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"That's what you get for being food": The Interconnected Oppression of Animals and Women in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*

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Abstract

In 1969, Margaret Atwood published her first novel *The Edible Woman*, which follows Marian, a college-educated young woman that starts experiencing a number of existential issues as a result of her forthcoming marriage, the arrival of an unusual man, with whom she forms an equally unusual bond, and her progressive lack of appetite. The book has now been read repeatedly as a product of the second-wave feminist movement, portraying majority of the concerns of this feminist period. In spite of the current already abundant literature on it, I believe *The Edible Woman* has great potential for applying vegetarian ecofeminist theory due to the relation of the mistreatment of animals with that of women, which Marian incidentally comes to realize.

In this thesis I argue that Marian's aversion to food is a result of an unintentional connection to animals' mistreatment, and that her circumstances reflect those of a prey in a hunting context. Additionally, I assert that the novel proves the inferior status associated with vegetarianism and the existence of meat normativity. To do so, I first explore Marian's food revulsion using Adams' vegetarian ecofeminist work, and the symbols that entangle women and animals as consumable flesh. I also examine the contrasting portrayal of men and women. Secondly, I analyze the hunter-prey dynamics in the novel, Peter's violent language, and Duncan's contrasting influence. Lastly, I explore how the other characters respond to Marian's food journey, revealing society's ignorance of the vegetarian movement and the prevalence of meat normativity.

Keywords: Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman*, vegetarian ecofeminism, meat normativity

0. Introduction

0.1. Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood is a worldwide recognized Canadian author. At the time of writing, she is 84 years old and has published around seventy books: fiction, nonfiction, poetry, children's books, and graphic novels; as well as several publications in independent press and some television scripts. Alongside the late Alice Munro, she is Canada's biggest international literary name, having not only an important impact on literature within her country but globally, with her works being translated into a countless number of languages. Her prolificacy from the very beginning has been astonishingly high. Furthermore, she has received substantial attention all throughout her life working as a writer; she has picked up plenty of awards and a few honorary degrees over the period. Atwood is known for addressing many themes in her writing, such as Canadian identity, gender, power politics, animal rights and environmental issues; while approaching them with different genres, including historical fiction, speculative or science fiction and poetry. She has also done some rewriting of classical works. As Howells highlights, "her fiction features on […] syllabuses worldwide, there is a thriving academic Atwood critical industry, and her publicity tours for every new book are sellouts around the world. Singlehandedly, Atwood has established a high profile for Canadian writing generally and for Canadian women's writing in particular" (221).

She started out in a context of "the rise of Canadian cultural nationalism [...] coinciding with the rise of North American second-wave feminism, [...] locat[ing herself] at the intersection of postcolonial and feminist perspectives" (Howells 219). She wrote her first poetry collection in 1961 before graduating, with which she won the E. J. Pratt Medal (Staines 16), and by the mid-70s she had published three novels and her first full-

length volume of poetry, which granted her the Governor General's Award for poetry (Howells 220). Her early works already show her innovative mind and her "genius for codifying and indeed for predicting popular cultural trends" (Howells 221). Her first ever novel, *The Edible Woman* (1969) was published in 1969, although she had already submitted it years earlier but without result. It is worth pointing out that the book was also published the same fall in England and in 1970 in the United States, a distribution procedure that was novel to most Canadian writers (Staines 19). A couple of years later, Atwood had also put out *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (1972), a relevant work of literary criticism of her country's written tradition because, as Staines highlights,

> "before Survival there was no volume of criticism on Canadian literature designed for the general reader. With its publication, Atwood's reputation was secure throughout Canada. [...] She had accomplished what she set out to do: forge an identity as a Canadian writer, something almost unique on the Canadian scene." (21)

She continued to create timeless works that are read and still adapted to new media in the present day, such as *Alias Grace* (1996) or *The Handmaid's Tale (*1985). In the context of the latter, it could be argued that, above all, Atwood is known for her eerie predictions of dystopian futures. In fact, the sales from *The Handmaid's Tale* peaked after Donald J. Trump was inaugurated as 45th President of the United States, turning Atwood's story into a symbol for the USA's real-life political controversies.

At present, Margaret Atwood is a notorious figure in contemporary literature, who keeps corroborating with her writing the profound power of language. She has been a fierce supporter of the nation's literary landscape, with tireless efforts to create the Writers' Trust of Canada. This shows her constant conviction in the potential of literature to foster cultural consciousness and national identity. Atwood's lasting influence

eloquently demonstrates the way literature both molds and reflects the current climate of society.

0.2. State of the art

At the present time, the Atwood scholarship is full of dissections of the symbolism, metaphors and meaning found in her work, and her first published novel is no exception. *The Edible Woman* (1969) tells the story of Marian MacAlpin, a college-educated young woman who begins to have a series of existential concerns due to her upcoming marriage, the appearance of a strange man with whom she begins to have an equally strange relationship, and her gradual loss of appetite. Despite the current abundant and detailed literature on it, when *The Edible Woman* first came out the majority of the critics offered a cursory reading of the work. The 1970 *The Saturday Review* wrote that Atwood "tries hard to be whimsical [...], but what might be briefly amusing becomes tedious when presented lengthily in rambling fashion. [...][S]harp imagery cannot make up fortrite characterization and lack of plot" (Easton 40). The same year, both the *Canadian Forum* and the *Library Journal* published a review in the same line, the first stating 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" (Stedmond qtd. in "Edible", par. 4), and the second pointing out that *The Edible Woman* "might do for a short story but just isn't enough for a novel. I can't recall a book more padded with tedious, irrelevant detail" (Avant qtd. in "Edible", par. 5). Nevertheless, some other contemporary critics to the release of the book did praise Atwood for her prose and humor. Preston found it "a distinct pleasure to read" and highlighted "its intelligence gentled by sympathy, its eye for telltale detail, and its humor which ranges from wit to some waywardly funny scenes" (par. 1), while Bell called it "a work of feminist black humor

[...] like a contemporary 'My Sister Eileen'" in which "Miss Atwood's comedy does not bare its teeth" (par. 1-2).

Nowadays, *The Edible Woman* has been time and again read as a novel product of the feminist movement, even though Atwood prefers to see it as rather "protofeminist", as she points out in her 1979 introduction to the book, because "there was no women's movement in sight when [she] was composing the book in 1965" (Atwood, *Edible* x). The author, to this day, wants to distance herself from the label 'feminist'. It is not that she fully rejects it, since she actually has pronounced herself as a feminist, but prefers to give importance to the context when the label is used. She remarks that

> "Feminist is now one of the all purpose words. It really can mean anything from people who think men should be pushed off cliffs to people who think it's O.K. for women to read and write. All those could be called feminist positions. Thinking that it's O.K. for women to read and write would be a radically feminist position in Afghanistan." (Atwood qtd. in Rea, par. 6)

She is also very active in the debate of transsexuality inclusion in the feminist movement, and some other contentious topics, which, in occasions makes her a controversial figure. All the pressure put upon her as a writer that deals with women's experience —even though it is not too avoidable— in her stories, as well as all the opinions regarding her way of being a feminist drove her to write her essay "Am I Bad Feminist?" (2018). In this special for *The Globe and Mail* she asserts that "[her] fundamental position is that women are human beings, with the full range of saintly and demonic behaviors this entails, including criminal ones" (Atwood, "Am I"). Thus, although it seems obvious that her writing fits in the feminist scope, she much rather prefers to have her work acknowledged for other values.

