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The Feminist Voice in Chopin's *The Awakening* & Atwood's *The Edible Woman*

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Abstract. This research paper intends to study Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Margret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*. These two novels demonstrate women's defiance to society and their struggle to obtain the freedom they desire. Both works strive to depict the female plight towards the quest of independence and fair share in a society ruled and dictated by patriarchy. The paper highlights how the notion of feminism is similar or otherwise different as presented in both works. The paper attempts to demonstrate that the structure and the elements of both works stress and affirm the feminist voice each work strives to make it heard in a world generally suffocating and supressing such voices.

Keywords. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*, Margret Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, Feminism, Patriarchy

1. Introduction

For centuries women have suffered the effects of living as subjects in a patriarchal society. Deprived of their rights and stripped of the chance to become more than just submissive mistresses and imprisoned damsels.

Women have always been denied several rights, such as: fair wages and equal pay, receiving education, owning property, voting, and receiving heritage... All of which were fought for by feminist activists, who were constantly perceived as rebellious female individuals who were expected to live according to the standards dictated by the patriarchal society, that is, to fulfil their roles as submissive wives and caring mothers.

Defiant women were criticized by the society for their "unlawful" acts. While the society imposed its standards on them defining their roles, women tried to free themselves from those restrictions by pursuing what they truly wanted to accomplish their dreams in spite of the catastrophic effects of their disobedience. For instance, women in the Victorian era were hardly able to publish their works. Marry Anne Evans is one illustration. In other words, women's refusal to let the society oppress them and define them by their roles, led them to fight the societal convictions and strive to live as who they are as individuals while facing criticism.

Women's struggle against the society's restrictions was all for the sake of obtaining their freedom and becoming the strong, independent women that they are today. Their rebellion enabled them to express their opinions and let their voices be heard as they should. All in all, they won in their battle against the patriarchal society and gained the equality they longed for.

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2. The Feminist Voice in *The Awakening*

Kate Chopin's novel, *The Awakening*, was published during the first feminist wave in the late 19th and early 20th century, when it was considered highly controversial due to the growing feminist movement at that time.

The novel mainly revolves around a 28-year-old, mother of two, Edna Pontellier who is married to, a New Orleans Businessman, Leonce Pontellier, with whom she stays the summer in Grand Isle, Louisiana. During their visit she meets new people and become fond of some, among them: Adele Ratignolle, Mademoiselle Reisz, and the son of "The House" owner, Robert Lebrun. Edna struggles throughout the novel to liberate herself from the classical role of women in the Victorian era. Her awakening process begins when she learns how to swim, along with the help of her newly formed relationships that push her to unleash her true self. Progressively, she reaches total awareness through a series of experiences or "awakenings" and sets herself free from everything she is bound to be, thus, acting upon her emotional and sexual desires disregarding society's opinion and societal convections.

Mrs. Pontellier is a normal married woman who lives by the social rules and obeys her husband, however, when she starts to understand her emotions and realizes the great oppression that she is under, her perspective on life changes and aspires to become independent and obtain her freedom.

> An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day. It was strange and unfamiliar; it was a mood. She did not sit there inwardly upbraiding her husband, lamenting at Fate, which had directed her footsteps to the path which they had taken. (7)

Her dissatisfaction of her role as a 'mother-woman' is triggered one night, during her stay with her family at Grand Isle, when her drunken husband returns from Klein's hotel and lies that their kid is having a fever. He "reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children" (6). That night was the first time she thought of herself and cried.

Those newly found, barely comprehendible feelings were the beginning of series of awakenings. Nonetheless, they were not strong enough for her to become detached from her role yet, Jennifer Gray notes in *The Escape of the 'Sea': Ideology and The Awakening* southern literary journal, that Edna "does not realize her position in a system of ideology but does feel a growing sense of self-awareness"(2004. 60). Edna's awareness of her role and her identity grows when she becomes friends with the proud 'mother- woman' Adele Ratignolle, and Robert Lebrun.

