

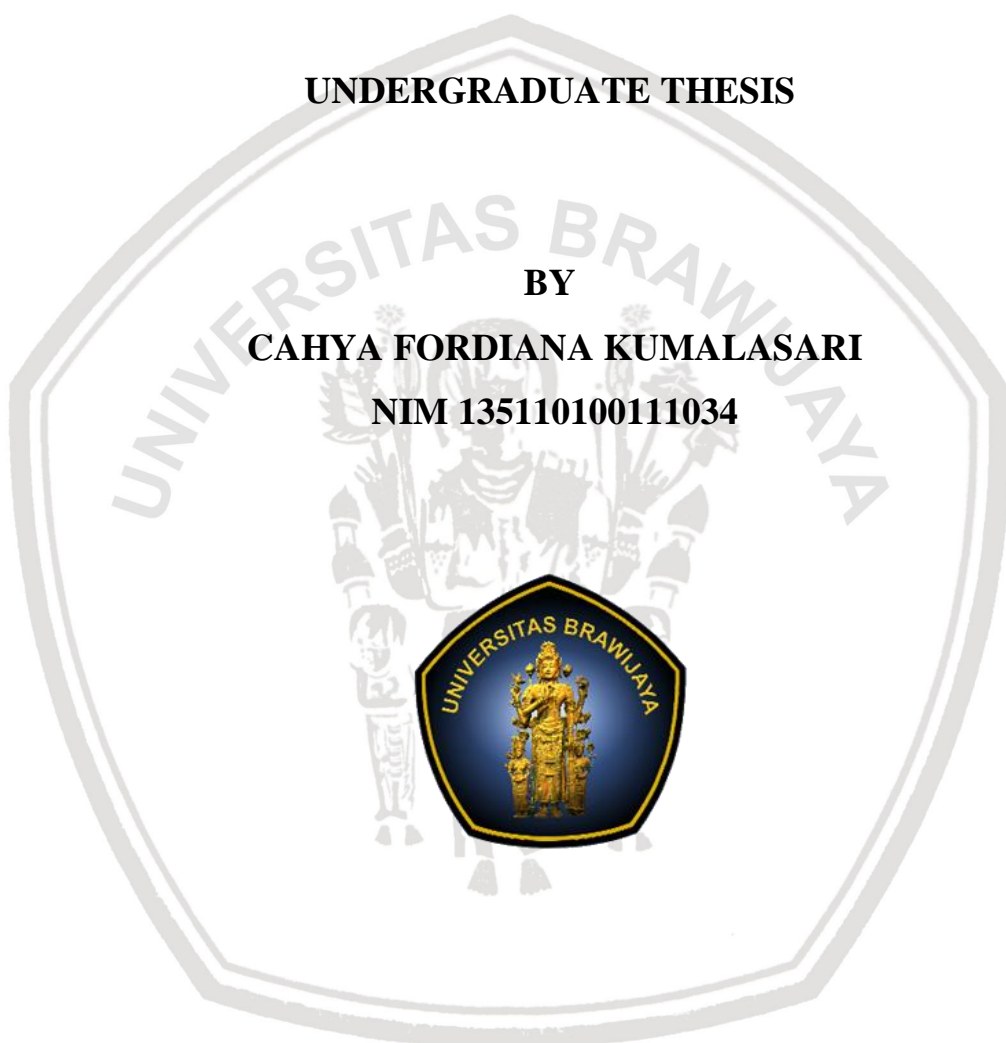
**SEXUAL OPPRESSION TOWARDS WOMEN DEPICTED IN
MARGARET ATWOOD'S POEMS "A WOMEN'S ISSUE"
AND "HELEN OF TROY DOES COUNTERTOP DANCING"**

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

BY

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**STUDY PROGRAM OF ENGLISH
DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
FACULTY OF CULTURAL STUDIES
UNIVERSITAS BRAWIJAYA
2018**

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UNDERGRADUATE THESIS

**Presented to
Universitas Brawijaya
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Sarjana Sastra**

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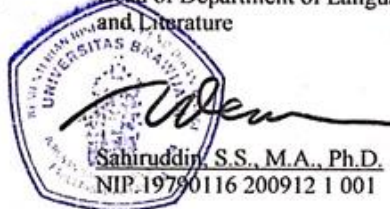
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Hopefully this thesis can be useful especially for English Department students who are interested in literature especially poetry.

Malang, 19 July 2018

The researcher

ABSTRACT

Kumalasari, Cahya Fordiana. 2018, **Sexual Oppression towards Women Depicted in Margaret Atwood's Poems "A Women's Issue" and "Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing"**. Study Program of English, Department of Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Cultural Studies, Universitas Brawijaya. Supervisor: Aris Siswanti.

Keywords: Sexual Oppression, Feminist Literary Criticism, Radical Feminism, Margaret Atwood.

There are some types of issues about oppression towards women in literary works. One of them is about sexual oppression: women's condition being forced, coerced, or manipulated into any unwanted sexual activities. This research discusses Margaret Atwood's poems entitled "A Women's Issue" and "Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing". The works contain feminist issue and represent the issues of sexual oppression towards women.

By using feminist literary criticism especially radical feminism, the researcher analyzed the issues of oppression related to the condition of women in Canada during the twentieth century in the two poems. In addition, this study applied poetry analysis, including the diction and figures of speech to understand the contents more and the meaning of the poems based on their context.

This research has found three forms of sexual oppression revealed in the poems, they are rape, abortion, and prostitution. The sexual oppression on women is also consistent with the condition of women in Canada during the twentieth century. In the end of analysis, the study also found women's power when they deal with the oppression. The findings emphasize that although women are objects of sexual oppression, they also show resistance under the oppression.

