CHAPTER II

A Counsel for Feminism

THE EDIBLE WOMAN
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. For instance, Catherine McLay seeks to discuss the novel in terms of a "romance". While John Lauber analyzes it from the viewpoint of "Consumer Society". For T.D. MacLulich, the novel is "a series of haunting images, a sequence of dream-like hallucinations, which flicker through the mind" of Atwood's protagonist. Yet, the deeper layers of the novel remain unexplored. Though the novel was written in 1965, that is at the very beginning of the Women's Lib, it appeared only in 1969 at the beginning of "Secondwave" feminism. The Edible Woman is Margaret Atwood's maiden attempt at fiction writing. As the novel represents the Women's Liberation movement, Atwood rightly describes The Edible Woman as a "proto feminist" novel. It shows the influence of Betty Friedan's 'The Feminine Mystique' and
Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex". It is an indictment of 'male consumption', 'over-richness' and 'over-decoration' of women in a patriarchal, capitalistic, consumer society. Thus, Atwood is chiefly concerned with 'de-constructing' gender politics in "The Edible Woman", as in her other novels.

**The Edible Woman** a convincing narrative of personal growth 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, the status of woman has constantly been changing, yet it cannot be said that her condition has improved much. Woman and her images are moulded, reshaped and reoriented by man and for man.\(^5\)

It is this awareness of their condition and treatment meted out to them that made the women writers take up the question of "female identity in a male-dominated society". What is she? and where is she getting to? They are essentially involved with such a crucial problem as this: how society sees women, how women see themselves and how they should direct their lives and thoughts.
The Edible Women is structured like a journey of a woman called Marian, who is a researcher. During her journey in life, through her association with several male and female acquaintances, the role models and friends she realizes and assesses different male strategies of exploitation and the causes of women's oppression. Her interaction with them brings in its wake a series of experiences, mostly unpleasant. Eventually, she picks up enough courage to turn the tables against men like Peter and Duncan, who are out to exploit and humiliate her. Thus, she refuses to be the "edible woman" trapped in domesticity. She endeavours to attain humanity and a human identity. This chapter seeks to explicate the progression of Marian from a meek, docile and non-descript woman to a strong, individualistic and active feminist. The critical issues with which the novel is concerned are the consideration of various choices alternatives and options available to working women in particular. This prompts Alan Dawe to observe that "The Edible Woman is a novel about choices."^6

The Edible Woman lays bare the ruthless and hypocritic postures of patriarchy through the dramatization of identity crisis in the soul of Marian. J. Brooks Bouson says: Atwood deploys her female
protagonist, Marian MacAlpin, to expose and subvert the ideological constructs that have long defined and confined women.

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 the 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?".

"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 "a 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 consumerism (of women especially), the novel presents "symbolic cannibalism" of women. The novel proves once
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 Marian, 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 work-place. The company Marian has to face and overcome is at her work-place. The company Marian works for has a highly stratified, three-tiered hierarchic 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: "On the floor above are the executives and the psychologists referred to as men upstairs, since they are all men.... Below us are the machines - mimeo machines." The prospect of getting grooved into the fixed middle-point of the office structure for the whole of her life, with a pension at the end of her tenure of job, makes her feel that in front of her was a "self... waiting performed, a self who had worked during innumerable years for Seymour Surveys and was now receiving her reward."
The Edible Woman pleads for radical changes in the gender relations in society and indirectly indicates "a way out of the gender power-struggle." As such, it serves as a feminist guide in the context of male domination in respect of sexual status, role and temperament. It forcefully drives home the message, that women are not mere objects of beauty meant for carnal consumption of men.12

Marian McAlpin is a researcher working for Seymour Surveys - a highly stratified, three-tiered, hierarchic market organization, where all responsible and respectable positions are held by men. The top floor of the research organization is manned exclusively by men and is not accessible to Marian, while at the lower level are old housewives. Marian does not wish to be there. Through the imagery of the three layers of Seymour Surveys, Atwood posits, "a metaphoric parallel for woman's place or space in society. The three layers represent three planes of reality: mind, body and matter. The men are minds; the women are bodies". This is the received categorization in patriarchal discourse. Marian says, "On the floor above are the executives and the psychologists - referred to as the men upstairs, Since they are all men... Below us are machines - mimeo machines". Marian cannot hope to be at the executive level nor can she allow herself to be equated with machines for the
hierarchial distribution of Seymour Surveys defines her place as above 'matter' but below 'mind'. Her dilemma arises out of this situation. She tries to ventilate her feelings: What, then, could she expect to turn into at Seymour Surveys? She couldn't become one of the men upstairs; neither could she become a machine person... as that would be a step down.

