

Corporeal Conflict: Unmaking and Making the Self in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*

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Abstract

At the heart of Western rationalist tradition are hierarchizing binaries, which artificially separate the mind from the body by granting primacy to the mind and contributing to the splitting of the female identification. This study seeks an alternative narrative structure to such cultural constructions by exploring how Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969) portrays the female body in connection with female agency and power by writing against classical representations. Accordingly, this study employs recent theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz, Susan Bordo and Kim Chernin who blend feminist perspectives with theories based on the body. By incorporating feminist theoretical approach and body politics, this study presents a discourse of resistance and the potentiality of a new meeting point for shared experience and a common knowledge. Atwood's *The Edible Woman* suggests that there is agency and power to be attained through the knowledge of our bodies. As a counter-narrative, *The Edible Woman* promotes a resistance to dominant cultural and social constructions that objectify and undervalue the female body. Atwood's novel attempts to bring a credibility and a value to knowledge that women gain through their corporeal experience. What emerges from this perception is that corporeal knowledge is essential to be able to acquire an understanding of women's corporeality as well as to be read as a means to resistance.

Keywords: corporeality, corporeal knowledge, resistance, Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman*

BEDENSEL ÇATIŞMA: MARGARET ATWOOD'UN *THE EDIBLE WOMAN* ADLI ESERİNDE BENLİĞİ ÇÖZMEK VE YARATMAK

Öz

Batı rasyonalist geleneğinin kalbinde, zihne öncelik vererek ve kadın kimliğinin bölünmesine katkıda bulunarak zihni yapay olarak bedenden ayıran hiyerarşik ikilikler vardır. Bu çalışma, Margaret Atwood'un *Evlenecek Kadın* (1969) adlı eserinin klasik temsillere karşı yazarak kadın bedenini kadın failliği ve gücüyle bağlantılı olarak nasıl tasvir ettiğini araştırarak bu tür kültürel yapılara alternatif bir anlatı yapısı arar. Bu doğrultuda, bu çalışmada feminist bakış açılarını bedene dayalı teorilerle harmanlayan Elizabeth Grosz, Susan Bordo ve Kim Chernin gibi güncel teorisyenlerden faydalanılmaktadır. Bu çalışma, feminist teorik yaklaşımı ve beden politikalarını birleştirerek bir direniş söylemi ve ortak deneyim ve ortak bilgi için yeni bir buluşma noktasının

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potansiyelini sunar. Atwood'un *Evlenecek Kadın*'ı, bedenlerimizin bilgisiyle elde edilebilecek eylemlilik ve güç olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Bir karşı anlatı olarak *Evlenecek Kadın*, kadın bedenini nesneleştiren ve küçümseyen egemen kültürel ve toplumsal yapılara karşı bir direnişi teşvik etmektedir. Atwood'un romanı, kadınların bedensel deneyimleriyle kazandıkları bilgiye güvenilirlik ve değer kazandırmaya çalışır. Bu algıdan ortaya çıkan, kadının bedenselliğini anlayabilmek ve bir direniş aracı olarak okuyabilmek için bedensel bilginin gerekli olduğudur.

Anahtar sözcükler: Bedensellik, bedensel bilgi, direnç, Margaret Atwood, *Evlenecek Kadın*

INTRODUCTION

There is a deep-seated problem of embodiment among women in the society. Across racial backgrounds and social classes, the female body is regarded as restricted rather than providing full access to a variety of individual needs and possibilities. As Kim Chernin reminds us, our society is “seriously divided within itself, splitting itself off from nature, dividing the mind from the body, dividing thought from feeling, dividing one race against another, dividing the supposed nature of woman from the supposed nature of man” (Chernin, 1981, p. 2). Human beings have been taught to attribute value and respect only to things that deal with the mind and its creations, the spirit and the soul. Western philosophy has long denied the body, considering it as a hindrance to, and a diversion from the operations of the mind. In the words of Elizabeth Grosz, a well-known psychoanalytic feminist, “the body has been regarded as a source of interference in, and a danger to, the operations of reason” (Grosz, 1994, p. 5). Then, the body has become the easier site of control, whereas the mind turns out to be more difficult and more complex to contain. The mind is also assigned more freedom than the body; ideas and thoughts are favoured over physical acts that are connected with embodiment.

