

THE TAMING OF EXTERNALS: A
LINGUISTIC STUDY OF CHARACTER
TRANSFORMATION IN MARGARET
ATWOOD'S THE EDIBLE WOMAN

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One focus of interest in the study of Atwood's novels is the character transformation of each heroine. My method of scrutinizing Marian's character transformation in *The Edible Woman* is through a stylistic analysis of her language. Before embarking upon analysis of the text, it is essential that we understand Atwood's narrative technique. The novel divides itself into three parts. In Part 1 Marian speaks in the first person singular; then in Part 2, which constitutes the main body of the text (18 chapters), the voice shifts from first to third person singular. But we must realize that this second voice also belongs to Marian, for in Part 3—the last chapter—where the voice returns to the first person again, Marian tells us:

Now that I was thinking of myself in the first person singular again I found my own situation much more interesting than his [Duncan's].¹

In other words, the whole narrative is presented through Marian's eyes. All the language in the novel is hers and can therefore be interpreted as a reflection of her changing psychological constitution.

Sherrill Grace, in her analysis of the book, claims that the speaker, in her drift from "I" to "she" then back to "I" again, learns very little if anything at all.² What I will attempt to show is that the protagonist makes a great deal of psychological headway. Not only does the split voice convey, as Grace claims, "Marian's . . . self-alienation" but it also allows her to objectify her experience, to stand back from herself as it were, and it is through this distancing process that she is able to emancipate herself from her initial role as victim.

¹Margaret Atwood, *The Edible Woman* (New York: Popular Library, 1969), p. 284. Future references will be in parentheses in the body of the essay.

²*Violent Duality: A Study of Margaret Atwood* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1980), p. 88.

She begins to make choices in her life by responding to her own inner feelings rather than only to the world of external appearances.

In order to achieve a deeper understanding of the progress the heroine makes we must give close attention to Marian's language, that is, Atwood's prose style. What I find most remarkable about her style is the way in which it correlates with the changes that occur in the heroine's self-perception. In order to examine Atwood's linguistic versatility more closely, I will compare the prose style of two parallel events in Marian's life. In chapter 20 she sets off for the supermarket to buy groceries for a dinner party she is having for her fiancé (Peter) and for her friends Clara and Joe. The auditory and visual gimmicks in the store overwhelm her so much that she barely survives the trip without buying everything in sight. And since she identifies so strongly with the food she has bought, it is equally difficult for her to prepare and eat the dinner. In the penultimate chapter Marian once again heads for the grocery store. This time, however, she goes to the store, gets what she wants, returns home and proceeds to bake and fashion a cake in the form of her own image. She even gives it a red dress, sequins, and well coiffed hair, simulating the way in which she was dressed for Peter's and her engagement party the night before. Her fashioning and eating of the cake signifies her recognition and rejection of her former compliant self, culminating in her new ability to respond to her own inner feelings.

In this study of Atwood's prose style I will first compare the two shopping excursions, then the two episodes where she prepares the food, and lastly the two points at which she eats what she has prepared. For the sake of concision I will refer to the first situation (the three events in chapter 20) as Sample 1 (S1) and the second situation (the three events found in chapter 30) as Sample 2 (S2).

The most prominent distinction to be made between the two shopping excursions is their length. In S1 Marian is so flummoxed that the shopping requires five pages of monologue while in S2 the shopping is described in one concise paragraph. Let's examine the difficulties she has in S1 and how they are overcome in S2.

Striking differences can be found in Atwood's use of verb forms. The six reflexive verb forms in S1 exemplify Marian's preoccupation with self-observation:

found herself
willing herself
watching herself

to defend herself
caught herself
convince herself

In fact, she is at three removes from reality:

She had caught herself lately watching herself with an abstracted curiosity, to see what she would do.

