Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*: A Feminist Reading

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In *The Edible Woman* Margaret Atwood ingenously and with a great ability penetrates into a young woman's mind, and explores the difficulties women in today's Western society face. Marian MacAlpin, the protagonist of the novel, is one of those who help to create this consumer society by working as a market researcher. However, she is also really confused young woman who feels trapped in the world he is living in. Not being married he refers to herself as "being on the market" (EW244), which indicates an object for sale. Unable to accept the idea of being consumed or consume, Marian rebels against the system, where she reveals her sense of discomfort by not eating. With a feeling of being a commodity, both at work and in her relationships, she experiences an urge to escape from the reality of her life. In fact, the emotional turmoil she undergoes is the basic cause of her developing some sort of Schizophrenia.

This paper examines how the protagonist, being a woman, feels trapped and isolated in a male dominated world, and tackles the different roles the two men Peter and Duncan play in the life of the lady. The concepts of female subjectivity, victimization, objectification and consumption of women in Atwood's novel are studied; pinpointing how the men characters in the novel are seen as the consumers and the women as the ones being consumed. Examining the novel from a point of view combining the feminist and psychological concerns, shows the devastating effects a patriarchal consumer obsessed society may have on a young woman's life in the modern wasteland of the commercial society.

I

Gayle Green claims that Atwood is breaking the traditional conventions, by writing a book using a lyric construction, which, according to Joanna Russ in "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write", is to "[set] various images, events, scenes, or memories to circle around an unspoken invisible centre. The centre is what the novel is about" (qtd in Green 97). This is very true about *The Edible Woman*, where nothing really seems to happen. Marian listlessly floats around with no real purpose.

Despite the fact that Atwood uses a lyric construction, she still employs "the familiar formula described by Jean E. Kennard as "the convention of the two suitors" (qtd in Green 96). Throughout the novel we expected Marian to resolve whether she wants her fiancé Peter or her friend Duncan, but surprisingly, Marian does not marry either of them in the end.

Peter and Duncan are in every possible way each other's total opposites; but Marian is drawn to Duncan probably because of the qualities he has, which her fiancé does not have. Peter is good-looking, articulate, successful and promising. To Marian he represents stability and security; but he is also a caricature of materialism and consumption. Duncan, on the other hand, is an ugly, sloppy, lame 26-year-old student who will probably never graduate.

Marian is very unhappy in her relationship with Peter, though, apparently on the outside, they seem to complement each other perfectly. However, the more serious their relationship becomes, the more Marian feels as if she is being suffocated. Peter objectifies and victimizes her to the point where she finally cracks. Duncan, on the other hand, allows Marian to be whoever she wants to be, i.e., her true personality that Peter attempts to suppress. Green states that you may think of Duncan as Marian's double; he is "the side she has repressed in the interest of normalcy" (108). According to Keith, Duncan is a kind of "mentor" to Marian, who leads her on the right track and makes her understand the world in which she lives (96).

To Marian everything is a blur, but, what she cannot see, Duncan sees. He becomes her guide and rescuer from a society set out to destroy her. W.J. Keith affirms that "Duncan's function in the novel gradually emerges as the voice of Marian's instincts and intelligence" (62). He explains to Marian why she is not able to eat "You're probably representative of modern youth, rebelling against the system; though it isn't considered orthodox to begin with the digestive system" (EW 192). D.J. Dooley describes Duncan extremely well in *In Margaret Atwood's Zoology Lab*:

This man is anything but ordinary…. His response to the world of commerce… is gamesmanship….The difference between him and most other people is that he is quite aware that he is playing a role, whereas they are

falling into roles, without knowing it. Just as he is capable of looking at his own situation objectively, he is capable of analysing his society. He prefers a literal wasteland to the wasteland of the modern commercial world. (142)

For a while, Marian lives a double life: when she is spending time with Peter, they plan their wedding and their future as a married couple. She believes that to marry a man is what you are supposed to do as a woman and everybody seems to think that Peter is such a good catch. However, after Marian has met Duncan, it seems as if she cannot continue to live with Peter, if she does not have Duncan by her side. Whenever she is feeling insecure and worried, it is Duncan she turns to, who helps her regain strength and desire to go on with her life. Keith says "[i]t is as if she is being drawn, mysteriously into Duncan's orbit" (67).