Madam Ratignolle is the epitome of the Victorian Feminine ideal in every aspect. She is a devoted woman who sacrifices her desires for the sake of her husband and children, around which her life revolves, and gives her whole being in for the purpose of fulfilling her duty as a wife and a mother. Having been properly introduced to the true meaning of 'mother- woman' by Adele, Edna starts to doubt if she is fit for the role since her maternal instincts are quiet low. After further contemplation on the matter, she concludes that motherhood is not meant for her. She is not the only one to notice this but Mr. Pontellier, her mother-in-law, and even her kids were painfully aware of that. Edna slowly starts to slip away from her role as she realizes that she is not that type of woman. Although she is fond of her children, she could never devote herself for her kids like Adele Ratignolle, who lives for the purpose of being a mother and takes great pride in it. Edna's view on being a mother becomes clear when conversing with Madame Ratignolle about the subject, admitting that:

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"I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me." (48)

Unlike madame Ratignolle, Edna would never let her children consume her whole being despite her love for them. Moreover, before committing suicide, she remembers her children but does not think of them in a motherly manner, instead she sees them as antagonists who want to enslave her for the rest of her life.

The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her, who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them. She was not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach. (115)

Edna's first awakening is her physical and emotional awakening, both of which she acquires through her first swim in the sea which leads her to discover her inner strength. As a result, she establishes sexual self-ownership when she denies her husband sex after her return from the sea. Jennifer Gray clarifies that Edna is "hailed by her husband as a sexual object. Edna resists this hailing by refusing to go to their bedroom and remaining on the porch for much of the night. Her resistance signifies self-ownership of her sexuality through refusing to have sex with her husband" (2004, 61). It is expected of the nineteenth century women to respond to their husbands' sexual desires and provide them with what they need submissively without any objections. Therefore, Edna's resistance is seen as an act of rebellion against gender norms. Her sexual self-ownership is what feminists of that time were determined to attain. Moreover, her defiance causes her to start to break away from her 'mother-woman' role.

A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before. (27)

The sea represents liberation and escape. Edna's ability to swim alone without anyone's help, made her believe that she can live without relying on other people. Therefore, she becomes impulsive and, like a child, does not give much thought to the consequences of her actions. Furthermore, her growing feeling of independence applies on her emotional state as well. By becoming emotionally independent, Edna breaks the rule of decorum, that a woman cannot be emotionally involved with another man other than her husband, by falling in love with Robert Lebrun. "For the first time she recognized the symptoms of infatuation which she had felt incipiently as a child, as a girl in her earliest teens, and later as a young woman." (46) Carol Stone in "The Female Artist in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: Birth and Creativity" suggests that Robert reawakens her sexual desires that were repressed for a long time: "Under his influence she speaks to him about her life and it is he who awakens her to the passions of her body" (1986, 26)

> It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world. (57)

By the time they return home, Edna has abandoned the 'mother-woman' role entirely and was resolved to become an independent woman. Consequently, she openly defies her husband, neglects the gatherings that usually are held at her house every Tuesday, and keeps denying her husband of sexual pleasure. "She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked." (57) Furthermore, by defying the societal convictions and responding to her own desires, the artistic

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person within her awakens. Nineteenth century women worked either in factories or provided domestic services for upper-class people. Or Some would take up home-based work in which they do embroidery, sewing… etc. However, work was not required of middle and upper class married women. They did not have to work because they did not need to worry about poverty. Therefore, when Edna resolves to pursue her career as an artist, no one understands her. She is a middle/upper class woman who wants to start drawing and live her life independently from her family. All of which led Leonce to believe that his wife is becoming mentally unstable since she is acting uncharacteristically, when in reality she is revealing her true self.

Moreover, Edna considers herself a free woman and does as she please, hence, acting upon her sexual desires and giver into Alcee Arobin' advances towards her. She does not think of the consequences, she simply acts on impulse and lives the moment. Nancy Walker in her essay Feminist or Naturalist, suggests that: "in giving herself over to emotion, Edna has allowed her decisions to be made below the conscious level... and she gives little thought to the consequences" (1994, 256) Edna allows herself to explore the pleasure that intercourse provides, beyond the purpose of procreation as the society have limited it for women.

Her growing need for independence and to be recognized as an individual rather than Mr. Pontellier's property, drives her to move out of Leonce' house to the 'Pigeon house' while her husband is on a business trip and the children at their grandmother's. She buys her house using the money from selling her paintings, which express individuality, as her drawing teacher/ paintings seller claims: "Laidpore is more and more pleased with my work; he says it grows in force and individuality. I cannot judge of that myself, but I feel that I have gained in ease and confidence (80).

