

Women's Oppressed and Disfigured Life in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Bahman Zarrinjooee (Corresponding author)

Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Postgraduate Department of English Language and Literature, Boroujerd,
Islamic Azad University, Boroujerd Branch, Iran
E-mail: bahmanzarrinjooee@yahoo.com

Shirin Kalantarian

E-mail: shirin.kalantarian@gmail.com

Doi: 10.7575/aiac.all.v.8n.1p.66

Received: 22/09/2016

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.8n.1p.66>

Accepted: 10/12/2016

Abstract

The present study attempts to analyze Margaret Atwood's (1939-) *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) based on theories of feminist thinker, Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) and applies her theories presented in *The Second Sex* (1949) that leads to better apprehension of sex and gender. Beauvoir's ideology focuses mainly on the cultural mechanisms of oppression which cause to confine women under the title of Other to man's self. In her view woman cannot be a simple biological category, and she asserts that womanhood is imposed on woman by civilization. In her idea, the fundamental social meaning of woman is Other. She believes that biology is the main source for woman's oppression within patriarchal society, and challenges the discourse through which women are defined based on her biology. She also believes that sexuality is another aspect of women's oppression and exploitation and all functions of women. In Beauvoir's view, prostitution and heterosexuality are exploitation of woman. She rejects the heterosexuality as the norm for sexual relations. This paper tries to show how Atwood in *The Handmaid's Tale* speculates feminist issues such as loss of identity, subordination of woman in a male dominated society and women's exploitation in consumer society where woman's body is treated as an object, a tool and consumable item. Atwood focuses on the problems such as gender inequality, and pitfalls of patriarchal system for women's oppression.

Keywords: Biology, Oppression, Other, Patriarchy, Sex and Gender, Sexuality

1. Introduction

Margaret Atwood is one of the most brilliant writers in contemporary Canadian literature. She has actively participated in Canadian politics and its feminist movement. Her works are mostly related to social and political issues. She considers the relation between men and women and human basic rights. The issue of gender is the author's major concern. She portrays the women in her novels that always search for their identity which is lost in the patriarchal societies. Oppression is another theme for her novels and it can be seen evidently in her writings. She challenges the inferior status of women in society. Atwood's representations of gender, reveals the exploitation and oppression of women, particularly women's body. She portrays the suffering of her female characters confined in their feminine roles in her novels. Moreover, gender is the main concern for examining *The Handmaid's Tale*. In Gilead society, women are deprived of their individual freedom and ordered to serve the state in different ways and functions.

In Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, women are totally under the control of male members of the patriarchal society; she describes a patriarchal society and reflects the political ideology in America of that time. Patriarchal rules and dominance of husbands or fathers in the family are shown clearly, women are considered as a means of production, and under the control men. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, women are transformed to the traditional passive roles in the society. Atwood is concerned about women's situation in the society, and the discriminations they encounter because of their sex in their lives.

In the mid-1980s in the United States, pollution and nuclear accidents caused many women become infertile. The republic of Gilead gained control over the government. In the new regime, women are divided into several categories. Women are categorized by their ages, and fertility and have separate roles in the society based on which they are different. Jews, old women, and nonwhite people are sent to radioactive territory, known as Colonies. White fertile women are sent to Commander's house to become handmaids. The Handmaids have one duty, which is bearing child for the childless couples of higher-class families. In Gilead, there are severe confining rules for Handmaids in the society. *The Handmaid's Tale*, shows inferior and oppressed position of women in the patriarchal society of Gilead. In this patriarchal society women are reduced to slavery status and being mere a means for reproduction and man's use. Atwood portrays a patriarchal society where women are victimized and marginalized by the state. This study shows

women's subordinate position and Otherness in a male dominated society and shows how, in this patriarchal society, women's basic freedom is ignored by the society.

2. Materials and Methods

Margaret Atwood's story is a dystopian nightmare, which enslaved women to the point of biology and sexuality and denies their basic freedom. This study provides a starting point from which to view *The Handmaid's Tale* in terms of sexual inequality based on Simone de Beauvoir's theories stated in *The Second Sex*. Beauvoir, as the most influential figure in feminism, argues in *The Second Sex* to show women and their social condition in a patriarchal society, being defined as 'Other' relative to men. In her book, she shows that women are oppressed, marginalized, and placed in the secondary status in the society. Its two main concepts are distinction between sex and gender and rejecting biology as the basis for women's inferior position and oppression. Beauvoir's main argument is that throughout history women are repressed and have been constructed as man's 'Other' and have not any autonomy. Man is responsible for all activities; women are confined, and are just for men's use and interest. The patriarchal society is constructed in such a way to maintain women in the inferior position and ignore their wills. Beauvoir argues that women's body confined them to the roles of wife and mother and these are the most important roles for women in the patriarchal society. The woman's role has been consigned to child rearing and sex. In Beauvoir's view, society is organized for men's favorite, it is full of oppression and suffrage for women, and they are unhappy.

