ABSTRACT
IMAGES OF FOOD AND EATING IN MARGARET ATWOOD’S NOVELS

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Images of food and eating, symbolic and concrete, are important in Margaret Atwood’s — the distinguished Canadian author, Booker prize-winner — production. My work in progress, dissertation, examines these images. In my presentation, I would like to discuss some examples of the gendered meanings of images of food and eating in her ten novels (published 1969-2000).

Food is something we all share: we all have a relationship with food and an attitude (or attitudes) towards food. As Deborah Lupton crystallizes: “Food and eating are central to our subjectivity (…) the meanings, discourses and practices around food and eating are worthy of detailed cultural analysis and interpretation” (Lupton, Deborah, 1996, Food, The Body and the Self. London etc.: Sage, page 1).

In my work in progress — my doctoral dissertation — I examine the images of food, eating, symbolic hunting and symbolic cannibalism in Margaret Atwood’s ten novels from The Edible Woman (1969) to The Blind Assassin (2000).

In my dissertation, I study what food and eating represent in the novels. What do the images of food and eating tell of the characters? What is their importance to the narrative? These images are gendered. What do they tell of the narrator’s views of gender: what is female characters relationship to food? What is typical for male characters in terms of food and eating? What part power plays in these images? Who has the power and what do they do with it? Who suffers, who wins, who eats whom?

In my dissertation, I argue that in Atwood’s novels food is a way to portray things that might otherwise be difficult or impossible to put to words. For instance feelings like fear, depression, and experience of power, powerlessness or pleasure. It is also a tool of depicting the often-violent sexual difference.