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**OBJECTIFICATION, FRAGMENTATION,
AND CONSUMPTION:
A CONSIDERATION OF FEMINIST THEMES
IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S
THE EDIBLE WOMAN:**

by

LISA RUTHERFORD, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
Department of English Literature

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
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Thesis Supervisor

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Abstract

This paper examines (the manner in which) Margaret Atwood's The Edible Woman plays out the objectification, fragmentation, and consumption of female desire in contemporary Western society. In my discussion of the novel, the fundamental opposition of man/woman becomes self/other and consumer/consumed with man's culture transforming women's nature. In the first chapter, by way of Sherry Ortner and Simone de Beauvoir, women are established as targets of the male gaze, the embodiment of social codes within a patriarchal context. In the second chapter, I will examine women's disease and alienation (namely Marian's) that contributes to fragmentation and a loss of an authentic self. In the third part, I argue that women's fragmented identity is then assimilated into a cultural agenda, but that ultimately as Atwood's narrative suggests, this assimilation can be nonetheless averted or retarded through small acts of resistance.

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Introduction

In Margaret Atwood's The Edible Woman, the female protagonist, Marian MacAlpin, works to make herself acceptable or 'appetizing' to those around her, and being successful, is labelled 'respectable' and 'sensible.' Her friend Clara even tells her she is 'abnormally normal' (241). The comment reassures Marian, who having attained the perfect female normality she was seeking, nonetheless finds herself physically sick, alienated from her own body. Atwood's intentions are clear: Marian, as a willing member of a mechanized, consumer-oriented society, has allowed herself to absorb the social mythologies that are destructive to her, thereby rendering herself a consumable object, that is, an 'edible woman.' This reinforces the central idea in Atwood's Power Politics : "You refuse to own/yourself, you permit/others to do it for you ..." (30). The more Marian fulfills the expectations of others--the more she is 'normalized'--the more she feels engulfed. In spite of her will to maintain her usual behaviour, her body begins to reject the things she consumes, namely food--first meat, then eggs, and finally vegetables. The only alternative to this slow dissolution of self, is to engage in aggressive consumption--a consumption associated with, and symbolically practiced by men.

Recent feminist scholarship has moved away from the age-old conviction that biology determines what men and women are (Peach 3). *Non-essentialist* views that consider gender to be *culturally constructed* have been adopted. Although some of the characters in Atwood's The Edible Woman maintain essentialist beliefs, the novel's overriding objective is to show how culture is a significant and transformative force that shapes social roles, more particularly,

gender and gender identity. Accepting Simone de Beauvoir's notion that culture is male, and nature female, we place this transformative force in the hands of men, and women become the transformed. Anthropologist Sherry Ortner reinforces the culture/nature binary, arguing that men "make and represent culture while women, closer to nature than men, are to be controlled by men('s)/culture" (Ortner from Pennee 1).¹ This conforms nicely to the "'finely adjusted veneers'" (Onley 24) of Atwood's male and female characters in The Edible Woman. Both in the logic of the novel and in my discussion of the novel and sexual roles, the fundamental opposition of man/woman inevitably becomes self/other, consumer/consumed, active/passive, hunter/hunted, transcendent/immanent, aggressor/victim, and so on. However, I would also like to suggest how such oppositions, although necessary, useful and often accurate, can be exploited and reversed. Atwood's novel shows that, as a victim, a woman is in a position to become the victimizer. In other words, men and women are, by turns, transformers or consumers of each other. Indeed, as Daniel A. Heller points out, Atwood 'sees all people, men, women, powerful, powerless, as human beings, sharing the common characteristics, both good and bad, of the human species' (90).

De Beauvoir in The Second Sex, asserts that human beings should engage in activities of transcendence rather than immanence, lest they be reduced to animal, that is, biological nature. For Atwood's protagonist, this transcendence is a risk, as she could be labelled 'abnormal,'

¹Subsequent feminists have criticized de Beauvoir and Ortner for being too "'essentialist' in presuming that all women share a commonality by virtue of their gender that transcends other significant differences among them, especially those based on race and class" (Peach 20). See Spelman, E.V. Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought. (1988).

perhaps even 'hysterical.' More recent feminism has suggested that the abandonment of the "objective, immanent body" (Weiss 49) for a "transcendent subjectivity" could in fact further a woman's objectivity, in that she is opening herself up once again to external social definitions. Atwood's novel explores this dilemma; her characters are implicated in a power politics in which women's empowerment can lead paradoxically to a new kind of powerlessness. Survival for women may demonstrate a 'masculine' aggression, in which they become 'consumers' of others or even of themselves.

My paper is divided under three main headings, Objectification, Fragmentation, and Consumption, following on from Carol J. Adams' The Sexual Politics of Meat, in which she argues that the oppression of animals resembles that of women. In The Edible Woman, an important aspect of Marian's attempt to escape the immanent, objectified fate of the animal, is her rejection of male practices (like hunting), feminine accessories (makeup and other adornments), and the 'specialized instruments' of eating and watching (rifle, cleaver, fork, camera). I will show how Marian's, and by extension, woman's fragmented social identity enables the consumption and assimilation of all her parts, intellectual, emotional, and physical, into a cultural agenda. Atwood shows that this assimilation can be nonetheless averted or retarded through small acts of resistance.

Chapter 1 - Objectification

Man's Culture/Woman's Nature

Now, what peculiarity signalizes the situation of woman is that she--a free and autonomous being like all human creatures--nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as object and to doom her to immanence since her transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego (*conscience*) which is essential and sovereign. The drama of woman lies in this conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego)--who always regards the self as the essential--and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential. How can a human being in woman's situation attain fulfillment?

(de Beauvoir xxix)

Cultural production takes she who is unmarked and re-marks her, rhetorically and imagistically, while he who is marked with value is left unremarked, in discursive paradigms and visual fields. He is the norm and therefore unremarkable; as the Other, it is she whom he marks. (Phelan 5)

* * *

1.1 The Marker and the Marked

Peggy Phelan's self/other thesis is manifest in the work of de Beauvoir, in that both authors suggest that a woman is "other" and that her otherness stabilizes her object status thus indicating "difference." In The Edible Woman, the self/other dynamic is evident in the relationship between Peter and Marian. Even before their engagement, their positions as man (self) and woman (other) have been asserted. Peter says he views Marian as the kind of girl that "wouldn't try to take over his life" (Atwood 66). His desires and needs cannot be met if he must bow down to her. Instead, he hopes she will submit and mirror his belief systems, and simply become a vessel through which he can accommodate his innermost desires and needs. Marian acknowledges, in retrospect, that their compatibility is based on her ability to "give in" to Peter. They had been, as she describes, "taking each other at our face values, which meant we had got on very well. Of course I had to adjust to his moods, but that's true of any man, and his were too obvious to cause much difficulty" (66). Marian recognizes that her social role, as a woman, is to cater and adhere to the principles of the "unmarked" sex in order for the male/female formula to work. She even goes so far as to allow herself to be enticed by Peter's "hi-fi music and brandy" (66), so he feels "crafty and suave" (66) when she is, as she puts it, "manipulated into the bedroom" (66). Atwood presents us with a female character who believes man has a fundamental need to "manipulate" and to confirm to himself, and the society that he represents that he is, for all intents and purposes, male. It is here that

Atwood sets up the dynamics of male (manipulator) and female (manipulated) relationships.

When such dichotomies are applied to The Edible Woman, man and woman quickly come to represent consumer and the product. Normally, the product is manufactured, reproduced, and cohesively designed according to the consumer's needs. Often in the case of human relations, however, women produce themselves to be consumed by men. As we will see, Marian's engagement to Peter signifies her transformation from a being into an object. She is made into a product for consumption at the moment her desires are overridden by man's own. Peter's proposal to Marian demonstrates this: As the reader we do not witness her acceptance; it is only signified through Peter's eyes. She is described as "small and oval, mirrored in his eyes" (Atwood 92), consumed by Peter's desire. In other words, Marian is now a "marked" woman, and Peter has signalled his "marker" status. The unequal relationship between Peter and Marian is the archetypal meeting between man as 'self' and woman as 'other.'

For Atwood, relationships such as Marian and Peter's, function within a patriarchal domain. However, it is a patriarchy far more complex than the usual definition as "a given set of institutions or ideologies" (Fand 18). Roxanne J. Fand defines it well, as:

a process of thinking that works toward the concentration and retention of power regardless of which ideology is current, to the detriment of both

men and women kept too long at the margins, as well as to the detriment of those isolated at the center. It is only called patriarchy because it is associated with a very broad masculine hegemony that is by no means monolithic in the diverse and even conflicting forms it may take. Even in the period of modern revolution the concentration of power in a masculine order has continued precisely because masculine power, relative to feminine power, is decentralized at the level of the individual's self image, where every man is (ideologically at least) the power center of his domestic domain, the king of his castle. (Fand 18-19)

Within a patriarchy defined in these terms, Marian is in constant danger of being reduced to her marked status. Peter is attracted to Marian largely because of her willingness to give in to his desires; it reinforces his feeling of being "the king of his castle" (19). She allows herself to be manipulated and seduced by the superficial props of brandy and hi-fi music and, as such, Peter is situated at the level of deceiver, while Marian becomes the deceived. Here Marian is losing herself, or as Iris Young puts it, referring to the 'social self,' she is "gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another subject's intentions and manipulations, rather than as a living manifestation of action and intention" (Young 155). Ironically, of course, it is Marian who believes she is deceiving Peter by acting as the deceived when she is fully aware that she is not.

It is important to point out however, that even here Atwood is blurring the lines between deceiver/deceived and the male role of "doer" and the female role of "done to." While on the surface,

their relationship conforms to the conventional binary model, underneath Marian's inner narrative suggests that she is not just a victim. It could be said that Peter is "the king of the castle" only because Marian has provided him with the sceptre and throne. We begin to see how patriarchy can also be a game that must be played out by both male and female participants if they are to validate one another.

It follows then that despite man's unmarked status, men are vulnerable to victimization as well. This is certainly the case for Atwood's characters: while Peter may think he can impose his desires on Marian, it is precisely because she deceives him into thinking he can. Similarly, Marian's roommate Ainsley, in the hopes of being impregnated, manipulates Len into believing that he is the seducer when it is she. She plans the seduction, approaching the event in a cold and calculating manner: "It's all got to seem accidental. A moment of passion. My resistance overcome, swept off my feet and so forth" (Atwood 97). In an effort to appeal to Len, despite the fact that she is university-educated, she acts naive, childlike, and docile. She knows that Len is attracted to the "supposedly pure" (97) quality trait in a woman. In the presence of the opposite sex, Atwood's characters function within their stereotyped social roles as it meets their personal interests. For Marian, her conformity offers her the security of marriage and acceptance in the workplace. Ainsley's "act" of seduction gives her the baby she intended to have. Peter's commitment to marriage is met with praise by the office virgins. He is considered a great "catch" by women, because he offers security, comfort, and predictability. Len's gigolo-like lifestyle feeds his ego through the seduction of young and naive women. It appears that women, in order to fulfill their role as deceived, must be deceivers. Likewise, men are

compelled to play at deceiving while blindly being deceived.² How can it then be said that women are the “marked” and men are the “unmarked”? Although Atwood suggests that social roles are interchangeable, we also see that within a patriarchal context it is difficult for ‘society’ to recognize such fluidity in male/female relationships. Thus, it is quite possible that men and women play out their social roles while their values and belief systems are to the contrary. I propose that Atwood’s characters conform to their social roles (e.g., marked/unmarked), but they are not necessarily dictated by them. Patriarchal roles must *appear* a certain way, even if they are not that way. Hence victimization³ becomes a factor when human beings, man or woman, have a misguided belief that these roles are static when they are not.

* * *

² Atwood discusses the male/female, manipulator/manipulated binaries and their interchangeability in many of her other works. She begins her poetry collection, Power Politics (1971) with the words, “you fit into me/like a hook into an eye/a fish hook/an open eye”(1). Many modern relationships are built around what Gloria Onley calls the “machismo love structure” (22) therefore suggesting that “romantic love is a devastating mode of existence” (22). See Cat’s Eye (1988), Lady Oracle (1976), Surfacing (1972), Murder in the Dark (1983), and Good Bones (1992) to name a few.

1.2 *Male Desire as Female Desire*

According to Fand's definition of patriarchy then, women are only given access to the cultural arena through an adherence to the principles of male desire. When I say "male desire," I am referring to Peter, specifically, but also the society that he represents. But if I were to isolate desire to the specificity of the male gaze, then it would appear that women are "valueless and obtain value only by relating to or bonding with men" (hooks 43). However, I prefer to argue that men are not the only vehicles through which women may access desire. Although women can define their desire in relation to men, they are not solely determined by men.

The compulsion to adopt the act, posture, and gait that embody the essential qualities of femininity, is for Marian overwhelming. She is most adamantly commended for her "sensible" demeanour when she conforms to this social construct. She is accepted by her coworkers, trusted by her landlady, and chosen by Peter to become his wife, but at the cost of her self. With Peter, through a combination of behavioural modifications and shifts in bodily disposition, dictated by a marginal sensibility, Marian adjusts to his moods. On her way to meet Len with Peter, Marian cautions herself: "Peter's mood, whatever it had been, had changed to one which I hadn't yet interpreted, so I didn't attempt conversation as we drove along" (Atwood 68). In the process, however, she is silenced and subdued. To avoid conflict, Marian's position as "other" initiates a process whereby she attempts to read Peter's mind and align her language and ideology with his

own. But in this course of action, Peter's thoughts gradually begin to take precedence over her own until she is unable to determine from whence her desires have originated. Throughout the novel, Marian is both consciously and unconsciously aware that her values and belief systems are gradually being subsumed by Peter's own. Whatever awareness she retains, however, is diluted by a culture that perpetuates, as Cathy Griggers voices, a "fractal structure of the fragmented desires and multiple social identities" (Radner xiv) of women

While Marian may be an agent in her own production, production of self is also mechanized by an undermining cultural tableau. And though she may attempt to repel Peter's advances or return his predatory gaze, she is, by virtue of being a woman, endlessly reconstructed in his eyes by their cultural milieu.