(p. 177)

It is as if she is watching her own dream, her own *mise en scène*, where she has no control of plot structure. No reflexive verb forms are found in S2: although the speaker may still be using the third person, she has moved from the position of observing the observer, to that of the observer. In S2 there is only one more layer to go to reach her inner self. Thus she is progressing from a dream world to reality.

Every verb (except the verb "found") in S1 relating to food choice belongs to the notional set of either physical action or sight:

<i>physical movement</i>	<i>sight</i>	("found" may be classified under the notion of location)
shot out (her hand)	glanced x2	
tossed	glared	
closed (her fingers)	looking	

There are no verbs which imply choice or desire. Having little control of events, Marian is like a puppet who stiffly shoots out her hand and closes her fingers around her purchases, a puppet whose strings are pulled by the consumer world. In contrast, none of the verbs associated with food selection in S2 belong to the set of physical movement or sight. Here they are related to selection and desire:

picking the things off the shelves
 she *wanted* everything new
 she didn't *want*

Marian has advanced from a puppet to a person who both acquires what she wants and rejects that which she does not want.

Our heroine's dependence upon oral speech in S1 further demonstrates her heavy dependence on externals. She carries a shopping list to guard herself from buying on impulse and reads aloud from her list:

"Beans" she said
 "Noodles" she said
 "Lettuce, radishes, carrots, onions, tomatoes, parsley" she read
 "Kleenex" she said (p. 177)

Since she is controlled by the dictates of an external, physical prop which forces her to buy only what she needs for a prescribed recipe, she completely represses her inner wants. Spontaneity is impossible. This list acts as a wall between her desires and the consumer world ("She had begun to defend herself with lists", p. 177). In S2 however, the list is abandoned and the barrier is removed:

[She] threw down the pencil after she had written several words.
She knew what she wanted to get.

(p. 274)

Now she allows herself to respond to inner, immediate desire (notice the verb "wanted").

A list of all the food lexemes and their modifiers will further clarify Marian's neurotic identification with food products. First, let's look at how they are configured in S1:

Anything with a bright label
two brands of *soap*
two cans of *tomato juice*
Which *tomato juice* can had the sexiest-looking label on it?
endless varieties and brands of *pasta*
noodles, stacks of them, identical in their cellopacks
tomatoes, hot-house pink and tasteless . . . prepackaged in card-
board and cellophane boxes of four
two flavours of canned *rice pudding*
canned *soup* section

Modifying the head are long, multiple and hyphenated descriptions regarding shape, colour, packaging and brands, modifiers and qualifiers which are so extensive that the outward covering of food takes priority over the food itself. The artificiality inherent in Marian's modifiers—especially the repetitions of "brand" and the four repetitions of "can"—reflect her distorted perception of food: she fails to recognize the real food that lies beneath its plastic layers. Just as the organic integrity of food is hidden under synthetic wrappings, Marian, throughout the novel, hides under her clothing: "Marian sat down on a chair, keeping her coat on as a shock-absorber" (p. 219). Another example of her need to conceal herself is seen in Duncan's plea for a "real" sexual experience:

"I mean if we went to bed, god knows you're unreal enough now, all I can think of is those layers and layers of woolly clothes you wear, coats and sweaters and so on. Sometimes I wonder

whether it goes on and on, maybe you're woollen all the way through . . .

Marian couldn't resist this appeal. She knew she wasn't woollen. (p. 207)

Marian's particular preoccupation with tomatoes and tomato juice further affirms her feeling of being edible, for it anticipates what she will look like in her red party dress. And since "tomato" is a slang term for a sexually attractive woman, "stacked" for well endowed breasts and "can" for womens' buttocks, it seems that Marian feels like a woman whose sexuality is strangely not inherent in her own person, but, rather, in her packaging: their labels are "sexy" and "bright," not the tomatoes themselves. Having no independent personality of her own, Marian sees labels (clothing) as alive and sensual, and food (her body) as "tasteless." Her whole identity is buried in consumerism.

