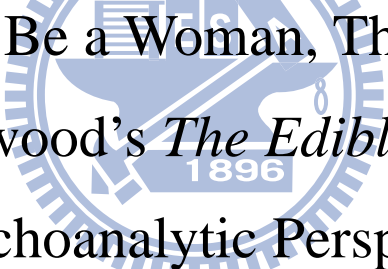


國立交通大學

外國語文學系外國文學與語言學碩士班

碩士論文

作為或不作為一個女人，這是個問題：
以精神分析論瑪格麗特·艾特伍德之《可食的女人》



To Be or Not to Be a Woman, That is the Question:
Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* in the
Psychoanalytic Perspective

研究生：林秀宇

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摘 要

此論文採用精神分析的觀點來閱讀瑪格麗特·艾特伍德的小說《可食的女人》。藉由精神分析的架構來探討書中的女主角瑪麗安對自己身為女人的自覺，以及分析瑪麗安作為一個歇斯底里女人的主體性。另外，此論文也將透過闡述到底作為一個女人會面臨什麼樣問題的過程中，重新檢視瑪麗安和其他角色的關係，並提出有別於其他評論者對女性氣質的定義。

全文共分成五個部分。第一章簡述此論文題目探討的重要性，以及對這本小說的文獻回顧和方法論的應用。第二章探討瑪麗安的欲求，除了解釋何以歇斯底里患者的身體為一充滿情欲的身體之外，也加以說明此欲望實為一未被滿足之欲望，進而探討瑪麗安的厭食與母親之間的關係。第三章探討瑪麗安對己身性別的困惑和他身為女人的自覺。在第四章中，我將提出瑪麗安和鄧肯之間的情感轉移是瑪麗安重新恢復健康和「正常」生活的關鍵所在。最後，經過一連串的探討，我們了解到作為一個女人對瑪麗安而言是什麼，並藉由精神分析的觀點重新定義女性氣質，因此在結論部分，我將綜合以上的論點來揭露小說的書名《可食的女人》所要傳達的訊息。

關鍵詞：精神分析、女性氣質、主體性、認同過程、情感轉移、《可食的女人》。

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ABSTRACT

This thesis adopts the psychoanalytic perspective to analyze Margaret Atwood's novel, *The Edible Woman*. Under the framework of psychoanalysis, we discuss the protagonist's, Marian's, awareness of being a woman and also her subjectivity of being a hysteric woman. Besides, this thesis will re-examine the relationship between Marian and other characters via the problems confronted in a woman's life and offer a new definition of femininity.

The thesis is divided into five parts. Chapter One describes the significance of the thesis topic, the literature review of the novel, and the methodology I will apply for in the following chapters. Chapter Two concerns what Marian desires. In addition to explaining why the hysteric's body is an erotogenic body, I will further elucidate that Marian's desire is actually an unsatisfied desire. In this chapter, I will also discuss the relationship between Marian's anorexia nervosa and her mother. Chapter Three discusses Marian's sexual confusion and what it is to be a woman for her. In Chapter Four, I want to prove that transference between Duncan and Marian is the key point for the restoration of Marian's health and her "normal" life. Finally, after a series of discussions, we understand what it would be like to be a woman for Marian and redefine femininity in psychoanalytic perspective. Therefore, in my conclusion, I will combine the above theses to unveil the message hidden in the novel's title, "The Edible Woman."

Keywords: psychoanalysis, femininity, subjectivity, identification, transference, *The Edible Woman*.

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Writing a thesis is like setting out on a mysterious labyrinthine adventure. I have to try several paths which I never trod on or discovered to search the entry to a totally new world. The ways I chose are not always passable and smooth. While some ways lead me to obstacles and sufferings, some surprise me with unexpected treasures, which help me achieve the goal. On the way to accomplishing my thesis, I have obtained many people's assistance and encouragement, without which I cannot finish my thesis and thus taste the fruit of success. Hence, I would like to take advantage of this acknowledgement to thank them.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Margaret Atwood's Writing Motive and Plot Summary

Margaret Atwood admits herself that during the process of writing *The Edible Woman* in 1965, she had “been speculating for some time about symbolic cannibalism” (EW 7). As she is especially fascinated by “wedding cakes with sugar brides and grooms” (EW 7), the title of the novel, “The Edible Woman,” is more or less related to Atwood's early experiences. As we shall see, the heroine, Marian McAlpin, is a twenty-four-year old rookie who has just graduated from the university and works at a marketing survey company. She lives on the top floor of a once well-to-do noble house with her roommate, Ainsley, in Toronto. Ainsley is at the same age as Marian, though a few months older. For her, a woman can only fulfill her deepest femininity via the process of pregnancy. In light of this, she dresses herself up as a virginal schoolgirl and traps Len, Marian's college friend who just comes back from England, to impregnate her. However, Ainsley's decision of rejecting Len to be the father of the baby makes him become insane at the end of the novel. When Marian studies in college, she has another good friend, Clara, who still keeps in touch with Marian even though she is already married to Joe and is now a pregnant housewife and a mother of two. Marian also has a boyfriend, Peter, who will become her fiancé as the novel develops.

In the novel, it is evident that Marian has transformed from a “normal” woman into a hysterical one, who develops anorexia nervosa, eccentric behaviors, and unexplainable fantasies, and returns to her former state as if nothing has actually changed. As Atwood claims in the “Introduction,” “It's noteworthy that my heroine's choices remain much the same at the end of the book as they are at the beginning: a career going nowhere, or marriage as an exit from it” (EW 8).

After having several conversations with Duncan, who is a graduate student of English Literature and who runs into Marian at the laundry after their first meeting in a questionnaire interview, Marian not only has an affair with him but recovers from the eating disorder later on by devouring the cake-woman, which is baked by herself and is bestowed a symbolic meaning. Overall, the relationship between Marian, Duncan, and Peter is so complicated that I want to analyze it and offer a different point of view to look at the novel.

1.2. Main Argument and Significance of My Topic

At the moment when Atwood published her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, in 1969, it witnessed the significant rise of North American feminism. Although Atwood herself regards the novel “as profeminist rather than feminist” since there was still “no women’s movement in sight” when she “was composing the book in 1965” (*EW* Introduction), many critics, including Lisa Jane Rutherford, Coral Ann Howells, and J. Brooks Bouson, read the novel in the feminist perspective since they respectively believe that *The Edible Woman* displays “the objectification, fragmentation, and consumption of female desire in contemporary Western society” (Rutherford iii), explores the “artifice and fantasy involved in representations of the female body” (Howells 38), and reveals Atwood’s “rejection of her own femininity” (Bouson 72).

What I find is that these critics share this common viewpoint: they want to know “what” a woman is, but they take a unilateral view to simply examine “what” a woman is under the gaze of men. The critics are so preoccupied with patriarchal mechanism without taking a closer look at the woman herself on how she may unconsciously think who she is. No doubts, their works are influential and important since they offer us a way to problematize the normalized relationship between men and women. Nevertheless, they neglect to problematize Marian herself, the

protagonist of *The Edible Woman*, whether she is a “woman” or not. In this way, I want to adopt the psychoanalytic perspective to analyze the novel because when most critics focus mainly on how Marian protests against the patriarchal context, they nonetheless ignore what Marian unconsciously desires and the fact that Marian confuses herself as a woman. In other words, while critics render Marian’s hysterical symptoms as a common phenomenon among Canadian women to express their dissatisfaction and rancor towards the patriarchal ideology, these critics overlook Marian’s individuality as a hysteric woman. What I mean is that although women are generally treated as an object of exchange by the phallogentric institution, they do not adopt an identical attitude and their reactions may vary. For example, some women can live undisturbedly as though patriarchy is part of their life, whereas some will rebel against the gender inequality in their daily life radically as if they represent the spokespersons of every oppressed woman. Still others may superficially coexist with the patriarchal system, but unconsciously they know something has gone wrong. So they fall prey to their hysterical symptoms at a specific moment. My thesis therefore intends to discuss those women who suddenly turn into hysterics without knowing why. Since so many critics have tackled the problems and the relationship between patriarchy and the persecuted women as some feminists used to hold, I attempt to offer a different view to analyze the inner struggle and the psychical predicament of the hysterics in the psychoanalytic perspective. To put it another way, I will employ psychoanalysis to analyze what it is to be a woman for hysterics and re-define what femininity is besides the feminist interpretations. Now, I intend to re-examine the present Margaret Atwood scholarship on *The Edible Woman*, pointing out their contribution and deficiency, to which I hope my thesis can offer its new findings.

1.3. Literature Review

Since my topic concerns what it is to be a woman and what femininity is, I will put an emphasis on the literature concerning femininity and psychoanalysis. As a result, I would like to divide my literature review into three main groups: the feminist reading, the comparison of *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Edible Woman*, and the psychoanalytic perspective. I include a literature review on the comparison of *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Edible Woman* not only because *Alice in Wonderland* is mentioned in *The Edible Woman* but because both Alice and Marian are puzzled by the same questions of “what I am” and “what a woman is.” Besides, while Alice makes her journey, which causes her to doubt her identity, during her sleep, Marian also realizes what she is in a world between reality and fantasy.

Let me begin from the feminist literature review. Most feminists pay attention to *how* women are exploited and reduced to the objects of exchange, infantile status, and self-diminished conditions by the powerful patriarchal ideology. The feminist commentators thus define that femininity is a “mystique” and “inauthentic” product created by the male-centered society in order to control women’s behaviors and mind. For instance, in “‘Feminine, Female, Feminist’: From *The Edible Woman* to ‘The Female Body,’” Howells appropriates Betty Friedan’s view in *The Feminine Mystique*, which criticizes the feminine mystique as based upon domesticity and social exploitation of the female body, to examine the two protagonists in Margaret Atwood’s *The Edible Woman* and her little fable “The Female Body” respectively. Howells contends that *The Edible Woman*, which prefigures the early 1990s postwar feminism in the history of North America, can be treated as a rebellion against the social myths of femininity in the contemporary society. Commenting on consumerism and the advertising campaign, Howells unveils the secret of the feminine mystique, in which women have actually lost their independence and subjectivity. Concealed by the image of pleasant domesticity, they are transformed into dependent objects in the

marrital relation as good housewives and mothers. Therefore, in her opinion, Marian's eating disorder is a hysterical protest since "Marian's body speaks its language of rebellion against the socialized feminine identity that she appears to have already accepted" (47) by resisting consumption and herself being consumed. I partially agree with her that patriarchal system indeed forms a "feminine mystique" of femininity, in the masculine constructions of which women are treated as an "other" such as a child-like doll image and an object of exchange, rather than a complete human being, since women are not only silent but silenced without having their own identities or voices to express their feelings and desires (57). However, I also doubt that patriarchy is the only reason to have caused Marian's hysterical symptoms. Since Marian is not the only persecuted woman in this patriarchal society, why her but not others?

To sum up, for Howells, the current concepts of femininity are filled with "mystification" and "inauthenticity" (40). She goes on: "In North American society of the late 1950s and 1960s [...] 'adjustment' for a woman meant accepting a dependent 'feminine' role [...]" (42). Accordingly, Howells keeps censuring the "cultural definitions" of femininity since in her opinion femininity is a kind of product of patriarchy. No doubt the oppression of the patriarchal system is one of the reasons that has caused Marian to generate traumas and hysterical symptoms. But it is not objective enough to blame all things on the patriarchal society alone. How about Marian herself? Is she always a victim? Are all of her unusual actions aroused by gender inequality and social oppression? Or, is it possible to decipher her abrupt and unreasonable conducts not only from outside but from within herself? Besides, except for the "mystification" and "inauthenticity" of femininity, are there no other "clarification" and "true essence" of femininity, which can barely be detectible, are invisible but can exist as such?

Similarly, in "*The Edible Woman's Refusal to Consent to Femininity*," J. Brooks

Bouson suggests:

The Edible Woman dismantles and demystifies the marriage ideal by laying bare what has long been naturalized—and hence ignored—in the traditional romance scenario: the painful objectification and self-diminishment of women in a male-dominated order. (91)

In other words, like Howells, Bouson also claims that femininity, which means the elimination of self-identity and the objectification of a woman, is granted by the patriarchal order as a masquerade. In her view, femininity for a woman is like transvestism for a transvestite, so “femininity is a role requiring make-up, costumes, and well-rehearsed lines . . . in order to be properly performed” (82). As Eleonora Rao contends, the red dress and the mask of make-up Marian wears for the party represent “the entry into femininity” (136). Rao continues that femininity is “a construct of male desire, and effectively portrays the process as a *masquerade*, as Luce Irigaray has called Freud’s notion of femininity.” Rao summarizes Freud’s words thus: “It is necessary, according to Freud, for the girl to make the painful transition, to ‘pass from her masculine phase to the feminine one’ in order to become a normal woman” (136). In light of this, we find that Rao believes that femininity is produced as a masquerade via the intention of patriarchal context. Nevertheless, she garbles Freud’s statement to claim that femininity should be always based on men’s desires. In my opinion, what Freud proclaims is that every child, including the little girl, thinks at first that he or she has a penis. However, one day as the girl finds that she is “castrated” as her mother, she must then identify with her father and develop “penis envy.” It is hard for a girl to accept the fact that it is as if she had already been “castrated.” As we shall see, as some girls cannot accept this seeming fact they become hysterics. Rao’s misinterpretation of Freud’s words brings out her own interpretation of “feminine masquerade,” which accords with Irigaray’s viewpoints. Therefore, it is in this light

that Rao appropriates Irigaray's words to say this on masquerade:

The masquerade represents the moment in which women try to “recuperate some elements of desire, to participate in man's desire, but at the price of renouncing their own. In the masquerade, they submit to the dominant economy of desire in an attempt to remain “‘on the market’ in spite of everything.” For a woman this movement signifies the “entry into a system of values which is not hers, and in which she can “appear” and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely, men.” (136)

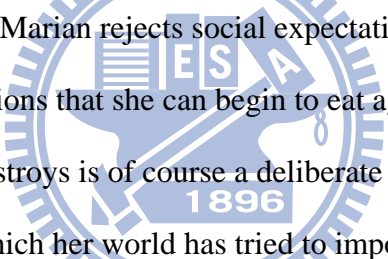
In short, if accepting femininity means only objectifying oneself or performing a gender according to Howells, Bouson, and Rao, then the discussion remains stagnant since no matter what we say, femininity will come to the same conclusion that it is the product of patriarchy. Actually, it makes me ponder whether it is a rule that as long as women live in this patriarchal society, their subjectivity will first be deprived and have then to struggle and fight against the established patriarchal system so to recuperate their subjectivity. To break through the predicament and the limitation of the feminist reading, I attempt to use psychoanalysis to plumb something new. Therefore, since most of these critics note the importance of feminine masquerade, I would like to go back to Joan Riviere's “Womanliness as a Masquerade” to offer a different perspective to understand why women perform “feminine masquerade” in front of men.

Unlike Rao's interpretation of feminine masquerade as a way to accept femininity, Riviere declares an opposite statement that “women who wish for masculinity may put on a mask of womanliness to avert anxiety and retribution feared from men” (91). A woman, especially an intellectual woman who displays excellent performance in her career in the public, will unconsciously disguise herself as a

castrated woman in front of those “potentially hostile father-figures, such as doctors, builders, and lawyers.” Being “castrated and reduced to nothingness, like the mother” in her fantasy, she is afraid of these father figures, who will castrate her in vengeance. As Riviere recounts, a woman’s successful exhibition of her competence in public is a way to signify “an exhibition of herself in possession of her father’s penis, having castrated him” (93). Therefore, womanliness is a protective mask, which hides the woman’s masculinity and averts the threat of castration and the expected reprisals. For fear that she might be found to possess the father’s “penis,” she placates and appeases the father figure by “showing him her ‘love’ and guiltlessness,” and many men will be seduced in this way and give her the reassurance she needs (99). In addition to providing a different perspective to see what feminine masquerade is, I will also apply Riviere’s theory to analyze Marian’s roommate, Ainsley’s problematic way of dressing up and expressions in front of men and women. Instead of regarding her “innocent” temperament as a “gender performativity,” which is naturalized by the patriarchal system, I argue that her womanliness is rather a masquerade to hide her masculinity from the menace of castration and expected reprisals. The most important is that she even uses her womanliness as a weapon to get what she has longed for, the father figure’s “penis,” which for her is equal to having a child without the father. In other words, the child somewhat fulfills her wish of having her own “penis.” Likewise, Marian also wears her feminine masquerade to prevent herself from the danger of castration, and to become the phallus for Peter. I will enlarge this point in my subsequent chapters.

Also, many critics have compared *The Edible Woman* to *Alice in Wonderland* because both novels question the protagonists’ identities as a woman by introducing the magic power of food. While Marian in *The Edible Woman* understands what a woman is through the process of anorexia, Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* questions her

identity via eating magic food, which causes the size-changing in her female body. The food is not just food in both novels since it is granted a symbolic meaning to help the two protagonists find out what it is to be a woman. As the text reveals, Atwood herself has created a role, Fish, who is an English graduate student devoted to the study of symbols in literature, to give readers the premonition of the subsequent development of Marian's anorexia. As Fish claims, *Alice in Wonderland* is a story about a little girl descending into the very suggestive rabbit-burrow, which symbolizes her pre-natal stage, trying to find "her role as a Woman" (194). To Gelnys Stow, both Atwood and Carroll use "nonsensical techniques and allusions" to comment on the traditional female role and the insane society she lives in. As a feminist, Stow remarks,


 It is only when Marian rejects social expectations and takes responsibility for her own actions that she can begin to eat again; and the cake that she devours and destroys is of course a deliberate symbol of the artificial womanhood which her world has tried to impose on her. (90)

Also, in Barbara Hill Rigney's account, Marian's body is like Alice's, which is subject to a sudden metamorphosis, such as transforming into a small figure or into a giant by eating specific drinks or food. Likewise, Marian's mental state is symbolically changed into different "sizes," as in one of the examples in which she has gazed at her small silvery image reflected in the bowl of the spoon: "herself upside down with a huge torso narrowing to a pinhead at the handle end. She tilted the spoon and her forehead swelled, then receded" (*EW* 146). As we can observe, food possesses the power to control the size of the female body, and becomes one of the means for the protagonists to search for their identity as a "Woman."

Finally, since the novel is regarded by most commentators as a feminist writing, I have found very few articles that read the novel in the psychoanalytic perspective.

The only exception is probably Sonia Mycak's essay, "*The Edible Woman: The Split Subject as Agent of Exogamous Exchange.*" In this article, Mycak points out that the construction of an individual subjective position is closely linked with the dynamics of the symbolic society such as "dynamics of circulation, consumption, and commodification, and relations of marriage, sex, and signification" (47). Nevertheless, while society and the subject are symbolic, "they are also divisive," so Marian disintegrates her sense of self and is unable to unify her multiple and fractured identity in the social commentary. In this way, Mycak wants to examine the issue of the split subject within its socio-symbolic milieu by combining "structural anthropological and psychoanalytic ideas" (48).

Mycak further argues, "Marian's self-imposed starvation becomes the symptom of an inability to circulate within exchange and a regression to the asymbolic" (50). She re-examines Marian's subjective position in the Lacanian method and reconsiders the relationship between the subject and the object in light of "the Hegelian master-slave dialectic" (63). She is concerned with how Marian returns to the imaginary stage or the mirror stage proposed by Lacan from the "old" symbolic world, and then goes back again to a "new" symbolic world, via the process of anorexia. As we can detect, the thesis she wants to offer is more or less what it is to be a woman for Marian since what she discusses is Marian's split subjectivity. However, what Mycak is most concerned with is still confined to the sphere of the relationship between the subject and the object, or the master and the slave. In other words, she still has not put the distinction of genders under scrutiny, but regards a man as Man and a woman as Woman. She puts emphasis on searching for Marian's identity as a woman by positing her in a fixed position of Woman without detecting the hysteric's general confusion of sexual difference. What I mean is that if she mentions that Marian returns to the imaginary stage, in which a young child still cannot discern what sexual difference is

but can differentiate the one with the phallus and the other without it, it is defective to simply discuss Marian's identification with woman without mentioning her identification with man. Nevertheless, although Mycak does not break her issue away from the limitation of gender problems, she pays more attention on Marian's inward thinking than most feminists do, who concerns social exploitation of women rather than the predicament within Marian's subjectivity. Thus, I want to offer some suggestions to complement Mycak's argument. In other words, while Mycak offers a different interpretation of Marian's commodification "in terms of the individual subjective stance" rather than "in general terms of social exploitation" (49), I analyze Marian's hysteria in respect of her childhood trauma and anxiety rather than simply in terms of her relationship with the patriarchal society.

Overall, instead of putting Marian in the position of the otherness, which is oppressed and objectified by the patriarchal society as many critics have pointed out, I view Marian as a hysterical case study, such as Dora's case, to discuss her desires, her sexual confusion, and her transference towards Duncan. I want to decipher the codes behind Marian's hysterical symptoms via the analytic method of psychoanalysis and to give the readers another perspective to read the novel not only from the feminist viewpoint but also from the psychoanalytic one.

1.4. Why is Marian a Hysteric?

Before we delve into the discussion of what it is to be a woman for Marian, some might raise the question: In what way is Marian a hysteric? Nowadays in the West, many insist that hysteria has already disappeared. We even hear more or less that hysteria is replaced by the term "femininity" (Mitchell 186) or feminine disease. According to Juliet Mitchell, the above comments are an incorrect impression of hysteria since hysteria still exists in our lives and is never the disease privileged to

women. She takes the examples of dreams and the slips of tongue or pen to denote that “women and men do not produce sexually differentiated symptoms” since there is no gender difference in the unconscious. We can only report that women are prone to develop the hysterical symptoms than men, but there is no such thing called “female” hysteria. To approve Mitchell’s view, I will enumerate Len’s case in the novel as a piece of evidence to affirm that men can also be attacked by hysteria.

