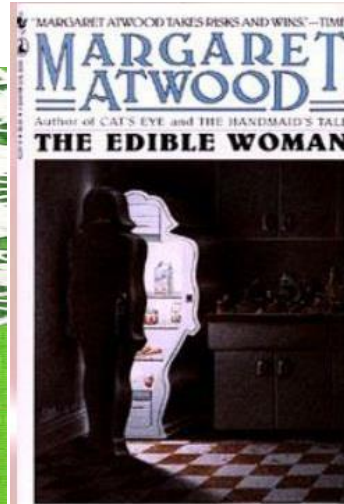
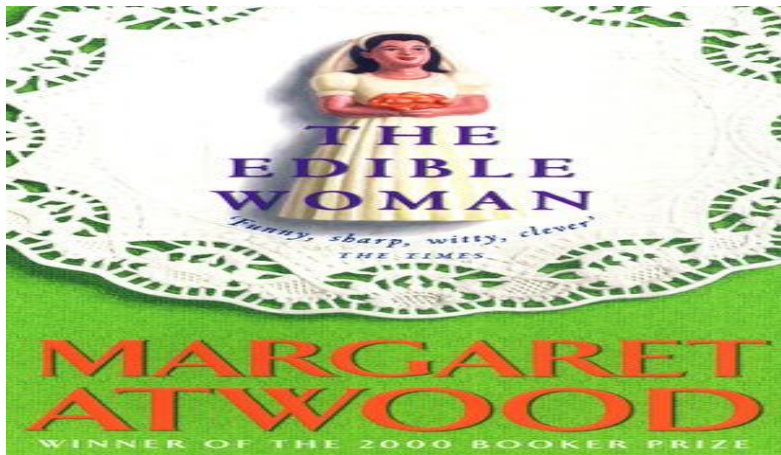


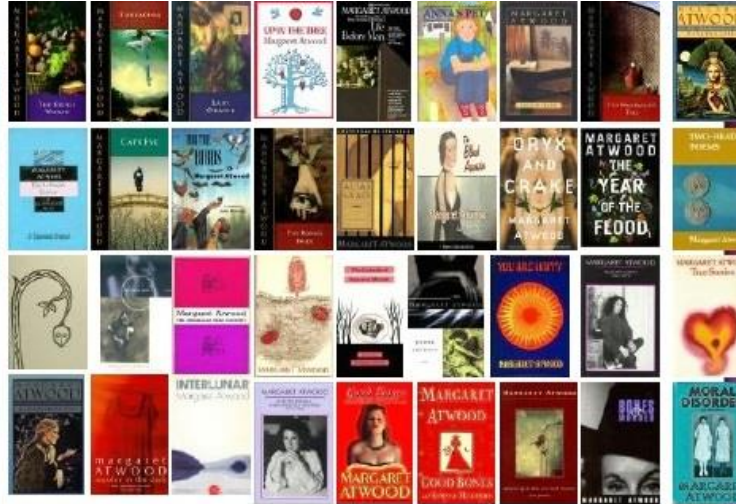
The Edible Woman – Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood (1939) living author

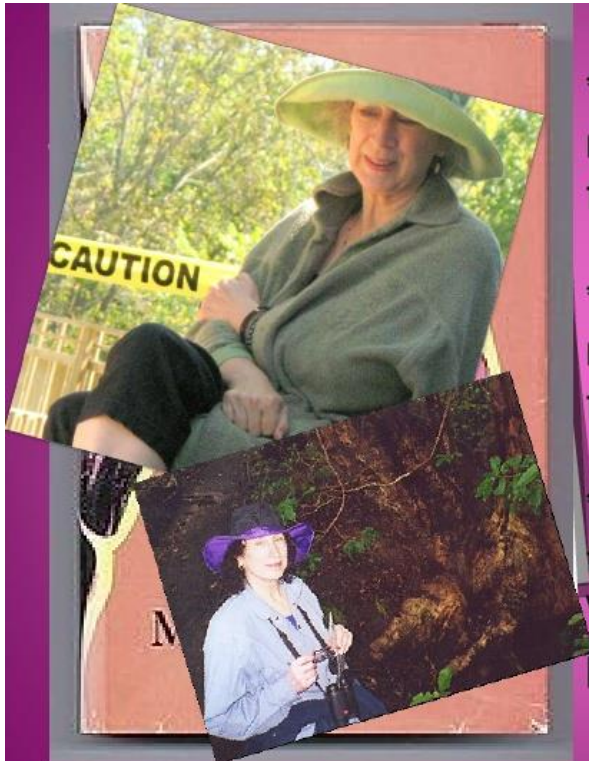


- ◉ Margaret Atwood is one of the Canada's major contemporary authors; she is a prominent novelist and poet, and also writes short stories, screenplays, radio scripts, critical studies and books for children.