Marian's predicament typifies the situation of women in male-dominated society and implicitly enshrines "Atwood's criticism of patriarchal hegemony and gender specific role-models". As a matter of fact, Marian has no freedom in her work and therefore she feels forbidden to do what she likes. She has no future because her job as a researcher cannot provide her with adequate pension, after a lifetime of unrewarding work. She feels it to be an outrage on her personality.

Moreover, Seymour Surveys proscribes marriage and pregnancy of women in employment. It regards marriage and pregnancy as acts of disloyalty to the authority of the company. Marian experiences an identity crisis in her place as a researcher, because of the discrimination against women. She feels outraged at the comment of a man whom she interviews. He says: "you ought to be at home with some big strong man to take care of you".(48)
Marian's identity crisis acquires a feminine colouration, when she looks for choices in terms of alternatives to her present situation. She is jostaposed with Ainsley, with whom she shares an apartment. They live together in a “Symbiotic adjustment” (16), but they differ on the issues of marriage and motherhood. Ainsley works as a tester of defective electric tooth brushes in a company. She is a self-proclaimed feminist, who is fond of “paper-back” books on psychology and anthropology. She develops hatred for marriage and plans to be an unwed mother. She says: “The thing that ruins families these days is the husbands” (40). She wants children by choice, rather than change products of emotional entanglements. That is why she hunts for a strong, handsome, intelligent man as “biological father” for her child and then looks for a “Father - Image”. Ainsley offers this radical alternative to Marian's situation. But Marian rejects that role model, because bringing forth an illegitimate child is a cold-blooded act, for which a woman has to pay her price. Ainsley allows herself to be entangled in the web of Len, a seducer and is pregnant by him. Later on, she reverses her views on marriage and marries another man called Fischer to provide a father for a child she is carrying. She ultimately accepts the traditional role of a wife.
and mother. Thus, she becomes edible in the marriage market, against which she has professed.

The second alternative available to Marian is the married life of Clara. She is not practical and sensible enough to manage and run a well organized marriage. Marian realizes how Clara, her friend from college days, has become a victim of biology. Marian watches closely how Clara gets involved in a succession of pregnancies and feels sorry for her and says: “The babies had been unplanned: Clara greeted her first pregnancy with astonishment that such a thing could happen to her, and her second with dismay; now, during her third, she had subsided into a grim but inert fatalism” (36).

Clara has not taken precautionary measures through the reasonable practice of reproductive-controlling technologies to avoid the succession of pregnancies.

Marian is aware that “the power of the wife declines as the number of children grows”.

Gradually, woman becomes no more than a child-bearing machine. She is totally dependent socially and economically upon her husband. Therefore, Marian emphasizes the importance of family planning: Birth control... all say, and, its the
population explosion not the atomic explosion that we must all worry about (199). A third choice for Marian is represented by "the trio of perennial blondes". Lucy, Emmie and Millie, who occupy the first Basic Victim position in survival: The position of being afraid to realize that they are victims in patriarchal society for "fear of losing the privileges they possess". Marian rejects these artificial blondes, because they invite victimization. In the ... of Gomez: "they unquestioningly accept society's definition of woman a role-occupant to fulfil the function of a wife.

