Binary Oppositions in Margaret Atwood's
The Edible Woman

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Abstract

This paper, titled "Binary Oppositions in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*," comprises two integral sections: a theoretical framework and an applied study. The theoretical framework delves into the concept of binary oppositions through a structuralist lens, providing a comprehensive definition and understanding within the realm of literary analysis. In the applied study, the focus narrows to Atwood's 1969 novel, *The Edible Woman*. Here, the analysis scrutinizes the contrasting dichotomies woven throughout the characters, narrative, and writing style of the novel. By dissecting these opposing elements, the study uncovers profound layers of meaning and underscores the inherent tension and complexity within the text. In *The Edible Woman*, various pairs of characters are utilized by the author to explore contrasting dynamics and themes, particularly related to identity, gender roles, and societal expectations. Furthermore, the distinctive narrative structure plays a pivotal role in conveying the evolving psychological state of the protagonist, Marian. A striking symbol of her transformation and shifting mental state is found in the contrasting depictions of her two trips to the supermarket. The marked differences in language and style employed to describe these outings serve to accentuate Marian's profound character evolution, her passage from confusion and loss to regained identity and clarity.

Keywords: Binary Opposition, Margaret Atwood, Feminism, Identity, Patriarchy, Structuralism, The Edible Woman.

المعارضات الثنائية في رواية مارجريت أتوود امرأة صالحة للأكل

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مستخلص

يتألف هذا البحث وعنوانه "المعارضات الثنائية في رواية مارجريت أتوود **امرأة صالحة للأكل**" من قسمين متكاملين: إطار نظري، ودراسة تطبيقية. يتعمق الإطار النظري في مفهوم المعارضات الثنائية من خلال عدسة نظرية البنيوية، الأمر الذي يوفر تعريفًا وفهمًا شاملين في مجال التحليل الأدبي. وفي الدراسة التطبيقية، يسلط البحث الضوء على رواية أتوود لعام 1969 "**امرأة صالحة للأكل**". وفي هذا الصدد، يدقق الباحث في تحليل الانقسامات المتناقضة المنسوجة في الشخصيات والسرد وأسلوب الكتابة في الرواية من خلال تشريح هذه العناصر المتعارضة، كما تكشف الدراسة عن طبقات عميقة من المعنى، وتؤكد التوتر والتعقيد المتأصل في النص. وقد استخدمت المؤلفة في هذه الراواية أزواجًا مختلفة من الشخصيات لاستكشاف الديناميكيات والموضوعات المتناقضة، ولا سيما المتعلقة بالهوية وأدوار الجنسين والتوقعات المجتمعية. علاوة على ذلك، تؤدي البنية السردية المميزة دورًا محوريًا في نقل الحالة النفسية المتطورة لبطلة الرواية "ماريان"؛ إذ يجد القارئ رمزًا مدهشًا لتحولها وحالتها العقلية المتغيرة في الصور المتناقضة لرحلتيها إلى السوبر ماركت، وتعمل الاختلافات الملحوظة في اللغة والأسلوب المستخدم لوصف هذه الرحلات على إبراز التطور العميق لشخصية "ماريان"، وكيفية انتقالها من الارتباك والخسارة إلى استعادة الهوية والوضوح.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المعارضة الثنائية، مارجريت أتوود، النسوية، الهوية، الذكورية، البنيوية، **إمرأة صالحة للأكل.**

INTRODUCTION

This paper consists of two main parts: a theoretical framework and an applied study. The theoretical framework explores the concept of Binary oppositions from the viewpoints of structuralism. It aims to clearly define and understand these opposing pairs within literary analysis. Moving on to the applied study, it focuses specifically on the novel being analyzed, *The Edible Woman* (1969). In this part, the analysis delves into the contrasting dichotomies found within the characters, narration, and overall writing style of the novel. By examining these opposing elements, the study aims to uncover deeper layers of meaning and highlight the tension and complexity within the text.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND
Introduction

Structuralism emerged as an influential intellectual movement in France around 1913-15, but its prominence was relatively short-lived, lasting for about a decade. It places significant emphasis on the internal structures of a text, considering it as a self-contained entity: "Rather than focusing on numerous interpretations of literary texts, greater emphasis should be placed on investigating the process of interpretation that occurs within readers' minds as they engage with the text" (Jonathan Culler 3). According to Charles E. Bressler, when applying a structuralist perspective to the analysis of a literary work, the aim is not solely to decipher the meaning conveyed but to understand how meaning is produced within the text (99). Similar to the approach of New Criticism, Structuralism isolates the text from its historical, social, and psychological context. According to David Buchbinder, the New Critics believe that considering historical and biographical aspects has no bearing on the text's meaning as a verbal construct. Furthermore, they assert that the author's intention is either already embedded within the text or holds no significance in determining its meaning (46). This perspective draws inspiration from the ideas of Thomas Stern Eliot, an Anglo-American poet, who emphasizes the self-sufficiency of the text. Russian Formalism, which focuses on the literary qualities of the text, particularly

rhetoric and transcendence, as well as the language circles of Moscow and Prague, notably influences structuralism. Additionally, Roland Barthes' article "Death of the author" and Nietzsche's dictum that "God is dead, and we killed him" also have a significant impact on shaping structuralist thought (Buchbinder 38, Lois Tyson 220). In brief, in the context of literary theory, structuralism highly regards how the text conveys meaning by focusing on the underlying structures and systems that shape and organize the text's elements.

Key figures associated with structuralism include Fernand de Saussure (sign, signifier, signified, and binary oppositions), Levi Strauss (mythemes), and Roland Barthes (Death of the author). Structuralism is an interdisciplinary approach that seeks to encompass various fields of human knowledge. It encompasses a wide range of intellectual disciplines, such as linguistics, aesthetics, anthropology, sociology, and psychoanalysis. The objective of structuralism, Tyson asserts, is to establish a unified understanding of the human sciences by applying a single methodology derived from the linguistic model developed by Saussure (210). To explain further, it seeks to identify the underlying structures and systems that govern human phenomena across different disciplines. By emphasizing the study of structures and relationships, it aims to uncover the underlying patterns and rules that shape various aspects of human culture, language, and society. Structuralism emerged as a rebellion against traditional ontological and epistemological views.

According to Louis Markos, Plato believes that the essence of things resides in Heaven and ideas are real and abstract entities taught by God. This perspective presents a spiritual and religious understanding of the universe, emphasizing the relationship between higher and lower realms (*Structualism Lecture*). To elaborate, Plato posits that the material world we perceive through our senses is merely a reflection or imperfect copy of a higher, non-material realm of existence, known as the world of Forms or Ideas. These Forms are abstract, perfect, and unchanging entities that represent the true reality. God does not teach them but are part of the inherent structure of the universe. In Plato's metaphysical framework, the physical

world is transient and subject to change and decay, making it less real than the eternal and immutable Forms. For example, when we see multiple beautiful objects in the world, like beautiful women or beautiful flowers, Plato believes that their beauty is derived from an abstract, timeless, and perfect form of beauty that exists in the world of Ideas. Furthermore, Plato thinks that human knowledge is not derived from our sensory experiences of the physical world but rather from our innate capacity to remember the eternal truths present in the world of Forms. He argues that our souls preexist before birth in the realm of Forms and acquired knowledge of these eternal truths during that time. When we are born into the physical world, we forget much of this knowledge and spend our lives trying to recollect it through philosophical contemplation and rational inquiry.

Karl Marx, Markos adds, challenges this viewpoint by asserting that religion, philosophy, and art are not purely tools for accessing higher realities or divine self. Instead, he argues that they are products of economic and social structures and relationships. According to Marx, meaning does not originate in heaven and then descend upon humanity through heavenly books or messengers. Instead, meaning arises from the material world, social structures, and economic forces in our earthly reality. In Marx's perspective, the relationship between the lower (earthly) and higher (heavenly) is reversed, with meaning ascending from the material and social dimensions to the spiritual, "knowledge is not the revelation of an objective world but a product of practical activity" (*Structualism Lecture*). In essence, Marx deconstructs the ontological view of the universe, emphasizing the primacy of material systems as the foundation and focal point of existence. Structuralism aligns with this perspective by considering everything as man-made and centered around material systems, with nature playing no active role in defining or determining phenomena. It rejects the notion that abstract or transcendent entities hold inherent essence, emphasizing instead the importance of social, economic, and material forces in shaping the world and its meanings.