Indeed, Edna Pontellier's first consciousness of her awakening is described in terms that echo the nineteenth-century feminist concept of female identity: "Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her" (Chopin 57). Gray suggests that "her awakening makes visible her position in patriarchal society and gives her the desire to seek alternative roles." (2004, 53- 54)

Furthermore, she boldly moves out of the house disregarding Leonce' opinion on the matter and purchases her own house. Accordingly, Edna establishes her individuality and full self-ownership, which shatters the nineteenth-century's principles regarding women's role in the society. Susan Kent notes in her book *Sex and Suffrage in Britain* that:

> Men possessed the capacity for reason, action, aggression, independence, and self-interest [thus belonging to the public sphere]. Women inhabited a separate, private sphere, one suitable for the so-called inherent qualities of femininity: emotion, passivity, submission, dependence, and selflessness, all derived, it was claimed insistently, form women's sexual and reproductive organization. (1990, 30)

The patriarchal society believes that women's actions and decisions are based on their emotions. They are, therefore, not qualified to deal with a world outside their house or lead high positions. Which led the society to believe that women are best suited to manage issues within the domestic sphere and must regard their families as top priority. Edna, however, does not dedicate herself to her family as society expects her to, instead, she acts upon her emotions that long for freedom. Which were triggered by her awakenings. Thus, confesses her love to Robert, which he returns. Nevertheless, they want different things; while Edna wants independence, he wants marriage. When Robert realizes that marrying Edna is almost impossible because he cannot have her unless Leonce gives her up, which is highly unlikely, and sees her reluctance, he runs away. "She had resolved never again to belong to another than herself." (80)

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Moreover, Edna has deserted her submissive role and became active, independent as well as selfish to some extent for not thinking of her children when making decisions. Because, despite what the society decrees, maternal instincts are deeply rooted within a woman, it is women's innate nature to care for their kids. Therefore, Edna's manners towards her children, reflects her deep desire to break free from the restrictions that ties her to her feminine side since it is what makes the patriarchal society regard women as the weaker sex and gives it the power to control them. Which is the principle that she wishes to obliterate in order to become an independent female individual and equal to men, thus, portraying masculine traits as an act of defiance to her femininity and society. "She drank the liquor from the glass as a man would have done." (79)

For Six years, Edna has accepted her role as a 'mother-woman' until the moment she realized how repressed she was and experiences a series of awakenings, which eventually led her to the state of total awareness. Having established self-ownership and living as a free woman, the reader would expect Edna to continue living that way. However, her last act puzzled the readers and left the critics debating whether her suicide indicates to her failure or success in attaining freedom. In her essay "Reconciling Edna's Suicide and the Criticism Surrounding Kate Chopin's The Awakening", Mary Bird claims that:

> there is extensive critical controversy surrounding the ending of Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*. One group of critics focuse on the novel as a feminist text. They argue that Edna Pontellier's awakening is one of mental clarity, and her suicide is a triumphant act. By committing suicide Edna is finally freeing herself from social constraints and possession. Her suicide is an act of liberation; therefore Edna is the ultimate feminist. The opposing group of critics read *The Awakening* as a naturalist text. They believe Edna's awakening to be a decline into insanity. Instead of triumphing against the society and men who oppress her, Edna gives herself up to the ocean in a symbolic return to the womb, allowing the ocean to possess her. (1999)

One of the first critics to present the idea that Edna's suicide is a triumphant act is Per Seyersted. In his critical biography he justifies that Edna takes her life because she, on the one hand, insists on sexual and spiritual freedom, and on the other, acknowledges a duty not to "trample upon the little lives." Her suicide was entirely valid for her time when her ideas of self-assertion were bound to be condemned outright by the Victorian moral vigilantes. (1969, 146)

Mary Papke belongs to the group that perceives Edna's suicide as obtaining freedom. In her book *Verging on the Abyss: The Social Fiction of Kate Chopin and Edith Wharton,* Papke claims that "Edna transcends despair, if only by embracing death" (1990. 87) On the other hand, Susan Harris asserts that "Edna… not understanding how to manifest herself outside of the sexuality delineated sphere, escapes a future that she sees as only further enslaving her" (1990. 206).