The food lexemes in S2, on the other hand, are completely isolated, unmodified and placed in five short sentences, four of which are fragments with no verb:

Eggs. Flour. Lemons for the flavour. Sugar, icing-sugar, vanilla, salt, food-colouring . . . Chocolate—no, cocoa, that would be better.

(p. 275)

The food is now separate from Marian's person and has no power or personality of its own. The stripping away of verbs here underlines the food's inert nature. Packaging (consumer advertising) is no longer a concern, but rather, the food itself. Whereas before she preferred synthetic food—"she had no reservations about eating that [canned rice pudding], it tasted so synthetic" (p. 179)—she now insists upon natural foods such as eggs and flour; she is cultivating a taste for reality. She also marks a clear differentiation between food and what is associated with it, namely, decorations and cooking utensils. While her descriptions of food are all unadorned, the decorations and utensils are fairly heavily modified:

A glass tube full of round silver decorations. Three nesting plastic bowls, teaspoons, aluminium cake-decorator and a cake tin.

(p. 275)

These descriptions demonstrate her awareness that food is organic while the objects mentioned here are inorganic; they consist of

"glass . . . plastic . . . [and] aluminium." This new linguistic method Marian has of separating the organic from the inorganic suggests that she is now capable of imposing structure upon the consumer world rather than having it impose its structure upon her. Like the artist, she is learning how to impose form on matter.

The food lexemes have specific psychological collocates: in S1 grocery shopping is an allegory for marriage. The first sentence of the chapter reads,

Marian was walking slowly down the aisle, keeping pace with the gentle music that swelled and rippled around her. "Beans", she said.

(p. 176)

The supermarket aisle with its music is also a wedding aisle where Marian is incapable of knowing how to choose food or a husband; her world consists of a melding of consumerism and human relationships. The conflation of these two worlds is further highlighted by the woman/label/food/price collocation which occurs at the end of the shopping excursion:

They were having another of their sales-promoting special programmes, some sort of contest that would send the winner on a three-day trip to Hawaii. There was a big poster over the front window, a semi-nude girl (1) in a grass skirt and flowers (2), and beside it a small sign: PINEAPPLES (3), Three Cans 65¢ (4).

(p. 179)

1=woman, 2=labelling, 3=food, 4=price

Since Marian takes note of this sign just before leaving the store, her entrance is like a wedding while her departure is like a honeymoon where, in both instances, men and women are edible, marketable, sexual objects. The setting of S2, on the contrary, is realistic rather than allegorical. The store is just a store: the introductory sentence reads, "In the supermarket she went . . ." (p. 274). The initial locative phrase signifies that the speaker knows exactly where she is. She has moved from a dream-like state to reality.

The metaphors Marian uses to describe herself further exemplify her progression towards reality. In S1 she claims that every time she goes to the supermarket she feels like a cow:

. . . she remembered an article she had read about cows who gave more milk when sweet music was played to them.

(p. 177)

This analogy depicts a brainless, compliant creature who produces but does not consume. She also describes herself as a sleepwalker:

These days, if she wasn't careful, she found herself pushing the cart like a somnambulist, eyes fixed, swaying slightly, her hands twitching with the impulse to reach out and grab anything with a bright label.

(p. 177)

As with the verbs I described earlier which gave the impression of Marian as a puppet (cf.p.3), the metaphorical impression here is one of a person whose movements are completely dictated by her environment. In S2, in contrast, the speaker is busy buying materials from which she will construct a physical metaphor of her former self. Thus she converts from passive speculation about, to active reconstruction of, her personality.

Marian suffers greatly in S1 from a feeling of powerlessness. The supermarket, which represents the consumer world in microcosm, is a controlling, threatening force. This feeling of powerlessness with respect to her environment is evident in the speaker's syntax:

She looked at her watch; *she* didn't have much time. Luckily *they* were playing a tango. *She* wheeled rapidly towards the canned soup section, trying to shake the glaze out of her eyes. (It) was dangerous to stay in the supermarket too long. One of these days *it* would get her. *She* would be trapped past closing time, and *they* would find her in the morning propped against one of the shelves in an unbreakable coma, surrounded by all the pushcarts in the place heaped to overflowing with merchandise . . .

