

Tribhuvan University

Body, a Space of Gender Performance in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*

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By

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Recommendation Letter

This research entitled “Body, a Space of Gender Performance in Margaret Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*” by Resham Dumre has been carried out under my supervision from August 2009 to April 2010. I recommend it for viva-voce.

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The undersigned members of the Research committee have approved this thesis entitled “Body, a Space of Gender Performance in Margaret Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Resham Lal Dumre.

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Abstract

This research focuses on the role of the body as a central factor in subverting gender norms. Hypothesizing a model based on Judith Butler's concept of gender performance that places the body in an integral position as mediator of discourse and creator of identity, it makes a point that bodily disruptions occur when the body re-cites patriarchal discursive assumptions of gender in such a way as to emphasize the constructedness of gender identity, and in turn, of discourse itself. I explore these concepts in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* to show the ways in which the text plays with the construction of gender through the use of bodies, such as through performance. The role of ironic language is also discussed, as are the different uses of irony among characters, and irony as a type of bodily performance. I discuss the subversive qualities of protagonist Marian's eating disorder, abjection of food, and mimesis in detail as they relate to the character's questioning of gender norms. The body is clearly the central factor in this novel, re-citing discourse and questioning gender identity. While the character's bodies can be interpreted as questioning gender norms, the characters are either unaware of it or are unable to express what their bodies are doing. Since the body exists within but also prior to discourse, the body is unable to be completely expressed through language, and thus leaves an excess of itself. This excess, symbolized by the mess in Marian's apartment, testifies to the lasting force of bodily subversion. Because it is not limited by language, the body has a freedom to express itself in other ways (as demonstrated by its excess) and thus provides a more successful disrupting force.

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