I regard Marian as a hysteric for the following reasons. First, she is attacked by serious hallucination that she blends reality with her fantasy together without distinguishing them. According to Josef Breuer, Anna O. often indulges in her hallucination “filled with terrifying figures, death’s heads and skeletons” (27). Likewise, when Marian immerses herself in her hallucinations, in which she cannot see herself but the dead rabbit, the terrible hunting images, and Peter’s isolated future, she is full of anxiety and horror as Anna O. is in her own hallucination. Next, Marian does not feel any pleasure or orgasm in sexual intercourse. According to Juan-David Nasio, a hysteric’s body “suffers from being an outsized, cumbersome phallus with a hole in it in the genital region,” so her genital parts cannot feel any jouissance; instead, her “erotogenic body” as a phallus is the place where she feels the unbearable pleasure. Third, Marian expresses strong cravings for love, through which she generates a serious eating disorder. As Breuer and Freud observe, some hysterics have eating problems, including Anna O., and Frau Emmy von N., not to mention Dora. Their eating disorder or anorexia nervosa is not simply the physical disease since their anorexia is usually accompanied more or less by phobia, which can be related to their traumas in the past or psychological problems they face now. For example, while Anna O. finds it impossible to drink because of the horrid dog she has once met (Breuer, 34), Emmy von N. shows her disgust at the meat because of her childhood trauma (Freud 1895d, 82). Moreover, the hysteric’s anorexia has a lot to do with the lack of love. As

we can see, while Emmy von N. loses her appetite right after her husband's death, Marian's first symptom of eating disorder appears after she consents to Peter's proposal. Fourth, as Marian usually wants to involve others, she usually gives the surrounding people a hard time. As Mitchell mentions, the hysteric is unmanageable, for the reason that they have urgent need and ability "to involve the other, as Anna O involved Breuer" (196). Finally, Marian has sexual confusion as almost every hysteric may encounter. According to Mitchell, the hysterical girl cannot accept the fact that she is "already castrated" but instead "she identifies with her father to possess her mother, and with her mother to possess her father" (187). To put it another way, the hysteric will rather identify with a man's desire and with a man than with a woman since except for the fact that she cannot break through the ordeal of castration, the hysteric is perplexed by the question of what it is to be a woman since women are always a mysterious enigma for her, and she believes that she can find an answer to it.

1.5. Proposal Summary and Methodology

In *The Edible Woman*, we observe that the protagonist, Marian, who possesses an excessively high morality and anxiety, has transformed from a "normal" woman to an anorexic, and then returned to her "normal" life again. By appearance, the novel describes the process of how an anorexic woman is cured abruptly without any doctor's prescription or help. However, if we investigate the causes of Marian's anorexia, the relationship between her and other characters, and the narrative mechanism of the whole novel, we will discover that Marian's "abnormal" behaviors and eating disorder are not so much simply physical changes as psychological rebellions. As we can observe, her hysterical symptoms such as her unexpected escape from people, her phobic anorexia, and her sudden paralysis, a result from the explosion of her long-time repressed affect, which is combined with many incompatible ideas and

has no way to find a discharge. Therefore, to untie the secret behind “the edible woman,” we should not regard food as simply nourishment, symptoms as physical pains, and most significantly, a woman as “woman.” To regard Marian as a hysteric woman in view of psychoanalysis, my thesis attempts to argue that what it is to be a woman for Marian and what the title, “The Edible Woman,” implies has to do with Marian’s desire, sexual confusion, and transference for Duncan.

In short, my thesis contains five chapters, including the introduction, three main body chapters of the former mentioned arguments, and the conclusion.

Chapter One is the introduction. In this chapter, I will show that the contemporary critical conversation of what a woman “is” instead of what a woman “should be” makes my thesis title significant. Since Atwood writes this novel at the rise of North American postwar feminism in 1960s, I will re-examine what femininity is and what it is to be a woman in the psychoanalytic perspective, but not in the feminist point of view. In other words, differing from the feminist interpretation that femininity, as derived only from the patriarchal mechanism, is full of mystique and inaccuracy, the femininity I want to elucidate and decipher is an identification starting from the childhood and a task of castration. In this way, I will at first give a historical review of the scholarship, which focuses on discussing femininity and the issues of what a woman is in *The Edible Woman*. And then, applying the cases of Anna O., Emmy von N., and Dora and comparing them with Marian’s unusual demeanors, I will prove that Marian is in fact a hysteric. In light of this, Dora’s case and the dream of the butcher’s wife¹ are helpful for us to understand Marian. In addition, since the methodology I am going to use is psychoanalysis, I will narrate why I adopt the

¹ In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud takes the example of his female hysteric, the butcher’s wife’s dream, to prove his assertion that “all dreams are fulfillments of wishes” (146). By analyzing her dream, we also discover the nuance of identification between the hysteric and other women. Therefore, I intend to take the example of the butcher’s wife to interpret Marian.

viewpoints of Sigmund Freud, Joan Riviere, Jonathan Lear, and most importantly, Jacques Lacan. In order to explain the relation between the female body and the landscape in the novel, I will also borrow J. Douglas Porteous's ideas.

Chapter Two concerns what Marian desires. As the text discloses, Marian herself neither figures out why she keeps giving others a hard time, nor comprehends what makes her act out those irregular behaviors. Therefore, I will first use André Green's idea that "my knowledge is one of knowing not that I know" to elucidate that Marian resists to be treated as a consumed object by Peter, her colleagues, and the exploitative male-centered society, so that her repressed affect is thus converted to her body, or more precisely, to her erotogenic body. To explain that the hysteric's body is not an organic body, but an erotogenic body, I will use Monique David-Ménard's view to illustrate that Marian's weird conducts and anorexia are her ways to experience "pleasure," which goes along with pain, all derived from her five-year-old childhood body. Next, I contend that what Marian desires is an unsatisfied desire. When Marian makes love with Peter, she remains absent from the lovemaking scene by imagining what reason it is that makes Peter make love with her each time and why Peter chooses the bathtub as the place to make love this time. Linking the bathtub to the drowned woman, Marian also develops the fleeting vision that she and Peter die accidentally in the bathtub, and the scene is later misinterpreted by the next apartment-renters as a suicide for love. Marian even observes the decoration and arrangement of Peter's bathroom, recalling the first time she met Peter at a garden party following her graduation and the first time they make love. As a result, instead of indulging herself into the process of lovemaking and uttering erotic words to express her bliss, Marian feels only "rotten" even though she tells Peter that it is "marvelous" to make love with him. Here, I will use Nasio's viewpoints to demonstrate that Marian does this on purpose to make herself never reach the

jouissance, since the hysteric lives the psychological life of fear and of persistent refusal to experience the utmost pleasure, a pleasure which she deems that once she reaches it, the wholeness of her being will be placed under the threat of full collapse and disappearance.

Secondly, Marian's unusual behaviors which happened during the meeting with her friend, Len, such as her sudden weeping without proper reasons, the unexpected running away from her friends, and her slipping under Len's bed, result from Marian's overwhelming anxiety. She does not know how to deal with it but behaves in her own structured, idiosyncratic way to appease it. Here, I will use Jonathan Lear's revision of Dora's case in his chapter "Transference" to illustrate how Marian tackles her overflowing anxiety. Besides, that Marian escapes from others does not mean that she prefers to stay alone; on the contrary, she wants to involve and manipulate others by being the only "phallus" pursued by others. Nevertheless, since the chase is no longer a game but is transformed into a hunting movement in Marian's imagination, Marian's castration anxiety is also aroused since she imagines herself as a phallus. In short, what Marian wants is not only "being adjusted," but also manipulating and grasping others' attention by fantasizing herself as a phallus.

Finally, Marian's anorexia, which is accompanied by phobia, reveals her eager craving for love from Peter and the rejection of her mother's suffocating love. Even after a series of Marian's eccentric behaviors, Peter proposes still to Marian. However, Marian develops eating disorder in return, for she thinks that Peter marries her because she is suitable to be his wife, but not because Peter loves her as Marian. As Freud points out in "Mourning and Melancholia," as mourning, melancholia "may be a reaction to the loss of a beloved object," which "may not really have died" (205). Marian becomes gradually unable to eat because she mourns the loss of "former" Peter, who differs from the domineering Peter and whom she loves, so that she

“assimilates” the “dead” Peter and “destroys” both herself and him by rejecting the nourishment of food. Besides, since food is bestowed a symbolic meaning by patriarchal cultures in Kristeva’s view (*Powers of Horror* 75), Marian’s rejection of food can be regarded as a way of resisting her femininity since she refuses to be castrated and to enter the symbolic order. In addition, although there is no clear description of the relationship between Marian and her mother, we can observe that the mother-daughter bond between the landlady and her daughter is duplicated in the relationship between the landlady and Marian. In this way, in spite of the fact that the landlady never specifically forbids Marian and Ainsley to do anything, Marian feels that she is in fact “forbidden to do anything” (16) as the landlady’s infantilized daughter. Hence, the original trauma of Marian’s eating disorder should probably be traced back to the relationship between Marian and her mother, for Marian cannot bear and accept her mother’s “imperative” and “tyrannical” love any longer.

Chapter Three discusses Marian’s sexual confusion and what it is to be a woman for her. In this chapter, I would take the example of Dora’s case to discuss what a woman is in the Lacanian view rather than in the Freudian perspective since Freud has treated Dora roughly as a homosexual when she is confronted with Frau K.’s female body, Lacan on the contrary re-examines Dora’s identification from her childhood. In the novel, we cannot find any evidence to prove that Marian has homosexual inclination, but we more or less sense the divergence between Marian’s identification and that of other women. Therefore, I decide to use Lacan’s viewpoints to manifest what it is to be a woman for Marian and to define what femininity is.

First, Marian wants to be the signifier, the phallus, for the Other’s desire, rather than to be simply the object of the Other’s desire. Instead of identifying with other women, she identifies with men and their desires. Here, the butcher’s wife’s dream can help us better understand the context of Marian’s identification. As we can

discover, Peter is Marian's lover and the one she wants to marry, so Marian yearns to figure out what he desires and hankers for being the only signifier for his desire. Since Peter has once complimented Ainsley, Marian identifies with his desire and therefore identifies with Ainsley by changing her appearance and way of dressing up to accord with Peter's sexual objects. In this part, I will appropriate Freud's viewpoints to explain why men love prostitutes and why the penetration of virginity is a taboo. As for the question why women dress and behave as innocent girls, I will use Joan Riviere's idea of "feminine masquerade" to expose that women would wear the mask of womanliness to conceal their wishes for masculinity and to evade the threat of castration since the father figures want to inflict punishment on them for seizing their fathers' penises. Moreover, according to Riviere, as the man's love will also give back the woman her self-esteem (95), the feminine masquerade is in this way an approach to obtain men's reassurance. Nevertheless, to be only men's sexual objects cannot satisfy Marian since in her fantasy, she should be the signifier, the phallus, for everyone, especially for Peter, her former lover, and for Duncan, her subsequent lover. As we can see, Marian's maternity is aroused by Duncan, who is depicted as Jesus Christ, and like Dora, Marian wants to be the Madonna, the virgin goddess who is desired but may not be acquired by men and who bears her own "phallus," Jesus Christ, as the signifier. In light of this, I will explain that she becomes frozen in front of the camera because as a phallus, her castration anxiety is aroused. Finally, I will elaborate Marian's identification with Clara, the pregnant woman, to explain Marian's contradictory identification with her suffocating mother.

In the following section, I want to distinguish the nuance between "what I am" and "what I should be" by using the Lacanian mathemes of the subject and the being. I intend to discuss this because the novel has defined the difference between feminine role and core. Therefore, I want to use the Lacanian mathemes to re-define what has

been put on display in the novel. After discussing the issue of “what I am,” I will extend the subject further to the issue of “what it is to be a woman.” In this part, I will point out how Marian looks upon her own and other people’s female bodies and most significantly, what Marian thinks of being a woman.

In Chapter Four, I want to prove that transference between Duncan and Marian is the key point for the restoration of Marian’s health and her “normal” life. First, I will use Lear’s interpretation of transference between Dora and Freud to examine the relationship between Marian and Duncan. In other words, while Freud is ascribed to the “Herr K position” by Dora, Duncan is placed at the “Peter position” in Marian’s idiosyncratic way of tackling her anxiety. In addition, Duncan makes Marian understand what a woman is by taking her to climb the mountains, by way of which, Marian experiences a “pregnancy fantasy.” Here, I will use J. Douglas Porteous’s viewpoint of “bodyscape,” the relation between female body and landscape, to show that the journey of mountain-climbing is actually the medium for Marian to comprehend what it is to be a woman. As Porteous indicates, “The vision of a landscape as a female body is a common literary theme” (7). For instance, Stella Gibbon’s *Cold Comfort Farm* (1938) regards the earth as “a great, brown outstretched woman” and “the stem of a young sapling as phallus,” or “buds as nipples” (7). Therefore, when Marian climbs the hills, passing through bridges, she not only re-examines the female body but also gives herself a new birth. Besides, since Duncan has claimed that he lives in “a world of fantasies” (263) as what Marian usually plunges in, their conversations are somewhat like the ones between the analyst and the five-year-old child of Marian’s erotogenic body. I will apply Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* to treat the whole process as a dream-work because according to Freud, daytime phantasies are like dreams (530). Besides, the talking cure between Marian and Duncan can more or less be seen as the act of

“chimney-sweeping” between Anna O. and Breuer, since what Duncan and Marian explore is a “female body,” which can also be regarded as Marian’s imaginary body.

Talking of “pregnancy fantasy,” the famous cake-woman scene is a way as well for Marian to experience what a woman is. This scene has been discussed by almost every critic as either a successful escape from, or as another enmeshment into, the field of patriarchal system or the exploitative capitalism. I want to lay aside the former concern of the relationship between Marian and the society; rather, I would focus on the question about what the cake may represent for Marian, or more precisely, what kind of mood and status Marian possesses when she eats up the cake. Besides, while she devours the cake and terminates the aggravation of her anorexia, does it mean that she is ready to accept her femininity, or as Dora, she still presents a case of failure? In my opinion, as Marian makes the cake into a woman who satisfies Peter’s expectation, she makes it through the gaze of a man. And yet, when she presents the cake as a substitute of herself in front of Peter, he refuses it and flees away. Since the cake has been interpreted by many critics as femininity, Peter’s escape can be regarded as that his castration anxiety is aroused by Marian, and this time, he cannot confront it. Although Marian eats up the cake, which is equal to accepting both her castration and femininity, we still cannot assert that Marian is completely cured, for she might still identify with a man who tastes the cake-woman, and her sudden bulimia is actually another hysterical symptom. Therefore, I cannot stand on either side of whether the ending of the story presents a success or a failure for Marian. Nevertheless, as Nasio contends, everyone can be a hysteric. As in the example of Peter and Len, we can only suggest that Marian is temporarily “cured,” but we cannot be assured that she will not be attacked by hysteria again when she reenters another work place or falls in love with another man.

Chapter Five is my conclusion. After investigating the process that ranges from

Marian's desire, to her sexual confusion, and then to her rehabilitation, we understand what it is to be a woman for Marian and redefine femininity in psychoanalytic perspective. Therefore, in my conclusion, I want to disclose what the title, "The Edible Woman," means by combining my theses above. For me, the title reminds me first of the cake-woman. It is not only the task of castration existing in our daily life but also the condition in which we all might be enmeshed at a specific moment. We cannot avoid it. All we can do is live with this castration.



Chapter Two: What does Marian Desire?

It is evident that many critical debates have discussed the principal question of *what* and *how* Marian desires, but there is still something they ignore to detect, which remains thus unresolved. For instance, while Coral Ann Howells argues in “Feminine, Female, Feminist”: From *The Edible Woman* to “The Female Body” that *what* Marian longs for is the liberation from the social myths of femininity and the feminine mystique, both of which are naturalized and normalized by the restrictive social rules within the patriarchal culture, Jennifer Hobgood explores in “Anti-Edibles: Capitalism and Schizophrenia in Margaret Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*” *how* Marian desires by examining “the moment between the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of desire,” two terms which are Deleuze’s and Guattari’s terminology (Hobgood 148). Nevertheless, the “desires” the critics concern are confined in the interaction between Marian and the contemporary society. Thus, although in this chapter I attempt to expound what Marian desires, the perspective I provide differs from those of the previous reviewers, who put more emphasis on the relationship between an oppressed woman and the general social context than on Marian herself, the unrecognized unconscious desire of a hysterical woman in her. To unsettle the confusion of what Marian desires, which she herself does not know but which is latently implicated in the description of the novel, I divide this chapter into three parts: desiring an unsatisfied desire, wishing to manipulate others, and craving for love.

2.1. Desiring an Unsatisfied Desire

2.1.1. The Hysteric’s Erotogenic Body

First of all, I would contend that what Marian desires is an unsatisfied desire.

Before I begin to explain what kind of unsatisfied desire Marian desires, I would first explain what it means by that Marian desires an unsatisfied desire: it is because she experiences *jouissance* through her desiring, hysterical body. What is the “hysterical body?” Is it a body we are familiar with or a body belonging to the hysteric only? Now, I am going to argue that the hysterical body is rather an erotogenic body than an organic one by following Nasio’s and David-Ménard’s elucidations. Nasio states, “the body of the hysteric is not his real one, but a body of pure sensation” (7). Similarly, according to David-Ménard, the hysteric has no body; instead, he has an omnipresent body. What does it mean? It means that because of the hysteric’s loss of *jouissance* in his genitals, he on the contrary attains *jouissance* from all over his body, including his legs, mouth, and even his hair, all of which are the erogenous zones since his childhood. As we discover, when Marian tries to run away surreptitiously from the engagement party, she suddenly was attacked by an unknowing paralysis; she felt difficult to walk and her flesh felt numbed and compressed (*EW* 245). She does not get hurt but just cannot walk although one minute ago she can still do that. There is no problem in her organic function, but her legs simply cannot function properly. Why? Since the hysteric suffers, he suffers from the erotogenic body rather than the organic body. According to Nasio, atypical vomiting, enuresis, a crying fit, or a hysterical paralysis of the gait are the ways the hysteric experiences his infantile sexuality. In other words, the hysteric’s sexuality is the infantile sexuality, which remains under the surface of the seemingly “adult body.” In this way, we can say that the hysterical body is not a physical body, but an erotogenic body or a psychoanalytic body. As what Nasio reminds us, the hysteric will hystericize or erotize what is not sexual. That is, the hysteric sexualizes everything but his genitals.

Nasio also claims that the hysterical body, like the harlequin costume, can be disassociated into several parts, the image of which is called the unconscious

representation by him and which is referred to the trauma (15). Likewise, David-Ménard suggests that the omnipresent body of the hysteric is related to the patient's erogenous zones instead of his organic body. In other words, the hysteric's symptoms cannot be treated physiologically since the hysterical body is a psychoanalytic body, which is troubled by the surplus of affect dispersed by the ego, rather than an organic body, which can deal only with the organic measures. Comparing Nasio with David-Ménard, we discover that they both share the idea that the external trauma alone is not the pathogenesis of hysterical symptoms; instead, it is the psychic trace, charged with the overloaded affect and under the tremendous force of repression, which makes the psychoanalytic body stand alone and causes the hysterical symptom to form. Both of them share the viewpoint that the hysteric does not have the organic body. Therefore, while David-Ménard contends that the hysteric has no physical body, Nasio on the other hand proclaims that the hysteric who suffers in the conversion symptom can get the equivalent excess of sexual affect as coming from infantile masturbatory gratification since the hysteric's sexuality remains infantile (20). Accordingly, the hysteric's absent body what David-Ménard supposes can also be regarded as an auto-erotic body, which can achieve orgasm through infantile masturbation as Nasio mentions. However, Nasio gives us the example of a hysteric woman, who "actualizes in her body (as aphonia) the psychic imprint of the other's body (the mother's shouting)," to recount that the hysteric's body can refer to other bodies, including that of the adult seducer and the witness to the scene (22). In this way, the hysteric's omnipresent body cannot only be elucidated as an erotogenic body by David-Ménard but also be interpreted as a "multiple" body, which is constituted by not only the hysteric's body but also the bodies other than his, as in Nasio. In brief, no matter the hysteric's erotogenic body is interpreted as an omnipresent body or a multiple body, the hysterical body is definitely more than simply an organic body. I

will later on take the examples of Marian to clarify the hysteric's erogenous body more lucidly.

2.1.2. Absent from Lovemaking with Peter

Next, Marian attempts not to attain *jouissance* when she makes love with Peter in order to dodge experiencing the utmost pleasure, which she regards as a danger and in her thought, which might make her whole being vanish or collapse. By making her subject absent from the reality, she keeps herself "safe" in her fantastic imagination. During the process of making love with Peter, Marian does not totally engage herself in it; instead, she pays her attention to the surrounding furniture and decoration of the bathroom, where she makes love with him. At first, she observes the style of Peter's shower-curtain, which is not his taste at all since Marian claims in her mind that he bought it in a hurry without taking time to look at it properly because the water kept running over the floor every time when he takes a shower (59). And then, she imagines a scene where there is a woman who is drowned in the bathtub, chaste as ice only because she is dead (60). Marian continues, "The bathtub as a coffin" (60). Here, we find that Marian does not enjoy the pleasure of making love; on the contrary, she relates the bathtub, where they make love, to a coffin. During the moment of love-making, she would rather identify with the fantasy woman who is drowned in the bathtub but who would be "chaste" than identify with a real woman who experiences *jouissance*, the transient death of suffering from excessive sexual satisfaction. Thinking of that, Marian catches a fleeting vision that she and Peter are killed accidentally in the bathtub (60). Shifting from the scene of fantasizing that they are killed accidentally, Marian recollects the past when she and Peter first meet at a garden party following her graduation, and how her "sexual mood" has been shattered by smashed glass (62).

The sexual intercourse ends up in her fantasy and memory of succession of unfortunate scenes. When Peter asks Marian how she feels, she replies “Marvelous” instead of “Rotten,” for she knows that even she gives him the latter answer, Peter wouldn’t believe her (62). According to Nasio, the hysteric lives the psychological life of fear and the persistent refusal to experience the utmost pleasure, a pleasure which he deems that once he reaches it, the wholeness of his being will be placed under the threat of full collapse and disappearance. Thus, without knowing that experiencing limitless pleasure will not menace the integrity of the entire being, and that there will be and must be only a loss of partial being in everyone because there is no object which can completely fill and match the lack made by castration, the hysteric would rather choose to remain in the state of dissatisfaction, that is, the unfulfilled pleasure. According to Nasio’s elucidation, the hysteric, who unconsciously renders herself as a phallus for a lack, the absence of the genitals, fears that the sexual penetration will tear and burst “her uterus, her vagina, and ultimately, her entire being” (46). To put it more simply, in the hysteric’s fantasy, a man’s penis is unconsciously equal to the “Mother-phallus,” which will arouse her anxiety, anxiety that the “Mother-phallus” can fill the lack of her phallus, lead her to the utmost pleasure, *jouissance*, and then threaten her “uterus-phallus” and lastly, the wholeness of her being.