(p. 179)

The subject of each independent clause is either "she" or "it/they" (the owners of the store), a syntactic arrangement which characterizes the paranoid tension between the speaker and an unknown, unnamed oppressor. (One exception to what I have noted is that the "It" of "It was dangerous" is a pattern marker.) This particular paragraph, I might add, is not atypical of the rest of this prose section with regard to its paranoid flavour. Here are a few more instances of the use of "it/they":

. . . *it* [the music] in the store was supposed to lull you into a euphoric trance . . .

. . . *they* would always be successful: *they* couldn't miss.

" . . . *they've* put another brand on the market."

Pretty soon *they* would have it in gold [Kleenex], as though *they* wanted to pretend it was used for something quite different. *They* were having another of their sales-promoting special programmes . . .

(pp. 176-179)

Pervading these examples is the notion that Marian is an acquiescent victim of the unconquerable force of consumerism. This oppressor-victim relationship, so strongly pronounced in S1, is altered in S2. In the one instance of the speaker's use of "they": "Lucky, she thought, *they* sell almost everything in supermarkets these days" (p. 275), we see that she is now using the store—the consumer world—to satisfy her wants; she takes advantage of it rather than it of her.

In S1 various psychological diversions cohabit the same sentence. The following paragraph is one example:

Her mother and her aunts of course had been interested in the wedding dress and the invitations and things like that. At the moment, listening to the electric violins and hesitating between two flavours of canned rice pudding—she had no reservations about eating that, it tasted so synthetic—she couldn't remember what they had all decided.

(p. 179)

The second sentence in the above quotation is typical of many of the sentences in S1 in that it is long (36 words, a long sentence especially considering that the mean length for this period is about 26 words),³ hypotactic ("listening . . . hesitating . . ."), disturbed and interrupted. The muddled syntax reflects Marian's muddled, interrupted thoughts; she thinks about one thing while doing another. More specifically, she is thinking about her wedding dress while deciding on which can of rice pudding to buy. The interlacing of these two allegorical levels in one sentence (shopping for food, preparations for the wedding) suggests that all the wedding properties, the dress, the invitations, are just as synthetic as the packaging and labelling on the food, and that in both situations Marian does not see beyond the package. Atwood is also creating here an emblematic merging of allegory. Since the word "canned" suggests "cans" (buttocks), the canned rice pudding is an icon of sex as a consumer commodity. A similar allegorical melding is visualized in the depiction of the Hawaiian girl on the poster along with the canned

³Robert Cluett, *Prose Style and Critical Reading* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1976), p. 221.

pineapples and their price. Marital sex is rendered a marketable commodity.

As I mentioned at the outset, the most obvious difference between S1 and S2 is their length. It takes Marian five pages to describe her shopping excursion in the former while in the latter all is narrated in one concise paragraph. There is more concision in S2 because there are no psychological digressions or diversions. The first sentence, with its well balanced participial seriations, and its initial locative phrase, achieves a sense of geographical and psychological orientation:

In the supermarket she went methodically up and down the aisles, relentlessly *out-manoeuving* the muskrat-furred ladies, *edging* the Saturday children to the curb, *picking* the things off the shelves.
(_____ = participials)

With the words “out-manoeuving”, “edging” and “curb” the wedding aisle is now a highway where Marian commands the wheel. In S1 there is no mention of which day it is whereas here she edges the “Saturday children to the curb.” She has become oriented to place and time.

