MARGARET ATWOOD'S THE EDIBLE WOMAN: A CORPOREAL LANGUAGE OF RESISTANCE

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Abstract:
The proposed study focuses on Margaret Atwood’s The Edible woman (1969), considering it in relation to Helen Cixous’s theory of Ecriture feminine. The study is an attempt to uncover the facets of corporeal language that emanate from female body. It further delineates how this corporeal language of female helps liberate herself from the patriarchal domination. The paper discusses in detail that how female revisits and reformulates her identity by rediscovering a renewed relationship with her body and thus, the voice emanates from this rediscovered position forms a narrative of self-assertion. A textual examination of the novel is attempted to examine how body sustains an individual's identity and how women’s bodily experiences straightforwardly impact her identity. The study also highlights that how Atwood deconstructs the feminist aesthetics and proposes a re-reading of female body by woman in order to liberate and empower herself toward making a niche of an individual subjective identity. The key focus has been to show how the theory of ecriture feminine resonates through Atwood's delineation of female body, thereby carving out a distinct female existence.

Key words: Body, Corporeal Language, Ecriture Feminine, Liberate, Patriarchal, Reconstruct.

INTRODUCTION

"[N]o woman can call herself free who does not own and control her own body...It is for women the key to liberty” (Margaret Sanger: 533).

History has witnessed that patriarchy exerts control over women by oppressing female body. Women are looked upon just as a body, an object of male pleasure in the traditional patriarchal society. Thus, women’s subjugation in society has impelled women activists and authors to strive to disentangle the female body from the male designed image. As Helen Cixous in her Essay ‘The laugh Of the Medusa’ writes: "Women’s language is fundamentally different from men. When a woman speaks, she uses her body to “support the logic” of her speech. Her flesh speaks true...She signifies it with her body”(251). Margaret Atwood echoes the same ideological construct with Cixous. She presents a sensible and corporeal investigation of the
female body in her text which not only addresses the intricacy of self-perception, but also demystifies the female form.

Atwood’s first novel, *The Edible Woman*, written in 1965 on the threshold of the women’s movement and published in 1969, focuses the facets of corporeal language that emanate from female body. Critics so far have analysed the novel from a feminist point of view. The proposed study intends to add to Atwood’s criticism by examining the novel from a divergent perspective. The study reinterprets the novel in the light of ecriture feminine that delves further into Atwood’s fiction and her literary style. However, other interpretations speak of her work as text of second wave of feminism, but the novel is possibly more substantial than that. Atwood rather deals with the complex concept of female body as a subversive tool against patriarchy.

A textual examination of the novel tries to examine how body sustains an individual’s identity and how women’s bodily experiences straightforwardly impact her identity. The paper also aims to delineate how the feminist aesthetics have been deconstructed that inspires women for a re-reading of the female body so as to liberate and emancipate them toward making a niche of an individual identity. The key focus is to show how the theory of ecriture feminine resonates through the female body in the novel that curves out a distinct female existence.

*The Edible Woman* is a journey of a young female researcher, Marian. Her acquaintance with several men and women makes her realize the ways in which a female is controlled in a patriarchy. Eventually, she finds a solution from this patriarchal oppression through self-realization and self-expression. Marian endeavours to reconstruct her identity. At the end of the novel she gets transformed from a ordinary submissive woman to a inviolable, unconventional and assertive personality. The paper is divided into two sections, the first section deals with the narrative structure of the novel and the second section deals with the metaphorical treatment of the theme of the novel.

**STYLE, STRUCTURE AND TONE OF THE NOVEL:**

The notion of ecriture feminine (women’s writing) cannot be expounded but, it is conceivable to recognize some of its features as described by Julia Kristeva and Helen Cixous. According to them, feminine writing overthrows the traditional conventions of structure and form and is composed through body in a non-structured pattern. Atwood in her novel moves away from the traditional style of writing in linear form. She uses a non-linear narrative and a complex tripartite structure. A shifting narrative technique in the three different sections is exploited to give the readers an access to the psyche of the protagonist. In the first section of the novel, Marian addresses herself with personal pronoun ‘I’ and in the second, the narrative shifts to third person singular. The second voice also belongs to Marian, and finally in the last section the narrative again returns to ‘I’. Marian speaks: "Now that I was thinking of myself in the first person singular again I found my own situation much more interesting than his [Duncan's] "(284).
The entire account is narrated through Marian’s eyes. As a distinct narrative technique, she undergoes her character transformation. The shift of narrative from first person to the third person and then back to first person can be deciphered as an impression of her transformation from object to subject and a metamorphosis of personality. Marian’s fractured voice distances herself from her own feelings as writes that Marian’s split narrative not only displays:

“Marian's ... self-alienation’ ,but it also allows her to objectify her experience, to stand back from herself as it were, and it is through this distancing process that she is able to emancipate herself from her initial role as victim. She begins to make choices in her life by responding to her own inner feelings, rather than only to the world of external appearances (88).

Marian’s language as Atwood's prose style, is closely scrutinized in order to comprehend the transformational journey of the heroine from victim to creating distinct space in the society. The language is skilfully used to correlate with the protagonist's self-discernment. The linguistic versatility of the author is analysed by examining and comparing the language and writing style in two different scenes of Marian’s shopping visit. Marian goes for shopping twice in the novel for the first time, in the begging of the novel after her engagement with Peter and second time, after her break up from Peter. These two shopping scenes metaphorically portray the transformation of Marian’s identity.

After her engagement she goes for shopping for the first time to buy some food stuff for a dinner party which she was hosting for her fiancé(Peter) and her friends(Clara and Joe). The store attracted her so much that she bought everything she saw. But soon she feels disillusioned with cooking and eating. By the end of the novel, she again goes for shopping but then, she has run away from her engagement with Peter. She chooses a cake of her own image and she dresses and decorates the cake doll exactly the same as she herself was dressed for Peter’s party. Her designing and consuming of the cake doll connotes her acknowledgement and dismissal of her submissive self. She begins to feel the urge to listen to her own voice and instincts.

The novel opens with Marin's marriage proposition and as the story unfolds Marian is undecided between Peter and Duncan, as she finds Peter to be appropriate and promising but at the same time she finds that Duncan suits her choice. However, the novel does not have a happy ending. Marian is neither contended with Peter nor with Duncan. The novel ends up leaving many open questions on the maze of life. By disturbing the design, Atwood proves that marriage is not the ultimate goal of women’s life and that a female’s life cannot be dictated by man or marriage. Thus, Atwood deconstructs the design of conventional plot and questions the certainty of marriage as essential criteria for happy ending. The shifting of narrative between first and third person is to express Marian’s self-distancing and self-destructive attitude which she develops in the wake of consenting to wed Peter. The first section of the novel consists of first twelve chapters, narrated in first person. Herein, Marian talks about her relationship to her roommate, her fiancé and to her work. This does not give the readers any obvious clue to Marian’s psyche, except the trace of her mood and how she sees herself. The primary section
depicts her feelings and her awareness that something isn't right with her, and she is unable to reason out. She asserts, “I know I was well all right on Friday when I got up; if anything I was feeling more stolid than usual” (3). As the novel advances, Marian gradually realizes that her body and her feelings were becoming uncontrollable: “I was astounded at myself. I’d never said anything remotely like that to him before. The funny thing was I really meant it” (94). The second part of the novel opens up drastic changes in her personality. Here, the narration shifts from first person to the third person. In the second section of the novel, Marian is unable to tell her story as she loses her control over her body and her feelings. Thus, in the second part, it’s not only the reader who is not able to have access to Marian’s thought but Marian herself feels distanced from her musings. Marian’s self-alienation becomes apparent in the dinner date scene where she is not able to realize that she is crying until she sees tear drops on the table. She narrates:

After a while I noticed with mild curiosity that a large drop of something we had materialized on the table near my hand. I poked it with my finger and smudged it around a little before I realized with horror that it was a tear. I must be crying then!” (The Edible Woman: 71).