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of knowledge, subjectivity, and self-awareness. René Descartes famously stated, "I think; therefore I am," highlighting the relationship between thinking and self-existence. However, structuralism challenges the notions of identity and self-consciousness, drawing influence from Sigmund Freud's theories. According to Tessa Davidson, Freud's interpretations significantly undermine the idea that the self is the origin of meaning. He sheds light on the intricate and elusive nature of the self, emphasizing the importance of the unconscious mind and its hidden relationships in shaping individual identities. Freud's work reveals that the conscious mind's understanding of "who we are as individuals" is often limited and obscured (*Structuralism: A Helpful Overview*). Structuralism rejects the notion that the human mind can be the ultimate center of meaning because it is influenced and shaped by the unconscious mind. According to structuralism, deep structures, often rooted in the unconscious, play a vital role in determining the meaning and concepts of things. This perspective adopts a predominantly physical view, emphasizing the importance of underlying structures and systems in defining and understanding phenomena. In brief, structuralism challenges the notion that self-awareness and the conscious mind are the sole sources of meaning and understanding. Instead, it highlights the significance of the unconscious mind and its influence on shaping our perceptions, identities, and the overall meaning we assign to things.

One of the criticisms of structuralism is that it tends to overlook the human element, disregarding the role of the author and disregarding the connection between literature and society, "Structuralism has tried to persuade us that the author is 'dead' and that literary discourse has no truth function . . . but the sin of semiotics is to attempt to destroy our sense of truth in fiction . . . In a good story, truth precedes fiction and remains separable from it" (Raman Selden et al 62). Additionally, Saussure's theory prefers synchrony to diachrony (Buchbinder 43). In Saussure's structuralist linguistic theory, synchrony refers to studying language at a particular point in time, examining its elements and relationships

within a static system. On the other hand, diachrony pertains to the study of language evolution over time, analyzing how language elements change and evolve through historical processes. The weakness lies in Saussure's emphasis on synchrony and relative neglect of diachrony. By focusing primarily on the static aspects of language, his theory offers a limited perspective on how language develops and adapts over time. Language is not a fixed entity; it undergoes constant change and evolution due to various factors, such as cultural shifts, historical events, and interactions between different linguistic communities. Neglecting diachrony in linguistic analysis can hinder a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of language development and how certain linguistic phenomena come into existence. Recognizing both synchrony and diachrony is crucial for a more complete and nuanced understanding of language and its evolution throughout history. Many modern linguistic approaches, in contrast to Saussure's theory, consider the interplay between both dimensions to gain deeper insights into the dynamic nature of language.

Binary oppositions

According to Abrams's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms*, binary oppositions play a crucial role in language structure. These oppositions include pairs of contrasting concepts such as speech/writing, nature/culture, truth/false, and male/female (58). Scholars in semiotics, like Peirce, Barth, Grimas, and Lotman, have employed binary oppositions in their analysis of narratives. These oppositions serve as conceptual mechanisms that carry cultural values: "His bounty's known as we censure their [his opponents] ways,/ Through contrasts drawn, distinctions get ablaze" (Al Mutanabbi[1]). Without these contrasts, values, beauty, and the distinction between good and bad would lose their significance. Some examples of these oppositions are up/down, right/left, near/far, and forward/backward. In everyday life, the directions "up, right, near, forward" are generally associated with positive meanings, while "down, left, far, posterior" are often seen as negative. These

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[1] **ونُثُمَهُمْ وبهم عَرَفُنا فضلَهُ ...... وبِضِدِّها تتميزُ الأشياءُ**

assessments are influenced by our physical and cultural experiences. For instance, we associate getting up with being alive, lying horizontally with sickness or death, and we tend to use our right hand more frequently than the left. "Proximity" refers to something that is easier to reach, more clearly defined, and involves direct interaction.

Binary oppositions emerge within the framework of structuralism and can be defined as the practice of categorizing two ideas or concepts as opposing entities: "According to structuralism, the human mind perceives difference most readily in terms of opposites, which structuralists call binary oppositions: two ideas, directly opposed, each of which we understand by means of its opposition to the other" (Tyson 213). This categorization allows for the study of their interactions and functions in relation to each other. While binary oppositions are prevalent in our everyday lives, they can also contribute to societal issues of exclusion and oppression. The concept of binary oppositions finds application in the realm of language and literature. C. Paradis suggests that binary oppositions establish a strong connection between language, cognition, and understanding. They play a crucial role in maintaining coherence in discourse and shaping our perception and comprehension of the world (1). In recent times, there has been a growing interest in researching binary oppositions in language. Advancements in empirical investigative techniques and technology have facilitated the exploration of fundamental questions surrounding binary oppositions. Researchers seek to understand the nature of binary oppositions, how they are represented, whether all binary oppositions hold equal value, and if not, the reasons behind such distinctions. This increased attention to studying binary oppositions reflects a desire to gain deeper insights into their significance and implications within language and communication.

Within the framework of structuralism, binary oppositions are considered a fundamental tool for organizing human philosophy, culture, and language. Sociologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, influenced by a range of prominent theorists such as Saussure, Jacobson, Bois,

Mauss, Troubetzkoy, Rousseau, and Marx, adopts binary oppositions as a key concept in his work. In the field of structuralism, the theory posits that all elements of human culture can only be comprehended in relation to one another, operating within a larger systemic structure. Cultural studies utilize the concept of binary oppositions to examine the dynamics between different groups of people. For instance, social boundaries between upper-class and lower-class groups may lead to prejudices and discrimination, as one group perceives the other as a potential threat. In literature, these oppositions are employed to explore disparities between various groups, such as those based on culture, class, or gender.

Saussure's theory of structuralism emphasizes the use of binary oppositions in language, where each linguistic unit obtains meaning through its relationship with another term. Saussure considers language a system of signs, where signs consist of a signifier and a signified. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, and the meaning of a sign is derived through its comparison with other signs in the system. Saussure prioritizes the spoken word over the written word, in contrast to deconstruction, which focuses more on the complexities of written texts. According to Peter Barry, structuralists primarily focus on understanding how meanings are established and maintained within a literary work by examining the functions of structure. At the phonological level, linguists analyze binary oppositions such as nasal/non-nasal, vocal/non-vocal, audible/inaudible, tense/indolent (41). To elaborate, these binary oppositions serve as the basis for assigning value or meaning to linguistic units, as proposed by Saussure. Saussure considers language as a system of signs, where each sign consists of two components: the signifier (the sound image) and the signified (the concept). The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and unrelated. Saussure's structuralist theory is founded on the idea of contradictory pairs, and he perceives language as a system of signs. In this system, a sign is composed of two elements: the signifier and the signified. These elements are inherently different, with the signifier representing the sound image and the signified representing the concept. The

relationship between them is arbitrary because the word itself and its corresponding object lack an inherent connection.

Structuralism introduces the idea of two distinct structures in understanding meaning: the surface meaning and the hidden meaning. The surface meaning refers to observable and easily recognizable aspects of human activities. However, beneath this surface lies the hidden meaning, which consists of underlying principles and concepts that are not immediately apparent (Tyson 210). To comprehend the deep structure of something, it is necessary to uncover the hidden meaning, and one way to achieve this is through the identification of binary oppositions. Binary oppositions are contrasting pairs of concepts or ideas that reveal the underlying dynamics of a given subject. These oppositions can be found within the surface meaning and provide insight into the hidden meaning. An example provided by Al-Ghazali illustrates the significance of binary oppositions. He suggests that without the presence of Satan and darkness, one would not be able to fully comprehend the concept of light. This implies that understanding and appreciating light is contingent upon its contrast with its opposite (qtd in Alimorad Ahmadi et al 725). Similarly, the recognition of imperfection is crucial in striving for perfection. By acknowledging and contrasting imperfection with perfection, individuals can work towards improvement. Binary oppositions extend beyond language and are employed in various fields of study. For instance, religious concepts such as angels and devils represent opposing forces, highlighting the duality of good and evil. In biology, the binary opposition of male and female is employed to depict and comprehend the concept of sex. These examples demonstrate that paradoxical dichotomies are fundamental in multiple areas of knowledge, including literature.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, a prominent advocate of structuralism, expands its application to popular literature and myths, viewing each myth as representative of other myths worldwide (Bressler 100). He analyzes myths using the framework of binary oppositions. He refers to the individual units of myths as "mythemes," drawing a parallel

with the phonetics and morphology of language studies. In his examination of the myth of Oedipus as a king, Lévi-Strauss identifies two key opposing elements. The first pertains to the overestimated blood relationship (Oedipus marrying his mother, Jocasta) versus the underestimated blood kinship (Oedipus killing his father, Laius). The second revolves around contrasting views on the origin of humanity, namely being born from the earth versus being born through sexual intercourse. Lévi-Strauss's study of myth is focused not on the narrative sequence of myths but rather on the underlying structural patterns that imbue them with meaning and significance. He posits that this linguistic model of contradictory binaries can reveal the fundamental structure of the human mind— the structure that shapes all human institutions, artifacts, and forms of knowledge (Selden 65). From a structuralist perspective, the meaning of a literary work does not solely arise from the author's or reader's experiences but rather from the underlying structure of conflicting ideas upon which the work is constructed. According to Putri and Sarawato (2016), binary oppositions are deemed essential across various fields of study, including literature. Furthermore, the reconstruction of binary oppositions enables readers to discern the implicit meaning of a text and choose alternative interpretations. They also serve as a tool for authors, allowing them to express their ideas in the text. Consequently, they hold equal importance for both authors and readers. They aid authors in generating, combining, and emphasizing ideas while enabling readers to decode the author's intentions, comprehend the entire text, and grasp its narrative development (84).

