

WOMEN’S CONFINEMENT AND STRUGGLE AGAINST THE PATRIARCHAL
FAMILY STRUCTURE:

A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF SELECTED WOMEN’S WRITING IN THE LIGHT
OF KATE MILLETT’S CONCEPT OF SEXUAL POLITICS



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PLAGIARISM

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to analyze the main female characters in two short stories and a novel written in three different periods, using the conceptual analysis framework that Kate Millett puts forward in her 1970 work *Sexual Politics*. In her book *Sexual Politics*, Millett formulated two important concepts as “sexual politics” and “sexual revolution” and focused on how the family institution and genders were handled in literary works. The most important contribution of her work and the reason why it is one of the founding texts of the second wave feminist movement is that she sees the abolition of the traditional family structure as the basic prerequisite for a real sexual revolution. Millett saw the patriarchal social structure as the biggest obstacle to the emancipation of women. In this direction, the present work discusses stories of women who belong to the middle class and try to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers congruously in the traditional family lives of their historical periods, but lose their harmonious existence as soon as they feel that they are confined to this family structure. Studies to be considered are Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), Doris Lessing's story "To Room Nineteen" (1963), and Margaret Atwood's novel "The Blind Assassin" (2000). Although each of the protagonists expresses this discordance process with different verbs such as going crazy, committing suicide and writing, what they have in common is that they have experiences that alienate, subordinate and trivialize them in the patriarchal family life. The fact that they can be replaced in this structure, that they are defined as hysterical, crazy, depressed people when they do not fulfill their role in the reproduction of this family life, and that they are oppressed, highlights Millett's analysis, and the fact that the novels and their characters live in different historical periods, makes it possible to follow differences and similarities between them through different waves of the feminist movement.

Keywords: Feminist Literature, Feminist Critics, Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, Image of Mad Woman

ÖZET

Bu tezde amaçlanan Kate Millett'in 1970 tarihli *Sexual Politics* eserinde öne çıkardığı kavramsal analiz çerçevesinden yararlanarak, üç farklı dönemde yazılmış iki kısa öykü ve bir romandaki baş kadın karakterlerin analiz edilmesidir. Millett *Sexual Politics* adlı eserinde “cinsel “politika ve “cinsel devrim” şeklinde iki önemli kavram formüle etmiş ve edebi eserlerde aile kurumuyla cinsiyetlerin nasıl ele alındığına odaklanmıştır. Çalışmasının getirdiği en önemli katkı ve ikinci dalga feminist hareketin kurucu metinlerinden biri olmasının nedeni, geleneksel aile yapısının ortadan kaldırılmasını gerçek bir cinsel devrimin temel önkoşulu olarak görmesidir. Millett ataerkil toplumsal yapısını, kadının özgürleşmesi önündeki en büyük engel olarak görmüştür. Bu doğrultuda orta sınıfa ait olan ve yaşadıkları dönemlerin geleneksel aile yaşamları içinde eş ve anne olarak uyumlu bir şekilde rollerini yerine getirmeye çalışan ancak bu aile yapısının içine kapatıldıklarını hissettikleri anda uyumlu varoluşlarını yitiren kadınların öyküleri ele alınmaktadır. Ele alınacak çalışmalar Charlotte Perkins Gilman'ın “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) adlı öyküsü, Doris Lessing'in “To Room Nineteen” öyküsü (1963) ve Margaret Atwood'un “The Blind Assassin” (2000) romanıdır. Kahramanlarının her biri bu uyumsuzluk sürecini delirme, intihar ve yazma gibi farklı fiillerle dışavursalar da ortak yanları ataerkil aile yaşantısının içinde onları yabancılaştıran, ikincileştiren ve önemsizleştiren deneyimler yaşamalarıdır. Bu yapıda yerlerinin doldurulabilir olması, bu ailenin yeniden üretiminde üzerine düşen rollerini yerine getirmediklerinde histerik, deli, depresyona girmiş kişiler olarak tanımlanmaları ve baskı görmeleri Millett'in analizlerini ön plana çıkarmakla birlikte romanların ve karakterlerinin farklı tarihsel dönemlerde yaşamaları, aralarındaki farkları ve benzerlikleri feminist hareketin farklı dalgaları üzerinden takip etmeyi de mümkün kılmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Feminist Edebiyat, Feminist Eleştiri, Kate Millett, Cinsel Politika, Deli Kadın İmgesi

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1. INTRODUCTION

As it is known, it is often mentioned in feminist criticism that women are tightly closed to patriarchal social patterns. In this social structure, it is stated that women, who are regarded as respected and valuable to the extent that they fit the roles assigned to them such as "a good wife", "a good mother", "a good sister", turn into beings who serve the world dominated by men. On the other hand the women who do not fit these roles are stigmatized with negative images such as witches, bad women and monsters. However, there are also silent heroes who do not stand out in the feminist movement and feminist criticism such as revolutionary and radical female figures. These are women who silently accept the tasks assigned to them, helplessly continue their existence within these patterns, and are seen more frequently in daily life. As part of the middle class, they are the heroes who have "a room of their own" or order, but become alienated in the male-dominated family life, fall into the grip of a hopeless depression with this alienation. As it can be seen in one of the stories this study considers this alienation could result in madness or suicide as the other story indicates. As a matter of fact, since the study of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Mad Woman in the Attic*, the difference between women who continue to exist as wives/mothers like "angels" to the extent that they internalize the patriarchal family life and "crazy women" who go crazy with disappointment have produced important data in terms of feminist criticism. However, as it will be seen in Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* women could learn the way to resist this alienation and confinement. In this respect writing their experiences and inheriting them to their offspring could be a way of emancipation or at least the negation of the patriarchal family structure in which they are confined in the first place. This study principally focuses on women who are harmonious, quiet but unable to fulfill their traditional roles due to the various reasons. Yet instead of their various reactions (suicide, getting mad, depression or writing) the common element in their life would be put under the microscope: patriarchal family life and their confinement and subordination to male-dominated world.

The aim of this thesis is to analyze main female characters in two short stories and a novel written in three different periods, using the conceptual analysis framework that Kate Millett put forward in *Sexual Politics* published in 1970. Kate Millett

formulated two important concepts as “sexual politics” and “sexual revolution” in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970), and criticized the reactionary and sexist writers in the literary world after the first wave feminist movement. However, the most important contribution of her work and the reason for being one of the founding texts of the second wave feminist movement is that she sees the abolition of the traditional family structure as the basic prerequisite for an authentic sexual revolution. In this direction, this thesis focuses on three literary works that deal with women who belonged to the middle class and tried to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers in the traditional family life of their periods, but found themselves in an impasse, struggled with their confinement and gave different reactions against the alienation and isolation accompanying their confined existence in this patriarchal society. Hence, these women’s experiences and the expression of those experiences through symbols and language invite us to include Millett’s analysis on the reason of this confinement: male-dominant family life.

In this endeavor works to be considered as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen" (1963), and Margaret Atwood's novel "The Blind Assassin" (2000). One of the reasons for choosing these three works is that their protagonists are in similar dilemmas and it is aimed to make sense of the gender politics that drag them into this dilemma through their traditional family structures. Another reason and the factor that is thought to contribute to the reading of feminist literature is that these three works were written at very different times from each other. These periods were the moments when the feminist movement differed from each other to a certain extent, both in terms of its demands and the problems it highlighted. Therefore, it tries to see the differences in the way in which the reactions of the female characters of these three works against traditional gender roles are handled by three different authors from three different periods in literary world.

As for the problematics addressed in this thesis, the first one is whether Kate Millett's concepts of *Sexual Politics* and *Sexual Revolution* draw a useful conceptual-analytic framework when analyzing women characters and feminist literature. Another important problem is the extent to which the periodic variations seen in the demands and complaints of the feminist movement, in parallel with the three different works, are reflected in the narratives of these works. To what extent do the ways in which the female characters, who are left helpless in the traditional family structure have similar problems in different periods, and to what extent do they reflect seasonal differences?

The third important problematic is the questioning of the possibilities of expanding and enriching a critical approach that covers all periods, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) did, in the way of analyzing the works produced by different women writers in different periods in terms of feminist literature.

Primary sources will be used in this study and three different literary works written by three female authors form its contextual limitations. Another limitation is the conceptualizations formulated by Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics*. It is a deductive study in terms of analyzing literary texts based on these conceptualizations. On the other hand, due to the fact that these literary texts were written in different periods, it is an inductive study in terms of stating the differences and similarities between them and interpreting Millett's conceptual framework in the light of these. In addition, the comparative method and feminist literary approach are also heavily used in the analysis of literary works.

To summarize the general organization of this thesis, first it is necessary to mention feminist literary criticism in the first part in a brief way and then basic information about first, second and third wave feminism will be given. The periodic forms of the feminist movement and the criticisms directed at these waves are necessary both to place Kate Millett's conceptual analyzes in a historical context and to follow the periodical influences in the literary works discussed in this study. Then, Kate Millett's contribution to the Sexual Revolution will be discussed and the set of concepts presented by this work will be discussed. In the second part, three different works selected for analysis and their authors will be introduced one by one, the place of the authors in the literature and plots of the works discussed will be briefly summarized. The purpose of this summary is to provide an easier presentation of the analyzes to be made in the next section. In the third part, three works will be analyzed comparatively in the light of the above-mentioned problematics. The peculiarities and common parts of confinements that three protagonists have been subjected to will be scrutinized and elaborated through critical excerpts and metaphors from two stories and the novel.

No matter what period they lived in, women writers continued to include the image of women who had been confined and struggle to emancipate themselves in their novels and stories. When women get stuck between the social roles assigned to them, and these roles isolate and alienate them they could give various reactions. When the women taken in literary works are not radical and revolutionary women, the destruction,

tensions and questionings caused by their lives in harmony with the patriarchal family order lead to great alienation. This could lead to tragic consequences such as insanity, suicide and depression.

It will also be emphasized in the literature part but an important caveat should be made here. It can be argued that these reactions may be the search for an identity unique to women, but the search for identity brings together very different discussions. The image of a mad or monstrous woman is also frequently mentioned with such characters; however, it can also be considered that it may have a self-defeating side, as it adopts the attitude of the author or women in the face of a de-subjectifying process through a certain image. The approach in this study is the impact of the patriarchal family life, which is the product of a political inequality between the sexes, on the mental state of women who voluntarily became a part of this life, rather than two separate issues such as identity and the image of the mad/monstrous woman. Through this reaction, it is examined whether these structures can be made sense of with the conceptual framework provided by Millett. The second important element looks at whether the relations between this structure and characters change between different historical periods and the critical thoughts (in this case feminist thought) accompanying these periods.

Historically, the feminist movement has always highlighted certain areas of struggle and problems, but common aspects of the problems women experience in their efforts to find their own voice are shown in the repeated appearance of this crazy/suicidal/confused woman image. In this respect, handling the conceptual plane presented by Millett and the way this woman image appears in different periods can always provide important data in terms of feminist literary criticism.

2. FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM AND KATE MILLETT'S SEXUAL REVOLUTION

Looking at respective debates in the literature, it is difficult to define a "feminist" literature unequivocally. However, it can be said that texts that include the situation of women in literary works, examine the conditions in which they live, and criticize them belong to feminist literature. In addition, the fact that the author of the text is a woman, that this author defines herself as a feminist or that she does not define herself as such but critically discusses the situation of women as stated above, puts that text among the feminist literary texts. In short, works that push the boundaries of male-dominated discourse and male language can be discussed under the title of feminist literature. However, another factor that complicates these definitions is that the differences within the feminist movement have been carried into the feminist literature. In this respect, the differences between periods and currents should also be taken into account.

If we look at feminist literary criticism, it can be stated that there is a current of criticism about how policies and ideologies that determine the relations between sexes shape literary texts (Humm, 2002, p. 11). Especially in the 1960s, the increase in gender discussions and the increase of women's visibility in the social and political field led to an increase in inquiries in the field of literature. As in Kate Millett's work, these criticisms have adopted different approaches such as Marxism, psychoanalysis, criticism towards the authority figure and criticism of the reader. Especially in western democracies, feminist literary criticism has settled at the heart of theoretical discussions (Moran, 1999, p. 249-250).

The main purpose of feminist literary criticism has been to liberate literature and literary criticism from patriarchal concepts. The most prominent figures in this respect are Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir. Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) is an important reference work in terms of examining whether women have a literature of their own, and if so, what the conditions are. In line with the demands of first-wave feminism, she emphasized that women writers need "a room of their own". Another important contribution of Woolf to feminist literary criticism is that she says that the social reality of women is shaped by genders, just like that of men. In this respect, she was the first to say that depictions of women's lives in literary forms are

also gendered depictions. She also emphasized that depictions of women can disrupt the traditional symbolic order and language of patriarchy in literature (Humm, 2015, p. 18-19).

Beauvoir, one of the most important architects of second wave feminist criticism, made a great contribution with her book *The Second Sex* (1949). In this text, she listed the reasons why women are pushed to a secondary position as the other being in front of male subject, who is accepted as an authentic being in the society. She has a striking place not only in feminist literature but also in the history of thought, with her work that also benefits from biology, spiritual analyzes and historical materialism (Uygun-Aytemiz, 2016, p. 58). The greatest contribution of *The Second Sex* in terms of feminist literary criticism is its effort to make a feminist critique of sexual ideology by looking at texts written by men through the eyes of female readers. Beauvoir was the first to take up the work of male authors and examine the position of women in these texts, as Kate Millett would do in *Sexual Politics*. In her work, she was the first to show that women were marginalized through texts of male authors (Moran, 1999, p. 251).

As stated before, *Sexual Politics* was a breakthrough for feminist literary criticism in 1970. It brought a systematic perspective to the texts written by men and the position of women in social life. In addition, her work has been instrumental in increasing the number of texts that argue that women writers have a separate tradition and position their analyzes and criticisms within this tradition. Some important texts of feminist literary criticism, which became a tradition with this work, can be listed as follows: Janet Kaplan, *Feminine Consciousness in the British Modern Novel* (1975); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (1976); Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (1977); Gilbert and Gubar, *Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979) (Moran, 1999, p. 255).

One of the most important contributions of feminist criticism to the field of literature is the employment of the culturally determined concept of gender in an analytical systematic way. Gender roles are effective not only in terms of social positions but also in the field of creativity. As Parla states, imagination is not independent of the subconscious and our subconscious is not "independent of socially restricted and determined structures" (Parla, 2014, p. 19-20). The differentiation created by gender in the fields of creativity brings together the differentiation of the language used by women from men. The oppression of women, the fact that their identity is not recognized, and that they are stuck in the patterns of the male-dominated world affect

their subconscious and therefore their creative activities. This is an element that ensures the existence of a separate women's literature and perpetuates it. The other element is strategies based on women's redefinition of themselves, art and society by crossing social and literary boundaries (Günaydın, 2017, p. 55). To summarize briefly, feminist literature and feminist literary criticism is a literature and criticism in which women exist with their own differences in the face of hierarchical relations created by gender relations and all kinds of othering.

As will be discussed below, being able to talk about feminist literature has become possible when feminist literary criticism emerged as a method and became controversial. In this respect, Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970) is a work that can be considered a cornerstone for the creation of such a method with a certain set of concepts. In addition, she emphasizes the achievements the first wave feminism got and the reaction of men against these achievements, and puts forward one of the main thesis of the second wave feminism, which is a matter directly related to the stories and novel to be discussed in this study. Because two of these stories were written during the rise of two separate feminist waves, and the novel examines the reactionary period between the two wars with a retrospective perspective.

In order to carry out this examination in a profound way, it is necessary to first go over the discussions on feminist literary criticism, then look at the general definitions and discussions about different periods of the feminist movement, and finally focus on the conceptual analyzes of Kate Millett's work. Since the basic information about feminist literature and feminist literary criticism is presented above at the beginning of the section, we can focus on them in detail.