Still, multiple authors have read Atwood's first published novel through the feminist lens. Green understands Marian's negation of her own body through starvation as a "covert rebellion against a system that appropriates femininity as a commodity to be

consumed" (qtd. in Tolan 17). Sasani and Arjmandi, too, acknowledge that the protagonist "gains voice by refusing to yield to the masculine authorization and oppression by patriarchal society" (1520). The issue that these readings bring up is very valid, and I agree with their arguments. However, it has been done many times, and, in addition, they tend to view the ending of the book as her gaining back her power. Sasani and Arjmandi contend that Marian denies the feminine role imposed by Peter and finds her strength back through eating again (1523). As I will argue in this thesis, I believe that is not exactly the case. In the matter of gender, Fleitz writes about the performativity of femininity in the book, basing on Judith Butler's works *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), where they state that "gender attributes and acts, the various ways in which a body shows or produces its cultural signification, are performative" (Butler 192). Later to this, Sasani and Arjmandi also briefly mention *Gender Trouble*, however, they do not delve into the topic notably as Fleitz does. Thus, this author notes how the novel plays with the construction of gender through Butler's idea of performativity, understands irony also as a type of bodily performance, and stresses the importance of the disruptive body to Marian's eating disorder, since previous Atwood scholarship speaks of her disease as either psychosomatic or conscious rebellion (Fleitz ii).

Furthermore, other authors, such as McWilliams and Roles, have read the novel from the postcolonial paradigm, stating that "the novel presents a recipe for self-preservation in national as well as individual terms and lays the foundation for the more developed exploration of the precariousness of Canadian identity, and survival as a key symbol of Canadian culture" (McWilliams 63). Thus, for them, *The Edible Woman* needs to not only be interpreted as an "exposé of female objectification" (McWilliams 65), but also as a story "played out against a determinedly Canadian backdrop as are, it might be

argued, Atwood's nascent concerns about the survival of the country's cultural autonomy" (McWilliams 67-68). In addition, it is worth mentioning Hobgood's understanding of Marian's internal rebellion by means of "paranoia, decomposition, schizophrenia, and finally reterritorialization to emphasize the ways capitalism exploits and consumes the female worker" (qtd. in Roles 277) since this reading brings awareness to the mental health struggle and what could be interpreted as schizophrenic tendencies that Marian experiences.

Moreover, authors Vokes and Patra have both provided with a relevant paper each on an ecofeminist read of *The Edible Woman*. They connect the oppression of women with that of nature and argue how that is portrayed through Marian's food journey. On the one hand, Patra analyzes the book together with another work, by concentrating on consumerism and "highlight[ing] the intersection of female oppression, consumerism, and environmental exploitation" (Patra 1), while Vokes focuses more on getting the *bigger picture*, as she puts it in her paper, by "explor[ing] the presence and purpose of food […] as a whole, aiming to prove that the seemingly insignificant mentions reveal a great deal of information about Marian's emotional state and ideals, and the ideals of the time in which the novel is set" (Vokes 1-2).

Lastly, and for my arguments it is of utter importance, some other authors have pinpointed the hunter-prey dynamic established in the book, interpreting it as a metaphor for the men-women gender roles and tense relationship. Mainly Mijomanović draws attention to how women are associated with food and flora in the novel, and how that results in "Marian gradually renounc[ing] parts of herself and through metonymical rearrangement becom[ing] Other" (Mijomanović 72). This 'I' and 'Other' dichotomy is relevant and useful, as well as how this author connects Marian and food. Nevertheless, this connection is almost always drawn within the context, as I have previously

mentioned, of second-wave feminism, consumerism or eating disorders. Only Drewett has based her research on feminist-vegetarian criticism, by showing that "the objectification of women as sexual objects and the objectification of animals as edible objects are interlinked, and that patriarchy and speciesism are interlocking oppressions" (Drewett 29). Still, since this author combines her main work on *The Edible Woman* with the comparison of another novel, I believe there is a need for further development on this analysis. This is why I will mostly draw from her arguments to base my own.

0.3. Vegetarian ecofeminism

The connection between feminism and vegetarianism was first drawn in the seventies but did not gain a voice to raise awareness until the nineties. Since it is a recent field of study, I will give a brief overview of vegetarian ecofeminism as a discipline. Firstly, it is a branch of the ecofeminist movement, which defends the idea that the oppression of women and the oppression of nature are linked. The ideology in question is an activist and scholarly movement that argues that all forms of oppression are interconnected and must be abolished. However, vegetarian ecofeminism distinguishes itself by believing that the way we deal with animals, particularly how humans capitalize on and murder them, must be acknowledged, and discussed. Furthermore, it adds a layer of intersectionality into its theory: speciesism. Speciesism, defined by *Britannica* as "the practice of treating members of one species as morally more important than members of other species [and] the belief that this practice is justified", was introduced by the English philosopher Richard Ryder in the seventies in his essay "Experiments on Animals" (1971). It is central to ecofeminism since it means that nonhumans (or animals) and humans are not equal. Thus, according to the scholars of this field, it is another type of discrimination.

Academically, vegetarian ecofeminism was first introduced by Carol J. Adams in 1975 (Lucas 150), whose "mind started thinking of vegetarianism within a feminist context", the "numerous nineteenth-century feminists who were vegetarian" and novels that inspired her to pursue the topic, such as "Charlotte Perkin Gilman's *Herland,* Marge Piercy's *Small Changes*, Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*" (Adams, "How did I", par. 2). However, in the following decade there were few publications on this topic. It was not until the 1990s that the debate on the feminist-vegetarian connection gained awareness, with authors such as Adams, alongside Josephine Donovan, as well as feminist journals such as *Signs* and *Hypatia* publishing about the subject. The first year of the decade, Adams published *The Sexual Politics of Meat* (1990), and Donovan wrote an essay on "Animal Rights and Feminist Theory" (1990), both speaking to many of the key concepts within the field. Donovan's article delves into the intertwined history of animal rights and feminism. She suggests that the domination of nature, which has its origins in postmedieval Western male psychology, is seen by cultural feminists as the fundamental reason behind animal abuse and the oppression of women along with the environment (Donovan, "Animal Rights" 360). Thus, she provides a scholarly relation by analyzing several authors that, unknowingly, have drawn the feminist-vegetarian connection. Adams's book is oriented to provide arguments and explanations and the aforementioned connection. She presents the main idea that "meat is a constant for men, intermittent for women" (Adams, *Sexual Politics* 48), exploring the famine situations in different parts of the world, the cookbooks and publicity biased targeting of recipes and products, the semantics of words related to meat and words related to plants, and the ancient dynamics of the role of the 'hunter'. She coins a key concept, as I have stated, that is worth calling attention to, which is the absent referent, referring to how "through butchering, [...] animals in name and body are made absent as animals for meat to exist"

(Adams, *Sexual Politics* 65). Meat normativity, too, is very relevant in her theory, and it is further explored by Heinz and Lee in a paper regarding the way that meat is constructed culturally. I will tackle these concepts in my analysis of the book by providing a more detailed elaboration and by showing how they apply to the novel.