One of the fundamental binary oppositions in metaphysics revolves around the concepts of male and female. This opposition is characterized by conflict and tension, with the implication that males hold a superior position and exert absolute dominance in social life, while females are subjected to rule and subordination. In society, it is considered the right of males to express their opinions publicly, whereas females are relegated to the position of "other," often having their right to speak violated. Those who do speak out publicly may face accusations of deviating from societal norms, such

as being labeled as homosexual or facing other forms of discrimination. Males enforce their will upon females, leaving them with little agency other than to carry out the commands of males and obediently comply. Any resistance or deviation from this dynamic often results in social rejection. The persistence of patriarchy in society remains a significant concern, as it perpetuates binary oppositions that marginalize women and perpetuate traditional female roles (such as cooking, childcare, and cleaning) as well as certain social roles (such as fashion designer or teacher) through discourses. Structuralists argue that we tend to comprehend our experiences through the lens of contradictory concepts, where we understand the meaning of words like "good" by contrasting them with "evil." Similarly, we understand reason in opposition to emotion, masculinity against femininity, and civilization versus primitiveness. These opposing concepts shape our understanding of the world (Tyson 254).

According to Derrida, binary oppositions in literature or discourse are hierarchical in nature, with one term being considered superior or privileged over the other. By examining the contrasting dichotomies in a text and identifying the two poles of opposition, one can uncover the underlying ideology promoted by the text. However, these dichotomies, Tyson asserts, are paradoxical and unstable, and the opposing poles are not completely separate. This instability allows us to detect the limitations of the ideology being presented (254-7). Many critics readily recognize the ideology revealed by the contrasting dichotomy of men and women, which often critiques white centrism and hegemony. However, it is important to note that this ideology also has its own limitations. While there is empathy for the tragic experiences of women, there is a failure to fully acknowledge that women's experiences are also influenced by their vulnerability. From a deconstructive perspective, the binary oppositions such as man and woman are not fixed and can be deconstructed. One common criticism of women is their perceived lack of strength of character, passivity, and inability to bear the consequences of their decisions. However, according to the deconstructive view, our experience of ourselves and the world is

shaped by language, and since language is intertwined with unstable and ambiguous ideologies, our own identities become unstable and ambiguous as well. We do not possess a truly stable identity because the concept of identity suggests a singular and unified self. In reality, we are multiple and fragmented, comprised of conflicting beliefs, desires, fears, anxieties, and intentions. In order to encourage women to challenge masculinity and address their weaknesses, postcolonial feminism, for example, invites the examination and deconstruction of the fragmented and dismantled identity of female characters. This process aims to motivate women to discover their unique identities and realize their self-worth. In brief, deconstruction seeks to challenge the traditional hierarchical structures and rigid categorizations inherent in metaphysics. It questions the notion that concepts can be neatly divided into opposing categories, such as good versus evil, male versus female, or black versus white. Instead, it seeks to reveal the complexities, contradictions, and interplay of multiple meanings within these oppositional categories[1].

Analysis
Opposing characters

In Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, several contrasting characters play significant roles in the story. By focusing on specific pairs of characters, we can explore the contrasting dynamics and themes within the novel. Here, we discuss the following pairs: Ainsley/Marian, Ainsley/Clara, Peter/ Marian, Ainsley/Peter, Peter/Joe, Peter/Len, Len/Joe, Marian/Clara, Peter/Duncan, Duncan/Classrooms, Ainsley/the virgins, Ainsley pre/after pregnancy, and Marian at the beginning/the end of the novel.

Firstly, Ainsley and Marian represent two contrasting approaches to life and personal fulfillment. Their different perspectives highlight the conflict between conformity and individuality. However, they get along by adjusting their routines in

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[1] Her face's as radiant as the morning light, her hair as dark as the night, /Two opposites in harmony unite, and through contrast, their goodness does flight (Al Mutanabbi).

فالوجْهُ مثل الصبح مِبيضٌ ... والشَّعرُ مثل الليل مُسودٌ

ضِدَّانِ لمَّا استُجْمِعَا حَسُنَا ... والضِدُّ يُظهِرُ حسنَهُ الضِدُّ

a symbiotic way, and there is not much of the typical "pale mauve animosity you often find among women" (*EW* 8). The contrasting pair of Marian and Ainsley shows clear differences in their personalities, behaviors, and attitudes towards gender norms. These differences contribute to the dynamics between them and the reactions they evoke from each other, as well as from the reader. Marian is depicted as reserved and modestly dressed, emphasizing her quiet and introspective nature. She avoids drawing attention to herself, as seen in her choice of clothing and minimal use of makeup. In other words, she is introspective, reserved, and struggles with societal expectations. On the other side, Ainsley is outgoing, carefree, and embraces her desires without questioning them. The landowner, for example, makes a judgment that Ainsley lacks respectability, contrasting with her positive view of Marian. This assessment seems to be based on their clothing choices. Marian believes that Ainsley selects clothing as a form of disguise or protective covering (*EW* 6). Marian tends to be silent in conversations, suggesting that she may feel uncomfortable or hesitant to express herself openly. Her reserved demeanor becomes evident when she overhears Len, Peter, and Ainsley discussing her, and rather than confronting them, she hides under the bed without being noticed for a long time. This behavior highlights her reticence and a sense of invisibility within social settings. Ainsley, in contrast, is portrayed as drunk, loud and forthright (*EW* 3). She does not shy away from expressing herself and tends to be more extroverted. Ainsley has a clear vision of her next career move—opting for a modern, gleaming office space with efficient air conditioning. On the other hand, Marian's workplace is a less appealing, older brick building with limited natural light. Furthermore, Ainsley holds an unconventional job as a tester for malfunctioning electric toothbrushes, a fact that consistently surprises people at social gatherings. She humorously adds, "Considering my B.A., what other opportunities are there these days?" In contrast, Marian's profession is more conventional and aligns with expectations (*EW* 10).

Ainsley's heavy drinking and her willingness to seduce men, as seen with her actions towards Len, demonstrate her more

uninhibited and assertive nature. She challenges traditional gender norms, positioning herself as a feminist and openly criticizing societal expectations. When she is not feeling well, she has a knack for pushing back and playfully teasing Peter, showcasing her ability to stand up for herself. This suggests that she possesses a strong personality and is not afraid to express herself assertively. She is not passive and has the capacity to stand up for herself when necessary. This implies that she is not easily intimidated and is willing to challenge Peter when she disagrees with him or when he does something she finds offensive. In contrast, Marian tends to be more easily influenced by him, behaving like a doll in his presence. She may lack the assertiveness or ability to challenge Peter's actions or opinions. This depiction suggests that she may be more passive in her interactions with Peter and may not engage in playful banter or teasing like "she" does. In other words, Peter has a prior encounter with Ainsley that leaves him with a negative impression. He suspects her of holding what he deems as "vague radical" viewpoints, attributing this belief to a theoretical discourse she has shared about freeing the Id. Peter, politically conservative, finds this unsettling. Ainsley further irks him by labeling one of his perspectives as "typical," prompting him to respond by deeming one of hers as "uncivilized." In Peter's interactions, Marian feels like a mere prop on a stage—silent, rigid, and lacking depth. Looking into his eyes, she sees a diminutive, oval-shaped reflection of herself, symbolic of how he perceived her (*EW* 68, 72, 85).

This contrasts with Marian, who rarely comments on gender roles and appears to treat Ainsley with a sense of rejection and suspicion, possibly due to their differing approaches and values. Ainsley's presence seems to bring out Marian's negativity, which is particularly visible to the reader. It is possible that Ainsley's assertiveness and disregard for societal norms act as a catalyst for Marian's introspection and self-doubt. Marian may perceive Ainsley as a threat to her own reserved and controlled lifestyle, leading to feelings of discomfort and a sense of being judged. This contrast between their personalities and behaviors serves to highlight Marian's internal struggles and brings her insecurities to the

forefront. Ainsley, a meticulous psychology major, aspires to challenge gender norms by intentionally choosing to have a child without getting married. She selects Len as her partner for this purpose, and her strategic approach proves successful (*EW* 17, 88, 89, 128, 167). In contrast, Marian lacks agency/power in every aspect of her life, including her own marriage, "I'd rather have you [Peter] decide that. I'd rather leave the big decisions up to you." I was astounded at myself. I'd never said anything remotely like that to him before. The funny thing was I really meant it" (*EW* 94, 159). It is only when her boyfriend, Peter, proposes to her that she starts to consider the idea of fulfilling the traditional role of a woman (Edita Bratanovic 44). In brief, while Ainsley is characterized as someone who fights back, pokes fun at men, and exhibits independence, Marian is depicted as more submissive and easily influenced by people's actions.