ABSTRAK

Kumalasari, Cahya Fordiana. 2018, **Penindasan Seksual terhadap Perempuan yang Digambarkan dalam Puisi-Puisi Margaret Atwood “A Women’s Issue” dan “Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing”**. Program Studi Bahasa Inggris, Jurusan Bahasa dan Sastra, Fakultas Ilmu Budaya, Universitas Brawijaya. Pembimbing: Aris Siswanti.

Kata Kunci: Penindasan Seksual, Kritik Sastra Feminis, Feminis Radikal, Margaret Atwood.

Ada beberapa jenis isu tentang penindasan terhadap perempuan dalam karya sastra. Salah satunya adalah tentang penindasan seksual: kondisi wanita dipaksa atau dimanipulasi menjadi kegiatan seksual yang tidak diinginkan. Penelitian ini membahas puisi-puisi Margaret Atwood yang berjudul “Isu Wanita” dan “Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing”. Karya-karya tersebut mengandung isu feminis dan mewakili isu-isu penindasan seksual terhadap perempuan.

Dengan menggunakan kritik sastra feminis terutama feminisme radikal, peneliti menganalisis isu-isu penindasan yang berkaitan dengan kondisi perempuan di Kanada selama abad kedua puluh dalam dua puisi. Selain itu, penelitian ini menerapkan analisis puisi, termasuk diksi dan kiasan untuk lebih memahami isi dan makna puisi berdasarkan konteksnya.

Penelitian ini telah menemukan tiga bentuk penindasan seksual yang terungkap dalam puisi, yaitu pemerkosaan, aborsi, dan prostitusi. Penindasan seksual terhadap perempuan juga konsisten dengan kondisi perempuan di Kanada selama abad ke-20. Pada akhir analisis, penelitian ini juga menemukan kekuatan perempuan ketika mereka menghadapi penindasan. Penemuan ini menekankan bahwa meskipun perempuan adalah objek penindasan seksual, mereka juga menunjukkan perlawanan di bawah penindasan.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents background of the study along with its significance, problems of the study, and objective of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Oppression is unethical treatments which break the authority or physical force. It is meant to keep someone down to prevent others for being free or equal. Taylor (2016) stated that “oppression is a form of injustice that occurs when one social group is subordinated while another is privileged, and oppression is maintained by a variety of different mechanisms including social norms, stereotypes, and institutional rules.” It is clearly stated that oppression is a type of injustice in giving a special treatment for the more powerful group that is able to maintain its treatment and power over other groups. Oppression can be based on social categories such as class, race, gender, and sexuality. Gender oppression is typically done by men to women in the forms of subordination or even abuse. Sexual oppression is when a person is forced, coerced, or manipulated into any unwanted sexual activities. Example of sexual oppression are rape culture, abortion, and prostitution. Moreover, the sexual oppression poem’s theme express the feeling and ideas about the power of men toward women.

In literature, one of the poet who concern about sexual oppression in women is Margaret Atwood, a Canadian writer born on November 18, 1939 in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. She is a well-known feminist author. Her writings are often examined using elements of science fiction, historical fact, fairy tale, and

dystopian vision. She writes about the feminist issues in contemporary society, which include *The Edible Woman* (1969), *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), *The Snowbird* (1981), and more.

Atwood's first published work was the pamphlet of poetry *Double Persephone* (1961) via Hawkshead Press. Then, she has published a collection of poems entitled *The Circle Game* (1964), which wins the Governor-General's Award. Atwood goes on to win dozens of awards for her poetry, fiction, criticism, and social activism. Her most recent volume poetry, *The Door*, was published in 2007. Her latest works are a book of short stories called *Stone Mattress: Nine Tales* (2014) and a newest novel, *MaddAddam* (2013), is the final volume in a three-book. Atwood's works have been translated into 30 different languages.

Atwood's poems that are analyzed in this research are *A Women's Issue* and *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*. The first poem is *A Women's Issue* was published in 1986. This poem compares various types of women to object in a museum as the 'Exhibit A', 'B', 'C', and 'D'. The poem uses some images of oppressed women that presented wearing a spiked device, wooden peg device, experience of a surgery related to childbirth process or abortion that quiet hars, and a scene of women lies in a room while eighty men a night move through her. All of these images are about what happened to women's "between the legs", the issues that finally concluded in the last stanza.

The second poem titled *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing* was published in 1995. This poem presents a character of woman named Helen of Troy who works as a countertop dancer or a stripteaser. This poems describes her job and how the society looks at her. She is seen as an sexual object of men's

desire. In Greek mythology Helen of Troy is known as the most beautiful woman who was the daughter of Zeus and Leda. She is also caused a trojan war. Related to this poem, the character of Helen of Troy presented as a modern version of her.

A Women's Issue and *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing* have a similar theme which is directly exposing women's body as the sex object of men's victimization and showing power within their oppression. Both poems were written at the same time in twentieth century in Canada.

The significance of analyzing *A Women's Issue* and *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing* poems is to make the readers understand about how sexual oppression happen to women especially in Canada, so the analysis will be focused on feminist issue.

1.2 Problem of the Study

Based on the background of the study, the problem of the study is how the sexual oppression towards women is presented in Margaret Atwood's poems *A Women's Issue* and *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*.

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the problem of the study, the objectives of this study is to find out how women become objects of sexual oppression by men in Margaret Atwood's poems *A Women's Issue* and *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

AND RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter contains theoretical framework, previous studies, and research method.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The objects of the analysis are poems entitled *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing* and *A Women's Issue*. For better understanding, the writer provides theory and concept related to the analysis such as feminist literary criticism, theory of radical feminism, and elements of poetry.