The body, desires, and hunger are attributes of the feminine, while the mind, clarity and reason are considered masculine. What this body/mind conflict reinforces is a male subjectivity and superiority that persistently objectifies the female body.

Within this limiting binary dichotomy, women suffer from a sense of guilt if they cannot control their bodies, but at the same time, they are considered threatening for men's attempts at control. Nevertheless, situating women in this status of inferiority is not only damaging to the feminine; it confines both sexes within gender dichotomy. This hierarchical structure, particular to



Margaret Atwood

patriarchal norms, thus lessens the value of feminine ways of knowing accessible through the body. Women have long been identified with the volatile nature of the body and as the female body was devalued so were women's intuitive body knowledge, feelings and sensations which are in conflict with the knowledges inscribed by culture and society. At the same time, patriarchal culture formulates norms of ideal appearance and behaviour that regulate female potential within this devalued condition dependent upon normative beauty and female self-denial. These formulations reinforce a male subjectivity while positioning women as objects before the male gaze. More precisely, the foundation of Western ideology is based on patriarchy and the process of becoming woman becomes the process of becoming what patriarchy determines and conceives women to be. Patriarchy classifies women as determined by sexual and reproductive use, in the role of mother, virgin, and whore, presenting us with shallow and weak stereotypes of the sexually passive female body and feminine beauty.

A number of contemporary women novelists, familiar with the continuing inclination of patriarchal society to identify woman with body and man with mind, have pointed to the mind-body conflict through thematic and structural innovations in their fictions. This study explores the manner in which one such writer, Margaret Atwood challenges the containments of normative femininity that continue to devalue and objectify the female body. As a woman novelist in Canada, she is also interested in the discovery of the agency and power of the female body through the knowledge apparent in corporeal experience. Counter-narratives by Margaret Atwood acknowledge both the existence of knowledge in corporeal experience and the equal recognition of men's ways of doing and women's way of knowing.

1. CORPOREAL REFLECTIONS OF FEMALE AGENCY

In the late 1960s throughout the 1970s writers like Margaret Atwood brought the experiences of women to the fore. In her book addressing to the subject matter of Canadian postmodern fiction and its writers, Linda Hutcheon states that postmodern Canadian writers "are always in a sense 'agents provocateurs' - taking pot-shots at the culture of which they know they are unavoidably part of but that they still wish to criticize" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 3). It is this time period that draws one's attention, for political and social upheaval added a particular emphasis to the emergence of the counter narratives that began to narrate female experience, to propose resistance and to offer possible alternatives. Master narratives have been used to restrict the female experience, which is recounted from a male viewpoint. In the course of this study then, Atwood subverts lack of attention to women's ways of knowing by recounting female experience. This feminist consciousness bring value to the knowledge to which women have access through their corporeality. This study suggests that by establishing a female voice in her narrative, Atwood realizes the agency and power in women's own corporeal knowledge.

In the late twentieth century Western culture, the fat body and the slender body have very different connotations, and those connotations are also thoroughly manipulated by the body's sex. Fatness becomes disassociated from its previous class-based significations of wealth and success and begins to acquire exceedingly negative features (Farrell, 2011, p. 27). As feminist philosopher Bordo

suggests in her seminal *Unbearable Weight*, “the obese elicit blinding rage and disgust in our culture and are often viewed ... [as] greedy, self-absorbed, lazy, without self-control or willpower” (Bordo, 1993, p. 202). At this point, people need to be reminded that the bodies that are most desired or appreciated in the contemporary society are not the obese ones. The fat body in itself is now equated with the lack of discipline, overconsumption, laziness, and even failure. Thus, controlling and containing a woman’s hunger for food, as Bordo points out, is “merely the most concrete expression of the general rule governing the construction of femininity: that female hunger--for public power, for independence, for sexual gratification--be contained, and the public space that women be allowed to take up be circumscribed, limited” (1993, p. 171). This drive to identify women with embodiment has contributed to struggles to control and contain the body, which led to the cultural requirement that the female body must be slender according to the cultural bodily ideals and the male-defined standards of ideal beauty in order to be regarded as feminine.