2.1 Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist literary criticism is literary criticism shaped by feminist theory or, more broadly, feminist politics. It uses the principles and ideology of feminism to criticize the literary language. This school of thought aims to analyze and describe the ways in which literature portrays the narrative of male dominance by exploring the economic, social, political and psychological forces embedded within literature. It can be said that such thinking and criticism of works changes the way literary texts are viewed and studied, and also changes the content of what is commonly taught. Greek myths are also widely used in these texts (Plain & Sellers, 2007).

Traditionally, feminist literary criticism tries to examine old texts with a new lens, by prioritizing the position of women in literature. Among the specific goals of feminist criticism are both the development and discovery of the women's writing tradition and the rediscovery of ancient texts. It also includes interpreting the symbolism of female authors so that it is not lost or overlooked by the male point of view, and resisting the inherent sexism. In other words, it sets alternative goals that center women against mainstream literature. Among these goals are to analyze women writers and their texts from a woman's point of view, and to raise awareness of the sexual politics of language and style. These goals, which have been developed for many years, were systematized by Lisa Tuttle in the 1980s and have been adopted by the majority of feminist critics since then. (Tuttle, 1986, p. 184).

The history of feminist literary criticism extends from the classic works of nineteenth-century women writers such as George Eliot and Margaret Fuller to the contemporary theoretic works of "third wave" writers in women's studies and gender studies. Before the 1970s, that is in the first and second waves of feminism, feminist literary criticism was concerned with women's authorship and the representation of women's condition in literature. In particular, it focused on the portrayal of fictional female characters. In addition, feminist literary criticism deals with the exclusion of women from the classical literary world. In this context theorists such as Lois Tyson put finger on the fact that people do not generally accept the views of women writers as universal (Tyson, 2006, p. 107-108).

More contemporary scholars seek to understand the intersections of femininity and access different identity categories (race, class, sexual orientation, etc.), complicating our shared assumptions about gender politics. They explore the main sexual tensions in novels and question how our basic literary assumptions about such novels depend on women's subordination. In this way, the accessibility of literature gains a much more inclusive and holistic content. Additionally, given the historical constraints surrounding female authorship in some cultures, works that have received little or no historical interest are dealt with in their original form and without abridgment. According to this point of view, as long as all major literary works are viewed without a sexist bias, readers are provided with a wider and more comprehensive evaluation of literature (Murfin, Ray, 2008).

Women have also begun to use anti-patriarchal themes to protest the historical censorship of women's literature. The resurgence of feminist literature in the 1990s meant a direct challenge to the sexual politics of patriarchy. Writers such as Rita Felski and Judith Bennet have managed to draw more attention to feminist issues in literature by discussing women's diverse sexual explorations and using their lesbian and queer identities.

Since the development of more complex concepts of gender and subjectivity and third-wave feminism, feminist literary criticism has followed new and varied paths that can be incorporated into the Frankfurt School's tradition of critical theory, which analyzes how a subject's dominant ideology affects society. In addition, the school considered gender as a concrete political element and as a part of the existing power relations that can be deconstructed in terms of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis (Barry, 2002). Traditional feminism, which focuses on women's representation and participation in politics, also continued to play an active role in this process. More precisely, modern feminist criticism seeks to identify the deliberate and unintentional patriarchal conditioning perceived within the basic structures of society, including education, politics, and working life.

Modern feminist literary criticism finds much of its roots in the second-wave feminist movements of the 1960s. Theorists such as Mary Ellman, Kate Millett, and Germaine Greer began by questioning the male-centered literature that portrays women in a humiliating and oppressed model, thus challenging the feminine dreams of literature's past. Three phases can be identified within second-wave feminism: the feminine phase, the feminist phase, and the female phase. In the feminine stage, female writers adhered to male values. In the feminist stage, there was a theme of criticism towards the role of women in society. And it has been assumed that women's studies are now valid in the women's phase and that the studies are less belligerent than in the feminist phase (O'Connor, 2012).

Susan Lanser suggested renaming feminist literary criticism "critical literary feminism" to shift the focus from criticism to feminism, and noted that writing such works requires a "political context awareness" (Lanser, 1991). Similarly, Elaine Showalter became one of the leading critics of the gynocritic method with her 1977 work *A Literature of Their Own*. To this date, scholars have been concerned not only with delineating oppression narratives, but also with creating a literary space for the

past, present, and future. Knowledgeable figures of women's literature also sought to reflect their experiences in a way that was appreciated by literary works and not excluded as part of reality.

Additionally, in the post-Civil Rights era in the United States, male-centered narratives about black empowerment in society have had a stifling effect on women's voices. Black literary feminist scholars began to emerge. *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, edited by Toni Cade Bambara (2005), was important to the rise of Black literary criticism and theory though not a "critical" text. Her collection of poems, short stories, and essays resulted in the emergence of new and institutionally supported forms of black literary scholarship. Combahee River Collective has published what has been called one of the most famous works in Black literary scholarship, known as "A Black Feminist Declaration" (The Combahee River Collective, 1977), which seeks to prove that literary feminism is an important component of black women's liberation.

In 1979, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar published *The Madwoman in the Attic*, an analysis of women's poetry and prose and how it fits into the broader feminist literary canon. This publication formed the basis of feminist criticism and expanded the scope of publications that were considered feminist works, especially in the 19th century. In particular, the book argued that women were largely judged by men in the academy into two separate categories: monsters or angels. Gilbert and Gubar argued that being confined to these categories led women writers to certain areas of literature and literary production, allocating the rest to men only, and causing a marked anxiety in women writers especially about staying within these categories or being ridiculed (Gilbert & Gubar, 2006, p. 45-92). Gilbert and Gubar's particular focus on literary criticism in the field of poetry and other short works has expanded the possibilities for feminist literary contributions today, as they were previously seen as less valid than longer works. Today, writers like Gloria E. Anzaldúa have succeeded in contributing to the feminist canon, despite working with typefaces other than full-size novels.

In the 1980s, Hazel Carby, Barbara Christian, bell hooks, Nellie McKay, Valerie Smith, Hortense Spillers, Eleanor Traylor, Cheryl Wall and Sheryl Ann Williams made great contributions to the Black Feminist movement of the period. Around the same time, Deborah E. McDowell published *New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism*, which calls for a more theoretical school of criticism against existing writings that she finds very practical. In this essay, McDowell also extensively

discussed the portrayal of black women in literature and how it is viewed more negatively than the depiction of white women. As time progressed, theory began to dissolve into ideology. Many have decided to shift towards the subtle psychological factors of the Black experience and move away from sweeping generalizations. Others began to link their work to the politics of lesbianism. Some decided to analyze the Black experience in terms of its relations within the West. Regardless, these scholars continue to use a variety of methods to explore the identity of black feminism in literature.

2.2 First Wave Feminism

First wave feminism can be summarized as the period of feminist activity and thought that took place in the West in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. It focused on legal issues, primarily securing women's suffrage. The term is often used synonymously with the kind of feminism adopted by the first-wave liberal women's rights movement, and by organizations such as the International Women's League and its affiliates. This feminist movement still focuses on gender equality from a predominantly legal and political perspective (Tong, 2018). In other words, first wave feminism can be characterized as a movement predominantly focused on legal and political matters.

The term first-wave feminism was coined by journalist Martha Lear in her essay titled "Second Feminist Wave: What Do These Women Want?" published in *The New York Times Magazine* in March 1968 (Lear, 1968). First-wave feminism is characterized as focusing on the struggle for women's political power, as opposed to de facto informal inequalities. Although the wave metaphor is well-established, including in academic literature, it has been criticized for creating a narrow view of women's liberation that puts activism in the background and focuses on specific visible actors (Hewitt, 2010, p. 1-12). To sum up the highly political aspect of the first wave feminism stems from its goal to provide equal voting and legal rights for women. Therefore, it brings forward political activism, legal struggles for equal recognition, political opposition on an institutional level and strategic alliances with other progressive forces in the society.

To focus on criticisms of first-wave feminism, it can be mentioned that it does not offer an intersectional perspective. In this feminist understanding, gender is not considered as a social construction, and the roles played by genders are not considered

as sexist (Hughes, 2002, p. 47-48). Biological differences were also emphasized in this time period and the only way to be accepted as a woman is through biology or sex (Joyce, 2000, p. 47). Women of color or women of lower socioeconomic status were not addressed and it didn't struggle for them (Janowick, 2008). At the same time, it took a stand for and defended colonialism, increasing the eroticization of women from different nations and geographies (Janowick, 2008). Another issue with First Wave feminism is that white, middle-class women can decide what is a women's issue and what is not (Siegel, 1997, p. 46-75). The first wave lacked the sexual freedom that women aspire to have but do not have (Segal, 2014). These elements, especially in the context of this study, sexual freedom and sexual policies were the most important aspects of second-wave feminism that set it apart from its predecessor.

2.3 Second Wave Feminism

Second-wave feminism was a period of nearly two decades of feminist activity that began in the early 1960s and extended into the third wave of feminism in the early 1990s. By and large it came into being in Europe as well as North America and aimed to increase equality for women, building on previous feminist achievements in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

While first-wave feminism mainly focused on removing legal barriers to While first-wave feminism mainly focused on removing legal barriers to suffrage and gender equality (for example, voting rights and property rights), second-wave feminism expanded the discussion to cover a wider range of topics: sexuality, family, domestic life, working life, reproductive rights, de facto inequalities, and formal legal inequalities. It was a movement that focused on criticizing patriarchal or male-dominated institutions and cultural practices in society (Pierceson, 1972). Second-wave feminism also drew attention to domestic violence and marital rape. It established rape crisis centers and women's shelters and introduced changes to custody and divorce laws. Feminist-owned bookstores, credit unions, and restaurants were among the key meeting places and economic engines of the movement (Davis, 2017, p. 129-75).

Another important factor of the second wave feminism in the context of this study is the internalization of male-dominated values. Discussions about how women internalize patriarchy has a very important place in this literature for understanding the ways in which dominant social norms and expectations influenced women's behaviours

and mindsets. To this end, second wave feminists underlined the socialization process in which girls were taught to be submissive persons who should prioritize their roles as good mothers and wives. These feminists analyzed social institutions like education system, media and family as significant superstructures shaping women's self understandings and demeanors (Gordon, 2013).

Particularly Betty Friedan's significant work titled *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) gives important clues for this phenomenon. Focusing on suburban and middle-class women's unhappiness, Friedan links the internalization of male-dominated norms among women and their problems. In this way it is important for understanding dilemmas that the characters from two stories and the novel experience. After Friedan conducted interviews with unhappy suburban women she found that they internalized patriarchal values and accepted their traditional roles. Their belief in their primary purpose as the servants of family causes internal conflicts with their desires, expectations and aspirations (Friedan, 1963).

As it can be seen while focusing on Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (2000) second wave feminists emphasized the necessity to recognize and challenge this internalization among women. The most important contribution of these feminists including Millett is the questioning of traditional gender roles, advocating for equal rights and empowering women to break the chains of patriarchal norms and institutions.

Second-wave feminism has also come under criticism for its scope. One of its common criticisms is that it excludes the experiences of working-class women as well as black and other women of color because some narratives focus on the sexism faced by white middle- and upper-class white women. Some narratives offer a focused perspective on events in the United States, excluding experiences in other countries, and neglect works of white anti-racist feminism. Although the term "intersectionality" was not coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw until 1989 after the end of the second wave, women of color formed various feminist political activist groups throughout the movement, especially in the 1970s (Thompson, 2019, p. 39-60).

The concept of difference is a phenomenon discovered towards the end of the second wave of feminism because the voices of white feminists have dominated the narrative since the beginning of the movement. The ideals of liberal feminism centered on the idea of women's equality with men, because liberal feminists thought that women

and men had the same intrinsic abilities and that society makes certain skills internalized in different sexes (Evans, 1995, p. 13). This elimination of difference seeks to eliminate sexism by working within a pre-existing system of oppression rather than challenging the system itself. Fighting for equality maintains a system by giving everyone the same opportunities regardless of their privileges, while the equality framework addresses problems in society and finds solutions to target the problem at hand (Juda, 2020).

A general criticism of the second wave was that it ignored differences in women and did not take into account, for example, how a black woman would experience sexism differently than a white woman. (Mann & Huffman, 2005, p. 56-91). Writers like Audre Lorde have critically addressed how attempts to homogenize "sisterhood" neglect all factors of one's identity, such as race, sexuality, age, and class (Lorde, 2000, p. 288-293).

Some black and/or working class and poor women felt alienated from the mainstays of the second-wave feminist movement, which advocated for women's right to work outside the home and for expanding reproductive rights. Black women and poor white women in the US have worked outside the home in blue-collar and service jobs for generations. In addition, Angela Davis wrote that African-American women and white women have suffered multiple unwanted pregnancies and had to have secret abortions, but African-American women also suffer from compulsory sterilization programs that are not widely included in the dialogue about reproductive justice (Davis, 1981) .

Starting from the end of the 20th century, many feminist academics such as Audre Lorde (Gail, 2005, p. 130-45) and Winona LaDuke (Jenks, 2001, p. 53-66) criticized the second wave in the United States for reducing feminist activity to a homogenized state. They critically framed feminist history, which ignored the voices and contributions of many women of color, working-class women, and LGBT women (Henry, 2012, p. 2071).

The second-wave feminist movement in the United States was criticized for not accepting the struggles of women of color, and their voices were often silenced or ignored by white feminists. Dominant historical narratives of the feminist movement has been focusing on white, East Coast, and predominantly middle-class women and

women's consciousness-raising groups, excluding the experiences and contributions of lesbians, women of color, and working-class and lower-class women (Douglas, 1990). Chela Sandoval called the dominant narratives of the women's liberation movement "hegemonic feminism". According to her, this feminist historiography was based on a special population of women who assumed that all women experienced the same oppression as white and predominantly middle-class women (Blackwell, 2011, p. 16).

Many feminist scholars find the generational separation of the second wave problematic (Babb, 2012, p. 69-78). Second wavers are actually based on the Baby Boomer generation, where many of the feminist leaders of the second wave were born before the end of World War II. This generational essentialism homogenizes the wave group and claims that everyone who is part of a certain demographic generation shares the same ideologies because ideological differences are considered generational differences (Henry, 2012, p. 2134).

From the early 1960s to the early 1980s, feminist scholars reexamined various writings, oral histories, works of art, and works by women of color, working-class women and lesbians. Decentralizing what they saw as the dominant historical narratives of the second wave of the women's liberation movement, allowed them to expand and transform the historical understanding of feminist consciousness (Douglas, 1990). These scholars claim to create what Maylei Blackwell calls "enhanced memory" by rescuing pasts that they believe have been erased and overlooked. Blackwell describes it as a form of "counter-memory" that creates space for women's feminist consciousness within a transformative and fluid "alternative archive" and "hegemonic narratives". For Blackwell, looking at the gaps and rifts of the second wave is to open into question existing dominant histories that claim to represent a universal, allowing fragments of historical knowledge and memory to be discovered and new perspectives on the past to emerge alongside new historical feminist issues. The feminist experience should be decentralized and open to the differences within (Blackwell, 2011, p. 101).

As can be seen below, it is not possible to talk about hierarchies of femininity, as there are no colored female characters in the works discussed in this study. However, the transformation of second wave feminism into a hegemonic feminism has led to the emergence of a single woman narrative and a single emancipation method (emancipation from the patriarchal family structure). In order to question the existence of the experience of constructing an alternative narrative, it would be useful to consider

the criticisms regarding second-wave feminism and third-wave feminism. It is also important in terms of evaluating the situations in which the relations between women and power are not only in the form of a confined-confiner relationship, where characters such as mothers, sisters and servants of men can enter not only in the relationship of exploitation, but also in the relationship of accomplice/collaborator in the context of the reproduction of the male-dominated order.