- ◉ At the date she is author of more than thirty books in thirty five countries, and her works having been translated into over 30 languages.



*Margaret Atwood is noted for her feminism too.

*She is considered a measure of the feminist thought

*Her early feminist treatise, "The Edible Woman" was published in 1969.

Major Characters

MAIN CHARACTERS

1. Marian McAlpin
2. Duncan
3. Ainsley Tewce
4. Peter Wollander
5. Len Slank

Marian McAlpin

Marian is the protagonist and she is also the first person narrator of the novel

Marian McAlpin

The protagonist of the novel, Marian leads a boring and predictable life. Eventually, it dawns on her that her boring boyfriend is metaphorically devouring her and she abandons her life for another man, Duncan.

Duncan

Marian's love interest, very different than Peter, Marian's fiancé. He is not particularly attractive, not ambitious, and he pushes Marian to "be real." At the end, the cake that Marian baked to test Peter is eaten by Duncan.

Duncan

He is a recent graduate student who Marian has an affair with.

Peter Wollander

Marian's fiancé, a "good catch" who proposes to Marian because it is a sensible thing to do. He wants to mold Marian into his idea of the perfect woman.

Peter Wollander
Marian's Boyfriend,
and then later becomes
her fiance.

Ainsley Tewce

She is Marian's roommate. She is the ultra-progressive, aggressive opposite of Clara and, perhaps, also Marian's opposite. She is anti-marriage at first, and then switches two different kinds of moral earnestness. She decides to have a baby out of wedlock and seduces Len so he can impregnate her. She succeeds and gets pregnant.

Len (Leonard) Shank

He is a friend of Marian and Clara, a "lecherous skirt-chaser" according to Marian. Ainsley is trying to trick him into fathering her child, but he is the opposite of the married father, Joe Bates.

Minor characters :

Clara Bates: She is a friend of Marian McAlpin. Quite pregnant with her third child as the book begins, she dropped out of college for her first pregnancy. She represents traditional motherhood and sacrifices for one's children. Marian finds Clara rather boring and believes she needs rescuing.

Joe Bates: Clara's husband, a college instructor, who does quite a bit of the work at home. He stands for marriage as a way to protect women.

Mrs. Bogue: Marian's department head and a prototypical professional woman.

Millie, Lucy, and Emmy, the Office Virgins: they symbolize what is artificial in women's stereotypical roles of the 1960s

Fish (Fischer) Smythe: Duncan's roommate, who plays a special role near the end in Ainsley's life.

Trevor: Duncan's roommate.

Trigger: A late-marrying friend of Peter's.

Woman Down Below: The landlady (and her child) who represents a kind of strict moral code.

Summary of the novel - Part One

The Edible Woman begins with a **first-person narrator** in the voice of the female protagonist, **Marian McAlpin**. For the first several chapters Marian describes her relationships to her roommate, Ainsley; her boyfriend, Peter; and her pregnant friend, Clara. Marian also describes her job, which requires her to take the technical language of survey questions and translate it into a language that the layperson will understand. When asked to substitute for one of the company's surveyors, Marian reluctantly goes from house to house asking people their opinions about a beer ad that will soon be broadcast on the radio. It is during this survey that Marian meets Duncan, an unconventional young man who throws Marian off guard with his lies and almost immediate admittance of his dishonesty.

After watching Clara interact with her children, **Marian's roommate, Ainsley**, announces that she wants to get pregnant. When Marian asks if this means that Ainsley wants to get married, Ainsley says no. She wants to raise the child by herself. She also wants to choose a man who will not make a fuss about getting married. Ainsley then proceeds to make inquiries about a friend of Marian's whose name was mentioned while they were dining at Clara's house. The old friend is Len Shank, and he has the reputation of a being a womanizer.