For women growing up in Western culture, these impositions define the discourses of femininity. As feminist philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky addresses in “Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power”, “We are born male or female, but not masculine or feminine. Femininity is an artifice, an achievement, ‘a mode of enacting and reenacting received gender norms which surface as so many styles of the flesh’” (Bartky, 1998, p. 64). The female body then becomes vulnerable to a power structure and in the process her sense of identity is destabilized and her body remains objectified and becomes a prey in a hunter/animal metaphor to a dominating patriarchy.

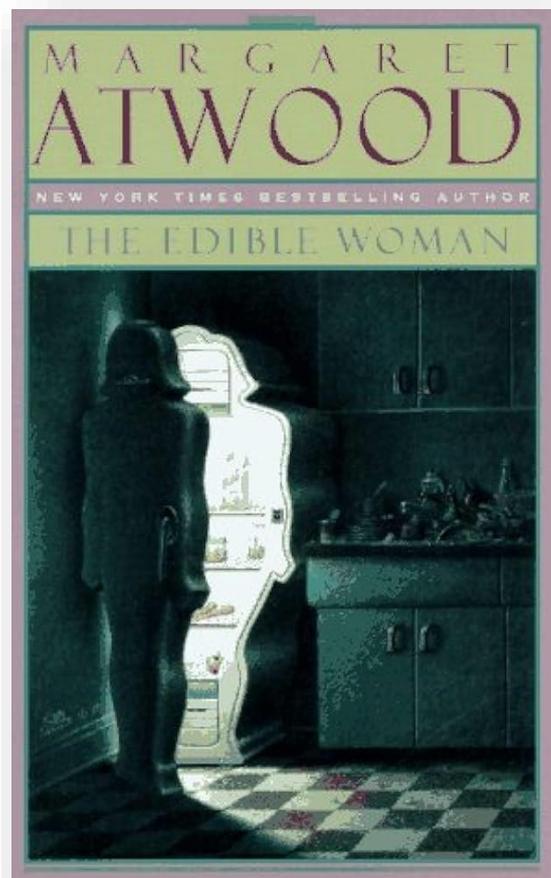
In this respect, Bartky lists three distinct types of feminine disciplinary practice which aim to shape female bodies into recognizably feminine bodies: “Those that aim to produce a body of a certain size and configuration; those that bring forth from this body a specific repertoire of gestures, postures, and movements; and those directed toward the display of this body as an ornamented surface” (1998, p. 134). According to this scenario, women yield to a self-discipline which relates to diet, exercise, and personal grooming and keeps them adorned, obedient, and thin, continuing to create bodies that intend to adapt themselves to the male gaze. Apparently, the patriarchal construction of the distinctly female body provides explanations for subordination and sexual objectification of women’s bodies. At the same time, in Bartky’s examination of the social practices of dieting, makeup, and exercise, she exposes a systematic disempowering of the female body. Under constant surveillance, the woman experiences her own individual body as a hindrance, plagued by uncertainty, vulnerability, and weakness.