This disturbing awareness is the direct result of a technologically advanced society (a culture-specific phenomenon), which by its very advancement forces individuals into are fabricated roles, and is therefore of a general nature." What then could I expect to turn into a Seymour Surveys? I couldn't become a machine person or one of the questionnaire-marking ladies, as that would be a step down". Marian's crisis, however, acquires a feminine colouration when she looks for alternatives to her present situation. These alternatives are represented in her office colleagues Emmie, Lucy and Millie, her friend Clara and her husband Joe, Peter and Ainsley her flatmate.
A pro-feminist to the letter, Ainsley has strong views about the male-dominated 'consumer' society. Then she becomes a victim of the self-same society, which is one of the ironies of fate. Ainsley though against marriage, does not deny motherhood. She does want get pregnant. For, she would like a child of her own. She thinks that motherhood satisfies one's "deepest feminity" (41) and "every woman should have atleast one baby ... It's even more important than sex." (40) And she is absolutely certain that "the thing that ruins families these days is the husbands". (40) wanting children "by choice" rather than as a natural consequence of a happy relationship in a 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 choosen 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: "I knew Ainsley was wrong, but she sounded so rational. I thought i'd better go to bed before she had convinced me against my better judgement." (43)
Ainsley, "Schemi female", Clara, "the earth-mother", and Lucy, Emmie and Millie, "The office Virgins' have allowed themselves to be victimized as objects of carnal desires of men both within and outside the legal framework of marriage. Hence, Marian accepts neither the radical and extremist feminist view-point of Ainsley, nor the submissive earth-mother role of Clara, nor the self-destructive innocence and ignorance of the office virgins. She realizes and assesses different root-causes of women's exploitation and oppression through these female alternatives, who illustrate various attitudes towards their own status as women.

Ainsley, Clara and Lucy, Emmie and Millie, the three different role models fail to offer appropriate alternatives to Marian's identity crisis, she seeks a male alternative in Peter, her boy friend, to fulfil her objective. Marian looks upon him as not only a rescuer from Seymour Surveys, but also a "rescuer from chaos" (89), a provider of stability. She is drawn to him because of his pleasing manners and impressive way of talking. She thinks, that he is an ideal choice for her. But, little does she realize that all these are nothing but affectionate ruses intended to win her over. Peter is a law graduate, who is well known for his purchasable
hobbies. Peter needs a wife to complement his collection of knives, guns and cameras. He likes Marian as she never demands anything from him. He sees her as a "girl who wouldn't try to take over his life" (61). As he finds her meek and docile, Peter proposes and explains the reasons for wanting to marry her. "I can always depend on You. Most women are pretty scatter brained but you’re such a sensible girl. You may not have known but I've always thought that's the first thing to look for when it comes to choosing a wife" (89). He is of the view, that she fits well into a "conventionalized even stereotyped image of a woman who minus her chastity, recalls the mid-Victorian Ruskinian image of a passive and dependant woman".  

In course of time, Marian understands the true character of Peter as a manipulator and gets insights into the truth of her relationship with him. She realizes that she has let herself be sold as some kind of a dispensable commodity. She identifies Peter with an anonymous caller, who has introduced himself to ladies as a surveyor of underwears.

Peter's narration of his hunting spree shocks Marian. Marian discovers that Peter enjoys shooting and killing of rabbits and
other animals mercilessly as a matter of pleasure and pride, and he is very fond of non-vegetarian food. The image of Peter as the hunter and herself as the hunted enters her mind. In one of the parties, Marian is annoyed with his excessive drinking and unsavoury attitude. She feels, that he has treated her as “a stage-prop” (71). The sensitive Marian develops a kind of nausea for these very habits of Peter. She begins to distance herself from him. However, she is aware that one has to eat to live. She chooses to eat very rarely and stops eating non-vegetarian food. This seems to be a form of her disapproval and protest against all that Peter represents.

As the date of her engagement approaches Marian feels nervous and disturbed. She realizes, that her interests and identity can never be safe and secure, in the event of her marriage with Peter. She begins to look at him as a destroyer of her individuality and identity.

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. He says: “She gets the idea she has a mind, her professors pay attention to what she has to say, they treat her like a thinking human beings; when
she gets marries, her core gets invaded. Her feminine role and her core are really in opposition, her feminine role demands passivity from her”.

(235) The conversation provides Marian with a flash of insight. She realizes what married life with Peter would be. She perceives, that as Peter’s wife she would be expected to don 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 relishingly.