2.4 Third Wave Feminism

Third wave feminism is a feminist movement that started in the early 1990s (Evans, 2015, p. 22). Building on the second wave's advances in civil rights, third-wave feminists, born in the 1960s and 1970s, embraced diversity and individualism in women. They tried to redefine what it means to be a feminist (Evans, 2015) (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). The third wave witnessed the emergence of new feminist movements and theories such as intersectionality, gender positivity, vegetarian ecofeminism, transfeminism and postmodern feminism. According to feminist scholar Elizabeth Evans, "confusion about what constitutes third-wave feminism was in some ways its defining feature" (Walker, 1992).

The third wave traces back to the emergence of the rebel grrrl feminist punk subculture in Olympia, Washington, in the early 1990s, and the 1991 televised testimony of Anita Hill (to an all-male, all-white Senate Judiciary Committee). African-American judge Clarence Thomas was asked to testify in the case in which he sexually assaulted her. The term third wave is attributed to Rebecca Walker, who responded to Thomas' appointment to the Supreme Court with an article in *Ladies* magazine entitled "Being the Third Wave" (Walker, 1992). Walker argued that third-wave feminism is not just a reaction, but a movement in itself. Because according to her, there was more work ahead of the feminist cause. In a similar vein, it is worth mentioning alternative feminist movements such as Chicana feminism. In the 1960s and 1970s Chicana feminism was organized mostly by and for Mexican American women. However, Chicana feminists emphasized that the necessity to connect issues of gender with liberatory aims of feminist movement. They also renounced the mainstream second-wave feminism for its inability to include racism and classism in their political emancipatory projects. They underlined the different needs, demands and concerns of women from different communities (West, 2014, p. 247-68).

Another important contribution of third wave feminism is the term intersectionality coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to explain that women live in "layers of oppression", e.g. from gender, race, and class, and the concept developed during the third wave (Evans, 2015). In the late 1990s and early 2000s, as feminists organized online and reached a global audience through blogs and e-journals, they broadened their goals by focusing on breaking down gender role stereotypes and expanding feminism to include women of different racial and cultural identities (Tong, 2000). 2019, p. 284-285).

At this point it is necessary to emphasize the creative activities and women's expression of their experiences. Since the expansion and enrichment of feminist thought, experiences and criticism it is necessary for women to express themselves by act of writing and with other creative endeavors. Even though it was published in 1976 and could be seen as a part of second wave feminism, the foundational essay in feminist literary theory titled "The Laugh of the Medusa" by Helene Cixous laid the foundation of a significant critical point put forward by third wave feminists in terms of the acknowledgment of female experiences. Cixous, in her article, deals with the idea of women's writing and the importance of women finding their own voices in literature. For Cixous the development of a unique style of writing is very important to include different narratives and experiences as well as to enrich women's literature and literature in general. It can encourage women to write as a form of exploration because she believes that this act can be a means of expressing their fantasies, desires and hidden truths. In this sense women's bodies, sensuality and writing have a strong connection between themselves. A rich and authentic kind of writing could emerge as the result of works written by women who take their inspiration from their own bodily experiences (Cixous, 1976).

The most obvious criticism that critics brought to this new movement was the lack of a single case for third-wave feminism, hence the lack of cohesion. The first wave fought for women's suffrage and won legal rights for them. The second wave fought for women's right to equal opportunities in the workforce and for an end to legal gender discrimination. The third wave is claimed to have no consistent purpose and is often seen as an extension of the second wave (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004).

Feminist scholars such as Shira Tarrant have objected to the "wave structure" for ignoring significant progress between eras. Moreover, she argued that if feminism

is a global movement, the fact that "the temporal segments summarized as the first, second, and third wave most correspond to feminist developments in America" raises serious problems about how feminism fails to accept the history of political issues (Tarrant, 2006, p. 222). Critics have argued that the "wave structure" also focuses on white women's suffrage and continues to marginalize the issues of non-white and lower-class women (Harnois, 2008).

With the previous subsection, critiques of second-wave feminism, the contributions of third-wave feminism may seem irrelevant at first glance. However, as stated at the beginning, the writing dates of the works discussed correspond to important breaking moments in feminist thought. In turn, this leads us to question whether there are certain differences and similarities in the confined situation of female characters and their reactions to this situation. In addition, the concepts of alternative memories and intersectionality, that is, the intertwining of different forms of oppression and closure, and the fact that they can be transferred to the future in different ways may be important for this study (rather than the feminism of black and colored women).

2.5 Kate Millett and Her *Sexual Politics*

Millett was a leading figure in the women's movement or second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s (Genzlinger, 2017). For example, she and Sidney Abbott, Phyllis Birkby, Alma Routsong, and Artemis March were among the members of CR One, the first lesbian-feminist awareness group. Millett, however, identified as bisexual in late 1970 (Buchanan, 2011, p. 39). In 1966 Millett became a committee member of the National Organization of Women and subsequently joined the New York Radical Women, Radical lesbians, and City Center Radical Women organizations (Rosenberg, 2013, p. 225). After the success of her book *Sexual Politics* (1970), she was subjected to criticism who found it arrogant and elitist, and she discussed her problems in her 1974 book *Flying* (Magill, 2014, p. 2536-2537).

Millett was one of the first authors to define the modern concept of patriarchy as the society-wide subjugation of women (Green, 2013, p. 285). "Millett articulated a theory of patriarchy and conceptualized women's gender and sexual oppression in terms that demanded a gender role revolution with radical changes in personal and family lifestyles," wrote her biographer Gayle Graham Yates. She was in a different place from

feminists who aimed to develop opportunities for social and political leadership and economic independence for women (Wintle, 2008, p. 532).

Millett has written several books on women's lives from a feminist perspective. For example, in her book *The Basement: Meditations on a Human Sacrifice* (1979), she described the torture and murder of young Indianapolis teenager Sylvia Likens by Gertrude Baniszewski in 1965. From a feminist perspective, she explored the story of the vulnerable girl and the dynamics involved in her sexual, physical and emotional abuse (Magill, 2014, p. 2536-2537). Her biographer Roberta M. Hooks notes "quite apart from any feminist polemics, *The Basement* can stand alone as an intensely felt and movingly written study of the problems of cruelty and submission." (Magill, 2014, p. 2536-2537). According to Millett, the perpetrator's motivation was as follows: "It is the story of the suppression of women. Gertrude seems to have wanted to administer some terrible truthful justice to this girl: that this was what it was to be a woman" (Broeske, 2007).

Briefly in *Sexual Politics*, Millett argues that "sexuality has an often neglected political aspect" (Millett, 2000, p. xix) and continues to discuss the role that patriarchy plays in sexual relations (Millet, 2000, p. 29-280). It particularly looks at the works of D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer (Millett, 2000, p. 294-335). Millett argues that these writers view and discuss gender in a patriarchal and sexist way. In contrast, she appreciates the more nuanced gender politics of gay writer Jean Genet (Millett, 2000). Other authors discussed at length include Sigmund Freud, George Meredith, John Ruskin, and John Stuart Mill (Millett, 2000, p. 89-147).

Sexual Politics was seen as a classical feminist text. It is seen as "the first book of academic feminist literary criticism" (Clough, 1994, p. 473-486). It has also been said to be "one of the first feminist books of this decade to arouse nationwide male anger" (Wilson, 1974, p. 14-15). *Sexual Politics* is an important theoretical touchstone for the second wave feminism of the 1970s.

2.6 Main Concepts and Arguments in Sexual Politics

Sexual Politics has proposed an important analysis method and thought system that constitutes the source of the women's movement that it defines and inspires. It has been a frequently mentioned fact that the book meets one of the most urgent needs of the age for feminist literature and feminist thought (MacKinnon, 2007): It has developed a

convincing, coherent and effective theory of male hegemony over women first and then powerless men who are secondary. Kate Millett expressed a very new view at the time when she said these: "Sex is at the root of all our problems, and if we don't destroy this worst of our oppressive systems; If we don't get to the root of sexual politics and the morbid delusion of power and violence associated with it, our struggle for liberation will lead us back to the same primitive anxieties" (Millett, 2000).

In this book, Millett built a perspective that said the sexualization of power underlies oppression. With this approach, she observed the spread of sexualization across time, space and culture. She does not merely suggest that there is a *realpolitik* that is sexual in nature. She also states that politics itself is essentially sexual in nature. She defines politics as a phenomenon related to "relationships based on power". Moreover, she argues, with convincing examples from literature and history, that heterosexual union is "an example of sexual politics at the individual or personal level" and that it implements "sexuality as a status category with political references" (Millett, 2000). Millett's words about the reproduction of male dominance are quite striking: "Unless accepting male supremacy as a birthright is abandoned, all systems of oppression will function through the rational and emotional imposition of sexuality, which is the fundamental position of humanity" (Millett, 2000).

According to Millett's analysis and the approach of the women's movement that followed her, sexuality is shaped and directed not naturally but by social influence. This is not a biological impulse, but a relationship created in the social sphere. Social roles, sexist behaviors and sexual scenarios create and produce the sexual hegemony of men over women and other men. In Millett's critique of Freud, she says that masculinity and femininity are not due to the natural nature of the person or biological necessity, and she makes the following determination: "Both sexes are determined by the behavior patterns that are developed gracefully within the society, are strictly based on the cultural structure, and constantly undergo intercultural change" (Millett, 2000). These forms of behavior achieve compliance with social norms based on the widespread but mistaken belief that the difference arises from male and female anatomy. Gender roles create the patriarchal character, which has become a way of thinking and a way of life. This "acceptance" of women and powerless men is achieved by the ideological conditioning of individuals through socialization.

Millett, who does not hesitate to define sexuality as the basis of the hierarchical

structure of politics and culture, says, “Basic social and political distinctions are sexual, not financial or class-based” (Millett, 2000). The family, whose basic dynamic is sexuality, is defined as the basic institution of male domination. The fact that men are superior to women and young men within this institution gradually spreads outside the family and becomes widespread in social life. Millett interprets the term “patriarchy” as a family-centered theory of male dominance, “phallic position” and international order, which begins with the male being the head of the family and ends up spreading into society (Millett, 2000).

In her book, she defines the bond between the "family", a male-dominated institution, and male-dominated sexuality, the relationship between the family and male domination, the heterosexual relationship and its institutional order within the family. Heterosexual union is interpreted as “a microcosm in which various forms of behavior and value criteria approved by the culture are loaded”, “an example of sexual politics on an individual or personal scale”, the intimacy being accepted as “a really big step” and moving to a wider area (Millett, 2000) . She conceptualizes the reactionary attitude of men that emerged after the first wave of feminism as the subordination of women to men in sexual life. Moreover, this is not limited to family only.

It has been stated that Kate Millett's view that criticizes sexuality as eroticized hegemony is later evidenced by worldwide data on rape, domestic violence and sexual harassment (MacKinnon, 2007). Millett stated that sexual freedom was restricted and put forward the goal of “separating sexuality from the brutal realities of politics”. While making this proposal, she does not envisage that women should have the same sexual freedom as the freedom granted to men. However, she does not hesitate to state that groups express sexuality freely, disclose it freely, and live freely. In summary, Millett assumes that, instead of maintaining a sexual life similar to these dominant groups, women's being pushed into the background will end and patriarchy will disappear through the liberation of women from the imposed sexual life (Millett, 2000).

Millett thought that what was described as the "sexual revolution" in the 1960s was also anti-patriarchal. The most important of her views affecting the women's movement of the period was that she emphasized that the sexual revolution was an action aimed at liberating women's own sexuality. Throughout the book, Millett exposes male tyranny and the forces opposed to women's emancipation by analyzing literary works by male writers and women in which women are passive. The reason she did this literature

reading was to offer clues to the sexual revolution she proposed (Millet, 2000).

In *Sexual Politics*, Millet supports the view that male dominance maintains its hegemony over women throughout society, despite changes within the family and in family types. She saw the adaptation of male dominance to changing conditions as one of the conditions for reproduction. In the light of this view, male-dominated sexuality, which is the engine of male hegemony, is largely an autonomous power independent of the family, the driving force of male domination's ability to adapt itself to a wide variety of institutional forms. As a matter of fact, these are the elements that Millet highlighted in her readings of literary works. One of her important contributions in this context is that she warns that the structure of sexual dominance may not change even if family structures change. Because, according to Millet's thesis, the main driving force of male hegemony is not the family but sexuality (Millet, 2000). In the following stories, although the conditions, historical periods and social patterns of women are different, the fact that they reflect a certain alienation with their madness in the face of male-dominated sexuality is considered within the framework of this theoretical conceptualization, an important contribution will be made to feminist literary readings with Millet's methods.

3. THREE PERIODS, THREE FEMINIST AUTHORS, THREE WORKS

Above, basic conceptual information about the feminist movement and feminist literary criticism has been presented. Then, the characteristics of the first, second and third wave feminist movements, the criticisms of these waves against the previous wave and their basic problematics were conveyed. Then, the focus was on Kate Millett's method of understanding gender relations through sexual roles in literary works with *Sexual Politics*. The purpose of these was to put the works that are the subject of this research and their authors in the context. However, it was thought that with the creation of such a conceptual and historical perspective, the works in question would be evaluated in a healthy way with the concepts in Millett's analysis.

As stated at the beginning, one of the reasons for following such a route is the unique characteristics of the works and their authors. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Doris Lessing, and Margaret Atwood are each engraved in different eras of feminist literature. However, it should be underlined that Gilman was also a humanist and pro-eugenics, Lessing produced a lot of works under the influence of communist and sufi views, and Atwood refused to define herself as a feminist and defined herself as a realist. Despite these differences, each of them has provided important resources to feminist literature and feminist criticism. In addition, the periods in which they lived and wrote selected works coincide with the three separate waves of the feminist movement discussed above. In this sense, they are names that can show certain continuities and breaks.

There is more than an effort to search for traces of these continuities and discontinuities in the selection of the works of these authors to be discussed here. The most important of these is that, as mentioned above, in the works to be analyzed, the women who accept to play their roles in the middle class family life silently, but become unable to play these roles and have psychological conflicts with their confinement in the traditional family life. In addition, experiences such as being confined by men, being devalued, risking losing their position against other women, and being sexually humiliated and raped are also among the themes of these works. Another factor that should be mentioned is the periods in which the stories and novels took place. Gilman's *Yellow Wallpaper* story is also autobiographical and was written at a time when women were unable to make decisions about their own bodies, property, and health. Doris Lessing's *To Room Nineteen* chronicles a middle-class family living in the prosperous

times after World War II. The alienation of gender stereotypes in the family of a middle-class woman who had advantages for which the first-wave feminism struggled for. Written years before Kate Millett wrote her *Sexual Politics*, this story has a quality that predicts her theses.

Finally, Atwood's *Blind Assassin* is important since it was written in the 2000s, reflecting the accumulation of these debates and the feminist literary tradition. In addition, it has a quality that reflects the general characteristics of the previous two periods with its long-term narrative that started in the interwar period. The suppression and helplessness of male-dominated sexual policies against women's achievements manifests itself in the story of two sisters discovering their life stories in a post-mortem way. In this respect, it can be said that it is a novel that indirectly points to many of the theses in Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* and provides rich comparisons with other stories.

In the last section, before the analysis part, brief information about the authors and their works is given in the following subsections. Then, in each subsection, a summary of the two stories and the novel is presented in order to facilitate the analysis. In other words, these summaries are a preliminary preparation for the analysis.

3.1 Charlotte Perkins Gilman and *The Yellow Wallpaper*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was an American humanist, novelist, author, academic, and social reform advocate ("Charlotte Perkins Gilman", 2018). She was a utopian feminist and became a role model for future generations of feminists because of her unorthodox concepts and lifestyle. Her most remembered work today is her semi-autobiographical short story "The Yellow Wallpaper", written after a severe bout of postpartum psychosis.

"The Yellow Wallpaper" (original title: "The Yellow-Paper. A Story") is a short story by American author Charlotte Perkins Gilman, first published in *The New England Magazine* in January 1892. It is considered an important early work of American feminist literature, as it shows the attitudes towards the mental and physical health of women in the 19th century. It is also seen as an excellent piece of horror fiction.

