

FOOD AND IDENTITY IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *THE EDIBLE WOMAN***B. Ramya¹**

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ID:b.ramya260@gmail.com.**Abstract**

Food studies are an emerging interdisciplinary field of study. It examines the complex relationships among food, culture, and society from numerous disciplines in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Food, identity, geography, and place are interlinked with a symbolic perspective. Though food can be viewed in various perspectives, the paper mainly focuses on the relationships between people and food. It helps us to analyze how food brings out the hidden information about a person. This paper deals with food and identity in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Edible Woman* in which the protagonist Marian McAlpin twenty-six years old working woman begin to lose her ability to eat. Marian has inadequate control over herself, her life and her diet. Atwood designed the novel in such a way that it stages the journey of Marian and how she recovered her identity through a series of components and symbols. Following her engagement, she feels a detachment over her body and herself. As Marian begins endowing food with human qualities that cause her to identify with it, she finds herself unable to eat, repelled by metaphorical cannibalism. At the beginning of the novel, she leads a life of a common woman and by the end she overcomes her eating disorder and steps forward for a better life.

Keywords: geography, social sciences, components and symbols, .etc

The diversity, hierarchy, and organization are partially decided by the food what we eat. Our relationship with the natural environment is reflected by the food what we eat and how we eat. Food is also the foundation of our self-identity, out of which human individual is constructed, biologically, psychologically, socially by the food he/she chooses to intake. There are two different dimensions to study human relationship with food. One is its relation that flows from biological to cultural and the second is its nutritional function to symbolic function. The eating practices of a person are very essential that it contribute them in terms of its consistency with their nutritional needs. The images and metaphors of eating and food enunciate much more of human life than one would think at first. The motif of food, eating, and hunger is most authentic in her novels. Her novels expose the fictional world where this

motif is one way of portraying the characters' circumstance, feelings, and possibilities in life. In her novels the characters' physical hunger or lack of it, their eating or non-eating, cooking and the food they eat are portrayed, sometimes in detail. Symbolic hunger is present in the relationships between the characters and their vision of others. The motif of food, eating, and hunger is most explicit in her novel *The Edible Woman*

In Atwood's first novel *The Edible Woman* (1969), the protagonist, Twenty-six-year-old Marian MacAlpin, Twenty-six-year-old woman gets engaged with her boyfriend Peter Wollander, a practicing lawyer. However, she stops eating, ends her relationship with Peter and starts eating again. In the novel, Atwood symbolically portrayed the motif of hunger, food, and eating.

The food motif is portrayed by Marian's situation. Her hunger is symbolic and concrete excessive in a restrictive society. The motif is colored by the protagonist's desire to be more than her reserved feminine role options allow. Marian is affected by Anorexia Nervosa, a disorder that affects a person's eating habit. Her view on the world outside of her is affected by her impossible choices about her life. She could see that everybody is either a hunter or hunted gorging or starving.

Marian works in market research, where her work deals with crafting survey questions and sampling products. She stays with her friend Ainsley in an apartment and dates Peter, a dependable but boring man. She also keeps in touch with her college friend Clara, who is now a constantly pregnant housewife. One day Ainsley declares that she wishes to have a child without getting married. Marian is shocked, but Ainsley thinks that fathers are what ruin families these days. She sets her sights on Len, a man who is not interested in having a family at all and is a serial bachelor. At work, Marian is given an assignment of a new beer. As she gathers feedback about the beer, she meets Duncan, a graduate student who charms her with his unexpected answers. Later that evening, she goes on a dinner date with Peter and Len. Ainsley shows up dressed as an innocent schoolgirl, intending to seduce Len.

Marian dissociates from her body as Len recounts describe rabbit hunt. It makes her unable to finish her food and run from the restaurant. Peter chases after her and, since he is unaware of Ainsley's plan, asks Marian why she couldn't behave more like her roommate. He proposes to her by the end of the night, and she is unable to say when she would like to hold the wedding.

Ainsley achieves in seducing Len, and when she tells him that she is pregnant, Len reveals his childhood fear of eggs to Marian. This makes Marian unable to take her usual breakfast of a soft boiled egg. Subsequently, she loses the ability to eat vegetables and cake. Both Marian and Ainsley have a complicated relationship with food. Neither of them wants to become fat and Marian, in particular, wants to lose weight. She finds that limiting calorie intake and

ignoring food feels to her as though she is finally in control of something. At some point of time, she stops eating completely, partly at revolution against what she sees as the unreasonable strictures and expectations of a patriarchal society. The symptoms of Anorexia Nervosa can be seen in most of Marian's decisions with the food.

Marian decides to throw a party and invites the office mates, Duncan and some of his friends. For some reason, Duncan isn't pleased and leaves the party, but Marian follows. Due to her complicated relationship with Duncan the next morning she finds herself unable to eat anything at all.

Marian realizes that Peter is metaphorically consuming her. She feels that after their marriage, she will cease to exist. To test him, she bakes a woman-shaped cake, symbolically understanding and accepting her but also symbolically destroying and consuming her and offers it to him. She taunts him by saying that this is what he really wants. He is confused and when he leaves, she eats it herself. At the end of the novel, when Duncan shows up at her apartment, Marian starts narrating the story in the first person. She offers him the rest of the cake, which he accepts and enjoys without any hesitation. He eats the entire thing.

The major theme of the book is the self-identity of the female characters. Atwood examines the traditional feminine ideals such as submission to men and quiet, passive attitudes. When Marian feels that she is losing her identity with her body, she reacts by ignoring to eat. This inability to eat is an act of solidarity with other prey, such as the rabbits in Len's story, because Marian feels that she is prey just like the rabbit.

The narrative changes between the first and third person as Marian loses her sense of reality. She dissociates from her body during one of Len's stories and is unable to return to reality until she consumes the cake she made, which is a representation of her. Her desire to be in control of her own identity is depicted by the cake, which Peter ignores. Duncan, on the other hand, enjoys it what it represents, and we understand that Marian has regained her sense of identity again.

Atwood doesn't offer any answers beyond Marian's reclamation of her own identity. Nowhere in the novel does it insist that society will rearrange itself to accept this woman's direct control of her life. Instead, Marian is literally unable to accept the kind of life that is expected of her upon her marriage to Peter, and Atwood explores Marian's feelings about herself through images of food. Atwood is more concerned about whether the character will choose to assert her own identity. The book is less about societal revolution and more about personal choices. Marian doesn't come to any profound realization about herself. Instead, she takes steps to get her life back to form and to decide what kind of future she might like as an alternative to what society offers.

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