Beauvoir is the one who differentiates sex from gender. The famous claim in *The Second Sex*: "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (273), reflected the distinction between "sex" as the biological difference between man and women and "gender" as the socially and culturally constructed difference. In this way, Beauvoir emphasizes that women are not born feminine but it is the society and culture, which construct them to be woman, and shape them as marginalized and second state in the patriarchal society. She insists that no one and nothing can define what woman is, but there are social forces, which establish her oppressed situation and determine what woman must be. Based on Beauvoir's assertions in *The Second Sex*, through family and other social institutions man can oppress woman. In Beauvoir's view, "everything helps to confirm this hierarchy [hierarchy of the sexes]" (292). Distributing power in traditional families and other social institutions perpetuate the patriarchal system in a society. In Beauvoir's view, traditional family or in other words, male-dominated family is one of the elements in a society that reinforces the idea of man's superiority and domination.

Beauvoir accepts physiological and biological differences between men and women; she rejects physiological differences between men and women as the factor to repress women in the society. Troil Moi believes that being a woman has to be seen as a background for all her acts and Beauvoir had found a way of thinking about sexual difference. Moi in *What Is a Woman? And Other Essays* (1999) states "to say that sexed body is the inevitable background for all our acts, is at once a claim that is always holds the key to the meaning of a women's acts" (120). Beauvoir's goal is to create a society which enables the women reach the universality as women not being like men or as sexless beings. In her book, Beauvoir maintains that man refers to all human beings; man is the norm and standard in the patriarchal society. Whereas for man, woman is sex. In such a society woman is defined in contrast to her differences from man. Man's body is considered as normal and woman's body is abnormal; in addition, she is defined according to her reproductive capabilities. Beauvoir criticizes the sex roles imposed on women by patriarchy and argues that the female body justifies the feminine role.

3. Results and Discussion

Feminism is a historical movement, which presents the idea of inequality in various aspects of women's life. In the patriarchal societies, women purely and simply, because they are women, are not treated as human. Sarah Gamble, in *The Routledge Companion in Feminism and Post feminism* (2006), asserts "within this patriarchal paradigm, women become everything men are not (or do not want to be seen to be) when men regarded as strong, women are weak, when men are rational, they are emotional, when men are active, they are passive and so on" (vii). Based on such a treatment, which restricts women everywhere, it is said that feminism "seeks to change this situation" and tries to increase "women's access to equality" in a male dominated culture (ibid).

In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir reveals the causes of women's oppression. The issue of gender is the main concern for Beauvoir; in her work, she indicates that women's problem lies in the belief that man is the "self" and woman is the "Other" (17). Woman's oppression originates in her Otherness. Woman is considered as an 'Other' because she is not a man. A woman lives in a world in which men have compelled her to be the second sex. The Woman for Beauvoir means more than being born female; she becomes a woman because of social and cultural relations, and beliefs. Beauvoir asserts that in a male dominated society man defines woman not according to herself but as relative to him. She argues that a woman for biological differences is categorized as the second sex and the Other. She shows that biology is one of the main factors for man to determine woman's dependency. Beauvoir declares that by biology male and female can be distinguished, but biology is not determinative of social roles in itself. She says that nature does not define a woman, and believes that the real experienced situation of woman is different, "it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her account in her emotional life" (ibid 65). Beauvoir rejects the biological differences as a source of woman's oppression.

Beauvoir believes that her body imprisons the woman. In maternity, a woman is bound to her body, and a woman is the prisoner of her female functions. She asserts that in the patriarchal societies woman's capacity to give birth to a child (biology) defines her. For Beauvoir sexuality is another aspect of woman's oppression, and in her idea, it is impossible

to legislate sexuality. This study deals with a society in which women are considered as Others, they are controlled by male members. Women are oppressed based on their biology and sexuality, which are regulated and manipulated by men. In Atwood's novel, society oppressed women according to their biology and they are defined based on their reproductive capacities; the state manipulates women's biological capacities. In this patriarchal society women are reduced to slavery status and being mere a means for reproduction and man's use.