Duncan also is in a way "caged" just like Marian; but the difference between them is that Duncan is able to see the reality of his society: he has learned to live in it and accept the way it uses, manipulates and suppresses people. His role or mission is to teach Marian to cope up with the various restrictions and difficulties faced in such a community. When, in the end, she is able to eat again, he welcomes her "back to so-called reality" saying, "you're a consumer" (EW 281).

One thing, which, according to Keith has been debated, is why, if this is a feminist novel, Marian needs a man to guide her and help her find a comfortable way of being (112). No one seems to have a satisfactory answer to this question. Atwood herself claims that her book is not feminist at all, but only shows how things were (qtd- in Keith 111).

II

Marian, being truly confused about her identity and what kind of life she wants to live, seems to float around in a world where she does not have a sense of belonging to. By accepting a marriage proposal from Peter, she fits perfectly into the mould that society has created or prescribed and consequently a conflict rises within her; a strife between keeping her own self or being "eaten up" by Peter and the "mechanised world" of marriage. Marian as Margaret Rathburn points out in *The Ties That Bind* feels isolated at her working place and in her relationship with her fiancé: "Marian is seeking and identity as she fights against being assimilated into the mechanized world she encounters at the personal, professional and spiritual levels of her life" (190).

After graduation from the university, Marian started working as a market researcher at a company called Seymour Surveys, which has a very determined hierarchy that Atwood describes as "an ice-cream sandwich" (EW19). The men

(psychologist and executives) work at the top of the sandwich, where no woman has ever been employed, while the women work in "the gooey layer in the middle" (EW19), whose job is to interview the puplic about different commodities. At the bottom the "frayed…operative" (EW19) type out the questionnaires. Marian feels trapped in the middle, because, being a woman, she feels that she has no chance of working her way to the top. Moreover, Seymour Surveys also have regulations that force a woman to resign from her job when she gets married; the company considers pregnancy "an act of disloyalty" (EW24).

The woman Atwood describes in her novel do not seem to have many options in life. Though highly qualified, they should not have any hope of a promotion: The three stereotypical "office virgins" (EW22), whom Marian seems to be afraid of ending up as, if she does not get married is a striking example. In fact, their only concern in life seems to be how to find men who will marry them. Lucy for instance goes to expensive restaurant and cocktail bars hoping to find a maritally inclined man who can rescue her from the female "gooey middle":

Lucy had mauve eye-shadow to match her dress, and lipstick with a pale mauve thing. She was, as always, elegant. She had been lunching out expensively more and more in the last two months, (though Marian wondered how she could afford it), trailing herself like a many-plumed fish-lure with glass beads and the three spinners and seventeen hooks through the likely-looking places, good restaurant and cocktail bars with their lush weed-beds of potted philodendrons, where the right kind of men might be lurking, ravenous as pike, though more maritally inclined. (EW111-112)

Once married, they will quit their jobs and be dependent on their husbands; thus the women are forced to ignore their own dreams of success.

Rathburn argues that Marian feels insecure, isolated and is "afraid of losing her freedom" with Peter (193) who is portrayed as very egocentric and self-righteous; thus she quite distinctly discerns that Peter does not seem to have any real affection for her. In the beginning of the novel we learn that he is against marriage, which he considers a trap women lurk men into. It is her relationship with Peter, however, that functions as the precipitating force for Marian's decomposition. Peter is a hunter and a novice photographer, and throughout her interaction with him in Part 1 of the novel Marian experiences an escalating anxiety, a paranoid fantasy of being hunted and captured. She becomes a "hunted animal trapped in the viewfinder of her future husband's camera" (Harting 243). Later however, when his career starts to take off, he

realizes that it is expected of him to have, as he himself says, "a sensible girl" (EW89) by his side. When Marian starts to rebel against her life with Peter, he accuses her of rejecting [her] femininity" (EW80). Thus, as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar claim "the eternal feminine [is] assumed to be a vision of angelic beauty and sweetness…the ideal woman [is] seen as a passive, docile and above all selfless creature" (qtd in Rathburn58).