Other critics regarded her suicide as an act of insanity. Among them, Nancy Walker who believes that Edna is acting like a child without thinking of the consequences and that she dies because "she does nothing to stop it" (Walker. 1994. 256). Bird blames Edna's childish behavior on the lack of motherly affection, justifying that:

Edna's mother died when she was very young, and she is raised by her emotionless sister. Because of this, Edna is still a child emotionally and continually looks for a motherly influence. (1999)

Cynthia Wolff supports Walker's argument in her article Thanatos and Eros, suggesting,

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"and with her final act Edna completes the regression, back beyond childhood, back into time eternal" (1994, 241).

Anne Jones is another critic who does not see Edna's suicide in the positive light and believes that it happened as a result of her failing attempt to control sexuality, thought, art, and social existence. In which she has a valid point since Edna's failure is symbolized in the bird with a broken wing on the beach before she commits suicide. "A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water." (115) For Mademoiselle Reisz once told Edna that: "the bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth." (83)

The novel was harshly criticized that Chopin responded to the critics stating that:

> Having a group of people as my disposal, I thought it might be entertaining (to myself) to throw them together and see what would happen. I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things and working out her own damnation as she did. If I had the slightest intimation of such a thing, I would have excluded her from the company. But when I found out what she was up to, the play was half over and it was then too late. (*Book News*. 1899, 296)

The Awakening created an uproar in the Victorian society during the time it was published. Women were supposed to stick to their roles as mothers and wives and fulfil their duties accordingly, they were not expected to fall in love with other men other than their husbands or explore sex beyond the purpose of procreation. Furthermore, the idea of women living alone, away from their husbands and kids, and fending for themselves was considered outrageous. All these social rules of decorum of the late nineteenth century Creole-South were broken by Chopin's protagonist; Edna Pontellier, who led to the prohibition of the novel, at that time, since it was considered immoral and scandalous in the eyes of the public.

3. The Feminist Voice in *The Edible Woman*

Like any other female in a patriarchal society, Marian is oppressed by the society through her femininity. A male-dominated society believes that women are not supposed to work because their main concern should be fulfilling their roles as devoted wives and mothers, or as the society has imposed upon them. However, if women were to work, they would be trapped in a dead-end job with low wages. This is the kind of job the protagonist has at Seymour Surveys.

> The company is layered like an ice-cream sandwich, with three floors: the upper crust, the lower crust, and our department, the gooey layer in the middle. On the floor above are the executives and the psychologists – referred to as the men upstairs, since they are all men – who arrange things with the clients; I've caught glimpses of their offices, which have carpets and expensive furniture and silk-screen reprints of Group of Seven paintings on the walls. Below us are the machines – mimeo machines, I.B.M. machines for counting and sorting and tabulating the information. (21)

In Margret Atwood: A Critical Companion, Nathalie Cooke notes that, "women are not expected to advance through the ranks of the company to management level in part because they are expected to leave the corporate world to raise a family."(2004. 45) Women are expected to leave work to fulfill their feminine roles, therefore, they do not allow them to occupy important positions, instead, they are appointed for secondary positions while men occupied the higher ones.

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> Sometimes I wonder just which things are part of my job, especially when I find myself calling up garage mechanics to ask them about their pistons and gaskets or handing out pretzels to suspicious old ladies on street corners. I know what Seymour Surveys hired me as – I'm supposed to spend my time revising the questionnaires, turning the convoluted and overly-subtle prose of the psychologists who write them into simple questions which can be understood by the people who ask them as well as the people who answer them. (20)

The positions that are offered to women are not highly important or well defined, which is something that Marian draws the reader's attention to, when she wonders about her role in the company. Thus, comparing her department to the gooey part of the ice cream because it does not have a specific shape that defines it.

