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Wicked Matriarchy behind the Scenes: On the Perfectionism of
Women from Book to Screen through *The Stepford Wives* and
Sharp Objects

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the requirements for the degree of “Doctorate” in Literature**

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Signature Date: 10/03/2023

Dedications

To my beloved parents, whose unwavering support has shaped me into the person I am today. To my dear siblings and darling niece, Farah.

To my loving husband - thank you for always being there to make me laugh during the toughest times. And to my friends - Sara in particular - your companionship has brought me immeasurable comfort and joy.

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Abstract

The status of women in the American society has been a controversial matter for years. The latter mainly focused on the unequitable treatment of women, compared to men, along with their oppression. In accordance, the issue of women's oppression has long been a recurring concern in both the global community and its literary output serving as a mirror of society. However, such discussions frequently revolve solely around a gendered dynamic of male-female oppression, often overlooking the conflict that can arise among women themselves, and the dire consequences that result from this tension. This thesis delves into the social constructs of a patriarchal ideology in the US that imposes rigid expectations on women to conform to prescribed standards of perfection and submissiveness. It examines the complex relationship between feminine and feminist characters, exploring the dichotomy between patriarchal femininity and feminist ideals of gender equality and female independence. This analysis fills a gap in the scholarly world by uncovering a new form of oppression termed "woman-woman oppression," where female characters serve as instruments of patriarchy to enforce traditional feminine behaviour. Additionally, the research delves into the psychological trauma experienced by female characters due to social and familial oppression, which manifests itself in violent and murderous behaviour. Specifically, this study investigates the psychology of female serial killers who target their own gender. This study explores the impact of temporality on the portrayal of women and their societal status, as well as the complex interplay between feminine and feminist characters, in light of the phenomenon of "woman-woman oppression" and the emergence of violent female protagonists, through a detailed analysis of Ira Levin's 1972 novella, *The Stepford Wives*, and Gillian Flynn's 2006 novel, *Sharp Objects*, alongside their contemporary filmic and television adaptations. Post-analysis this thesis reached the conclusion that women-women oppression indeed exists and reflects dire consequences for women's mental sanity that in some cases can metamorphose into murderous acts. The research also discovers that the temporal shifts play a significant role in reshaping the status of women through different media.

Key words: women's oppression, patriarchy, feminine-feminist dichotomy, adaptation, psychological trauma, female serial killers, *The Stepford Wives*, *Sharp Objects*,

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Statement of Originality	i
Dedications	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
Table of Figures	x
General Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background.....	9
1.1. Introduction.....	10
1.2. Societal Hierarchies between Patriarchy and Matriarchy.....	11
1.2.1. 20 th Century Societal Shifts and Female Gendered Role Expectations	15
1.2.2. 21 st Century Societal Shifts and Female Gendered Role Expectations.....	18
1.3. Women and the Rise of the Novel.....	23
1.3.1. From the Feminine to the Feminist Novel	27
1.3.2. The Female Character through the Male and Female Lens	30
1.3.3. The Matriarchal Effect and the Reversal of Roles	34
1.4. Discourse in the Novel	36
1.4.1. Dialogism within the Novel	37
1.4.2. Intertextual Interconnectedness	40
1.4.3. Narratology and Narration	43
1.5. The Psychological Turmoil in Literature	49
1.5.1. Women’s Utopia.....	54
1.5.2. Women on the Verge of Insanity	59
1.5.3. Violence, Women, and Murder.....	62
1.6. Psychological Criminology and the Serial Killer	66

1.6.1. Criminology in Literature	73
1.6.2. The Serial Killer from Book to Screen.....	76
1.7. Cinema and Adaptation	79
1.7.1. Adaptation between Film and Television	84
1.7.2. Adaptation and Intertextuality	88
1.7.3. Feminist Film Theory	91
1.8. Conclusion	94
Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and the Disourse in the Novel.....	96
2.1. Introduction.....	98
2.2. Novelistic Summation and Analysis	98
2.2.1. Ira Levin's <i>The Stepford Wives</i> (1972).....	99
2.2.2. Gillian Flynn's <i>Sharp Objects</i> (2006).....	102
2.3. Feminisms and Femininities.....	109
2.3.1. Stepford Women	111
2.3.1.1. Feminine Appearance, Actions and Conversations	111
2.3.2. Charmaine Wimperis	116
2.3.2.1. Feminist Actions and Conversation	116
2.3.2.2. The Feminine Transformation.....	117
2.3.3. Bobbie Markowe	118
2.3.3.1. Feminist Actions and Conversations.....	118
2.3.3.2. The Feminine Transformation.....	120
2.3.4. Joanna Eberhart	122
2.3.4.1. Feminist Actions and Conversations.....	122
2.3.4.2. The Feminine Transformation.....	124
2.3.5. Wind Gap Women	125
2.3.5.1. Feminine Appearance, Actions, and Conversations	125
2.3.5.2. Feminist Actions and Conversations.....	132

2.3.6. Amma Crellin	134
2.3.6.1. Feminine Appearance, Actions and Conversation.....	134
2.3.6.2. Evil, Murderous Amma	136
2.3.7. Adora Crellin.....	137
2.3.7.1. Feminine Appearances, Actions and Conversations.....	137
2.3.7.2. Evil, Murderous Adora	138
2.3.8. Camille Preaker	140
2.3.8.1. Feminist Actions and Conversations.....	140
2.3.8.2. Camille, the Self-harmer	143
2.4. Men and Masculinities in the Selected Novels.....	147
2.4.1. The Stepford Men	148
2.4.2. The Men of Wind Gap	152
2.5. Deconstructing the Novel.....	156
2.5.1. The Feminine-Feminist Dialogic Clash in the Novels	157
2.5.2. Betwixt Feminine and Feminist Intertextuality	166
2.5.2.1. <i>The Stepford Wives</i>	167
2.5.2.2. Sharp Objects	172
2.5.3. Narrative Modes in <i>The Stepford Wives</i> and <i>Sharp Objects</i>	179
2.6. Conclusion	187
Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Femle Psyche	189
Chapter Three:.....	190
3.1. Introduction.....	191
3.2. Adaptations.....	192
3.2.1. <i>The Stepford Wives</i> (1975).....	192
3.2.2. <i>The Stepford Wives</i> (2004).....	195
3.2.3. <i>Sharp Objects</i> (2018).....	196
3.3. Adaptive Shifts	197

3.3.1. Plot Alterations.....	198
3.3.1.1. <i>The Stepford Wives</i>	198
3.3.1.2. <i>Sharp Objects</i>	202
3.3.2. Interfigurality and Characterization	206
3.3.2.1. In 21st Century Stepford.....	206
3.3.2.2. In 21st Century Wind Gap.....	212
3.3.3. Hypertextuality through the Winding Ups.....	215
3.4. Discourse in the Adaptations	217
3.4.1. Dialogic Resemblances between Adaptations.....	217
3.4.2. Intertextual Connections in Adaptations.....	224
3.4.3. Narrative Shifts	232
3.4.3.1. Point of View and Focalization	233
3.4.3.2. Reliability and Linearity	235
3.5. Female Characters and the Deranged Psyche in the Selected Novels.....	238
3.5.1. Joanna Eberhart	238
3.5.2 Amma Crellin	241
3.5.2.1. Unhinged Amma	241
3.5.2.2. Victim or Psychopath?	243
3.5.3. Adora Crellin.....	246
3.5.3.1. Unhinged Adora	246
3.5.3.2. Victim or Psychopath?	248
3.5.4. Camille Preaker	252
3.5.4.1. Unhinged Camille.....	252
3.6. Stereotypical Psychological Female Typologies from Novels to Adaptations	258
3.6.1. Claire Willington as the Lucia	259
3.6.2. The Ophelia between Mother and Daughter	261
3.6.3. Camille, the Crazy Jane	263

3.7. From Deranged to Criminal Females	265
3.7.1. Women as Serial Killers	266
3.7.2. Women as Victims.....	273
3.7.3. Women as Self-harmers.....	277
3.8. Conclusion	279
General Conclusion	281
Works Cited.....	289

Table of Figures

Figure 1: a graph caption about “Best-Selling Novels by Author’s [sic] Gender”	22
Figure 2: A graph caption about “Profile Characteristics of Six Major Female Serial Killer Types”	72
Figure 3: The Stepford women about to work out at the gym (<i>The Stepford Wives</i> 2004, Paramount Pictures).	200
Figure 4: Mrs Sandersen providing money of her mouth like an ATM (<i>The Stepford Wives</i> 2004, Paramount Pictures).	201
Figure 5: Joanna at the television network being praised for her successfulness (<i>The Stepford Wives</i> 2004, Paramount Pictures)	207
Figure 6 and Figure 7: Captures of Bobbie Markowitz before and after her transformation into a Stepford wife (<i>The Stepford Wives</i> 2004, Paramount Pictures)..	209
Figure 8 and Figure 9: Roger before and after his transformation into a Stepford husband (<i>The Stepford Wives</i> 2004, Paramount Pictures)	210
Figure 10, Figure 11 and Figure 12: Claire Willington (<i>The Stepford Wives</i> 2004, Paramount Pictures)	211
Figure 13: Joanna and Claire in the Stepford gym (<i>The Stepford Wives</i> 2004, Paramount Pictures).....	219
Figure 14: Camille, Amma and Adora at the clothes’ shop. (<i>Sharp Objects</i> 2018, Ep 5, HBO).....	220
Figure 15 and Figure 16: Joanna Eberhart and Camille Preaker from <i>The Stepford Wives</i> (2004, Paramount Pictures) and <i>Sharp Objects</i> , Ep 3 (2018, HBO)	225
Figure 17 and Figure 18: Claire Willington from <i>The Stepford Wives</i> (2004, Paramount Pictures) and <i>Sharp Objects</i> , Ep 5 (2018, HBO)	226
Figure 19 and Figure 20: Commercials included in the beginning of <i>The Stepford Wives</i> (2004, Paramount Pictures).....	227
Figure 21 and Figure 22: The posters in Wind Gap in the beginning of <i>Sharp Objects</i> (2018, HBO)	229
Figure 23 and Figure 24: Signs directed to Camille from <i>Sharp Objects</i> , Ep 1 (2018, HBO).....	231
Figure 25: Amma as Ophelia from episode 8 in <i>Sharp Objects</i> , Ep 8 (2018, HBO).	261

Figure 26 and Figure 27: Joanna before and after her transformation in <i>The Stepford Wives</i> (2004, Paramount Pictures).	268
Figure 28 and Figure 29: Ann Nash and Natalie Keene from <i>Sharp Objects</i>, Ep 1 (2018, HBO).	270
Figure 30 and Figure 31: Amma strangling Natalie Keene from <i>Sharp Objects</i>, Ep 8 (2018, HBO).	271
Figure 32: Natalie Keene’s toothless body from <i>Sharp Objects</i>, Ep 2 (2018, HBO).	271
Figure 33: A pyramid which explains victimisation in the Crellin/Preaker family by Adora Crellin	275

General Introduction

General Introduction

Throughout history there have been notable shifts and transformations in the political and socio-cultural Western expectations placed on women depending on the space they occupy in their context. Although some women, such as Queen Elizabeth I and warrior Joan of Arc, have occupied non-traditional roles for women, they were still expected to adhere to specific stereotypes imposed by the patriarchal ideology of their respective contexts. Patriarchy, duly, is a social system that has been present in many societies throughout history and in its most extreme definitions is based on the belief that men are inherently superior to women and that they should therefore hold the highest positions of power and authority. This ideology is thought to have dominated the Western world in general and the United States of America in particular, since early on in their respective histories (Therborn 17). Despite some advancements, gender inequality still persists in the US, and the blame for this cannot be solely placed on men, as there have been cases of women who have supported and enforced the value systems inherent to patriarchy (Joho np), thus perpetuating a cycle of oppression and suffering.

Women who did not conform to the expectations as outlined in the dominant patriarchal discourse often faced the repercussions of being labelled as mentally ill and/or deviant and even driven to commit suicide. Silvano Arieti, a renowned psychiatrist, found that rebellious and non-conforming women were often sent to psychiatric wards, where they were only released after conforming to proscribed feminine behaviours and social expectations (qtd in Scull 310). This reinforces the idea that femininity was equated with mental health and stability, while non-conformity and rebellion were seen as signs of mental illness and/or deviance. This societal expectation placed an enormous burden on women, leading to further oppression and suffering. Arieti's statement illuminates the intricate interplay between mental illness, gender, and social norms, emphasizing the necessity for a more nuanced comprehension of these phenomena. Additionally, this correlation between gendered role expectations and perceived non-normative behaviour is evident in cases where one woman oppresses another, potentially resulting in various manifestations of psychological distress.

The phenomenon of women oppressing and policing each other's behaviour has been the subject of scholarly inquiry and is recognized as a complex issue. Women, as members of the same societal framework, have assimilated the misogynistic beliefs and standards that have been deeply embedded in the Western cultural psyche for generations. This assimilation perpetuates oppressive structures, both consciously and unconsciously. Consequently, some women may engage in harmful behaviour or derogatory remarks towards other women as a

General Introduction

means of securing their position or validation within a patriarchal society (Beauvoir 20). The act of policing each other's conduct not only manifests as a result of this internalized oppression, but also as a survival mechanism in a culture where adherence to gendered expectations is praised, while deviation is reprimanded. Thus, it is of utmost importance to comprehend the intricate nature of these gendered power systems and strive towards dismantling the oppressive structures that result in women oppressing and policing each other.

Pauline Kael, the renowned American film critic, posited in one of her essays that despite the societal and cultural institutions' oppressive and manipulative labelling of women, it is ultimately women themselves who accept and conform to these standards. In her opinion, if women become carbon copies of the feminine ideal presented in advertisements, it is a self-imposed limitation (np). Hence, the responsibility for bringing the perfect woman into existence must not rest solely on men, as women are also complicit in perpetuating these oppressive standards. Jungian psychologist Bruno Bettelheim argued that a woman's ultimate aspiration is to be a mother and a "womanly companion" to men, thereby insinuating that such a standard is not male-made, but rather a product of women's own desires (qtd in Eagly et al 1). However, some would argue that such women, who live in a patriarchal society, are not only compelled to comply with its norms and values to secure their survival and comfort but do not have access to an agentic space to challenge these gendered frameworks (Chesler 2). This often results in harmful behaviour towards other women, as each person strives to establish their individual position in a system that favours patriarchal ideals.

Drawing parallels between female oppression and mental illness, it is feasible to extend the same correlation to the oppression inflicted by one woman upon another. The adverse impact of such oppression can lead to various forms of psychological distress. It is important to acknowledge that this can result in violent and even homicidal behaviour, which further emphasizes the need for a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between gender, societal expectations, and mental health. According to historical medical documentation there is a series of rationale identifying the female condition as lacking, even by great psychologists such as Freud (Nolan and O'Mahony 159) and as biologically and rationally less than men since their bodies and mental functions are considered flawed by a patriarchal ideology (Shildrick 2). More so, in further analysis, researchers Nichole H. Rafter and Elizabeth A. Stanko explore the societal and judicial perceptions of female criminals in the US, identifying six potential explanations for why women might engage in violent behavior. One of their explanations is rooted in biology, suggesting that women are subject to

General Introduction

uncontrollable biological forces, such as the menstrual cycle (qtd in Lima 8). Another explanation posits that women are irrational and driven by instinct (ibid). A third explanation suggests that women are perceived as passive and weak, making them ideal victims or easily manipulated accomplices in male-dominated crimes (ibid). In another explanation, they suggest that women are impressionable and in need of protection, and therefore easily moulded to fulfil male desires (ibid). The fifth explanation, which allows for some agency on the part of women, involves the categorization of “masculine” women as independent and deviant, often viewed as criminal (ibid). Finally, the sixth explanation invokes the idea of pure evil (qtd in Lima 8), which defies both the traditional image of women as pure and angelic and the expectation that they will follow the law. Throughout these justifications for women’s non-normative behaviour, there is a consistent theme of deviation from socially and culturally defined feminine roles.

The way in which early criminologists studied women’s crimes also helps to shed light on how dominant patriarchal ideologies perceived women as primitive and pathological individuals who failed to develop into moral, feminine women (Estrada et al 138-39). This view reduced women to childlike or irrational beings based primarily on their physiology. Meera Atkinson argues that oppressive societal structures cause mental illness and trauma in women, leading to the commission of crimes, just like in men (np). Similarly, Sophia Huneycutt notes that women who commit murder often do so due to a lifetime of pain and trauma resulting from patriarchal oppression (np). Hence, there seems to be a correlation between women oppressing other women based on patriarchal norms and women who commit crimes and murder due to the mental instability and trauma caused by such restrictive social positionalities. Conversely, the psychological deterioration and subsequent transformation of oppressed women into murderers has been widely explored in literary fiction and their subsequent adaptations for the screen, thereby allowing audiences to witness these themes visually. Having said that, the power of adaptation extends beyond visual media wherein it makes use of hypertextuality, allowing for satirical reinterpretation of literary works. As literary works are often influenced by cultural and societal contexts, adaptations of works depicting female representation can also reflect the societal changes in the status of women.

In this vein, the present research aims to conduct an analytical study that sheds light on the dilemma of female oppression and its association with mental illness, however on the basis that such oppression is perpetrated by women themselves. To achieve this objective, the

General Introduction

study examines prominent American literary works from the 20th and 21st centuries, including Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* (1972) and Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* (2006). The temporal difference between these works serves as a crucial aspect in highlighting the shifts (or lack of shifts) in female representations across different eras. For instance, *The Stepford Wives* portrays women as submissive housewives whose sole purpose in life is to cater to their husbands' happiness and conform to the societal expectations of the Men's Association. Although a few characters in the story espouse pro-feminist ideals, they fail to retain or attain their independence and ultimately become perfect, robotic housewives. In contrast, *Sharp Objects* delves deeper into the female struggle for independence and examines the psychological consequences of women oppressing other women, ultimately leading to murderous tendencies. Despite the temporal difference between the selected novels, their film and television adaptations were produced during the same century, indicating that female characters in both stories share a similar fate when oppressed by comparable patriarchal ideologies propagated by both men and women. In the end, female characters from both works succumb to insanity and become killers and serial murderers.

After considering the points mentioned above, the following research questions are derived:

I- Is it plausible to prove the existence of women-women oppression? If yes, then can it be considered as a façade for wicked oppressive women?

1- Can the 21st century be considered an age of female empowerment in the US?

2- What are the historical, literary and methodological concepts in relation to the rise of the idea of an independent female?

3- Can it be considered that women-women oppression can trigger the rise of female killers, or serial killers?

4- To which extent do the screen adaptations help in the process of answering these inquiries?

To address these inquiries, this research study will employ various methodologies related to the creative aspects of novels, as well as psychoanalytic and forensic psychiatric approaches to literature as comparative tools. Furthermore, the analysis will be structured into three distinct chapters.

General Introduction

The opening chapter of this study focuses on establishing the theoretical concepts that form the foundation of the study. It explores the role of women in literature, examining their societal and literary position in the 20th and 21st centuries and how male and female writers have portrayed the changing status of women in fiction based on reality. The chapter then delves into the transformation of the literary scene in the Western world, particularly in the United States, from a patriarchal society to one with (sometimes) redefined gender roles. The rise of women writers has played a significant role in this transformation, and this study seeks to re-examine the portrayal of women as both writers and characters in patriarchal contexts. This section also explores the intersection of literature with science, particularly psychology, and how it has influenced the portrayal of women in literature. The study employs a dialogic and intertextual approach to investigate the aesthetic elements and narrative modes of selected literary works to better understand the depiction of female psychology through literary characters or narrators. The final section of this chapter discusses the relationship between mental deficiency, societal pressures, and criminal conduct in women. It emphasizes the importance of understanding the woman as a violent individual and murderer through the lenses of psychology and criminology. Furthermore, it also looks at the psychology of women, its association to criminal behaviour and how this is represented in modern and contemporary Anglophone novels, films, and television from a comparative perspective by making use of intertextuality as the comparative device.

The second chapter of the research study focuses on analyzing the constructive elements of the selected literary works, including plot, characters, and discourse. Using an intertextual approach through dialogism, the researcher aims to uncover connections between the portrayal of women, oppression, patriarchy, and the emergence of strong oppressive women in *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*. The analysis also includes exploring the narrative modes and psycho-emotional development of both male and female characters to examine the dichotomy of the feminine and feminist personas and explore women-women oppression through narration.

As for the third chapter, it stresses the need to consider the inevitable changes implemented when a literary work is adapted for the screen. Such changes occur, either, to suit the visual medium, or to satirize the original work, strengthen its message, or reflect changes in societal context. Both *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects* display changes post-adaptation, particularly in regards to plot, characters, the portrayal of femininity and feminism and the ending of each story. The transformation of these elements is crucial in understanding

General Introduction

how cinema portrays the female experience, status, and development over time. Dialogism and intertextuality are tools for deciphering these adaptations, narration and narrative techniques used in films that modify how the story is told and how the female character is portrayed. The visual medium also offers greater insight into the psychological disorders of the female protagonists, while film adaptations can more effectively depict criminal aspects. Recent cinema has seen a reversal of the traditional murder-victim dynamic, with women shifting from victims to perpetrators, a theme explored in *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*.

The motivation behind this research stems from a lifelong fascination with the interrelated fields of fiction and human psychology, with a particular focus on women's psyche. The fusion of these two disciplines provides a more profound understanding of women's struggles and growth. As an avid enthusiast of psychological thrillers, the experience of analyzing and deconstructing these literary works to address the aforementioned research inquiry has been an enriching journey. The goal is to contribute to the existing body of research by bridging a small gap in the area of studying female psychology in relation to crime and societal oppression.

**Chapter One:
Historical,
Societal and
Analytical
Literary
Background**

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

- 1.1. Introduction
- 1.2. Societal Hierarchies between Patriarchy and Matriarchy
 - 1.2.1. 20th Century Societal Shifts and Female Gendered Role Expectations
 - 1.2.2. 21st Century Societal Shifts and Female Gendered Role Expectations
- 1.3. Women and the Rise of the Novel
 - 1.3.1. From the Feminine to the Feminist Novel
 - 1.3.2. The Female Character through the Male and Female Lens
 - 1.3.3. The Matriarchal Effect and the Reversal of Roles
- 1.4. Discourse in the Novel
 - 1.4.1. Dialogism Within the Novel
 - 1.4.2. Intertextual Interconnectedness
 - 1.4.3. Narratology and Narration
- 1.5. The Psychological Turmoil in Literature
 - 1.5.1. Women's Utopia
 - 1.5.2. Women on the Verge of Insanity
 - 1.5.3. Violence, Women, and Murder
- 1.6. Psychological Criminology and the Serial Killer
 - 1.6.1. Criminology in Literature
 - 1.6.2. The Serial Killer from Book to Screen
- 1.7. Cinema and Adaptation
 - 1.7.1. Adaptation between Film and Television
 - 1.7.2. Adaptation and Intertextuality
 - 1.7.3. Feminist Film Theory
- 1.8. Conclusion

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

1.1. Introduction

Any research study is grounded on a set of theoretical concepts necessary to conduct a proper research analysis. This introductory chapter is dedicated to establishing the literary and scientific concepts that inform this study and includes concepts associated with women in literature. First, it moves from the societal to the literary field where it discusses the position of women in 20th and 21st centuries in US society and how they are reflected in literature by both male and female writers, while also considering the shifts in the female status from reality to fiction. This chapter delves into the psychology of women, its correlation with criminal tendencies and how this connection is suggested in the novels examined in this thesis and their adaptations to films and television series—while identifying the depiction of female nature that ranges from a docile automaton (the Stepford wife) and a monstrous female serial killer.

This examination begins by studying the societal shift from a patriarchal society to refigured socio-cultural gender role expectations for females, specifically, between the 20th and the 21st centuries in the Western world, but more precisely in the United States. This shift, along with the influence of the increasing number of women writers, encompasses the transformation of the literary scene in the Western world, which began as early as the 18th century with the rise of the genre of the novel. The novel, thus, as a literary product associated with women as writers and characters within patriarchal contexts, also needs to be re-examined in order to help in the process of answering the inquiries posited in this research work.

Since the 18th century, the novel became a prominent literary genre that reflects many aspects of societal life on the one hand while also being identified as possibly the first a female product to be later on adapted by men. In a sense, the novel was created by women to tell their stories, yet it transformed into a tool to cage them within specific stereotypes, achieved via the inculcation of hegemonic discourses of power in the novel. The novel, in this sense, is taken as a valuable material for investigation to highlight and make use of the novelistic aesthetics from the dialogic to the intertextual elements. Furthermore, the narrative modes the novel manifests also help to better understand the depiction of women in the selected literary works hereas narrators and/or as characters.

With the English novel's expansion during the 19th and 20th centuries, it started to transcend the literary world and engage with the field of science, amongst other disciplines.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

Among these disciplines, the field of psychology, mainly espoused by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, was the most important (Leigh 97) as it cleverly and conveniently seeped within the pleats of the literary artefact. For both literature and reality, the field of psychology explored the impact of the way in which the world reshaped and influenced women's roles in society: how they were perceived before the rise of feminist movements, and how they are subsequently defined from a feminist perspective. This chapter shall explore the way in which the Jungian and Freudian psychoanalytic approaches and studies investigate female struggles and reactions to a patriarchal world and the difficulties of a woman's fight to preserve her mental sanity within such restrictive contexts.

When a person arrives at a state of mental deficiency, that is when they are no longer in control of their own actions as a result of societal pressures, they find themselves in a problematic situation either of harming themselves or others (Qasim et al 385). Here, the shift between psychology and criminology is of the essence to gauge criminal conduct and the criminal's psyche and how they both become an essential part in understanding the potential for a woman to be violent and/or a murderer. More importantly, this section deals with how literature depicts criminality and the violent woman in modern and contemporary Anglophone novels.

Not only can literature engage with scientific fields such as psychology and criminology, it also demonstrates an affinity to be adopted through film and television adaptations; thereby shifting literary stories from being only read and imagined to being experienced through a visual medium. The female character (the sick, the violent woman, and the killer) is not only written but also portrayed through the visual apparatus by taking the literary story and adjusting it to the screen. Therefore, cinema and television as adaptation are concepts that need to be explored as intrinsic to analysing female representation from book to screen in these selected works. In accordance, intertextuality is to be aligned with adaptation as a comparative instrument before moving to the analytical part of this research study.

1.2. Societal Hierarchies between Patriarchy and Matriarchy

Historically, organised human society has acknowledged two governmental systems of authority based either on male or female dominance. A world overseen by female authoritarianism known as matriarchy, or an androcentric system that is patriarchy—in neither cases is leadership shared by both sexes. On that note, the dispute over social decree between these two systems fluctuated throughout history. Though the rule of patriarchy has often been

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

accepted as the 'norm', matriarchal societies are often discussed passionately because it presents an exception to this rule. However, this work mainly focuses on the power women held, or not, in both the private sphere of the domestic space of the home or in the public world—both of which can reflect a patriarchal or a matriarchal context depending on their respective historical and social settings.

Researchers and anthropologists such as Johan Jakob Bachofen, John Ferguson McLennan and Lewis Henry Morgan, conducted anthropological studies on civilizations such as the Greeks, Egyptians, and East Indians, to mention but a few. They concluded that most ancient tribes were matriarchal communities commanded by female leaders as a form of primitive governance, similar to Amazonian matriarchy (Banerjee 218). At this level, men were deprived of any right to rule, to inherit property, or even for an offspring to carry their lineage, while females prospered both domestically and publicly. Hereafter, matriarchy would soon develop into an advanced patriarchal version of social authority (ibid). On the other hand, numerous anthropologists would reject such claims and label them as utter legends, refusing the existence of a so-called matriarchal society (Price 69). In most cases, the result of this debate is one, although societies were not at an equal level of patriarchal rule, it is safe to say with some conviction that most societal forms were patriarchal in nature, as noted by Goran Therborn: “In the beginning of our story all significant societies were clearly patriarchal. There was no single exception” (17). So, it seems that, throughout history, humanity, or more precisely the Western hemisphere, was never led by females. Instead, it was predominantly a male-led world.

Patriarchy would denote a gendered hierarchy of social and economic authority that ultimate leadership was to be owned and assumed by the male over the female members of society. However, in its most extreme forms, patriarchy was acknowledged by many, as an institution within which women were to be subdued, oppressed, and taken advantage of by men (Walby 20). In Silvia Federici's words nuclear families in the Western world during the 19th century, and into the 1970s, were predominantly “centered on the economic dependence of women to men” where women were excluded from the workplace entirely to be exclusively kept for child bearing (17). That is why, since the onset of the feminist movement by the late 19th century, feminist activists such as Virginia Woolf, the Fabian Women's Group and Vera Brittain, for instance, chose the concept of patriarchy as the primary concern to be put under the spotlight when discussing the status of women. These feminists considered patriarchy as the major key to solving the riddle behind women's unfortunate fate of being

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

considered the weakest link of society, and thus suffering subordination to men (Beechey 66). Scholars such as Sylvia Walby attempt to dissect the patriarchal notion and has concluded that the latter is comprised of six constructs: “the patriarchal mode of production, patriarchal relations in paid work, patriarchal relations in the state, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexuality, and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions” (20). The previously mentioned constructs touched different aspects in women’s lives with one purpose of confining them to restrictive gendered roles in the domestic world as determined by fixed androcentric power hierarchies.

These six structures, as outlined by Walby, start by devaluing women’s role as homemakers, hence being less of economic producers than men since, according to the second construct, they have been allowed only minor jobs, such as in textile factories where they were paid less than their male counterparts (Walby 216). Likewise, the third construct denotes that patriarchal ideologies inherently support unequal and inequitable gendered power hierarchies that privilege male supremacy over females just as racism and capitalism has worked in favour of predominantly white and economically privileged members of society. Consequently, even gendered violence also featured the victimisation of women based on the premise that men in the Western world knew better because “it was not only the mental and physical weakness of the female constitution that invoked the disorder of the foetal body, but an intrinsic lack of self-restraint that marked women as actively dangerous others” which meant that men had to restrain them and refine their actions as “women were in need of policing and control” (Shildrick 42). More so, violence against women in the domestic sphere witnessed lack of interference by the state itself to protect women in the household. Women in the United States were only protected if they were publicly abused, or severely harmed, but what happened behind closed doors was disregarded by the society (Walby 225), until women spoke up for their human rights with the rise of feminist activists in the 1970s. Furthermore, patriarchal ideologies tend to establish heterosexuality as the norm while patriarchal relations in cultural institutions, on the other hand, speak of the picture created by the male gaze of how a woman should be, a portrait painted by cultural establishments including media, film and commercials (Walby 20). That is, vital and significant decisions concerning female lives were made and altered by men and women had no right to challenge its inequities, even if it touched their own wellbeing. Instead, a female is objectified as a “doll” to please male desire. According to Martine Delvaux, this “doll” label is inspired by Barbie: a female stereotype that inspire girls to become the “ideal” (white) woman “with a narrow waist and big breasts”, a

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

woman who, in the real world, “would not menstruate and would be incapable of standing upright on her two feet” (25). This further reduces girls and women, via the male gaze, to being plastic and inanimate sex objects destined to serve the male ego and his desires.

Recently, various scholars have started to admit that patriarchal rule has been in decline in the past century, or more precisely by the end of World War II (Horak 256). In George Horak's words, “Patriarchy is under threat. It is not able to stop this ongoing shift” (ibid), a shift led by female activists whose sole purpose was to “place the goddess back in her rightful place” (THE FEMINISTS 26). These words were a response written by THE FEMINISTS entitled “Building the Matriarchy” to a letter by Jane Alpert, in which the renowned 20th-century feminist fighter laments women’s situation and calls for her sisters in bondage to patriarchal societal injustices to fight for their rights and help matriarchy resurrect from the ashes (26). Bringing women to an equitable social state was also the mission of feminist literary critics—a group of intellectual women such as Elaine Showalter and Virginia Woolf, to mention but a few, whose main goal was to reposition female writers in their rightful place in the male dominated literary canon (Lorraine 496). When one speaks of the female scope of accomplishments, especially in terms of availing the female position in society, literature is indispensable since it was used as a tool to reveal women’s historical oppression and struggle, as well as their ability to write literature as good as, or even better than, some male authors. Before women had the chance to transcend into the public domain, for example in the British Victorian era or the 18th and 19th centuries in the United States, women writers used their confinement to the domestic space to write in the name of female freedom, making the role of women writers in reshaping women’s history indisputable. Exploring the history of women writers mainly focuses on the fact that feminist literary critics helped in identifying those women writers who not only wrote literature but might have contributed to creating the novel as a prominent literary form of the modern age as well as using this literary tool to strengthen the female fight against gender discrimination and female oppression. Women writers of the Anglophone novel, since the rise of the novel and until the 21st century, wielded the pen and conquered the pages of history by repositioning ‘the woman’ from a stage of oppression and submission to a female fighter to achieve autonomy and self-independence (Showalter 405). Nevertheless, this literary success was yet to become an extraordinary transformation reflected on real grounds since real societal gender equality and equity were still to be achieved. Women’s purpose at the time was to attempt to reach equity through equal rights for both genders.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

Researchers observed that a subtle, but certain, move was taking place from a male-dominated society to a world within which strong independent females also participated and occupied space. A truth that came to light when women acquired their right to education and started to prove their own value and ability to be equal to men in terms of intellectual, scientific, political, and economic achievements by the mid of the 20th century in the US (Horak 255-256). This change in the socio-political arena of women's rights metaphorically opened the door for particular discussions regarding the rise of independent career women in the 20th and the 21st centuries in the Western world.

1.2.1. 20th Century Societal Shifts and Female Gendered Role Expectations

By the end of the 19th century in the US, women were still underestimated and treated differently from their male counterparts; based on the erroneous preconception of their mental and social deficiencies compared to the established male norm—a hegemonic code that continued to consider females as child-like imperfect humans that had yet to complete their full mental growth (Halldorsdorttir 139). Similarly, Freud considered women as flawed and less reliable than men because they are more emotional and less pragmatic (Nolan and O'Mahony 159). As such, their position was inevitably seen as secondary to men's; occupying gendered roles such as housekeepers, child-bearers, and morality instructors only (Halldorsdorttir 139), thereby making the prospect of a matriarchal society even more fictional than fiction itself. Still, the 20th century proved to carry considerable changes in the Western hemisphere in the representation and social situatedness of the female gender within their respective environments.

The growth of capitalism and the spread of industrialization in both Western Europe and America by the late half of the 19th century brought a new turn to the world, mainly inspired by the “French Revolution and, in the United States, by the elimination of slavery, the expansion of Western territories, and urbanization” (Andersen 383). These transformations paved the way for the suffragettes in Britain and the Feminist American movement. These two feminist groups mainly flourished by the early 20th century and endeavoured to gain female rights (ibid). Feminist activists such as John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Harriet Taylor (1807–1858) turned to law as the primary force that deprived women of their educational and professional rights and the opportunity to have a voice in politics and matters of the state and community. They aimed at unravelling the dominant patriarchal discourse which exposes that women's inferiority is only but a ruse fabricated by men to safeguard their own status, a mission which was known as “‘denaturalizing’ the social relations and social

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

roles of women and men” (Hawkesworth 200). Mill and Taylor attest that men were never created superior nor women inferior but, historically, it was men’s task to find an ‘other’ to compare themselves to and by undermining that other men found superiority. French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) mentions in her studies concerning the female condition, that patriarchal societies disable women from having even basic privileges that men hold, including the right to vote, equal education, job opportunities, the right to wear comfortable clothes and even the right to decide their own fate (Handal 9).

Even though the 20th century gave women, in the United States and Europe, the chance to replace men (who left to fight for the World Wars) in the work force and prove themselves to be crucial assets to society (Handal 2), they continued to be seen as none-equal to men. In fact, after the end of World War II, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) inspired the emergence of a second wave of feminism whereby Friedan spoke of a female condition that she herself labelled as “the Problem That Has No Name”. The issue at hand was the degradation of women (qtd in Handal 12) as merely pleasure objects, beauty pageant idols, docile mothers, and homemakers, in a way to keep them confined to the walls of a house and their low- paying employment. This feminist wave focused on addressing “three main issues drawn from the women’s movement: a woman’s domestic labor, a woman’s role in the nuclear family, and a woman’s control over her body” (Krugovoy Silver 60). It was led by female activists such as Carrie Chapman Catt who was the leader of the National American Women’s Suffrage Association first installed in 1890. With time and effort, this association’s passion and hard work, along with the support of other feminist activist groups, achieved the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment in the US, and women’s right to vote was finally approved in August 1920 (Andersen 345). The latter opened a new chapter in the life of women in the US when the Equal Pay act of 1963 challenged the precept that women were to be paid less than men for similar jobs and was followed by the Civil Rights’ Bill of 1964, which reinforced the Equal Pay Act. Still, it was only on theoretical grounds that law stood by women and gave them equal rights in the US during this time. However, it was still a matter of how that law was practised and by whom and with whom it stood that made the real difference in the case of women, especially at a time when there was a severe lack of women lawyers and lawmakers (ibid 327). Thus, women’s status still could not have reached its full potential based on the fact that women were not yet allowed all of their rights, let alone be perceived as equal to men in both the private and public domain.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

In the literary field, women writers were not to be acknowledged in the predominantly androcentric literary canon, leading to the rise of a particular branch of the feminist agenda known as feminist literary criticism. Respectively, this feminist division focused on criticising such a literary stream that marginalized women writers. Norman Foerster, in his 1916 preface to *The Chief American Prose Writers*, claimed that there were only nine public-chosen figures which were the pioneers of the American prose classics. Almost half a century later, in Foerster's preamble to *Eight American Writers*, he wrote: "In the consensus of our time eight writers-Poe, Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Mark Twain, and Henry James- constitute our 'American Classics'" (qtd in Lauter 436), and unsurprisingly in both lists, there were no women writers to be mentioned. This example is but one of the many instances of women writers being neglected which fuelled female historians to uncover the real contribution of women to the world of literature. With this, feminist literary critics aimed at acknowledging previously ignored female writers and in some occurrences publishing their "lost" writings, in a way giving them a place in literary history (Rose 349). In simpler words, the unapologetic injustices of the male literary canon inspired a female led literary movement to reposition women-writers in their rightful place and address their previous exclusion because of the dominant patriarchal ideologies that had silenced them.

Novels by women were considered as a reflection of women's status and also a place where women could voice their rejections. Susan Koppelman Cornillon, for instance, declared that women: "looked to literature, and especially fiction, for answers, for models, for clues to the universal questions of who [they were] or might become" (qtd in Rose 349). That is, the novel helped in recognizing women's nature, history and achievements through the female literary lens instead of a world created by men. Similarly, Judith Gardiner believed that women writers wrote of female protagonists that reflected the discovery and self-definition of the writer herself through the character she had created (qtd in Handal 8). Hence, the world that the women shaped held their aspiration of how the world should be for women, possibly a world led by women (Rowbotham 49). Moreover, the female struggle for demolishing the image of "the angel in the house", a term utilised by Virginia Woolf to reflect the female relegation to the domestic space at the time (Showalter 207), is evidenced in diverse literary works of the 20th century such as Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Through the newly acquired rights, women felt more empowered and more versed in the artistic domain to enter the literary field and set their own rules. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) was indeed the waking point for many female authors of the 1900s— her

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

main character Edna set the stage for the refusal and the fight against the domesticized world of women. Even though a patriarchal society led Edna to her doom, she was the epitome of women in the real world (Martin and Becker np), women who fought patriarchal injustices to the last breath.

For women to be acknowledged and appreciated, both, for their literary achievements and their role within society, one must identify and dismantle the gendered role expectations in their socio-cultural context in the 20th century that has held them back from obtaining equality. It was during the 20th century and due to the feminist movement that women could acquire some of the significant rights they were previously denied. They were able to occupy space in the public world and prove that women too can participate in society both domestically and publicly. Women writers also competed with men in the literary field with novel writing with artistic mastery and robust female characters (Evans 212). Be that as it may, obtaining equality and equity was still a work of fiction that not all writers would participate to achieve since the majority of male writers still kept female characters at the margin, not to mention women in real life. Though most women in literature were still portrayed as weak, docile creatures dependent on men to survive, there were realistic female characters emerging and during the 21st century there were more examples of female characters that portrayed women authentically.

1.2.2. 21st Century Societal Shifts and Female Gendered Role Expectations

Even in the 21st century, in some regions of the world, women are still suffering from inhumane acts such as marital violence, ritual genital mutilation and cultural extremism—a victimisation based on female degradation, exploitation and torture even within politically and economically advanced nations. That being said, Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian anti-colonial nationalist and writer, once said: “You can tell the condition of a country by looking at the status of its women” (qtd in Zaveri and Shah 2); this could say a lot about the status of women in countries such as the US which claims democracy and equality. Undeniably, the result of the 1900s feminist movements and activism in the US was indeed an epiphany to realize that women could be writers and participatory members of society. Hereafter, this research analysis shall make use of the influence of feminist movement on the shift in female status to study the selected works of 20th and 21st century’s American literature.

The feminist movement has focused on acquiring equal rights for women, yet institutionalized patriarchal ideologies continue to dominate in various societies and persist in

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

creating numerous setbacks in the realm of the status of women's rights. Despite not being entirely successful, the 21st century's advancement and change in women's rights in the US has attempted to reach a certain level of equity however with certain setbacks. Based on Anthony P. Carnevale, and Nicole Smith's research on women's educational achievements in the USA, during the span of 50 years between 1964 and 2014, women have indeed achieved certain goals. In education female students have surpassed their male counterparts in higher education in the US where the percentage of female students in college reached just over 70%, equating to approximately 240,000 females more than men. Moreover, more than half of the "Associate's and Master's degrees" are also acquired by females which is a similar case for Bachelors as well as Doctoral stages since, in recent years, women also outnumbered men in being Doctoral degree holders (Carnevale and Smith 1). Not to mention that in biology and medicine, over half of the graduates were women, thereby outnumbering men (Benhold np).

In the political arena of the late 20th century, the US Senate had no sanitary facilities specifically dedicated for women whereas, today, an unprecedented percentage of females are occupying a variety of high-status political professions in the US (Andersen 323). In the Senate itself, 20% of officials are women and a third of the "Supreme Court justices, and one of them, Sonia Sotomayor, is the first Hispanic to serve on the nation's highest court" (Andersen 323). Equally, women also started to excel in scientific fields and although their contributions started to be recognized during the 1900s, it was not until the 21st century that women were finally rewarded for their achievements in the world of science. In 2009, five women received the Nobel Prize and in the first twenty years of the 21st century a total of 24 women have been gifted this praiseworthy reward (NobelPrize.org). According to Kathrine Bennhold's article on "Risk and Opportunity for Women in the 21st Century", women were now receiving almost half the percentage of the science degrees in the countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development which includes the United States of America and other major countries of the world, totalling 30 nations. Even so, such realities cannot alter the fact that women are still not treated as equal to men in the US and other countries throughout the world.

As evidenced by the wage gap, women's income is not proportionate with their educational achievements and women still suffer from discrimination when it comes to wage distribution based on gender: "In 2012, young women with a Bachelor's degree earned just 77 cents for every dollar earned by young men with the same degree. For mature women with a Bachelor's degree, the gap with men had widened to 62 cents on the dollar" (Carnevale and

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

Smith 7). Moreover, Carnevale and Smith assert that “the gender wage gap widens with age – a fact that has not changed in the past 30 years” (6), not to mention its intersectionality with women’s race and age as additional factors impeding equal pay with men and amongst each other. Many would argue the absurdity of this situation since the two parties would generate the same outcome for the company or place of work (ibid). Yet, it seems that a patriarchal society does not wish to revise its ideologies but continue to privilege a gender and racially biased earning potential.

Notwithstanding the position of the first lady, US history denotes how women remain the subject of stereotypes and clichés no matter what position they occupy. The ladies of the White House themselves were expected to follow specific gendered rules of conduct. They were expected to fit a specific mould, playing the role of the compliant wife by focusing on supporting the success of the president and caring only for what they are supposed to care for, that is, “children, health, and education” (Andersen 323). In support of this claim, in an analysis of three influential females in American politics during 2008, Heather Dillaway and Elizabeth Pare stated that Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and Michelle Obama are examples of how women in the political sphere are judged and “defined by their attention to and participation in biological motherhood” (212), instead of being appraised for their intellectual and political merit. Outside the political arena, women in the media were not yet free of the conventional image as the object of male-desire, from Scarlet O’Hara’s obsession with being a wife in *Gone with the Wind* (1939) to Playboy models (Johannsdottur 20). Between the 20th and the 21st centuries women have negotiated roles from housekeeper to sex objects (ibid); ergo, it seems even women with power and influence still cannot break away from the restrictions placed upon them by a dominant patriarchal discourse.

Regardless, in a 2017 article for *The Guardian*, the 21st-century writer John Boyne declared his dissatisfaction with gender inequality with respect to literary acclaim. He affirmed that his two decades of affiliation to the world of literature enabled him to witness the “double standards in the industry. A man is treated like a literary writer from the start, but a woman usually has to earn that commendation”, mainly those female writers were always restricted by “how female-oriented their book promotion should be” (np). Boyne also speaks of his experience in a literary celebration, when a many female writers were described as “wonderful storytellers” while three male writers of similar stature were referred to as “giants of world literature” (np). Boyne’s frustration certainly could not reach that of female authors, yet; he could not resist the urge to admit what he believes, “women are better novelists than

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

men”. To support his claim, Boyne mentioned that in one year he read a little over a hundred books with the majority of them being published in 2017; more than half were written by female authors. Boyne reached one decisive conclusion, the books which he considered “the best were written by Min Jin Lee, Polly Clark, Elizabeth Day, Molly McCloskey, Gail Honeyman, Kamila Shamsie, Francesca Segal and Celeste Ng, while the best non-fiction was *Gone by the violinist* Min Kym”. In other words, he believed that women were better writers than men due to a number of reasons and he supported his beliefs by outlining reasons for which he thought women were better equipped for writing fiction.

In Boyne’s view, since women were given peripheral roles in society, mainly running a household and raising a family, they were more capable than men to understand human nature, which was reflected in their literary works through more complex characters. He stated:

First, perhaps it is the historically subservient role women have played in society that has made them understand human nature more clearly, a necessity if one is trying to create authentic characters. Having been expected to bring up families while running a home and catering to society’s expectations of what women should be, they have a better grasp of human complexity. (Boyne np)

Boyne also gave personal examples of his own surroundings when he recounted: “My female friends, for example, seem to have a pretty good idea of what’s going on in men’s heads most of the time. My male friends, on the other hand, haven’t got a clue what’s going on in women’s” (ibid). Additionally, Boyne noticed that many male authors care more about gaining fame than the act of writing for the sake of it, or for the purpose of being relatable to readers, “I recall one highly ambitious young man telling me all the awards for which his first collection of stories would be eligible and rating his chances of winning each one. (In the end, the book made less of an impact than a pebble thrown in the Atlantic)” (Boyne np). Boyne explained that women writers simply aimed to create good stories and his claims do not stem from his subjective views but, from the fact that Boyne has “taken part in countless literary festivals around the world” where he had observed that most young-male writers are vain and most women writers are underestimated (ibid).

Boyne observed that women are better readers in the sense that “they seem to read a lot more. If a male writer appears in a green room carrying a book for everyone to see, nine times out of 10 it will be something obscure, something in translation, or something out-of-print” (np). Thus, Boyne alludes that women who read a lot possess more understanding of the process of writing characters and stories in comparison to men who do not. The difference

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

between female and male writers is mostly seen in the way they write each other; women tend to portray men more realistically than men portray women. On the other hand, men tend to cage women within four stereotypes:

the angelic virgin who manages to tame some quixotic lothario who's spread so many wild oats that he has shares in Quaker; the pestering harpy who nags her boyfriend or husband, sucking all the fun out of his life; the slut who eventually gets murdered as payback for her wanton ways; the catalyst who is only there to prompt the man's actions and is therefore not a human being at all, just a plot device. (ibid)

By the end of his article Boyne concludes by saying that the best living fiction writer of all, in his view, is a woman no doubt be it “Anne Tyler. Or maybe Sarah Waters. Or Margaret Atwood. Or Rose Tremain” (np). Ergo, Boyne, though being a man could not resist to set the records straight, as his article's title denotes, by providing arguments and evidence praising the female ability to join the literary canon by being able to portray human nature in the most authentic manner possible.

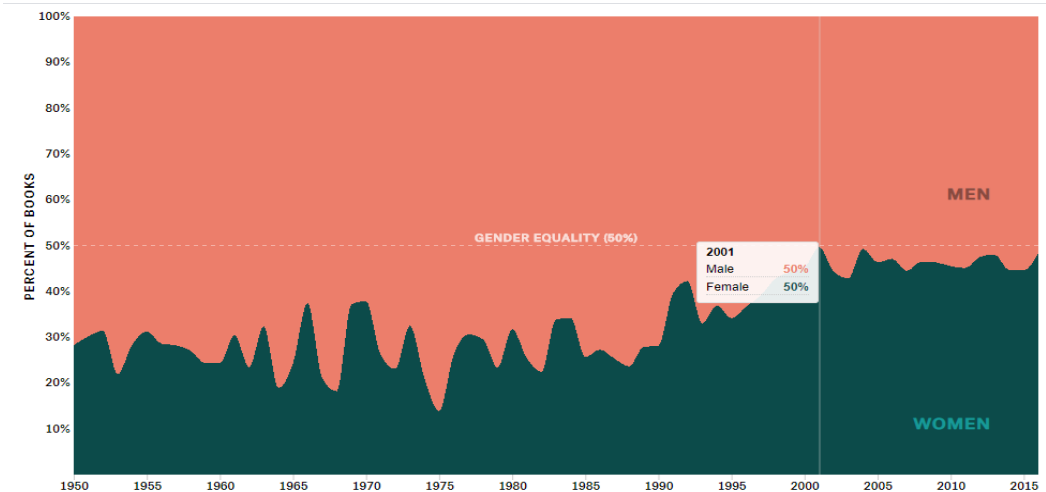


Figure 1: a graph caption about “Best-Selling Novels by Author’s [sic] Gender”

Cima, Rosie, “Bias, She Wrote: The Gender Balance of The New York Times Best Seller List”. The Pudding, 2017. 04-06-2020. <http://pudding.cool/2017/06/best-sellers/>

The above graph taken from Rosie Cima's article on bias and gender inequality in literature displays the ratio of bestselling books by women from the 1950s and 1990s wherein women's books consisted of a quarter of the whole percentage while men's contributions were over 75% (np). Roughly, ten years later, in 2001, bestselling books by women compared to men remained in close range, but never exceeding men by 48% in 2015 (Cima np). Though the statistics proved that nowadays, books by women are as appreciated by the public as those

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

by men, Cima asserts that the publishing industry appears to reject this fact, since a “lot of the bias in reviews reflects a bias in publishing” (np). Moreover, Ruth Franklin’s analysis in 2011 “found that 11 of the 13 publishers, including Harper, Norton, Little Brown, Knopf and FSG, had heavily male biased catalogs — around 30% or less of their books were written by women. The *Huffington Post* followed her study up in 2012 with similar findings of widespread gender bias” (Cima np). The publishing industry, like other institutions, has been often accused of gender inequality and sexism. Cima argues that “Every year, the VIDA Count organization goes through literary journalism... According to their most recent study, in 2015, books by women made up less than 20% of books reviewed in the *New York Review of Books*, 30% in *Harpers*, 29% in *The Atlantic*, and 22% in *The London Review of Books*” (ibid). Initially, if women were accepted by more publishers to be reviewed, they very much possibly would have had more fame and appreciation—Cima points out that “The statistics suggest publishers and critics aren’t giving these new young authoresses the chance they deserve” (np).

Even so, the first twenty years of the 21st century is yet not enough to decide whether this century is the one which brings positive change to the female status especially that the US has seen a regression of women’s rights. Thus far, the world still seems biased to men whether in politics, job markets, or literature—all of which are mostly still dominated by men—in the US, and in many parts of the world, women are not necessarily better off. They are still not treated equally to men, but it is leaning towards a different angle, women are no longer just portrayed as docile obedient creatures but acknowledged as more complex individuals. This new angle, therefore, generates interest in respect to the way in which 20th and 21st centuries literary productions reflect the Western world and more precisely the US’ view concerning a revision of gendered roles and power hierarchies. Hence, exploring the role literature (and specifically the novel) plays, in the representation of women mainly in the US, is of the essence, since fiction reflects real life and, in turn, fiction influences real life as well (Lewis np). In his essay “On Stories,” author Staples C. Lewis argues that stories are a way of exploring and understanding the complexities of real life, and that they can have a powerful impact on our beliefs and attitudes (np).

1.3. Women and the Rise of the Novel

In a period of 300 years, the Anglophone novel proved to be a genre born out of the collision of previous literary artefacts and the product of the society in which it originated (Majumdar and McLaurin 224). Many researchers investigated the reasons and the conditions within

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

which the novel emerged in the US including Marc Egnal who attempted to use Ngram database to study the evolution of the novel in the US (Egnal 231). A Ngram database is a type of database that contains statistical information about the frequency of words or phrases in a large corpus of text. By analysing the frequency of different words over time, Ngram databases can be used to track changes in language use and cultural trends, as well as to identify patterns and relationships between different words and phrases (Jockers 23) which explains the usage of Ngram database to study the novel. While some attributed the novel's existence to social, economic, and political changes, feminist literary critics such as Madame de Stael (1766-1817) and Elaine Showalter (1941-present), on the other hand, strongly argued that the rise of women writers was a critical aspect for generating the novel in the 18th century and its evolution until the early years of the 21st in the Western world in general and in the US in particular.

Other intellectuals settled on the fact that the changes that had occurred in the US since the Renaissance until the 18th century gradually brought the novel into the spotlight. These modernizations included the industrial revolution, the evolution of printing technology, along with increasing accessibility to education. In turn, such progress in the publishing industry made written texts more readily available for readers and resulted in the rise of the middle class and its interests in reading stories that people related to, which was what the novel offered—thereby leading to a considerable upsurge in the reading population (Hasan 18). Though various parallels attempt to make a link between capitalism and the rise of the novel, such as Lucien Goldman (Donovan 442) and Ian Watt in his *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), it was, in fact, the sense of individualism that generated the rise and fast spread of the novel as a new craze which was devouring Europe and precisely England to be quickly spread to the US. Watt stated that Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), which he alleged was the first English novel, served as the unparalleled link between the many facets of social individuality and the upsurge of the novel (62), especially because individualism began to be reflected in novels and through relatable and more realistic characters instead of heroic kings and damsels in distress (Hasan 18). The novel, then, became a reflection of actual life.