Like Bartky, in *Unbearable Weight*, Susan Bordo maintains that normative social pressure over the body “works from below” by means of “individual surveillance and self-correction to norms” (Bordo, 1993, p. 27). Although our patriarchal society can be regarded as promoting the image of the self-denying woman, it is in fact this “individual surveillance” and “self-correction” that maintains the stereotype of the virgin and basically requires that women perform in a continuous state of the self-denying virgin construction. At this point, Bordo feels that this is the condition of contemporary woman, a condition in which “a constellation of social, economic, and psychological factors have combined to produce a generation of women who feel deeply flawed, ashamed of their needs, and not entitled to exist unless they transform themselves into worthy new selves (read: without need,

without want, without body)" (1993, p. 47). This is exactly the case of the heroine in Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, who is in pursuit of a worthy self. Initially, Marian McAlpin in the novel believes that this will be obtained by trying to integrate into the social order, struggling to be "without need, without want, without body". Drawing upon feminist theory and discussions of body politics, this study examines the paths in which Margaret Atwood's protagonist Marian McAlpin challenges the construction of normative sexual beauty, which continues to impose the slenderness regimes, normative beauty and self-denial through corporeal experience in *The Edible Woman*. Then, this study will identify moments within the novel where Marian tries hard to behave within regulations, and examines Marian's corporeal representation and her resistance to the cultural and social constructions of the feminine.

Atwood's *The Edible Woman* centers upon one woman's reaction to her culture's effort to assign domestic and maternal roles to her. As Gayle Greene notes in her influential *Changing the Story: Feminist Fiction and the Tradition*, the "conflicting signals of the postwar period" embraced not only "a restrictive ideology that objectified woman" but also "social circumstances that held out new possibilities for agency and autonomy" (Greene, 1991, p. 61). Marian MacAlpin, the protagonist of *The Edible Woman*, becomes trapped between these contradictions, but has partial knowledge of them. Atwood uses her female protagonist, Marian MacAlpin, a self-reflective, financially independent, educated and sensible young woman of liberal ideas, in an effective way to reveal and subvert ideologically constructed forms of femininity that have long confined and defined women. We, the readers, see Marian restricted within her own body as it refuses to accept her intake of food. However, her body does not remain restricted but becomes her awakening. Through her knowledge of her body, Marian arrives at a place of agency and power.

During her first months in a dead-end job as a writer of interview questions for a market research company, Seymour Surveys Company, Marian goes through the process of an engagement because "[She'd] always assumed... that I was going to marry someone eventually and have children, everyone does" (Atwood, 1969, p. 104). Marian seems subconsciously to be afraid of marrying Peter, for becoming engaged to him imprisons Marian in a fixed role, which men have prescribed for women. In fact, it is the only alternative available to her in this society where a woman finds no place to establish her 'self. As Bordo points out every woman, to varying extent, is



vulnerable to "the requirements of the cultural construction of femininity" (1993, p. 47). As Marian makes an effort to adhere to social expectations, the judgements of others reassure her that she has almost attained her calling in life, marriage to an eligible bachelor. Likewise, Marian notices the difference in her as her relationship with Peter, an ambitious young attorney, transforms from one of a serious courtship to an engagement. She attempts to become the image her fiance contemplates: she is thoughtful, dependable, ready for making herself as conspicuous as possible and denying her own needs in an effort to accommodate Peter.

In this regard, reinforcing her feeling of loss of identity and her consumable qualities for Peter is a talk with her friend Joe, a professor married to the fecund Clara. Joe's earnest conversation about the following effects of university education on women makes Marian's state of exploitation acute. Joe observes that as long as a woman has attended university, her professors treat her as an individual with a thinking mind, but when she gets married, her "core gets invaded" (Atwood, 1969, p. 242) and she appears to become trapped within marriages. According to Joe, such an invasion leads to conflict in marriage, where "her feminine role and her core are really in opposition, her feminine role demands passivity from her..." (1969, p. 235). This makes her observe that as Peter's wife, she would allow her core to be taken control by the desires and demands of both her husband and her children as well.

