

**T.C.**

**ISTANBUL AYDIN UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**



**SUBJUGATION AND SUBORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE  
YELLOW WALLPAPER (1892), THE MARK ON THE WALL  
(1917) AND BOYS AND GIRLS (1946)**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**Hajer K. ALSHISHANI**

**Department of English Language and Literature**

**English Language and Literature Program**

**JUNE, 2022**



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**Thesis Advisor: Asst. Prof. Dr. Sanaz ALIZADEH TABRIZI**

**JUNE, 2022**

**APPROVAL PAGE**



## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare with respect that the study “Subjugation and Subordination of Women in The Yellow Wallpaper, The Mark on the Wall and Boys and Gils”, which I submitted as a Master thesis, is written without any assistance in violation of scientific ethics and traditions in all the processes from the project phase to the conclusion of the thesis and that the works I have benefited are from those shown in the Bibliography. (22/06/2022)

Hajer K. ALSHISHANI

## **FOREWORD**

It has been written to fulfill the graduation requirements of the Master in English Language and Literature at Istanbul Aydin University. I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Sanaz Tabrizi, for her exceptional support and guidance throughout this journey. My heartfelt thanks go to all of the instructors in the English language and literature department at Istanbul Aydin University, whose persistent support and guidance made this work possible.

And most importantly, I would like to thank God Almighty for the showers and blessings throughout my life. Finally, I'd like to thank my family and loved ones: my mother, father, and especially my sister Noor, who has always supported and inspired me. It would have been impossible for me to complete this work without their tremendous help, love, and encouragement.

For those who dared to fight.

June, 2022

Hajer K. ALSHISHANI

**SUBJUGATION AND SUBORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE YELLOW  
WALLPAPER (1892), THE MARK ON THE WALL (1917) AND BOYS AND  
GIRLS (1946): A FEMINIST READING**

**ABSTRACT**

This thesis compares the three short stories: *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Mark on the Wall* (1917) by Virginia Woolf, and *Boys and Girls* (1964) by Alice Munro, through investigating women's subjugation and subordination by patriarchal societies during the First and Second Waves of feminism. The main theoretical framework of this study is Kate Millett's subjugation theory, outlined in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970). This comparison analyzes the way the three authors, through their characters, portray patriarchal societies that place women at the bottom of the social hierarchy and men at the top. This study investigates the way patriarchy divides society into two categories: men as powerful superior subjects and women as subjugated, weaker inferiors who are ruled and controlled by their superiors. The study further emphasizes the various ways the three female protagonists in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *The Mark on the Wall*, and *Boys and Girls* reject being subordinate and oppressed. Furthermore, it examines how Charlotte Gilman, Virginia Woolf, and Alice Munro presented female protagonists who suffered and were mistreated by male-dominated societies and fought against male supremacy and oppression imposed on them by patriarchal societies. This study aids in developing a deeper understanding of women's conditions during the first and second waves of feminism.

**Keywords:** Subjugation, subordination, patriarchal society, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *The Mark on the Wall*, *Boys and Girls*

**SUBJUGATION AND SUBORDINATION OF WOMEN IN THE YELLOW  
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GIRLS (1946)**

**ÖZET**

Feminizmin Birinci ve İkinci Dalgaları sırasında toplumlarda kadınların ataerkil tarafından boyun eğdirilmesini ve onlara tabi kılınmasını araştıran bu tez 3 kısa öyküyü karşılaştırır: Charlotte Perkins Gilman'ın Sarı Duvar Kağıdı (1892), Virginia Woolf'un Duvardaki İşaret (1917) ve Alice Munro'nun Erkekler ve Kızlar (1964). Bu çalışmanın temel teorik çerçevesi, Kate Millett'in Cinsel Politika (1970) adlı kitabında özetlenen boyun eğdirme teorisidir. Bu karşılaştırma, üç yazarın karakterleri aracılığıyla kadınları toplumsal hiyerarşinin en altına ve erkekleri en üste yerleştiren ataerkil toplumları nasıl tasvir ettiklerini analiz ediyor. Bu çalışma, ataerkilliğin toplumu; erkekler, güçlü üstün özneler olarak ve kadınlar ise üstleri tarafından yönetilen ve kontrol edilen, boyun eğdirilmiş, zayıf, aşağı kişiler olarak iki kategoriye nasıl ayırdığını araştırıyor. Çalışma ayrıca Sarı Duvar Kağıdı, Duvardaki İşaret ve Erkekler ve Kızlar'daki üç kadın kahramanın tabi olmayı ve ezilmeyi reddettiği çeşitli yolları vurgulamaktadır. Ayrıca, Charlotte Gilman, Virginia Woolf ve Alice Munro'nun erkek egemen toplumlar tarafından acı çeken ve onlara kötü davranılan Kadın kahramanları nasıl sunduklarını ve ataerkil toplumlar tarafından erkek egemenliğine ve onlara dayatılan baskıya karşı nasıl savaştığını inceliyor ve feminizmin birinci ve ikinci dalgalarında kadınların içinde bulunduğu durumu daha derin bir anlayışla geliştirmeye yardımcı oluyor

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Boyun eğdirme, tabi kılma, ataerkil toplum, Sarı Duvar Kağıdı, Duvardaki İşaret, Erkekler ve Kızlar



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The feminist movement cast doubt on women's role within society, and female authors replied by producing works that fought patriarchal society. Through these works, they reflected their desire to gain more rights. Hence, women created the feminist movement to gain gender equality in different aspects of life. Some of these include social, political, and economic aspects. Furthermore, this movement provided women with a chance to analyze their lives within the patriarchal social structure (Showalter, 1985, p. 6). This patriarchal social structure considers men as superiors and puts them at the top of the social hierarchy. Women, on the other hand, are confined to a subordinate position, are treated unequally and oppressively, and are placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Beechey, 1979, pp. 66-67). Thus, by investigating women's subjugation by a patriarchal society, particularly during the first and second waves of feminism, this study contributes to the field of literature and literary theory by providing a better understanding of the status of women during those times and the way women fight against subjugation progressed from the first to the second wave.

Ever since the early nineteenth century, there has been a drive by women to enhance their position in all parts of society. Women have continuously attempted to improve their living conditions throughout history. Feminism, as a movement, attempts to reassess women's status and improve their lives. It has fought for equality independence, and freedom and continues to do so. Feminist criticism has emerged as a literary criticism that tries to comprehend and reevaluate literary texts through a new perspective, examining gender roles, female representation, patriarchy, subordination and marginalization of women. As a result, the primary goal of this study is to investigate mental and physical subjugation and subordination of women in the three short stories: *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) by Charlotte Gilman, *The Mark on the Wall* (1917) by Virginia Woolf, and *Boys and Girls* (1964) by Alice Munro. While applying Kate Millet's theory of female subjugation outlined in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970).

Kate Millett, a prominent feminist, published her famous and contentious first feminist literary criticism book, *Sexual Politics* (1970). She addressed controversial issues such as gender inequality, and female oppression. She also brought out the relevance of patriarchal societies in sexual relationships. In her book, Kate Millett describes politics as a power structured system in which one group of people is ruled by another group of people. She explains the relationship between men and women and how it is strongly rooted within a power structure, she states “The term “politics” shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another” (Millett, 2016, p. 23). Millett believes that men have established power over women, but this dominance is a social concept rather than an innate or biological basis. Millett in *Sexual Politics*, investigates women's subordination, especially in literary works, she criticized literary works that reinforced gender inequities and supported society's patriarchal values. Furthermore, she emphasized the importance of knowledge. She says: “If knowledge is power, power is also knowledge, and a large factor in their subordinate position is the fairly systematic ignorance patriarchy imposes upon women” (Millett, 2016, p. 42). She believed that patriarchal systems of power had shaped our cultures since the beginning of time and that when a superior dominant group rules an inferior one, it affects the whole society in a gradual way that is by categorizing the society into a dominant superior subject versus the subjugated weaker inferior that is ruled and governed by the first category. This hence determines that in such a society, the ruler will always be the dominant patriarchal figure. She further argues in her book *Sexual Politics* that gender roles have been socially and culturally established and enforced throughout our early experiences as well as our families’ ideals of what is considered suitable (Millett, 2016, p. 46).

Kate Millett in her book *Sexual Politics* expresses Simone de Beauvoir’s concept discussed in her book *The Second Sex* of how women are often viewed to be the Other and the non-subject, while men are viewed to be an important part of history and primary: “She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not be with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other” (Beauvoir, 1989, p. 27). Millett also believes that the perception of women is formed and shaped by males to meet their demands. She states: “Patriarchy is endemic in human social life,

explicable or even inevitable on the grounds of the human psychology” (Millett, 2016, p. 24). Kate Millett reflected on Simone de Beauvoir’s work’s central idea that within a society, women are subordinated by men, which actively demonstrates that women in general unconsciously sense that they are obligated to submit to the oppressive social norms. Women were led to believe that domestic life was their only and real purpose. Kate Millett argued that when women are subjugated and immersed solely in domesticity, they easily lose their identity and goals in life. Another point Millett discusses is the way family is a patriarchal unit within a whole patriarchal society and its role in the subordination of women. She says: “Patriarchy’s chief institution is the family. It is both the mirror of and a connection with the larger society. The chief contribution of the family is the socialization of the young into patriarchal ideology’s prescribed attitudes towards the categories of role temperament and status . . . As the fundamental instrument and the foundation unit of patriarchal society the family and its roles are prototypical. Serving as an agent of the larger society” (Millett, 2016, p. 33).

This thesis is a descriptive comparative study that aims at understanding the way the three authors Charlotte Gilman, Virginia Woolf, and Alice Munro in their short stories *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *The Mark on the Wall*, and *Boys and Girls* represented female subjugation in patriarchal societies and how these women fought their subordinated status during the times of the first and second waves of feminism. The three short stories were written by female writers who lived through these times and hence the three authors influenced and were influenced by the feminist movement.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the author best known for her short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), is a female author who was influenced and also had a major influence on the feminist movement in the late nineteenth century. She is best known for her story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, which is one of the stories discussed in this study. In her works, she wrote about oppressed women and the effect men have on women’s lives. Gilman, as a female who experienced patriarchal dominance firsthand for the majority of her life, reflected on the way the patriarchal male-centered societies limited women’s contributions towards not only their societies but also civilization, having been undermined if not neglected totally. As a product of her experiences, Charlotte Perkins Gilman used her writings, stories and speeches to try

to alter society. She advocated for women's rights and campaigned against social barriers that prevented women from achieving equality with men since women at that time were considered less important and were placed in the backdrop of society. For example, she advocated for women's economic freedom and urged women to expand their horizons further than the confines of their households (Hill, 1980, pp. 517-518). Gilman wrote many works, both fiction and nonfiction, most of which highlighted financial independence, freedom from household tasks, and equality as a means of ending female oppression and subjugation (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2011). She ventured to express her opinions on the concept of marriage and women's aspirations for social, economic, and political equality. In one of her famous works *Women and Economics* (1898), Gilman focuses on the realities of men's roles and how men view themselves as superior to women due to their economic dependency, as a result, she encourages women to acquire economic independence. Gilman also sheds light on the idea that girls from a young age are obliged to abide by the social roles assigned to them as mothers and caregivers, and the importance of fighting for independence to ensure women's freedom from their subordinate state.

Virginia Woolf, like Gilman, was a forerunner of feminist criticism. In her works, she conducts comprehensive investigations on feminist issues within patriarchal societies. Woolf also addresses the status of women in a male-dominated society. Virginia Woolf covers nearly the same range of topics, all of which are tied to political and gender issues, placing women at the bottom of the social pyramid. Woolf encourages women to consider how subordination, motherhood, and sexuality entirely define the feminine experience. The issue of feminism and the role of women within a patriarchal society was prevalent in the majority of her literary writings. She fought and aspired to attain gender equality both in the real world and in the literary field (Bergès, Botting, & Coffee, 2019). *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *Orlando* (1928), and *A Room of One's Own* (1929) were among Virginia Woolf's many works that advocate for women's rights in which she conveys her aspiration for women to gain their rights, freedom, and economic independence by representing various types of patriarchal authorities that oppress and subjugate women. She encouraged women to pursue their lives outside the domestic, as a way to achieve legal equality and overcome the obstacles imposed on them by a male-dominant society. Woolf uses fiction to explain the inequality among men and women in a

patriarchal system. She speaks against those who claim the existence of equality between the sexes. Woolf has long questioned why men have had authority and, consequently been superior throughout history while women have been inferior. She discussed the issue of the social and economic setting of women's writing (Black, 2016). Woolf authored and published several essays, novels, and short stories, as well as lectures in which she displayed her feminist views. *A Room of One's Own* is one of her most famous works and is widely recognized as one of the foundational works in feminist criticism in which she prominently expresses her feminist themes. Woolf was critical of women's subordination in the literary world. Her work frequently criticizes the patriarchal dominance of women's identity and advocates for women's roles. Woolf has always desired a place in which women are able to present themselves, in their very own creative work, to represent their voices, ideas, and beliefs, and to represent themselves rather than be represented by men (Goldman, 2007, pp. 66-87).

Alice Munro, the author of the short story *Boys and Girls* (1964), is another feminist writer. She was a prominent female short story author of the second wave of feminism who used literature as a tool to advocate for women's rights and to represent the hardships of women. She also highlighted the obstacles to women's liberty and individuality in her works. Her stories are focused on women's emancipation from many aspects, which include: sexual emancipation, economic emancipation, and liberation from being subjugated and controlled by the patriarchal society. She wrote three collections of stories. She published her first collection in 1968, called *Dance of the Happy Shades*, which was written at the beginning of the second wave of feminism. In her works, she reflected on the specific goals of the second wave of feminism, which included the improvement of women's social and legal rights and emphasized how patriarchy and sexism have an impact on all parts of women's lives, both professionally and personally. Furthermore, it is directly associated with concerns of equality, most importantly abolishing gender discrimination, and it investigated the theoretical origins of gender discrimination within society while focusing on the distinctions made between females and males. As a feminist activist, she advocated for social reforms and changes that were absent from the social, cultural, political, and literary systems (Cox & Lorre-Johnston, 2015).