The plot reaches its climax when Peter arranges the cocktail party on the occasion of their betrothal. The engagement provides Marian an occasion to have all her male and female friends together, whom she figures out as her alternatives. The artificiality in the consumer society manifests itself in Marian, who is found in an elaborate coiffure, a “daring” new red dress, a girdle, heavy make-up, and gold earnings. She does all this as directed by Peter. She looks at her own image as reflected in the mirror, which seems to mock in return at her:

Marian realizes, that a Woman’s primary market value in the marriage market depends upon the artificiality of her fascinating image. She is no longer herself, but only the image of a wife of Peter and what the society cherishes. The male gaze of Peter dominates and
influences her appearance. Marian finds herself dwarfed by her fatal metamorphosis into Peter's wife. She becomes progressively divided and objectified in the marriage market. As she is made a mere decorative object, she is reduced to insignificance. Marian is now defined as "other" and becomes an object. As she turns from subject to object, consumer to the consumed, Marian loses her capacity to perceive anything.

In Marian's mind, the image of the hunter and hunted becomes stronger. She feels more and more a victim identified in her red dress as "the perfect target". Peter is a camera enthusiast. His camera is his substitute for a gun, the weapon. He looks upon her as an image of a salable commodity. He gives up all his thoughts of loving her. Peter wants to get a couple of shots of Marian alone, in order to show her "red" on a movie slide in the "zero hour" of the party. It evokes uneasy feelings in Marian, for she feels as though she has become a lifeless statue meant for commercial display.

Marian finds Peter aiming his camera right at her. It clicks in a blinding flash of light, but she covers her face with her arm. She screams as it startles her. It shocks her into the awareness of the reality of Peter, the hunter. Being shocked, Marian aptly likens her face
to a “Vastly spreading and papery and slightly dilapidated: a huge billboard smile, peeling away in flaps and patches”...(244). The climactic scene is reversed with Marian’s realization of the fact, that she is sought to be turned into a state of eternal bondage in the name of marriage. Marian feels a sense of urgency to wriggle herself out of this crisis. As her awareness of the victimization becomes acute, she emerges out of the crisis with heightened consciousness. As T.N. Dhar comments: Her beliefs and modes of thought are out to a strenuous test till, after being battered in body and psyche, she finally passes into a state of “raised” consciousness.  

Marian now finds a confident voice of her own. She feels, that she should never have worn red, because it has made her a perfect target of Peter’s designs. What she has dreamt about her future married life crashes on the hard rock of bitter realities. She avoids the mirror and Peter’s camera frightens her, for Peter’s photography is a kind of death or the final trap for her. She perceives Peter as a victimizer, who directs technological assault on women by means of a camera. She sees in him a “homicidal maniac with a lethal weapon in his hands” (246). The image of Peter as a hunter upsets Marian emotionally.
The cocktail party provides Marian with the perception, that Peter has an ability to devour her in a civilized way and he has a strong motive to negate her individuality and autonomy, thereby expecting her to assume the roles of a traditional wife and mother. She comprehend, that Peter is a threat to her very identity. J. Brooks Bouson says: “As a realistic novel The Edible Woman 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”.23 So, Marian does not want to be trapped in a decorative life, where both her identity and individuality are likely to be mercilessly crushed. She feels the need for fresh air, the freedom to grow and develop her personality. She refuses to be his “edible woman”. She upsets Peter’s designs to control and dominate her, by running away from her engagement. It shows her feminine valour and her potential for wholeness.

It is because of the “anxiety of being influenced”24 Marian takes her flight to Duncan. But it is like jumping into the fire from the pan. Marian hopes to find some kind of safety and shelter at the place of Duncan, (with whom Marian has interviewed as a part of her market research surveys), instead she becomes a helpless victim of Duncan’s
lust. Critics like George Woodcock and T.D. MacLulich look at him as a parasite and narcissistic cannibal.

Duncan takes advantage of Marian’s credulous and gullible nature and entices her into his bed saying that he is a “Virgin”, who needs to be introduced to sex. Secondly, he recites the theory of the unreality of matter and exploits it to seduce Marian. According to him, the unreality of matter is: “... if we went to bed, god knows you’re unreal enough now, all I can think of is those layers and layers of woolly clothes you wear.” (202)

Finally, Duncan takes her to a hotel patronized by prostitutes and their clients and later accuses her of “corrupting” him. He sees the red dress as a sign of seduction and Marian as “The Scarlet woman herself” (247). He looks upon her as a seductress, and the female equivalent of the male hunter figure. After seducing her, Duncan, the passionate beast remarks, “It’s no use. I must be incorruptible ... I don’t exactly know what’s wrong. Partly i don’t like not being able to see your face...” (253) This damaging statement degrades womanhood and humanity itself. Marian may not be the first woman to become the victim
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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. Her 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." Marian identifies herself with the hunted rabbit and other objects of consumption. As Marian leaves the place of Duncan, he asks her: "where do you want to go..?" (258). This query echoes the plight of women who are abused, exploited, oppressed, divorced and abandoned.