2.1.1 Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist literary criticism is the critical analysis of literary works based on the feminist perspective. It uses the principles and ideology of feminism to critique the language of literature. According to Tyson (2006), feminist criticism is focused on "...the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce or undermine the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women". It means this approach holds many different issues of their discipline examines, for example the issue in social discipline. Within social discipline, feminist criticism concerned with forms of marginalization of women writers' exclusion from the traditional literary canon: "...unless the critical or historical point of view is feminist, there is a tendency to under-represent the

contribution of women writers" (Tyson, 2006, p.82-83). One major approach to feminist literary criticism revolves around the desire to challenge or redefine the literary canon that has been dominated by men. The representation of women in literature, then, was felt to be one of the most important forms of 'socialization', since it provided the role models which indicated to women, and men, what constituted acceptable versions of the 'feminine' and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations (Barry, 2002, p.85).

The poems of *A Woman's Issue* and *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing* are written by a female writer and tell about lives of women. Therefore, the researcher's uses the feminist approach to see the representation of women in the poems. This approach focuses on what women's condition is under the sexual oppression by men and how the women respond in such conditions.

2.1.2 Radical Feminism

Radical feminism is a branch of feminism formed during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s. It is a philosophy emphasizing the patriarchal roots of inequality between men and women, or, more specifically, social dominance of women by men. It views patriarchy as dividing rights, privileges and power primarily by sex, and as a result oppressing women and privileging men. (Lewis, 2017, para.1)

Radical Feminists also comment on many practices that promote violence against women such as prostitution, pornography, and so on. According to Lewis (2017) key issues for radical feminists include:

- a. Reproductive rights for women, including freedom to make choices to give birth, have an abortion, use birth control or get sterilized.
- b. Understanding pornography as an industry and practice leading to harm to women, although some radical feminists disagreed with this position.
- c. Understanding rape as an expression of patriarchal power, not a seeking of sex.
- d. Understanding prostitution under patriarchy as oppression of women, sexually and economically.

Just because a woman wants to explore whether power games are part of what makes sex “sexy” for her does not mean she wants to serve as an object for male violence in real life (Tong, 2009, p. 68). It means that women has a right on their own sexuality, not to be object of men’s desire.

However, the point related to this research is to focus on the ways in which women have been subordinated by men in the sexual objectification. This theory will support to find out how the sexual oppression portray in Margaret Atwood’s poem, especially her two poems entitled “A Women’s Issue” and “Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing”.

2.1.3 Elements of Poetry

There are several essential elements that should be understood to help analyze poems, such as the diction and figurative language. Those in order to analyze more about sexual oppression represented in the poems by Margaret

Atwood entitled “A Women’s Issue” and “Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing” are need to understand the content of the poems.

“Diction is the use of words in poetry. It could be the stylistic and tonal qualities of the words which the poet has chosen to convey his intended meaning” (Reaske, 1996, p.31). There are two kinds of diction and they are denotation and connotation. “Denotation is conventionally understood by a word. For example, the word “mother” means a female parent. While connotation is contrast with denotation, connotation is one of the various implications that a word carries. It could be used by the poets to explain the certain meaning of words. Most words have many connotations. If we say “home” for example, we are not simply naming a house, but rather an idea-having members of a family joined in one place” (Reaske, 1966, p29). This research uses denotation and connotation in the context in which related to the poems idea and the society when the poems were written.

“Figurative language is a language which employs various figures of speech. Using figurative language is making imaginative description in fresh ways” (Reaske, 1966, p.33). There are many types of figurative language, this study focuses on allusion, hyperbole, metaphor, metonymy, personification, and simile presented in the poems.

Allusion is “the process of referring to figures or events in life or in literature that are well known” (Reaske, 1966, p.26). For example is “He was a real Romeo with his lady.” Here, Romeo, a reference to Shakespeare’s play,

“Romeo and Juliet”, is considered to be a true romantic hero or a passionate lover of Juliet.

Hyperbole is “a figure of speech which employs exaggeration. It can produce a very dramatic effect” (Reaske, 1966, p.34). For example, “This story has never-ending!” does not mean the story literally has no ending, but it is used to exaggerate the statement that the story keeps continuing or going.

Metaphor is “a figure of speech which compares one thing to another directly.” It is usually created through the use of some forms of the verb ‘to be’. For instance, in “life is a hungry animal,” hungry animal has become a metaphor for life.” (Reaske, 1966, p.36). It is because life is characterized as greedy and wild as hungry animal, which means life is simply teach people not easy to get satisfied in learning one experience and never give up to struggle with many obstacles in a wild life.

Personification is “the process of assigning human characteristic to nonhuman objects, abstractions or ideas”. For example, in addressing “the moon” as “a lady”, it is personified into a female person who is mature, like having a moon cycle or period. The moon is also can be a reflective of all the stages of woman’s life (Reaske, 1966, p.39).

Simile is “a figure of speech which compares two things or more through the use of word “like” or “as”. In simile, one thing is “like” something else. For instance, “He was as happy as a lark,” means making comparison between a person who is happy to a species of bird which is always twitting, it is the same as

when a person expresses happy like screaming or shout out a happy sound continuously” (Reaske, 1966, p.41).

“Metonymy is the substitution of a word closely associated with another word in place of that other word” (Reaske, 1966, p.36). For example, “crown” can mean power or authority. It is because crown is usually worn by a king as the leader of kingdom or a person who has authority.