Peter does not want a wife with an independent mind and personality, who might mess up his "nicely packaged" (EW146) life. He wants a wife who will sit next to him at dinner parties and agree on everything that he says. Gary R. Brookes argues in *The Centerfold Syndrome* that "[W]omen's bodies…are objectified and treated as potential trophies-living testaments to a man's prowess as financial success, skillful sexual performer, or fearless warrior' (7). However, Peter is also a victim of society. People at his work place and in his community expect him to marry and live a normal family life: "A fellow can't keep running around indefinitely. It'll be a lot better in the long run for my practice too, the clients like to know you've got wife; people get suspicious of a single man after a certain age, they start thinking you're a queer or something" (EW89). Peter quietly follows the rules of society even though he is against marriage.

Marian soon realizes the kind of life she will have; if she goes through with the wedding plans, she will lose her job and will be Peter's own trophy to be shown off to his friends and associates. Family life and motherhood seem to frighten Marian a great deal. Green points out that she is terrified of ending up like her college friend Clara (104); therefore, she goes to see Clara when she is pregnant with her third child and the family life she encounters shocks her: "[Clara] simply stood helpless while the tide of dirt rose round her, unable to stop it or evade it. The babies were like that too; her own body seemed somehow beyond her going its own way without reference to any directions of hers" (EW37).

The traumatic dilemma she confronts is that if she does not marry Peter, she will face that fate of the office virgins and continue working at Seymour Surveys, a spinster desperately waiting for a man to save her, and if she marries Peter, she will have to accept a life like that of Clara. The psychological anguish Marian experiences and her inner-conflict escalate as her wedding day approaches. The stress and intensified paranoia cause Marian to develop an eating disorder.

In her book about eating disorders Charlotte Buhl states that a patient with Anorexia Nervosa struggles to attain full control over her/his behaviour. They also feel a need to have control over their bodies and their surroundings. The need to always be the master of a situation has to do with a feeling of being

overwhelmed (65). Marian seems definitely overwhelmed by her own feelings in the novel. In the chaos of emotions that she experiences, she desperately tries to find something that she can be in control of. So, her body becomes the target of her obsession.

Susan Orbach and Marlene Boskids-White, who are engaged in feministic issues, believe that the increase of eating disorders in the Western society is related to women's roles in the changing world they live in (38). In reality, one can state that this is one of the main reasons that causes Marian's illness. She is totally confused in her role as a woman, which is quite explicit in the constant battle inside her between what she wants to do and what she is supposed to do. Marriage to Peter scares her and she is terrified of ending up like her friend Clara, being the traditional housewife, but at the same time she sees no other way out. She cannot understand why her body refuses to consume: "She had never been a picky eater, she had been brought up to eat whatever was on the plate; she hadn't even balked at such things as olives and asparagus and clams, that people say you have to *learn* to like" (EW204).

Marian does not only suffer from Anorexia: but also shows many schizophrenic symptoms. She experiences delusions, where vegetables, eggs and even the mould in her kitchen sink become alive, which according to DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) are the exact symptoms of a person suffering from schizophrenia:

> The central features [in schizophrenics] are confusion and incoherence, together with a particular severe deterioration of adaptive behaviour. Fragmentary hallucinations and delusions may be present…[t]he behaviour often appears silly and childlike, and their emotional responses are highly inappropriate…[t]he most prominent features in paranoid schizophrenics are delusions of persecution, in which they believe that others mean to harm them. (qtd in *Psychology* 523)

Marian is so confused, that she does not understand why she behaves in such a way, that makes her awfully scared of her own feelings: "Although she was keeping her forehead purposefully unwrinkled, she was worrying…as she had poured the cream over [the rice pudding] her eyes had seen it as a collection of small cocoons. Cocoons with miniature living creatures inside" (EW203). One basic reason for her inability to eat is such kinds of hallucinations. She actually deems the food she eats as something alive on her plate.

In fact, her behaviour is often very childish and even absurd. One evening when she is visiting her friend Leonard, she experiences an intense urge to

crawl under his bed. She has recently had a panic attack, where she believed her own boyfriend was chasing her; thus seeks protection under Leonard's bed: "I eased the bed out from the wall as noiselessly as I could, using my whole body as a lever, lifted the fringed border of the bedspread, and slid myself in like a letter through a slot" (EW 76).

As the wedding approaches, Marian's condition worsens, since she truly believes that Peter will kill her, and at their engagement party she experiences a bout of paranoia. Smith, E Ronald claims in *psychology* that psychoanalysts believe that a person may develop Schizophrenia if the world that they live in has become too stressful for them to deal with (525).