Nonetheless, even Ian Watt himself admitted to the deficiency of his arguments to account for female novels of the 18th century both in England and the United States, as well as the rise of female writers, which coincided with the rise of the novel. In an attempt to remedy such a dearth in facts, Watt focused on 19th century's women writings, precisely those by Jane Austen (1775-1817). He stated that “the feminine sensibility was in some ways better

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

equipped to reveal the intricacies of personal relationships and was therefore at a real advantage in the realm of the novel” (Armstrong 127). Hence, he acknowledged the role of women in the advancement and sophistication of novel writing. On that note, feminist literary critics such as Virginia Woolf thought it best to attribute the rise of the novel to women writers—women who were believed to occupy the largest share of the readers during the 18th century, as they had more free time to do so (Mathews 58). It further illustrates that women were able to display their creativity and ability to write and share the literary arena with men, producing as much as them and as valuable in terms of reflecting real life.

Feminist scholars such as Madame de Stael, from the late 18th century, for instance, attempted to remind the literary world of the association readers made between women and the novel to the extent that it was known as a “female thing” (qtd in Donovan 441). Madame de Stael explained the latter in reference to the connection between the noticeable rise and infiltration of female writers within the ranks of the literary field and the abrupt upsurge of the novel by the 1700s in England (ibid). Subsequently, other critics, such as Woolf and Showalter, rejected male-based theories on the disregard of female creations that preceded *Robinson Crusoe* and the likes, encompassing the works of Aphra Behn, referring to *Oroonoko* (1688), and Delarivier Manley’s *The Lost Lover* (1696). Those feminist critics also mentioned other female novelists who inspired the so-called creators of the novel, such as Samuel Richardson (1689 –1761), whose works were believed to be inspired by Eliza Haywood (1693–1756), Penelope Aubin (1679 – 1738), Mary Davys (1674–1732), and Elizabeth Rowe (1674–1737) (Williams 113). These women, who thrived during the early years of the 18th century, used their literary texts to underline women’s response to sexual violations and marital infidelity and were, thus, an essential muse for the works of Samuel Richardson, even though he dismissed such facts (ibid).

Jane Austen (1775-1817), Frances Burney (1752-1840), and Charlotte Smith (1765-1806), to name but a few, were also famous female names who became renowned for their exceptional novelistic writings (Williams 113). The male rejection of the female role in the creation of the English novel, ergo, cannot hide the fact that female authors from England and the United States of America (such as Hannah Foster [1758-1840] the first American woman to have written a novel) were responsible for some of the best novels of their time. Foster, for example, proved not only that her works “surpass her contemporaries in her handling of the epistolary form and in her relatively sophisticated depiction of character, but she anticipates as well most of major [American] writers in her complex treatment of a characteristic, indeed

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

almost obsessive, American theme” (Walter and Wenska 243-244). Foster, though did not make her feminist views visible through her works, she could change the way women were perceived as she proved that women could write novels exceptionally that she was considered as “an early master of a distinctly American genre” (Baym 54). Following on Foster’s footsteps is Fanny Fern (1811-1872) who was another American novelist and columnist who tackled the dilemma of gender injustices, “women’s rights, domesticity, and the male dominated society with humor” (Howell 23). Fern was one of the most renowned female writers of her time and was also “the most highly paid author in America” during the 19th century (ibid).

Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897), the famous African-American writer, also shed light on gender inequalities from a different point of view—that of a slave girl. In *Incidents of the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Jacobs speaks of her own personal experiences “under her pseudonym Linda Brent, describing her struggles with sexual exploitation, mistreatment by her owners, and family relations” (Howell 23). To write under a pseudonym, either of a woman or a man, was quite common during the 19th century, mostly because some women writers such as Mary Ann Evans (George Eliot) wished their works to be appreciated for what they were and not to be judged based on the gender of their writers. Surprisingly, even contemporary women writers in the United States still prefer to use pseudonyms than to use their real names, because of the fear of being underrated for being women writers (Bell np). Alice Bradley Sheldon (1915-1987) who wrote her famous science fiction novel *Star Songs of an Old Primate* (1978) under the nickname James Tiptree, confessed that she chose to use a male name instead of her own because she believed that a woman, writing fiction, would attract much unwanted attention which would degrade the value of her work. In her own words “A male name seemed like good camouflage. I had the feeling that a man would slip by less observed. I’ve had too many experiences in my life of being the first woman in some damned occupation” (qtd in Phillips 47). Sheldon’s confession further proves that the merit of female authors was never properly acknowledged neither as originators of the novel nor as being capable writers of fiction just as their male counterparts.

Feminist literary critics such as Virginia Woolf and Madam de Stael have made a rather plausible argument concerning the rise of the novel, even though history has chosen to celebrate *Robinson Crusoe* and *Pamela* (1740) by Samuel Richardson as the earliest acknowledged forms of the novel. Yet, the novel's role in presenting female nature, status and struggle is undeniable, be that by female or male American or English writers and at various

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

stages of the novel's existence i.e. since its upsurge in the 18th century and until present day. Therefore, the novel tells the story of women's experiences including their fight for female independence. As such, the novel served as the vehicle by which women fought gender injustices, either by establishing themselves as talented women writers able to write just as well as men, or by portraying strong female characters who fought patriarchy by destroying the stereotypes attributed to women and bringing forth the new woman of the 21st century as seen in *Sharp Objects* (2006).

1.3.1. From the Feminine to the Feminist Novel

Like other forms of literature, women-authored literary works have also developed throughout history depending on the socio-political and cultural conditions within which women lived and wrote. In *A Literature of their Own*, Elaine Showalter classified women's literature into three stages: from the feminine phase which was characterised by "subordination"; to the feminist phase when female writers chose "protest" instead of submission; to the third stage where they reached the female "autonomy" (405). During the female stage, in the United States in the 1920s to the present, women's writing became debatably less constricted by dominant patriarchal ideologies, though many women writers and characters still portrayed gendered social and psychological struggles. Nevertheless, some critics believe that women indeed became autonomous writers because they no longer had to prove their merit and stature, it simply became a natural process—as Kate O'Connor states in her essay entitled "Feminist Approaches to Literature". Perhaps, it is due to the fact that there are many female authors nowadays who are appreciated by readers of different genders such as Gillian Flynn (1971- present) author of *Sharp Objects*. As for how the female stage was reached, it is in fact the feminine and the feminist stages which paved the way for the female stage, for it was only the fruit of women's struggles and protests.

The notion of 'feminine writing' or 'women's writing' has been referred to as "écriture feminine" by the French feminist and theorist Hélène Cixous in her controversial essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975) (Pontuale 37). Cixous stated that women had to use the language and the parsing of men as they were always expected to write using a phallogocentric discourse (887); so, no matter what women wished to write about, they were always restricted by the boundaries of an androcentric system. Likewise, in Showalter's view, feminine writing was the earliest form of women's literature which was not yet free from the male tradition of literary composition. Those works focused on female characters at the heart of the issue; they were created and used to subtly and indirectly portray, project, and unveil female confinement

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

(O'Connor np). Even the literary mode itself, when they had to follow the male tradition of writing, was enough proof of the extent to which women were oppressed. Women writers were obliged to use the literary language men had established as the norm and were not allowed to break free of the patriarchal literary tradition.

As controversial as it may seem, the earliest novel written in English was the epitome of feminine writing:

For despite assaults on what they called romance and sentimentality by male critics and reviewers and attempts like Fielding's to place the novel within established and exclusively masculine categories, the novel early on assumed many of the distinctive features of a specialized language for women. As often as not it might have an explicitly female source, concentrate on a woman's experiences, address an audience of young middle-class ladies, or find itself censored by female reviewers. (Armstrong 133)

Armstrong argues that the novel, in all its novelty, was created either by women or for the purpose of reflecting women's lives and thus their struggle and rejection by their social context and historical stereotypes that had predefined their nature (133). Suppose one is to ponder on what was said previously with respect to the novel's origin, in that case, it is probable that the novel was a new feminine mode of literature, mainly because it was where women excelled (MacCarthy 349). In a sense, the first novel ever written was a feminine one, that is still a novel which was obliged to follow the male tradition despite carrying, subtly, within its pleats a spark of female resistance. Taking Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, Woolf declared that "All women everywhere should let flowers fall on the grave of Aphra Behn ... for it was she who allowed women the right to speak their minds" (32). Woolf believed that *Oroonoko* was the first novel written in English, and most importantly is that it was written by a woman.

There are various women writers of the 18th and 19th centuries who followed the feminine tradition using their own names or pen names, including as mentioned before, Eliza Haywood and others such as Ann Radcliff, George Eliot and the famed American writer Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888) who portrayed women's lives through their female characters. Others such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen, according to Rachel Evans, "represented themselves through writing at this time in order to be emancipated from constructions of femininity and to position themselves as rational thinking beings" (17). In the US, Francesco Pontuale argues that *The Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin could be interpreted as the earliest form of women's writing (37) since the protagonist Edna, as

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

declared before, portrays the female experience of oppression, violation, and sexual objectification.

Feminist writings, on the other hand, rejected the female stereotype and fought for women's rights for equality and emerged as a form of protest by the end of the 19th century (O'Connor np). With the rise of the feminist movements in the United States during the 20th century, women did not only fight the patriarchal rule, but they started to found their own publishing houses. According to a recent article by Sisterhood and After Research Team entitled "Feminist Literature": "by the late 1980s there were nearly 20 feminist presses worldwide", which published not only current feminist works but also lost and recognized feminine works of the past (np). Some examples include: Virago Press, Sheba Feminist Press, the Onlywomen Press, the Women's Press; and even for women who were too unable to read the printed word, The Feminist Audio Books was set up, along with other forms of facilities such as "radical independent bookshops, magazines and a thriving feminist bookfair scene" that could allow women to reach and discuss female literature (Sisterhood and After Research Team np). The reason for which is simple, it is through those literary works that women regained some of their rights and freedoms and it was through the feminist texts and novels that women challenged patriarchal ideologies.

Though there are many literary works that could be thought of as feminist writings, according to the American feminist and novelist Roxane Gay's article "Theses on the Feminist Novel", not all women's writing can be considered feminist literature. Feminist works in her view include "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying*, Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*, and Tayari Jones's *Silver Sparrow*" (Gay np). The common thread linking these works is the focus on women's predicaments, fight, and protest against male tyranny within which the female characters find themselves. Other feminist authors, theorists and critics also include Ding Ling, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Virginia Woolf and others (Freedman xiv-xv), who focused on the female pursuit for equality, independence and female power to overcome those obstacles presented by their respective socio-cultural environments.

Many would confuse the *feminine* with the *feminist* since some works do overlap both of these viewpoints. Jane Austen, for instance, is considered by many as a feminist author, while her works mostly follow the feminine tradition of confining female characters to the

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

domestic space of the household and marriage. Still, what matters is not which phase they belong to; instead, it is their contribution to the world of literature, women's writing and women's status that matters most. All of the aforementioned female authors contributed to setting free the female author and the female gender by reaching the female stage of autonomy when they no longer needed to imitate male authors nor accept the traditional stereotyping of women by men.

1.3.2. The Female Character through the Male and Female Lens

There is a straightforward truth, women and men are not the same, at least not on the physiological and psychological levels. Nevertheless, this does not postulate nor prove women's inferiority as stipulated by Freud and others. When looking at women through the male gaze, one cannot ignore the absence or silence of women in the spheres historically dominated by men, including literature. As a result, women writers and critics chose to interfere and create literature that belonged to "her" and told "her" story (Warner 187) and aimed to dismantle the homogeneous mould created by men and to show the diversity and the strength of women writers.

Characterization in the novel is generally believed to consist of eight techniques. In David Vermillion's research paper, he adapted Walter L. Meyers' elements of characterization which combined "Objective details of the character's appearance and action; character's conversation; presentation of the character's actual sensations, perceptions, and concepts; interpretative comment upon the character; generalized narrative; and objective details of the character's environment" (qtd in Vermillion 5). That is to say, characters can be studied based on their physical appearance, the reasons for which a writer chooses specific attire and appearance for a certain character, and also the way they act in the story. They can also be analysed based on the dialogues they have with other characters, the way they display emotions and the way they perceive events. In simpler words "a character's thoughts", along with the way these characters make contact with the environment in which they dwell, that is the story and the settings (Vermillion 5). As for a female character, it is not only about the previously mentioned features, but it is also about the ambivalence of the feminine and the feminist characterization which provides a better glance into the representation of both men and women in fiction during different time periods.

As asserted by Cynthia Griffin Wolff, literature about and by men takes into account the issue of authority. It is about men's authority over women, men and family, men and society,

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

men and a higher power, such as the government or nature itself—all in all, it is about a man taking control of the world around him (206). When giving examples of such works, time and place are trivial, for the most famous literary works of the world focus on male authority, including *Hamlet* and *King Lear* by William Shakespeare, *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, *David Copperfield*, *Lord Jim*, *Huckleberry Finn* and even famous Russian literature by such authors as Fyodor Dostoevsky (ibid). However, when narrowing it down to women, it is her relation to a man that defines her as a woman, while the way she comports herself with the rest of humanity, including her family, children, and even female friends or just other women, is too insignificant to be displayed. In Griffin Wolff's analysis of the female representation in American literature she highlighted the fact that a conflict between two women was rarely, if not ever tackled, within a literary work while, in reality, it is as common as any female activity such as mothering (206). Instead, literature tended to emphasise that women competed for male attention (Griffin Wolff 206), that is; the major focus of a female character in a male-written novel is to attract men, flatter the male ego and satisfy male desires. Even mothering, though a personification of the female strength, is often dealt with through the point of view which is predominantly male, taking the example of a son who is either satisfied or not with his mother's mothering, because "the genuine happiness and difficulty of mothering don't exist in traditional literature" (ibid 206-207). From the viewpoint of a patriarchal literary canon, "woman is always the victim; she is the prey of man's passions, the plaything of his caprices; she is not an end but a means, not a person but a thing" (Beauvoir 406) i.e., a woman is only an extension of the male ego and not an equal human being.

As Griffin Wolff demonstrated in her analysis of the female representation in literature, the claim that women were objectified by a patriarchal literary canon is not only witnessed in English or American literary works but in various literatures of the world (206). More importantly, the stereotyping of women is not specified to a time period for it transcends time and shifts in meaning and construct with each generation. Hélène Cixous also fervently expressed her rejection of the male representation of women and stated that, through men's eyes, a woman was "reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow" (880). That is, women had no desires and no dreams aside from those needed to serve men. Cixous asserted that men homogenized women of having identical features (881) as if all women are made of one mould and have no individual identity of their own. Instead, women tended to be painted as the image of vulnerability, silence and sensitivity (Scott 135). Aside from seeing women as house furniture (as described by Gillian Flynn to describe one of her submissive

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

female characters in *Sharp Objects*), women were also sexualized based on their association with men. Women were placed on only one of the two extremes: either as the Virgin Mary or the whores of the stories (Snyder xxii) —enforcing stereotypes of the perfect virtuous, obedient wives or the sex and desire-fulfilling objects to gratify male desire.

Eventually, canonical literature, mainly that written in English, neglected half of the world's "experience" (Snyder preface) since it refused to acknowledge the individuality and the distinct roles of different women. Female sexualization appeared to be an illness in which most male writers suffered from and that is why most men wrote women as sexual objects. The young adult author Gwen C. Kartz used Twitter to express her frustration with the male-writer's gaze towards female characters declaring that "A male author is insisting that he is living proof that it's possible for a male author to write an authentic female protagonist" (qtd in Ahsan). Such claim is due to the absurdly unrealistic and far too sexualised representations of women in contemporary American and English fiction. Kartz's post stirred up quite a relatable issue in the female audience that they released "a new Twitter challenge: 'describe yourself the way a male author would'". Many women participated in the challenge and one of the best comments was by author Jennifer Weiner, who imitated a male description: "Her breasts entered the room before her far less interesting face, decidedly maternal hips and rounded thighs. He found her voice unpleasantly audible. As his gaze dropped from her mouth (still talking!) to her cleavage, he wondered why feminists were so angry all the time". (qtd in Ahsan). This sexual objectification of women is not only part of the discourse in literary production, but it also manifests itself in media. Researchers have noticed "that the media often depicts a narrow and often unattainable standard of women's physical beauty and links this standard with a woman's sexiness and worth" (qtd in Szymanski et. al. 10). Simply put, women were only appreciated if they had the perfect body as defined via the male gaze and male desire (Beauvoir 595) wherein women's intelligence, education and intellectuality were not necessarily taken into consideration. In fact, these traits would make a female character too unappealing to men. In 2015, Carl Anka reported a study conducted on men in the US in three different American universities that postulated that the majority of men are intimidated of dating strong, intelligent independent women, whereby "feelings of diminished masculinity accounted for men's decreased attraction toward women who outperformed them" (qtd in Anka np). As such, this study explains why male writers often wrote about women who are weak and dependent on men, because they would be more attractive to male readers.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

Women writers responded to such prejudices by producing literature that rejected gendered stereotypes in order to draw a new empowered image of the female character (Jacobus 7). Women's writing in fact was both considered, according to Saskia Wieringa, as subversive and "subversive". It is subversive in its quest to subvert patriarchal ideologies and way of life, and it is "subversive" when it endeavours in aiding women in "circumventing, undoing, and denying the various, distinct, and multilayered verses in which their subjugation is described" (Wieringa 1-2). Since novel-writing seemed to be the field female-authors excelled in (MacCarthy 349), as assured by Virginia Woolf, they used it to break the male tradition, that is to destroy the image of "the angel in the house" (Showalter 212). They utilised literature, and specifically the novel, to feature and substantiate their experiences, apprehensions and wants through their characters (Chen 9). One of the many examples, of breaking the female stereotype are Jane Austen's works where she created female characters "endowed with wisdom and ...capable of being reasonable and rational" (ibid 10). Nonetheless, like many writers of her time, Austen too was unable to escape the restrictions and the stereotypical influences of her own society. Furthermore, throughout history female authors have introduced innumerable inspirational, powerful characters ranging from Victorian women who challenged patriarchy, such as the Bronte sister's Jane Eyre, to African American characters similar to Alice Walker's Celie, who fought racism and gender roles, and Indian women who defied supremacy through Arundhati Roy's Ammu (Ashikama). Such characters emerged to embody the thoughts of the women who created them and to show that feminism is intersectional since women in different parts of the world suffer at the hands of the same oppressor, a patriarchal ideology.

Novels by and about women since the emergence of the novel tend to tackle issues that women went through in real life; for example, their main focus was "love, marriage, children, and the care of infants" (Beauvoir 430). This statement may allude to the fact that both genders discussed women in the same way but, fortunately, that was not the case; the rationale behind the choice of topic was quite different. While men focused on how women should be better wives and mothers, for many female writers, to be a housewife was to condemn oneself to a life of confinement, boredom, and endless mind-deadening tasks, without mentioning the dread of caring for the children (Pavlik 13). That is "the smothering embrace of the Angel, is fought repeatedly in women literature" (Showalter 210) while in American media (eg. films, advertising, and women's magazines of the 1900s) motherhood was portrayed as bliss for women (Pavlik 13). Examples of works that portrayed how women suffer domestically

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

include *Small Changes* (1997) by Marge Piercy and *The Women's Room* (1973) by Marilyn French (Pavlik 13). As for contemporary feminist literature, the image of females in novels is of the authentic, less perfect character, which acknowledges women's strength and admits her flaws whilst rejoicing in them. Women do not always have to be good and obedient however, they risk facing dire consequences if they fail to fulfil the gendered roles expected of them. Through famous literary artefacts such as *The Hunger Games* (Suzanne Collins, 2008), *The Paying Guests* (Sarah Waters, 2014), and *Gone Girl* (Gillian Flynn, 2012), one sees rebellious women who act based on their conscience and understanding of the world (O'Reilly np). They are violent, they are sneaky and clever, and even murderers and psychopathic, but there is one thing they are not, they are not the dolls the world wanted them to be. Just like men, women were finally free to do wrong and repent (ibid). They are finally depicted as having various facets to their lives; the modern and contemporary female characters are complicated, intricate and unpredictable, just like women in real life.

The question that seems to remain is; if female characters are the deciders of their fate and the heroines of their stories, what do male characters do? In reality, this highlights another apprehension concerning whether the contemporary novel is matriarchal in the sense that a matriarchal novel displays women in control of their surroundings, including other male characters. That is, a matriarchal novel endows its female characters with masculine traits and, as a result, it has become a subject of concern that male characters are starting to be overshadowed (and even emasculated) by the independent women in a position of control, so it is quite necessary to explore the matter further.

1.3.3. The Matriarchal Effect and the Reversal of Roles

In the face of stereotypes and prejudices against women, numerous female, and even some male, contemporary authors chose to typecast male characters from being: “the ‘dumb jock’, to the bumbling, dull husband, to the cruel, yet fascinating rake” (Pavlik 15). The 21st century brought a new shift to the world of creating fiction. While in previous works of literature men were often portrayed as the flawless heroes, nowadays in American literature, and even visual media, feminist fiction writers portray men with a new set of stereotypes, as if this was only a first step towards a stage when roles start to be reversed between male and female characters. As argued by Mary C. Harges, “Women writers since Shelley have used the fantastic to subvert the male symbolic order” (31), that is, the gothic and science fiction genres were the earliest forms of literature that challenged the traditional value systems privileging the male members of society.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

Various women writers transcended the wish to be on equal grounds with men and instead created a utopian world where women do not need men. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, a 1915 novel, presents an exclusively complex female world led by females. It is an ideal world where women could prosper and reproduce without the need for men (Snodgrass 261-262). Though it seemed farfetched, it still brought the matriarchal issue into the spotlight of gender inequality. Likewise, while Gilman aimed to display how women could flourish in a matriarchal world, Rosa Montero used her 1990's gothic novel *The Temblor* as a tool to satirize contemporary patriarchal systems by creating a parallel corrupt future-world inhabited and led by a matriarchal society (Hanley 1). Both Gilman and Montero succeeded in highlighting gender inequalities and hinted at the possibility of a female-run society.

However, a matriarchal society was not a topic discussed only by female authors. Several male authors have also advocated for and/or explored matriarchal ideologies. In 1941 the famed feminist advocate and psychologist William Moulton Marston created a central female character known as Wonder Woman. Marston admitted that: "Wonder Woman [was a] psychological propaganda for the new type of woman who should, [he believed], rule the world"(qtd in Pagonis 8). In an intelligent manner, Marston created a stereotype which influences children's brains and grows with them as a typical image of women. Marston was rather shrewd to use comic books as the vessel for his message (Daniels and Kidd 12) and his ambition for a female-led community. The influence of Wonder Woman persists even after 60 years of her creation, she has "been repeatedly reborn and reinvented" and has also "been joined by other female superheroes, from Mary Marvel and Supergirl in the '40s and '50s to Invisible Girl in the '60s (growing up, of course, into Invisible Woman, in the '70s and beyond) to She-Hulk in the '80s and to Preface Elektra and Xena, Warrior Princess, in the '90s and into the new millennium" (Robinson ix). Lilian Robinson believes that there is an undeniable connection between the appeal of Wonder Women in today's societies and the rebirth of feminism (x). Before Marston, inspired by Briffault's *The Mothers: The Matriarchal Theory of Social Origins* (1931), John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) marked the shift from a patriarchal family to a matriarchal one while his characters struggled against depression and the dangers of immigration (Motley 397). Steinbeck's novel was acknowledged as the bestselling novel in 1939 and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1940 (Bauer et al np), and still it glorified the female role in getting the family into a safe haven during the great depression. This idea could be seen in the representation of the female

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

characters in the story, such as Ma Joad, who transformed from simple wives to strong, authoritative women, and family leaders.

To witness renowned, diverse authors tackling patriarchy by highlighting what women could achieve if given power, is enough proof of the impact the female role could have on society. The term patriarchy is used here to refer to a female as the “head of the family or tribe”, and in the 1800s, “the word ‘patriarchy’ came to mean governance by women over family and the state in the early human society” (Banerjee 918). Though the previously mentioned works remain fictional, fiction is well-known to be a reflection of human life and desire whilst also serving as the vehicle which reflects such human impulses. Because of the informative and transformative role of the novel in depicting this subtle desire for empowering women and because of its intricacy and genius, it is essential to focus on those disciplines and techniques which deconstruct the novel into its most basic forms.

1.4. Discourse in the Novel

“A bright book of life” was how D. H. Lawrence defined the novel in his essay “Why the Novel Matters” (qtd in Ravitch and Ravitch 434). Conversely, Henry James also elucidated that the novel is but the author’s rich understanding of life. So, the novel can be said to bring human values to the centre of focus (qtd in Haralson and Johnson 311) thereby providing and setting the stage within which many aspects of human existence and human experience are depicted and understood. Furthermore, on the literary level, the novel is believed to be the extension and culmination of a rich history of literary and artistic forms that existed before, including oral literature and poetry.

Margaret Doody, for example, ascribed the novel as the offspring of Western history and philosophy intermingled with the literary artefacts of the Eastern world, including Arabic, Indian, and Persian works, such as *The Arabian Nights*. She added that such a combination could only have lived on and prospered through “prose” (153) as if prose had risen from the ashes of preceding literary genres such as oral literature, poetry and drama. Moreover, the novel served as a simpler and more accessible means while, in more recent times, reading poetry seems much too complicated for the masses—Michael Bugeja observes that the efforts made in analysing poetry renders it a heavy task for readers (32). Georg Lukacs also described the novel as “the art-form of virile maturity, in contrast to the normative childlikeness of the epic” (71). Accordingly, the novel marked the peak of literary creations such as the Romance and became the basis for what will be included in new forms of novel

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

writing. Lukacs' concluded that the novel, as the most recent offspring of prior literature possesses a certain "completeness to [its] world", allowing it to distinguish itself from previous works due to the heterogeneity of its form and content (ibid). It is only through the novel that literary form displays meaningful content and carries meaning in itself through characterization where characters can represent real life and even the aspirations of their creator. In the case of the exploration here of *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*, it is through female characterization that one reaches a better understanding of female oppression and fight against patriarchy.

Consequently, it becomes a crucial point to study the form and structure of the novel in order to recognize its total value in relation to female representation. The techniques and styles of writing are no longer only embellishments and "vehicles" for the novel but rather they are an indispensable part of its sense and worth, that is "an integral part of the work's meaning and value" (Niazi 118). The disciplinary tracks which focused on the links between form and content, in the novel, are primarily based on Mikhail Bakhtin's studies on discourse in the novel, including dialogism, intertextuality and narration, which are to be explored further in the following section.

1.4.1. Dialogism within the Novel

As a constantly developing genre, the novel proved its distinction and prominence by mirroring society through telling stories. By the 20th century, critics went further and focused on 'showing' instead of 'telling' events (Dentith 41). Scholars such as David Lodge emphasised that the novel not only constituted of the narrative aspect but was also comprised of dialogues (118) where the characters actually participate in showing the events of the story. These dialogues were thought to have served as a basis for studies concerning the discourse of the novel, a study predominantly espoused by Mikhail Bakhtin, which in the end, resulted in his work on dialogism.

In negation to "monologism", or the independent stance of an utterance from the influence of any others, dialogism as a term refers to how a word or an utterance is defined and understood through its contact with other words or sentences (Shepherd np). Initially, this explanation depicts similarity with what Bakhtin explained in one of his early unpublished works, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity". In this essay, Bakhtin speaks of the incompleteness of humans because they cannot witness neither their death nor their birth, as such, they are not the protagonists of their lives; instead, "a condition of heroic completeness

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

...should be perceived by another, situated outside the hero's life" and thus having meaning only through the eyes of the opposite side (6). Just like human life, dialogues too must be understood by their participants, i.e., an utterance gains meaning through its contact with another utterance, when "one historically specific moment comes into contact with another" (Dentith 7). This dual relation leads to what Bakhtin referred to as "heteroglossia", a belief that language diversity and its meaning are the products of societal and historical settings (qtd in Richter 411). Thus, "heteroglossia" does not only rely on the words themselves to fathom meaning but, also on the processes occurring between the parts of the speech as well.

That is, different speakers mean the multiplicity of speech styles in a language (Pechey 62), and when these speech styles clash through dialogues, they produce dialogism. As such, Bakhtin deconstructed languages to understand how they correlate or how utterances contribute to a dialogue. In his *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1979), Bakhtin examined discourse and utterances and clarified that when two expressions partake within the same level of meaning, they create a dialogized contact (117). In turn, that contact results in a dialogic relation between multiple speech forms known as "dialogized heteroglossia" (Bruhn and Lundquist 30). This discovery was only the tip of the iceberg for Bakhtin since his studies on language dialogue and heteroglossia led him to a higher understanding of dialogism associated with the novel. Since the novel reflects real life, it also reflects the multiple speech types used in society through the dialogues of its characters. As Graham Pechey puts it: "Dialogism ...is a defining characteristic of the novel, as is its openness to that 'social diversity of speech types' which Bakhtin's English translators render as heteroglossia" (62) which means that the novel served as a fertile ground for his studies on dialogism.

Bakhtin decided to conduct his studies on the novel because he saw it as a rather fresh and yet a young form of creative writing. He believed it to be "the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted...studying the novel...is like studying languages that are not only alive, but still young" (3). Some of the earliest novels he examined were Fyodor Dostoevsky's in his first book entitled *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929). In his analysis, Bakhtin gauged that the works of Dostoevsky were characterized by what he termed as "polyphony", that is, when the voice of the narrator engages in a dialogic relation with the voices of the characters, while both are equally influential (Deninth 39) —the result is a "double-voiced" discourse (Richter 411). Hence, before the term dialogism came to light, it was polyphony that defined the dialogic relation of double voices. When reading this work, one realizes that other prose writers also exploited this double-voiced discourse in their

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

novels, making it of higher importance to gauge, as it was not specific to the works of one author but rather to an array of novelists (Deninth 41). In final analysis, Bakhtin's studies on dialogized heteroglossia led him to discover dialogism or, as he referred to it, polyphony or multiple voices in association with the multiplicity of the narrative views. In the case of female representation and the dichotomy of the feminine and the feminist, dialogism enables the researcher to uncover the historical, social, and personal elements which may influence the author in writing female characters endowed with their own voices to tell their stories.

In *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences*, Bakhtin maintains that writings are understood "in relation both to other texts and to their extratextual historical context, personified in the voices of other" (qtd in Zappen 65). He insinuated that dialogism does not only exist in the narrative mode of the text or in a mere discussion between the characters of a story but even "between words as well as texts, dialogism is the dialogue of texts and writers from different generations and horizons", says Wassila Mouro (22). Once more Bakhtin clarifies that "the text lives only by coming in contact with another text" (qtd in Zappen 65). Then generally, dialogism is the mechanism of having a dialogic relation between different voices either of characters, cultures, styles or languages between author and character, and any other dichotomy which participates in the creation of the novel, including the impact of other authors and texts.

Similarly, Bakhtin's acknowledgement of the dialogic association between words and texts touches the author's language and the texts s/he creates or borrows. Bakhtin probed into the dialogic relation between texts and concluded that the writer, when in need, borrows words or texts from other writers, which are already inhabited with these author's own meanings, and then moulds them to fit his own scheme. Bakhtin referred to this process as the "individual's ideological becoming" (qtd in Alcorn Jr 34). The magic of dialogism, ergo, lies in the harmonious contact made between the new text and the borrowed text which results in the dialogic relation. This level of dialogism was later on labelled as "intertextuality".

Furthermore, the most expedient manner in which dialogism could be fathomed in a text is by deconstructing the latter into its minor components. Such an act reveals that dialogism is simply everywhere: it is in the multiple languages or speech types of characters, authors and cultures, in the manifold voices and in the relation between author and character. It also includes the collision of texts to create a new artistic work when the writer re-formulates borrowed ideas to convey his/her specific meaning and message. Hence, the novel proved to

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

be the best habitat for dialogism or more for intertextuality, and thus the most appropriate cultural product to study it as well.

1.4.2. Intertextual Interconnectedness

Intertextuality as the progeny or the extension of dialogism is also comprised of dialogic relations. However, it tends to be restricted to textual materials, as Bakhtin explains, it is “the interplay between writers, texts, and other texts” (qtd in Durey 616). The supposed nature of this literary, artistic phenomenon brought it to the centre of attention for literary scholars such as Hermann Meyer and Julia Kristeva. Nevertheless, it generated unprecedented misperception and falsehood to its merit rather than highlighting its qualities (Durey 616), thus making it necessary to clarify its meaning, function, and role in promoting the literary domain.

Various literary intellectuals connect intertextuality to a developed version of Aristotle’s “theory of imitation” and Plato’s claim on “the mimetic function” and their utter indispensability to art (Shannan 11). They stipulated that any artistic work, including poetic, oral or written works, or even myth, are generated by simulating and imitating what was previously created (ibid). Similarly, Linda Hutcheon, when referring to Victorian writers, postulated that these authors “had a habit of adapting just about everything—and in just about every possible direction; the stories of poems, novels, plays, operas, paintings, songs, dances, and *tableaux vivants* were constantly being adapted from one medium to another and then back again” (xi; original emphasis). This conception is not entirely erroneous if one focuses on how more recent scholars perceived intertextuality. For example, Harold Bloom believed in the strong influence of earlier literature on the new creation of authors. It is a process where novelists are inspired by those who preceded them, and then gradually disengages themselves by reaching an original creative piece of art (qtd in Alkhadra 81). In Hermann Meyer’s view, intertextuality is “a poetics of quotation”, i.e. just like Bakhtin, he too sees the novel as rather a culmination of other texts and not an original creation (qtd in Durey 617). He emphasises that the novel could never be utterly unprompted, as it “arises from the interplay of spontaneity and tradition” and thus, for Meyer “literature is nourished by literature” (qtd in Durey 617). Bakhtin’s elicitation follows the same stance, when he artistically described the journey of an utterance through time and place: “The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

consciousness around the given object of utterance” (276). Thus, though the influence is unintentional, it is inevitable and present.

The term intertextuality itself was first utilised in 1966, when the French feminist literary critic Julia Kristeva mentioned it in her two essays “Word, Dialogue and Novel” and “The Bounded Text”. Inspired by Bakhtin’s dialogism, she revealed that intertextuality denotes that a text is not a stagnant production but rather a meeting ground for dialogical relations and progressions. She also highlighted the position of a “literary word” as “an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings” (qtd in Alfaro 268). However, for Bakhtin, it is not only about the text or the words; it is also about the writers themselves—as mentioned before, it is the chemistry between writers, texts, and other texts which employs and formulates an intertextual connection. Bakhtin’s focus is the dialogized interconnection between the prose writers and the writers who preceded them since the text that the writer borrows comes from another writer’s production and so “the essence of the theory has in its equation two writers, texts, and other texts” (Durey 617). On that note, Bakhtin referred to the writer’s role as the role of a mediator between the original text and the borrowed one to reach “a dialogic realization” (qtd in Durey 617). Hence, it is about the writer or, more precisely, the prose writer, as the novel seemed to provide a lush ground for intertextual connections.

As for Bakhtin, the novel gave space and freedom to the manifestation of intertextuality. He believed that the novel encompassed an arrangement of languages “that mutually and ideologically interanimate each other” and thus making it “impossible to describe and analyze it as a single unitary language” (Bakhtin 47). This explanation proposes that the novel is the best manifestation of how intertextuality functions to create a new hybrid text by borrowing intertexts. The intertext was artistically described by Ronald Barthes as “a music of figures” (qtd in Brown et al 193), while in Michael Rifattere’s opinion, an “intertext” is the original textual material that has been incorporated with the new text, and it is the role of the reader to depict and recognize the origin of this intertext and decipher the collective meaning of the two parts based on the original one (qtd in Roth 66). Moreover, Rifattere differentiates between what an intertext is and what intertextuality is, respectively, by noting that intertextuality is the process of perceiving and decoding the new texts by means of extracting the intertext and making sense of the collision between the two (qtd in Alcoba-Murphy 4). That is, intertextuality is not only possessed and wielded by the author, but even by the readers themselves rendering the reading process all the more intricate.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

Similarly, Michael Worton and Judith Still shed light on the reader's role in deciphering intertextuality. They maintained that intertextuality happens in two ways, either through a writer, who is influenced by other writers and thus inculcates his/her influences through his/her works or through a reader who sees and recognizes these instances of borrowing other texts. Hence, they are "[both] axes of intertextuality, texts entering via authors (who are, first, readers) and texts entering via readers (co-producers)" (Worton and Still 2) thereby acknowledging that intertextuality is both a mechanism and a technique, and it cannot function if not decrypted by the reader. Worton and Still also clarify how intertextuality is employed:

the work of art is inevitably shot through with references, quotations and influences of every kind. ... This repetition of past or of contemporary texts can range from the most conscious and sophisticated elaboration of other poets' work, to a scholarly use of sources, or the quotation (with or without the use of quotation marks) of snatches of conversation typical of a certain social milieu at a certain historical moment. (1)

This elaboration dictates specific techniques that a writer can use to implement an intertext, either through referencing, quoting or through other signs of influence.

Quite similar to Worton and Still's idea, Christiane Achour and Amina Bekkat propose three different manners in which intertextuality functions without any disruptions of the new text. "Integration", "collage", and "citation" are those three manners, whereby citation, as the term denotes, involves borrowing a particular text as it is with citing its source. In contrast, collage is only the act of quoting another work. Integration, however, is more sophisticated and is divided into four different processes: by installation, by suggestion, by allusion, and finally by absorption. Integration by installation requires the usage of quotation marks or italics in order to highlight the intertext, while integration by suggestion means referencing a name or a title. Integration by allusion, on the other hand, is about implementing only signs. At last, integration by absorption is when the intertext is submerged by the new text to the extent that it is quasi-impossible to differentiate between the two (qtd in Mouro 32-33). Verily, if the intertext is depicted in this case, it could be seen as an act of plagiarizing.

Gerard Genette also sought to clarify the relation between a text and an intertext in a more comprehensive manner. Grounded in his knowledge of "structuralism, post-structuralism and semiotics too", he eventually reached "transtextuality" (Mirenyat and Soofastaei 533). In his view, it is how texts correlate and create new meaning, and it includes intertextuality as only one of its five branches. The other four were "architextuality," "paratextuality," "metatextuality," and "hypertextuality". Architextuality for Genette was the

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

most couched form, as it is more concerned with the interconnection between different genres, the genre of the new work and those of other texts from which the writer is inspired (ibid 536). For paratextuality, it is, as the term signifies, about the connection between the surroundings of the text and the text itself, “such as titles, headings, prefaces, acknowledgements, footnotes, illustrations” (ibid 534). Like architextuality, metatextuality, as stated by Genette, “unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it” (qtd in Mirenayat and Soofastaei 535). Therefore, metatextuality, as well, is an implicit interpretation or criticism, but of a certain text by the new one (Mirenayat and Soofastaei 535). Finally, hypertextuality, as defined by Voicu Simandan based on Genette’s studies, is concerned with “the relation between a text and a text or genre on which it is based but which it transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends (including parody, spoof, sequel, translation)” (qtd in Mirenayat and Soofastaei 536). It indicates the usage of a new text as a way to remould another.

Furthermore, Mihkelev asserts that intertextuality transcends time and place to gather the influences of different texts, writers, nations, and identities to generate the world’s literature (qtd in Glinka 147). More importantly, for this research, intertextuality plays a significant role as the tool for comparative literature since it studies how and why different works correlate (ibid 148). It is also valuable and convenient for studying film adaptations since adaptations are thought to “represent a purposeful intertextuality that embeds unconscious intertextual movement within the source text that will inform in many ways the adapted text” (Snyder 206). That is, the adapted text is an amalgam of intertexts taken from the original work of literature for a certain purpose, along with the unconscious influences of the literary work, which all participate in realizing the adapted film for the screen.

To further investigate how intertextuality is analysed through adaptation, it is first necessary to understand the latter, which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, it is important to tackle another stylistic aspect of the novel which encompasses the narrative approaches and techniques the novel uses and develops, including point of view, focalization and stream of consciousness.

1.4.3. Narratology and Narration

Any story demands a voice as a “storyteller”, and any storyteller's position defines how the story is perceived and appreciated by the readers (Diasamidze 160); and it is narration that is responsible for engaging the readers and keeping them immersed within the folds of the

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

literary work. Narratology, though, is a science containing “the ensemble of theories of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events, cultural artefacts that ‘tell a story’” (Bal 3). The role of narratology, then, is to study narration and its variations and for this study narration is essential to analyse the voice of women as narrators in relation to the characterization of the female protagonists in *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*.

Similar to intertextuality, narratology also has a history; one that, in Manfred Jahn’s view, has a starting point in both philosophy and science, including narratology, and originated in Plato’s and Aristotle’s theories of the two spheres: “‘mimesis’ (imitation) and ‘diegesis’ (narration)” (qtd in Amerian and Jofi 183). These two concepts were further enlightened by several scholars, including Seymour Chatman and his theory on narratology and narrative fiction depending on text types in *Coming to Terms* (1990). Chatman asserted that “diegetic narratives” are texts such as “novel, epic, and short story” while “mimetic narratives” are the visual texts such as “movies, cartoons, and plays” since cinematic shots and sequences are also narrative texts (qtd in Bal 5). Moreover, Chatman believed that novels and plays are similar on certain levels since they are both stories that “share the common features of a chrono-logic of events, a set of characters, and a setting” (qtd in Jahn 669). Thus, they are only different on the level of how they are transmitted to the audience, either as mimesis or as diegesis (ibid), which could be understood as “telling” and “showing”.

For Mieke Bal, narratology is about understanding “elements” and “aspects”, by elements she refers to “actual events, actors, and places that make up the story” while aspects “are the ways that the text manipulates the presentation of those elements” (qtd in Punday 227). Even though for Bal these two are requisite aspects of narration and without them it cannot exist, for Gerald Prince, critics of narratology focus solely on aspects, and they pay “little or no attention to the story”; instead, they concentrate on “the discourse”, that is, the manner in which a story is told (i.e., narration) (ibid). Genette added that narration is part of all texts because all stories include “telling and showing”, thus rendering the story more alive (qtd in Diasamidze 160). The storyteller in literature is known as point of view, which could be of different types including the omniscient, the dramatic point of view, first-person and the third-person points of view (Diasamidze 160). As such, point of view plays the role of deciding who tells the story (George 40), and that in turn determines how the reader perceives it.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

The omniscient point of view has been labelled as the storyteller outside the story who is not part of the plot, but is all knowledgeable about the characters and events. This narrator decides how a story should be told and controls all knowledge of the events and characters. This type of narrator was primarily employed in 18th and 19th-century prose writings such as *Tom Jones* (Henry Fielding, 1749) and *Vanity Fair* (William Makepeace Thackeray, 1848) (Diasamidze 161). A dramatic point of view, on the other hand, requires no narrator since the events are seen and not told through drama (ibid 164). In the first-person point of view, however, the narrator is the “I”, it is a complicated manner to tell a story, as it demands the authors to detach themselves and give voice to the main character to tell the story. Here, the narrator has limited knowledge of the events that transpire; the story, then, becomes subjective to him depending on his type of character, similar to Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (Bodden 8-9). Sometimes, the author chooses to implement a “limited omniscient point of view” or a third person point of view. In this case, the narrator is a character of the story, and the readers can hear him through “dialogue or...monologue, represented speech or stream of consciousness” (Diasamidze 161). This narrator could be any character of the story, yet most of the time, it is a secondary one, whose main task is to observe the happenings and transmit them to the audience (Diasamidze 161). It seems, this character would have no real influence on the happenings of the story as their main role would be solely to recite what they see.

Though some novels have a distinct point of view, others could have a mixture of various points of view since sometimes the narrator is not one but multiple, such as the example of Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852-1853) and Daniel Menaker's *the Treatment* (1998) (George 41). On the same plane, the issue of “who sees?” or “who speaks?”, identified as “focalization”, has been studied by scholars such as Manfred Jahn whose analysis yielded four types of narration: fixed, variable, multiple and collective focalization. By “fixed focalization” Jahn means a narrative act based on a single point of view, while “variable focalization” refers to the different parts of the story that are recounted by different storytellers. This type of focalization could sometimes be misunderstood as “multiple focalization”, a different system, where various “internal” narrators retell the same part of a story differently, depending on each one of them. Lastly, Jahn mentions “collective focalization” that is “focalization through either plural narrators (we narrative) or a group of characters (collective reflectors)” (qtd in Amerian and Jofi 185). Therefore, it is up to each

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

writer to choose the type of narrator or narrators they wish to explore, depending on the message they wish to transmit.

Likewise, when focusing on the role of the narrator, it is also important to clarify that narrators could be of two kinds, an “overt” or a “covert” narrator. The overt narrator is one who acknowledges their role and is known as an “I” or a “we”, so their contact with the reader is direct and vivid (Amerian and Jofi 185). In contrast, Jahn asserts that the covert narrator is a storyteller with no specific voice; they are to a certain extent “neutral”. In this case, the gender of the covert narrator cannot be recognized, and their role is stagnant since they cannot intervene in the events and only tell the story as it naturally unfolds in its own opportune “sequence and tempo” (qtd in Amerian and Jofi 185). Also, narrators could be related to the stories they tell in a different manner: as Gerard Genette postulated, they could be “autodiegetic”, “homodiegetic”, and “heterodiegetic” (qtd in George 41). The latter concepts were further explained by David Richter depending on their position in the story: just like the first-person point of view, an autodiegetic narrator tells his own story and homodiegetic is a first-person point of view telling another individual’s story, thus becoming a character narrator. Finally, Richter adds that the heterodiegetic narrator is similar to the third person point of view who does not belong to the story (qtd in George 41). Consequently, the reader cannot guess the identity of the storyteller since s/he is not a character, nor is his/her identity revealed.

Genette also proposed two different levels of narration since he saw a text as a “stratification of levels” (qtd in Salzman 123); Genette introduced the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic narrators. Gerald Prince explained these two levels and asserted that the dichotomies of position and level of narration often overlap. That is, an extradiegetic narrator is one who is not inside the story giving the example of Honoré de Balzac’s *Eugénie Grandet* (1833). However, Prince insists that an extradiegetic narrator is not the same as a heterodiegetic one and uses Genette’s examples of Scheherazade from *The Arabian Nights* to illustrate the heterodiegetic narrator. Nevertheless, she is still not extradiegetic but rather intradiegetic since Scheherazade is “a character in a framing narrative that she does not tell” (qtd in Prince 29). Equally, a homodiegetic narrator could also be extradiegetic such as it is the case for the narrator in Le Sage’s *the Adventures of Gil Bilas* (1864) (ibid). Therefore, the level of narration seems to be determined based on the position in which the narrator stands: inside or outside or based on being a character or an onlooker. Furthermore, Genette was able to identify a higher level of narration which he termed as “metadiegetic”: a condition when

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

there are two voices to be heard, one of the narrator and the “higher” voice of the author (Williams 36), a double-voiced discourse or polyphony. This double-voiced-ness “serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author” (Busch 477-478), eventually the interaction of the two voices gives birth to a dialogic relation.

Various critics such as Wayne C. Booth and William Riggan also believe that a narrator does not continuously transmit a story, in some cases, they call on to a distinction between a reliable and an unreliable narrator. The terms reliable and unreliable were first introduced by Wayne Booth in the *Rhetoric of Fiction* in 1961, whereby he “called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author’s norms) unreliable when he does not” (158-159). The implied author refers to the author’s image or identity in a certain work as perceived by the reader (Rimmon-Kenan 90). Besides that, there are certain ways to recognize a reliable narrator from an unreliable one. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan suggested that an unreliable narrator is one whose “limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value scheme” are characteristic of it (103). Plainly said, unreliable narrators cannot be all knowledgeable, since they tend to display gaps within the narrative, as well as being subjective and, thus not always honest about the other characters. Hitherto, narrators could be reliable only if they transmit the same values as the perceived author.

In that sense, Rimmon-Kenan gives examples of such narrators, starting with the adolescent narrator in J.D. Salinger’s *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Benjy in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), which are both narrators with limited knowledge. For the narrator’s “personal involvement”, Rimmon-Kenan indicates the example of Rosa in Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). Since she was a victim in the story, she could but reflect her subjective judgment while narrating, thereby making her unreliable. When it comes to the value scheme, the latter is subjected to inquiry when the narrator’s values do not go along with that of the implied author, and thus makes the narrator an unreliable one (Rimmon-Kenan 103-104). Thus far, when inferring such features, a reliable narrator is one who is fully knowledgeable, objective, and synchronic with the implied author’s norms and morals.

Aside from the position and nature of the narrator, the narrative act in itself can be categorized into different types in respect to Genette’s temporal relations (Rimmon-Kenan 92). Narration, according to Genette, can happen at four different temporal periods: first, an

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

“ulterior narration” is the logical type since narration happens after the events occur, similar to *Tom Jones* (Henry Fielding, 1749) and *Great Expectations* (Charles Dickens, 1860-1861). An “anterior narration” is quite the opposite, as it occurs before the events transpire, and so it is a type of prediction, and it mostly happens in future tense and sometimes in the present tense too. This narrative type was said to be implied by Milton in *Paradise Lost* since it is chiefly seen “in narratives within narratives in the form of prophecies, curses or dreams of fictional characters” (ibid 92-93). The third temporal state is the “simultaneous” narration; in this situation, narration and action occur at once, while in the “intercalated” narration, action and narration switch places constantly, such as the case of epistolary novels (ibid 93), and since the act of writing letters as the narrative part could happen both before and after the events.

When focusing on the ulterior narration, one can see relation with what Genette labelled as “analepsis”, referring to a set of events told by the narrator after they occurred in “the form of flashbacks” (Mouro 40). When interfering within the narrative body, these flashbacks result in a nonlinear narrative that some consider as a “zigzag round trip”, this narrative trip creates a link between the past and the future (Huang 97). Such a shift often occurs by using “stream of consciousness”, a narrative technique mostly celebrated by Virginia Woolf in her *The Lighthouse* (1927). Woolf enabled the heroine’s thoughts to teleport her and the readers to her past, resulting in a “nonlinear stream of consciousness” (ibid). Stream of consciousness as a term was coined by the philosopher and psychologist William James, whereby he explained it as a “river” of human thoughts, observations, insights, and emotions which reside in the mind of every human being (Diasamidze 163). Later, with the development of literature and psychology, many considered the stream of consciousness “as a variation of first person point of view” (ibid 164) —thus becoming an essential part of the literary narratives and their interpretation.

The field of narratology is a vast one since the narrative modes, techniques, and styles continue to develop along with the novel and other artistic media. On that note, the act of narration is also associated with human beings as storytellers and thus inherently linked to human nature and psyche. Hereafter, the stream of consciousness is to be employed in this research analysis as a tool to study the psychology of female characters.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

1.5. The Psychological Turmoil in Literature

Though two distinct disciplines, psychology and literature overlap since they share the same concern for the rationale behind human behaviour. Psychology is acknowledged as a systematic examination of human conduct in correlation to human “mental processes” by understanding and, to a certain extent, controlling and modifying such conducts “including subjective experiences” (Sooriya 2). On the other hand, David Lodge asserts that literature served as the most inclusive and opulent “record of human consciousness”, whereby “The novel is arguably man’s most successful effort to describe the experience of individual human beings moving through space and time” (10). That is, it is through literature that human psychology is best represented, and it is by wielding the psychoanalytical approach that human representation could be properly gauged.

Similar to Lodge, many of his peers (e.g. Noam Chomsky and Joseph Conrad) considered literature as the best insight into human nature. Lionel Trilling as well saw it as the most reachable doorway to examine the full “human experience” and to understand “the ‘whole’ of a person—the rational, emotional, sacred, and profane dimensions of being human” (qtd in Aras 251). In recent decades psychology has become a part of literature and, most precisely, the novel. In his 1932 paper, Leo Spiegel reported: “Every age has its field of thought, its particular pastures whose grasses it prefers to chew. Our writers are at present chewing on psychology. And countless novelists, critics, biographers, and dramatists throw out confusedly a psychological jargon as if to say they, too, are in on the great scientific parade” (476). It is because literary authors chose to represent the human psyche to aid the readers in their search for “the meaning of life and existence” (Aras 251), that they indulged in the psychological haven. Consequently, they started by recognizing their own self within their creations (ibid), as literature was their guide to reach a clearer probing and understanding of who they were.

The first instances of “psychological narrative”, a term first coined by Jorge Luis Borges (Leone 1), go back to the earliest novels of the 18th century, namely Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) and Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759). However, the psychoanalytical approach to literature did not reach its peak until the 20th century with Sigmund Freud’s findings and studies in the field of psychological analysis (Emir 51). In Rene Wellek and Austin Warren’s opinion, “psychology of literature” could either refer to “writer psychology” or “audience psychology”. That is, either the psychoanalytical analysis of the author’s nature as a person and as a literary creator

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

and so examining his/her literary productions and their types in accordance, or the examination of “the effects of literature upon its reader” and their psyche (qtd in Wilson 127). As a result, the psychological approach touches four levels: the writer and his background, the literary artefacts, their types, and the readers’ retort to the work. Moreover, psychologists assert that any psychological inquiry within a work of literature must deal with “man’s mind”(Paris 1), the man, in this sense, is the author, the reader or the character of either gender yet scholars seem to have focused on the male mind only because, as already mentioned, female authors were not even considered as active participants in the literary canon. Psychologists inferred this mind into three categories “the author’s mind, a character’s mind, and the audience’s mind” (ibid) —a stratification rendering psychology essential for literary analysis.

When dealing with the author’s mind, Freud postulated that a literary man’s creations are his own personal therapy since he makes use of them in a sort of outlet for his mental turmoil; because he is, as any other individual, subjected to a set of psychological impacts including the “unconscious, the theory of psychic, interpretation of dream, and the relationship between neurosis and creativity” (qtd in Lifa and Lati 15). Though Freud’s studies were biased to male authors, this does not reject the fact that women writers as well used their writings to reflect their personal desires and struggles. Moreover, Freud believed that through the many layers of literature, one might possibly recognize the author’s unconsciousness and personality (ibid). However, it appeared that most renowned psychologists, including Freud, Jung and Otto, agreed that a literary work is not enough to label the psychological state of a certain writer. Though, all three still believed that “the artist is in closer touch with the unconscious” and so he is the most susceptible to “inner turbulences”. Yet, since each writer is different from another, no generalization is possible (qtd in Wilson 129). In addition, one cannot deny the fact that no scholar has ever been able to “prove a connection between an artist’s actual work and his neurotic disposition” (Merlino et al 15), because sometimes authors are just that brilliant, that they can describe neuroses and psychopathy without themselves being a victim of either, just as a deranged writer is still able to write about perfectly ordinary and normal people.

Notwithstanding, Jungian psychology argued that those archetypes, which are persistent images and symbols reoccurring in stories, do not only reflect the writer’s psyche; but they also influence the reader’s psychological perception. They “may serve as compensatory function, balancing the wholeness of the psyche within the reader or his or her community, or

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

may unfold into possibilities of consciousness” (McKenzie and Kaltner 145). For the Freudian camp, the reader’s unconsciousness was more important to investigate since it is associated with the written work on a different level, wherein a literary text occupies the role of a dream for the reader. It meant that a text enables the reader to experience “desires and fantasies” on a literary fictitious virtual level—that is, once readers are engrossed with reading literature they lose their consciousness to the imaginary world and delve within its pleats through their fantasies. So, though the readers reach “unconscious pleasure and satisfaction” (Ahmad and Nayab 58-59) this still says nothing about the reader’s psyche and it seems it is not the writers’ goal after all. Other psychologists, including Freud, decided to focus on the reader’s response to the characters of the stories, their flaws, and qualities instead of symbols (ibid), making the study of the character’s mind the most relevant. Thus, the prominence of characters lies in the fact that they serve as a middle ground for both readers and writers, as they are also easier to scrutinize since their actions are explained by reasons which any reader could reach.