Alice Munro's work investigates societal power dynamics, and as a result, her work focuses on the male gender's power over the female gender. Her short stories criticize patriarchal society. Additionally, these stories are told from an early childhood point of view, and they directly oppose the societal stigmas against girls. Some of the story's key topics are gender roles and their imposition, as well as the inevitability of the differentiation process between the sexes through cultural and societal norms and the female characters' attempt to challenge traditional conceptions of social hierarchy. She advocated for women's independence and emphasized the importance of women having lives outside of the home. As a result, her writings stressed financial independence, freedom from domestic responsibilities, and equality as a means of ending women's oppression and subjugation (Cox & Lorre-Johnston, 2015).

The first chapter of this study investigates Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short fiction *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), this study focuses on the way Gilman, through the narrator, represents women who are subjugated mentally and physically by the patriarchal society. By applying Kate Millett's subjugation theory established in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970). The story is heavily based on the author's experience with postpartum depression and follows the story of a female narrator and her doctor husband, who forcibly imposes a "rest cure" which involves bed rest, a ban on working, reading, writing, and socializing, essentially anything that requires stimulus effort. She can do nothing but stare at the yellow wallpaper after being essentially imprisoned in a large room where she is completely isolated from the rest of society. The more time the woman is imprisoned in the room, the more the yellow wallpaper appears to mutate until eventually, it takes the form of a woman whom the narrator believes must be freed. Throughout the plot of *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator is constantly begging her husband to recognize that something is wrong with her. She repeatedly uses the words, imprisonment, isolation, boredom, and the room eating at her, and all her husband does is discredit her. This chapter provides a look at how women at those times suffered in male-dominant societies.

The second chapter, called "Subjugated Women in Virginia Woolf's *The Mark on the Wall* (1917)" examines the way Woolf presents the patriarchal society and how it mentally oppresses and subordinates women. Moreover, this chapter focuses on how women fought against patriarchal societies. This chapter applies Kate

Millett's subjugation theory, discussed in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970). In the story, Virginia Woolf presents a female narrator who sits in a chair staring at a black mark on the wall, wondering what it could be, and uses her introspective thinking to contemplate social issues. The narrator is unable to convey her opinions and thoughts regarding these issues to the outside world. She is confined to her thoughts. The narrator is interrupted by her husband. Through her narrator's thoughts, Virginia Woolf demonstrates the effects male-dominated societies have on women's status at that time. Woolf also portrays the way such societies view women as inferior to men by expecting women to be a role of servitude, a role of raising children, a role of cooking, and cleaning. The narrator jumps from one flow of consciousness to the next, representing what it is like to be subjugated by a patriarchal society.

The third and last chapter of this study examines Alice Munro's short story, *Boys and Girls* (1964). This chapter investigates the way in which Alice Munro points out the stereotypes that are put on women, especially by the family domain, not just society. And the pressure put on women from a young age to behave in certain ways and to fulfill certain roles. Also, the way patriarchal society affects women's place and status. This chapter focuses on a young female narrator who portrays oppressed and subjugated women by the male-dominated society. Whilst employing Kate Millett's subjugation theory. The narrator tells the story of how her father was a fox farmer. As the narrator and her brother grew up, they would take care of the pen and feed the foxes, the narrator much prefers these tasks to help her mother in the kitchen. Her mother continues to make comments that she looks forward to Laird, the brother, growing up to be a real help and that the narrator would help her mother more in the kitchen. The context of this story references the 1960s patriarchal society that placed those gender stereotypes on women, leading to subordinating of women. This chapter also emphasizes how the young narrator tried to escape her subjugation and have freedom, by using her imagination and freeing her horse, Flora.

This study is a comparative study of three short stories: *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Mark on the Wall* by Virginia Woolf and *Boys and Girls* by Alice Munro to analyze two different forms of female subjugation, mental and physical. Furthermore, this study compares the three short stories written by female authors who tried to escape their male-dominated societies through literature.



The three stories provide an analysis of the way women were perceived from the early first wave of feminism to the end of the second wave of feminism. This study traces the situation of women as depicted by female authors from the late nineteenth century, which marked the beginning of the first feminist wave, through the end of the twentieth century, which marked the beginning of the second wave of feminism. The study looks at how women in the three literary works attempt to resist their oppressors in their unique ways.



## II. CHAPTER ONE

### A. Subjugated Women in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1917)

The first chapter of this study examines Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, in which a female narrator, who represents the subjugated women who live in male-dominated societies, is placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy by her husband. This chapter will concentrate on the mental and physical forms of subjugation imposed on the narrator by her husband as a direct representation of patriarchal society. Kate Millett's subjugation theory in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970) will be applied. This chapter will also address the way the female narrator fights the subjugation imposed on her by both patriarchal society and her husband.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman is most known as a feminist (1860 to 1935) and has had a variety of experiences that influenced the development of her feminist ideals (Porter, 1957). In her works, she reflects the perspective of women who lived in nineteenth-century patriarchal societies. Gilman was subjected firsthand to patriarchal authority most of her life. Her father abandoned her at a young age, and her first marriage failed. She suffered from postpartum depression after having her daughter. As a result of her experiences, Gilman strived to reform society through her writings, stories, and lectures. She supported women's rights and fought the social barriers that kept women from obtaining equality with men. For instance, she fought for women's economic independence and encouraged women to explore their lives beyond their domestic lives (Hill, 1980). She published numerous works, fiction and nonfiction, the majority of which emphasized economic independence, freedom from domestic duties, and equality, as a means of ending the intimate and sensual components of being subjugated and oppressed (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2011). One of these popular works in which she argues about the way men control women through economic dependency and encourages women to gain economic independence is *Women and Economics* (1898), which, according to Florence Kelly,

a forerunner of social settlement development, was the first actual, significant contribution written by a woman to address women's economic independence within the field (Hill, 1980). She wrote many literary works with female protagonists who resist and question being oppressed and subjugated by patriarchal society (Hill, 1980). Gilman wrote her autobiographical short fiction, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, in which she illustrates females' suffering at the hands of authoritarian power to construct a patriarchal system that views males as superior and females as inferior (Korb, 1997). She wrote the story in a way that gives a reflection on the difficulties that the narrator experiences from depression, misconceptions about women's health, marriage, and what this study focuses on, being subjugated by the male-dominant society (Hood, 2007). As a feminist author, Gilman has had a major influence on the first wave of feminism, her story, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, being one of the earliest feminist American works published in 1892. Gilman starts her story with the idea that women are obliged to abide by the social roles assigned to them as mothers and caregivers. Gilman also claims that patriarchal male-centered societies have undermined, if not completely ignored, women's contributions to their societies and civilization. Women were considered less important and backward in society, and women were only able to escape patriarchy when the economic drifts of a relationship were changed. This shift would allow them to be free from their domestic duties and be productive economically outside of their homes. And thus, the chance towards emancipation was achieving economic independence (Raouf, 2014).

The story is told through the perspective of a female narrator who is controlled and objectified by her husband, and who eventually falls into madness. She battles postpartum depression and masculine dominance, both of which were prevalent in the nineteenth century. *The Yellow Wallpaper* is about a woman, who is taken by her husband, named John, to the country away from distractions to recover from an unnamed illness after giving birth. Her husband and brother are both physicians and assume that they know what is best for the narrator's health, though they have no knowledge of a woman's psyche. Her husband refuses to diagnose his wife with an illness; he believes she only has a "temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency" (Gilman, 2016, p. 844). John tries to treat her accordingly. Although the narrator herself admits that she suffers from an illness, she explains that: "Her

husband does not believe that she is sick” (Gilman, 2016, p. 844). Both her husband and her brother believe that the fresh air and calmness of the country will help in her recovery from the nervous condition. Her husband’s treatment is known as “[the] rest cure.” He prevents her from any physical and stimulus activities, and he does not allow her to read, write, paint, or see her newborn baby, which leads her to a mental breakdown. She is only allowed to sleep and to breathe the fresh air of the country. She says: “So I take . . . journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again” (Gilman, 2016, p. 844). John expects her to behave and follow his orders and is able to maintain the protagonist in a submissive position while making her believe she lacks the power to make her own choices. The room and the house John keeps the narrator in have signs of imprisonment. The narrator describes the house: “There are hedges and walls and gates that lock” (p. 844). He keeps her in a nursery chamber, which shows obvious marks of captivity—“heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs” (p. 846). The room has yellow wallpaper that is breaking apart. The more time the woman is confined in the room, the more she invents stories based on the pattern of the wallpaper, imagining women trapped behind it (Gilman, 2016). In the story, the main character represents Gilman and those who have undergone the struggles and who experienced oppression by a dominant male society. The narrator deals with the consequences of her subjugation and battles such effects (Ghandeharion & Mazari, 2016).

The story reflects on the ways in which women have been exploited by men from one generation to the next. Furthermore, it touches the gender inequality as a substantial challenge for women’s endeavors to change men's attitudes toward them. Overtime, women were not only physically but also mentally oppressed and were treated unequally, despite the fact that gender prejudice has been visible in the past and women have been led to believe themselves to be weak and inferior, and accordingly more vulnerable as a result of their sentiments of weakness (Montagu, 1999). Therefore, the story portrays how societies view the perfect women and portrays how women of the nineteenth century suffered from oppression by being subjugated within the male-dominant society. Ideally, women were expected to be obedient to their husbands, never ask questions, and be loyal, all dedicated to the patriarchal society. Gilman, in her story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, presents a female

character who struggles from the effects of being subjugated by her husband (Nazrul, 2009).

In her book *Sexual Politics* (1970), Kate Millett explains subjugation by referring to the role of patriarchal societies in sexual relationships. She describes politics as power structured connections and arrangements, in which one group of people is subordinated by another group. Accordingly, she asserts that patriarchal systems of power, with men having more power than women, have shaped our cultures since the beginning of humanity, and gender roles have indeed been socially and culturally formed. Millett emphasizes the flowing impact in a society in which a group has a substantial political presence in its historically patriarchal political structure, while the other group is unavoidably subordinated to patriarchal rule and dominated by that other one. Thus, the dynamic of the dominant males versus the subjugated female emerges (Millett, 2016). Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* illustrates this societal idea, by presenting her character as a parallel to the women of the nineteenth century, who were viewed as lesser sex, portraying them as frail and emotionally insecure. The notion of weakness only focuses on explaining their inferior status in comparison to males, who are viewed as the rational gender (Ghandeharion & Mazari, 2016). John and the narrator represent the society's power structure of the time amongst men and women. And this literary work, according to Elaine Hedges portrays “a nineteenth-century woman which directly confronts the sexual politics of the male-female, husband-wife relationship” (Hedges, 1973, p. 37).

According to Allan G. Johnson, the patriarchal structure that exists in society is primarily responsible for the oppression and subjugation of women (Johnson, 2005, p. 58-59). As a result, the husband views himself as having a higher social status in society than his wife, which leads to the development of subordination, which allows the continuation of mistreatment, which reduces the female's status and enhances the male's standing in society (Johnson, 2005, p. 271). This form of subordination that the narrator experiences are portrayed in various ways, which is foreshadowed from the beginning of the story, when the narrator mentions to her husband “that there is something queer” about their country house, yet he disregards and laughs at her, “... of course, but one expects that in marriage.” (Gilman, 2016, p. 844).

In “*Gender Roles in the Nineteenth Century*”, Kathryn Hughes explains that the male has always been regarded as the supreme authority figure in patriarchal

societies, the father, the guardian, the provider, and the head of the house, and has been firmly acknowledged as such. By dominating society, men have had the power to determine a woman's place within the home. In contrast, the position of women has been observed to be physically inferior, making them better placed for domestic life. They were restricted and confined to preserving their husbands' households, carrying and raising children, and being obedient. While men regarded themselves as superior, women were regarded and implied to be inferior. Accordingly, gender roles contribute to social dominance, which is defined as men wielding broad social authority over women, and therefore it was assumed by the patriarchal society that men have the authority over women (Hughes, 2014). John exploits the patriarchal society-defined gender roles. The narrator warns that "John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith" (Gilman, 2016, p.844). In other words, John is insufferably controlling, and never allows his wife to move without being watched. He becomes a caricature of the patriarchal society. As a result, the narrator is forced to accept and tolerate the classical norms of patriarchy and hence is subordinated.

In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone De Beauvoir questions women's conditions and gender roles within patriarchal societies. She argues that individual perspectives are shaped by social and cultural factors. She states, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 1989, p. 3). And femininity is not something that is inherent, but it is rather something that has to be taught and constructed by socialization in order to maintain the dominance of men within society. Historically, De Beauvoir states that women were constrained by gender roles and the male-dominant societies which demanded them to fulfill the needs of males, to seek external confirmation of their worth in society (Bergoffen & Burke, 2020). In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, John views himself to be intellectually and physically responsible for his wife's health because he perceives his wife as an object that is incapable of taking care of herself. He does not take into consideration her desires or her opinions regarding her medical health. He only views them as symptoms of her illness; "John doesn't know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him." (Gilman, 2016, p.846). John's and Jane's marriage is a representation of how women were seen as secondary, not only in marriage but

rather within society as a whole. Women were seen as objects whereas men viewed themselves as subjects.

Throughout the story, John gives his wife commands and does not allow her to write, take care of her baby, or do any other task that requires mental or physical strength. He insists that if she does so, it will make her fall deeper into depression. The narrator accepts it and explains that: “I am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again. Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good. But what is one to do?” (Gilman, 2016, p. 844). John convinces her that her only job is to get better in order to return to her stereotypical nineteenth-century housewife role, being obedient, and passive. Consequently, the protagonist becomes fully dependent on her husband. She gives in to her husband's controlling and persuasive opinions. When she tries to persuade her husband to replace the disturbing wallpaper, he not only refuses to comply with her request, but also demonstrates his authority over his wife by not even allowing her to choose another room. She asks him, “Then do let us go downstairs ...there are such pretty rooms there” (Gilman, 2016, p. 845). However, she denies it.