Peter is introduced in a phone conversation with Marian, in which he tells her about the engagement of his last remaining bachelor friend. A day later, in an attempt to wear off his depression, Peter and Marian have sex in the bathtub, a setting that Marian describes as Peter's attempt at being spontaneous. Marian is disturbed with the incident, and for a variety of other reasons from that point until the end of the story her discomfort intensifies.

In a restaurant Marian introduces Peter to Len. Marian is surprised when Ainsley appears at their table. At this point Marian realizes that Ainsley has targeted Len as the proposed father of her child. Through the rest of the evening, Marian is caught up in emotions that she does not understand. She finds herself crying without knowing the reason, and, later, she runs away. When the group reunites at Len's apartment, Marian hides under a bed. Eventually she is confronted by Peter, and she tells him she didn't know what she was doing. But before saying good night, Peter proposes marriage by telling her that it is time for him to settle down. Marian accepts and relinquishes to Peter all responsibility for making decisions.

Shortly after her engagement, Marian bumps into Duncan at a Laundromat. It is the first time they have seen one another since the survey. They share an abbreviated conversation, then kiss, stare at one another, and depart.

Part one ends with Marian commenting on her engagement, concluding that although her actions have recently been inconsistent with her true personality, life is run on adjustments. She then sees one of her childhood dolls and remembers how she used to leave food with this doll overnight but was always disappointed in the morning when the food had not been eaten. With this image, Atwood leads into the next section, which deals with Marian's eating problems.

Part Two

Part Two begins with a **third-person narrator**. Instead of being inside Marian's head, the narrator now looks at Marian from a distance. There are other shifts as well. Clara has given birth to her third child and is once again in "possession of her own frail body." Peter has begun to stare at Marian as if he were trying to read her as he would read a manual of how to work a camera. Also in this section, Marian and Duncan's relationship intensifies. The more fascinated she becomes with Duncan, the less suited she is for coping with her life with Peter.

It is at this point of the story that Marian has her first troubled encounter with food. At dinner with Peter, she looks down at her plate, and instead of seeing a steak, she sees the live animal from which it was taken. She watches Peter cutting his steak and refers to it as if he were operating on a cow. Along with Marian's increasing inability to eat food, she also imagines that her body is beginning to disappear. The first images come to her in a dream in which her feet and hands are disappearing.

Marian meets with Duncan again, finding his "lack of interest [in her] comforting." She also tries to convince herself that her relationship with Duncan has nothing to do with Peter although she fears that if the men were ever to meet one another, they might end up destroying one another.

In contradiction to his lack of interest, Duncan tells Marian that he needs something real in his life. He's hoping it is Marian. He then adds that to find out if she is real, he wants her to peel herself out of all the woolen layers that she is wearing and go to bed with him. Marian agrees, but they do not know where to go, except to a hotel where Marian would be looked at as a prostitute. They do not go to the hotel this time, but this scene is a foreshadowing, or preview, of a later scene in which Marian is wearing a sequined red dress and has her face made up. She realizes, in this later scene, that she does look like a prostitute and even encourages that impression by flirting with the hotel clerk.

The last section of Part Two tells of Peter's party and its aftermath. Marian's eating patterns have eliminated all natural foods. She is down to "eating" only vitamin pills. Peter remains unaware of her problems and suggests that for the party she should buy a new dress, something less "mousy" than her normal wardrobe. He also hints that she should do something with her hair. Although Marian feels uncomfortable in the new red dress and new hairdo, she succumbs to Peter's wishes.

Before the party, Marian takes a bath, during which she sees three separate versions of herself reflected in the hot and cold water taps and the faucet. Later, in her bedroom, she again sees three images. This time it is two of her dolls on either side of a mirror, with her own reflection in the middle. When she stares at the three images, she feels that the dolls are pulling her apart.

After Marian puts on her new red dress, Ainsley makes up Marian's face, attaching false eyelashes to her lids, and teaching Marian how to create an alluring but false smile. Later, at the party, Marian explores her new image in a mirror and wonders what is beneath the surface, holding her together. Everything that she sees of herself is false.