In addition, Marian’s subjective position flees to other places in her fantasy to keep her desire unsatisfied so that she can ensure that she is not the cause of the Other’s *jouissance*. Marian imagines scene after scene without disposing her subject at the right place and time during the process of lovemaking, for she does not want to satisfy both herself and the desire of the Other. Perhaps we can say that it is Marian’s “being” which is making love with Peter, but her “subject” is somewhere in her fantasy playing the role she invents. According to Nasio, the hysteric “is intent on the unconscious desire for the non-realization of the act and hence on the desire to remain

unsatisfied” (8). In other words, Marian thinks of other things when making love with Peter because she can only get the unsatisfied desire by her non-realization of the sexual act. She is absent; the hysterical subject is not present (Soler 270). What Colette Soler means is that the hysteric makes herself indulge in her own thought. Via the process of keeping thinking, she is disposed into her own fantastic world, filling up “the lack with signifiers, with thoughts” (Soler 270). Here, we observe that Marian does not want to be an “object” of the Other’s desire, but the “signifier” of the Other’s lack. In other words, although Peter is penetrating her, he is not really “occupying” her. What he penetrates is just her physical body, whereas what he gets is simply an object but not the phallus, that is, no *joissance* but only orgasm. Besides, Marian does not utter any erotic words or perform any obscene behaviors as a way to divulge her enjoyment in the process of lovemaking since she does this on purpose to remain “absent” with her thought and make Peter dissatisfied, too. According to Nasio, the hysteric attaches himself to the state of being forever unsatisfied in order to keep away from the danger in front of him, the danger of attaining “the satisfaction of utmost pleasure” which will make him crazy or disappear (5). In other words, the hysteric is not chasing the happiness; rather, he persistently runs after the loss of pleasure. To sum up, even though being unsatisfied is a great pain for Marian, she would rather live in the vicious cycle of endless suffering than in the danger of being torn up via reaching the utmost pleasure from making love with Peter.

Actually, that Marian fantasizes herself as a phallus can also be considered as a way to identify with man, so when Marian makes love with Peter, she virtually regards him rather as a male fighter who attempts to “castrate” her than as her lover who just wants to make love with her. Now, I intend to elaborate why Marian becomes frigid during the process of making love with Peter by employing Freud’s ideas. As Freud avows, after performing the sexual intercourse, it is common for a

woman to embrace a man at the climax of satisfaction, but it is not the behavior for the woman who encounters the first occasion of intercourse. Instead, more frequently, the woman displays frigidity as a reaction to the loss of her virginity, for there is “only disappointment for the woman, who remains cold and unsatisfied, and it usually requires quite a long time and frequent repetition of the sexual act before she too begins to find satisfaction in it” (201). Therefore, Freud indicates that frigidity is women’s psychological impotence as the failure of full impotence is men’s, but what disturbs those frigid women is instead that they cannot untie “the connection between sexual activity and the prohibition” (186). Freud enumerates many explanations of the women’s frigidity established as a neurotic inhibition towards sexual intercourses as follows. One explanation is “the narcissistic injury which proceeds from the destruction of an organ,” another is that “fulfillment cannot be in accordance with expectations,” and still another is “paradoxical reaction towards the man.” Here, I want to note Freud’s idea of “paradoxical reaction towards the man” to argue that Marian cannot completely enjoy the sexual intercourse with Peter not only because she fears that she might be torn up by the penetration of the penis since she fantasizes herself as a phallus without a lack but because she wishes to be masculine. As Freud suggests, “At first, in his [Ferenczi’s] opinion, copulation took place between two similar individuals, one of which, however, developed into the stronger and forced the weaker one to submit to sexual union. The feelings of bitterness arising from this subjection still persist in the present-day disposition of woman” (205-06). Although Marian does not divulge her real feeling of “Rotten” about the sexual intercourse to Peter, she nevertheless exposes her “masculine protest” indirectly by uttering no erotic words or voices to seduce Peter. Besides, after finishing the sexual act, Peter bit Marian’s shoulder, the signal of which is recognized by Marian for “irresponsible gaiety” since “Peter doesn’t usually bite,” and so Marian “bit his shoulder in return”

(63). Unlike the average couple who bite each other for arousing sexual interest, Marian's behavior of biting Peter back on the shoulder is more like taking "vengeance" for her defloration. Or perhaps we can as well regard it as a fair fight between a man and another one, for Marian does not want to "submit to sexual union" and be the weaker one, so she bit back.

2.2. Wishing to Manipulate Others

Secondly, instead of viewing Marian as a social victim under the exploitation and persecution of the patriarchal ideology, I want to argue that Marian's "abnormally normal" conducts reveal her unconscious wish to manipulate others and the whole situation. Critics have regarded Marian's "unusual" behaviors as something "abnormally normal" since they believe that her hysterical actions are rebellious counterattack against the patriarchal context, which forces so much feminine mystique and social constraint on the contemporary women. Thus, to some degree, Marian seems to be an undoubted victim as Dora is in the fourfold love relationship in various feminist perspectives since they both are treated as "objects of exchange" either by men or by women. For instance, when Marian and Dora feel oppressed and utilized by their lovers, Peter and Dora's father respectively, they choose to bear the unjust treatment given by their intimate parties without divulging their real feeling or opinions even though they are actually free or encouraged to offer their requests and complaints. Abandoning the opportunity to tell the Other their real feeling, they play instead the role of victims to manipulate others by degrading their status. Both Marian and Dora might never recognize this idea of wanting to control others since they have placed themselves in the position of being exploited, constantly denying the fact that they are actually the persons who direct everything behind the scenes. I would like to

borrow André Green's idea that truth does not appear or manifest itself at the moment when everything becomes rational (85). Rather, the real truth in Green's interpretation is not only "a state of 'knowledge of not knowing'" (85), but a more subtle, "[m]y knowledge is one of knowing not that I know" (86). What Green expresses here is that actually we do know something, but our knowledge is so limited that we do not know that we know. From the examples given by the novel, we observe that Marian is perplexed by her irrational and unusual behaviors such as her sudden weeping in the restaurant without suitable reasons, followed by her unpredictable running on the street and later by her incomprehensible hiding under Len's bed. Like the readers, she also asks herself the same question as to why she commits all these ridiculous things. Thus, I am going to dispel these puzzles by adopting Jonathan Lear's viewpoint in rereading Dora's case.

2.2.1. Marian's Idiosyncratic Ways to Deal with Her Anxiety

Now, we are going to discuss how Marian's anxieties are aroused and how she handles her overwhelming anxieties. At the beginning of the novel, we observe that Marian is an extremely self-repressed person who conceals her emotions cautiously and utters words with contemplation since she usually tries her best to accord with other people's expectations and needs, no matter at work, or with her friends, or even in her love life. Let's take one of the instances of her specific way about getting along with the landlady. Although the landlady does not plainly express her discomfort about Ainsley's carelessness and sloppiness, Marian herself, however, conjectures that the landlady often keeps her watch in secret so that Marian sometimes glosses over Ainsley's mistakes, fearing that the landlady might be irritated by some trivialities done by Ainsley:

Ainsley is always leaving rings, which the lady down below regards as a

violation of her shrine. She leaves deodorants and cleansers and brushes and sponges in conspicuous places, which has no effect on Ainsley but makes me feel uneasy. Sometimes I go downstairs after Ainsley has taken a bath and clean out the tub. (56)

Marian cares so much about other people's opinions and judgment on her that she feels "uneasy" even when her roommate, Ainsley, has done something inappropriate that she believes that others might misunderstand what she was doing. Besides, Marian also fears that her colleagues might detect her real thought, so she usually suffers from the overwhelming anxiety. For example, when her colleague, Lucy, asks Marian about whether going out with Peter or not, Marian replies with a short answer without offering volunteering information since her colleagues' wistful curiosity makes her nervous (29). Another example is that attempting to exhort Ainsley to abandon the thought of rearing a child on her own without the presence of a father, Marian nonetheless is accused by Ainsley as a prude, the term which makes Marian secretly hurt since she thought that she "was being more understanding than most" (42). However, she does not let Ainsley know that she is hurt by her words; rather, she goes to bed without saying anything, but she feels "unsettled" (43). Instead of letting others, such as the landlady, her colleagues, her roommate, and so on, know what she considers, Marian represses her feeling and thoughts again and again. As a result, she acts "abnormally" the first time after she represses her feeling and redraws her words again in the conversation with Peter. Eating frozen peas and smoked meat for dinner, Peter blames Marian for never cooking anything (63). His words seriously hurt Marian, but she does not act out; instead, she changes the topic to cover her real emotions:

I was hurt: I considered this unfair. I like to cook, but I had been deliberately refraining at Peter's for fear he would feel threatened. Besides,

he had always liked smoked meat before, and it was perfectly nourishing. I was about to make a sharp comment, but repressed it. Peter after all was suffering. Instead I asked, “How was the wedding?” (64)

From the above instance, we can assume that Marian develops her “hysterical symptoms” not only because she is oppressed by the patriarchal standards as feminists have pointed out but also because she herself has always repressed her “affects” and “ideas” for a long time so that those accumulated affects along with the incompatible ideas have no way to discharge but transfer to her body, the symptoms occurred by which is called “conversion” by Freud.

Since I have enumerated several examples of what has caused Marian’s anxiety, I will then elaborate how Marian tackles her overwhelming anxiety by using Lear’s re-interpretation of “transference” in Dora’s case. According to Lear, people use their own structured, idiosyncratic ways to face people and events in the world, so sometimes misunderstandings, fights, and break-ups will happen in their personal relations (124). Lear thus argues that Dora reveals her relatively limited and distinct way to experience people and events, for she can only experience the surrounding things by putting them into a fixed Herr K position. Once her anxiety is aroused, she can only be quelled through her own idiosyncratic way of experiencing the world in a familiar pattern (124). In this way, Lear accounts, “Dora’s slap is a manifestation of an *anxiety defense*” (125). Lear further censures Freud as to why he does not inquire Dora the reason of lining him to Herr K and that of slapping Herr K since Freud might find earlier events to explain that Dora’s slap at Herr K is itself a repetition (125). Lear indicates, “Dora has been reacting to anxiety since childhood with angry outbursts” (127). In other words, the developmental history of her emotion is disrupted by her constant defense of overwhelming herself with anxiety. The insufficiencies of her emotional resources, which are not fully developed, impel her to

act out immature angry outbursts to tackle her anxiety. Therefore, Lear deduces that Herr K.'s proposition is the occasion rather than the reason for Dora's angry reaction (127). Likewise, when Marian's anxiety is evoked because her surplus affect as accompanied by the incompatible ideas is blocked, she does not develop various emotions or reactions during the process of growing up to manage her anxieties as adults will adopt. Instead of expressing her discomfort or resentment through the normal way with words, she releases her overwhelming anxieties via the methods of crying, running, hiding, and raising a tremendous uproar as a three-year-old child usually performs when his or her desires are not fully satisfied. Nevertheless, we probably will ask the question what Marian desires. A glance at the given description of the novel, we are asserted by Marian's confession that she wants to escape from certain people and places. However, if we take another close look, we will detect that actually Marian wants more than just "escaping."

2.2.2. Wishing to Be the Phallus

I have argued that Marian repeatedly acts out her idiosyncratic ways of bursting out suddenly, irrationally running, and hiding away from people since her childhood in order to tackle her overwhelming anxieties, but which are evoked instead by her incompletely developed emotions and behaviors. Marian has claimed that she herself does know her motives behind these unusual actions, in which she indeed presents herself as a victim. However, I would like to offer a different perspective to treat Marian's self-justification. In my account, that Marian attempts to stay away from people is in fact a way to control others, for she wishes to be the phallus for others.

Before I elaborate the arguments of Marian's wish to be the phallus, it is necessary to first define the "phallus" I employ in my thesis. I want to take Juan-David Nasio's viewpoints to mark the difference between penis and phallus and

why “being” the phallus is more urgent than “having” the phallus for the hysteric. According to Nasio, in the child’s eyes, what the mother lacks is not the penis but “the idol of the penis,” or “a simulacrum of the penis,” which psychoanalysis terms it as the “phallus” (42). In the same way, the body of castration anxiety suggested by psychoanalysis is also a psychoanalytic body, so what terrifies the child is the intimidation of his “phallus” instead of the castration of his “penis.” Nasio also claims that “*The hysteric, then, is the child who has not progressed beyond this stage [the phallic stage] but remains fixated there*” (42). In this light, if we plumb the world of the hysteric, there would still exist the infantile universe, which is divided into the phallic or non-phallic power, or to be more simple, “powerful and powerless beings, the healthy and the sick, the beautiful and the ugly” (43) but without the sexual differences of whether it is a boy or a girl. This sexual uncertainty is also the source of the hysteric’s sufferings. Hence, we can conclude that “having” the phallus means something for the hysteric, but how has this idea transformed into “being” the phallus?” Nasio offers us an explanation that the hysteric is enmeshed into the painful position of “the object loved, cherished, and desired by the Other of his unconscious fantasies” (116). If someone, mostly a woman, attempts to pass through this stage of “being the Other’s object,” she “must go through the identification with the father’s object, that is, with the phallus” (116). Nevertheless, since she knows that she cannot earn this coveted object, she then becomes this “paternal phallus.” In other words, her identification with the phallus makes her turn into the paternal Other and thus possess the phallic power she desires and envies. Now, I am going to further explicate how the hysteric wields the power of “being” the phallus to manipulate others and control the whole situation by taking the examples of Marian’s eerie behaviors.

Marian enjoys provoking other people’s heeding and worries via the means of excluding herself from the reality or the symbolic world. By acting absurdly and

ridiculously, with the behavior that differs from her usual discreet feature, Marian successfully upgrades her position from an object as woman in general to the signifier as a phallus. For instance, Marian suddenly changes her personalities from an amiable woman to an elusive one without any reasonable clues to follow. She no longer cares about others' gaze and comments as she has minded before. On the contrary, what she cares about is whether she should be the phallus for Peter's desire or not. As the lines in the novel describe, when Marian sinks into her own hysterical reveries, she wants Peter to turn and talk to her. She wants to hear his normal voice, but he wouldn't allow it (69). And then she begins to cry with no reasons (70). She knows that something inside her starts to dash about in dithering mazes of panic, as though she had swallowed a tadpole (70). I conjecture it as Marian's intuitional reaction to tackle the overwhelming emotion aroused by the hunting scene in her fantasy, where she is the dead rabbit killed by Peter and his friends (69). In light of this, she plans to play the game of tag, in which she needs someone to chase after her, so she involves others, including Peter, Len, and Ainsley, to run after her, whereas she becomes the phallus for everyone. She is satisfied at being pursued since "it seemed an achievement, and accomplishment of some kind to put them one by one behind" her (72).

At first, Marian expects that Peter can chase her on foot, but instead "it was Len who was galloping heavily along behind" her (72). Peter, however, chases Marian by car. In this scene, if Peter runs after Marian, then their positions are somewhat equal since they both remain in the primitive condition, where the symbolic law is absent. However, the real situation is that Peter chases her by driving a car, a thing produced by civility and thus symbolic. Therefore, Marian no longer feels the pleasure of tagging, but is threatened. The menace she perceives is actually her castration anxiety. "All at once it was no longer a game. The blunt tank-shape was threatening. It was threatening that Peter had not given chase on foot but had enclosed himself in the

armour of the car” (73). Peter, now a symbolic Father, utters his prohibiting voice to forbid Marian to have incestuous desire toward the castrated Mother, the desire to have jouissance. In other words, Marian is now returning to the Real, in which she is a three-year-old child. As Marian decides in her mind, she has to get out of it (71), so she runs. Running can be regarded as a symbol of breaking through her physical body and dashing her erogenous body out since Marian admits later that she must have been thinking of herself as “plural” (81). Like what David-Ménard contends,

[T]he hysteric has no body, owing to a lack, in her history, of symbolization of the body. Yet at the same time, he (or she) has too much body: it is as though, in constituting this evidence of her loss of jouissance, Dora was freezing up and attempting to enclose within her own body as a totality, without any residual formations, everything having to do with her own jouissance. (103)

The body which wants to run away is not Marian’s organic body but her erogenous body, which provides jouissance all over the body but the sexual genitals, so Marian is surprised to find her feet moving, “wondering how they had begun,” but she didn’t stop (72). Unlike her own former desperate figure who cries incomprehensibly, Marian “was filled with the exhilaration of speed” this time (72).

However, simply running unexpectedly cannot satisfy Marian’s desire. What she really desires is the dissatisfaction of the Other’s desire. The hysteric is good at causing others’ anxiety and panic whereby she feels satisfied that others maintain in an unsatisfied desire as she does. Nasio contends, “the neurotic’s desire is a desire for anxiety” (84). To put it another way, the hysteric refuses to be the cause of Other’s jouissance, so she desires an unsatisfied desire. Hence, Marian is making herself become the origin of the discontent of the Other’s desire. Although she suffers from being the phallus for others, she still feels her existence only through such an extreme

manner. For example, Marian behaves oddly so that she successfully arouses other's attention and disquietude even though she affirms that she avoids stirring up the Other's attention. Not only does she make sure that no one witnesses her crying (70), but also she climbs under the bed after she checks around to assert that no one would notice her (75). Her intentional prudence to exclude others divulges nevertheless her eager aspiration to include others in her dissatisfaction. As a result, Peter and her friends respectively chase after and search for her when she runs away without any warning and slips under the bed without uttering any voice. "What does she want?" This is the question both the characters and the readers might ask. If Marian wants to get out of her organic body, why does she get herself stuck again between the bed and the wall? Here, we clearly observe that wanting to get "out" is just an excuse for Marian since she gets herself "into" another cramped place right after the event of running away. What she wants is neither freedom nor limitation but the torture of others. If others are trapped into the web devised by her and worry about her disappearance, Marian will reach her goal by becoming the phallus for them. Being the phallus is something to Marian, for it means that she is the only one who can wield her phallic power and even castrate the Other, who possesses the "penis." The following lines narrate Marian's satisfaction of being the only "phallus" among others:

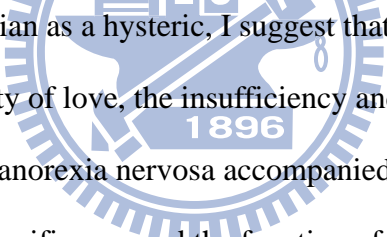
In spite of the narrowness and dust I was glad I didn't have to sit up there in the reverberating hot glare of the room. Though I was only two or three feet lower than the rest of them, I was thinking of the room as "up there". I myself was underground, I had dug myself a private burrow. I felt smug.

I smiled to myself. It was satisfying to be the only one who knew where I really was.

I began to wish they would hurry up and realize I had disappeared, so they could search for me. (76)

She enjoys lonesomeness because it means that she is the phallus no one can yet desire, but on the other hand she is afraid of being alone without being loved and desired by any one. Therefore, her thought is somewhat ambivalent since she wants not only to “escape” from others but also to be “desired.” In other words, she flees away in order to be chased. The final motive behind the situation is that she has to grasp others’ attention to reassure her fantasy as a phallus, which is provided with the unparalleled phallic power to manipulate others and thus indirectly “castrate” them.

2.3.Craving for Love



Finally, as regards Marian as a hysteric, I suggest that what disturbs Marian most is the quantity and the quality of love, the insufficiency and the excess of which are vitally interrelated with her anorexia nervosa accompanied by a little phobia. In addition to explaining the significance and the function of love in Marian’s life, I will also expound the close relationship between femininity and food, and thus offer a different analysis to view Marian’s eating disorder. Accordingly, in the final part of Chapter Two, I argue that what Marian craves for and discards is love, the love for Peter and the anti-love for her mother respectively.

2.3.1. Mourning for the Lost Love-Object

Before we enter into the discussion of the causes of Marian’s anorexia nervosa, I would like to clarify that Marian’s anorexia nervosa is not simply a physical disease but a serious mental problem, when using Coral Ann Howells’s opinions to supplement my view. Howells argues that Marian’s eating disorder is not equal to

anorexia nervosa since Marian does not suffer from weight-loss and “phobic fear of fat” but from “a condition of self-division,” a division of mind and body, as in Dennis Cooley’s view in *Power Politics*. Howells also adopts Caskey’s term, “a thought disorder,” to elucidate Marian’s hysterical protest. As Marian confesses, “It was my subconscious getting ahead of my conscious self, and the subconscious has its own logic” (101). In other words, Marian’s eating disorder is not a conscious behavior but a “subconscious” conduct which displays Marian’s repression and desires of her life, as Howells later contends, “Marian’s hysteria is a mode of metaphorical discourse popularized first by Freudian psychoanalysis as the language of the subconscious and of dreams [...]” (47). As Duncan, another character in the novel, claims that he lives in a fantasized world, Howells considers this as happening in Marian, “rebellion occurs at a level below consciousness and then manifests itself in hallucinations and body language” (48). Connecting Marian’s hallucinations with Freudian psychoanalysis of dreams, Howells indicates that Marian’s anxiety of her dissolving individuality in the patriarchal constructions through “marriage to Peter” is metamorphosed into her identification with “animal victims.” However, unfortunately, she neglects to investigate the “wish fulfillment” suggested by Freud in Marian’s dream or her dream-like hallucinations. I will take the example of Marian’s dream to argue that there is still wish fulfillment besides the pure patriarchal persecution that many critics have pointed out:

The alarm clock startled me out of a dream in which I had looked down and seen my feet beginning to dissolve, like melting jelly, and had put on a pair of rubber boots just in time only to find that the ends of my fingers were turning transparent. I had started towards the mirror to see what was happening to my face, but at that point I woke up. (43)

Many feminist critics regard Marian’s dream as a reflection of her present stagnant

condition constrained whether by the society, by her love relationship with Peter, or even by her mind. As Marian has described her department as the gooey ice-cream between two crusts, that she dreams of her feet dissolving like melting jelly and having put on a pair of rubber boots just in time can be interpreted as Marian's oppressed and unchangeable status in her company. As for her love relationship with Peter, the dream implies that she cannot decide and utter her own voice on anything since her personality is so flexible, like melting jelly, that she will impel herself to a specific role in order to cater to everyone else's desires and needs. Still another limitation is her mind. When Duncan confesses liquidly to Marian simply after their first meeting at the laundromat, Marian ponders surreptitiously that she cannot express herself like this: "It seemed foolhardy to me [Marian], like an uncooked egg deciding to come out of its shell: there would be a risk of spreading out too far, turning into a formless puddle" (99). In short, Marian is confined to certain containers such as her work, her lover, and social standards. However, while most critics deem it as a persecution and constraint towards Marian's freedom, I intend to argue that Marian herself desires to be fixed. In this way, the dream is the revelation of her wish fulfillment. If we use Freud's interpretation of dreams to see her dream, we can recognize not only the social persecution towards Marian and the disintegration of Marian's identity but also her wish fulfillment.

