

**OPPRESSION TOWARD AMERICAN WOMEN
REFLECTED IN “*THE HANDMAID’S TALE*” NOVEL
BY MARGARET ATWOOD: FEMINIST APPROACH**

THESIS



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**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES
PUTERA BATAM UNIVERSITY
2021**

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**Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
of Sarjana Sastra**



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2021

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Yulia Puspita Sari

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DECLARATION OF THE THESIS ORIGINALITY

I, Yulia Puspita Sari, NPM 171210067

Here with declare that the thesis entitled:

**OPPRESSION TOWARD AMERICAN WOMEN REFLECTED IN
“*THE HANDMAID’S TALE*” NOVEL BY MARGARET ATWOOD:
FEMINIST APPROACH**

Is the real work of myself and I realize that thesis has never been published in other media before, partially or entirely, in the name of mine or others.

Batam, July 31st, 2021



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171210067

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**By:
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171210067**

The thesis has been examined on the date as indicated below

Batam, July 31St, 2021



Emil Eka Putra/S.S., M.Hum.

SUPERVISOR

ABSTRAK

*Dalam penelitian ini, peneliti menerapkan pendekatan feminis dari Beauvoir (1949). Sumber data adalah novel *The Handmaid's Tale* karya Margaret Atwood. Dalam penelitian ini, peneliti akan membahas novel *The Handmaid's Tale* karya Margaret Atwood dengan tujuan mengungkap keberadaan perempuan sebagai *second sex* dan penindasan yang diterima perempuan dalam novel *The Handmaid's Tale* karya Margaret Atwood. Dalam penelitian ini, peneliti menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Data yang diambil dan dianalisis berupa kata dan kalimat. Demikian penelitian ini dilakukan agar terwujudnya beberapa pertanyaan yang dapat dipecahkan dalam penelitian ini. Hasil dari penelitian ini peneliti menemukan keberadaan perempuan sebagai *second sex* dan penindasan yang diterima perempuan dalam novel *The Handmaid's Tale* karya Margaret Atwood.*

Katakunci: *Seks kedua, Penindasan dan Feminisme*

ABSTRACT

In this study, the researcher applied the feminist approach of Beauvoir (1949). The data source is the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. In this study, the researcher will discuss the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood with the aim of revealing the existence of women as second sex and the oppression received by women in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. In this study, the researcher used a qualitative descriptive method. The data took and analysed in the form of words and sentences. Thus this research was conducted in order to realize some questions that can be solved in this study. The results of this study, researchers found the existence of women as second sex and oppression received by women in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood.

Key words: second sex, oppression and feminism

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

MOTTO

There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off.

Proverb 23: 18

DEDICATION

This thesis is proudly dedicated to

My beloved Mother and all my siblings and Family

All lecturers and staff at Putera Batam University

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First of all, I would like to praise and thank my Lord Jesus Christ for His blessings for giving me good health in completing this thesis. So, I can finish this thesis in a timely manner. This thesis is entitled "Oppression Toward American Women Reflected In "The Handmaid's Tale" Novel By Margaret Atwood: Feminist Approach".

The researcher also expresses her deepest gratitude to her beloved mother and family for the prayers and support that has always been given without stopping, until finally the researcher was able to complete this undergraduate program. In addition, the researcher would like to express their deepest gratitude and appreciation to the thesis supervisor, Mr. Emil Eka Putra, S.S., M.Hum, who has been willing to share and give a lot of time, ideas, support, advice, and patience. Suggestions and inputs are very meaningful for researchers in making and completing this thesis.

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Yulia Puspita Sari

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2.1 Theoretical Framework

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Research

The feminist thought has existed for a long time. This can be attributed to the existence of several literary works on feminist, such as: Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labor* (1911), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). After a decade of publication of the book *The Second Sex* (1949), around the 1960s there was a 'women's movement' that brought feminism closer to literature. Some of the literary works that have been written are : *The Human Situation : A Feminine View* (1960)by Valerie Saiving Goldstein, *Fat is A Feminist Issue* (1978) by Susie Orbach and *The Handmaid's Tale*(1985) by Margaret Atwood. These literary works have become one of the places used by feminists to express women's aspirations.

The Handmaid's Tale (1985) is one of the works that Margaret Atwood has written. She is one of Canada's most famous novelists, her work is in the form of prose fiction and her feminist outlook. This novel published in 1985 in Canada. In the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood tells about the transfer of power that occurred in America, which later turned into the Republic of Gilead. It is said that the Republic of Gilead is a dystopian for women, because in it there is a patriarchal understanding that makes men as the holders of the highest power.