In terms of objection, Kathryn Paxton George is one of the authors that criticized vegetarian ecofeminism, with her article "Should Feminists Be Vegetarians?" (1994) and her book *Animal, Vegetable, or Woman? A Feminist Critique of Ethical Vegetarianism* (2000). Both works gained attention from Adams and Donovan, as well as from the younger researcher Sheri Lucas. In the 1995 fall edition of the *Signs* journal, the first two responded to the question posed by George, and counteracted the critical remarks that the latter wrote. Donovan denounced the misrepresentation of ethical vegetarian theory, George's use of the naturalistic fallacy[1], the lack of supporting evidence and the misleading analogies (Donovan, "Comment"); while Adams criticized the reduction of vegetarianism to merely quantifiable nutritional resources that fail to acknowledge the normativity of eating animals, George's definition of vegetarianism —which includes fish— and the male-centered view that overlooks feminist-vegetarian theories (Adams, "Comment"). As I have mentioned, Lucas, too, defended the feminist-vegetarian connection, claiming in the 2005 winter edition of *Hypatia* that even though "George finds the feminist-vegetarian connection wrought with internal contradictions and oppressive assumptions" she still "retains her censure of cruelty, violence, and waste and her belief that raising and killing animals in conditions of frustration of natural behaviors or of pain and suffering is morally wrong" (Lucas 156). Thus, George herself is being

[1] Philosophical ethics term which claims that ethical ideals should be constructed based on empirical 'norms'.

contradictory and inconsistent, while at the same time adopting a male-centered view and privileged interpretation of the issue.

In sum, although the ultimate aim of vegetarian ecofeminism is to eradicate all forms of oppression, its principles emphasize the links that exist between the abuse of nonhuman animals and the discrimination of women. The two are treated as commodities by males in the patriarchal discourse, yet in distinct ways: nonhuman animals are viewed as food, and women are viewed as sex objects. [2]

0.4. Outline

This dissertation aims to apply vegetarian ecofeminist theory to *The Edible Woman* in order to demonstrate the presence of many reminders of the oppressive connection between animals and women in the writing of this story. I intend to determine if the novel analyzed highlights the primary issues and points of debate within vegetarian ecofeminism by presenting Marian's situation in relation to that of animals and meat. Additionally, the examination of the novel's ending seeks to prove the inferior status associated with vegetarianism and the existence of meat normativity.

In the first section I explore Marian's aversion of food, especially meat, as a result of considering it to be 'alive', and how it leads to unintentional compassion for animals. To achieve this, I select the most pertinent passages from the book to serve as examples, and I study the idea of the absent referent in order to better comprehend how Atwood accomplishes this. I also examine the contrasting representations of masculine and female characters; men being related to meat and activity, while women are related to vegetables

[2] For further research, some other scholars and activists to consult that are not mentioned here include Marti Kheel, Birke, Deane Curtin, Greta Gaar, Zoe Hawkins, Brian Luke, Jim Mason, and Deborah Slicer.

and inactivity. The second section of this dissertation focuses on analyzing Marian connection not with meat and the liveliness of it, but with the actual life of animals. I tackle the hunter and prey dynamics to illustrate that, and I also examine the dynamics of Ainsley and Len, the relationship of which slightly switches the roles. I highlight the echoes of the actual hunter-prey dynamic that exists in the world of hunting by analyzing the nature of their connections, significant scenes in the novel, and Atwood's choice of language. Lastly, I explore how the other characters respond to Marian's journey with food, and how it reveals society's ignorance of the vegetarian movement. In a similar vein, the book's ending is examined to uncover the truth about meat eating and how it demonstrates the normativity of its socially constructed norms.

1. "It was flesh and blood, rare, and she had been devouring it.": The Absent Referent in Meat and Vegetable Women

In order to start my analysis, Marian's connection with food and meat consumption needs to be explored. Throughout the first half of the book, Marian eating habits are very much healthy and conventional. She is aware of her hunger queues: "I was hungry again. I had been eating in bits and pieces all day and I had been counting on something nourishing and substantial" (Atwood, *Edible* 24) and has several dinner dates with her partner Peter and her friends, which follow their normal course. However, Marian's initial comfort with conventional eating habits and, generally, her lifestyle, feel threatened when she gets engaged to Peter. Simultaneously, the narrating voice in the novel switches from first to third person, and she starts to view life with much more detachment. Despite her previously constant cravings, in occasions she starts to feel less hungry (Atwood, *Edible* 135). The crucial moment to understand her journey with her appetite and its connection

with vegetarian ecofeminist theory can be found in chapter 17, when Peter and Marian go out for dinner. They order Filet Mignon, Peter's decision. At the beginning, when Marian is served the plate, she actually wants to eat, since she "[is] so hungry she would have liked to devour the steak at one gulp" (Atwood, *Edible* 181). However, when she starts eating, she starts simultaneously to reflect on Peter. She acknowledges how before getting engaged, he would not even notice her or look at her too much. Conversely, now "he would focus his eyes on her face, concentrating on her as though if he looked hard enough, he would be able to see through her flesh and her soul and into the workings of her brain" (182-183). This makes her feel uncomfortable, as if she were some kind of creature to be scrutinized and dissected, "feeling that she [is] on a doctor's examination table" (183). She feels exploited by this idea of her and starts to get absent-minded at dinner. In this precise moment is when she switches from eating the steak to playing with her salad: "[s]he wanted a piece of tomato. [...] She spiked and devoured a black olive from her salad" (183). Adams' statement that "our minds move from objectified being to consumable food" (*Sexual Politics* 75-76) is very relevant to understand this switch, because she starts feeling objectified before even seeing how Peter cuts the steak: "[s]he watched the capable hands holding the knife and fork, slicing precisely with an exact adjustment of pressures. How skillfully he did it: no tearing, no ragged edges. And yet it was a violent action, cutting; and violence in connection with Peter seemed incongruous to her" (Atwood, *Edible* 184). As Mijomanović hints, "he [is] metaphorically cutting her" (72), hence, this symbol entangles women and animals, uniting them as flesh to be devoured, used, and discarded. Seeing him "operating" on the steak like that, verb which takes us back to her thoughts on feeling as if she was on a doctor's table, also reminds Marian of the Moose Beer commercials, whose surveys' she had worked on:

> "The fisherman wading in the stream, scooping the trout into his net, was too tidy [...] And the fish also was unreal; it had no slime, no teeth, no smell; it was a clever toy, metal and enamel. The hunter who had killed a deer stood posed and urbane, no twigs in his hair, his hands bloodless. Of course you didn't want anything in an advertisement to be ugly or upsetting; it wouldn't do, for instance, to have a deer with its tongue sticking out." (Atwood, *Edible* 184)

Moreover, she also recollects a story from the news, in which a young boy killed nine people with a rifle, but Marian perceives that "he wasn't the kind who would hit anyone with his fist or even use a knife. When he chose violence it was a removed violence, a manipulation of specialized instruments, the finger guiding but never touching, he himself watching the explosion from a distance" (184). These two recollections show violence, but the type of violence is essential to understand its connections with animals. Meat is the food, but behind it there is always a dead animal. However, society, language, and the meat industry, hide the brutal violence exercised on animals. In the Moose ad, everything is tidy, and there is no mess made by the dead fish; the dead deer appears almost as if it were posing. To be appealing for consumers, dead animals cannot be disgusting or unpleasant; they need to be presented as appealing and edible. Similarly, the shooter from the news willingly kills people, but there is no proximity and rawness of the death, he is killing them from a distance. In both cases, extreme violence has been exerted, but it is not fully recognized. In language, animals to be eaten are never referred to by their actual name; instead, we hear pork for pig, beef for cattle, or venison for deer. This is rather unfortunate because it takes away their identity. The culmination of Marian's contemplation comes when she thinks of

> "the diagram of the planned cow at the front of one of her cookbooks: the cow with lines on it and labels to show you from which part of the cow all the different cuts were taken. What they were eating now was from some part of the back, she thought: cut on the dotted line. She could see rows of butchers somewhere in a large room, a butcher school, sitting at tables, clothed in spotless white, each with a pair of kindergarten scissors, cutting out steaks and ribs and roasts from the stacks of brown-paper cow-shapes before them. The

> cow in the book, she recalled, was drawn with eyes and horns and an udder. It stood there quite naturally, not at all disturbed by the peculiar markings painted on its hide." (185)

Stanković & Vlašković point out that by mentioning Planned Cow, the narrator "hint[s] at the possibility that like those animals, Marian's position as a woman, is predestined, already known. She identifies herself with the planned animals and therefore cannot eat them, because eating them would mean [...] accepting her role in the system in which she is like an animal" (232-233). In addition to this, although without animals there is no meat to consume, when meat is sold and eaten, the referent of it is absent. If an animal is alive, it cannot be meat. However, when it is dead, it replaces its role and turns into meat. Therefore, despite them being imperative in the act of eating meat, they are absent, not there in body and mind, but only in flesh. "They have been transformed into food" (Adams, *Sexual Politics* 65). Marian, or better said, Marian's body, becomes aware of this, and after realizing it, that is when she is unable to eat her steak: she "suddenly saw it as a hunk of muscle. Blood red. Part of a real cow that once moved and ate and was killed, knocked on the head as it stood in a queue like someone waiting for a streetcar" (Atwood, *Edible* 185). Hence, she sheds light to animal cruelty by bringing to reality the actual animal and its actual experience. As Drewett puts it, "the normally absent living animal is cognitively restored to the idea of meat and is no longer just an object for consumption. Through this process of restoring the absent referent, the activity of meat eating is interrupted" (20). I combine both Stanković & Vlašković and Drewett ideas because the absent referent coined by Adams' can metaphorically represent anything. "In this case the original meaning of animals' fates is absorbed into a human-centered hierarchy. Specifically in regard to rape victims and battered women, the death experience of animals acts to illustrate the lived experience of women" (Adams, *Sexual Politics* 67). Therefore, Marian is connecting not the human, but more specifically the female

experience, to the animals' one. As Atwood writes, "now it was suddenly there in front of her with no intervening paper, it was flesh and blood, rare, and she had been devouring it" (*Edible* 185).

Further in the novel, Marian rules out any meat option, now that she has already acknowledged the absent referent, and becomes aware of many stories that she is told, with incidents similar to this one:

> "Hamburger after a funny story of Peter's about a friend of his who had got some analysed just for a joke and had discovered it contained groundup mouse hairs; pork because Emmy during a coffee break had entertained them with an account of trichinosis and a lady she knew who got it—she mentioned the name with almost religious awe ("She ate it too pink in a restaurant, just think, all those little things curled up in her muscles and they can't ever get them out''); and mutton and lamb because Duncan had told her the etymology of the word "giddy": it came, he said, from "gid," which was a loss of equilibrium in sheep caused by large white worms in their brains. Even hot dogs had been ruled out; after all, her stomach reasoned, they could mash up any old thing and stick it in there." (218-219)

However, Marian's body's refusal of food doesn't stop at meat; it goes beyond that, revealing that she "concluded that the stand it had taken was an ethical one: it simply refused to eat anything that had once been, or [...] might still be living" (220). She stops eating eggs after Len's story in chapter 18, when he discovers Ainsley is pregnant with his baby and cannot fathom the idea. He shares that his own mother made him eat an egg that he thought had "a little chicken inside it [...] a little beak and little claws and everything. . . ." (196). With this anecdote, Marian gains new perspectives on the living in food —in this example, unborn chicks. Thus, that Marian also stops eating foods that are not meat still makes sense, because she perceives as if they had been or are alive. In chapter 20, she needs to add carrots to the list of everything she cannot eat, because when looking at one, she starts overthinking and imagines it alive:

> "It's a root, she thought, it grows in the ground and sends up leaves. Then they come along and dig it up, maybe it even makes a sound, a scream too low for us to hear, but it doesn't die right away, it keeps on living, right now it's still alive… She thought she felt it twist in her hands." (220)

As Ferreira points out, "Marian progressively comes to reject even vegetables and fruit, developing a sense of concern against eating vegetables which might be alive and have a type of plant consciousness" (153). This consciousness develops to even reach the more artificial and less natural foods. Even if the substitutes, such as the canned pudding, had once been safe, she finally rejects them as well. Previously, as Lahikainen states, "the synthetic nature of the pudding suggest[ed] that it [was] safe: it [did] not threaten Marian's denial, it [did] not remind her of anything real" (63). In fact, it was a "comfort" food for her because "she could rely on it [and] it provided bulk" (Atwood, *Edible* 253). Here I remind that Marian's journey is not one of an eating disorder; she actually wants to eat, but her body does not permit her to do so, which is common in times of emotional trauma and stress. However, when she visualizes the canned rice pudding as a "collection of small cocoons with miniature living creatures inside" (253), she fully rules it out. Even cake revolts her at one point, when she feels it "spongy and cellular against her tongue" and proceeds to spit it out (258). All of these examples show that Marian is able to see further than just a piece of meat, an egg, a vegetable or a canned pudding. She perceives humanity in these elements as if she gained consciousness of the cruelty happening to almost anything non-human. Drewett agrees when she writes that