Gilman presents another character in the story that represents women who are adapted to the prevailing societal norms. Gilman introduces Jennie, the narrator's sister-in-law, who does the housework while the narrator recovers. She represents the ideal prototype of the nineteenth-century housewife. The narrator constantly compares herself to her sister-in-law; guilt building within her due to her inability to be the mother she is taught to be. She says: “she is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession” (Gilman, 2016, p. 847). The narrator hides her secretive writings from her as well, since she believes Jennie shares John's values, and that writing is what caused the narrator's sickness, and will inform him if she finds the narrator writing, she reveals her worries when she says: “There comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing” (Gilman, 2016, p.847). Jennie's indirect support of John's approach to treating his wife, through watching every move the narrator makes, and reporting to John indirectly promotes patriarchal ideals. Women who do not confine to the societal and gender norms, appear to be castaways of society,

whilst women like Jennie unknowingly uphold their own subjugation, by being indirect representations of the patriarchal norms (Ghandeharion & Mazari, 2016).

Gilman responds to the male-dominated structure of nineteenth-century society by raising the alarm about the outcome of the rigid gender roles determined by the male-dominated society. She questions the idea that the man is the more rational while the woman is the housewife who should abide by the long-established rules of her husband (Nazrul, 2009, p. 18). According to Hume, the protagonist's continuous downfall is aggravated mostly by the oppression of her husband, John, and the men in her life. Hume interprets the story "as one that offers the detailed and chilling account of a woman's entrapment, defeat, and movement toward madness- one caused by patriarchy, that is, by obtusely sexist men such as the narrator's husband John or nineteenth-century psychiatrist like S. Weir Mitchell" (Hume, 1991, p. 477). Furthermore, the fact that John is a well-known physician and she is a woman who has been taught to be a good wife and mother creates an educational gap between the narrator and the husband, leading to another form of subjugation. Millett also addresses that subjugation of women can be caused as regards to class, economic state, and educational level; she states: "If knowledge is power, power is also knowledge, and a large factor in their subordinate position is the fairly systematic ignorance patriarchy imposes upon women" (Millett, 2016, p. 42). Thus, because women are restricted from different forms of education, they are put under subjugation and are unable to compete with or surpass men in the required field of knowledge (Millett, 2016). Since being a woman is linked with putting family and others before herself, while being content and joyful, it is not expected of females to educate themselves on other matters. Moreover, being obedient, having faith, and respecting family values created the perfect female image, while anything that threatens this so-called perfect image, such as education, is viewed as a waste of time (Moore, 1982, pp. 9-10).

Moreover, women's education during nineteenth-century focused on teaching virtues more than actually learning; for instance, females were taught to be obedient, having servility, as well as a sexual aversion, that being the case, the main focus of women's education was centered around men in their lives, everything a woman is taught revolves around her being as virtuous and appealing as possible for her husband (Poirier, 1983). These teachings are deeply embedded into women's brains



that if they fail to abide by them, women feel they are at fault and burdens on society, according to Simone De Beauvoir, a woman is destined to feelings of failure and shame because, if she fails to achieve the feminine roles imposed by the society, she will be a liability to the patriarchal society. Therefore, she is expected to showcase: “an inhuman entity: the strong woman, the admirable mother, the virtuous woman, and so on” (Beauvoir, 1989, p.9). Subsequently, in the story, the narrator experiences a conscious regret due to her inability to do the domestic work she is taught to do from a very young age. She says: “I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!” (Gilman, 2016, p.846). This feeling of inferiority results from the level of education men receive in comparison to level of education women receive. Women mostly had no opportunities and were only allowed to receive a limited level of education. In contrast to men who were allowed to choose their paths and careers, subsequently, men were responsible for the financial aspects and women were only responsible for their homes and kids and the wellbeing of their husbands, and because men were the providers, they believed they possess authority over women. Therefore, women were prevented from expressing themselves in any creative activities. Their lives were only limited to their kids, husbands and homes, and if they then failed to excel in their duties, they viewed themselves to be a disappointment to society. Because they were led to believe they were only born to be perfect housewives. Therefore, Gilman criticizes the roles created by the patriarchal society, and shows through her character that women have the right to express themselves intellectually (Budhianto, 2008).

Gilman echoes Kate Millett's profound discussion on the patriarchal political structures that subjugate and keep women trapped in repressive gender roles, by presenting a successful and well-educated man whose expertise or judgments could not be questioned by someone less educated than him. In this case, his wife is less educated than he is because education for women was deemed unimportant unless it focused on parenting and being a good housewife, while men like John dominated important positions in society (Poirier, 1983, p. 16-17). For instance, John responds to challenges, in this case, his wife's illness, in ways that suit him, resulting in a relationship where he is the subject and his wife is the object. Accordingly, the protagonist's treatment by John was focused on power rather than affection. This is enhanced due to the lack of educational opportunities that identify women as inferior

to males, causing them to be subordinate objects. Gilman's story is a testimony to this notion since John is a successful physician. Therefore, the protagonist cannot disagree with him; "If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do? . . ." (Gilman, 2016, p. 844). Through his rest cure treatment, John demonstrates his superiority over his wife. He is seen as an experienced physician, and this automatically gives him a higher position since he received higher education than his wife. All of these issues point to the idea of dominance and subordination. Moreover, the economic dependence of women, which is mainly caused by a lack of education, forces a woman to depend on another social group. According to Millett, this is one of the primary factors that contribute to female subordination, and women transcend the usual caste classes of the patriarchal system, placing them at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Millett, 2016, p. 87).

The protagonist's secretive journal implies that women are not expected to engage in intellectual activities such as painting and writing if they want to be considered good mothers and housewives in male-dominated societies. Gilman expresses the horrific outcome of such mistreatment and just how being kept away from normal life might push someone into their downfall (Korb, 1997, p.284). As mentioned, Gilman's story discusses a variety of issues surrounding women's hardships during the nineteenth century, specifically, their subjugation and confinement by gender roles. A dynamic of subordinate and subordinator is drawn by the author in the story's portrayal of both the protagonist and her husband. The husband is portrayed as a well-educated physician who solely thinks about what society expects of his wife; on the other hand, the wife is portrayed as a writer who hides her creative abilities to avoid the harsh reality forced on her by her husband and society, such as being forced to stay in her room and not being permitted to write, which is her only means of escape (Korb, 1997). The result is the creation of the image of the control men have over women, who are oppressed in a patriarchal system that imprisons women within the laws of this society. The narrator is pulled out of her society and is put into captivity. As she tries to resist this oppression, her husband puts her through; she is not allowed to express herself. Gilman had previously encountered the same pattern of subjugation when she relied on her

imagination to hide from life's hardships, though many of her friends advised her that such an elusive imagination was dangerous. As a result, Charlotte, a kind, obedient woman, locked all the doors to her world of visions and imagination so she could maintain her status as the perfect picture of a woman (Ghandeharion & Mazari, 2016). The protagonist uses her imagination to escape her subjugation by her husband, which leads her to imagine the country house as haunted, yet her husband reminds her that she must not give in to her irrational thoughts. As an illustration from the story, which demonstrates this repetitive pattern of the narrator's oppression is when she asks her husband to repaint the wallpaper because she dislikes the terrible pattern. He responds, "nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies" (Gilman, 2016, p. 846). In doing so, he made her feel as though her dislike of the yellow wallpaper because of its ugliness was just a silly feminine instinct that could only be restrained. Even after she addresses her desire to move to any other room, due to the strange wallpaper patterns, the husband ignores his wife's emotional needs as he thinks he knows what is best, adding: "You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is improved, I feel really good about you" (Gilman, 2016, p. 850). According to Conrad Shumaker, John's authority and subjectivity over his wife is undermined by her imagination; therefore, by labeling his wife's imagination as harmful, he can mute what challenges his authority (Shumaker, 1985). John tries to prevent his wife's imagination in the story, when the narrator expresses her dislike of the wallpaper and she explains: "he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies" (Gilman, 2016, p. 846). Gilman demonstrates John's direct patriarchal representation by him focusing on physical details color and elevation while ignoring the true nature of his wife's request. He mockingly suggests that he will take her to the cellar and paint it white if she wishes to go downstairs far from the yellow walls. By this, he achieves his goal while dismissing her objection to the wallpaper's ugliness as simply a fancy. Another example of him trying to maintain his wife from using her imagination in order to keep her in a subordinate state is when the narrator notices a woman behind the wallpaper's surface pattern. She decides to ask John to take her away from the country home; however, after he notices her getting out of bed to inspect the paper more thoroughly, he refuses, even though she suggests that her physical state is not the true issue. He interrupts her and tells her "I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one

instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy” (Gilman, 2016, p. 884). John tries to maintain his wife’s subjugated state not only by keeping her in a room but also by controlling her imagination. As a result of all these repetitive forms of subjugation that run throughout the story the husband, who is a direct representation of patriarchal society, seeks to restrict his wife's fancy imagination and labels it as the main cause of her condition. This mistreatment and wrongly given diagnosis, which is based on the proven experiences of the medical profession at the time that took the experience of men as a global standard and applicable to both sexes, the narrator tries to find common ground between her developing desire to immerse her imagination and her husband's dismissive remarks on the subject. This exemplifies the narrator’s inner strife of choosing between the world of being subjugated by males in her life and the world of her imagination (Johnson, 1989). It is for this reason that Gilman drove the protagonist of her story to keep writing despite the obstacles she was put through. Gilman portrayed the character's imagination as a tool of resistance that could reach up against oppression and subjugation. These basic views are well illustrated and clearly represent the power struggle as depicted by Kate Millett between two groups: the subjugated female protagonist and her husband, the subjugator.

According to Shumaker, John is unable to realize or acknowledge that writing can be therapeutic and that putting his wife in such prison to rest is what makes her case worse. He believes that her imagination leads to insanity. “Imagination and art are subversive because they threaten to undermine his [John's] materialistic universe” (Shumaker, 1985, p 592). As a result, Shumaker explains the narrator questions herself and is unable to criticize John or the patriarchal society that supports his perspective since he symbolizes reason rather than her imagination. So she distances herself from her usual role as the subjugated wife. As mentioned, the protagonist uses her inner voice and imagination as means to her emancipation from being subjugated and muted, Gilman’s story paved the way for women to first realize their subjugation and second to re-examine their place in society by constructing a category of everyday female situations that resonated to other women about their personal female experiences (Shumaker, 1985). The narrator follows her husband’s orders by sitting in her room all day without any stimulus activities, except for

writing in her diary, which she does despite her husband's rigid rule of lying down and resting. The more she is confined in the room with the disturbing wallpaper the more she finds it amusing. She grows to like the wallpaper and builds an alternative world to her husband's and society's subjugation of her. In the daytime she starts to see two sets of patterns in it, "This paper looks at me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had! There is a recurrent spot here the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down... I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before and we all know how much expression they have!" (Gilman, 2016, p.847). Then the pattern gets clearer at dark; and last, in the moonlight, she notices a woman trapped in the wallpaper (Hedges, 1992). This lady behind the wallpaper, who is "subdued" by daytime when the narrator is watched, and by moonlight the lady shakes the wallpaper. The narrator's conflicting sentiments and behaviors in the presence of John and Jennie are reflected in contrast between daytime and moonlight, according to which the pattern seems to change. She becomes more and more aware of John, Jennie and everybody around watching her; "[John] seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look" (Gilman, 2016, p.851). The narrator's anxiousness grows she begins "getting a little afraid of John" (p.851). Therefore, her awareness of the wallpaper grows and reflects her imaginative development and evolving self-identity which is a step closer to being free from her being subjugated. As a result of oppressing and subordinating her desires, the protagonist detaches from her own self and her mind in order to escape her confinement, and instead of fearing the lady behind the wallpaper, she transforms into her and loses touch with reality. Hence, not only does the story represent women's subjugation through patriarchy's direct representation and educational inequality, but it also depicts a woman who uses patriarchy's exact weapons to start her own resistance. *The Yellow Wallpaper* opposes the big narrative by emphasizing the resistance of women who are subjugated and silenced. It depicts a clearly repressed female voice, mirroring the terrible domestic treatment of many women who have been driven into terrible psychological situations due to their lower inferior status in society. Hence, Gilman presents a story about a woman who is subjugated and accordingly tries to emancipate herself from gender norms by using her imagination and by writing in her journal.

Elaine R. Hedges interprets Gilman's short story's ending as a positive ending. She views the wallpaper as a patriarchal narrative wherein the subjugated protagonist by liberating the lady trapped behind it, she liberates herself (Hedges E. , 1996). However, Paula Treichler in her essay *Escaping the Sentence: Diagnosis and Discourse in "The Yellow Wallpaper"* views the ending to be both a negative and positive representation, due to it being ambiguous and enigmatic. She argues it is positive because it implies that the protagonist after being denied activities that provide her comfort and happiness, such as thinking and writing, manages to escape from being subjugated by her husband and society. Treichler explains: "the story testifies to an alternative reality and challenges patriarchy head on" (Treichler, 1948, p.67). Gilman presents a narrator who is denied her freedom and hence alters her personality completely as a result of her living situation. Therefore, madness according to Treichler is a logical conclusion and a peculiar type of adaptation for the circumstance. Obviously, the narrator is now insane. The moment the mystery woman makes her first appearance, the narrator begins to humanize the wallpaper, saying, "This paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had!" (Gilman, 2016, p.847). The narrator starts to feel compassion for the woman behind the wallpaper, and tries to free her, instead she completely separates herself from her own identity, and comes to believe that she is the woman behind the wallpaper. As a result, she gets past Jane, herself, and her husband, John, the narrator says to her husband: "I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane! And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!" (Gilman, 2016, p. 855). For the first time, she experiences freedom and being her own agent. Furthermore, the dramatic impact of her new independence is established by the idea that her husband faints once he sees her madness. She has defied her subjugation by following her personal reasoning and thought this ultimate moment. Hence, insanity is viewed as a form of freedom from her being the submissive wife. Treichler explains that the narrator: "steps over the patriarchal body, she leaves the authoritative voice of diagnosis in shambles at her fee" and the narrator: "has followed her own logic, her own perceptions, her own projects to this final scene in which madness is seen as a kind of transcendent sanity" (Treichler, 1984, p. 67). On the other hand, the ending is negative due to the fact that even though the narrator mentally escapes her subjugated state she will still be under the control of the patriarchal system, and her personal escape against patriarchal oppression is temporary, at least physically. She

is still locked up in a room and her insanity will almost certainly sentence her to much more intensive medical treatment, and the people in her life certainly will make decisions quickly and severely to handle her. They might even put her under the care of Weir Mitchell whom she fears greatly (Treichler, 1984, p. 67). Going insane, according to Gilman, may result in the emergence of a mental state far more rational than that which is recognized by others. Insanity, instead of being a source of loss for the narrator, becomes a type of protection for the self. She realizes her authority and the reality that she has the ability to resist her subjugation demonstrating that she has the courage to stand alone in her subconscious. She wakes in a world defined by her own feelings and judgment, as opposed to a world defined by males. Therefore, the narrator believes her madness is provides a better and different reality (Quawas, 2006, pp. 35-53).