Furthermore to reveal the feminist issues contained in this novel, the researcher uses several existing phenomena existence of feminism issues in this novel, the first:

“Mother, I think. Wherever you may be. Can you hear me? You wanted a women's culture. Well, now there is one. It isn't what you meant but it exists. Be thankful for small mercies”. (Atwood, 1985, p.190)

This sentence is found in chapter 21, which is when the handmaids are brought back to their respective places, after performing a birth ceremony at the house of one of their handmaid colleagues. Where this sentence was uttered by Offred in her heart which contains the meaning of remembering what her mother said in the past who wanted a women's culture. Women culture by her mother is women who are united by the same experience and lifestyle, in the context of women's culture, this does happen in this novel but it is different. The different is based on the freedom, according to the point of view Offred's mother, women culture is when women are united by the same experiences and lifestyle based on the freedom of each woman, whereas what happens in the novel women culture what happens is based on obedience and piety as a handmaid women culture on Offred mother point of view of freedom. Based on the data above the researcher conclude it can be explained that women are different from men Atwood (1985) based on the data in this quote about women as the second gender because in this quote it is imagining gender equality.

The second phenomena:

I rub the butter over my face, work it into the skin of my hands. There's no longer any hand lotion or face cream, not for us. Such things are considered vanities. **We are containers, it's only the insides of our bodies that are important.** The outside can become hard and wrinkled, for all they care, like the shell of a nut. (Atwood, 1985, p. 146)

This quote is taken from the seventeenth chapter. When Offred finish dinner, she took a piece of butter and put it in her shoe to hide. This was done because she was not allowed to use lotions and face creams. Offred who felt her skin was dry, then secretly put the butter on her face and on her body. Offred said if her body is only likened to a container, for the fertilization process. So that only the inside of the body is considered important, the outside is not. This is related to the theory oppression of Beauvoir (1949) woman as a second sex.

Furthermore, *The Handmaid's Tale* novel has been widely appreciated in the form of journal articles. That related to the novel which researcher use as a reference and comparison. The first journal article is "Offred as The Victim of Totalitarianism in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*" written by Transiska and Wedati (2020). This previous researcher used a qualitative descriptive method. This research applies the theory of Friedrich and Brzeziński and Hannah Arendt's totalitarianism. This research is about the influence of totalitarianism in the Republic of Gilead and Offred's struggle against totalitarianism in the novel. Next article is "Handmaid as The Object of Sexism in Gilead Society: A Feminist Analysis in Margaret Atwood's

The Handmaid's Tale" written by Septiawati and Darma, (2014). In this previous research, the researcher aimed to analyze acts of sexism. There are acts of sexism accepted by Offered's character as a handmaid in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Previous researchers analyzed this research using the sexual political theory of Kate Millet. However, there are several previous researchers who discussed the previous novel *The Handmaid's Tale*" using a different theory among them Transiska and Wedati (2020) and Septiawati and Darma(2014). The similarities between the two are, using the same novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood but both use different theories in research Transiska and Wedati (2020) using Friedrich and Brzeziński and Hannah Arendt theory totalitarianism, while in research Septiawati and Darma (2014) using Kate Millet theory the sexual political theory. There are no previous researchers who have reviewed this research before.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

Based on the research background, researchers identified several problems related to feminism, they are:

1. There are influences of totalitarianism embraced in the Republic of Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.
2. There are resistances by the character to fight totalitarianism in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.

3. There are several acts of sexism that the character in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.
4. There are existences of oppression received by woman in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.
5. There are woman struggles carried out in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.

1.3 Limitation of the Problem

Based on the identification of the problem, research limit several problems on feminism, they are:

1. There are existences of oppression received by woman in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.
2. There are woman struggles carried out in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel by Margaret Atwood.

1.4 Formulation of the Problem

Based on limitation of the problem, research formulated several problems of feminism as the follows:

1. What are the existences of oppression received by women in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*?

2. What are woman struggles carried out in novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood?

1.5 Objective of the research

The research objectives are:

1. To discuss the oppression accepted by woman encounter in novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood.
2. To discuss the women struggles in novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood.

1.6 Significance of the Research

1. Theoretical significance

Theoretically, researchers have several desires that later can make a better contribution in the field of science, especially in the field of literature in this research. Researchers also hope that this research provides information about the oppression that are still accepted by women, both physically and mentally, and provide knowledge and some theories about feminism. Finally, the researcher hopes that this research can be used as a comparison and reference for the future.