Secondly, Ainsley and Clara serve as foils to each other. Ainsley embraces her sexuality and revels in her physical appearance, while Clara is portrayed as more plain and sensible. This juxtaposition highlights societal expectations regarding femininity and the pressure on women to conform to certain beauty standards. In other words, the novel under study seems to be rich in complex character relationships and nuanced explorations of gender dynamics. The various pairs of characters provide contrasting approaches to the relationships between men and women, and they challenge the expectations associated with each gender. While Ainsley embodies feminism and challenges traditional gender norms, Clara, as well as Marian, appears to conform more closely to societal expectations.

These contradictions and complexities in their characters highlight the intricacies of individuals and the challenges of fitting neatly into predefined gender roles. During her time at university, Clara focuses on maintaining a healthier lifestyle, possibly by engaging in regular exercise or following a nutritious diet. As a result, she is in better physical shape compared to her present state. However, Clara's long, blonde hair is one noticeable change in her

appearance. As she lets her hair grow, it adds a medieval-like quality to her overall look. The association with the medieval era may stem from the common perception of long, flowing hair as a characteristic of that period. In medieval art and literature, women are often depicted with long, unbound hair, which is considered a symbol of femininity and beauty. By growing her hair long, Clara inadvertently acquires a visual aesthetic reminiscent of the medieval era, potentially characterized by a romanticized or nostalgic charm. This contrast between her healthier lifestyle, her medieval-like appearance and her present appearance can create an interesting juxtaposition (*EW* 33).

Clara's lack of practicality is evident in her inability to manage mundane aspects of life, such as finances or punctuality for attending lectures. She, unlike Ainsley, struggles with finding matching shoes or having enough clean clothes, often resulting in a disheveled appearance. Moreover, her living space is cluttered with accumulated junk, requiring assistance to navigate through the mess. Ainsley frequently leaves behind items such as rings, deodorants, cleansers, brushes, and sponges in noticeable locations. The lady living downstairs considers these items a violation of her sacred space (*EW* 55-56). Unlike Ainsley, whose messiness stems from a creative and chaotic energy, Clara's untidiness is more passive in nature. It does not carry an active, dynamic quality but rather represents a neglectful attitude towards organization and cleanliness (*EW* 34). Unlike Clara, Ainsley is against marriage; she finds Joe's domestic role revolting and disgusting. In contemporary times, husbands are often identified as a significant factor contributing to the breakdown of family units: "You can't say the sort of household Clara and Joe are running is an ideal situation for a child. Think of how confused their mother-image and their father-image will be; they're riddled with complexes already. And it's mostly because of the father" (*EW* 37-38).

However, according to her perspective, having a baby holds great significance for every woman, surpassing even the importance of sex. It is seen as a profound fulfillment of one's innate femininity,

making it a crucial experience that every woman should have, ideally at least once (*EW* 39). Both Marian and Clara serve as a constant reminder of Ainsley's lack of knowledge about babies, as she openly admits to not having a strong affinity for them. In fact, she goes as far as describing babies as unappealing, labeling them as both dirty and noisy (*EW* 40-41). Ainsley is a "whited sepulcher" (*EW* 135); she is a person inwardly corrupt or wicked but outwardly or professedly virtuous or holy. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that these characters are not simply one-dimensional representations. Ainsley, despite her feminist beliefs, ends up marrying and becoming pregnant, mirroring Clara, who represents tradition and conventions. At the start of the novel, Marian holds the belief that both Clara and Joe's marriage lacks practicality. She perceives a complete lack of understanding in managing and maintaining a well-organized marital relationship. She, however, finds herself being envious of Clara for the first time in three years, because Clara has reached a point in her life where the culmination of her experiences, choices, and personal growth has brought her to a definitive and transformative state. The person she has become at that moment is a reflection of the direction in which her journey and aspirations have led her. This transformation is a result of the amalgamation of her beliefs, values, learnings, and external influences, all shaping her into the individual she has envisioned and progressed towards becoming. It is a realization of the potential she has within, manifesting into her true self (*EW* 225).

In the larger context of the narrative, Clara emerges as a character deeply intertwined with traditions, conventions, and classicism, and ultimately, she achieves a certain level of victory or success. Clara's involvement with traditions signifies her adherence to established customs and practices, often rooted in cultural or societal norms. This connection to tradition provides her with a sense of stability and identity, allowing her to navigate life with a certain level of certainty and familiarity. Similarly, Clara's affinity for conventions suggests that she prefers following established rules and expectations rather than veering into unconventional or avant-garde territories. This inclination towards conformity might grant her

a sense of belonging and acceptance within her social or cultural circles. Clara's character is portrayed as remarkably resilient and content with the life she leads, despite the challenges she may face. Throughout the narrative, there is no indication of her complaining about her circumstances or expressing dissatisfaction with her situation. Instead, she demonstrates a remarkable ability to reconcile herself with the ups and downs of life. Despite any obstacles or hardships she encounters, Clara remains steadfast and composed. She does not allow negative emotions to consume her; instead, she adopts a positive and accepting outlook. This attitude enables her to find inner peace and contentment even in difficult situations. Clara's ability to reconcile herself with her life may stem from her inner strength and adaptability. She might have learned to embrace life's imperfections and uncertainties, accepting them as integral parts of the human experience. Rather than dwelling on what she lacks or what could have been, Clara focuses on what she has and appreciates the simple joys and blessings that come her way. Additionally, Clara's positive disposition might be fueled by her sense of gratitude and perspective. She might recognize that others face even greater hardships and challenges, leading her to fully appreciate her life and circumstances. This sense of perspective allows her to maintain a sense of balance and avoid becoming consumed by self-pity or complaints. Furthermore, Clara's ability to reconcile herself with her life might also be connected to her inner sense of purpose and fulfillment. She may have found meaning in her daily experiences, relationships, or personal endeavors. Having a clear sense of purpose can provide a source of contentment and motivation, helping her navigate through life's complexities with grace and resilience. In summary, Clara's character embodies a remarkable sense of acceptance and contentment. Her ability to reconcile herself with the life she leads showcases her inner strength, positive outlook, gratitude, perspective, and a sense of purpose. These qualities not only allow her to face life's challenges with grace but also inspire those around her to appreciate the beauty of finding contentment and peace amidst life's uncertainties.

Thirdly, Marian's relationship with Peter represents the

conflict between personal desires and societal expectations. Peter embodies traditional gender roles and pressures Marian to conform, "he saw me as the kind of girl who wouldn't try to take over his life" (EW 61). Marian's struggle to assert her own desires and maintain her independence creates a contrast between her internal conflict and Peter's more traditional views. She might feel trapped or suppressed, unable to fully express herself or pursue her own interests due to her passivity. Bratanovic suggests that women's passivity and submissiveness in the traditional roles of wives and mothers result in a loss of self-fulfillment and a decline in their sense of self-worth (49). Marian's job also emphasizes these traditional gender roles and pressuring Marian to conform; they may hinder her autonomy, self-esteem, and personal growth. She works in Seymour Surveys Company where her role involves reviewing questionnaires and transforming them into easily comprehensible queries that the general public can understand:

> The company is layered like an ice-cream sandwich, with three floors: the upper crust, the lower crust, and our department, the gooey layer in the middle. On the floor above are the executives and the psychologists – referred to as the men upstairs, since they are all men – who arrange things with the clients; I've caught glimpses of their offices, which have carpets and expensive furniture and silk-screen reprints of Group of Seven paintings on the walls. Below us are the machines – mimeo machines, I.B.M. machines for counting and sorting and tabulating the information; I've been down there too, into that factory-like clatter where the operatives seem frayed and overworked and have ink on their fingers. (*EW* 13)

This extract portrays a company structured with a hierarchical division. This imagery compares the organizational structure to an ice-cream sandwich, with three distinct layers: the upper crust, the lower crust, and the heroine's department, referred to as the gooey layer in the middle. The floor above represents the upper crust, where the executives and psychologists work. They are described as the "men upstairs" because they are all men, indicating a lack of gender diversity in positions of power within the company. Their

offices are depicted as luxurious and well-appointed, with carpets, expensive furniture, and silk-screen reprints of Group of Seven paintings on the walls. This description suggests a stark contrast between the opulence and comfort experienced by those in higher positions and the reality faced by employees on other floors. On the lower crust, are the machines. This floor represents the operational and technical aspects of the company. The atmosphere is described as factory-like, with a clatter that implies a noisy and chaotic environment. The operatives on this floor are portrayed as frayed and overworked, with ink on their fingers, possibly indicating repetitive and demanding manual work. The description of the company's layered structure, with stark differences between the upper and lower levels, reflects a hierarchical organization with clear divisions and disparities in power, resources, and working conditions. A decision has been made by the men in authority (referred to as "upstairs") (*EW* 20) that necessitates women to undergo a pre-test over the upcoming weekend. Additionally, it is noted that Peter is dominating or exerting significant influence over Marian. The term "monopolized" (*EW* 29) implies that Peter is taking up much of Marian's attention, time, or involvement, but the exact details or context of this dominance are not provided in the given text. Comparing Marian to a stage prop (*EW* 72) implies that Peter is using her as a mere background element, devoid of power or significance. Like a prop on a stage, the speaker is expected to remain silent and passive, serving only to enhance Peter's presence or narrative. The description of being "silent but solid, a two-dimensional outline" (*EW* 72) further emphasizes the lack of depth and agency attributed to the speaker. She is portrayed as existing in a flat, unchanging manner, devoid of individuality or the ability to express themselves. Overall, these extracts convey the sense that both the company and Peter disregard the speaker's autonomy, treating her as a background figure without considering her thoughts, emotions, or individuality. The speaker feels reduced to a mere object in Peter's interactions, lacking a voice and a true presence in their own right. For example, Mrs. Bogue, the head of the department, regards pregnancy as an act of disloyalty to the company, "I'm afraid Mrs. Dodge in Kamloops will have to be

removed. She's pregnant" (*EW* 19). This situation highlights potential inequalities within the company, both in terms of gender representation and the distribution of resources and opportunities.