Though the psychological scrutiny of an author is out of reach, his/her characters, on the other hand, seem to be more approachable. Those characters are thought of as “projections of the author’s psyche” wherein the author’s “childhood traumas, family life, sexual conflicts, fixations” are to be depicted in the characters s/he creates, though in an indirect coded manner that not all could fathom (Ahmad and Nayab 56-57). These influences could only be fathomed through techniques such as “symbolism”, “condensation” or “displacement” (ibid). Hence, the category which is more suitable for a psychoanalytical examination of a text is, in fact, the character, as “every literary character qualifies as a case for psychological study” (Emir 52). For many, Freud’s theories are valuable for examining characters and their roles based on the narrative or poetic structure of the literary work (qtd in Lifa and Lati 15). This psychological analysis concentrates on the characters’ ups and downs, their feelings, views, and actions based on the social context in which they exist within the literary creation.

The character-based psychoanalysis reached centre stage with James Joyce’s allegorical novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), a novel that marked a shift in modern fiction writing (Yemir 162). In this novel, Joyce displays the manifestation of mind’s evolution and the consciousness of “the artist” at distinct levels concerned with human feeling, sentiment, and passion in connection to the human body and religion, and “finally the level of intellectual awareness” (ibid). These levels are part of what Freud concluded through his own scrutiny of the human psyche after observing his patients. He discovered that if, at an

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

early age, the human mind experiences disorders and inner turbulences, they will result in agony and misery for the individual. Within this theory, Freud claimed that childhood experiences are factors in adult functionality and most likely emotions which can lead to criminal or aggressive behaviours. This idea led him to believe “that the mind is made of two parts –the conscious mind and the unconscious mind”, and the latter, in truth, is sometimes subtly responsible for some unconscious choices because it is the one holding up to those memories (Ahmad and Nayab 57) i.e., the unconscious mind is often the orchestrator of anomalous behaviours.

In Jacques Lacan's opinion, who was inspired by Freud's theories despite being contemporaries, the unconscious part is the generator of human instincts that the conscious part relates to and which he called the “enigmatic symbol of total mystery” (qtd in Loncar-Vujnovic 70). Though Lacan revealed a certain connection between the two spheres, it is Freud's interpretation of this association that made it more transparent, resulting in “stream of consciousness”, which was later on adopted as a new technique utilized in the conception of the modern novel. On explaining the function of the human brain, Freud asserted that not all mind function is conscious (ibid) —the unconscious mind's functions are, according to Freud, results of past experiences (Adam and Nayab 57), and to fully understand a character, you need to understand their past through their subconscious mind. In accordance, Freud's endeavours in simplifying Lacan's findings helped in shaping the psychoanalytical approach to literature, and how to analyse the stream of consciousness and its role in understanding the characters' psyche.

In 20th century literature, the stream of consciousness technique was at the centre of writing the Anglophone novel. Modern writers from both England and the US focused on enabling the reader “to connect the thoughts, to see them as a whole and to conclude about them opening the horizon towards some skills of literary and life-living experiments” (Loncar-Vujnovic 71). In other words, the stream of consciousness technique became the doorway to characters' inner selves, making the story more approachable and understandable for the reader. It also gave those readers the ability to participate in identifying “with the characters and inner stories, rather than demanding the transference” (ibid). Writers now not only spoke of the characters; but also gave characters a voice through their thoughts and their ability to tell their own stories. Hence, authors acknowledged the past as a crucial part in fully understanding a character's nature, just like Freud thought a childhood experience is responsible for the adult's nature. Russian writers such as Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy were

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

among the finest authors who adapted and mastered this technique, along with English novelists including James Joyce, Henry James, Arthur Miller and Virginia Woolf (Emir 53). The interplay between the conscious and unconscious parts of the mind resulted in a more detailed division of three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego. For Freud, this trio represented different levels of the human psyche and thus were ultimately used for human psychological analysis to be later on applied even on literary characters (Sari et al 100). Through a psychological lens, characters can be representative of the different parts of human psyche and were studied as representatives either of the id, the ego, or the superego.

Gerald Corey's knowledge on human behaviour and psychology allowed him to see the id, the ego, and the superego as "biological," "psychological," and "social" components, respectively (qtd in Sari et al 100). More precisely, the id is the dark, lawless part responsible for primitive impulses; it is the generator of "psychic energy and the psychosexual desires" (Lifa and Lati 8). It is accountable for all sexual, physical, and personal drives, including "sexual (libido), wishes and desires that motivate the organism to seek pleasure", without concern for any social or political regulations (ibid). The ego, on the other hand, is the developed version of the id, which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world (Ahmad and Nayab 57). Moreover, it is the sensible and reasonable part, which is governed by the "reality principle" instead of the "pleasure principle" (Zdenek 186). The ego also serves as a medium between the carnal drives of the id and the decrees and laws of the real world (Sari et al 101). At a higher level than the ego, the superego is responsible for regulating an individual's actions and thoughts based on the restrictions of the community within which the individual lives. The superego seeks to function in a more idealistic manner sometimes in connection to religion. Though it is in charge of feelings of conscience, responsibility, and guilt (Lifa and Lati 8), it is somewhat too restrictive; and in many situations, do not really apply to the real world.

If these three elements are to be described briefly then, the id is the needs, the ego is the mediator, and the superego is the moral sense. Since the id, the ego, and the superego are interwoven, they significantly impact each other. When they work harmoniously and in unity, the person is able to act and function appropriately within society, and thus, they are supposed to be at a stable mental stage. However, the moment these "systems are at odds with one another" the person experiences mental disorders and deficiencies (Zdenek 184). Freud's interpretation of dreams enabled him to dive within the unconscious and realize that, for the desires of the id to be successfully governed, they resort to different kinds of outlets such as

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

dreams that keep the individual in check (Ahmad and Nayab 58) to avoid any disturbances between the three parts of the human psyche. The id, the ego, and the superego, also become indispensable for character analysis in the psychoanalytical approach as to decipher types of mental fragility or maladjustments in literary characters.

Though the stratification of the id, the ego, and the superego apply to both genders as it is representative of both male and female psyche, for some, it neglected aspects that belong specifically to the female gender. Psychologist Helen Deutsch believed that women's particularities encompassing "pregnancy, motherhood, and the menopause" seemed to be ignored by male psychologists (Blumenfeld 81). The female psychological analysis adopted by Deutsch, which was inspired by Freud, revealed that, as little girls, women suffer from a particular conflict. The latter is girls' lack of control and confusion when they have their first period and each time their catamenia occurs again. When they are adults, women's inner conflict, unlike that of men, occurs between "narcissism", self-love, and altruism which is the impulse to "love others" and to be a loving, "nurturing mother" (ibid 81-82). These feelings within female development, as Deutsch and Freud claimed, result in a "masochistic side, sometimes in conflict with a more sadistic desire to attain to the masculine position of greater freedom, in social terms", i.e., women feel jealous of male manhood as they termed it "penis envy" (ibid 82). Inevitably, women were caught in a quarrel between their wish to be good mothers (as per societal expectations) and their wish to be free of such restrictions.

A marvel as it is, human nature and psyche is a maze. Though there are still many aspects to be discovered in the field of psychological studies, much has been understood about human psychology which was previously an enigma. Within the field of women's psychology, for instance, much has been achieved to reject generalizations previously made by male psychologists such as the claim that hysteria, the supposed female malady, is triggered by women's over-emotional nature and innate weakness (Ussher 7-15). In this research, one believes female psychology should be analysed separately in a more detailed manner tackling the socio-cultural expectations around the construct of the perfect female, the rebellious woman who witnesses inner conflicts, and finally, the deranged woman who allows those conflicts to take over her mental sanity.

1.5.1. Women's Utopia

Similar to many areas of study, historically the field of psychology started as a male domain focusing on male psychology or a male perception of the female psyche. As Showalter

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

reported, it was not until 1894 that the first female doctors were permitted to join “the Medico-Psychological Association” (qtd in Sigurdardottir 4). The second wave of feminism shed light on this issue, tackling psychology’s shortcomings in its treatment of women—for example, in *The Feminine Mystique* Betty Friedan accused Freud and his camp of contributing to women’s unfair status in society. Friedan decried: “Instead of destroying the old prejudices that restricted women’s lives, social sciences in America merely gave them new authority” (qtd in Eagly et al 1). Hereafter, women, both in society and psychology, were boxed within a particular frame that they could not transcend: the naïve, innocent, docile mother, and wife (Eagly et al 1), or simply the androcentric expectation of the perfect idealized female.

Feminism and psychology, when hand in hand, helped discover the origin of the “woman” by the “woman”, Jane Ussher (1997) and Valerie Walkerdine (1990-1996) meant “the particular configuration of ‘woman’ as sign in language, visual representation and in material and discursive practice, and the way in which women are regulated and resist through negotiating hegemonic scripts of femininity” (Squire 86). Alternately, the term ‘woman’, refers to a specific stage of female maturation into adulthood (womanhood), that is often paired in the 20th century cultural imaginary of the United States with the concept of the perfect obedient woman which dominated fiction. This stereotype of idealized female perfection was also labelled as the “domestic goddess” (Douglas and Michaels 13) and this heteropatriarchal expectation of femininity was characterised by traits such as: beauty, kindness and nurturing along with willingness to put her husband’s and children’s needs above her own. The best examples of this image in media can be seen in advertising, women’s magazines and television shows such as Joe Connelly’s *Leave It to Beaver* (1957-1963). This show portrayed a female protagonist as a quintessential homemaker whose sole purpose in life is to take care of her family and make her husband happy. This show reinforced traditional gender roles of the time and promoted the idea that woman’s place was in the home (Mayer 161). Furthermore, when speaking of the female maturation stage of womanhood menstruation is often used as the mark of transitioning from girl to woman and often used as the explanation behind a woman’s “abnormal” behaviour as contingent on her experience of “premenstrual syndrome”. A woman, hence, was categorized either as “the real [her] being the non-premenstrual self” or “the non-[her] being the premenstrual self” (Squire 86-87) — where the menstrual self is flawed, and grim and generally pessimistic, while the non-premenstrual self is “perfect”, effortlessly stable, and level-headed. Most importantly, it lives

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

up to the “cultural representations of the perfect ‘woman’” (ibid)—representations which prevailed in media and commercials of the 20th century’s Western culture.

More so, “a predominantly female psychiatric population in America...has been diagnosed, psychoanalyzed, researched, and hospitalized by a predominantly male professional population”, a population which tended to disregard the female psycho-physiological experience and focused on the male one since they believed that “what happens to men as somehow more important than what happens to women” (Chesler 65). In other words, mentally ill women were diagnosed by a medical system based on dominant patriarchal ideologies which saw their suffering as trivial in comparison to that of men. Equally, as reported by Phyllis Chesler in *Women and Madness*, about 65 years ago “Seventy-nine clinicians (forty-six male and thirty-three female psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers) completed a sex-role stereotype questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 122 bipolar items, each of which described a particular behavior or trait” (67). The rationale behind this questionnaire was to determine the psychological features of what defined a healthy male or a healthy female. The questionnaire yielded three results, of which the third one is the most pertinent to mention since it focuses on what makes a female healthy in the point of view of the predominantly patriarchal institution of psychology:

Their concepts of healthy mature men did not differ significantly from their concepts of healthy mature adults, but their concepts of healthy mature women did differ significantly from those for men and for adults. Clinicians were likely to suggest that women differ from healthy men by being more submissive, less independent, less adventurous, more easily influenced, less aggressive, less competitive, more excitable in minor crises, more easily hurt, more emotional, more conceited about their appearances, less objective, and less interested in math and science. (Chesler 67)

Are these supposed characteristics of the female gender not generalizations? Are they not the epitome of how most world literature, including Anglophone fiction and the Hollywood industry, portrayed women in most of its productions? This is indeed the stereotypical image which prevailed in most of 20th century’s American fiction and media and even continued until the 21st century.

Pauline Kael, the American film critic who wrote for *The New Yorker* magazine, concluded in one of her essays that no matter how forbidding, demanding or manipulative society and its cultural institutions were in terms of labelling women, it was still a female who accepted it and abided by it. She states, “If women turn into replicas of the women in commercials, they do it to themselves” (qtd in Krugovoy Silver 61); the blame must not only

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

fall on men, women too, are responsible for bringing the perfect woman to existence. Some psychologists such as Bruno Bettelheim also alleged that women's ultimate dream is to be "womanly companions of men and to be mothers" (qtd in Eagly et al 1), insinuating that it was not a male-made standard, but instead a woman's wish. However, what truly brings a woman to such a state in which she has the choice to oppress herself or other women? In Phyllis Chesler's insightful book on woman-woman aggression, she sheds light on a simple truth: "We live on the same planet; women are not an alien species. To the extent that women are oppressed, we have also internalized the prevailing misogynist ideology which we uphold both in order to survive and in order to improve our own individual positions vis-a-vis all other women" (2). In *Woman's Inhumanity to Woman*, Chesler not only gives reason to women harming or condemning other women, but she also explains that it is a rather more complex situation than many believe. Women are, certainly, far from being angels, yet what influenced them for centuries to hurt each other is their wish to be accepted by society, a society which remains, until present day, predominantly patriarchal.

Similarly, as a response for Kael and Bettelheim's prejudices, the idea of "the angel in the house" by Virginia Woolf represents the supposedly perfect woman since they have the same qualities of fragility and obedience, and especially that of having no personal individual desire. The "angel in the house" was a situation forced upon many women (Venkatesh et al 118), it was not freely chosen, yet it continued to have an impact on how women were defined and expected to behave for centuries. To clarify, women who harm each other were and are, ostensibly, forced to obey frameworks of power and identity predominantly patriarchal in nature. In Simone de Beauvoir's words "To decline to be the Other, to refuse to be a party to the deal—this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon their alliance with the superior caste", which means that even if women served as accomplices in policing other women's behaviour, it is because they did not have any real freedom to fight against it (20). Helen Gilbert and Susan Gubar echo Woolf's observations and Beauvoir's when they asserted that it was men who "fastened masks over women's faces- identifying them with eternal types of their own invention to possess them more thoroughly" (17). So, even if women adhered to this tradition, it was not internally a woman's free will but rather what they were forced to do.

Based on the theory of an "internalized patriarchy" as described by Rashmi Goel, those women who acquiesced to such standards and degradations and accepted them as their truth could end up likewise undermining other females as well (Goel 572). For Chesler, women

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

were directly or indirectly forced to follow the standard image produced and supported by an institutionalized patriarchal value system. Furthermore, it is reinforced by a patriarchal-led field of psychology that the male entity made sure that “for a woman to be healthy she must ‘adjust’ to and accept the behavioral norms for her sex” which are mainly obedience, dependence, simple-mindedness and being preoccupied with her physical appearance (Chesler 67-68). Ergo, if women did not abide by those norms they run the risk that “their parents and husbands will ostracize and psychiatrically commit them for this—and the psychiatrists will keep them in hospitals until they assert their ‘femininity.’ Less educated and more ‘attractive’ women are probably released sooner and more easily from state hospitals and from private treatment” (ibid 69). On that note, as reported in a 2018 article by Jess Joho, the crux of patriarchy is, in fact, this ability of manipulating women and tricking them into believing that they are appreciated, but only according to how much they follow the rules until they become representatives and enforcers of the same societal restrictions on other females. They “do the work of policing one another for ‘correctly’ performing femininity” (Joho np). In literature as well, “female characters appear as the agents of patriarchal oppression” (Alshammari 5), as it seems women were now subjected to a double oppression both by men and other women.

Other studies on female psychology as reflected in American literature, mainly through Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899) and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892), have shown that before feminism could acquire women their rights at a time when women were unable to transcend the oppressive rules of society, women would often “become insane or commit suicide” (Qasim et al 385). In some cases when women found themselves compelled to follow the gendered frameworks and live like the “dolls”, dominant patriarchal ideals expected them to fulfil their acquiescence, is symbolic to signing their death sentences. As Qasim et al note, this adherence to restrictive patriarchal codes was not entirely by choice but rather inescapable and ultimately position women as essentially enchained to these restrictive patriarchal norms and stereotypes. Such a conclusion was reached by Mari Kotani and Thomas LaMarre who conducted an analysis on the 1991’s famed American film *Thelma and Louise*. By the end of the film, the two women drive their car over a cliff in order to avoid living as “dolls” within their patriarchal society. Kotani and LaMarre reached the conclusion that being a doll equals death—women could either relieve themselves through suicide or surrender “to life as a doll, pet, or robot” (Kotani and LaMarre 50). Nonetheless, to end one’s life was not the choice of all women, for not all were that brave or that coward—depending on how one perceives such an act. Furthermore, women are not a

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

homogeneous entity; not all women share the same socio-political, cultural, racial, and religious environments, and so their choices depend on the complexities of their backgrounds and their distinction from one another. In other cases, the severity of such coercion left women unable to acquire inner peace, resulting in Gilbert and Gubar's conclusion: the repercussions of the patriarchal confinements could only find women passage through "madness" (qtd in Koscher 109). As mentioned earlier, such madness was portrayed in two famous literary works, "The Yellow Wallpaper", and *The Awakening*, these works focused on the story of two female victims of marital oppression that ultimately suffered mental breakdowns because of the restrictions the men in their lives set upon them. In conclusion women's refusal of patriarchal restrictions appears to be synonymous with mental insanity.

1.5.2. Women on the Verge of Insanity

Before the 19th century both England and US shared "many fundamental English ideas about insanity" (Showalter 6): insomuch that to be insane meant to be treated like "criminals and idiots" (Sigurdardottir 3). The mentally ill had "been regarded as unfeeling brutes, ferocious animals that needed to be kept in check with chains, whips, strait-waistcoats, barred windows, and locked cells" by both society and psychiatrists (ibid). However, by the end of the 1700s the insane were "seen instead as sick human beings, objects of pity whose sanity might be restored by kindly care" (Showalter 8). This shift in public awareness towards mental insanity was the result of English social reforms which had "been called the first psychiatric revolution" (ibid). Surprisingly, this shift led to a new stereotype from "the bestial madman", to the "less threatening but troubled mad-woman" (Sigurdardottir 3). For Elaine Showalter and other feminist writers, the period between the 1830s and the 1950s marked insanity as a "distinctively female malady" (qtd in Busfield 260)—that is, to be a rebellious woman, is to be mad.

The American psychiatric domain was indeed dominated by men even "during the 1960s and 1970s" (Chesler 63) to the extent that madness started to be particularly associated with women unveiling the possibility that female insanity was but a patriarchal social product. More so, Chesler explains that despite the majority of psychiatrists being men, the major focus of their studies and writings were on women. Their incentive, in Chesler's view, is that "it was both safe and 'therapeutic' for them to do this. In women, they could study madness without dread...mad women had no power" (75). She further explained that the best subjects for male psychologists were strong women, their strength in a patriarchal society meant that they are not only mad but that they "are despised and feared" (ibid). This ideology appeared

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

to be a result of the idea that to be insane was to refuse and rebel against societal norms and customs (Qasim et al 385). For a patriarchal society, it was often women who would reject such norms and therefore be labelled “mad” (ibid).

In the same vein, Chesler assured that any type of insanity equalled a rejection of socially ascribed gender roles stating that ‘madness,’ whether it appears in women or in men, “is either the acting out of the devalued female role or the total or partial rejection of one’s sex role stereotype” (56). In other words, if women did not abide by the social constructs of patriarchy then they are to be punished by being labelled mad and this labelling of madness was men’s weapon to undermine any woman with independence tendencies. Twenty years later Jane Ussher maintains in her book *Madness and Misogyny*, that “madness acts as a signifier which positions women as ill, as outside, as pathological, as somehow second rate—the second sex” (65). Similarly, Gilbert and Gubar cast light on the issue of the madwoman and women writers in *The Madwoman in the Attic* in which they sustained that many scholars in the social sciences and history chose to focus on societal norms that can render women mad and ill on both the corporal and mental levels. They continue their argument by underlining that, in a male-controlled community, women were stuck between two extremes if they were not “angels”, they had to be “monsters” (53). The madwoman was often categorized as belonging to one of three types “suicidal Ophelia”, “the Crazy Jane”, and “the Lucia”, which in Showalter’s view were all created to blame female sexuality for women’s madness (Martin 10). It appears the patriarchal ideology did not only control women in the household but even women under mental therapy and in asylums were not free of the imposed social constructs. They were essentially boxed in a man-made cliché: if women were docile it meant they were mentally stable; if they were independent and opinionated it meant they were crazy and hysterical.

The “suicidal Ophelia” was inspired by one of Shakespeare’s characters in *Hamlet* as the grief-stricken madwoman. Showalter points out that women who resided in English mental wards during the Victorian era were often rendered in similar status to this character, “wearing white, keeping their hair unbound and unruly, and wearing wreaths of flowers and branches on their heads” (qtd in Sigurdardottir 5). She also asserts that during the 1800s, Ophelia was taken as an example for psychological studies concerning “hysteria and mental breakdown in sexually turbulent adolescence” by psychologists such as Freud and his mentor, the Parisian neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (Showalter 148). Hysteria was acknowledged as “the first mental disorder attributable to women”, and it was perceived as an exclusively

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

female illness (Tasca et al 110). According to Charcot hysterics were characterized by patient's paralysis, and the best way to understand its triggers was hypnosis. As a result, by "careful observation, physical examination, and the use of hypnosis, Charcot was able to prove that hysterical symptoms, while produced by emotions rather than by physical injury, were genuine, and not under the conscious control of the patient" (Showalter 147). In correlation, hysteria started to be recognized as a result of emotional turbulences which could occur both in men and women resulting in seizures or paralysis with hypnosis as the best way to control it and alleviate its effects. However, despite having special wings for men diagnosed with hysteria it remained a strictly female malady (ibid 148).

For the "Crazy Jane" type, it was similar to Ophelia and was the topic of various ballads of the 19th century, and also other works of art such as Richard Dadd's painting of 1855. Crazy Jane was known for her violent traits just like the "Lucia" type (Sigurdardottir 5). She was first introduced to the world through the works of William Butler Yeats, when he wrote a series of poems, "The Crazy Jane Sequence", to portray women who voiced their rejection and broke free of society's constraints (Galvin ix). The origin of "the Lucia", in contrast, was the 1835's Gaetano Donizetti's opera, wherein Lucia of Lammermoor was one of its characters who was passionately in love with a man and forced to marry another. Suffering through such oppression and injustice, she loses her mental grip and ends up killing her husband. Then she falls into lunacy and performs a "virtuosic double aria before dying" (Poriss 1). The Ophelia, the Lucia or the Crazy Jane, though all mad, are evidence of female madness as the side effect of dominant patriarchal ideologies.

According to the World Health Report of 1998 and Helen Herrman's (the president of the World Psychiatric Association) 2016 article "The Impact of Social Changes on the Mental Health of Women in the 21st Century", numerous women still suffer from mental illness due to social disparities, causing them to become violent sick beings (Herrman 218). The Ophelia was the preferable model for the madwoman since she was the image of the easily handled and docile patient, while Crazy Jane and the Lucia were less favoured by psychologists because they portrayed a less understandable and acceptable type of insanity, "namely psychosis and violence" (Sigurdardottir 5). Even in madness, women were expected to fit a certain stereotype. Men who rejected such types of sick women forgot that this status was only a result of their condition in society and the discrimination and injustices from which women suffered. As such one can propose that hysteria served as the tool by which "the nineteenth- century U.S. and European cultures made sense of women's changing role"

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

(Briggs 246), that is if women wanted more than to be restricted to the household they were hysterical.

Yet, one should note that in medical history hysteria seemed specific to white women of the higher class. As explained by Laura Briggs in “The Race of Hysteria”, the origin of hysteria as “nervousness was often characterized as an illness caused by ‘overcivilization,’” (246). Thus, while savagery and uncivility were the features of non-whites including Asians, Africans and Latin Americans; over civility or “overcivilization,” was categorised as “a hysterical illness” exclusive to “Anglo-American, native-born whites, specifically, white women of a certain class” (ibid). Finding that women both in *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects* feature main female protagonists from upper-middle class, this historical medical analysis of hysteria and madness is key foundational information to this study.

1.5.3. Violence, Women, and Murder

Though Raewyn Connell’s asserts in his book *Masculinities* that men are more prone to violent tendencies and are more likely to commit crimes and murders (83), it is still within logic to recognize that women, too, can commit violent acts and even kill. The tendency for women to be violent is often understood as the culmination of the oppressive details in a woman’s life that ultimately leads her to find an outlet through violence (Lewis-Horne 233). When Michael Kelleher and C. L. Kelleher conducted their research study on 20th century’s serial murders by American women, they saw “greed, jealousy, self-defense, revenge, or psychopathology” as those factors behind these women’s violence (qtd in Lima 7). In a sense, those abnormalities which occur in some women’s lives can impact the probability of them becoming violent and/or criminals.

Moreover, Nichole H. Rafter and Elizabeth A. Stanko propose six different explanations for why women would surrender to violent drives and its relationality to the perceived image of female criminals by society and the US judicial system. First is the biological justification which articulates that women are “gripped by biological forces beyond [their] control” referring to the menstrual cycle (qtd in Lima 8). Second is attributing irrationality to women of being “impulsive and nonanalytical” driven simply by instincts (ibid). Third is that women are supposed to be “passive and weak” which allows them to serve better as victims or manipulated accomplices in male crimes. The latter is linked to the fourth category since it also denotes that women can be easily manipulated as they are “impressionable and in need of protection” so they can be easily moulded to fulfil male desire (ibid). As for the fifth category

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

it finally gives a woman some agency, when she is categorised “as masculine” —independent females who break the docile stereotype and display deviance who “are likely to be criminal and also likely to be viewed as lesbian” (qtd in Lima 8). Finally, the sixth category which is “purely evil” since it destroys both the held image of women as angels and that they are lawless (ibid). Noticeably, justifying a woman’s deviance always finds its way to her rejection of the socio-culturally defined feminine role.

Reports by the World Health Organization explained that violence is branched into three different types: first, “self-directed violence” touches both self-harm (which is often cutting and damaging one’s body) and suicide (Krug et al 6)—situations scholars classify as acts resulting from mental issues (Pickard 72). Secondly, there is “interpersonal violence”, a type of violence directed in two different ways; it could either be violence against one’s closest contacts which includes family and lovers, or “community violence”, as defined, it is violence against strangers. Finally, the category of “collective violence” that seems to run more extensively than the previous ones because it is considered as “social, political, and economic” manifestations that include: organized crime, wars, and economically-driven wrongdoings (Krug et al 6).

For women, they are mainly concerned with self-directed violence or interpersonal violence (Pickard 72). Presented in Keith Hawton’s and colleagues’ research, “five to six times as many adolescent girls self-harm as compared to boys”, and similarly for female prisoners, they occupy the largest share of self-abusers “of ten times higher” than men in England and Wales (qtd in Pickard 72). Likewise, it was reported in a 2018 article entitled “How Many Teenage Girls Deliberately Harm Themselves? Nearly 1 in 4 Survey Finds” that;

Up to 30 percent of teenage girls in some parts of the United States say they have intentionally injured themselves without aiming to commit suicide, researchers have found. About one in four adolescent girls deliberately harmed herself in the previous year, often by cutting or burning, compared to about one in 10 boys...Adolescent girls who participated in the survey were more likely than boys to report belonging to the L.G.B.T. community and having been sexually assaulted or bullied online. But males were more likely to report smoking and using drugs. (Baumgaertner np)

As such “response to trauma” is considered as the most probable psychological and clinical cause for the issue of self-harm. Yet, others, such as Freud, adhere that it is associated with other psychological side-effects including “ego, castration, penis envy, and the like”, while for feminist thinkers it is attributed to issues of “gender and protest, and rebellion against bodily norms” (qtd in Gurung 33). The question of trauma in relation to self-mutilation

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

explains that those people who wind up harming themselves are those who suffered, at some point, from physical or psychological abuse (ibid 34). In respect to interpersonal violence, Anna Motz a clinical and forensic psychologist known for her extensive experience with women who commit violence, asserts that women tend to commit crimes towards others in a hidden form—they choose narrow and out of reach areas “in the private realm, directed towards parents, partners and children” (qtd in Pickard 72). However, this does not rule out the fact that women do not commit crimes against strangers.

For various feminist scholars, women’s aggression and illicit deeds are often misunderstood and prejudiced because no one questions why a woman ends up as a criminal (Chesney-Ling 99). They rather point fingers and ask, “How could she do that?” (ibid). Additionally, women’s association with violence was often considered absurd and miscalculated. They are judged on the fact that they are women, the epitome of femininity—they were born females and they are expected to maintain the image of the gentler sex and live up to the expectations of a male-defined community: being perfect women, wives, and mothers because society wants them to be nothing but feminine (Lima 11). Unfortunately, if women commit a crime, they become outcasts of society, anomalies, and abnormalities, while the phrase “boys will be boys” is often used as an excuse to justify serious crimes committed by men, such as sexual assault, domestic violence, and other forms of gender-based violence (Shwartz 222). Such a fact stems from the idea that men are biologically preordained by sexual desires and violent tendencies while women are not, and when women do not adhere to the mould they are supposed to fill they are considered mentally unstable and eventually become outcasts. Women are said to use violence towards themselves or their children as a way to display their distaste and aggression in ways that, for them, seem acceptable (Jono np). Sometimes they do so through exclusively female disorders akin to self-mutilation and Munchausen by proxy syndrome (ibid) since they do not wish to transcend the feminine territory, not out of free will but because they fear being rejected by and losing the support of their society (Chesler 2).

Cutting and Munchausen by proxy are different, yet they overlap at a certain point due to the aspect of harm either harming oneself through cutting or harming others for gratification because of Munchausen by proxy syndrome. In a sense, women, when strictly haunted by certain demons, eventually end up harming others or themselves. Most of the time, these demons are a result of patriarchal oppressive society which can even turn women on one another (Chesler 2). In some instances, this hope for release happens by hurting one’s

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

body. Furthermore, some psychoanalysts believe that girls, unlike boys, do not fall into the Oedipal state (Gardner 72), which Freud has described as a stage when the child, if he is a boy, will hate his father and have a strong attachment to, and sometimes even sexual desire for his mother (Melton 555). On the other hand, the daughter will hate the mother and obsess over the father in what is known as the “Electra complex” (ibid). Here, because most girls see themselves as “an extension of their mothers” (Motz 16), and the mother sees her daughter as her reflection, the bond between mother and daughter puts girls in a psychological dilemma. The girls agonize on whether to remain attached to the mother or to be distinct from her, leading some adolescent girls in extreme cases to self-harm (Gardner 72).

Alternatively, violence committed by a female, either self-directed or others-directed, can be perceived as a phenomenon against female nature, a sign of psychological ailment and aberration (Pickard 72). Munchausen syndrome as a mental disorder was first diagnosed in 1951 by Dr Richard Asher after observing a group of patients who feigned illness and faked symptoms and laboratory tests, leading “doctors to perform unnecessary surgical procedures” (Unal et al 671). Dr Asher believed that those who suffered from this disease attempted to “draw both sympathy and attention onto themselves” through such stories of illness (Esparza np). As such, this illness was named after Baron Munchausen, a Russian military man recognised for the highly exaggerated stories he told after getting back from battles (Esparza np). Essentially, the proxy part to this illness, parallel to cutting, involves the relationship between a mother and her child. It is not the mother, who fakes her sickness, but rather it is centred on women’s obsession with good mothering, it is about over- caring for a child by simulating or causing physical signs of an illness on their children for the mother to garner attention (Unal et al 671). Mothers would sometimes go even further, to the extent of making their children sick to nurse them to well-being again and again, and in association, the mother is in herself granted attention due to her dedicated efforts as a caregiver (Robins and Sesan 285). This mental disorder is thought to be a reflection of women’s “adherence to traditional sex roles, indirect use of power, reliance on male authority, and devaluation” (ibid), which means it is believed to be exclusively female.

The severity of Munchausen by proxy illness can sometimes reach child murder (Artingstall 251) and these murders could be either intentional or unintentional, but in both scenarios, the mother aims at gaining sympathy and attention from others, and that is why she makes her child ill in the first place (Artingstall 251). Kathryn Artingstall reported in her book on Munchausen Syndrome that the 1988 studies about domestic-family murders “indicated

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

that 1/3 of identified offenders were female. Female homicide defendants accounted for 15% of sibling murders and 18% of the murder of parents. Women were also responsible for 41% of spousal murder and 55% of the murder of their children” (251). These statistics reveal that women could take lives, and it does not always have to be a child’s life or accidental, it could be of a different member of the family or even of a stranger. Research on criminology shows that the rate of female crimes started to rise by the mid-20th century (Estrada et al 145) —this upsurge is apparent through criminal statistics and:

anecdotal evidence, such as the appearance of a female serial killer, the ‘black widow,’ Chechnyan terrorists involved in the deadly Moscow theater siege, the Beslen school attacks, suicide bombings, and the increasing number of female gang members...Women who are incarcerated are reported to have mental illness at a higher rate than are men, with the two most common diagnoses being PTSD and substance use disorder... Other diagnoses, such as bipolar disorder and personality disorder, may also increase the risk of criminality in women. (Friedman et al 523)

Freidman and his peers’ report reveal the extent to which women could also commit crimes previously defined as predominantly male crimes; however, with the distinction that, in the women’s cases, it is mostly ascribed to mental deficiencies, including trauma.

The history of female abuse and killings is long and filled with horrible stories, especially those of male serial killers. To best understand this history and especially the crux behind the murders committed against women both by men and women, one should consider criminology as the science of crime. This shall also help account for the criminal’s psyche and its depiction in literature as the mirror of society.

1.6. Psychological Criminology and the Serial Killer

Criminology entails the use of methodical means for the systematic scientific investigation of criminal conduct and criminality as a whole (Walsh and Ellis 2). For many, it is an “inherently *interdisciplinary* field” because it was formulated and founded on the grounds of various other fields of study, including “sociology...anthropology, biology, economics, and psychology/psychiatry” (ibid). Hence, criminology utilises the findings of psychological studies to understand how criminals think and proposes various theories concerning why criminals do the things they do.

The interdisciplinary connection between criminology and psychology or psychological criminology investigates how criminal tendencies inhabit the mind of a criminal, how they are triggered and how these criminal tendencies endure or change depending both on societal and personal incentives. By making use of behavioural sciences, scholars connect such influences

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

to criminal behaviour by investigating the mental processes of criminals and their criminal conduct (Sathyanarayana Rao 4). One of the many findings such researchers have explored is the concept of criminal profiling, which is “the process of identifying personality traits, behavioral tendencies and demographic variables of an offender based on characteristics of the crime”, and also in association and reflection to similar offences by different criminals (ibid). Therefore, criminals are not only understood by the nature of their crime but also by similarities to other criminals and their respective criminal behaviour.

Surveys concerning criminal behaviour, on the other hand, yielded results postulating that most criminals are characterized by “aggressiveness, restlessness, poor attention span, under achievement, impulsivity, reluctance to postpone gratification in the interest of long-term goals, intolerance of frustration and unreliability in personal relationships” (West 78). However, though based on credible information, such assumptions were still not accredited as reliable data; because they tend to generalize, while humans differ, and so do criminals. Accordingly, it was also discovered and proved that “the majority of offenders do not manifest any of the classic psychiatric syndromes and are not regarded by themselves or their associates in need of therapy” (ibid). Basically, not all criminals are mentally ill. Henceforth, creating a stereotypical profile for a “murderer, rapist or psychopathic killer” built on a few examples of similar crimes is out of the question (Sathyanarayana Rao 4). Hence, within the science of crime, generalization proved its ineptness, leaving the mind of the criminal unresolved.

Beyond similarities and typologies, Shani D’cruze and her colleagues focused on the inherent features of each individual criminal in distinction with another, concluding that “factors can vary from establishing the presence of a mental disorder, a particular personality type, having suffered some physical or mental trauma in childhood, to other ‘triggers’ like job loss, the break up of a relationship and other stressful situational factors” (D’Cruze 34). Similar inquiries were the main focus of the fields of “psychiatric criminology,” also known as “forensic psychiatry”. This method was mainly adopted in the US and applied the “Freudian psycho-analytic” approach which not only dominated the criminal spheres of investigation but also emphasised the role of the subconscious in understanding human behaviour. Scholars like David Abramsen and Philip Q. Roche testified that delinquents themselves are in most instances ignorant to the triggers of their lawless acts (qtd in Sathyanarayana Rao 4). Instead, such behaviours are the progeny of their subconscious minds whereby these subconscious traits are but a mere reflection of mental disorders and childhood

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

trauma (ibid). Looking back at Freud's studies on the conscious and the subconscious, it is apparent that Abramsen and Roche, like Freud, concluded that delinquency is the product of subconscious influences, including child abuse.

Due to scientific developments such as the invention of brain scanning in the 1980s, it was finally possible to apprehend how the brain functions. The earliest brain scan of a murderer was conducted by the British neurologist Prof Adrian Raine in California. His study led him to discover that murderers' brains had a high perceptivity "to rage and anger" and weaker abilities to control their emotions. He attributed such tendencies to child abuse, but even so, such abuse must be coupled by a genetic fact, genes which entail "psychopathic behaviour" (Mosley np). These two together, according to Jim Fallon, professor of psychiatry at the University of California, provide higher risks "of a life of crime", and so, if one has "the high-risk gene but... weren't abused, then there really wasn't much risk. So just a gene by itself, the variant doesn't really dramatically affect behaviour, but under certain environmental conditions there is a big difference" (qtd in Mosley np). As a result, these studies propose that no matter how one is born, it always depends on how one is brought up and how one lives, that defines one's personality and, in this case, defines an individual as a murderer or not.

From a murderer to a serial killer there are varying psychological factors impacting one's decision to kill multiple victims in the same manner—in effect, to be a serial killer means committing numerous murders reaching or exceeding three in specificity. These murders must be identical and must not happen at once but, should be gradual whereby between each one, there should be a "cooling off period" to distinguish serial killing from other types of murder (D'Cruze 32). Like murderers, the majority of serial killers in the US are middle aged men reaching 95% with white males as the majority (Vito and Maahs 223). According to studies undertaken by the FBI, during the late 1900s "nearly all of the killers were white men. Many were aged between 20-35 and most of them had some form of sexual dysfunction" (Howard and Smith 4). Likewise, criminologists have categorized serial killers of having certain features; they "have similar emotional development issues. They also tend to be above-average intelligence, wise and in some ways killing acts as a drug for some of these men" (Venas 2). The emotional development issues are said to have started since infancy that is when the child is only two years old (ibid). As clarified by Elliot Leyton, it is a sensitive period when the child cannot grow emotionally in a proper manner since he is unable to have feelings of "sympathy, remorse, and affection", and in fact, this could mean, according to Peter Vronsky, that the child might display "a psychopathic personality" (qtd in Venas 2). If

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

psychopathy develops at such an early young age, then the possibility that childhood trauma is the main cause for anomalous behaviours is more plausible.

By psychopathy scholars refer to individuals characterized by: “low levels of emotional reactivity (callous unemotionally, shallow affect, and bold-ness), glib interpersonal style (superficial charm, egocentricity, and deceitfulness), antisocial tendencies (poor behavioural control and aggression), and a parasitic lifestyle typified by impulsivity, irresponsibility, and a lack of long-term planning” (qtd in Semenyna 1). To summarize, psychopathy denotes emotional detachment, egoism, lack of self-control and recklessness which trigger murderous desires in a psychopath with no empathy. Though psychologists find these tendencies to inhabit the mind of a sociopath as well, there is a certain difference between the two that is the sense of right and wrong. The psychopath is believed to lack any sense of morality, while the sociopath has a “*twisted one*” (Kirkland and Cleveland 325; original emphasis), i.e. the actions of a psychopath do not follow any type of moral compass while those of a sociopath are based on their own understanding of what is right.

Studies show that most serial killers, either psychopaths or sociopaths, shared psychological deficiencies as a legacy from their dysfunctional childhood when these children were often left for adoption or raised by over-controlling, abusive mothers. When the child cannot break free of his mother’s grip, as Freud mentioned, he eventually drowns in rage. Additionally, some serial killers were also believed to have been victims of “bullying” as children—that is, childhood trauma plays the role of the subconscious trigger for adult criminal tendencies (ibid). Furthermore, Freud’s psychodynamic theory provided criminological investigations with another explanation for the serial killer dilemma by postulating that any disruption in a child’s subconscious evolution would result in uncanny behaviours in their adult life. The id, the ego and the superego, Freud’s parts of the human psyche, are those elements that must develop properly during childhood (Venas 3) —if not, there would be no set rules to stop human impulses through the ego and the superego; instead, the id will overpower logic and morals and strengthen the serial killer tendencies.

The subconscious compulsions of serial killers differ insomuch that criminology studies in 1998 classified them into different categories primarily based on the work of Ronald M. Holmes and Stephen T. Holmes. They delineated four typologies: the “visionary, mission, hedonistic, and power-control” (qtd in Froeling 98). The visionary is that serial killer who is most likely suffering from psychotic issues or having multiple personalities; their acts result

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

from “voices” and illusions that urge them to kill. The missionary type are those who believe they are purging the world of a particular category of people such as the example of Edmund Kemper¹ while the hedonistic is that who kills based on his sexual desires or the hunger for “thrills or comfort” (Walsh and Ellis 324-325). Finally: power and control, this category speaks of those who wish to have God-like control by taking lives or preserving them through body mutilation or, in some cases, re-grooming them after the murder is committed to exert their power. Examples of this type include Ted Bundy (1946-1989) and Jeffery Dahmer (1978-1991)² (Walsh and Ellis 325). In spite of these typologies not revealing much about the inherent reasons for their serial killings, they still provide key information in identifying serial killers and differentiating them from one another.

Another way to define a serial killer was reached by John E. Douglas and his colleagues in their *Crime Classification Manual* which resulted from a project by the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime (Palemo and Kocsis 145). They classified serial killers of being either “organized or disorganized, mixed, or sadistic” (qtd in Froeling 98). Organized serial killers are featured by their calculated moves, intelligence, and high societal and carnal aptitudes; they are more careful in a crime scene not to leave any incriminating evidence (Froeling 98). In contrast, disorganized serial killers commit crimes randomly, and the crime scene in most cases would still preserve evidence, indicating that they are less fortunate in terms of intelligence, as well as in terms of social and sexual abilities (ibid). Mixed serial killers are both organized and disorganized whereas sadistic ones are those who prolong the period of the murder since they “[focus] on the visceral satisfaction brought about by torturing the victim”, this type is similar to the organized type (Froeling 98). There are many more typologies for serial killers, yet, unfortunately, they are solely based on male candidates, and thus they do “not necessarily reflect the gender differences between male and female serial killers” (ibid 99). Through a critical lens one notices that a smart and social serial killer belongs to the organized type, while those who are seen as belonging to the lowest classes of society or social failures are more likely to be unorganized killers. Yet, neither of these typologies, nor the aforementioned criteria, includes women.

¹ Edmund Kemper, also known as the “Co-ed Killer,” was a notorious American serial killer who murdered ten people, including his own mother, between 1964 and 1973. Kemper is known for his brutal crimes, which included dismemberment and necrophilia (Douglas and Olshaker 122-126).

² Jeffrey Dahmer and Ted Bundy were both infamous serial killers in the United States. Jeffrey Dahmer murdered at least 17 young men and boys between 1978 and 1991 (Hickey 139-140), while Ted Bundy killed at least 30 young women and girls across several states in the 1970s (ibid 104-107).

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

In an article by *The Guardian* entitled “Patriarchy Perpetuates Trauma. It’s Time to Face the Fact”, Meera Atkinson discusses the issue of mental illness and trauma experienced by women. She highlighted that the main generator of female stress and trauma could be no other than an oppressive, unfair society, which would mean a path to crime for women just as it is for men. In her article entitled “Murder Becomes Her”, Sophia Huneycutt lamented the fact that many woman murderers are the product of a lifetime of pain, recognizing that women’s only safe haven from patriarchal oppression and coercion is through murder. Murder is a product of gender discernments that regulated women and subjected them to “repression, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, discrimination, outrageous social pressure” and more (Huneycutt np). Huneycutt painted a horrifying, yet an owe-inspiring, picture to reflect these female tendencies to enter the world of crime, saying it is “like watching a moth fly into a bonfire” (Huneycutt np). Criminology, too, was perceived as a male domain since it overlooked females both as victims and as offenders (Chesney-Lind and Pasko 3). It is true that men constituted the larger share of criminals and murderers, but there is still a percentage of female serial killers which reached 17% “in the United States of America between 1825 and 1995” (Froeling 100) while in other countries female serial killers even exceeded this percentage to reach a quarter of the serial killers’ rate (ibid). Fortunately, though scarce, there is a small number of criminologists and researchers who discuss the phenomenon of the female serial killer.

The early criminologists who showed interest in women’s crimes similar to Otto Pollak and Cesare Lombroso, the so-called father of criminology, labelled these women “as primitive and pathological individuals who had failed to develop into moral, feminine women” and that any criminal acts were, in fact, the expected outcome “of women concealing their menstrual cycle and their sexual desires” (qtd in Estrada et al 138-39). These claims reflect dominant patriarchal ideologies since they tend to reduce a woman to a childlike creature or an unreasonable one based only on female physiology (ibid). Yet, some feminist criminologists, such as Freda Adler, concluded that the upsurge in female crimes between the 20th and 21st century is a consequence of “gains in gender equality” (qtd in Estrada et al 139). Edwin Sutherland added, in his *Book on the Principles of Criminology* (1947), that women’s crimes were inevitable attempts to reach those of men due to the fact that women started to have a better status in society to the extent that women competed with men in certain fields (100). Though many scholars, such as Carol Smart and Darrell Steffensmeier, rejected this theory, it was still within logic that women tended to imitate male attitudes making the crime mimicry

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

theory plausible (ibid 140). Aside from the previously stated typologies of serial killers, there is a different set targeted explicitly towards female serial killers such as: “black widow, angel of death, revenge killer, profit or crime killer, team killer, and sexual predator”, as Michael Kelleher and C. L. Kelleher cited (qtd in Froeling 101). Such taxonomies describe both women who act alone and those who commit crimes in groups.

The female profiles for serial killers are best depicted in the graph below entitled “Profile Characteristics of Six Major Female Serial Killer Types”, taken from *Criminology Research Focus* by Karen T Froeling (102).

	Black Widow	Angel of Death	Revenge Killer	Profit or Crime	Team Killer	Sexual Predator
Start Age	> 25	21	Early twenties	25-30	20-25	Mid-thirties
Cycle	>10 yrs	1-2 yrs	< 2 yrs	10 yrs	1-2 yrs	> 1 yr
Average # of Victims	6-8	8	3-4	10	9-15	6-7
Victim Type	Family members	Patients in hospitals	Family Members	People with money	Varies	Varies
Preferred Weapon	Poison	Lethal injection	Poison	Poison	Multiple methods	Violent methods
Sexual in Nature	No	No	No	No	Yes or No	Yes

Figure 2: A graph caption about “Profile Characteristics of Six Major Female Serial Killer Types”
 Froeling, Karen. T, ed. *Criminology Research Focus*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2007.

This graph specifically describes at which age each type starts to function, ranging from twenty years of age for the death angel, until mid-thirties for sexual predators, while black widow, revenge killer, profit or crime and team killers fall in between, and team killers fall into three types “(1) male/female teams, (2) female teams, and (3) family teams” (Froeling 102). Concerning the span of their criminal endeavours, while the angel of death’s, revenge killer’s, team killer’s, and sexual predator’s tend to be between one and two years; for black widow’s and profit or crime killer’s span, it could reach ten years. The average age of their victims varies between 3 to 15 years of age. Each type of these serial killers has its own victim type—the black widow and revenge killer share the same victims who are “family members” or even loved ones and typically killed through poisoning. For the angel of death type, they tend to use “lethal injections” to terminate the life of “patients in hospitals” which is, in most cases, in their workplace. Profit or crime serial killers are motivated to kill to gain

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

profit, so they target rich people and they too mainly kill by poisoning their victims. For the remaining two, the victims could vary; the sexual predators tend to favour more violence, and so they use tools of that nature to fulfil their sexual needs (Froeling 102). The best example of a predator sexual serial killer is the woman perceived as the first female serial killer in the history of the US: Aileen Wuornos (1956-2002). In fact, Wuornos was not the first since Amy Archer-Gillian preceded her, a nurse who killed “up to 100 patients in her charge” (Walsh and Ellis 327), meaning that she was most likely an angel of death.

It is quite extraordinary to see how far criminology has developed in a period of three hundred years, quite similar to the time in which the novel rose and developed. Criminology first became a recognized field of study in the late 1800s (Miller 12), this coincidence but paves the way for fathoming the relation between literature and criminology especially the novel since they overlapped and precisely because the novel is the reflection of human life and society and all its manifestations. Consequently, the next section attempts to tackle criminology as it was reflected through literary works.

1.6.1. Criminology in Literature

Literature has historically attempted to represent real-life murderers and thus probe into their minds: “murder, or the attempt at it, is the second most stereotypical event found in the history of English literature” (Faas 154). Additionally, John Scaggs asserted that, despite the non-lucrative nature of crime stories, they still occupied the role of the groundwork for “an entire genre of fiction for over one hundred and fifty years” (1). He also added that this relatively novel genre had been termed differently by numerous writers and scholars: “From Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘Tales of Ratiocination’, to the mystery and detective fiction of the turn of the twentieth century and the whodunnit of the period between the First World War and the Second World War”(1). Thus, the connection between crime and fiction seems to have lasted for a long period of time and still continues to present day.

The history of crime stories, like any other literary genre, has experienced various shifts and developments; for example, the 1900s first witnessed the prosperity of this genre in “detective stories and crime novels” produced by authors such as Agatha Christie, G. K. Chesterton and Dorothy Sayers (Stolarek 1). Soon after, stories of such writers began to demonstrate certain shortcomings; especially in connection to the restrictive scenery “a country house which represented an isolated setting” (qtd in Stolarek 2). Abrams also added that some were also characterised by an “‘artificial’ structural pattern”, mainly seen through

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

the implementation of unprofessional investigators and the absence of “any forensic and scientific police investigation” which, for Abrams, seemed utterly “unreal” aspects of a crime story (ibid). On the other hand, Tzvetan Todorov attempted to explain what makes a crime story, illuminating that it is of two parts: the initial part is a story of a crime committed, while “the second is the story of its investigation” (Scaggs 2). However, the focus on crime instead of on its investigation specifically categorized this genre and this is why it was primarily known as “crime fiction” (ibid 1).

Due to “the public’s gradual tiredness and diminishing interest” in the earliest crime stories, a new genre of crime fiction emerged known as the “hard-boiled fiction” (Stolarek 2). The latter, first originated in the US in the early 1900s, as a reaction to the “highly artificial classical detective stories of the interwar period, mostly in Britain” (ibid). Hence, unlike what preceded it, this new form of literature shed light and focused on the American popular culture of the post-World War I era by portraying its customs and ideals, among which “interest in police and detectives’ work, their background, the quest for sensational subject-matter and the engrossment in the psychological aspect of crimes” were at the centre (Stolarek 2). Literary critics and scholars, in essence, went back even further in history and looked at the earliest works of literature, even those which did not belong to detective or crime stories but that also included a criminal component to focus on the individual criminal instead of the crime story.

Thomas De Quincey, a 19th-century’s literati, was one of those scholars who saw criminal literary characters as an inner-lens into a murderer’s mind. He looked at Shakespeare’s works as a reflection of the troubled murderer’s psyche through “*Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*” (Alshiban 58). De Quincey’s studies on the fictitious murderer which uncovered “outstanding insight into the criminal’s mind” led him to conclude that murder and crime are, in fact, genius works of art (Alshiban 58). When studying *Macbeth* in his essay “On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*”, De Quincey mentioned a reference to ‘the real-life case of multiple murderer John Williams’ (qtd in Alshiban 58). This real-life example of horrendous murders provided De Quincey with the foundational material to understand the literary characters and come closer to understand the human psyche of a criminal (ibid). Similarly, J. A. Cuddon was fully convinced that any and every story of crime holds in between its folds the traces of criminal psychology whereby the criminal could be spotted by the earliest instances of the story, and the rest of the story would be dedicated to the nature of this criminal’s “psychological state” (205). George Orwell in *Decline of the English Murder*

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

and Other Essays (1946) referred to a set of works which in his view, reflected a realistic type of murderer, that is; ordinary human beings who are triggered by perverse spurs to kill, similar to Jack the Ripper, Dr Crippen, and The Brides in the Bath Murderer³ (88). Ergo, Orwell appreciated those fictional works which reflected the psychological turmoil leading to the birth of the murderer or even the serial killer.

Serial killer fiction was the next level of crime novels in late 19th and early 20th century USA which reflected the public's fascination with serial murders (Schmid np). In Philip L Simpson's analysis, this new form of literature was the outcome of a concoction between crime fiction and the gothic novel (26). As a matter of fact, he recognised four stages for forming this so-called genre, starting with the Gothic tradition, since it already tackled the horrific atmosphere resulting from the killer-victim interaction. When this genre crossed roads with detective novels, shedding light on the killer and the detective dichotomy, the result was a more microscopic probing into the mind of the criminal, i.e., the "psycho profile". It granted the murderer centre stage as the protagonist allowing the readers to read into his psyche. At last, the final stage is the influence of the "'mytho-apocalyptic' which recontextualizes or decontextualizes the serial killer from the historical moment in an attempt to give the killer a kind of apotheosis as a demonic messenger" that is isolating the act of killing from any background knowledge of the killer and so setting him as a devilish being (qtd in Cook 16). Thus, serial killer fiction was born out of an amalgam of sub-genres of crime fiction and the Gothic literature.

Various intellectuals, including Philip Jenkins, looked at crime fiction as more than a read for pleasure and they believed that fiction, as the echo of human life, quite possibly served as a reflection for the factual murderer (Phegley 100). Perhaps, it even created a new cultural figure to help the public in understanding the nature of serial killers in real life since Jenkins believed that "serial killers often copy the actions and personas of their fictional counterparts and vice versa" (qtd in Phegley 103). Recently scrutinized, Philip Jenkins revealed that serial killer characters in literature served as an inspiration and a prototype for real criminals to imitate; like Jack the Ripper and Jekyll and Hyde, two of the many fictitious

³ Jack the Ripper was a serial killer who was active in the Whitechapel district of London in 1888. He is known for his brutal murders of at least five women, many of whom were prostitutes (Pegg 1-2). Dr. Hawley Harvey Crippen was an American doctor who was convicted and hanged in 1910 for the murder of his wife, Cora Crippen (Hill 94). George Joseph Smith, also known as the Brides in the Bath Murderer, was an English serial killer who was executed in 1915 for the murder of three women—all of whom he married drowning them in their bathtubs in order to collect their life insurance money (Marshall 1-10).