Here, Marian starts losing control over her body the gulf between her body and self gradually increases and her body refuses to eat many things. Again by the end of the novel, Atwood strategically links Marian’s self-alienation and the third person narration. It is only in the ultimate section that when her clash with Peter is settled, and the danger of marriage is escaped that she can once again connect herself with her body and her psyche. Thus, shuttling between first and third person narration is just to expose the psychological pressure on her mind which Marian goes through. Ellen Peel in this context argues that by alternating narrative voices, as opposed to integrated voices, alienation and tension between the subject and object is stressed (108). At the end of novel, Marian seems to bring both subject and object together when she says: “[n]ow that I was thinking of myself in the first person singular, again I found my own situation much more interesting than his” (284). She tries to compose herself both as subject and object symbolically by baking a cake doll in her own image and then eating it. This act of baking a cake and eating it, conveys that although Marian has saved herself from the danger of being consumed but she has no clear vision of herself or of her future.

Working from the premises that feminine experience is marginal and oppositional, Irigarary developed an understanding of the disruptive capacity of an alternative, semiotic language working in opposition to the language of the symbolic, disrupting its logic and its authority. In This Sex Which is Not One (1977), Irigarary defines female sexuality as typically multiple and fragmented; it is ‘more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex, more subtle’ (11) than the symbolically unified phallus. The multiplicity of feminine sexuality is not in opposition to masculine unity, but, instead, defines opposition. Irigarary terms this feminine language (écriture feminine) as diffusive and oppositional in manner (11). According to Irigarary, conventionally male writing is considered to be linear, coherent and dynamic and authoritative whereas feminine writing (écriture feminine) is actually symbolic, non-linear, uncertain and with numerous and even opposing implications. One of the natural characteristic
of ecriture feminine is its multifarious views and no single view is special over other. As Susan Seller explains: "Language, because of the particular world-view it encodes, represses, excludes or appropriates all other constructions and hence, the feminist revolution must find a base (12).

Atwood seems to echo Cixous and Irigarary’s notion of language. The trace of ecriture feminine is found in the first and second section of Marian's narratives in which Marian is so much baffled in the first shopping scene that she is confused to decide what she wants and thus, she is engaged in a monologue. Whereas, the second shopping scene is very short. Further, the novel is dominated by food eating metaphor which makes the language symbolic and multi-layered, thus characterising it as women’s writing. Atwood’s linguistic versatility also corresponds to ecriture feminine as her language is embodied with more of verbs, alliterations and metaphors. For instance Atwood uses a number of reflexive verbs in chapter twenty and action verbs in chapter thirty of the novel to portray the transformational journey of the protagonist. Reflexive verbs like 'found herself', 'writing herself', 'watching herself” used in chapter twenty shows that Marian has no control of plot structure. It appears as if she is watching her own dream: “She had caught herself lately watching herself with an abstracted curiosity, to see what she would do” (177). Whereas, in chapter thirty, no reflexive verbs are found and she positions herself as eyewitness. Marian comes closer to her inner self in chapter thirty. She moves from her dreams to the world of reality. Moreover, the verbs related to food choices in chapter twenty relate more to the set of physical action or sight. For example, she uses 'shot out'(her hand), 'tossed', 'closed'(her fingers), 'glared' etc. There are no verbs which imply willingness or desire which in turn shows the lack of control on the events of her life. Here, Marian acts like a puppet who unwillingly buys the items mechanically. Whereas, in chapter thirty, the verbs used to select food do not relate to any mechanical gesture. Verbs used in chapter thirty are related to her preference and aspirations:

Picking the things off the selves
She wanted everything new
She didn’t want (177)

Marian has transformed from a dummy to an autonomous individual who has the freedom of choice. It is observed that in chapter twenty her expressions depend on external factors, rather than on her own desire. For example, she takes a list of items that she has to buy which in turn does not give room to her choice and while shopping she reads aloud from her list:

“Beans” she said
“Noodles” she said (177).