One of the issues that a woman's femininity is associated with is pregnancy, which is an association that Marian's roommate, Ainsley, firmly believes in, claiming that, "Every woman should have at least one baby," (43) and justifies, "It's even more important than sex. It fulfills your deepest femininity." (43) Ainsley embraces her femininity and intends to fulfill it; however, she is not fond of the idea of marriage, hence, tricking a man into impregnating her is how she resolves to have a baby. She is not planning to have a man in her life, since she believes that, "the thing that ruins families these days is the husbands." (42) and uses Marina's married friend Clara's household situation as an example of an unidealistic environment for a child and mentions how it confuses the father-image and the mother-image in the mind of the children. Therefore, she looks for a guy who is not interested in relationships and sets her sights on Marian's womanizer friend, Len:

> The quality of Peter's voice had changed; it was a voice I didn't recognize. The sign saying TEMPERANCE flashed in my mind: I couldn't let my perceptions about Peter be distorted by the effects of alcohol, I warned myself. (72)

Marian's greatest dilemma manifest itself in the form of her boyfriend, Peter. When she hears him telling her friend, Len, stories about his past days when he used to go out with his friends to hunt, all the while describing some disturbing scenes, she starts to see him as a hunter and a consumer but quickly dismisses the thought believing that it only occurred to her because of the alcohol. However, she starts to feel like she does not recognize him anymore. "I noticed with mild curiosity that a large drop of something wet had materialized on the table near my hand." (72) Her foreign boyfriend and her awareness of Ainsley's plot to seduce Len, was overwhelming that she started crying, "I realized with horror that it was a tear." (72) and stating:

> Peter and I had avoided talking about the future because we knew it didn't matter: we weren't really involved. Now, though, something in me had decided we were involved: surely that was the explanation for the powder-room collapse and the flight. I was evading reality. (80)

Later that night, Marian behaves like a child despite being a sensible person. She runs away when they get down from the bar and hides beneath Len's bed when they get to his apartment, which is uncharacteristic of her. It seems that crying, running away, and hiding are her ways of escaping from the unfamiliar feeling that possessed her when they were at the bar, in other word, Marian is trying to escape reality. "something in me had decided that we were involved: surely that was the explanation for the powder-room collapse and the flight. I was evading

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reality." (80) The scene where Peter chases Marian in his car seems like a predator chasing its prey, which only intensifies the consumer image of her boyfriend and serves as foreshadow of what is to come, but she is relieved to hear Peter "normal voice" again after he catches her.) "It was threatening that Peter had not given chase on foot but had enclosed himself in the armour of the car." (76)

In another instant, "Ainsley behaved herself properly, why couldn't you? The trouble with *you* is," he said savagely, "you're just rejecting your femininity."" (83) Marian's behaviour did not set well with Peter. Taking into account the fact that they live in a patriarchal society, it is understandable that his definition of femininity is for the woman to be well behaved and submissive, instead of objecting to whatever she is told or defying her male counterpart. Namely, a woman should not express herself and acknowledge her place in the society as a subservient.

Peter's hunter/ consumer nature triggers Marian's anorexia, which can be considered as a form of rebellion. Shamsoddin Royanian notes that, "Marian MacAlpin struggles between the role that society has imposed upon her and her personal definition of self; and food becomes the symbol of that struggle and her eventual rebellion. Margaret Atwood employs an eating disorder in her novel *The Edible Woman* as a metaphor of a revolt and protest." (1) After getting engaged, Marian cannot bring herself to eat meat, and later, her list of edible food completely diminishes, which forces her to take vitamins as an alternative to provide her body with the necessary nutrients. Marian is subconsciously aware of the idea that she is being consumed, thus, sympathizing with food remembering that those animals were alive before they were slaughtered and served. Carol J. Adams in her book *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, while defining objectification mentions that, "the butchering of animals that converts animals from living breathing things into dead objects. This process allows fragmentation, or brutal dismemberment, and finally consumption." (1990. 47) At first, such thoughts were reserved for animals, later, nonetheless, she starts to imagine vegetables as animate creatures and stops eating them as well. This sympathy that Marian displays towards food is influenced by the way women are 'devoured' by men in the society. Therefore, the relationship between food and its consumer portrays the relationship between the two genders, Cooke points out, "*The Edible woman* critiques the kind of consumer society that dominated North America in mid to late twentieth century, where relationships between individuals are built upon consumer relations and status is based upon purchasing power. The critique is largely a feminist one that aims to expose, and thereby dismantle, the way women are oppressed, used, or "consumed" in such a society. (2004. 45) Thus, Atwood uses the extended metaphor that compares women to food throughout the whole novel to demonstrate the position of women in the patriarchal society. To elaborate on the idea, Atwood goes on describing Marian's female co-workers, in the office Christmas party, using food to draw the edible image of the feminine body:

> But now she could see the roll of fat pushed up across Mrs. Gundridge'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; and the others too, similar in structure but with varying proportions and textures of bumpy permanents and dune-like contours of breast and waist and hip; their fluidity sustained somewhere within by bones, without by a carapace of clothing and makeup. What peculiar creatures they were. (169)

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Marian criticizes the feminine body of her fellow co-workers and compares it to food, Cooke notes that "Mrs. Gundidge possesses a 'ham-like bulge of thigh'(184) and 'her jowls jellied when she chewed' (185). Moreover, all the co-workers are described as being wither 'ripe' or 'overripe' as they are seen to be connected 'by stems' to an 'invisible vine' (184). Clara, when pregnant, seems like a vegetable." (46) Furthermore, when Marian finally admits to herself that Peter is consuming her, she bakes a cake in a form of a woman, which symbolizes Marian herself, and offers it to him as a substitute:

> "You've been trying to destroy me, haven't you," she said. "You've been trying to assimilate me. But I've made you a substitute, something you'll like much better. This is what you really wanted all along, isn't it? I'll get you a fork," she added somewhat prosaically. (175,176)

Elspeth Cameron, in her article "Famininity, or Parody of Autonomy: Anorexia Nervosa and *The Edible Woman*", justifies Atwood's purpose of using cake to symbolize Marian, "one of the reasons why Atwood puts a 'cake' in The Edible Woman was that "she wanted to link a cake lady to the notion - common in the 1950s - that woman was a kind of confection. Women, she had observed, were "offered to be devoured," an idea that in her mind was associated with cakes because of the convention of a woman jumping out of cake" (1985. 46). After Peter leaves alarmed and disturbed, Marian suddenly feels hungry and eats the cake, to which Ainsley exclaims, "you are rejecting your femininity!" (277) Marina's presentation of the cake can be considered as an act of defiance against the patriarchal society's definition of femininity, while the action of devouring the cake, is Marian's way of reclaiming herself and taking control over her life again. Cooke calls attention to Atwood's demonstration of Marian's control over her life by dividing the novel into three parts in which the narration shifts from first person to third person omniscient point of view. "It performs in the narrative precisely what Marian experiences during those chapters: a separation between her mind and her body, between her decisions and the decisions her body makes for her, especially about what she can and cannot eat. Another related answer is that the third-person narrative gives control of Marian's story to someone other than Marian herself." (Cooke, 48) Furthermore, Bonnie Lyons suggests that the transition to third person is, "as if to indicate that during this period Marian has no self, no 'subjectivity,' and thus cannot tell her story" (182) After Marian eats the cake, the narration goes back to first person point of view after it had switched to third person omniscient in the second part of the novel. Which shows that Marian has successfully defied the society and betrayed its expectations by regaining control over her life and defining herself while disregarding the society's definition of femininity. In terms of Atwood's style of writing Patricia Goldblatt (1999, 275) notes that "Atwood creates situations in which women, burdened by the rules and inequalities of their societies, discover that they must reconstruct braver, self-reliant personae in order to survive."

In assessing Mariam, Peter says:

> "And there's one thing about you, Marian, I know I can always depend on you. Most women are pretty scatterbrained but you're such a sensible girl. You may not have known this but I've always thought that's the first thing to look for when it comes to choosing a wife." (92)

Marian's loss of control over her life and body is what made her bake the cake for Peter to eat, instead of consuming her. Peter perceives Marian differently from other women, she is sensible, which is what he likes about her and the reason as to why he sees her as a potential wife. Ironically, Peter believes that women take over men's lives once they are married, however,

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seeing how he affects Marian's life, he has no problem in taking over a woman's life. In fact, we can interpret Peter's perspective of 'sensibility' as a form of weakness and submissiveness. Peter rejects the idea of women being in control or have the audacity to act upon their desires, instead they should act upon men's desires. Marian's logic is that "life isn't run by principles but by adjustments" (105), she adjusts herself to suit Peter's standards to please him, which is exactly what Peter wants. Katie Conboy (1997) suggests that, "Just as man's civilizing impetus transforms wildlife, land, and vegetation into territories to tame and control, so too does it render woman a form of nature to apprehend, dominate, and defeat. In fact, culture has, variously, valued supposedly 'natural' feminine bodily characteristics (narrow waists, small feet, long hair, for example), which have required the most unnatural maintenance (corsets, foot-binding, products for straightening or de-tangling)" (2):