III

In fact, another reason for Marian's starvation is her sense of being a victim and an object. The first chapters of the novel shows that Marian is very vulnerable and powerless in her relationship with Peter. One evening when Marian, Peter and Leonard are having a drink at a bar, she suddenly sees herself as a defenceless animal and Peter as the predator. Peter, who is really devoted to the typical male hobbies of hunting and photographing, tells Leonard about the thrill and excitement he feels when he shoots down rabbits:

So I let *her* off and wham. One shot, right through the heart. The rest of them got away. I picked it up and Trigger said the rest of them got away. You know how to gut them, you just slit *her* down the belly and give *her* a hard shake and all the guts will fall out. 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 the place. (EW 69, my italics)

Peter refers to the rabbit as she, which is a feminine pronoun and Marian identifying herself with the she-rabbit, imagines as though he is referring to her when he talks about the animal as a female: "something inside me started to dash about in dithering mazes of panic" (EW70). Thus, she runs away from the bar absolutely terrified; but she is eventually "hunted down" just like an animal by Peter and Leonard and is forced to capitulate. It is Peter's victimization of the rabbit that causes Marian's panic attack and, being to grasp what was happening under the impact of the paranoia, she fails to draw any parallels between the incident and her feelings of being a victim in her role as a woman.

She succumbs to the role of a victim and loses all her strength to fight back. However, her body takes on her quest for selfhood, and helplessly gives in to the traditional role woman had at the time, the role of a passive fiancée;

Rathburn declares that "[t]he abdication of authority over one's life is a constant theme throughout the novel, showing the ways that Marian willingly relinquishes her autonomy and selfhood and accepts victimization" (194). After her engagement to Peter, it seems as if she surrenders her whole life into his hands, and sees herself as "an object destined for another" (360), a phrase used by Simoné de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*.

In reality, Marian's feeling of being an object starts immediately after she has accepted the marriage proposal from Peter. She starts to talk about herself as if she were a thing: "I gave him a tender chrome- plated smile" (EW88), and she also sees Peter's objectification of her as "[h]e sounded [referring to Marian] as though he had just bought a new shiny car" (EW88). This objectification sense is observed when, one evening right after they have had sex, Peter places an ashtray on Marian as though she were an ashtray holder. In fact, the climax of this objectification sense that Marian experiences occurs when she is to be "shown off" for the first time to Peter's friends at a party: "Now that she had been ringed he took pride in displaying her" (EW176). It is this new phase in Marian's life that makes her lose control over herself where she does not feel normal. She seems to be really concerned about her psychological health, when she feels that something in Peter scares her, and as a result her eating disorder really becomes uncontrollable. To please everyone and especially Peter, Marian fixes her hair at a beauty parlour and buys a new exclusive dress for the party. Brooks argues this regard that "Voyeurism and objectification can easily be interpreted as patriarchal culture's backlash attempt to keep women in their place- the beauty parlor, tanning salon, aerobics studio, or magazine cover" (105). Truthfully, the scene at the hairdresser's is full of modern life imagery that can be directly connected to a consumer society.

She looked sideways down the assembly-line of women seated in identical mauve chairs under identical whirring mushroom-shaped machines. All that was visible was a row of strange creatures with legs of various shapes and hands that held magazines and heads that were metal domes. Inert, totally inert. Was this what she was being pushed towards, this compound of the simply vegetable and simply mechanical? An electric mushroom. (EW209-210)

In this scene all the women are presented as objects, where they resemble the mass-produced commodities. Marian feels that the atmosphere is as sterile as that in a hospital; the women are presented as empty-headed electronic devises; thus Marian is "feeling like a slab of flesh, an object" (EW209). Keith in *A Reader's Guide* argues that this passage is "a bitter attack on the

absurdities of contemporary fashion" (83), and Green presents a similar argument saying that it is the women who are the victims in this system; they are valued for their physical traits rather than their intelligence in today's society. Thus they have to spend a lot of time and money on their appearances (101), which makes them part of the consumer society that is criticized in this novel. The basic reason that pushes Marian to go to the beauty parlour to fix her hair and buy an expensive dress in a boutique, is that she desperately believes it necessary to fit into society's mould for women by being beautiful, quiet and pleasing. She is nothing but a "tiny two-dimensional small figure in a red dress, posed like a woman in a mail order catalogue, turning and smiling, fluttering in the white empty space" (EW243).