After she loses her sanity, the protagonist climbs over her motionless husband, symbolically ascending above her subjugator and everybody else who has left her feeling oppressed, constrained, and subordinate. She says: “Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path, so that I had to creep over him every time!” (Gilman. 2016, p. 855). Initially, the wallpaper appears to be simply unappealing, and the protagonist attempts to figure its pattern out; however, it becomes an eerie sub-pattern as a desperate woman, “And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. (Gilman, 2016, p.846). The narrator searches for a way out to break free from the room and the wallpaper, which has taken on the appearance of cage bars. She compares her current situation to a metaphorical prison; “there are hedges and walls and gates that lock [...] the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls” (Gilman, 2016, p. 844). The narrator becomes infatuated with the wallpaper and its patriarchal overtones. The protagonist’s hallucination in which she sees women imprisoned behind the wallpaper appears to be presenting social suffering of females in general. The protagonist's husband, who is portrayed as the superior in their marriage, reflects the patriarchal norms of their society and enhances his status by doing his duties as a husband and provider. He is not just the provider, but also a physician by profession. He establishes his dominance in all of his masculine obligations because he represents a practical and realistic man. His wife, on the other hand, is unemployed, and he regularly sees her as his object. She is regarded as

immature, illogical, and solely defined in opposition to him. This establishes a classic gender divide, with masculine reasoning as opposed to feminine irrationality. Simone de Beauvoir states that: “man occupies the role of the self, or subject; woman is the object, the other” (Beauvoir, 1989, p. 577).

Elaine R. Hedge noted that *The Yellow Wallpaper* is a story about nineteenth-century women that tackle a woman's subjugated position, her fight for equality with the man in marriage, education, and all other aspects of her life. Gilman as a female author and a subjugated woman, questioned the traditional reasons for subjugating women while also proposing reforms by conducting a detailed analysis and account of how and why women are being subjugated. In *The Yellow Wallpaper* Gilman presents a narrative of a female who has no access whatsoever to the hegemonic power system and a man who symbolizes both the spouse and the doctor, resulting in the creation of an image of control men have over women who are deprived of expressing themselves in a patriarchal system that imprisons them within its laws and norms. The narrator is pulled out of her society and put into captivity, as she tries to resist the subordinate state, her husband puts her through (Hedges, 1992).

To conclude, Gilman wrote her short fiction about women of the nineteenth century, by presenting a family ideology that places the male figure at the top of the social pyramid and female figures at the bottom. In her work, Gilman defends these women and uses her protagonist to represent her own life experiences as a mother and wife, in addition to calling readers' awareness to unacknowledged difficulties in women's lives. The story aims to demonstrate how patriarchal societies go to great lengths to retain their subjugation of women by emphasizing women's ideal status in society and the way they are misled by patriarchal society. Gilman, on the other hand, portrays her character as mistreated and devoid of rights. Gilman's protagonist lives in oppression as the stereotypical image of a woman who is mentally and physically subjugated within male-dominated societies, who is forced into being dependent on her husband as a result of gender role imposition. The story also emphasizes the way women were dictated to by these gender roles and masculine societies that required them to fit the demands of males and to be validated of their value by men. She underlines that having fewer political, educational, and legal rights reduces women's conformist influence in society. And lastly, this late-nineteenth-century short story portrays the narrator's fall into madness as a result of



inadequate care for her mental disease and patriarchal gender stereotypes that drive her to madness. However, the protagonist's use of her imagination of the women in the wallpaper and secret writings on the wall are powerful tools to present her yearning for mental and physical liberation, and by managing to free the lady behind the wallpaper, the narrator frees herself mentally from being subjugated and oppressed by her husband.



### III. CHAPTER TWO

#### A. Subjugated Women in Virginia Woolf's *The Mark on the Wall* (1917)

The second chapter of this study focuses on Virginia Woolf's short fiction, *The Mark on the Wall* (1917), in which a female narrator uses her inner thoughts as a means of avoiding society's patriarchal-dominated perception that places her at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Furthermore, this chapter will examine the female narrator, who is mentally subjugated by the male-dominated society and her husband, who is a direct representation of it. Whilst applying Kate Millett's subjugation theory, discussed in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970).

Adeline Virginia Stephen Woolf, born in 1882 and died in 1941, had lived an incredibly hard life. She had been sexually assaulted by her half-brother, and discriminated against by patriarchal society for being a female writer. However, preceding the death of her father, she became a member of the Bloomsbury Group, a group of intellectuals that included economist John Maynard Keynes and author E.M. Forster, among others. They got together on a regular basis to talk about a variety of things, for instance, their criticism of capitalism and gender norms. Woolf, a member of this group, inspired and was inspired by this group in a number of ways. Some of her views on gender roles were influenced by the Bloomsbury Group, which encouraged her to publicly share her feminist ideas (Greenblatt, 2008). Woolf, a pioneer of feminist literary criticism in the twentieth century, was greatly interested in the role of women in history, especially in the history of literature, throughout her writing career. Being a female author herself, in her novels, her dairies, her short stories, her letters, her essays and her criticism, she constantly addressed the struggles women faced in patriarchal societies, she states in her essay *Granite and Rainbow* "that both in life and in art, the values of a woman are not the values of a man. Thus, when a woman comes to write a novel, she will find that she perpetually wishes to alter the established values to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important" (Woolf, 1958, as cited in Duplessi, 1988). Feminism without a doubt had a significant influence on Virginia Woolf's life, her

interest in women's role in society was evident in her works; the theme of feminism was present in most of her works, and she dreamed of achieving equality between men and women, not only in the real world but also in literature (Black, 2018). Virginia Woolf became well-known for her original and unique storytelling skills as well as her contribution to the field of feminist literary critique. She criticizes the way women are perceived in society and argues that women, in the eyes of male-dominated societies do not exist since males disregarded women's significance as they were only ever seen to be inferior to their spouses, and their only role was to be mothers and housewives who totally depended on their husbands. Subsequently, women were always described in connection to men, not as separate entities (Bowlby, 1992). Woolf expressed the importance for women to represent themselves through literature since women's presence, independence, and equality, simply didn't exist in works written by men, which is why in her works she attempted to rewrite women's history. One of these works is *A Room of One's Own*, which is one of Woolf's earliest feminist works that present a number of crucial concerns that are still relevant for women in today's world, and thereby highlights some of the fundamental causes of women's oppression and subjugation. Virginia Woolf discusses the importance of education for women, which according to Woolf, is the most important step toward their liberation as it is the only way for them to be treated equally to men. Abrams states that *A Room of One's Own* is a significant book that gives a critical discourse that addresses a wide range of topics and reveals male dominance as well as the way women have been marginalized from society's cultural, social, and economic life. He argues that "in actuality, it appears that the book was written as a critique of the social barriers that have hindered women from reaching their creative potential" (Abrams, 1999, pp. 88-89). The major idea of Woolf's reflection is the core reasons for women's powerlessness and subjugation. According to Woolf one of the key elements contributing to women's oppression is their economic dependence on males. Woolf goes on to discuss the reasons for women's subordination, noting that women are perceived in regard to men rather than to themselves, and they are subordinated in all spheres of life because they have been forced to depend on male figures.

Woolf published her early short story, *The Mark on the Wall*, in 1917, at the end of World War I, and only a year before English women of a certain class were

granted the right to vote. Yet women still faced many great challenges. They had no access to education; they were unable to buy or own any property; they were viewed as objects which were expected to marry and care for their husbands and children; they were always viewed to be dependent on the male figure in their lives; and they had no opportunities to achieve their dreams. Virginia Woolf portrays women's struggles at that time in her short fiction (Andriyani, 2016, p. 8). The role of women in the First World War had a great influence. They served as nurses, munitions factory workers, they sewed bandages, they sold war bonds, they worked at shipyards, were spies, and much more. The majority of women were forced into the workplace by the death of their husbands, as women replaced men at their jobs, and the numbers of women working increased all over the globe. Although this can be seen as a gauge of women's will to sacrifice everything for their countries, it should be read rather that they were seen as cheap and easily replaceable labor. Hence, they only got half of a man's wages for the same work. Yet, taking on a number of traditionally male roles led to some big changes in attitude, and in a lot of places, it was the final push toward giving women the right to vote. In general, post-war European women gained new social and economic options and stronger political voices, even if they were still viewed by most men as mothers and housewives first. Though women's appearances changed in that they wore shorter skirts or even wore trousers, expectations about family and domestic life as the main picture of women remained unchanged. Unfortunately, the role of women during and after the First World War was and is still under-appreciated, serving and working and often dying without any acknowledgment as their lives were turned inside out (Kovacs & Osborne, 2014).

Woolf introduces the short fiction from her collection named *Two Stories* (Woolf, 2001, p. 12) with a female narrator who sits in a chair and remembers noticing a small black mark on the wall in the living room. The narrator starts wondering what this mark is. Initially, she thinks it is a hole created by scratching a nail on the wall. She says: "If that mark was made by a nail, it can't have been for a picture" (Woolf, 2001, p.3). Yet not long after she rules this assumption, her wondering leads her to contemplate life, her imagination, and her train of thought on some social problems of that time. As she focuses on and off the mark and from one flow of consciousness to the next, she ponders about the past, nature, life, social

roles, personal musings, history, and nature. (Jin, 2011, pp. 115-116). Each of the narrator's seemingly aimless ideas draws on the next while constructing an elaborate debate on the essence of reality, every thought returns to the mark just to drift to a new thought. Virginia Woolf sheds light on a wide range of topics that involve gender issues, placing women at the ending margins of the social hierarchy and providing the reader with an image of subjects developing in a dangerous world. She further pulls her reader to recognize the way female identity is fully defined by being subjugated, sexuality, and maternity. Furthermore, this subjugation prevents females from making every minimal contribution to society. The chain of thought\inner feminine monologue is used by the narrator as a way to avoid the male-dominant perception and subjugation within society and her introspective thinking is cut by her husband. As if the reader is inside the narrator's head, unable to express these concerns to the outside world, indicating a lack of social acceptance and recognition, while using these thoughts and her imagination as tools to escape from her husband, who represents the male-dominant society (García, 2020, pp. 4-5). When the narrator stares at the mark on the wall, her thoughts take her to multiple levels of awareness where a small mark becomes the center of many links that signify patriarchal dominance over the protagonist's outside world identity.

As stated previously, Kate Millett defines subjugation in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970) by pointing to patriarchal societies' role in relations between men and women. She defines politics as power structured interactions and arrangements in which one group of people is subordinated to another. As a result, she claims that patriarchal power structures have shaped our societies since the dawn of time. Furthermore, expectations based on what is seen as acceptable have shaped and enforced gender norms on a social and cultural level (Millett, 2016). As a result, this patriarchal influence captures Woolf's narrator's thoughts. Therefore, the protagonist's thoughts are penetrated by the masculine presence from the minute she realizes the existence of the mark, hence her first thought in the story is about a knight: "I thought of the cavalcade of red knights riding up the side of the black rock" (Woolf, 2001, p.3). Her thoughts bounce from one idea to the next, shifting between past and present while speculating about the mark and what could have caused it, all while the male presence becomes more and more dominating. Furthermore, the narrator initially presumes the mark to be a hole made by a nail of a

miniature lady, she further imagines and describes this lady as “the miniature of a lady with white powdered curls, powder-dusted cheeks, and lips like red carnations.” (Woolf, 2001, p.3). Woolf’s mention of the woman as a doll, and an object emphasizes the way women were viewed as objects and the way they were forced to be perfect physically because society pressured them to be the source of happiness and pleasure for men. In this description, the narrator showcases and mocks the perfect painted picture of women within society, which lacks any reasonable, educated, or intellectual characteristics that a woman would have. In contrast, this lady is regarded as an objectified woman who exhibits superficial ideals based on her outer beauty, which is modeled from a male’s point of view. Hence, the narrator guesses who may admire this perfect picture of a lady to be a male, the narrator continues and says: “so he said” which is a sudden, unexpected remark emphasizing the influence of male domination in her thoughts and her real life (Öteyaka, 2016, p. 192).

Romero and Rodríguez argue in *Gendered spaces and female resistance: Virginia Woolf’s The Mark on the Wall*, that the story, as previously said, portrays women who do not participate as their subjects, but rather as simply objects of submission and subjugation, and the portrait, which is symbolically referred to in the story, reproduces a false objectification of women. When the narrator goes on to describe the lady in the painting, she refers to it as “a fraud, of course,” demonstrating how male-dominated societies viewed women (Romero & Rodríguez, 2006). To Millett, this sexual objectification of women is one of man’s instruments of power and evidence of their dominance, authority, and subjugation over women (Millett, 2016). The male voice, which continues to subjugate and dominate even her thoughts, views women as subordinate figures dedicated to household responsibilities and pleasures in domestic life, whereas males are depicted as powerful figures outside the domestic life. Thus, the narrator demonstrates these oppressed thoughts by saying, “as one is torn from the old lady about to pour out tea and the young man about to hit the tennis ball in the back garden of the suburban villa as one rushes past in the train” (Woolf, 2001, p.3). Furthermore, her feminine identity is restricted by such a masculine perspective, and the protagonist’s female intellect appears to battle against limits set by patriarchal society. Hence, Simone De Beauvoir, much like Kate Millett, describes the nature of the relationship between

men and women as a relation of power where one has more power than the other, in this case, women having less power than men, and that every entity interprets itself as the Subject or the Self by defining other entities as its other or object, meaning that the male figure views and interprets himself as being essentially different from the female figure and thus has signed women in the position of the other to set himself as the subject (Ramsay, 1999, p. 17).