After accepting the marriage proposal of Peter, Marian unconsciously refuses to eat certain kinds of food since she feels herself being controlled by Peter and her body turns out to be a battlefield. Marian finds herself continually revolving around food, yet she is able to consume very little. For Marian, eating directs her into a production-consumption dynamic where consuming refers to be consumed. When she goes to a restaurant for lunch with her colleagues, "Marian was surprised at herself. She had been dying to go for lunch, she had been starving, and now she wasn't even hungry" (1969, p. 112). Marian's eating model, or her "just eating to stay alive" (1969, p. 192) with food of inadequate nutritional value reinforces Catherine Rainwater's claim that "undesirable relationships with food appear amongst Atwood's characters during the first phase of their metamorphoses, and such troublesome relationships are symptomatic of these women's disturbed attitudes towards the body" (Atwood, 1969, p. 17). The quiet rebellion of her body reveals itself through the refusal to eat, which reflects the inadequate nourishment she is getting from the cultural and social constructs that confine her. At home she feels trapped because of her landlady's constant queries and observation of her and her roommate Ainsley. At work she is controlled by her "vaguely defined" (1969, p. 13) job duties. In her relationship she is restrained by a domineering and exaggeratedly or ostentatiously dignified or self-important fiance. These external (of the mind) constraints start to impact her internal (of the body) state of well-being. As she comes to experience these limitations, her sense of self fades away and is converted into a fading of her body as well. There is no acceptable cultural standard of the image of women for Marian's sense of self or for her body. Performing unconsciously, Marian's body's rejection of food then makes apparent both her resistance to the socially approved roles of naturalized femininity and the rejection of selfhood as socially prescribed.

Plagued by the dissolution of the self through the body, Marian remembers a dream after awaking one morning: "I had looked down and seen my feet beginning to dissolve, like melting jelly, and had put on a pair of rubber boots just in time only to find that the ends of my fingers were turning transparent" (Atwood, 1969, p. 43). Her subconscious fear of losing herself appears in her dream in the sense that "melting jelly" comes to be the manifestation of disappearing into nothingness. Subsequently, in a bath, "she was afraid that she was dissolving, coming apart layer by layer like a piece of cardboard in a gutter puddle" (1969, p. 218). These disturbing and surreal body images make Marian's mind sense the tenuous condition of her existence and thus demonstrate her "pathological condition of self-division" (Howell, 1996, p. 27) as Coral Ann Howells states. Marian's suffering from a condition of self-division, a division between mind and body draws attention to the powers of agency through the knowledge of her body within herself, her instinct and her desire performing in opposition to each other. The intuitive nature living within her body rebels against her feminine destiny in such a way that Marian's refusal of food is prompted by her body rather than her mind: "She was becoming more and more irritated by her body's decision to reject certain foods. She had tried to reason with it, had accused it of having frivolous whims, had coaxed it and tempted it, but it was adamant; and if she used force it rebelled" (Atwood, 1969, p. 196). Here, Marian points to her own body as if it were a self-governing person. Apparently, she is not able to exercise conscious control over it. Her body's decision, on the one hand, shows that Marian unconsciously opposes the socially prescribed roles available to women. On the other hand, the power of her body in regulating the pattern of eating reveals the ability of the body to restrain the mind. In this respect, Marian's body comes to have a knowledge, which is different from her conscious intellect. The body can be regarded as a path towards knowledge rather than a mere artifice or a distraction. As Elizabeth Grosz has put it in *Volatile Bodies*, Marian's "body is [her] being-to-the-world and as such is the instrument by which all information and knowledge is received and meaning is generated" (Grosz, 1994, p. 87). What Grosz postulates as a body's "explanatory powers" (1994, p. vii) provides Marian a notification, a manifestation of the corporeal knowledge of blood and death her body identifies with Peter, and progressively, food.

2. RESISTING BODY AND FEMALE AGENCY

In *Edible Woman*, Marian explores food as a channel of restoring her own embodiment and finding agency. Throughout the novel, Marian observes that she cannot regulate her situation, that is, her impending marriage and her unequal opportunities as a young woman; therefore, her body reacts. As an example, in the restaurant with Peter, Marian's gustatory reaction to the meat in front of her is one of disgust: "She set down her knife and fork. She felt that she had turned rather pale," hoping that Peter does not realize, but "She picked up her fork, speared a piece, lifted it, and set it down again" (Atwood, 1969, p. 164). Although Marian yearns for control, her body, particularly, her gut, skin, and hand, controls the situation. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* makes a key statement: "the body is not a thing, it is a situation... it is the instrument of our grasp upon the world, a limiting factor for our projects" (Beauvoir, 2011, p. 66). Here, Beauvoir envisions that situations, ever changing, describe the body. The body is far more than a physical presence, as it definitely is