One wish fulfillment is that Marian does not want to take over others' work and go outside in such a sultry weekend to have the beer questionnaire finished. As the dream discloses, Marian first recognizes that her feet, the organ which controls her actions, begin to dissolve, and then her fingers, the organ which are used for writing things down (the interviewed content), are turning transparent. Accordingly, the concealed wish fulfillment probably is that she does not want to take other people's duty of interviewing others on the beer questionnaire since she dreams that both her

feet and fingers are turning transparent, which might vanish at any time. If her feet and fingers were gone, then she could shirk the responsibility for making interviews. Besides, I speculate that Marian does not want to go outside because when her melting feet start to flow around, she has to put on a pair of rubber boots, the containers that hold the liquid, just in time. Instead of running around, Marian wants to be fixed or formed in a limited container even though the container might suppress her thought. Another wish fulfillment is that Marian wants to get married. She confesses later that “she wanted something solid, clear: a man; she wanted Peter in the room so that she could put her hand out and hold on to him to keep from being sucked” (167). Thus, the way that she chooses to be fixed is to depend on Peter. Here, I want to insert Sonia Mycak’s interpretation of Marian’s dream. She points out,

The pre-mirror-stage child is not yet defined within a physically limited space, and its organic insufficiency promotes an anarchic, formless existence. It is thus significant that in response to her dream, Marian “started towards the mirror” (43), perhaps in an attempt to take comfort in thethetic moment whereby the ego is established by way of identification with a unified specular image. (55)

In this light, Mycak argues that the “disintegration of Marian’s ego-identity becomes linked to her contractual agreement to marry Peter” (55). In other words, Mycak’s words somewhat agree with my argument on Marian’s wish fulfillment of marrying Peter. Besides, Mycak’s viewpoints that “the ego is established by way of identification with a unified specular image” can link with my observation that Marian “wanted something solid, clear: a man.” To put it another way, if a man represents “a unified specular image” for Marian, then she actually identifies with a man rather than with a woman. As I will elaborate Marian’s identification in Chapter Three, I would just mention here Marian’s unconscious wish.

Now, let's go back again to the dream itself. As we can detect in the dream, while the melting feet start to flow around, what Marian has put on are nothing else but a pair of "rubber boots." She dreams of the rubber boots because she has a memory of Clara and Joe's ridiculously idealistic worship of each other before the wedding that "one kept expecting Joe to spread his overcoat on mud puddles or drop to his knees to kiss Clara's rubber boots" (36). In light of this, Marian unconsciously wants Peter to propose to her so that she dreams of a pair of rubber boots, which are one of the objects in Clara and Joe's imagined idealistic proposal. Her wish fulfillment thus clearly is to marry Peter since she "had put on a pair of rubber boots just in time [proposal time]" (43). As the plot goes on, we see that Marian herself confesses to Ainsley that "subconsciously" she "probably wanted to marry Peter all along" (84). However, it is not enough to claim according to the dream that Marian's desire can be satisfied by marrying Peter since Peter does propose to Marian afterwards, but she nevertheless develops anorexia nervosa in return. Thus, in the following paragraph, I will explain that what Marian desires is not simply "marrying Peter."

I want to argue that Marian develops anorexia nervosa accompanied by phobia rather mentally than physically because she mourns and desires the love of the lost love-object, that is, the former Peter. In other words, what she searches for and loves is not the corporeal Peter but the fantasized ideal Peter, who might once have existed or loved Marian in her fantasy. Moreover, although many critics regard Marian as an "object" of exchange in her relationship with Peter, Marian is not always an "object," for she also treats Peter as her own property. As Mycak indicates, Marian should "take responsibility for being a consumer:"

Indeed, Marian enjoys certain proprietary rights over Peter, evident in "the sense of proud ownership" (EW 146) she feels toward her acquisition: "I could feel the stirrings of the proprietary instinct. So this object, then,

belonged to me” (90). (62)

From the above description, we notice that Marian considers Peter as her exclusive property. In other words, Marian hopes that she can manipulate Peter’s actions and thoughts, including his heart. However, after several events, Marian thinks that Peter no longer belongs to her. What is worse, she suspects that Peter’s love towards her is not like true love but the love with appended values and conditions. As the text describes, Marian deems that Peter, who highly worships the value of being a single man, wants to marry her because she is suitable to be his wife and he cares so much about others’ judgment, but not because Peter loves who she is. He has once claimed,

And there’s one thing about you, Marian, I know I can always depend on you. Most women are pretty scatterbrained but you’re such a sensible girl. You may not have known this but I’ve always thought that’s the first thing to look for when it comes to choosing a wife. (89)

Instead of loving Marian and treating her as a wife, Peter on the contrary tries to get the nourishment and advantage from Marian, viewing her as a tool rather than a woman he loves. In this way, Marian mourns the loss of the former Peter or her fantasized Peter, who might have loved her, and becomes a melancholic who is attacked by anorexia nervosa. In “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud defines melancholia as “a profoundly painful depression” that the patient will lose interest in the outside world, the ability to love, and the sense of self (204). To put it another way, melancholia is the reaction to “the loss of a beloved object,” which “may not really have died” (205). I assume Marian to be a melancholic who mourns for the loss of Peter’s love because her symptom of anorexia nervosa after Peter’s proposal is like the destruction of her “ego,” which cannot accept the loss of “former” Peter, who loves Marian so much in her fantasy, and which thus destroys both itself and the internalized image of Peter by rejecting the nourishment of food. As Freud indicates,

the melancholic patient will extend his self-criticism to cover the past and complement his “sense of inferiority” by “sleeplessness, rejection of food, and an overcoming of the drive” (206), so that the loss of the beloved object will be transformed into the loss of ego (209). Since the ego of the patient has identified with the lost love-object, the ego will assimilate the “dead” object and perish together with it. Overall, one cause of Marian’s anorexia nervosa is that Marian cannot accept the fact that her love-object, “Peter,” has already past away, so she mourns it and at last assimilates and destroys it by eliminating her ego as well.

2.3.2. Resisting Her Femininity

In the part of “Mourning for the Lost Love-Object” above, we understand that Marian develops anorexia nervosa because she assimilates her lost love-object and destroys her ego together with it. Nevertheless, it is not the only reason, which causes her eating disorder. Therefore, in this part, I want to argue that Marian’s anorexia nervosa implies her resistance to femininity, which means castration in Marian’s fantasy.

First, as Marian is transformed from a starveling to an anorexic person due to her castration anxiety and phobic fantasy, she would rather stay unsatisfied than be “killed” by eating food. Originally, Marian is hungry all the time, but then she is adapted to the anorexic condition, under which she actually keeps herself in the desire for wanting. Examining the gradual process of Marian’s anorexia, we detect that Marian refuses to eat meat first, and then fish, and finally vegetables. For example, when Peter invites Marian to eat at the restaurant, she feels so hungry that she would have liked to devour the steak at one gulp as soon as the steak is presented in front of her (148). However, after seeing Peter’s violent action of cutting, and imagining the torture and the horror of the cow before its death, Marian could no longer finish her

own half-eaten steak. She imagines the earlier “living” scene of the “dead” meat and cannot eat anything that is once alive. What is worse, she gradually cannot eat the lifeless food, such as carrots, pudding, and take in even a glass of orange juice (257). In light of Mycak’s point, Marian could not kill and consume that which is the other because her subjective position becomes threatened (64). To attest to the point, Mycak raises the example in which Marian fantasizes that the carrot is still alive even when it is dug out:

She [Marian] was watching her own hands and the peeler and the curl of crisp orange skin. She became aware of the carrot. It’s a root, she thought, it grows in the ground and sends up leaves. Then they come along and dig it up, maybe it even makes a sound, a scream too low for us to hear, but it doesn’t die right away, it keeps on living, right now it’s still alive....

She thought she felt it twist in her hands. She dropped it on the table.

(EW 161)

Mycak also relates Marian’s position to the uncooked egg that had lost its boundaries (EW 99) and to the subject, who “exerts some power over the soft-boiled egg on the breakfast table” (EW 161). In other words, “at some level she [Marian] is now identifying with the positions of both master and slave” (64).

Undoubtedly, Mycak’s thesis has its own rationale, but I ponder that it is still too rough and arbitrary to attribute so many examples of anorexic conditions simply under the dualism of subject and object, or master and slave. As I have mentioned in my Chapter One, Mycak fails to break the border between man and woman. If we understand the hysteric’s sexual confusion, we can thus detect that Marian’s anorexia nervosa is to some degree related to her sexual identification. In fact, I suggest that Marian’s anorexia nervosa, which is accompanied by “phobia,” results from her castration anxiety in her “phobic fantasy.” According to the story of *Alice in*

Wonderland interpreted by Fish, a character invented by Atwood in *The Edible Woman*, Alice does not respond positively to the dominating-female role of the Queen and she utters castration cries of “Off with his head!” (194). If Marian identifies with food, which she thinks is still “living” like the carrot and the steak, her behavior of “cutting” food is like “castrating” herself. Moreover, Nasio remarks that in the phobic subject’s fantasy, as his incestuous desire towards the mother will be prohibited by the father, he will develop hatred towards the father. However, since the hatred of the father arouses his castration anxiety, in order to appease it, he represses the hatred towards the father and transforms it into his love for the father, who none the less rejects his love. Hence, the resulting anxiety is projected to an object in the external world such as a crowd, an enclosed space, a bridge, or an animal (61). Nasio continues, “What the phobic subject does is to place his castration anxiety out on the stage of the world in order to locate, control, and avoid it” (62). In this sense, Marian is afraid of food because she transfers her castration anxiety to food. Although the novel does not trace back to her childhood, we still can find the representation of the symbolic Father, that is, Peter, who in Marian’s thought, tries to destroy her (271). Like a child, Marian disguises her hatred for Peter, revealing instead her love for him, but Peter rejects her love by attempting to take away her “phallic power,” whereby he accuses Marian of rejecting her femininity (80). As for Marian, imagining that every food is alive and she thus gradually becoming anorexic, it has a close relationship with Peter’s words, “A good meal always makes you feel a little more human” (152). While the Little Hans in Freud’s case associates his phobic object, the horse, to his forbidding father, Marian considers food as a living human being that resembles Peter. In this sense, not only do dead animals have had lives, but the vegetables can scream as human beings do. Also, if food represents Peter, then it is a “patricidal behavior” to eat food in Marian’s fantasy since it is a taboo. Therefore, Marian becomes anorexic

because she turns food from an object into the symbolic Father. Now food is no longer a thing to stuff her stomach but is worshipped as divine and inviolable as the symbolic Father or the law.

On the other hand, refusing food can also be regarded as a way to reject the ideal woman image or femininity required by the symbolic order. As such, Marian thinks that the carrot is screaming because in her fantasy, being a dominated woman who possesses no phallic power as the carrot, which is consumed by the subjective consumer, is like being castrated by the symbolic Father. Therefore, she refuses to eat food in order to preserve the wholeness of her phallic body and simultaneously to discard her femininity. As what Barbara Hill Rigney announces, “The motivation behind anorexia, a disease which Atwood sees as so problematic in young women, is not so much a desire for fashionable slimness, as an attempt to avoid womanhood, to remain a little girl, in essence to escape one’s very humanity” (24). As such, Marian’s anorexia confides that she covets to stay in the phallic world as a little girl, and evades to be castrated like other women. We can get the proof that Marian’s rejection of food is equivalent to her repulsion of femininity since the first thing that Marian chooses to eat again after she resumes her appetite is “the woman made of cake.” To put it another way, by eating this piece of cake she accepts her femininity given by the symbolic society again and lives as a woman rather than a little girl inside her psyche.

Yet another reason for Marian’s anorexia is that she would rather give up the pleasure of satisfaction than get “killed” after experiencing a satisfied desire. According to Nasio, “Castration anxiety is converted into bodily symptoms, sexual dysfunction, and the pain of discontent” (64). Hence, I am going to discuss that Marian suffers from the agony of discontents resulted from her castration anxiety. We may detect that Marian’s anorexia becomes worse probably because she has one day read the instructions on how to kill a turtle before cooking it. The following is the

instructions. At first, you have to love it and feed it hamburger to rid it of its impurities. When the turtle starts to trust you, you put it one day into a cauldron of cold water, where the turtle would swim and dive happily, and then brought it slowly to the boil (155). As we can see, the turtle is treated well before it is killed by the cook, who at the beginning provides it the utmost pleasure but then kills it without any premonition. As Barbara Hill Rigney points out, “Marian’s anorexia is also clearly linked with her vision of herself as an animal, a prey to the male hunter in the person of Peter” (24). In this way, Marian refuses to eat food not because she has compassion for the turtle or other animals but because she, as a rabbit in her imagination, is afraid that if she continues to eat food, to satisfy her hunger, she will one day be “killed” gently as the turtle, so she would rather substitute suffering for utmost pleasure since there is danger accompanying the contented pleasure, that is, castration anxiety.

2.3.3. Rejecting Mother’s Suffocating Love

Finally, Marian’s anorexia nervosa is an act of rejecting her mother’s suffocating love. Although hysterics usually live in the condition of desiring more love, some of them nonetheless cannot bear the suffocating love given by their mothers in their childhood. Marian becomes the hysteric who is attacked by anorexia nervosa probably because she cannot accept her mother’s tyrannical and overwhelming desire of possession since she was still a little girl. There is no distinct description of Marian’s relationship with her mother, but J. Brooks Bouson contends that the “extended symbiotic mother-daughter bond” of the tyrannical landlady and her “cretinous” fifteen-year-old daughter is actually the duplication of the childhood Marian and her mother. Employing Marianne Hirsh’s words about analyzing the role of the mother in nineteenth-century novels, Bouson declares that “[i]f in *The Edible Woman* the mother’s absence is the condition of the daughter’s development, the narrative also

expresses repressed fears of the overbearing mother through the character of the landlady, who fits the ‘malevolent yet inconsequential’ brand of maternal representation described by Hirsch” (78). Moreover, in “Sexuality, Pregnancy, and Parenting in Anorexia Nervosa,” S. Louis Mogul also contends that some of his anorexic patients have had “unhappy childhoods based mainly on difficult relationships with mothers who are painted as depressed, bitter, limited people [...] who were cold to these daughters and enormously controlling of their sense of separateness and autonomy [...]” (71). In light of this, Marian’s anorexia nervosa probably is provoked by the second trauma of facing the landlady who reminds Marian of her mother. Furthermore, we might wonder how this suffocating mother functions as the Other that desires. Since the novel mentions no husband of the landlady, we can therefore assume that the landlady might be a widow or a woman whose husband is absent. As we can see, the child is everything or the pivotal support for the landlady since what she has done is based on protection and advantage of her child. She takes overwhelming care of her child because the child somewhat represents the “phallus,” which complements for her the lack of her husband. Nevertheless, she has deprived her child of being independence since she wants to possess this “phallus” completely. To put it another way, she makes her child powerless by controlling her child’s action and life. The landlady needs to be convinced that the phallus’s phallic power is bestowed by her rather than inherent so that she can appropriate and wield the power of the phallus to “castrate” others. On this point, Marian ,as a child who tries to go out, is afraid of running into the landlady in the hall, fearing that she might be caught by “her mother” and then be scolded by her even though she does not do anything wrong. Unfortunately, the omnipresent mother usually surreptitiously waits at the door as the text attests, “I knew I was trapped. It was the lady down below” (13). In front of the landlady, Marian can only

behave as an obedient daughter, who cannot answer anything back in defiance but insinuates her mother that she has to go out now. As the line describes, “I shifted from one foot to the other and smiled again, hoping she would realize I was in a hurry” (13).

Besides, Marian seems to assume herself to be one of the landlady’s compliant daughters by comparing the landlady’s different quantity of love towards her and Ainsley. For example, she suspects that the landlady never stops Ainsley in the hall to talk about the trivial things because “she’s decided Ainsley isn’t respectable,” whereas she is (13). To sustain and earn the most confidence and compliment among the suppositional “brothers and sisters” from the mother, Marian is cautious about her critical words towards the landlady whereas Ainsley never minds the consequences of being heard. Therefore, while Ainsley curses the landlady as “the old bitch,” Marian replies, “She’s not that old,” “glancing over at the curtained windows of the house; though she knew she couldn’t hear them. She even stands at the landlady’s side by retorting that Ainsley is being paranoid” about rendering the landlady as one member of the W. C. T. U. (14). According to S. Louis Mogul, during her clinical observation, some anorexic women had experienced a tight bond with their mothers and very much “viewed the world through her mother’s eyes without realizing these limits until she actually left the family home” (71). In this way, Marian controverts Ainsley’s words because she sees and thinks things through the landlady’s or rather a mother’s eyes that “whatever happened the child’s innocence must not be corrupted” (15). Here, we can perceive the ambivalence of Marian’s thoughts. She on the one hand wants to complain about the landlady’s excessive surveillance to Ainsley, but she on the other hand agrees with the landlady’s worries of her children. As Richard A. Geist mentions that one of her anorexic patient recalls that she is terrified of being like her mother and just as scared of not being like her (18). Therefore, Marian rejects her mother’s

suffocating love not because she does not want to be like her but because she cannot help but become her and might reproduce the behavior of her mother on her own children or in her daily lives. As Geist claims, “The eating-disorder patient experienced herself as having possessed an exquisite sensitivity to the unspoken needs and wishes of her mother” (18). Keeping responding to her mother’s desires and wants, Marian cannot distinguish herself from her mother, so she rarely feels herself as a separate and independent person. Instead, a part of her mind and that of her body are occupied by her mother so that even though the landlady has never specifically forbidden her and Ainsley to do anything, Marian yet feels that she is actually forbidden to do everything (16). In fact, Marian’s confession divulges her mother’s long-term wish as one of Mogul’s anorexic patients admits how unacceptable to her mother was her “growing beyond being a compliant, asexual child” (71). We must notice here that what Marian’s mother desires is not only a subservient child but an “asexual” child, the perception of being which will affect Marian’s later identification of her sex. Also, as Mervyn Nicholson puts it, “Anorectic women, furthermore, stop menstruating, so that not only do they step out of the eater-eaten cycle, they also escape from the fertility cycle of sexuality, of generating beings-that-die” (48). Without menstruation, a woman could not be called a “real” woman since now she is positioned on the border between man and woman. As some medical reports prove, partial women appear to have men’s second sexual characteristics like growing beard when they stop menstruating. They become asexual. Accordingly, since anorexia nervosa is more or less related to one’s identification of sex, I will then discuss Marian’s sexual confusion and what it is to be a woman for her in Chapter Three.

Chapter Three: Marian's Sexual Confusion

3.1. Marian's identification (The Butcher's Wife's Dream)

Since we have discussed that Marian not only desires an unsatisfied desire but also involves others in wanting her as a phallus, we might wonder what makes her identify with the signifier or the phallus. Therefore, I am going to investigate her identification with three principal characters, Peter, Ainsley, and Calra. I will also take the example of the butcher's wife and that of Dora's case as a comparison and contrast to elucidate the process of Marian's identification with the subject and the object. And then, I will extend it to Marian's sexual confusion.

First, I want to take the example of the butcher's wife and that of Dora's case to clarify the transition between the object and the signifier. According to Bruce Fink, the butcher's wife has a wish to keep her wish for caviar unsatisfied. While Freud gives an account of it as having a wish for "an unfulfilled wish," Lacan interprets it as a "desire to have an unsatisfied wish" (21). Fink later continues, "the patient [the butcher's wife] plumbs his [the butcher's] desire to try to fathom its object and become it—that is, she wants to be what causes him to desire and thus strives to become what Lacan at this point in his work refers to as the phallus, the phallus as 'the signifier of the Other's desire' (E 694)" (22). I believe that this claim of Fink leaps forward a little too quickly, for the fact that the butcher's wife identifies with her thin female friend, and this stage is still for me at the level of desiring to be the object of the Other's desire. For one thing, the butcher still avows that he loves his wife, not any one else, so the butcher's wife is already the "object" of her husband's desire. Also, the butcher's wife is aware that her skinny friend is never her husband's type. If she identifies with her simply because her husband praises her friend very often, then perhaps one day her husband will complain about her skinny feature, so her friend is

still a substitutable as an object. Therefore, identifying with her friend cannot satisfy the butcher's wife; she might identify in the future with other women who also earn her husband's high evaluation. In other words, what the butcher's wife is looking for is not being an object of the Other's desire; rather, she prepares to be the signifier for the Other's desire, after which no object can defy her position to fill up the lack of the Other's desire. Identifying with her thin friend is just a way to comprehend what a woman is, but not the final goal for the butcher's wife. Nevertheless, the butcher's wife lives in such an endless wanting because no one's desire can be satisfied. As Fink remarks, "Whereas need can be satisfied, desire cannot: There is always something left to be desired" (23).

In light of this, while the butcher's wife defines what it is to be a woman by identifying with the object of man's desire, that is, her thin female friend, Dora cannot be satisfied by the answer of simply being the object of a man's desire. Instead, she wants to occupy something more superior than an object, something that can fill up the lack of a man's desire, that is, the sacred signifier of every man's desire, Madonna. Standing in front of Madonna's painting for more than two hours, Dora might ponder the method of transforming her position as an object of her father, Herr K, and Freud, to that as a signifier, the phallus, for them. Nevertheless, from the examples of Ainsley, Marian, the butcher's wife, and Dora, we detect that being the phallus can only exist in the fantasy. In the reality, everyone should be subjected as the object of the Other's desire but never the signifier for the Other's desire. Like Ainsley, even though she has once rendered as a goddess by men, after she gets pregnant, she is nothing but temporarily an object of Len's desire. Perhaps we can say that the permanent phallus does not exist; it exists only because we fantasize about it. As such, the hysteric has great "angst," the term used by Lacan, because she cannot detach herself from the fantasy of being the phallus without knowing that she is attempting to be the phallus.

According to Nasio's account of conversion, "what takes place is a phallicization of the non-genital body and, simultaneously, an estrangement from the genital body. The hysteric's body, therefore, suffers from being an outsized, cumbersome phallus with a hole in it in the genital region" (49). Marian suffers from being a tremendous phallus for Peter in their love relationship, but she does not know. Therefore, her hysterical symptoms keep breaking out until one day Duncan makes her realize that there is a distance or gap between her and the Other's desire, in which she will never be the signifier, namely the phallus, or the cause, namely the object *a*, of the Other's desire. To sum up, in the following sections, I will elucidate why Marian identifies with Peter's desire (or more precisely, the Other's desire), and then with Ainsley by referring to the butcher's wife's dream, in which we detect the butcher's wife's desire of being not only an object for his husband but the phallus for him.