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

serial killers who dominated popular culture through media and literature (Phegley 100). In turn, literature started to occupy a more scientific role; scholars concerned with criminology began using fiction “as its object of inquiry” on two levels (Frauley 32). On the one hand, some scholars such as Michael Fiddler (2007) and Pat J. Gehrke (2001) amongst others aimed at investigating the audiences’ response and attitudes towards crime in literature and cinema. On the other hand, literary works were investigated on the grounds that they “exemplify sociological and criminological concepts—that is, the major ideas criminologists and sociologists work with to describe and explain what they are studying” (qtd in Frauley 32). That is to say, since literature served as a mirror of society it also mirrored the psychology of a criminal.

Criminality, murder, and the serial killer in fiction and in real life started to intersect, that is, though a work of imagination, fiction is not always separate from human reality. It is both made by a human being who lives in the real world, as it is the product of one’s everyday influences and the things one reads and witnesses; hence, it is but one of the cultural and social products which literature reflects on. Likewise, the effect of literature on the readers is plausible, as it portrays human-like characters, especially with their psychological depth. The allure of such characters started to take a certain role both in literature and cinema which shall be discussed in the next section.

1.6.2. The Serial Killer from Book to Screen

Despite the fact that the notion of a serial killer is not that recent, the term itself is believed to have first been used in the 1980s by “Federal agencies to report on the ‘wave’ of serial murder and subsequent hysteria sweeping across America” as reported by Egger in his detailed book on serial killers *The Killers Among Us* (89). It revealed that Harold Schechter, an expert in serial killers, spotted the existence of this term even earlier in time during the 1930s in a translated version of *The Monster of Düsseldorf* by Margaret Seaton (Cook 4). In *Natural Born Celebrities* (2005), David Schmid proposes that the serial killer phenomenon is as American as a cowboy or, as others stated, “As American as apple pie” (ibid 3). Alternatively, the serial killer is perceived by various researchers as one of the entrenched elements of American culture.

Schmid among a number of researchers advanced that this interconnectedness between the serial killer and the American culture goes back to certain literary works, specifically to the late 19th century, or even earlier (qtd in Cook 3). The serial killer in fiction is not

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

specifically restricted to American literature but, most examples of such works involve famed American writers of horror and crime stories such as:

C. M. Eddy's "The Loved Dead," H. P. Lovecraft's *The Call of Cthulhu*...Stephen Crane's "The Blue Hotel," James T. Farrell's "The Fastest Runner on Sixty-First Street," Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," Edgar Allan Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart," Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon*, Joyce Carol Oates' *Zombie*, Robert Bloch's *Psycho*, and many, many more. (Alshiban 59)

These stories are featured by "psychiatric, sociological, and psychological aspect of homicide", in a sense; they are concerned with the psychological drives which cause a human being to commit murder or even serial killings (ibid). Occasionally, those drives are enhanced by fiction and, as stated earlier, killers often look at fictional characters for inspiration (Jenkins 89). Greg Jenkins discovered that many serial killers got stimulated by literary "works such as *Red Dragon* and *The Silence of the Lambs* both by Thomas Harris", which were also adapted into movies by the same title in 1981 and 1988 respectively (89). The lead character, Hannibal Lector, was not only an inspiration for serial killers but even researchers who seemed to forget the fact that he is a work of fiction and used him as a reference for scholarly journals concerned with serial murder (ibid). In spite of most scholars, such as Philip Simpson, acknowledging the rise of female serial killer characters (210), most of the above-mentioned works remain with a male serial killer at their centre.

In more recent studies Tania Modleski revealed that what occupies contemporary literature and even cinema is, in fact, women who kill, giving the example of Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the Serial Killer* (2018), a novel which hit the literary world by storm since it did not focus on the female serial killer as a unique or horrendous phenomenon but rather on sibling relationship. The story dovetails around Korede and her sister Ayoola who serially murders her boyfriends in self-defence while Korede, the protagonist, helps her in covering her crimes. Likewise, Modleski speaks of *Killing Eve*, a television show which harnessed "a large female audience, and its popularity has perhaps helped spawn CBS All Access's *Why Women Kill*" (Modleski np). There is a decent number of novels speaking of female serial killers; unfortunately, they do not figure in many scholarly books and investigations on female serial killers in fiction. They are mostly mentioned in online articles similar to Huneycutt's "Murder Becomes Her" wherein the author lists works from *Medea* by Euripides to *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) by Thomas Hardy and even the most recent Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012), all of which are exceptional works that depict the nature of female murderers. Equally, five other notable works are cited in a different article, entirely

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

devoted to the female serial killer: those works include *Misery* (1987) by Stephen King, *My Sister, The Serial Killer* (2018) by Oyinkan Braithwaite, *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (1962) by Shirley Jackson, *An Elderly Lady Is Up to No Good* (2018) by Helene Tursten, and *Heartsick* (2021) by Chelsea Cain (Uwadiae np). These literary, psychological marvels look at women of different ages, backgrounds, and countries and how each one ends up a serial murderer for her own specific reasons.

Cinema also demonstrated a fascination with serial killers. Though it began by focusing on the male serial killer, a recent appeal to the violent, manipulative, and murderous woman started to surface by the mid-20th century. This fascination began during the 1940s with the popularity of the “femme fatale” figure when film audiences at the time were bewitched by the scheming, deceitful, and lethal nature of femme fatales such as: Barbra Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity* (1944), Joan Crawford in *Mildred Pierce* (1945), and Ava Gardner in *The Killers* (1946) (Ross np). Still, as C. Holmlund noted, the violent acts committed by these characters, specifically murders, “were often shown off screen or were quick and not excessively violent” (qtd in McCormack 11). In 1992, *Basic Instinct* by Paul Verhoeven was released to the cinema, the story of a seductive fatal woman who lures her victims to her bed and then kills them in awful ways (Simpson 211). For instance, Catherine Tramell, the serial killer, would stab the rock star Johnny Boz to death with an ice pick during sex. Other cinematographic works made at approximately the same time and were quite similar to *Basic Instinct* include Jason Matherne’s *Goregasm* (1990) and James Keach’s *Praying Mantis* (1993) (ibid). During the 21st century, the female serial killer’s allure did not lose any of its charms. According to IMDb, one of the best-acknowledged sites for rating and reviewing movies and television shows, the most famous serial killer movies with a female lead, include Patty Jenkins’ *Monster* (2003) based on a true story, Rob Zombie’ *The Devil’s Rejects* (2005), Albert and Allen Hughes’ *From Hell* (2001), Tate Taylor *Ma* (2019), and Tommy Wirkola’s 2020 production *Hansel and Gretel*, to mention but a few.

Since the role of cinema is evident in terms of depicting the character of a serial killer, it should not be ignored. The theoretical and historical background to films, television series, and most evidently adaptations of literary works including the selected ones for this research work, will be explored further in this chapter. They, too, play a role in this investigation, especially since the two works, *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*, chosen for this research, were originally novels adapted into different cinematographic works.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

1.7. Cinema and Adaptation

Cinematographic productions began by the closing of the 19th century which Shoma Chatterji defined “as a rich visual medium with a virtual flood of images...” (205), while Richard Abel saw it as “a *cobinatoire*” of both the acoustic and the graphic elements (xxx; original emphasis). Other critics, including Christian Metz, chose to perceive it as a story-telling artistic form, in which “it ‘says’ things that could be conveyed also in the language of words, yet it says them differently” (qtd in Hutcheon and O’Flynn 3), that is, cinema, like literature, takes the viewer, instead of the reader, into a picturesque world of its own in a pictorial audial manner.

Since cinema is based on the visual aspect; it focused on enhancing it by the technological developments invented with the aid of the psychological domain such as “devices that were used to measure and simulate mental functions and emotions” (Holl 23) to have a stronger influence on the viewer’s perception. This fact led intellectuals like Ute Holl to perceive cinema as “an illustrative system that expresses and alters perception and the corresponding nerve-psychological relations in bodies as it transmits its impulses” (23). That is to say, the visual medium, with the help of technological developments, can influence the viewer’s perception and emotional impulses, for example: “Camera and editing techniques accelerate our bodies’ own frequencies of shivering, vibrating, and flickering” (ibid 24). Plainly, cinematographic devices were concocted on the basis of their effectiveness in terms of determining and simulating “mental functions and emotions” of the viewers (Holl 23).

Beyond the mechanisms responsible for making a film, to better understand what a cinematographic production is, Jill Nelmes insists that it should be a “narrative”. She believes that what distinguishes cinema from literature is that audio-visual media offers both a verbal and a graphic product similar to films. The linguistic part is seen as communicative acts “through the presence of dialogue or voiceover on the soundtrack, as well as the inclusion of printed text within the image (such as intertitles, shots of newspapers, books, letters)” (Nelmes 80). This chemistry between the visual and the heard, or even between words and pictures, ensured the productivity of the cinematographic world. For instance, the interconnection of sound and dialogue endowed cinema with a more developed narrative mode similar to that of theatrical works (ibid).

Both texts and spoken words, since the release of the first “non-silent” movie or the first “talkie” known as *The Jazz Singer* in 1927 (Nuetzel 112), also contributed to the narrative

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

aspect of cinematography by providing more narrative explanation in a short period of time. This proved to be very useful for films as they are restricted to specific lengths, seeing the examples of “the ‘literary’ voice-over narrator of *The Age of Innocence* (Martin Scorsese, 1993)” and “the opening ‘crawls’ of George Lucas’s *Star Wars* films” (Nelmes 80). This does not postulate that silent movies had no narration; on the contrary, they conveyed some of the most famous pieces of entertainment. However, the evolution of the film industry allowed it more influence on the viewers because “with the advent of the ‘talkies,’ not only did the voice become suddenly important, but a whole new set of directorial techniques had to be developed” (Nuetzel 112), and with these developments narration in films reached a higher level. More so, Nelmes’ study of the narrative explains that it must transmit related events that follow one another. In most cases, this connection should be of a “cause and effect” association, where no part of the story happens haphazardly as they gather to form a whole story. She also shed light on the narrative part of the story, saying that “Cinematic narration is arguably the most sophisticated of all narrative media, because it is ‘multi-track’, both visual and audio” (Nelmes 80), recognizing it as a more privileged form which can reach more of the readers’ senses. On this narrative matter, the effect of prose on cinema is tangible. When speaking of the classical Hollywood industry itself, Nelmes and many other literati exposed the fact that it owed much “to the traditions developed in the nineteenth century classic novel, which, like Hollywood cinema, was a popular, commercial narrative form” (ibid). Hereafter, a film, at least since the first “talkie”, could be identified as a narrative story of logically connected events; a viewer could both see and hear (Nuetzel 112).

The extrapolated connection between cinema and novels yielded a paradoxical relation: novels were perceived as “words” while films as “images” with both being complex and “untranslatable” and of being the most unique of forms. Furthermore, the connection between the film, from its “integral formal, generic, stylistic, narrative, cultural, and historical connections to the novel” were promulgated by critics as though “the two sides of the paradox tend to coexist within single critical works: they do not, by and large, represent differing views of opposed critics” (Stam and Raengo 1), but rather they complement one another. Better described by Brian McFarlane, as cited in Rahmoun’s research thesis entitled “Literature Beyond the Written Word: Towards Screen Adaptation-Based Literature Teaching for EFL University Students”, cinema and literature “might be seen, if not as siblings, at least as first cousins, sometimes bickering but at heart having a good deal of common heritage” (40), hence, though sometimes at odds, these two cannot deny the bond they share. It was, and

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

still is, a well-known fact that from the onset of filmmaking, by the final years of the 1800s, novels and drama provided valuable material for filmmaking through adaptations (Shepherd 5). Focusing on such an idea yields the fact that films and cinema, in their early years, depended on the novel through what scholars call adaptation.

Moreover, the usage of literature as the basis for filmmaking proves to be more than a recent trend, but rather as part of the very essence of motion pictures (Andrew 422). James M. Welsh argued that even with cinema's development and various shifts in terms of both technical and stylistic levels and after a century of production, it continues on "telling and retelling stories, and most of those stories are still being (or have been) appropriated from literary or dramatic sources, as much as 85 per-cent by some calculations and accounts" (qtd in Shepherd 5). This revealed the vast and pivotal role adaptation played for a hundred years, since the birth of the world of cinema and the progression of cinematography and might continue to dominate it for a far more extended period (qtd in Shepherd 5). Though many would think of adaptation as a form of conversion, George Bluestone explains this process as it happens, unravelling: "when the filmist undertakes the adaptation of a novel...he does not convert the novel at all. What he adapts is a kind of paraphrase of the novel – the novel viewed as raw material" (62), hence; modifications or changes in the adapted prose story are in fact inescapable.

Adaptation is often criticised, specifically, by focusing on its fidelity to the literary work. In Robert Stam's view, critics would seldom use words ranging from "‘infidelity,’ ‘betrayal,’ ‘deformation,’ ‘violation,’ ‘vulgarization,’ to ‘bastardization,’ and ‘desecration’" (qtd in Shepherd). While these forms of infidelity insinuate a different degree of transformation, these terms refer to the extent to which the novel was altered in the process of being adapted to the screen (qtd in Rahmoun 59). Be that as it may, the fact that the literary admirer would depreciate the cinematic version is attributed to certain explanations. Robert Stam revealed that it could be because "some adaptations are indeed better than others", "some adaptations do fail to ‘realize’ what we most appreciated in the source novels" and "some adaptations miss at least some of the salient features of their sources" (54). Despite the fact that these arguments are plausible and well-grounded on viewer appreciation or the lack of it thereof of adaptations, the concept of infidelity could not be recognised "as a methodological principal"; because complete faithfulness is hardly attainable—a novel and a film are not and cannot be identical vehicles (ibid). As such, for many, the novel will be perceived as the better option since it has a larger audience with a considerably longer period

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

of reader-appreciation (Shepherd 9). Still, there should be proper acknowledgment of the unique production of the adapted film.

George Bluestone explains why a film could never be indistinguishable from the original literature in a more tangible explanation. For him, rephrasing a novel happens because, often, there is no real attachment between the status of a book and that of the film being adapted. According to Bluestone, “the film adapter” often has not even read the novel and his/her only acquaintance with this prose literature is through “a paraphrase by his secretary or his screen writer” (62). An adaptation is not a translation of the original work but rather it is a new manner of reformulating and telling this story, so it is impossible to be identical to the literary work. The filmmaker then is not only a film adapter but is “a new author in his own right” (Bluestone 62). Or, as concluded by Linda Hutcheon adapters are also “creators” who are involved in “a process of appropriation, of taking possession of another’s story, and filtering it, in a sense through one’s own sensibility, interests, and talents” (18). Such a fact may indeed support the negativity towards adaptations, because though they seem independent and innovative, the core of their stories is of literature. Nonetheless, viewers must understand that adaptation is not “slavish copying” (Hutcheon 20) and so it is not as if directors committed plagiarism when remaking an adaptation they call their own.

In an attempt to further elucidate how adaptation works and how it alters the original work in the process of creating the visual version, Greg Jenkins summarizes the views of a number of film critics into a trio of changes. The three are considered unavoidable alterations for the making of an adaptation:

1. Condensation, effected by choosing the most valued plot elements while discarding the rest;
2. Incorporation of additional scenes to close any gaps caused by condensation or to fortify the drama; and
3. Modification of story components to bring the “moral tone” into conformance with the exacting standards of the industry’s Production Code. (Jenkins 11)

On that note, what filmmakers have to do is to ensure the well-ordered depiction of the events of a story by making sure to remove any novelistic aspects capable of disrupting this order in the filmic adaptation and keeping the length of the film reasonably proper (eg. within the run time of two hours). As Frances Marion explains, “Usually no more than third of a novel represents actions suitable for ‘picturization’” (qtd in Jenkins 10). Then, adapters again have to refill any deficiencies with visual explanations which spontaneously occur within the events of the plot. These explanations in books would occur in the form of “an overflow of

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

characters and episodes”, i.e., the author makes sure to incorporate the explanation by these means (Jenkins 11). Finally, since “Cinema is, after all, a distinct medium”, it is bound to the “conventions” of filmmaking which carry more than the written word and are more strictly bound in terms of time than a novel (ibid). Indeed, Stam elucidated this dissimilarity; clarifying that cinema possesses five times as many pathways for expression as the novel has, because it can present: “moving photographic image, phonetic sound, music, noises, and written materials”, while the novel has the sole utensil of “the written word” (qtd in Zee 6). Looking at cinema as a rather multi-layered media proves that it is not plagiarism but an elevation to the readers’ senses when they behold the written words on screen alongside the directors’ own creation and interpretation of the literary piece (Hutcheon 18).

The matter of altering a novel while adapting preoccupied various intellectuals among which Geoffrey Wagner came to conclude three manners wherein a filmic adaptation modifies a novel into its own scheme, that is:

transposition – a novel ‘directly given on screen’ (Wagner 1975: 222); commentary – ‘where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect’ (Wagner 1975: 223); and analogy (e.g. a film that shifts the action of the fiction forward in time or otherwise changes its essential context; analogy goes further than shifting a scene or playing with the end, and must transplant the whole scenario so that little of the original is identifiable). (qtd in Cartmell and Whelehan 8)

In a personal effort to elucidate these three types of adaptation, the following explanations are provided: firstly, transposition seems to fit one of the source choices for this research analysis. That is, *Sharp Objects* exemplifies how a story can be adapted and depicted as it is to the screen with very minor changes. Commentary, in contrast, is seen in the other choice of this research analysis, *The Stepford Wives* wherein the 2004 adaptation displays changes in the events as well as in the winding up of the story, which seem to be alterations purposely made. Lastly, analogy, though it does not apply to cultural products chosen for this study, it is believed to be similar to Sharon Maguire’s *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (2001), an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, or Amy Heckerling’s *Clueless* (1995) an adaptation of *Emma*, with only minor elements left to indicate the association with the original work (Cartmell and Whelehan 24).

Like Wagner, many other academics attempted to extrapolate forms of adaptation, similar to David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, who divided adaptation into:

Referential that is a reference ‘to things or places already invested with significance.’
Explicit wherein references are ‘defined by context.’
Implicit based on meanings which come up from the filmmaker’s interpretation.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

Symptomatic referring to ‘a manifestation of a wider set of values characteristic of a whole society’. (qtd in Rahmoun 81)

Thus, the adaptation happens as an outcome of the filmmakers’ intention for the story based on their personal aims and deductions (Rahmoun 82). John Desmond and Peter Hawkes also inferred three manners to adapt a novel “Close”, “Intermediate”, and “Loose adaptation” (qtd in Rahmoun 82). Such manners could be compared to those by Wagner, for instance: close adaptations seem to be located in between transposition and commentary since it tends to alter only minor elements and keeps all the major ones with very slight adjustments. Intermediate adaptation is somewhat closer to the commentary because it is more agile in terms of transformations, but it could not reach analogy. It will be more of a loose adaptation if it reaches analogy, as it only “uses the literary text as a point of departure” (ibid). Though along with the previously stated techniques, Linda Costanzo Cahir and others also attempted to clarify how adaptation functions, they still seem to turn around in the same cycle as Wagner’s.

On addressing adaptation, it is apparent that it does not only cover novels being turned into films, but recently various works of literature have also been turned into various other visual mediums, including television series, such as *Sharp Objects*. Films and television series are different and yet similar cinematographic vehicles as will be explained in the upcoming section.

1.7.1. Adaptation between Film and Television

Films and television series belong to the same family of cultural entertainment, but they are distinctive mediums of cultural production. While film is approximately a 90 minutes-long motion picture, a television series is a sporadic show of various episodes and often seasons that could last for years (Wells-Lassagne 50). It was during the mid of the 20th century that the world of entertainment witnessed the birth of an artistic competition between the two mediums (Halliwell 147). Although films have enjoyed half a century’s success when television, as a vehicle of entertainment, began to have an impression on society, they both have an important role to play in this thesis since they both depict and display female representation in visual media.

Furthermore, television is said to have competed with cinema in terms of its convenience and domesticity, while cinema provided more of extraordinary worlds (Farmer 281). With respect to the themes, both “television and film borrowed ideas and products from each other, albeit with variable end results” (Farmer 283). As previously noted, films also rely

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

heavily on another medium for subject matter, namely literature, and the novel in particular, and television has demonstrated that it also has made use of literature to enrich its productions. Nevertheless, the earliest works of adaptation tended to be into films rather than television shows (Corrigan 189).

“Faust - apparition de Méphistophélès (1897)”, by the Lumière Brothers was the first recorded film adaptation, based on Goethe’s oeuvre entitled “Faust”. However, counting on profits and audience acceptance, the most renowned adaptation of that time was *Greed* (1924), directed by Von Stroheim (Corrigan 189). It is said that, through such works, cinematographers started to gain inspiration from a combination of stories and even used some as basis for their own filmic scenarios ranging “from the Bible, fairy tales such as *Cinderella* and others written by the Grimm Brothers, and detective stories, particularly from Sherlock Holmes adventures” (Vergara 155). More recently, the world of cinema took a different approach when it came to adaptation by considering the filmmaker’s profession and his/her relationship with novel-readers especially classic novels whose readers expect identical adaptations. Ergo, film makers began evading classic literature—works characterized at times by a more sophisticated language and writing mode which can render the adaptive process complex and that is what academics would call “the notion of unfilmability” (ibid 156). Eventually, the 1960s and 1970s marked the period in which the fear of infidelity to appraised literature allowed cinema to become more creative by avoiding adaptations and creating original scenarios (ibid).

In the case of television series, the earliest adaptation occurred in 1930 through a BBC adaptation “of Pirandello’s play, *The Man With a Flower in His Mouth*”, followed by “the first live television drama to be broadcast, *Journey’s End*, a literary adaptation of R.C. Sherrif’s play” (Eberts 12). By the advent of the 1950s, television adaptation flourished and, unlike cinema, took advantage of several classic dramas and novels for its themes; such works were known as “anthology dramas” (ibid). The classic originals included works by William Shakespeare, Emily Bronte, and George Bernard Shaw, as well as Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868), that is, a selection of celebrated authors of their times. Twenty years later, television miniseries became the new format for television producers tackling both historical works and blockbusting “pulp fiction novels, such as *Rich Man, Poor Man* (1976)” (Eberts 12). With the arrival of the 21st century, television series became more oriented towards the contemporary productions, works which the young audiences are more familiar with like

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

Boardwalk Empire, (2010-2014), *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019), and *True Blood* (2008-2014) (ibid).

As for films, Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan stated that “Cineastes” lead by the French critique André Bazin, during the 20th century, were not entirely enthusiastic about adaptations because they believed in their dependency on literary works, while they held that films should be original artefacts (Cartmell and Whelehan 127). These cineastes feared dishonouring and deflating the literary value since films could never be fully faithful to the written form, hence; seeing that “bringing culture ‘to the masses’ could therefore potentially destroy ‘culture’ altogether” (Cartmell and Whelehan 127). Having said that, television was perceived differently, albeit quite similar to film adaptation, series adaptations were professed by many as a more faithful form given that it “has shown a peculiar respect, even reverence, for the identity of the literary author. The evidence for this is both various and compelling. It spans different modes of television narrative, from “the one-off play, to the mini-series, to the literary adaptation, to the television novel” (Cook 131). One of the best examples is the BBC’s mini-series adaptation of Jane Austin’s *Pride and Prejudice* (Zee 10), where the minutia of details of the novel were studied and recreated through the adapted version.

It has been claimed, this faithfulness, which certainly cannot be absolute, does not refer to the entirety of the world of television; it refers to a selection of British adaptations (Cook 132). Jon Cook explains that adaptations in Britain were closer to a dealing with literature in order to preserve the “cultural quality” (132). Cook also goes on to explain that “Television borrows prestige from an existing literary tradition...in return, donates its power to attract considerable audiences who might never encounter the original work in its printed form”, vicelike; the visual art is only an advertisement, an appetizer for the literary one (Cook 132). Thereafter, the issue of fidelity remains since, like filmmaking, series’ makers also have to alter their adaptations to convey their own interpretations and messages. Such issues concerning fidelity for both films and television series involves considerations of “what scenes were cut, what was taken too far, what was underplayed, or the poor casting choices often elicit the statement, The book was better” (Eberts 8). That is because television series, like films, do not always stick to the novel version even if it did at first, such as *Game of Thrones* which; with new seasons, started to deviate from the original work and gain an identity of its own both in form and plot (Wells-Lassagne 50). The *Game of Thrones* novels were not entirely finished during the filming of the series, so the film makers had to improvise to finish the television series. In other cases, it might be due to the fact that filmmakers try to

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

avoid their works being spoiled by the books, so they decide to bring an end to their adapted versions (David Fincher qtd in Galloway np).

When comparing filmic and television productions, films seem to be closer to novels in terms of “resolution”, or simply the close ended-ness of a story; while: “Every television series begins, but not all of them end—or at least not all series conclude” (Wells-Lassagne 48). Despite the similarity between film and novel, the length of a film does not always suit that of the novel since it is, in most cases, condensed into two hours only, urging most critics to use it as leverage against the film adaptation (Adkins np). King Adkins, in his article “Is Literary Adaptation Better on Film or on Television?”, reported how Erich Von Stroheim attempted to create what scholars would consider a faithful adaptation by recreating every detail of the literary work *McTeague* (1899), a novel by Frank Norris, through the adaptation. This attempt led him to film approximately a ten-hour movie that he eventually shortened into two hours as the industry requires. Inevitably, this work was a failure since it attempted to compact 10 hours of events into two hours—possibly indicating that a television series would have been more suitable since it would have given more space to account for the details of the novel as it has access to extended programming and serial delivery to take more time in developing its storylines.

Indeed, television series have the luxury of portraying novels over an extended timeline—Sarah Cardwell explains how television series have what films do not, and that is time:

This is a form with which commercial cinema cannot compete. [...] television adaptations are able not only to retain more of the source’s narrative, but also open out the details of the novel—its intricacies of plot, mood, and atmosphere, to build characters and our relationships with them more incrementally and carefully, and to sustain a sense of atmosphere. (qtd in Wells-Lassagne 49)

In brief, a series would logically seem more suitable for adapting novels since they both share the loose “conception of time” (ibid 50). A two-hour film can never offer what episodes or seasons could in terms of character and plot development, or even concerning the attachment the audiences develop towards the entirety of the work. Bertha Chin explains that “narrative television has a special ‘longevity’ that film typically lacks; ‘the character and plot development in a TV show, which can continue for years, make it ‘easier for fans to become emotionally attached to the show’s characters and their relationships’” (qtd in Kukkonen and Klimek 88). That is, the viewer gets to grow with and relate to characters in the span of years while with films the viewers’ connection with characters is brief.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

In summation, though distinctive cultural products, television series and films, in terms of adaptation, both engage in intertextuality to convey their own artistic perspectives of literary sources. In other words, when a series maker or a filmmaker adapts a novel, they will unconsciously add their own influences and their own aim for the adaptation whilst also reflecting contemporary socio-political and cultural contexts.

1.7.2. Adaptation and Intertextuality

As previously discussed, intertextuality refers to the dialogic relationship between original texts of different authors and their influence on a new text by a new author, which fuse to fulfil the artistic aim of the new creator. Adaptation, however, alludes to the process of recreating a literary text in the form of a tapestry of audio-visual images through films or television series (Awung 7). Christian Metz postulates that a film “is a textual system that is complete within itself and the author, if at all present, is only a part of the system” (qtd in Awung 7-8). Thence, when looking at both intertextuality and adaptation one notices that texts are an integral part of both processes.

As elucidated earlier in this chapter, the basis of intertextuality was through Bakhtin’s studies on dialogic relations. Robert Stam for instance decided to once again return to those roots of intertextuality and Bakhtin’s notion of “hybrid construction”, which he used to define the connection the author makes between his own original words and those by others which he borrows (qtd in Zee 8). This dialogic relation is labelled as intertextuality, wherein the intertextual nature of a visual medium in adaptation is of two kinds. In Snyder’s view, an adaptation would include either conscious intertextualities (texts or influences chosen on purpose by the adapter) or the unconscious ones (which are elements that find their way into the adapters’ work without them even noticing) (206). In this research analysis, intertextuality plays a pivotal role in understanding the influences which preordained the changes made by the adaptations and how they serve the overall analysis of the dichotomy of the feminine and the feminist character in relation to social constructs and patriarchy.

From dialogism to intertextuality, Stam was able to reach “hypertextuality”—which has been claimed as a higher level of intertextuality, whereby the newly created text modifies or alters the ending of the original one. Based on Gerard Genette’s studies, Stam clarified that the original one is known as the “hypotext” and the new one is the “hypertext”. When applying these two concepts on adaptation, Stam referred to the adapted version as the “hypertext” (qtd in Zee 8). Like a new text, an adaptation inspires from the original work and

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

alters it according to the filmic genre's needs and the creator's aims. In correlation, Wolfgang G. Muller deciphered another aspect of intertextuality which he referred to as "interfigural". The latter is aimed at explaining "the interrelations that exist between characters of different texts" (Muller 101), wherein interfigural denotes the borrowing of a character by name or features from one literary work to another (ibid 104). Duly, interfigural can also be used to denote the transportation of literary characters from texts to the screen through adaptations. However, what is believed to be more indispensable for this research is hypertextuality via interfigural that is the satirical alterations made to the traits of characters upon being adapted into visual media help in understanding the new message which the visual work wishes to transmit through characters. What is vital for this research study is to establish a proper ground for an intertextual comparison between the original works and their adapted forms. The focus of this comparative study shall also account for the updated socio-political and cultural aspects which have changed between the time of the production of the literary work and the time of adaptation. This idea is mainly manifested in the adaptation of *The Stepford Wives* as it allowed for updating the message of the film to reflect current issues in society of the time period within which it was produced.

Julie Sanders concludes that, to better analyse an adaptation is to look for similarities and differences between the original work and the adaptation, which means there are no specific elements that one should tackle in order to conduct a comparative study between the two works (Snyder 271). However, Zack Snyder's four analytical approaches to tackle an intertextual comparison provide a valid and plausible manner of analysis especially helpful in analysing the examples of adaptation in this thesis. Snyder begins by investigating the background information for the making of the film, such as the producer and the script, and deciphering if it includes the tactics behind the conception of the adaptation. Snyder called this approach an "*Adaptation process analysis*", but he assured that this process could not be accessible to everyone (original emphasis). Then, he put forward the "*Adaptability analysis*"—a method that entails investigating the adaptability levels of the source text; the researcher could ask questions such as: "What problems do you think might be encountered in adapting the story to film? In what ways is the story highly adaptable to film? What elements of the story seem a better fit for film than other elements?" (Snyder 272; original emphasis). In other words, it is to be discussed if the literary text is suitable for a visual medium as a film adaptation or not.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

Since the issue of fidelity is typically at the centre of adaptations, it would be illogical to leave out the latter in the investigative process of an adaptation. Hence, the third approach Snyder postulates is the “*Fidelity/infidelity analysis*” —a process that focuses on depicting “how closely, loosely, or experimentally the film was adapted from the story”, but Snyder believed it needed more than this to decipher an adaptation (original emphasis). He thought it essential to choose “why” as the vital question an analyser should ask. He urges an investigator to discover the reasons behind the alteration an adapter makes, from omitting scenes to inculcating new ones from outside the source text, and even the impulses behind choosing certain situations to be adapted, while others not. This occurrence is highly relevant to *The Stepford Wives* film since it provides an “updated” version from the 1970s publication to fit it into current societal issues and demonstrates how the arguments made back in 1970s remain issues in the 21st century. Snyder claims that answering such questions might enable the analyser to reach the wisdom behind the message the maker wants to transmit, especially if the adaptation takes a different path from that of the original source (272). Lastly, the “*Specificity analysis*” involves exploring both the literary and the visual artefact by stressing how each of the two tools used specific methods to attain a certain goal (ibid; original emphasis). Moreover, this form of analysis investigates the literary or filmic techniques used to fulfil a particular effect on the audience to discover if they serve in similar ways or different ones.

In Snyder’s view these four methods can be interchangeably used in analysis—the investigators have the freedom to choose the one more accessible to them based on the knowledge they have of the filmmakers or the literature that they can access concerning the adaptation. Some academics choose a different manner to study the intertextual relationship between the two works. For instance, Nathan C.H. Zee, in his analysis of *Pride and Prejudice*’s adaptations, as there are many, selected “the studio’s style, the casting and the choice of stars for each film, and their mainstreaming ideologies and narrative points of view, especially considering the way the film’s narrative can impact how we read both the novel and the film”, as a basis for his comparative analysis (19). But as noted, these elements are more suitable for works with multiple adaptations. In analysing *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *The Great Gatsby*; Zee switched to deal with the first-person point of view narrative between book and screen, and how this point of view transforms in the visual version (ibid) because through the lens of the camera, viewers get to see the events from different angles unlike the novel.

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

To put it briefly, adaptation is an intertextual mechanism; it entails taking an original text and remaking it into an audio-visual medium. This tool not only encompasses the influences of the source text but also of others, just like a text is an amalgam of the influences of many other texts. To analyse this intertextual process, the analyst is free to choose elements that display either similarities or differences because adaptation remains the progeny of the literary work.

1.7.3. Feminist Film Theory

Feminist film theory emerged during the 1970s and 1980s to fight the patriarchally informed gender bias in the representation of women in the Hollywood industry (Sari and Cetin 2). The patriarchal eye is such a disquieting phenomenon that it troubled women since the upsurge of cinema. Judith Mayne in her review of Marie Cardinal's *The Words to Say It* (1975) best explains it with a story:

a small child, walking in the woods with her father and a nursemaid, she has the urge to urinate, and the nurse takes her behind a tree. Suddenly the girl hears a loud whirring noise. She turns to see her father standing behind her: 'He is holding a funny black thing in front of one of his eyes, a sort of metal animal which has an eye at the end of a tube. That's what's making the noise! I don't want him to see me.' (qtd in Mayne 81)

The story is not only a *Lolita* allegory but also a symbolism for the patriarchal film industry personified in the father which looked at women through the objectifying male gaze of the camera. The patriarchal ideology used cinematography as a sexualizing tool to violate the female body and her sexuality—Laura Mulvey further argues: "Feminist theory of popular culture has concentrated on the processes that produce the image of woman as 'signifier of sexuality' and has striven to create a sexual politics around representation that displaces and alters previous discourses" (75). Mulvey emphasises the idea that the feminist theory rose in order to fight the biased, sexualized image patriarchy painted of women in various cultural media.

The critical discipline of cinema analysis rose during the second half of the 20th century and mainly followed a patriarchal tradition led by literary men "who offered film appreciation, analysis, and history as variants of their literature courses" (Andrew 882). Though feminist film theory commenced predominantly in the 1970s and 1980s it was not until the onset of the 21st century that it focused on "the search for a suppressed canon of women filmmakers—a feminist version of the auteur theory—and the study of the image of women in films, primarily the image of women in films by men" (Carroll 349). Film theory in

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

itself did not limit itself to filmic productions but all forms of visual media such as television, cinema and, in more encompassing terms, visual arts studies (Andrew 883-884). In a sense, it followed the footsteps of feminist literary criticism, but applied its methodologies to visual media rather than literature.

It was believed that all visual media belonged to the realm of cinema, especially that they were made in somehow the same manner. The best example is television series whereby it has been frequently clarified that “Film producers regard TV as part of the established distribution system of cinema” (Carroll 20). That is to say, feminist film theory is an approach which can be applied to television series just as efficiently as it can be applied to motion pictures. During the mid-1980s, the psychoanalytical feminist approach to film started to occupy an influential part in film criticism (Carroll 349). It did so by probing into female psychology as evidenced in cinema consisting predominantly on two distinct drives: according to Annette Kuhn they are the connotations behind the psychological perceptions of film in relation to the representation of gender and the urge to understand gender representation in cinema. Furthermore, it is the way in which viewers reflect on cinematographic works with respect to gender roles and the resulting dilemma around the representation of women in visual media becoming viral (1222-1223). Owing to the fact that visual media in general was dominated by a patriarchal ideology it was not unexpected for cinema as well to carry disagreeable representations of women.

Various scholars such as Margaret Andersen, Howard Taylor, and Kim Logio agree that media, in all its forms “communicate strong—some would even say cartoonish—gender stereotypes” (262). Moreover, though there have been some transformations in the roles women play in films, television series as well as other media: from being depicted as docile housewives to independent-working women, women continue to be portrayed in sexualized roles to satisfy the male viewer (*ibid*). The American Psychological Association proposes that there is “massive exposure to portrayals that sexualize women and girls and teach girls that women are sexual objects” (*qtd in Andersen et al* 262). Ergo, feminist film theory helped expose the gravity of the unjust stereotypical female depiction which was limited and controlled “by the dichotomy of the mother versus the whore” (Carroll 349). Women were either labelled as virtuous virgins or fallen women and the effect of this prejudiced representation in real life is evidenced in the images of females and femininity constructed via the male gaze (*ibid*). Likewise, the feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” declared that “In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

has been split between active/male and passive/female” (12), the male gaze, then, reflects its fetishes on a sexually objectified female figure configured by male desire.

In recent years the sexualized image of the female, though still visible, is also coupled with the representation of the violent woman. According to Martha McCaughey and Neal King, the strong female in media has more appeal and she may even receive acknowledgment and appreciation from the viewers. McCaughey and King give examples of works like “classic horror and film noir to 1970s blaxploitation and 1990s road movies” which portray women who commit violence (1-2). However, representing women to be strong is perceived as a non-normative female conduct, in comparison to the dominant normative image of female docility and femininity. Violence committed by women, even if serves a higher purpose like fighting crime, is considered “below standards of human decency” because it is committed by women (McCaughey and King 2). Violence was, and is still believed to be, a male dominant trait to the extent that it is rejected by those who do not wish women to imitate men and to create a new type of women. From a feminist perspective, violence can be considered both “patriarchal and oppressive”, so it is as if women, when violent, take on the (male) role of the oppressor (McCaughey and King 2). Janice Loreck states that from one side, violence in women is part of the “pleasures” the visual medium wishes to bestow upon the viewers (9). From the other side, aggressive and murderous tendencies in women indeed reflect an impactful portrayal of women yet, it also renders women a patriarchal tool whereby the murderous woman is used “to signify an artificially masculinized female predator” and as “a superficial marker of power transformation” (Minowa et al 210). The powerful woman serves as an indicator of a reversal of roles where women are not the oppressed but now the oppressor of her own gender and possibly even men.

Feminist film theory not only focuses on the sexualization of women, or their objectification as weak and docile and as sex symbols, but it also looks at replacing these stereotypes with an empowering image of women. This possibility of a new image is believed to be most likely used to change the female’s non-aggressive nature, or to serve a political agenda behind the reversal of biased gender roles. The violent woman, though seen as strong and independent, is still a product of the male gaze. According to Mulvey: “The magic of the Hollywood style” is “its skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure. Unchallenged film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order” (16). That is, the strong woman in skimpy, tight clothes fighting the bad guys is what men nowadays love to see because a fighting woman in revealing clothes and heels is far more sexually appealing

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

than a man, especially since men tend to be easily aroused visually (Minowa et al 213). Nonetheless, representing women as sexy action heroines is not the same as casting them as deranged murderers. Females who commit serial murder, such as Amma in *Sharp Objects* or Claire Willington in *The Stepford Wives*, who are depicted as being driven by mental instability may not be what the feminist lens would have desired. It is eerie and unbecoming, but it is the basis of this study which explores a terrain rejected and ignored by patriarchal modes which is the fact that female oppression is a trigger for murderous tendencies in women.

1.8. Conclusion

The first chapter of this research analysis comes to its end after examining the set of scientific and literary information needed to fulfil this academic study. It was devoted to the notional concepts associated with women, either as literary characters or real-life people between the 20th and the 21st centuries in the US and/or in Anglophone literature as the next paragraphs denote.

The first section examined the societal rulings between the patriarchal expectations of women and the rise of the strong independent female. It focused on the 20th and the 21st centuries as significant periods for the shifts in status for women in society as well as their representation in literature. These shifts were believed to be the result of the efforts made by feminist movements. Furthermore, the two centuries displayed shifts in various fields, including literature which paved the way for tackling the novel in association with the female status between past and present as represented both by female authors and characters.

As a result, the next part of this chapter investigates women's role in the creation of the novel and how the novel helped project the development both of women writers and female characters in the literary realm, including a reversal of dominion from a strong hero to an independent resourceful heroine. Such a shift in the world of literature was believed to be the result of women's excellence in novel writing as well as due to the rise of feminist literary criticism and its endeavours in retrieving previously overlooked women's literature and locating it in its rightful place within what has been a male dominated literary canon.

Given that the novel proved to be essential for both female representations in fiction as well as in depicting the rise of women writers, discourse in the novel is just as indispensable for deconstructing the novel into its basic roots. Dialogism, intertextuality and narration are clarified and rendered close to reach, both for the analyser and the reader to be later on

Chapter One: Historical, Societal and Analytical Literary Background

utilized to scrutinize the feminine-feminist dichotomy in *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*. In fact, such a dichotomy would not have been able to exist if not for the classification of novels by women from the feminine to the feminist—until they reached the female stage which portrayed strong and even violent female characters. As a result, discourse in the novel is also essential to explore the female characters' development from expected docility to perceived monstrosity.

Likewise, it was critical to engage with the discipline of psychology and its applicability as an interpretative and interdisciplinary methodology for literature (the novel) and its multi-medial adaptations. This multi-disciplinary approach to literary analysis provides further insights into female psychology and how the male-led world moulded female identity and impacted the mental health of women and their historical treatment by society and medical professionals. While at first psychology was used by the medical field to further restrict women by upholding patriarchal ideologies, it developed as a weapon to fight women's desire for independence and in return further oppress women. As a consequence, what finally emerged as the despicable female killer is also the product of a patriarchal psychological domain which can lead women to mental disorders and, in turn, to crime.

Crime, equally, led to the inculcation of criminology as both a science and a discipline associated with criminal conduct and the criminal identity of a woman. Moreover, this field of study could reveal how literature too portrayed the criminal world—specifically the psyche of a murderer and the serial killer. Yet, it also failed to account for female serial killers as it focused on men. Instead in this work, the analytical process focuses on female serial killers, how they came to be and their genesis as inherently linked to their mental instabilities due to restrictive gendered roles espoused by their patriarchal society.

For its part, literature in itself was also recreated through its adaptations into film and television and other multi-media productions. This research analysis shall discuss the rationale behind adaptation, in both its forms through film and television, modifying the literary work. Finally, intertextuality, is considered as a comparative tool between the literary and the visual medium, laying the ground for the upcoming chapters where it shall be used to analyse the literary influences of the authors and the filmmakers. In precision, the focus of an intertextual analysis is to be laid on the feminine-feminist ambivalence between the two selected novels *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects* with their respective adaptations.

**Chapter Two:
Storyline,
Characterisation
and Discourse in
the Novel**

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

- 2.1. Introduction
- 2.2. Novelistic Summation and Analysis
 - 2.2.1. Ira Levin' *The Stepford Wives* (1972)
 - 2.2.2. Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* (2006)
- 2.3. Feminisms and Femininities in *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*
 - 2.3.1. Stepford Women
 - 2.3.1.1. Feminine Appearance, Actions and Conversations
 - 2.3.2. Charmaine Wimperis
 - 2.3.2.1. Feminist Actions and Conversations
 - 2.3.2.2. The Feminine Transformation
 - 2.3.3. Bobbie Markowe
 - 2.3.3.1. Feminist Actions and Conversations
 - 2.3.3.2. The Feminine Transformation
 - 2.3.4. Joanna Eberhart
 - 2.3.4.1. Feminist Actions and Conversations
 - 2.3.4.2. The Feminine Transformation
 - 2.3.5. Wind Gap Women
 - 2.3.5.1. Feminine Appearance, Actions and Conversations
 - 2.3.5.2. Feminist Actions and Conversations
 - 2.3.6. Amma Crellin
 - 2.3.6.1. Feminine Appearance, Actions and Conversations
 - 2.3.6.2. Evil, Murderous Amma
 - 2.3.7. Adora Crellin
 - 2.3.7.1. Feminine Appearance, Actions and Conversations
 - 2.3.7.2. Evil, Murderous Adora
 - 2.3.8. Camille Preaker
 - 2.3.8.1. Feminist Actions and Conversations
 - 2.3.8.2. Camille the Self-harmer
- 2.4. Men and Masculinities
 - 2.4.1. Men in Stepford
 - 2.4.2. Men in Wind Gap
- 2.5. Deconstructing the Novels
 - 2.5.1. The Feminine-Feminist Dialogic Clash in the Selected Novels
 - 2.5.2. Between Feminine and Feminist Intertextuality
 - 2.5.2.1. In *The Stepford Wives*
 - 2.5.2.2. In *Sharp Objects*
 - 2.5.3. Narrative Modes in *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*
- 2.6. Conclusion

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

2.1. Introduction

To critically analyse a story it is essential to discuss its constructive details such as plot summary, characters, and discourse. The choice of characters and the course of their development are pivotal to explore the overall message and structure of the work: what the narrative insinuates, or alludes to, based on the development of its plot and its various elements. After considering these elements the analysis of *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects* requires an analysis through and within the novels' discourse.

An intertextual approach to examining novel writing is achieved through dialogism; the latter should be the foundation and the main element to deconstruct the selected works in this thesis. That being said, that which is intertextual can also be dialogic, rendering intertextuality an essential tool for examining novels since it is in novels that intertextuality is best manifested (Bakhtin 378). In the process of intertextually and dialogically analysing *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*, one can discover connections between the world of women, oppression, patriarchy, and the emergence of the strong, yet oppressive, woman in each of the two works and, in turn, thematic connections between the two novels.

Moreover, as narration holds the role of the compass by which the direction of the story is known it is important to explore the information its analysis would yield. The analysis of the narrative modes implemented in both novels also includes a discussion of the characters and their psycho-emotional development as depicted through the novels' narrative shifts. These narratological processes are to inform the research with illustrative examples to further explore the dichotomy of the feminine and feminist personas. This dichotomy entails exploring women-women oppression through narration by focussing the analysis on deciphering evidence to support or refute the existence of this new type of female subjugation.

2.2. Novelistic Summation and Analysis

Before delving into the discourse analysis of each novel, it is first necessary to have background knowledge of both works. The latter will be concerned with bringing forth information related to the authors and their stories with providing a brief overview of the plots of each novel. Equally, it is essential to provide information related to the contexts of each story and how they reflect societal issues specifically concerning the situation of women in society from a feminist or a patriarchal lens.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

2.2.1. Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* (1972)

The Stepford Wives is a 20th century novella, written in 1972 by the American writer Ira Levin. Levin was not simply a successful novelist and playwright but, many would consider him as one of the best suspense writers of his time. In Stephen King's words about Levin, quoted by Joe Finder, King stated that: "Every novel [Levin] has ever written has been a marvel of plotting. He is the Swiss watchmaker of the suspense novel; he makes what the rest of us do look like those five-dollar watches you can buy in the discount drug stores" (np). In addition, Chuck Palahniuk's introduction to this novella he quoted *Esquire*, in which the novel was described as "Masterful, ridiculously well crafted, and, like the ladies of Stepford themselves, flawless," thus, *The Stepford Wives* contributed to Levin's rising reputation as a master of suspense novels. The term 'Stepford' itself, was added to the American English dictionary to refer to an individual "resembling an automaton in being conformist and submissive, unemotional, mechanical, etc." (Collins Dictionary np) —that is, too submissive, cold, and willing to the extent of being robot-like.

The Stepford Wives tells the story of the Eberhart family, Walter, Joanna, and their two children who travelled from New York City into the tranquil suburban town of Stepford. This town, according to Levin, as stated in an article in the *New York Times Magazine*, was inspired by the town of Wilton in Connecticut where he once lived during the 1960s. The focal point of the story is Joanna Eberhart, a young wife, mother, and successful creative photographer. Upon her family's arrival in this charming town, Joanna notices the somewhat suspicious beauty of Stepford: its calmness and unnaturally perfect atmosphere portrayed through its calm environment and its flawless inhabitants. Day by day, Joanna also starts to take note of the unusually perfect women in Stepford. These women seem to project a physical perfection as idealized in television commercials: perfect bodies, perfect sundresses, perfect houses, and a ridiculously tranquil and compliant attitude to the whims of their husbands—as if there was "A nationwide contest... A million dollars and Paul Newman for the cleanest house by next Christmas" (Levin 23). That is, the women's perfection was best reflected through their flawless homes.

Meanwhile, the Stepford men are described to gather at the Men's Association, an exclusively masculine domain that women were not permitted to enter. Levin describes it as a "sexist" all prevailing institution while the women had "no women's organization, not even a league of Women Voters", they only had "the Garden Club, and a few old-biddy church groups" (Levin 23). Furthermore, the town, through the Men's Association, also embodies a

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

microcosm of a patriarchal society where the men hold all power while the women have no representation, no right to voice their opinions nor do they possess the right to vote or challenge this inequitable treatment.

Joanna's concerns start to grow especially after her request, to hold a women's gathering to discuss the community's needs and inequitable treatment of women, was met with complete dissention with trivial pretexts that they were too busy keeping their houses in perfect order for their husbands. In contrast, when the men come to the Eberhart's residence for a visit, Joanna enjoys participating in their conversations during which the reader is provided a brief glimpse into the backgrounds of many of the male characters. They are revealed to be geniuses in their fields: mostly scientists, technicians, artists, and even those who worked in Disneyland (the profession of the Men's Association's president, Dale Coba).

When Joanna encounters Bobbie Markowe, another Stepford wife, though different from the rest of the seemingly lifeless Stepford women, Joanna is optimistic of having found a new female friend with similar values. Joanna and Bobbie start investigating the town and their suspicions heighten after discovering that Stepford indeed had a "Women's Club" at one point (Kit Sundersen was the president) during which Betty Friedan⁴ gave a special talk. Dale Coba's wife and Frank Roddenberry's wife were also officers of the Women's Club before it was shutdown (Levin 43)—prior to Charmaine Wimperis, who Levin describes as "a live one" (38), was transformed from an imperfect opinionated woman into another emotionless, humourless Stepford wife. Consequently, Joanna and Bobbie begin conjuring theories about what is wrong with the Stepford women, and the motives behind them becoming inanimate dolls. Bobbie proposes that something must be in the water, a sedative of some kind; just like it happened before in El Paso, Texas⁵; except in Stepford, it has only affected women.

Four months after Bobbie's arrival to Stepford, she too has undergone a Stepford transformation after an allegedly romantic weekend with her husband. Bobbie returns from the weekend not her old energetic self but, as the new robotic Stepford woman, leaving

⁴ Betty Friedan was a key figure in second wave feminism in the US and her book *The Feminine Mystique* is credited for inspiring the movement (McGirr np). Being mentioned in this novel is a clear indication that *The Stepford Wives* reflects societal issues in relation to women's rights and specifically in relation with second wave feminism.

⁵ It should be noted that the incident involving the sedation of the water supply in El Paso, Texas is a fictitious event created by the author Ira Levin. The incident serves as a literary device to draw a parallel between the unnaturally submissive behavior of the Stepford wives in the novel and the possible effects of a mass sedation. In the story, the contaminated water caused the inhabitants of El Paso to display symptoms of drowsiness and lethargy, similar to the subdued behavior of the women in Stepford.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Joanna all alone to solve the mystery, and to run for her life. Before she could attempt an escape, her husband Walter convinces her to see a therapist, however, that did not dissuade her from fleeing Stepford. Despite the soothing therapist's remarks, Joanna had a very strong intuition that the men created life-like automatons to replace their wives. All the incidents that she patched together led to the same conclusion: they have drawn their portraits, recorded their voices, and the men in Stepford are all masterminds, manufacturing a robot was hardly an impossible mission for them, just as Joanna said, they were "the men who put us on the moon" (Levin 131). Joanna came back home for the sole reason of taking her children with her though Walter had already hidden them away at a friend's house, leaving Joanna with no choice but to abscond alone for now and return later to rescue them when she is safe.

On her way out of Stepford, Joanna was intercepted by a group of the townsmen who convinced her to go see Bobbie. Joanna, though hesitantly, trusted the men and went to see if her friend was not a robot as she believed—as proof of her humanity Bobbie cuts her finger and shows Joanna how it bleeds. At Bobbie's residence, a critical juncture presents itself, as Joanna struggles to reconcile her suspicions about her friend's transformation into an ostensibly more compliant and attractive form with her desire to believe that Bobbie was still fundamentally human. As Bobbie was about to cut her finger, Joanna comprehended: "the music is in case I scream...She isn't going to cut her finger; she's going to—" (Levin 137) and, with that much suspense, without ever knowing what really transpired, the reader is left with a horrific end: Joanna now transformed into another Stepford wife gliding along the aisles of the supermarket with the rest of the robotic women of Stepford. The most logical explanation would entail Bobbie harming or killing Joanna to be swapped by a Stepford wife. However, Bobbie was not herself, she was a Stepford automaton and, as Rashmi Goel theorised, it was not entirely a female resolve to be men's objects, or more to aid men in their quest of objectifying women (572), like Bobbie did. Simply put, if ever women are found to be guilty of harming each other to serve a patriarchal agenda, it is not an act of free will but of coercion—just as Bobbie had to be a robot in order to harm Joanna. The story ends with the prospect of Ruthanne, the last woman who came to town, as the next one in the line to become a Stepford wife; and the nightmare endures.

Scholars such as Anna Krugovoy Silver believes that "the themes of *The Stepford Wives* dovetail so closely with those of second wave feminism" (Krugovoy Silver 60), as demonstrated by the women's obsession with domestic chores, their role as a stay-at-home wife, and their lack of control over their own bodies. Astonishingly, "Friedan lambasted it as

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

‘a rip-off of the women’s movement’” (qtd in Krugovoy Silver 60). Many saw Friedan’s accusation as baseless, since *The Stepford Wives* only added to the popularity of the second wave of the feminist movement in the US. In fact, many believed *The Stepford Wives* to be partially “a science fiction rewrite of Betty Friedan’s pioneering 1963 liberal feminist polemic *The Feminine Mystique*” (ibid 60). By shining a light on the plight of women in an unfair and male-dominated society, Levin’s work in *The Stepford Wives* follows the footsteps of celebrated feminist writers like Simone de Beauvoir and Virginia Woolf, among other trailblazers in the field. Levin told the unsettling story of Bobbie, Charmaine and Joanna’s forced transformations, their protest, and their fight against it. Levin also implemented the pursuit for equality exemplified in Joanna’s endeavours to make the voices of women heard; her independence by refusing to be a Stepford stay at home mother and her commitment to cultivating her photographic skills. Joanna also displayed female power to overcome man-made obstacles as embodied in her struggle to save herself from the same fate as her Stepford female friends. That is, Joanna’s story incorporates a pursuit for equality, independence, and female power to overcome the hindrances of a patriarchal power hierarchy that typified feminist literature based on the second wave of feminism’s beliefs (Freedman xiv-xv). As Mary C. Harges argues, feminist writers used “the fantastic to subvert the male symbolic order” (31), and Levin used his science fiction thriller to dare the still existing patriarchal ideologies which sought to censor and confine women’s lives within restrictive gender roles.