> "When do you want to get married?" he asked, almost gruffly. My first impulse was to answer, with the evasive flippancy I'd always used before when he'd asked me serious questions about myself, "What about Groundhog Day?" But instead I heard a soft flannelly voice I barely recognized, saying, "I'd rather have you decide that. I'd rather leave the big decisions up to you." I was astounded at myself. I'd never said anything remotely like that to him before. The funny thing was I really meant it." (93)

Marian starts to depend on Peter to make the big decisions for them rather than expressing her own thoughts, which shows the kind of control that Peter has on her that brought her to submission. Not only did he trigger her anorexia, but his dominance made her change her style of clothing and appearance as well. Before Peter's party, he suggests that she buys a dress "not quite so mousy" (211) as her other dresses, therefore, despite her discomfort, she buys a dress that she wouldn't normally buy or wear and puts on make up as well as styling her hair, all for Peter's sake. "She didn't think it was really her." (211) Women usually dress to illustrate the ideal feminine image, which serves as an appetizer, to attract men or a potential mate. Lisa Rutherford (2000) explains that, "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." (63) During the party, she is overwhelmed by the emotion of alienation, as a result, she runs off with Duncan, the English major student with whom she feels free, and sleeps with him. Duncan is a self-indulgent very thin young man. Perhaps Duncan's self-centred personality is what made her appreciate his company since he is the opposite of Peter. While Peter portrays the dominant male, who wants to suppress Marian, Duncan does not care about Marian or her life, he even confesses that he does not like her. The day after she gets engaged, and after she encounters Duncan at the laundromat, she realizes that her "restlessness of the afternoon had vanished," (102) which is the opposite effect that Peter's presence has on her, thus, by meeting Duncan, Marian escapes Peter's dominance. It seems that Duncan's self-absorbedness is what prevents him from consuming her like Peter, because he is too busy consuming himself. We can say that Duncan serves as Peter's foil character, which is the type of person Marian, normally, would not associate herself with. Marian's attraction to these two men of dissimilar characters only intensifies her inconsistency.

The Edible Woman resembles women to animals in the sense of being restrained. The patriarchal society frowns upon unmarried women, for it believes that every woman should be contained by a man, which leads to their objectification. "Now that she had been ringed he took pride in displaying her." (177) Atwood portrays Peter as the owner of Marian as she is his object, for women are "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. 1990. 155)

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Women were deprived of many things; receiving education is one of them. However, after women's movement, they were able to reserve a seat in educational institutions and study alongside of their male peers. Nevertheless, some men were not fond of women's higher education, which is something that Atwood has briefly mentioned in the novel:

> "They had been pathetically eager to have the wedding in the family church. Their reaction though, as far as she could estimate the reactions of people who were now so remote from her, was less elated glee than a quiet, rather smug satisfaction, as though their fears about the effects of her university education, never stated but always apparent, had been calmed at last. They had probably been worried she would turn into a high-school teacher or a maiden aunt or a dope addict or a female executive, or that she would undergo some shocking physical transformation, like developing muscles and a deep voice or growing moss." (175)

In the quote above, the narrator is speaking of Marian's family's reaction to the news of her engagement. It is apparent that although women are finally able to receive education, the society is still not pleased by idea of women's education. Marian's family were afraid that her education would lead her astray, that is, to end up as an old maiden. The speaker even exaggerates her family's fear and went as far as imagining that she would acquire manly features since they were not accustomed to the idea of an independent woman. In the past, men considered women's education as a threat to their superiority; because women's ignorance puts men in a position of power that allows them to control women:

> "All along you've only been *using* me. What a moron I was to think you were sweet and innocent, when it turns out you were actually college educated the whole time! Oh, they're all the same. You weren't interested in *me* at all. The only thing you wanted from me was my body!" (161)