Marian exhibits a sense of hesitation when it comes to making decisions, often seeming unsure or cautious in her choices. Additionally, she demonstrates a lack of assertiveness in pursuing her goals and aspirations, showing little ambition or drive to actively work towards them. These characteristics collectively suggest a tendency towards indecisiveness and a subdued approach to pursuing her objectives (*EW* 14, 15, 18, 61, 85). Unlike Marian, Peter is ambitious; he is ascending within it, akin to a balloon floating upward (*EW* 56, 65). This figurative expression describes Peter's progression or advancement within the small firm. It suggests that Peter is experiencing rapid upward movement in terms of his career growth, just like a balloon ascending into the air. This imagery implies that Peter's career trajectory within the firm is ascending quickly and steadily. It may indicate that he is being promoted, taking on greater responsibilities, or gaining recognition for his work. The comparison to a balloon emphasizes the speed and buoyancy of his rise, suggesting that he is making significant strides in his professional development within the company. In brief, the phrase conveys a sense of Peter's upward mobility and success within the small firm, highlighting his increasing importance and influence in the organization. Peter also admires or holds high regard for people's occupations or professions. He finds value and respect in the work that others do and may view their jobs as important or impressive in some way. This admiration could stem from various factors, such as the level of skill, expertise, or impact associated with different occupations.

In chapter eight, Peter expresses a negative view towards marriage, particularly concerning Trigger's marriage. He describes Trigger's decision to get married as being "taken in" or deceived, suggesting that he sees marriage as something that compromises personal freedom or independence. Peter's monologue characterizes Trigger as a noble and free individual, drawing comparisons to the

last of the "Mohicans and dinosaurs" (*EW* 65). This imagery emphasizes Trigger's perceived uniqueness and vulnerability. Peter portrays Trigger as being destroyed by fate, implying that marriage is a destructive force that diminishes one's individuality or autonomy. Furthermore, Peter directs his criticism towards Trigger's bride, depicting her as predatory, malicious, and responsible for drawing Trigger into the "domestic void." The metaphor of picturing her as a vacuum-cleaner suggests that Peter sees her as someone who sucks the life and vitality out of Trigger's existence. This portrayal highlights Peter's negative perception of marriage and his belief that entering into a marital relationship is disadvantageous and restrictive. Peter concludes his monologue by expressing funeral-like predictions about his own future, particularly in terms of his solitude without other single men. This suggests that he associates marriage with the loss of camaraderie and the potential isolation of being the only single man among his peers. Overall, this situation illustrates Peter's skeptical and cynical attitude towards marriage, presenting it as a fate-driven trap that compromises personal freedom and leads to a negative domestic existence. His negative perception of marriage and his own future as solitary reflect his resistance or aversion to committing to a long-term romantic relationship.

Fourthly, this part discusses the contrasting characters of Peter and Duncan, as well as their relationships with Marian. Peter is portrayed as physically strong and attractive, adhering to traditional concepts of masculinity. He embodies the qualities that are often associated with being a "perfect" partner in a traditional gender narrative. The portrayal of masculinity is evident in the narrative through the use of "firearms, cameras, and meat." Traditionally, guns and hunting are associated with notions of masculinity and strength. Peter's pride in being a hunter and showcasing his collection of firearms reinforces his perception as a violent man, emphasizing his 'macho' and predatory traits. Furthermore, Peter's possession of an extensive camera collection also plays a significant role. In the story, cameras are linked to weapons since they metaphorically 'shoot' images. When Peter aims to photograph a dressed-up Marian during the engagement party, she experiences a

sense of being prey, akin to something he is hunting. This situation instills a feeling of threat in her. The camera, in this context, represents a potential trap, making her apprehensive that the images captured might bind her indefinitely to an unsatisfying marriage under Peter's influence. Marian, along with other characters like Clara, notices Peter's good nature and describes him as a perfectionist. Peter's attractive appearance and his ability to fulfill traditional gender roles make him an ideal partner in Marian's eyes.

In contrast to Peter's strength, Duncan, a young boy whom Marian estimates to be around fifteen years old but turns twenty-six, is portrayed as extremely "cadaverously thin" (*EW* 47), frail, neat and tidy (*EW* 153), giving off an unsettling and bewildering impression. Marian's discomfort and confusion are heightened as she observes his childlike body, noting how he speaks in a flat, lifeless tone, sits hunched over with his elbows on his knees, and keeps his head lowered (*EW* 100). His demeanor clearly indicates instability (*EW* 115). Duncan himself expresses a sense of alienation, claiming that he is not human and originates from the underground, further adding to his peculiarity, "They kept telling me my ears were too big; but really I'm not human at all, I come from the underground" (*EW* 152). Duncan's desire to be an "amoeba," citing their immortality and shapeless nature, reflects his growing dissatisfaction with being a human (*EW* 219-20). He finds the complexities of being a person overwhelming and seeks a simpler existence. His eccentricity is evident through his admission of setting fire to his apartment, partly driven by a curiosity to observe the reactions of his roommates and perhaps to understand his own response. Ultimately, he is fascinated with witnessing flames and smoke, highlighting his peculiar interests (*EW* 104). Duncan's non-conformity to traditional masculine standards emphasizes his incompatibility with the norms expected of men. The description of Duncan's appearance paints a vivid picture, highlighting his unique complexion and choice of clothing. The pale, nearly colorless complexion resembling "old linen" gives the reader a distinct sense of his appearance. The choice of the color "khaki" for his pants and the mention of "bare feet" suggest a casual or laid-back style. The focus on his eyes, mostly

"hidden by a rumpled" mass of black hair and carrying a persistently melancholic look, provides insight into Duncan's emotional state. The deliberate choice to wear this expression hints at an intentional desire to convey a sense of sadness or pensiveness. This could suggest a complex emotional inner world or perhaps a deliberate attempt to communicate a particular mood or demeanor to those around him. Overall, this detailed description effectively communicates Duncan's physical appearance and emotional state, allowing readers to form a clear image of his character and potentially anticipate the mood or tone of the narrative (*EW* 47-48).

Unlike Peter, Duncan does not try to control Marian or adhere to traditional gender roles. This allows Marian to experience a different kind of relationship where she can be herself without the pressure of societal expectations. While Peter may make Marian feel stifled due to his adherence to oppressive gender roles, Duncan provides a sense of freedom for her, "I realized Peter was trying to destroy me. So now I'm looking for another job" (*EW* 306). Even though Duncan might not overtly express love for Marian, he allows her to be authentic and true to herself, "You didn't tell me it was a masquerade," . . . "Who the hell are you supposed to be? (*EW* 263). He understands her thoughts and communicates openly with her, in contrast to Peter and Marian's lack of understanding and true emotional communication. Duncan, explains Bratanovic, acts as Marian's alter ego as he could be perceived as the mirror of her subconscious, the representative of her inner thoughts and hidden personality. She would like to live her life the way he does, freely and without the need to justify her actions and decisions (47). When she is with Duncan she is caught in an eddy of present time; they have virtually no past and certainly no future (*EW* 200). The difference in appearance and behavior between Peter and Duncan serves as a way to portray Marian's contrasting relationship with them. Peter represents the traditional, attractive partner who fulfills the expected role of a traditional woman. Duncan, on the other hand, challenges gender norms and allows Marian to explore her own identity without conforming to societal expectations.

Fifthly, Joe and Len represent two contrasting figures in the novel. Joe is depicted as a more supportive and understanding partner, while Len is portrayed as self-centered and inconsiderate. This contrast emphasizes the importance of empathy, communication, and mutual respect in relationships.