Thus in S1 Marian stumbles, puppet-like, through a timeless dream where the strings of consumer advertising control her actions. In S2, where Marian begins to make her own decisions, her world becomes more real, and more ordered. In the transition from dream to reality the speaker has managed to rectify her distorted perception of the world. Her individuality is initially so nullified by advertising that she never goes beyond staring at the surface of things. Rather than choosing food or a husband in accordance with their inner qualities she makes choices through the examination of their external, physical properties (clothing, brands, labels). Thus the vocabulary in S1 is composed of the lexis of physical movement in response to the detailed description of external appearance (reaching for labelled food products). Like Swift’s Gulliver, Atwood’s Marian ironically sees but does not see. In S2, however, there appears a new lexical configuration of choice in response to the intrinsicality of objects. What things are takes precedence over what they look like. The naming of things, that is, the naming of grammatical heads (flour, sugar, etc.), takes precedence over modifying and qualifying them (packaging).

If we examine all the verbs in S1 that are associated with the preparing and cooking of food we discover several things:

rubbed the wooden bowl with . . . garlic
threw in the onion rings
tore up the lettuce
adding a grated carrot
began to peel off the skin
holding the carrot

First of all, four of these verbs convey a sense of violence (“rubbed, threw, tore, began to peel”). Since Marian identifies so closely with food, I suggest that the violence inherent in these verbs characterizes her feelings of self-disgust as well as of self-destruction. Secondly, these verbs depict the speaker’s movements as frenzied and dyskinetic; it seems that she is trying to get the necessary, laborious preparations over with and that she is certainly not enjoying herself.

Whereas in S1 the speaker has relied on one of her mother’s recipes for a mushroom-and-meatballs casserole (p. 182), the cake in S2 is of her own invention. In fact, this is her first occasion for creativity. On all previous occasions Marian has depended on the consumer world of prepared foods: at Peter’s she prepared “frozen peas and smoked meat, the kind you boil in three minutes in plastic packages” (p. 64). Before going to the laundromat she “warmed up and ate a frozen dinner” (p. 93), and when asked to bring brownies to the office party she “bought [them] at a bakery and switched to a different bag. She had not felt much like cooking lately” (p. 166). Now Marian feels creative and thus feels like cooking. In contrast with the 6 unaesthetic verbs included in the one paragraph of S1 we now have, within the three pages of narration regarding the cake making, 57 verbs directly associated with cooking, verbs which are refulgent with creativity:

crack	mixed	took x3
separate	divided	stuck x3
beating	lift	felt
sifting	tinted	operate
folding	stirring	pulled x2
poured	put x3	placed
drew x2	tested	scooped
break	turned	taken
slid	refused to put	nipped

to mould	extending
to cover	adding
contracted	to add
reinforced	appended
clothing	demarkating
filling in	applied
filled	made x6

I find it most striking that Atwood is drawing from such a variety of significant notional sets. As well as the notion of cooking we have that of painting, sculpting, surgery ("operate") and engineering. Verbs such as "crack, separate, beating, break" convey a sense of controlled energy rather than that of uncontrolled energy inherent in such verbs as "rubbed, threw, tore" found in S1. So not only is the narrator blooming with creativity, but the converging sets demonstrate that she has achieved an artful balance of talents which draw from both her animus and anima (the feminine cooking set is merged with the essentially masculine set of sculpting, surgery and engineering). Variations on the verb "to make" occur 6 times in direct relation to the cake's construction. The repetition of this verb suggests that Marian has become "a maker," Horace's "vates."

I will now examine the alterations which occur in Marian's perception of her own body in relation to the food she prepares. Her syntax asserts the perceptual distortion she suffers from in S1 where she cannot discern where her body ends and the food begins: "She was watching her own hands and the peeler and the curl of crisp orange skin" (p. 183). The three direct objects occur on the same syntactic level, a construction which suggests that the three separate objects—"hands . . . peeler . . . curl of . . . skin"—through Marian's eyes inhabit the same perceptual plain. She is not certain where her skin ends and the skin of the carrot begins. Further evidence of this confusion is provided by the redundant word "own" modifying "hands." It is as if she must reassure herself that the hands she sees are indeed her own. No wonder Marian has to protect her body from the world by wearing numerous layers of clothing. The syntax of S2, in contrast, evinces the speaker's new capacity to separate her body from the world of externals. Rather than passively watching herself being controlled by the strings of consumerism, she now fuses her thoughts with her actions. While cooking she smoothly alternates from one movement to another:

She dried the things and began to crack and separate the eggs, hardly thinking, concentrating all her attention on the movements of her hands, and then when she was beating and sifting and folding, on the relative times and textures.