Len, for instance, prefers high school girls because they are ignorant and innocent, which reinforces his sense of superiority. "He says anything over seventeen is too old." (35) It seems that Len thinks that college educated women are vicious, and he is proven right when Ainsley fools him into impregnating her so she could "fulfil her deepest femininity." (43) since "she was particularly fond of anthropology at college" (159) At first, when she informs him that she is pregnant, he feels bad because she is "so young" (158), but when Marian tells him that Ainsley is college educated and that it was her plan all along, he gets mad for being used. "That's what we get then," he said nastily, "for educating women. They get all kinds of ridiculous ideas." (160)

Coral Howells points out that "the narrative traces the stages of Marian's rebellion against social conformity as she becomes increasingly disillusioned with her job and her fiancé to the point where her inner conflict finds its outward expression in an eating disorder whose symptoms resemble anorexia nervosa." (1993. 42) In general, Atwood's comparison intends to give voice to the oppressed women and call attention to the inequality of the sexes. *The Edible Woman* portrays the relationship between the genders in the society as consumer (men)/ consumed (women). Both Marian and Peter influence the other. While Peter causes Marian's loss of appetite, he grows one. "I really worked up an appetite." (210) Kant in *Lecture on Ethics* suggests that, "sexual love makes of the loved person an Object of appetite; as soon as that appetite has been stilled, the person is cast aside as one casts away a lemon which has been sucked dry. … as soon as a person becomes an Object of appetite for another, all motives of moral relationship cease to function, because as an Object of appetite for another a person becomes a thing and can be treated and used as such by everyone" (163) Despite the norms, the

roles can be reversed. Women are not always the victims of the process of consumption, for men can take the role of the consumed as well, which is demonstrated in Ainsley's plot of getting Len to impregnate her. Accordingly, we infer that the consumption process between the two genders occur through intercourse.

Before publishing *The Edible Woman*, Atwood was just a poet. Therefore, it attracted the attention of the critics, who were quick to voice their opinions. Many critics have deemed Atwood's novel as tedious, while some, admired her use of metaphor.

In a 1970 review in the *Saturday Review*, Elizabeth Easton states that "Margaret Atwood, a Canadian poet, tries hard to be whimsical about all this [the plight of Marian McAlpin] but what might be briefly amusing becomes tedious when presented lengthily in rambling fashion…. Sharp imagery cannot make up for trite characterization and lack of plot." (40)

John Stedmond (1970) argues that:

> "the novel as a whole does not live up to the promise of its parts. The characters, though clearly sketched, do not quite jell and the narrative techniques creak a little…. The novel's approach to the 'position of woman' question is fresh and the method of dealing with it is full of possibilities. But the potentialities are disappointingly unrealized. The author's second book should be better." (267)

4. Conclusion

Women lived in the shadows of male domination for a long time, which resulted in their oppression and objectification. The role that the patriarchal society has imposed upon women are men's own fantasy that women sole existence is to procreate and please them. Martin Luther (1463–1546) in Table Talk, for example, demonstrates such type of men. He says that women "are chiefly created to bear children and be the pleasure, joy, and solace of their husbands."

Nonetheless, some men are convinced that women are not different from men. In fact, they believe that are equal to them. The French author François Poulain de la Barre, for instance, whose most notable work is *On the Equality of The Two Sexes* (1673), and in which he applied the Cartesian principles to feminist thought, defends women and clarifies how women are equal to men. In his book, Poulain speaks of the unequal treatment that women receive while stressing the importance of getting rid of one prejudices as well as rejecting the idea that the brain of the two sexes contrast with each other, claiming that the mind is sexless. (La Vopa, 2010).

Despite what men believed, women resolved to not let themselves be ruled by man any longer and voiced their objection by rebelling against the society and tossing its expectations along with its convictions aside in order to acquire their rights as human beings. They have gained their rights through the feminist movements, known as the waves of feminism, in which they fought for their liberation, individualism and social mobility. Although they have become the independent women that they aspired to be, unfortunately, women's objectification has not completely vanished as they hoped it would. Women's rape, body shaming, and sexual harassment are the issues of the fourth wave feminism that women are still fighting until this day.

Feminist voices ask for platforms where they can be heard. In their own ways, the two writers endeavoured and made success to make it reach us. There is still more effort to be done.

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