Since she is directed by the prescribed list to buy the items needed for a specific recipe, she totally stifles her own needs and choices. Her spontaneity is lost. Whereas, in chapter thirty, Marian moves out for shopping without any prescribed list: "[She] threw down the pencil after she had written several words. She knew what she wanted to get (274).
Similarly, on comparing the verbs related to cooking of food in chapter twenty and thirty, it is found that the protagonist transforms to the subject position. The verbs in the following passage regarding preparing and cooking of food exemplifies her mental state:

She **Rubbed** the wooden bowl with a half-clove of garlic and **threw** in the onion rings and the **sliced** radishes and the tomatoes, and **tore up** the lettuce. At the last minute she thought of adding a **grated** carrot to give it more colour. She took out from the refrigerator, located the peeler finally in the bread-box, and began to **peel off** the skin, holding the carrot by its leafy top (220).

The above underlined verbs convey a sense of violence portraying Marian’s dissatisfaction and anguish. These verbs also picture Marian’s lack of performing voluntary actions. Whereas, in chapter thirty, she bakes a cake of her choice involving the entire mind’s satisfaction. Till now, she had been preparing food as prescribed by others. For Peter, she prepared 'frozen peas and smoked meat, the kind you boil in three minutes in plastic packages' (64). Then, before going to Laundromat she ‘warmed up and ate a frozen dinner’ (93). Further, 'She had not felt much like cooking lately' (166). But in chapter thirty, Marian uses creative verbs out of her creative inspiration while baking the cake. She uses the word 'to make' for six times which suggests that Marian has transformed to ‘a maker’.

Thus, with the analysis of the narrative technique and language employed by Atwood, it is obvious that Marian transforms her identity from a victim to an artist. It is observed that language, when connected to self (body), brings a transformation in one’s identity. Marian’s imaginative faculties interlace with her body and the language thus formed, characterizes her movements to be smooth, controlled and powerful. In the last chapter of the novel, she tells us: "I was cleaning up the apartment. It has taken me two days to gather the strength to face it, but I had finally started. I had to go about it layer by layer" (283). Atwood finds the tools of language such as verbs and nouns to be useless objects. She finds it difficult to communicate through language as she points out: 'Besides, language has a ‘bad smell’ coming from rotted mouths and the speaker cannot use it until they find a way to wash it clean (Atwood: 83).

Similarly, the female characters in Atwood’s novel find it very hard to use language as a means for expressing their bodies and emotions because they live in a patriarchal society and language is a male weapon. As Irigaray claims that: "the masculine' is not prepared to share the imitative of discourse. It prefers to experiment with speaking, writing, enjoying ‘Woman’ rather than leaving to that other any right to intervene, to 'act', in her own interests "(157). But Atwood’s women characters act to their greatest advantage by finding an alternative means of expression and communication echoing Helen Cixous' view that: “Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring them to writing...Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history– by her own movement” (Leitch: 2035). In the novel, Atwood equips her protagonist with body gestures as an alternative for language. For example, Marian develops an eating disorder when her body refuses to take food. The bodily act of eating disorder replaces language in order to express Marian’s physical and emotional hunger. Palmer, in her book rightly justified this point:
No longer is the Western phenomenon of eating disorder interpreted as a reaction to the barrage of images of extreme slenderness promoted by the fashion industry and media. Rather, feminists have come to understand the eating disorder, overwhelmingly a female problem, as a rebellion against culturally defined experiences of womanhood (28).

Along these lines, Anorexia and chronic eating disorder can be viewed as a calculated act that show either cognizant or oblivious dissent against the patriarchal notions of feminine and women’s lack of corporeal autonomy what is again corroborated by Orbach's statement that feminism "has taught us that activities that appear to be self-destructive are invariably adaptations, attempts to cope with the world"(9). She continues: “To see the anorectic’s food refusal as a *hunger strike* is to begin the process of humanizing her actions” (Orbach: 102). The author has used a corporeal language of resistance while unfolding the events of the story. A bodily act of eating disorder is used as a troupe of language to resist patriarchy what Atwood concedes in an interviews:

“It’s a human activity that has all kinds of symbolic connotations depending on the society and the level of society. In other words, what you eat varies from place to place, how we feel about what we eat varies from place to place, how we feel about what we eat varies from individual as well as from place to place. If you think of food as coming in various categories: sacred food, ceremonial food, everyday food and things that are not to be eaten, forbidden food, dirty food, if you like –for the anorexic, all food is dirty food” (Lynos :228).