The Handmaid's Tale describes a society in which women are not considered as autonomous beings, but rather as Others. They are sexual objects for men's pleasure and needs. In *The Handmaid's Tale* a woman is imprisoned by her body, only her body identifies her. Actually, *The Handmaid's Tale* exposes two major forms of women's oppression under the patriarchal rules that Simone de Beauvoir mentions in *The Second Sex*, biology and sexuality. Atwood provides a feminist vision, a patriarchal society in which women are subjugated to men based on their biological capacity and sexual slavery.

This study illustrates how, in this patriarchal society, women's basic freedom is ignored by the society. It is clear that women in the Republic of Gilead are not considered as human; but rather as men's possessions. It shows that in a patriarchal society women are weak and subservient creatures. The men in Gilead use women in various ways such as prostitution, and monthly sexual acts that, according to Beauvoir, are exploitation. The present study aims to explore, through the ideology of Simone de Beauvoir, why and in what way women are oppressed in a patriarchal society.

3.1 Women's Biological Oppression and Otherness

Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, shows the woman's image and definition in a patriarchal society which is based on her biology. She asserts "Woman? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb. An ovary; she is female. This word is sufficient to define her [...]. The term female is derogatory not because it emphasized woman's animality, but because it imprisons her in her sex" (33). Atwood in Gilead portrays women as two-leg wombs, an ovary, and the female. In the patriarchal society of Gilead, the state controls and manipulates women's biological and reproductive capacities. Atwood creates a society in which women's biology and their function to procreate is as the main cause for their oppression. Gilead reduces women to slavery status, they are reproductive machines and are defined based on their biology and their capacity for reproduction, as Offred states: "we are all for breeding purposes. We aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary: everything possible has been done to remove us from that category there is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us [...] we are two legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 13).

In Atwood's novel women are considered as nothing more than an ambulatory wombs. In Gilead, women are deprived of their gender identity if they do not have capacity for bearing child. In *The Handmaid's Tale* biology is clearly the key factor for woman's oppression. Patriarchy has always convinced women in relation to their biology. In the patriarchal societies, maternity is women's biological task. Women in Gilead are devalued and they are worthy only for their fertility capacity. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the Commander justifies the rules of Gilead to Offred by claiming that in the new state women will be protected and will at least be able to "fulfill their biological destinies in peace. With full support and encouragement" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 219).

Beauvoir denies that physiological differences between women and men can justify women's oppression. Her most quoted argument in *The Second Sex*, woman is not born a woman, but rather becomes one, can be seen as the main theme for her feminist thought. In this way Beauvoir questions the idea of biology as destiny by looking into the formation of female sex; "no biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society, it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature" (274). She repeatedly emphasizes that woman is categorized as the second sex, as the Other, mostly for the biological differences between men and women and notes that biology is one of the most important factors for society to determine women's subordination; therefore, there is an absolute human type, the masculine. "Woman has ovaries, a uterus; these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature. It is often said that she thinks with her glands, such as testicles, and that they secrete hormones. He thinks of his body as a direct and normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison, weighed down by everything peculiar to it" (16).

In Beauvoir's view, woman is just for serving man and is imprisoned by her body, as Offred says "something that determines me so completely" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 69). Beauvoir states that "he is the subject, he is the absolute—she is the Other" (16). Throughout Atwood's novel it can be seen that the Handmaids are considered as "Other." They are "relative beings" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 15). They are defined by their biology, their capacity for reproduction, they are not considered as human being.

According to Beauvoir's assertions, man in Gilead is "subject" and "free being", woman's situation relative to him is low, she is "Manichaeism" as Beauvoir's states: "to pose the Other is to define a Manichaeism" (104). The Handmaids may be considered the most oppressed group among other groups of women in Gilead. Offred is a prisoner of a patriarchal domestic tyranny, and spends time mostly in her bedroom that is, her prison. She explores her bedroom: "I don't want to do it at once, I wanted to make it last. I divided the room into sections, in my head; I allowed myself one section a day. This one section I would examine with the greatest minutes: the unevenness of the plaster under the top coat of paint"; also Offred notes that in her pre-Gilead life "she was careless". (*The Handmaid's Tale* 58). It shows her dissatisfaction of her present life; Offred is a slave and victimized in Gilead regime. The society of Gilead treats the

Handmaids like someone who is immature; they are “kept vulnerable and treated as children” (Hudock 105). They belong to the Commanders, and as their properties.