The power of the gaze has historically been in man's possession; one need only especially if we examine the "historically entrenched tradition of male artists that produced artwork for a primarily male clientele" (Linton 1-2). This art frequently depicted nude female subjects posed for the delectation of their male audience.⁴ In such works, the gaze of the female subject is often cast downwards, or turned away from the audience. Essentially, the "male gaze" is often met with a passive gaze that is neither threatening nor judgmental. More recently, cinema has enhanced women's spectacle status and invited further perusal with a heightened degree of voyeuristic pleasure. Laura Mulvey argues that this process cannot be reversed to permit female pleasure. Using a psychoanalytic and feminist approach, she claims that within patriarchal culture the

⁴Examples of such paintings include Bathsheba by Rembrandt van Ryn, 1606-09, Nude by Modigliani, 1884-1920, Nevermore by Gauguin, 1848-1903.

scopophilia⁵ and identification that men experience is impossible for women to experience. Moreover, “[f]ilm reflects, reveals, and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle” (van Zoonen 90). In cinema, particularly, the male gaze takes “visual” and “narrative” control of the woman’s body. The addition of fetish objects (e.g., high-heels, long hair, earrings) or turning the woman into a fetish object herself, through “exaggerating, styling, and fragmenting” (90), allows for pleasurable voyeurism.⁶

Marian and Peter’s imbalanced rapport is reinforced by art and cinema, which are themselves derived from a social reality that valorizes male desire over female desire. A woman grows to reflect the worth that man invests in her and, principally, she becomes man’s most precious commodity. Her “objectified bodily existence” (Young 155) is not

⁵Scopophilia is defined in psychoanalytic theory as “a basic human sexual drive to look at other human beings” (van Zoonen 88) that is not related to erotogenic zones.

⁶Mulvey classifies potentially “unpleasurable” voyeurism as a fear of castration: “To the patriarchal unconscious, ‘woman’ signifies sexual difference and more particularly she connotes the lack of a penis” (van Zoonen 90). Displeasure is rendered unproblematic once the “castration threat that women signify is eliminated” (90).

threatening to the man behind the gaze and allows him to project his fantasies and images onto her body. Soon after Peter and Marian's engagement, Marian begins to view her smile as a separate entity: "I gave him a tender chrome-plated smile; that is, I meant the smile to express tenderness, but my mouth felt stiff and bright and somehow expensive" (Atwood 99). Here, Marian wishes to convey a tender smile, but it evolves into a shiny and expensive commodity. Her own mouth is no longer complying with her impulse, but with the expectations of Peter and the culture he embodies.

Atwood's use of "chrome-plated," "bright," and "expensive" is meant to remind us of the language of consumer culture. Marian, in the process of submission to male desire, resembles a product, a consumable object. Women are victims of, but clearly also agents of "objectification." Carol J. Adams in her book The Sexual Politics of Meat, defines objectification as that which

permits an oppressor to view another being as an object. The oppressor then violates this being by object-like treatment: e.g., the rape of women that denies women freedom to say no, or the butchering of animals that converts animals from living breathing things into dead objects. This process allows fragmentation, or brutal dismemberment, and finally consumption. (Adams 47)

Marian, a living breathing being is slowly being replaced by a man-made object; moreover,

her shiny, metallic parts have been fashioned by man, mechanized by man, and are soon-to-be owned by man. As long as Marian gives into Peter's desires, she will be permitting him to view her as an object, a commodity, a thing to be possessed. Marxist critic John Berger, in his popular book Ways of Seeing, takes it one step further and suggests that "to be born a woman has been to be born, within an allotted and confined space into the keeping of men" (46). I would like to identify this space as the female body and suggest that women's relationship within it is often disharmonious. As long as women remain caged like animals, *within their bodies*, their pleasure will invariably be commodified by men. Cultural construction will be tempered by the "unmarked", while "marked" will contribute to preserve the patriarchal order.

* * *

1.3 The Surveyor and the Surveyed

Atwood's narrative would lead us to believe that patriarchal society is dependent on the disharmonious relationship women often have with their bodies. While "human" can be defined as "transcendence and subjectivity" (Young 155), women are asked to view their bodies as bodily objects. In the process, women take a distanced stance, and then must exist in a perpetual state of "discontinuity" (155). Marian's recognition of her "chrome-plated smile" reveals a subject (I) voicing her opinion of the object (it). In doing

so, she becomes divided; on the one hand, she reduces herself to an object through her description of her smile, but on the other hand her discovery of her objectification reveals a very real subjectivity. Paradoxically, Marian not only identifies herself with animal-victims, as we will see in the next chapter, but starts “taking on the characteristics of [her] oppressors” (Sweetapple 51). John Berger proposes that there are two elements to a woman’s identity:

From earliest childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. And so she comes to consider the *surveyor* and the *surveyed* within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplanted by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another. (Berger 46)

Marian is valued for her “sensible” and “more normal than normal” qualities, since they complement the social order. She internalizes the desires of that order and performs operatively within the public realm. Indeed, she has become the embodiment of a subject (surveyor) and an object (surveyed) in exile. I say “exile,” because Marian’s character is

prone to discursive meandering in and out of various subjectivities, often not her own.

Perhaps it would be appropriate, then, to propose that all women are in exile, so long as their desires and belief systems are an appropriation of another's "sense of being."

Clearly the same could be said for men if they reject their social role. Within dominant discourse, however, it is women who are banished from a subjectivity that could potentially incite rebellion, stir upheaval, and challenge patriarchal norms.

Berger furthers his argument by adding that "men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at" (47). He goes on to say, "[t]his determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of the woman in herself is male: the surveyed female" (47). Atwood writes in *Murder in the Dark*: "He wants her arranged just so. He wants her, arranged. He arranges to want her. This is the arrangement they have made" (Atwood 64). The woman has become the embodiment of a culture acting upon its own nature; her body subsequently evolves into a site of struggle.

In the second part of The Edible Woman, Marian goes from referring to herself in the first person to the third person, "as if to indicate that during this period Marian has no self, no 'subjectivity,' and thus cannot tell her story" (Lyons 182). In the process of watching her move from subject to object status, the reader is forced out from behind Marian's eyes and looks with the cold, harsh gaze of objectivity. We, as readers, are no longer working against cultural constructions; rather, like Marian, we become the embodiment of it. Atwood demonstrates Marian's transformation into a

surveyor/surveyed status most noticeably in the second part of the novel. For example, she concentrates on Marian's legs that push "the rest of her body up the remaining stairs ..." (Atwood 135). Also, Marian encounters her roommate's legs before the rest of her body. When coming up the stairs, she sees a "pair of naked legs ... topped by Ainsley ... standing half-dressed in the small vestibule ..." (135). By referring to her legs as separate from her body, the narrative objectifies Marian. Meanwhile, Marian objectifies Ainsley's legs by describing them as "naked legs," rather than identifying them as "Ainsley's naked legs." By mentioning the legs first, Atwood is suggesting that they have priority over the thinking apparatus that sits above them. It also foreshadows the more distant and self-conscious relationship that Marian will have with her body further on in the novel.

All of the women in The Edible Woman demonstrate an unusual self-consciousness (e.g., the office virgins), being highly aware of appearance. Marian's encounter with Ainsley's legs is reminiscent of the girdle advertisement that she observes on the bus. A colourful poster exhibits

a young woman with three pairs of legs skipping about in her girdle. I must admit to being, against my will, slightly scandalized by those advertisements. They are so public. I wondered for the first few blocks what sort of person would have enough response to that advertisement to go and buy the object in question, and whether there had ever been a survey done on it. The female form, I thought, is supposed to appeal to

men, not to women, and men don't usually buy girdles. Though perhaps the lithe young woman was a self-image; perhaps the purchasers thought they were getting their own youth and slenderness back in the package. (Atwood 105)

The young woman in the ad lays the groundwork for Marian's encounter with Ainsley's legs. Even though Marian remains critical of the advertisement, she becomes a victim of it in her next thought: "Then I thought about middle-aged spread: when would I get it? -- maybe I already had it. You have to be careful about things like that. I reflected; they have a way of creeping up on you before you know it" (105). Marian's original comment targets the advertisement, while her afterthoughts make her the target audience, the former to ensure the latter. She is no longer threatening the media overlords, but rather giving into the fears that the advertisement wishes to instill. Marian applies the image of the young woman onto herself and in the process, becomes a surveyor over her body thus objectifying it.

Given the fact that "'the natural attitude'" (Weiss 48) has been to confine women to an objective, immanent body and, in turn to deny the innate human desire for transcendence and subjectivity, it is not surprising that Marian perceives Ainsley's legs as separate from the rest of her body. Indeed, the relaying of images is effective in not only planting self-doubt in women, but also creating a sex that associates self-worth and, what is worse, agency with bodily appearance. Marian is reminded of the cultural

dictum: “[N]o well-dressed woman is ever without a girdle” (Atwood 105). Apparently, women’s identity is as much about their bodies as the implements they use to contain them. That which is deemed “natural” appears to be limited to a “set of unquestioned presuppositions about our everyday lives” (Weiss 48). The normalization of the artificial, therefore, allows for the relaying of cultural codes onto the female body.

The Collins Dictionary defines “objective” as “existing independently of perception or an individual’s conceptions ... 4. Med. (of disease systems) perceptible to persons other than the individual affected” (Collins 920). Disease could be identified with women’s objectivity that could spread and reproduce outside of the woman in the form of images. The girdle advertisement, for example, allows for objectification to take place away from any real woman, the real woman loses control of the way in which she is processed and digested. Adams argues that objectification “permits an oppressor to view another being as an object” (47). The violation of that object is continually relayed through the “image” of a woman and is not isolated to the living, breathing woman who “permits” her objectification.

* * *

1.4 Control, Power, and Coercion of the Branded Other

Women’s situation is produced at the level of male dominance, but perhaps it is

more subtle than that. Catharine A. MacKinnon states that male power over women is “not a discrete location, but a web of sanctions throughout society which ‘control[s] the principal means of coercion’ that structure women’s everyday lives” (169). This suggests that male power, founded on social constructions and institutions, is far more complex than the institutions themselves. It is inappropriate to suggest that the male sex is solely responsible for oppression, especially when many of Atwood’s female characters either produce their victimization or are equally prone to inflicting victimization on another. Therefore, MacKinnon’s use of male power is suspect, since the effectiveness of coercion is as much the responsibility of the man as it is for the woman. At the same time, I define male power, within a patriarchal context, as the “surveyed” aspect of a woman’s identity. For Marian, male power becomes self enforcing when she begins to view parts of herself--in particular her smile--as objects. It is, as Hilary Radner argues, a “fragmented intertextual process that works upon, against, and through the body” (Radner xiv). Radner’s point takes us back to Cathy Griggers’ argument that women, as a heterogeneous group, comprise “fragmented desires and multiple social identities” (xiv). Marian, like many contemporary women, discovers that she is caught between the “half of the individual which wishes to express her individuality, her self” (McMullen 66) and the half that desires marriage and the socioeconomic privileges that go with it, but “often at the expense of individuality” (66). She senses that social forces threaten to pull her apart and reconfigure her into the form of an object. Thus, in a struggle to maintain her individuality, she employs strategies to prevent her fragmentation. Aligned with the

brutal dismemberment of an animal, her fragmentation would enable consumption and hence the fulfilment of oppression.

If we consider the words often ascribed to the dominant social order by MacKinnon, Berger, and many others, it appears that a human being can only be effectively objectified through “control,” “power,” and “coercion.” The question may be asked: When is a woman considered an object? First, if we follow Adams’ example and allow women’s objectification to be compared with that of an animal, we may understand what necessitates the use of control, power, and coercion over the “marked” other. We can then examine and locate humanity’s desire for meat, and get closer to realizing why women oftentimes feel *like* meat. If man’s appetite is observed in conjunction with female desire, we be able to comprehend the ways in which women construct their identities around men.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that women feel like objects when, in the same way as animals, they are objectified; only it is usually only their images that are butchered and disassembled. Upon passing into the space of the slaughterhouse, animals are no longer beings, but items to be dissassembled and eventually packaged, shelved, bought, and consumed. It is precisely the annihilation of an animal’s will that places his/her being along the same trajectory line as a woman’s. While the objectification of an animal is most evident in the butchering process, women are objectified through more subtle forms of control, power, and coercion (i.e., self-monitoring).

It could be said, then, that Marian’s identity is constructed through a “medium of

social control” (Bordo 181) that limits her to the imprisoned cell of her body. Her description of her smile suggests that she is being manufactured by a commodified culture that functions on control, power, and coercion.