**EVALUATION**

Some of Atwood’s critics have evaluated this eating disorder as women's language of resistance. Karen Stein describes Marian’s eating disorder as “enacting her resistance to the traditional female romance plot with her body” (160). MacLulich describes it as an action to show resistance and he describes this action as a “rejection of her own body” (190). J.brooksBouson terms it as 'self-starvation', which “reflects her resistance to the cultural constructions of femininity” (Brutal Choreographies: 25). Thus, eating disorder is not an isolated case but it stands for subject-object dichotomy. By analysing the corporeal behaviour of the protagonist, and the ways in which language is deconstructed through body, the study echoes cixous’ theory of ecriture feminine.

The body has the power to control both the interpretation of discourse and empower identity. Through the narration of the story, it is gradually made clear. Young Marian works in market research company, namely Seymour Survey that follows a three level hierarchy. All the authoritative and decorous positions were held by men. The organization was too much biased against females as the top floor of the office was solely operated by men and females were not even allowed to visit the floor. Moreover the housewives were assigned to the lower floor of the office. Through the imagery of the three layered structure of Marian’s office building, Atwood posits “a metaphoric parallel for woman’s place/space in society. The three layers
represent three planes of reality: mind, body and matter. The men are in minds; the women are bodies” (Salat: 95). 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…” (Atwood: 19).

Marian can neither think nor plan of holding an administrative position nor can she bracket herself with machines. According to the hierarchical positioning of Seymour Surveys Marian was placed above ‘matter’ but below ‘mind’. She feels suffocated in the companies system and thus expresses: What, then, could I expect to turn into at Seymour Surveys? I couldn’t become one of the men upstairs; I couldn’t become a machine person…as that would be a step down (Atwood: 20).

Her job at the company is to translate the complicated questionnaires formulated by male psychologists into a simpler form so that a common man can understand it. Her job involves the manipulation of language with sexist norms rather than the creative use of language. Marriage and pregnancy are considered illegal acts for the women who are employed in the company. Marian feels distress and disoriented due to the sexist conditioning. She feels scandalized with the comments of a man upon her: “You ought to be at home with some big strong man to take care of you” (48). Despite possessing a handsome, successful boyfriend (Peter), urban lifestyle, air of confidence and independence, Marian is not satisfied because of the predefined stereo typical roles which society expects her to play. On the other hand, she is ravenous for cognitive and psychological incitement through which she can achieve something laudable. She says:

"At times I’m certain I’m being groomed for something higher up, but as I have only hazy notions of the organizational structure of Seymour Surveys I can’t imagine what" (Atwood: 19).

Continuous inner turmoil emaciated her as her body chooses to deny an ever increasing number of consumable items, step by step. She is stunned by her body's choice to change without her authorization. Her body experiences an unwilling self-starvation: “[S]he 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 and tempted it, but it was adamant; and if she used force it rebelled” (177-178). Marian soon realises that this bodily act of eating disorder is more than ‘bridal nerves’ (206). Duncan, one of Marian’s friends interprets this disorder as rebellious and comments: “oh, you’re probably representative of modern youth, rebelling against the system; though it isn’t considered orthodox to begin with the digestive system. But why not” (208)? Throughout the novel, Marian faces difficulty expressing her feelings through language. So, her body finds alternative ways to express her thoughts. She finds language to be a male rather than female tool. Atwood uses the body as the medium of resistance to this male dominated language. The pattern of her eating supports Rainwater’s contention 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” (17).
The experience of eating disorder wanes her body as well. As she awakes up one morning, she remembers a dream: “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” (43). For Rainwater, these disturbing body images "evince the fundamental difficulty of negotiating the boundaries between self and world" (15) and are also examples of the process of self-actualization that Linda Hutcheon refers to in her comments: "we must not always take it at face value, for this process, is not... always presented in positive terms, and when it is not it is usually a signal of Marian's unreliability as what Henry James called a narrative 'centre of consciousness': images of drowning, dissolving, drifting into a natural realm are viewed as negative at first, that is, from Marian's limited, unreliable point of view. Such loss of individuality as is implied in these images of merging with process is therefore perceived as dangerous to her personal sense of herself (141).