2.2.2. Gillian Flynn’s *Sharp Objects* (2006)

In Gillian Flynn’s short literary career, she has been able to write three exceptional novels—all of which have been adapted into either film or television series. According to Goodreads, for her first novel *Sharp Objects*, which is the focus of this chapter, she was rewarded the 2007 Ian Fleming Steel Dagger for best thriller category. Similar to his praise for Levin, Stephen King also complemented Flynn’s writing: “Gillian Flynn is the real deal, a sharp, acerbic, and compelling storyteller with a knack for the macabre” (Goodreads np). While it is crucial for King to acknowledge the considerable literary prowess of both Levin and Flynn, the true significance lies in the connections that can be drawn between the two authors’ bodies of work.

In “Gillian Flynn Reveals How *Sharp Objects* Came to Life”, Ariana Bacle reveals that Flynn’s storytelling skills were nourished by her profession as a television critic for the *Entertainment Weekly Magazine*. Bacle reports that *Sharp Objects* was begotten by the influence of a many cinematographic sets and works from the epic *Lord of the Rings* (2001-

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

2003) directed by Peter Jackson, to the less sophisticated: *Jackass: The Movie* (2002) by Jeff Tremaine (qtd in Bacle np). Nonetheless, Flynn's true inspiration is believed to have been *Mystic River* (2003) directed by Clint Eastwood, as mentioned by Marshall Raine in his overview of the novel. Furthermore, in a 2015 review of the novel in *The Guardian*, *Sharp Objects* is described as Flynn's best literary creation, in spite of the writer only achieving true fame with her last novel *Gone Girl* (2012). The review also praised the storytelling process of including "everything a perfect thriller should include" (qtd in Raine np). Published in 2006, the novel was set in Flynn's "home state of Missouri", however the town of Wind Gap itself was the product of her imagination. More so, further influence of Flynn's personal life on her work is revealed in her HBO interview where she expressed her attachment and affection toward her first novel (qtd in Bacle np) thereby indicating that, intentionally or not, a writer most of the time inculcates influences from his/her personal life.

The narrative perspective in *Sharp Objects* is through the main character's eyes, Camille Preaker, a young psycho-emotionally troubled and aspiring journalist working for the *Daily Post* in Chicago. Her job and her boss require her to return to her hometown (where she once lost her little sister) to investigate the passing of a little girl and the disappearance of another (Flynn 7). Upon her arrival in Wind Gap, Camille drinks alcohol to cope with her own past trauma and is hoping to leave Wind Gap as fast as possible because being back in town only brings out her most disturbed memories and feelings. Camille starts her investigation into the death of Ann Nashe and the disappearance of Natalie Keene by interviewing the town's chief of police, Bill Vickery, who only indulges her with limited access to the location of the crime scene. He "had drawn a tiny X to mark where the murdered girl's body was discovered last year" on a map he gave her (ibid 13). On her way to Falls Creek, where Ann's body was found, Camille oddly encounters "four blonde girls...on a picnic towel", one of which is her stepsister Amma, though she did not recognize her at first. In the woods Camille meets a Wind Gap townie who reveals a ghastly fact about Ann's body, that her teeth were removed by the psychotic killer. Camille's discomfort in the town and the revelations she uncovers about the girls residing there have a profound impact on her, ultimately leading to a recollection of some unpleasant memories from her own childhood of boys hunting, a bloody shed and gruesome pornographic pictures (ibid 17). The reader discovers that the collage of these horrible scenes was the trigger for her first sexual arousal and orgasm as a teenager.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Camille's next exploratory stop leads her to the Nash family home, but not before she ensures that her emotions are numbed by the effect of the alcohol so that she can handle the discussion with the Nash family. Her interview with Ann's father, Bob Nash, leaves Camille perplexed and sorrowful because it reminds her of losing her sister, and also due to Bob Nash's disturbing revelation that he preferred his daughter to be killed than raped. At the end of the day Camille had no choice but to return to her "elaborate Victorian" childhood home, where the reader meets her stunning yet peculiar mother Adora Crellin and her passive stepfather Alan (Flynn 23-24). The next day the mutilated body of the Keenes' girl is found near a building in the middle of the street looking "like a plastic baby doll" with her O shaped mouth—and the reader is introduced to the detective from Kansas City (ibid 28-29). Though not invited, Camille attends the Keenes' funeral, again numbed by the sedating effect of alcohol consumption. After the funeral Camille meets up her mother's friends and some of her high school colleagues, a "well-coiffed circle", which she apparently despised (ibid 35). The reader notices the contrast between the women in Wind Gap and Camille: where the Wind Gap women of her age are married housewives with children, she is a single career woman who did not even have a boyfriend. After reporting the funeral to her boss, she is finally introduced to her stepsister, Amma, at home now and looking younger than when Camille first saw her in town. Camille comments that Amma resembles "a changeling" (ibid 41), because she looked nothing like the girl Camille met in town where she resembled a grown woman more than a teenager.

Camille persists in her aim to get the real story around the murders and meets again with Vickery and, though he was repulsed by her presence, he reveals key information about how the two dead girls were known for their "aggressive" behaviour. Ann had once "killed a neighbor's pet bird with a stick", and Natalie had "stabbed one of her classmates in the eye with a pair of scissors" (Flynn 43-44). By chance, Camille is met with another lead on a possible murder suspect—she visits James Capisi, a young witness of what happened to Natalie and whose testimony no one believed because he says a "white" woman took the girl (ibid 48). Camille continues drinking alcohol, which she claims is the effect the town has on her—but this time she drinks with Richard Willis (the detective from Kansas City) at a local bar. During their chat the detective questions Camille with tact and sensitivity, preventing her from fully comprehending his motives or uncovering the reasons behind his questions. When she returns to her family home Camille is surprised by Amma's odd comportment while playing with her doll house—the fact that she throws a tantrum after realizing that her

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

miniature furniture does not match her mother's real furniture. This emotional outburst provides the reader an indication of Amma's strong attachment to aesthetic conformity and her desire to emulate her mother's home. As Amma and Adora cuddle, Camille experiences recollections of her deceased sister Marian, for "The scene was startling" for her as it brought memories of her deceased sister, Marian (ibid 54). Camille then reveals that she carved her flesh by writing words on her body, "I am a cutter" she monologues, (ibid 55) —a ritual she started when she was thirteen years old, just after her sister's death—a self-harm practice that she only stopped recently after spending some time in a psyche ward for female self-harmers.

Camille attempts to forge a connection of some kind with her family by trying to sit at the breakfast table but is interrupted by Amma's eccentric demeanour of craving attention and gaining it in any ways possible—including wishing for her own death (Flynn 61) and Adora's dramatic display of broken-heartedness over the murdered girls. Adora acts as if everything revolves around her; described by Camille as "Every tragedy that happens in the world happens to my mother" (ibid 63). The contrast between the women in town and Camille is further witnessed in her encounter of her mother's friends for lunch. Jackie O'Neele, one of those ladies, reveals how Amma, in spite of being a child, indulges in sexual activities at parties (ibid 77) and warns Camille about her mother, urging her to leave saying "Adora can harm" (ibid 78). Following that encounter Camille goes, once again, to the Nashes' house where Adora unexpectedly arrives while Camille is interviewing Ann's parents. Adora dismisses her daughter from speaking with the Nashes which infuriates Camille (ibid 84). Camille reveals that her mother in truth was always an atypical person: Camille recalls how once she witnessed Adora bite a child's cheek so she would cry, just so Adora could shush her again (ibid 88). Uncanny as her mother, at thirteen years old, Amma demonstrates a fascination with the pigs being slaughtered and ill-treated at the slaughterhouse. For Camille it felt like "watching a rape and saying nothing" (ibid 90) —though Camille finds the actions inhumane she notes that Amma is mesmerized by the same scene.

Nevertheless, Camille tried to stay focused on her goal of discovering the culprit behind Ann and Natalie's death and writing her article. She was adamant to find more clues for her newspaper story, so she decides to meet with detective Willis to exchange both drinks and information. Camille tells him the horrors of town, but to the reader's shock all the horrifying facts are related to her family: biting babies, sexual abuse, rape, and the erotic conquests of a preteen. As proof of Camille's stories, she and the detective meet young Amma on a night out with her friends drinking, and she seemed too sexually active for her age as she acted

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

seductively and addressed the detective with a phallic word (Flynn 102). After a surprisingly good night's sleep, Adora decided to take the girls shopping for her party. Camille, as usual, was bullied by her mother and sister: they attempted to coerce her into wearing revealing dresses which forced her to expose her scars. Enigmatically, Amma was intrigued by her sister when she saw how she harmed herself and the evidence left on her body. After the shopping failure Camille welcomes Meredith Wheeler over to her house, who promised her an interview with Natalie's older brother, Meredith's boyfriend and suspect of the crime, John Keene. The interview did not go as expected and Camille was unable to gather any valuable information on who the culprit could be and yet she was able to collect some facts on Natalie.

In the attempt to obtain more information Camille accepts an invitation to meet with her high school friends during which she finds out more disturbing facts about Amma. Overwhelmed by the contrast between her life and theirs, Camille dwells on all the horrific details of her life, relishing in "sobbing" to release her frustration (ibid 120). Amma, in a rare moment of kindness, offers Camille a "joint" to make her feel better (ibid 121). A couple of days later, after Camille's second article was released, she and detective Willis make a bargain to exchange information. To fulfil her end of the deal the two of them meet in the woods to investigate the nooks and crannies teenagers love to hang out in, with the hope of finding "a kill site" (ibid 127), instead, they end up being intimate as they share a kiss in the woods. When home, Camille is met by Adora's strange disclosure that she never loved Camille—revealing why she did not love her: basically because she was not an obedient baby or teenager. This interaction with her mother drives Camille to drown her emotions with alcohol and loathing and she even attempts suicide in the bathtub the next day (ibid 133).

After getting a grip of herself Camille heads to meet Meredith and John Keene again but, is surprised by an inappropriate flirtatious scene between John and Amma. Even worse is Camille's connection with John: despite the ten-year age gap between them she felt instantly attracted to him. Although Meredith's testimony was fabricated, it still shed light on the hostility of the two victims, "they were biters" and maybe that is why their teeth were removed (Levin 138). Meanwhile, tensions at home keep rising, and this time it is Alan who accuses Camille of "tormenting" her mother by reminding her of their dead daughter and the recent murders (ibid 144). With no one to confide in, Camille tries to cope with the emotional impact of the events by consuming alcohol, yet again. However, when Camille calls her boss for comfort, the reader discovers that he apparently treats her like family, and she perceives him as the father she never had. Still, Camille needed more emotional support to fight her

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

demons, so she drives to detective Willis' apartment where they have intercourse with "clothes on" because she was too insecure to show her hidden scars. On her way home she is lost in old memories of being raped in the woods by a group of boys and what happened with Richard Willis, she wondered if she was "mistreated" in both cases (ibid 152). Evidently, Camille's mental state was troubled by her inability to decipher whether or not what she experienced was abuse. Unfortunately, the reader realizes that Camille's psycho-emotional well being has been compromised since childhood: first by her mother and then by her school mates (the gang rape). Camille did not know that what she experienced was rape which can explain her odd engagement with sexual intercourse.

Before arriving home, Camille meets Amma who invites her to a party where she offers her pills. Later that night, while Camille and Amma are on their way home, Amma shares some uncomfortable facts about her mother's care and her sexual experience—both leaving Camille even the more mystified. Camille is disconcerted about how a thirteen-year-old could find relief in sex, and that she and Amma do not seem very different since they both seem to find relief through harmful outlets. Due to the pills, their constant falling down and confessions both Camille and Amma wake up the next day quite queasy. As a result, both Camille and Amma are taken care of attentively by their mother—causing Camille to "remember [sic] the drill" (Flynn 167). The following morning, Camille finds Amma "naked" on the floor playing with her mini-house which made Camille suspicious of the medicines Adora gave them (ibid 170). Camille's traumatic memories are triggered and she wonders if whatever happened to Marian is happening again to her and Amma. In order to find some answers, she visits Jackie to talk about Adora, but ends up even more confused about her mother's nature and not any closer to understanding what happened to Marian than she was before.

Drowning in sorrow and alcohol, Camille meets up with John Keene at a bar and they both lament their losses of their younger sisters while drinking. Their drunken state leads them to bed and they have intercourse, an escape Camille found with no other man, because she not only allowed John to see every ugly scar she had, but the experience made her feel "exorcised" (Flynn 183). Later that day, Camille meets one of her old friends again, and learns that Ann had once "jabbed Natalie in the cheek with her needle" (ibid 190). Back at home, Adora pretends to care for Camille but instead poisons her with "bluish milk" (ibid 195) —this brings up further suspicions Camille has about her mother's role in Marian's passing. Camille, then, heads to the hospital to investigate her sister's hospital files where she

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

discovers that her sister was never sickly, but it was Adora who made her sick—revealing her Munchausen by proxy illness which is further confirmed by Marian’s nurse (ibid 199).

After understanding the truth about Marian’s death, Camille is certain her mother killed the other two girls. Nevertheless, once at home she accepts every bit of poison fed to her by Adora because of the “bitter vengeance that fueled” her to punish both Adora and herself for not saving Marian (Flynn 208). Camille’s fake obedience of her mother continues until the police arrive to arrest Adora for murdering Ann and Nataile. With Adora at trial, Amma was taken to Chicago to live with Camille yet, she was too bored and restless that her father decided to enrol her to a private school. It is then revealed that Amma was the true killer, and furthermore, even at the private school, she could not restrain the urge to kill and she murders her schoolmate Lily. When Lily’s body was found Camille knew her sister was the murderer, she searched Amma’s dollhouse and found the proof in the “fifty-six tiny teeth” (ibid 215). Finally, Amma was convicted for Ann’s, Natalie’s, and Lily’s murders and she confessed to Camille that envy had been her incentive; she could not endure how they took attention away from her. For Camille, at last, she was able to quit drinking with the help of her boss (and best friend) Frank and his wife—the loving parents she never had.

This complex and suspenseful story is not simply about murder, violence, and mental disorders but, it is about chameleon women disguised as lambs but are the wolves. As previously mentioned, feminist literature endeavoured to portray strong women—in Victorian times feminism was embodied in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*’s fight against patriarchy, in the US it lived through racism and gender discrimination fighters such as Olivia Celie from Alice Walker’s *The Colour Purple*, and in India in those who rejected supremacy such as Ammu (Ashikama np). However, *Sharp Objects*, as a 21st century American work, looks at feminism differently because women in this century struggle differently than women did in the previous centuries. Literature in the 21st century reveals socio-cultural developments that denote a stage when women are to be depicted in a more intricate manner—where female characters are explored, acknowledged, and distinguished for being flawed and empowered at once. Women in American literature are not necessarily righteous, but they are free to be what they wish to be, be it housewives or career women (O’Reilly np). Like Flynn’s latest novel, *Gone Girl* where the female lead character is evil, *Sharp Objects* also features vile mad women.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Flynn breaks the tradition of depicting women as feminine, docile or as a femme fatal and divulges that it is not always a man-woman conflict, sometimes men are just passive pawns and women are each other's worst enemies. Sometimes women become the wardens of their kin, while also their oppressors (Goel 572), and evil matriarchs like Adora. The enigma lies in the reasons behind a shift from freedom fighters to autocrats in Western literature and specifically American novels. As Elaine Showalter postulated, female characters represent the female status by moving from a phase of subjugation to one of autonomy during the later years of the 20th century (405). Many critics believed in the claim that men were the ones who "fastened masks over women's faces- identifying them with eternal types of their own invention to possess them more thoroughly" (Gilbert and Gubar 17), insomuch that some women were consumed by the patriarchal doctrine, and thus started enforcing it on others who were non-compliant. These women will "do the work of policing one another for 'correctly' performing femininity" and that is why, in the literary realm some "female characters appear as the agents of patriarchal oppression" (Alshammari 5). In fact, that was exactly Adora as well as Amma's principle role in the story, as theorised by detective Willis: the murderer "was a woman who resented strength in females, who saw it as vulgar. She tried...to turn them into her own vision" (Flynn 203). In that light, Adora and Amma seem to resemble another female character from *The Stepford Wives*, Bobbie Markowe, since she too participated in turning Joanna from a normal woman to the automaton of the Stepford wife.

Though Bobbie was already a robot when she tried to attack Joanna in *The Stepford Wives*, Adora was herself—uncompromised as Bobbie was. Having said that, Adora and Amma were both mistreated as children by their mothers while their fathers were ignorant and passive to the abuse. Once more, it is essential to bear in mind Simone de Beauvoir's explanation, what if women choose femininity because they are left with no other choice: "To decline to be the Other, to refuse to be a party to the deal—this would be for women to renounce all the advantages conferred upon their alliance with the superior caste" (20). That is, if women choose femininity and docility it is not simply out of sheer will but because of the fear of losing male support. To further understand each female character and her motivations to be either feminine or feminist it is important to critically examine their characteristics along with the roles men play in forming them.

2.3. Feminisms and Femininities

As revealed in the theoretical part of this research, male and female authors are influenced by social, political, cultural and religious contexts that delineate the normative roles expected

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

from women which, in turn, influences the characters they create. The fact that most Western societies, including the US, were predominantly patriarchal societies is reflected in the literary realm by depicting society's preconceptions and prejudices that can shape and define gendered expectations and normative roles for women. It is understood that female characters are often expected to fulfil traditional and patriarchally institutionalized gendered roles of wife or mother (Palvik 13), and most importantly of being feminine.

Alternatively, in recent years, women are portrayed more realistically as Sally O' Reilly states in her article entitled: "Women Are the Modern Literary Heroines. This Is Why", women can be rebellious, they can be wicked and flawed just like men (np). In conjunction with O'Reilly's observations, Laura Mulvey investigates the power of the male gaze in the objectification of women by male writers and filmmakers and its evolution in more recent times. Either from a male or a female point of view it appears the reader will witness women in a new form as a reflection of their socio-cultural context, and that are exposed by critically analysing the female characters in each novel. In *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*, the reader encounters a number of female characters, each one rather distinctive and each one seeming to serve an explicit purpose, but all gather to signify the feminine-feminist dichotomy. Psychologist Phyllis Chesler summarizes that, according to the psychological association of the US and of the Western world, feminine women are "submissive, less independent, less adventurous, more easily influenced, less aggressive, less competitive, more excitable in minor crises, more easily hurt, more emotional, more conceited about their appearances, less objective, and less interested in math and science" (67). If women possess features which contradicted the ones reported by Chesler, it means they are feminists, since they seek independence, are opinionated and interested in the public life and thus they are condemned by patriarchal ideologies (Steinem 11). Moreover, in order to reach a complete analytical result, even those characters who do not play a main role in the novels are to be examined to establish a relational construct based on the ambivalence of feminine and feminist characters. In this context *feminine* refers to the stereotypical qualities of being submissive and highly invested in one's physical appearance; while *feminist* describes those women who are rebellious career women who seek independence.

Based on Walter L. Meyers' elements of characterization which combine "Objective details of the character's appearance and action; character's conversation; presentation of the character's actual sensations, perceptions, and concepts; interpretative comment upon the character; generalized narrative; and objective details of the character's environment" (qtd in

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Vermillion 5), this research analysis will take into consideration some of these elements in relation to female representations. The examination shall be based on appearance, actions and characters' sensations—traits that are equated either with femininity or feminist tendencies based on the characters' representation and development.

2.3.1. Stepford Women

The main female characters to examine in *The Stepford Wives* are Charmaine Wimperis, Bobbie Markowe, and Joanna Eberhart—the ones who demonstrate a Stepford process of transformation in the story. Once the reader steps into Stepford, the other women have already been transformed into robot-like women—that is, converted from being normal to the idealized “perfect” women. They were already the image of the “perfect ideal” female the patriarchal society admired, i.e., “the angel in the house”⁶ (Venkatesh et al 118) as perfect fragile, docile, and obedient females.

2.3.1.1. Feminine Appearance, Actions and Conversations

The term “female” refers to gender, the word “feminine”, as already explained, refers to the docile nature of women in terms of actions, thoughts, and even attire. The first female character the reader encounters in *The Stepford Wives* is the Welcome Wagon lady who was taking information about Joanna and her family for *The Chronicle*, Stepford's local paper. In spite of the Welcome lady (she is not given a name in the novel) already being in her sixties, she was “working on youth and vivacity (ginger hair, red lips, a sunshine yellow dress)” (Levin 3). She was too good looking for her age but, she reflected the representation of the perfect female as defined by the patriarchal ideology which expected women to remain dolls despite age, just as she did. She disclosed more interest in knowing about Joanna rather than the entire family. Then, perhaps, she was an accomplice in the men's plan to transform the women from being ordinary people to perfect housewives, and that was the first trace of information about Joanna to be collected. The information dovetailed around Joanna's interests in photography, tennis, and also of being a pro-feminist and knowing the story of Stepford, Joanna revealed herself to be everything Stepford did not want in its women.

Afterwards, the reader gets a glimpse of Donna Claybrook amidst her ardent window-cleaning as expected of “the angel in the house”. She is not to be mentioned again until

⁶ “The Angel in the House” was a popular Victorian-era concept of ideal femininity, coined by the poet and critic Coventry Patmore in his 1854 poem of the same name. The “angel” referred to a woman who was pure, domestic, and submissive, serving as a gentle and loving influence on her husband and children. The idea of the angel in the house was popularized in the 19th century and became an ideal for middle-class women to aspire to (Melani np).

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

midway through the novel's end when Joanna sees her through the "living room window...polishing what looked like an athletic trophy, buffing at it with steady mechanical movements" (Levin 74) — like a robot. Joanna's neighbour Carol Van Sant is another typical Stepford model: "a dark silhouette...red dark hair glistening...tall and leggy and naked seeming, but edged by the purple of a lighted-form-behind dress...profile of too-big bosom...Her red hair was neat and gleaming; her thin-nosed face looked thoughtful (and, damn it all, *intelligent*)" (ibid 11-12; original emphasis) — as if she was a florescent woman-creature, too perfect for the eye to bear, too good looking and too sexual for doing house chores.

When Joanna attempts to invite Carol to have coffee while the men have their meeting, Carol refuses excusing herself because she had to "wax the family-room floor" (Levin 12). Though it was night-time, she claimed it was the most opportune time to do it, especially since her husband would be at the Men's Association, apparently, a place he visited every night without any complaint from his wife (ibid). Once again, when Carol was requested to partake in a women's get-together to speak of women's needs, she refused on the same account as before, being too busy at keeping her house spotless. Though Carol appears to be intelligent, she was not: she could not recognize the meaning of the word 'archaic', a word Joanna used to describe the ideology of the Men's Association, and how it shunned away women and their needs and desires. Instead, Carol said that "Ted [was] better equipped for that sort of thing than [she was]" referring to her husband (Levin 25) thereby fulfilling the role of the perfect female who would admit her inferiority to men and allow the man to take the lead and make decisions for her.

Like Carol, Barbara Chamalian, "a square-jawed brown-haired woman, in a snug pink dress molding an exceptionally good figure" (ibid 26) also refuses Joanna's attempts to gather women and discuss women's needs in town because she is too busy ironing and doing other home chores. Mary Ann Stavros also claims that she is too busy for such assemblies, busy staying at home and keeping it perfect for her husband. Mrs Stavros reveals that the only time she would leave the house was to go to the supermarket—the very place where Joanna met her. To that end, Joanna noticed that Ann, and all the other ladies, had perfectly organized grocery carts, adding to her puzzlement of the women living in Stepford (Levin 27). Joanna also seems to notice that only the married women were that flawless. Melinda Stavros, a young teenager, whom the Eberharts hired to babysit their children, was an ordinary young girl who did not even have to clean up after herself. Then, thankfully; whatever that

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

mysterious thing that altered the women to be too faultless; “they don’t pass it on to their daughters” (ibid 30). From an analytical point of view, married women in Stepford are a reflection of femininity due to their exceptional beauty and also their obsession with housework. On the other hand, single women such as young Melinda carry feminist traits as they are not focused so much on preserving a perfect house, yet she is a young girl and, thus, she is not yet accounted for her lack of fully developed femininity.

Regardless of how the women in Stepford turned out to be, astonishingly Joanna discovers they were not always doll-like. The women used to be socially active feminists, they had a Stepford Women’s Club, one headed by Mrs Herbert Sundersen and consisting of over fifty members. The Club even hosted Betty Friedan after the release of *The Feminine Mystique*; whereby, Friedan spoke of the many injustices and disappointments women suffered from which threatened their well-being and happiness. Moreover, the women in attendance showed their agreement with Friedan through ardent applause (Levin 43). In fact, the women in town did not only head and contribute to the women’s club, but those ladies were also cultivated and educated independent women. For example, Mrs Coba, the wife of the Men’s Association’s president, who “majored in languages, [was] using her spare time to write a translation of the classic Norwegian novel *The Commander’s Daughters*” (Levin 117; original emphasis). However, after being transformed the women had to give up everything that did not comply with the specific gendered role expectations defined by the Stepford men.

Mrs Sundersen was “a pretty woman, black-haired and dimple-cheeked, and only slightly older-looking than in the *Chronicle’s* unflattering photo... (Her figure in a short sky-blue dress, was almost as terrific as Charmaine’s)” (Levin 47-48; original emphasis). To answer Joanna’s inquiries on what happened to the Women’s Club, Mrs Sundersen alleged the uselessness of its quest in contrast to taking care of their houses, it was too tedious and that is why it was closed. Instead, the women, including Mrs Sunderson, thought to serve their society better through staying at home and giving their husbands all the luxury they needed to run the Men’s Association for both of their well-beings. That is, Stepford society seems to be governed by the male ego (and safeguarding it) and the male wish to be and remain superior to the female. Hereafter, the men in Stepford convinced the women that the best thing for the society is for women to serve men unconditionally. That is, these women represent the male fantasy for they had no personal individual wish (Venkatesh et al 118) —becoming objects holding no personal aspirations of their own.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

In Mrs Sundersen's words: "I feel I'm living a very full life. Herb's work is important, and he couldn't do it nearly as well if not for me. We're a unit, and between us we're raising a family, and running a clean comfortable household, and doing community work" (Levin 50). Apparently, the ladies of Stepford were not only rendered dumb, pretty marionettes but, when transformed, they were also programmed by the Stepford men to be delusional about the meaning of personal happiness. Mrs Sundersen, after being converted, was programmed to believe that to be a happy wife is to give up every single thing that makes her a real person, by becoming a hybrid between a super housekeeping machine and an exotic docile sex-toy—always prioritizing the needs of her husband over her own. The reader then realises that Kit Sundersen was "Like an actress in a commercial", or even worse "That's what they *all* were, all the Stepford wives: actresses in commercials, pleased with detergents and floor wax, with cleansers, shampoos, and deodorants. Pretty actresses, big in the bosom but small in the talent, playing suburban housewives unconvincingly, too nicey-nice to be real" (ibid; original emphasis). After careful examination, it appears that the women of Stepford were stuck in a state that scholars refer to as a permanent non-premenstrual self. This state is characterized by being stagnant and perfect, embodying the "cultural representations of perfect 'woman'" (Squire 86-87). This includes being level-headed, docile, and beautiful, which are common images projected in media and commercials throughout the 20th and 21st centuries in Western culture, the same time period in which Levin's novel was written.

Furthermore, it is at Mr Cornell's pharmacy that the reader sees the contrast between the women and men in Stepford. Mrs Cornell was methodically cleaning, she was "tall and blond, long-legged, full-bosomed; as pretty as—oh an Ike Mazzard girl" (Levin 118), exactly like the other ladies in town. Though Mrs Cornell was a commercial model, Mr Cornell was practically bald; "the top of his head was white scalp, like an under-a-rock *thing*, a slug, with few strands of brown hair pasted across it...He was ugly; small-eyed, chinless" (ibid 120; original emphasis). Most likely, this was the case of all the Stepford men, that Joanna sarcastically blurted out "This town is full of lucky men" to have such "Pretty, helpful, submissive" wives (ibid). In conclusion, the women in Stepford were robotic "stay-in-the kitchen wife with big boobs and no demands" (ibid 123). The women, despite all their beauty, not only settled for middle aged dull husbands but fulfilled their male fantasy of the submissive trophy wife. Griffin Wolff explained that literature, which is led by patriarchy, often depicted women in their quest for male attention, competing with one another to flatter

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

their ego and satisfy their desires (206). In other words, women in Stepford were rendered robots in order to make men's dream of the perfect wife come true.

If one would discard the unnatural robotic aspect to the women and project their situation on the real world, one would realize that those submissive women, those who were seemingly content with their docile domestic situation, were the women who helped patriarchs deprive women of the right of equality. For instance, Phyllis Schlafly, an aspiring politician during the 1970s, in the US, is an example of such a woman. She was an anti-feminist who stood against women's fight for equality that she claimed "that 'equality' would actually rob women of their privileges rather than bestow them anything new" (qtd in Carr np), which could only influence women to stop their fight and to bring doubt to the feminist movement. Some would argue that such women, in real life, had no choice but to live a "life as a doll, pet, or robot" or they would end up losing their sanity to all the criticism and censorship they would receive from a patriarchal society (Kotani and LaMarre 50). Nonetheless, in Pauline Kael's critical essay, she argues that *The Stepford Wives'* story is misleading somehow, to the fact that women were not simply victims, and the blame was not to fall entirely on men. Kael states: "If women turn into replicas of the women in commercials, they do it to themselves" (qtd in Krugovoy Silver 61), because no matter how strong the cultural pressure and influence is, women could reject it and stand head strong for their personal independence but, they chose not to. Nonetheless, Kael's claims fail to account for the feminist movements, and also those women who indeed stood against patriarchy and its sexist ideologies. More so, Kael does not mention that women who stood against patriarchy found themselves to be outcasts and more severely accused of madness, that they would be admitted to asylums until they agreed to fulfil the traditional roles as expected by their patriarchal societies (Chesler 69).

For some, anti-feminist women are to be recognized as accomplices to women's oppression since they stood silent while men oppressed women, thereby making them collaborators in the unfairness and injustice of the institutionalized patriarchal power hierarchies. Still, the lines remain blurred for Beauvoir saw that women had no choice and in this particular story, Levin (though a male writer) proves to agree with Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*—and to be a feminist. From a feminist perspective, Levin tackles "three main issues drawn from the women's movement: a woman's domestic labor, a woman's role in the nuclear family, and a woman's control over her body" (Krugovoy Silver 60). No matter if he was attacked by feminists, through his work he proved that women were if not physically

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

murdered, they were psychologically terminated and their bodies (without their consent) transformed to please men, and so, in turn, be accepted, appreciated and celebrated by a patriarchal society as well.

2.3.2. Charmaine Wimperis

2.3.2.1. Feminist Actions and Conversation

“Bobbie found a live one”, the first occurrence in which Levin introduces this character called Charmaine Wimperis, is by calling her *a live one* in contrast to the Stepford ladies (Levin 38). Bobbie would refer to her as someone similar to Raquel Welch, the famous American actress, model, and sex symbol of the 1970s (ibid 38). Compared to the other women in town, Charmaine did not do her own house chores, nor gardening but had a female servant and a greenskeeper. In addition, Charmaine had talent and a hobby of playing tennis on her own court, things the other Stepford wives did not do, but that Bobbie and Joanna marvelled in (ibid). Therefore, it meant Charmaine did not belong to the feminine club: she was a beautiful woman but she lacked the unnatural tact women in Stepford possessed: she was not the compliant housewife, nor was she an obedient and submissive woman.

Charmaine is in fact an athlete, a great tennis player, in addition to being obsessed with, and believing in, horoscopes. When Bobbie asks: “You don’ really believe that stuff, do you?”, Charmaine would swiftly reply “I certainly do” (Levin 40). Her fervent interest in horoscopes appears in her readings of her previous tennis partner’s and her maid’s personalities. Speaking of her maid she crudely states “A German Virgo; if I told her to lick my shoes she’d do it” (ibid). Charmaine’s words only proved that, unlike the ladies in town, she was beautiful but arrogant and rude, even if she only interpreted what was said by the horoscopes. In other words, the idea that Charmaine did not act overly-civilised set her to be different from the other women in Stepford—and she speaks openly because she does not believe women must follow a specific conduct.

Nonetheless, Charmaine, like most of the ladies in Stepford, was a wife and a mother, she “had one child, a nine-year-old son named Merrill”, and “Her husband Ed was a television producer” (Levin 40). In spite of Charmaine’s physical appeal, and her semi-Raquel Welch appearance, she was not interested in any physical contact with her husband, she was too indifferent to the sexist injustice of the Men’s Association, but she was also happy of anything which got her husband “out of the house nights” (ibid). Charmaine also confesses that she would rather spend lonely nights than to have any type of sexual contact with her husband

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

(and his perverted tendencies) and even he did not escape her horoscope readings. She was a talkative woman with no filter and she spoke of a kinky “*rubber suit*” her husband wished to dress her in (Levin 41; original emphasis) but she never would, instead she preferred he cheated on her than to be demeaned into wearing it. Charmaine embodies various feminist ideologies: she is independent in her life choices and instead of being a docile housewife she decided to enjoy her own hobbies and interests. Most importantly, she did not allow her husband to make her into the sexual object of his fantasies.

Mrs Wimperis was an irresistible supermodel even in a town of supermodel housewives. At Joanna’s party she “was Miss Vamp, provocative and come-hither in floor-length white silk cut clear to her navel”, logically most of the men were smitten by her appeal and hovered around her (Levin 58). The party also marks the closeness of Charmaine’s transformation since her family had arrived in July, it meant by November she would be a new woman, especially that she had already recorded audio tapes for the Men’s Association (ibid 58). These recordings were undertaken by Claude Axhelm, one of the Stepford husbands. He claimed that he was asking people in Stepford to record some tapes for him to create an “electronic Henry Heggins” as a way “to give a geographical rundown on a person” mostly for police work (Levin 72). The process entailed Charmaine speaking about personal information because, to be transformed; it meant the personal information collected by Claude were going to be fed into her robot version. After the party; Charmaine and her husband Ed were going on a rediscovery vacation which she did not appreciate at all as she loathed all alone time with Ed, particularly intimate time (ibid 59) — little did she know that it was not a sexual-holiday but, a personally transformative one and without her consent.

2.3.2.2. The Feminine Transformation

Female representation in English literature was typically confined to two stereotypes: the caregiving mother and the loving wife (Eagly et al 1), but Charmaine was neither, so her conversion into the Stepford wife was inescapable. Indeed, when Charmaine and her husband return, she was already converted, “She was wearing an apron over slacks and a blouse” (Levin 60). She could not play tennis with Joanna anymore on the excuse of having housework, and she let her maid go.

Leaving Joanna utterly astonished, Charmaine blamed herself for being unfair to her husband: “Ed’s a pretty wonderful guy, and I’ve been lazy and selfish. I’m through playing tennis, and I’m through reading those astrology books. From now on I’m going to do right by

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Ed” (Levin 61). Even the tennis court was not spared, it had been destroyed to be replaced by a golf court for her so-called wonderful husband (ibid 62). To serve her husband well, Charmaine was made to believe that she needed to abandon all her interests and hobbies which made her an independent self while Ed could keep his own freedoms and interests. Although Joanna tried to convince Bobbie that Charmaine’s situation was temporary, deep down they both knew that was untrue. Looking at all the women in Stepford that stage of housewife-perfection seemed permanent (Levin 63). Women with a character-type like Charmaine’s could not survive in that hellishly flawless place—women could only be identified through their relationship to the men in their lives, through their love and obedience to them (Wolff 206-207) and that is what Charmaine was rendered into, just a reflection of her husband’s caprices.

Between the feminine and feminist features, Charmaine, at the beginning of the story represented feminist ideas of female independence in terms of her passions, her freedom to control her body despite her husband’s wishes; while also being an equal to her husband in terms of enjoying her own hobby of playing tennis. Yet, once Charmaine is transformed into the Stepford wife, and having her freedoms and personal agency negated, she is forced into the feminine. That is, she no longer has any passions of her own except to serve and please her husband and she was no longer an equal as illustrated by her tennis court being replaced by a golf court for her husband—she simply no longer mattered.

2.3.3. Bobbie Markowe

2.3.3.1. Feminist Actions and Conversations

Bobbie Markowe is characterized as a sarcastic and free-spirited type of woman from the onset of the novel. Before the reader meets Bobbie, s/he hears her first, her “voice was loud, happy, raspy, Peggy Clavenger-ish” (Levin 21). She had a refreshing sarcastic sense of humour as she mocked the chronicle magazine refereeing to it as “*Chronic Ill*” (ibid 21; original emphasis), because of its rather distasteful content which had a patronizing focus on everything feminine as confined to the domestic space of the home. Bobbie called Joanna after reading about her talents and views in *The Chronicle* hoping to finally find a decent female friend who is not obsessed with detergents and cleaning products (ibid 22).

When Bobbie and Joanna meet, Bobbie comments on Joanna’s muddled kitchen, but through her words the reader realises that Bobbie’s kitchen is even worse with “peanut-butter handprints on the cabinets” (Levin 22). Her sense of humour continues as she comments on

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

instant coffee, that it is the only type out there, alluding that no woman should go through the trouble of making coffee from scratch. With respect to Bobbie's physical appearance, she was described as "short and heavy-bottomed, in a blue Snoopy sweatshirt and jeans and sandals. Her mouth was big, with unusually white teeth, and she had blue take-in-everything eyes and short dark tufty hair. And small hands and dirty toes" (ibid). If beautiful Charmaine was no Stepford wife, Bobbie was the furthest from being a normal housewife, let alone the Stepford version: she was sloppy and she looked distraught, as if she were a naughty little girl who often made herself dirty playing outdoors (Levin 22). She was the opposite of all that was supposed to be feminine in the eyes of the patriarchal institution of Stepford's Men's Association which saw physical agreeability as the first necessity in women.

Like Mrs Markowe's sloppy attire, her life too is hectic: she is in her early thirties, with "a husband named Dave who was a stock analyst, and three sons, ten, eight, and six. And an Old English sheepdog and a corgi" (Levin 23). However, Bobbie's busy house did not keep her from having long chats with Joanna and discussing the situation in Stepford. Bobbie showed an investigative sense as she "combed" the town for any women's organization and found none (ibid). In addition, along with Joanna, Bobbie also belonged to "the National Organization for Women", and so the two of them planned a day in which they would meet with the women in town and discuss their circumstances (Levin 24). They hoped to make a change, and even scare the Men's Association to dissolve or include women. Thus, Bobbie, like Joanna, was a feminist at heart with pro-feminist beliefs, having agency over her own body. Furthermore, neither Bobbie nor Joanna aspires to look beautiful, both refuse to do housework and wish to free other women of it too.

As expected, Joanna's and Bobbie's efforts were to no avail, the other women had no interest in any women rights' get-together. Bobbie, being intuitive, knew "Something fishy" was happening in Stepford, in her words it was a "Town That Time Forgot" (Levin 28). With luck, and Bobbie's perseverance, Joanna and Bobbie find Charmaine, the only woman who was still relatively sane and not the robot-like doll, but eventually is turned into one too. When Joanna and Bobbie visited Charmaine and were about to leave, Bobbie made another funny sarcastic remark about Charmaine saying "she may not be ideal NOW material, but at least she's not in love with her vacuum cleaner" (ibid 42). Bobbie's statement also insinuates that she is knowledgeable about feminist groups and admires them as well when she refers to "NOW" the National Organization for Women.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

As anticipated by Joanna and the readers, Bobbie's home was "tornado struck", but what Joanna did not expect to find in Bobbie's house is Bobbie's picture drawn by Ike Muzzard, just like the one Ike Muzzard Drew of her (Levin 46). Bobbie had a theory related to the sedated nature of the women in Stepford she believed it to be similar to something that happened in El Paso Texas years prior: there was a "chemical in the ground that gets into the water, and it tranquilizes everybody and eases the tension" (ibid 64). Since Bobbie possessed a critical mind, she linked the El Paso incident to what is happening in Stepford—she thought the shifts women went through were the effect of "some kind of hormone" which makes the women gorgeous, and fanatical about spick and span households (ibid 65). That is to say, the only logical explanation for women to be that perfect was something unnatural and of an ultimate sacrifice for the women involved—women are also human like men and neither can be perfect no matter how hard they try.

2.3.3.2. The Feminine Transformation

Filled with the fear of change, Bobbie suggests to Joanna to move away from Stepford. Bobbie believed that she and Joanna did not have enough time before they turned to another Charmaine, particularly because Bobbie arrived only one month after her (Levin 67). Dave did not reject Bobbie's request, nor did he seem bothered by it, which astounded his wife (ibid 70), perhaps it was due to his hidden agenda. Unconsciously, following Charmaine's footsteps, Bobbie recorded tapes for Claude Axhelm, marking the beginning to the end of her free life (ibid 72) since this was known to be one of the last steps before being transformed. Those tapes are considered as one of the tools to create robot versions of women because they carried personal information about the women and their voices. Possibly Bobbie had a sixth sense, or she was very observant and just calculated it right—but she did go house-hunting in nearby towns (ibid 80). Despite the fact that Bobbie and Joanna sent water samples to the Department of Health to test for chemicals (like the El Paso example) and the results came out negative, Bobbie was still adamant on leaving since there was still something suspicious and wrong happening to the women.

The expected day finally arrived when Bobbie and her husband Dave were going on their "second-honeymoon" (Levin 84). It was the day that Bobbie left as someone and returned as someone totally different: she looked spectacular, but she acted weirdly, she did not make any sarcastic jokes, and she was too tactful—the opposite of her old self. She even referred to her son as "gumdrop" and acted very affectionately towards her husband and her son which was not in her nature (ibid 91). Two days later, a worried Joanna called to check in

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

on her friend and to her disbelief Bobbie was no longer searching for houses instead she “went shopping” that morning, and she was “ironing” at the time of the call (ibid 93), two things which she usually abhorred. Unfortunately, like Charmaine, Bobbie joined the army of female robots, her hurricane struck living room became “immaculate” and she now looked “beautiful, her hair done, her face made up. And she was wearing some kind of padded high uplift bra under her green sweater, and a hip-whittling girdle under the brown pleated skirt” (ibid 97). The woman who seemed the furthest from being a decent wife became perfect-looking and acted seamlessly in line with the ideal of the perfect wife and mother.

Bobbie even blamed herself for previously being a bad wife and mother and mentioned that all her theories were sheer nonsense, leaving her friend flabbergasted (ibid 100). All the ladies of Stepford, now including even Bobbie, were degraded in their objectification into beautiful pleasurable and compliant mothers and wives—embodying the female condition that Freidan labelled as “the Problem That Has No Name” (qtd in Handal 12). In the final pages of the novel, the reader gets a better understanding of the new Bobbie as being a patriarchal tool exploited by the men to also assist in terminating Joanna’s life as a feminist (Levin 137). Bobbie was supposedly carrying a knife to cut her finger and prove to Joanna that she was a normal human woman, instead the readers are directly transported to the next day with Joanna newly transformed into the Stepford woman. Even though the reader did not witness Bobbie harming Joanna it is obvious that she was used as a trap to render Joanna as the rest of the women in town, a doll.

The mysterious town of Stepford neither accepts pretty women like Charmaine nor sarcastic plump ones like Bobbie, it only takes in those with picture-perfect figures, spotless houses, and a severely pliable and submissive nature expected and enforced by patriarchal ideologies to undermine women and elevate men and their egos. Stepford men cherish women who were featured by identical traits, those who were “reduced to being the servant of the militant male, his shadow” (Cixous 880-881). It was Bobbie’s transformation which opened Joanna’s eyes to the truth about Stepford—from a smart calm woman to a detective and then dismissed as a hysterical being, Joanna’s transformation was even more drastic than those of the rest of the Stepford women.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

2.3.4. Joanna Eberhart

2.3.4.1. Feminist Actions and Conversations

Joanna Eberhart is the lead female character of *The Stepford Wives*: she is a wife and a mother to two children, as well as a talented professional photographer prior to her arrival in Stepford. The reader first encounters and learns about Joanna through her interview with the Welcome Wagon Lady: Joanna speaks about how she plays tennis whenever she found the time to and describes herself as a: “semi-professional photographer...That means an agency handles three of [her] pictures” (Levin 5). She also mentioned that she was “interested in politics and in the Women’s Liberation movement” (ibid5). Early in the story, Joanna establishes herself as a woman with character and intelligence, she has talent, hobbies, and she sees herself as a feminist, or a pro-women’s cause person (Neill 257). Thus, this shows that Levin, despite his gender, was able to write an independent powerful female lead character, like famous feminists such as Betty Friedan and Virginia Woolf, amongst others (Freedman xiv-xv). That is, some writers highlight the feminist perspective of their work via strong lead female characters and their pursuit for equality, independence, and empowerment despite a patriarchal oppression.

From the way Joanna handled her children’s tantrums, she proved to be a good mother who disciplines her children with strictness and compassion (Levin 7). It was also noticeable that her relationship with her husband was quite remarkable on the basis that he seemed to treat her as an equal. In fact, one of the scenes between Joanna and her husband shows how they support each other at home where she notices “the kitchen was spick and span, the washer pounding”, and Walter was standing near the sink, because it was his turn in doing the dishes (ibid). Unlike the other women in Stepford; Joanna did not have to do all the house work on her own as Walter also helped her; she was not a doll; but she was opinionated and headstrong. The moment Walter said he would be joining the Men’s Association, Joanna could not resist the urge to call it “an outdated, old fashioned” institution, and not in a vintage classy way, but rather in an archaic sense because of its misogynistic agenda (Levin 8). The association allowed no women inside, and though the men ran the town the focus was on maintaining and safeguarding a sexist male dominant environment that intrinsically diminished the female status and restricted both their personal and public agency. Not only did Joanna voice her opinions to Walter, but they also shared things which, by Stepford standards, were believed to be solely “women’s work” (eg. cleaning and cooking); or only for men, like smoking cigarettes with her husband on the patio (ibid 9). With respect to her attire,

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Joanna was more of a free spirit, she wore “shorts and a shirt and her sneakers” and “tied her hair” (ibid). Joanna sported a casual look, fun, tom-boyish clothes, and not the Stepford floral feminine summer-dress with heels and perfectly coiffed hair as the standard Stepford wife.

Once Joanna encounters the ladies in town, her personality is more evident, since the contrast between her and the other women becomes quite clear. Meeting Carol Van Sant made Joanna realize how far she is from being “a compulsive hausfrau”, that is, an addictive house cleaner like Carol (Levin 12). She would not imagine herself doing any type of house chores at night, while Carol seemed obsessed with floor waxing (ibid). Upon meeting Bobbie, there is also a glimpse of Joanna’s house and housework, when Bobbie says “what a pleasure to see a messy kitchen”, then Joanna adds “I can show you some dull dingy bathrooms” (Levin 22). At this point, the reader realizes how different Joanna was from the typical women in town—she is definitely not the domesticated hausfrau as the Stepford norm. Joanna was not a typical perfect Stepford wife and yet she and her family are living the closest to a perfect life, which is displayed through the first pages of the novel and during their Saturday trip to the Stepford Centre. The fact that Joanna is a feminist who had her own career and refused to be non-agentic and doll-like did not destroy her family life as many feminist opponents would argue by claiming that women with a career are inescapably failures in their personal lives (qtd in Mackey 11).

Joanna’s pro-feminist tendencies are further seen in her disdain for the Men’s Association: when her son compliments the high fence of the institution, she replies, “to keep women out” (ibid 15). In the same vein, on the evening on which Walter would invite what he called “the New Projects Committee” to his and Joanna’s house, Joanna finds an opportunity to voice her concerns about women and speaks about their lack of participation in any Stepford community work and suggests “evening lectures for adults” (Levin 32). During the conversation, Joanna would make funny jokes and smart comments and the men would laugh and nod showing their appreciation of how smart she was, “she felt very good indeed, meeting their questions with wit and good sense” (ibid 33), she even thought that she did better than Gloria Steinem. Despite the fact that Joanna showcases a high sense of humour, intelligence, and independence during that meeting, little did she know is that the men were taking her measures to create the robot version of her because no matter how funny, beautiful, or smart she was, she was yet not a Stepford wife.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Discovering that Betty Friedan visited the short-lived Women's Club (Levin 44), awakened Joanna's detective senses, but to no avail. Trying to focus on her photography and too intrigued by the Men's Association; Joanna decided to gather photographic evidence, though while she was doing so she was stopped and stalled by a policeman—an occurrence that made her all the more suspicious of the nature of that institution. Joanna's misgivings would not be silenced, only more heightened when Charmaine (the fiery horoscope-obsessed model) was turned into a perfect sexual obedient being—an observation that unsettled Joanna quite a bit (Levin 62) since it only proved further the idea that women were changing unnaturally. But Joanna's discomfort reaches its peak when even "Bobbie has changed" (ibid 98), Bobbie who was the farthest from being feminine and also because she was the closest "normal" female friend Joanna had, and now she was a Stepford wife.

Apparently, as Joanna suspected, it "takes four months to work", that is the process of transforming a woman into the Stepford wife. Thus, for Joanna time was of the essence with only one month left in her timeline to become a Stepford version of herself (ibid 101). The process of side-lining women among the feminists was known as "'denaturalizing' the social relations and social roles of women and men" (Hawkesworth 200). Since Joanna personified feminist ideologies in the novel, she wished to reveal that this unnatural female state is part of the Stepford male agenda to accentuate their power over women and to possess them more thoroughly once they become utterly dependent on men physically, emotionally, and socially.

2.3.4.2. The Feminine Transformation

At the beginning of the novel Joanna is a well accomplished woman with free will and agency even though she is a wife and mother. However, once she begins to voice her rejection of the Stepford ideology she is perceived and treated as a hysterical and irrational woman. By the end of her first four months, Joanna is said to "recover" her sanity by becoming the artificial construct of the idealized Stepford woman. However, when Joanna tries to escape from Walter and the town prior to her Stepford metamorphosis, she is unfortunately unsuccessful. Joanna, like the other Stepford women, meets her inevitable destiny of being a Stepford wife—in the end she is depicted just like another Edna, revealing what a woman attempting-to-be-free goes through because of coercion by men: from diminishing her role to sexualisation (Pontuale 37). In the end she was just another Stepford woman "looking terrific in a tightly belted pale blue coat...Her bow lips were red, her complexion pale rose and perfect" (Levin 143). Joanna, the epitome of feminism in the story ends up destroyed by the Men's Association—a result which highlights that *The Stepford Wives* tells the story of

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

women's wish for independence and their struggle against the restrictions of an institutionalized patriarchy. The novel delves into the details of what happens when women are expected to abide by the unjust rules of androcentric communities such as Stepford and its impact on women like Joanna—that is, the novel highlights the eternal fight between patriarchy and feminist movements.

2.3.5. Wind Gap Women

In *Sharp Objects* the story revolves around women, yet the main emphasis is on Camille Preaker, her mother Adora Crellin, and her stepsister Amma Crellin. It is important to examine these characters independently and in relation to each other as well as to the other female characters in Wind Gap to better understand how feminine and feminist ideologies influence the relationships between the women. Flynn creates a telling female dichotomy: on the one side is the typical Wind Gap females who are appealing and yet appalling gossip-loving stay-at-home mothers who care only for trivial domestic topics. On the other hand, are the other female characters: feminist, tom-boyish, stubborn, freedom-loving type who, unfortunately, end up either dead or outcast from society. In order to highlight the feminine and feminist aspects of each character, it is once more essential to make use of Meyer's elements of appearance, action, conversation, and sensations for they play a significant role in investigating the nature of the female characters in this novel.

2.3.5.1. Feminine Appearance, Actions, and Conversations

It is noteworthy that Camille seems to represent the point of comparison with the other characters, or simply it is because the story is seen through her point of view. The first female character to be contrasted with Camille is her dead sister Marian. The reader learns about Marian from the picture Camille had of them as children: “her eyes wide open in surprise. I have mine scrunched shut” (Flynn 9). Subtle but present, it is the first distinction between the two characters; Marian was the perfect child: obedient, lovely and she was “the confirmed beauty: big blue eyes, tiny nose, perfect pointy chin” while Camille's beauty did not surface until she had her menstrual cycle (ibid 57). Camille explains: “That summer, other things happened. I became quite suddenly, unmistakably beautiful...My features changed by the day, as if clouds floated above me casting flattering or sickly shadows on my face. But once it was settled—and we all seemed to realize it that summer, the same summer I first found blood speckling my thighs” (ibid). Marian was everything Camille was not; she was kind and vibrant she could have “soaked up the world” with her joy even when bedridden (Flynn 59).

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Yet, Marian was a tragically perfect child: she was constantly ill with a “sweet series of diseases” (ibid) that made her quite feeble, as if incomplete and not yet ready to face the world and, for that reason, she was reclaimed once again to “heaven” for she was an angel (Flynn 70). Marian seemingly represented the perfect female, she was feminine, obedient, and forever an angel because of dying at such a young age—now leaving Camille to fulfil the now vacant and unobtainable role as “perfect daughter”.

Marian looked like Adora while Camille had taken after her father (106), a fact which only placed more strain on Adora and Camille’s relationship since he had abandoned Adora pregnant at a young age. Marian was not only close to Adora in shape, but she was also Adora’s favourite daughter because of her compliant nature. Adora openly admits to Camille that she often pondered “Why Marian and not her”—that is, why did the good daughter die instead of Camille, the “bad” daughter (132). Marian was too good that she was not allowed to grow:

a blonde baby girl maybe a hair too cute for her own good...She collected hair ribbons and arranged them in alphabetical order by color name. She was the kind of girl who exploited her cuteness with such joy you couldn’t begrudge her. Batting of the eyes, tossing of the curls... She always cleaned her plate, kept a remarkably tidy room, and refused to wear anything but dresses and Mary Janes. (Flynn 146)

Marian is described as femininity incarnated though she was not even a woman yet—she was only eleven and not yet started menstruating. In fact, it is plausible that the absence of menstrual cycle meant that Marian was the perfect female. Menstruation as considered by late 19th and early 20th century US male psychologists is the phase in which women become repulsive (Squire 86) and since Marian did not reach it she remained innocent and pure in the eyes of a patriarchal society. Moreover, Marian, even in her illness was a “doll”, most of all she was, in Adora’s opinion, “easy” while Camille was stubborn (ibid 211 and 207). For the perfect feminine girl to be persevered it was necessary for her to be kept as a perfect child and the only means to achieve that was by killing her. A dead girl is eternally flawless and, as such, “It’s impossible to compete with the dead” (ibid 59)—a remark made by Camille about Marian and pointing to how Adora would often compare them to each other. Marian would even be the topic of conversation when Adora would visit Camille in the psyche ward,

inevitably, came the stories of Marian. She’d already lost one child, you see. It had nearly killed her. Why would the older (though necessarily less beloved) deliberately harm herself? I was so different from her lost girl, who—think of it—would be almost thirty had she lived. Marian embraced life, what she had been spared. Lord, she had soaked up the world—*remember, Camille, how she laughed even in the hospital?* (ibid 59; original emphasis)

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Perhaps it was a blessing that Marian did not get to grow up because the typical women in Wind Gap were not just feminine but also mean and intolerable as evidenced by Adora's manipulations of her daughters' relationship with each other; or even Adora's friends whose only interest is to gossip and look pretty.