Perkins Gilman married Charles Stetson in 1884, and less than a year later their daughter, Katharine, was born. She was already prone to depression, her symptoms aggravated by marriage and motherhood. An important part of her diary records from

the time she gave birth to her daughter until a few years later describes the upcoming depression she will face (Knight, 1994, p. 323-85). As a matter of fact, her personal development is very important in terms of inspiring her to join the feminist movement and being a source for the creation of *Yellow Wallpaper*.

The story is written as a compilation of diary entries told in the first person. The diary was written by a woman whose husband is a doctor and who rents an old mansion to stay in for the summer. After leaving the other rooms in the house, the couple moves to the upstairs nursery. As a form of treatment, the husband forbids the diary writer from working or writing. It also encourages her to eat well and get plenty of air, thus aiming to get rid of what he calls "temporary nerve depression - mild hysterical tendency".

The story continues with the domestic life of this young woman and her husband. When she suffers from "transient nervous depression" after the birth of her babies, her husband gives her a resting treatment. They spend the summer in a colonial-era mansion, where the narrator is largely confined to an upstairs nursery. In these developments the narrator has no right or opportunity to take her own decisions about her medical condition and the treatment regime. Legally she is dependent on her husband's decisions. He could confine her in a room without asking her consent. Here their relations show a great inequality in terms of Millett's "political power" in the family structure. The story strikingly uses the following elements to reveal gradually the extent to which her husband "imprisoned" the narrator by her physical and mental condition: torn wallpaper, barred windows, metal rings on the walls, a "scratched, carved and shattered" floor, a bed bolted to the floor and a door at the top of the stairs.

The narrator devotes several diary entries to describing the wallpaper in the room. Its 'sick' color, its 'yellow' smell, its strange and disturbing pattern of 'an endless string of mushrooms budding and sprouting in endless folds', its missing patches and how it leaves yellow stains on the skin and clothes of anyone who touches it. She tells how the longer the stay in the bedroom, the more the wallpaper mutates, especially in the moonlight. Patterns and designs become more and more interesting for the narrator, who lives with no stimuli other than wallpaper. She soon begins to see a figure in the design. Eventually, she begins to believe that a woman is crawling on all fours behind the model. Believing that she must release the woman on the wallpaper, she begins to remove the remaining paper from the wall.

When her husband gets there, the narrator refuses to unlock her door. Returning with the key, he finds her crawling around the room, rubbing against the wallpaper, and screaming, "I'm finally out... despite you." She faints but continues to spin around the room, crawling over her motionless body every time he passes by, and continuing to believe she is the woman trapped behind the yellow wallpaper. The narrative that a woman who has no control over her body, health and life breaks the mold by seeing herself in the images on the wallpapers and going crazy is quite impressive. In this story protagonist's confinement finds its reflection on the wallpaper and in a sense she earns a self-awareness regarding her own confinement via the entrapped imaginary woman in the wallpaper. It will be further elaborated below as it is discussed in comparison with other texts.

3.2. Doris Lessing and *To Room Nineteen*

Doris May Lessing (22 October 1919 - 17 November 2013) was an English-Zimbabwean writer. She was born to a British parent in Iran, where she lived until 1925. Later, her family moved to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), where she stayed until 1949 when she moved to London. Her novels include *The Grass Is Singing* (1950), the *Children of Violence* (1952–1969) compilation, *The Golden Notebook* (1962), *The Good Terrorist* (1985) five novel series, and the *Canopus in Argos: Archives* (1979-1983) compilation. There are five known novels. At the age of fifteen, Lessing began selling her stories to magazines. Her first novel, *The Grass Is Singing*, was published in 1950. The work that put her in the limelight in the international arena, was *The Golden Notebook* published in 1962. By her death, she had published more than 50 novels, some under pseudonyms.

Lessing was awarded the 2007 Nobel Prize in Literature. The Swedish Academy described her as "that epicist of the female experience, who with skepticism, fire and visionary power has subjected a divided civilization to scrutiny" (Crown, 2007). Lessing was the oldest person to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature at the age of 87 (BBC Editors, 2007).

First published in 1963 in the collection of *A Man and Two Women*, "To Room Nineteen" follows Doris Lessing's intense interest in the consciousness of women under the stress of modern life. It reflects the anxieties of the time in which it was written and

heralds the kind of feminist discoveries that will become much more common after 1970.

The Rawlings in the story has everything a couple could want. They have four healthy children. Their nests have a stable and comfortable appearance when viewed. However, Matthew Rawlings is an unfaithful husband. This eventually seems like an acceptable situation, but sets off a state of severe depression that results in the alienation of his wife, Susan, rather than their marriage. As a result of this alienation, Susan Rawlings slowly goes isolated from her world and even her life due to the meaninglessness of her life. And she finally commits suicide. There is no more to the plot than that, but it forces readers to explore the text in detail to try to see what exactly is driving Susan into such a desperate mood when there is so much right in her life.

The story is delicately balanced between possible explanations: Susan is presented at first glance as a bored and middle-class woman. Things started to go wrong for her because she gave up "being herself" after she learned her husband had cheated her. This situation eventually led her to become a victim of the male-dominated family institution. She cannot find the strength to be a good wife and mother again. Her suicide seems to transcend local or gender questions to some extent. Her situation seems to mean that Susan has not lived up to her ideals of being logical and rational—ideals that were key to the success of her marriage to Matthew. Once she becomes irrational or even insane, she can no longer function as a wife, mother, or anything else. But then, when things start to go wrong, we start to wonder if Matthew's rational world is lacking in intelligence because he can't help or understand Susan. It could even be argued that "intelligence" should have a military meaning: the right kind of information about the nature of human life and relationships is lacking.

What seems missing in the seemingly ideal world of the Rawlings is pain. They are extremely sensitive and stable; they always choose the right paths, therefore they are in a 'abstinence' away from 'painful experience'. Lessing clearly lays out options for the female character: children or Matthew's work alone cannot provide a reason to live; their love for each other seems like a good reason but even that is hollowed out. Where "intelligence forbids tears" and nothing unforeseen can happen, a void opens in Susan's heart. One of the valuable parts of the story is that we can feel the craziness it brings to Susan. The void is first "something waiting for her in her house", then "enemy", then

"demon", then "devil", then an ominous man with red whiskers that she thinks she saw in her garden. Just like the reader, Susan realizes that these are signs of insanity as she reads. In this respect, we witness a gradual madness, as in Gilman's character. Yet it is different in an important aspect. She is aware of her ongoing process and in a sense she substitutes her own method of confinement (hotel room) for her real one in her family life. Her internalization of traditional family values as a middle-class woman comes to an abrupt end with the unfaithfulness of her husband and the alienation it brings.

Susan realizes she's living a lie. She also realizes that, no matter how absurd, feelings are still felt, but that she must learn that it is too late. When Matthew tells her she's irrational and "diagnoses" her, she really loses her mind. Once the illusion of perfection in her life collapses, nothing can stand in front of a total collapse. She retreats to a hotel room and sits there, now free from the demands of a meaningless world. Now her only freedom is stasis, and this soon becomes a logical desire for the ultimate stasis of death.

The final paragraphs of the story attempt to demonstrate the self-awareness of Susan's depression. Normal life is represented by planning to convince her husband that the lover she invented really exists. Matthew needs a lover's logical explanation to understand his wife's distress; his wife invents one for his sake. This is ridiculous now, as Susan did with implicit expressions. The wild world of suicide, however, is represented by a series of largely positive images: Susan plunges into a dream that "fruits" and caresses her "inwardly" like her own blood. According to the impression that the story gives us her madness reveals the lack of a dimension of true self, creativity, and true body knowledge, that is the dimension emphasized by D.H. Lawrence after Nietzsche. Susan ends with a secret reference to Lawrence as her death "drifts into the dark river". It can be read as liberation from the stalemate in which she was thrust into madness and the ensuing suicide. In this sense, it is an important story in terms of the image of the woman who is confined in a social structure alienating and isolating women.

3.3 Margaret Atwood and *The Blind Assassin*

Margaret Eleanor Atwood (born November 18, 1939) is a Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, lecturer and environmental activist. Since 1961 she has published eighteen books of poetry, eighteen novels, eleven non-fiction books, nine

short fiction collections, eight children's books, two comics, and numerous small press editions in both poetry and fiction. Atwood has won numerous awards and honors for her writings, including two Booker Awards, the Arthur C. Clarke Award, the Governor-General's Award, the Franz Kafka Award, the Princess of Asturias Awards, and the National Book Critics and PEN Center USA Lifetime Achievement Awards. A number of her works have been adapted for movies and television series. Atwood's work covers various themes such as gender and identity, religion and myth, the power of language, climate change and "power politics" (Marion, 2010).

Atwood's work has attracted the attention of feminist literary critics, and her work has been cited extensively in feminist analyses. Despite this, Atwood has often avoided defining her works as "feminist" works (Tolan, 2007). Since her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, Atwood has stated her main approach as social realism rather than feminism (Kaminsky, 1990, p. 27-32). Despite her displaying such an attitude, literary critics continued to evaluate her works within the framework of feminism. In their analysis, sexual policies, domestic sexual relations, and the use of myths and fairy tales were frequently highlighted (Rose Wilson, 1993). Atwood's interview with feminist theorist Elizabeth Meese before *The Handmaid's Tale* was published in 1985 is important for understanding Atwood's thoughts. Here she defined feminism as a "belief in the rights of women" and averred that "if practical, hardline, anti-male feminists took over and became the government, I would resist them" (Neuman, 2006, p. 857-68). Then in 2017, she again expressed her discomfort with the label of feminism with the following words: "I always want to know what people mean by that word [feminism]. Some people mean it quite negatively, other people mean it very positively, some people mean it in a broad sense, other people mean it in a more specific sense. Therefore, in order to answer the question, you have to ask the person what they mean" (McNamara, 2017). In her interview with *The Guardian*, she said "For instance, some feminists have historically been against lipstick and letting transgender women into women's washrooms. Those are not positions I have agreed with" (Allardice, 2018).

In 2000, Atwood published her tenth novel, *The Blind Assassin*, to critical acclaim and won both the Booker Prize and the Hammett Prize in 2000 (The Booker Prizes, 2000). The book takes place in Ontario, Port Ticonderoga, and Toronto. It is told from a present perspective, with reference to earlier events spanning the twentieth century but mostly the 1930s and 1940s. It is a work in which important events in

Canadian history form an important backdrop. For example, it is seen that historical events such as the Journey to Ottawa and the Communist rally held in Maple Leaf Gardens in 1934 are also included in the fiction (Atwood, 2013). A series of newspaper articles commenting on the events and characters of the novel from afar gives the fiction a realistic and documentary-like structure.

Protagonist of the novel Iris Chase and her sister Laura grow up wealthy but without a mother in a small town in southern Ontario. As an older woman, Iris begins to remember events and relationships from her childhood, youth, and middle years, including her unhappy marriage to Toronto businessman Richard Griffen. The book contains a novel within a novel: a novel attributed to Laura but published by Iris. The name of this novel is *Blind Assassin*, which also gave its name to the work. In other words, we have a process of remembering and a work of science fiction embedded in a historical narrative. In a multi-layered structure, the reader is taken into a gripping story of discovery.

The novel progresses through a gradual series of revelations that illuminate both Iris's youth and old age before coming to the pivotal events of her and Laura's lives during World War II. Laura and Iris live in a house called Avilion. Their mother dies young, leaving the caretaker Reenie to take full responsibility for the girls. As the novel develops and the novel within the novel becomes more and more clearly inspired by real events, the real author and heroine of the novel in this work is revealed to be Iris, not Laura. Although it is thought that this work was inspired by Laura's love for Alex, it turns out that *Blind Assassin* was written by Iris based on her extramarital affair with Alex. After Laura commits suicide upon learning that Alex had died in battle, Iris later publishes the work on Laura's behalf. After the suicide, Iris realizes through her sister's diaries that Richard raped Laura during most of their marriage, and blackmails Alex by threatening to turn him to the authorities. Iris takes her young daughter Aimee and runs away from her home. She threatens to reveal that Richard got Laura pregnant and forced her to have an abortion. This move distances Iris from the last people who supported her, and creates resentment between her and the grown-up Aimee. Iris convinces Richard that Laura is the one who had an affair with Alex Thomas, driving her to suicide. The novel ends when Iris dies, leaving the truth to her only surviving grandchild to be discovered in her unpublished autobiography.

What appears to be a historical narrative at first turns into a narrative of domestic violence, repression of female sexuality, rape and oppression with successive discoveries. The life story of a character who sees the solution in writing but can't stand it and commits suicide years later is understood by her sister, who reads her diaries. Although she takes the reins and pushes the dominant male character in the novel to a passive position with blackmail, she cannot find a solution other than leaving this narrative to her grandchildren. As can be seen, this complex layer of narratives reveals the female character phenomenon seen in other stories. Exploring through the feelings and experiences recorded in diaries also provides rich sources for comparison.



4. THE STRUGGLE OF WOMEN TO COPE WITH THE PRESSURES OF PATRIARCHAL AND GENDERED FAMILY LIFE

In the above sections, firstly, basic information on feminist literary criticism was given, and then developments in the history of feminist thought were discussed in order to examine the historical transformations in the literary works discussed. Then, the theses of the work *Sexual Politics*, which is an important touchstone in feminist literary criticism, were discussed in general terms. In the next section, general information about the texts and their authors was given. After these preparatory steps, it is now possible to proceed to the analysis of these texts.

As can be seen from the title of this chapter, the struggle of silent, non-radical women to cope with their alienation and isolation in patriarchal family life. While doing this, we benefit from Kate Millett's analysis summarized above, as family life and domestic sexual policies, which are the sources of this alienation, are important evaluative criteria. As a matter of fact, as seen in the summary of the texts just above, in all of the three works discussed, the heroines are passive, secondary characters in line with the decisions and priorities of the men in their domestic lives. Then, in the process of their reaction to this, they became even more alienated, lost their mental balance, were exposed to great pressure and were driven to depression. Since Kate Millett focuses on the source of this alienation and oppression through patriarchal family life and its political structure based on gender inequality these characters enable us to read her insights into their particular stories. The stories of three heroines (actually in the last one there are two heroines) are taken under consideration one by one in the light of this theoretical framework. In addition historical positions of these works and their heroines in feminist thought and criticism will be another important subject that this study tries to shed light on.

The narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Susan Rawlings in *To Room Nineteen*, and Iris Chase Griffen in *The Blind Assassin* have in common that they are silent women who accept their circumstances despite their discomfort and discontent. They are the characters who hide their helplessness and suffering and make us, the readers, feel them without expressing their inner turmoils directly. As will be emphasized again, they are not radical feminists or women who want their own autonomy and space for creation. As we emphasized at the beginning, they are the women we encounter every

day in our daily lives. This offers a different and advantageous perspective to examine their tragic end in the axis of a search for their alienation in family life and sexual politics the family represents.

In these works, it is possible to find traces of the subjects that feminist thought focused on at the time they were written. The reason for the examination of the subjects on which different feminist waves are focused above is due to this quality of the works. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* was published as a short story in 1892, at a time when the first-wave feminist movement was gaining momentum. The aim of women to have the same and equal legal status as men and to obtain economic and political rights had an important place in this period. Doris Lessing's story *To Room Nineteen* coincided with the rise of the second-wave feminist movement in 1963. Even though they had legal and political rights, it bears the traces of the period when the status of women without a name in the family and society was opened to question. Finally, Margaret Atwood wrote *The Blind Assassin* at a time when previous periods were subjected to intense criticism with third wave feminism, the feminist movement became pluralistic within itself and tried to write its own history objectively and in an anti-hierarchical way. The fact that its narrative takes place in the years between the first and second world wars is also important in terms of making sense of the transition between the two feminist waves and, in Millett's words, the male-dominated counter-revolution in the interim period.