Throughout the novel it is clear that “the Gilead regime effectively robs women of their individual identities and transforms them into replaceable objects in the phallogocentric economy” (Bouson 259). They are even deprived of their real names. Offred asserts, “my name is not Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it’s forbidden” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 88). Her name, Offred, suggests that the Handmaids are deprived of their identity, because everyone’s name is her/his identity.

The Handmaid’s situation corresponds to Beauvoir’s assertion about the definition of woman by man that is a woman is not an “autonomous being” but merely “relative to him” (16). In her work, she asserts, “humanity is male and man defined woman not in herself but as relative to him, she is not regarded as an autonomous being” (ibid); this condition can be touched clearly regarding the names of Handmaids. The Handmaids’ names are just devices, which show to whom they belong; total male ownership as one of the basis of patriarchal state of Gilead and also emphasizes the deprivation of women’s self-identities. Handmaids are sex slaves and fertility machines who are controlled by high-class males in the society.

Beauvoir in her work speaks about the restrictions imposed on women by education and custom, which limit them. She asserts that the patriarchal societies “educate women” to feel themselves as an object and prompted them to identify themselves with their body (ibid 598). She also says that “the universal predominance of males, her own education (in schools)-everything confirms her in her belief in masculine superiority” (ibid 70). In this regard, the biological mothers in Gilead are women who were forced and educated in the Red Centre to be ready for their role as Handmaids before they are placed into the Commanders’ households and do their duty. Atwood depicts the oppression of women in biology through the social institutionalized maternity within the patriarchal society. Beauvoir believes that maternity is as a block against women’s liberation and regards it as women’s slavery. She emphasizes that the social institutions of time attempt to position the women as mothers.

In Gilead, women have been exploited by men especially Handmaids, who are obliged to play the maternal roles which is what the society expects them to do. Women’s oppression in biology is obvious in the Handmaids’ life through such an institutionalized maternity. Through these institutions, they understand that this is their destiny and cannot refuse it. In one of the private meetings of Commander and Offred, she says “we are for breeding purposes [...] we are two legged wombs, that’s all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 139), which shows that Offred and other Handmaids accept their roles and hope to be preganated: “I have viable ovaries. I have one more chance” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 145). They accept this notion that maternity is their biological destiny.

The Handmaids are victimized, they are abused and exploited because of their fertile body by men, they are bound to their body as Beauvoir states in *The Second Sex* that a woman is closely bound to her body. Beauvoir in her work repeatedly emphasizes that in the patriarchal societies “woman is reduced to an object condition, because of the [...] structure of society” (184). As an example, Offred describes such an inferior situation, “resign my body freely, to the use of others. They can do what they like with me. I am object” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 282). In the patriarchal society of Gilead all female bodies are viewed as inherently object. The Handmaids are dedicated to their roles as biological mothers in Gilead. The state of Gilead by various means tries to establish the power structure of Gilead and extend the male’s domination. The Handmaids are taught how to play maternal role and fulfill their duty by the Aunts.

The state of Gilead tries to identify women based on their biology; they are equipped with uterus, which make their body suitable for child bearing to implicate with their social role. In the Gilead society, a woman is the womb and mothering is her main role; she is expected only to obey men. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, the Handmaids’ sense of their values is reduced to their body, the womb, while being trained in the Red center. The Aunts consider the Handmaids’ feet and hands as useless organs, only their wombs are regarded as precious for fertility, which signifies the exploitation of the female body by the patriarchal society. In the novel, Aunts Lydia tells the Handmaids to “think of yourselves as seeds” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 27). Seed refers to the offspring, the only thing that is important in Gilead and confines the women to their reproductive capacity.

3.2 Women’s Sexual Oppression

In Atwood’s novel women’s sexuality is extremely manipulated and appropriated by men. The Handmaids, while taking their maternal tasks in bearing children, are regulated and oppressed based on their sex because of their restricted roles and subordinated position in Gilead. The institution of heterosexuality and the notion of love embedded in such an institution play significant part in demolishing female sexuality in Gilead. Atwood’s novel shows the female body as something that is degraded, sexualized, and is socially accepted as the core of female identity; women are reduced to an object in the heterosexual relationship. Beauvoir argues that women are considered as sexual objects for men and everything is for men’s pleasure; she rejects heterosexuality as a norm of the society. She believes that women are confined to their maternal task and men’s requirements determine female sexuality. One might see how women in Gilead are treated as sexual objects of men and even sexually violated to satisfy men’s needs and pleasures.