here for Marian. The female body is performing in different situations, in its own right. One can notice that although Marian's body may be experiencing a state of rebellion with food, her gradual withdrawal from food is a state through which she will acquire perception. In this sense, the act of discovery of the self happens through embodiment of one's situation. For Beauvoir, the individual's project signifies a vision and the construction of agency in the sense that an individual identifies with the world through his or her body. Then, they perceive themselves as being bodies rather than as having them.

When Marian watches other women's bodies, she collects her future prospects and reacts in a visceral manner, generating further estrangement from women's bodies, not merely losing contact with her own body. In her book *The Obsession* (1981) Chernin suggests that "false blaming of the body" is key to Marian's understanding of her condition, and the way she sees other women, due to "her inability to liberate herself from the impoverished identity that is troubling her" (Chernin, 1981, p. 69). As an example, at the Office Christmas party, the tables "heaped" with "salads and sandwiches and fancy breads and desserts and cookies and cakes" (p. 176), Marian closely observes all the women around her, "the mouths opening and shutting" (p. 180) and examines the bodies of the women, some "ripe, some rapidly becoming overripe, some already beginning to shrivel" (Atwood, 1969, p. 181). Atwood provides an image of "the mouths" performing mechanically, and as with Clara, she serves the corporeal experiences of the women as detached from themselves. As a result of this detachment, they experience their bodies as objects. She is afraid of being "sucked down" into this smothering "sargasso-sea of femininity" (p. 181) and being covered with the "moist congratulations and chocolate crumb enquiries and little powdery initiatory kisses" at the time of her engagement (1969, p. 182).

Eventually, Marian realizes that she cannot get free of the production-consumption cycle, particularly the male consumption of the feminine, by her renunciation of herself as both consumer and consumed. She ascends from her excessive anxiety with a sense of empowerment, autonomy, and greater knowledge. In order to articulate her new perceptions, she buys the ingredients for a cake, bakes it, and designs it in the form of a woman's body since "what she needed was something that avoided words" (1969, p. 274). Still unwilling to depend on language as a means to convey meaning, Marian discovers another version of signification in the shape of a woman suggesting that she has been treated as a consumable commodity. She intentionally makes the cake in her own image as an edible woman. The woman-shaped cake is even personified: "Her creation gazed up at her, its face doll-like and vacant except for the small silver glitter of intelligence in each green eye" (p. 298). After baking the cake, she looks at it attentively and says, "you look delicious.' 'Very appetizing. And that's what will happen to you; that's what you get for being food" (1969, p. 300). Her remarks point out the irrefutable complicity of her stance in the society. As a metaphor of women, this cake and Marian herself become essentially commodified and fetishized.

When Marian offers the woman-shaped cake to Peter "carefully and with reverence", she breaks their engagement with a new awareness: " 'You've been trying to destroy me, haven't you... 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, isn't it? I'll get you a fork' (1969, p. 301). Marian's

statement that Peter is trying to “assimilate” her works as a potentially transgressive attempt, for such an attempt points out Marian’s realization of her socially mediated self and her own potential capability to negotiate that mediation so he will not be compelled continuously to a state of submission. At this point, Peter is unable to get a word out: “[Peter and Marian] didn’t have much of a conversation after all” (1969, p. 300). Peter, however, fails to consider the cake as a symbol of the socially gendered inscriptions of women and their bodies.

In her speech, Marian blames Peter for attempting to dominate and assimilate her as though he consumes her like a cake, signifying Atwood’s narrative conception of symbolic cannibalism. In “An Introduction to *The Edible Woman*” Atwood writes, she had “been speculating for some time about symbolic cannibalism. Wedding cakes with sugar brides and grooms were at that time of particular interest to me” (Atwood, 1984, p. 369). Atwood suggests that “symbolic cannibalism” functions as a ritual to ease the transition into marriage and reveals that both male and female are cannibalized in that institution, just as the figures of bride and groom on the wedding cake will be.