In *The Mark on the Wall*, the descriptions of men's and women's positions, such as the repeated reference to Whitaker's Table of Precedency, portray the patriarchal society during that time, which is one of the reasons for the female's subordinate state. When Woolf's main character contemplates the norms for men and women, she mentions this table or list as she names it in the story, which represents the established hierarchy from the patriarchal perspective. Woolf demonstrates this table, when the narrator says: "for who will ever be able to lift a finger against Whitaker's Table of Precedency? The Archbishop of Centerbury is followed by the Lord High Chancellor; The Lord High Chancellor is followed by the Archbishop of York" (Woolf, 2001, p.8). Furthermore, Woolf portrays Whitaker as a masculine figure who represents the hierarchical society and classification that cause the oppression of women. However, those factors constantly remind the narrator that the patriarchal order restricts and governs women's independence and real life. The narrator explains this by saying: "The masculine point of view which governs our lives which sets the standard, which established Whitaker's Table of Precedency" (Woolf, 2001, p.7). Whitaker's Table of Precedence is used in the story as a symbol of patriarchy and dominance, which determines who has more authority than the other, and hence who has more supremacy over whom. Therefore, the narrator starts to dream, literally and figuratively, about a life free of this subjugation that places women at the bottom of the hierarchy (Swanson, 2012). She expresses this by saying: "Yes, one could imagine a very pleasant world. A quiet, spacious world, with the flowers so red and blue in the open fields. A world without professors or specialists or house-keepers with the profiles of policemen, a world which one could slice with one's thought as a fish slices the water with his fin" (Woolf, 2001, p.8). She continues to say: "if it were not for Whitaker's Almanack\*—if it were not for the Table of Precedency!" (Woolf, 2001, p. 8). This Table proves the existence of discrimination towards women resulted in inequality in the sense of marginalization

and subjugation, and therefore not concerning women in any form of decision-making, while giving them a higher domestic workload, abusing them, which brings forth a social ideology toward the value of gender roles, and therefore a lack of opportunity for women who sought to strive and realize their full potential since the restrictions were so rigid (García, 2020). These regulations were designed to subjugate women so that they would not dare to approach males and would constantly be under and subject to them and viewed as frail and inferior creatures. As a result, women's contributions to society were undervalued. Consequently, women were limited in the form of education they received, which made them appear to be more illiterate than men, which made them easily mistreated and oppressed by men due to their lack of education and dependency on the male figure (2020). Magdalen Wing-chi Ki, explains in his research, *Structure and Anti-Structure: Virginia Woolf's Feminist Politics and "The Mark on the Wall"* that Woolf "uses this metaphor of "Whitaker's Almanack" to represent what she later calls "impersonal and impartial authority", a system that advocates male prejudice and discrimination against women in the professions" (Wing-chi Ki, 2020, p. 433). Wing-chi Ki continues to explain how to Virginia Woolf, such authorities cause the oppression and subordination of women who try to strive for a higher position in society (2020). However, the narrator is unable to convey her concerns to the outside world, due to the male figure's constant interruption of her thoughts, implying that she is subordinated even in her thoughts (García, 2020, pp. 4-5).

The story contains pictures and thinking sequences relating to militarism, which are strongly critical of the politics of her time. Woolf denounces that women's voices are not included in decisions regarding war, whereas men are devoted to celebrating pride and competing among themselves, portraying military icons, as Wing-chi Ki claims. Moreover, Virginia Woolf is able to portray women in domestic life as a fundamental and acceptable obligation, ironically highlighting their submissive role in the outside world "Retired Colonels for the most part, I daresay, leading parties of aged laborers to the top here, examining clods of earth and stone, and getting into correspondence with the neighboring clergy, which, being opened at breakfast time, gives them a feeling of importance, and the comparison of arrowheads necessitates cross-country journeys to the county towns [...] their elderly wives, who wish to make plum jam or to clean out the study, and have every reason



for keeping that great question of the camp or the tomb in perpetual suspension” (Woolf, 2001, p.7). Woolf uses vivid imagery to show how war and political oppression may be used in the domestic domain, bringing the house and family into the political sphere and implicating patriarchy inside a war-making state (Foster, 2013). Despite the fact that Woolf does not present a clear actual solution in *The Mark on the Wall*, she retains a positive view of the future. In “men perhaps, should be a woman” (Woolf, 2001, p.6). She also declares that this oppressive system will end at a certain stage, and that men and women will be equal. “Even so, life isn’t done with; there are a million patient, watchful lives still for a tree, all over the world, in bedrooms, in ships, on the pavement, lining rooms, where men and women sit after tea, smoking cigarettes” (Woolf, 2001, p.10).

Kate Millett explains in her book *Sexual Politics* that the man-woman relationship is based on power and dominance, and this relationship between the sexes is founded on the subjugation of the weaker sex by social authority and economic pressures on a daily basis. The dominant sex tries to sustain and enhance its authority over the subjugated sex in different aspects of life. Literature the mirror of society being one. Furthermore, Millett searches for explanations that have established female inferiority and therefore subjugation from the perspective of men and society (Millett, 2016). Because, in literary terms, fiction production has mostly been a male-dominated environment, dominated by masculine voices and exact methods, and instilled with male values, Woolf expresses the necessity for female writers to challenge this, and assert that women have a place in fiction writing. In her story *The Mark on the Wall*, this need is rooted in the very source of female oppression, where Woolf presents a woman who is focused on her thoughts, rather than presenting a woman who is engaged in deep educated talk. (Romero & Rodríguez, 2006, p. 96) Hence, it was commonly recognized that a female’s only responsibility in life is to enhance her feminine emotional capabilities in order to maximize their efficiency within their home. Any woman with personal ambitions or desires for academic or economic independence is thought to be unneeded (2006). Therefore, Virginia Woolf, who is critical of women's subjugation and marginalization in the literary world in her work, frequently criticized the patriarchal dominance of women's identity and role, and advocated for women’s role in literature. Since creativity was mostly limited to males only, women had no choice

but to be represented through the eyes of men. As a consequence, in literature, there has always been sexual discrimination, and female talent has been purposefully restricted from various forms of literary production. Therefore, she has always advocated for women to have a place in which to present themselves in their very own creative work, to represent their voices, ideas, and beliefs, and to represent themselves rather than being represented as subordinate by men. (Goldman, 2007, pp. 66-84). Hence, Woolf portrays a female protagonist in *The Mark on the Wall* who understands and values creativity in women by raising concerns about the reality of women being treated as inferiors to men, and even though the male character prevents the narrator from thinking, she nevertheless expresses her need to do so, as a reflection of women's desires that are disregarded, and hence the narrator says: "I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciouly, never to be interrupted, never to have to rise from my chair, to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility, or obstacle. I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts" (Woolf, 2001, p.15).

Woolf reflects Kate Millett's perceptive analysis of patriarchal power structures that subordinate and confine women to oppressive gender norms and how education is a crucial foundation for the development of one's consciousness as well as a guarantee of equality and emancipation from subjugation (Millett, 2016). In *The Mark on the Wall*, Woolf presents this by representing the social condition that shaped women's subjugation which stems from women's inability to acknowledge the forms of subjugation, such as inequity in receiving an education with men. However, Woolf considers literature to be an integral part of education. She believes that literature, like educational models, is dominated by the patriarchal society and hence subjugates women. In the text, Woolf exploits the figure of Shakespeare to symbolize literature as a male-dominated sphere in which females are objects (García, 2020). To illustrate, the narrator says in the story: "Shakespeare... Well, he will do as well as another. A man who sat himself solidly in an armchair, and looked into the fire, so—a shower of ideas fell perpetually from some very high Heaven down through his mind" (Woolf, 2001, p. 5). The narrator's thoughts on Shakespeare, Troy, and Whitaker's Table of Precedency are criticism of those in the authority of societal norms and who have been granted the privilege of being able to

express their opinions on anything at any time in order to justify their claim to power, whose views on women as inferiors were more valid than women themselves.

Virginia Woolf believes that a woman's place in society is limited to a society defined solely by masculine dominance. As a result, she believes it is critical to oppose and question the cause of oppression by rejecting patriarchy's prescribed modes of conduct and ideas for women as submissive subjects. Thus, Woolf uses stream of consciousness in the story as a way to present women to be more than just housewives and subordinates of the patriarchal society, even though from the outside the narrator is sitting staring at the mark on the wall, however her creative and intelligent inner thoughts reflect the real version of women in contrast to the way women are perceived by patriarchal society (Gligorovic, 2021, p. 61). Therefore, the narrator's inner thoughts depict resentment and resistance to the patriarchal system's domination over her world, and the black mark, where the narrator goes back and forth, stimulates her thoughts, and the mark on the wall becomes the central focus among many patriarchal power relationships. The female narrator opposes female subjugation, by relying on her inner thought to record her perceptions and struggles within the patriarchal world (Snaith, 2003). She depends heavily on her inner thoughts and musings to break away from the reality that occurs beyond these thoughts, which gives not only a more static and passive way of standing up against her subordinate state but also a much more artistic and creative way of emancipating herself "the narrator takes only mental actions, physically remaining passive and immobile, as if demonstrating that real life is the life of the mind. The account of what is illusory, though often passing for real," (Vorobyova, 2005, p. 7) from being subjugated by the patriarchal society itself and by the male figure who is a direct representation of this society. Her stream of consciousness is interrupted by this male presence that she is attempting to avoid. Since these interruptions are caused by an unexpected hit of the real world, the moments of interruption are frequently linked to the pressures of power systems on individuals, as well as masculine dissatisfaction, which is exemplified by male character disturbance, and these times of interruption by the male figure of the protagonist's stream of thought are frequently related to the strain of power systems on the individual, as well as masculine superiority (Berman, 2012).

Woolf, who is a self-educated woman regards professional and educational growth as critical to ensuring women's way to emancipate themselves from their subordinate state and become their subjects and hence in her works Woolf wishes to cultivate intellectuals who would serve as the foundation for a new social model based on equality; thus, in *The Mark on the Wall*, she encourages women to have inner critical reflection rather than established the conventional patriarchal ideas “And the novelists in future will realize more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted” (Woolf, 2001, p.6). The importance for women to receive an equal education within a developed educational structure that would allow them to achieve the same level of success as males, since the system at that time was a continuation of patriarchal social institutions that valued warfare and expressly taught men how to partake in wars “The military sound of the word is enough. It recalls leading articles, cabinet ministers—a whole class of things indeed which as a child one thought the thing itself, the standard thing, the real thing, from which one could not depart save at the risk of nameless damnation.” (Woolf, 2005, p.5). Moreover, Simone de Beauvoir reflects a similar viewpoint on women's education as Woolf's. In her book *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir explains the importance for women of receiving an education that is not based on an idea that obliges women to have inferior roles and men superior roles that do not allow women to flourish outside of the basis of these duties and overcome their subordinate status (Beauvoir, 1989, p. 577). Millett also discusses how educational levels can all contribute to women's subordination. She explains that if having knowledge gives you power, then having power brings forth opportunity for knowledge, and the main factor in female inferiority is the relative ignorance imposed by patriarchy (Millett, 2016, p. 42).

The story ends with the male presence wanting to go out to buy a newspaper, “I'm going out to buy a newspaper [...] Though it's no good buying newspapers.... Nothing ever happens. Curse this war; God damn this war!” (Woolf, 2001, p. 10). He dismisses the mark and the narrator's stream of thought by saying, “I don't see why we should have a snail on our wall.” (Woolf, 2001, p.10). Hence, he dismisses any indicator of the protagonist's mental development, and when the male presence

acknowledges the mark on the wall, it becomes a reality. However, it is the distorted quality of this mark that allows the narrator to shift from being subjugated by the male-dominated society as depicted in the fictional portrait, to be her subject, who has feminine consciousness that calls into question patriarchal authority and patterns of reality depiction (Romero & Rodríguez, 2006, p. 96). Woolf criticizes the male's inability to communicate with women and how they view themselves to be socially superior to the other gender, which is evident when the narrator's world of daydreaming is disregarded by the man. Hence, the mark on the wall, as the story's title suggests, is the central focus of the discussion. The mark frees the narrator from the constraints of traditional gender roles, such as order, consistency, and logic, allowing her to dive into her stream of thought and theories (Romero & Rodríguez, 2006).

To conclude, Virginia Woolf wrote *The Mark on the Wall* about a female narrator who represents women's suffering under gender structured society and the challenges they experience while living in these patriarchal societies by helping to understand the perspective of women's status during the first wave of feminism. Virginia Woolf displays a realistic portrayal of an outcast who is mentally subjugated. Moreover, the mark on the wall, despite its unusual nature, which calls logic into question, becomes the most significant thing and the narrator's primary focus, this undefined, nonsensical mark occupies the narrator's thoughts between past and present upon which narratives are built, which reflect the patriarchal established hierarchy. Through the narrator's chain of thought, Virginia Woolf gives insight on a variety of topics that include gender issues, which places women at the bottom of the social hierarchy and men at the top, just like her utilization of Whitaker's Almanack metaphor to present, as she then designates, the impersonal and impartial authority. That is a system that encourages masculine male prejudice against feminine in professions. Furthermore, the way the female identity is fully defined by being subjugated by their superiors, which in this case is her husband, who is a direct representation of the male-dominant society, hence restricting women from making even the most insignificant contribution to society. Moreover, the narrator uses her inner thoughts as a passive way to escape the patriarchal power structure that subjugates her as a woman to the oppressive social construct.