Marian finds herself reduced to the state of a destitute girl. She is extremely melancholic and feels dejected about her future. Gradually, she realizes the futility of starving herself to death. Marian begins to see both Peter and Duncan in their true colors and recognizes her complicity in her victimization. She realizes how she has allowed Peter and Duncan to exploit and "eat" her. Thus, Marian is made a victim
of symbolic cannibalism. As Linda Hutcheon says: "As both a Canadian
and a woman, Atwood protests any tendency towards easy passivity and
naivety; she refuses to allow... women to deny their complicity in the
power structures that may subject them". In this process, Marian
realizes and assesses different male strategies of exploitation and
oppression through her male alternatives. Through Marian's search for
alternatives, Atwood examines the situation of woman vis-a-vis patriarchal
structures of power and domination.

It is from the experiences of her friends and her own
evaluation, Marian gradually, but painfully learns that woman in the
contemporary society is reduced to a commodity meant only for male
consumption. Hence, she takes exception to the obscene posters of
women to boost up the sales of different products. Marian is aware of the
necessity to wage a war against those, who exploit women for their
advancement and prosperity by way of nude and semi-nude
advertisements.

Marian struggles against the technologically oriented
men with cameras, guns and planned career, who direct technological
assault on women. Marian opts for a long battle "in a spirit approaching gay rebellion" (267) against exploitation and oppression of women.

After she returns to her place, she rejects her passivity and refuses to be a victim. Marian bakes a cake in her own image - woman to test and expose the true colors of Peter and Duncan. Atwood herself says, that by doing so Marian is trying to depict: "an action, a preposterous one in a way, as all the pieces of symbolism in a realistic context are, but what she is obviously making is a substitute of herself". Marian admits that "the price of this version was testing the other one". (271) It is a test "simple and direct as litmus paper" (267).

She bakes the cake-woman in her own image, the surrogate of her own artificial self she presented at the cocktail party. In an interview with Gibson, Atwood comments: "Marian performs an action, a preposterous one in a way, as all the pieces of symbolism in a realistic context are, but what she is obviously making is a substitute of herself". Thus, symbolically, the cake-woman represents woman as an object for male consumption. Marian 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. 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 a critique of domestic myth. Howells rightly asserts, that
the woman-shaped cake is “Marian’s perception of woman’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”.

Marian offers Peter the cake as a substitute for herself, when he comes to demand an explanation for her disappearance from the
cocktail party. She remarks: “You’ve been trying to destroy me... you’ve
been trying to assimilate me. But I’ve made you a substitute, something
you’ll like much better. This is what you really wanted all along” (271).

Marian deconstructs Peter’s image of her by making the symbolic literal. This symbolic gesture is suggestive of Marian’s
release from what George Woodcock calls “emotional cannibalism”. Peter is embarrassed by the cake and is non-plussed at this unanticipated
behaviour of Marian. He realizes, that he can no longer play the game of
deceit with her and hence prepares himself to leave the place with
wounded feelings. Marian looks at Peter’s back as he leaves the place
and comments, that the face on the other side of his head could have
belonged to one of the future killers like him. Marian realizes, that people like Peter and Duncan would be dangerous as they know how to pin woman as a victim. Marian imagines Peter featured on a poster as one: “Impeccably dressed, a glass of scotch in one hand; his foot was on the head of a stuffed lion.... Beneath one arm was strapped a revolver....”

(272)

Thus, Marian visualises him as a hunter. She begins to eat the cake ending her withdrawal from food as soon as Peter leaves the place. This gesture is symbolic of the empowerment of women. As Emma Parker comments: “By demonstrating how consumption is related to power, Atwood subtly urges women to empower themselves by urging them to eat their way into the world”.32 Marian also offers the remainder of the cake to Duncan, who comes there on his own. Unlike Peter, Duncan proceeds to eat the cake, as he fails to realise the implication of this act.