* * *

1.5 *Absent Reference*

To amply demonstrate women’s objectification, I turn again to the objectification of animals, specifically through the butchering process. Carol J. Adams explains that “[t]hrough butchering, animals become absent referents” (40). Simply put, animals become absent in order for meat to exist, but “[i]f animals are alive they cannot be meat. Thus, a dead body replaces the live animal. Without animals there would be no meat eating, yet they are absent from the act of eating meat because they have been transformed into food” (40). Adams, most appropriately, invites us to examine a picture of a "healthy sexual being ... she wears bikini panties ... She is touching her crotch in a masturbatory action" (39), only the being in question is not a woman, but a pig. The photograph of "Ursula Hamdress" has been derived from the magazine *Playboar*; critics describe it as the "pig farmer's Playboy" (39). Significantly, the pig's positioning is indicative of a woman's presence, only in this case, she is absent. The viewer is unable to separate the death experience of the animal from the lived experience of a woman. It can be gathered from the evidence, then, that meat eating and sexual violence intersect, thus

creating a "dialectic of absence and presence of oppressed groups. ... What is absent refers back to one oppressed group while defining another" (Adams 44).⁷ In the midst of altering Adams's theory slightly, I propose that, while the "absent referent" is intended to refer to oppressed groups, women's "image" can also be considered an oppressed group. Admittedly, images cannot be exploited, but the reality that they embody obscures the definitive lines between the real and imaginary. Images are so persuasive they convince us they are more real than the woman herself.

The girdle advertisement, though only a computer-generated image, comes to represent women's real life experiences. So while the sexually-alluring pig becomes an absent referent for the sexual exploitation of women, the "lithe," six-legged image in the girdle advertisement becomes an absent referent for the objectification of real women.

Arguably so, Marian's objectification of Ainsley's naked legs has been spawned from the

⁷It is important to note that absent referents implicate individuals. Adams' explains that women's failure to "see anything disturbing in the violence and domination ... is an inextricable part of this structure" (43). Therefore, "women work in slaughterhouses, at times treat other women as 'meat,' and men at times are victims of sexual violence" (43). Women, just as men, benefit from animals' transformation into meat. But neither can recognize their participation in women and animals' oppression if they do not recognize their "implication in the structure" (44).

dialectical advertisement. In the same way that animals are made absent in order for meat to exist, real women are made absent for their images to exist.

Marian's existence in the public world is best summed up in Althusser's definition of ideology. He defines it as "the 'imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'" (Poovey 3). Marian has therefore projected an image of a woman, an illusion that serves to objectify, onto her roommate, the absent but real woman, Ainsley. However, the fact that the real woman (i.e., Ainsley) is made absent, while the image (girdle ad) is displayed, creates an inability in the viewer to make connections between the imaginary and the real. Feminist critic Naomi Wolf argues in her book, The Beauty Myth, that female identity is more important than beauty, yet women seek an image outside of themselves: "Women are trained to see themselves as cheap imitations of fashion photographs, rather than seeing fashion photographs as cheap imitations of women" (105). Therefore, as long as this beauty is defined outside of women, they will be manipulated by it. The location imposes a danger on the female body, since it is socially and culturally determined.

If women give credence to an image of themselves, outside of themselves, women's three-dimensional world will be judged by two-dimensional rules (105). And as long as the advertiser's themselves produce images that have been prodded, plucked, and arranged just so, women will begin to see themselves as the absent referent. In other words, women will compare themselves to the more perfect-than-perfect standard of the fashion photograph, focussing on what they lack, rather than on the tangible, three-dimensional

body that they inhabit.

If we return to the girdle advertisement Marian encounters, we observe that the image presented inhabits an illusory realm that is more effective as a symbol than as a social reality. The advertisement, in a bid for attention, shows six legs to express motion. Clearly, its purpose is to conform to sex-role stereotypes (through the use of a girdle), but also to detract from women's bodily immanence. The body thus becomes the illusory vehicle through which women think they can attain transcendence and subjectivity. Wolf argues that women "must make their beauty glitter because they are so hard for men to see. They glitter as a bid for attention that is otherwise grudgingly given" (Wolf 106). Indeed, Wolf implies that women's value is intrinsically tied in with the image that their body presents, since the active mind is inconsequential. Helen Gurley Brown, editor of *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, wrote in her 1964 book, Sex and the Office, "When I'm on a television show in my padded bra, capped teeth, straightened nose, Pan-Cake, false eyelashes and wig I may not be natural, but I'm absolutely glorious!" (Brown in Radner xi). Whether a woman is three-dimensional or six-legged, she is taught that in order to get noticed, she must use her body to flaunt, flirt, and shine above the rest:

[T]he woman remains obsessively concerned with her physical appearance as the only basis she has for any claim she might wish to make as a woman, even claims she might wish to make for or against herself as a solitary woman, which is rapidly becoming the only 'relationship' she is

culturally allowed. (Dean MacCannell and Juliet Flower in Radner xii)

A woman with "middle-aged spread," or a woman who has let herself go, is not acceptable within a culture that valorizes the body over the woman herself.

Women's relationship with their bodies is one that employs strategies that mutilate and objectify. Whether a woman uses girdles, wigs, make-up, capped teeth, or more recently plastic surgery, she is treating her body as a "defect" that can be "fixed" (Radner xii). In the second part of my paper, I will discuss this issue further. Hilary Radner explains that "fixing"

depends upon the manipulation of consumer products as technologies that function to reproduce and circulate an image that a woman will claim as her self through a rewriting of body that must be continuously rewritten, kept up, and made over. (Radner xiii)

Here we see the surveyor at work, the part of the woman that shapes, alters, and manipulates the flesh. In the same way that woman rewrites herself through the manipulation of her body, animals are rewritten when they are converted into meat: ribs, chuck, loin, shank, and the like. Instead of taking command of the image that transforms the woman, she adopts it as what is most "feminine" about herself (xiii). Similarly, we take the rewritten version of the animal, such as a cellophane-wrapped pork chop and

accept it as what is most edible and real about the animal. Consequently, women and animals become absent referents subsequently erasing their identities and replacing them with what their culture desires of them (feminine cultural constructs/meat).

* * *

1.6 *Women as Symbols of Male Conquest*

Thus far, I have attempted to provide a framework for women's oppression. In the same way that a consumer objectifies a piece of meat, for instance, women, through a series of feminine rituals, objectify their bodies. Perhaps it can be assumed, then, that man's desire for meat is linked with women's desire for femininity. In each instance, a being is objectified and, in the process, male dominance is reasserted. In The Edible Woman, we discover the above to be true. In preparation for Marian and Peter's engagement party, Marian, at Peter's suggestion, buys a short, red-sequined dress, and has her hair done. But by complying with his wishes, she begins to feel like a two-dimensional fashion plate, an object of male desire. Even worse, Marian's experience at the hair salon becomes analogous to a sick patient going in for an operation:

Marian had closed her eyes, leaning back against the operating table, while her scalp was soaped and scraped and rinsed. She thought it would be a good idea if they would give anaesthetics to the patients, just put them to sleep while all these necessary physical details were taken care of; she didn't enjoy feeling like a slab of flesh, an object. (Atwood 245)

Marian does not consider the physical treatment of her body to be indelibly linked to her femininity. Rather, she regards her transformation into a "feminine" self as a degrading

process whereby she is not only treated *like* a piece of meat, but *feels* like a piece of meat.

Of course, a “slab of flesh” cannot feel, but Marian’s perceptions serve to reject her culture’s definition of femininity. She sees it more as a masquerade than an intrinsic part of her identity.

Marian recognizes that her adornments are not an expression of her self. Instead of objectifying her body, she objectifies the accessories, the “extras” that signify “femininity.” She cannot “grasp the total effect: her attention caught on the various details, the things she wasn’t used to -- the fingernails, the heavy earrings, the various parts of her face that Ainsley had added and altered” (Atwood 268). Her fiancé, Peter, appreciates Marian’s transformation and reacts by saying, ““Darling, you look absolutely marvellous”” (268). Marian feels that his response implies “that it would be most pleasant if she could arrange to look like that all the time” (268). She senses that the nail polish, makeup, and elaborate hairdo “looked extra, stuck to her surface like patches or posters” (245). Her billboard status resembles the advertisements she observes on the bus or the magazine at the hair salon with the caption, ““Girls! Be Successful! If you want to Go Places, Develop Your Bust’...” (246). Certainly, much of a woman’s success can be attributed to her body, and to the girdles, makeup, and ornamental hairdos built up around it.

Marian eventually feels that she is nothing more to Peter than the “elegant mannequins posturing in their bright glass cages” (197) in downtown Toronto. Certainly, Atwood attributes a human or animal quality to the mannequins, since they are described

as caged. It also furthers Catharine A. MacKinnon's claim that "[m]en are women's material conditions" (138), but indeed we cannot be limited to this claim. Historically, women's appearance has been inspired by masculine-driven needs. In the contemporary Western world, however, women are equally driven by the needs of their own sex.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, more than ever, the desire for individuality is of the utmost importance. In a consumer culture, the purchasing of material goods is, in essence, one of the largest claims that an individual can make to his or her identity.⁸ As long as women define themselves through their ornamentation, then the materiality of their bodies will eventually become nonexistent and they will be no more than the caged mannequins Marian observes. While women continue to cater to man's favoured illusions, ideological constructions will be rendered uneven.

The "mixtures and instruments" (Atwood 260) of beauty aids that Ainsley uses to manipulate Marian's features, for example, adhere to the rituals of beauty that have been "determined by mortal beings, shaped by politics, history, and the marketplace" (Wolf 87). Her red sequined dress becomes a symbol of Peter's conquest over her body, as she has conformed to her time period's cultural codes. Traditionally, the sacrifice of

⁸ John Fiske writes "[a]ll commodities can be used by the consumer to construct meanings of self, of social identity and social relations" (11). It could be argued, then, that consumers (men and women) become their commodities.

animals' lives has provided women with the necessary materials (e.g. whale-bone corsets, elephant tooth combs) to create the required image, owing all to male conquest. The animal is killed and thus becomes "being-less"; animal parts are passed over to the female sex and, through their usage, they become implicit in her "beingness." Therefore, her status and the economic machinery of her sex are expressed through the exploitation of the animal (and hence herself) for the benefit of others. Similarly, Marian's red dress becomes a symbol, not of male conquest; however, the colour suggests that she is a marked target.

Early on in the novel, Marian identifies herself with the victimization of the animal. This is exemplified most effectively when Peter relays a rabbit-hunting story to Marian's misogynist friend, Len. Atwood writes Peter's part in a deliberately sadistic manner:

So I let her off and Wham. One shot, right through the heart. The rest of them got away ... 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 me. All over me, what a mess, rabbit guts dangling from the trees, god the trees were red for yards.... (Atwood 75)

In the midst of Peter's story, Marian retreats into the recesses of her soul and returns to

feel that she is nothing more than a “two-dimensional outline” (77). Again, this relates to Marian’s form later in the book--when she feels like a billboard/fashion plate--as she evolves into the appropriation of her fiancé’s desires. Moreover, Marian aligns her victimization with the rabbit and, in turn, allows herself to become a symbol of male conquest.

Peter’s boasting reflects a culture that equates masculine behaviour with the victimization of other beings. His recreational approach to his hunting escapade undermines the severity of the oppressive act itself. In response, “Len bare(s) his teeth” (Atwood 75), expressing his mutual blood lust with Peter. Both men receive pleasure from the blood spillage of another being--seemingly, the more grotesque, the more entertaining. However, Peter and Len’s enjoyment cannot be cast off as a simple fascination with gore. Anthropologist Nick Fiddes relates man’s desire for hunting, more specifically meat-eating, to “environmental control” (45). For many generations, obtaining meat has been especially enjoyed by those “who *liked* the notion of power over nature that it embodies” (45). The expression of that power, however, does not end with the capture of the animal. Even more crucial is the treatment of the animal once he or she is in man’s possession. Oftentimes, the meat that is derived from the most suffering, carries the highest value. For example, veal has “enjoyed high prestige for many years...” because, as Fiddes argues, “...of the extreme subjugation of the creatures intrinsic to its production” (44). At the same time, the “‘taken-for-grantedness’ of values implicit in the

meat system ... partly serve to obscure these values from our consciousness" (44). The animal is thus made absent subsequently obliterating the reality of his/her subjugation.

The absence of the rabbit's suffering is succeeded by Marian's own. She can identify with the rabbit, since they are both victims of objectification. Indeed, the repetition of "her" in Peter's story could be referring to either animal or woman. In the mere telling of the story, the animal that becomes Marian, is made absent through her slaughter. In place of her absence is a "stage-prop; silent but solid, a two-dimensional outline" (Atwood 77). Marian's identification with the rabbit's suffering also suggests that she has not fully implicated in the desires of her culture. By adopting the rabbit's trauma as her own, she, too, is metaphorically shaken, cracked, whipped, and strewn thoughtlessly about. Marian's resistance evolves from an inner body politic that disagrees with the extreme subjugation inflicted on another being, whether it be human or animal.

The "surveyed" part of herself is beginning to take over the "surveyor," thus signifying the transition from rational human to animal status. In the process, Marian's resistive behaviour subverts cultural codes and extinguishes her three-dimensional status. Here, the complexity begins, because Marian's three-dimensional existence is dependent upon a male cultural construct and without it, she lacks definition. Her identification with the rabbit's suffering reduces her to two-dimensional status; she recognizes the underlying danger of dominant discourse and its ideological constraints. She has adopted the rabbit's instinct and feels paralyzed by fear and longs to escape.