It is necessary to emphasize again that there are serious intersections and commonalities between the works, despite all the periodical differences. To summarize in one sentence, all three narratives are about the distortion and upheaval of female characters' worlds wrought by men. The following procedure is followed in order to make the follow-up of the analyzes below easier. Although they will be taken one after the other in the historical chronology, they will be included in a preliminary comparison since the first two of them are in the form of stories. The scope and depth of *The Blind Assassin* also play a role in this. Then, Atwood's work will be subjected to a more nuanced analysis and placed in a comparative perspective in the light of the findings within and between the two stories. While doing this, the issues stated in the problematics of the thesis and various approaches of feminist literary criticism with the conceptual scheme drawn by Kate Millett are taken into consideration. After that findings of this comparative analysis will be discussed in the conclusion part. It is

thought that such an approach will facilitate the follow-up of the works and their analyzes.

4.1 Women In Alienation and Isolation: The Yellow Wallpaper and To Room Nineteen

As mentioned before, *The Yellow Wallpaper* is mostly evaluated in readings related to the status of women in the 19th century Western world. It is also read as a reaction to the role of middle class woman emphasized as the “angel of the house” and the limitations of her rights in this role. Similarly, Doris Lessing's *To Room Nineteen* is a story that conveys the alienation brought about by the middle class woman's position in her domestic life and her status. Both female characters were crushed under the ideal of “true” womanhood and when they were unable to sustain it, they suffered a great mental destruction. The axis of the struggle that defines two wives and mothers is the ideology of “real womanhood” that dominates family life and pervades all kinds of relations between two sexes.

Their problem is not just whether or not they have a room and life of their own. All female characters in these works we have discussed have this environment. In fact, in the second work, *To Room Nineteen*, there is an alternative room where our heroine can take time for herself (the hotel room she hires). The problem is that the forces beyond their control draw the boundaries of their lives, namely the dominant position of males in patriarchal family structure. Because, as can be seen in both stories (and later in Atwood's novel), none of them will realize with horror that they do not have an autonomous life in this environment. As a result, going crazy and suicide will be an escape from this ideal of femininity as well as their alienated life as gendered subjects of this family structure. Although suicide is an important motif in Atwood's work, the way the character handles it puts her in a slightly different place from these two stories.

If we start with *The Yellow Wallpaper*, first important point of the story is the situation that its author Gilman also experiences: the situation of being confined against her will. Moreover, her only pathology is to be a woman, that is, to be hysterical. She is defined as a patient to be treated by her husband, although she does not have any other concrete pathology. *The Yellow Wallpaper* consists of twelve separate narratives similar to diary entries. The common ground of all of these narratives is that the

character covers the three-month treatment period. The narrative has the reader witness the character slowly going mad in isolation.

This change is conveyed to us through the transformation of the relationship between character and the yellow wallpaper that gives the story its name and adorns walls of her room. At first, the narrator does not like the wallpaper at all. But then she “gets really fond of the room in spite of the wall-paper”. “There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will” (Gilman, 1892). As can be understood from this sentence, her relationship with the yellow wallpaper becomes a component of a process that differentiates the identity of the woman and enables her to find her own voice in her deteriorating mental state.

In fact, it can be said that it has transformed into an alternative reality of the narrator. There she sees an entrapped and silent woman like herself. It is even possible to say that she recovered as a result of her obsession with the female figure on that wallpaper. It is also evident that it gives her vitality in this following sentence: “You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch” (Gilman, 1892). Actually both the narrator and the imaginary woman in the wallpaper are imprisoned beings and they have no political or legal rights. The narrator’s husband is the ultimate decision-maker here. As Millett indicates above, the male-dominated family structure gives no opportunity to the narrator to make her own decisions. Her dysfunction as a wife and mother due to her depression deprives her of even minimal advantages her husband gives her in a middle-class household. At some point, the narrator does not want to leave the room. In other words, she does not want to return to the world that alienated her. Before she can solve the mystery of the woman imprisoned in the wallpaper, she fears that her husband will take the room where she was locked up. By the end of the story, the narrator has become almost completely identified with that woman she discovered there.

One of the important aspects of the story, and the phenomenon that will be more prominent especially in *To Room Nineteen*, is that the place of the woman in the family can be filled with another woman. When the middle-class woman loses her mental and physical capacities, and is no longer able to fulfil her duties in the family (taking care of husband and children), an alternative woman (a maid, sister, husband's sister or mistress) can easily be found to take her place. Also in Gilman’s story, the narrator’s domestic duties, such as taking care of her child, are transferred to her husband's sister.

In terms of Millett's analysis on sexual politics, this female character indicates another level of internalization of male-dominated values. Politically this sister reproduces the dominant role of males in the family and as a woman she could take on domestic responsibilities when the narrator loses her functions.

The last part of the story, the moment the narrator leaves the room, comes with an important paradigm shift in terms of the form of work. The story that has been told in the first person through narrator until that moment suddenly begins to be told in the third person narration. We also learn the name of the narrator for the first time after this radical transition (that is, she finally has a name along with an identity). She pulls out her husband's sister, who came to take her out, and locks herself inside so that the woman in the wallpaper can't escape. By owning the room, the transformation between the figure on wallpaper and herself is completed. Her exclaim, "I've got out at last" when her husband arrives is an expression of liberation. The passage in which her name is conveyed to us reflects this transformation to the reader in a very radical way, for she is no longer John's wife. Her empowerment, in a sense, is a result of the rejection of her role in this family structure, as Millett would propose in *Sexual Politics*.

The narrator is the one who she was before she escaped from that wallpaper. She is a woman who has internalized her husband's standards and values, her duties and roles at home, and has adapted to all of them. She is the woman who chose to remain silent by recording her thoughts and feelings in her diaries. It is the woman trapped inside wallpapers in the room where she is closed. But this process of confinement and insanity allows her to get rid of her husband's control and his sister Jennie, who is imposing her husband's rules. But her fight for salvation almost brings her closer to suicide:

In one point of the story, she got angry enough to do something desperate. She contemplates on jumping the window but bars of windows make her deter from this action. Interestingly the real reason that makes her to dissuade from the suicide is the improper nature of this action and the fact that it could be misconstrued. Also outside, there are lots of creeping women and in a sense she tries to find and solve her own problem by reflection on the woman in the wallpaper (Gilman, 1892).

She considered suicide but interestingly found it inappropriate. However, the most important transformation is the transformation occurred in herself. At the end of

the story, her scream is striking: "I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (Gilman, 1892) In summary, the sexual political plane in which she was imprisoned by her husband and her sister-in-law, was the beginning of a madness that would lead to the questioning of this plane when it was closed and isolated as a result of the mental crisis she experienced. At the same time, the narrator goes in parallel with the process of escaping from her own entrapment as a woman breaking norms. In other words the political structure of her domestic life makes her incompatible at some point even though she internalizes its values and responsibilities. The entrapment symbolized by the yellow wallpaper and the imaginary woman our narrator finds there open the way to break with this political sexual structure of her family. Even though the story has no links with voting or political rights, it is evident that the narrator has no legal and political rights, and this determines her life and aggravates her condition. She has no legal and political rights to use against her confinement.

As to the story *To Room Nineteen*, it is necessary to underline an important difference and similarity between itself and Gilman's story: Its heroine is a woman who has certain economic and political rights due to the historical period of the story. This also expands her choices to deal with the problem she is experiencing (such as renting a hotel room, hiring a maid). Because she is not a woman who is locked in a room against her will, like Gilman's character. However, this does not prevent her husband from making certain diagnoses (such as "not being rational") about her.

As a matter of fact, the protagonist of this story, Susan Rawlings, is a character who is alienated by the unequal gender relations within her family. This adds a different meaning to the important similarity between two stories. Susan discovers that her "indispensable" role as a wife and mother is ultimately dispensable. However, in an effort to overcome the alienation she experiences, she makes the decision to hire a woman who would help with housework and taking care of children. With Lessing's story, we see an issue that Millett emphasizes with the concept of sexual politics in a very plain way. Although the role of women is indispensable for the reproduction of the male-dominated family order, the women who fulfil them are themselves dispensable. It shows the political character of family life because the most important aspect of this domestic structure is the responsibilities and functions of women. When they cannot fulfill them, it is possible to find another woman for them. In this case the housekeeper and the caretaker assumes these roles.

One of the similarities and differences between two stories concerns the first-person narration. Lessing's story is also narrated in first-person narration, but unlike Gilman's story, this person is not our hero. It is as if a free-observing God-writer who tells us every detail of Susan Rawlings' life. The narrator, who presents us the anatomy of a marriage, conveys Rawlings' depression and madness step by step. This anatomy also reflects the unequal and problematic structure of male-dominated family life this middle-class couple live.

Lessing analyses the inner life of middle-class marriages through this narrator. The story starts out like a fairy tale. It introduces us to the Rawlings, who had a perfect life and a perfect marriage in the 50s. Children, suburban homes, appliances in the house, everything is perfect. However, the phrase "and yet" is the beginning of the emptiness, meaninglessness and contradictions in this family, to be conveyed to the reader step by step.

Susan's depression begins with a confession. One night, her husband, Matthew, confesses her that he had a sexual relationship with another woman, a younger woman. He says it was a petty affair and short-lived relationship, and they both admit it's a trivial thing so they don't risk their "perfect" lives. Susan accepts Matthew's confession and remorse and does not make a scene, but this event marks the beginning of her isolation and alienation from her perfect life. At this point, two stories turn into parallel narratives. Because with each passing day, Susan is alienated from her family and home, driven into depression and impasse by the emptiness she falls into.

Susan Rawlings' confrontation with the emptiness of her married life turns into an effort to discover herself before marriage. In a way she tries to interpret her life except her marriage and its responsibilities. For the first time, she feels that the life she is living is not really her life. She's just devoted to her family and ideal feminine roles: "I signed myself over, so to speak, to other people. To the children. Not for one moment in 12 years have I been alone, had time to myself. So now I have to learn to be myself again" (Lessing, 1994). This self-awareness initially gives the story an optimistic tone. With this questioning, Susan started a quest to find her own voice. In this regard it is possible to say Susan starts to follow the solution Millett offers in her work, namely breaking with patriarchal family life and focusing on women's own feelings, aspirations and desires. In this case it starts with Susan's quest to find herself outside her family life.

However, Susan's efforts to spend time alone in her own room at home are constantly interrupted by her husband, children, and housekeeper. The children call her room as "Mother's Room" and this actually has a content that reduces her identity to only motherhood. What other individuals in the household demand is not Susan's "own" identity, but the identity she carries as a mother, wife, and caretaker of the house. Although she has her own room and makes time for herself, her husband and children talk about her as if she were an irrational child (Lessing, 1994).

As a result of her effort, Susan discovers that she is replaceable and dispensable. To alleviate her domestic duties, she takes home a caretaker named Sophie Traub. Sophie is perfectly aware of the role she must play. Sophie gets along very well with kids and the housekeeper and gradually takes Susan's place. This gradual process has also a political character because it gives the reproductive functions of family life to another women and makes her more valuable than the dysfunctional woman. The first one aggravates the problematic nature of the latter. Also at the end it reproduces the power of man in the family since he does not share these responsibilities on an equal basis. This situation also reflects the reproductive role of women in patriarchal family life as Kate Millett highlights in her work. Women has a gendered role in family life and when women do not fulfil this important role, another woman or women might get involved.

Discovering that she can be replaceable as a result of her willful effort, Susan Rawlings, unlike the narrator in Gilman's story, is aware that she is going under a very severe depression and consciously observes the progress of her depression. She begins to look for a way to save herself in a place where she can be the 'real' Susan, where there are no children, no husband and no household chores. On the one hand, she questions her life before getting married and having children. She rents a hotel room in London. She goes there five days a week and just sits and spends time alone. Room 19, where she stays for a few hours, becomes where she isolates herself. There she does "nothing at all". The following sentence very strikingly sums up the emptiness she falls into when she isolates herself from her family life and roles: "I'm just the same. Yes, here I am, and if I never saw any of my family again, here I would still be ... how very strange that is!" (Lessing, 1994).

Suspecting his wife is cheating on him, Matthew hires a detective and has him follow Susan every day to find out where she's going. When he realizes that Susan is

spending time alone in a hotel room, he forbids her to go to that hotel room again. In this regard the patriarch emerges as the ultimate decision-maker again. Losing this free space, Susan goes to her hotel room for the last time. She knows that Sophie will take her place in her absence. She considers leaving a suicide note behind, but eventually she decides "not to trouble about it, simply not to think about the living." The emptiness and conscious insanity she falls into results in Susan's suicide (Lessing, 1994).

The description of her last moments before her death is of particular importance because of the obscenity implied in it. In her final moments, Susan dies in her hotel room, perhaps thinking about the traces of illicit relationships (with an implication implying her husband's cheating on her): "For the first time since she had been in the room she lay on the hard bed that smelled stale, that smelled of sweat and sex" (Lessing, 1994). In suicide, Susan also finds a way to abstract herself from her family responsibilities and the depression in which she is entrapped as a result of the alienation in her family life. As Kate Millett indicates, it might be said that she discovers the way to emancipate herself from this condition lies in her rejection to patriarchal family life. However, her solution is a self-destructive and self-defeatist one. Yet she enjoys last four hours before she turns on the gas to commit suicide. "She spent them delightfully, darkly, sweetly, letting herself slide gently, gently, to the edge of the river" (Lessing, 1994).

To summarize, these two stories provide us important insights that highlight Kate Millett's analysis of sexual politics in patriarchal family life. Both characters have had problems in reconciling with their duties and roles in this family order. They were shaken to see that they could be replaced even if they were not rebellious and revolutionary characters, and to witness that they were discredited when they could not fulfill their roles mentally or emotionally. It is striking in this respect that their husbands play the role of "diagnosing," "commenting about their character," shutting them down. Their dominance in the family is reinforced to some extent by caregivers, sisters, and other women.

However, it is true that there are certain differences in terms of the periods in which these two stories were written. In the first, it is quite evident that women are deprived of certain fundamental rights. In the second, the problem is experienced on a more sociological and domestic level. But there is a very serious parallel ground in both. And this is the destructive, alienating and isolating effect of the patriarchal family

sphere on women who are trying to cope with it. At this point, it is necessary to keep in mind Gilbert and Gubar's analysis (2006). Gilbert and Gubar have claimed that female writers projected their rebellious and questioning attitudes onto their heroines. However, they state that the image of mad or monstrous woman somehow expresses their inner divisions in their desire to accept and reject the patriarchal society. In other words, this mad woman image in feminist literature was not the antithesis of heroic protagonist, but rather the expression of the anxieties and angers growing within their authors. Considering that Gilman recounts what happened to her as a feminist writer with *The Yellow Wallpaper*, and Lessing wrote her story at a time when traditional family life in the West was questioned, it is quite possible to say that her characters reflect a certain sexual and political preference.

4.2 Woman's Entrapment in Retrospect: The Blind Assassin

Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* takes place between the first and second world wars in terms of time span of the narrative. However, as a work published in 2000, it is possible to say that it looks at the events and status of women in the past with a historical and retrospective eye. Although three fictions intertwined throughout the book complicate some observations, it can be said that in essence, two sisters convey the oppression and alienation processes they experience in the male-dominated world. Again, in this intertwined story, which includes middle-class women, the phenomena of alienation, depression, patriarchal family life and its oppression on women (both physically and psychologically) appear in different ways. In addition, the journey of its protagonist, Iris, provides an interesting comparison with the two stories discussed above.

Although its outlines are tried to be presented in the summary in the second chapter, it is useful to repeat some basic elements in order to carry out the analysis and comparisons in a healthy way. After these, the main breaking moments of the novel and the critical points related to the difficulties experienced by the female characters can be discussed in detail. It should also be noted that while these are being made, the chronological order in the novel will be followed. This is thought to be beneficial so that the analysis can be followed more easily for the readers.