3.1.1. Identification with Peter

At first, Marian identifies with Peter, and as a consuming subjective, she always feels hungry (27). Her thirst for food accords with Peter's good appetite, as Peter has once said to her, "A good meal always makes you feel a little more human" (152). Besides, her hunger and yearning for eating resemble Peter's image as a hunter who pines for his hunting prey. Not only does Marian identify with Peter, but she also identifies with what the Other desires. In this sense, Marian performs her masquerading femininity to match Peter's ideal woman and thus to become the object of the Other's desire. She identifies with Peter's desire because she is curious about what it is to be a woman. However, since there is always a three-year-old phallic child preoccupying the hysteric's mind, Marian can only identify with a man as a subject to understand what a woman as an object is. We can observe that as Marian has at first identified with the desire of Peter, she behaves as a circumspect woman who applies

excessive high morality and standards to her daily lives. For example, Ainsley thinks that it is no big deal to leave showering appliances in the public bathroom without cleaning the bathtub after taking a bath. Nevertheless, Marian cares about what other thinks, so that she always keeps herself in the alerting condition: “She [Ainsley] leaves deodorants and cleansers and brushes and sponges in conspicuous places, which has no effect on Ainsley but makes me feel uneasy. Sometimes I go downstairs after Ainsley has taken a bath and clean out the tub” (56). Responding to Peter’s job as a lawyer and hobbies of reading the detective novels, Marian is scrupulous about every detail and detective about the surrounding environment. Besides, in order to fit the ideal feminine image of Peter’s expectation, Marian dares not reveal her true feeling; rather, she says things that correspond to Peter’s thought. For instance, Peter talks about his prospective marriage to Marian, but even though Marian has a different view, she chooses to remain silent. As the lines insinuate, “I had heard this speech twice before, or something like it, and I knew there was nothing I could say. If I agreed with him it would only intensify his depression, and if I disagreed he would suspect me of siding with the bride” (64). Marian tries her best to be the object of Peter’s desire; nevertheless, she is not satisfied at being simply the object of the Other’s desire. According to Nasio, the neurotic shapes the fantasy of the daily reality that everyone, whether loved or hated, plays the role of the unsatisfying other for him (5). In this sense, Marian searches to be something which cannot be substituted by any other object in the desire of the Other, so that her identification of being the object of the Other’s desire is promoted to the identification of being the irreplaceable signifier, that is, the phallus for the lack of the Other’s desire. In this way, we will discuss Marian’s identification with Ainsley later on, who in Marian’s fantasy, is equal to the “phallus” for men.

3.1.2. Identification with Ainsley

Before we discuss how Marian identifies with Ainsley, we should not overlook the fact that Marian chooses Ainsley to be her mimicked object because Ainsley not only earns high praises from Peter about performing her femininity properly but also successfully seduces Len, Marian's good friend, successfully without informing Marian in the first place. In other words, in Marian's fantasy, Ainsley uses the power of her feminine masquerade to win the two intimate men in Marina's life. Therefore, Ainsley's behavior actually arouses Marian's jealousy and her wrath of attempting to take revenge on her. The way Marian adopts to fight against Ainsley is to identify with her and then snatch back her men, that is, Peter and Len. Besides, if we employ Joan Riviere's idea to explain Marian's demeanors, we will detect that the real motive below the series of vengeance is that Marian wants to usurp the symbolic father's phallic power as Ainsley does. Identifying with Ainsley, who plays the role of an ideal woman and thus becomes the phallus for men, Marian imitates her behavior and clothes, refining the masquerading femininity in order to acquire the phallic power from Len, especially from Peter. As the text reveals, Ainsley always prepares to pretend to be an innocent girl, a lovely image that accords with men's ideal woman, in order to take the advantage of usurping the phallic power secretly. For example, Ainsley schemes a fortuitous encounter with Len, who is Marian's single friend, in the bar without notifying Marian in advance. She appears with the dress of schoolgirlish quality, orders a glass of ginger ale instead of wine, and gives short and shy answers, to create the illusion for people that she is "very young." Ainsley manifests the power of masquerading femininity so purposely that Marian connects her to the large plump doll in the stores at Christmas-time (68). Adopting a doll-like image, which does not correspond to her age and her real personality, Ainsley successfully seduces Len and obtains what she desires, a baby without its original father, for she is convinced that

“no woman has fulfilled her femininity unless she’s had a baby” (157). Yet, she does not simply want a baby, but a baby with a “penis” (158). At this point, we can infer that Ainsley wants not so much to be a woman as to be a mother since she pines for the phallic power via generating a “phallus” from pregnancy. In Sonia Mycak’s account, “The oedipalization of desire through an acceptance of castration and compensatory yearning for childbirth is, within the psychoanalytic model, the most appropriate resolution for the dilemma facing the pre-oedipal girl and signals a successful assumption of femininity that will allow her to take her place within the circulation characterizing the symbolic order” (52). Ainsley attempts to occupy the position of the castrated mother and that of the symbolic father, through which she challenges and intimidates the order of the extant symbolic infrastructure. As we shall see, Len blames Ainsley on seducing him and using his body to be pregnant so that now he cannot help but think of himself as a father and even becomes hysterical, for he recalls his mother who has once forced him to eat an egg with a little chicken inside it (160). In light of this, Ainsley’s pregnancy inspires Len’s first trauma since there is also a “life” in her “womb.” Perhaps we can say that it is a double success for Ainsley since she subverts the conventional symbolic order not only by her “masquerading femininity” but her “maternity.”

However, we must not overlook Len’s tremendous changes of his attitudes toward Ainsley. Before he acquires the truth that Ainsley schemes on using his body to have a baby rather than getting pregnant accidentally, he feels guilty about ruining such a young and lovely girl’s life, for she is not simply a woman as other regular women but an innocent girl who he dreams for. As he groans to Marian, “She’s [Ainsley is] such a little *girl*, Marian, I mean most women you’d feel what the hell, they probably deserved it, rotten bitches anyway, not that anything like that has ever happened to me before. But she’s so *young*” (156). At that moment, Ainsley is not

placed within the general category of women, whom Len treats as nothing else but sexual partners in his mind, the object of his desire; instead, Ainsley is elevated to the position of a signifier, which can fill up the lack of the Other's desire, or in Lacan's term, the phallus. Still ironically, when Len is informed by Marian that Ainsley intends to get pregnant on purpose, he no longer treats her as the phallus he desires but degrades her to the debased position of a slut (240), even though Ainsley does not plead that he assumes the responsibility for the baby. But perhaps it is the point which vents Len's anger and which cuts off his reason since Len reproaches her for not only using his body but involving him psychologically as a father. In other words, Len has psychologically deemed that he is occupying the position of a symbolic father and no longer a single man now; nevertheless, Ainsley does not want to involve him into a triangle relationship, which includes the symbolic Father, the castrated Mother, and the phallic child. Rather, Ainsley wants to usurp the place of the symbolic Father and creates a world containing only the castrated Mother and the phallic child. As what she claims, "The relationship between mother and unborn child is the loveliest and closest in the world" (159). In this sense, Len's castration anxiety is aroused, for his phallic or symbolic power is snatched by a humble woman, whom he despises most.

Likewise, as Marian wants to be the phallus for the Other's desire rather than the object of man's desire, she identifies with Ainsley by dressing up as a doll, an ideal feminine image in men's fantasy. Also, we must re-examine Marian's identification with Ainsley since Marian intends to change her appearance and dress because instead of identifying with Ainsley, she actually identifies first with Peter's desire, the desire of the Other, who compliments Ainsley for accepting her own femininity and behaving herself properly (80). However, after Marian imitates Ainsley's apparel and makeup, she secretly says to herself that she looks like a callgirl (210), and even the hotel owner treats Marian as a slut, too (250). In this sense, Marian does not

successfully become the signifier for the Other's desire; instead, she remains at the level of being an object of the Other's desire. Nevertheless, Peter loves Marian's apparel and appearance as a prostitute since Peter "desires" Marian to accord with his ideal image for women rather than "demands" Marian to be who she is. Now, I am going to elaborate why men loves prostitutes by going back to Freud's ideas.

3.1.3. Why do men love prostitutes and why are men afraid of virginity?

In the above sections, we have explained why Marian identifies with Peter and Ainsley. Therefore, in this section, I want to analyze why Peter loves Marian as a prostitute and how a woman's virginity arouses a man's castration anxiety. In "Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men," Freud demonstrates that the preconditions for men's love objects are as follows. The first precondition is that the woman should be "an injured third part," already engaged to another man, to whom she should not be unattached. The other precondition is that the woman should be of "bad repute sexually." To put it another way, the object chosen by men should be like a prostitute. Freud deciphers it further that the love-objects are so easily and frequently substituted by one another that a "*long series of them is formed.*" (168). In other words, every sexual object of men's object-choice is not the only and irreplaceable one as the signifier; instead, the sexual objects are just "objects," which should be eliminated and renovated in order to stimulate men's sexual capacity. As Freud asserts:

Psycho-analysis has shown us that when the original object of a wishful impulse has been lost as a result of repression, it is frequently represented by an endless series of substitutive objects one of which, however, brings full satisfaction. This may explain the inconsistency in object-choice, the "craving for stimulation" which is so often a feature of the love of adults.

(189)

While these love-objects, which are unable to provide the desired satisfaction for men, are nothing but the surrogates of a man's original love object, his mother, a man's unconscious wish is so to supersede his father to make love with his mother and give her a son who resembles himself. To elucidate Freud's claim more explicitly, in a little boy's fantasy, his parents should not perform sexual activities since his mother can only have sexual intercourse with him, not with his father. If she does it with his father, she is unfaithful to him, and then there is no difference between his mother and the prostitutes since "basically they do the same thing" (171). At this point, Freud suggests that every man might have the chance of suffering from the universal affliction of "psychical impotence," which is not "a disorder confined to some individuals," if they cannot combine the "affectionate" and the "sensual" currents in love. Failing to surmount their childhood "incestuous fixations" even after entering their puberty, they still cling to their "primary object-choices," that is, their mothers. In consequence, a man can only recover his sexual potency by way of debasing and despising the sexual objects, or we can say, regarding the mother as a prostitute. In this view, Freud cites an example that explains why men of the highest classes of society will choose women of a lower class as a permanent mistress or even as a wife, for the debased sexual object is psychologically "the possibility of complete satisfaction" for men (185). Accordingly, Peter likes Marian to dress up as a slut because unconsciously his sexual desire can only be satisfied via the process of degrading a woman as a prostitute.

We learn in this way that men cannot truly love a woman or his wife since the only woman he desires and loves is his mother. The other women besides his mother are just his mother's reflections or substitutes. I believe that Freud's view can as well be applied to Len's anxiety of birth and his cynical attitude towards his forsaken love-objects. Len, as a philanderer, is unwilling to be trapped into the stricture of

marriage not only because he is afraid of losing freedom but because he cannot escape from the strong childhood fixation of Oedipus complex since what he is looking for all the time is not just the sexual objects of young and innocent girls but the primal object, also his forever lost sexual object, that is, his mother.

As a result of keeping searching for the primal object, Len could not be completely satisfied by the substitutes of his mother. And so he breaks up with his “sexual objects” one after another until he meets Ainsley, who schemes to have him impregnate her but refuses to accept him as the father of the unborn baby. Unlike other women, who beg their boyfriends to marry them because of the unwanted pregnancy before marriage, Ainsley nevertheless contrives furtively to be impregnated on her own decision and thus reverses the traditional pattern of fertilization that men are always the decision-makers of whether they should “sow seeds” in the womb or not. What is more, Ainsley’s demeanor bewilders Len since he is prohibited to wield his authorized paternal power as not only a decision-maker but a father. As we shall observe, at first, Len feels guilty toward Ainsley since in his imagination, she is so young and innocent, unlike those other regular and older women, who are rendered as prostitutes in Len’s thought, but still he does not want to take the responsibility for marrying Ainsley as his wife. Nevertheless, after he discovers that Ainsley is not as young and unsophisticated as he has thought, Len calls her a prostitute like other women. Since Ainsley is still Ainsley herself, we might wonder what makes Len change his words and judgments towards her from such a “sweet” and “innocent” girl to a “rotten bitch.” When Len still misinterprets that Ainsley is a naïve girl, he feels guilty and self-reproaching for making her pregnant since a man’s sexual objects cannot be chaste. As a goddess being chaste and lofty is what men pursue all the time, those “virgin” girls are after all a taboo for men. In Freud’s view, “the taboo of virginity is connected with the taboo of menstruation which is almost universally

maintained” (197) since both defloration and menstruation are accompanied the flow of blood. The horror of blood, which is the seat of life, has nothing to do with sexuality but is connected with “the prohibition against murder and forms a protective measure against the primal thirst for blood, primaeval man’s pleasure in killing” (196). In addition to the horror of blood, men also fear their first sexual intercourse with a virgin since the defloration of a woman consists of danger, the danger of “drawing her hostility down upon oneself.” Freud has mentioned how the well-known *virgin* widow, Judith, in Hebbel’s tragedy *Judith and Holofernes*, uses her virginity as a weapon to destroy the Assyrian general, who deflowers her virginity and thus brings death to himself:

After she [Judith] has been deflowered by this powerful man [the Assyrian general], who boasts of his strength and ruthlessness, she finds the strength in her fury to strike off his head, and thus becomes the liberator of her people. Beheading is well-known to us as a symbolic substitute for castrating; Judith is accordingly the woman who castrates the man who has deflowered her, which was just the wish of the newly-married woman expressed in the dream I [Freud] reported. (207)

Likewise, since Len deems that he “deflowers” the “young” and “innocent” Ainsley, Ainsley’s refusal of him to be the father is somewhat equal to “castrating” Len, for her decision arouses his “horror” and “anxiety” in his childhood. He recollects that his mother has once asked him to eat an egg with a little chicken inside it since his mother does not believe him that it is not an ordinary egg as it seems. When Ainsley retorts the sarcasm from him by saying that “you were all curled up inside somebody’s womb for nine months just like everybody else” (159), Len to some degree relates the baby in the womb to the chicken in the egg. So he breaks down when these repressed memories come back again. If we employ Freud’s view that a

little boy has sexual desires toward his mother and wants to have a baby with her to elucidate Len's reaction, we will find that Len's panic and horror might be derived from the thought that her mother wants him to "kill their own baby," whom he gives to his mother. As Len gasps at Ainsley, "you've involved me. You involved me psychologically. I'll have to think of myself as a father now, it's indecent, and all because of you" (159). Len is afraid of being the father because he cannot stand having "his own child" and then killing him or her because of his mother's order. Since everyone can be a hysteric, this is no exception for Len since deep down his mind lives a little Len who cannot get rid of his childhood trauma. Therefore, when Ainsley places Len under the condition of making him the father of the baby without consulting with him first, Len cannot help but burst into a hysteric. As we can see, at the end of the novel, both Len's mind and his behaviors regress to the infantile stage. "He's afraid to go outside the house, though he seems perfectly happy as long as he stays in Arthur's room" (280). As the text reveals, Len is infantilized as Clara's three-year-old boy, for now he shares the room with Arthur and "plays with all of Arthur's toys and sometimes they get into fights" (180). Before the ordeal of castration presented by Ainsley, Len cannot pass it this time and what is worse, he is so severely enmeshed into his childhood trauma that he cravingly searches for the love of his mother again from the mother figure, Clara, in order to negate the reality that he is someone else's father, who is commanded to kill his own child in his fantasy.

3.1.4. Identification with Clara

Finally, we should not neglect Marian's identification with the pregnant woman, Clara. The bulging shape of Clara's body does not simply mean pregnancy for Marian but a satiated stomach which might be related to Marian's eating disorder. As we can

detect, Marian likened Clara's pregnant body to a "boa-constrictor that has swallowed a watermelon" (31). It can be read that the child is not gestated by the mother but eaten by her. This cannibal image of the mother is connected with Marian's trauma mentioned in Chapter Two where Marian wants to and as well rejects to identify with her suffocating mother. Therefore, she develops anorexia nervosa at first and guzzles a big cake made into a woman's image at the end. What she rejects and digests is her mother's image or her own reflection as a woman. For instance, besides associating Clara's body to the jungle law of the food chain, Marian also links it to "a strange vegetable growth, a bulbous tuber that had sent out four thin white roots and a tiny pale-yellow flower" (32). She refuses to devour meat at the first stage and then vegetables because she does not want to enforce herself to accept her mother's overwhelming love as she had succumbed to in her childhood. Nevertheless, eating up the cake-lady in the end of the novel reveals Marian's contradictory thought that she also hopes that she would not separate from her mother. In other words, she somewhat identifies with her mother and would probably teach and love her own child in the same way if she had one. The mother image of Clara, who gets pregnant all the time, satisfies Marian's fantasies since her body, being both a carnivorous boa-constrictor and a bulbous tuber, is also a self-contradiction. To put it another way, Clara becomes a predator and a victim who is attached and absorbed by the child. Likewise, Marian on the one hand identifies with her mother, but on the other hand she wants to separate from her.

3.2. What am I?

After discussing Marian's identification with Peter, Ainsley, and Clara, I want to figure out what Marian thinks who she is. I will first elaborate the differences between feminine role and core, the issue of which is discussed by the characters in the novel

to indirectly articulate Atwood's opinions toward femininity, which unconsciously molds also Marian's personality and identity of her femininity. And then, extending the concept of feminine role and core, I will apply the Lacanian mathemes of the subject and the being to distinguish the nuances between what one really is and what one is required to be.

First, various characters in the novel has their own viewpoints on femininity. We find different kinds of women, such as the pregnant woman, the able woman, and the hysterical woman. Among them, we observe that they hold different definitions toward femininity and what it is to be a woman. For example, Ainsley thinks that every woman can only fulfill her femininity via having a baby (157), but she does not want a man. As for Clara, she hates to be "just a housewife" who can only fix the home, bearing and nourishing babies. Marian, as an unmarried woman, encounters the dilemma of either being an ideal woman or being only herself. Especially, when she is attacked by hysterical symptoms, she becomes more sensitive to femininity and the question of what a woman is. As we can observe, the above-mentioned characters and Joe, Clara's husband, have once got together with others, discussing the distinction between the "core" and the "role." According to Joe, a woman's core means "the centre of her personality, the thing she's built up; her image of her self" (235). In Joe's opinion, the core of the college woman is a thinking human being; however, when she gets married, "she allows her core to get taken over by the husband" (236). He continues, "when the kids come, she wakes up one morning and discovers she doesn't have anything left inside, she's hollow, she doesn't know who she is any more; her core has been destroyed" (236). In this sense, while Clara's core is transformed from a thinking human being into an empty core after having children and her role as a machine of bearing children, Ainsley's core on the other hand is being a mother but her role is actually an independent woman with no need of a husband. However, is it

clear enough to define what a woman is simply through the dualism of “core” and “role?” I do not think so. In fact, I ponder that the question of what a woman is has an intimate relationship with the Lacanian mathemes of “being” and “subject.” In other words, to understand what a woman is, we must first comprehend “what I am.”

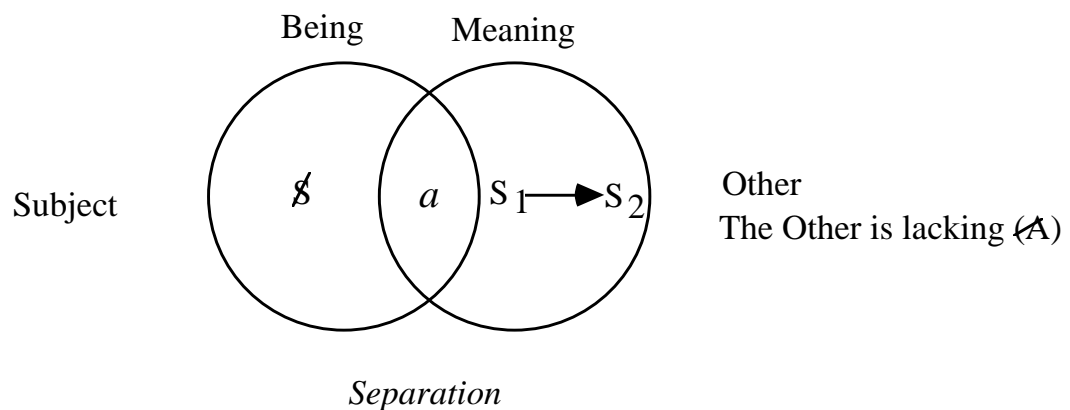
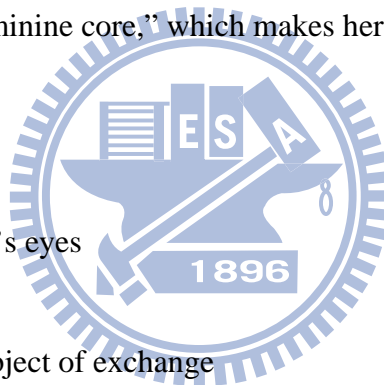


Fig. 1. The Lacanian separation.

Source: Éric Laurent. “Alienation and Separation (I).” 19-28.

In “Intervention on Transference,” Lacan argues that the subject is constituted through a discourse (62). What he means is that the subject is manipulated by language (the Other), whereby the subject is granted a meaning. For example, one identifies himself as a teacher because there is the Other, the administration of education, that provides him the symbolic order to play the role of a good teacher. Therefore, even though part of his subjectivity is occupied by his being, which keeps drawing him from being the role of a good teacher to the person outside the control of the Other, he still insists on teaching until he accomplishes the order imposed by the Other. As Dylan Evans elaborates, “in the early 1960s Lacan defines the subject as that which is represented by a signifier for another signifier; in other words, the subject is an effect of language (Ec, 835)” (196). Evans continues, “‘the subject is a subject only by virtue of his subjection to the field of the Other’ (S2, 188, translation

modified)” (196). In other words, the subject stays in part within the symbolic world, as the result which is the lack of being, since by partially remaining in the symbolic, there is one part of this subject that is not granted meaning. This way, Evans recounts, “Being belongs to the symbolic order, since it is ‘the relation to the Other in which being finds its status’ (E, 251)” (16). Therefore, in Lacan’s account, since being and subject are constructed in and through language, “a human being is above all a speaking being” (Evans 17). To sum up, if we use the Lacanian mathemes of subject and being to explicate the feminine role and core, we can discover that Marian’s identification with Peter and Ainsley is not only because she wants to accord with her feminine role given by the mainstream culture or the symbolic world but because she is in search for her “lost feminine core,” which makes her keep doubting her status as a woman.



3.3 Female body in Marian’s eyes

3.3.1. Female body as an object of exchange

In this part, we attempt to analyze what and how female body looks like in Marian’s eyes. I will first explain that Marian feels so disgusted at the female body that Clara’s pregnant body makes her relate the baby to the food, and then develops a contingent link to her anorexia nervosa. As Coral Ann Howells points out, Marian feels grotesque and rather disgusted towards those sexually mature female bodies, including “Clara’s pregnant body or the fat, ageing bodies of her fellow office workers at the Christmas party, or the fiasco of the coast-to-coast market research survey on sanitary napkins, where some of the questionnaires ‘obviously went out to men’” (25). Her disgust for the female body, especially the fear toward the pregnant body, can be detected from her description of Clara’s pregnancy. Relating Clara’s

pregnancy to the relationship between the eater and the food, Clara's pregnant body probably unconsciously reminds Marian of her childhood trauma about getting along with her strict mother, which I have mentioned in Chapter Two, arousing the terror of the cannibal image of the mother: "Clara's body is so thin that her pregnancies are always bulgingly obvious, and now in her seventh month she looked like a boa-constrictor that has swallowed a watermelon" (31). According to the narration, while the mother is analogized to the zoophagous animal in Marian's fantasy, the child is portrayed as an unceasingly growing fruit. Since the snake has to eat meat instead of fruit to sustain its life, the child as the fruit image cannot in fact offer any substantial nutrition to the mother. What is worse, the child as fruit will keep growing rather than be crushed and "digested" by the mother. Accordingly, Marian is attacked by anorexia nervosa later because she relates the full bulging stomach to Clara's protruding pregnant body. She at first cannot eat meat, then vegetables, and even a glass of juice, all of which are no longer dead but are bestowed with life. In other words, food is no food any more, for it is fantasized by Marian as living human beings. Therefore, eating food is like bearing a child, the process of gestation, instead of offering the essential nutrition to the body. Besides, the transformation of the female body accompanied by pregnancy provokes Marian's inward dread of being consumed by the child or the food in her anorexic situation. As the text delineates, "She [Clara] lay back in her chair and closed her eyes, looking like a strange vegetable growth, a bulbous tuber that had sent out four thin white roots and a tiny pale-yellow flower" (32). Described as a plant, Clara's movement is as a matter of fact confined and remains stable. The child, which resembles the bulbous tuber, stores and absorbs nutrition from the mother, and the mother will acquire the nutrition from the external world. Unlike the former simile used by Marian of relating to Clara the "boa-constrictor," which possesses agility and movement, her later analogy of

rendering Clara as a still plant implies that Marian is perplexed by the sudden change of her female body, for Marian cannot discern what exact kind of Clara's pregnant figure should be, which also makes Marian question her own identity. As Glenys Stow indicates, after Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* devours the cake which is labeled "EAT ME," the size of her body is out of control and soon Alice "begins to question her identity" (90). It becomes a great puzzle for Alice to figure out who she is, as Marian is so baffled by Clara's pregnant body that she develops sexual confusion.