In the early stages of this process, Marian's mind perceives the tenuous state of her existence through these surreal images, images that re-enforce her "pathological condition of self-division" (Howells: 27). It becomes markedly evident after her marriage with Peter and this opposition between body and mind becomes evident as her body "becomes the battleground in the struggle towards self-definition" (Rainwater: 17). Peter's comment on food item at a restaurant, shortly after their engagement that: "A good meal always makes you feel a little more human" (152) wakes up Marian's sense that she is going to be caged as traditional Canadian women. If she does not begin to navigate a more autonomous course, she will have no clear individual identity. The intuitive nature of her body protests and begins refusing food. It starts with a rejection of steak and slowly adds on to eggs, cheese and finally breaks down to a few carrot sticks and spoonful of peanut butter. She is surprised to learn that her body appears to have a mind, a knowledge all its own, a knowledge that is other than her conscious intellect, a knowledge that is centred in her body.

Although mind and body are yet to merge, her mind's growing awareness of her body's voice indicates the potential conversation that might arise between the two. This conversation offers an interesting twist to Cartesian ideology that sees "the body as alien...a confinement and limitation...the enemy (and) the locus of all that threatens our attempts at control" (Bordo: 144-5). The sudden and unconstrained response of Marian's body is her initial step to recapture freedom. As she gradually finds the nature and reasons for her eating disorder, she begins to comprehend her own particular needs and sentiments. She begins to walk away from Peter: "I drew back from him. A tremendous electric blue flash, very near, illuminated the inside of the car. As we stared at each other in that brief light I could see myself, small and oval, mirrored in his eyes" (83). The unappetizing tendency bears the stamp of her personality and position. It creates the impression that food is excessively comparable to her body: she is an eatable like the foodstuffs she disdains.

With growing aversion to eating various food items, she realizes the necessity to understand her body gestures that sensitizes her to win back her identity. One of the manifestations of her
internal resistance to adjust to the role of the mother that Clara epitomizes is her body's refusal to dine with Peter, despite the fact that she is ravenous. Both the body and the sentiments of Marian have picked up autonomy that continues on an unusual path till she recognizes and coordinates them. When she acclimatizes her mind and body, she recovers her narrative power. As she gradually discovers the nature and reason of her eating disorder, she begins to retaliate to the gender biasness by distancing herself from her body. By empowering Marian's body to challenge the gendered binaries, Atwood reproves the harsh polarities that structure the society. Here, the onerous control that patriarchy exercises on the female body is exposed. Atwood insists that rather than admitting and confining to the dominating and culturally defined conventions, women must re-write them. Her notion of rewriting by women, in a way, resounds Cixous's view that feminine language (écriture feminine) operates in diffusive, oppositional manner.

The language of female body is quite inconceivable by men what is made clear through the protagonist's eventful life. The salon episode makes it clear that female space is not a place for women to fulfil their aspirations; rather it is a space to fulfil the desires of men. Ostensibly, the beauty salon scene is a case of patriarchy infringing on female space to control the female body. Peter's love making is just a clinical approach as his insensitivity to a woman is fathomed by the movement of his hands: “gently over her skin, without passion, almost clinically, as if he could learn by touch whatever it was that had escaped the probing of his eyes” (63). Marian's body transforms into a corporeal space whose apparent components are exposed to a close examination in order to apprehend her mental guts to administer and regulate her subjectivity. Peter’s scrutiny of Marian’s body is a ferocious attack on Marian’s integrity as these practices may lead women to ‘utter demoralization, debilitation and death’ (Bordo: 91). Marian realizes that feminine paradigms are restricting her to be her real self; she envisions herself vanishing. Sitting in the bath, Marian is all of a sudden overpowered by the dread that she is dissolving, ‘coming apart layer by layer like a piece of cardboard in a gutter puddle’ (218).