2.1.4 Women in Canada during the Twentieth Century

During the twentieth century is the year of women gained equality with men even there are several issues about sexual oppression towards women. For example Freedman (1989, p.21) states, “In the 1937, the New York Times created a new index category of sex crimes, which included 143 articles published that year. Then it is changed when women’s presence in public increases during 1960s”. On the same page, Freedman (1989, p.21) says, “As female nature became sexualized and female desire for sexuality legitimated,...an act in which women...contributed to their victimization”. It indicates at that time women still blame for their victimization towards sexual oppression. This causes women difficulties to fight against sexual oppression. Moreover, Hines (1974) stated that in Canadian legal history there was 1.202 reported and unreported sexual assault toward women.

In addition, women’s movements during the period 1960–85 often referred to as second-wave feminism included campaigns in support of peace and disarmament, equality in education and employment, birth control,

and an end to violence against women. Movements also tackled women's representation in everything from advertising to dress (Strong-Boag, 2016).

2.2 Previous Studies

There are two previous studies which are related to this study. The first previous study is "Gender Equality in Melin W's Poems and Beyonce's Song Lyrics: A comparative Study" was done by Najelina Ruth Yessica.S. (2015). The purpose of the study is to find out woman's issue and representation women's condition in workplace, marriage, and political movement, that women also have power to defend themselves. There are similarities and differences have been found.

The similarities with this study are analyse poems about women and the poetry analysis as a theory for analysis. The differences are the theoriest, the former study used comparative literature and liberal feminism, while this study used radical feminism. Song lyrics is the material object of the previous study, which study used poems focused on how women are sexually oppressed in poems whether Najelina's study is used to represent women liberality by showing struggle of women to achieve equality for them.

The second study is "Sexuality as Seen in Maya Angelou's Poems, *Woman Me*, *Phenomenal Woman*, and *Seven Women's Blessed Assurance*" by Ashika Prajna Paramita (2011). The study focused on a woman's captivating and overwhelming sexuality and beauty. The findings are the poems have contrary aspect or side towards Maya Angelou's sexual experiences in her younger years.

The similarities with this study are the issue of sexual oppression as the study problem and the poems about women as the object of analysis. The differences with the current study are Paramita's used expressive approach and sexuality theory while this study used feminist literary criticism and Radical feminism theory. On the other hand, Paramita's study also used the biographical elements to analyze the poems.

These two previous studies were appropriate references for this study because they give understanding to analyse women's poem and some views about women's issues in sexual oppression or abuse. Also both of the study help the researcher to understand about the poetry analysis.

2.3 Research Method

To conduct this research, the researcher went through several stages, those are:

1. Selecting the material object of the research

The objects used in this research are two poems by Margaret Atwood entitled "*Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*" and "*A Women's Issue*". The poems are chosen because both of the poems have the same theme which tell about women as sex object of men.

2. Collecting the data

The primary data sources are Margaret Atwood's poems entitled "*A Women's Issue*" and "*Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*". The poems were collected from two books of poetry by Margaret Atwood released in 1986 and in

1995. In order to get clearer information and detailed facts about the issues of sexual oppression presented in the poems, the researcher read them frequently. The secondary data sources are from the article ,journal, internet, book, and references which are relevant with the study. The researcher looked for references about kind of sexual oppression which happened in Canada during twentieth century related to the poems.

3. Analyzing and interpreting the data

After the data were collected, then the researcher applied the theory to interpret the data. The reasearcher use Feminist Literary Criticism and Radical feminism theory to find how the poems also presented the issues of sexual oppression of women besides the use of diction and figurative language as the instrinsic elements of poem.

The focus of feminist critism and theory is the marginalization of women in literature which women are often the objects in literature while men are the subjects and this works sustain the inequalities in society. The researcher finds the evidences of sexual oppression's issues related to what happened in Canadian society in twentieth century as the time of poems are created. It is suitable approach as it deals with the issues of sexual oppression that revealed in the poems.

4. Drawing the conclusion

The last stage is drawing the conclusion based on the research findings and formulating suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER III

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the problem of the study in the first chapter, this chapter is intended to discuss more about the issue of sexual oppression towards women depicted in Margaret Atwood's poems entitled "*A Women's Issue*" and "*Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*."

The first poem entitled *A Women's Issue* consists of 5 stanzas and 39 lines, while the second poem entitled *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing* is type of free verse poem consists of 3 stanzas and 83 lines. Both poems were written by Margaret Atwood. She portrays the sexual oppression towards women through the poems by using sexual words and described women as sex object of men.

A Women's Issue and *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing* poems expose the sexual oppression issue towards women in twentieth century. The speakers of both poems are women who struggle through the sexual oppression by men. They are represented as the sex object to the men's desire.

The analysis will be started from the forms of sexual oppression portrayed in the poems based on Radical feminist's views and the elements of poetry analysis. It is also supported by the fact of social condition which happened in Canada during twentieth century related to feminist criticism within literature. Then, it continues with the response of woman's character in the poem about how she shows their resistance under the oppression.

3.1 The Forms of Sexual Oppression on Women

The movement of women has some history written by some poets, politician or academician. By the time, the research of woman in several cases becomes broader. One of the most common researches is about women's issue in sexual oppression in Canada. Margaret Atwood's poem *A Women's Issue* and *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing* portray sexual oppression in the some forms of sexual violence.