Marian's fear of her own objectivity and assimilation initiates a desire to recreate the story in the form of a scene:

I saw it as though it was a slide projected on a screen in a dark room, the colours luminous, green, brown, blue for the sky, red. Peter stood with his back to me in a plaid shirt, his rifle slung on his shoulder. A group of friends, those friends whom I had never met, were gathered around him, their faces clearly visible in the sunlight that fell in shafts down through the anonymous trees, splashed with blood, the mouths wrenched with laughter. I couldn't see the rabbit. (Atwood 75)

Marian transforms Peter's grotesque story into an artistic rearticulation of the event. His back offers the viewer a point of entry, an opening through which Marian's objectification—in the form of the rabbit--can be witnessed. The reader watches Marian who views Peter, the sole creator, observing his work of art. The annihilation of the animal's will affirms Peter's creator status, while preserving man's dominion over nature.

Art becomes reality when Peter views Marian from across the table. She feels like the "two-dimensional outline" and begins to sense that her surroundings, "the looped curtains and muted carpet and crystal chandeliers was concealing things; the murmuring air was filled with a soft menace" (Atwood 77). Inscribed in Peter's gaze, she is evaluated and estimated for her worth; perhaps, he is determining how she may benefit him. To Peter, she may be an outline, but underneath she is distraught and seething with anger.

The boastful and comic approach Peter takes to another being's suffering conceals a very real and vulgar act.

While Peter constructs an image of brutality in a juvenile fashion, Marian artistically recreates the scene as a symbolic representation of woman and animal's fused oppression. The blood that covers the "anonymous" trees is what will later dress Marian in the form of a red sequin dress. The brown, green, and blue colours, enhanced by the fiery sun, represent the natural elements: earth, water, air, and fire. They provide the necessities of life, but human interference is harmful to the environment and its inhabitants. Elizabeth Gould Davis's book The First Sex, published in the early 1970's, provides a dualist view of women and men's relationship to nature. She argues that "man is the enemy of nature" and that it is in his instinct to "pollute" and "destroy," while "[w]oman ... is the ally of nature, and her instinct is to tend, to nurture, to encourage healthy growth, and to preserve ecological balance" (Mellor 47).

I do not agree with Davis's line of reasoning, however, because it is too essentialist. Women are not just passive recipients of male oppression, but actively involved in their own production. To be sure, women are not guided solely by the stereotypical female traits of nurturing and tending, nor are all men the embodiment of destruction. Certainly Atwood is not implying that men and women are divided along the lines of aggressor and victim. Her use of the character Duncan, an English graduate student who stands on the margins of society, confirms this. Unlike Peter or Marian, he is only interested in his own opinion and not society's definition of what that opinion

should be. Duncan is not subject to the scrutiny of his culture, because he excludes himself from it altogether. Perry Nodelman claims that "Peter uses camouflage to disguise his violence, Duncan to protect himself from violence" (79). Duncan is like a turtle in its shell, but then it can be argued that he is also like an egg. His roommate Fischer describes him as "'pre-adolescent'; like a chick refusing to emerge from his egg, he packages himself in his eccentricity in order to avoid real life" (79). Ironically, "real life" is a shell in itself. Men and women play the aggressor/victim game through the surface qualities of their sex. Peter and Len express the stereotypical qualities of the male sex with their talk of rifles and cameras, while the three office virgins also adhere to their social role through their obsession with marriage and "catching" a man. Both sexes seek out the other, thus either men or women could be considered hunters. Yet each sex continues to function within the stereotypes of man as hunter and woman as hunted.

As I mentioned before, women use accessories and other "feminine" devices to present an image they consider more real than the reality of the woman herself. Similarly, men adopt the masculine roles that their culture has constructed for them. Atwood introduces human activities that are, in fact, "more normal than normal"--like hunting, for instance--but by virtue of being normal, they are potentially the most dangerous. Normality is precisely that which is most implicit in the structuring of patriarchal binaries--aggressive male/passive female dualism to name one example. A culture defines itself by the power and control that it exerts over nature, therefore robbing an ontological meaning from those beings who are considered closest to it.

What becomes clear then in this section is that the exploitation of nature is necessary. We may ask: to whom? The answer is to the entire society, since it is dependent upon the objectification of other beings to secure preset conditions. Atwood does not exclude her female protagonists from their involvement in their own objectification. They are “generally neurotic, sardonic, and rather aimless women, ‘escape artists’ who must eventually confront the realities they have carefully constructed for themselves” (Peri 30). There is no such thing as a male or female hero in Atwood’s novel: “men victimize and women comply in their own victimization. But her female characters usually manage to come through for each other in ways that men do not” (30). Atwood provides the reader with a comic approach to masculine and feminine stereotypes, while exposing the more destructive elements of human behaviour. She comments in an interview, “respectability can kill you very quickly, if you start paying a lot attention to it. If you get up in the morning and say, ‘As a national institution, what shall I wear today?’ It can get very deadening” (Dreifus 33). For the purposes of this paper, the question can be edited slightly to read, “what shall I consume today?” To conclude this section, I end with a comic piece of prose from Atwood’s collection, Good Bones:

Each female body contains a female brain. Handy. Makes things work. Stick pins in it and you get amazing results. Old popular songs. Short circuits. Bad dreams ... The male brain, now, that’s a different matter. Only a thin connection. Space over here, time over there, music and

arithmetic in their own sealed compartments. The right brain doesn't know what the left brain is doing. Good for aiming though, for hitting the target when you pull the trigger. What's the target? Who cares? What matters is hitting it. That's the male brain for you. Objective. (Atwood *Good Bones* 36)

Chapter 2 - Fragmentation, Disease, and Disciplinary Practice

The cover of Carol J. Adams' book, The Sexual Politics of Meat, features an animated picture of a kneeling woman with her body divided into parts. The words, "chuck," "rib," "loin," "rump," and "round" separate each section of the body. The woman's hands are placed gently on her knees, while her arched back and protruding rump advertise that she is a piece of meat whose function is to be consumed. Her voluptuous crimson lips and dark, sultry eyes are aimed directly at the viewer, suggesting that she is an agent in her production. The woman addresses the viewer seductively with the question "What's Your Cut?", while her lips remain closed. Her body communicates her objectification, acting as a metaphor for meat and affirming her status in relation to man. The woman is "Man the Hunter's willing prey" (Fiddes 150), offering herself up for ritual sacrifice to satisfy the God's lustful desires. The animal is transformed from a living being to a dead object and in the process it is disassembled for consumption; similarly, a woman's body is objectified and then reassembled in her culture's desired image subsequently enhancing humanity's lived experience.

Thus far, it can be assumed from the evidence acquired that women's objectification is comparable to animals', since value is more often attributed to their object status--meat is more valuable than the animal, while an image of a woman's femininity can supersede the real woman. Control, power, and coercion are necessary to maintain the standard precedence of political, ideological, and religious loyalties. Man's

desire for meat is inherently linked with his desire for dominance over the “marked” other.

In Atwood’s book, Survival, she writes that man (the hunter) wishes to “conquer” by killing and assimilating animal’s “magic qualities, including their energy, violence and wildness, thus ‘winning’ over Nature and enhancing his own status” (Atwood Survival 74). Sadly, “Nature” is reduced to a challenge and becomes necessary for man’s gaining of respect and social power.

In this next part, I will be examining the destruction and control that Peter and the society he represents enforce on nature and the subsequent erasure of the animal and the woman’s will. I will also look at the ways in which man’s power can be destructive and how it produces a need in women to seek alternative forms of control. It can be observed in the case of The Edible Woman that Peter’s enjoyment, in relaying his hunting story, is derived from a culture that accepts aggressivity as a primarily masculine characteristic. Women naturally feel *like* meat when dominant discourse asks that they view their bodies as objects to manipulate and transform--in the hopes of adhering to the current standard feminine ideals, circumscribed in male desire. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, women adopt masculine characteristics, since they are produced within them, and approach their bodies with aggressive strategies of discipline and control. Man’s work is most commonly identified as a “creative, active, transformative process ... while the female is identified with the matter to be worked upon and transformed” (MacKinnon 15). So long as women remain in this position, they will always feel incomplete, diseased, and alienated from their bodies and the women around them.

Marian is at continual risk of losing her “authentic self” (Hesse-Biber 115), but is at even more risk when she starts to fragment. But while Marian’s fragmentation is signified through a whole host of “multiple and contradictory subjects” (Radner 52), an animal’s fragmentation involves being severed from subject status completely. At this point, one may wonder if men and women’s roles can be reversed. Certainly, a woman can be responsible for the death and dismemberment of an animal, whether it be through hunting or in the kitchen, but the dynamics are slightly different. Since patriarchy limits men and women to the social roles of male/active and female/passive, then the transgression from their pre-set roles would either label them as “unmanly” or “unwomanly.” In the kitchen, the dismemberment of an animal is validated as a womanly role, because of the female space that the woman occupies. If a woman were to hunt, however, it may be perceived as a rejection of her femininity.⁹ The cruelty inflicted on the animal (if there is any) is less important to the maintenance of male and female roles than the space in that they occupy. Furthermore, women and men’s rejection of their roles could result in marginalization, as in the case of Duncan, but this is not necessarily a negative alternative. But since men have typically been associated with aggressivity and dominance, it appears that an animal’s transformation into parts of meat and a woman’s vision of herself in parts preserves man’s position as the sum of those

⁹Marian is accused of rejecting her femininity twice in the novel—once after she escapes from Peter, Ainsley, and Len and another time when she bakes a surrogate cake of herself and then consumes it. In both cases, she is resisting womanliness and the feminine decorum that accompanies it.

parts.

* * *

2.1 *Man's Ubiquitous Presence*

One critical point that I have not addressed directly is female desire, more importantly Marian's desire, and how it coincides with the ways in which women construct their identities in the patriarchal arena. Perhaps it would be too simple to argue that women's desire is dictated by man, for man, and benefits only man. Yet, paradoxically, man is nowhere and yet everywhere. Roland Barthes gives insight into man's ubiquitous presence:

Where then is man in this ... picture? Nowhere and everywhere, like the sky, the horizon, an authority which at once determines and limits a condition ... Man is never inside, femininity is pure, free, powerful; but man is everywhere around, he presses on all sides, he makes everything exist; he is in all eternity the creative absence....[T]he feminine world.... a world without men, but entirely constituted by the gaze of man....

(Barthes in Pollak 77)

Barthes indicates that man's physical presence is not necessary in order for his authority over the feminine world to be effective. Indeed femininity has the potential to be "pure, free, and powerful" (Pollack 77), but not so long as women perform within masculine constructs. Man's absence yet overriding authority suggests that women are the enactments of male desire. In applying Carol J. Adams theory of absent reference, it could be argued that women have become the absent referents for men. While men may not be considered an oppressed group, it cannot be denied that men's absence from the feminine world marks the female body with what she is not. Women's identity is tacitly represented through "our current understanding of femininity, touching on body size and configuration, gestures, facial expressions, postures, styles of movement, and styles of ornamentation" (Bartky 117). Since women's identity is intrinsically linked to appearance, it would appear, then, that the male audience is necessary. However, humankind's internalization of social roles initiates self-regulation thereby eliminating the necessity for man's presence. In lieu of it, women are kept in a perpetual state of uncertainty, penetrated by an asymmetrical gaze that could in fact be their own.

A popular example of man's ubiquitous presence can be found in British philosopher/social reformer, Jeremy Bentham's design of the Panopticon prison. The Panopticon has been described as the "essence of the disciplinary society" (120) because of its architectural composition. At the centre of the prison is the "inspection lodge,"

while there are “cells around the perimeter” (Lyon 62). Each cell has two windows, one on the outside and one on the inside “facing the windows of the tower ... allowing an effect of backlighting to make any figure visible within the cell” (Bartky 120). The central tower had Venetian blinds, so the inmate “cannot even see a shadow” (Foucault 201), thus creating anxiety that he is constantly being observed even when he is not. “Visibility is a trap” (200), Foucault argues, since inmates are kept in “a state of consciousness and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201). The Panopticon, Foucault claims is “a marvelous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power” (202). For Foucault, the model of the Panopticon can be mapped onto other institutions throughout society, such as “hospitals, workshops, schools, prisons” (205).

* * *

2.2 *Panopticon and Feminist Application*

Feminists have incorporated Foucault’s account of the Panopticon into their scholarly research and have applied it to other cultural institutions. The “docile bodies” of the inmates are compared to the bodily experience of women, since they are “subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes ... a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine” (Bartky 120). If we recall the girdle advertisement, it can be

argued that women's uniform prescription to a uni-feminine ideal coincides with the disciplinary practices of the Panoptic regime. The current ideal female figure in fashion, for example, is described by feminist Sandra Lee Bartky as "taut, small-breasted, narrow-hipped, and of a slimness bordering on emaciation" (121). The normal adult woman, of course, does not have the hips of an "adolescent boy or a newly pubescent girl" (121); therefore, many women submit their bodies to dieting. In the process, however, she submits her body to a tireless regimen whereby, through starvation and denial, her body becomes an enemy, "an alien being bent on thwarting the disciplinary project" (121). At this point, women begin to see their bodies as not only objects, but diseased sites that must be cured through dieting, among other disciplinary procedures.