(p. 275)

In this particular sentence the sense of smoothness, and thus of orderliness, is achieved through anaphora ("on the movements . . . on the relative times"), the two triple predicators, the rhythmical repetition of "ing," and the alliteration of "times and textures." Atwood employs both sound and syntactic techniques in order to characterize the speaker's new-found ability to separate the world from her own body and thereby impose structure upon it.

There are contrasting responses on the speaker's part to the passage of time. Even though, in S1, she has already prepared the casserole the night before and all there is left to do is prepare the salad, Marian is harried by time:

Now, *hurriedly* slicing up the radishes for the salad . . .
At the *last minute* she thought of adding a grated carrot . . .

(p. 182, p. 183)

The temporal adverbials demonstrate that she allows the brevity of time to directly effect her actions. Also, two of the verbs used to describe the salad preparation which I outlined earlier (cf. p. 12) express the notion of urgency: "threw . . . tore". But in S2, even though Peter is shortly due to arrive and she has yet an entire cake to mix, bake, sculpt and decorate, Marian does not allow time to hamper her creativity; she no longer lets her thoughts wander off on long digressions. While the paragraph in S1 begins with the salad making, then digresses onto thoughts about her past neurotic behavior,

Now hurriedly slicing up the radishes . . . She was becoming more and more irritated by her body's decision to reject certain foods . . . But she faced each day with the forlorn hope that her body might change its mind.

(p. 183)

she remains, in S2, in the immediate present:

She wondered what time it was . . . *but* anyway she would have to hurry.

It was bumpy in places . . . *but* it would do . . .

For an instant she wished she had bought . . . *but* where could they be put? The image was complete.

(pp. 276-277)

The speaker's "but" clauses halt any temptation to digress, thus she maintains a firm grip on immediate events. Instead of only concentrating on one thing at a time as well as forever wandering off on tangents as she does in S1, she can now perform two tasks simultaneously:

As she slid the tin into the oven, *she* almost hummed with pleasure.

While the cake was in the oven . . . *she* re-washed the bowls . . .

While the cake was cooling . . . *she* went into the bedroom . . .

While making it *she* had been almost gleeful . . .

(p. 175, p. 176)

The simultaneousness of her actions is signified by numerous left-branched sentences, her left-branching being temporal. The harnessing of time is also evident in the frequent use of temporal adjectives (e.g., "next") and sequential adverbials:

Later for them. *Right now* she didn't have time . . . and *then when* . . . *While* the cake . . . *Then* she divided the *next* one . . . the *last* one . . . *when* she had finished . . . *While* the cake . . . *Then* she began . . . *Then* she nipped . . . *Now* she had . . . *First* she gave it . . . *Now* it had . . . *until* she . . . *Finally* she put . . . *Now* . . . *Now* the woman looked . . . *For an instant* she wished . . . , *but* . . . *While* making . . . , *but now* . . . and *now* . . .

(pp. 275-77)

The heroine is zeroing in on one project of which inner thought and outward movement are synchronized. No part of her creative energy is wasted on neurotic, tangential or guilt ridden anxiety. Time is used efficiently.

Up to the point of the gala cake baking Marian has been floundering in a world of advertising propaganda where she has attempted to choose and judge in accordance with the way things appear. Hence she is forever providing us with useless descriptions of label's brands and wrappings. Her language is such a nimity of modifiers and qualifiers that the head is imperceptible. She observes so much surface that she perceives none of the things which exist beneath it. Through Atwood's interlacing of allegorical layers the reader notices that Marian employs this myopic, Gulliver-like method of perception in all her experiences, that is, buying food, choosing clothes, choosing a mate.