3.1.1 Rape

The first form of sexual oppression towards women is rape. Radical feminist believe that rape is an expression of patriarchal power, not seeking for sex (Lewis, 2017). It emphasizes the harm that rape does to women as a group to show men have power over women also to give intimidate towards women. This form is reflected in Atwood's poem entitled *A Women's Issue*. In the first stanza, line 1-4 states that:

*The woman in the spiked device
that locks around the waist and between
the legs, with holes in it like a tea strainer
is Exhibit A
("A Women's Issue", Stanza 1, lines 1-5)*

This stanza portrays "Exhibit A" which used connotation, it is described by the use of words which have various meaning. As the use of allusion in the line 1 to 3, the woman in the poem is described wearing the spiked device that locks around the waist and between the legs, with holes in it like a tea strainer. This device draws out the image of "chastity belt" which is a locking beltlike device

with a loop designed to go between a woman's leg in order to prevent her from having sexual intercourse (collinsdictionary.com).

According to the myth, the use of chastity belts was introduced within the framework of the culture of medieval chivalry, so that the knights leaving for battles or wars could be sure of their wives' fidelity, since the unrestricted desire of women seemed untameable. The idea of chastity belts appeared originally as a symbol, first in the language of medieval theology, was that medieval men could lock their wives up while they went off to war – often for several years – safe in the knowledge that their women could not have sex with anyone else (Sanghani, 2016). The similar device is also described in the second stanza of “A Women's Issue” as “Exhibit B” states that:

*The woman in black with a net window
to see through and a four-inch
wooden peg jammed up
between her legs so she can't be raped
is Exhibit B
("A Women's Issue", Stanza 2, lines 1-5)*

This stanza uses connotation. In the lines 1 and 2 shows a woman dressed in black color which symbolises dark or mysterious, “with a net window / to see through” related to “veil” as a symbol of feminist. Then it continues draws the similar device as the first stanza before, in the line “a four-inch, wooden peg jammed up, between her legs so she can't be raped ” it is an allusion describing the device which is used to prevent her from rape. It shows women still get a lack of choice towards their sexual ability. As men have right to control over women's bodies. Men have right to do “sex” with another women, but women must only

with a man. This stanza describe the ways in which sexuality is used to oppress women and rape as a symbol of men's power.

During twentieth century, the era of the chastity belt had ended, but, as two stanzas of *A women's Issue* poem suggests a cycle of control and oppression still continued. Canada's Justice MacFarland noted that rape is "an act of power and control rather than a sexual act. It has to do with perpetrators' desire to terrorize, to dominate, to control, to humiliate; it is an act of hostility and aggression" and it "acts as a method of social control over women" (Sheehy, 2012, p.33). It is clearly states that rape is part of patriarchal system as men's act to control over women.

In the 1970s and 1980s the issue of violence claimed public attention in Canada, particularly among women. The double sexual standard was mirrored dramatically in the Criminal Code laws on rape, which permitted questions as to the victim's, but not the accused's, previous sexual history and encouraged defence counsel to argue that women had consented to sexual intercourse. In 1982 major changes to the Criminal Code addressed the situation where the victim of a sexual assault was, in effect, put on trial along with the accused. The legal concept of rape was replaced by one of sexual assault and violence. Although many changes of law related to protect women, it shows there are still areas of law which treat women differentially to their disadvantage in Canada society (Stoddart, 2012).

3.1.2 Abortion

The second issue of sexual oppression is abortion related to reproductive rights for women as freedom to make a choice (Lewis, 2017). Abortion is the

premature ending of a pregnancy. *The topic of abortion is revealed in the third stanza of "A Women's Issue" about exhibit C which is quite harsh.*

*Exhibit C is the young girl
dragged into the bush by the midwives
and made to sing while they scrape the flesh
from between her legs, then tie her thighs
till she scabs over and is called healed
now she can be married
("A Women's Issue", Stanza 3, lines 1-6)*

This stanza uses denotation meaning, it shows "*Exhibit C*" which directly illustrates a young girl who get a treatment by the midwives like "*dragged into the bush*" showed the sound of violence by the word "*dragged*", how she experienced the act of forced into the bush. Then it follows in the next line "*and made to sing while they scrape the flesh, from between her legs,*" portrays a scene of childbirth or abortion because related to "*between her legs*". The word "*sing*" here refers to her reaction making a sound after experienced "*scrape from between her legs*". It means she is painfully torture to get "*scrape*" towards her vital body part. This lines continue "*then tie her thighs, till she scabs over and is called healed*" represent the scene of the recovery so "*now she can be married.*" The situation represents a young girl related to abortion as the form of sexual oppression. The topic of abortion is countinued to the next line in "*A Women's Issue*" poems.

*For each childbirth they'll cut her
open, then sew her up.
Men like tight women.
The ones that die are carefully buried.
(A Women's Issue, Stanza 3, lines 7-10)*

By using denotation, these line concludes the acts in the previous lines as a childbirth or abortion. It also clear indicates women are required to surrender their happiness, pleasure, and perhaps even their lives to satisfy men. In demonstrating how injurious and at times deadly women's oppression can be. However, this whole of the third stanza A Women's Issue describes a woman who has lack of choice to do abortion.

Inducing an abortion was a crime in Canada until 1988. By the mid-20th Century, official attitudes had changed and the abortion law was rarely enforced against doctors. Through the 1970s and 1980s, both "pro-life" groups (seeking a stricter abortion law) and "pro-choice" groups (seeking the legalization of abortion and public funding for it) organized large public rallies, including demonstrations on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Although the law technically remains in the *Criminal Code*, it is considered unconstitutional and therefore unenforceable. Because no other law has replaced it, abortion has remained legal throughout Canada since 1988.

3.1.3 Prostitution

Prostitution is a sexually exploitative, often violent economic option most often entered into by those with a lengthy history of sexual, racial and economic victimization. Prostitution is only now beginning to be understood as violence against women and girls under the patriarchy rules.