In Atwood's The Edible Woman, Marian's loss of appetite signifies the eradication of her identity and an attempt, on her part, to exert some control over her fragmented life. First, however, it should be noted that Marian's loss of appetite parallels her shift from first-person to third-person status and initiates the process whereby she views her body as an object. Marian's object status, though self-destructive, enables the reader to watch her as she watches herself. Part Two in the novel "seems to be told in the objective voice of an uninvolved narrator" (Nodelman 74), thus allowing for the reader to monitor her with a "clinical detachment" (74). Essentially, the reader has joined forces with Bentham's inspection tower and has the privilege of surveying Marian's actions, right down to her bodily functions. At the same time, our surveillance of her is unnecessary since it has become self-enforcing. Marian is convinced that her inability to

eat is a sickness that must be cured. Consequently, she has abandoned her body and joined the ranks of the reader in the inspection tower. Meanwhile, her body remains caged and every so often it is thrown scraps, but gradually it rejects meat, eggs, vegetables, and then all food. Marian's complete loss of appetite illustrates a point of departure. Either she allows the Panoptic eye to consume her or she subverts it and identifies it as her own. In the third part of the novel, as we will see further on in my paper, Marian chooses to subvert her own consumption and reclaim her self in the form of a surrogate cake. At this point, suitably, the book ends thereby severing the reader's status as watcher and consumer.

If in fact Marian is giving into the normal feminine regimen, her inability to eat could be identified as anorexia nervosa. In a brief synopsis about The Edible Woman, Anne Montagnes writes that "[i]t's about a girl suffering from *anorexia nervosa*, a psycho-neurotic complaint seen mostly in young unmarried females and characterized by an aversion to food" (56). Perhaps if we subjected Marian to a medical exam, this conclusion would be considered adequate. Certainly anorexia nervosa appears to be the only definitive term for Marian's illness, since it concurs with a femininity defined by restraint, moderation, and self control, "the virtues of our Puritan heritage" (Hesse-Biber 4). However, I argue that Marian's inability to eat is triggered by an inability to consume another being's suffering.

Peter's hunting story is strategically placed in the first part of the book, so as to prepare the reader for Marian's confrontation with meat in the second part. The rabbit

with the “guts dangling from the trees” (Atwood 75) reinforces her own sense of victimization to the extent that she adopts the characteristics of the rabbit: “helpless, white, and furry” (76). In the second part, she is at the restaurant with Peter and suddenly sees her steak as a “hunk of muscle. Part of a real cow that once moved and ate and was killed ...” (175). Peter’s hunting story allows her to make the connection between the free-roaming creature and the lifeless slab of flesh that sits on her plate. As demonstrated earlier in my paper, Marian identifies with the rabbit’s suffering and assumes it as her own. Eating thus becomes both a painful and symbolic act--painful because she is consuming herself, symbolic because her identity is being assimilated into her culture’s definition of what she should become.

There are similarities between anorexia nervosa and Marian’s behaviour, however, that cannot be ignored. Bartky claims that anorexia “is to women of the late twentieth century what hysteria was to women of an earlier day: the crystallization in a pathological mode of a widespread cultural obsession” (121). Marian’s bodily protest is indicative of a hysterical protest, thus signalling “the collapse of boundaries between personal trauma and social crisis” (Howells 47). Quite literally, Marian is suffering from a social system that “makes her sick” (Howells 48). She has not consciously decided to suppress her desire to eat; rather, her body has taken a stand on its own. Her condition does not fully embrace the anorexic’s motto, “[y]ou eat to live not live to eat” (Hesse-Biber 9). In Western culture, being overweight is considered to be a “sinful deviation” (10). Marian’s concern is certainly not for fear of becoming overweight--her disease is

the disease with no name. She does not suffer from anorexia, but an examination of the disease lends insight into her condition. For example, it suggests that a woman's relationship with food is crucial in determining her relationship with herself. Since women can only voice their identity through their body, inevitably, the use of food will be essential to that expression. Food does not satisfy women's appetite for self-rule precisely because it has become an unpleasant experience--an enemy of the body, while the body has become the mind's enemy.

Whether Marian is anorexic or not, her body's rejection of food suggests that it is voicing its dissent through the expression of "psychological stress" (15). While men control their environment through external endeavours (e.g., hunting), women manipulate their food intake (83). Marian does not manipulate her food; rather, she feels manipulated by it. But she feels even more betrayed by her body's rejection of food.

* * *

2.3 *The Caged and the Loose*

Marian's loss of control over her appetite coincides with her fear of spreading out. Her fragmentation has initiated a fear within her that she is spilling over, losing her shape, and is no longer able to contain herself. So while an anorexic woman may fear spreading out physically, Marian fears spreading out emotionally and losing control. Since femininity is "gauged by how little space women take up" (Rowe 413), I argue that Marian's fear is brought on by her inability to function according to "bourgeois and feminine standards of decorum" (413). Those standards dictate that "fatness and looseness are violations of codes of feminine posture and behavior" (413) and, as such, eliminate women's access to dominant culture. Unfeminine behaviour (i.e., looseness of body language and speech) may however, elevate her to a position of power.¹⁰ But as Kathleen K. Rowe points out, "'extreme looseness of body-focused functions' is generally not available to women as an avenue of revolt" (413). With limited options, Marian's lack of control over her body reaches crisis proportions. Her fragmentation signifies a loss of self control, while social control increases. Thus, I would agree with Iris Young insofar as women's refusal to monitor their bodies (self objectification) may result

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu uses the example of Roseanne Barr, a television celebrity who exudes unruliness through her crass dialogue and body language (e.g., she slouches, moons, wisecracks, munches). Her "... indifference to the objectifying gaze of others ... neutralizes its powers' and 'appropriates its appropriation'" (Rowe 414). In resisting culture's efforts to inscribe her in its objectifying gaze, she resists definition and subsequently subverts the cultural regime.

in others doing so instead (social objectification). At the mercy of external forces, whether it is her landlady, roommate, coworkers, parents, or fiancé, her identity will be completely overridden by the imposition of rules.

In a culture where nature is identified as “sloppiness” (Rowe 414), value is attributed to those who can attain physical beauty and maintain a degree of control. In the first chapter of The Edible Woman, we see Marian as a healthy young woman who in posture, appetite, and moral attitude reflects her culture’s notion of femininity. Peter’s hunting story, however, begins the process of Marian’s fragmentation. Her disease starts to spill over in the form of a tear:

After a while I noticed with mild curiosity that a large drop of something wet 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! Something inside me started to dash about in dithering mazes of panic, as though I had swallowed a tadpole. I was going to break down and make a scene, and I couldn’t. (Atwood 76)

Marian’s fear of crying suggests that she does not want to make a spectacle of herself (here we see her social conscience at work). Mapped onto Peter’s hunting story, Marian, like the rabbit, must remain camouflaged for survival; she hides under the guise of femininity.

Marian embodies a split subject. On the surface, she appears together, but underneath, she has the desire to “dash about in dithering mazes of panic” (76). She feels caged by social constraints that forbid her to take control of her natural environment. She recalls a “frenzied armadillo” (108) she had seen at the zoo:

The animal went around in figure-eights, just around and around in the same path. I can still remember the funny metallic sound its feet made on the bottom of the cage. They say that all caged animals get that way when they're caged, it's a form of psychosis, and even if you set the animals free after they go like that they'll just run around in the same pattern.

(Atwood 108)

The cage represents the implementation of humanity's destructive forces, while the armadillo, taken out of its natural environment, expresses uncertainty. The cage is a symbol of environmental control in its cruelest form. The armadillo's transition from a free-roaming creature to a dependent and panic-stricken beast is demonstrative of man's power over those beings that are “other” than him. Producing uncertainty, as I will discuss later in this section, is man's most efficient form of control.

Control for women means an exertion of power over the diseased qualities of their sex. The uncertainty that is instilled in a woman is derived from the split qualities of her existence. For example, the anorexic woman may equate her value with her ability to contain the spread of excess fat. But she is kept in a perpetual state of “uneasiness” for

fear that her weight may fluctuate at anytime. Consequently, the development of selfhood has been superseded by the preoccupations of the body.

Marian's inability to cope becomes a diseased condition, because she is not accepting the "everyday bodily requirements and vulnerabilities of 'femininity'" (Bordo 186), which are the very conditions of her existence. Susan Bordo cites a 1971 analysis, which values feminine disciplinary practice:

Sit down in a straight chair. Cross your legs at the ankles and keep your knees pressed together. Try to do this while you're having a conversation with someone, but pay attention at all times to keeping your knees pressed tightly together.

...

Walk down a city street. Pay a lot of attention to your clothing: make sure your pants are zipped, shirt tucked in, buttons done. Look straight ahead.

Every time a man walks past you, avert your eyes and make your face expressionless. Most women learn to go through this act each time we leave our houses. It's a way to avoid at least some of the encounters we've all had with strange men who decided we looked available.

(Williamette Bridge Liberation News Service 1971)

(Bordo 186)

In man's midst, women is defined through her body and its accessories, not through facial

expressions that may expose the activities of her mind. Women's sexuality appears to be a disease that must be contained, whether it is through zippers, buttons, or tucked in shirts, lest they attract attention to themselves. Her containment, in fact, is essential to her survival within the patriarchal arena. When I say "survival," I am referring to the survival of Marian's feminine self, not her identity. However, femininity can, oftentimes, become a woman's expression of self and without it, she lacks meaning. One of Marian's co-workers, Lucy, (one of the three office virgins) "ha[s] a face and shape that almost demand[s] the artificial: nail polish and makeup and elaborate arrangements of hair blend[s] into her, bec[o]me part of her" (Atwood 245). Throughout the novel, Marian restrains herself accordingly for fear that her fate will become like that of the rabbit. But in actual fact, it is her conformity to dominant discourse that objectifies, fragments, and threatens to consume her identity. For Marian, her engagement with Peter signifies the swallowing up of certainty, and marriage could very well render her being-less. Then again, if she cannot form an identity outside of dominant discourse, then maybe it is best that she works with it, rather than against it.

Historically, the dominant view has been that women must be contained or preoccupied lest they "scatter reason and swallow up certainty" (Flynn 90). However, the same could be said for men, especially considering Marian's engagement to Peter initiates her fragmentation. Her identity becomes divided between what Peter would like her to become and what she believes herself to be. Soon, the former usurps the latter and

Marian senses that she is being pulled apart like an animal in a disassembly line,¹¹ piece by piece. After her engagement, one of the first things to go is her language. At one point, she finds herself speaking in a “soft, flannelly voice” (Atwood 101) she barely recognizes, and telling Peter what she thinks he wants to hear: “‘I’d rather have you decide that. I’d rather leave the big decisions up to you’” (101). Marian is momentarily shocked at what she has said, but then realizes that she “really meant it” (101). She has temporarily been subsumed by Peter’s desire. And since women’s bodies take precedence over their minds, the male mind takes the initiative in dictating, outlining, and mapping his desires onto her body; in the meantime, her language has become his own.

Marian’s fragmentation benefits Peter, because he can assert his identity over her own. Clearly, her fragmentation is a transitional phase that wavers between, and is overlapped by, her objectification and consumption. Her status is indeterminate and cannot be labelled, so perhaps it could be argued that her fragmentation is the most empowering development in her character. At the same time, if she does not label herself, others will do so for her. So long as she lacks definition for her self and does not have a cohesive centre, she will become a reconfiguration of male desire and nothing else.

¹¹Carol J. Adams describes the disassembly line as a process through which the “animal must be treated as an inert object, not as a living, breathing being. Similarly the worker on the assembly line becomes treated as an inert, unthinking object ...” (52-53).

Marian's fear of losing control spawns in her a desire to escape. Her first escape challenges the social norms that try to assimilate her, but at the same time demonstrate how she is contained by them. After having drinks at the Park Plaza Hotel, Marian runs away from Peter, Ainsley, and Len—it is her bodily instinct that takes over, not her rationale:

I let go of Peter's arm and began to run. I was running along the sidewalk. After the first minute I was surprised to find my feet moving, wondering how they had begun, but I didn't stop ... Then Peter yelled, "Marian! Where the hell do you think you're going?" I could hear the fury in his voice: this was the unforgivable sin, because it was public.

(Atwood 78-79)

This scene signifies Marian's resistance to her assimilation into convention, while exposing how she is produced within it. She follows her instinct, but is aware of the absurdity of it all in the face of convention. The act "indicates an alarming dissociation both of Marian from her society and, internally, of her mind from her body, her intellect from her emotions, her conscious from her unconscious" (Lauber 25). Here we see the conflict between the "socially-referred character" (Weiss 46) and the self-referred. Young recognizes these "contradictory bodily modalities" (47) as a struggle between "... others regarding her ...'" and "'the woman herself'" (47) taking up her body as a "'mere thing'" (47). Marian's escape, however, transcends Young's theory, in that she wishes to escape in the hopes of protecting her bodily existence. For a moment, the reader might even be

deceived into thinking she has actually escaped, but then the characters of Peter, Len, and Ainsley remind us that she is encased within the societal convention of each word, line, and dot. Peter's hunting story is what initially inspires fear in Marian, and her escape is based more on survival than tomfoolery. As long as she is contained within the power structures Peter represents, she will be pulled away from any claims she can make for herself.

In response to Marian's rebellious behaviour, she must be maintained, manipulated, mistreated if necessary, and redefined "as whatever doesn't disturb the pattern of what we already know" (Frye 35). Marian becomes aware of the restrictive forces when she sets foot on private property and finds herself trapped. On one side of her is a house, which she imagines to contain a "group of middle-aged ladies in evening dress" (Atwood 81) and she is "momentarily conscience-stricken" (81). On the other side of her is "something that was more solid than the darkness blocking [her] way. It was the brick wall attached to the iron gate at the front; it seemed to go all the way around the house" (81). The house acts as the inspection tower in the Panopticon prison. Its existence instills order and prevents transgression. Len, Peter, and Ainsley have become the symbolic agents employed to ensure that her behaviour is not threatening to the social order.