In the patriarchal societies, the relations between men and women are built based on the domination and subordination. Sexuality is one of the important factors in their relationship. As Beauvoir states, man’s: “domination is expressed in the very posture of copulation—in almost all animals the male is on the female, and certainly the organ he uses is a material object, but it appears here in its animated state—it is a tool— where as in this performance the female organ is mere in the nature of an inert receptacle. The male deposits his semen, the female receives it. Thus, though the female

plays a fundamentally active role in procreation, she submits to the coition, which invades her individuality and introduces an alien element through penetration and internal fertilization" (50). According to Beauvoir, heterosexuality is one of the main factors for oppressing women in their sexual orientation. In Gilead through the experience of sexual objectification from the heterosexual institution in the society, women are treated as sexual objects for men and even sexually violated based on men's needs and pleasures. In Gilead, women's sexuality is under the control mainly through sexual abuse and exploitation. Accordingly, heterosexuality, sexual torture, and prostitution are the means for abusing a woman and reduced her to an object.

In the patriarchal society of Gilead, men have power over women and their bodies and women suffer from this. In this way, the women are like prisoner of sexual desires of men. It is obvious that "*The Handmaid's Tale* construct a feminist reading position as it continues Bodily Harm's critique of the sexual degradation violence to which women are subjected" (Bouson 139). In the patriarchal society of Gilead women play the roles of prostitutes for men because of the authority and domination of male members toward female sex. Beauvoir believes "the prostitute is denied the rights of a person, she sums up all the forms of feminine slavery at once"; she then asserts "woman appears here [...] as an object of pleasure" (171). There is a hidden household, known as Jezebel's in Gilead that shows the strong sense of women's sexual slavery in this patriarchal society, as Moira defines "Butch Paradise" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 249).

In Gilead women are victimized, brutalized, and dehumanized by the male's control and power upon the women's bodies which is like "Master-Slave relationship". Master always benefits from slave and "everything is in favor of the oppressor [master] and against the oppressed [slave]" (Beauvoir 20). In the patriarchal society of Gilead Offred is treated as a prostitute when she becomes Commander's mistress; she is dressed as a prostitute by the Commander when they want to go to the Jezebel's. Offred is a slave and an object for the Commander's desire. One can refer to Beauvoir's idea about prostitution which is a kind of slavery. She argues: "public or simply social authority always belongs to men" and also adds, for men, "women constitute a part of the property which [men] possesses and which is a medium of exchange between them" (ibid 96). The tag on Offred's wrist that makes her as an evening rental indicates her status as a slave and an object and Commander's property as Offred says the Commander "slips around my wrist a tag, purple, on an elastic band, like the tag for airport luggage", and also adds, "if anyone asks you, say you're an evening rental" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 233). Women are as commodities within the exchange market under patriarchy. Women in Jezebel's are like objects for sale in the patriarchal society. In Atwood's novel "women are particularly singled out as products, items to be decorated and sold as commodities" (Agee and Gaines 40).

According to Beauvoir, in the patriarchal society, heterosexual sex results in gender inequalities. She argues that it is one of the main ways for women's subordination. In Gilead, the Handmaids are exploited and manipulated in their biological function of sexuality and serve as sexual objects for male sexual consumption and use, mainly through heterosexual relationship. Similarly, Beauvoir claims "it is impossible to regard woman simply as a productive force: she is for man a sexual partner, a reproducer, an erotic object—another through whom he seeks himself" (85). The impregnation Ceremony signifies male sexual abuse of women under patriarchal ideology. In the state of Gilead, sex for pleasure is forbidden, and sexuality is under the control of male members.