The issue of prostitution are presented in the fourth stanza of "A Women's Issue" lines 11 to 17.

The next exhibit lies flat on her back

*While eighty men a night
Move through her, ten an hour.
She looks at the ceiling, listens
to the door open and close.
A bell keeps ringing.
Nobody knows how she got here
(“A Women’s Issue”, Stanza 4, lines 11-17)*

The next exhibit in the fourth stanza uses denotation meaning addresses the form of prostitution. It portrays women who “lies flat on her back” means in the position lying on something horizontal. Continues with line “While eighty men a night / move through her, ten an hour” seems like the woman in the prostitution, because it represents the act of sexual activity without draw in detail. There are more than one man a night. She provides “service” just to pleased men. Still in lying position, she just “looks at the ceiling / listens to the door open and close.” It means the woman in that situation can do anything with no feeling or just daydreaming when her “men” come and go. Also “A bell keeps ringing.” means something can make an attention, but “Nobody knows how she got here”, it emphizes the men who visit her no need to know or do not care about her existence. She feels a lack of empathy and end up in such a terrible job in the prostitution.

According to the poem related to the society in Canada while prostitution is still viewed by some as a job choice to which the victim “consents”. The Canadian study found that a comparable 90% of women in prostitution wanted to leave prostitution but could not (Elizabeth Fry Society of Toronto, 1987). Many expressed a resigned hopelessness regarding the possibility of escape from prostitution.

The topic of prostitution also reveal in whole part of "*Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*" poem. This poem point out Helen of Troy as an allusion creates the modern of Helen as myth character of greek represented a beautiful woman who call herself as goddess. She was born to Zeus, who rapped her mother, Leda disguised as a swan. Helen is a motif for men emphasis on physical beauty which cause a Trojan war. In this poem, she characterize exploit herself to be a streapteaser or exotic dancer.

The world is full of women
Who'd tell me I should be ashamed of myself
If they had a chance. Quit dancing.
Get some self-respect
and a day job.
Right. And minimum wage,
And varicose veins, just standing
In one place for eight hours
behind a glass counter
bundled up to the neck, instead of
naked as meat sandwich.
Selling gloves, or something.
Instead of what I do sell.
You have to have talent
to peddle a thing so nebulous
and without material form.
(*"Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing"*, Stanza 1, lines 1-16)

In the first stanza of *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*, used connotative meaning. The first line described using hyperbole from the idea of "*the world is full of women*" means there many women in the whole world, then continued with denotative meaning in the next lines. Those women tell her "*should be ashamed*" of herself, that she should "*get some self-respect and a day job.*" she is trying to justify her actions of being an exotic dancer. The beginning lines described how other women disagree with how she makes living. She faced

the conflict between the character as a woman to others judgmental by society especially same woman to quit from her job. But the character of Helen convinced that whatever women still oppressed in the way they are.

As in the workplace is explained in the line 6-10, which shows women with minimum wage in the work labour. In lines “*bundled up to the neck, instead of / naked as meat sandwich. / Selling gloves, or something. / Instead of what I do sell*” used simile by comparing her job to labour force women. This line is represented as a labour force. There is no differences that women has chance to work but still get injustice. Helen acknowledges sexuality, comparing herself naked as meat sandwich, which refers to how she is not a complex individual, just simple and useless. Continued with last two lines, she argued that women still have talent to sell something nebulous which mean desire and without material form.

However, this poem is supposed to explain clearly that in this era women have been exploited in work place, but she believes that is her job is her right. She also admit that she was exploited. It is quite clear can be seen in last line of first stanza.

I do give value.
Like preachers, I sell vision,
like perfume ads, desire
or its facsimile. Like jokes
or war, it's all the timing
(“Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing”, Stanza 2, lines 1-5)

In the second stanza of “*Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*” lines 1 to 5 used connotation and dominated with the simile. The character of Helen compares her job to preachers who are religious people or clergyman and

illustrate that she sells something that is nebulous and without form. She also compare herself to perfume ads which desire or its facsimile. Then like a jokes or war, it is all about time. Each of lines is parallel in structure and in thought. It related to what she do as a sex worker that shows the way she offering herself to the men. She plays with men's desire in the right time. She gains the attention of men.

I sell men back their worse suspicions,
that everything's for sale,
and piecemeal. They gaze at me and see
a chain-saw murder just before it happens,
when thigh, ass, inkblot, crevice, tit, and nipple
are still connected.
("Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing", Stanza 2, lines 6-11)

The next lines "*I sell men back their worse suspicions: / that everything's for sale, / and piecemeal.*" means everything can be bought and sold at an increasingly endless cycle. Helen describes the mood in her workplace as sex worker in the prostitution where she sell everything for sale to attract men She just as a thing for sale. Continue to lines "*They gaze at me and see / a chain-saw murder just before it happens,*" they means men. It portrays how men see her as sex object, but she looks men as a chain-saw murder. Men describes as predators stalking their prey. These lines describe the types of men that come to see Hellen as the erotic dancer. She played with sexual words and described the body parts and sexual activity like "*when thigh, ass, inkblot, crevice, tit, and nipple are still conected.*"

Such hatred leaps in them,
my beery worshipper! That, or a bleary
hopeless love. Seeing the rows of heads
and upturned eyes, imploring

but ready to snap at my ankles,
 I understand floods and earthquakes, and the urge
 to step on ants. I keep the beat,
 and dance for them because
 they can't. The music smell like foxes,
 crisp as heated metal
 searing the nostril
 or humid as August, hazy and langurous
 as a looted city the day after,
 ("Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing", Stanza 2, lines 12-24)