## IV. CHAPTER THREE

### A. Subjugated Women in Alice Munro's *Boys and Girls* (1964)

The third chapter of the study examines Alice Munro's short story *Boys and Girls*, in which the female narrator struggles under the patriarchal society within the family structure, and is subjugated by the patriarchal society and her mother, who is an indirect representation of patriarchal society. Furthermore, Kate Millett's theory of subjugation, in which she focuses on female subjugation and male domination in her book *Sexual Politics* (1972), will be used in this chapter. This chapter will also analyze how the young narrator tries to resist her subordinate state.

Alice Munro, a Nobel Prize-winning author mostly known for her feminist short stories, used literature as a tool to advocate for women's rights and to represent the sufferings of women who live in patriarchal societies. Despite years of rejection from publishers and the restrictions imposed on her profession by the duties of family life, she persisted in her efforts to build herself up as an author. Feminism had a great influence on her life and work and hence she highlighted the obstacles of women's liberty and individuality in her stories and focused on women's liberation from imposed gender roles and the control of the patriarchal society (Prabhaka & Satish, 2011, p. 58). Alice Munro presents complex female characters who face patriarchal dominance and demonstrates the damaging impacts and obstacles of patriarchal ideas on gender roles and their effects on them (Ross, 1992, p. 15). She wrote stories and collections, some of which include: *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), *The Progress of Love* (1986), *Friend of My Youth* (1990) *The Love of a Good Woman* (1998), *Who do you think you are* (1977), *Runaway* (2004). The first collection she published was in 1968 called *Dance of the Happy Shades* (Serafin, 2020). This collection includes fifteen short stories (Martin, 1987, p. 30) and Munro describes the restricted liberties that women practice despite the expectations of society, her characters bravely explore life beyond the confines of their gender. Beverly J. Rasporich reflects on the characterization in Munro's stories saying: "In fact, Munro's strength as a feminist writer is both this extra facet of her female

persona and the range of her portraits of women. Her gift is a variety of female characters portrayed from childhood to old age, whose hidden selves she explores beneath their artificial, disguised or misinterpreted social faces” (Rasporich, 1990, p. 33). These interpretations of Munro's writings examine the power structures of society, hence her work focuses on the male gender's dominance over the female gender and the female characters' attempts to undermine conventional views of the social hierarchy. Munro fought for women's independence and pushed women to have an existence outside of domestic life. Hence, her writings emphasized financial independence, freedom from household tasks, and equality as a means of putting a stop to oppression and subjugation (Cox & Johnston, 2015). Alice Munro is a strong advocate of women's rights, and her work reflects her feminist beliefs. In her short stories, Munro depicts how women battle to survive and prove their identities. She pointed out the victimization, gender discrimination, and patriarchal dominance of women, and the importance of building a place for women inside the repressive patriarchal societal structure. She is an outspoken advocate for women who have been oppressed, and are not able to break free. The female characters in her stories represent women who are trying to resist patriarchal concepts, in which she creates them to be knowledgeable of these social barriers. As they try to fight these barriers, they go through immense distress, both mental and physical. They fight, resist, and protest patriarchy's imposed gender roles (Keshk, 2019).

The analysis of Alice Munro's late 1960s short stories reveals the way women were bound by social norms. And she uses her work as a means to free them from the bonds of bondage and subordination that confine them to domestic life. Since the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s provided women with opportunities to survey the basic reality of their lives and that the entire societal structure is based on the patriarchal power structure, with men having power over women in different social aspects and women being confined to secondary status and treated inferior to men (Guerin, 1999, pp. 196-200). Munro's *Boys and Girls* (1964), is an autobiographical story that was published in her first collection *Dance of the Happy Shades* (1986), shows a narrative in which a girl is subjected to gender oppression in a patriarchal culture and a powerful demonstration against gender inequality. The story takes place in 1940s southern Ontario. Gender propriety and gender divisions are strictly enforced in this little culture. The patriarchal gender norms govern the

family. The protagonist of the story is a female who is recalling her childhood. Like Munro lives on a farm with her parents and brother, her father is a fox farmer. In the story, she explains the nature of her father's work and how she helps him with the foxes and the farm work. Because of the girl's young age, she has the opportunity to help her father with caring for the foxes. She also shares memories of her and her brother Laird, where she would sing to him and he would fall asleep to her singing. She vividly imagines herself as a heroine in adventurous stories, she says about the stories: "These stories were about myself, when I had grown a little older; they took place in a world that was recognizably mine, yet one that presented opportunities for courage, boldness, and self-sacrifice, as mine never did" (Munro, 1998, p. 86). She imagines herself riding horses and shooting guns. She has great knowledge of the fox business just by watching and helping her father on the farm, in contrast to what her mother wants her to learn about dresses, fashion, and kitchen duties, which the narrator finds boring. Also, regardless of her mother's love for her, she does not trust her because she is aware of her mother's plans for her future, which she knows are against her wishes. As she grows, she receives lectures from her family on how girls are supposed to act and have specific manners "Girls don't slam doors like that." "Girls keep their knees together when they sit down" (Munro, 1998, p. 90). Unlike the protagonist, the mother never involves herself with her husband's work, and he is also not involved in his wife's house tasks. The nameless young girl lives between two worlds; the farm and her imaginary world in which she pictures herself as being a hero and a knight. However, she slowly becomes aware of the difference between boys and girls, and the gender roles within her patriarchal society.

The second wave of feminism began in the early 1960s and lasted until the late 1990s, including feminists agreeing that women and men were not intrinsically different, but that any distinctions were socially made. And women began to challenge society as patriarchal and male-dominated, with many believing that notions of women's position in society needed to improve (Dicker & Piepmeyer, 2003, p. 15). Munro's story directly addresses the difficulties found in women's search for ways to break from this male-dominated society that places women at bottom of the social hierarchy. The narrative is told from the perspective of a female narrator. Suryamol, in his article *Subsistence of Space and Gender in Alice Munro's Boys and Girls* suggests the patriarchal restrictions limit the fantasies of the girl, and



the confrontation with domestic life and the challenges the narrator goes through put into perspective the gender roles, which instead of becoming the free and independent woman of her dreams, these gender norms force her to grow up and become a girl who works inside of the house with her mother (Suryamol, 2020, pp. 46-48). Hence, Munro, demonstrates the way patriarchy limits young girls' growth within society (Zhitong, 2020, p. 186). Moreover, Simone de Beauvoir's work has guided Munro in her exploration and comprehension of the topic of women's inferiority. Beauvoir's analysis of women's subjugation in *The Second Sex* appears to have had a strong influence on Munro. As a result, Munro in her stories explores how women became inferior to men and expand on Beauvoir's analysis of women's second status when she explains that since patriarchal times women have in general been forced to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men, a position comparable in many respects" (Beauvoir, 1988, p.148). Hence, through her short stories, Alice Munro speaks out against patriarchal society's discrimination and oppression of women. However, Kate Millett explains patriarchy as a society structured on the concept of male dominance over females. Although, patriarchy can take many different forms in different societies. She emphasizes on the aspects of men's dominance over women. Furthermore, the family is an essential unit of patriarchy in Millett's view, and it is a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal system. She states: "Patriarchy's chief institution is the family" "It is both a mirror of and a connection with the larger society" (Millett, 2016, p. 33). It also serves to socialize males and females into gender divided roles, demeanors, and statuses, as a way to keep women in a condition of subjugation (Beechey, 1979, p. 68).

The protagonist becomes conscious of the gender roles that impact her will to be free. And rather than working with her brother and father on the fox farm, she is expected to join her mother in the house; she is meant to be kind in her demeanor, and obedient to authority. The authority of men, who are placed at the top of the social hierarchy and are viewed as superiors with the power to decide that women's place as inferiors is inside the home. That is present when the nameless female narrator is belittled and objectified by a salesman who visits the farm while the narrator is out doing farm work with her father collecting cut grass when her father introduces her by saying: "Like to have you meet my new hired man" The salesman responds, "Could of fooled me," "I thought it was only a girl," (Munro, 1998, p. 88).

This shows how women were considered in male-dominated societies. This objectification of women, according to Millett, is one of men's weapons of power and proof of their domination, authority, and subjugation over women (Millett, 2016). Gender contrast entails, of course, the superiority of men and the inferiority of women. The girl is delighted when her father praises her because she does an excellent job for him. In her opinion, being compared to a male worker is aesthetically appealing.

The narrator tends to maintain a distance from her mother and sees her mother's work and character objectively. On the other hand, she idolizes her father's work and place and feels that if she follows his rules and attempts to be like him while exploring his universe she will grow up to be more like him. Furthermore, the narrator expresses her irritation through the use of the word "girl," which is referenced many times in the story, by which the narrator is frequently humiliated and escapes into her fantasies. She says: "I no longer felt safe. It seemed that in the minds of the people around me there was a steady undercurrent of thought, not to be deflected, on this one subject. The word girl had formerly seemed to be innocent and unburdened, like the word child now it appeared that it was no such thing" (Munro, 1998, p. 90). As Simone de Beauvoir explains in *The Second Sex*, these social norms are formed by social factors. She says: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 1989). However, the narrator quickly realizes being a girl entails being removed from male tasks, like helping her dad with the farm work. She becomes aware that her younger brother will eventually replace her as the father's helper. Her mother makes it obvious and uses it as a way to bring the girl inside to do housework when she says: "Wait till Laird gets a little bigger, then you'll have a real help" (Munro, 1998, p.88).

Kate Millett explains: "half of the populace which is female is controlled by that half which is male, the principles of patriarchy appear to be a fold: male shall dominate female" (Millett, 2016, p.25). In Munro's story, this patriarchy is the dominating force behind the narrator's fate, and thereby subordinates a female who is socially taught to be just a girl. Everyone in her life expects her to do the duties that are associated with being a female, for instance, doing the dishes, cleaning the house, and having lady-like manners all of which are not as important to her as her father's work at the farm. She says: "work in the house was endless, dreary and peculiarly

depressing; work done out of doors and in my father's service was ritualistically important" (Munro, 1998, p.88). Her mother, as a typical woman, believes that a girl is not supposed to help her father with the outside work, she expresses that working outside is a boy's job. Throughout the story, the mother constantly imposes patriarchy's social norms on her daughter by reminding her that a woman must follow these social norms. As a result, the narrator attempts to maintain a distance from her mother. In the outside farm work, she sees her mother as an outsider. The mother is part of the inside world that signifies domestic space for women, and she is the force that pulls the narrator into becoming a girl, by trying to keep her trapped up in the house, away from her father's world. Her mother represents everything she does not want to become. The narrator says: "She was also my enemy. She was always plotting. She was plotting now to get me to stay in the house more, although she knew I hated it (because she knew I hated it) and keep me from working for my father" (Munro, 1998, p. 98). Munro portrays the mother as a woman accustomed to gender norms and, without realizing it, reinforces them on her daughter. Thus, she unknowingly becomes an advocate of the traditional roles of women, and carries the psychology of patriarchal society. The mother says: "I can use her more in the house...It's not like I had a girl in the family at all" (Munro, 1998, p.98). However, the girl tries to defy her mother's expectations of her. While male domination suppresses the narrator's desire to be free. Unlike her mother, she thought she was able to use masculine equipment and accomplish man's labor. According to Boynton: "Munro emphasizes psychological barriers by illustrating those terms of physical barriers: the father works with the foxes in their pens removed from the house where the mother cooks and cleans" (Boynton, 1979, p. 29). Like the mother, her grandmother, who comes to visit imposes on her what her mother already imposes on her. She says: My grandmother came to stay with us for a few weeks and I heard other things. "Girls don't slam doors like that." "Girls keep their knees together when they sit down." And worse still, when I asked some questions, "That's none of girls' business" (Munro, 1998, p. 90). But she kept slamming doors and sitting as improperly as she could, believing that by doing so, she would keep herself free; "I continued to slam the doors and sit as awkwardly as possible, thinking that by such measures I kept myself free" (Munro, 1998, p. 90). The narrator defies her grandmother's and mother's accepted values. She fights to learn how to be a 'girl.' She is confined in a world created by a patriarchal system for her. Yet, until the end

of the story, she fights to maintain her relationship with her father while keeping her distance from her mother (Farrokh, 2016). The protagonist uses her imagination and dreams as a powerful tool to present her yearning for liberation from the oppression that is imposed on her by the rules of how to become a girl. Every night, she would tell herself stories that are not typically associated with women. In these dreams, she imagines herself in a different world where she is able to be a hero: “went on with one of the stories I was telling myself from night to night. These stories were about myself, when I had grown a little older; they took place in a world that was recognizably mine, yet one that presented opportunities for courage, boldness and self-sacrifice, as mine never did. I rescued people from a bombed building” (Munro, 1998, p.86). These stories are about “courage, daring, and self-sacrifice”; an imaginative universe in which she can be anyone she wants to be. This heroic woman is what the protagonist aspires to be in the future, yet she is the total opposite of the conventional girl her family expects her to be. The girl believes that their home, is a place of continuous regulations and restrictions, with a view that limits her ability to live the life of her choice, highlighting the contrast between her dreams and aspirations and her mother’s expectations of her (Wessman, 2015). Munro throughout the story feels it is necessary to fight and examine the root causes of oppression by presenting a narrator who opposes patriarchy's established ways of behavior and views about women. Hence, the young female narrator tries to escape and fight her inferior status in society, which is defined completely by masculine domination, by using her imagination. Furthermore, Munro believes that a woman's place in society is defined primarily by male dominance. As a consequence, she believes it is critical to resist and challenge the reason for oppression by resisting patriarchy's imposed modes of behavior and ideas for women as subordinate individuals.