In light of the constant syntactic interruptions and digressions in S1 we notice that Marian's thoughts bounce off the surface of objects (and people) and deflect into neurotic ruminations of past and future events. However, when she begins to strip away externals (the superficialities of objects) her language in S2 rids itself of many of its cumbersome adornments, making way for her perception of the head—the true essence of objects and people. Her thoughts penetrate, rather than deflect from, the present. And as these modifiers are cast aside the syntax becomes smoother, uninterrupted, focused and sequential. Because she ceases expending so much of her energy on digressive ruminations and begins to channel it into artistic endeavor, Marian becomes what Atwood would call a “creative non-victim,”⁴ an active participant rather than a passive observer. And thus verbs of creativity increase while modified heads decrease; action is more predominant than observation.

At the dinner table with Peter, Clara and Joe, Marian is upset that she cannot think of any “bright topical remarks” and does not want the position of “referee” (p. 184). Thus her need to hide her meatballs under her lettuce rather than eating them symbolizes her need to conceal her personality from herself and others. The lexemes used to describe the meatballs which she so strongly identifies with resemble those of someone being x-rayed:

She felt as though her *plate** was *exposed* all eyes fixed upon it, the *hidden* meatballs *showing up* from *beneath* the lettuce leaves like *bones* in an *x-ray*; . . .

(p. 184)

Not only does Atwood employ a simile (“as though . . . like bones”) but she also strengthens and extends its force by flanking it with its own lexical set. Because Marian still feels defenseless against external invasion, she, in her layers and layers of protective clothing, imagines herself on a “plate” hidden beneath layers of greenery. This hiding of her meatballs also recalls the story of Adam's fall in the Garden of Eden: the concealment of his “balls” behind a fig leaf signifies his loss of power.

⁴Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 1972), p. 38.

* two meanings of “plate” come to mind here, both a domestic dish and a metal x-ray frame.

When we move on to S2, we notice that there is a clear division between food and the self, hence Marian is able to eat. While enjoying the cake, she says to herself, "The cake was after all only a cake" (p. 279). When Ainsley arrives home, sees her munching on the cake, and accuses her of rejecting her femininity, she replies, "Nonsense, it's only a cake" (p. 280). This repeated statement shows that Marian has not only retracted her neurotic projection onto food, but also, what she says aloud to others coincides with what she says to herself. She is becoming assertive in the direct expression of feeling.

Nowhere in chapters 1 to 29 does the speaker experience the taste of food. Although often surrounded by things edible, she only experiences taste once, if one may call it that, in chapter 11 where Duncan's mouth tastes "like cigarettes" (p. 103). Whether at lunches or coffee breaks with the "office virgins," at dinner with Clara, Joe and Ainsley, at the restaurant with Peter, at the gala office buffet, or at dinner with Duncan, Trevor and Fish, flavour is never experienced. Food is described, not tasted. In S2 however, her palate awakes from its dormancy. While the heroine is enjoying the cake, a new lexis is born:

<i>delicious</i>	chewing
<i>appetizing</i>	"Not bad"*
considered*	critically*
seemed odd*	needs a touch more lemon
<i>pleasant</i>	"It's really good"*
tasting	(p. 279, p. 280)

The lexis associated with eating the cake not only conveys a new sense of pleasure (as italicized) but it also reflects the notion of artistic criticism (*) so that the heroine has become at once an artist and a critic of her own art.