The plot strikes its crest when Peter hosts a party on their engagement ceremony. Marian is decorated as per the directions of Peter. She has an elaborate hairdo, a ‘daring’ new red dress, a girdle, heavy make-up, and gold ear rings. She doesn't feel herself to be real and finds herself manipulated. On looking into the mirror she feels her own image mocking at her. Marian’s self-image is shattered. She realises that she is no longer her real self rather she is an image of Peter's wife and she has become all that society expects her to be. Marian realizes that she has turned into Peter's significant 'other' and an ‘object’ and loses her capacity to perceive anything. The image of the hunter and hunted becomes stronger in her mind. Peter’s camera becomes a gun, ready to shoot her. It brings out uneasy feelings in Marian for she feels as if she has turned out to be inert statue implied for show. The blinding flash of Peter's camera attacks her like a hunter. This makes Marian realize that she is entreated into a condition of interminable subjugation in the name of marriage. She feels the exigency to eschew her-self out of this calamity. 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 (269).
At the party Marian realizes that Peter has the potential to devastate her identity and he wants to dominate her autonomy. She apprehends that Peter is a threat to her identity what J. Brooks justifies: “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” (231). Marian flees from the engagement bomb shelling Peter’s plan of controlling her identity. It demonstrates her feminine audacity for her integrity. In this discourse, it is the mind that must control the body, yet in Marian's case it is her body overriding her intellect. It is not until she accepts this dialogue with her body that her intellect can take action towards autonomy which is symbolized in the cake baking and eating scene. At the end of the novel she plunges "her fork into the carcass, neatly severing the body from the head" (273).

She feels that cake's fate would well have been her own fate if she had stuck with convention; but in the end she asserts that the cake is edible, whereas- she is not. At the end of the narrative, she may not yet be 'fully human', but she appears to be on the track that will lead her there. This conversation between mind and body is what sets Marian apart from the anorectic, for, as psychologist Helen Malsen observes in her study of anorexia that:

Women with eating disorders are relentlessly attempting to silence the body and its messages saying body management becomes central to the maintenance of self-integrity, and eating becomes an occasion when the body, something that is 'not me', 'takes over' and triumphs in the discursively produced conflict between mind/self and body. As an object of bodily desire, food takes on very powerful significations within this discourse. It is simultaneously wanted (by the body) and forbidden (by the mind/self). Food becomes constituted as a profoundly threatening temptation (125).

It is in this relationship with food that Marian and the anorectic experience their corporeal realities differently. For the anorexic woman, food is constantly craved by the body yet repeatedly denied by her conscious self, while in Marian's situation, her mind constantly acknowledges that she is in need of food, but it is her body that is denying its entry.

**DISCUSSION**

The denial is resistance to male domination which fills her with the sense of self loss. Peter’s camera in the party is a masculine weapon just like that of language as Butler states: "It trades on the masculine privilege of disembodied gaze, the gaze that has the power to produce bodies, but which is itself no body" (136). Peter’s camera produces a fallacious picture of Marian’s body that symbolizes the representation of female through male gaze. On the contrary, Duncan's approach is more fondly remembered as he is least concern to look at Marian. He even switches off the lights while making love with Marian. Unlike Peter, Duncan enjoys touching Marian what gives her sensual gratification. As Irigarary says, ‘the predominance of the visual…. is particularly foreign to female eroticism. Women take pleasure more from touching than from looking’ (25-26). Marian enjoys sexual autonomy with Duncan, as she is her real self with him. She does not have to stick to the submissive role of women and...
flatter his performance to boast his ego. Duncan not only functions as Peter’s antithesis but also as Marian’s alter ego and it helps Marian perceive and comprehend herself clearly for the first time. Her effort to change Duncan is an unconscious effort to change herself. Duncan confesses that he does not love her: ‘[y]ou’re just another substitute for the Laundromat’ (145) but, irrespective of gendered stereotype he treats her equal to him. He even forces her to consider her own wishes and desires.

As Marian starts identifying herself with gutted rabbits and beheaded carrots, she prefers to run away to Duncan in Laundromat, and spend a night with Duncan at a motel. The next morning Marian finds herself unable to eat anything at all now, so she strives to find a solution for her eating disorder. Marian and Duncan both distrust language; Marian is of the view that the words are ‘like snakes, they had a way of coiling back on you and getting you all wrapped up’ (134) and Duncan feels ‘all tangled up in words’ (142). So both prefer to be silent and walk together towards the bottom of a huge valley as Marin comments: ‘frozen ravine where in the snow you’re as near as possible to nothing’ (263). Atwood intentionally employs ravines here and exploit them as a place of transformation as in Lady Oracle, Joan sees the exhibitionist in the ravine who flashes his genitals at her but also gives her a bouquet of daffodils. So, she realises that every man is a villain and a hero at the same time. In Cat’s Eye Elaine is left to die from hypothermia in the frozen ravine where she sees a vision of the Virgin Mary. Likewise, Marian in the novel realises that she should stop being a victim and should not expect Peter to be her rescuer; instead, she should break her silence and voice her feelings.