Indeed Marian has become the rabbit who attempts to flee the technologically destructive forces that try to pull her apart. While the rabbit flees from man's rifle, Marian finds herself trying to outrun Peter's car:

All at once it was no longer a game. The blunt tank-shape was threatening.

It was threatening that Peter had not given chase on foot but had enclosed himself in the armour of the car; though of course that was the logical thing to do. In a minute the car would stop, the door would swing open ...

where was there to go? (Atwood 80)

The exploitative forces of male logic pursue Marian in the form of a car. She knows that her capture may mean her inevitable destruction, but when she thinks of Peter with his car door ajar, she foresees no other choice: "In a minute the car would stop, the door would swing open ... where was there to go?" (80).

Marian's escape signifies a desire in her to obtain power and control over her life. But as Carolyn G. Heilbrun argues, women's desire for power is considered "unwomanly." Therefore, women come to "prefer (or think they would prefer) a world without evident power and control" (17). In the meantime, "women have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots, or examples, by which they might assume power--take control of--their lives" (17). For lack of a better choice, Marian gives into her capture with relief: "I felt myself caught, set down and shaken. It was Peter who must have stalked me ... The relief of being stopped and held, of hearing Peter's normal voice again and knowing he was real" (Atwood 81). Marian yearns for the "normal," because the alternatives do not offer the same privileges. At the same time, the language used to

describe her capture (e.g., caught, shaken) mirrors the gutting of the rabbit, only it isn't her body that will be gutted, but her identity.

Elaine Showalter cites Tony Robert-Fleury's 1887 painting, "Pinel Freeing the Insane," (1887), which is effective in demonstrating Marian's situation. Most striking in the painting is the stark contrast between the hysterical, raving lunatics and the upright, rational-minded Pinel surrounded by his fellow men. Strangely, the crouched and cowering figures of the lunatics are all women. Phillipe Pinel, who in 1793 freed the lunatics from the Bicetre and the Salpêtrière in a politically symbolic act, is represented by Robert-Fleury in sexual terms--with the men standing upright in civilized poses, and the women, prone to madness are to be redeemed by men. Significantly, the woman at the centre of Robert-Fleury's painting, "Pinel Freeing the Insane," epitomizes Marian's situation. Her escape exposes her "disordered body and mind" (Showalter 3), while capture reveals her opposition "to the scrutiny of the man who has the authority to unchain her" (3). The female representatives of insanity in Robert-Fleury's painting are unchained, but the barred windows to the right of the picture remind us, still, of their imprisonment. Simone de Beauvoir argues that the female of the species is enslaved, since "her animality is more manifest" (de Beauvoir in Peach 31) than man's. In this statement, de Beauvoir is indicating that women's reproductive surrendering to humanity reduces women to the level of nature's unruliness, their identity is thus linked to animal status. "[T]hrough a medium of technology and symbols" (Peach 31), the rational-minded man, then creates, invents, and shapes nature to suit his purposes. The barred windows in Robert-Fleury's painting thus represent women's enslavement to man's culture where women, like the animal, is subjected to man's disciplinary practice. For Marian, the private house, the iron gate, the brick wall, and Peter's "tank-shape" car are the symbolic examples of her containment. Like the woman at the centre of the picture, Marian cannot escape man's ubiquitous presence. Nonetheless, her escape unravels the yarn that has her tightly bound.

So far, it has been established that Marian's escape from her friends represents her escape from the restrictive forces of her culture. Recent philosophers, critics, and social theorists have identified a link between "woman" and "madness"; "[t]hey have shown how women within our dualistic systems of language and representation, are typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature, and body" (Showalter 4-5).

Meanwhile, "men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture, and mind" (4).

Upon being captured, Len's only comment for Marian was, "[d]idn't think you were the

hysterical type” (Atwood 82). Grounded in rationality, Len belittles Marian’s position by reducing her to a type. So long as Marian does not utilize the available forms of discourse, she will be grouped off as hysterical. This explains Marian’s later shift over to dominant forms of discourse and her rejection of the feminine body, as a diseased and hysterical site. As Elaine Showalter points out, “muted groups must mediate their beliefs through the allowable forms of dominant structures” (Showalter in Radner 56).

Like the prisoners of Pinel, Marian may resent her oppressor’s definition of her, but at the same time, she is contained within it. As we have seen, anorexia, though self-destructive, is one example of an attempt to assert control over a woman’s environment, while still adhering to dominant structures. Marian flees from her friends, because she has no other mode of expression. While they are out for drinks at the Park Plaza Hotel, Peter and Len’s conversation about hunting and cameras is accompanied by Ainsley and Marian’s silence. It is considered “unwomanly” to talk about implements of control and power, let alone their destructive outcome. Unable to voice her rebellion, Marian employs her body. Her choice of resistance is adequate, but the way she uses it is threatening to dominant structures and must be controlled accordingly. Anorexia, on the other hand, does not upset the balance, because women are preoccupied with their figurability and not the external forces that define what that figurability will be. Rather than scrutinizing their oppressors, as the chained hysteric might, the unchained scrutinize their own body and, therefore, become their own prisoners.

* * *

2.4 *Woman as 'Defective Male': Fleeing the Feminine*

The feminine body becomes suspect, dirty, diseased even. Anorexic women or women on diets are at constant odds with their bodies. The female body is not to be trusted, for it can betray the mind, reinforced by the male desire that has become self enforcing--that seeks to objectify, fragment, and consume. Since the average woman is socialized to scrutinize her body, then it follows that she must have a closely monitored relationship with food. Product labels are examined, calories are counted, and weight scales are the determining factor of success. Barbara Ehrenreich describes man as representing “‘wholeness, strength, and health’” (Wolf 221), but in stark contrast “[w]oman is a ‘misbegotten man,’ weak and incomplete” (221). As long as she is contained by man and allows herself to be produced by him, she will be regarded as nothing more than Aristotle’s claim: “‘a defective male’” (Wiesner 225).

Earlier, it was established that Marian’s inability to eat is not attributed to body-image, but to her identification with another being’s suffering. The latter remains true, but it can also be added that Marian is rejecting her femininity and the sickness associated with it. T.D. MacLulich describes Marian’s eating habits as a paradox. She initially rejects meat because it was once alive and then she rejects vegetables for the same reason. Soon, she turns to processed or artificial foods, such as canned-rice pudding or noodles.

Vitamin pills become her next “alternative to organic food” (MacLulich 122). The paradox arises because, MacLulich asserts, “Marian is using the products of the consumer society to sustain a rebellion which is ostensibly directed against that very society”(122). Here I suggest that Marian’s abstinence from food is not a rebellion against the society that Peter represents, but a rejection of her own body. MacLulich echoes this point, confirming that Marian’s inability to eat is a rebellion against herself and a rejection of her femininity.

Femininity spreads out like the food laid out at the office Christmas party. The loaded table makes Marian “feel gluttonous: all that abundance, all those meringues and icings and glazes, those coagulations of fats and sweets, that proliferation of rich glossy food” (Atwood 192). The women from Marian’s office become extensions of the food; their femininity is worn like the artifice of icings and glazes. But Marian now peels away the surface dressings to reveal their bodies:

She examined the women’s bodies with interest, critically, as though she had never seen them before. And in a way she hadn’t, they had just been there like everything else, desks, telephones, chairs, in the space of the office: objects viewed as outline and surface only. But now she could see the roll of fat pushed up across Mrs. Gunridge’s back by the top of her corset, the ham-like bulge of thigh, the creases round the neck, the large porous cheeks; the blotch of varicose veins glimpsed at the back of one

plump crossed leg, the way her jowls jellied when she chewed, her sweater
a woolly teacosy over those rounded shoulders. (Atwood 194)

Marian strips away the feminine artifice and what remains is a fragmented object with no identity. Mrs. Gunridge, like the sectioned woman on the front of Carol J. Adams' book, is reduced to a series of body parts: back, ham-like thigh, neck, cheeks, leg, jowls, shoulders. Femininity merely disguises the more menacing aspect of women's true function; that is, to be objectified, fragmented, and consumed.

The definitive lines between the feminine identity and the consumption of food become more difficult to trace. The food is dressed, sweetened, and displayed in a similar custom to a woman's presentation of her body through the use of clothing and makeup. Thus, the eating of food at the Christmas party becomes a cannibalistic act. More and more, it becomes difficult for Marian to decipher between that which is edible and that which is not. Like Mrs. Gunridge, she views the other women at the Christmas party as

similar in structure but with varying proportions and textures of bumpy
permanents and dune-like contours of breast, waist, and hip; their fluidity
sustained somewhere within by bones, without by a carapace of clothing
and makeup. What peculiar creatures they were; and the continual flux
between the outside and the inside, taking things in, giving them out,
chewing, words, potato-chips, burps, grease, hair, babies, milk, excrement,

cookies, vomit, coffee, tomato juice, blood, tea, sweat, liquor, tears, and garbage.... (194-95)

Marian links bodily excrement with the food that creates such excrement. T.D.

MacLulich argues that Marian rejection of her body “explains why she stops eating. If nothing goes in, nothing will come out: she will cease being ‘dirty’” (122). MacLulich adds to his statement, arguing that Marian does not give up all foods at once, but meat is the first food to be eliminated from her diet. In the same way that she eliminates food from her diet, I argue that “words” (language) are also eliminated. Moreover, “words” are intentionally thrown in between “chewing” and the “potato chips” to suggest that women consume their words (or allow others to consume them) just as easily as they consume their potato chips and cookies.

MacLulich suggests that Marian is not only “fleeing from her own feminine or natural self” (124) and the “distressingly messy cycle of natural processes” (124).

Marian, of course, is also escaping the fate of the rabbit in Peter’s hunting story. Peter describes the gutting of the rabbit as a “mess” (Atwood 75), but fails to acknowledge the animal’s suffering. Women’s bodily excretions can be compared to the rabbit’s blood. Both are natural, but Peter and the society that he represents would rather they didn’t exist; therefore, they must be contained accordingly. As long as the natural forces are controlled, the dichotomy between nature and culture will succeed.

Levi-Strauss aligns the masculine with “aggressor, deceiver, permanence, and culture,” while the feminine is measured up against “victim, deceived, change, and nature”

(MacLulich 124). Marian opts for permanence as opposed to the fluid and unpredictable nature that women represent:

... she wanted something solid, clear: a man; she wanted Peter in the room so that she could put her hand out and hold on to him to keep from being sucked down. Lucy had a gold bangle on one arm. Marian focussed her eyes on it, concentrating on it as though she was drawing its hard gold circle around herself, a fixed barrier between herself and that liquid amorphous other. (Atwood 195)

Atwood challenges Levi-Strauss's masculine/feminine divisions by presenting male and female qualities that are both all-encompassing. For example, Marian's escape from Peter, Len, and Ainsley is symbolic of a flight from the masculine-derived destructive forces. But she is entirely consumed and constituted by man's ubiquitous presence. At the Christmas party, Marian fears that she will drown in the "Sargasso Sea of femininity" (195). Lucy's gold bangle becomes her life preserver, since it represents the "hard circle" (256) of her engagement ring, "a protective talisman that would help keep her together" (256). Paradoxically, Marian's instinct seeks to escape male dominance, but at the same time she employs masculine measures--such as the ring--to repel the liquid amorphous otherness of the feminine body.

Marian wavers between the solid qualities of the masculine and the liquid feminine, but always remains the “other.” At one point, she catches herself in her bedroom mirror in between two of her dolls:

She saw herself in the mirror between them for an instant as though she was inside them, inside both of them at once, looking out: herself, a vague damp form in a rumpled dressing gown, not quite focussed, the blonde eyes noting the arrangement of her hair, her bitten fingernails, the dark one looking deeper, at something she could not see, the two overlapping images drawing further and further away from each other; the centre, whatever it was in the glass, the thing that held them together, would soon be quite empty. By the strength of their visions they were trying to pull her apart.
(Atwood 257)

This scene suggests that Marian now considers the lifeless dolls to be more real than herself. According to Jacques Lacan, “at a certain point in its development, a child comes to recognize itself in the mirror, but imagines the child in the mirror to be more complete, perfect, and powerful” (van Zoonen 89). The gaze, however, is owned by the masculine subject and “that upon which it gazes is feminine. Women are only lack, the unified identity to men’s looking” (Young 179). Young suggests that women can only maintain access to subjectivity through “adopting this position of the male subject who takes

pleasure in the objectification of women" (179). Marian's vision of herself in between the dolls suggests that she recognizes a feminine lack, a failure "to fully identify with an image that can never be entirely her own, her 'self'" (Radner 55). Her dolls represent her gender-role socialization as a child, but she has not figured into her respective social role as an adult. Thus, her doll's image functions as an accomplishment of feminine upkeep, defined by dominant discourse, while the reflection of herself is incomplete, bedraggled, and malformed.

Marian begins to project her identity onto the doll's eroded faces, rubbery skin, and chewed fingers and toes and their defects become her own. She has assumed the identity of the blonde doll and is looking outwards from her worn-away eyes, observing that it is now Marian who has the "bitten fingernails" (Atwood 257). Indeed her self-evaluation, through the doll's eyes, indicates that their identities have meshed together. So, "[r]ather than abandoning her overidentification with the image, she reinvests in it as though it were her 'self.' She misrecognizes it as herself" (Radner 56). She unconsciously spreads and assumes the image of the dolls, but in the process her identity is extinguished. She is reduced to a form and the dolls fix the subject (Marian) as an object.