The book mainly consists of a science-fiction work called "*The Blind Assassin*" and memories of Iris, later on, including the events that Iris relates with her sister

Laura's diaries. Since parts of this work are quoted from place to place in the book, it is essential to state its importance in terms of analysis. The science-fiction work is published with Laura's name and takes place in a fictional city named Sakiel-Norn. This work revolves around an illicit love affair between an unnamed blind assassin and a nameless woman. They are only referred to as the "Blind Assassin" and the "Woman." Blind Assassin is a storyteller who recounts his tales to the Woman. He tells her a science fiction story set on the planet Zycron, where a group of rebels is fighting against an oppressive regime. Since the domination of this oppressive regime over women is so emphasized, it can be said that it brings to mind Kate Millett's analysis of the counter-revolutionary period in the interwar period. In addition, the insinuations that Blind Assassin is related to a communist youth, Iris' lover, seem to be a reference to the radical and revolutionary elements who were fighting against fascism in this period. Besides both this dystopian work and the novel itself is the way of expression for Iris' reckoning with the past, herself, her internalized values and patriarchal family life.

Since these elements will be examined in the passages taken from *The Blind Assassin* below, it is also useful to keep the events connected to the chronological process of the novel. Iris and Laura Chase are middle-class sisters whose father owns Chase and Sons Factory. They lost their mother when they were young and their caregiver is the housekeeper Reenie. When their mother dies, the responsibility of the house and the girls falls entirely on Reenie. But Reenie isn't the only one taking on traditional feminine roles. The older sister Iris started to take on the roles that the traditional family assigned to women at an early age. She always has to take care of her little sister, Laura. In the narrative in which she recounts her memories, Iris does not fail to hint to the reader how emotionally draining it is.

In a sense, it can be stated that the responsibilities she assumed with the loss of her mother at a young age and the emotional burden it brought gained a quality that made Iris question her life and push her to seek an identity. Although her younger sister Laura is more fragile, she grows more freely with the protection provided by her sister and becomes a person who behaves according to her emotions. Iris is always more mature. The biggest reason is the responsibilities that fall on her after her mother's death. Another reason is her marriage with a someone fifteen years older than her due to work-related needs of her father.

Although Iris' relationship with her father is very limited, Iris tells us about her father's effort to teach her about family business. For the first time, Iris realizes the limited space in which not being a man has placed her while her father tries to involve her in the business world. After the first wave of the feminist movement, women gained certain economic and representational rights, but they were again confined to their traditional areas, as their being in business life was not welcomed socially. This situation is clearly summarized in the following passage: "At one point, after the death of their mother, the father decides to teach her the family business only when she is about ten years old, and later makes her go to the company every day, where she is exposed to the sullen stares of the company workers. Needless to say, both attempts fail bitterly. Knowing that she can never satisfy her father's standards, since she will not miraculously wake up as a boy one day, Iris is crushed." It is also important in the sense that woman cannot assume roles exclusively belonged to the man and they are bound to entrapped in their gendered roles in this family structure.

After this failed attempt, Iris' father wants his daughter to marry a wealthy businessman named Richard Griffin to save his struggling factory. Thanks to this marriage, the company survives, but the control and assets of the company, of course, pass into the hands of her husband. On the other hand, Laura's opposition to her sister's marriage does not affect any decision. In fact, Iris has already accepted the situation as someone who has started to internalize her responsibilities and role from a long time ago.

A crucial point existing in Gilman's story is also here as well. The villain of novel and the man Iris got married to is not alone in the reproduction of his dominance. Richard's sister Winifred is at least as ruthless and malicious as her brother. In fact, Winifred is someone who guides and mentors her brother Richard on many issues. Richard consults Winifred about everything "because she was the one who sympathized with him, propped him up, encouraged him generally" (Atwood, 2001, p. 352). This reveals the sexual political sphere that presents women who benefit from the continuity of patriarchal policies within the family, not as independent women, but as women who reproduce the male-dominated structure. As a matter of fact, the political personality of Richard and the fact that Winifred, not his wife, Iris, contributed to the production of this personality is clearly seen in the following lines. It also exemplifies Millett's conceptualization of the continuity of sexual politics.

Before Iris, Winifred assumes the reproduction of the family structure as a sister. As Atwood describes her (through Iris' words) Winifred is the one who prepares her brother and promotes his interests. In every decision he made Winifred is the most significant person who whispers cues and suggestions for him. Richard is "the man of the future and the woman standing behind him" (as every successful man has one) is Winifred. After marriage Winifred does not give this status to her brother's wife Iris. As the extension of patriarchal family structure, Winifred is an important reason for Iris' depression and alienation because she is also replaceable as Gilman and Lessing's characters: "She was necessary to Richard, I on the other hand could always be replaced. My job was to open my legs and shut my mouth." This last sentence refers to her reduced role as sexual and trivial object of male dominated sexual politics and its basic unit, family as Millett always indicates (Atwood, 2001, p. 353).

One of the tragic developments for Iris is her experience after her father's death. In fact, Iris has sacrificed herself, in a way, by agreeing to marry Richard in order for her father's business to survive. Richard hides the news of her father's death from Iris. As telegrams from Laura do not reach her, Iris is even excluded from her father's death. Later, she learns that Richard did not comply with the agreement he made with her father, and that Richard deceived her father during the merger. Richard, who is required to keep her father's factory open as per the agreement, closes the factory. So Iris's sacrifice, her self-sacrifice is for nothing. With the death of her father, all the assets inherited from the company pass to Richard.

Another factor that turns the sacrifice made by Iris into a tragedy is that she sees marriage as a salvation from the conditions she is in, but is trapped in a much more terrible relationship. As literary critic Donna Heiland indicates, "it leads to an even grimmer form of entrapment than they knew before. The marriage destroys Chase industries entirely, and nearly destroys not just one but both sisters as well" (Heiland, 2004, p. 167). Trapped in a terrible marriage and unable to save her father's job, Iris's only solace is that she has offered her sister Laura a home. However, later developments will cause Laura to suffer a great disaster as a result of this marriage.

At this point, Heiland's notes on Laura will be useful for our analysis. Comparing Laura with Iris is important in terms of making sense of the impacts of their tragedy. It was mentioned that Laura was brought up more freely than Iris. But Laura

was different from her sister in other important ways: “She is seen as “different” primarily because of her unwillingness – maybe even inability – to engage in the double-talk of life ... Laura functions as an uncanny other to her sister and to Others as well, letting that which has been repressed rise to the surface, or, more accurately, never repressing anything at all” (Heiland, 2004, p. 166). Laura is a character who maintains her purity and rebelliousness against the world around her, what happens around her, people and social norms. She's sincere and does not have any pretensions. This literally turns her into an “other”. It can be said that she is an honest, simple feminine force that should be shut down and feared by the male-dominated world. On the other hand, the fact that her reaction to the events she experiences is different from her sister's lies in her pure nature. Laura is not someone to be controlled, nor is she someone to be raped and oppressed by the patriarchal power.

The difference between two sisters is seen most clearly when Laura proposes to her the night before Iris's marriage to run away and get rid of her burden. Iris rejects Laura's proposal, but in this refusal, besides her love for Laura, there is also her discomfort with her. Because Laura's perception of the world and her honesty and the way she expresses her feelings and emotions are against the world to which Iris is attuned. Iris legitimizes her cowardice and meekness to herself under the guise of virtue and self-sacrifice. Laura's efforts to shake this perception arouse great anger in Iris. One dialogue between two sisters could be interpreted as two alternative reactions to male dominated world. While Iris prefers to be conform with it Laura chooses to be outside of this world yet she sees Iris' choice as a passive obedience or unconscious existence where Iris says “Leave me alone, I've got my eyes open” and she responds as “like a sleepwalker” (Atwood, 2001, p. 253).

But a great tragedy causes Iris to free herself from this ideal womanhood: Laura's rape and impregnation by her husband Richard, Laura's confinement to an institution and forced abortion, and ultimately her suicide. The event that triggers Laura's suicide is the news of the death of her beloved communist writer (who is also the inspiration for the Blind Assassin persona) Alex Thomas.

The male-dominated world that hurt Laura and Iris is at home. Intimidated by threats from the outside world throughout their childhood, and taking advice from their caregivers, Rennie, against outside rapists and bad boys, the girls are eventually

subjected to rape and oppression in their own homes. This shows how the ideal family life put before the chaste woman actually, as Millett states, how a systematic social pressure is institutionalized on women. It is Richard who harms them, driving Laura into madness and destruction, and imprisoning Iris in a meaningless life.

After Richard gets Laura pregnant, he puts her in a mental institution. He legitimizes this decision by citing her characteristics and citing the severe depression she experienced after systematic rapes. His sister Winifred is also involved in this plan, and one of their aims is to have Laura an abortion at this institute. Laura, who is not a compatible person like Iris, is shown as a crazy woman. The fact that the head of the family closed her in a mental hospital is a motif that the patriarchal power uses a lot and is seen in other two stories. The way of the power that reproduces patriarchal sexual policies to deal with problematic women is to ignore and close them. First, this woman is shown as mentally disturbed. After diagnosis, a suitable place is found to turn it off and it is guaranteed that it will not be heard again. This power structure and the family life that it defines can only be maintained smoothly if such women are entrapped and isolated.

As mentioned above, Laura's death and learning of her sister's experiences shatter the shell that Iris has built for herself. It leads her to radically question her own life and make moves to change it. The relationship between the man Laura fell in love with, Alex Thomas, and Iris is also part of this questioning. Alex Thomas is also a factor that unites two sisters. Both women loved him. At this point in the novel, we learn that Iris' daughter Aimee is actually Alex's daughter, not Richard's. Iris begins to yearn to pass on this secret that Richard and Winifred never learned to her granddaughter Sabrina. For this reason, she writes her experiences and leaves them to her grandchildren. The reason she left it to her granddaughter is that after Richard's death, Winifred kept this patriarchal core of power alive and made her daughter Aimee an enemy against her mother.

To sum up, Iris, in a way, survives this tragedy by writing and passing on her experiences as a historical narrative to new generations. The act of writing, as Cixous emphasizes above, is the way to explore herself as a means of expressing her desires, hidden truths and aspirations. For Iris it is first of all a critical reckoning with her past. Also it has a political function because it analyzes her own internalization of traditional

values and the suffocating/alienating structure of male-dominated family life with its political structure desubjectifying women or in Winifred's case transforming them into the shadow and representative of male power. In a way, Iris also impartially conveys the role she plays in maintaining the patriarchal power structure. As Atwood stated in her interviews, it can be said that she takes into account the accumulating criticisms in the feminist movement with a "realistic" attitude rather than a "feminist" one. Because, in addition to the image of the woman (Laura) who went crazy and committed suicide, we witness a woman (Iris) who is both a victim and a part of this process, coming to terms with it and criticizing the process through writing.

4.3 Relations Between Metaphors, History and Present: Excerpts from The Blind Assassin In the Light of Sexual Politics

Now we can continue our analysis through certain quotations in the book. The fictional work with the same name in *The Blind Assassin* presents the traces of the phenomena discussed throughout the book in a metaphorical sense. On the other hand, the book itself embodies Iris's effort to reexamine her past and analyze herself in the present by comparing herself to Laura. Then, in order to make more comprehensive comparisons with the stories, it is useful to go through the metaphors, the narrative patterns woven between past and present. Of course, while doing these, the above conceptual and theoretical perspective is taken into consideration.

The science-fiction work in *The Blind Assassin*, which we later learned was written by Iris, not by Laura, and published under Laura's name, is actually very important in terms of making metaphorical references to sister's lives and world which they live in. Looking at the subtexts, it can be said that the dystopian world described in *The Blind Assassin* focuses on the life of Iris and Laura and the situation of women in general.

One of them is about noble Snilfard families sacrificing one of their daughters at the beginning of the novel. This immediately brings to mind the sacrifice of Iris for her father. On the other hand, since corrupted and twisted girls were considered an insult to their Goddess, Snilfards mutilated and disfigured their daughters to save them. However, this was a solution that upper-class families would resort to. When the lower classes attempted to take similar measures, their daughters were only counted as worthy

of brothels. At the same time, noble Snilfard families took slave girls and used them as sacrifices in place of their legitimate daughters. Because they were so powerful, they were welcome to bend the divine rules. But over time, noble families became lazy. They stopped raising the girls in their own homes and preparing them for sacrifice, and they gave them to the Temple of the Goddess in exchange for money. Sacrificed girls continued to add prestige to their families. The depictions here shed light on the real world and the life of Iris and Laura, to the extent that they metaphorically describe the fate of girls waiting to be sacrificed to other men in a male-dominated world.

However, as can be seen from the depiction from the novel within Atwood's novel, it also makes it easier to understand confinement of women under the command of patriarchal family structure in the context of Millett's concepts. In these world women's confinement has a sacred characteristic. Dedicated girls are prisoned inside temples and sacrificed after they are trained. Their Goddess is the deity of "absence and silence, unfulfilled love and unexpressed regret and wordlessness". The similarity between the qualities of their goddess and those of our heroines from three works is quite striking. In a sense, each of them is the incarnation of this goddess in the novel within *The Blind Assassin*" (Atwood, 2001, p. 38).

The fact that the songs they sing for the goddess are about silence and deprivation, about unlive love and wordlessness, speaks volumes. There is no cultural, ideological or political element that will give them an identity on this plane where women are closed. In fact, the blind assassin in this narrative, while talking to the woman, states that what he tells her is based on real historical events. In other words, what is being described is not just a dystopia, but a systematic practice of closure and sacrifice of women from past to this date. *Blind Assassin* (perhaps because he is the persona of communist Alex) wants to destroy this structure, but as it will be seen later, it will also be insufficient.

It is clear that the fictional book within the novel has a radically critical voice. As a matter of fact, after the first passage taken from *Blind Assassin*, Iris' hesitations and internal conflicts about publishing this book are very important in terms of her struggle to find her confinement throughout the novel. The narrative, which is in a way critical and radical, seems to be attributed to Laura, who does not fit into the middle-class patriarchal family structure. However, the person who had this book published on

behalf of her sister was Iris, who adapted to this structure and sacrificed herself. This contradiction paves the way for her effort to break Richard and Winifred's chains through metaphors in her own historical and fictional work.

For the first time, Iris reveals her inner conflicts to us while sharing with us how people perceive Laura and her work named after her. She emphasizes that Laura's courage and dedication to her goals is much talked about, but her death and the book are not mentioned at all. Although years have passed since her suicide and the publication of the novel, "it retains its aura of brimstone and taboo." The excerpt below shows that the book is something as forbidden and obscene as free sexual relations. It says a lot about a male-dominated world that forbids sexuality and freedom from the world of women. Clergy, public libraries and bookstores come together to forbid and censor this book (Atwood, 2001, p. 48).

When we later learn that Iris wrote the novel, it is striking to listen to her inner voice that initially regretted publishing the novel. She thinks that she is disrespecting her family's name. She states that she wishes to be measured and quiet. It is obvious from the very first moments that there is a great tension between the quiet and submissive Iris and the author of the novel, Iris. In the conclusion part of the novel we find Iris in a very different state of mind. Yet here, she regrets for allowing her family "to be dishonoured and along with them the entire town" because of this book. At first Iris is still the compliant member of the society and sexual-political sphere she lives in. Even though she has suffered from alienation and isolation she thinks that she should have protected her sister's memory and "put a match to the manuscript" (Atwood, 2001, p. 49).

It is with these questions that Iris begins to write her past. She is not sure for whom she is writing her past in the first place. As she cannot think of herself in the future, she cannot think of a stranger reading the lines she wrote after her death. As we will see later, Iris, who managed to escape and started an effort for telling the truth, will leave these lines to her grandchild. But at the beginning of everything, in 1929, there were only two people: her sister and Laura herself. Laura would borrow everything from Iris and break it effortlessly. Iris would always forgive her and has no choice other than that because she has no one but Laura. As a matter of fact, her loss will push Iris to confront her confinement in her marriage.

The lines in which Laura is first introduced to us we learn her ulterior and direct personality, as emphasized above. She has always retained that characteristic of young children from the very beginning: “believed words meant what they said” (Atwood, 2001, p. 96). But she always carried it to extremes. An important anecdote for understanding Laura is that when she talks a lot, her caregivers take a word Reenie said to her as fact and act as an idiom: “She once told Laura to bite her tongue because that would keep the questions from coming out, and after that Laura couldn't 't chew for days” (Atwood, 2001, p. 96).