Marian is very uncomfortable in her red dress: "She should never had worn red. It made her a perfect target" (EW244). A target to Peter who wants to take "a couple of shots" (EW231) of her before the guests arrive. Peter is of course talking about photographing, but Marian sees herself as a prey and feels really uncomfortable and rather horrified by this statement. Green argues that "Peter's attempt to "shoot" [Marian] throws her into a panic. The word "shoot" brings together the functions of cameras and guns, Peter's dual obsessions. These are related in that both entrap, one framing and the other killing, and both are associated…with the imposition of men's wills upon nature and women" (109):

> Peter was there, dressed in his dark opulent winter suit. He had a camera in his hand; but now she saw what it really was. There were no more doors and when she felt behind her for the doorknob, afraid to take her eyes of him, he raised the camera and aimed at her, his mouth opened in a snarl of teeth…[s]he had to get out before it was too late. (EW243-244)

Marian knows that Peter expects her to look and behave in a certain way and she does everything to please him. She neither wants to be a part of this society that devours her, nor to look like the objects she encounters in the markets. She does not want to be the stilted paper woman in every magazine ad; but realises she will have to conform, if she wants to have Peter as her husband.

IV

To actually reveal Marian's feeling of not being in control of her life anymore, Atwood changes the narrative voice in the novel from first to third person after the engagement. Tracy Brian reads this shift as indicative of repression: "Marian represses her identity and her multiplicity by switching to

third person, referring to herself as a single 'she' instead of 'I' (302). Whereas Keith sees that "Marian has resolved to view her own actions from an external perspective" (65), which might be the only way for Marian to understand the mixed feelings she has been struggling with; the feelings of being a victim and an object.

Green argues that Marian's first attempt to resist and rebel against the objectification imposed upon her by Peter and the community is when she for the first time sees food as objects and identifies herself with it (106). Marian is unable to see the destructiveness in her relationship with Peter but her body starts to protest. Having dinner one night at a restaurant, the engaged couple discuss how you best bring up children and the two have quite different opinions. In fact, Peter demonstrates his views to Marian as if she were a child. He is extremely patronizing of her views and opinions; it is there where Marian experiences a strange feeling that Peter looks at her and regards her as if she were a new toy he had bought. She fantasises that Peter has secretly bought a manual on her "[i]f you got something new you went out and bought a book that told you how to work it" (EW150). Suddenly Marian perceives the steak on Peter's plate as the cow once was, and since the cow is a female animal, she identifies herself with it after which it becomes impossible for her to finish her meal.

Rathburn claims that "[Marian] is identifying with the idea of being consumed and becomes unable to control her body urgings" (195). In her confusion about her identity and her feeling of being used by Peter, her body suddenly cannot consume anymore. She refuses to be a consumer like Peter and the rest of her society; thus, refusing to be part of this machinery. Marian imaginatively perceives everything in her environment fully alive and it is her refusal to consume such things that makes her starve. Green declares that Marian experiences a feeling that whatever she eats is as much alive as her own body, which denotes "to consume is to be consumed" (107). To stop eating is also to protest against femininity which to Marian denotes to be an object. At a Christmas party at Seymour Surveys, her friends and colleagues disgust Marian, because the tables are crammed full of delicious food and all of the women, except Marian, gorge themselves with the goodies:

What peculiar creatures they were; and the continual flux between the outside and the inside, taking in, giving out, chewing, words, potato-chips, burps, hair, babies, milk, excrement, cookies, vomit, coffee, tomato-juice, tea, sweat, liquor, tears, garbage…she was one of them, her body the same,

identical, merged with the other flesh…she left suffocated by this thick Sargasso…sea of femininity. (EW167)

At the beginning of her illness, it is only cooked food that she perceives to be alive, which she cannot eat, but later she cannot even eat a piece of cake; "[the cake] felt spongy and cellular against her tongue, like the bursting of thousands of tiny lungs" (EW207).