Joe's physical appearance is described as harried and uncombed when he appears behind the screen door. He is depicted as a tall, shaggy man with a slight stoop, which suggests a lack of meticulous grooming (*EW* 27, 33). Despite not resembling Jesus Christ in physical appearance, he is likened to a philatelist, a collector of postage stamps (*EW* 141). Comparing Joe to a philatelist suggests that Joe may possess qualities or attributes that are not immediately apparent or widely recognized. Just as a philatelist delves into the intricacies and nuances of stamp collecting, Joe may have hidden depths or virtues that make him an interesting and valuable individual, even if he may not be considered a major or prominent figure in the conventional sense. This comparison implies that Joe is not a major or prominent figure, but rather someone who may possess hidden qualities or virtues. Furthermore, it is mentioned that Joe has a protective attitude towards Clara (*EW* 141). This suggests that he cares deeply for her well-being and takes on the role of her guardian. He exhibits a sense of responsibility and looks out for her, indicating a strong level of commitment to their relationship. When Marian states that she believes Joe to be one of the minor saints, she is emphasizing her admiration for him. This implies that Joe possesses qualities that are praiseworthy and admirable, even if they may not be widely recognized or celebrated. Despite his unassuming demeanor and less prominent position, Marian holds Joe in high regard, appreciating his qualities and considering him a wonderful husband. Overall, the description and characterization of Joe convey his appearance and demeanor, highlighting his protective nature towards Clara and Marian's positive perception of him as a devoted spouse.

Unlike Joe, Len is described as having blond curly hair and wearing horn-rimmed glasses (*EW* 37). He is introduced as an old

friend of Marian and Clara from their college days. Following college, he pursues a career in television after moving to England. While Leonard is considered a "nice type," it becomes evident that he has a problematic attitude towards women. Len is depicted as a seducer of young girls, indicating that he tends to pursue relationships with younger women (*EW* 30). He sets an arbitrary age limit, stating that anything over seventeen is considered too old for him. This attitude reveals his disregard for the maturity and agency of women, treating them as objects rather than equals. It highlights his lack of ethics and respect for boundaries when it comes to romantic relationships. Len is characterized as someone who views unmarried girls as vulnerable and in need of protection (EW 32). According to Pesquera, Len exploits young women for his personal gain, taking pleasure in leading them astray and enticing them into intimate encounters. Once they have succumbed to his advances, he discards them because their innocence is gone, and they no longer hold any value to him. He views this as a regular and acceptable practice, but he considers it abnormal and unacceptable if a woman were to do the same to a man, as is evident in the present situation (14-15). However, his perception is skewed and patronizing, failing to recognize their independence and capability. He never wishes marriage upon anyone, particularly those he likes, indicating a fear of commitment or a desire to maintain a certain level of control in his relationships: "Being a husband would be bad enough, I'm too *young* to get married, but can you imagine me as a husband and *father*?" (*EW* 170). Ainsley manages to seduce him, resulting in her becoming pregnant. This situation reverses the power dynamics, with Len becoming the oppressed party and Ainsley taking on the role of a predator: "The little slut . . . The only thing you wanted from me was my body! . . . "*You* seduced *me*!" "Now I'm going to be all mentally tangled up in Birth. Fecundity. Gestation. Don't you realize what that will do to me? It's obscene, that horrible oozy" (*EW* 171-2). Despite his lecherous behavior and questionable attitudes towards women, Len exhibits a peculiar tenderness and sentimentality towards the people he genuinely likes, although this group is small in number. Notably, he idolizes Clara, treating her with a mixture of admiration and reverence. His actions towards

women he perceives as out of his reach, such as his friends' wives, are marked by devotion and an unrealistic trust. He assumes their unassailability and considers them too old for his advances (90). To sum up, Len's character is complex and contradictory. While he may display moments of tenderness and sentimentality towards those he likes, his treatment of women as objects of seduction and his problematic views on age and relationships undermine his character. This leads to accusations of misogyny from women and misanthropy from men, suggesting that he may embody elements of both.

Finally, the pairing of Duncan and classrooms represents the contrast between traditional education and unconventional learning experiences. Duncan encourages Marian to question societal norms and find her own path, while classrooms symbolize the restrictive and conforming nature of traditional education systems. Ainsley and the virgins also represent contrasting attitudes towards sexuality. The virgins are portrayed as innocent and naive, while Ainsley embraces her sexuality without shame or judgment. This contrast highlights societal expectations and the different ways women navigate their sexual identities. Furthermore, the contrast between Ainsley before and after pregnancy explores the transformative nature of motherhood. Before pregnancy, she is carefree and focuses on her own desires. After pregnancy, she takes on the responsibilities of motherhood, which introduces new challenges and changes her priorities. The contrast between Marian at the beginning and the end of the novel also showcases her personal growth and transformation. At the beginning, she struggles with her identity and societal pressures. By the end, she asserts her independence and finds her own path, challenging the expectations placed upon her. These pairings highlight the various contrasts and themes present in *The Edible Woman*, including gender roles, societal expectations, personal identity, and the pursuit of individual fulfillment. Each pair contributes to the overall exploration of these themes, offering insights into the complexities of human relationships and the challenges faced by individuals in conforming or challenging societal norms.

Narration: Presence, Absence, and Presence

The novel follows a distinctive narrative structure that shifts between two perspectives, reflecting the evolving psychological position of the protagonist, Marian. The first part of the novel is narrated in the first person, allowing readers to directly experience Marian's thoughts and experiences. This intimate perspective provides a deep insight into her inner world and allows for a personal connection with the character: "I know I was all right on Friday when I got up; if anything I was feeling more stolid than usual (*EW* 3). The extract is narrated in the first person. The narrator is recounting her experience on a particular Friday morning. Her feeling is relatively stable and unaffected when she wakes up. As she heads to the kitchen to have breakfast, she encounters Ainsley, who is feeling down. Ainsley explains that she attended a disappointing party the previous night, consisting mostly of dentistry students. This depresses her, leading her to cope with her emotions by getting drunk. The given extract presents the narration from the perspective of a first-person narrator who exhibits curiosity and a longing for more details when Ainsley discusses her party experience. The narrator experiences disappointment as she has anticipated dinner with Peter to provide solace. Additionally, feeling hungry and desiring a nourishing meal further highlights Marian's sense of self-mastery and control over her own life: "Oh?" I said, wanting further explanation. I was disappointed, I had been looking forward to dinner with Peter to cheer me up. Also I was hungry again" (*EW* 22).

The significance of employing the first-person narrative in "I was being invited as an entertainer and confidante, someone who would listen to a recital of Clara's problems" (*EW* 24) is that it allows the narrator to directly express her effective role and purpose in the situation. By using "I" as the subject, the narrator establishes herself as the one being invited and highlights her intended role as an entertainer and confidante for Clara. This perspective gives the reader insight into the narrator's perception of her purpose in the interaction and creates a sense of intimacy and personal involvement in the narrative. The first-person narrative allows for a more

immediate and subjective portrayal of the narrator's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, enhancing the reader's connection to their experiences and perspectives. In brief, these examples assert presence.

The sentence, "I knew Ainsley was wrong, but she sounded so rational," (*EW* 41) is indeed narrated in the first-person perspective. The use of "I" suggests that the narrator is sharing her personal thoughts and insights. In this context, the narrator expresses her understanding that Ainsley's perspective or opinion is incorrect. However, despite recognizing the factual inaccuracy, the narrator acknowledges that Ainsley sounds rational. This implies that the narrator possesses the ability to empathize with others and appreciate their emotions, thoughts, and troubles, even if they may not align with objective reality. Furthermore, the narrator's statement implies that she has the capacity to value and understand different perspectives, even when they disagree with her. It suggests that Marian can recognize the importance of considering others' viewpoints and experiences and that she might be willing to offer solutions or support to help address Ainsley's problems, even if she believes she is mistaken. Overall, this quotation portrays the narrator as someone who possesses empathy, understanding, and the ability to see beyond factual accuracy to acknowledge the emotional and rational aspects of someone's perspective.

In the second part, constituting the central part of the text, there is a shift in narrative perspective from first person to third person. This transition could initially evoke a feeling of detachment. It ultimately reveals that this new perspective is no longer filtered through Marian's lens, "Marian was sitting listlessly at her desk. She was doodling on the pad for telephone messages" (*EW* 113). The sentence is indeed narrated in the third-person perspective. The use of "Marian" instead of "I" or "she" indicates that the narrator is observing Marian's actions and emotions from an external standpoint: she is the object, not the subject. The description of Marian sitting listlessly and doodling on the pad for telephone messages suggests a lack of engagement or enthusiasm. The word

"listlessly" emphasizes the absence of energy or motivation in her demeanor. By using this descriptive language, the sentence implies that Marian has lost her sense of purpose or control over her experiences. The act of doodling on the pad for telephone messages further emphasizes Marian's disconnection or disinterest. Doodling, often seen as an absent-minded or subconscious activity, suggests that Marian's mind is elsewhere or that she is not fully present in her current situation. This reinforces the notion that she has lost her mastery or control over her experiences, as her actions indicate a lack of focus or active participation. The use of the third person allows for a broader exploration of Marian's experiences and perceptions beyond her immediate perspective.