2. Practical significance

Practically, this researched and by knowing how to apply its theories. Researchers hope that this research will benefit readers. Researchers hope that with this research in social interaction or family interaction there will be no longer differences in position and kind of oppression received by women anymore in terms of social, economic, and political.

1.7 Definition of Key Term

Feminist : Feminist is an approach that contains political elements that can be used to attack other approaches that have wrong perceptions about women. Guerin (2005)

The second sex : The Second Sex (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir, that men and women have differences so that they cannot be said to be the same. The difference according to Beauvoir, men are considered “the default”, while women are considered "the other".

Oppression : Oppression is a form of deviation that occurs in the social, political and economic environment. Some of oppression that

occurs around us can be seen or can still be felt. According to Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, cases of oppression still occur in certain categories that are able to dominate other categories.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Feminist Approach

The feminist approach is one of several approaches used to analyze a literary work. Literary work is a place for feminists to carry out feminist literary criticism. In feminist criticism, literary works are used to explain and raise issues that are accepted by women. Novel is one of the literary works used in feminist criticism. One of the novels that contain feminist issues is *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood which the researcher uses in this research.

Feminist means a study that is used to analyze the existence of gender inequalities that are usually accepted by women. According to Purwanto (2009) in applying this approach it is used to state that both men and women have the same right to use their own decisions. The analysis that is studied in feminist is usually because women are treated differently from men. In feminist literary criticism, it is usually carried out to define, then build, and finally achieve gender equality in all fields, whether political, economic, personal, and social. According to Barry (2017) feminist is an approach that contains economic, political and social elements that can be used to explain the issues of feminism contained therein. To discuss feminist, Barry includes several books to support his opinion, they are Mary Wollstonecraft's

A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), Olive Schreiner's *Women and Labor* (1911), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). In this research, the researcher used *The Second Sex* by Beauvoir theory to conduct this research.

2.2 Feminist Theory

According to Simone De Beauvoir (1949) men and women have differences so that they cannot be said to be the same. The difference according to Beauvoir, men are considered the default, while women are considered "the other". So it is said that humanity is a man, while women are a relative of men and not herself. Beauvoir reflected the relationship between ovum and sperm in living things (humans and animals), then she describes the subordination of women in terms of reproduction. The result shows that the value is not obtained from the results of comparisons biologically, but must be based on the ontological, economic, social, and physiological context.

Simone de Beauvoir(1949)said that women are "the other" her statement that "the other is special". Beauvoir stated that the "other" here is a privilege because it is "the way the One chooses to position himself". And writes that, "But the only earthly destiny reserved to the woman equal, child-woman, soul sister, woman-sex, and female animal is always man. In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir explains several feminist understandings to criticize feminist issues contained in literary works, there are existence, patriarchy and oppression. This understanding is used as the theory used to conduct this research.

2.2.1 Existence

Existence is taken from the word 'existere' which comes from two words, namely "ex" which means to come out and "stere" which means to appear. Broadly speaking existere means to appear, arise, exists, and has an actual existence. The definition of existence is divided into four meanings, first what is, second what has actuality, third everything that is experienced and emphasizes that something is there and last is perfection. In *The Second Sex*, Simon De Beauvoir explains that the existence of women is recognized as "the other". Biologically, women are likened to a uterus, an ovary, and she is female. Contrast to the "female" designation for women who are considered imprisoned in their gender, men feel proud to be dubbed a "male".

There are many things that make the existence of women seem different from men, who are often referred to as "the other". Simon De Beauvoir(1949)Beauvoir reveals in *The Second Sex* on the biology section that if the female is the carrier of the egg and the male is the carrier of the sperm, it is not something valid to prove the existence of living things. In addition, Beauvoir(1949)also explained that physically and biologically there are differences between men and women, differences in body shape, hair, skin texture. Men are considered more than women because women have less muscle strength than men, women have lower respiratory capacities, and women have smaller lungs and throats than men. Hemoglobin and blood in

women are also less so that women often experience anemia and lose strength by men.

Simon De Beauvoir(1949)revealed that connecting biological facts from various ontological, economic, social and psychological points of view. Basically, a species in achieving its state of existence is not only based on biological factors, but also through its transcendence to the world and to the future. So that there is no longer a difference in the name of "female" because it has limitations compared to male, because a woman's body is one of the important elements in her situation in the world. In the end, nothing valid was found in the biological facts explaining that women's existence was not recognized.