Green suggests that the real transformation achieved by this consumer society is the ability to turn people into mechanized objects; "become the things of their things" (101-102). Marian describes the office virgins as metallic; Emmy is "whisk-tinted and straggly" (EW22) and Lucy is described as "platinum and elegantly coiffured" (EW22) and Milly is "brassy" (EW22). They have no future at Seymour Surveys because they are women, and in their desperate search for a man to liberate them, they give up themselves. The ladies are so obsessed with how they look and how they are presented that they forget who they are and what they want. They turn metallic, grey and non-living.

Peter is associated with soap throughout the novel and he smells of soap. In fact, Marian refers to his friends as "the soapmen" (EW238) and, this association may refer to Peter's ability to always look respectable. He is neat, good-looking, well dressed and have a good smell. Peter is actually like the office virgins, a victim of consumer society. He is very concerned with how he looks, and is also extremely shallow and worried about what other people might think of him.

Duncan, who is extremely thin and white in the skin, is described as papery and fragile. He is working on an English paper that he seems unable to finish. The whole apartment is filled with sheets of paper and he is said to "slave in the paper mines" (EW97). Duncan's refusal to be part of the consumer society makes him almost invisible, and actually it seems he may disappear in a society obsessed with success and money. As the characters in the novel are being objectified, their "complex inner life" (Green102) seems to die. They become empty shells.

In the end of the novel Marian successfully manages to escape from her destructive relationship with Peter, denoting her acquiring the needed impetus to resist "a system that would devour her" (Green96). She realizes that it is Peter's victimization and objectification of her, along with her own feelings of being consumed that made her sick, and she is finally able to discern the causes of her eating disorder and irrational behaviour. Marian's manner of dealing with this new insight is ingeniously rendered by Atwood.

Marian bakes an exquisite sponge cake carved out like a lady, a symbol of Marian herself: "You look delicious, [Marian] told her. Very appetising. And that's what will happen to you, that's what you get for being food" (EW270). She invites Peter to her apartment to tell him how she has been feeling lately, and offers the cake saying "[y]ou've been trying to destroy me, haven't you…trying to assimilate me" (EW271), and as Glenys Stow argues, the cake "is of course, a deliberate symbol of the artificial womanhood which her world has tried to impose on her; and with the 'crazy feast ' where at the novel's conclusion " Marian breaks out of the expected social pattern" (96). And as Green rightly argues " Marian's cake lady is a gesture of defiance", that is also a "no to a system that defines women as commodities and devours them" (111). When Peter leaves Marian, she is finally able to start eating again, and begins with her cake. George Woodcock in her article "Margaret Atwood: Poet as Novelist" claims that "she metaphorically [eats] herself, the artificial 'normal' person she [has] tried to become" (93), which denotes she has followed her instinct and broken free from the bonds of society, where the narration immediately changes from third to first person and Marian is again in control of her life.

We do not exaggerate if we say all people are part of the system created by the consumer society, and that we are turned into puppets controlled by a community only interested in its own profit: "By playing on anxieties which it promises to alleviate through the power of purchasing, it creates needs and train people to buy" (99). Thus, no wonder to see Marian experiencing a feeling of discomfort about her work task, because she believes being a market researcher makes her complicit in the sleazy underside of consumerism. Working in an environment, which is playing on people's insecurity and longing to be accepted, she is utterly aware of the control advertisers play on their customers' thoughts and feelings.

W.J. Keith claims that the advertisement is "a psychological manipulation by means of language" (46), and through the using of words that are connected with manliness and virility, the advertisers manipulate their customer into buying their product. They want their buyers to believe that, if they drink Moose Beer they will become "real men"; thus the Moose Beer promises the fat-bellied man "a magical transformation through the power of purchasing" (Green101), and asserts if he drinks the beer, he will transform from a coach-potato into a sexy hunter desired by women.

Marian deems herself a victim and that through her job she unconsciously encourages and increases the objectification of women. Thus she, who is so very uncertain in her role as a woman, takes part in a mechanism that destroys people's love for themselves. "[T]here really wasn't a single human

unpleasantness left that [Seymour Surveys] [had] not managed to turn to their use" (EW174):

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. The first long cool swallow will tell you that Moose Beer is what you've always wanted for true beer enjoyment. Put the tang of the wilderness in YOUR life today with a big satisfying glass of sturdy Moose Beer. (EW26)

Marian's job at the Moose Beer is to perform interview visits in people's homes; thus she, as a woman, is exposed to an extremely male-centred world. One of the interviewed men makes a pass at her and she has to flee the apartment: "Now what's a nice little girl like you doing walking around asking men all about their beer?" He said moistly. "[Y]ou ought to be at home with some big strong man to take care of you" (EW47-48).