On the other hand, the narrative about the world view and target of the assassin character in *The Blind Assassin* can be read as a feminist criticism of the communist and socialist movements of the period. Because the assassin's struggle against the rich and noble classes does not bring very important gains in terms of women's liberation. Of course, it should be noted that this determination was made retrospectively from the position of the author. It emerges in the subtext that Atwood is conscious of the criticisms leveled at the first and second wave feminist movements.

In addition, the apathy and hatred of the assassin bears a content that brings to mind the criticisms of third wave feminism directed at radical feminist movements. In this case the target of criticism is the hierarchical narrative of first and second wave feminism. It shows itself in the assassin's state of mind because he feels “nothing about the death he is about to inflict”. He hates rich and powerful people (perhaps referring power holding capitalist class) yet he considers entrapped women as “little more than a decorated and bejewelled prisoner.” He just wants to do his job (assassinate) and do not care the fate of those women. In a sense it criticizes the dominant emancipatory narrative as advocated by socialist and radical intellectuals (especially when we consider the blind assassin character as an incarnation of Alex and his communist ideology). On the flipside it shows the necessity for women to emancipate themselves with their own theoretical and practical efforts, rejecting hierarchical and power-oriented agendas (Atwood, 2001, p. 146).

Iris' puberty and growth left a deep wound in her heart, a development that disturbed her father. Her father's first discomfort with her and his trying to regulate his daughter came into the being with her growing up. He has become involved in her way of speaking, her posture, and in general all her manners and movements. She was compelled to wear simple and plain clothes, and to wear uniform-like clothes. At the

end of the list of things is sexuality. Women are brought up in isolation from their own sexuality during puberty. "My shoulders should be straight, with no slouching. I should not sprawl, chew gum, fidget, or chatter. The values he required were those of the army: neatness, obedience, silence, and no evident sexuality. ...Sexuality, although it was never spoken of, was to be nipped in the bud" (Atwood, 2001, p. 173).

The reactions that Iris experienced and saw during her first period reveal this situation more clearly. Iris associated this condition with a kind of sickness and punishment. Her caregiver, Reenie, has a role in this, as well as her father, who would raise them like boys if possible. Reenie's saying "It's the curse" on the day of her period is a comment implying that femininity is something cursed. In Iris' words, "she stopped short of saying that it was yet one more peculiar arrangement of God's, devised to make life disagreeable: it was just the way things were, she said" (Atwood, 2001, p. 174). This attitude is also in line with Reenie's depictions of girls or women. Reenie recommends that they always be inert. Ideal woman "would be magically deprived of the ability to scream or move. She would be transfixed, she would be paralyzed—with shock, or outrage, or shame" (Atwood, 2001, p. 216).

No one helps Iris on the day of her period. However, when Laura sees the blood on the bedspreads, she begins to cry and concludes that Iris will die, just like her mother. Initially, Iris thought she would die too. With the lesson she learned from Reenie that day, Iris immediately takes a mature attitude towards Laura. She intends to internalize being a woman. She tells Laura not to speak stupid.

Personal trainers are also hired by Iris and Laura's fathers and caregivers so that they are brought up within certain patterns and boundaries. An instructor would shape them in terms of knowledge and skills, a practice unique to middle-upper class families of the period. However, an incident between Laura, who is still a child, and this trainer is important in that it depicts the rigid sexual walls drawn between adults and children. Although the female body is open to unlimited shaping in the hands of her husband and father, the child's body, which has not yet become a woman, is especially closed to the sexual pleasures of adults. However, it is not closed to humiliation and belittlement. The observations made by their trainer, Mr. Erskine, after he gave the girls to measure their knowledge and intelligence show this: "He then told Father that we had the brains of insects or marmots. ... We had developed slothful mental habits—we had been

allowed to develop them, he added reprovingly. Happily, it was not too late” (Atwood, 2001, p. 175).

Her father gave authority to Mr. Erskine to shape them. While training them, Mr. Erskine may even resort to verbal and physical violence. Especially Laura, who is younger and independent, has many problems with Mr. Erskine and is exposed to his anger. However, as implied above, the incident between Laura and Mr. Erskine that led to Mr. Erskine's expulsion shows us where the line is drawn. This boundary is revealed in the transition between physical violence and sexual harassment against the disobedient Laura.

Most importantly, Laura irritates Mr. Erskine due to her behaviors negating his authority over her. Even though he physically punishes misbehaving Laura, she continues to renounce her authority, which enrages him. However, Laura realizes something else in these physical punishments and interference. She tells her elder sister, “It doesn’t matter whether I annoy him or not. ... Anyway, he’s not annoyed. He only wants to put his hand up by blouse.” Here the male authority shows itself not only as the punisher/discipliner but also as the one who reduces womanhood into a sexual object. When Laura does not believe what her sister says she gives details about his harassment in a very calm way. Laura cannot believe a grownup man could do such a thing a little girl. After they tell this situation to Reenie, the family get rid of Mr. Erskine. In this case, their young age and family saves them. Later, when they get married or become adolescent we’ll see they won’t be such lucky (Atwood, 2001, p. 179).

Knowing the innocent and naive nature of Laura from previous pages, we would not think that what she said about Mr. Erskine was a lie. As a matter of fact, Reenie believed him and transferred this situation to their father. Mr. Erskine then accepted his fate in a shaken state, even though he said he was innocent. Of course, Laura welcomes the situation, as she wants to get rid of Mr. Erskine because of the violence she has suffered. But the reason we cite the above passage in its entirety is because Iris did not believe her sister. She tries to internalize the norms and rules so much that he cannot fathom that a grown man would do this to a little girl. Then a similar situation will once again come before Iris in a very different context (in Laura's pregnancy).

As mentioned above, Iris agrees to sacrifice herself for her father and her father's business by marrying Richard. Her father owes his entire existence to the fact that his

factories got out of the difficult situation and became active again. He sees himself as the "commander" of the workers he employs at the factory, which he refers to as "my men". So when he loses it, he will perish. On the other hand, he sees this as essential to ensure the future of her daughters. He clarifies the situation to his daughter Iris as follows: "What he was saying was that unless I married Richard, we wouldn't have any money. What he was also saying was that the two of us—me, and especially Laura—would never be able to fend for ourselves."

With this decision, Richard's sister Winifred is involved in the novel and the lives of the girls. Although Winifred, Richard's advisor and mentor, is a woman, she is the spokesperson and reproducer of male-dominated power. She says from the very beginning that Iris and Laura lack the charming quality that women should have. Iris modestly accepts this criticism and disdain. They are women whose feminine traits have been suppressed because of the way her father and Reenie raised her. But in the end, because they were not men, they had to be married, be charming, and endear themselves to men. Winifred, the sister of the man she is going to marry, tells her all this.

The meaning of Iris's marriage was emphasized above, but here the confrontations that this decision caused between Laura and Iris need to be specifically addressed. One of them is when Laura opposes Iris' marriage. The other is when Laura asks Iris to run away. Both show us Iris's acceptance of her destiny and her reactions to the disturbances caused by Laura who defies this acceptance. While Laura sees her marriage as a "malicious whim at best," Iris thinks that she might be envious of her. There is a lack of communication between two sisters because Iris conforms her role in traditional family life like Susan and the narrator from the above stories. Laura highlights her sister's young age but she compares herself with their mother. When she got married she was eighteen and Iris is nineteen. Laura expresses her sadness and cries but the lack of communication between them disables Iris to understand the entrapment which she voluntarily accepts (Atwood, 2001, p. 252).

In fact, Laura draws attention to something abnormal, she wants to save her sister from the tragedies that will happen to her. But Iris is in a mood to think that her sister is even jealous of her. Crying also bothers her, and she thinks that she should be the one who should be upset, because she is the one making the sacrifice. The moment when Iris tells her sister to run is also very critical. She says "It's not too late. You could run away tonight and leave a note. I'd come with you." Yet Iris insists that she is old

enough to know what she's doing. The sexual characteristic of male-dominated family structure or sexual-political character of family as Millett points out shows itself in Laura's respond: "But you'll have to let him touch you, you know. It's not just kissing" (Atwood, 2001, p. 253). Since Laura gets familiarized those sexual touches with harassment of Mr. Erskine she is nervous.

Actually, here Laura is emphasizing something to her sister that we also see in Kate Millett's analysis. Knowing that she will be the slave of her husband's bodily and spiritual desires when she gets married, Laura presents a different level of interpretation to her sister's narrative of self-sacrifice. But Iris is determined not to listen. It is particularly striking when Iris tells her that she is a sleepwalker when she says she has opened her eyes. Actually, Iris has no identity outside her roles and responsibilities in patriarchal family structures. She just wanders around like sleepwalkers in the male-dominated world that ignores her.

Iris's search for something meaningful is again revealed to us with the influence of Winifred in her life. In a way, Winifred has taken the place of her father and Reenie in this respect. Thinking that she should have a hobby, Iris starts gardening with Winifred's encouragement. But Winifred, just like her trainer and caregiver, despises her for her incompetence: "She'd decided I should start with a rock garden, because even if I killed the plants the rocks would still be there. Not much you can do to kill a rock, she'd joked. She'd sent over what she called three reliable men, who were to do the digging and the arranging of the rocks, so that I could then plant things." She can't even do this hobby alone. Male servants need to help her. For the first time, Iris begins to realize that she wants to change something. The fact that she cannot determine her hobbies and life pursuits by her own will has brought her to this point. She started gardening at Winifred's request, but knew nothing about it. Iris, who does not even find the freedom to cry out of desperation, is in an impasse. The reason she couldn't cry was because she thought about the status she would lose in the male-dominated world: "I'd felt like crying, but cry once and it's all over: if you cry, the reliable men will despise you, and then they will not be reliable any more" (Atwood, 2001, p. 315). This comment reminds us of the narrator from *The Yellow Wallpaper* and Susan from *To Room Nineteen*. Weakness and feminine pursuits are what destroy the image of the reliable woman in the world of men and produce the image of the crazy and hysterical woman.

Her husband, Richard, can't console Iris either. In fact, as time passes, she feels that she knows Richard less and less. It's like Richard is always withdrawing himself. The only person he listens to and is close to is Winifred, who looks down on Iris and despises her. However, Richard's failure to tell Iris about her father's death and his views on women put him in a great estrangement within the marriage. Richard implicitly makes her feel like a worthless being. Examples of women's comments on hair loss are: "After my showers, my removal of bristles, my brushings and combings, I was now careful to remove any hairs from the floor. I would lift the little wads of hair from the drains of tub or sink and flush them down the toilet, because Richard had casually remarked that women were always leaving hair around. Like shedding animals, was the implication" (Atwood, 2001, p. 338).

His classifications of women also hide hints that he cheated on her on a regular basis. Richard "says women could be divided into apples and pears, according to the shapes of their bottoms". Iris questions this within herself, but doesn't dwell on it too much as she is a compatible person: "How did he know? How did he know, about the pears and the apples and the shed hair? Who were these women, these other women? Aside from a surface curiosity, I did not much care" (Atwood, 2001, p. 338). In fact, there is a side that sexually objectifies women in these comments. But the most important thing is the efforts of the male-dominated world to make women identifiable, manageable and meaningful by putting them into certain patterns.

Richard's attitude towards Laura is also imperious and authoritative. It's almost like a father figure. On the other hand, her scolding of Laura as "young lady" also touched Iris. She knows subconsciously that she is also exposed to the same domineering and authoritarian male power. "The young lady made me nervous. It was a reproach, as if there were something wrong with being young, and also with being a lady. If so, it was a reproach that included me" (Atwood, 2001, p. 348). She is also unconsciously aware that her husband Richard is responsible for her father's death. Laura told herself, "Richard killed Father, I can't live in his house. It's wrong," she reluctantly shows that Richard was aware that his actions had caused her father's death: "That's not really fair. Father died because of an unfortunate combination of circumstances" (Atwood, 2001, p. 348).

Laura's pressure and Richard's rapes, as we will learn later, increased Laura's fears and strengthened her desire to escape. But Iris continued to appease her sister,

advising them to move on with their lives, either unaware of what was going on or accepting this oppressive family life. Iris realized how naive she was when she went back and told them. However, she realizes that everyone can degenerate in this family order (in the words of Millett, she can ensure the reproduction of this sexual political structure). First she thought that she could cope with Winifred and Richard. She uses tiger and mouse metaphor to explain this corruption. Not only she couldn't understand they were tigers but also she couldn't see she could be tiger herself. Unequal relations between genders lead women to be one of so to speak "tigers", sharing power with men (Atwood, 2001, p. 349).

However, neither Laura nor Iris are tigers. Both are prey in their patriarchal family life. Iris is actually sexually assaulted by her husband every night. Then we learn that the same thing happened to Laura. Even if Iris gets hurt these nights, it's her own fault. Richard blames her for being easily hurt. Also, Iris gives this attitude to his tendency to conquer. Besides, it is clear that she is disturbed and is aware that her body and soul are harmed. Every day she takes shower in order to get rid of Richard's scent and his marks from the previous night. Richard, even in bed prefers "conquest to cooperation." She always gets up with bruises, purple, blue or yellow. Even the injuries are Iris' fault since he says "it is remarkable how easily she is bruised ... He had never known a woman to bruise so easily" (Atwood, 2001, p. 391). In other words men are free to do anything to their possession (including woman they get married or under their roof).

Iris first observes her husband Richard's desire to please Laura and explore her. According to Iris, Richard sees Laura as a puzzle. She attributes his interest in Laura to his exploratory and conquering desires. She "catches him looking at her at odd moments, in much the same way as he looked at the stock-market pages" (Atwood, 2001, p. 401). As can be understood from this, the head of the family acts on a ground where he will dominate men and women and reduce them to subordinate status politically. The parallelism between their economic and political activities and their movements against women stems from this. There are traces of this in the fact that women themselves can be dispensable than the roles that fall on women in the stories above.

Winifred and Richard get full control of the arrangements for Laura's life. The two of them make plans for Laura without her consent. Although Iris warns them about this, the possibility of influencing their decisions is almost nil. While Winifred makes

plans for the way she introduces Laura to high society, her main goal is to get rid of her: by a strategic marriage. Winifred meets Iris privately for this and tells them to plan a "stratagem" for Laura together. Winifred's plan is to find a rich and stupid husband for a troubled woman like Laura: "The best that could be hoped for Laura, all things considered—she continued—was that some nice rich man would bite the bullet and propose to her, and march her off to the altar. Better still, some nice, rich, stupid man, who wouldn't even see there was a bullet to be bitten until it was too late."

What Winifred says to persuade Iris is that being a maverick is a big risk in the world of men. According to Winifred, all men are "mean sex, whether they know it or not". Laura's attitude "could get a girl like her in a lot of trouble" (Atwood, 2001, p. 442). While Iris is optimistic, Winifred is pessimistic. She emphasizes that men will take advantage of girls who are in the middle of nowhere. All they need "is some greasy little Romeo. That would cook her goose" (Atwood, 2001, p. 442). The obscene terms here always serve to include women in this male order and to make them passive. When Iris asks what should be done in the face of these suggestions, Winifred restates that she should get Laura get married. She says that after marriage, if it's love she wants, she can search for it freely. However, while Winifred gives her these advice, Iris does not yet know that Laura was raped by Richard.