Marian starts imagining her colleagues as edible as she says: ‘They were ripe, some rapidly becoming overripe, some already beginning to shrivel; she thought of them as attached by stems at the tops of their heads to an invisible vine, hanging there in various stages of growth and decay’ (166-67).

Hence, leaving Duncan in the ravine she returns to her home and finally decides to bake a cake for Peter. Marian explains her objective for creating the doll cake. She says: “The price of this version of reality was testing the other one” (27). She bakes the cake-doll in her own image, the surrogate of her own artificial self-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 (Graeme Gibson:25)

She has become a sculptor rather than being a passive puppet. By creating the cake, she would like to symbolize her feelings in the wake of her experiences with Peter and Duncan. Thus, symbolically, the doll-cake represents woman as an object for male consumption. This gesture of Marian is at once a complicity and a critique of domestic myth. Howells rightly asserts that the doll-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” (Howells: 25).

Marian offers Peter the cake as a substitute for herself when he questions her for her sudden escape from the party. She remarks:
You have 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 disturbs Peter’s plan of her by baking the symbolic literal. This symbolic gesture is suggestive of Marian’s release from what George Woodcook calls “emotional cannibalism”. (George Woodcook: 153). Peter is shocked at Marian’s unanticipated behaviour and leaves the place. Marian than 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 in their way into the world” (Parker: 350). Marian also offers the residue of the cake to Duncan who comes at Marian’s place without any invitation. Unlike Peter he proceeds to eat the cake as he fails to realise the implication of this act.

The cake that Marian bakes and eats seen as a symbolic evidence of the development of her vision, and her ultimate refusal to be a victim to the patriarchal hegemony. She affirms a sense of Pride and Proclaims at the end that a cake is edible but women is not. As a woman, Marian has definitely changed from the meek, docile and passive to assertive, active and bold individual.

CONCLUSION

Atwood s in her thematic guide to Canadian literature, Survival, describe that in order to survive from being victimized, one must become 'creative non-victim' (38). Marian achieves this position by the creative act of cake baking and she transforms herself to non-victim position from victim. She ultimately regains her identity by coming back to personal pronoun “I”. The protest that Atwood manifests through Marian's corporeal experience becomes life-affirming, eventually leading Marian to regain her autonomous identity symbolically narrated with a new eye/I. Atwood finally suggests that in order to liberate women from such conditioning it is important for women to develop a renewed relation with their bodies and give voice to their bodies. The novel scrutinizes the ways in which women are conditioned to extend their bodies for sexual gratification of men. By redefining female body, the author gives voice to women’s concern over their harsh social encounters and to defy that abuse

The Edible Woman deconstructs the patriarchal abstraction of femininity while re-defining the female body. It uncovers the fallaciousness of the male coded body that divorces woman from her body and distances her away from her real self. Marian's subjugated patriarchal encounters are able to challenge that tyranny. Atwood echoes Helen Cixous' view that the female body is an agency that can liberate women from the male definition. Eating disorder is experienced as corporeal language of women’s liberation. Marian neither wants to be a man nor a machine but a woman who quests for a meaningful human identity. She is able reclaim her humanistic
identity by re-evaluating her body and developing a renewed relationship with her own body irrespective of patriarchal dictates. Atwood in the novel encourages women that they need to reincarnate themselves in order to redefine society. Marian is able to find a language (body language) suitable for her to rediscover her voice and regain her identity. This is Atwood’s ecriture feminist perspective. Finally, the novel not only reflects society, but it also acts as a guide to our own geology that comprises of shared information, and this common learning is a necessity.

REFERENCES

Works Cited