The reader encounters Adora's friends in "La Mère" (French for "mother") and is introduced to the first lady of Wind Gap, Annabelle Gasser, Adora's closest friend. Annabelle is a feminine Wind Gap housewife and does not act as a 21st century woman, for example, in spite of hating her husband's last name "It never occurred to her that she didn't have to take it" (Flynn 74). Annabelle is described as still living in the past and following traditional social norms where women were too docile to be independent from their husbands. Aside from Annabelle, there is also Jackie, the black sheep of the group, and after running into her at the funeral Camille remarks that Jackie had "just had a facelift" and she looked "as if she was an angry baby squeezing out of the womb. Diamonds flashed on her tanned fingers... She had a melon of a head, covered with over bleached hair, and a leering smile. Jackie was catty and shallow" (Flynn 36). Nevertheless, Jackie is depicted just as shallow as her other friends at the restaurant; all of whom are blondes, a trait used by Camille to address each one as opposed by their name. As Camille narrates the actions of each one, she states: "snapped another blonde...said a blonde" (ibid 75), to indicate that their appearance identifies them as typical Barbie-doll women: physically flawless, with plastic-looking figures due to constant surgeries to remain beautiful despite their age and blonde hair. However, this stereotype also implies that they lacked intelligence or substance beyond their physical appearance (Chocano 34) which could have negative effects on both their self-perception and societal perceptions of them. Like the ladies in *Stepford* and like Marian, there is no lack of reference to dolls, because feminine women were expected by their patriarchal societies to act and look like dolls: beautiful yet controllable and compliant. On that note, Jackie in Camille's words resembled "a ventriloquist dummy come alive" (ibid) in that she looked plastic and unreal while being controlled by Adora and/or the restrictions of the society that influenced her decision to have plastic surgeries to be beautiful and feminine despite her age.

In summary the ladies' group consisted of "A quartet of drunk, bored, and bitchy housewives who knew all the gossip of Wind Gap" (Flynn 75)—a stereotype supported by the gendered expectations of the high middle-class women in town which limits them to a restrictive domestic space with gossip as one of the few outlets of expression left to them. These women are depicted as having a great deal of free time to collect, remould, and

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

disseminate rumours as they were hardly included in any real topics of discussion. Their opinions rarely mattered to others and Camille used it to her advantage while questioning them, “I’d be interested to know what you think” she said, “A sentence they couldn’t hear very often” (ibid). While prying about John Keene’s life, Adora’s friends were as hungry as vultures to devour and reveal his personal secrets. The moment one of the blondes, DeeAnna announced that John left his parents’ home, the others were exuberantly curious,

“What?” said a blonde.

“You are jooeking,” said another.

“My word,” gushed a third.

“And...” said DeeAnna triumphantly, smiling like a game-show hostess about to bestow a prize. “Into Julie Wheeler’s home. The carriage house out back.”

“That is too good,” said Melissa or Melinda. (Flynn 76)

While women in Stepford were artificially created perfect feminine creatures, the women in Wind Gap are feminine on the outside only, in terms of attire and conduct such as nibbling at “a piece of bread in the birdy, girlish way” (ibid 77). However, despite their external beauty, Wind Gap women are depicted as having negative character traits and behaving in unkind ways, making them more inhumane than the robotic Stepford wives. Nonetheless, the Wind Gap ladies do not have the advantage of being robots—not in the sense that the women in Stepford were more fortunate, the exact opposite, it only means that they could preserve their perfect façade because they were not human. These women of Wind Gap, despite trying to fit the demanding mould of the southern lady, are at least able to remain human, self-defined, and independent to lead their own lives to a certain extent. Therefore, being feminine is not necessarily negative but, it is the hollowness of the proscribed restrictions of a feminine domestic life that produces superficial, ignorant, gossiping women with no true goal in life.

The women in Wind Gap were meant to match certain gendered roles: “Most nice women in Wind Gap are teachers or mothers or work at places like Candy’s Casuals” (Flynn 11), meaning even their occupation or their lack thereof revolves around caring for children. These women are expected to avoid anything different from the stereotype of the proper southern lady in physical appearance, to always look pleasant, always act with proper manners and, most importantly, to make sure to secure a husband (Cobra np). At the Keene’s funeral Camille encounters her high school friends: “I saw Katie Lacey, my old best friend from Calhoon High, in her own well-coiffed circle, the exact mirror of my mother’s group, minus twenty years” (Flynn 35). Those ladies seemed too oblivious of their surroundings and, unlike Camille, they had no care in the world but their public image as wives and as mothers.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Angie, quickly announced to Camille that she had “a five-year-old daughter” as if bragging of her accomplishment (ibid). Days later, and after Camille accepted the ladies’ invitation for a get-together, she discovers that they were all already married and with children. For example, in describing Katie Lacey and her husband, Camille says that his role is to “impregnate Katie when she asked, buy Katie the Pottery Barn sofa she wanted, and otherwise shut up” (Flynn 116). Camille’s friends lived a perfect life as long as they remained silent and not bother their husbands with feminine concerns that further insinuate that women can only be truly perfect if they were inhuman like the women in Stepford.

Being unimportant as a partner also brings to mind Ann’s mother. Once Camille saw her she wished “Betsy Nash would disappear. Literally. She was so insubstantial, [she] could imagine her slowly evaporating, leaving only a sticky spot on the edge of the sofa”, and yet her husband called her “the caregiver” (ibid 80). It seemed both frustrating and irritating to Camille to witness how such an important role as that of a mother was used to render women too frail and bound them to restrictive domestic roles. As for Katie, she had two children and was pregnant with the third, so apparently, she was doing her reproductive labour impeccably. Writing on women’s expected reproductive labour, Silvia Federici notes that women had no control over their reproductive abilities and were forced to have children, whether or not they wanted to for ages and until the 1970s and 80s (87). This lack of control over their own bodies was used to keep women confined to the domestic space and ultimately controlled by men—just as the case for Wind Gap women. In fact, most Wind Gap women were unaware of these gendered frameworks. They seemed quite happy with their situation—this sets them to be quite different from Camille who refused to live by Wind Gaps’ gendered expectations and chose, instead, a career in reporting crimes.

Some of those women took on the stereotype of the feminine idols as early as their teenage years and worked towards always looking perfect, acting properly—all in the hopes to secure wealthy husbands. Nevertheless, there were also some who worked hard to just fit in such as Becca Hart who found that securing a husband is the best way to do it, “she snagged Eric Hart” with emphasis on the verb *snagged* as if she won a trophy (ibid 116). She also attempts to dress like Angie, seemingly the leader of the ring, “comically similar” to Angie in truth (ibid). Camille’s high school friends were strangely content with their simple lives, yet, when Tish dramatically declares that she is going back to work she said it hesitantly and ashamed, as if she was committing blasphemy of the Southern lady’s standards. Her friends’ reactions were no different either, Katie was abashed as she quickly commented: “Good God,

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

sweetie, why?" (ibid 117). Tish explained that she needed purpose, and the job was just that, but the other ladies believed that they already had a purpose as mothers and wives. Angie even indirectly attacked Camille saying "Don't let feminists...make you feel guilty for having what they can't have" (ibid) themselves. Though Becca declares: "Feminism means allowing women to make whatever kind of choices they want", their actions, unconscious or not, negates a female solidarity since they oppress or judge other women or make different choices (ibid). In truth, feminism could have served as a solution for Tish and Mimi who were struggling with the urge to have a job or the idea of having another baby against their husbands' wishes. Feminism would allow them the ideological space to make their own choices, yet they choose to be feminine and remain true to the dominant social expectations placed on "proper" Wind Gap ladies.

As Becca stated, feminism gave women the opportunity to be free to make the choice they wanted but, because Becca's friends were used to being guided by the society's norms, they "were looking dubiously at Becca" (Flynn 117). These women do not know how to be free of the restraints of society, one may say they might not even know what they really wanted, that they were confused (ibid). Tish and Mimi were still reminiscing in their self-created dilemmas "I miss my babies...I've always dreamed of a big houseful of kids, that's all I've ever wanted...what's so wrong with just being a mommy?" (Flynn 117). Camille's high school friends are also depicted as an illogical emotional mess: when they start crying for the dead girls they are said to resemble "a gruesome Victorian portrait come to life" (ibid 118). The portrait represents a simile to the women's obsolescence; an obsolescence scholars explained as women's utmost desire to be "womanly companions of men and to be mothers" (qtd in Eagly et al 1). Whether in mockery, or in pity, such an image was highlighted by bringing attention to the out datedness of this type of portrayal and its irrelevance to the 21st century.

Becca and her friends believe that being a mother suddenly makes one the most compassionate person in the world and without it one is heartless or incomplete—the latter of which Camille was an example. Tish rudely explained to childless Camille what is biological essentialism, stating: a "part of your heart can never work if you don't have kids. Like it will always be shut off" (ibid 120). Ironically, those same women had nothing that resembled compassion towards each other as they were constantly "stabbing each other in the back" (ibid 118) like many other women in town. Camille's childhood friends showed no sympathy when unmarried and childless Camille was intentionally attacked by their "mothering

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

obsessions” rendering her “desperately sulky” with urges to cut herself once more (ibid 120). Nonetheless, Tish, Becca, and the other women were blindly bound to their conviction that being mothers is their sole, and noble, role approved and allotted both by God and science: “‘The Bible says be fruitful and multiply, and science, well, when it all boils down, that’s what women were made for, right? To bear children.’ Katie announced” (Levin 119). As such, *Sharp Objects* presents a group of women that work to meet the expectations of their society’s patriarchal ideologies by preserving and transmitting their feminine, wife and mother roles onto the next generation (of which Camille is an exception) (Lima 11). Clearly, the society in Wind Gap was able to indoctrinate most of its women (since childhood) with such beliefs that it seems as brainwashing them to believe that this is the ideal domestic life. What Camille discovers, and the reader, is that Wind Gap women end up becoming shallow women and mothers in a town that “demands utmost femininity in its fairer sex” (Flynn 16).

Indeed, females of all age groups in Wind Gap were expected to internalize the femininity trait, from the older ladies, such as Annabelle and Jackie, to the ones in their thirties such as Camille’s high school friends. Even little Marian and the teenager Meredith Wheeler represent the southern feminine charm when, just like Tish, Meredith “snagged John,” the most eligible young man in Wind Gap, with her “A-student little virgin” disguise (Flynn 77). Meredith had a “sort of plastic chumminess”, that is, an ambidexterity to look perfect and still be the stereotypical popular mean girl (ibid 109). Meredith’s particular shallowness was visible in the way she acted with John despite his broken heart for his sister, attempting to be too physically intimate (ibid 110), and in her tenacity to have her name and words in Camille’s paper with no consideration for the dead girls (ibid 124). Meredith resembled Adora in Camille’s eyes due to how she loved everything to be perfect from her “glazed berry tarts” to her “linen sundress the color of an unripe peach” to her hairdo (which surely have taken her “twenty minutes to get that perfect”) (ibid 136). Nonetheless, as her fellow ladies, Adora’s friends and Camille’s highschool friends, Meredith could not escape the town’s gossip. As Camille chastised her for her untrue statements about Natalie, Meredith resorted to her gossiping nature and spoke of the misconducts John’s sister was suspected of, not to mention Amma’s own transgressions (ibid 139). Whether young or old, women in Wind Gap had to be beautiful and well-mannered, yet free to gossip—that is, Wind Gap women are only expected to be pleasing to their husbands and it does not matter if they were vile to other people in town as long as it is through a womanly way, that is through gossip. Having said that, gossip is not necessarily trivial for it is also associated with oppression in a sense that

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

gossip provides a shared defence mechanism for women (Guendouzi 474)—it is a tool, whether intentional or not, for women to cope and resist systems of oppression together.

2.3.5.2. Feminist Actions and Conversations

Notwithstanding, if Wind Gap only had compliant pliable women there would be no clash between the feminists and the feminine (non-feminists), but fortunately the new generation included some rebellious young females. Ann Nash and Natalie Keene, two young girls who ended up being murdered, were the farthest from femininity. Ten-year-old Natalie's picture was the first glimpse into her persona, she was "a dark-eyed girl with a feral grin and too much hair for her head. The kind of girl who'd be described by teachers as a 'handful'" (Fynn 11)—a similar description to nine-year-old Ann. At the Nashes' house when Camille sees Ann's picture, she notices that, unlike her rather beautiful "blonde" sisters, she was "a girl with a wide, crooked smile, her pale brown hair cut jaggedly above her chin" (ibid 22). From birth the two girls were different from the typical idealized Wind Gap girls, they were not blonde, neither docile nor well-kept. That is, they were not the kind of girl who would capture the male gaze. Ann's father described her as "a willful thing. A tomboy" and he was puzzled to why the murderer did not choose the feminine girls, because they seemed to be everyone's favourite (ibid). However, Camille liked both girls since not only did they resemble each other but also her at the same age.

Besides their rough appearance Ann and Natalie seemed to be savage in actions as well. When investigating the murders Camille discovered that once "Ann had killed a neighbor's pet bird with a stick. She'd sharpened it herself with one of her daddy's hunting knives", whilst Natalie "stabbed one of her classmates in the eye with a pair of scissors back in Philadelphia" (Flynn 43). Whether the stories were entirely true or not, they ascribe violent tendencies to the two dead girls—traits highly unusual in Wind Gap that many townspeople considered them "bad seeds" (ibid). Betsy Nash called her daughter "tough, she was [her] toughest...She could have played football if she'd been a boy. She'd knock herself silly just running around, always had scrapes and bruises...Ann was my mouth" (Levin 81). Ann might have been aggressive, but it was not without a reason: she was bullied by the girls at school, by their neighbour's daughters who claimed she hurt their bird (ibid 83) and by anyone who saw that she was "smart" and had a "*personality*" (ibid; original emphasis). Her father believed she was a "real *person*" as opposed to the dummy-like girls her age and even grown-up silly women like her mother (Levin 83; original emphasis). He predicted a bright future for

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

her despite her teachers considering her “bossy” and “wild” (ibid 82) — Ann’s personality was summed up in few words, she was not “a little lady” (ibid 83).

In comparison, Natalie was similar to her predecessor, “extremely smart” (Flynn 111). Her brother, John, spoke proudly of her intelligence; how she was supposed to “have skipped a grade or two” if it was not for their mother’s fear that she would not fit in (ibid). Natalie indeed was different from typical little girls in Wind Gap—she was tomboyish and odd, she already had enough reasons not to fit in with the rest of the girls her age, and she did not need brilliance to make her situation any worse (ibid). Having mentioned that, John could not resist to boast about his sister’s cleverness, saying that at a time “she invented this whole other language...Natalie had the whole alphabet figured out—looked like Russian” (ibid 112). Even so, Natalie still did not like going to school since the girls harassed her as the new tom boyish child. However, Natalie already demonstrated belligerent tendencies before arriving in Wind Gap from Philadelphia where Natalie was accused of hurting a girl with scissors for constantly harassing and bossing her around. Natalie, being a wilful girl, would not simply accept and comply to the girls’ bullying advances and still John assures Camille that the incident was, no doubt, an incident of girl banter and that his sister would never harm anyone wilfully, not even her bully (ibid 113).

Ann and Natalie were promising young girls: they were intelligent, but they did not find a proper milieu in which their talents and capacities could develop. Had they grown in the city the situation might have been different, but feminine ideal in Wind Gap only brought out the worst in them as demonstrated by their aggressive and harmful behaviour. Their restricted life as the perfect Wind Gap girl did not allow for certain behaviours, and in Ann’s and Natalie’s case their teachers criticized them for being too wild. They were also punished by their classmates who constantly bullied them for being different which engendered “serious tempers. Like scary-time tempers. Like boys’ tempers” (Flynn 139). Meredith Wheeler compared the girls to boys because, in Wind Gap, girls are not supposed to get furious. It is understandable, for the young girls were awfully treated at school—once, Amma and her gang “cornered Natalie in the bathroom after school one day...and cut her hair off”, and “they made Ann show her...privates to the boys”, they were only abused because they were a “little different” (ibid 119). It is plausible that the girls turned aggressive “biters” (ibid) since they were not allowed freedom to be themselves nor did they receive positive societal nurture for their dreams (ibid 190). Their response is to fight back with aggression and even each other as Ann once stabbed Natalie with a needle in sewing class (ibid). How disappointing that sewing

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

class was not replaced by something “more gender neutral and modern” as Camille expected (ibid 188). It seemed Wind Gap’s outmoded ideology rendered the girls harsh, just like Camille said “I just always feel like I’m a bad person” when she is in town (ibid 149). Ann and Natalie were not murdered because they hurt people, the murderer “picked the two girls in Wind Gap who had minds of their own” (ibid 181), as it is not a place in which they would survive with their defiant nature as perceived by the Wind Gap townspeople.

Although most women in town adhered to the dominant patriarchal ideologies that urged women to look like dolls and act like ones too, it is clear that the novel’s presentation of these women is only a way to criticise patriarchal ideologies. Historically, literature has been dominated by patriarchal ideologies; it often focused on men’s heroism and strength and neglected women (Griffin Wolff 206). Women were typically defined as men’s silent angels in the house, not even their roles as mothers or as wives mattered (ibid 206-207). As for Flynn, she explores in *Sharp Objects* how even supposedly feminine women cannot fit the unreachable expectations defined by men to be an image of frailty, silence, and compassion while also negotiating the tenuous opposition of being perceived as either saint or whore (Snyder 135, xxii). In the novel, the female characters are not helpless, they have a choice to leave the compliant feminine terrain or stay within it. However, girls like Camille, Ann and Natalie who refused femininity face rather grim outcomes. In *Sharp Objects*, there is no focus on men’s strength nor role, everything revolves around women who either choose to internalize patriarchal value systems or challenge them.

2.3.6. Amma Crellin

2.3.6.1. Feminine Appearance, Actions and Conversation

Amma, an adorable name for an adorable looking doll, yet Amma Crellin was no doll, she was not simple minded nor was she the perfect docile girl but rather a manipulative and psychopathic young girl. Amma was born when Camille was in college, so she was much younger than her sister and the reader is first introduced to Amma via Camille’s run in with her near Ann’s crime scene with a trio of her friends: they were “four blonde girls” who “sat stiffly on a picnic towel spread in the sun” (Flynn 14). The girls’ description in this scene, using the words *blondes* and *stiffly*, implies that the girls resemble a group of plastic Barbie dolls and, by extension; their blondness represented the typical Wind Gap women. Amma was “the prettiest”, though she was only thirteen years old, her appearance occupied the liminal space between childhood innocence and purity and adult seduction: “Her flushed face had the roundness of a girl barely in her teens and her hair was parted in ribbons, but her breasts,

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

which she aimed proudly onward, were those of a grown woman. A lucky grown woman” (ibid). As an adolescent girl Amma is at a crossroads of the feminine girl and the seductive female—negotiating the physiological and psycho-emotional complexities of the transition from childhood to womanhood. Catherine Driscoll describes this female maturation phase as the most difficult in the life of a female since it represents “a universal trauma” as the girl moves from a stable phase of childhood to a troubled one during adolescence when her body experiences changes a girl cannot understand (8). More so, Driscoll adds that adolescence in the 21st Western conceptions was “characterized by feminized attributes such as difficulty, malleability, and pre-maturity” (9)—traits embodied in Amma’s characterization as an adolescent girl with a mature body that accentuates and emphasises her femininity.

Ann and Natalie, the murdered girls, were Amma’s “schoolmates”, so Adora urged Camille to sympathize with her sister’s trauma for having lost two of her classmates. Yet, the second time Amma is seen near Natalie’s funeral, once again with her gang, “They were huddled together laughing until one of them, again the prettiest, motioned over at [Camille], and they all pretended to hang their heads” (Flynn 33). There were no signs of sadness nor even sympathy, they instead mocked the dead girl. Indeed, they were only flawless dolls on the outside. Until this moment, Amma was only depicted outdoors, but at home she was a “changeling” as described by Camille, too surreal to be of true flesh, her “Long blond hair drifted in disciplined rivulets down her back...in a childish checked sundress, matching straw hat by her side. She looked entirely her age—thirteen—for the first time...Actually, no. She looked younger now” (ibid 41). That is, while in public Amma was a preadolescent sex symbol, in the domestic space of the home (constrained by Adora’s expectations) she was preserved in childhood innocence and adorability.

Amma’s duplicity, however, was not unrestricted; she admits to Camille that she was forced to be a puppet for Adora and reveals that her feminine traits were not an authentic representation of her true self: “I wear this for Adora. When I’m home, I’m her little doll” she says (Flynn 41). Amma, on the surface, was what Virginia Woolf termed as “the angel in the house”, a perfect little girl endowed with fragility and obedience with no personal individual desires (Venkatesh et al 118). Yet, beneath this façade, Amma manipulated her surroundings and plotted more than one murder. Though Amma was coerced into docility, her true nature is revealed once she passes the threshold of her mother’s house. Strangely, aside from her clothing, Amma’s feminine compliance at home is difficult to deduce as by free will or by force of habit. For instance, her obsession with her dollhouse mini version of “Adora’s house”

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

is an indicator of her feminine obsession to have a little home of her own to run. Amma herself admits that “This dollhouse is my fancy” (Flynn 41) which means that even Amma, the serial murderer also loved her mini dollhouse like any girl her age indicating a schizophrenic state resulting from her unnatural upbringing by Adora.

2.3.6.2. Evil, Murderous Amma

When Amma moved in with Camille she was enrolled into a school where she befriended a young girl called Lily. Lily was smart, she “had a spray of freckles, oversized front teeth, and hair the color of chocolate” (ibid 113); Lily was not a dumb blonde, she was like Ann and Natalie. She was one of those girls Amma saw herself in and was jealous of their freedom. Indeed, after Amma exposed her envy of Lily, the latter was found dead, with “six of her teeth” removed (ibid 114). Amma was the true serial killer after all. In *Wind Gap*, Amma received help from her friends to kill but, in Chicago she “killed Lily all by herself” and braided her hair into a rug for Camille’s room in the doll house (ibid 216). Amma is a mentally unstable monster who could not bear to see free, smart opinionated girls like herself. From one side, Amma wished to keep all of the attention to herself and from the other, since she was never free of Adora’s restraints to be a doll, they could not be free either. Amma essentially silenced and caged her victims for life by killing them and removing their teeth. According to Froeling, the age in which women start to commit serial murders is twenty-one (102) yet Amma seems to belong to a new type of the female serial killer not yet categorised. Amma’s jealousy fuels her inherent psychopathic nature and, despite her youth, she becomes a teenage serial murderer.

Amma was left at a crossroads: either to kill herself, or surrender “to life as a doll, pet, or robot” (Kotani and LaMarre 50). Amma belonging to the twenty-first century chose both and neither. She killed but not herself, she was a doll but only as a façade to hide her deranged mannerisms. Notwithstanding, Amma’s psychopathy was not by birth but rather it is because she was “A child weaned on poison” that made her consider “harm a comfort”—traits that indicate her inner struggle against Adora’s subjugation (ibid 219). That is, Amma was not a victim of a patriarchal code but rather an over controlling female who represented a new form of oppression.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

2.3.7. Adora Crellin

2.3.7.1. Feminine Appearances, Actions and Conversations

Adora is a name extracted from the verb “to adore” or the adjective “adorable” which both denote compassion, warmth, and lovability—however, Adora Crellin is everything but; she is a wealthy pig-slaughtering business owner, who lived in an enormous, “elaborate Victorian replete” house (Flynn 24). Adora and her ancestor southern Victorians preferred the distance the house had from the rest of its surroundings, “to wall themselves away from sticky emotions” (Flynn 24), or to display her superiority to the rest of the town.

From Adora’s first words Camille described her voice as “needy” (ibid) and even though Adora had not seen her daughter for almost a year, she did not even offer Camille a small embrace nor did she invite her in right away. Instead, she was fazed by why her daughter arrived unannounced and that her home was “not up to par for a visitor” despite it appearing to be in an impeccable state (Flynn 25). She also did not expect her daughter to stay there, despite it being the obvious choice. Moreover, Adora had no motherly warmth toward Camille: she did not notice her daughter’s new hair colour nor did she attempt to ask her about how she was doing. Physically, on the other hand, Adora is described as having a Stepford aesthetic and despite being “in her late forties” she did not look much older than her daughter (Flynn 26). Adora is described as having “Glowing pale skin, with long blonde hair and pale blue eyes. She was like a girl’s very best doll”, the type which remains untouched, “She was wearing a long, pink cotton dress with little white slippers” (ibid). She was an image of perfect femininity according to the dominant social standards of female beauty in her small town in the southern US.

In contrast to her cold manners towards her own daughter, Adora feigned care and concern when Ann and Natalie were brought up in conversation. Camille also comments on Adora’s weird nervous habit of pulling “her eyelashes. Sometimes they come out” and she resembles “a lab rabbit” with pink lash-less eyes (Flynn 26). Adora is also committed to a specific aesthetic that even supercedes common social practices; for example, she could not wear black but wore blue instead to Marian’s funeral and she was wearing it again to Natalie’s (ibid 30). Adora’s reasons are not mentioned in the novel, but one can interpret her behaviour as a clear attempt to set herself apart from the rest of the women and be the centre of attention. Camille’s mother was not simply “needy” in the way she spoke, but in her nature too. When Camille encountered Jackie, one of Adora’s close friends, the latter told her that Adora was at odds with her for trivial unfathomable reasons, and it was made clear that Adora

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

getting angry for no good reason was typical behaviour for her. She said “your momma isn’t talking to me right now—I disappointed her again somehow... I probably forgot to send her a card for something ...Or maybe that gardener I recommended didn’t please her” (ibid 36). The relationship between Jackie and Adora evidently displays Adora’s judgmental attitude and leverage on and manipulation of other women.

For Wind Gap, Adora was the perfect mother and housewife, even after her lapse in judgement in getting pregnant out of wedlock at the age of seventeen. She rectified the situation by having a Victorian-style courtship with Alan, by keeping her virtue, laughing “girlishly” at his in-existent jokes, and by throwing her newborn baby “in some far corner room, kept quiet by the maid” until her marriage was consummated (Flynn 69). Adora did not attempt to create a warm home for her family as the idealized housewife is expected, because Adora is not one. Instead Adora preferred “all relationships in the house to run through her”, she is supposed to be the centre of everything and everyone’s attention (ibid). Even with her daughter’s death she refused to “be distracted from her grief”, twenty years later “it remains a hobby” for her to garner attention (ibid). Setting aside Adora’s inner darker nature, on the outside she was careful to only display predefined traits of the “feminine” woman: fragile, elegant, and flawless.

2.3.7.2. Evil, Murderous Adora

Taking care of her daughters provides Adora with the necessary social façade for her poisonous ways. Even when Amma was hang over because of drinks or intoxicating pills Adora did not punish Amma, she just pretends she did not know to have reason to nurse Amma, or more precisely poison her further. With Camille and Amma both sick, it was Adora’s chance to gratify her psychopathic nature by making her daughters sick to then try to heal them. The entire operation was so well rehearsed because she had done it so many times before,

She tilted my jaw from side to side and pulled my lower lip down, like she was inspecting a horse. She raised each of my arms slowly and peered into my armpits, jamming fingers into the hollows, then rubbed my throat to feel for swollen glands. I remembered the drill. She put a hand between my legs, quickly, professionally. It was the best way to feel a temperature, she always said. Then she softly, lightly drew her cool fingers down my legs, and jabbed her thumb directly into the open wound of my smashed ankle...She used the moment to poke at my head until she hit the smashed-fruit spot on its crown. (Flynn 168)

So well-rehearsed indeed, even her treatments were as meticulous as her actions. Meticulous they were, but not meant for healing, only to bring more suffering to her daughters but more

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

attention and sympathy to herself. When Camille would question the medicines Adora administered, the latter would get too uncomfortable, her “chest turned blotchy pink and her smile began flickering like a candle in a draft. On, off, on, off in the space of a second” (Flynn 169). The entire procedure would kindle Camille’s urge to cut, and the word “nurse” would flash on her skin (ibid), but a nurse who poisons her patients. Adora was an angel of death type of a serial killer (qtd in Foeling 102). That is, Adora’s psychopathic tendencies to harm her daughters gave her a sense of satisfaction while gaining love and attention from the people around her. These traits can also be linked to her Munchausen by proxy illness and her narcissistic nature. When Adora’s psychopathy reaches its peak, she turns into a serial killer, an angel of death who kills her victims by caring for them too much until she finally poisons them to death. In conclusion, Adora was killing her other daughters like she murdered Marian because she could gain more love and attention if she was the mother of a deceased daughter than she could from being the mother of an ill child—and it required less work.

Unfortunately, even Adora’s urge to harm her daughters was inherited from her own mother, Joya—that is, Adora’s suffering from the psycho-emotional abuse exerted by her mother led her to be a bad mother as well. Joya was a very bizarre woman, she was never loving to her daughter, but she was “Always fixing the hair, tugging at clothes, and ... Instead of licking her thumb and rubbing at a smudge, she’d lick Adora... When Adora peeled from sunburn... Joya would sit next to [her], strip off her shirt, and peel the skin off in long strips” (Flynn 206). One night she even took eight-year-old Adora “into the North woods and left” her there, for no clear reason (ibid 206). Even more, Adora, like Marian, “was sick all the time. She was always having tubes and needles and such stuck in her” (Flynn 177). But was Adora sick, or was she rendered ill by her mother? Scientifically what Adora, and maybe even Joya, had was Munchausen by proxy where “The caregiver, usually the mother... makes her child ill to get attention for herself” (ibid 199). Adora even went further, and killed her daughter, and what better tragedy to harvest permanent attention than losing a child. Now with Ann and Natalie dead, Adora’s tragic appeal was losing its spark, it was time for her to lose another child, and Camille was the better choice, especially since the poison did not seem to work on Amma.

Adora’s character is one of the most complicated ones in the story. You can neither sympathise with Adora despite her supposedly rough childhood, nor can one hate her for being the deranged woman she is. Adora was an abused child, just like Amma, who grew up to be a hateful mother and a monstrous killer. Under the veil of care, she murdered and

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

tortured not only her daughters, but she was even suspected of poisoning Ann, Natalie, and her husband Alan. Adora struggled between embracing her evil self and between the pretty image everyone expected. Joya, Adora's mother, oppressed her daughter and harmed her to no end. As a result, Adora developed mental issues which could classify her as a psychopath. She is unable to feel sympathy, regret or to have any sense of morality. Adora's actions only stem from her wish to maintain her status as the perfect mother and housewife which is identical to what a patriarchal society wished of its women. More so, Adora also wished to infect other women, especially her daughters, with her supposedly feminine attitude that she perchance represents patriarchy under a wicked matriarchal façade and in feminine attire.

2.3.8. Camille Preaker

The protagonist and main character in *Sharp Objects* is Camille Preaker. Camille, though was born and raised in Wind Gap, left her hometown to find freedom in Chicago to pursue a career in journalism. Nonetheless, despite Camille becoming an independent working woman, the influence of her childhood in Wind Gap still affects her life even as an adult. She deals with her past trauma by finding psycho-emotional release in self-harm—by cutting trigger words into her flesh—and excessive drinking. In the novel she is first acknowledged by the readers as the narrator, and then as a broken character based on her cutting and psychological trauma. Her contact with evil and tragedy is evident from the first page—as a newspaper reporter her first assignment was to report on a grisly story of abandoned children left starving and dirty, while their mother used drugs. Furthermore, Camille was not like women her age in Wind Gap since she did not take on the typical feminine gender roles of housewife—instead she craved freedom and the uncanny such as the ugliness of crimes and murders. Nevertheless, it was not only Camille's job which exposed her to evil and tragedy, her own life was traumatic because of being psycho-emotionally abused by her mother throughout her childhood.

2.3.8.1. Feminist Actions and Conversations

Since childhood Camille was criticised for her defiance and unfeminine-nature: she was a bit of a tomboy as revealed in the description of her childhood summer activities: “we swam at a spot just downstream where huge table rocks made shallow pools. Crawdads would skitter around our feet and we'd jump for them, scream if we actually touched one. No one wore swimsuits, it took too much planning. Instead you just rode your bike home in soaked shorts and halters, shaking your head like a wet dog” (ibid 16). Camille also seemed to be mesmerized by violence as early as her preteen years, it was no wonder she found herself

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

investigating the most eerie crimes. For instance, older boys who used to hunt for pleasure “always compelled” her, in the sense that she felt extremely attracted to their feral acts (Flynn 17). It seemed Camille’s subconscious often forged a link between violence and pleasure to the extent that her first orgasm as a teenager was the outcome of gruesome thoughts of the pornographic hunting shack (ibid). While a normal child would be typically repulsed by the images of dead animals and grisly pictures of women being violated, Camille found some sort of sexual gratification in them. Despite her shock of Amma’s fascination with the pigs being slaughtered, Camille was in fact no different, nor was she different from Ann and Natalie and their violent outbursts—possibly why she felt a connection with Ann and Natalie, precisely because they resembled her younger self.

Camille grew up to be different from Wind Gap women by not occupying stereotypical normative feminine roles such as mother, schoolteacher, or clothing saleswoman. Camille was different, an independent single city woman, and the furthest from Wind Gap’s expectations of a feminine woman. When first summoned by her employer to investigate her hometown, she instantly expressed her reluctance and rejection of the assignment. She genuinely did not wish to go back to Wind Gap—not just her hometown but more so of the prospect of seeing her mother. Since Camille left town, the contact she had with her mother was merely a Christmas “chilly, polite call after administering three bourbons” (Flynn 7). It is such a difficult, emotionally draining, and trauma triggering exercise to contact her family that Camille resorts to drinking alcohol. Despite her revulsion of returning to Wind Gap, as a career woman her ambition made her agree to the assignment and the promise of the “stunning story” she was going to report—all was enough of an incentive to go back to Wind Gap and endure the horrors she is to encounter (ibid 9). Yet, before she arrived in town, the mere thoughts of encountering her mother caused her to drink, because seeing her mother would mean she will have to endure her condescending and hurtful remarks along with reliving the memories of her dead sister.

Upon her arrival at the family home, Camille finally encounters her mother but without a warm welcome. Adora did not even question how Camille was faring considering Camille’s sensitive nature after her sister Marian’s loss and her time at the psyche ward. When mentioning Amma and the death of her so-called friends, Camille used certain words to insinuate that she too, was still hurt from her sister’s loss but Adora “didn’t notice their bitter spin” (ibid 27). Camille was still bitter, for she was never given the chance to mourn her loss

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

and process her emotions and returning to her childhood home only brought back Camille's worst feelings which caused her to have trouble sleeping and suffer from nightmares:

Four hours of threadbare sleep, like lying in a bathtub with your ears half submerged. Shooting up in bed every twenty minutes, my heart pounding so hard I wondered if it was the beating that woke me. I dreamt I was packing for a trip, then realized I'd laid out all the wrong clothes, sweaters for a summer vacation. I dreamt I'd filed the wrong story for *Curry* before I left: Instead of the item on miserable Tammy Davis and her four locked-up children, we'd run a puff piece about skin care. I dreamt my mother was slicing an apple onto thick cuts of meat and feeding it to me, slowly and sweetly, because I was dying. (Flynn 27)

The constant stress of Camille's job, her first day in Wind Gap and being at Adora's home led to sleep deprivation and awful dreams for Camille. Not only were Camille's thoughts confused but she had not dealt with her feelings her entire life which left her feeling incomplete and lacking. She had no suitable place to call home, both Wind Gap and even her Chicago apartment "held no comfort" for her (Flynn 39). Camille had as much social life in Chicago as she had in Wind Gap:

I kept my eyes closed and imagined myself back in Chicago, on my rickety slice of a bed in my studio apartment facing the brick back of a supermarket. I had a cardboard dresser purchased at that supermarket when I moved in four years ago, and a plastic table on which I ate from a set of weightless yellow plates and bent, tinny flatware. I worried that I hadn't watered my lone plant, a slightly yellow fern I'd found by my neighbors' trash. Then I remembered I'd tossed the dead thing out two months ago. I tried to imagine other images from my life in Chicago: my cubicle at work, my superintendent who still didn't know my name, the dull green Christmas lights the supermarket had yet to take down. A scattering of friendly acquaintances who probably hadn't noticed I'd been gone. (Flynn 39)

Camille's life was empty and miserable, even as a teenager she did not allow herself the small joys of life. Unlike young girls her age, Camille's room lacked a personal touch with no "posters of pop stars or favourite movies, no girlish collections of photos or corsages. Instead, there were paintings of sailboats, proper pastel pastorals, a portrait of Eleanor Roosevelt" (ibid). Little that child Camille knew is that Eleanor Roosevelt was a feminist activist who called for women's rights and equality (Cook 47), and so Camille unknowingly eluded Wind Gap's definition of femininity by choosing the poster of the first lady whom she picked—because in Camille's view was "good" and perhaps good for Camille meant allowing girls to be free of the restrictions of oppressive ideals of femininity (Flynn 39). Yet, now as she grew older, and knew better, Camille admitted that she would have preferred a picture of "Warren Harding's wife, 'the Duchess,' who recorded the smallest offenses in a little red notebook and avenged herself accordingly", because nowadays Camille favoured "first ladies with a little

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

bite” (ibid 40), women with a spine. The idea that grown up Camille preferred a feminist president’s wife over any other type of women provides the reader with insights into Camille’s thought processes and pro-feminist values that made her stand apart from the women in Wind Gap, perhaps, that is why she never fit in in her own hometown.

2.3.8.2. Camille, the Self-harmer

It was Marian’s death that triggered Camille’s unhinged behaviours, and it was then that she became a self-harmer. She acknowledges, “I am a cutter, you see. Also a snipper, a slicer, a carver, a jabber. I am a very special case. I have purpose. My skin, you see, screams. It’s covered with words—*cook, cupcake, kitty, curls*—as if a knife-wielding first-grade learned to write on my flesh” (Flynn 55; original emphasis). Unable to deal with her sorrow young Camille attempted to divert her pain to her skin, or more so, it was her skin which decided to speak for her; it “screams” she said. Her skin spoke of what troubled Camille’s subconscious and most of the words Camille carved had feminine connotations, “*cook, cupcake, kitty, curls...baby-doll...petticoat*” (Flynn 55; original emphasis). Other words were the total opposite, they carried evil, or simply troubled insinuations like “*harmful*” and “*wicked*” (ibid; original emphasis). Evidently, Camille was conflicted whether to please Adora, and be her doll to manipulate, or to unleash her rebellious side which was only the more nourished by Adora’s over control and evil effect.

In Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*, she attempts to explain the connection between a female body and her thoughts and desires. According to Arleen Dallery, Beauvoir proposes that the female body functions as a substitute for her absent voice (197). In correlation, the idea that women’s writing can even be done on the female body is highly relevant to the protagonist, Camille Preaker. Camille found voice and refuge in writing on her flesh. All the words which bothered her inwardly were released when being carved onto her body. In one instance when Adora barged into the Nashes’ home and dismissed Camille, “A word suddenly flashed on [her] lower hip: *punish*” (Flynn 84; original emphasis). Camille was a book for those who wished to read and it was about loss, negligence, and the insecurities of a young girl. She feared that people could read her, that a “word might slip out from under a sleeve or pantcuff” (ibid 165), and people could recognize her inner conflict between a doll (which her mother expected of her) and a wicked girl who refused to breastfeed from her mother, cut her hair short and refused to behave. Even as a grown woman, Camille was still lost that she only found refuge in self-harm. Even after she quit cutting, the urge lasted. She wishes to

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

immortalize words like “*Equivocate. Inarticulate. Duplicitous*” on her skin (ibid 58; original emphasis). Such words only prove Camille’s confusion—she evades the fact that she could never be a free person because she has never understood—her true identity. She suffers duplicity because society, and especially her mother, did not allow her to relish in her true self, a rebellious unfeminine personality. Camille admits that she had to cut to express her bottled emotions and that is why most self-harmers are women⁷. Furthermore, the hospital Camille stayed in was “a special place for people who cut, almost all of them women” (ibid). They were oppressed and sick women which the society, and their families, contributed to their emotional depravity and confinement, just like Camille.

When at home in Wind Gap, Camille was often attacked by old memories of her dead sister ignited by the coziness of the Crellin’s family. Amma being needy and somehow ill gave Camille flashbacks of her caring for Marian. She says “I felt a shot of alarm, then annoyance: I was sinking back into old routines, about to run to the kitchen to heat some tea, just like I always did for Marian when she was sick” (ibid 54). The *tableau* of a happy family, a doting father and mother to a lonely child brought envy into Camille’s heart. She remembered her young stubborn self and “suddenly wished [she’d] been easier”, she wished she allowed Adora to care for her as she always wanted with solutions and ointments (Flynn 54). She wished she let herself belong within her family, especially that “Everyone here was a Crellin”, except her (ibid). In rare moments of earnestness Camille unconsciously admits to the anomalies of her life. Bringing Adora to her conversation with detective Willis disclosed her inner beliefs. She thought “some women aren’t made to be mothers. And some women aren’t made to be daughters”, she both self-confessed Adora’s failure as a mother and her own as a daughter (Flynn 101). Furthermore, she pondered on her love of darkness, her indirect wish for her life to pass and end when she admits that she finds comfort in:

checking days off a calendar—151 days crossed and nothing truly horrible has happened. 152 and the world isn’t ruined. 153 and I haven’t destroyed anyone. 154 and no one really hates me. Sometimes I think I won’t ever feel safe until I can count my last days on one hand. Three more days to get through until I don’t have to worry about life anymore. (ibid)

Camille is insecure and she did not enjoy being alive, yet she tried to prove that she existed. Upon witnessing the bullying encounter between Camille and Amma’s gang; Amma

⁷ Statistically, reports on adolescents in the USA have found that “About one in four adolescent girls deliberately harmed herself..., often by cutting or burning, compared to about one in 10 boys...Adolescent girls who participated in the survey were more likely than boys to report belonging to the L.G.B.T. community and having been sexually assaulted or bullied online” (Baumgaertner np).

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

mentioned how Camille was an attractive girl in the old days, but Richard's laugh generated insecurities and "*Unworthy* flared up [her] leg" (Flynn 103; original emphasis). Nevertheless, Camille tried to convince him; "It's true, Richard. I was something back in the day" (ibid). Because of her vulnerability Camille needed acknowledgment from the detective that she existed and mattered. She became easily distraught, especially in front of perfect-skinned girls who "all seemed unfinished" (ibid 103). The girls looked doll-like, the very thing she hated about Adora's constant condescending remarks of how Camille was never a doll.

Camille's perplexity appears to be the progeny of her traumatic upbringing, her loss and then her cutting. On the surface Camille is an independent city girl, but beneath this façade Camille was a psycho-emotionally troubled woman due to the residue of her childhood trauma. She is too insecure that she hides her scars, gets bullied by her half-sister and mother, and attempts to please the detective who uses her to further his investigation. When all these factors are patched together, they prove that Adora was the one who traumatized Camille. It was Adora who abandoned Camille when she lost her sister, the one who blamed her for not being pretty enough or obedient and it was Adora who triggered Camille's cutting for most of the words she wrote on her body were used by her mother to undermine her.

Indeed, Camille was not what Adora wished her to be, she was a feminist who loved her career, but she also wished to have a family and children. In the company of her high school friends, she felt jealous because they had great houses, and children, "Talk of me, Chicago, no husband yet but fingers crossed! Talk to her, her hair, her new vitamin program, Brad, her two girls" (Flynn 116). Camille felt incomplete in comparison, though she despised their docile fake natures to please their husbands. Her high school friends, too, called her incomplete claiming that a girl cannot become a woman unless she has children, and Camille had not fulfilled that requisite (ibid 119). In her bed that night Camille felt petulant and tormented, "I called myself sweetheart. I wanted to cut: *Sugar* flared on my thigh, *nasty* burned near my knee. I wanted to slice *barren* into my skin. That's how I'd stay, my insides unused. Empty and pristine. I pictured my pelvis split open, to reveal a tidy hollow, like the nest of a vanished animal" (ibid 120; original emphasis). What a horrifying image indeed coated by the words "Sugar", "nasty" and "barren", a mixture of feminine sweetness and bitter ugliness which further highlight Camille's inner conflict.

Setting aside all the horrible, uncanny facts of Camille's life, at heart she only craved attention, and true belonging. To that simple end, she tagged along with underaged Amma and

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

her friends to a party. She even took pills to please her sister, because Amma gave her what she yearned, a bond, a relationship of some sort. Amma gave her back the feelings she last had with her long-lost sister Marian. Camille lost sight of her logic because Amma “calling [her] Mille took [her] back to Marian”, at that very moment, Camille’s reasoning was overshadowed by a sense of belonging (Flynn 146). The two sisters, then, ended up perplexed, especially Camille who was not used to such an atmosphere, that is to have fun with teenagers under the influence of drugs while she was an adult. Her confusion took her to dark places in her memories, her hospital and the suicide of her roommate. Hence, once more pleasure and ugliness seem to be intertwined for Camille when she found gratification in being intoxicated and remembering dark and sad memories of Marian (Flynn 159).

On that very note, Camille preferred being sick, even as an adult she liked “that retching and weakness and spit”, because it meant Adora would pay her attention, and mother her, “holding [her] hair back, her voice soothing: *Get all that bad stuff out, sweetheart. Don’t stop till it’s all out*” (ibid 166; original emphasis). That is why she truly liked Amma, because she saw the resemblance in her warmth when Amma would wish to sleep next to Camille and ugliness when she bullies people. She was another intelligent messed-up young girl, similar to Camille herself (ibid 161): they were both abused by their mother and that, in relevance, led them to darkness either by self-harm or harming others. At the moment of being intoxicated with her younger sister, Camille had “never been happier than right” then (ibid 163). Camille was able to have a relationship with a family member, no matter how deranged, which she did not experience since Marian died. It is in Amma that Camille could find what she lost a long time ago.

Camille also suffered another conflict when her mother would forcibly take care of her. Camille as a child used to refuse, now as an adult, she decided to comply because she finds solace in her mother’s touch and care (Flynn 169). She finally received the affection she often dreamed of and no matter how obvious her mother’s monstrosity was, she decided to ignore it. Even when confronted by Jackie O’Neele, Camille still doubted the fact that her mother could have killed Marian (ibid 177). Camille’s loss and fragility after meeting Jackie left her vulnerable and when, with John Keen, not only did she succumb to the allure of his sorrow, but Camille finally let go and revealed her scars to a man. In truth John was able to “read” her as if she was a book which caused her to feel “exorcised” (ibid 183). A feeling she never allowed herself to feel, because she feared being judged by people who are closest to her such as Adora. In her diary on September 14th, 1982 Adora wrote: “I’ve decided today to stop

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

caring for Camille and focus on Marian. Camille has never become a good patient—being sick only makes her angry and spiteful. She doesn't like me to touch her. I've never heard of such a thing? She has Joya's spite. I hate her. Marian is such a doll when she's ill" (ibid 210).

As a teenager, as a young woman and even as an infant Camille was accused of being disobedient against what Adora expected, as if Camille wished to punish Adora (132). The rush of Adora's ugly confessions, that she never loved her daughter, and Camille's weakness drove her to the unthinkable, Camille attempted suicide (Flynn 133). Even as a child, Camille was not pardoned for her rebellious nature, she was despised for not being compliant and puppet-like like Marian was, though it would have meant her death. Thus, the accumulation of Adora's hatred over the years highly contributed to Camille's mental instability and self-harm.

2.4. Men and Masculinities in the Selected Novels

In both *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects* the readers come across several male characters that provide a relational perspective on gendered role expectations in each context. Though the two novels focus primarily on women's transformation into robots or monsters; they also depict the male characters' influence, or the lack thereof, in these transformations. It is essential to explore the inter-relationality of the gendered roles represented in the novels to better understand the bigger picture concerning female depiction. It is important to either reveal or negate the theory on the reversal of gendered roles in respect to men. Though 'traditional masculinity', refers to the idea of being an "authentic man, such as being a provider, being aggressive, being strong, being stoic and being a leader among others" (Waling 364), this notion is also considered by some scholars as synonymous with "toxic masculinity." The cultural construct of toxic (sometimes also labelled as 'hegemonic') masculinity entails toxic practices' of masculinity that have resulted in the oppressions" of both men and women as it is "responsible for aggressive and predatory heterosexual behaviour resulting in sexual and domestic violence committed by men" (Waling 365-366). On the opposite side of the spectrum of toxic masculinity lies "healthy masculinity" which denotes having roots in:

feminist consciousness raising, a form of activism that seeks to make people more aware of social, personal, or political issues (see Bartky 1975). In this framing, men must rationally and consciously reject oppressive regimes of manhood and masculinity in order to support the dismantling of unequal gendered power relations (Berggren 2014). Men must 'take responsibility for their own masculinity.' (Waling 366-367)

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Furthermore, healthy masculinity also insinuates keeping in touch with a feminine side to men where they are allowed and encouraged to express their emotions (Waling 367). From a different point of view, it is believed that some feminist authors represented men in their stories under a set of clichés from “the ‘dumb jock,’ to the bumbling, dull husband, to the cruel, yet fascinating rake” (Palvik 15). Moreover, the following sections to this study shall make use of Palvik’s categorisation of male characters in order to explore the male characters in both novels.

2.4.1. The Stepford Men

The town of Stepford is already recognized as a graveyard for female individuality and independence within which men endeavour to shape how women should be better wives and mothers through the dominant institution of the Men’s Association. This patriarchal microcosm of Stepford is described as “an outdated, old fashioned” all masculine body (Levin 8) and, architecturally, it “had a surprisingly comic look to it: a square old nineteenth-century house” (ibid 52). Both its architecture and value systems reflect ideologies from the 19th century: it included only men and women were never allowed inside; it did not tackle female issues such as an equitable female representation. As a result of the institution’s antiquated nature, Joanna “thought it went back to the Puritans” (ibid 58). Yet, all the men in Stepford were “magnetically” attracted to the Association, “they didn’t want to leave” (Levin 60), no matter how unjust or misogynist it was. By misogynist, researcher Kate Manne refers to a “deprivation mindset regarding women being giving, caring, loving, and attentive, as opposed to power-hungry, uncaring, and domineering” (xiv). In other words, women who wish and endeavour to gain important roles in the public sphere are rejected by a misogynist society. Such women are to be considered as “morally suspect in at least three main ways: insufficiently caring and attentive with respect to those in her orbit deemed vulnerable; illicitly trying to gain power that she is not entitled to; and morally untrustworthy, given the other two kinds of role violations” (Manne xiv). The men in Stepford who clearly reflect misogyny are those who refuse to accept women like Joanna, Bobbie or Charmaine who were opinionated and independent—instead, the Stepford men chose to render these women into domesticated versions of themselves by being submissive to their men.

As the main protagonist’s husband and the newest arrival to Stepford, Walter Eberhart is one of the male characters that has the most presence in the novel. Before the reader’s encounter with Walter, he is described by Joanna as a Women’s Liberation movement advocate which seems to perplex the Welcome Wagon Lady. Joanna also speaks about his

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

hobbies like “boating and football” along with collecting “Early American legal documents” (Levin 5). Walter, in fact, was not simply a cultivated smart man; he was also helpful and respectful of Joanna—both sharing household chores and occasionally smoking cigarettes. That is, Joanna and Walter enjoyed an equal and loving partnership type of relationship before the influence of the Men’s Association on both of their personalities. Despite all his positive pro-women tendencies Walter still wishes to join the Men’s Association, claiming that the best way to alter it is from the inside (ibid 9). Up until this point Walter seems to be the perfect husband, yet the reader grows suspicious when it is revealed that “the whole idea of moving had been his in the first place” (ibid 80). Despite his need to commute, even though there were better options like Norwood or Eastbridge, he claimed that those towns would be “dead” in contrast to Stepford.

Walter’s visits to the Association become regular, though not daily, as those of the other men. On one particular night, while Joanna is sleeping, he returned from the Men’s Association and he started masturbating beside her in bed. He claimed he did not want to disturb and wake her, but it was still unbecoming that Joanna felt embarrassed that her husband did not seek comfort in and/or release with her (Levin 19). The meeting at the Men’s Association had such an effect on Walter that it made him sexually aroused and the way in which he seemed to divert the conversation about it made the situation even more suspicious to his wife (ibid 20). For Walter it seemed Stepford made him “chipper” –changes his city friends noticed in him (ibid 29). Then, days later he brought the “New Projects Committee” home (ibid 30). The new project, most likely, was Joanna herself, his delight could have been his excitement to get his own brand-new Stepford-Joanna: passive and obedient and him more “manly”. Supporting this hypothesis is Walter’s urgings for Joanna to sit with the men, chat and give her opinions—the same group of men that controlled and enforced Stepford’s sexist power hierarchies. In addition, he would even get up to pacify their daughter Kim instead of her, as to not stop the illustrator Ike Mazzard from drawing multiple sketches of her face and body. What exposed the devious aspect of the meeting was the men’s reaction while Joanna was being drawn; they looked “tense” that even Joanna noticed it (ibid 34) which alluded that the drawings were neither spontaneous nor without a hidden purpose.

For a feminist, Walter’s response to Charmaine’s transformation was odd, he was not baffled, only expectant as if he knew it would happen (Levin 63). As Joanna’s fears grow and she starts thinking of leaving Stepford, astoundingly Walter seemed very supportive and agreed to do whatever pleased her (ibid 69). Walter’s actions appeared illogical in comparison

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

with his words because, though he claimed to support moving from Stepford, he was plotting to transform his wife. For example, when Axhelm asked Joanna to tape-record some songs, words and information about herself, Walter subtly, yet slyly, influenced her to agree (ibid 73). With Christmas close by, Walter had more excuses to stay in the Men's Association and he became even more distant from Joanna as shown in one scene where "Walter was lying on his side, facing away from her" in bed after they had intercourse (ibid 81). When guilt and doubt consume Joanna, thinking that she did not satisfy him, Walter acts indifferent to her questions, until she accuses him of infidelity (ibid 82). Though he convinced her that he was faithful he did nothing to soothe her doubts, he still turned away, not giving her even one reassuring hug. Consequently, Joanna started to feel self-doubt and the beginning of a rift in her marriage.

After Bobbie's transformation Walter and Dave have a private chat on a so-called stock, perhaps a code about the process of changing the women. The fact that Walter avoids kissing transformed Bobbie supports the theory about Walter's awareness of the secret of the Stepford women and how they were turned into complacent robotic versions of themselves (Levin 92). He also hid the bankbooks from Joanna alleging that he was buying stock, as an attempt to prevent her from accessing money to be able to flee (ibid 99). Indeed, Walter unconsciously wishes Joanna to change, he also asks her to see a psychiatrist—to thwart her escape from Stepford. Yet, despite Joanna's efforts to escape, she becomes a Stepford wife and no matter how many times Walter denied his role in the story or denied knowledge of how everything transpired; Joanna was morphed into the perfect Stepford wife (Levin 143). No matter if Walter was ever a pro-feminist or not, he ended up like the rest of the men wanting a perfect obedient doll as his wife. In the end Walter's "healthy masculinity" was transformed into a "toxic masculinity" when he replaces his wife Joanna, whom he clearly lived happily with before coming to Stepford, into an object to fulfil his misogynist desires.

