



Feminism: A Psycho Analysis in Margret Atwood's *THE EDIBLE WOMAN*

Dharani Pon

Department of English
PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore

Dr. M. John Suganya

Associate Professor of English
PSG College of Arts & Science, Coimbatore

Abstract

This article aims at exploring how a woman suffers from struggles and pain to empower. It explores theories like Feminism and Psychoanalytic with reference to the character Marian McAlphin, the protagonist who makes her way and transforms herself as an empowered woman after crossing up many challenges and experiences in her life. Social expectations and gender roles were the tools which helped her in empowering her character. The chosen character is apt to exhibit the portrayal of a woman in society as an edible which is being consumed by men who are considered as superior to others.

Keywords: Feminism, psychoanalytic, symbols and signs.

Introduction

Margaret Atwood, a renowned Canadian author, has consistently explored themes of feminism, identity, and psychoanalysis in her literary works. Throughout her career, Margaret Atwood has written numerous novels, poetry collections, essays and short stories and she has received the Governor General's Award, the Booker Prize and the Golden Booker Prize. *The Edible Woman*, one of her early novels published in 1969, is no exception. This novel provides a captivating lens which examines the interplay of feminism and psychoanalysis. *The Edible Woman* is considered as a feminist novel and it's exploring the themes that would become central to her writing. It's a thought-provoking and satirical examination of gender roles and the dehumanizing effects of societal pressures. In discussing the gender role, the article, "Communal Expectancy and the Authentic Self of Men and Transgenders - Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw and Birthday by Meredith Russo" the author Suganya et al. explains the other end of the spectrum, the emotional sufferings of men and transgender as,

Restricting one's emotions will lead to physical and psychological effects. Peer pressure and societal fear drags down the male victims from equity and impartial justice. Transgender individuals face significant discrimination and marginalization, including lack of legal recognition and access to appropriate healthcare, harassment and violence (Suganya et al. 882).

Glimpse of the novel

The Edible Woman, the story revolves around the protagonist, Marian McAlphin, a young woman working in an advertising agency in Toronto. Marian is engaged with her boyfriend, Peter and seems to be following the conventional path of marriage and domesticity. However, as the wedding preparations progress, she begins to feel a growing sense of discomfort and alienation from the role expected of her as a woman in society. She starts to lose her appetite and begins to view herself as an “edible woman”, feeling consumed by the expectations and roles imposed on her.

As the story progresses, Marian McAlphin's defiance of conventional social expectations becomes increasingly evident. She becomes romantically entangled with an unconventional artist named Duncan and begins to withdraw from her commitment to Peter. Her experience serves as a symbolic exploration of the social constraints and demands imposed on women during 1960s. *The Edible Woman* thoughtfully examines issues of identity, conformity and the quest for self-realization in a society that frequently attempts to define and engulf individuals according to its established norms and anticipations.

Feminism in *The Edible Woman*

Margaret Atwood's feminism is deeply embedded in the fabric of her storytelling and *The Edible Woman* is a compelling testament to this. This article introduces the readers to the life of the protagonist, Marian McAlphin, a young woman living in Toronto in the late 1960s. Marian McAlphin is initially depicted as a typical, modern woman, working in an advertising agency and engaged to her boyfriend, Peter. However, as the story unfolds, Margaret Atwood exposes the societal pressures and expectations that weigh heavily on her. Marian McAlphin is expected to conform to the roles defined for women in the 1960s to be a dutiful girlfriend, future wife and eventually, a mother. The title itself, *The Edible Woman*, alludes to the objectification of women, reducing them to consumable entities within a patriarchal society.

As Marian McAlphin grapples with her impending marriage. Marian McAlphin experiences a growing sense of alienation and dissatisfaction with her life and a sentiment shared by many women of her time. Margaret Atwood's portrayal of Marian McAlphin's internal conflict mirrors the broader feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which sought to challenge traditional gender roles and question the constraints placed on women.

Psychoanalysis in *The Edible Woman*

Psychoanalytic theory, particularly the work of Sigmund Freud and his successors, has often been used to analyze literature. In *The Edible Woman*, psychoanalytical elements are subtly interwoven into the narrative, offering readers a deeper understanding of Marian McAlphin's psychological journey. One prominent psychoanalytic concept that can be applied to this article is the idea of the “uncanny”. Marian McAlphin, who bakes a cake in the shape of a woman for her fiancé's birthday. As Marian McAlphin serves the cake and watches it being devoured by the guests, she experiences a psychological crisis, (Atwood 340 – 342). As Marian McAlphin's engagement progresses, she experiences a growing sense of unease and detachment from her own body and identity. This sense of the uncanny, a feeling of the familiar becoming strange and unsettling, mirrors her inner turmoil as she grapples with social expectations and her own desires.

Moreover, Marian McAlpin's relationship with food takes on a symbolic dimension that can be explored through psychoanalysis. Her obsession with dieting and the act of cooking for Peter can be seen as manifestations of her attempts to regain control over her life and body. In Freudian terms, this can be interpreted as an unconscious reaction to her perceived loss of autonomy. In the article, "Gender Performance on the Reinvigoration via Food", the author Suganya et al. describes the positive side of food in reinvigorating the lives of people. The food helps to soothe self and others. The female character "Madame Mallory realizes that people with talent can come from any ethnicity. Hassan's life is the classic rags-to-riches tale, spiced up with a tremendous love for the culinary arts and committed to the idea that, no matter our cultural differences, we can still be united at the table" (Suganya et al. 890).

Conclusion

Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* serves as a rich literary canvas for the examination of feminist and psychoanalytic theories. Through the character of Marian McAlpin, Margaret Atwood critiques the social norms and gender roles of her era while delving into the complexities of female identity and autonomy. Additionally, this article's subtle use of psychoanalytical elements adds depth to Marian McAlpin's psychological journey, making *The Edible Woman* a thought-provoking exploration of the intersection between feminism and psychoanalysis in literature.

References

Atwood, Margret. *The Edible Woman*: Margret Atwood. Virgo Press, 1980.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Atwood

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/margaret-atwood>

<https://www.gradesaver.com/the-edible-woman>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Edible-Woman>

Suganya, M.John & Boopalan, Priyanga & .V, Harish Sachin. (2023). Gender Performance on the Reinvigoration via Food Section A-Research paper Eur. European Chemical Bulletin. 12. 883-891. 10.31838/ecb/2023.12.s1.095.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372140450_Gender_Performance_on_the_Reinvigoration_via_Food_Section_A-Research_paper_Eur.

<https://www.eurchembull.com/uploads/paper/b9181a968de998b7727c25b6af5d20f2.pdf>.

Suganya, M.John & S., Jeevitha & Grashya, L.. (2023). Communal Expectancy and the

Authentic Self of Men and Transgenders - Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw and Birthday by Meredith Russo. European Chemical Bulletin. 12. 878-882. 10.31838/ecb/2023.12.s1.094.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372140477_Communal_Expectancy_and_the_Authentic_Self

_of_Men_and_Transgenders_-

_Arms_and_the_Man_by_George_Bernard_Shaw_and_Birthday_by_Meredith_Russo.

<https://www.eurchembull.com/uploads/paper/72c7b104b7b5ddc1f8fe0b8cbb0f69a8.pdf>