As Lévi-Strauss views cannibalism as an “ideology of consumption” (Levi-Strauss, 1969, p. 338), cannibalism seems to be appropriate to Atwood’s analogical relationship with eating and gender relations in *The Edible Woman*. More specifically, the title of the novel itself clearly positions this relation at the scene of gender, where the one in power eats the one who has less power. In such a case, the woman is a commodified subject of consumption. As a metaphorical act of self-cannibalism, Marian’s making and eating the cake can be considered as an attempt to gain control of the process of her production in spite of a self-conscious awareness of hegemonic cultural norms.

Throughout the novel, gustatory actions of hunting and eating are introduced as similar to the figurative cannibalism which views women as a prey and a victim to the designs of others. The convention of gender roles which compels man to be the hunter and pursuer, while woman as the prey and the pursued in the typical courtship ceremonies is exemplified in Peter’s description of his experience of hunting a rabbit:

One shot, right through the heart. The rest of them got away. I picked it up and Trigger said, “You know how to gut them, you just slit her down the belly and give her a good hard shake and all the guts’ll fall out.” So I whipped out my knife, good knife, German steel, and slit the belly and took her by the hind legs and gave her one hell of a crack, like a whip you see, and the next thing you know there was blood and guts all over the place (Atwood, 1969, p. 74).

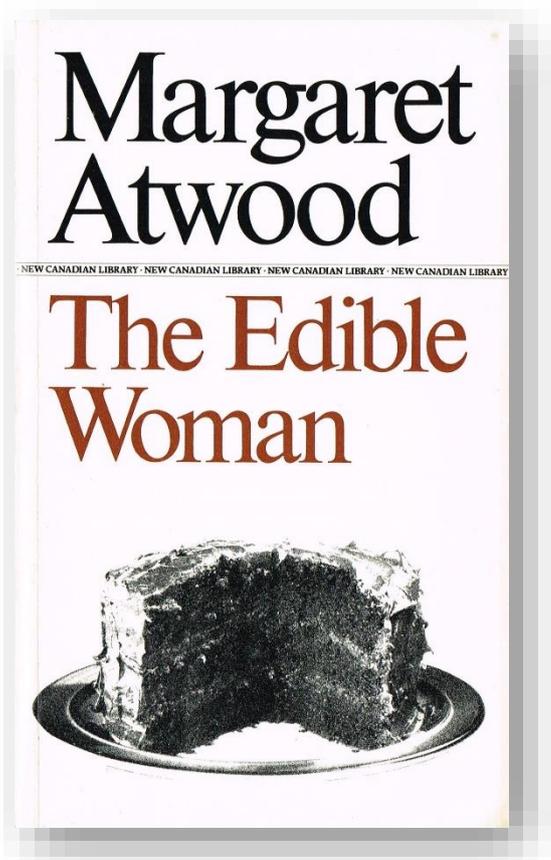
The use of the feminine pronoun, “her,” as a reference to the rabbit in Peter’s description implies that Marian is captured like the rabbit, that is a prey of Peter who performs as a hunter. The vulnerability and innocence of the rabbit symbolises the powerlessness of women as a consumable object. Subsequent to the description of the hunting event, Peter talks over his interest in shooting with cameras, which reinforces his role as a hunter who catches images in photographs. As he states, “God it was funny. Lucky thing Trigger and me had the old cameras along, we got good shots of the whole mess” (Atwood, 1969, p. 74). Peter captures photos of the dead rabbit as a means to show his power over his prey. This is corresponding to men’s strength over women when the woman’s body is captured and objectified by the camera as a sexual commodity. Another example

is the scene of Marian and Peter's flight and pursuit. Marian's attempt to flee from Peter stimulated by her fear of loss of her self is parallel to the rabbit's escaping death by being caught. When Marian becomes clam especially after a state of agitation and talks with Peter in his car, Peter accuses her, "'Ainsley behaved herself properly, why couldn't you? The trouble with you is,' he said savagely, 'you're just rejecting your femininity'" (1969, p. 87). Peter's accusation of Marian demonstrates his feeling of being disappointed by Marian's refusal of acting the culturally prescribed roles of femininity. The consumer/consumed dichotomy within the novel positions men as consumers, pursuer and hunter and women as commodities, the consumed, pursued and the prey. In this respect, consumption is framed as male-female power relations excessively moderated by socially constructed needs and desires.