Marian is also able to destroy the Society’s synthetic stereotype of femininity through the ingenuous device of the cake and free herself to realize her own true identity.33 Apart from this, the act signifies
the celebration of Marian's new freedom and even rebirth, making her "a whole person" again.

The Edible Woman has received enthusiastic and mutually contradicting responses on its ending. Critics like Robert Locker and Jerome Rosenberg, who are more negative in their reading of the closure, feel that Marian's quest has failed. Robert Lecker observes: "Marian's plight is not resolved..." and she "reenacts her female as food role". Jerome Rosenberg asserts, that Marian has "changed very little" by the end of the novel. However, a close reading of the novel with the main focus on the delineation of Marian reveals the contrary.

There are also other critics, who are more positive in their reading of the closure. Barbara Rigney argues: "Surely, Marian knows more than she did in the beginning..." For Jayne Patterson, Marian's "fashioning and eating of the cake signifies her recognition and rejection of her former compliant self, culminating in her new ability to respond to her own feelings". According to Nora Stovel, Marian demolishes "society's synthetic stereotype of femininity through the ingenious mirroring device of the cake" and "frees herself to realize her own true identity". Catherine McLay, who looks at the Edible woman as
“Romance”, comments, that the cake “feast” signals “the celebration of Marian’s new freedom and even rebirth. Marian, according to T.D. MacLulich, at the novel’s end, “is a whole person again” and while her “fate is uncertain... She will face it squarely instead of trying to escape”. Perry Nobleman, who finds Marian a “sympathetic” character, comments, that The Edible Woman is “a convincing narrative of personal growth”. Inspite of these learned responses, the main theme of the novel is inadequately focused upon and partially explored.

The cake, which Marian finally bakes and eats is seen as symbolic evidence of the development of her vision, and of her ultimate refusal to be a victim the packaged product of a male-dominated capitalistic society. Marian asserts, that she cannot be manipulated by people like Peter and Duncan. She affirms a sense of pride and proclaims at the end, that a cake is edible, but a woman is not. As Sharon Rose expresses: “By backing, decorating, serving, and consuming the cake-woman image... Marian announces, to herself and others, that she is not food” Gayle Green comments, that Marian’s cake-woman is “a gesture of defiance, a way of saying “no” to a system that defines
women as commodities and devours them. As a woman, Marian has definitely changed from the meek, docile, traditional woman to be bold, conscious and a rebellious feminist. She has become active again as agent, a subject, a consumer rather than a consumable object of exchange traded on the market. Marian is a representative of modern youth rebelling against the system of gender and its oppression. She is a representative of modern youth rebelling against the system of gender and its oppression. Marian has resigned her job, challenging the gender power-politics to attain 'human equality' and 'human freedom'. She wants to become neither a man nor a machine, but a woman who quests for a meaningful human identity. This is Atwood's feminist perspective as found in The Edible Woman.

Thus, The Edible Woman "a convincing narrative of personal growth" 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, for Marian after being battered in body and psyche, finally passes into a state of raised consciousness. She comes to think of herself in the first person singular and acquires a confident voice of her own. "In Atwood's own words, the novel makes a negative statement
about society... The complications are resolved, but not in a way that affirms the social order.  

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 eyes of Marian, the champion of feminism. As Howells puts it: "This is sociology translated into the private idiom of one fiction character". The Edible Woman is an indictment of the male authority, hierarchy, competition double standards of morality and discrimination, the governing elements which victimized women for centuries. As Atwood says: The Edible Woman makes "a negative statement about society.... The complications are resolved, but not in a way that affirms the social order."  

This novel helps us to realize how a woman is sought to be used, abused, and manipulated by the theory of unreality, pseudo-culture, biology and commercialization. The novel reveals that victimization of women is a reality of our system and the only way to resist it is through a revolt against it. The Edible Woman is a subversive rather than a confrontational novel. It is an attack on social script of gender ideology.
In short, The Edible Woman is "an imaginative transformation of a social obstacle or problem into comic satire as one young woman rebels against her feminine destiny" as The Edible Woman. Thus, The Edible Woman not only proposes hypotheses for solution to woman's exploitation and oppression in gender system, but also serves as a guide to feminist struggle. The Edible Woman also serves as "a prelude to all the novels of Atwood" as it establishes the broad thematic pattern in which her subsequent novels operate.
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