In this passage "Marian's first impulse was to go over and see whether it was a bad burn, and suggest remedies, butter or baking soda; but she decided against it. Instead she sat unmoving and said nothing" (*EW* 152), Marian's first impulse is to go and examine the burn and offer suggestions for remedies like butter or baking soda. However, she decides against acting on that impulse and instead chooses to remain still and silent. Marian's decision to remain unmoving and silent may stem from a lack of confidence or uncertainty in her ability to provide helpful solutions. She may hesitate to offer remedies due to a fear of being wrong or making the situation worse. This interpretation implies that she is hesitant to assert her knowledge or expertise in this particular situation. In brief, Marian initially feels the inclination to intervene and offer assistance, but ultimately decides against it. Her choice to stay still and refrain from speaking can reflect a desire to respect boundaries, a lack of confidence, or a combination of both.

The given extract indeed portrays Marian as hesitant, passive, and lacking in self-awareness. She finds herself in a situation where she is uncertain about how to act. She is clutching a grey bundle, and it is implied that someone has suggested or requested that she do something with it. Marian is aware that following the suggestion would make her feel uneasy and silly. This hesitation suggests a lack of confidence or uncertainty in her decision-making abilities. She is

torn between the discomfort of complying with the suggestion and the fear of feeling even sillier if she were to decline a seemingly harmless request. The passage emphasizes Marian's internal conflict and her consideration of how her actions would make her feel. It indicates her tendency to prioritize avoiding feelings of silliness or uneasiness over asserting her own preferences or boundaries. As time passes, Marian eventually finds herself undoing the buttons and putting on the dressing gown, despite it being too large for her. This act further emphasizes her passivity and lack of consciousness, as she is not actively asserting her own desires or taking control of the situation. The dressing gown's oversized fit, with the sleeves covering her hands and the bottom trailing along the floor, visually symbolizes Marian being overwhelmed or swallowed up by the situation: "Marian stood for a moment . . . uncertain how to act . . . After a minute she found herself undoing the buttons, then slipping on the dressing gown" (*EW* 154). Overall, the extract portrays Marian as hesitant, passive, and lacking a strong sense of self-awareness. Her decision-making process is driven by a desire to avoid feeling silly rather than by a conscious evaluation of her own needs or preferences.

Finally, in the third section of the novel, the narrative perspective reverts to the first-person: "I was cleaning up the apartment" (*EW* 305). The use of first-person narration in this passage suggests that the narrator has regained a sense of agency and control over her actions and thoughts. The opening sentence, "I was cleaning up the apartment," indicates that the narrator has taken the initiative to address the clutter and disarray in her living space. This act of cleaning implies a proactive mindset and a willingness to confront the task at hand. The statement that it took the narrator two days to gather the strength to face the cleaning further underscores their regained ability to think and make decisions. This suggests that the narrator has overcome any previous barriers, such as procrastination or feeling overwhelmed, and has actively chosen to tackle the cleaning process. The mention of going about the cleaning "layer by layer" implies a systematic and organized approach, demonstrating the narrator's ability to think critically and strategize.

By categorizing her belongings and placing the items she wishes to discard into designated boxes, the narrator displays the capacity to make decisions and sort through her possessions with purpose. Overall, the first-person narration in this passage signifies that the "I" has regained a sense of control, determination, and the ability to think well. It indicates that Marian has mustered the strength and initiative to face the cleaning task and is actively making progress by organizing their belongings thoughtfully.

The statement "I'll start with the feet," (*EW* 300, 309) suggests a change in Marian's mindset and behavior. It implies that Marian has transitioned from a state of disconnection or detachment, as indicated by the phrase "so-called reality," to a more active and engaged role as a consumer. The mention of Marian being a consumer implies that she has regained her appetite for eating, suggesting a restoration of her basic needs and desires. The act of eating well can symbolize several positive attributes and states of being. (1) Consciousness: By actively choosing to eat well, she demonstrates a heightened sense of self-awareness and mindfulness regarding her dietary choices. This implies that she is more present and attentive to her own physical and emotional needs. (2) Stability: Restoring her appetite for eating well indicates a return to a balanced and stable state. It suggests that Marian's emotional or psychological turmoil, which may have caused her loss of appetite, has subsided or been resolved. (3) Positiveness: The decision to eat well can be seen as an optimistic and positive choice. It reflects a belief in self-care, nourishment, and overall well-being. Marian's renewed appetite for eating suggests a more positive outlook and a willingness to prioritize her health and happiness. (4) Presence: Eating well requires being present in the moment, consciously selecting nutritious food, and savoring the eating experience. This indicates that Marian has regained a sense of presence and engagement with her surroundings, moving away from a disconnected or apathetic state. To sum up, restoring Marian's appetite for eating well symbolizes her increased consciousness, stability, positiveness, and presence. It signifies her active engagement with her own well-being and a return to a more balanced and positive mindset.

This return to the first person signifies a renewed sense of self-awareness and agency for Marian. It is worth noting that the narration is entirely presented through the eyes of the heroine. The language used in the novel reflects her evolving psychological position. As the story progresses, Marian gains greater control over the vocabulary and language, which reflects her changing mental and emotional state. This evolution in her command of language mirrors her growth and development throughout the narrative. By employing these narrative techniques, the novel provides readers with a deep understanding of Marian's inner world and her journey of self-discovery. The shifts in perspective and language usage add layers of complexity to her character, allowing for a nuanced exploration of her thoughts, feelings, and personal transformation.

Doll/Human: A Stylistic Analysis of the Two Trips to the Store

The contrast between the protagonist's two trips to the supermarket serves as a powerful symbol of her journey from a state of confusion and loss to one of regained identity and clarity. The differences in language and style between the two trips highlight this transformation.

During the first trip, the protagonist is depicted as being in a state of confusion and disorientation. The self-dialogue that spans five pages demonstrates her internal turmoil and lack of clarity. She buys items without much thought or intention, simply grabbing whatever catches her eye. Additionally, she relies on a prepared list, indicating her detachment from her own desires and preferences. The lengthiness of the first trip emphasizes the protagonist's struggle and the difficulty she faces in navigating the supermarket:

> Marian was walking slowly down the aisle . . . "Beans," she said . . . 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. She had begun to defend herself with lists, which she printed in block letters before setting out . . . "Noodles," she said . . . Any package. (*EW* 187-8)

In the supermarket, Marian felt overwhelmed by the multitude of choices. She wanders through the aisles, her thoughts in disarray. She picks up items almost randomly, without a clear purpose. She glances at her list, a crumpled piece of paper she has prepared beforehand, and tries to remember what she needs. The self-dialogue in her mind seems endless as she debates whether to choose this brand or that. The process takes much longer than she has anticipated, leaving her feeling drained and even more confused.

The stylistic analysis of the excerpt suggests that Marian is experiencing a sense of overwhelming confusion and internal struggle. The narrative employs various literary devices to convey her mood and state of mind. (1) Repetition: The repetition of phrases such as "she said," "the music," and "the list" emphasizes Marian's fixation on these elements. It reflects her attempts to anchor herself amidst the chaos of choices and the captivating influence of the music. (2) Vivid imagery: The author uses vivid imagery to describe Marian's surroundings, such as the "gentle music that swelled and rippled," the "lilting sounds coming from the concealed loudspeakers," and the "stacks of noodles, identical in their cellopaks." These descriptions enhance the reader's understanding of the overwhelming environment and sensory stimulation Marian is experiencing. (3) Metaphors and simile: The comparison of Marian's cart-pushing to that of a somnambulist (sleepwalker) and the reference to her "eyes fixed, swaying slightly" create a dreamlike quality. This imagery suggests that she is navigating the supermarket semi-consciously, as if under a trance induced by the music and abundance of choices. (4) Internal dialogue: Marian engages in an internal dialogue, questioning her choices and debating between brands. This stream of consciousness reflects her inner turmoil and the mental exhaustion caused by decision-making. (5) Contrast: The contrast between the soothing music and Marian's growing resentment toward it creates a juxtaposition of emotions. The music is intended to induce a euphoric trance, but Marian resists it and recognizes its manipulative purpose. This contrast highlights her struggle to maintain control over her own choices and resist the persuasive tactics employed by the supermarket. Overall, the

stylistic elements in the passage effectively convey Marian's overwhelmed and confused mood, capturing her internal struggle as she tries to navigate the supermarket's sensory overload and resist the influence of the music.