In addition, as Dora feels that women are treated as objects of exchange in her fourfold love relationship with her father, Herr K. and Frau K., Marian feels as well that women cannot possess the phallic power and are objectified by men in some ways. For instance, Marian has described the way she changes her appearance as a process of objectification. As we can observe, Marian changes herself into another person from crown to toe to accord with Peter's suggestion and hints on her appearance. Changing her former image with plain hair style and grey suits, Marian has not only bought a girdle and a red dress at Peter's hint, but has gone to the salon to have a baroque curls designed by the hairdresser. The hairstyle does not suit her personality and taste but conforms to the new, short, red dress so to be consonant with Peter's ideal woman image. She relates the salon to the cake store, the supermarket, and the hospital. She becomes both the edible woman and the patient respectively. Not only does Marian objectify herself, but she objectifies every woman in the salon, where women become cakes, vegetables, and pieces of meat: "They treated your head like a cake: something to be carefully iced and ornamented" (208). Also, when she goes out from the salon's gate, she refers it to the "gilded chocolate-box door," so in this sense, Marian is self-objectified to the cake-lady and the chocolate. Furthermore, she describes that the scene of "the assembly-line of women seated in identical mauve

chairs under identical whirring mushroom-shaped machines,” an “electric mushroom,” reveals the inertia of women (210). The connection between food, machine, plants, and women expresses the fact that women are objectified among the objects. On the other hand, in addition to objectifying women, Marian also personifies objects, the mushroom-shaped machines, which she relates to as “live” vegetables, so that later on she dares not to eat those “live” creatures.

As regards the use of the hospital tropes, Marian reflects that “she had felt as passive as though she was being admitted to a hospital to have an operation” (209). From the description through the third-person narrator, Marian thinks that she is like a slab of flesh, an object on the operating table in the beauty salon (209). “She had checked her appointment with a mauve-haired young woman who despite her false eyelashes and iridescent talons was disturbingly nurse-like and efficient; then she had been delivered over to the waiting staff” (209). Using such words as “anaesthetics,” “surgical cloth,” “doctor,” “nurse,” and “bottled medicines,” Marian feels like “a slab of flesh, an object” (209). If the salon is regarded as a hospital, then it is much more like the orthopedic clinic since Marian is “transformed” into a callgirl-like under the “operation of the male hair-dresser, who knows what kind of the perfect woman men desire. Overall, we discover the reason why Marian cannot identify with the category Woman. For one thing, women with “femininity” are inert objects under Marian’s “phallic” gaze; for another, they do not have their peculiar independence, for they look the same and are controlled by a subjective man, the male hairdresser who cuts women’s hair in the novel.

We can thus deduce that Marian is reluctant to share the same femininity and female body with other women as Howells’s further argument demonstrates:

We begin to understand that Marian does not wish to turn into any of the models of adult women offered by society, and that behind her

conventional femininity lies a horror of the body which relate to her fear of growing up signaled either by marriage, maternity or the office pension plan. She wants none of these futures, and it is in this context of challenge to the discourses of both femininity and adulthood that her hysterical eating disorder needs to be interpreted. (46)

According to Howells, Marian rejects to eat food because she refuses to grow up as a mature woman, who is requested by the society to play her femininity role of being a good mother or a responsible spinster. To put it another way, she cannot accept the feminine identity since femininity is exploited and socialized by male desires and patriarchal ideology. As Stow suggests, Marian is aware that “as a woman she is expected to define herself by the possession of a man.” To put it another way, in Marian’s thought, being a “woman” is a dependent word because a “woman” is just a man’s background prop. Therefore, like Dora, Marian detests being treated as an “object” among others. Instead, what Marian pines for is to be the “phallus” for others, especially for the men she loves.

3.3.2. What is it to be a woman for Marian?

I have concluded that Marian wants to be the phallus for others, particularly for her lovers, so in this section, I want to analyze and elaborate that what it is to be a woman for Marian, who as a hysteric faces the same question that almost every hysteric will ask. Since we have distinguished the difference between “being” and “subject,” we can now proceed to discuss the question of what a woman is as a woman, or to be more precise, what it is like for the hysteric to be a woman.

According to Fink, “[h]aving is static; being is a pursuit” (23). Thus, to be a woman is rather a process than a position. One is not born a woman but structured as one. I say “structured” because being a woman is established in the signifying chain. The word

“woman” is the same as the “man” since they are just signifiers as other entities, like a professor, a beggar, or a mother. Nevertheless, being a woman is much more complicated than being a man. Now, let’s use again the Lacanian mathemes to elaborate why being a woman is a question not only to women but also to men:

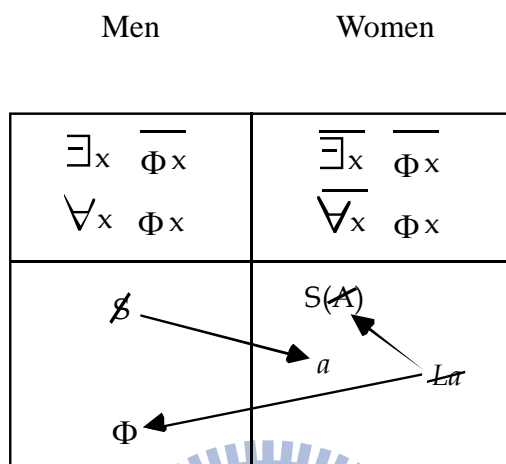


Fig. 2. The formulas of sexualization.

Source: Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX. Encore. On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-73*. Ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York and London: Norton, 1998. 78

Man does not ask the question of why he is a man because he has a penis, which is a ridiculous mark of what a man is since it is just a fantasy of every man in the sense that a man without a penis is still a man, which none the less terminates the circular question of what it is to be a man, while a woman will on the contrary thirst for asking what it is to be a woman. Perhaps we can say that fantasy, in which a man has signifier to signify themselves, defines what a man is, for men all live under the horror of castration anxiety ($\forall x. \Phi x$); only one man is not submitted to the phallic function, who is the primordial Father ($\exists x. \overline{\Phi x}$). However, the formula applied to the female side is an antinomy since no woman can escape the effect of the phallic function ($\overline{\exists x. \overline{\Phi x}}$), but not all women are affected by the phallic function; some of them might escape from it ($\overline{\forall x. \Phi x}$).

Since I am going to discuss what a woman is, we can take Ainsley's instance to see how women are affected by the phallic function and how it influences the way they choose their husbands. In "The Taboo of Virginity," Freud finds that the important factor of the disappointment experienced in the first act of intercourse is "the evolution of the libido" (203). As a man's primary sexual object is his mother, a woman's first love is her father, causing other men to be only his substitutes. Moreover, during the early age, little girls envy their brothers for having the penis and they often display their envy and hostility in front of their brothers. "Only later was the little girl's libido directed towards her father, and then," Freud continues, "instead of wanting to have a penis, she wanted—a child" (205). In light of the above analysis, Ainsley finally chooses Fish, a first-met stranger at the party, instead of Len, the baby's real father, to be the father of the unborn baby because Fish's voice is "heavy with symbolic meaning" (241). In other words, at first, Ainsley wants to have a baby, whom she believes is a boy, because now that she cannot have a penis as other men do, she then wants a child so as to compensate for her lifelong regret of "lacking" a penis. However, she does not want a husband to share the child, or more precisely "her penis," with her, for every man is just the substitute of her father, her first love. Until she has met Fish, the one who seems familiar and talks in a voice heavy with the symbolic meaning as the father usually possesses, Ainsley cannot help but acquiesces in taking him as the father of the unborn child since he resembles and reminds her of her father.

Next, to be a woman is an ambiguous question, for the subject is not completely comfortable under the signifier as a general woman; instead, it is "the subject as the subject of speech" that indicates the signifier of woman. The subject of speech is the one who speaks, so one regards herself as a woman based on the effect of speech. As I have mentioned, the subject is part of the symbolic, but it is not simply "equivalent to

the conscious sense of agency” (Evans 195); rather, “the unconscious knows about the subject” (Soler 276). According to Soler, man knows he is a man because “every man is a subject of castration;” otherwise, he will not know how to use his penis, for he has already attained jouissance. Nevertheless, how about a woman to be a woman? The butcher’s wife gives us one of the possible answers that “being the phallus is not an ideal but it is *something*, given that a woman cannot be Woman” (Soler 273). The capital “Woman” is the general concept of our knowledge, that is, the woman without penis. However, being the phallus is being something, for one cannot be deemed as a regular woman, but a particular woman as the signifier. Comparing the woman being the phallus to the woman not being the phallus, we understand from Nasio’s explanation that in hysterical thinking, to be the phallus will obtain the phallic power, which permits a woman not to become dominated.

In *The Edible Woman*, Peter scolds Marian for rejecting her femininity, but does man really know what a woman is or what an ideal femininity is? Take the example of the butcher’s wife. The butcher loves his wife and tries his best to satisfy his wife, but his wife does not want her desire to be satisfied. In other words, she desires an unsatisfied desire. Besides, she looks for the lack of her husband’s desire. Even though her husband claims that he loves her, is satisfied with their marriage life, and has all in him satisfied, she still suspects that “Couldn’t it be that he too has a desire that remains awry when all in him is satisfied?” (Lacan “The Direction of the Treatment and the Principle of Its Power” 523). As a result, she develops a “hysterical identification” with her female friend. She begins to wonder why her friend, who is so thin that she cannot be her husband’s type, can otherwise earn her husband’s praises so often; what kind of characteristics that she does not have but her friend does is on her mind. To be a lovable wife of her husband is not the patient’s aim; instead, she helps her husband search for his lost desire (object *a*) and endeavors to accomplish the

loss of his desire, that is, to be the phallus for her husband's desire. In this way, do men really know or create an ideal woman more than women do? Perhaps it is the woman who "plays the part of the man and at the same time fabricates the man" (Soler 279). To put it another way, the butcher's wife identifies with her friend because she identifies with her husband's desire. Playing the role of a man inside, she simultaneously makes the man since she surmises the loss of her husband's desire and presumes the thing she figures out—identifying with her friend and thus dreaming smoked salmon—is the object *a* of her husband's desire. But whether it is her husband's desire we do not know. We are sure only of one thing: while the subject has the fundamental fantasy of the Other's desire, the Other on the contrary has no fantasy. Does man create woman or does woman fabricate man? Perhaps they both produce certain myths or fantasies of each other.

Since we have distinguished the difference between the erotogenic body and the organic body, we must comprehend that the anatomical body does not exist in the hysterical body. Hence, we should not regard Marian's body as a female body, nor should we treat it as a bisexual body, for there are only phallic and non-phallic bodies in the hysteric's knowledge, in the world in which there is no sexual difference. In fact, I agree with Nasio that hysterics are asexual rather than bisexual (56) for the following reasons. First, according to Freud in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, everyone unconsciously invests a part in homosexuality. Hence, there is no one who is absolutely heterosexual since we somewhat unfold the bisexual inclination in both our consciousness and unconsciousness. Next, when we attribute someone to the category of bisexual, we have preconditioned that the person loves both men and women. In this way, we have assumed the gender limitation in front of one's sexual inclination. Nevertheless, as the hysteric does not constitute the concept of "sexual difference" in her mind, we can just propose that the hysterics are asexual but not

bisexual. Finally, according to Nasio, the hysteric cannot take on a definite sex (57). Whether one is a homosexual or a hermaphrodite, he or she will choose a side to stand as a man or a woman. However, for hysterics, they can just distinguish the one with the phallus and the other who lacks it. The phallus is not exclusive for a hysterical man, nor does the “uterus-phallus” belong to a female hysteric alone. The hysteric can possess both the phallus and the uterus-phallus simultaneously in their psychoanalytic bodies. As a result, the hysterics’ bodies cannot be demarcated by the organic sex, for they are psychoanalytically asexual. As what Nasio comments, in the hysteric’s castration fantasy, he is either the uterus protected safely within his hysterical body or the uterus “assimilated to the hysterical body itself” and “at the same time a uterus containing two bodies “of a man and a woman with no genitalia” (56). In this sense, we should not assume in advance that Marian is a woman, but suppose that her hysterical body is an asexual body, which contains both phallic and non-phallic power.

Talking about Marian’s asexual body, which consists of both phallic and non-phallic power, we should not ignore Marian’s status as both the phallus and the “mother.” I have suggested in Chapter Two that Marian’s anorexia nervosa is partially derived from her childhood trauma with her mother, whom Marian wants to segment and blend with. Therefore, Marian fantasizes herself not as merely a woman but a woman with the phallic power, or to be more precisely, a “phallic mother.” She makes herself become “such a woman” by imagining Duncan as her “phallic child.” As we can detect, while Duncan exposes his “febrility” and “liquid confessing” without any concealment in front of Marian, who is almost a stranger to him at that time since it is just the second time they run into each other at the laundromat store, Marian’s maternity is suddenly evoked so that she wishes she could “have reached out effortlessly” and put her “arms around that huddled awkward body and consoled it,

rocked it gently” (99). The motherliness Marian has aroused toward Duncan is not simply a desire to be a mother but to be something sublime and sacred, that is, to be Madonna. As we observe, before coming across each other at the laundromat, the first time that they meet on a beer interview Marian has figured Duncan as Jesus Christ:

He rubbed one of his eyes with a finger, as if he had just got up. He was cadaverously thin; he had no shirt on, and the ribs stuck out like those of an emaciated figure in a medieval woodcut. The skin stretched over them was nearly colourless, not white but closer to the sallow tone of old linen. His feet were bare; he was wearing only a pair of khaki pants. The eyes partly hidden by a rumpled mass of straight black hair that came down over the forehead, were obstinately melancholy, as though he was assuming the expression on purpose. (49)

With a rather young appearance than his real age, Duncan is misunderstood by Marian that he is only fifteen (49). Marian also describes that the way Duncan sat with the cigarette lit and “his hands cupped” is “like a starved buddha burning incense to itself” (51). Moreover, when Marian runs into Duncan at the laundromat store, Marian observes that Duncan’s skin “was even more unearthly” (95). Perhaps we can also say that Duncan is not only child-like for Marian since what he represents is a lofty signifier, which cannot be replaced by any other object. To put it another way, in Marian’s fantasy, Duncan is also her “phallus,” the signifier which helps Marian identify with men and discover what it is to be a woman. In short, the relationship between Marian and Duncan is more than the love relationship between a woman and a man; rather, their relation can be likened to that of a mother and a child, the Madonna and Jesus Christ, or the “phallic mother” and the “phallus.” Accordingly, in Chapter Four, I will proceed to discuss transference between Marian and Duncan and extend as well the issue of what it is to be a woman to the elaboration of the book title,

“The Edible Woman.”



Chapter Four: Transference and the Title “The Edible Woman”

4.1 Transference between Marian and Duncan

We might wonder how and what makes Marian recuperate her health from an “abnormally normal” state of anorexia nervosa and changes her hysterical personality back into the “originally normal Marian.” Here, the role of Duncan is the key point. Even though Marian does not go to see any doctor for her anorexia nervosa, Duncan plays nevertheless the role of a psychoanalyst who helps Marian to release from such symptoms as hysterical anorexia, paralysis, and phobia. The way he adopts is nothing more than “listening” and “looking at what he hears.” Instead of asking Marian to be a particular woman who should possess femininity as Peter does, Duncan simply follows along Marian’s behavior and words; moreover, he even encourages Marian to escape from the “regular” life, transgressing the orthodox rules. For example, when Marian tells him that she could not eat any food, Duncan does not enquire why she has a bad appetite as Peter has questioned her; rather, he tells her that personally he prefers to be fed through the main artery (192), takes her side, and even assists her to cover up the secret of her anorexia by helping her to take food from her plate when they dine together at their friend’s house. According to Nasio, the listening power of the analyst and the analytic interpretation (the symbolic ego) will confer a new meaning to kill the symptom since the analyst will identify with the nucleus of the suffering and integrate what the hysterical ego rejects. However, it is not enough to just listen to the patient’s words; the most important thing is that the therapist should have the ability of “looking at the sound.” It means that while listening to what the hysteric says, the analyst must forget his ego, become the physical sound of the spoken words, and perceive visually with his mental gaze the unconscious origin of the symptom. What the analyst is looking at is actually what the patient desires in the

unconscious transference (73). Nasio's idea actually resonates with Lacan's belief in "Intervention on Transference" that the analyst should become a positive non-acting object, echoing the subjectivity of the hysteric's words (72). In this light, the disappearance of Marian's hysterical symptoms is not simply a miracle but one with the help of Duncan. To put it another way, although the "talking cure" can discharge the excessive affect of the hysteric, the essential factor of the treatment is nevertheless the analyst's listening and visualizing power since without the guidance of the analyst, the hysteric cannot figure out the nucleus of suffering on her own. In other words, the defense and resistance of the hysteric make him or her reluctant to speak out the pathological cause of the hysterical symptoms and to achieve an "affect abreaction." It requires the therapist to utilize and transform the unconscious transference between the doctor and the patient into a beneficial power to help the patient search for the origin of the symptom and discharge it.

There is transference happening between Marian and Duncan since Marian experiences Duncan as though he is occupying a fixed "Peter position." She repeats the behavior of the unsatisfied "sexual touching" without knowing that she is reiterating it, by which she acts out what she has forgotten or repressed in order to remember. Take the scene of kissing, for example. After Marian accidentally runs into Duncan at the laundry store and says goodbye to him, she and Duncan both take a step forward and kiss each other without feeling any erotic sensation in her mind. Apart from the feeling that Duncan's mouth tasted like cigarettes and an impression of thinness and dryness of his body, Marian cannot remember any sensation at all (100). In "Transference," Lear points out what Freud claims that because of *false connection* of developing transference towards the psychoanalyst, the patient desires a kiss from him (117). Instead of bearing the duty of the whole treatment, Freud assigns all the responsibility of the analytic hindrance and failure to his patient without inspecting

his analytic methods and process. Therefore, Lear suggests a different view to side with Dora and re-examines Dora's reactions toward Freud. According to Lear, Freud pays more attention to delve into the sexual etiology of Dora's symptoms to attest his great theory and accomplish his interpretation of dreams than to be concerned with her real feeling. Thus, Dora is usually asked to tell about her erotic wishes to Freud, which she had never done before, and hence her anxiety is aroused (118). Freud, however, regards Dora's "anxiety" as uncooperative, and as a doctor, he is confident of his ability to "cure" her "desires." Besides, Lear argues that instead of treating Dora as a hysterical patient and assisting her in getting rid of her hysterical symptoms, Freud takes the advantage of treating Dora as a support to his theory of dreams (120) and suggests the concept of transference to seek justification for himself. In this way, Dora relates Freud as "an older, male seducer" to Herr K. position since Dora feels again that she is used by another male authority figure, who induces her to describe in detail what Herr K. is like, and who does not really want to help her but takes her as a clinical experiment of his theory (139). Unfortunately, Freud does not notice that his technique of dream interpretation, which attempts to bring out the unconscious sexual fantasies of Dora, will reinforce Dora's rising anxiety about the analysis, an anxiety that is so strong that Dora is impetuous to disrupt and terminate the dream-like analytic process.

In this way, comparing Marian with Dora, it is not hard to find that both of them generate transference toward their analysts, but the meaning of "coveting to give their analysts a kiss" argued by Freud is however different for them. While for Dora, a kiss is a representation of disgust, for Herr K.'s erection forcing on her fourteen-year-old body has transferred to her oral cavity through the process of language, by which the displacement takes place, Marian, on the contrary, does not encounter the trauma of feeling the erection opposed to her abdomen in her childhood, so instead of feeling

disgust at a kiss, which will remind Dora of Herr K.'s erection having once forced on her inviolate youth body, Marian, however, feels no sensation.

Nevertheless, kissing with Duncan without any sexual sensation is still a repetition of a traumatic occasion, which we can detect from the scene of Marian's love-making with Peter. As I have mentioned earlier, when Marian makes love with him, she is totally occupied by a series of scenarios fabricated by her. The only sensation she felt during the process of love-making is Peter's smell. As the text indicates,

I [Marian] could smell Peter's hair, a clean soap smell. He smelled of soap all the time, not only when he had recently taken a shower. It was a smell I associated with dentists' chairs and medicine, but on him I found it attractive. He never wore sickly-sweet shaving lotion or the other male substitutes for perfume. (61)

Normally, if one sinks into the whirl of *jouissance* brought by love-making, it is almost impossible to "notice" and even to "analyze" where the smell comes from. None the less, not only does Marian "decompose" Peter's smell, she also associates his goodlook to "the youngish well-groomed faces of cigarette ads" during their sexual coition (61). Marian can only perceive Peter's "smell" but no other senses. She links Peter's face to the "faces of cigarette ads" because kissing with Duncan, Marian remembers that "His [Duncan's] mouth tasted like cigarettes" (100). If we deduce from Lear's idea that Freud, who is also a smoker and who uses Dora to affirm his theory, is put into the fixed Herr K. position by Dora, then Duncan is arranged into the Peter position by Marian for two reasons. One is that Marian's subject is equally absent in the kissing scene, in which she kisses mechanically without enjoying it, as when she makes love with Peter. Another is that since Duncan is a smoker, Marian might develop transference towards him based on her association of the smoker (her

“smell” and “taste” from Duncan) and the “faces of cigarette ads,” which represents Peter’s image in her fantasy for Peter smokes as well as Duncan (64). Also, we should not forget that Duncan lends his soap to Marian, the smell of which Marian might unconsciously relate to Peter’s smell of soap all the time. In this way, Duncan properly fits the Peter position. Here, we notice that even though there are “repeating phenomena” happening to both Dora and Marian, the methods of repetition used for remembering by them are not completely identical. While Dora acts out the occasion via “duplicate repetition,” Marian on the other hand adopts the way of “associative repetition.” In other words, Dora wants to slap Freud because she just repeats the traumatic scene with Herr K.; Marian, however, kisses Duncan not only because Peter and Duncan overlap in her but also because she loves Duncan. Before I discuss the relationship between Marian and Duncan, I will first analyze why Marian takes such an unconscious behavior of kissing Duncan.