What Marian has wrought is a replica of the way she looked at Peter's and her engagement party the night before: an edible, cake woman in a chintzy red dress, coiffed hair and garish, silver sequins, appropriately made of "sponge cake" (p. 275), the ultimate symbol of compliancy. But before commencing with her work of art Marian rids herself of this dress and dons one of her own mousy liking (Peter had described her taste in clothing as "mousy", p. 214), a dress of "plain grey wool" (p. 274). After completing her art work, she then proceeds to kill her former passive self by eating the cake. This idea is orchestrated by the speaker's depiction of the cake as human (see _____) which she then proceeds to kill (see _____):

"I'll start with the *feet*"
 She was halfway up the *legs*.
 She speared a chunk of pink *thigh* . . .
 The *woman lay* there, still *smiling* glassily, her *legs* gone . . .
 She plunged her fork into the carcass, neatly severing the *body*
 from the head . . .

(p. 279, p. 280)

All the verbs here signify accuracy, power and, because they are collocated with the female anatomy, sexuality, a collocational configuration which suggests that Marian is drawing strength from her previously dormant animus. In S1 she merely sat powerlessly "*fidg-eting* with a piece of roll" (p. 184). Before leaving this section of the text it is important to realize that the heroine's eating of the cake symbolizes more than an extirpation of her compliancy: it is equally a symbol of self-acceptance.

Having both killed and accepted her former self it is only then that she returns, in the last chapter, to the first person singular again where she finds her own situation more interesting than Duncan's. For the first time in the novel, in fact, her own well-being takes priority over that of others. When she offers Duncan a piece of cake she is not sacrificing her body to him as she did previously, but, rather, she is only giving him that which she has already discarded, for when she retrieves the cake from the shelf it is depicted as dead:

I had half the *torso* and the *head* left over . . . I got him a fork
 and took the *remains* of the *cadaver* down from the shelf where
 I had put it, I unwrapped its cellophane *shroud*.

(p. 287)

The edible woman beneath the cellophane wrapper is finally exposed and annihilated. Marian has achieved a rebirth of the spirit, a 'metanoia'.

Thus, what we have witnessed in this novel is the persona's transformation from acquiescence to autonomy, from victim to artist. When she is overwhelmed by the onslaught of externals the syntax is often interrupted and embedded. Various levels of reality—through the interlacing of notional sets—occur in the same sentence. As she begins to think more clearly the syntax is no longer interrupted by diversions; each sentence contains one topic while numerous temporal adverbials reflect her ability to synchronize and order the external world. The verbs initially used to describe her movements are awk-

ward, rootless and mechanical, her mind not being in touch with her body. With her transformation, that is, when her imaginative faculties interlace with her body, the verbs characterizing her movements are smooth, controlled and powerful, an artful balancing of animus and anima.

The most obvious psychological breakthrough is her ability to retract her projections onto food. Initially the food lexemes are buried in layers of modifiers of artificiality (plastic, cellophane etc.) so that their true essence, like Marian's personality, are hidden. But as the heroine is able to understand herself more clearly, as she travels from the real world, into dream, and back to the real world again, the food is eventually stripped of its plastic layers. It stands alone, like Marian in her "plain grey wool," unadorned for all to see. Along with this stripping down of words is the stripping of her previously filthy apartment. In the last chapter of the novel she tells us,

I was cleaning up the apartment. It had taken me two days to gather the strength to face it, but I had finally started. I had to go about it layer by layer.

(p. 283)

She can see everything much more clearly now: food, her body, her environment.

Through the heroine's burial in, followed by her resurrection from and taming of, externals, Atwood is making a crucial statement about survival in our consumer world. In order to prevent the dangerous tendency to believe that everything originates from outside ourselves, in order to preserve our individuality, we must heavily rely on inner feeling. When we do this we can then enjoy the consumer world at our leisure rather than being swallowed up by its force.

What I hope I have shown in my discussion here is that, because of Atwood's linguistic ingenuity, a stylistic analysis of her prose is a very profitable method of examining Marian's personality development. It provides a richer understanding of the text. If this is true of *The Edible Woman*, then perhaps the same kind of critical approach in the exploration of the personality development of Atwood's four other heroine/artists in *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle*, *Life Before Man* and *Bodily Harm* would prove to be equally if not more rewarding.