In contrast, the second trip reflects the protagonist's regained sense of self and clarity, "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 . . . She has moved from a dream-like state to reality" (Jayne Patterson *Par. 3*). The description of the shopping process is condensed into a brief paragraph, indicating her increased efficiency and focus. She only buys what she truly wants, showing her reconnection with her own desires and preferences. Her reliance on her memory instead of a prepared list suggests her increased confidence and trust in her instincts. Furthermore, the quickness of the second trip emphasizes her newfound ease and familiarity with herself and the world around her:

> In the supermarket she went methodically up and down the aisles, relentlessly out-manoeuvring the muskrat-furred ladies, edging the Saturday children to the curb, picking the things off the shelves. . . . Eggs. Flour. Lemons for the flavour. Sugar, icing sugar, vanilla, salt, food colouring. . . . She started back towards the apartment, carrying her paper bag. She turned on the oven. . . . She tied on an apron and rinsed the new bowls and the other new utensils under the tap, but did not disturb any of the dirty dishes. . . . She poured the batter into the tin and drew a fork sideways through it to break the large air bubbles . . . It was a long time since she had made a cake. (*EW* 295-6)

 Marian confidently strides through the supermarket, her mind clear and focused. She knows exactly what she needs and where to find it. With each item, her memory guides her choices. She moves swiftly through the aisles, effortlessly picking up the products she desires. The shopping process is quick and efficient, leaving her with a sense of satisfaction and a renewed sense of self.

The stylistic analysis of the second excerpt suggests that Marian is in a state of control and confidence. The narrative employs stylistic devices to convey her clarity of purpose and efficient decision-making. (1) Repetition and parallel structure: The repetition of phrases like "She wanted," "She dried," "She poured," and "She slid" highlights Marian's agency and control over her actions. The parallel structure emphasizes her deliberate and focused approach to baking. (2) Specificity and detail: The author provides specific details about the ingredients and baking tools Marian chooses. The inclusion of items like "eggs," "flour," "lemons," "sugar," and "vanilla" creates a vivid and precise image of Marian's shopping list. These specific details further emphasize her thorough planning and meticulous attention to the task at hand. (3) Inner dialogue: The mention of Marian's thoughts, such as her consideration of using chocolate or cocoa, and her satisfaction at making a cake after a long time, reveals her confidence and pleasure in her decisions. This inner dialogue reflects her self-assuredness and control over her choices. (4) Descriptive language: The use of descriptive language, such as "creeping skin-disease-covering of dirt," creates a contrasting image between the well-organized baking area and the neglected parts of the kitchen. This contrast reinforces Marian's intentional focus on the task she is currently undertaking. (5) Sensory details: The inclusion of sensory details, such as the texture of the sponge cake batter and the sound of the fork breaking the air bubbles, adds depth to the scene. These details not only enhance the reader's sensory experience but also emphasize Marian's attention to detail and her mastery of the baking process. In brief, the stylistic elements in this passage convey Marian's sense of control and confidence. Her purposeful actions, clear decision-making, and attention to detail demonstrate her ability to manage and organize her environment. The specific details and sensory descriptions immerse the reader in Marian's experience, highlighting her self-assuredness and satisfaction in her actions.

These examples demonstrate how the language and style used in describing the two trips to the supermarket reflect the protagonist's transformation from confusion and loss to regained

identity and clarity.

Conclusion

Binary oppositions are a fundamental concept within structuralism, a theoretical framework that emerged in the mid-20th century and has been influential in fields such as linguistics, anthropology, cultural studies, and literary analysis. Structuralism posits that meaning is generated through the contrast and interplay of opposing elements or concepts. These binary oppositions are tools used to analyze and understand the structure of human thought, culture, and language. In both cultural studies and literary analysis, the significance of binary oppositions lies in their ability to reveal the underlying structures and ideologies that shape our understanding of the world. By examining how these oppositions are constructed and represented in texts and cultures, structuralism seeks to decode meaning and uncover the processes through which meaning is created and maintained. This analytical approach has been instrumental in shedding light on the complexities of human thought, culture, and language. In cultural studies, binary oppositions are employed to investigate the relationships and power dynamics between different social or cultural groups. In postcolonial studies, the binary opposition between colonizer and colonized is crucial. This binary helps analyze how colonial powers asserted their dominance over colonized nations. Us vs. Them is often used in the analysis of nationalism and identity politics. It explores how societies create and reinforce group divisions based on nationality, ethnicity, or religion. For example, the concept of "othering" involves constructing an opposing group as fundamentally different or inferior, leading to discrimination or prejudice. In literary analysis, binary oppositions are used to explore the underlying themes and structures within a text. Good vs. Evil is a classic binary opposition found in many literary works. Nature vs. Nurture is often used to analyze character development. Male vs. Female has been a focal point of feminist literary analysis.

In Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, the intricate web of character pairs and their contrasting dynamics serves as a

powerful vehicle for exploring the multifaceted themes of identity, gender roles, and societal expectations. As we delve into the lives of Marian, Ainsley, Peter, Clara, Joe, Len, Duncan, and others, we witness a rich tapestry of human experiences that reflect the tension between personal desires and the pressures of conformity in a rigid society. Marian's transformation from a compliant young woman to a rebellious individual mirrors the overarching theme of self-discovery and resistance to societal pressures. Through her interactions with characters like Ainsley, Clara, Peter, and Len, we see the spectrum of choices available to women in the 1960s and the consequences of embracing or challenging traditional roles. Ainsley's journey, from carefree femininity to the harsh realities of motherhood, underscores the stark contrast between societal ideals and the responsibilities women face. Her character reminds us that the path to self-discovery often involves navigating the clash between personal desires and external expectations. The male characters, including Peter, Joe, Len, and Duncan, provide a counterpoint to Marian's struggle. They represent the limited roles and expectations placed upon men during this era, adding depth to the exploration of gender dynamics. Furthermore, the interactions between these characters, such as Ainsley's flirtation with Peter or Marian's evolving friendship with Clara, reveal the complexities of human relationships and the power of influence in shaping one's identity. Ultimately, *The Edible Woman* serves as a thought-provoking exploration of the intricate dance between individuality and conformity, personal desires and societal expectations. It challenges us to reflect on our roles within the societal constructs surrounding us and encourages us to seek our own paths, just as Marian does in her quest for self-discovery. In brief, Margaret Atwood's novel is a masterful examination of the human condition, wrapped in the cloak of a compelling narrative. Its characters and their contrasting dynamics compel us to confront our own beliefs and choices, making *The Edible Woman* a timeless and thought-provoking work that continues to resonate with readers, encouraging us all to question, resist, and ultimately, discover our own true selves.

In Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, the narrative structure emerges as a vital element that guides the storytelling and mirrors the evolution of Marian's character. Divided into three distinct parts, each utilizing a different narrative perspective, this structure is a powerful tool that conveys Marian's shifting psychological state as she navigates the complex terrain of societal expectations and personal identity. The shift from the initial first-person narrative, which draws readers intimately close to Marian's thoughts and emotions, to the third-person perspective, which gradually distances us from her inner world, is a profound literary device. It allows us to witness Marian's transformation from a compliant conformist to a woman in search of her own identity. This shift in perspective corresponds to her growing detachment from her own sense of self, a journey that the reader is invited to witness in an almost clinical manner. This narrative structure beautifully underscores the novel's central themes. It serves as a powerful metaphor for the struggle many individuals face in reconciling their own desires and aspirations with the expectations and norms imposed by society. Through this literary device, readers are not only spectators but active participants in Marian's psychological journey. We feel her initial connection and later detachment, mirroring the internal conflicts she grapples with. In brief, the distinctive narrative structure of *The Edible Woman* is not merely a stylistic choice but a deliberate and effective means of conveying the novel's central themes. It immerses us in Marian's world, allowing us to intimately understand her, only to gradually pull us back as she becomes disconnected from her identity. This dynamic narrative technique brilliantly mirrors Marian's transformation and provides readers with a thought-provoking exploration of identity, societal expectations, and the complexities of personal growth. Margaret Atwood's skillful use of narrative structure elevates the novel into a work of literary artistry that continues to resonate with readers, inviting them to contemplate their own journeys of self-discovery and conformity in a changing world.

The contrast between the protagonist's two trips to the supermarket symbolizes her transformation and evolving state of

mind. The differences in language and style used to describe these trips highlight the profound change in Marian's character and her journey from confusion and loss to regained identity and clarity. The first trip to the supermarket stresses confusion and loss. Marian's style reflects her initial state of confusion and discomfort with societal expectations. The language and style used to describe this trip are characterized by uncertainty and a sense of detachment. The second one highlights regained identity and clarity. It reflects Marian's transformation and growing clarity about her identity and desires. The language and style used in this part of the novel are more assertive and self-assured. The contrast between these two trips to the supermarket is a vivid representation of Marian's personal journey throughout the novel. It symbolizes her progression from a state of confusion and conformity, where she feels like a passive observer of her own life, to a state of regained identity and clarity, where she actively makes choices that reflect her true self. The shift in language and style underscores this transformation, emphasizing the novel's central themes of self-discovery and resistance to societal expectations.

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