In Atwood's novel, women's sexual desires are oppressed, and women's inferiority and man's superiority are presented in Ceremony. "The Handmaids are required to submit to sexual intercourse with their Commanders monthly in the hopes of achieving a pregnancy, sexual passion is entirely set aside and love no longer exists, at least not officially. Sex is a function" (Macpherson 55). In Gilead, sexuality is just for bearing child and man's pleasure, for the Handmaids it is just a job. In a similar way, Beauvoir states that the woman is imprisoned "through man's need—sexual desire and the desire of offspring" (10). Tidd, in her work Simone de Beauvoir, writes in "female sexuality within a heterosexual binary [...] women's role was conditioned by male desire and motherhood" (54). In Gilead, Ceremony is for satisfying the male desire and childbearing. In Gilead, the impregnation Ceremony is just for procreation under the state's rules and it has benefit for men and fulfills their sexual desires too. In other words, "man's biological role in reproduction [...] is such that it does not interfere with his interest as an individual. Indeed, the two interests can coincide exactly" (qtd. in Bear 219).

In the patriarchal society of Gilead heterosexuality is an ideal form because reproduction is their purpose and the other forms are forbidden by the state, and they do not have the right to choose. In Gilead, sexuality is bound to notions of biological sexual difference and reproduction and the state privileges heterosexual relations over other sexual relations, for example homosexuality. Women's definition based on biology is socially and politically constructed in Gilead society. The Gilead confines the role of woman mainly to the maternal role. However, Moira is different and denies the principles of heterosexuality the state established to subordinate women. Some feminists believe that homosexuality is "the most or even the only, politically correct choice for a woman" (Walters 107). Moira denies man's superiority in Gilead and it is one way for her to show this. As a homosexual, Moira is a strange person in the heterosexual society of Gilead. She is not a traditional woman; on the contrary, Offred is a traditional one who seeks for men's love within the heterosexual framework.

In Gilead, women as the Wives and Handmaids are forced to take the maternal roles to produce babies by social institutions. The state through family and other social institutions tries to convince women that biology determines their destiny and they fulfilled their duty and task by bearing child. Besides, the Handmaids clearly manifest the female victimization, they are sexual objects and sexually violated by the Commanders within the heterosexual society of Gilead.

4. Conclusion

Margaret Atwood, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, is primarily concerned with objectification of women in the patriarchal society. *The Handmaid's Tale* is the story of women's oppression, where women become slaves subjected to the rigid control in every aspect of their lives. Atwood in this novel shows the women's second status in the society. She presents the women as the second sex and Other. She describes a world without freedom, without choice and opinion for women. Atwood describes a society in which women are mentally and physically enslaved. Women are slaves and men as their masters. In this novel, Atwood depicts a patriarchal society in which women are shapeless objects that society forms them in accordance with men's desires. She aims to show that in the patriarchal societies women are worthless and are just for reproduction and satisfying men's sexual desire. They are men's property and the patriarchal norms deprived them of everything even their identity. Atwood, by writing this novel, wants the reader to understand the social conditions of women over time.

Both Atwood and Beauvoir argue that their primary thesis is that women as a group are placed in the second status in the society. They then argue that women's marginalization is mainly because of their capacity to reproduction. In their works, they shows that men are the prime measure by which the world and particularly women are judged, one theoretically and the other through her novel. Both represent the problem of women's otherness and attempts to discover the means by which women overcome this secondary status. They assert that the social construction creates a generalized idea of women that all female must obey. The social forces determine what a woman is, establish her inferior position, and impose on her its rules. These two thinkers show that sexuality has the main role in restricting women and is the main cause for women's oppression and victimization and thier inferior position in the masculine society.

References

- Agee, James and Gaines, Evnest J. *Notable American Novelist*. Ed. Car Rollyson. New York: Salem Press, 2008.
- Atwood, Margaret. *The Handmaid's Tale*. Toronto, Ontario: McClelland Stewart Ltd, 1985.
- Beaur, Nancy. *Simone de Beauvoir, Philosophy and Feminism*. New York: Columbia UP, 2001.
- Bouson, J. Brooks. *Brutal Chereographies: Oppositional Strategies and Narrative Design in the Novels of Margaret Atwood*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans and Ed. H. M. Purshley. London: Jonathan Cape, 1956.
- Gamble, Sarah. Ed. *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Post feminism*. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006.
- Hudock, Amy. *Feminism in Literature: A Gale Critical Companion*. New York: Thomson Gale, 2005.
- Macpherson, Heidi Slettedahl. *The Cambridge Introduction to Margaret Atwood*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2010.
- Moi, Troil. *What is a woman? And Other Essays*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.
- Tidd, Ursula. *Simone de Beauvoir*. New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2004.
- Walters, Margaret. *Feminism: Avery Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005.