I want to argue that by comparing it to Dora’s case, it is Marian’s anxiety, rather than other plausible reasons, making her repeat the meaningless scene. According to Lear, instead of acting as a mature adult, who not only experiences a feeling but makes a claim when he or she is angry, Dora’s anger is “not mature enough to make a *real claim* for its own reasonableness” (127). Herr K.’s proposition is the *occasion* for stirring up Dora’s overwhelming emotions, which provokes her anxiety. Since Dora does not know how to handle the anxiety, she chooses an angry outburst to face it as she would in her childhood, and as a result she disrupts herself and the normal process of angry reactions in an adult (127). As Lear asserts, “in a completely non-mysterious way, the three-year-old emotions have been preserved in the young woman” (127). Similarly, Lacan indicates in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses 1955-1956* that the analysis emphasizes on the hysteric’s preverbal world, or an intraworldly *Gestalt*, in which the subject remains as an infant and displays the

imaginary world (164-65). Nasio also proclaims that the hysteric who suffers in the conversion symptom can get the equivalent excess of sexual affect as coming from infantile masturbatory gratification since the hysteric's sexuality remains infantile (20). If both the hysteric's "anxiety" and "sexuality" are more or less linked with the childhood, and even the preverbal world, language must play a significant part since only via language can the hysteric traverse the fantasy. Therefore, it might be the reason why the subject is always manipulated by the Other and is so only in the discourse. In the world of the hysteric, the subject does not function well in the signifying chain of language, that is, the symbolic world. Therefore, Dora wants a kiss from Freud so that she can repeat the scene in which she slapped Herr K. because Freud triggers her anxiety—which functions as a defense—by Freud's imposing search for her hidden sexual secrets. Since her anxiety cannot enter the symbolic world, she repeats the same way as she used to do in her childhood to deal with it. Likewise, Marian repeats the scene of the unsatisfied sexual contact because making love with Peter provokes her anxiety of reaching jouissance. Besides, she returns to her childhood stage, at which she uses anxiety as a defense to vent her excessive affect. Hence, Duncan renders Marian "a capital-G girl" (54) rather than a "woman" when she questions him. In short, Marian cannot help but step forward to kiss Duncan to relieve or tackle her anxiety through an unsatisfied sexual contact. Although it is a painful process, the hysteric feels safer in the agony of great anxiety. Or we may say, Marian desires the anxiety.

Undoubtedly, the goals that Dora and Marian want to reach are somewhat similar. That is, they both hanker for being the Other's phallus and germinate the anxiety as their defense, but their motives are arguable. Dora duplicates the repetition of kiss to Freud because for one thing, unconsciously she wishes that Herr K. could propose to her again so that she will not feel that she is tricked again as the governess is, who

was deserted by Herr K. after his proposal. For another, both her father and Herr K. take advantage of her to accomplish their adulteries, so she develops transference towards Freud to take revenge on him. Still another is that as a hysteric, she does not want to satisfy both herself and others, so she hopes that she can always be the Other's phallus by dissatisfying both the Other's and her own desires. As a result, after the thought of coveting to kiss Freud, she terminates the treatment earlier on her own decision instead of being "asked to go" by Freud. Frustrating the Other's wishes, including declining Herr K.'s proposal and disrupting Freud's analysis, makes Dora think that she is the essential phallus for the Other's desire. Of course, she herself gets no satisfied desire from the discontinuous analytic interpretations, but it is this unsatisfied desire that the hysteric desires. Likewise, as Marian also wants to be the phallus or the signifier for the Other's desire, she keeps herself in the condition of wanting, so must the Other's desire.

Although Freud and Duncan occupy a certain fixed position in Dora's and Marian's respective fantasies, the transference applied in each pair is oppositional to the other. While transference between Freud and Dora is negative, transference between Duncan and Marian is, however, positive. The polemical results of transference are due to the fact that Freud and Duncan use different techniques to treat their patients. Freud not only listens to Dora but encourages her to tell him sexual etiologies of her hysterical symptoms and then interprets them to Dora, the interpretation of which makes Dora so embarrassed that she terminates the treatment earlier; whereas as Duncan uses the technique of "free association" without adding too much of his own interpretation, Marian can rely on him and tell him everything that disturbs her. Perhaps we can infer that even though Marian does put Duncan in the Peter position, she none the less places him in that position only under the repetition of "her unsatisfied desire," without other negative transference at all. In

other words, Dora renders Freud to the Herr K. position not only because she wants to kiss him but to also slap him on his face as she has done on Herr K.'s proposition; whereas the behavior that Marian kisses Duncan is simply a repetition of "her unsatisfied desire" and normal phenomena of doctor-patient transference instead of having a specific meaning or purpose like taking revenge as Dora does to Freud. The relationship between Marian and Duncan is more like what Lear summarizes in Freud, who finds narrates in the cases of hysterical women that every woman patient is "becoming erotically involved with her doctor." The patient "wishes the doctor to abandon his normal role" so that he can give her a kiss and even have a baby with her (119). Then, how can Freud avoid the danger of being matched into the Herr K. position? After re-examining the case of Dora reported by Freud, Lear gives us a conclusion that since Dora places Freud in the Herr K. position, Freud must "recognize that anything he says will most likely be heard in a Herr-K-like way." In this way, the smartest thing for any analyst to do is that "the analyst might as well say nothing, or ask a genuine question." Only when the analyst expresses his non-aggressive, non-erotic openness will he help Dora realize the false connection of transference (142).

I agree with Lear since Nasio also mentions the power of the analyst's listening, instead of that of his interpretation or that of his suggestion. Nasio claims that the analyst should have the ability of looking at the sound, that is, to use his mental gaze to search for the nucleus of suffering. Pointing out the fact that the hysteric cannot accept his or her castration anxiety as normal subjects will do, Nasio still does not ask the analyst to force the patient to accept it; rather, he suggests that the analyst should bring the hysteric again to face the ordeal of castration anxiety, and let the latter decide on himself whether to pass the task of castration anxiety or not. It all hinges on the patient's own self-discovery. He has to look for the answer of "what am I?" or

“what is it to be a woman?” by himself. The failure of Dora’s case might be because Freud has said too much to Dora, instead of letting her resolve the sexual confusion by herself in her own way. It is Freud’s impatience that provokes Dora’s anxiety, thus ceasing the analysis earlier than expected. As we can see, Dora is always confused by the question of “What is it to be a woman?” She starts to find out the answer by identifying with her father, Herr K., and then Freud, because her identity of being a woman comes first from her identification with men. To put it another way, she cannot accept herself “as an object of desire for the man” (68) as Lacan points out in “Intervention on Transference.” Rather, Dora aims to become the signifier for every man, or for the lack of men’s desire. Hence, Lacan reexamines the hysterical symptom of Dora’s aphonia during the absence of Herr K since he wants to prove that “woman is the object which it is impossible to detach from a primitive oral desire” (67). In Lacan’s account, Dora could not utter any voice not because she can only write rather than talk to Herr K. but because when she was left face to face with Frau K., she identifies with her father, who is impotent so that Frau K. can only attain jouissance via cunnilingus during the sexual coition. As Dora also identifies with Herr K., who was slapped by her, she suffers from right-sided facial neuralgia later on. To sum up, Dora recognizes her femininity by identifying with men rather than with Frau K since woman is an object in Dora’s acknowledgement. Instead, she identifies with men as subjects, including her father, Herr K, and Freud, to know what a woman is. Comparing Dora with Marian, they are both confused by sexuality and they develop transference toward their psychoanalyst and psychoanalyst-like friend respectively. Therefore, in the next section, I will elucidate what kind of method Duncan adopts to help Marian experience and understand what a woman is by herself.

4.2 Marian experiences “pregnancy fantasy” via the mountain-climbing with Duncan

Marian discovers her unconscious subjectivity, which is veiled under the masquerade of her physical body, and understands what it is to be a woman, via the “imaginary treatment” applied by Duncan, who takes her to mountain-climbing. After escaping from the engagement party, Marian stays with Duncan, who takes her to climb mountains, the landscape of which can be rendered as Marian’s “imaginary vagina.” In “Bodyscape: The Body-Landscape Metaphor,” J. Douglas Porteous indicates that the metaphorical use of “landscape as body” and that of “body as landscape” have undoubtedly democratized in the Western world. In light of this, that Duncan leads Marian to climb the mountains is equivalent to analyzing a female body or undergoing the ordeal of analytic treatment, for Duncan also helps Marian re-find her unconscious subjectivity during the process of climbing the mountains. In this journey, Marian is totally guided by Duncan since she does not know where they are going to or what they will do at the next moment. In other words, Duncan is the one who controls the “direction” to search for the “unconscious subjectivity of Marian.” As the text describes it, “He was leading her. He was in control.” “She had no idea what part of the city they were in” (259). In addition, although Marian deems that she is attacked by hysterical paralysis and she could not run, Duncan, however, drags Marian behind him “as if she was a toboggan” (259). He does not listen to Marian’s entreaty to slow down his step, for his reason is that they are “escaping” (260). The word “escaping” is a key point since what they are escaping from is the symbolic world. In other words, Duncan is taking Marian away from the real world, where they are manipulated by rules and the law, or to be more precise, they escape from her consciousness to her unconscious. Running swiftly, Marian’s red dress split apart: “She had a vision of the red dress disintegrating in mid-air, falling in little scraps behind her in the snow, like feathers” (260). There is a metaphor implied in the text, in which Marian is shaped like a phoenix. According to Earnest Jones, the methods of

treatment are most intimated and inspired by hysterics as in Freud's cases: Anna O. figures out the idea of "talking cure," whereas Elisabeth von R. suggests the method of "free association." Therefore, it is plausible to announce the thesis that hysterics are cured by talking with others, or rather, with themselves. Instead of attributing them to the trait of invalids, they are more adjacent to the delimitation of "normal" subjects. They are not insane or physically injured but are "shortcut" for a span of time in some periods of their lives. Once they trace the origin of the symptomatic causes or re-discover their own unconscious subjects, they will recover themselves and return to the normal state. Like the phoenix, it burns itself in the pile of wood and then resuscitates itself from the ashes. In this way, Duncan does not give any suggestion to change Marian's mind; what an "analyst" can do is just to help the hysteric find the nucleus of the symptom and leave her to face the choice of whether she should undergo the ordeal of castration anxiety or not.

The way of climbing the mountains is also like the treatment of "chimney-sweeping" suggested by Anna O. while she faces his psychoanalyst, Breuer. In addition to my former claim of Porteous's words that "body components are metaphorically matched in detail with landscape features" (2), such as the breasts as mountains, the vagina as the cave, and the clothed body as the vegetated landscape, Porteous also argues, "the culmination of 'the body as landscape' metaphor is pornotopia" (1). During the process of searching for her real self, Duncan brings Marian to a strange place, where Marian can just follow Duncan's step without any idea of where they are going. Running to the footbridge at the bottom of the hill, Duncan then leads Marian to the end of the bridge. Along the way they trace, nothing Marian sees around her is familiar. After they climb down the bridge step by step "like children learning to go down stairs," they were "in one of the ravines that fissured the city" (260). "The ravine was narrow here and deep, closed in by trees which looked as

though they were pinning the covering of snow to the steep sides. Far above, towards the rim, some children were playing” (260). The scene is not just a natural view but a psychoanalytic process of searching for the “nucleus” of a woman, that is, a woman’s erogenous body. According to Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*, climbing stairs in the dreams is usually the symbol of the sexual coition. Besides, they run from the upside to the downside of the hills is like passing through a woman’s mons pubis, where Marian sees a maze of branches of tree-tops (260), which symbolize a woman’s pubic hair. Also, as Porteous claims, “The belly is a smooth rolling downland, giving way to the tangled shrubbery of the significantly named *mons veneris*, which in turn guards a secret cave” (8), and “The female body is ‘uncharted territory’ dominated by ‘hillocks and foothills’” (9). He further announces, “Breast hills, mouth caverns, mossy mounts, dark caves, and deep valleys, were all brought into play as descriptors for the usually supine female body” (10). On the whole, the natural scenes of “hills,” “caves,” and “trees” are familiarly used to associate with the female sexual organs and hair in literary works. As for “the ravines that fissured the city,” it can be regarded as the vagina since when they proceed forward, “water was dripping on them from the icicles on the underside of the bridge” (260). Porteous also indicates that the metaphor of ravine as a vagina still survives in Romance-language novels, “where we still find characters who explore ‘the wet well of her womb and the narrow ravine between the cliffs of her buttocks’ (Amado 1977, 211)” (10). Moreover, “water” here involves the meaning as “a kind of getting wet involved in sexual intercourse” since reading from the interpretation of Dora’s first dream by Freud, who associates “fire” and “burning” with “wet” and “water,” and who reminds Dora that “during the act of copulation the man presented the woman with something liquid *in the form of drops*” (90). We can thus infer that Duncan and Marian’s “escape” is not only a relief from reality but an escape to an “eroticized fantasy.”

This “fantasy” of entering into a woman’s body can be interpreted into several meanings, which I will divide into three categories. First, it is the fantasy of attaining the satisfied pleasure from the sexual intercourse. Before experiencing the event of escaping, Marian remains in an unsatisfied situation or desires an unsatisfied desire. For example, Marian’s anorexia reaches its peak at the moment before their escape; she cannot take in anything at all, not even a glass of orange juice (257). Freud declares that the hysterical symptom “reaches its climax shortly before the patient gives utterance to that memory” (296). Nevertheless, if the patient speaks out that traumatic memory, the symptom, or vomiting for instance, will disappear as soon as he finishes the last word; otherwise, the patient will start to vomit heavily.

Analogously, if vomiting is related to the reason why hysterics are most anorexics, we can then assume that vomiting is a kind of “unconscious talking.” Hence, after the “escaping,” Marian is not only transformed into another person, who dares to challenge Peter but also recovers her lost appetite. I have mentioned earlier that food is a kind of danger to Marian inasmuch as she is afraid that she might be “killed” by reaching the utmost pleasure from eating it. In this way, if Marian starts to eat again, she has understood as others that reaching *jouissance* will not tear her whole being apart. Furthermore, since there is always transference between the doctor and the patient, that Duncan takes Marian to escape from reality into fantasy can be regarded as an imaginary “chimney-sweeping” through the process of psychoanalysis.

Secondly, we can deem this imaginary female body as a fantasy of being reborn from Mother’s body. I regard this “maternal” body as both Marian’s own and the mother’s. According to Porteous, “we experience body, both our own and that of the mother, before we experience landscape” (4). As the infant distinguishes himself from the external milieu by exploring the surrounding environment for “several developmental stages,” Porteous claims therefore, “To explore is a natural drive” (4).

In this way, when Duncan takes Marian to explore the bleak and desolate snow landscape, what Marian explores is not only a female body, but a body both of her own and that of the mother. I use the definite article “the” instead of “her” mother because “the mother” on the one hand, represents the relationship between she and her mother and on the other hand, reflects her “pregnant body” as a mother to make herself reborn from her own body. In fact, I link the escaping scene to the maternal body from the word “water.” In addition to the meaning of its “sexual temptation” as Freud figures out, “water” can also relate to amniotic fluid or blood as Porteous suggests (6), whereby the whole process of “escaping” is like procreation. The scene I have described above is just the imaginary “vagina” of the Mother. I am now going to look deeper into the “escaping” scene to the extent of the “womb.” As Duncan and Marian proceeds further, “the creek had disappeared into an underground culvert” (261). And “ahead of them was another bridge, a larger one. They kept walking” (261). Now, “they were standing on the very edge of a cliff. [...] Below them was a huge roughly circular pit, with a spiral path or roadway cut round and round the sides, leading to the level snow covered space at the bottom” (262). Here, another bridge, or the cervix, is the way to the womb, which is the “huge roughly circular pit.” The scene can be interpreted in two ways. For one thing, Marian returns to the state of preparing to be born again. For another, while she goes through the ordeal of reaching the “cliff,” she accepts and overcomes the fact that the mother is “castrated.” Marian can thus handle the castration anxiety. In brief, she has to re-examine the relationship between she and her mother, so that she can comprehend that everything, including the mother’s castration, is nothing but her fantasies.

Last but not least, although Marian gets a rebirth, it does not mean that Marian is no longer Marian but that Marian re-finds Marian who is always there. Duncan brings Marian to search for the nucleus of her symptoms, making her suffer under the ordeal

of castration anxiety again because as soon as the hysterics pass through these tests, they are reborn and can live a normal life as the healthy subjects do. As Nasio declares, “passing through anxiety is finding the birthplace of the person I have been all along” (97). What Nasio says is that the hysteric simply becomes who she used to be. Hence, Duncan does not lead Marian to proceed further and further; instead, he takes her back to the origin. Revealing what she desires and what disturbs her, Duncan does not show the way for Marian to find an exit; rather, he asks her to solve all the problems and questions on her own. The way Duncan treats Marian is like the process of an analysis. According to Nasio’s diagram of it, we understand that the analysis has its own limited duration if it is regarded as a treatment; nevertheless, it is a cyclic and unlimited duration in its psychological process (101). Comparing different replies of Peter and Duncan when they were asked the same question by Marian about what time it is, they give polemical answers. While Peter replies “Two-thirty” (266), Duncan on the contrary remains silent (262). When Marian asks what time it is, Duncan does not answer because there is no linear and temporal time during the analysis. Instead, “analytic time contracts into the moment when truth emerges into actuality” (Nasio 102). In this way, Peter’s mechanical time is thus a symbolic time, which has its limitation and the general accuracy. Perhaps we can say that the analysis is like an archaeological process since the job of an analyst is not to search for “new things” from the patients; instead, he just assists the patients in rearranging those chaotic “old objects” in order to put them into the original order. Every “new” discovery of the analyst is nothing other than “re-finding the loss.” Hence, the restoration of the hysteric is not equivalent to creating a totally new subject but to unveil the subject in the unconscious. Let us take the evidence of the dinosaur fossil. When the fossil is dug up by the archaeologist, what we see is not the surface of the dinosaur’s body but “the body as surface,” that is, the bone. The essence of the

dinosaur has not changed, but what we detect now is the “endopsychic” part of it. Similarly, the hysteric’s subject is not replaced by another subject. He remains the one the analyst first met but the one without the unconscious subject veiled. After Marian talks with Duncan, or more precisely with “herself” since Duncan does not provide her any suggestions or help to solve any problems, she suddenly realizes that it was time for action. As Duncan reiterates, “it’s your [Marian’s] own personal cul-de-sac, you invented it, you’ll have to think of your own way out” (264). But out of what and to where? In my opinion, Marian invents the anxiety by herself, the anxiety in which she keeps questioning what femininity is. As she could not accept herself as a woman, she has identified with surrounding people in order to find out the answer to what it is to be a woman. This is why both Peter and Ainsley comment on Marian that she is rejecting her femininity (80, 272). After the “escaping,” she recognizes that what she has really wanted is simple safety, a safety to be adjusted (263). To put it another way, Marian stays in a confusion of sexual difference and doubts why she is a woman, to which she believes she could find an answer. Nevertheless, she finally realizes that actually she hadn’t accomplished anything even though she thought she had been heading towards it all these months (263). Afterwards, Duncan shows her how to get back, but he does not accompany her; instead, he turns and walks away. But now, Marian knows where she is. She is familiar with herself now because she is like being a sort of getting out, not only out of the womb but out of her shell, the shell of her conscious subjectivity.

4.3 Devouring the cake-woman to accept the femininity and castration anxiety

In addition to climbing the mountains to search for her veiled self, Marian also accepts her femininity and castration anxiety through another way of devouring the cake-woman. Before we discuss how Marian achieves these, we have to make clear

why the cake is both a “symbol” and “mere a cake.” According to Bouson, many critics, including herself, are frustrated by the novel’s closure since Atwood writes confusingly that the cake is both a “symbol” and “mere a cake.” For me, there is no contradiction between the two interpretations when they are applied to the psychoanalytic perspective. In my account, the cake-woman is a “symbol” because the first food Marian chooses to eat is nothing but a woman made of the sponge cake. Hence, the question we might ask is why the cake is made into a woman shape instead of other forms. On the other hand, the cake is “mere a cake” means that no matter what femininity or masculinity mean for everyone, the definitions of them only exist in our fantasies. The cake is mere a cake for we cannot use it to distinguish men and women, as in the case in which we cannot use a penis to define what a man or a woman is. Actually, the combination of the cake as both a “symbol” and “only a cake” remind me of Freud’s kettle joke², in which the reasons are reasonable when they are separate but are irrational while being put them together. Perhaps Atwood is playing a game with the readers by blurring the boundary line between the text as fantasy and the readers as reality. Now, since we have comprehended that the cake can be both a symbol and mere food, our focus on the cake-scene should thus be diverted to why Marian suddenly can eat the cake after her long-term anorexia nervosa and what it means or matters for Marian to eat the cake made into a woman.

First, Marian creates a “new” symbolic femininity via the process of devouring the cake-woman. When Marian eats the woman made of cake, she not only relieves her hunger from her long-time anorexia, but also satisfies more her erogenous body.

² In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud points out that the inconsistency of his patient’s dream is like “the kettle joke”. The man who is charged by his neighbor with having given back a borrowed kettle in a damaged condition defends his guiltlessness by declaring three reasons. Each reason would stand by itself if it is accepted individually. However, if they are presented simultaneously, they are illogical and unacceptable.

After the “escaping,” Marian bakes a cake of an ideal woman’s image, which resembles her discarded femininity, and then dismembers it, chewing it to the greatest content since what she eats is not simply a cake, but a “symbolic woman” who she has meditated and investigated for a long time and now accepts it as such. Waiting for Peter’s arrival, who is angry about Marian’s sudden disappearance without any notification and who thus wants to come over, to enquire what has happened to her, Marian decides to make a cake to tell Peter the unrevealed problems and conflicts between them. The woman made of cake by Marian represents a “new” symbolic femininity since the ingredients she uses are totally new, from the cooking tools to the foodstuff:

Her image was taking shape. Eggs. Flour. Lemons for the flavour. Sugar, icing-sugar, vanilla, salt, food-colouring. She wanted everything new, she didn’t want to use anything that was already in the house. [...] A glass tube full of round silver decorations. Three nesting plastic bowls, teaspoons, aluminium cake-decorator and a cake-decorator and a cake-tin.