In the process of searching for her identity, Iris finds her escape route, albeit temporarily, in her relationship with Alex and gets pregnant by him. But she waits to tell Richard that she is pregnant by him not Alex. Richard responds that this is already expected of Iris. During this period, Laura also became pregnant as a result of Richard's rape. She learns from Winifred and Richard that her sister is pregnant. They lie to Iris, saying they don't know who its father is. They do not even believe that she is pregnant, they think that Laura is crazy. Laura also refuses to tell, in order not to harm Iris' marriage, and because she is sure that Iris is actually trapped in this marriage. Winifred and Richard's attitudes that make Laura question her sanity are an attempt to hide their own guilt. On the other hand, they aim to reduce it to a medical case. So they can get rid of her and put her in a mental hospital. Laura is also hysterical as our other heroines from two stories and she deserves to be locked up in a medical institution with decision of men. Nevertheless, Winifred finds manipulating Iris necessary: "The mental specialist said that Laura must be insanely jealous of you... Jealous of everything about you; she wants to be living your life, she wants to be you and this is the form it's taken"

(Atwood, 2001, p. 450). Winifred uses the status and privileges of her family, particularly her brother, as the source of manipulation to turn Iris to her sister.

Winifred denigrates Laura to Iris, saying that she has always been jealous of her and wants her life. When Iris compares herself to Laura's situation, she sees herself as a woman who has everything. Because when the norms are exceeded, a woman loses her right to make decisions even on her body. This dire situation prevents Iris from getting in the way of things planned for Laura.

Iris' inner conflict over Laura's situation comes to a point where she questions whether she is insane or not. Iris knows that her sister has always been very naive, pure and untrue. On the other hand, she thinks that maybe she wanted to share the pregnancy because she shared everything that belonged to her throughout her life (as they shared Alex and Richard). However, if this inference was correct, it was impossible for her to be lying about the pregnancy, so she couldn't be making it up. The conclusion was that Winifred and Richard were lying, that Laura was in her right mind. However, this opened the door to another questioning. If she was pregnant and in trouble, why hadn't she come to Iris and asked for help? Perhaps she did so out of consideration for the delicate situation she was in. But Iris knew that the life she was trapped inside was breaking her bond with Laura. As seen before, Laura had begged her repeatedly not to marry, and to run away after they were married.

She thought that if she was pregnant, the father should be Alex Thomas, but that was impossible because Alex had been with her. Iris, who has imprisoned herself in the structure she is in, sees Laura for the first time as an unknown person in front of her. In fact, this is a new step for Iris into unknown lands in her effort to find her own identity: "She had become unknown to me, as unknown as the inside of your own glove is unknown when your hand is inside it. She was with me all the time, but I couldn't look at her. I could only feel the shape of her presence: a hollow shape, filled with my own imaginings" (Atwood, 2001, p. 462). Her conclusion that she does not know Laura actually opens the door to a conclusion about herself. She evaluated her sister from the point of view that she took from herself, in fact her father, Reenie, and the patriarchal family structure in general.

In the moments when the effort to get rid of Iris' alienation and depression intensifies, we encounter the episode titled "Yellow Curtains" taken from *Blind*

Assassin. This chapter is very interesting in many ways. In terms of the argument here, there are many points that connect it metaphorically and formally with the stories discussed above. We have seen above that the world in which *Blind Assassin* takes place is a dystopian place that ignores women. Here, the Woman character decides to become free by sacrificing everything and everyone she has. The metaphor of a room and a yellow curtain comes to the fore. The room is the place where the woman will be liberated, the curtains are what she will reflect the first step to emancipation so to speak. In *To Room Nineteen* and *The Yellow Wallpapers*, the elements associated with the isolation, closure, and insanity of women transform here into an element of self-affirmation and liberation (or more accurately their possibility).

This woman dreams of buying a room with the money she will get by pawning everything. This room is more than a shelter to escape a meaningless and miserable life. It is a plane that allows for escape from the source of her depressed life. Like Susan she wants to rent a room, not inexpensive nor dingy. She also plans to settle accounts with her previous life and rejects that order altogether. They could hire lawyers, threaten or punish her but she'll never give up (Atwood, 2001, p. 462). As emphasized by Millett, the first step of women's emancipation runs through the rejection of patriarchal family life and its social structures.

She will survive by eating crackers if necessary. The desire to be free is very strong. So is the desire to construct a memory for oneself. The dream of the yellow curtains she will sew in her room reflects this metaphorically. A whole lot of other items follow her. Contrary to the yellow wallpaper in which the woman is confined and then finds her way out, we switch to the yellow curtains that the woman will create by reflecting her own life energy. Since the woman herself will sew those yellow curtains for her house. It will be yellow because it would give a cheerful, sunshine like air to her habitat. She needs to learn how to sew something but it is no problem. Before she has never maintained a household by herself but she is ready to do it without depending on men and their burden on her (Atwood, 2001, p. 462). In this significant passage, Atwood follows up the intellectual traces of first and second wave feminism. The room that a woman owns for herself (first wave) and the emancipation of patriarchal family (second wave) are strong elements at this point. Atwood emphasizes the autonomy of woman here because from now on she will decide to arrange everything in the house from stencils to towels, sheets and pillowcases. Even though she is a realist writer and

sometimes retrospectively criticizes previous feminist lines of thought with the intellectual culmination of third wave feminism, she adopts these elements as important achievements of previous generations.

More interestingly, this room and curtain dreams are not parts of a plan by which she isolates herself from the whole world. She also plans to buy radio and telephone. She wants to learn about the developments in the world and to freely connect with people outside, even if she has no one to call on her phone at first. In other words, she does not close herself in an individual dream alone. She puts a huge pool of possibilities in front of herself. She intends to evolve, open up and discover herself. However, in the dystopian world she lives in, none of this comes easy. This also applies to the real world in which Laura and Iris live: “None of this happens, of course. Or it does happen, but not so you would notice. It happens in another dimension of space” (Atwood, 2001, p. 486).

After this interesting and important metaphor-filled episode, we find Iris ready to tackle with Richard, Winifred and what they represent. Their relationship steadily deteriorated after Laura was confined to an institute. While she is having one miscarriage after another, Richard gets himself new mistresses all the time. Each new mistress of Richard is younger, more beautiful, younger than the previous one. While gifts and flowers go to these girls, she is kept aside as the "official wife". Iris mentions her disregard and the meaninglessness of her marriage more and more, but when questioning why they did not get divorced, she conveys how a lie patriarchal family life is, with the following political statement: “Divorced men did not become leaders of their countries, not in those days” (Atwood, 2001, p. 500). In a way, this politicized family institution, in which a certain gender was oppressed, had to maintain a certain appearance for dignity and prestige. As emphasized by Millett, every move of the woman to distort this image would give her political power. Iris has realized this: “This situation gave me a certain amount of power, but it was power only if I did not exercise it. In fact it was power only if I pretended to know nothing” (Atwood, 2001, p. 500).

Then, as outlined above, Laura leaves the institute and confronts her sister. She invites her to get rid of this order and home she still lives in. Iris cannot find the strength to do this herself. But learning the truth behind Laura's experiences will move her into action. Laura says that Richard and Winifred made herself look crazy and locked herself

in that institute to avoid a scandal. Unlike Iris, the fact that she is a maverick scared them.

The place where she describes what happened to the baby, namely the abortion, is striking in terms of showing how the female body is dehumanized. Iris describes the procedure as a mechanic operation by using the word “extraction”: “They conk you out with ether, like the dentist. Then they take out the babies. Then they tell you you’ve made the whole thing up. Then when you accuse them of it, they say you’re a danger to yourself and others” (Atwood, 2001, p. 508). The woman who is pushed out of the norm is open to any kind of intervention. There is no chance to resist and oppose it. When she objects and criticizes, she is said to be a threat to herself and indeed to society.

Learning the truth, Iris takes matters into her own hands after Laura's death. To our surprise, she does something what other protagonists of the above stories could not. Taking the reins, she rebels against Winifred, Richard and the order they've created. Now the only precious asset she has in life is her daughter Aimee. She openly threatens Richard and Winifred, saying that if she is harmed, she will cause a big scandal. However, she did not destroy this order and keeps silent in return for securing the girl and her financial situation. She was also recklessly accused and criticized by Winifred for embarking on such a struggle. In the end, there is an Iris who decides to write about her experiences and regrets her silence in the last parts of the novel.

Officially, Laura had been papered over. A few years more and it would be almost as if she'd never existed. I shouldn't have taken a vow of silence, I told myself. What did I want? Nothing much. Just a memorial of some kind. But what is a memorial, when you come right down to it, but a commemoration of wounds endured? Endured, and resented. Without memory, there can be no revenge (Atwood, 2001, p. 530).

Although Iris resisted and found emancipation, this is an incomplete freedom. Because she did not destroy the patriarchal power structure that stood her, in a way it provided an individual escape. But she is still filled with a desire to take revenge and reckon with the past (including her own passivity, that is, self-criticism). The way to do this is to keep memories alive. Here, the act of writing turns into an important tool in the hands of a woman. After all, as feminist thinkers always repeat, writing and academic pursuits have been the privilege of men for thousands of years. Women need

a memory of their own in order to come to terms with the past, and writing provides this.

This act of writing that ultimately gives Iris her own narrative and a step to construct herself on her own with her newly found empowerment: “I wrote it myself, during my long evenings alone, when I was waiting for Alex to come back, and then afterwards, once I knew he wouldn't. I didn't think of what I was doing as writing—just writing down. What I remembered, and also what I imagined, which is also the truth. I thought of myself as recording. A bodiless hand, scrawling across a wall.” As Iris admits, the author of the book is not alone. It was written with Laura. What she started as a memorial has turned into a process that unites the two. Laura is part of the spiritual creation process, while Iris has written down her memories and criticisms along with her self-criticisms as stated above: “The real author was neither one of us: a fist is more than the sum of its fingers” (Atwood, 2001, p. 535).

Iris finally tells who the book was written for: for her granddaughter Sabrina as we know it. Because she is the person who will live and have the opportunity to build a life free from the experiences of past generations. Sabrina's legacy does not come from the likes of Winifred and Richard. Her real grandfather is Alex Thomas, and Alex does not come from a noble family. Therefore, Sabrina's past and future are a sea of unlimited possibilities: “Your real grandfather was Alex Thomas, and as to who his own father was, well, the sky's the limit. Rich man, poor man, beggar-man, saint, a score of countries of origin, a dozen cancelled maps, a hundred leveled villages—take your pick. Your legacy from him is the realm of infinite speculation. You're free to reinvent yourself at will” (Atwood, 2001, p. 536). The last piece of advice she gives Sabrina is very important. She says she is free to re-create herself, to construct a life and identity as she wishes. In a way, we come across one of the most important messages of the third wave feminist movement. The woman is free to rebuild everything, including her own identity. In previous stories, their desires to have a room of her own, to have a legal identity, to be a woman free from responsibilities in the family, goes even further.

5. CONCLUSION

As stated at the beginning, the struggle to overcome isolation and alienation that women's confinement brings in the patriarchal social order has been one of the important themes of feminist literary criticism. In this quest, the pain, expectations and anxieties of women, who face the pressures of the male-dominated order, the meaninglessness of the norms they internalize, and the discrimination they suffer from a new perspective, are reflected in the female characters the female writers create. Historically, the course of this search also reflects the pressing problems that the feminist movement has focused on in its struggles and the transformations in the structure of these problems over time. Works written in different periods and describing women have expressed different concerns and expectations.

However, the norms imposed by the male-dominated family structure and patriarchal society continued to exert their pressure on the body, mind and life of woman, despite being stretched to a certain extent. This ensures certain continuity and discontinuity in the criticisms of women writers and their characters in literary works. In this sense, just as the historical transformations of the feminist movement in different waves provide the explanation of certain differences, the theoretical-conceptual contributions to feminist thought and literary criticism make it easier to follow these continuities. The theoretical approaches, concepts and analytical methods Millett propose shed light on our analysis in the present study and they are important examples of these contributions.

As a sub-type of female characters who go out of the norm is a very powerful figure. Contrary to radical and revolutionary female characters, accepting existing norms, internalizing them, silently sacrificing or devoting themselves to the male-dominated order turns their spiritual-mental fractures into a more interesting read. As Gilbert and Gubar stated, this situation also gives important ideas about the moods of the women writers who created them in their historical, social and political planes. However, this study has primarily focused on Millett's analysis on sexual politics and uneven relations between sexes in traditional patriarchal family. Women characters' confinement and their struggles to overcome the desperation and alienation that brings have become the focal point of this study. Their effort to overcome this confinement are not the product of conscious choice and systematic practices. As a result of this mad,

divergent or monstrous women figures could also gain prominence in these narratives but the common ground in all of these stories is the patriarchal order and its pressures on women. Also the result of not being able to fulfill their roles and functions in the "sexual-political" plane that they have internalized is being confined, marginalized, and reduced to an out-of-norm cases with medical diagnoses. The way of internalization also comes to the forefront because in all of these narratives some other woman assumes the roles and responsibilities of domestic life when our protagonists become dysfunctional and this situation aggravates their alienation, confinement and political desubjectification.

When we look at the analyzes made on the narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Susan Rawlings in *To Room Nineteen*, and Iris-Laura sisters in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Blind Assassin*, it is seen that there are differences between periods and continuity between same periods as mentioned above. The narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper* lives in a time when women do not have legal and political rights yet. This situation is clearly seen in her institutionalization process. Even though the story itself does not revolve around women's struggle for suffrage and political rights it is partly relevant to first wave feminism since the narrator in the story does not have any legal rights regarding the decisions determining her physical and psychological well-being. Susan Rawlings in *To Room Nineteen* has these rights but is overwhelmed and alienated by the weight of her duties to sustain her family's life. Therefore, her problem has a more social content. Atwood's characters, on the other hand, sit between the other two stories as of the period of the novel, but in terms of its ending, it has a vision that overlaps with third-wave feminism. This vision is evident in Iris's decision to write about her life and in the message she gave to her granddaughter. Apart from that, two sisters have experienced many things that other heroines in stories go through. In short, works written in different periods reflect the changes in feminist thought. Despite the fact that all the characters in the works discussed are gathered under a common figure, the historical differences they have experienced are easily seen.

This brings us to the important common grounds between them. These common features revolve around this issue: the sexual political sphere or patriarchal power structure that tries to shape, imprison and direct them. All of the female characters in two stories and the novel are trapped in a life where men draw their boundaries. Sometimes these boundaries are unclear or internalized by women. However, their

efforts to overcome the pressures of this confinement, being paralyzed by unhappiness and falling into depression cause them to lose their functions in this structure and pose the danger of leaving their place to other women.

In all of three narratives the internalization of male-dominated and patriarchal family values have an important place. Also the detrimental consequences of this internationalization on women could be seen easily in terms of those protagonists' alienation, confinement and depression. Yet the second way of this internalization is seen among male characters' sisters in two narratives and the caretaker in *To Room Nineteen*. Although the latter does not have a hierarchical and oppressive role it has a common characteristics with the other two women, namely the reproduction of domestic and political unit of family life by fulfilling women's roles. In this regard all protagonists are dispensable and in very unequal relations in their family life in terms of their legal rights in the first story, alternative opportunities to fulfill their aspirations without domestic roles in the second story and the novel. Oppressive female characters are political extensions of male power and serve to keep women in this unequal and oppressive sexual political relationship. The alienation and depression that this family life creates lead our characters to find a way to break with this confinement, sometimes in self-defeating ways. Yet in the final narrative, *The Blind Assassin* the act of writing itself could become a way to preserve an alternative memory and express a feminine voice in a critical tone.

In this regard Kate Millett's reading of this family life and social whole as a political structure founded on inequalities between the sexes in her book *Sexual Politics* continues to provide important data for understanding the works written by women and the problems that female characters grapple with. In other words, it presents a universal set of concepts to make sense of the suffering, insanity, suicide and struggles of female characters. It has a special importance as it sees the source of the sexual revolution in the woman's effort to build herself against this structure.

To summarize, the analyzes above show that it is possible to address the common problems that women have experienced since the birth of the feminist movement, with a set of generally accepted concepts, despite their differences and historical changes. The middle class women who tries to stay within the norms but is pushed by the norms, provides important data to make sense of women's struggle and search for identity in social sciences as well as in literature. The thinkers whose

concepts and theories are used here have provided rich resources in this respect. These and similar studies will provide important readings for the solution and overcoming of the patriarchal family structure and the pressures on women, which will be an important contribution for the future.



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