2.2.2 Patriarchy

Patriarchy is the origin word of patriarchy, which means in this case it is explained that the male role is the only one, central, and powerful ruler. Patriarchy is a social system in which a man has a leadership role and the main power holder and dominates politics, social rights, moral authority and property control. According to Simon De Beauvoir(1949), women began to be eliminated because of private ownership, which was caused by a history called Patrimoni (father line). The father is in control of the daughter. When patriarchy applies, men will forcibly take all women to own and get inheritance. When his daughter marries he will hand over her power to her

husband. His daughter who became a wife has become the property of her husband, so the wife deserves to be likened to a slave.

Simon De Beauvoir (1949) states if society rejects the existence of private ownership and rejects the existence of a family that has the integrity of patrimony in it, the role of women will be better and more developed. Many did not agree with this, because of the assumption that at that time women did not have sufficient education to create higher goals. However, according to Beauvoir (1949) patriarchal institutions can be destroyed through many feminist criticisms of the traditional nuclear family. She also supports a 'politics of equality' in which equality can only be achieved via an androgynous ideal (equal roles between masculine and feminine at the same time). So that there will be no more men and women, but only workers who are equal to each other. Finally, the principle of equality between women and men will get the same place because it has benefits from society.

2.2.3 Oppression

Oppression is a form of deviation that occurs in the social, political and economic environment. According to Cudd (2005) it means, which a person or group systematically and injustice exists or even restrictions are unfair, burdened, or reduced by one person or group of several power. Some of oppression that occurs around us can be seen or can still be felt. According to Simon De Beauvoir (1949), cases of oppression still occur in certain

categories that are able to dominate other categories. Simon also explained that inequality in numbers can also be a trigger for oppression between the majority against the minority. However, Simon mentioned that women in several countries such as Negroes, Americans and Jews are also a minority in that country.

In this case the ideas Simon De Beauvoir (1949) related to the existence of feminism, where women feel oppression that occurs due to differences between men and women. The forms of oppression felt by women today are not only in the form of violence but there is also oppression that is not visible, for example married women are not allowed to work, besides that there are also those who are not allowed to continue their education at a higher level. Some of it is the type of oppression that women still feel today.

2.2.4 Women Struggle

Women's struggle is one of the efforts made by women to achieve gender equality. Women struggle usually occurs because of unequal treatment between men and women such as oppression received by women by a man. According to Simone De Beauvoir (1949), oppression occurs because of differences between men and women based on biological factors. Beauvoir (1949) revealed that biological factors are not a valid basis for distinguishing between men and women. In the book *The Second Sex* Simon says that if there is an effort by women to do women struggle, one of them is stating the existence of women. Basically, a species in achieving its state of existence is

not only based on biological factors, but also through its transcendence to the world and to the future.

Previous research

Furthermore, after discussing the theory used by the researcher, the researcher added several previous studies to support this research. First, In a previous study “New Woman as Seen in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” by Winandhini and Jatmiko (2020), this research is taken from the novel *Dracula* by Stoker (1986), which was published in the Victorian era. Around the 19th century there was a feminist movement in literary works so that feminists had aspirations to become the new women. In the novel *Dracula* the new women which is found from the characters Mina and Lucy their beauty and attractiveness is praised but on the other hand they have an "unfeminine" side such as their independence and intelligence which is considered a threat to men. Furthermore, in this research the method used includes close reading to analyze the character of the novel through the new perspective.

The next, in previous studies by Utomo and Supriyanto(2018), previous researchers examined the culture contained in the patriarchal *Suti* novel where there are oppression actions that are accepted by women, for a man and women are considered to have no value. From the previous research, the aim was to find out social strata, the style of language used, motives and forms and the oppression accepted by women in *Suti* novel by Sapardi Djoko

Damono. Which previously researchers also used the approach of literary sociology and feminist approaches. This research resulted in, among others, emphasizing the behavior and character of the characters through a study of the language style used in Javanese terms. Furthermore, the social strata are the aristocratic and ordinary classes, and in an effort to maintain social class.

The next, in previous studies is “The gender equality struggles in the novel of Perempuan Berkalung Sorban and Gadis Pantai” written by Muzakka and Suyanto (2020). This research uses a feminist approach and a sociological approach. This research explains about the existence of patriarchy which makes oppression accepted by women, this is carried out by men. The result of this research is the discovery of several oppressions contained in the novel, due to social conditions. Furthermore, due to the difficult social situation, women's struggles are difficult to do.