In comparison to Stepford's super-model wives, the men were average looking if not ugly and the New Projects Committee members who visited the Eberharts' residence were described in a way to highlight that contrast of beautiful wives and ugly husbands. There was a total of five men, "one, a cherry little red-faced man of about sixty, with toothpick-ends of waxed moustache, was Ike Mazzard, the magazine illustrator", the others "were all late-thirties or early forties", there was "Axhelm, Sundersen and Roddenberry...Sundersen, who was pale and paunchy, nervous-seeming" (Levin 31). Frank Roddenberry "had a pleasant pug-nosed blue-chinned face and a slight stutter" and Claude Axhelm "was thin and blond;

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

bright-eyed, restless” (ibid 31-32). These men were a combination of the unpleasant and “bumbling, dull husband” (Palvik 15); they also fitted one of the three stereotypes of men, while Dale Coba fit another stereotype, “the cruel, yet fascinating rake” (ibid). He was “The tall black-haired one, laxly arrogant...with green eyes”, he was “*One of the die-hard men’s-only’s*”, for him “*women are to lay*” Joanna thought (Levin 31; original emphasis). Coba, the president, had a scary, perverted aura, he would watch Joanna in the kitchen “Very cool in his jade turtleneck (matching his eyes of course)” and admits “I like to watch women doing little domestic chores” (ibid 35). Clearly, Coba epitomised “toxic masculinity” and the patriarchal notion of proscribed gender roles emphasised by a sense of male supremacy and egoistic nature—admitting to appreciating women in a specific setting (the kitchen, the home) fulfilling a specific (denigrated) role (perfect housewife/servant).

The Stepford men contributed to achieving the irrational scheme of having perfect, sexually pleasing robots for wives. Stepford’s women were not described as having “real” jobs, that is outside of the domestic space of the home, whereas the men took control over all public life. Although most of the men were average looking, unsophisticated and hardly (if ever) in the same league as their wives, it was a town “full of lucky men” (Levin 120). However, it was no coincidence that such men could possess trophy wives—that is, an extremely beautiful young wife who marries a not so attractive man. The Stepford men did not only enjoy (literally) possessing beautiful women they also got to control and use them for their every whim without any push back from the women. These men are described as scientific masterminds—each from a field that supports the creation of the Stepford wife:

Mr. Ferretti is an engineer in the systems development laboratory of the CompuTech Corporation.

... Mr. Sumner, who holds many patents in dyes and plastics, recently joined the AmeriChem- Willis Corporation, where he is doing research in vinyl polymers.

... Mr. Duwicky, known to his friends as Wick, is in the Instatron Corporation's microcircuitry department.

... Mr. Weiner is with the Sono-Trak division of the Instatron Corporation.

... Mr. Margolies is with Reed & Saunders, the makers of stabilizing devices whose new plant on Route Nine begins operation next week.

... Mr. Roddenberry is associate chief of the CompuTech Corporation's systems development laboratory.

... Mr. Sundersen designs optical sensors for Ulitz Optics, Inc. (Levin 116)

Their leader was Dale Coba, he was known as Diz due to the job he held at Disneyland. As revealed by Joanna, he “did postgraduate work at the California Institute of Technology...he worked in ‘audioanimatronics’ at Disneyland, helping to create the moving and talking presidential figures” (ibid 117). Indeed, it is no wonder that these men were able to transform

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

their wives into machines, and not be detected by the world outside of their isolated suburban town of Stepford—which they control.

These men made sure to trap the town and its women in a patriarchal environment within which the women had one simple task, to satisfy their husbands. The Men's Association's architecture was not haphazardly chosen, it symbolized everything it stood for: it is the epitome of misogynist and sexist men who "fastened masks over women's faces—identifying them with eternal types of their own invention to possess them more thoroughly" (Gilbert and Gubar 17). It was indeed a *Men's* association, for and about men alone.

2.4.2. The Men of Wind Gap

Unlike Stepford, Wind Gap seems to celebrate women, while men are mostly marginalized as secondary characters to the overall female centred plot. They hunt, work, feed their families, but they hardly ever participate in anything substantial in their society or in relation to women. They are not mentioned in serious matters such as why Wind Gap turned out to be a town harbouring a serial killer, or even their role in protecting young girls, like Ann and Natalie, from being victimised and killed. If one leaves out detective Richard Willis, since he is not from Wind Gap, there are not many male characters in *Sharp Objects* that play definitive roles to be analysed and there are others that are rarely part of the development of the story.

Adora's husband, Alan Crellin, is described by Camille as "thinner than [her] mother, with cheekbones that jutted out of his face so high and sharp his eyes turned almond slivers...He overdressed always, even for an evening of sweet drinks...he sat, needly legs jutting out of white safari shorts, with a baby blue sweater draped over a crisp oxford" (Flynn 26), just another dull husband figure of Wind Gap. Along with his appearance, Alan's demeanour in parallel was as dull: he barely participated in real conversations and upon Camille's arrival he was unable to participate in a simple small talk, as if he was voiceless, "He smiled. It was the closest to a question as [Camille] could get" (ibid). Furthermore, Alan admitted to being fragile, "'We Cellins run a bit delicate,' Alan said somewhat guiltily" (Flynn 54). Even when there is some conflict in the house or around the dinner table Alan is always side-lined by Adora, as if he and his opinions do not matter. After Adora and Camille's minor fallout at the breakfast table, Alan "followed [Adora] with his manic whistling, like an old-time piano player lending drama to a silent movie" so, if Adora were the lead actress in the picture, Alan was faint soundtrack (ibid 63). According to Camille, even

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

while courting Adora, it is likely that Alan never “made a joke in his life” (ibid 68), that is how tedious he is. Tedious, in the sense that Alan had no influence nor was he interesting in any way or shape, he simply did not matter neither for Adora nor in the story.

Tedious and frail, and most likely since he met Adora, Alan was “often ill, and even when he’s not, he’s mostly immobile...and seems content to let [Adora] do most of the talking” (Flynn 68). In other words, he was happy and satisfied with Adora taking the lead. His illness, for instance, was most likely manufactured by Adora, since she poisoned most of her family, specifically when Alan claimed that the Crellins are rather weak because Marian and Amma were always sick. In correlation, since Marian and Amma were sick because of Adora, it meant Alan might have been too, for he suffered from no particular illness. Alan’s situation resembled that of a domesticated wife in the sense that a woman “was kept in the confinement of domestic duties” (Beauvoir 108) that is she had to occupy the private sphere, while men inhabited the public sphere, just like Alan was. Being often at home added to Alan’s docile nature, in one of the scenes Adora enters in a rush and Alan is awaiting her as if casually but it was planned, “‘How was your day out?’ he called after her” as a woman would do when her husband arrives from work. The representation of heteropatriarchal normative gendered roles in *Sharp Objects* is reversed, and Adora is the oblivious *husband* to her *housewife* Alan (Flynn108). Consequently, Camille frequently imagined him “curled next to [Adora] or perched on her vanity chair, just watching” as it was his habit to watch things happen from a far as a passive onlooker (ibid 109). He rarely spoke in Adora’s absence, especially to Camille, perchance he feared he would say the wrong things. Camille failed to place him in time, “Victorian gentleman, Edwardian dandy, ‘50s fop?”, because he was a different type of man, he is a “Twenty-first-century househusband” (ibid 143). If Alan is to be compared to the already mentioned typologies of men including “toxic” and “healthy” masculinities, he certainly represents a healthier type of masculinity because he lacks the stereotypical aggressive male traits yet he is also a passive, “dull husband” (Palvik 15) because he has no role in his own family.

Alan was the ideal househusband; he defended Adora from any accusation made against her by Camille. Despite Adora’s wickedness: he believed her every word, and so he attacked Camille claiming that she tormented Adora, though he never witnessed it, simply because he heard it “from Adora”—and he believed her because she “had a hard life” (Flynn 144). As for Adora, she might have picked Alan because he was just like her father, another silent obedient man that “was never around, and when he was, he was just quiet and...away” the same as

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Alan (ibid 177). Adora took the lead of the family, even at the dinner table Alan would ask her to handle dinner “You cut, Adora”, thereby shifting the gendered power dynamic to Adora as the family matriarch (ibid 204). To be an obedient husband can be considered highly farfetched in a southern town, but to be a father who witnesses his children being poisoned and does nothing is a plain calamity. Alan was too compliant that he became brainwashed by Adora that even after her arrest for killing both Marian and the other two girls, he did not allow himself to see her true colours. In fact, he still cared for her and “immediately paid the punishing bail sum so she could await trial in the comfort of her home” (ibid 212), and after her conviction he “shut down the Wind Gap house and took an apartment near her prison in Vandelia, Missouri. He writes letters to her on days he can’t visit” (ibid 217). In other words, it seems that Alan is unable to survive without Adora—and as such, does not represent a traditional type of masculinity, rather a non-normative masculinity which sets him as the subordinate half in his marriage

Aside from Alan, Chief Bill Vickery is the first male inhabitant from Wind Gap the reader encounters and he is described as “a slim fellow in his early fifties” (Flynn 12). He appears to be a religious man, or he is just used to uttering the words “Jesus Christ” too many times (Flynn 11). He also seems to be emotionally invested in the murder and loss of the little girls, that Camille wondered “if he was going to cry” (ibid 12). Though Vickery refused to give Camille any information about the murders, he still guided her to the crime scenes. However, in terms of his investigation, he was “in over his head” (Flynn 22). Vickery was no true detective, nor was he strong hearted enough to handle seeing Natalie’s body in the condition it was found in. The moment he saw her, the Chief “put his head against the brick of the beauty parlour and breathed hard” and then “He was kneeling by the body, motionless His lips moved as if he might be praying, too. His name had to be spoken twice before he snapped back” (ibid 29). Undoubtedly, the novel depicts a reversal in the gendered roles: men are no longer strong and heartless, nor are they dominant patriarchs. The chief was a decent man, he saw Camille’s job as a violation to the dead girls (ibid 42), yet he himself would refer to them as the bad seeds, the reason for which he believed they were chosen to be killed (ibid 43). Chief Vickery, like Alan, has no significant role in the story besides being a mediocre detective and helping with narrative development. However, like Alan he also represents a different type of masculinity than that of being toxic, since he, as well, does not represent a domineering man and he is not ashamed of feelings of vulnerability.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Ann Nash's father is another male character in the story who represents an opposite type of masculinity as depicted by Alan and Vickery. Bob Nash, while distraught over Ann's murder, is left to care for his other children on his own. He "was a well-kept man: clipped mustache, receding blond hair held down with gel, a glaring green polo tucked into jeans" and a boring job (Flynn 20). He was the closest to the male stereotype of the dull husband: a middle-aged man with boring attire and a dull job. Though he was devastated by the loss of his daughter, he demonstrated certain traits theoretically attributed to toxic masculinity. Based on such a classification, he was relieved because his daughter died without being raped, as if that even mattered when her life was already lost (ibid 21). Bob in fact held certain patriarchal beliefs as Camille's description of his fatherly bias demonstrates: she notices that Bob's youngest, who was a boy was his favourite, he even named him after himself, and he always made sure he is cared for, even by his older sister (ibid 22). On the other hand, Ann also seemed to occupy a special place in his heart, she was smart and he thought she had a promising future unlike her siblings—he proudly stated: "Sometimes I thought she was smarter than her old man" (ibid 81). When Camille was at Bob's house for an interview Adora rushed in with no prior notice, yet he would act obedient and welcoming because of her influence on him and his family. When Adora urged Camille to leave and demanded confirmation from him, "he smiled awkwardly, like someone staring down the sun" (ibid 84). Adora, though a woman, demonstrates in this particular scene the power of social status and economic wealth to exercise a certain power over Bob in his own house—like she knows what is best for him and his family.

As for John Keene, he is not just a peaceful young man, he has delicate beauty, resembling an "androgynous" aesthetic in Camille's opinion (Flynn 109). He is "a beautiful boy of eighteen or nineteen, brunette head bowed into his chest, sobbing. Natalie's brother" (Flynn 31). John, unlike most men, and more importantly like most of the boys in Wind Gap, did not hide and repress his emotions—he did not hide his tears for his dead sister. Historically, and even to present day, for a "man" to show his emotions would be a sign of weakness and in opposition to the expected normative expectations of masculinity. As such, John does not represent toxic masculinity; rather, he is more of a healthy male able to express his sadness through tears (Waling 367). In the same vein, John moved to his girlfriend, Meredith's parents' home because he could not stand living in the house his deceased sister used to live in (ibid 76). Meredith had an influence on John as if she had the upper hand in the relationship, she was the one who convinced him to talk to Camille about his sister, Natalie

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

(ibid 93). At the interview, the reader gets a closer look at John through Camille's eyes, "He was truly beautiful, almost androgynous, tall and slim with obscenely full lips and ice-colored eyes" (ibid 109). What the readers do not get at the interview is John's personality, whenever he is asked a question, it is Meredith who replies. John seemed to be voiceless, until urged by Camille to speak of his sister (ibid 111). In John and Meredith's relationship the roles appear to have entirely shifted; in Meredith's words on John, she claimed: "I practically *own* him, ask anyone" (ibid 124; original emphasis). John's docile emotional nature, which reflects the supposed healthy masculinity, sets him as a suspect of the crime of killing both Ann and Natalie, his own sister. He cried in public, too open about his sorrow, and that made him atypical in detective Willis' eyes because, "teenage boys will sooner kill themselves than cry in public" (ibid 130). In conclusion, John Keene's characterization seems to align with a healthy type of masculinity similar to Alan because of his peaceful, acceptant and fragile nature; while Meredith seemed much like Adora with her controlling attitude and her love for perfection.

In regards of the rest of the men, it is essential to briefly mention detective Willis, though he did not belong to the world of Wind Gap he still fits one of the three main 21st century stereotypes of masculinity. He is closer to "the fascinating rake" than any other stereotype which shows from the way he tricked Camille for information using his charms (Flynn 201). It is true that he developed a certain liking to her as he alleged: "I genuinely fell for you" addressing Camille (ibid 202), yet the moment he saw her scars along with the fact that she had intercourse with John, his feelings for her changed. In summation, the majority of the men in Wind Gap including Alan, Chief Vickery, and John Keene possess traits of healthy masculinity because they are more in touch with their emotions. Yet still, Chief Vickery harboured some toxic tendencies because he still considered Ann and Natalie bad seeds for being free spirited. Bob Nash, however, is in an in between space because, though he mourned the loss of his smart daughter, he also reflected toxic masculinity when he expressed his happiness that his daughter died without being raped.

2.5. Deconstructing the Novel

Novel writing is an intricate process. It does not only stem out of the creativity and imagination of a writer, but also from his/her external influences, background knowledge, and literary intellect. That being said, critically engaging with a literary work is equally complex as it demands focus to decipher the influences and the innuendoes implemented within, either intentionally or unintentionally, by the authors. These implementations can include ideas,

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

messages, texts, or even narrative tendencies in the construction of the narrative world by utilizing processes such as dialogism and intertextuality. This section explores the dialogic and intertextual connections between *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects* and how they represent ideas concerning misogyny, the feminist-feminine dichotomy and monstrosity.

2.5.1. The Feminine-Feminist Dialogic Clash in the Novels

Writers are unable to escape the dialogue occurring between them and their historical and social context and influences. Both Levin and Flynn, whether deliberately or not, have either included or alluded to certain historical events, incidents, and belief systems that impact their literary creation and the messages they impart. This study proposes to highlight that dialogue which occurs even between the writer's historical background influences and his/her writing, and not simply between literary characters.

According to Mikhael Bakhtin, the exchange between two voices, either in the real world or in literary texts, is known as dialogism. A certain language entity acquires meaning when in contact with another, or rather, more precisely, it occurs when "one historically specific moment comes into contact with another" (Dentith 7). This two-fold relation was coined by Bakhtin as "heteroglossia", a belief that language diversity and its meaning are the products of societal and historical settings (qtd in Richter 411). That is, a literary text does not only rely on its words to give meaning, but it is, in fact, the banter between the written text and the historical influences that helped in creating it which carries more import.

Anna Krugosovoy Silver claims that *The Stepford Wives* is influenced by the voice and language of the second wave of the feminist movement. This movement which focused on challenging traditional gender roles and norms included the right for all women to control their own bodies, the right to choose their own destinies, and the right to live free from violence and oppression. It is clear that these struggles were reflected in the Stepford women's fight to keep their humanity and free will. Krugosovoy Silver also asserts that a plethora of intellectuals including Betty Freidan, at the time when Levin's novel gained fame, either criticised or praised the hidden message delivered in his novel. Yet, the novel did not only reflect the main focuses of second wave feminism but also served as a form of verbalizing apprehensions about the injustices suffered by women (Krugosovoy Silver 60). Hence when the crux of the second wave of feminism contested Levin's creativity, they created hyper-feminine female robots that epitomized the stereotypical version of women by men, "That's what they *all* were, all the Stepford wives: actresses in commercials, pleased

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

with detergents and floor wax, with cleansers, shampoos, and deodorants. Pretty actresses, big in the bosom but small in the talent, playing suburban housewives unconvincingly, too nicey-nice to be real” (Levin 50; original emphasis). The dialogic relation between these characters and the novel’s message produced a satirical piece to criticize male misogyny, after all it was the men who murdered their wives and replaced them by a non-human version of the perfect female.

In deconstructing the dialogues with and between female characters, the historical and societal beliefs of the second wave of feminism entailing freeing women from oppressive gender roles and gaining freedoms to control their bodies and lives are clearly visible. Joanna’s short interview with the Welcome Wagon Lady is the earliest proof, “Do you have any hobbies or special interests?” the Welcome Wagon Lady asked, and Joanna answered by speaking about her love for tennis and photography along with the fact that she was “interested in politics and in the Women’s Liberation movement...And so [was her] husband” (Levin 5). The lady’s response to Joanna’s answer was “*He is?*” (Levin 5; original emphasis). This simple dialogic gesture insinuates the unfamiliarity of a male supporting feminism and, as represented through the fictional town of Stepford, it is rare that men would not only support the feminist movement but they would be considered strange and possibly embodying an untraditional type of masculinity.

In a different encounter between Joanna and another Stepford wife, Carol Van Sant, Joanna asks,

“When you’ve got the kids down, why don’t you come over and have a cup of coffee with me?”

“Thanks, I’d like to,” Carol said, “but I have to wax the family-room floor.”

“Tonight?”

“Night is the only time to do it, until school starts.”

“Well can’t it wait? It’s only three more days.”

Carol shook her head. ‘No, I’ve put it off too long as it is,’ she said.

“It’s all over scuff-marks. And besides, Ted will be going to the Men’s Association later on.”

“Does he go every night?”

“Just about.” (Levin 12)

The outcome of this dialogue is embodied in Joanna’s shock, it was not only unbecoming that Carol refused the invitation because she had to do house-cleaning but, that it happened at night. It is utterly peculiar for any woman to scrub floors at night, and more so that Carol claimed it was the best time since her husband would be at the Men’s Association. It appears the conversation between Joanna and Carol reveals that only a perfect robotic woman,

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

designed according to the patriarchal and misogynist ideologies of the Stepford men would clean the house at night while her husband is almost every night away at meetings of a sexist men's club.

Furthermore, after Bobbie Markowe's transformation into a replica of Carol and the rest of the Stepford ladies; Bobbie without being questioned admits:

“Yes, I've changed. I realized I was being awfully sloppy and self-indulgent. It's no disgrace to be a good homemaker. I've decided to do my job conscientiously, the way Dave does his, and to be more careful about my appearance. Are you sure you don't want a sandwich”

Joanna shook her head. “Bobbie,” she said, “I – Don't you see what's happened? Whatever's around here – it's got you, the way it got Charmaine!”

Bobbie smiled at her. “Nothing's got me,” she said. “There's nothing around. That was a lot of nonsense. Stepford's a fine healthful place to live.”

“You – don't want to move anymore?”

“Oh no,” Bobbie said. “That was nonsense too. I'm perfectly happy here. Can't I at least make you a cup of coffee?” (Levin 100)

In this encounter, the novel alludes to patriarchal ideologies that define women's purpose in life as the duty to nurture a house and a family—sexist stereotypes focused on restraining women to the domestic sphere. Bobbie emphasises her happiness with the word *awfully*; it is a simple adverb, yet it is derived from *awful*. It was in truth awful, that a lively smart woman like Bobbie was forced by the male community into becoming a lifeless being, happy for serving only, and receiving nothing. *The Stepford Wives* portrays the domestic life of women as awful when not of a personal choice as it becomes a prison rather than a celebration of family life.

Another significant encounter is between Joanna and the men of Stepford on the evening Walter hosted a meeting at their home. One of the visitors was Ike Mazzard, a magazine illustrator who was known for objectifying women in his perfect “dream girls” sketches (Levin 31). At the gathering Mazzard starts drawing pictures of Joanna, when she notices she blushes and says “I'm no Ike Mazzard girl”, he replied “Every girl's an Ike Mazzard girl” (ibid 32). A subtle reply but a meaningful one, as a man known for objectifying women, Ike Mazzard admits that all women were subjected to the stereotypical norms of the perfect woman—a non-human version sexualized via the fantasies of the male gaze. As an elusive confession for men's wish to domesticate all women Dale Coba, the leader of the Men's Association and the epitome of patriarchy, admits in a discussion with Joanna: “I like to watch women doing little domestic chores”, and Joanna responds: “You came to the right

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

town” (ibid 35). In Joanna’s reply the reader understands what the researchers meant about *The Stepford Wives* being an allegory of men’s view on women’s domestic role. Cobra’s admission reveals a patriarchal ideology that relished in confining women to the domestic world of the home, enjoying homely chores, and not occupying themselves with anything which required a brain. As a matter of fact, Joanna’s conversation with Carol Van Sant, Bobbie Markowe, Ike Mazzard, and Dale Cobra epitomizes the trilogy of the second wave of feminism’s concerns “a woman’s domestic labor, a woman’s role in the nuclear family, and a woman’s control over her body” (Krugovoy Silver 60). In this sense, Carol reflects what a domesticated woman is like, Bobbie represents mothers and wives’ conviction in pleasing their families and, finally, Ike Muzzard and Dale Cobra are the spokesmen of the misogynist male gaze.

To reach full circle, the novel began with Joanna praising her husband’s support of the feminist movement and ends with revealing his true colours as another misogynist Stepford husband. After unmasking the truth behind Stepford’s flawless women, Joanna trusts in her supposedly pro-feminist husband for an escape from the horrific town of Stepford, however one dialogue drops the curtains on his charade. Joanna questions his motives to move to town:

“Do you want me to change?” she asked.

“Of course not, don’t be silly.” He turned around.

“Is that what you want?” she asked. “A cute little gussied-up hausfrau?”...”Did somebody pass the message to you? ‘Take her to Stepford, Wally old pal; there’s something in the air there; she’ll change in four months.’”

“There’s nothing in the air,” Walter said. “The message I got was good schools and low taxes. Now look, I’m trying to see this from your viewpoint and make some kind of fair judgement. You want to move because you’re afraid you’re going to ‘change’; and I think you’re being irrational and-a little hysterical.” (Levin 101)

This tête-à-tête carries two key words: *change* and *hysterical*. Though Walter was well aware that Joanna was right and that he, as any member of the Men’s Association, was planning to swap his wife with a perfect robotic version, when Joanna refuses this change, which is against her every belief as an independent woman, she is accused of hysteria. Hysteria, which has been historically defined as a female illness by a male dominant field of medicine as resulting from psycho-emotional turbulences (Showalter 147) and even though it was proved that even men could suffer hysteria, it remained a strictly female malady (ibid 148). If a woman refuses to change to a hausfrau or wishes to alter her dull life for joining the public sphere she was often accused of insanity—the stereotype of the “madwoman in the Attic”. Scholars such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar highlight this very issue, sustaining the dreadful bearing of heteropatriarchal society on women accusing them of folly until they

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

believe it themselves because they were unable to break the mould of the saintly and flawless female (qtd in Alshammari 7). This type of judgment and treatment is described by Kate Manne as “gaslighting”—a term inherently associated with misogyny wherein the “capacity for the victim’s independent perspective has been destroyed, at least when it comes to certain subjects. She is bound to agree with him; she may not only believe, but take up and tell, his story” (11). In that sense, Joanna was forcibly made a madwoman despite the well-grounded claims she made against the men’s plan to transform their wives into domestic robots.

Flynn has a background as a contemporary writer and film critic and her main inspirations come from the world of cinema as a films and television reviewer (Bacle np). *Sharp Objects* itself was destined to be set in Flynn’s “home state of Missouri”, with the embellishment of an imaginary town known as Wind Gap (ibid np). Likewise, in an interview for HBO, Flynn revealed that imagining *Sharp Objects* “was a very, very personal experience” (qtd in Bacle np). Dialogically, it cannot go unnoticed that Flynn implemented bits and pieces of her life’s inspirations in her work such as her own fascination with gruesome creatures (like spiders) when she was a child instead of dolls.

How personal that experience was for Flynn is crucial for understanding how dialogism manifests itself in her novel. When examining the main protagonist, Camille Preaker, it becomes apparent that she and Flynn share some commonalities: both Flynn and Camille are writers in a sense, Flynn as a film critic and novelist, while Camille as a journalist and self-cutter. For Camille, and even for other female characters in the story, to come to life there has been a dialogic interaction between Flynn’s personal life, and her wish to display a new type of woman. In Samantha Mixon’s article about the novel, she reported Flynn’s explanation of her artistic motives: “Flynn speaks about how the female anti-heroes in her novels are a direct reflection of herself” (np). Put differently, those unhinged, eerie female characters in the novel mirror Flynn’s own unflattering thoughts and mannerisms of the world through fiction. As an infant Flynn recognized her strangeness; she was “an odd child with a distinct curiosity for all the ‘wrong’ things. She portrayed violent behaviour with her dolls starting at a young age and was often found playing with ants and spiders in her backyard” (Mixon np). Like Adora, Amma, and Camille, Flynn was also not the stereotypical woman which is evidenced in her wish to display both types of women in *Sharp Objects*: the typical feminine and the atypical violent and deranged one (ibid np). Hence, the dialogic clash between Flynn’s childhood, and her wish to prove the world wrong about the homogeneity of women is visible, whereby she believed in her role to take “feminism to a whole new level” (ibid). This, in turn,

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

can reveal a new type of woman to make sense of a different kind of female oppression not just committed by men but by monstrous mothers and other women.

In one of the earliest conversations in the novel, the author uses a dialogue to set the stage for one of the main themes of the novel and the major character:

“Tell me about Wind Gap.” “It’s at the very bottom of Missouri, in the boot heel. Spitting distance from Tennessee and Arkansas,” I said, ... “It’s been around since before the Civil War,” I continued. “It’s near the Mississippi, so it was a port city at one point. Now its biggest business is hog butchering. About two thousand people live there. Old money and trash.”

“Which are you?”

“I’m trash. From old money.” I smiled. He frowned. (Flynn 6)

Among the many adjectives Camille could have used to describe her hometown, and the many facts she has been aware of, she chose the most negative. First, she spoke about the location being at the far end of the state of Missouri, as in being isolated from the rest of civilization. She also mentioned the Civil War, a black stain in the American history which will also prove influential to the characterization of women in this novel. Then, she speaks of its biggest business which dealt in animal slaughter to produce ham. As for its people, she divided them into two categories only: the wealthy heirs and the lower class. When asked about her place in the two categories, she said she was a mixture, a lower-class heiress. This dialogue served as an opening introduction for what is soon to be revealed in the story, a vile place, with vile people, and more importantly an unusual female character. Camille’s words had no refinement to them as expected of a female; she was too natural in her description that it turned vicious; she was more of a spiteful woman.

To better understand Camille’s peculiar nature, there are other dialogues that provide the readers with a deeper insight:

“Your mom’s still there, right, Preaker?”

“Mom. Stepdad.” A half sister born when I was in college, her existence so unreal to me I often forgot her name. Amma. And then Marian, always long-gone Marian.

“Well dammit, you ever talk to them?”

Not since Christmas: a chilly, polite call after administering three bourbons. I’d worried my mother could smell it through the phone lines. “Not lately.”

“Jesus Christ, Preaker, read the wires sometime. I guess there was a murder last August? Little girl strangled?”

I nodded like I knew. I was lying. My mother was the only person in Wind Gap with whom I had even a limited connection, and she’d said nothing. Curious.

“Now another one’s missing. Sounds like it might be a serial to me. Drive down there and get me the story. Go quick. Be there tomorrow morning.”

No way. “We got horror stories here, Curry.” (Flynn 7)

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Apparently, the town of Wind Gap was more horrendous: it harboured a serial killer targeting little girls. For Camille, she was a lonely person, who lost her younger sister a long time ago, and had no true connection with her mother. Camille was a very traumatised, damaged woman that she seemed unfazed of the news delivered about the girls. She did not wonder who they were, nor was she affected by the death of one and the disappearance of the other since she showed no emotions or reactions of sympathy when Curry told her about them. Camille did not feel the need to display a feminine dramatic reaction, as the society would expect—both her traumatic past and her role as a journalist makes Camille a different type of woman: one who is used to the ugliness of life and is unfazed by it when she encounters it upon her return to Wind Gap.

Whereas Camille does not exemplify the typical Wind Gap woman, the town in which Camille was born was not aware of the ugliness of some of its women. When Ann was found and Natalie was missing, there was one suspect of the crime, a man. Chief Vickery, the townspeople, and the families of the victims all agreed that a man had to be the culprit. One of the first townies who spoke to Camille summarized why they thought so:

“Are there any theories about Ann?” I asked.

“Some loony, some crazy man musta done it. Some guy rides through town, forgot to take his pills, voices are talking to him. Something like’at.”

“Why do you say that?” ...

“Why else would you pull out a dead little girl’s teeth?”

“He took her teeth?”

“All but the back part of a baby molar.” (Flynn 15)

In medical history, the traditionally male dominated field of psychology claimed that women could not and should not be violent, let alone murder and mutilate the body of a little girl. The town, like other places in the world, did not suspect a female, since it is an established knowledge that many serial killers and psychopaths in the world are men. However, Flynn continues her dialogic task to create the monster as a woman to reveal that even women are capable of such dreadful deeds, and though there were some clear signs that it was not a man, everyone seemed to ignore these facts,

“What do you mean, *they* got her?”

“Them, him, whatever. The bastard. The sick baby killer. While my family and I sleep, while you drive around doing your reporting, there is a person out there looking for babies to kill. Because you and I both know the little Keene girl isn’t just lost.”...

“He didn’t rape her. Everyone says that’s unusual in a killing like this. I say it’s the only blessing we got. I’d rather him kill her than rape her.” (Flynn 21; original emphasis)

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

He shrugged his shoulders. "I've said it already. A hundred times."
"One more time."
"She was old."
"Old like me?"
"Old like a mother."
"What else?"
"She was wearing a white bed dress with white hair. She was just all white, but not like a ghost. That's what I keep saying."
"White like how?"
"Just like she'd never been outside before."
"And the woman grabbed Natalie when she went toward the woods?" I asked it in the same coaxing voice my mother used on favored waitstaff.
"I'm not lying."
"Of course not. The woman grabbed Natalie while y'all were playing?"
"Real fast," he nodded. (Flynn 48)

In both dialogues with Bob Nash and James Capisi (one of the town's little boys), there is proof that the killer was not a man, the girl was not raped, and the only eyewitness of the kidnapping admitted that it was not a man who took the girls but, a woman in white who took Natalie, yet no one in town thought it could be possible for a woman to commit such a crime.

One of the most important dialogues in the story occurs between Camille and other women: her mother (her mothers' friends and Camille's high school friends). First, it was her mother, Adora, who would often address Camille with words like "sweetheart", "sweetness" or speak of others using: "sweet, beautiful little girls. Just beautiful", "doll" and many others, in purpose of displaying her womanliness. Yet, at moments when her mask drops, Adora's language becomes abhorrent:

"I think I finally realized why I don't love you," she [Adora] said. ... "You remind me of my mother. Joya. Cold and distant and so, so smug. My mother never loved me, either. And if you girls won't love me, I won't love you."...

"I never said I didn't love you, that's just ridiculous. Just fucking ridiculous. You were the one who never liked me, even as a kid. I never felt anything but coldness from you, so don't you dare turn this on me." ...

"The only place you have left," she whispered at me. Her breath was cloying and musky, like air coming from a spring well.

"Yes."

"Someday I'll carve my name there." She shook me once, released me, then left me on the stairs with the warm remains of our liquor. (Flynn 131-132)

According to Sharon Hays, motherhood is culturally constructed and varies by social class wherein middle-class motherhood is idealized as self-sacrificing, nurturing, and intensive, working-class and poor motherhood is often stigmatized as neglectful, passive, and permissive" (66-81). She further elucidates that these pre-set ideals of motherhood influence

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

and impact mothers' behaviours to fit the expected stereotype. Adora, similarly did not want society to reject her so she pretended to be a caring nurturing mother who was not supposed to hate her children and still Adora, who faked perfect motherhood, did. Adora was another peculiar female, she was not only malicious in language but in actions too: she admitted that she wished to carve her name on Camille's flesh like a psychopath; she was no perfect woman indeed, she psychologically abused her daughter threatening to cause her physical trauma. As previously mentioned Adora is a narcissistic mother who expects emotional payment for her services, as she cannot mother a child unconditionally (Almond 24)—thereby characterizing Adora not as the expected good mother, but rather as an evil psychopathic mother who harms her children for gratification.

Amma also seems to foster a version of femininity in private by looking doll-like and removing the mask of the obedient child forced by her mother's oppression when in public. In this dialogue, Amma shows a glimpse of her wicked nature:

“Have you thought about getting some counseling, seeing a therapist?” I said.

“It might be really helpful.”

“Yeah, John, might quell some of your *urges*. They can be *deadly*, you know? We don't want more little girls showing up without their teeth.” Amma had slipped into the pool and was floating ten feet away... “That was really cruel,” I said to her. (Flynn 135; original emphasis)

In this dialogue while Camille tries to help John Keene get better after losing his sister, thirteen year old Amma, the murderer of John's sister was the one tormenting him and accusing him of killing his own sibling. Amma, outside of the confines of the family home and outside of Adora's control did not have to act docile or feminine; she was free to reveal her malice. In that sense, Amma's aggressive, provocative actions can be interpreted as her way to release the oppressed emotions and the psycho-emotional damage Adora caused to her. Some of her evil deeds are described in the following dialogue between Camille and her high school friend, Katie Lacey:

“Your sister [Amma] is like us times three. And she has a major mean streak.”

“Mean streak how?”...

“Oh, she and those three girls, those little blonde things with the tits already, they rule the school, and Amma rules them. Seriously, it's bad. Sometimes funny, but mostly bad. They make this fat girl get them lunch every day, and before she leaves, they make her eat something without using her hands, just dig her face in there on the plate.”... “Another little girl they cornered and made her lift up her shirt and show the boys. Because she was flat. They made her say dirty things while she was doing it. There's a rumor going around that they took one of their old friends, girl named Ronna Deel they'd fallen out with, took her to a party, got her drunk

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

and...kind of gave her as a present to some of the older boys. Stood guard outside the room till they were done with her.”

“They’re barely thirteen,” I said. ...

“These are precocious little girls. We did some pretty wild things ourselves at not much older.” (Flynn 191-192)

Camille’s conversation with her high school friend did not only divulge the malice behind Amma’s docile façade but also revealed that Camille’s generation was no different. They, too, committed some evil, improper deeds which are not befitting of young ladies according to southern society’s expectations of young girls.

Indeed, the culmination of the dialogues mentioned disclose that women of different generations are not perfect, docile, and lovable but, that women can have a dark evil side, if not properly dealt with, or if further burdened with childhood trauma and oppression can impact their psycho-social development. This fact is showcased through Amma and Adora who become psychopathic killers or Camille who is a self-harmer. In Camille’s case the level of her childhood trauma is literally written onto her body through self-harm in an act of rebellion and/or resistance as her own struggle between docility and wildness, not to mention a refusal to compromise her true self for the world’s (and her mother’s) expectations. Furthermore, it is not simply the characters’ dialogues which hold deeper meaning. In fact, “the dialogue of texts and writers from different generations and horizons”, says Mouro (22), or what is known as intertextuality is also essential to reveal the hidden messages of novels, that is, the influence of the many literary works a writer comes across, through his/her life, on his/her own literary creation.

2.5.2. *Betwixt Feminine and Feminist Intertextuality*

Intertextuality emerges out of the dialogic relation between textual materials and is one form of dialogism which occupies itself with “the interplay between writers, texts, and other texts” (qtd in Durey 616). That is, intertextuality functions to create a hybrid text by borrowing intertexts from various literary influences. According to Michael Rifattere, it is the role of the reader to decipher the implemented original intertext and its origin to grasp the collective meaning of the newly created artistic creation (qtd in Roth 66). In order to understand the original references, Christiane Achour and Amina Bekkat introduced three different manners in which intertextuality can be employed: integration, collage and citation. Citation involves borrowing a particular text as it is with citing its source, collage is the act of quoting another work and, finally, integration which is dissected into four different methods. These methods of integration include: (1) by installation which requires highlighting the intertext; (2) by

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

suggestion, as a simple mention of a name; (3) by allusion which requires faint signs; and (4) finally by absorption, in which the intertext is flooded by the new text that it is nearly impossible to be depicted (qtd in Mouro 32-33). Having clarified the techniques, intertextuality is not the only textual patchwork, Gerard Genette also unveiled four other forms of textual dialogism: architextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, and hypertextuality (Mirenayat and Soofastaei 533). Architextuality is the interconnectedness of distinct genres, i.e., the original genre of the work at hand and the influencing genres (ibid 536). Paratextuality is the interplay between the text and its accessories, “such as titles, headings, prefaces, acknowledgements, footnotes, illustrations” (ibid 534). Metatextuality, as defined by Genette, “unites a given text to another, of which it speaks without necessarily citing it (without summoning it), in fact sometimes even without naming it”, i.e., it is an implied understanding or reproach, but of a certain text by the new one (Mirenayat and Soofastaei 535). Finally, hypertextuality, as defined by Voicu Simandan, is concerned with “the relation between a text and a text or genre on which it is based but which it transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends (including parody, spoof, sequel, translation)” (qtd in Mirenayat and Soofastaei 536). It designates the creation of a novel text as a way to reshape another literary work.

2.5.2.1. *The Stepford Wives*

During the process of deciphering the intertexts in *The Stepford Wives*, the reader starts by discovering the mention of “Kate Millet” (Levin 13). Millet was a “Radical feminist writer best known for her pioneering 1970 book *Sexual Politics*”, and of her role in initiating “the second wave of the women’s liberation movement” (Bindel np). Levin used intertextuality through integration by suggestion by simply mentioning Millet’s name and using it to show the continuum on which women were placed. On the one hand, were the perfect women in Stepford, and on the other hand was Kate Millet’s espoused feminist ideologies which represents women who refused the stereotypical patriarchal view of being a woman. Mentioning Kate Millet, ergo, emphasises the sexualisation of women by patriarchal ideologies which she fought against, and which are embodied in Levin’s novel. Followed by Millet was the integration by installation of *Hogan’s Heroes!* (Levin 15), a sitcom centred on a Nazi Germany’s prisoner in concentration camps which aired in the US between 1965 and 1971 (Berr np). The sitcom was mentioned by Joanna’s son when he beheld the high fence of the Men’s Association, in a sense he compared the institution of the Men’s Association to Nazi Germany as another oppressive evil organization, just like the men in Stepford.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Likewise, within integration, Levin suggested “NOW” (Levin 24), the National Organization for Women, which was an American feminist movement founded in 1966 and focused on the sexual discrimination and injustices against females (Augustyn np). In the novel, Bobbie proposes NOW to fight the Men’s Association. Once more, the association is set as the epitome of patriarchy with its out-dated sexist rules of not accepting women to visit it and its lack of concern in tackling female issues. Using integration by installation, Levin also refers to Gloria Steinem (Levin 34), an American journalist, writer, and one of the most popular feminist activists known for her motivational lectures on equality among sexes (Karbo np). Though Joanna referenced her to express her sense of pride as she attempted to convince the men of elevating the role of women in Stepford, it appeared that their encouraging smiles were only a ruse—just like not all the men in real life appreciated Steinem’s speeches. Similarly, when Joanna was drawn by Ike Mazzard she recalled her childhood and the women she used to see in her mom’s journals and companions (Levin 36)—magazines and journals that featured perfect housewives—integrated into *Sharp Objects* through installation, highlighting the image of perfect women the men wished to impose on their wives.

Dale Coba, the leader of the Men’s Association once worked in Disneyland which brought into view integration by suggestion not only of the place, but also of the implications of perfection behind it: Disneyland is the world where perfect, beautiful Disney princesses dwell and were managed at one time by Coba. His earliest inspiration for the perfect ladies of Stepford could be none other than fairy tales and Disney princess stories. Following the reference to Disneyland, is a mention of *Linda Goodman’s Sun Signs*, an astrological book which displayed the intelligence of a female scientist who studied the movements of the sun to determine horoscopes. The book was praised by various magazines including *The Guardian*, *Bustle* and *Time* (Pan Macmillan np). Levin’s goal behind highlighting Linda Goodman’s work is to shed light on women’s abilities and intelligence outside the confining patriarchal ideologies espoused by the men of Stepford.

In many critics’ view, Betty Freidan and her book the *The Feminine Mystique* had a notable impact on the creation of *The Stepford Wives* and indeed Levin used integration by suggestion to mention Freidan and by installation to reference her book (Levin 43). Moreover, according to Joanna’s discovery, Friedan had visited the town and lectured over fifty women who applauded and praised her, yet those very women were later turned into robot-like housewives. In a sense *The Stepford Wives* shares some elements with what Friedan preached

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

concerning female subjugation. For instance, like Friedan, the novel suggests that it was men who were responsible for creating the stereotypical perfect image of women and forced it onto them. Another book, or rather series of books known as *The Nancy Drew Mystery Stories*, was also referenced through integration by installation, with specific reference to the main female character, Nancy Drew. The story of the young detective Nancy Drew was popularized during the 1930s, a time when women were still busy with being housewives, yet the traits of the liberated woman already started to surface through the characterization of its main character. Nancy Drew, indeed, was not portrayed as a doll, but as an adventurous female detective, a job which was traditionally restricted to men. In *The Stepford Wives*, Joanna used it to liken herself to Nancy as she had suspicions of the Men's Association—showcasing Nancy Drew in the novel reveals the intelligent perseverant side of women to reveal the crimes of patriarchal societies which aimed to degrade women into passive sexual dolls.

One of the subtlest, yet intriguing, intertexts used by Levin was the integration by suggestion of “Heckle” and “Jeckle” (Levin 56), a hypertextualised children's version of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Louis Stevenson, 1886) which Kim, Joanna's daughter dressed up as for Halloween. Heckle and Jeckle were two comic characters with different accents one British, and one American, the two birds were both intelligent and mischievous (Krug np). Analytically, it is quite plausible that these comic characters were not chosen for their popularity; after all it is not Pete, the boy, who chose to disguise himself as them but the little girl Kim who disguised as both of them in one costume. The fact that the novel shows that a little girl chose mischievous smart comics to represent her instead of a Disney princess demonstrates that girls too are free to identify with what they wished even comic characters that reflect the personal duality of a normal human and a beast. This can also allude to the fact that even girls can have a double identity both smart, and girly, or simply that girls are just as mischievous as boys and hence the construct of restrictive gendered roles can be challenged. Upon discussing the time span of the existence of the Men's Association, Joanna thought it had belonged to the “Puritans” (Levin 58). This historical reference is integrated through suggestion to refer to the earliest settlers in America exiled from England, a radical religious group which followed beliefs in a higher connection between God and his subjects while also being restrictive towards a woman's role (Westerkamp 573). The Puritans believed that women were the culprits for the original sin and thus they wished to restrict her to avoid any non-virtuous deeds. As for the Men's Association, they followed a similar doctrine by restricting women in Stepford to the confinements of their homes and house-based

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

chores instead of occupying themselves with acquiring more rights in the public sphere. That is, the Men's Association was traditional in its conduct and beliefs that it resembled the Puritan doctrines. Joanna, thus, referred to the Puritans to criticise the out-datedness of the patriarchal ideologies of the 1970s which rejected female freedom.

Women in Stepford were far from being free, they resembled zombies and the town itself was referred to by Bobbie as "Zombieville" (Levin 67), both a reference integrated by suggestion and by allusion, since it alludes to the lack of rational thought in the zombie and inability to think and the tendency to just exist for the base desire to feed. The 'zombified' Stepford wives are imprisoned in a primitive semi-dead state—not as zombies but as robotic versions of themselves. As an introduction to robotise Stepford females, Joanna witnessed a prototype of figures for "President Kennedy and President Johnson" on television (Levin 70). The link between the robot versions of presidents may not be clear separately, but once the reader realises that Dale Gribble was one of Disney's engineers who worked on Disney robots it only makes sense that even the female Stepford robots are made by him. Via integration by suggestion, the novel sets the ground for the mastermind plan of the men to turn their wives into compliant robotic figures. If Gribble even contributed to the duplication of presidents, it was not a hard task to replicate the Stepford wives in a secluded town like Stepford.

Levin not only used intertextuality, but also implemented architextuality as a way to reference other genres besides prose. When Joanna would watch the ladies cleaning, she thought of a poem to describe their ardent efforts, "*They never stop, these Stepford wives*, she thought. It sounded like the first line of a poem" (Levin 74; original emphasis)—because of how passionate the women were about their cleaning that she could but think of a poem to describe them. In contrast, the latest arrival to town, Ruthanne Hendry, was carrying a set of books which instantly set her as a feminist: "*A Severed Head* by Iris Murdoch, with *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and *The Magus*" (Levin 85). The first book mentioned by Murdoch is a novel dealing with male objectification of women (Tait 54), while the second book is an autobiography about the famous feminist and activist Maya Angelou, and finally *The Magus* (John Fowles, 1965) is a novel discussing power dynamic between men and women in a postmodernist era (Ferrebe 207). Levin did not only help categorize Ruthanne using integration by allusion and suggestion, but also introduced to his readers some valuable literary artefacts which dealt with similar female issues from which the women in Stepford suffered. Then, if ever, the readers are intrigued enough to read these works they would be indulged with a higher understanding of female struggle.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Architextuality is also used to criticise a different genre of writing such as children's literature. In Joanna's view *Penny Has a Plan*, a children's book authored by Ruthanne, was a fresh addition to the genre because it introduced a new type of girl who "actually does something besides make tea for her dolls" (Levin 86). *The Stepford Wives* includes this satire by allusion to lament how a great part of children's literature neglects the possibility of depicting girls with a certain intellect and independence outside the patriarchal norm and gender roles expected from girls (e.g., being responsible for domestic chores). On one night, Joanna fell asleep while reading Burrhus Frederic Skinner's book which was also previously integrated by installation through its title: *Beyond Freedom and Dignity* (1971)—a book that discusses human behaviourism and psychology in terms of grasping one's freedoms and rights (Hartenberg 353). This intellectual book is repeatedly referenced in Levin's novel, including right before Joanna was accused by her husband of being hysterical—insinuating that she was not disturbed but quite a rational woman who understood what her freedoms and rights were and she only wished to safeguard them. In a sense, without deliberately exposing Walter as an accomplice of the other Stepford men, this subtle reference to this particular book reveals, through intertextuality, the irony of a woman who is informing herself about the importance of gaining one's freedoms and rights is then accused of being hysterical—a historically accurate reaction of women who challenged the status quo being dismissed as hysterical, madwomen, or insane.

Levin's shrewdness is evident in moulding the intertext and also architextuality with reference, through integration by installation, to the nursery rhyme *This Little Piggy Went to the Market* (Levin 119). Though a children's song, after being carefully analysed, researchers have discovered that the song is not about a fun day in the supermarket but rather about death and slaughter of the pigs before being turned into ham (Stechyson np). In the novel, Joanna used it in a way to mock Mrs Cornell and how she was a pig brought to the slaughter by the men like all the ladies in Stepford, yet the zombie-like woman was unable to notice the innuendo. In the same vein, Joanna uttered the phrase "submissive to her lord and master" (Levin 120) as an allusion to slave narratives where the words *slave* and *master* are often used. It is a way for Joanna to liken the relationship between the men in Stepford and their wives to that of a slave master and his property, i.e., a relationship of control and servitude without any rights for the slave.

To summarize, the intertextual elements in *The Stepford Wives* depict the contrast between the feminists and the feminine characters. On one side, feminists like Joanna and

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Ruthanne seem to be influenced by public figures such as Kate Millet, Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan, or books such as *A Severed Head* and *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. On the other hand, Stepford women are linked with feminine stereotypes that the women become when being transformed by the male gaze and male desire into thoughtless non-human zombies and robots.

2.5.2.2. Sharp Objects

Gillian Flynn's use of intertextuality in *Sharp Objects* opens with an example of architextuality in reference to the "slice-of-life" genre of stories which are not appealing to Camille's boss (Flynn 6). This integration by suggestion already prepares the reader not to expect something as fulfilling and hopeful as the typical slice-of-life type of story. Making use of integration by allusion, the reader discovers an insinuation to Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) through Amma Crellin. Lolita is a 12-year-old girl who is being obsessed about by a middle-aged man, owing to her supposedly innocent yet sexual appearance (Ratna 22). Similarly, Amma Crellin is a 13-year-old depicted in the Lolita fashion as a fusion of eroticism and innocence: "Her flushed face had the roundness of a girl barely in her teens and her hair was parted in ribbons, but her breasts, which she aimed proudly outward, were those of a grown woman. A lucky grown woman" (Flynn 14). The essential element that Lolita and Amma have in common is their role in setting a new stereotype for girls that breaks free of incorruptibility, that is, even young girls can be mischievous and behave badly behind a socially constructed image of femininity forced upon them.

Though a psychological thriller, *Sharp Objects* does not lack the influences of fairy tales. At Ann's crime scene Camille could but remember her childhood through "fuzzy cottonwood seeds" which they named "fairy dresses", and when a "grasshopper landed suddenly on [her] wrist" she thought "Creepy magic" (Flynn 15). Even Adora's weird habit of plucking her eyelashes made Camille think of her lashes as "fairy nests" (Flynn 69). Fairy tales, which belonged to children's literature, often encompass feminine characters, but also evil witches and ghouls. By the end of the novel the reader figures out the rationale behind the redundancy of referencing the wicked witch as s/he discovers that the serial killer is a wicked, deranged girl. When Camille is finally informed by her sister's former nurse that Marian was a victim of her mother's Munchausen by proxy, she also explains Adora's incentives in relation to fairy tales:

"You never really want to believe such a thing. Like something out of Brothers Grimm, MBP." "MBP?" "Munchausen by Proxy. The caregiver, usually the mother,

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

almost always the mother, makes her child ill to get attention for herself. You got Munchausen, you make yourself sick to get attention. You got MBP, you make your child sick to show what a kind, doting mommy you are. Brothers Grimm, see what I mean? Like something a wicked fairy queen would do". (Flynn 199)

Wicked women (witches) are indeed a much-used archetype in fairy tales. Most of the time they are not the heroes but, they are essential characters with a specific function within the fairy tale—typically as the antithesis to the female protagonist. Because monstrous women are not feminine, they represent those hindrances which adolescent young girls such as Cinderella or Snow White encounter before becoming a type of women which the patriarchal society expects, complacent to establish gendered role expectations (Rowe 240). Hence, the inclusion of fairy tale subtext/intertext in *Sharp Objects* serves as a tool to emphasize the feminine, violent duality.

Moreover, there is a clear connection between the feminine and the horrific female characters in *Sharp Objects*. According to Barbara Creed the image of the woman as a monster is not recent for it has “haunted the dreams, myths and artistic practices of our forebears many centuries ago” (1). As such, there is a number of fictional works which display women as horrific creatures. Upon studying the dichotomy of the feminine and the monstrous, the description of Adora’s house as a Victorian styled home (Flynn 23) suggests not only to the architectural design of the house, but links it to the similarities between Adora’s lifestyle and the Victorian era (e.g. Adora enjoys her domesticized status as the lady of the house). Not to mention that Adora’s courtship by Alan is described by Camille as: “anything but awkward. Alan, pleated and pressed, elaborating on the weather. My mother, alone and untended for the first time in her life, in need of a good match, laughing at...jokes? I’m not sure Alan has ever made a joke in his life, but I’m sure my mother found some reason to giggle girlishly for him” (Flynn 68). It is notable that this scene resembles a courtship between the hero and the heroine from a Jane Austen novel—further supporting the use of integration by allusion as it also insinuates that patriarchal values and norms impact gendered roles and expectations. Yet, the irony lies in the fact that Adora at the time had just given birth to Camille out of wedlock.

Like *The Stepford Wives*, Flynn in *Sharp Objects* also uses examples of architextuality to reference a different genre, the gothic horror—a literary genre entailing fear and haunting of a place or house and, sometimes more specifically, of a damsel in distress (Hogle 1). The gothic allure is implemented in various scenes: first in Camille’s dream, “I dreamt my mother

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

was slicing an apple onto thick cuts of meat and feeding it to me, slowly and sweetly, because I was dying”; then in her reference to a “B-movie scream queen” (Flynn 27); the famous female characters of horror movies known as the “attractive young damsels-in-distress” (Thomas np). Amma’s interaction with her dollhouse alludes to the gothic: as Amma “focused on [Camille’s] room in the dollhouse. A small finger poked the bed. ‘I hope you enjoy your stay’, she murmured into the room, as if she were addressing a tiny Camille no one could see” (Flynn 41). In fact, it seemed to be a fusion between the gothic horror⁸ and the fairy tale of Thumbelina: two genres where girls or women wait for a male saviour. In this novel Amma is the evil witch threatening Camille’s presence—displaying a juxtaposition of the fairy tale stereotype of damsel in distress and the peculiar girls depicted in the novel such as Amma. To that end, when James Capisi spoke of the woman who took Natalie (who was Amma), he was believed to be influenced by a local tale, owing to Amma’s appearance which resembled a white witch, “she was wearing a white bed dress with white hair. She was all white, but not like a ghost” (Flynn 48), and Camille imagined her as a “wicked witch of fairy-tale, the cruel snow queen” (ibid 64). To summarize children’s literature, fairy tales, and the gothic genre are implemented as intertexts in *Sharp Objects* to highlight the evilness and horror behind female characters in the novel.