The next lines of stanza 2 used connotation, it still describes men's treatment towards the character of Helen. "*Such hatred leaps in them,*" "*my beery worshippers! That, or a bleary / hopeless love.*" it uses personification of hatred represent Helen point of view towards men looks like and how she feel about men. "*Seeing the rows of heads / and upturned eyes, imploring / but ready to snap at my ankles,*" It presents how woman feels threatening and watch carefully how she think in dangerous situation. She pretends doing manipulation. Continue with "*I understand floods and earthquakes, and the urge / to step on ants.*" means the way Helen draws the image of crowded into kind of natural disaster. The domination of men looks like ants. Helen dehumanise her audience implying that they are not worth more than the sum of their parts which mirrors the objectivication she receives by society. However, she keep dancing to pleased men, because she think they can not dance like her. It means Helen has such proud of herself. Then the next lines, there are simile of the music feels like.

when all the rape's been done
 already, and the killing,
 and the survivors wander around
 looking for garbage
 to eat, and there's only a bleak exhaustion.
 Speaking on which, it's the smiling

tires me out the most.
 This, and the pretence
 that I can't hear them.
 And I can't, because I'm after all
 a foreigner to them.
 ("Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing", Stanza 2, lines 25-35)

In line "*when all the rape's been done*", The woman is just an object of men's pleasure, it is not what she want to be in that position. The survivor from that rape then still struggles to continue her life. By "*looking for garbage / to eat, and there's only a bleak exhaustion.*" It compares exotic dancing to the consumption of garbage, the means to survive in a hostile environment at what personal cost. What she feels "*Speaking of which, it's the smiling / tires me out the most.*" She complains that she is very tired with his job as streapteaser. She has no choice to do it. She is just a victim to fight for her life by ignoring women's own intuitions about their own bodies.

In the next line, the woman says "*This, and the pretence / that I can't hear them.*" "*And I can't, because I'm after all / a foreigner to them.*" It directly means that whatever she does, men actually do not care about her. This is related to the words "*I'm after all/ a foreign to them*" means she call herself as stranger as men see her. The words "*them*" means men.

The next lines of "Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing" poem also presents the perspectives of women's condition in the protitution.

The speech here is all warty gutturals,
 obvious as a slab of ham,
 but I come from the province of the gods
 where meanings are liting and oblique.
 I don't let on to everyone,
 but lean close, and I'll whisper:
 My mother was raped by a holy swan.

You believe that? You can take me out to dinner.
 That's what we tell all the husbands.
 There sure are a lot of dangerous birds around.
 ("Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing", Stanza 2, lines 36-45)

In the line of 36 to 45 are used connotative meaning, begin with "*The speech here is all warty gutturals*" means all of the dialogs surround Helen are no sense. Helen reflects her to the greek mythical character. She believes that she came from the province of gods. It was clearly stated in line 42, this character of Helen such an allusion of the mythological told, that her "*mother was raped by a holy swan*" according to the greek mythology, she was born to Leda who has raped by Zeus. The allusion to Helen's mother, Leda gives a certain allure to the speaker and makes her higher than everyone else. Then followed by the question to make sure the readers believe her story. Then back to reality of the prostitute workers as "*we*" in the line "*that's what we tell all the husbands.*" means they admit that all the men they meet are their husband. Continue with metaphor in line "*There sure are a lot of dangerous bird around.*" implied that comparing men to the dangerous bird.

Not that anyone here
 but you would understand.
 The rest of them would like to watch me
 and feel nothing. Reduce me to components
 as in a clock factory or abattoir.
 Crush out the mystery.
 Wall me up alive
 in my own body.
 They'd like to see through me,
 but nothing more opaque
 than absolute transparency.
 Look—my feet don't hit the marble!
 ("Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing", Stanza 3, lines 1-12)

Continue to the third stanza, by using denotation, from the rest of the line show that she was being a minority as she is objected, especially in the line 3 to 4. Oppression still happened to her as a woman.

3.2 Women's Resistance under the Oppression

In presenting the forms of women sexual oppression inside the poems of Margaret Atwood entitled "A Women's Issue" and "Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing", there is also women's resistance under the oppression. It is revealed in poem "A Women's Issue" in the fifth stanza.

*You'll notice that what the have in common
Is between the legs. Is this
why wars are fought?
Enemy territory, no man's
land, to be entered furtively,
fenced, owned but never surely,
scene of this desperate forays
at midnight, captures
and sticky murders, doctors' rubber gloves
greasy with blood, flesh made inert, the surge
of your own uneasy power.
("A Women's Issue", Stanza 5)*

From this stanza, Atwood summarizing from whole poems to the reader that all is about "*between the legs*" continue with the question "*is this why wars are fought?*" means to make sure all of this oppression happened because the issue of "*between the legs*" as the enemy territory. It means that something "*between the legs*" never really owned. Back to describe the abusive sexuality then showing the kind of "*uneasy power*". It indicates that something "*between the legs*" also has power which can play with men's desire, so men can not control themselves easily.

The women's resistance under the oppression also revealed in "*Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*" poems in stanza 1 lines 17-19, "*Exploited, they'd say. Yes, any way/ you cut it, but I've a choice/ of how, and I'll take the money*" it describes Helen gives the strong argument by admitting that she has exploited to respond the judgement from society. Then continue with the next line, whatever she did, she always get social judgement, but she has choice to get good money or salary from it.

Then in the third stanza of "*Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*" poem,

Like breath or a balloon, I'm rising,
I hover six inches in the air
in my blazing swan-egg of light.
You think I'm not a goddess?
Try me.
This is a torch song.
Touch me and you'll burn.

("Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing", Stanza 3, lines 12-19)

By using a simile, comparing herself to a balloon, the woman defines the expectancy of falling or of being confined to some social preconception, the same way a balloon or breath cannot be confined. She hover six inches in the air means she not trully float in the air. It is just like she plays with men's sexual desire. She believes that she will be forever cherished by her subjects and know she is above them all in a blazing light. The third stanza of the poem explores Hellen's self-absorption. She shows her sexual desire and anger by comparing herself to a goddess. She also lives in a constant state of mistrust and the only emotion she can openly convey is anger. This description to express her freedom and

uninhibition in the face of societal norms encourages women's power under sexual oppression.

The character of Helen in the poem sees the spirit she has and chooses to cover on their weakness. Helen knows that she will be oppressed no matter what she does. Although women are oppressed, she believes that she also has her body as a tool to make men become weak.



CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This chapter will focus on the conclusion and the suggestion of the study.

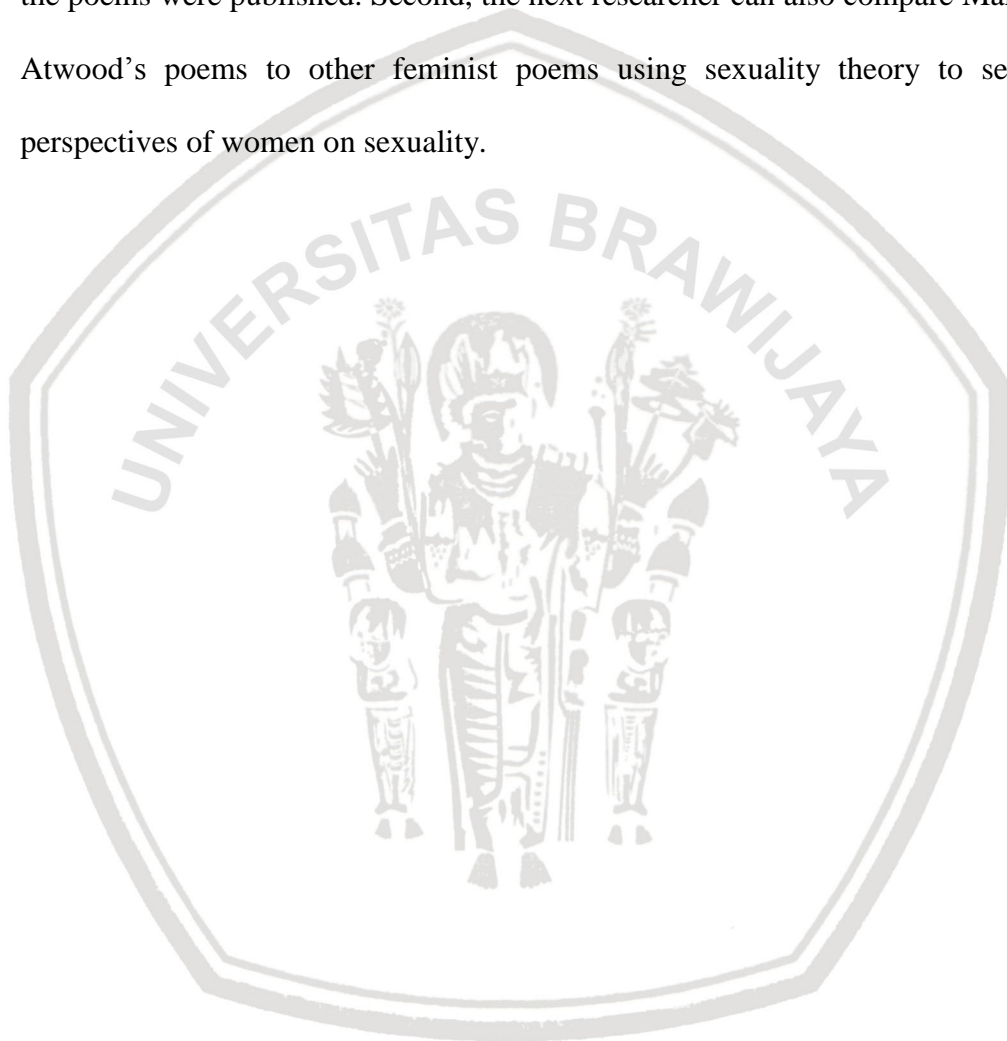
4.1 Conclusion

There are many literary works which represent sexual oppression towards women. For the example, poems from Margaret Atwood entitled *A Women's Issue* and *Helen of Troy Does Countertop Dancing*. The poems expose the sexual oppression issues towards women during twentieth century in Canada. Thus, the research findings show the forms of sexual oppression portrayed in both poems.

There are some points which answer the problem of the study. The first point is the forms of sexual oppression revealed in the poems, which include rape, abortion, and prostitution. In the radical feminist view, the description sexual oppression in the poems emphasizes how women have been objectified by men. It also supported by the data about women's condition in Canada during the twentieth century. Then the second point is women's resistance within the oppression. This research also found resistance although women are sexually oppressed. The poems suggest women can have power towards men because men have desire which they cannot control. Women have body and appeal that men want to own.

4.2 Suggestion

Future researchers can use Margaret Atwood's poems and compare them to one of Atwood's novel entitled *The Handmaid's Tale* which is about a similar theme of sex oppression on women and which was also published around the time the poems were published. Second, the next researcher can also compare Margaret Atwood's poems to other feminist poems using sexuality theory to see the perspectives of women on sexuality.



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