The next previous research is “The Feminist Voice in Chopin’s *The Awakening* and Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*” written by Ahmed (2020). This research paper uses a feminist approach. The data sources are taken from the novels *The Awakening* and *The Edible women*. These two novels were appointed because of the struggle of women in fighting for their freedom. The results of this study found that there was resistance by women in fighting for their freedom in a patriarchal social environment.

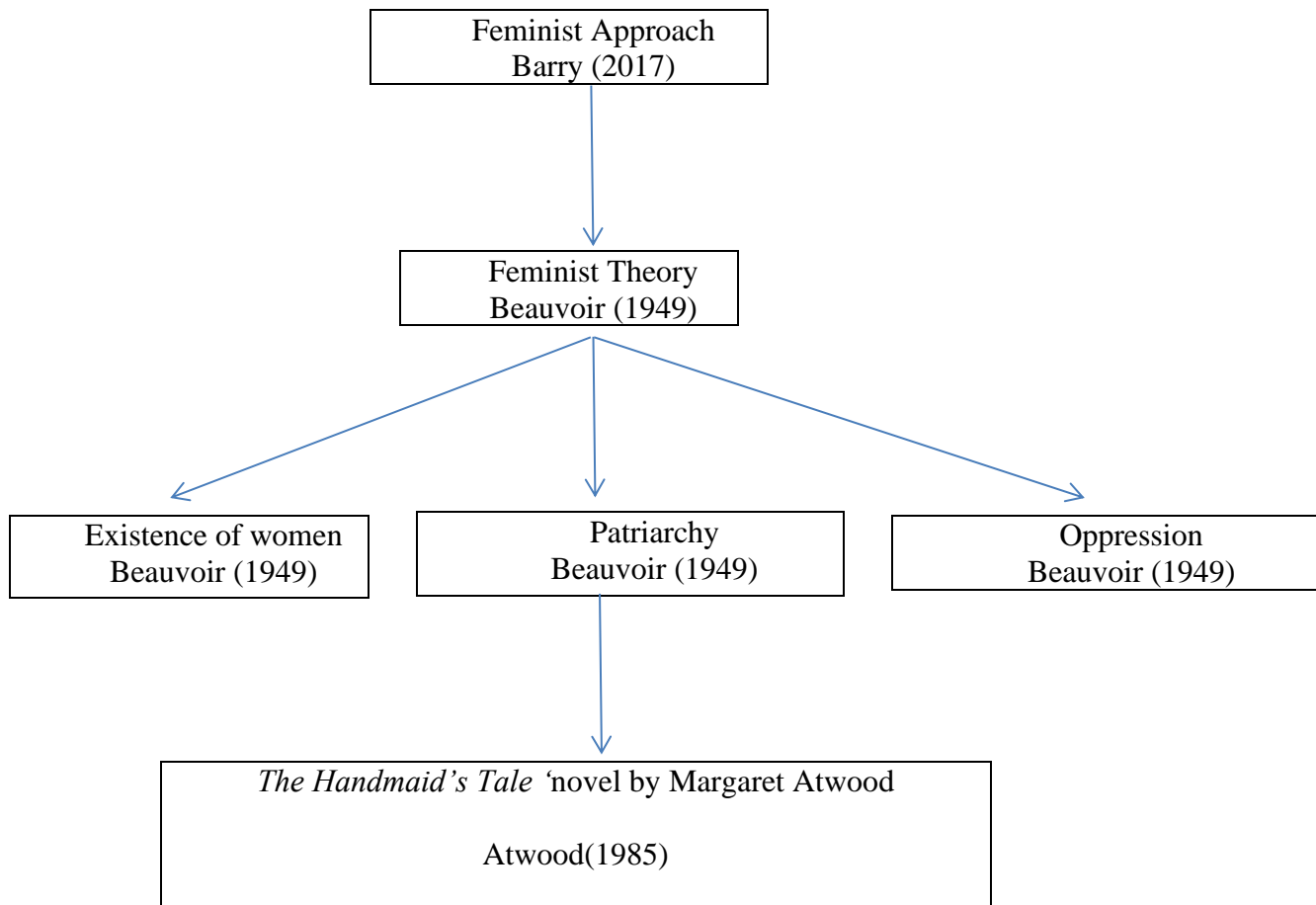
The last research is “Representation of Woman Existentialist Reflected from Archetypal Image Analysis in *The Chrysanthemums Story*” written by