Despite her assumption that she is coping at the beginning of the party, in the end Marian runs away. She searches for Duncan, who has refused to enter Peter's apartment once he sees how Marian is dressed. She finds him, and they finally have sex. Later Duncan takes her for a long walk and literally and symbolically points out her way back home.

The next day, Marian bakes a cake-woman, clothing her as if the cake-woman were wearing a red dress. She makes this cake-woman as a test for Peter. Peter fails the test, refusing to take part in the parody. So Marian eats the cake herself.

Part Three

Marian cleans up the apartment and plans to move on. In the last few sentences, she tells Duncan that she is eating again, and he welcomes her back to reality. Then she watches Duncan finish off the cake.

One of the **major themes** of the book is that of **identity**. Atwood looks at traditional **feminine ideals** such as submission to men and quiet, meek attitudes. When Marian, feels that she is losing her identity her physical body reacts by refusing to eat. This inability to eat is an act of solidarity with other prey, such as the rabbits in Len's story, because Marian feels that she is prey as well.

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

The book is less about societal change and **more about personal choices**. Marian doesn't come to any profound realization about herself. Instead, she takes steps to get her life back and to decide what kind of future she might like as an alternative to what society offers.

At the beginning of the book, Marian led an ordinary, unexamined existence, and by the end, she is beginning to take control of her life. Her eating issues represented her profound unwillingness to proceed through life as a passive example of ideal femininity.

Major Themes

- Concerned with Canada's cultural identity
- Women's lives and identities (feminism)
- Survivor & victim mentality
- Themes of Duality: Self & Other, Men & Women, Victim & Victimizer, City and Nature



The Edible Woman as a feminist novel ...

“The Edible Woman” was first published in 1969 and was written by the Booker Prize-Winning author Margaret Atwood. Due to the book’s exploration of gender stereotypes and when it was released, many have associated it with the feminist movement in North America. Margaret Atwood insists that the book should actually be considered “proto-feminist” because she completed writing it in 1965. Switching between the first-person and third-person narrative and painting an accurate picture of the typical issues a young professional woman dealt with in the 1960s, The Edible Woman is a study in the evolution of women’s roles in the mid-20th century.

The significance of food in Atwood's *The Edible Woman*.

In *The Edible Woman* food represents Marian's self. Therefore, every instance that requires her to interact with people is a direct symbol of how society, the moment, or the future may consume her.

In the beginning of the story, food was a binder for society, as she was a survey reader for the company she worked for. Through the beginning of the story it is realized that Marian is a good eater. She gets an invite from her eternally barefoot and pregnant friend Clara to eat. It is after her meal visit to Clara and her realization that (after her marriage to Peter) she will become another Clara, Marian begins to relate herself to food.

The story revolves around the main figure 'Marian' who starts to recognize food a lot that she even loses the capability to eat food. She usually ventures out on a brief lunch most days with her associates at work. Before accepting Peter's proposal of marriage, Marian's association with food is not a main problem for her. But her acceptance of proposal of marriage, her connection with food change.

She has noticed that her companions being consumed by marriage and pregnancy, she comprehends that likewise this will be her destiny. Food starts to rebuff her; however she from the outset does not create the connection between her absence of craving and her dread about being eaten up by marriage and cultural standards. In order to regain her old self, she realizes that she should not marry Peter.

Gender stereotypes in *The Edible Woman*

- Atwood explores gender stereotypes through characters who strictly adhere to them, such as Peter or Lucy, and those who defy their constraints, such as Duncan.
- The narrative point of view shifts from first to third person, accentuating Marian's slow detachment from reality. At the conclusion, first person narration returns, consistent with the character's willingness to take control of her life again.
- Food and clothing are major symbols used by the author to explore themes and grant the reader insight on each of the characters' personalities, moods and motivations.
- Setting is used to sharply accentuate the differences between the characters; for example, Duncan is encountered in a mundane laundromat, gloomy theatre or sleazy hotel. In comparison, Peter inhabits genteel bars and a sparkling new apartment. However these changing environments are also used to explore different angles of existence, contrasting a freer, wilder glimpse of life, with a civilised, gilded cage. This highlights the difficulties presented to women in the era, where freedom was synonymous with uncertainty but marriage presented problems of its own.
- This novel's publication coincided with the rise of the women's movement in North America, but is described by Atwood as "protofeminist" because it was written in 1965 and thus anticipated feminism by several years.