Marian's subconscious reveals her disassociation that threatens to pull her away from her identity (her centredness), subsequently annihilating her will. The dolls become Marian's surveyors, their watchful eyes indicating their disapproval. This scene demonstrates Marian's embodiment of surveyor/surveyed status, since she drifts in and

out of the doll's consciousness and her own. The images of the dolls (the surveyors) become more tangible, real, and complete than her own existence (the surveyed). Their worn-away faces symbolize the feminine part of herself that she has rejected, but is dependent upon for male approval. And now it threatens to disassemble her like an animal, and reassemble her into pieces, mechanized by the social order.

The feminine body threatens dissolution and thus a loss of identity. Levi Strauss's masculine/feminine dualism of permanence and change is grounded in centuries of stereotyping. Historically, women have had less physical, economic, and political power than men, so it was believed that they had to engage in deviant means to get what they wanted. In Early Modern Europe, during the witch craze, it was thought that while "a man could fight or take someone to court, a woman could only scold, curse, or cast spells" (Wiesner 223). Therefore, a woman's "physical and legal weakness" (223) made her that much more susceptible to witchcraft than men. Man's physical and intellectual superiority made him a pillar of strength, a "protective talisman" (Atwood 256) from demonic transgressions. Marian draws upon Peter, the husband figure, to ward off the disease of her sex.

* * *

Again, if we return to the example of the Panopticon, we are reminded of the disciplinary practices that David Lyon terms, “clean control” (Lyon 65). He explains that panoptic control is much better

than something like Addison’s bizarre-sounding proposal to try ‘virginity with the lions’. There you saw blood and uncertainty: here you see certainty without blood’. Of course, uncertainty still exists for those subjected to the Panoptic regime. Indeed, the ‘machine’ depends on it. Certainty resides in the system, and, one might add with the inspector, the one ‘in the know’. (65)

Just as the panoptic ‘system’ depends on the inmate’s uncertainty, the patriarchal order relies on the self-scrutiny of its female occupants. The punishment that was once “public and brutal” (Lyon 65) has now been discarded for a “clean and rational” (65) form of social control. In modernity, women may not be subjected to witch burnings, by virtue of their sex. However, by virtue of not being male, they may be convinced (in all certainty) that they are diseased sites—only cured through the clean, intact male presence.

If women are considered the diseased, then it follows that men are the “clean” ones. The dictionary defines clean as “1. without dirt or other impurities,” but it is also aptly defined as “without extraneous or foreign materials” or even more appropriately “without defect, difficulties, or problems ... pure; morally sound ... honourable and

respectable ... habitually neat ..." (Collins 247). The opposite would thus include words such as "dirty, filthy, soiled, stained, spotted; ... messy, untidy, disorderly ... flawed, imperfect, faulty, crude ... contaminated, polluted, impure, infected, tainted ..." (Thesaurus 134). Bentham's Panoptic model demonstrates the clean and rational principles of order that serve to curb sickness, ensure predictability, and eliminate identity. The female body, like the inmate, is infected by "visibility"; women learn not only to see their bodies as diseased and disorderly, but also "foreign" and "extraneous" both to the society and to themselves. Such is the effect of "clean control."

Clean control allows for the automatic functioning of a society's power. Control and power are made accessible through the acceptance of the clean and rational principles of the dominant institutions and social roles. Peter, Marian's landlady, and her coworker Lucy demonstrate the clean behaviour of the dominant order. Peter often showers and Marian describes him as having a "clean, soap smell" (Atwood 65). Marian describes his clothes as always being in a state of "arranged carelessness" (Atwood 99) and goes as far as to suggest that his paint stains match his socks (99). She even describes the hairs on his arm as neatly arranged (65). His ordered life reflects the rational behaviour of Pinel and his men in Robert-Fleury's painting who stand in an upright formation exhibiting the transcendent characteristics of their sex. The landlady is very particular about Marian and Ainsley's cleanliness in the communal bath tub. In addition, she is constantly trying to protect her fifteen-year-old child's eyes and ears from any indecent behaviour. This includes the "flagrant exhibition of soilage" (104) that their laundry displays. Marian

imagines her landlady, who glides by the velvet curtains voicing her disapproval: "We are all, I silently quoted her, utterly unclean" (104). At the Christmas party, Lucy tells a story of a roommate who never washes: "... Nothing else was wrong with her, she just didn't wash ... she seemed perfectly normal in every other way, but obviously underneath it she must have been really *sick*" (192-93). Lucy's story implies that to deviate from the norm is a form of sickness. Since women are close to the unruliness of nature, they especially bear the responsibility of keeping themselves together in order to maintain femininity.

It could be said, then, that all women are unclean. At least this is the impression Marian gives the reader while at the office Christmas party. In response to Lucy's story about the dirty roommate, Millie (another coworker) said, "'Maybe it was one of those things we sort of all go through ... Maybe she was just immature ...'" (193). Marian loses her appetite at the party, because she associates maturity with "[d]resses for the mature figure" (194), as is represented in the body of Mrs. Gunridge. Maturity is associated with getting fat and fatness implies the imposition of rules and disciplinary practices. The maturity of the women in the room threatens to spread and engulf Marian with its "sweet organic scent" (Atwood 195). She has stripped away the women's various disguises, to reveal a fat that threatens to spread if not subjected to femininity's vices.

Women are socialized to believe that the female body is a disorderly site and thus must be squished into girdles, swathed in nylon, greased with makeup, and bound in clinking bangles--all in the hopes of manipulating or perhaps detracting from bodily

transgression. Maybe women's belief in their defectiveness affirms man's advancement. And just maybe women turn to dominant forms of discourse when they are convinced that their bodies, hence their minds, are "contaminated, polluted, and impure" (Collins 247). And if power and control is considered "unwomanly," as Carolyn G. Heilbrun argues, and if women's only mode of expression is through their bodies, then perhaps women have also accepted that they have little power and control over their bodies and must rely on external forces.

Marian chooses the companionship of men, since they represent a transcendence and subjectivity that moves beyond the dirty confines of the female sex. Peter is "ordinariness raised to perfection'... with the appropriate costume for every occasion ..." (Lauber 23). At times, Marian finds comfort in his character because she *thinks* she knows what to expect. Other times, she prefers the companionship of Duncan because he embodies unpredictability. Unlike the macho image that Peter presents, Duncan is on the verge of emaciation, and "his clothes never seem to change" (23). Peter is a young upstart in his profession as a lawyer, while Duncan is still finishing term assignments from the previous year. Peter enjoys the expensive hobbies of "photography and model-making; Duncan irons, or sits in the laundromat watching clothes whirl in the dryer (his substitute for television)" (Lauber 23). If we look at each character's relationship with Marian, it becomes evident that they are both using her. Peter is attracted to Marian's sensibility, because he believes she will never override his authority or his career goals. Also, "Marian is convenient and dependable, and he can act out his fantasies with her.

(Most of the men in this novel are 'acting out' in their relations with women.)" (23).

Duncan is utterly self-absorbed and even confesses to not liking Marian very much, but is still dependent on her as a vessel through which he can voice his mind's preoccupations.

John Lauber splits Marian's character in a similar fashion to Young's social-referred/self-referred dichotomy. He defines Marian's social self as "what has been expected of her and what she has accepted" (25) and her true self as "her inarticulate desires, needs, and revulsions" (25). I would be tempted to map Lauber's social/true split onto Marian's relationship with Peter and Duncan. Peter and Duncan present fronts that overtly articulate the split Marian embodies. Peter's appearance is clean and intact, while Duncan is shaggy and unwound. Between Duncan's endless self revelations and Peter's Playboy fantasies, Marian loses control over her own desires and needs.

To conclude this section, I argue that Marian's fragmentation is an inherent part of her experience as a feminine body, but if she rejects her femininity, then, she falls outside of classification. If we consider the construction of femininity, for a moment, one can detect a paradox. On the one hand, women are taught that femininity is fulfilling and will get you places. The ultimate accomplishment is to "catch" a man and fulfill his goals and dreams. On the other hand, obtaining femininity means viewing your body in parts; more specifically, scrutinizing your body to ensure that your knees remain tightly bound, your legs are shaved, or a corset is worn to maintain excess spread around the midriff. Women tend to view the different parts of their bodies as "'problem areas', which are referred to in the third person: 'flabby thighs ... they'" (Coward 43). Rosalind Coward contests that

“[i]f the ideal shape has been pared down to a lean outline, bits are bound to stick out or hang down and these become problem areas” (43). Therefore, women who seek out femininity must employ fragmentary means to obtain wholeness, as is represented through the catching and keeping of a man.

In observing Levi-Strauss's dichotomies, it becomes clear that Marian mediates between the masculine (subject) and feminine (other), characteristics of aggressor and victim, deceiver and deceived, permanence and change. But unbeknownst to Marian, the masculine and feminine are both artificial and, therefore, equally destructive. Lacan suggests that simply in the experience of being human, the subject is exposed to “a law which decentres and divides: sexuality is created in a division, the subject is split” (Lacan 26). In fact, the superficial representations of wholeness and togetherness pose perhaps the greatest threat to any claim Marian can make over her identity.

* * *

Chapter 3 - Consumption

The Annihilation of Will

We have seen thus far the definitive boundaries that can be traced between the masculine and feminine. Simply put, men have most typically possessed the transformative qualities that shape and cloister the female sex in its particularities. The disciplinary practices that women inflict on their bodies reflect a social sickness. Marian's identification and rejection of the women's diseased bodies at the office Christmas party suggest that she is seeking out a new identity. Her fragmentation ignites a whole host of contradictory subjects. On the one hand, she attempts to escape from the restrictive forces that Peter represents, but discovers that her desire for power and control could be perceived as socially indecent, "unwomanly" perhaps. On the other hand, she needs to escape the conditions of the feminine body, since by definition alone, it resembles the power and control Peter has over her, and man has over animal.

The third part of my paper will discuss the final step in Carol J. Adams' cycle: consumption. We have seen the way in which women become objects. In the fragmentation stage, the woman is broken up on a psychological, emotional, and spiritual level, her qualities severed from their ontological meaning. Similarly, animals are rendered being-less through the disciplinary practices imposed on them, namely dis-memberment in an assembly line. Consumption, as Adams defines it, is

the fulfillment of oppression, the annihilation of will, of separate identity
... Finally, consumed, it exists only through what it represents. The
consumption of the referent reiterates its annihilation as a subject of
importance in itself. (Adams 47)

Woman and animal's otherness is reinforced by a culture that seeks to disguise their original nature. Again, animals' transformation into meat and the renaming of its various body parts (rib, loin, shank, etc.) obscures its identity as animal. A woman's continual production of herself in the image of the "more perfect than perfect" is also conceived in terms of parts (breast, butt, thigh, abs, etc.). Outside of the real woman, images cater to a culture's desire, since its two-dimensional status does not threaten existing social roles or governing institutions. Once the image is mistaken for the real woman, then her consumption is complete. If a woman desires the body-image she sees in a fashion photograph, but knows that she does not have the body to match, then the implementation of disciplinary practices (e.g., the girdle) become necessary and, soon, it is an intrinsic part of her identity.

Marian's inability to eat is indicative of her resistance toward identity-fixing and the social sickness that accompanies it. Her abstinence from meat, vegetables, and then all food, is directly related to her rejection of masculinity, femininity, and then all humanity. Marian's escape--after Peter tells his rabbit-hunting story--is a rejection of the masculine characteristics that define aggressivity as a virtue inherent in men. Her escape from

external forces foreshadows her later retreat from society entirely, demonstrated through her body's complete renunciation of food. Her body becomes a symbolic vessel through which only select food items or none at all are accepted, in accordance with Marian's current psychological ailments.

* * *

3.1 *Man is the Hunter, Woman is his Game*

Marian's nausea before meat is her instinctive identification with the hunted animal. The hunter/hunted dichotomy is one of the most persistent metaphors for the relationship between man and woman in our culture. Tennyson writes in *The Princess* (1847), "Man is the hunter; woman is his game./The sleek and shining creature of the chase,/We hunt them for the beauty of their skins;/They love us for it and we ride them down" (Fiddes 144). Nick Fiddes also asserts how women are often portrayed as "man's willing prey" (150), claiming this is nowhere more apparent than in pornographic material or spoof magazines such as *Playboar*. Pornography is saturated with

associations between women and animals. We see a film in which women become animals, who are then trained with a whip. Juvenal tells us that a woman filled with sexual desire becomes 'more savage than a tigress that

lost her cubs.’ In *Hustler* magazine, a woman is photographed surrounded by the mounted heads of wild animals and animal skins ... (Griffin 148)

We think of Peter’s attempt to photograph Marian in her red dress by his collection of guns. Marian recognizes the danger of the “black light meter” (Atwood 272), which phallically extends from the camera. Marian’s resistance could be interpreted as an underlying fear of rape or “slaughter,” as she is “backed against the wall” (272) and arranged by Peter’s lens. Marian recognizes herself as a target, but the reader cannot decipher between whether she is the bloodstained rabbit-victim or the sexual object. Either way, she will be silenced, renamed for consumption, and assimilated into Peter’s instruction--manual reared lifestyle. Since women have come to be associated with nature, they could be said to inhabit the same space as the animal, reduced to a kind of “bovine mindlessness, chewing the cud” (Birke 101).