Keingard Nischik, in *(Un-) Doing Gender: Alice Munro, Boys and Girls (1964)*. *The Canadian Short Story: Interpretations (2007)* explains that the narrator by rebelling against her mother and her domestic restriction, symbolically rejects the typical female gender role that was established for her as a girl. The story depicts how, during her youth, the girl is pushed into a role she would never have chosen for herself. She is surrounded by representations of the patriarchal society, and controlled by the views of how a girl should be and how a girl should act, this denies

her from her desire to be free from what is imposed on her, and to give up the work on the farm (Nischik, 2007). However, as the narrator grows, she feels more isolated and the society's expectations of her also grow, pushing her to limit her independence and to accept the unpleasant rules merely to suit the social standards. Despite the fact that she is a girl, the young narrator of *Boys and Girls* satisfies her urge to be strong by portraying herself differently. The young girl aspires to be more than just a female, which society does not accept. On a similar note, Syed Mir Hassim, in *The Unheard Symphony: A Reaction against Blatant Sexism in Alice Munro's "Boys and Girls"*, argues that the story *Boys and Girls*, like other short stories written by Alice Munro, is primarily created in response to the discrimination against girls and women in society. Furthermore, the story is written from the perspective of childhood and early adolescence, and it directly contradicts the long-standing gender roles that oppress women irreversibly, and constant subject of gender discrimination, which is actually stated through the narrator herself, who presents her life experiences as a girl in a male-dominated society. From a young age, the protagonist becomes acquainted with the way gender distinctions impact her relationships with other family members. In this narrative, Hassim explains that Munro depicts the shamed and pained emotions of a girl who is being molded to become a girl, which for the narrator: "was a definition, always touched with emphasis, with reproach and disappointment. Also it was a joke on [her]" (Munro, 1998, p.90). The girl initially assists her father, she provides water to the fox cages and, and helps him in cutting the long grass. The same may be said for Alice Munro, who assisted her father in his job. The girl feels pride in helping her father, she says she works: "I worked willingly under his eyes, and with a feeling of pride" (Munro, 1998, p.88). However, she will be forced to give up her work with her father, when her brother grows and is able to take on the work. Instead, she will assist her mother with home chores, like working in the kitchen which she finds extremely boring. Munro illustrates the house as a place of endless impositions that limits the protagonist's ability to construct and build a life of her own. Despite the fact that it is winter, the narrator feels this kind of imposition as a result of her difficult existence at home, the outside world appears to be better than the inside one. She says: We were not afraid of outside though this was the time of year when snowdrifts curled around our house like sleeping whales and the wind harassed us all night, coming up from the buried fields, the frozen swamp, with its old bugbear

chorus of threats and misery. We were afraid of inside” (Munro, 1998, p.85). As the narrator grows, society's expectations of her grow, too, limiting her independence, limiting her time outside helping her father, and forcing her to adopt harsher rules just to suit the patriarchal social norms. In order to gain freedom, the narrator of *Boys and Girls* depicts herself differently, she aspires to be more than a woman. Furthermore, she tries to resist these gender norms in different ways, as mentioned previously by slamming doors, but also by singing at night when everyone falls asleep, and using her imagination as an escape from the patriarchal society that makes her feel inferior to her brother (Hassim, 2016, pp. 60-64). Furthermore, in the story the narrator's brother's name Laird is known, hence individualized. In contrast, the female narrator's name stays unknown in the story, and is only regarded as a girl, this emphasizes the gender discrimination between both Laird and the narrator. Hence, pointing out the inferior position of the narrator (Nischik, 2007).

The narrator explains that her father slaughters horses to feed the foxes, and the horses occasionally remain with them for long periods of time, therefore, the narrator grows to love them and names them: “The winter I was eleven years old we had two horses in the stable. We did not know what names they had had before, so we called them Mack and Flora. Mack was an old black workhorse, sooty and indifferent. Flora was a sorrel mare, a driver” (Munro, 1998, p.90). The narrator secretly watches her father shoot Mack. She is aware that her father will shoot Flora, the mare, two weeks later, but Flora, being strong and rebellious, manages to run away; “The stable door was open. Henry had just brought Flora out, and she had broken away from him. She was running free in the barnyard, from one end to the other” (Munro, 1998, p.93). The narrator reaches the gate and instead of closing it, she opens it wider, she says; “Instead of shutting the gate, I opened it as wide as I could. I did not make any decision to do this, it was just what I did” (Munro, 1998 p.94). This shows that the narrator identifies with the horse. The girl wants to be free to do whatever she wants and isn't interested in being bound by patriarchal rules. Despite the fact that the girl opens the gate, she is aware that her father will catch the horse; “Flora would not really get away. They would catch up with her in the truck” (Munro, 1998, p.94). The same way the patriarchal system has assigned the narrator a female subordinate status. Eventually, her father will catch the horse, so both the narrator and Flora are fated to a certain fate. Keingard Nischik explains this by saying: “The girl intuitively

identifies with the female horse because she, too, wants to escape a certain death - if not in the literal sense of the word, then in the sense of the end of her free ranging activities and options when she is pressed into a fixed female role pattern” (Nischik, 2007, p.212). However, the narrator's emotions about the horse's escape are similar to her feelings about herself. She understands that there will be no freedom for her from patriarchal gender norms and no freedom for Flora either. And she becomes aware that; “A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become” (Munro, 1998, p.90). She recognizes herself as a prisoner who is powerless and is associated with the horse that is ready to be shot. As a result, the poor girl's dreams are shattered, and she ultimately ends up in the constraints imposed by the male-dominant society, which limit her ability to live the life of her desires.

*Boys and Girls*, demonstrate the way patriarchy limits young girls' growth within society. The young female character, possesses a great desire for liberation from many aspects of her life, as a means to gain subjectivity (Zhitong, 2020, p. 186). In *Boys and Girls*, the narrator is forced to leave everything she learned from working on the farm, learn household work inside the house with her mother, and take care of her physical appearance because of the social pressures of how women should look. Though she has a driving force to be liberated from imposed gender roles and continue to work on the farm, her mother, who represents the patriarchal society, pressures her to avail to the cultural and societal roles of women, and that women's place is in inside the house. As a result her dreams and imagination of being a hero change (Alexander, 1984, p. 128). She says: “I told myself stories, but even in these stories something different was happening, mysterious alterations took place. A story might start off in the old way, with a spectacular danger, a fire or wild animals, and for a while I might rescue people; then things would change around, and instead, somebody would be rescuing me” (Munro, 1998, p.95). She is no longer the brave hero, but the victim in need of help.

When the narrator enters the house after Flora's incident, she knows that she has to face the consequences of her action, and she is aware of the inevitability of her action and the effect it will have on her father. She says about her father: “he was not going to trust me anymore, he would know that I was not entirely on his side” (Munro, 1998, p.94). As the family is seated around the dinner table, Laird exposes his older sister by revealing that Flora escaped on purpose. Instead of

closing the gate, she widened it. “Laird looked across the table at me and said proudly, distinctly, “Anyway it was her fault Flora got away” (Munro, 1998, p95). For the first time in the story, her brother takes his father's side against her. After the father overcomes his first irritation at his daughter's obviously rash behavior, the father reacts in a way that is much more harmful to the narrator than anger and punishment. She says: “Never mind, my father said. He spoke with resignation, even good humor, and the words which absolved and dismissed me for good. “She’s only a girl,” he said.” (Munro, 1998, p.95). Consequently, the narrator accommodates not just how to behave, but also how to feel and think like a girl, and hence, as the ending indicates, she considers herself to be a subordinated female. Flora’s escape displays her own ambition to break out of the confining role patterns imposed by the dominant gender system by adopting her father's dismissive attitude to her action. And given the pressures of patriarchal society, the narrator gives up her subjectivity. Eventually, Munro's narrator becomes aware of her transformation into a girl. She says, after her father refers to her as only a girl: “I didn’t protest that, even in my heart. Maybe it was true” (Munro, 1998, p.95). The female protagonist falls victim to the pressures of her domestic life, and she eventually accepts her inferior position as a girl. Furthermore, she can no longer avoid the formation of her becoming a girl any more than she can avoid the fact of Flora's death. Hence, Munro portrays the way patriarchal dynamics in families replicate themselves and impose set gender roles. And the way mothers support social norms. Thus, male domination inhibits the narrator's desire for uniqueness as a result of a social organization that creates and preserves women’s subordinate states within male-dominant societies (Nischik, 2007).

*Boys and Girls*, published at the start of the second wave of feminism, presents gender rules in a somewhat structured way, by presenting a conventional portrayal of the mother, who has the psyche of a patriarchal society, and also presenting the father, Henry the hired workman, and Laird as males they view the narrator as only a girl despite her resistance to becoming one. Kate Millett says: “the parents’, the peers’, and the culture’s notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture and expression” (Millett, 2016, p.31). Moreover, the story also presents transparent socializing pressures forced on the girl by her family, which are slowly reflected in her imagination.



Where initially she is the hero rescuing everyone, and later she becomes someone in need of being rescued. Although in the story, the restricting, de-individualizing influences of gender notions are demonstrated. At the same time, it highlights the valuable, liberating chances for women to rebel and resist the inferiority imposed on them by the dominating male society. Thus, the daughter experiences her first detachment from her dad when she secretly observes him killing a horse, seemingly without showing any feelings. She says: Yet I felt a little ashamed, and there was a new wariness, a sense of holding-off, in my attitude to my father and his work” (Munro, 1997). However, the second time around she defies her father and society by helping the other horse in its escape (Nischik, 2007).

Sheldrick Ross, in *Alice Munro: A Double Life (1992)*, argues that Munro presented the narrator within a repressive structure of cultural and patriarchal authority. The author draws attention to the problematic outcome of patriarchy. She investigates the issue of women under a patriarchal structure by constructing a world in which women are subordinated. She demonstrates the devastating impacts of patriarchal notions of women's roles and their effects on women's intellect, emotions, and psyche. Alice Munro's short story is primarily concerned with the effects of a male-dominated society and the pressure it has on the young female narrator. As a result, the protagonist of the story faces a traditional feminine conflict between her freedom and subjugation. She realizes that everyone around her expects her to behave in a particular manner, the kind of behavior that is proper, traditional, and socially respectable for a girl. A woman requires space and independence. She also desires a place where no one can influence her feelings and emotions so that she can have subjectivity over herself (Ross, 1992). Lastly, Alice Munro portrays her female protagonist as a courageous young girl who tries to resist the society that binds her freedom and places her at the bottom of the social hierarchy. As Kate Millett suggests, in any dominated group, it has been indicated many times that if women are freed from subjugation, it will result in the destruction of patriarchy and women's freedom from inferiority (Millett, 2016, p.13).

In conclusion, this chapter investigates the way Alice Munro in her short fiction *Boys and Girls*, presents a female protagonist who encounters gender structured society. The story features a female narrator who represents women who are oppressed and subordinated not only by male figures in their live, but also by a

female character who is believed to be a proponent of conventional roles of women and carries the mindset of patriarchal society; in this context, the narrator's mother. The narrator is subjugated by her mother, who constantly presents her with the patriarchal expectations that have been imposed on her all through the story. The protagonist is unable to realize her true freedom as a result of the system that society has imposed on her. And confines her only to domestic tasks and how the girl is a victim of the patriarchal gender structure. Furthermore, Munro through her story displays the way women are identified and established as inferiors, while men as superior. She also believes that in patriarchal systems of power where men have more power than women, hence women have always been subordinate to men. Munro's story examines patriarchy and the subjugation of women and highlights the way patriarchy places women at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Moreover, this chapter focuses on how the female narrator tries to escape her subjugation and gain freedom by imagining herself as a hero. And the ways she identifies herself with the horse, as she tries but fails to escape her role as a girl and the horse fails to escape its destiny.

## V. CONCLUSION

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Virginia Woolf, and Alice Munro are female authors who used their personal lives and experiences to create female protagonist figures who represent women and the challenges they face while living in patriarchal societies and being subjugated to gender-structured and male-dominated societies. Furthermore, they emphasize specific aspects and patterns in the description of their characters as a means to indirectly criticize patriarchal societies. Their characters are portrayed as females who reject the established gender norms and call into question the social hierarchy, exposing the oppression and dominance imposed on them by society. *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Gilman, *The Mark on the Wall* by Virginia Woolf, and *Boys and Girls* by Alice Munro, all present female protagonists who are subjugated and oppressed either mentally or physically by the male figures in their lives. However, each character manages to resist her subordinator in her own way.

The three short stories are narrated by female protagonists. Each narrator experiences mental or physical subjugation. In *The Yellow Wallpaper* the narrator is physically and mentally subjugated by her husband. She is imprisoned in a room and banned from any stimulus activities. Woolf in *The Mark on the Wall* presents a narrator who is mentally subjugated. The narrator is unable to present her thoughts to the outside world. Furthermore, Alice Munro's narrator in *Boys and Girls* is physically subjugated by not being allowed to work on the farm. The authors, Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Alice Munro, wrote the stories from their experiences and points of view, which makes them semi-autobiographical stories. Though many details have been changed, however, Gilman herself suffered from a mental illness similar to her character in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. The story is based on Gilman's medical journey after she suffers from postpartum depression and her relationship with her physician, Dr. Mitchell, who is also mentioned in the story, who pushed her into mental anguish, before she rejected his therapy and resumed her writing. Similar to the narrator's husband's rest cure treatment, the same treatment

Gilman was prescribed by her doctor. As for *The Mark on the Wall*, Woolf reflects on her difficult life as an educated female who is discriminated against by a patriarchal society. Hence, the narrator in the story is mentally subjugated and is unable to share her thoughts on the social problems, so she only ponders and thinks. Similarly, Alice Munro's background is reflected by the young narrator of *Boys and Girls*, who, like Munro, had a fox farmer father and lived in a small conventional town in Southern Ontario. Munro, through the narrator, portrays the patriarchal society she lived in and the oppression she experienced from a young age. In the narrative, Munro also portrays her relationship with her mother by describing how the narrator's mother, like her mother, had a notion of girls' good behavior, which consisted of her daughter being ladylike and pure.