Duncan understands Marian's spiritual agony caused by her job as an advertiser, and what she does for a living. When they meet for the first time, he makes fun of their materialised society. In fact, the "mind twisting" Moose Beer jingle does not fool Duncan, and instead of answering Marian's questions about the beer truthfully, he makes up answers that will be impossible for Marian to use.

The exploitation of female's body in advertising is another theme in the novel. One day Marian observes an advertisement, which reads "The girdle ad…puzzles and slightly scandalizes" Marian. "They are so public…. The female form, I thought, is supposed to appeal to men, not women, and men don't usually buy girdles" (EW93), and when Duncan sees Marian's girdle, the night they have sex, he is absolutely fascinated by it:

"Hey!" he said. "A real [girdle]! I've seen in the ads but I never got that far in real life, I've always wondered how they worked. Can I look at it?" She handed it over to him. He sat up in bed to examine it, stretching it all of its three ways and flexing the bones. "God, how medieval," he said. "How can you stand it? Do you have to wear one all the time?" He spoke of it as though it was some kind of unpleasant but necessary surgical appliance: a brae or a truss. (EW252)

Marian later realises that it is women who are seen as objects and therefore it is their bodies that are used in marketing techniques. Brooks argues that the objectification of women is a product of their culture: "As the culture has granted men the right and privilege of looking at women, women have been expected to accept the role of stimulators of men's visual interest, and

their bodies becoming objects that can be lined up, compared and rated" (3-4). He continues saying that the fashion industry plays a great role when it comes to "[distorting] women's bodies, to [exaggerating] differences among women, and to endlessly [contriving] to drape and reveal in a manner that sexually arouses men" (206), and John Berger raises the same argument when he claims in *Ways of Seeing* that "advertising steals [woman's] love of herself as she is, and offers it back to her for the price of the product" (134).

When Marian hears about "the Underwear man" (EW117) she cannot do anything except pity him. The Underwear man is a person who by pretending to work at Seymour Surveys, as a marketing researcher, phones women up giving them dirty propositions: "[H]e was a victim of society. Society flaunted these slender laughing rubberized women before his eyes, urging, practically forcing upon him their flexible blandishments, and then refuse to supply him with any" (EW117). Marian speculates if the man might be Peter, which indicates Marian's hesitation about the wedding and her feeling of not really knowing her husband to be.

Conclusion

To survive as a woman in a society controlled by men almost kills Marian MacAlpin. Studying the novel from a feminist as well as a psychological point of view shows how harsh and difficult is life for young women in today's Western society. Many have to rebel against the system to create a satisfactory life, which is not all honey for them. This is the case with Marian, who has to struggle to maintain the power over her own life. She is, by being a woman, trapped in a system that does not allow her to grow as a dignified person. Her options are limited: she has to choose to be either a housewife or a career woman.

It is seen how Marian's fiancé's victimisation and objectification of her makes her ill. By treating her as an object, she is shocked and almost paralysed where she totally relinquishes herself and is ready to let him take control over her life. The stress she has to deal with in her relationship and in her working environment makes her both anorexic and schizophrenic. Marian has a sensation of being consumed by a system that tries to mechanise people. It is her identification with food that causes her to refuse it, and in her hallucinations food becomes as alive as she herself is. This is why she identifies herself with a victimised animal, which demonstrates her feelings of defencelessness.

It is pointed out that through the help of Duncan Marian is able to understand and respond positively to her own feelings. Thus he is considered Marian's guide through a patriarchal society, which she does not know how to

live and behave in. He gives her advice and the necessary strength to continue living and confronting the obstacles she faces. Peter, on the other hand, sees Marian as an object and tries to adjust and mould her into someone who fits into his personal aims and purposes in his life. By baking the cake lady and offering it to Peter, she is finally able to break away from their destructive relationship, and symbolically rejecting the bonds of his male-dominated society.

The novel gives us an insight into the destructive power society exercises on people and women in particular. It shows how men and women take on different roles to try to fit in. Marian's job as a market researcher makes her feel even worse about herself. She sees how her company is using different marketing techniques to trick people into buying their products. They objectify women's bodies and let them know that they are not good enough.

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