(267)

At first, Marian bakes the cake for Peter’s sake because she wants him to know that he has been trying to destroy her, to assimilate her all along, so she makes a substitute of her ideal image in Peter’s expectation. However, Peter does not taste any bit of it but leaves in embarrassment. The woman made of cake as a symbol has definitely failed, but Marian eats it and thus gives it a “new” symbol. As is detected, Marian has always searched for the meaning of femininity or what it is to be a woman. If the woman made of cake contains the symbolic meaning of being an ideal woman, she therefore possesses the “subjectivity” which Marian looks for and has been confused over. In this way, that Marian eats the woman little by little can be regarded as a way to accept her “new femininity.” It is new because Marian is still Marian, but she is no

longer the original Marian, who dares not challenge the symbolic rules, or the hysterical Marian, who refuses to accept any femininity in the symbolic world but escapes to her own world of fantasy. Now, she no longer craves for the answer of what it is to be a woman and what femininity is, nor does she reject her femininity in the symbolic world since she knows that while she cannot get rid of it, she has to learn how to live with it. As Coral Ann Howells claims, "Eating the cake is an act of celebration which marks the decisive moment of Marian's recovery from a hysterical illness and her return to the social order" (43). Entering again to the symbolic world, Marian wears her grey suits back, changes her job, moves from her former apartment, and most importantly cancels her engagement with Peter. What she discards is not only her past life but the "old" symbolic world, where she feels oppressed by her boss and her colleagues, the picky lady living down stairs, and her patriarchal fiancé. Marian starts to live her brand-new life as other "normal" women do with the unanswerable question of what it is to be a woman.

Next, Marian experiences and understands what it is to be a woman via the process of eating the cake-woman, which represents her "pregnancy fantasy" and which thus offers her a chance to reexamine the relationship between her and her mother. In Howells's account, the cake represents "a sign of hallucinatory displacement," which "inscribes Marian's unconscious fears of becoming an object of consumption itself" (49). Marian is afraid of becoming an object of being consumed, which in her fantasy is a powerless woman, who accepts her femininity given by the social patriarchy and be treated as a commodity in the marriage terms. The way that Marian devours the cake woman is actually a way of experiencing what it is to be a woman. As we can see, Marian chooses sponge instead of angel-food as her main ingredient for her cake. Except for the reason that the "spongy cake was pliable, easy to mould" (169) as a dependent woman who is not only doll-like but submissive to

her femininity, there is another more significant reason, which is that, it is also the way for Marian to understand what a woman is by experiencing her “pregnancy fantasy” through “making” and “chewing/absorbing” the sponge cake since Marian renders Clara’s pregnant body, which conceals or conquers Clara’s mind, as “sponge-like” (130). Therefore, the way that Marian eats the cake can be regarded as a way of both “destroying” and “digesting” a mother figure. As I have mentioned in Chapter Two, Marian “resists” and “blends” with her mother. She initially rejects to be like her mother by refusing food and detesting Clara’s pregnant body but finally accepts her mother by devouring the cake-woman, which represents an ideal woman and is made into sponge as the sponge-like pregnant Clara. Perhaps we can say that Marian actually receives her femininity and recognizes what it is to be a woman by the process of “identifying” with a “pregnant feminine woman.”

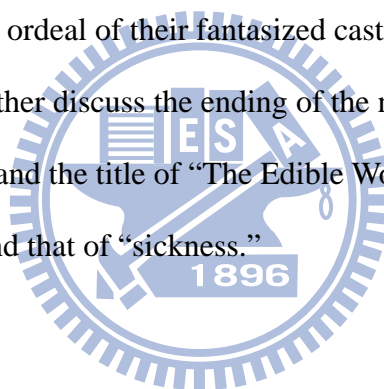
Finally, Marian accepts her castration anxiety and arouses as well other people’s by dismembering the cake-woman bit by bit and presents it as a symbol of castration ordeal in front of others respectively. In Bouson’s view, the novel “focuses on Marian’s initial consent to and ultimate dissent from femininity” since Marian makes a substitute of her ideal feminine image as a cake-woman for Peter, refusing to be a consumed object and operating instead on the cake-woman, “just as she was operated on at the hairdresser’s” (87). After Peter feels threatened and flees away, Marian suddenly feels hungry not only for food but for “power and revenge” in Bouson’s account since she no longer accepts the powerless and consumable femininity given by the patriarchal ideology. I have a view different with Bouson’s toward the cake-woman scene, however. Although in Marian’s fantasy, it is Peter who always tries to destroy her, Duncan nevertheless reminds Marian that actually she is trying to destroy Peter. As Duncan tells Marian, “Peter wasn’t trying to destroy you. That’s just something you made up. Actually you were trying to destroy him” (280). He later

continues, “But the real truth is that it wasn’t Peter at all. It was me. I was trying to destroy you” (281). As Marian could not accept her femininity granted by the old symbolic world, she deems that Peter, as a symbolic Father, has persecuted her; nevertheless, the one who is “destroying” her is in fact Duncan, who compels her to confront her fantasy of castration anxiety and dispels her hysterical symptoms, transforming the hysterical Marian into the “normal” Marian. After that, Marian understands that as she cannot find the answer of what a woman is, she no longer deems Peter as an enemy, but a normal human being like most other people (271). In this way, Marian eats up the cake because she can live again with her castration anxiety. Therefore, since the cake resembles her femininity, we can interpret that Marian has more or less accepted and assimilated her femininity by devouring it. However, one thing we should also notice is that the femininity that Marian accepts actually differs from the former femininity she fantasized or imagined because Marian does not accept or experience her femininity without demolishing it. Instead of imitating or copying what femininity is, she disassembles it via the process of “eating,” by which she at first “chews” and “shatters” the former femininity and then “digests” it. Re-shaping that what femininity is rather than following the model that all women and femininity resemble objects, Marian “tastes” and “experiences” her femininity and what a woman is in a totally new way. That is, femininity is not just something to be consumed and objectified, but also individuality and subjectivity to be possessed by every woman. Moreover, as Rigney contends, the cake “serves as a reflection, a way of seeing herself [Marian] as in a mirror, and it expresses a truth not before perceived” (34). In this way, the cake-woman might not be totally “inauthentic” as Howells thinks when commenting on femininity since it might reflect and represent parts of Marian’s subjectivity. We can also interpret the feminine masquerade as a part of Marian’s true subjectivity, which she is reluctant to admit and

accept, but by recognizing that what she is anxious about and fears are nothing but her own fantasies, she can not only face her feminine masquerade but receives it as a part of her subject instead of as an object. As the narrative reveals, Marian is now able to think of herself “in the first person singular again” (278). It is her misrecognition that makes her generate the fantasy that only men can possess subjectivity and individuality.

In fact, men can also be enmeshed in the predicament of accepting their masculinity if they are impelled to encounter the ordeal of castration anxiety. Some of them might pass the task of castration fantasy, others might get confused, and still others cannot pass the trial so that he might suffer from hysterical symptoms. For those who can face the test of castration, who is perplexed, and who is defeated, we can find their representatives in Duncan, Peter, and Len respectively. The most prominent ordeal of castration scene in the novel is probably the cake scene, in which Marian presents the cake-woman in front of Peter, who is threatened and flees away, and Duncan, who eats up “the remains of the cadaver” (281) with appetite. Peter runs away in great panic, daring not to take even a piece of the cake because what Marian presents before Peter is not the “sweet” cake but rather the horrible symbol of castration. As the text below depicts, that Marian brings the cake to Peter resembles a servant presenting “the crown” for the king, “She went to the kitchen and returned, bearing the platter in front of her, carefully and with reverence, as though she was carrying something sacred in a procession, an icon or the crown on a cushion in a play. She knelt, setting the platter on the coffee-table in front of Peter” (271). Presenting the cake-woman as a crown, Marian also asks the same question of what it is to be a woman to Peter. At this point, it turns to Peter who feels menaced since in his fantasy, he imagines that he encounters a powerful agent, which he fears that he cannot handle and control and most significantly that he might be castrated. On the contrary, Duncan

can eat the “cadaver” of the cake-woman because he understands that there is always a “lack” in everyone’s being whether for men or women, and the castration anxiety is nothing but a fantasy. As Duncan has confessed to Marian that he lives “in a world of fantasies” (263), it can also be elucidated that he lives peacefully with fantasy. As for Len, his individuality is thoroughly demonstrated by Ainsley by way of arousing his childhood trauma and rejecting him as a symbolic father for his child. He cannot live a “normal” life since he can barely face his “emasculated” situation or his castration anxiety and what is worse, in Bousoon’s view, “he is also infantilized, reduced to sharing a room with Clara’s infant son, Arthur” (85). In short, hysteria is not a female disease, which is only confined to women; rather, even men can be hysterics once they cannot pass the crucial ordeal of their fantasized castration. In my final chapter of the conclusion, I will further discuss the ending of the novel and the connection between castration anxiety and the title of “The Edible Woman” to problematize the limitation of “normality” and that of “sickness.”



Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1 Discussing the Novel's Ending

At the end of the novel, Marian does not transform her appearance into that of a man or a “desired” woman; rather, she remains the same with the grey suit and the plain hairstyle as the text depicts at the beginning of the novel. What differs from the opening is that Marian cancels the engagement with Peter, leaves the apartment, and breaks up with Duncan. To sum up, Marian finds again her individuality and subjectivity. The rehabilitation of Marian's appetite and that of her psychological mechanism seems that Marian's hysterical symptoms are cured. Nevertheless, I have the same doubt as Jerome Rosenberg, whose view is quoted by Bouson, “Marian is more self-assertive and healthy, but for how long?” (90). Although the patriarchal constitutions are agitated and disturbed by Marian's “hysterical protest” against Peter's phallogocentric world and by Ainsley's reversion of the seduction plot upon Len, we still cannot guarantee that Marian's hysterical symptoms has disappeared ever after, based on its rebellion against the overwhelming institutions. Perhaps when Marian works in another company or falls in love with another man, her hysterical symptoms will be called and re-evoked. Nevertheless, we have at least clarified that patriarchal persecution is not the only reason which has caused Marian's “abnormal” behavior. Except for the external oppression, Marian should also take some responsibilities herself since she is not always a victim as Dora presumes herself to be for Freud. To put it another way, Marian has actually “involved” others in her game as Dora has voluntarily participated in the adulterous love relationship.

Marian undergoes three stages from being hungry all the time, to developing anorexia, and to the final stage of being normal again. At the end of the novel, she starts to eat again, changes her job, and cancels her engagement with Peter. Is it a

remarkable success or an utter failure for Marian? In my opinion, the ending of the novel can be regarded as both a success and a failure. In the psychoanalytic thinking, it is a great success for Marian inasmuch as her hysterical symptoms disappear, and so she can live a normal life again. However, we should not be too optimistic since there is still the possibility that her hysterical symptoms will relapse and disturb her life again. Yet still, according to Nasio, the disappearance of the hysterical symptoms is not the paramount mission of psychoanalysis; rather, the urgent obligation of the analyst is to effectuate a change of the patient's subjective position. As Nasio argues, "The disappearance of symptoms should not lead the practitioner to imagine or expect that the end of the treatment is approaching. It is much more important for him to observe changes in the patient's subjective position" (91). The termination of the analysis according to Nasio occurs when "the patient is able to distance himself calmly from the analyst," that is, when the patient "has stopped directing his demand for love to the Other of the transference neurosis" (91). In this sense, we deduce that the ending of the novel is successful since Marian changes her subjective position from the first-person narrator, and then the third-person narrator, to the original first-person narrator again.

At first, as the first-person narrator, Marian is searching for what the Other desires. The most obvious example is that Marian works at Seymour Surveys Company as a worker who revises the questionnaires made by the psychologists, turning the abstruse prose into simple questions which can be understood by the people who ask them as well as the people who answer them, but she is asked to run many miscellaneous errands which are prescribed in her job list, such as filling out questionnaires from house to house. For instance, taking the beer questionnaires made especially for men, she asks one man after another about the questions such as their frequency of drinking beer, the proper phrases the beer advertisement should use, and

how much they like the commercial song. As a subjective consumer, or the first-person narrator, Marian actively searches for what the prospective customer desires. Another example is that as Marian cares about the feeling of the lady living down below, she is cautious about her behaviors and words toward the lady. Unlike Ainsley, Marian seldom reveals her impatience and indifference to that lady; rather, she carefully tackles the relationship between her and the lady. Actually, she behaves in a considerate way to figure out that lady's desire. Still another example is that Marian looks for what Peter's desire is. As such, she discovers that the woman he wants is someone who will not restrict his freedom, or threaten his patriarchal power. Therefore, Marian represses her sharp comments before Peter and refrains from cooking at his home for fear he would feel the pressure of marrying her (63). To sum up, Marian lives under the observing eyes of the Other because she attempts to scoop out the desire of the Other.

In Part Two, the narrator changes into the third-person since Marian is transformed into the object of the Other's desire, or we may say, she craves for being the phallus for the Other's desire. As I have pointed out, Marian changes her attire from grey suit into a red dress, and her plain face into a makeup appearance, which makes her look like a whore. Although Peter compliments her change, Marian is still an object of the Other's desire. I infer that she is still an object of the Other's desire but not the signifier of the latter because if she is the cause of the Other's desire, she must possess the power of manipulating Peter, not just being manipulated by him. For example, when Peter takes a picture of Marian, she feels like the shaken animal caught by a hunter: "Her body had frozen, gone rigid. She couldn't even move the muscles of her face as she stood and stared into the round glass lens pointing towards her, she wanted to tell him not to touch the shutter-release but she couldn't move...." (232). Under Peter's stare through the camera, she is still framed into the picture as an

object like the dead animal made into a specimen which is hung on the wall in Peter's house. She is still controlled by the Other, for which she does not possess the phallic power as a phallus, but will keep the Other pursuing after her and arouse the Other's worship. What is worse, in the second stage as the third-person narrator, Marian's anorexia reaches its peak. She is no longer a subjective agent; on the contrary, she becomes "the edible woman," or the cake-lady, an "object" baked to satisfy Peter's desire.

In Part Three, Marian returns to the first person narrator, the recycling process that I deem as a notable success. Not only does Marian annul the engagement with Peter but she also distinguishes that there is a distance between Duncan and herself. She finally understands that her love towards Duncan is caused by the transference of the doctor-patient relationship. She does not divert her love to Duncan after leaving Peter because she can control her subjectivity now by keeping her demand for love in check. As Nasio reminds us, "terminating an analysis involves my [the patient's] separating psychically from the analytic Other, my no longer addressing my demand for love to him, and my taking this demand outside the treatment" (92). There is no definite time for the termination of psychoanalysis; the analysis terminates at any time the truth shows up or the transference is cleared up. In this sense, this ending is usually rendered as a failure by the feminist reading, since Marian does not change or subvert anything. For example, Peter still lives with his patriarchal thinking that women should accept their femininity. The patriarchal circle does not cease revolving even though Marian does more or less threaten it. In addition, we cannot be certain that Marian's hysterical symptoms are forever removed. Now although Marian changes her job, moves away from her old apartment, and breaks up with her fiancé, there still exists the risk that she might collapse and disintegrate again when she enters into another symbolic system. This might be true since the end of the novel does not

mean the end of the troubles in her life. However, I'd like to suggest another point: there is neither success nor failure at the end of the novel since we are all hysterics! It is the idea proclaimed by Nasio, who elaborates the claim by announcing that "the experience of castration recurs constantly throughout life, and we are vulnerable to hysteria—and phobia and obsessionality—every day" (113). In other words, hysteria is a common phenomenon among us since we all have penis envy and castration anxiety as Marian does. Nevertheless, we are not required to see the psychoanalysts because we can live peacefully with the fantasy of penis envy and castration complex, although at times we may fail to do so as Peter and Len do.

During the long duration in the novel, Marian has asked Clara and Peter separately whether she is normal or not. While Clara comments that Marian is "almost abnormally normal," Peter on the other hand replies quickly that she is "marvelously normal." Accordingly, how can we define a person as "normal" or "abnormal?" Is it appropriate to ascribe what most people do to the category of normality and few others do to that of abnormality? And are things classified as normal at the beginning will be "normal" all the time, and vice versa? According to Glenys Stow, "because common sense desires order and stability, many people tend to preserve behaviours which have worked in the past. They continue to define them as 'reality' even when they no longer fit the new situation" (96). In light of this, that Peter accuses Marian of "rejecting her femininity" seems logical and rational as on the surface. Nevertheless, if we take a second thought on the flip side of what Peter denounces, we will discover that there are biases in it. In other words, Peter uses just his way to measure Marian's behaviors without standing in Marian's shoes. No doubt that Peter speaks out a partial fact about Marian's hysterical symptoms, he nevertheless ignores the point that the act of "rejecting one's own femininity" is not simply confined to the "abnormal" women but also to those so-called "normal" women, who reject as well their femininity but in

the dissimulated ways without manifesting it.

The same deduction can in fact be applied to Peter himself, who is usually regarded as a “rational” and “normal” man in general view. In Stow’s view, as Peter is described as “ordinariness raised to perfection” (*EW* 61), Marian’s nonsensical behavior makes him feel threatened. Peter is menaced because in Stow’s account, “People who act in a nonsensical way are seen as different from the norm, strange and perhaps threatening” (95). Doubtlessly, nonsense will bring a tremendous and uncontrollable chaos to the conventional society and logical mind. Nevertheless, as my essay emphasizes it, isn’t it too biased to assign all the blame on the other and detach ourselves from the affair? What I want to argue is that whether Peter is always reasonable and logical or not, my answer is definitely negative. Measuring who Peter is, we should not overlook his absurd behavior beyond his authoritative and convincing conducts. For example, when Marian irritates Peter by disapproving his words that she is just rejecting her “femininity” (80), and retorts his attitude of “being plain and ordinary *rude*” about the meeting with Len, Peter abruptly “accelerated the car in torrents and, and then the car skidded, turned two-and-a-quarter times round, slithered backwards down over someone’s inclined lawn, and came to a bone-jolting stop” (81). Generally speaking, any one who returns alive from the crisis of life and death in a thrilling car accident will tremble as Marian “from a combination of fright, cold, and fury” (81). However, called by Marian as a “maniac,” Peter laughs at his “masterpiece” of leaving “two deep gouges” in the lawn as if he “seemed to find willfully ruining other people’s property immensely funny” (81). If Peter has always appealed to “reasonable claims” as a mature adult should when they are angry, he should then adopt logical speech and rational ways instead of impulsive actions to rebuke Marian.

Another example is that Marian has once suspected that Peter is the Underwear

Man:

Perhaps this was his true self, the core of his personality, the central Peter who had been occupying her mind more and more lately. Perhaps this was what lay hidden under the surface, under the other surfaces, that secret identity which in spite of her many guesses and attempts and half-successes she was aware she had still not uncovered: he was really the Underwear Man. (118)

From the above two instances, we survey that Peter is not a completely reasonable person as the narrative conveys. Hence, in my view, Peter feels threatened not only because the insane people are “threatening” as Stow contends but because the stability of Peter’s logics and that of his intelligence are attacked and challenged. A step away from the cliff of sanity, Peter is full of fear that he will become insane as Marian if he is carelessly aware of it. His attempt to flee and panic prove Nasio’s claim that everyone can be a hysteric. Marian is a hysteric not because she is born to be one but because suddenly she cannot sustain her sanity and live a “normal” life. In this sense, we can presume that if one can live his life without any serious physical or psychological problems, he is still a “normal” person. As Freud confesses in “The Psychotherapy of Hysteria,” the hysterical symptoms cannot be permanently cured. Rather, the analyst could only succeed in transforming the patient’s hysterical misery into common unhappiness. He continues, “with a mental life that has been restored to health you [the patient] will be better armed against that unhappiness” (305). We are not satisfied with our lives, nor is the hysteric, but we live with the unhappiness since we cannot get rid of it. The hysteric is a hysteric because he cannot live peacefully with his fantasy, but the “normal” people can. No doubt Marian is still a hysteric, but she goes back to her “normal” life again as other “normal” people do. Her case is not a particular case, which occurs frequently in our daily lives. As André Green declares,

he would rather define the hysterics as “mad” instead of seeing them as psychotics, for “they just wanted to live and to love” (88). In light of this, everyone is Marian and everyone can be an edible woman.

5.2 The connotations of “The Edible Woman”

Since the title of the novel is called “The Edible Woman,” we must wonder what kind of meaning is implied behind it. Besides, why is the topic named “the edible woman” rather than “the anorexic woman” while Marian is attacked by serious anorexia nervosa instead of being “eaten” in the novel? Before commencing to dig out the answer or discuss this, we have to first solve the questions usually offered by the hysteric of what it is to be a woman and what the femininity is. By probing into them, we can not only discover the meaning of “the edible woman” but also investigate the sexuality of the hysteric.

After a series of discussion about Marian’s desire, identification, and her doubt towards sexual difference in my former chapters, I believe the implication of the title, *The Edible Woman*, bursts now into being. The novel is not talking about a pure anorexic woman; instead, it is a story of a hysteric woman, who gradually becomes anorexic because of the traumas accompanied with phobia. At this point, we should not regard Marian’s anorexia simply as a physical illness; rather, one of the proper ways we can adopt to treat her is psychoanalysis. In addition, the title “The Edible Woman” also contains another meaning, in which a woman is an object. As we can see, women are related to food in the novel. The most obvious example is the woman made of sponge cake by Marian, who is both its creator and its destroyer. Here, we discover an interesting situation: Marian, who makes the cake-lady built on her own image, devours the cake herself. In other words, Marian is not only “the edible woman” but also “the cannibal woman.” In fact, it is a way for her to understand what

a woman is. Like other hysterics, Marian is afraid of being castrated since in her fantasy, she suffers from being a huge phallus. She cannot identify with women and femininity because in her fantasy, women, who do not possess subjectivity, are castrated by the Other. As such, she identifies with men because the hysteric can only construct herself into one piece by identifying with the subject. Take the example of Dora. She identifies with the subjective men such as her father, Herr K., and Freud. Through her own “male gaze,” she is still confused about what Frau K. is, that is, what a woman is; nevertheless, as Herr K. dares to say that Frau K. is nothing to him, Dora must slap him. In this sense, Dora’s homosexual desire actually carries a “heterosexual” affect. She does not use her female body but her phallic body to desire Frau K. since she identifies with her father and Herr K., both of who love and should love Frau K. When she identifies with her father, she at the same time identifies with his impotence, and cannot therefore talk when she faces Frau K.

Overall, both Marian and Dora look for the answer of what it is to be a woman and they believe that they can find it. However, it is an answerless question since whether being a man or being a woman is just a fantasy for everyone. To put it another way, we are all trapped into the fantasy of having a penis or not to define sexual difference. While man has a penis as a signifier to prove himself as a man, a woman has no signifier to demonstrate that she is a woman. Although man having a penis is a doubtless fact, having a penis or not does not define a man as a man or a woman as a woman. It is after all the fantasy of penis envy and castration anxiety. Therefore, is *The Edible Woman* simply a fantastic novel? Well, I would rather deem it as a case study of everyone’s fantasy!

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