> "even in these examples of nonanimal foods that her body rejects, there is a common theme: what she connects with them is the idea of something that is living, that can experience pain, suffering or death, especially through her eating of that food. Even though these foods are not from animals, they metonymically stand for foods that require the death of something living in order for them to be foods. In this way, all of the foods that she stops eating represent a living animal that is killed to become meat." (20)

At the same time, she is identifying herself with these "victims", in her role as a woman. To completely understand this, consider Sanchez-Grant argument:

> "[t]his is reflected in the constructed oppositions of culture and nature, and reason and emotion. If the mind is allied with culture and reason, then it follows that the body is associated with all that is 'other'. Historically, women have been defined by their 'biological potentiality', and the female reproductive system has worked to reduce women to the sum of their child-bearing parts (Morgan and Scott: 11). If woman is inextricably associated with the body, and the body is regarded as being somehow inferior to the mind – the carnal flesh to which the elevated mind is shackled – then woman surely *is* inferior." (78)

Hence, we associate the female with body, flesh, uncontrollable emotion, nature, a tool; while the male would occupy the position of mind, thus, reason, logic, power, culture, and control. Furthermore, as Adams elaborates, when meat "carries resonances of power, the power it evokes is male" (*Sexual Politics* 75). In advertisement for meat goods, for example, men are most likely to be associated with images of strong individuals grilling meat for themselves or others, therefore with agency. Also, phrases such as 'bringing home the bacon' reinforce this idea. Conversely, when we refer to meat with weak connotations, we are provided with images of animals and women. 'Meat', in fact, turns into a word used by both feminists and patriarchy to describe women's oppression—that is, to call them 'pieces of meat' (Adams, *Sexual Politics*). Once again, in advertisement, women tend to be presented under clothed or/and in a suggestive manner next to meat, like the "It'll blow your mind away" Burger King campaign, which alluded to oral sex and a seven-inch burger.[3] In this case, both the woman and the animal in the form of meat are deprived of agency. As a consequence, animals and women are put in the same bag,

[3] 2009 Burger King ad campaign that showed a woman with her mouth open and a burger hovering in front of it, with the tagline "It'll blow your mind away. Fill your desire for something long, juicy and flame-grilled with the New BK Super Seven Incher."

almost equaling them in this inferior position. Just like that, meat becomes not only a physical thing, but an idea and ideology that represents much more.

It is also thought-provoking how male and female characters are described in the novel. As Mijomanović points out, "the female principle is always represented through plants, while the male is represented through carnivorous actions" (72). In real life cases of rape, for instance, it is common to use the word 'predator' to refer to the man as an assaulter. In contrast, femininity is depicted with expressions such as 'a rose among thorns', 'as delicate as a flower', or 'in full bloom'. In the case of the book here analyzed, the women in the hair salon are described as "electric mushroom[s]" (Atwood, *Edible* 263) and Clara is described as plant-like on several occasions. Some of the pictures include "a bulbous tuber that had sent out four thin white roots and a tiny pale-yellow flower" (31) or presenting "gigantic pumpkin-like growth" (138). Ainsley's descriptions slightly diverge, since being a more progressive and aggressive woman, she has some of the carnivorous, male elements (Mijomanović). She is characterized once as a "squirrel" (Atwood, *Edible* 169), which despite being an animal, is definitely not carnivorous nor dangerous, and also as a "pitcher-plant" (89), combining both the vegetable-like nature and the predatory attitudes she has towards Len. In contrast, Peter is described in the Mijomanović "carnivorous actions" previously mentioned, such as the fact that "his taste ran towards steak and roast beef: he did not care for peculiar things like sweetbreads, and he didn't like fish at all" (Atwood, *Edible* 180). His preferences are far from meaningless, because if meat is considered masculine, he is reasserting himself in society as a man. The fact that he does not like fish is not contradictory, because, as Lahikainen points out, "fish is a softer and more feminine food, not so reminiscent of human flesh" (72). His taste reflecting his identity is also reinforced by Adams. She states that "one's maleness is reassured by the food one eats" (*Sexual Politics* 58) and that, usually, "men who

become vegetarians challenge an essential part of the masculine role. They are opting for women's food. How dare they? […] Men who choose not to eat meat repudiate one of their masculine privileges" (63). Therefore, what Peter rejects and what he embraces is symbolic, he is making an effort to distance himself from things which are usually equated as unfavorable in manhood, including femininity and homosexuality, and at the same time emphasizing his maleness and straightness. As opposed to Peter, Clara's husband Joe is not exactly described in the same way. Marian pictures "a large globular pastry, decorated with whipped cream and maraschino cherries, floating suspended in the air above Joe's head" (Atwood, *Edible* 297). This is so because Joe is one of those men that unknowingly is slightly challenging his prescribed maleness. He takes on a significant amount of household chores, including cooking, cleaning, and childcare, and he supports marriage as a means of protecting women. As a result, he plays the role of father, in contrast to Len, who is known for being a womanizer. Len is well-known for being attracted to younger women, especially if they are virgins, and fooling around with them but then he is typically against getting married. Fundamentally, Len's attitude represents the unjust expectations placed on women in patriarchal societies. Even Duncan, which as I will argue in the next section is sort of Marian's escape from the animalistic dynamic, is described as "cadaverously thin" (53). Despite it not being a strong and vital portrait, it still implies a human-like nature, because the cadaverous associated with this adverb tend to be that of a human skeleton. Nonetheless, returning to the female descriptions, in the office Christmas party in chapter 19, Atwood provides an exhaustive and thorough description of Marian's colleagues, and what she observes in them. She perceives them as "ripe" (205), or in other words, ready to be consumed, in what she previously calls "the mature figure [or] fat" (205). Fat is used not precisely as a physical descriptive term, but

rather, in this context, in connection to the aforementioned ripe idea, as in full and brimming:

> "They were ripe, some rapidly becoming overripe, some already beginning to shrivel; she thought of them as attached by stems at the tops of their heads to an invisible vine, hanging there in various stages of growth and decay . . . in that case, thin elegant Lucy, sitting beside her, was merely at an earlier stage, a springtime green bump or nodule forming beneath the careful golden calyx of her hair. . ." (205)

Thus, although they are all in different stages, they are all perceived as vegetable or fruit-like. She starts seeing them as a reflection of her own identity: "She was one of them, her body the same, identical, merged with that other flesh that choked the air in the flowered room with its sweet organic scent; she felt suffocated by this thick sargasso-sea of femininity" (206). It gets so scary for her that she feels like she needs "something solid, clear: a man" (206), because maleness contrasts the vegetable-state and fluidity that femininity represents. These observations align with those made by Adams:

> "Vegetable [...] represents the least desirable characteristics: suggesting or like a vegetable, as in passivity or dullness of existence, monotonous, inactive. Meat is something one enjoys or excels in, vegetable becomes representative of someone who does not enjoy anything: a person who leads a monotonous, passive, or merely physical existence […] To vegetate is to lead a passive existence; just as to be feminine is to lead a passive existence." (*Sexual Politics* 60)

So, the idea that women are like plants has led to the terms related to flora being used as a synonym for women's passivity, and this can be seen all throughout the book. Atwood goes as further as to write that "during the later, more vegetable stage of Clara's pregnancy [Marian] had tended to forget that Clara had a mind at all" (*Edible* 158). This passage reveals the degree to which Marian considers how women's lives are defined by their physicality and deprive them of their intellectual identity, especially when they are pregnant. Clara is not only living a life of passivity, but she is perceived as boring, with no aspirations, and devoid of any intellectual stimulation or pleasure. Clara's situation

supports this claim, since she dropped out of college to have a family, and now all she seems to do is have children and rest. Therefore, the dehumanization of women in this way draws attention to the way society tends to see femininity as a physicality and inactivity, which feeds into the repressive assumptions about the identities and duties of women.