Furthermore, the three feminist authors, Gilman, Woolf, and Munro, discuss the important issues and challenges that women faced at the times they wrote the stories. They represent different time frames, which highlight two significant moments of the feminist movement: the beginning of the first feminist wave with Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) and Woolf's *The Mark on the Wall* (1917), and the beginning of the second wave with Munro's *Boys and Girls* (1964). The stories also illustrate the power-structure of male-dominated societies in three different geographical areas that are yet connected culturally, ethnically, and politically; all are patriarchal societies. Gilman, in her short story *The Yellow Wallpaper* responds to the male-dominated structure of nineteenth century society by portraying her protagonist as a reference to nineteenth-century women, who have been regarded as weak and emotionally unstable. Gilman portrays the consequences of strict gender roles imposed by a male-dominated culture. She criticizes the notion that men are more sensible, but women are housewives who must follow their husband's rules. Woolf wrote *The Mark on the Wall* in 1917, at the end of the First World War. In it, she portrays the disparate roles of women and the oppression imposed on them at that time. Moreover, Munro's story, *Boys and Girls*, written in 1964, openly discusses the hardships encountered by women seeking to break free from a male-dominated culture that places women at the bottom of the social order. And the distinctions between males and females were socially established, therefore, Munro being heavily influenced by the feminist movement criticizes the patriarchal

society and emphasizes the importance of changing the women's suffering and destiny in society.

Patriarchy had a profound impact on these characters' lives. Through their stories, Charlotte Gilman, Virginia Woolf, and Alice Munro have shown the struggle of women under this system. According to Kate Millett, the concept of patriarchy has been used to describe male dominance and the power structures in which males dominate women (Millett, 2016, p. 25). In the stories, the authors show how a woman is characterized and established as the object and a man as the subject. They believe that all through history, women have been subordinated to men. They have portrayed the devastating impact of the patriarchal culture. And their stories criticize patriarchy and the subordination of women. Furthermore, the authors successfully undermined patriarchal ideals by using their vocation to write about women's suffering within a patriarchal society. Alice Munro, Virginia Woolf, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman investigated patriarchal society's gender structure through the lens of their lively feminist views throughout their works. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Gilman illustrates this idea by presenting the character of the narrator's physician husband, who represents the patriarchal society, his continued mistreatment of his wife implies his higher social status over his wife, who is completely dominated by her husband, to the extent that she is confined in a single room by his instruction. The woman who recently gave birth and is struggling with postpartum depression her husband, on the other hand, believes her troubles are the result of her imagination. His approach is to remove all stimulation by prescribing the rest cure, "I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition" (Gilman, 2016, p. 844). As a consequence of this therapy, the woman is isolated from everyone around her and is unable to use artistic abilities, like writing or drawing. As a result, she descends into insanity, unable to return to her previous life. Virginia Woolf in *The Mark on the Wall*, through the narrator's stream of consciousness, presents the patriarchy that places women at the bottom of the social order. And the way female identity is determined by being subjugated. Woolf presents her character as a woman who is unable to express her ideas to the outside world, indicating a woman's lack of social acceptance and recognition. This patriarchal system captures her inner thoughts, as her introspective thinking is cut by her husband. As if the reader is inside the

narrator's head, unable to express these concerns to the outside world, indicating a lack of social recognition. On a similar note, Alice Munro conveys the male-dominated patriarchal society through the constrictions imposed on the narrator in *Boys and Girls* that limit her desires to be free from the expectations of women that push her to stop working outside with her father and instead do housework inside with her mother. Munro illustrates the effect patriarchy has on women, limiting their contribution to society. Her narrator is confined by her family to becoming a girl in the same way the narrator of *The Yellow Wallpaper* is confined to her room and is unable to express herself, either by writing or drawing. The narrator of *The Mark on the Wall* is also unable to present her ideas to the outside world. The three narrators are confined mentally and physically from expressing themselves within their societies. They represent women who are inferiors to the mainstream patriarchy. Hence, these three authors, in their short stories, spoke about women's sufferings in a patriarchal society, and they properly challenged patriarchal rules.

Kate Millett states that men use the objectification of women as a tool to demonstrate their dominance and subjugation over women. As a result, women contribute less as subjects to themselves and more as objects of submission to patriarchal societies (Millett, 2016, p.16). This objectification is symbolically referred to in the stories. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator has been objectified by her marriage and her husband. As a mentally disordered woman who must obey her husband's orders without asking questions, and whose husband does not allow her to give opinions on her condition, and what will make her feel better, he says that as her husband and physician, he knows better. In *The Mark on the Wall*, it is referenced in the text by the portrait the narrator mentions: "The miniature of a lady with white powdered curls, powder-dusted cheeks, and lips like red carnations. A fraud of course" (Woolf, 2001, p.3). Woolf here presents the way women are objectified and viewed by a patriarchal society. Likewise, in *Boys and Girls*, the narrator is objectified by the use of the word 'girl' on many occasions throughout the story, one of which is when her father introduces her to Henry, the salesman, as his hired man, and Henry replies by saying "she is just a girl" (Munro, 1998, p. 78).

Through *The Yellow Wallpaper* Charlotte Perkins Gilman emphasizes the positions of men and women in society, hence, she describes the hegemonic power structure, in which men have the power of control over women. The husband pulls

his wife out of society by imprisoning her. Hence, she is unable to represent herself within the confinements of the patriarchal system. Similarly, in *The Mark on the Wall*, Virginia Woolf portrays men's and women's statuses and positions, by referring to Whitaker's Table of Precedency which demonstrates the patriarchal society. The protagonist inspects and questions the norms for men and women by directly referring to this table, or list as she names it in the story, when the narrator says: "for who will ever be able to lift a finger against Whitaker's Table of Precedency? The Archbishop of Canterbury is followed by the Lord High Chancellor; The Lord High Chancellor is followed by the Archbishop of York" (Woolf, 2001, p. 8). She argues that this "list" represents the deep-rooted hierarchal system as seen from a patriarchal perspective. Woolf examines this table. Furthermore, Woolf presents Whitaker as a masculine figure who represents the hierarchical society and she adds that this classification impoverishes women. Those factors continuously remind the narrator that the patriarchal order restricts and governs women's independence in real life.

The female narrators share their objection and refusal to the assumptions laid upon them by their dominant societies. They see that these assumptions downgrade them to "subordinated, secondary, parasitic" (Beauvoir, 1989, p. 443). Hence, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Virginia Woolf, and Alice Munro have established artists as female in their narrations to motivate and inspire women to become the artists as female. In all three stories, the women and girls have to face the profoundly established gender system and the patriarchal ideology through a diversity of female characters, ranging in age from childhood through adulthood and then old age. These characters' lives are misinterpreted and misrepresented by the patriarchal rules of their societies. Munro takes aim at the patriarchal world's social hegemony, which imposes oppressive rules on women. Munro disproves the subordination of females in *Boys and Girls* Thus, the narrator is socially molded to become "only a girl" (Munro, 1998, p. 78).

These stories might have different methods of presenting patriarchal societies and their restrains. However, they are told from the perspective of female narrators struggling to meet the expectations that have been placed on them. For instance, Gilman in *The Yellow Wallpaper* introduces Jennie, the sister-in-law, as another character, other than the husband. Jennie represents women who are adjusted to the

restraints forced upon them by mainstream patriarchy. Hence, by doing the housework while the narrator is recovering, she sets an example of a perfect nineteenth-century woman and housewife similar to the narrator's mother in *Boys and Girls*, who is a constant reminder of everything the narrator does not want to be. The mother is accustomed to prevailing gender norms and unknowingly pushes them on her daughter. The narrator expresses her disinterest in being like her mother, doing work inside the house and becoming a traditional housewife.

According to Kate Millett, there is an underlying barrier created by power structure, with men having power over women which implies domination and subordination. Therefore, the dominance and oppression of the husbands and families had a profound impact on the lives of the protagonists in the three stories. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Gilman presents Millett's idea of the power structure through the husband, who represents the patriarchal society of the time. Having power, and hence dominance over his wife. He treats her more like an object by preventing her from practicing any human activities. Virginia Woolf, in *The Mark on the Wall*, also reflects on this idea by stating: "I understand Nature's game her prompting to take action as a way of ending any thought that threatens to excite or to pain. Hence, I suppose, comes our slight contempt for men of action men, we assume, who don't think. Here, she is also concerned about women being overshadowed by the deeds of dubious men of action" (Woolf, 2001, p. 9). However, the narrator of *Boys and Girls* is subjugated by her family, which, according to Millett, is an integral part of patriarchy, which serves to mold the statuses of females into subordinate entities of the society. The family is the main aspect in *Boys and Girls* that forces gender norms on the narrator.

The power and oppression of their male-dominated societies had a profound impact on these characters' lives, and their imprisonment and anguish are inextricably caused by their inferior positions within society. The three main characters resented being subjugated and mistreated, and each developed a resistance to it. The authors portray their protagonists' sufferings as they stumble through a world that will not recognize them for who they are. Their pain is portrayed as they are pushed into the mold they so desperately tried to resist. Rather than having the opportunity to follow their ambitions, they are oppressed and forced to hide behind their own minds, dreams, and imaginations. Charlotte Gilman's protagonist in *The*



*Yellow Wallpaper* uses her fantasy as an escape and resistance to her husband's control and his rest cure treatment, after constantly trying to explain to her husband that writing, going out, and drawing will make her feel better. She says: "Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good" (Gilman, 2016, p. 844). He rejects it by emphasizing that these activities are only making her worse. However, she secretly writes her in her journal. She says: "There comes John, and I must put this away—he hates to have me write a word" (Gilman, 2016, p.845). Her writings are her way of resisting the subordinate state her husband puts her in. Likewise, Woolf's protagonist uses her stream of consciousness as a means to resist the patriarchy. Her desire to think without her husband's interruption. She says: "I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciouly, never to be interrupted, never to have to rise from my chair, to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility, or obstacle. I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts" (Woolf, 2001, p. 11). The narrator chooses her thoughts to express her need to be free and employs the chain of thought to resist the masculine view and subjugation in society. However, even her thoughts are trapped by patriarchal influence. She ponders about the power structures that identify women's place in society, restricting them from being housewives and mothers and preventing them from making any contribution to society outside the domestic domain. Similar to the protagonists of *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *The Mark on the Wall*, the protagonist of *Boys and Girls* uses her imagination as an escape from the patriarchal society that she is surrounded by, but in this case, she imagines herself to be a hero who saves everyone around her. She says: "These stories were about myself, when I had grown a little older; they took place in a world that was recognizably mine, yet one that presented opportunities for courage, boldness, and self-sacrifice, as mine never did" (Munro, 1998, p. 86). For as long as she is able to, she resists the restrictions that limit both her desire to work outside with her father and her fantasies.

*The Yellow Wallpaper*, *The Mark on the Wall*, and *Boys and Girls* illustrate the way women can be subordinated by patriarchal society. Each character displays her own desire for freedom in different ways. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Gilman's narrator starts to see hidden patterns on the wallpaper, and the longer she is imprisoned in the room, the more she imagines nonexistent details of the wallpaper.

She imagines that there is a woman trapped behind the wallpaper. “There are things in that paper that nobody knows but me, or ever will. Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day” (Gilman, 2016, p. 849). As her mental health deteriorates, the protagonist disassociates from herself and her mind, and rather than being scared of the woman trapped behind the wallpaper, she becomes her and loses touch with reality pushing her into temporary freedom from the world around her. In *The Mark on the Wall*, the narrator might not fall into madness. However, the black mark, similar to the wallpaper, allows the narrator to have subjectivity over her thoughts, and an awareness that questions the hold patriarchy has on women. Moreover, the issue of determining the origin of such a mark allows the narrator to go into a stream of thinking and imagination in a flowing inner dialogue free from the rules imposed by a male-dominated society. In comparison, to the wallpaper and the mark on the wall, the horse Flora, in Munro’s story *Boys and Girls*, represents the narrator's yearning to escape society’s expectations of her. Therefore, the horse escapes from being shot; the girl does not stop it; she rather helps it by opening the gate. Therefore, the protagonist resonates with the horse, though the escape is temporary because she knows that Flora will eventually be caught, the same way she will not be able to escape patriarchy’s expectations of her; “a girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become” (Munro, 1998, p.90). The female protagonists in the three short stories become aware of the domineering male figures in their lives and take a stance against them.

The short stories, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *The Mark on the Wall*, and *Boys and Girls*, share symbolic endings in different ways. There are various perceptions of the narrator's ending in *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Going insane symbolizes the narrator’s subjectivity over her life, which enables her to have control of a small part of her fate for a brief time. In the end, she chooses insanity as a way to gain her freedom rather than be deprived of her independence and imprisoned by her husband. In *The Mark on the Wall*, the mark represents the narrator’s thought process in terms of moving from one subject to the other, and every time her thoughts ponder into women’s place within a patriarchal society, she always comes back to the mark, back to the idea of women being painted over by the society that put men on top of hegemonic order. *The Mark on the Wall* closes when the mark is defined by the man, through this Woolf puts emphasis on the idea that whatever thought process that the narrator

goes down to, she is going to return to a world run by men than dominate and subordinate women. Likewise, Alice Munro portrays the female protagonist of *Boys and Girls* as a courageous girl who decides to rebel against a system that restricts her freedom. Therefore, the story is not only about the inquiry and quest from a females self-awareness, but it is also about the narrator's deep understanding of the confinements of patriarchal societies; thus, the horse Flora's escape demonstrates her desire to liberate herself from the subordinate restricting state imposed by the male-dominant society.

As seen in the previous chapters, this study examines how the protagonists in the short stories *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1982), *The Mark on the Wall* (1917), and *Boys and Girls* (1964), had their ways of fighting against the forms of subjugation imposed on them by the patriarchal society, as discussed in the discussion chapters, by the use of the narrators' imaginations and fantasies in *The Yellow Wallpaper* and *Boys and Girls*, and the stream of thought in *The Mark on the Wall*. The study also presents the way Charlotte Gilman, Virginia Woolf, and Alice Munro in their literary works represent the challenges women experienced while living in patriarchal societies since the late nineteenth century, which marked the start of the first feminist wave towards the end of the twentieth century, which marked the start of the second wave of feminism. The authors present female protagonist figures who are subjugated by male-dominated societies. Finally, this study concludes that these stories are a push against the domination of men over women. And representations on the reality that women are becoming more aware of the societal restraints and their inferior position in society. Hence, the purpose of the current study is to analyze the patriarchal societies that restrict women to subordinated positions and treat them as inferiors. Thus, the aim is to reveal patriarchal principles in order to encourage women's resistance to subjugation.

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