Sirait and Arianto (2020). This research is taken from *The Chrysanthemums Story* by John Steinbeck in 1937. This research is a qualitative descriptive study, uses archetypal image approach by Jung (2013) and Beauvoir (1949). The result of this research is that through the archetypal images contained in *The Chrysanthemum Story*, it is found that there are 4 archetypal images, namely symbols, personas, anima and animus archetypes, and self-archetypes. From the four archetypes above are representations of women in *The Chrysanthemum Story*. So that from this research the reader can know and understand the representation of women which is reflected in the basic pattern in *The Chrysanthemum Story*.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This research was conducted based on the feminist approach proposed by Guerin and Barry who explained that the feminism approach is an approach that contains political elements that can be used to explain the feminism issues contained in it. This is followed by Simon De Beauvoir who explains the differences that occur between men and women and the oppression received by women. The research begins with an explanation of feminism as the basis for the analysis of Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. The cause of this data is analyzed based on the differences in treatment between men and women and the oppression received by women. This research is divided into two forms, namely the difference between men and women and then there is the oppression that women get. The purpose of this

study was to determine the oppression faced by women. The theory used to analyze is Beauvoir (1949) in analyzing *The Handmaid's Tale*.



CHAPTER III

METHOD OF RESEARCH

In this chapter the researcher discusses the research methods used in this study. One of the important parts in conducting research is research methods. In this study, the researcher used research design, research object, data collection method, data analysis method, and method of presenting analysis results.

3.1 Research Design

This research is a qualitative descriptive study. According to Creswell and Cresswell (2018) qualitative descriptive method is a method used to review an event or experience that occurred. This research is a qualitative research because it explains the phenomena of natural phenomena which are reflected through words and sentences.

In result, the phenomenon it present in the form of words and sentences. Furthermore, the results of this research explained in a descriptive way. Then, this was concluded as a qualitative descriptive study, because data presented in the form of words in the words, sentences and paragraphs of the novel, but no numbers, no diagrams and no graphics in it. This study uses theories from Beauvoir (1949) which state about women as the second sex and the oppression accepted by women are the main theories in the analysis.

3.2 Object of the research

The most important part of an analysis is the object of the research which in the main analysis of this research. In this research, researchers examine the women as the second sex and the oppression accepted by women and applied theory of Beauvoir (1949) in the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Atwood (1985) . In this case, the oppression of women is the main reference in this analysis.

3.3 Method of Collecting Data

In collecting data, researchers used qualitative methods according to Creswell and Cresswell (2018) that in literary research involving authors, the author's social life exists, including cultural elements in general. In literature, usually the data sources used are in the form of scientific works and manuscripts, research data, as formal data are words, sentences and discourse. In this data collection technique researchers used data collection techniques indirectly because it is non-participant or taken from a novel.

In this research, the researchers took data sources from *The Handmaid's Tale* novel and the supporting data is obtained from articles and journals related to this research. This study applied Simon De Beauvoir (1949) theory to analyze women as the second sex and the oppression accepted by women the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Researcher in collecting data through several stages, as follows.

1. First, the researcher read the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* as a data source.

2. The second, the researcher looking for the phenomenon of women as a second sex and oppression accepted by women.
3. The third, the researcher marked the sentence or phrase that contains the oppression received by women in question.

3.4 Method of Analyzing Data

From the above theory, the researcher becomes a qualitative method. Because qualitative research explains natural phenomena that are reflected through words and sentences Creswell and Cresswell (2018). It is used in this research to analyze women as a second sex and the oppression received by women in the novel.

Following are some steps that taken by researchers when conducting data analysis.

1. The researcher analyzed the intrinsic elements of fiction in the novel, from plot, character, theme, setting and point of view. This element will be connected there are women as a second sex and oppression accepted by women.
2. The researcher analyzed the intrinsic element by applying the feminist theory to reflect there are women as a second sex and oppression accepted by women in the novel.
3. The researcher analyzed through words that interpret women as a second sex and the oppression received by women in the novel.

The researcher analyzed the data obtained by outlining the explanation according to the theory that applied

3.5 Method of Presenting the Analysis Result

The method of analysis of presenting method presented with qualitative research methods that explain natural phenomena that are reflected through words and sentences Creswell and Cresswell, (2018). In this descriptive research there are no numbers, no diagrams, also no charts. This analysis explained in order to make it easier for the reader or recipient to discuss the topic to be analyzed.