When Marian realizes she would be "expect[ed] to leave her job" because "newly-weds [...] were inclined to be unstable" (Atwood *Edible* 207), it is precisely in this instant, that she truly recognizes her fate as a woman. Hence, her mood gets ruined because she realizes she is "lost to the Pension Plan forever" (207). I suggest a parallel with the fate assigned to animals. Just like Ainsley, who in this case represents society, believes women should "have at least one baby [...] [because] it fulfills your deepest femininity" and to give them "a sense of purpose" (43), animals, too, are subjected to this idea of predetermined course. It is their role to become meat, as well as to produce, in this case, milk or eggs or honey. Marian, from an external point of view, is willingly participating in the organization of the wedding and she is apparently satisfied with her life. In the case of animals, there is the common belief that animals do not suffer because they are born and raised in the context of production and that they know they will end up slaughtered. Adams affirms that popular culture and advertising show that animals desire to be eaten, highlighting examples such as Charlie the Tuna[4] and Al Capp's Shmoo[5] (*Sexual Politics* 82-83). As a result, there is the implication that women and animals are aware of their

[4] Tuna cartoon mascot for the StarKist Tuna brand, who desperately wants to be chosen and eaten, but is constantly rejected.
[5] Fictional cartoon creature in the comic strip Li'l Abner, that behaves as an animal and claims to be delicious to eat and eager to be eaten.

duty, and are willingly participating, thus, making them almost aiders and abettors of the crimes committed against them.

2. "She could not let him catch her this time": The Hunter and the Prey

To get a deeper understanding of the vegetarian feminist connection, the predator-prey relationships that emerge in the book need to be explored. This analysis, as Drewett also argues, reveals that the intertwined oppressions of women and animals are not just apparent in Marian's connection with meat consumption, but also in the way she relates to being prey in hunting scenarios (Drewett 23). The clearest example for my argument can be found in chapter 8; it occurs when Peter, Len, Ainsley and Marian are at the bar and Peter tells a hunting story:

> "'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, "You know hot to gut them, you just slit *her* down the belly and give *her* a good hard shake and all the guts'll 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. All over me, what a mess, rabbit guts dangling from the trees, god the trees were red for yards…'" (Atwood, *Edible* 80, my emphasis)

After he tells the anecdote, Marian tries to imagine the scene, but she realizes she "couldn't see the rabbit" (80). I believe this is so because she sees herself in it, rather than in the actual human in the story, Peter. This makes her feel disconnected and distant from him, and without even noticing, she starts crying: "I realized with horror that it was a tear. I must be crying then!" (81). By psychically detaching herself from her body, as Parker points out, she attempts to remove herself from her victimization experience and safeguard certain aspects of her selfhood (Parker 366). This also occurs in the dream that Marian has earlier in the novel, where she "had looked down and seen [her] feet beginning

to dissolve, [...] and [her] fingers were turning transparent" (Atwood, *Edible* 47), which foreshadows the loss of her own identity throughout the story; as well as when she is in the bath and she watches her body in the water and gets "afraid that she was dissolving, coming apart layer by layer" (274). Moreover, the fact that Peter refers to the rabbit as female is illustrative to see once again the connection between women and animals. Adams' states that "one way in which animals are oppressed is by associating them with women's lesser status, and vice versa" (qtd. in Drewett 24). Thus, the hunter is human and male, and the prey is animal and female. Additionally, in the theory provided by Adams' there is also the discussion prompt of what pronouns to use when referring to animals. There is no common consensus to whether one should call animals "it," "she," or "he", but when referring to them as female, it "demonstrates how in talking about the fate of animals we invoke femaleness" (Adams, *Sexual Politics* 102). Therefore, the pronouns used in Peter's story are not only so that Marian connects with it, but also signaling a "vanquished power, a soon-to-be-killed powerless animal" because "male animals become symbolically female, representing the violated victim of male violence" (103). In addition, the violent language used by Peter is also a display of vocabulary we too use in society. His detachment when telling such a violent story quite reflects the tendency to normalize these types of acts on animals, and how language perpetuates this happening. Idioms such as 'beat a dead horse', 'bring home the bacon' or 'kill two birds with one stone' are still commonly used by a great number of English speakers. As PETA[6] reminds, although these expressions may appear innocuous, they have deeper meanings and can convey conflicting messages about how people and animals should interact. Therefore, Marian's horror not only comes from hearing the brutality of the story, but

[6] a.k.a: *People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals,* an American animal rights nonprofit organization.

also connecting it with the mistreatment of animals, and identifying with it. As Drewett points out, “she seems to recognise this in how she identifies with the rabbit and starts to see Peter as a threat” (24). This underscores why she feels the need to “beg[i]n to run” (Atwood, *Edible* 83) when they leave. The scene where she runs away imitates the dynamic of the hunter and the prey, with Peter alongside Len, and Marian, respectively as the characters. The way Atwood describes how at the beginning Marian is “filled with the exhilaration of speed” but then she realized “it was no longer a game” (86) suggests that she first acts from her animalistic instincts, since she feels threatened and as if she had nowhere to go. Even after she is “caught” and they get to Len’s apartment, she still retains some behaviors that are reminiscent of rabbits: “feeling threatened, Marian finds a place to hide, like a rabbit going underground to escape a predator” (Drewett 24). Finally, the culmination of this scene and metaphor arrives when, after once again Marian is trying to escape from Peter by choosing to walk home alone, he ends up proposing to her. Reading about how Marian feels during the whole night, the fact that she says yes may come as a surprise, but it should not be regarded as such. An engagement is, traditionally, the capstone of any conventional relationship, the same as when an animal being hunted is finally shot. Marian, like an animal who masters deception in order to survive in the wild world, she too adopts deceptive strategies of disguise. While some birds pretend to be tree stumps and large cats employ mottled coats to blend into their surroundings, Marian accepts Peter’s proposal and tries to adhere to the lifestyle that is pushed upon her.