CONCLUSION

In Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, the female protagonist seeks to assert the multiple and dynamic female self by adopting various strategies of resistance both to the stereotyping of femininity encoded in food practices and female bodies and to defy the conventional gender roles that situate women in unfavourable positions. In this regard, the mind/body dissonance is central to the life of Atwood's female protagonist, excessively influencing her corporeal experience. *The Edible Woman* reveals the falsities of mind/body dissonance that alienate woman from her body and drive her from her sense of self.

For Atwood, the body serves as a means by which a woman can assert her existence. In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood uses corporeal language of resistance. Since cultural and social codes dictate on our bodies, the female body both exhibits female voicelessness and fights against it, adapting the eating problem to this aim. Atwood's view of the female body as a site of resistance and power is one of the key statements of her work. It enables us to realize the relation between our bodies and our minds through a conversation between the two. As Elizabeth Grosz notes in *Volatile Bodies*, although the body and the mind are "disparate," each has "the capacity to twist one into the other" (Grosz, 1994, p. 209). The mind/body dissonance can result from both the denial of the subjectivity of women and the tendency to treat women as merely bodies. That dissonance, which appears in the form of eating disorders in *The Edible Woman*, serves as a means of communicating that the mind and the body are integrally connected and it is full of danger or risk to treat them otherwise.



In *The Edible Woman*, Atwood depicts Marian's inability to eat as both self-destructive and self-rescuing. That is, Marian's body's refusal of food, which threatens her with starvation, alarms her through that very danger of the psychic threat that marriage to Peter signifies for her – the death of the self. By deliberately shaping the cake in her own image, Marian expects Peter to eat the cake, as the woman-shaped cake is a sacrificial offering to him, and as a result Peter will stop controlling and destroying her. What Marian does not realize is that the symbol of herself as an edible object was never meant for Peter. Rather, it serves as a clear symbol of Marian's feminine image, and its shaping emphasizes the almost natural construction of gender identity. In this sense, the act of shaping and manipulating her woman-shaped cake is more effective for Marian, as it results in disrupting the culturally imposed ideals of femininity. The cake has nothing to do with Peter. Instead, it is meant as a means for Marian to see the truth about Peter's manipulation of her.

As Grosz states in *Volatile Bodies*, "the specificities of the female body" such as "menstruation, pregnancy, maternity, lactation, etc." are in one way viewed as "a limitation on women's access to the rights and privileges patriarchal culture accords to men... in the other, the body is seen as a unique means of access to knowledge and ways of living" (Grosz, 1994, p. 15). What emerges from this argument is that Marian's body's denial of food refers to the body's resistance to the idealized feminine image she is confronting with. Marian subverts the cultural construction of feminine image through corporeal knowledge. She transcends the construction of gender norms by accessing her unique means to knowledge. Concerning the potential relation between the mind and the body, Atwood indicates a similar understanding of the nature of agency through her depiction of the body, not as separate from or in opposition to the self, but as a key aspect of it, and not as a hindrance to the operations of the mind, but as the means for experiencing the world.

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OKTAY YİVLİ

Kırk Yama

AŞK, EDEBİYAT ve ÖTEKİ ŞEYLER




Günce Yayınları

(İnanışlar ve Gelenekler Bağlamında)

**TÜRK ve SLAV
KÜLTÜRLERİNDE
RENK SEMBOLİZMİ**

DR. HAKAN SARAÇ




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