Anti-feminist arguments have almost always been rooted in biological determinism. In the mid-nineteenth century, especially, women’s biology was believed to limit their education, while at the same time “education itself would damage [their] biology” (102). Biological determinism has usually preserved the status quo and when women do not challenge it, it is for fear of being deemed a “monster” (Gilbert and Gubar 34). Beneficial to the religious, political, and ideological underpinnings of Western society is the permanence of biologically-determined roles, thus reinforcing an attitude that sees man and woman’s gender and sexuality immutable. Indeed, Simone de Beauvoir would

argue that a woman's reproductive capacity often limits her to the "animalistic" nature of her body.

When we root our values and belief systems in "genetic and/or hormonal differences" (Birke 102), women are aligned with animal's victim status, since they are not considered to have the same amount of reason and intellect. In time, we could say they have tended not to comment upon their own situation and instead resist more discrete ways. In Marian's case, for example, she backs against the wall in an effort to escape Peter's lens. She is caught between her fear of being consumed and her conventional inner voice that seeks to justify the use of the camera. Peter's suggestion to take a snapshot leaves her "unreasonably anxious" (Atwood 272). The coupling of "unreasonable" and "anxious" underline Marian's pull between resistance and acceptance. We link her anxiety with Peter's story of gutting the rabbit, and her anxiety seems natural. The word "unreasonably" stands out, and shows her tendency to preserve the status quo; as a biologically determined woman, she feels it is unreasonable of her to feel uncomfortable with those who possess power or control over her.

* * *

3.2 *Anxiety of the Consumed*

While Marian's resistance to her "consumption" is often present in her behaviour

she invariably gives into her anxieties. Marian's critical attitude to the girdle advertisement sparks such anxious feelings in her. Fast forward 150 pages and we find her pushing herself into a new girdle. Hoping to ease her potential anxiety, she gives in to the saleslady's rationale: "... you don't really need one, but still that is a close-fitting dress and you wouldn't want it to be obvious that you haven't got one on, would you?" (Atwood 259). Anxiety seems almost to be a moral dilemma, one that can only be remedied through conformity to conventional practices. The need for a girdle implies that women must be contained and are defective otherwise. This scene forwards Susan Griffin's claim that women "have felt obliged by society to impersonate what society thinks is a woman. We have felt obliged to be this creature that we aren't" (Klein 1991). Certainly Marian feels obliged to conform to a standard that has been set out by Peter and his society--as it is represented through her girdle and red-sequined dress--but in the end her conformity only instills a greater anxiety in her. We might say that this is how consumer culture to work. It promises to appease women's anxiety through purchasing power, even though the products only serve to increase self-doubt.

The mythology of women's deviant nature contributes to women's anxiety. In the process, they are silenced and become willing participants in their own consumption. *Hustler* magazine published a cover with a woman being passed through a meat grinder. Another Valentine's issue displayed a woman in chains who was also bound and gagged. Ironically, she wore a pair of sunglasses in the shape of hearts. The shape of the glasses veils the suffering of women and indicates that, once again, she is "man's willing prey."

In Los Angeles, in the 1990's, two plastic surgeons were offering a Valentine Day special: "A man could buy the entire package for the woman he loved: a Dior nightgown: a bungalow in the Bel Air Hotel; fourteen karat gold-plated sunglasses and a face-lift" (Ideas 1993) all for fifteen thousand dollars. Indeed if women take pleasure in producing themselves, their ultimate triumph is to be consumed. In The Edible Woman, Marian buys Peter a Valentine cake but when she takes a bite, it feels "spongy and cellular against her tongue, like the bursting of thousands of tiny lungs" (Atwood 243). The form of the heart effectively disguises the anxiety and suffering that accompanies consumption, whether it is of an image or food. Although Marian does not inflict any suffering on an animal or herself, the act of eating the heart is symbolic. The consumption of the cake suggests that she has conformed to the culturally-coded constructions of male/female relationships. Ultimately, the form of the heart conceals the ideologically uneven ground that man and woman stand upon. If we confuse love with domination, degradation, and control, then, are women not merely objects to be consumed?

* * *

3.3 *Women as Objects of Consumption*

Women adorn themselves and bring attention to themselves as "targets" for men. Atwood's adjective 'edible' evokes the idea that women are prey to be consumed. Mills

points out how women have long been described as edible:

The Dictionary of Historical Slang lists several phrases colloquially popular since the C15th, some still in use, which evoke an image of woman as dead flesh, bloodily carved up, hacked at, minced by a butcher or cook, and eventually served up for male consumption. *A bit of meat* meant firstly sexual intercourse (from the male standpoint) and later a prostitute. *Fresh meat* was a prostitute new to the trade ... In the C20th the expression *a cut or slice off the joint* is a UK slang term used by men meaning to have intercourse with a woman. (Mills 155)

The conflation of female and meat suggests that the consumption of both is a sign of male success, that is to say, potency. Meat has long been reputed to “inflamm[e] the lustful passions” (Fiddes 147) of men, so much so that many nineteenth- and some twentieth-century educationists encouraged a low meat diet to discourage masturbation in young males (147). The bodies of animals and women are both “dressed” and “adorned” for their male consumers.

We cannot forget that intrinsic to the ‘production’ of women within consumer culture, is the necessity of female consumers as well. Marian, for example, receives more praise from women than men after she visits the hair salon—she rekindles the manifest rivalry between women who wish to produce themselves as men’s prey.

As I have demonstrated Marian's conscious mind resists the notion of herself as prey, and yet her instincts push her to a self-instilled slaughter. At dinner, Marian notices Peter "watching her more and more ... he would focus his eyes on her face, concentrating on her as though if he looked hard enough he would be able to see through her flesh and her skull" (Atwood 172). Peter is able to look at the animal and see the steak that will sit on his plate, and likewise, he observes Marian, not as a soul, but as flesh to be consumed.

Subconsciously, Marian has memories that connect general images of consumption with her own consumption by Peter. Part of the Moose Bear commercial, for one, displayed the caption, "Any real man on a real man's holiday -- hunting, fishing, or just plain old-fashioned relaxing--needs a beer with a healthy, hearty taste, a deep-down manly flavour ..." (Atwood 22). Accompanying the caption is a picture of a hunter standing alongside a deer he has just killed, yet his hands are bloodless. Marian recognizes the advertisement as deceptive, since it provides a clean picture of a brutal act. It reiterates the fact that manliness is associated with control, cleanliness, and efficiency. Marian perceives a similar incongruity between the brutal act of killing the animal and the polite mannerisms that Peter uses when slicing, chewing, and swallowing his steak: "How skillfully he did it: no tearing, no ragged edges. And yet it was a violent action" (174). Man's aggressivity is disguised through the reshaping of his victim.

When Peter is evaluating his prey (Marian), he is consuming her fate in the form of a steak. The act of eating and watching intersect at the point of consumption. Atwood

makes other links between eating and watching. The use of special instruments, in Peter's case, guns and cameras to "arrange" his object by shooting it, makes the rendering of meat easier. Marian becomes Peter's strategically sliced piece of flesh made edible. Caught in the correct pose, she will be transformed into the mechanistically-derived image of "an unchanging cardboard figure" (77). Marian imagines the steak as a diagram of a cow with the lines and labels that divide him into parts. The animated drawing of the divided cow disguises its suffering and her consumption of it hides her own:

She looked down at her own half-eaten steak and suddenly saw it as a hunk of muscle ... But most of the time you never thought about it. In the supermarket they had it all pre-packaged in cellophane, with name labels and price labels stuck on it, and it was just like buying a jar of peanut butter or a can of beans, and even when you went into a butcher shop they wrapped it up so efficiently and quickly that it was made clean, official. (Atwood 175)

* * *

3.4 *Implemental Violence*

When Peter's knife and fork divide his steak into "neat cubes" (174), we are witnessing the symbolic fragmentation and consumption of Marian. Man's strength, power, and control are manifest in his calculated use of implements. Among the guns, black-light meters, blue flashbulbs, knives, and forks that litter Peter's apartment, Marian stands out as an object of desire. The "technologies of misogyny" (Wilson 8), as Deborah S. Wilson refers to them, exert their power through--not so much their use--but merely in their existence. The "concave silver circle" (Atwood 271) of Peter's flashgun never actually takes a shot of Marian, but its presence alone instills anxiety since it is a "tool of power" (Sontag 8). It functions as an altering device, the photographer "always imposing standards" (6) on its subjects. In addition, the material document of a photograph suggests "sequences of consumption" (9) that are carried on outside of the subject as well. Peter's appetite, we feel, is unending. The reproduction of the image outside of the woman allows for her distortion, exploitation, and assimilation into another's desire.

The rifle, like the camera, penetrates female space and threatens identity, but from a distance. At the restaurant with Peter, Marian reflects upon a newspaper story about a young boy who had killed nine people with a rifle. But when she describes the boy's picture, it sounds as if she is talking about Peter:

He wasn't the kind who would hit anyone with his

fist or even use a knife. When he chose violence it was removed violence, a manipulation of specialized instruments, the finger guiding but never

touching, he himself watching the explosion from a distance; the explosion of flesh and blood. It was a violence of the mind almost like magic: you thought it and it happened. (Atwood 174)

Peter's rabbit-hunting story parallels the newspaper cover story. They both display a cold, calculating, and methodical use of weaponry with destructive results, but they come away from it clean. When Marian examines Peter's closet, his clothes seem smugly to assert "so much invisible silent authority ... She reached out a hand to touch them, and drew it back: she was almost afraid they would be warm" (Atwood 269). The clothes he wears and the rifles and cameras that he drapes over his body have become more alive and dangerous than the man himself.

Can it then be argued that women approach their bodies in the same cold and calculating way as Peter approaches his hunting? Is Atwood suggesting in the example of the newspaper cover story that implements enable us to distance ourselves from the pain and suffering we inflict on the environment? Or are the implements we use embodied in more subtle forms of thought control? These are questions Atwood presents in her novel, but does not answer. One thing is clear, "specialized instruments," in the midst of consumer culture, have enabled humans to distance themselves from nature. Implements, as well as the artificial surroundings of contemporary life alter and disguise nature from its true meaning. Synthetic pudding, air conditioning, the plastic supermarkets with their

lulling music, cellophane-wrapped meat, cars, rifles, electric toothbrushes, and six-legged girdle advertisements are just a few examples from the novel. Nature is given less value for its wild and unruly manner and must be tamed. Similarly, women sometimes strive to obtain a taut, small-hipped, prepubescent body, to tame and control it.

In a dream sequence, Marian imagines “the real Peter, the one underneath” (Atwood 285) standing beside the barbeque with a long fork in one hand and a cleaver in the other. At first, not seeing the cleaver, she finds the image reassuring, but approaching him from a different angle, she notices not only the butcher’s implement, but that she is absent from the scene. The cleaver explains her absence—it symbolizes her fragmentation, “the process through which the live referent disappears” (Adams 49). We think of Hannah Arendt’s idea that without dining implements, “human beings [can] not eat meat ... Sharp knives are essential for rapidly rendering the anaesthetized living animal into edible dead flesh” (Adams 50). Knives, she says, are not only “distancing mechanisms” (50), but “enabling mechanisms” (50) as well. Meanwhile, the fork represents Marian’s consumption, which is, in effect, the complete annihilation of her will.

At the end of the novel, Marian is severed from humanity altogether and comes to exist only through what she represents. Seeing Peter in her dream sequence, he is the very image of normality, but she realizes at once that he is a threat to her. She finds she must escape from becoming a mere “two-dimensional small figure in a red dress, posed like a paper woman in a mail-order catalogue... fluttering in the white, empty space” (Atwood 286). Refusing the fate marked out for her, she bakes a cake in the form of a woman, a

symbolic act, since the cake is a surrogate of herself—at once an object of consumption and of liberation. Atwood purposefully sets up the scene like an operation, only it is Marian and not patriarchal culture who constructs the woman's shape. By "making" herself, and offering herself to Peter to be consumed, she becomes an active force in her own healing. The objectification and consumption of herself is diverted to an actual object.

Here Marian seems to understand her own fear of assimilation, and in presenting Peter with the cake, she is presenting him with an ultimatum; the game must end, and eating the cake, Peter will accept Marian into his life. The cake's silver eyes, the "amorphous hands" (Atwood 318), and the "baroque scrolls and swirls" (318) of hair are reminiscent of the feminine practice that once threatened to consume Marian's identity. Now however, she offers the cake to Peter with the statement "'You've been trying to assimilate me'" (320). Her voiced recognition of her "assimilation" allows her to repossess herself and even re-enter consumer culture.

This re-entering begins with Marian's eating the cake. Having produced herself, she can now consume herself. Peter on the other hand, refuses the cake. He stares "from the cake to her face and back again ... he [seems] embarrassed and eager to leave" (Atwood 320). Once he has left, Marian is hungry and eats, thereby changing the "edible woman," that is, herself, into nothing more than food: "The cake afterall was only a cake" (320). The last line of the novel demonstrates how Marian has reclaimed power: "She plunged her fork into the carcass, neatly severing the body from the head" (322). At the moment

she consumes the cake, it is no longer a symbol of her situation as a woman, but quite simply a carcass void of meaning other than nourishment.

Marian's identity as "produced" or "consumed" conflates with her newfound identity as "producer" or "consumer." The dichotomies that have functioned throughout Marian's life, as well as Atwood's book, are therefore momentarily collapsed; the cake is simply food, a primary need for all humans, regardless of sex, class, or race. The simple act of eating symbolically renders the destructive process of objectification, fragmentation, and consumption, harmless to Marian's integral body. Marian's social self is at once rejected and accepted. Here, however, Marian confronts the female dilemma-- only by accepting her social self can she hope to cast it off.

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