In this context, Duncan is crucial for her to get a sense of escape. One might examine Duncan's personality in comparison to Peter's because he represents the predator, whereas Duncan is less conventional and more docile. Marian's encounters with Duncan —especially in non-traditional contexts— emphasize her efforts to break free from the

predator-prey dynamic. Even he uses her as an escape from reality and is very clear that he does not want her as anything else. Therefore, they are using each other reciprocally. Most of the times they meet without previously arranging it, and their relationship shows a sort of balance between pursuer and pursued. On most occasions, he is the one finding her, but Marian too finds herself thinking about and looking for him. Duncan strikes her from the beginning: even after only being to his apartment once, "she remembered the way to [it] perfectly" (Atwood, *Edible* 165). Her fixation shows he is a getaway for her. When they meet in the laundromat on the first occasion, Marian is overwhelmed, but after being with him "[her] restlessness of the afternoon had vanished; [she] felt in control of the whole white space of the laundromat" (120). This extract illustrates the contrast Duncan supposes in opposition to her lifestyle with Peter, and his fiancé's subtle ways of controlling her that often go unnoticed. Duncan is the one Marian turns to when she, once again, decides to run away, because "it all depended on getting as far as Duncan: he would know what to do" (307). In this case, her runaway occurs during the engagement party, but now "she could not let [Peter] catch her this time" (308). What has triggered her on this occasion are the photographs Peter is taking, which is another portrayal of her identification with preys.

Before delving into this, I consider Len and Ainsley's dynamic as a slight counter-narrative. As I have stated in the anterior chapter, Len is a womanizer that takes advantage of young women and discards them afterwards. He is represented as a hunter who is extremely patient in order to achieve his goals. However, as Lahikainen shows, his portrayal is switched to that of a victim of Ainsley, the female hunter: "Len and Ainsley want each other, but they want different things and try to hide what they want [...]. He thinks he is the hunter in the relationship with Ainsley and is especially careful with his strategy with her. During [the novel], Len's identity as a hunter gradually dissolves"

(Lahikainen 75). I have already exhibited how due to being more assertive and progressive than the other female characters, Ainsley is described differently. In this context, one could argue she exhibits some of the male predatory tendencies. This is true, because when Peter and Marian go out to meet Len, she appears dressed as a young girl to fit Len's taste. She performs that role very well: "'Gosh Marian, [...] you didn't tell me this was a *bar*. I sure hope they don't ask me for my birth certificate'" (Atwood, *Edible* 77). Since Len is a potential candidate, she needs to make sure he is fit to be the father. When Marian complains to her about her strategic plan, she simply claims "[she is] not going to *do* anything to him" and that "it won't hurt" (82). Next, she begins planning everything: the date of the impregnation, in order to have the baby in the spring or early summer; how she will coax Len to end up having sex with her; and how after Len refuses to act as a father to the baby, "[she]'ll simply have to get another one" (269). Nevertheless, I agree with Lahikainen's point that "women and men hunt in different ways. Male predatory behavior is more transparent and visible than female. Women are preying, but in a more hidden and seemingly passive manner. They aim at attracting men and thus getting a grip of them" (71). Ainsley's hunting is still dangerous but diverges from the violent and dominant male hunting. She does not present overt displays of power or dominance like traditional male hunters, but instead uses cunning and strategy. She understands Len's nature and exploits it, strategizing actions to achieve her goals. This is an example of a special form of power that is psychological rather than physical. Furthermore, Ainsley's "hunt" is motivated by a specific, private goal: reproduction. Her goals are self-focused and pragmatic, emphasizing her agency and freedom to choose how she wants to reproduce. Lastly, Ainsley's search for Len is empowering, as opposed to male hunting, which often maintains the pre-existing autonomy and authority that men have and reinforces male power.

Returning to Peter's photographs, they present a deeper threat to Marian, because they materialize her hunted reality with Peter. After the rabbit story, Peter remarks how funny the experience was, and "lucky thing Trigger and me had the old cameras along, we got some good shots of the whole mess" (Atwood, *Edible* 80). They take a picture to immortalize the moment, in order to be able to relive it again after it has already happened. That is very common within hunter culture, where one can find pictures of hunters holding their prey, for example, a big fish or bird, after they have killed them. This concept is perceived by Marian in the engagement party, and she once again feels threatened by Peter. When she gets to his room before the event, she points out "the books and the guns" (287), a mix of his intelligence and logic, with his hunter and violent side. On this backdrop is where Peter wants to take Marian's shot; a smart use of the word, since although Atwood could have used picture or photo, shot represents how Marian feels. She gets very tense after Peter's demand of "stand[ing] over there by the guns" (291) in order to take a picture, and she feels as if she cannot move. He ends up not being able to take it, and Marian feels relieved, but during the party she starts to really get paranoid about her future with him. She wants to think "there had to be something more" (306), but she realizes Peter, with his camera in his hand, is all there really is for her. Then, she sees the flash of the camera and completely panics. That Peter takes a picture of Marian means that she will be immortalized in that moment forever, and that "she [has] to get out before it [is] too late" (307). This understanding of her situation parallels that of animals forever dead in their pictures taken. She is afraid of life being always like this, of looking exactly like that moment. Her fate is the same as that of animals trying to live freely in nature, but hunters coming to shoot them. The destined gunshot for animals is the destined snapshot of Marian; if she avoids it and runs away, she will avoid her fate as a woman, same as if an animal were able to run away and survive. As Atwood writes it, "[s]he could

not let him catch her this time. Once he pulled the trigger she would be stopped, fixed indissolubly in that gesture, that single stance, unable to move or change" (*Edible* 308).

3. "Everyone eats cows, it's natural": Meat Normativity and the Vegetarian Crank

In this last segment of my analysis, I aim to shed light on how, even though *The Edible Woman* can be read through vegetarian ecofeminist theory, the characters as well as the plot still maintain common and accepted ideas on vegetarianism and meat normativity, likely reflecting Atwood's intentional critique. Within Marian's circle, everyone interprets her struggle with food in different ways. Clara supposes it is due to "bridal nerves" (Atwood, *Edible* 257), Marian's mother "set[s] her strange loss of appetite down to overexcitement" (215), and Ainsley is constantly trying to add deeper meanings to it: "she would have said it was something wrong with Marian's sex life, [...] or some traumatic experience in her childhood" (254) or her common remark of "you're rejecting your femininity!" (345). Only Duncan adds a new layer of supposition by stating that Marian is "probably representative of modern youth, rebelling against the system" (236). Nevertheless, it still has an ironic tone and a superficial conclusion since Duncan tends to draw drastic conclusions very easily. All of these reactions try to explain her new diet in a sensible way, since society tends to view any not omnivorous diet as silly. Meat consumption is very much present in western diets, and when this normalized habit is challenged, people cannot find it rational. Even Marian herself is baffled by her rejection of meat: ""This is ridiculous," she lectured herself. "Everyone eats cows, it's natural; you have to eat to stay alive, meat is good for you, it has lots of proteins and minerals""'(185-186). According to Drewett,

> "the way that Marian reacts to her body's rejection of meat reveals not only how meat eating is normative, but also how animals are socially constructed as meat. [...] That she deems it natural to eat cows reflects how animals are ontologised as creatures for meat, that "[f]lesh is a cultural construct made to seem natural and inevitable."" (21)

I have previously argued about the ideas of dead animals and meat, but Drewett makes a thought-provoking point. Meat normativity is so intrinsic in society, that it feels as if one could not live without it. Therefore, I connect this with Adams' commentary:

> "[i]n a situation where flesh is consumed, vegetarians inevitably call attention to themselves. They have made something absent on their plates; perhaps a verbal demurral has been required as well. They then are drawn into a discussion regarding their vegetarianism. Frequently, someone is present who actually feels hostile to vegetarianism and regards it as a personal challenge. If this is the case, all sorts of outrageous issues are thrown out to see how the vegetarian will handle them." (*Sexual Politics* 123)

Considering this, it makes sense that Marian worries about how others will handle her dietary restrictions, whether it is her that is hosting a dinner, or if she is going to someone else's house. In her family's Christmas dinner, "she had thought of saying she had taken up a new religion that forbade her to eat meat, Yoga or Doukhobor or something" (Atwood, *Edible* 215); and when she invites Clara and Joe for dinner "she realized that the menu would be a major problem" (218). She ends up serving them a casserole with mushrooms and meatballs, but she lowers the light so that they will not notice she is not eating the meatballs. This illustrates how she is the one to adapt to the pre-established normal behavior of eating, because she is the freak in the equation. Even Peter, who being her partner should be the one to accept her the most, is also ashamed of her and bothered: "[o]ne incident like that in a restaurant had been enough. Peter had been terribly nice about it [...]; he'd driven her straight home and helped her up the stairs as though she was an invalid and insisted she must have the stomach-flu; but also had been embarrassed and (understandably) annoyed" (219-220). All of these inputs, as well as the ones in cookbooks or menus in restaurants, foment misunderstandings of the vegetarian cause,

and also misconceptions that lead to view vegetarians as freaks and cranks. Marian states multiple times that she cannot wait to be "normal" and start eating a "healthy and complete" diet again. She once says "I hope it's not permanent; I'll starve to death!" (Atwood, *Edible* 186), and on another occasion reflects on how "she felt like a rabbit, crunching all the time on mounds of leafy greenery. How she longed to become again a carnivore, to gnaw on a good bone!" (215). She even tries to reason with her own body, as if it were completely unreasonable to not want to eat anything that had once been alive. Hence, it is crucial to emphasize that Marian rejects the concept of becoming a vegetarian, even if her body is rebelling against eating meat: "I'm turning into a vegetarian, [...] one of those cranks" (187). To conclude my point, in Drewett words, "she sees her divergence from meat eating as abnormal and therefore undesirable. […] Marian battles with conflicts in meaning regarding meat eating, and her initial empathy with animals that become meat is soon overridden by the dominant cultural belief that it is abnormal to be vegetarian" (21). This last idea is essential to understand the end of the novel in my view.

That Marian goes back to eat meat shows how the real world works. She finds it impossible to see vegetarianism as an ethical alternative because of how ingrained meat normativity is in her life. As I have argued, vegetarians are not seen as rational and ethical, but rather as health fanatics and nonsensical. Marian then makes an effort to get back to normal because there is not enough room in her environment for Marian to develop her connection with animals. When she bakes the cake to give to Peter, she directs the slander that is commonly targeted to her and animals to the cake: "that's what will happen to you; that's what you get for being food. [...] She felt a certain pity for her creature but she was powerless now to do anything about it. Her fate had been decided" (Atwood, *Edible* 342). She also realizes that "Peter was not the enemy after all, he was just a normal human being like most other people" (343), because his behavior was so because he reflects the

traditional values of society. Marian's act is an attempt to materialize her experience as a woman, which connects with that of an animal, since language and comprehension from others has failed her. The attempt fails and the change she has undergone does not matter, since society does not permit her to keep this way. Thus, despite going through a transformation in the book, her circumstances remain the same. She goes back, as Duncan says, to "so-called reality" (Atwood, *Edible* 353).

4. Conclusions and Further Research

This thesis has aimed to analyze *The Edible Woman* in the vegetarian ecofeminist framework, in order to prove the interconnected oppression of animals and women, and its portrayal in the novel. Throughout the dissertation I have firstly explored Marian's gradual aversion of food in the context of perceiving it as 'alive', conducive to her unwitting sympathy for animals. To do so, I have chosen the most relevant scenes in the novel to illustrate it, and I have tackled the concept of the 'absent referent' to further understand how Atwood does it. In that same chapter I have too delved into the opposing portrayal of male and female characters, the first in connection to meat and activeness, and the second one in vegetables and passivity. Secondly, I have focused on the hunter and prey dynamics portrayed in the book, mainly that of Peter and Marian, but also the role-switching one of Ainsley and Len. By exploring the nature of their relationship, important scenes, and Atwood's choice of language I have pointed out the reminiscences of the real hunter and prey dynamic existing in the world of hunting. Lastly, I have explored the other characters' handling of Marian situation, reflecting of society's misunderstanding of the vegetarian cause. Along the same line, the analysis of the ending

of the book has additionally unearthed the reality of meat eating and how it reveals its normativity socially established.

A close reading of the novel as I have described, as well as of the secondary sources used and referenced, has allowed me to validate my thesis statement and to argue that *The Edible Woman* does reflect the main concerns and arguments within vegetarian ecofeminist theory, by portraying Marian's circumstances in connection with that of animals and meat, as well as how without fully realizing, she has made a connection with animals' lives. Furthermore, it has approved the existence of meat normativity and misjudgments of vegetarianism. In sum, it is a novel that not only illustrates feminism and the societal and cultural gender dynamics from its period, but it can be read even further. It sheds light on more contemporary issues, making it a progressive and forward-thinking piece of literature.

From this dissertation, my intention for future research would be going further deep into the exploration of the novel within the framework used. I believe there is, in general, insufficient research on vegetarian ecofeminist theory applied in the large variety of fiction books published nowadays, but mainly in the novel here studied. In the analysis provided of *The Edible Woman*, for the sake of length, I have omitted some aspects that I could not fully develop within the scope of my research, but that would be an issue of interest for further studies. It would be engaging to examine the issue of consumerism, which is tackled in the book, in connection to the mass production of kettle, and the serious repercussions it has on the environment and animals. Additionally, overviewing the history of gender roles in conjunction with the role of animals could provide a relevant link between the common perception of animals and nature as feminine, which is hinted in the novel, and the ancient but still prevailing understanding of men as hunters and providers. Although I have examined that, I believe there could be much more to write

on it. Furthermore, other Atwood's works, such as the *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003–13) which includes the concept of the 'monstrous vegan', could be read within the framework of this dissertation in order to obtain more relevant insights of her stylistic and thematic choices. In any case, further explorations of this topic in the Atwoodian context would be beneficial to obtain thought-provoking dissertations.

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