Paratextually, Flynn’s reference to Gothicism may also allude to the film *The Others* (Alejandro Amenàbar, 2001) starring Nicole Kidman. It is the story of a mother and her children who haunt a house, the two children, a girl and a boy, are trapped in a permanent state of infancy and unaware that they are ghosts (Khairy np). In *Sharp Objects* Camille receives a similar aura from Bob Nashes’ children: “The children, too, hovered about, little blonde ghosts trapped in a limbo between indolence and stupidity” (Flynn 80). The novel also includes various allusions to vampires in the vampiric quality of the journalists as exploiters of the public, not for blood but for information (Flynn 92). In addition, Camille also had visions of her sister, Marian as a haunting ghost,

I could see her so easily here, sitting cross-legged on that bed, small and sweat dotted, her eyes ringed with purple. Shuffling cards or combing her doll’s hair or coloring angrily. I could hear that sound: a crayon running in hard lines across a

⁸ “Gothic fiction is a mode of writing that combines elements of horror and romance in order to evoke intense emotions in the reader. The genre emerged in the late eighteenth century, and has since become a major cultural force, shaping not only literature, but also film, television, music, and fashion. Gothic works often feature supernatural or inexplicable events, mysterious settings, and characters who are haunted by the past or struggling with psychological or physical trauma. The genre is known for its dark, brooding atmosphere, and its exploration of themes such as death, decay, madness, and the unknown” (Hogle 1).

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

paper. Dark scribbles with the crayon pushed so hard it ripped the paper. She looked up at me, breathing hard and shallow.

“I’m tired of dying.”

I skitted back to my room as if I were being chased. (Flynn 146)

In the twenty-first century, the demon-ghost child, most likely a girl, became a known figure of horror novels, movies and franchises: Michelle J Smith observes that they “represent dead or ghostly children who, in diverse ways, work to critique or remedy adult actions, particularly through their interactions with history. Contemporary Gothic children’s literature...displaces the anxieties that ordinarily accompany the representation of child death in realist fiction” (Smith 191). Examples of such characters include: *Anabelle* (John R. Leonetti, 2014), *The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976) and *Orphan* (Jaume Collet-Serra, 2009), to mention but a few. The main characteristics uniting these types of representation of children in these films entail an innocent appearance disguising the evil creature lying beneath—that is, a psychopathic child who is able to commit the most horrific crimes: Amma. Thus, in this novel, reference to this film genre is implemented not solely to add the gothic allure to *Sharp Objects*, but also highlight the psychological aspects which help understand the psychopathic nature of Amma as a demon-child.

When describing Wind Gap’s church at which Natalie’s funeral was held, it was called “Our Lady of Sorrows” (Flynn 31), a religious name referencing the Virgin Mary who was called as such because she suffered the seven sorrows—thereby epitomising female struggle and agony. After the funeral, Camille headed to Natalie’s home wherein she found a copy of the novel *A Wrinkle in Time* (Flynn 34), an integration by suggestion for a young adult novel where the major characters travel in time and space and witness the struggle between light and darkness, good and evil, and how they helped them grow (Dowling and Scarlett np). Natalie, who was a ten-year-old herself, was described as struggling between conforming to the societies’ norms and being wild—an uncontrollable and hard to handle child.

In discussing the unattainable societal and patriarchal expectations placed on women and girls, Camille references two first ladies known for their rejection of these values: “Eleanor Roosevelt” and “the Duchess”, Florence Mabel Harding (Flynn 39). Both of whom were first ladies and also feminists who called for women’s equal rights in different manners (Eschner np). The mention of these women, duly, helps set the stage for Camille as a girl who is different from other girls her age who were instead fascinated by Barbie dolls. In relation to infancy, children were often taught to read through *Dick and Jane* (Flynn55) from the series

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Basal Readers. These two fictional characters are implemented through integration by suggestion by Camille to refer to the duality of the words she cut, the feminine as Jane and the unfeminine-like as Dick. However, it also insinuated to an allusion to women's writing as Camille saw her body as a book on which she wrote her struggles, it is a woman's writing symbolized in female flesh especially that Camille could not voice her sorrows. Camille's words cut into her body builds on the concept iterated by Arleen Dallery not just as writing the female body, but onto the body, that is Camille's body functioned as her voice (197). These are some of the reasons for which she often mocked herself, "Over the years I've made my own private jokes. You can really read me. Do you want me to spell it out for you? I've certainly given myself a life sentence" (ibid 57). That is, Camille's body becomes a written record of her trauma: her sister's death, her mother's psycho-emotional and physical abuse; and the gang rape.

Repeatedly referring to children's literature, Amma mentions a fairy tale by suggesting a famous character, "You're like poor Cinderella, and I'm the evil stepsister. Half sister" (Flynn 61). It is perplexing that evil women were always part of fairy-tale stories yet were neglected because they did not comprise the proper female image society expected, yet they *were* there, existent and real even in real life. As a matter of fact, Karen E. Rowe states that such wicked women reflect societal anxieties about women who challenge traditional gender roles and norms. She suggests that by examining the representations of women in fairy tales, people can gain insight into cultural attitudes towards gender and power (31-42). Amma, when referencing Cinderella, insinuates that she, not Camille, is the evil stepsister, by aligning herself with Cinderella's evil stepsisters; that is, she acknowledges her evil self (because she was the one who killed Ann and Natalie). Flynn utilizes the supposedly feminine stories to reveal that malice in women represented female rejection of gender roles, in the story this idea was precisely projected through Amma. Therefore, Amma also compared herself to "Bluebeard's dead wives" (Flynn 107), when her mother claimed she would rather jail her to keep her safe, a less murderous version of Bluebeard since he was a masochist man who killed each of his disobedient wives and hid their bodies (Vaz da Silva 358-360)—thereby also highlighting Amma's mental and emotional instability. Instead of this story Adora mentions that Amma could have chosen the fairy tale "Rapunzel" (Flynn 107), since it is the more girly and positive version of a confined woman, even though both stories ultimately reflect female oppression. Within the same genre of fairy tales, Flynn also paratextually alludes to *Peter Pan* when John spoke of Camille's dead sister, "In that imaginary

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

place...where Marian never aged” (Flynn 181). The culmination of fairy tale intertexts display the dichotomy of the feminine and the monstrous Amma: as in the stories of evil girls such as Cinderella’s stepsister, the oppressed confined women like Bluebeard’s wives, and finally Marian who was killed while still prepubescent and thus preserved forever in innocence, much like Peter Pan.

Sharp Objects goes beyond fiction and by also referencing another historical figure—the famous female figure and a British royal family member, “princess Diana” (Flynn 61). While Amma devoured ham and syrup, she spoke of her wish to die and be immortally loved like Diana. Death and life, ham and syrup, the feminine and the feminist and Amma the doll versus Amma the serial murderer are subtle dichotomies which describe Amma best since she had a duality of a feminine little girl and a monster who shatters the typical female image of the good girl stereotype. Indeed, Princess Diana was almost perfect, but she suffered betrayal, she was not happy though loved (Kretschmer np), and more importantly she was dead. Amma also references Joan of Arc, another female figure from the medieval times—and unlike Diana, Joan of Arc’s strong character led “her into the central places of masculine power, where she performed as an active mystic, serving as both catalyst and instigator in the political life of her era” (Barstow 29). Bluebeard’s wives, princess Diana and Jean of the Arc all met an awful end on the hands of men, they were either killed, suffocated to death or accused of madness such as Jean of the Arc because she lived a life different from the society expected of her.

With the mention of Amma playing Joan of Arc with her friends, Camille has an epiphany, an intertextual allusion to poetry through architextuality. Camille thought of the beginning of a poem “*The children in the woods play wild, secret games*” (Flynn 63; original emphasis). In reality there is no such poem, nonetheless, there is a real-life incident known as “Babes in the Wood Murders” which is the story of two nine-year-old girls killed in the woods in the town of Brighton, England, in 1986 (Bishop np). It is far too similar with Ann and Natalie’s murders to be a simple coincidence. Additionally, architextuality was also used when referring to Greek mythology wherein Amma declared her fascination with Greek goddesses, as Camille witnessed her reading—which is integration by suggestion of the book *Greek Goddesses* (Flynn 109). Later on, Amma reveals that she favoured Persephone to “Sleeping Beauty” which was Camille’s suggestion to escape life. Whereas Persephone was “the Queen of the Dead [and] She was so beautiful, Hades stole her and took her to the underworld to be his wife. But her mother was so fierce, she forced Hades to give Persephone

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

back. But only for six months each year. So, she spends half her life with the dead, and half with the living” (Flynn 205). Persephone was quite similar to Amma, she was the image of innocent beauty, but she was a murderer, only brought back to her doll-like state by her mother’s over-control. Although Amma did not seem satisfied with her state as someone who harms people, she still believed in Machiavelli’s doctrine, which Flynn referenced through integration by installation and with the phrase “Safer to be feared than loved” (Flynn 161). Being feared for Amma was better than being loved so she preferred to harm and kill girls who possessed a freedom she did not. Moreover, the gown in which Amma killed was a disguise for “Artemis, the blood huntress” (Flynn 216), another Greek goddess—another intertextual influence, integrated through suggestion, reflecting Amma’s fascination with strong yet violent women.

Male in Mourning is a fictional book referenced in *Sharp Objects*—a gift for John Keene to help him deal with his sisters’ death. According to the book, men dealt with pain through denial because they are not emotional enough to cry it out as it is a part of hegemonic masculinity which stresses that it is not manly to show emotions let alone cry. Yet John, even after reading the book, only realizes how wrong it was for he found crying as the best way to deal with his grief (Flynn 181). John was an emotional man, a new type of man in fact, who accepts his emotional side—an example of what was earlier explained as healthy masculinity. On the other hand, Alan read a book entitled *Horses* (ibid 196), it might seem farfetched but for some reason, the first idea comes to mind after reading the name is, *Gulliver’s Travels* and the land where horses were smart and logical while people were dumb creatures known as Yahoos (Nuttall 51). Alan, if placed in the context of that story is a Yahoo, too passive and too oblivious to the world around him. He neither discovered Adora’s monstrous side nor did he show his repulsion of her after she was revealed to have killed their daughter, Marian and poisoned her other girls. It is apparent that Alan represents the reversal in roles theories as earlier mentioned he was Adora’s househusband not just a representative of healthy masculinity more so he is a dull husband who plays no significant role in the family.

While the previously mentioned intertexts are rather obvious, there are some allusions which require a more meticulous scrutiny. For instance, when Camille would tell the story of the little girl who was abused by some boys in school, the teacher would ask the girl to apologize because “young ladies must be in control of their bodies because boys are not” (Flynn 98). History has shown women were not allowed to be as physically free as men, they always had to be restricted and restrictive in their sexual behaviours not to break the

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

proscribed norms for acceptable female behaviour. This particular idea was discussed in both Beauvoir's *Second Sex* and Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* which signifies intertextual allusions to both works. Similarly, when Camille would allege that she was not raped by the football players (because she had intercourse while drunk) detective Willis criticised her saying that the interaction was not consensual (ibid 99). Camille, who has yet to deal with the trauma of the gang rape, wants to convince him (and herself) that she had sex with multiple partners because it was her choice (Ilief-Martinescu 6). Camille was deprived from the right to control her own body, when she was raped by those boys, which led her to a stage of denial and as such she refused to admit to the Detective that the intercourse was not consensual. Camille's predicament also serves as an allusion to Friedan and de Beauvoir's beliefs on women's lack of control over their bodies.

To conclude, both Levin and Flynn focused on the dichotomy of the feminine and the feminist, and the docile and the violent woman. For Levin's 20th-century novel the focus was society's and men's oppression of women with the specific focus on the different representations of masculinity and its relationality to the feminist cause of women's rights, gendered roles and also feminine and feminist allusions. In *Sharp Objects*, Flynn focuses mainly on the violent female as a reflection of the fairy tales' wicked witch or the Greek goddess, yet still with subtle reference to Friedan's doctrines in terms of women's control over their bodies.

2.5.3. Narrative Modes in *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*

Stories, no matter if fictional or not, require a storyteller. Basically, it is how the readers perceive the narrator that determines their appreciation or rejection of the story being told (Diasamidze 160). The role narration plays is to engross the readers and keep them absorbed by the intricacies of the literary piece. To study the narrative techniques employed by the author, it is necessary to apply the theory of narratology and its narratological tools such as: point of view, focalization, and levels of narration, amongst others.

One of the key narratological elements to examine is the point of view of the narrative: that is realising by whom the story is told and how it is perceived by the reader (George 40). Commencing with *The Stepford Wives*, it is told by the author himself as an outsider, narrator:

The Welcome Wagon lady, sixty if she was a day but working at youth and vivacity (ginger hair, red lips, a sunshine-yellow dress), twinkled her eyes and teeth at Joanna and said, "You're really going to like it here! It's a nice town with nice people! You couldn't have made a better choice!" Her brown leather shoulderbag was enormous, old and scuffed; from it she dealt Joanna packets of powdered breakfast drink and

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

soup mix, a toy-size box of non-polluting detergent, a booklet of discount slips good at twenty-two local shops, two cakes of soap, a folder of deodorant pads—

“Enough, enough,” Joanna said, standing in the doorway with both hands full. “Hold. Halt. Thank you.” (Levin 1)

It is clear at the opening of the novel that the story is told through the author, as an unknown narrator. According to Chuck Palahniuk’s introduction of *The Stepford Wives*, since the narrator’s gender is not known, it is to be automatically assumed to be the gender of the author. Nevertheless, he is not an omniscient narrator because he follows one character, Joanna Eberhart, and speaks through her. He is not part of the plot, neither is he all knowledgeable about the characters and events; furthermore, he controls all knowledge he has of the events and characters only through Joanna’s eyes. Sometimes the reader confuses the narrator for Joanna because, he speaks in her tone:

Sylvia called to apologize - she had been passed up for a promotion she damn well knew she deserved-and Charmaine called to say they’d had a great time and to postpone a tentative Tuesday tennis date. “Ed’s got a bee in his bonnet,” she said. “He’s taking a few days off, we’re putting Merrill with the DaCostas-you don’t know them, lucky you-and he and I are going to ‘rediscover each other’. That means he chases me around the bed. And my period’s not till next week, God damn it.” (Levin 59)

Likewise, the reader is left with half-truths, that s/he cannot figure what truly happened to Bobbie and Charmaine, or of what happens in the Men’s Association. The fact that the narrator is not omniscient helps in rising suspense and keeping the story mysterious. As a result, ignorance, in this case, allows more suspense for the readers, which explains the open end of the story, where no one knows if Joanna transformed by free-will or by external forces (Berlatsky np).

Narration is also to be analysed in terms of focalization. Manfred Jahn’s analysis yielded four types of focalization: fixed, variable, multiple and collective. The one implemented in Levin’s work is “fixed focalization” that is a narrative act founded on a single point of view (qtd in Amerian and Jofi 185) of the author/narrator through the main female character, Joanna Eberhart. He is what narratologists know as a homodiegetic narrator; an individual’s story told through a first-person point of view (qtd in George 41). In addition, the narrator is also “a covert narrator”, which Jahn specifies as a storyteller with no precise voice; he is to a certain degree “neutral”. In such a state, the gender of the covert narrator cannot be recognized and his part in the unfolding of the story is non-significant as he is unable to intercede the events and only tells the story as it naturally discloses in its own fitting

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

“sequence and tempo” (qtd in Amerian and Jofi 185) as it is apparent in the following passages:

She bought winter clothes for Pete and Kim, and two pairs of wool slacks for herself. She made terrific enlargements of “Off Duty” and “The Stepford Library,” and took Pete and Kim to Dr Coe, the dentist.

“Did we?” Charmaine asked, letting her into the house. “Of course we did,” she said. “I said it was okay if nothing came up.” Charmaine closed the door and smiled at her. She was wearing an apron over slacks and a blouse. “Gosh, I’m sorry, Joanna,” she said. “I completely forgot.” (Levin 60)

In this instance, the narrator speaks about Joanna’s routine with some neutrality and ignorance to what happened to Charmaine—that is of Charmaine being transformed into a Stepford woman. The reader does not realize Charmaine has changed until Joanna goes to meet her and even then the narrator shows no emotions about what happened to Charmaine—further attesting to his covert nature.

Gerard Genette also introduced two different levels of narration since he saw a text as a “stratification of levels” (qtd in Salzman 123). He presented the intradiegetic and the extradiegetic narrators along with the heterodiegetic and homodiegetic. Gerald Prince explained Genette’s extradiegetic narrator as one who is not inside the story (qtd in Prince 29), similar to the narrator in *The Stepford Wives*, as he is an unknown entity. In regard to reliability, the narrator in *The Stepford Wives* is considered to be reliable as he is an author/narrator, and the reliability of a narrator is based on the implied author’s meanings and ideas (Booth 158-159). As for the temporality of narration it occurs at four different stages, “ulterior narration,” “anterior narration,” “simultaneous narration,” and “intercalated narration” (Rimmon-Kenan 92-93). In *The Stepford Wives*, the narration is traditional and logical, it happens right after the events happened meaning it is an “ulterior narration” similar to *Tom Jones* and *Great Expectations* (ibid) as illustrated in the following passage: “A black woman in an orange scarf and striped fake-fur coat stood waiting at the library desk, her fingertips resting on a stack of books. She glanced at Joanna and nodded with a near-smile; Joanna nodded and near-smiled back; and the black woman looked away” (Levin 85). As evident from this scene, seeing Ruthanne happened just before the narrator recounted the actual event which supports the idea that it is an “ulterior narratoion”. Lastly, there are neither flashbacks nor flash-forwards in the story which insinuates that the events happen chronologically, without a non-linearity involved. Non-linearity would mean a certain complexity to the narrative but, *The Stepford Wives* is somehow still a suspenseful enough story through its non-omniscient narrator.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

On the other hand, the narrative in *Sharp Objects* is quite different; it is more intricate and complex. It starts with a first-person point of view of the main female character Camille Preaker, “My sweater was new, stinging red and ugly. It was May 12 but the temperature had dipped to the forties, and after four days shivering in my shirtsleeves, I grabbed cover at a tag sale rather than dig through my boxed-up winter clothes. Spring in Chicago” (Flynn 1). With the first-person point of view, the narrator is the “I”. Scholars such as James Phelan, Dorrit Cohn and Wayne Booth believe it to be a complicated manner to tell a story, since it obliges the author to disengage himself/herself and give voice to the main character to unfold the events. Here, the narrator has limited knowledge of the events that transpire (Bodden 8) which, in turn, emphasizes the enigmatic nature to the suspenseful story.

Like Joanna, Camille was ignorant of what happened to the dead girls and who the murderer was. Still, the reader reacts to the events according to how Camille tells them. When she is indifferent to the death of the girls or to her humiliation, the reader as well does not dwell on them but rather dwells on what Camille focuses on like Natalie’s knee, “I sat in a room the color of egg yolk for two hours while the officer got my story down. The whole time I was thinking about Natalie going to autopsy, and how I would like to sneak in and put a fresh Band-Aid on her knee” (Flynn 29). Or Mrs Keene’s necklace,

“Now I will tell you one last time: Do not come back here. Do not try to contact us. I have absolutely nothing to say to you.” She stood over me, leaned down. She wore, as she had at the funeral, a beaded necklace made of wood, with a big red heart at its center. It bobbed back and forth off her bosom like a hypnotist’s watch. “I think you are a parasite,” she spat at me. “I think you are disgusting. I hope someday you look back and see how ugly you are. Now please leave.” She trailed me to the door, as if she wouldn’t believe I was truly gone until she saw me step outside her home. She closed the door behind me with enough force to make her doorbell chime lightly. I stood on the stoop blushing, thinking to myself what a nice detail that heart necklace would make in my story. (Flynn 93)

Hence, the story is rendered personal, and dependent on the character’s personality (Bodden 8-9), in Camille’s case, also based on her own emotional fragility and instability.

Regarding “who sees?” or “who speaks?”, falls under focalization and both Levin and Flynn chose “fixed focalization” with one stable narrator to keep the novel’s focus on the female narrative, her point of view, and the feminine-feminist ambivalence. This fixed narrator, in *Sharp Objects*, is also “overt”, i.e., she acknowledges her part to be the narrator and uses the “I”, so her contact with the reader is direct and vivid (Amerian and Jofi 185). This element is evidenced when Camille speaks of her self-harm issues:

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

I am a cutter, you see. Also a snipper, a slicer, a carver, a jabber. I am a very special case. I have a purpose. My skin, you see, screams. It's covered with words—cook, cupcake, kitty, curls—as if a knife-wielding first-grader learned to write on my flesh. I sometimes, but only sometimes, laugh. Getting out of the bath and seeing, out of the corner of my eye, down the side of a leg: baby-doll. Pulling on a sweater and, in a flash of my wrist: harmful. Why these words? Thousands of hours of therapy have yielded a few ideas from the good doctors. (Flynn 55)

Camille is personal in her narratives not only when speaking of herself but also when showing her emotions towards the events happening in Wind Gap:

My mother finally was handed the baby, and she cuddled it ferociously. Oh, how wonderful it is to hold a baby again! Adora jiggled it on her knee, walked it around the rooms, whispered to it, and I looked down from above like a spiteful little god, the back of my hand placed against my face, imagining how it felt to be cheek to cheek with my mother. When the ladies went into the kitchen to help tidy up the dishes, something changed. I remember my mother, alone in the living room, staring at the child almost lasciviously. (Flynn 87)

It is that private touch which renders the story more relatable to the readers and allows them a more reliable glance into Camille's nature and her perception of others.

Based on Genette's analysis, narrators could relate to the stories they tell in different manners. They could be "autodiegetic", "homodiegetic", and "heterodiegetic" (George 41). According to David Richter the autodiegetic narrator tells her own story (qtd in George 41), such as Camille. Though the story seems, on the surface, to be about the murdered girls, Camille's story is told from her childhood until the present moment, even her relationship with her family and her own personal struggles are explored, as displayed in the summary of *Sharp Objects*. Nevertheless, the fact that Camille's narrative is too personal also brings the dichotomy of the reliable or unreliable narrator into focus. A sample of narratological intellects postulates that narrators sometimes do not transmit a story in a faithful manner. In Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, he "called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms) unreliable when he does not" (158-159). By implied author, it means the author's image or identity in a certain work as perceived by the reader (Rimmon-Kenan 90). Hitherto, a narrator could be reliable only if s/he conveys the same principles as the perceived author. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan suggests that an unreliable narrator is one whose "limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value scheme" are characteristic of him (103). In correlation, Camille as a narrator is more similar to an unreliable narrator than a reliable one since she has limited knowledge, her personal point of view governs the narrative and also the fact that she is quite often under the influence of alcohol.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Camille in that sense is most of the time unreliable for a number of reasons: first of all, in order for Camille to endure her stay in Wind Gap she often drinks, which then impact her ability to be coherent at all times:

Back at Footh's for a drink after my mother and the Nashes. I was boozing too much, but never to the point of drunkenness, I reasoned with myself. I needed just a nip. I've always been partial to the image of liquor as lubrication—a layer of protection from all the sharp thoughts in your head. The barkeep was a round-faced guy two classes behind me who I was pretty sure was named Barry but not sure enough to actually call him that. He muttered, 'Welcome back,' as he filled my Big Mouth cup two-thirds full of bourbon, splashed some coke on top. (Flynn 88)

Camille's "sharp thoughts" which are often written on her body with sharp objects are associated with her drunken state which, in turn, interferes with her narration; for instance, when at the Nashes, though she was unable to know their life stories, she speculates about their hopes and dreams for a boy instead of three girls:

Happy Hour. I gave up on the search and stopped off at Footh's, the town's low-key country bar, before dropping by 1665 Grove Street, home of Betsy and Robert Nash...As I sipped my bourbon and cracked peanuts, I pondered the growing desperation the Nashes must have felt each time a child popped out without a penis. There was the first, Ashleigh, not a boy, but sweet and healthy. They'd always wanted two anyway. Ashleigh got a fancy name with extravagant spelling and a closet full of frosting-cake dresses. They crossed their fingers and tried again but still got Tiffanie. Now they were nervous, the welcome home less triumphant. When Mrs. Nash got knocked up once again, her husband bought a tiny baseball glove to give the lump in her belly a nudge in the right direction. Imagine the righteous dismay when Ann arrived. (Flynn 18)

Despite the fact that these ideas were only speculations, they already set the reader with a negative view towards Bob Nash, as a patriarchal agent, though when he spoke about Ann she seemed to be his favourite. Thus, the reader is uncertain of the reliability of Camille's narration, in addition to the fact that Camille's self-harming nature and emotional baggage sets her as an unstable person who has been thrust into the environment that is triggering to her past trauma that she only knows how to deal with via alcohol and self-harm. Camille has returned to the same place that traumatized her as a child and she is expected to function without any adverse effects on her psycho-emotional well-being. Thus, Camille's need for alcohol characterises her narration of unreliability.

Camille's instability was mostly consequential of her relationship with her mother. As a result, it is when Camille speaks of or encounters her mother that her unreliability resurfaces. It is apparent that Camille loves to torment Adora but she never spoke in details of the dead girls nor of Marian, yet Alan attacked Camille warning her, "You can't talk to her about the

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

corpses of these two dead little girls, or how much blood must have come out of their mouths when their teeth were pulled, or how long it took for a person to strangle them” (Flynn 144). The reader is unsure if Camille ever did so and since Camille is the narrator, she never mentions such things occurring, still the readers can read between the lines that Camille liked to unravel Adora’s nerves. Yet, there is some discrepancy between Adora’s stories and Camille’s truths: for example, while the readers read about Ann’s story and her refusal to curl and put ribbons in her hair, Adora claims that it was Camille’s story when she was a little girl. Likewise, another story overlaps between mother and daughter, Joya’s story. Adora claimed that her mother Joya was supposedly pinching her in the middle of the night, yet Camille also remembers how her mother, Adora used to do the same thing. The reader, ergo, is uncertain if the incident applies to both characters or one of them is falsifying a truth. Camille remembered the story “A jangle of memory: Marian down the hall in her pulsing, machine-filled invalid’s room. A sharp pain on my arm. My mother standing over me in her cloudy nightgown, asking if I was okay. Kissing the pink circle and telling me to go back to sleep” (ibid 145). Then indeed, the reader is left doubtful of what truly transpired, or not, but the reader has no choice but to follow Camille’s narration of the events since she is the narrator.

Making sense of Camille’s narration is also complicated by the fact that she often jumps between past, present and even the future. Despite the majority of the narration being “ulterior narration”, it is not a traditional type, it is more of a zigzagged trip into Camille’s mind. Genette labelled the term “analepsis” referring to a set of events told by the narrator after they occurred in “the form of flashbacks” (Mouro 40). When interfering within the narrative wholesomeness, these flashbacks result in a nonlinear narrative that some consider as a “zigzag round trip” (Huang 97). This narrative trip creates a link between the past and the future and such a shift often occurs by using “stream of consciousness” (Huang 97). According to Virginia Woolf, the narrator’s thoughts can teleport the readers to the past, resulting in a “nonlinear stream of consciousness” (ibid). Since the stream of consciousness is the amalgamation of the inner thoughts of a character and it is perceived “as a variation of first-person point of view” (Diasamidze 164). As such, because Camille functions as a first-person point of view narrator she also possesses the ability to implement personal life incidents through flashbacks. These flashbacks, in turn, explain Camille’s influence on the narrative and how she tends to focus on certain elements even when they are not the most important in a particular scene, such as Mrs Keene’s necklace and Natalie’s injured knee at her funeral.

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

Camille sometimes goes back in time to mention bits and pieces of her personal life as a child which help in understanding the major events concerning her relationship with Adora and Adora's compulsive nature to over-care,

When I was a child, I remember my mother trying to prod me with ointments and oils, homemade remedies and homeopathic nonsense. I sometimes took the foul solutions, more often refused. Then Marian got sick, really sick, and Adora had more important things to do than coaxing me into swallowing wheat-germ extract. Now I had a pang: all those syrups and tablets she proffered, and I rejected. That was the last time I had her full attention as a mother. I suddenly wished I'd been easier. (Flynn 54)

The author implemented this temporal shift in order to make Camille's loss and agony about her sister's death and her constant feelings of unworthiness known to the readers. On other occasions, Camille moves from the past to predicting the future in a flash-forward—for example, before arriving to Wind Gap Camille already imagined her encounter with Adora,

I already knew the reaction I'd get when I showed up at her door. A quick, shocked flustering, her hand to her hair, a mismatched hug that would leave me aimed slightly to one side. Talk of the messy house, which wouldn't be. A query about length of stay packaged in niceties. "How long do we get to have you for, sweetness?" she'd say. Which meant: "When do you leave?" It's the politeness that I find most upsetting. (Flynn 9)

Logically, Flynn is allowed her narrator liberty because after all it is her life's story, though some events did not yet happen but were predicted by Camille such as the way Bob Nash's son would grow up, or how her mother would receive her. They were based only on Camille's point of view; ergo, they transpired according to how Camille saw them and, as a result, this raises questions about Camille's narrative reliability and her influence on the perception of the readers on certain characters such as Bob Nash.

Comparing Camille and Levin's author narrator sets forward a number of differences in the narrative technique's influence over the readers. While Levin tells the story through a female character's eyes, the reader is not allowed a deeper understanding of Joanna's psyche: her emotions and apprehensions are not revealed in the narrative; they are primarily restricted to the author as a narrator. Joanna is a female restricted by the patriarchal dominion of a male-author whereas, for Camille, her ugliness and wallowing is visible in the way she told the story. While Levin as the author narrator is reliable enough based on his authority as the creator of the literary work, Camille leaves much for the reader to ponder on and decipher her version and her fidelity to the events. Therefore, *Sharp Objects* seems to be far more suspenseful and complex than *The Stepford Wives*. From a researcher's point of view, and to

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

focus on the gist of the analysis, it is the time in which the two novels were written and set which determined their narrative complexities. While the 20th century had a clear conflict between women being equal to men or not, Flynn's 21st century's creation reflects the broader and complex conflict between not only men and women, but women amongst each other and, more importantly, it is the violence women exert on each other and themselves. Hence the complexity of the narrative simply reflects the complexity of the theme the novel wishes to deliver.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter examined the details of each story by focusing on key constructive details of both novels, such as their plot summaries, the characterization of their main protagonists, and the critical analysis of their literary discourses. After analysing these elements, one notes that both authors display the duality of the feminine/feminist characters or the docile/monstrous female and the way the clash between the two shapes both stories and the manner in which both stories aimed to make female struggles visible.

Through the dialogic study of the novels, it is apparent that the influence of the exterior world is visible once depicting feminist movements and famous figures which are sometimes incorporated into the theme of the story. Furthermore, the characterization of the novel's protagonists also depict the clash between domesticated and independent women and how this clash harbours female-female oppression as a form of mental, physical and emotional abuse it can result into monstrous or psychologically unstable women. Moreover, these depictions also highlight the relationality in the gender roles and the ultimate transformation of the male role from an oppressor in *The Stepford Wives* to a passive onlooker in *Sharp Objects*. The intertextual elements, likewise, tend to accentuate the dialogic correlation between the selected novels and the literary influences which helped shape their stories and themes. Both dialogism and intertextuality are used by the authors to reveal the connections between the world of women, oppression, and patriarchy in both novels; with the most important element to highlight being the female representation as a docile creature or an independent, sometimes, unhinged and violent woman.

In the end, this chapter has focused on analysing certain elements in the novels that reveal the nature of the women characterised in each story and how they reflect, or reject, certain stereotypes. Likewise, the male characters' analysis also plays a role in understanding the shift in male-female dynamics in terms of the female representation in these novels. The

Chapter Two: Storyline, Characterisation and Discourse in the Novel

overall outcome of the analysis reveals that *The Stepford Wives* as a 20th century novel represents a miniature patriarchal dominion, through the Men's Association. The latter aimed to destroy the independence of female characters and replace them with robotised women to meet the expectations of the patriarchal ideology, as a part of systemic male-female oppression. On the other hand, *Sharp Objects*, as a 21st century novel depicts the development in female struggle as it transforms from male-female subjugation to women-women oppression where characters such as Adora and Amma harm other women who are characterised as being non-feminine and too independent.

Though both novels reveal substantial information for the aims of the research which entails revealing shifts in female representation, women-women oppression and its psychological consequences, it is still essential to further explore the adaptations of both works as they comprise the transformed version from a literary work to a cinematographic visual. This shift also plays an important role in answering the queries of the research concerning female representation especially due to the temporal shift from a 20th century novel to its 21st century's adaptation. Hence, the upcoming chapter investigates the impact of adaptation in transforming female representation and confirming or refuting the idea that women-women oppression exists in a way that it contributes to the creation of the monstrous female.

Chapter Three:
Adaptive Shifts
and the Female
Psyche

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

- 3.1. Introduction
- 3.2. Adaptations
 - 3.2.1. The Stepford Wives (1975)
 - 3.2.2. The Stepford Wives (2004)
 - 3.2.3. Sharp Objects (2018)
- 3.3. Adaptive Shifts
 - 3.3.1. Plot Alterations
 - 3.3.1.1. In the Stepford Wives
 - 3.3.1.2. In Sharp Objects
 - 3.3.2. Interfigurality and Characterization
 - 3.3.2.1. In 21st Century Stepford
 - 3.3.2.2. In 21st Century Wind Gap
 - 3.3.3. Hypertextuality through the Winding Ups
- 3.4. Discourse in the Adaptations
 - 3.4.1. Dialogic Resemblances Between Adaptations
 - 3.4.2. Intertextual Connections in Adaptations
 - 3.4.3. Narrative Shifts
 - 3.4.3.1. Point of View and Focalization
- 3.5. Female Characters and the Deranged Psyche in the Selected Novels
 - 3.5.1. Joanna Eberhart
 - 3.5.2. Amma Crellin
 - 3.5.2.1. Unhinged Amma
 - 3.5.2.2. Victim or Psychopath?
 - 3.5.3. Adora Crellin
 - 3.5.3.1. Unhinged Adora
 - 3.5.3.2. Victim or Psychopath?
 - 3.5.4. Camille Preaker
 - 3.5.4.1. Unhinged Camille
 - 3.5.4.2. Reliability and Linearity
- 3.6. Stereotypical Psychological Female Typologies from Novels to Adaptations
 - 3.6.1. Claire Willington as the Lucia
 - 3.6.2. The Ophelia between Mother and Daughter
 - 3.6.3. Camille, the Crazy Jane
- 3.7. From Deranged to Criminal Females
 - 3.7.1. Women as Killers
 - 3.7.2. Women as Victims
 - 3.7.3. Women as Self-harmers
- 3.8. Conclusion

3.1. Introduction

Once a written piece is adapted into the screen there are certain elements which must be adjusted for the purpose of fitting the visual medium while others may be altered for satirizing the original work. The process may also lead to strengthening the message of the original work or depicting the temporal influences which alter/update societal contexts such as the role and freedoms of women in society. Both *The Stepford Wives* (Dir. Frank Oz; 2004) and *Sharp Objects* (Dir. Jean-Marc Vallée; 2018) display changes post-adaptation to different extents. In these two visual media, the elements which portray the main adaptive shifts involve: plot, characters, and the characterization of feminine and feminist characters, along with the ending of each story. The manner in which and the purpose for which, these elements are transformed holds the key to exploring the role of cinema in portraying the female experience, status, and character development through time in both *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*—the focus of this chapter.

On that note, dialogism and intertextuality (and its different types) discussed in the previous chapter likewise comprise the tools for deconstructing and deciphering these adaptations. Robert Stam elucidates that the intertextual connection between different texts can also be depicted between literary works and their adaptations (qtd in Zee 8). While dialogism gives birth to intertextuality it also encompasses the non-literal influences the film makers experience, and consequently include in their works either intentionally or not (Snyder 206). On the other hand, intertextuality serves as the tool of the filmmakers to recreate the novel into a screenplay and later on into a film. Coupled with intertextuality, hypertextuality (which was introduced by Gerard Genette) serves as the satirical tool for the filmic re-creation where it alters the winding up of the story and its core context (Hutcheon and O'Flynn 3). Furthermore, narration and the narrative techniques adopted for films also modify the way in which a story is told as they allow the viewers to see more than they could within the written forms while also stimulating their feelings through the visual techniques used (Hall 24). Hence, the importance of studying the narrative shifts lies in revealing the impact of cinematographic narrations in portraying the female characters and their engagement with/in the environment they occupy.

Moreover, the visual medium allows a unique view into the psychological disorders from which the characters suffer—and in this case these characters are the female

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

protagonists. While the written work voices inner thoughts through stream of consciousness, the filmic adaptation demonstrates essential details of the inner workings of characters which renders analysing their mental states more accessible for the audience. As for the criminal aspect, 20th and 21st century's Hollywood cinema is known for its fascination with the murderous persona. Tania Modelski points out that cinema and television featured a great number of both male and female serial killers through characters like Hannibal Lector in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and Cathrine Tramell in *Basic Instinct* (1992), Patrick Batman in *American Psycho* (2000) and Dexter Morgan in the television series *Dexter* (2006-2013). Furthermore, film adaptations can also highlight, more clearly, the criminal aspects compared to their written counterparts simply in terms of the visual advantage which allows the viewers to see the act of murder and the psychological instabilities of the murderers. In addition, the dynamic of murder-victim between men and women is a reoccurring image in cinema and recent fiction features storylines in which gendered roles are reversed. That is, women shift from being the stereotypical victims to being the perpetrators as noted in the selected works *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*.

3.2. Adaptations

3.2.1. *The Stepford Wives* (1975)

Following the success of Ira Levin's 1972 novel *The Stepford Wives*, director Bryan Forbes adapted the latter for the screen in 1975 with the help of screenplay writer William Goldman. Like the book, the film focused on gender roles, female submission, and the sterility of suburban living for ambitious women (Coggan np). Nonetheless, the film adaptation presents the viewers with a clearer image of the male-female dynamics in the story and allows them more clarity than the events in the novel in terms of women being replaced by robots.

The film starts the same as the novel with the Eberhart couple and their two children moving from New York City to the suburban town of Stepford, Connecticut. The lead character is Joanna Eberhart (Katharine Ross), a young housewife and talented photographer who decides, with her husband Walter (Peter Masterson), to move to the suburbs for a better life, specifically to Stepford. Once in Stepford, Joanna befriends the town's newcomer Bobbie Markowitz (Paula Prentiss). As in the book, Bobbie is depicted in the film as having a light, funny, and careless character, careless in the sense of the tidiness of her home. Joanna and Bobbie also encounter and spend some time with Charmaine Wimperis (Tina Louise) before she is transformed into the robotic Stepford woman. To a certain extent, the 1975 film is

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

faithful to the novel as it retells the majority of the events mentioned in the book while adding certain scenes to accentuate the idea that the women were indeed supplanted by robots. For instance, in one scene, Mrs Sunderson (a robotic Stepford wife) has a little accident near the shopping mall. The accident incites a technical glitch that causes her to keep repeating herself like a broken record. Joanna also noticed that the ambulance which was responsible for transporting Mrs Sunderson headed in the opposite direction of the hospital which meant she was being taken elsewhere to be treated (Forbes 17:00-19:25). Equally, Mrs Sunderson also displayed abnormal behaviour at the house party where she kept repeating the phrase “I’ll just die if I don’t get this recipe” (ibid 39:58- 41:20). Mrs Sunderson’s malfunctions reveal that she may not be a human being—and despite blaming her odd behaviour on her excessive drinking, it is apparent that the behaviour is caused by a glitch in her robot programming.

In fact, it is not only Mrs Sunderson who behaves oddly, the behaviour, attire, manner of speech and comportment of most of the women in Stepford is too monotonous and stiff that the viewer suspects that there is something unnatural and mechanical about them. In the novel, the fact that the men are masterminds in electronics and robotics is a hint to the readers that the men brainwashed or replaced the women with human-like robots. However, in the film, it is more evident to the audience that it cannot be easily ignored since there are more explicit indicators of what is really happening. In other words, unlike the reading experience of the book, the film viewers have access to witness the men’s suspicious behaviour in the Men’s Association —insinuations that the men were plotting something for the women. This plot is revealed by the end of the film where the viewers witness Joanna’s transformation into the Stepford wife. In the book, the readers have to speculate what truly transpired whereas in the film Joanna’s encounter with Bobbie exposes almost everything. Once Joanna heads to Bobbie’s house for an explanation to Bobbie’s weird transformation, the situation unfolds quite differently from the book where Bobbie was about to stab Joanna. In the 1975 film, Joanna is suspicious and afraid that it is she that ends up attacking Bobbie with the knife. Bobbie does not bleed but she starts experiencing a similar glitch as Mrs Sunderson—she keeps repeating her words and acting peculiarly (Forbes 01:38:30- 01:39:50). By the end of the film, the audience also gets to see Joanna’s robot replacement in the presence of the Men’s Association’s president, Dale Gribble. He was the mastermind of the entire plan of transforming the women into perfect machines, and his presence at that scene reveals that all what Joanna suspected (that the men were somehow changing the women) from the start was true, and instead of being killed by Bobbie, it is her robot self that kills her (ibid 01:49:30- 1:50:55). In

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

the final scene, the robot version of Joanna once more glides around the aisles of the supermarket, just like the book version, after being *stepfordised*.

Symbolically, the image of Joanna being attacked by her other-self and Cobra standing aside witnessing the situation, not simply as an outside onlooker but also as the orchestrator of the entire situation, alludes to the men who brainwash the women. This misogynist androcentric control is so influential that it reaches the point where these women end up as the agents of patriarchy in destroying women's independence and liberation. In the same vein, the film reflects women under a patriarchal grip which engages them in the stereotypes of the perfect housewife, the perfect mother, and the docile partner. Scholars such as Anna Krugovoy Silver believe *The Stepford Wives* (1975) to be "a feminist allegory that stems from the ideological and political concerns of feminists as diverse as Friedan, Pat Mainardi, the Redstockings, and The Feminists"⁹ (60). Though both the film and the novel were rejected by many feminists, it only drew more attention to the issues affecting women under dominant patriarchal ideologies and gendered power hierarchies. Precisely, this film draws on second wave of feminism ideologies that focused on issues such as "a woman's domestic labor, a woman's role in the nuclear family, and a woman's control over her body" (ibid). Ergo, the audiences of *The Stepford Wives* are forced to witness patriarchal attempts to create the supposedly perfect image women must embody both physically and behaviour wise.

The first adaptation of *The Stepford Wives* insinuates that, in the span of three years (1972 -1975) there were no substantial changes in the mind-set of the American society especially in terms of female representation in fiction and film. Thus, the first adaptation of *The Stepford Wives* is not considered as a valuable tool for comparison with the novel since it does not show the effect of temporality on adaptation. However, it is important to further explore it to see the clear contrast between the 1975 and 2004 film versions and, inherently how each film is adapted to reflect societal value systems and concerns at the time of production. The 1975 version ultimately sets the groundwork for the alterations included in the 2004 adaptation and, as such, informs this research and its focus on the role reversal of victim/victimiser for women in these cultural products.

⁹ Betty Friedan was a key figure in the second wave of feminism in the US and her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) is credited for inspiring the movement. (McGirr np). Pat Mainardi was a member of the New York City chapter of the feminist group Redstockings which was active in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Redstockings were known for radical feminist views (Mainardi 119). "The Feminists" were a group of radical feminists who formed in New York in the 1960s; this group was braver in its protests which entailed protesting against beauty pageants and infiltrating male establishments such as Miss America Pageant and Playboy Club (Breines 155).

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

3.2.2. *The Stepford Wives* (2004)

Twenty-nine years after the first filmic adaptation of Levin's *The Stepford Wives* was released, Hollywood produced another adaptation in 2004 with director Frank Oz's and screen writer Paul Rudnick's version as a science-fiction black comedy satirizing Levin's original novel (Fleming and McNary np). Unlike its predecessor, the 2004 adaptation is less faithful to the events of the novel from its beginning, overall plot development or its ending. Though this version also tells the story of a couple moving to Stepford, Connecticut, the reason for the couple's departure from the city is different. Furthermore, there are certain characters' traits that are modified and there is also the introduction of new characters. Nevertheless, Stepford is still presented as a town where the women are flawless, and the men are more than delighted about this fact. .

The film opens with Nicole Kidman as the ambitious television executive Joanna Eberhart and not as the part-time photographer and housewife of Levin's novel. Moreover, Matthew Broderick plays her husband Walter Kresby and has a fairly important role in the story than what is rendered in the original literary version. Bette Midler plays Bobbie and this 2004 production introduces a new character known as Roger Bannister (Roger Bart), a gay man who replaces Charmaine Wimperis' role from the novel. Likewise, Glenn Close is cast as the welcome lady and the Men's Association's president's wife, Claire Willington, as another new character in Oz's film and occupies a rather decisive role—both of which will be discussed later in this chapter. Instead of Dale Coba, it is Mark Willington (Christopher Walken) who heads the Men's Association. It is evident that the addition of certain characters and the alteration of others were purposefully made for parodying the original work whilst also updating the character types to reflect contemporary society. However, the feminist viewers of this version believed that it failed in reflecting the efforts of feminist movements to the extent that it was labelled an "insult" to the thirty years of feminist endeavours (Reeder 52). Even though many did not appreciate the mockery behind the 2004 adaptation of *The Stepford Wives*, it still transmits a rather strong message about the perception of women and their representation in the early 21st century in comparison not only to the 1970 film version but also to societal values of that era.

Considering that the adaptations refer to the shifts made by the film makers to the written work to reflect their own points of view or the current times (Hutcheon18)—this topic is to be discussed in a different section of this thesis. However, in this section it is appropriate to explore the similarities between the 21st century's adaptation and the original novel. For

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

instance, Joanna, her husband Walter and their children indeed move from the city to the suburbs where they discover a whole new world where the men are the stereotypical providers, and the women are submissive, docile, perfect housewives. Like the book, there is a patriarchal institution called the Men's Association which is more visible in this version than in the novel or the earlier film. Walter, likewise, visits the association often and the women keep transforming to perfect housewives a few months after their arrival, as it was the case for Bobbie Markowitz. Unfortunately, like the 1975 version, the 2004 version also does not end with a female saving herself and/or other women.

Apparently, even after twenty years of trying to prove that women are equal to men, the standards for the perfect woman in the new version of *The Stepford Wives* remain the same as the original work (Thompson np). Since adaptations reflect current events and times, as Linda Hutcheon explains (18), it is then to be concluded that the early years of the 2000s still reflect and privilege a stereotypical image of an obedient and submissive woman. The ideal woman remains the sexy woman who is compliant and submissive and do not complain about her husbands' caprices, desires or deficiencies. Furthermore, women who do not fit this mould continue to be rejected by their society or reworked into acceptable Stepford versions of themselves.

3.2.3. *Sharp Objects* (2018)

In 2018, Home Box Office or HBO, one of the most renowned American pay television networks, released the first adaptation of Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* (2006). The television series recounts the story of Camille Preaker, the troubled journalist who returns to her hometown of Wind Gap to report on and investigate the disappearance and murder of two young girls. The series was directed by Jean-Marc Vallée, while its screenplay was written by several writers including Marti Noxon, Alex Metcalf, Vince Calandra, amongst others (Weinlander and Pinals 127).

The protagonist, Camille (Amy Adams) is a young woman haunted by a mysterious past while struggling with alcoholism and self-harm. Patricia Clarkson plays the role of Adora Crellin, Camille's bad mother, though beautiful and well-composed on the outside, she harbours a mysterious an inner malice and deranged nature. Similarly, Eliza Scanlen's angelic features make her portrayal of Amma Crellin (Camille's sister), as the female serial killer the most unnerving (Weinlander and Pinals 127-128). Thanks to the talented actors who brought *Sharp Objects* to life, the television series succeeded in catching and captivating the attention

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

of the viewers in its portrayal of deranged and/or traumatized women who either harm themselves or one another. As in the book, the television series follows Camille on her trip to Wind Gap and her struggle to keep her sanity in an extremely toxic environment marked by disagreeable, if not disturbing, moments with her mother—which she attempts to manage by deadening her feelings with alcohol or in self harm.

Though there are some slight changes and some additions necessary for the screen adaptation, most events are faithful and almost identical to that of the novel. The television series focuses on preserving the core elements and events of the story including the characters, plot, and the ending. Yet the televised version also endeavoured to highlight certain elements to better display Camille's suffering, such as her constant itchiness to carve words on her flesh and her reoccurring urges to drown herself in alcohol.

3.3. Adaptive Shifts

Adaptation shifts not only refer to alterations made by the filmmaker but also to those revisions made in order to criticise or satirise the original work. For both novels selected in this chapter there are some visible transferals in the way the textual story is told visually as well as changes to characters—though to different degrees. According to Sayyed Ali Mirenayat and Elaheh Soofastaei, the remake of a literary work is strictly associated with time shifts. They explain that the original work and its adaptation “are a sign of the past and the present as a unity of meaning” (536). That is, the modifications implemented in the adapted work are the product of the influences of the time in which it is being remade as a proof that “the present is different from the past” (ibid). Hence, the temporal gap between the original work and its adaptation plays an essential role in the extent to which a director chooses to modify a literary work so that it may engage with contemporary societal concerns.

While Linda Hutcheon postulates that an adaptation is a reflection of the filmmaker's thoughts and intentions (20), Joseph Ortiz adds that with each adaptation made new alterations were being added to reflect the time period of their remake (Ortiz 185). Robert Stam, for instance, explains that “Since adaptations engage the discursive energies of their time, they become a barometer of the ideological trends circulating during the moment of production” (qtd in Ortiz 185). That is, the beliefs and the thoughts prevailing at a certain time period have a substantial influence on the minds of the filmmakers as they tend to remould the literary story to fit the current times. These shifts not only touch the events of the story but

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

also have an influence on the traits of characters and how they represent contemporary society and its dominant ideologies, value systems and power hierarchies.

In this chapter, the analysis of the film and television adaptations is based on Julie Sanders' stipulation about the effectiveness of focusing on the distinctions and similarities between the written version and its adaptation (27). This examination also considers the "*Fidelity/infidelity analysis*" by emphasising the extent to which a visual creation is faithful to its written counterpart and, most importantly, the reasons behind why some visual adaptations choose to veer away from the course of the original work. According to Mary Snyder, the gist of an adaptation's analysis lies in discovering the "why" behind any omissions, alterations or additions (272). In *The Stepford Wives*' and *Sharp Objects*' adaptations it is integral to explore the reasons behind removing or adding certain events and characters to answer the queries of this research in connection with the role of adaptations in representing female status in society during that specific temporal context.

3.3.1. Plot Alterations

3.3.1.1. *The Stepford Wives*

Frank Oz's 2004 adaptation of *The Stepford Wives* reveals a number of alterations in its plotline in order to satirise the female status in the 20th century in correlation with male dominance. Though the film kept the general framework of the story of an urban family moving to the suburbs where they witness unusual events, it also transforms the original work from a gothic thriller¹⁰ to a satirical comedy¹¹. The film altered the genre of the story and some of its major events to highlight the shift in social context between the 20th and the 21st century and how the concept of female oppression has changed through time.

The 2004 film introduces the protagonist Joanna when being praised for her work as a well-accomplished television show producer instead of being presented as a part time photographer and housewife as she was in the book. The television network in itself represents a shift in the ideology of American society and the context of the original work. That is, while the novel portrayed Joanna and most of the women in the story as having minor or no jobs outside the home; the 2004 version opens with a very successful career woman who happens to be the protagonist of the story. Interestingly, the film also begins with a scene

¹⁰ Gothic thriller is a genre of fiction which dovetails around dark mystery where the protagonists often face an unnatural foe either of the spiritual world or one which is made by science such as Frankenstein (Pagan np)

¹¹ According to Collins dictionary satirical comedy refers to the process of using comic or humorous elements in order to criticise something, in some cases it criticises societal and individual views (np).

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

that depicts Joanna producing a show for her network which is entitled “Balance of Power”—a show based on the competition between genders where couples are asked questions such as “who makes more money?” to see who holds more power in the relationship. The couple which is shown at the beginning of the film is asked the same question and the winner, in both cases, reveals that it is to be the woman who holds more power because, in the 21st century women can occupy highly paid jobs (*The Stepford Wives* 04:38- 05:12). Another television show produced by the network where Joanna works is entitled “I Can Do Better!” and also functions as further intertext of contemporary societal views depicted in the series. This show appears to be an allusion to the reality television series *Temptation Island* which started airing in 2001. In both shows, a happily married couple is isolated on an exotic island with eligible bachelors and by the end of the week or season the couple is to decide whether to stay together or part ways. In the film, the only contestants the viewers see is a couple who decides to get separated at the end of filming because the wife realized she can do better, that is, be with a more attractive man (ibid 05:40- 07:20). The message behind the show is evident: unlike the time in which the original novel was written, women in this version are free to not only choose their partners but also change them. The couple’s story demonstrates the differences in the ideology of the American society between the 1970s and early 2000s and it plays a role in the reasons for which Joanna and her family moved from the city to the suburbs. The husband in “I Can Do Better!”, Hank, after having experienced a severe heart break, attempts to murder Joanna, the one he deems responsible for his ordeal (*The Stepford Wives* 08:20- 08:40). Joanna, inevitably, though not harmed, is fired by the network as their way to appease offended viewers. As a successful woman, Joanna could not accept being fired and experiences a “full mental collapse”. Due to Joanna’s mental breakdown, Walter decides to leave his position at the same network Joanna worked at after she was fired and they move their family away from the city to the tranquil town of Stepford (ibid 11:45- 13:40).

Notwithstanding the early revisions to the story, when the family settles into Stepford, Joanna and Walter are bombarded by the images of female perfection, from Claire Willington (the Welcome lady) to the Stepford women Joanna first meets at the Stepford Spa. Different from the novel, in a rather absurd scene, the women are depicted working out wearing summer dresses, heels, and perfect hair styles (see figure 3).

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche



Figure 3: The Stepford women about to work out at the gym (*The Stepford Wives* 2004, Paramount Pictures).

The workouts consist of imitating house chores and even pretending to be dishwashers. In another scene, which was only introduced in the 2004 version, Walter drives through town and comes across two men playing golf while their wives function as their caddies, carrying their golf equipment and looking just as fabulous as the women in the gym in heels and short dresses (*The Stepford Wives* 20:18- 20:24). Another element which is not witnessed in the original novel is interactions between husband and wife, other than Joanna and Walter, particularly between Bobbie and her spouse. At the celebration of the fourth of July, Bobbie and her husband comically argue about what he expects of her, like cleaning cooking and caring for the children and not what she wishes to do, which is to finish writing her book (ibid 23:05-23:20). Like the 1975 film, at the party, one of the women experiences a malfunction though on a rather more severe level than the earlier film version—in the 2004’s film, Mrs Sandersen even has sparks coming out of her ears—making it quite obvious that there is something mechanic about her (ibid 25:50- 26:30). In this version, the audiences are also allowed to see more of Walter’s nature: in the book he occupies a more neutral position while in the first film he seems to be an accomplice with the men, but in the 2004 version, he is too supportive and amiable to ever be considered as part of the Stepford ruse. In the scope of this analysis, the change in Walter’s characterization reflects a societal transformation in men’s attitudes towards their wives wherein Walter reflects a new generation of men.

Furthermore, there are other signs that the Stepford women are robotic. After the incident Sarah Sunderson experienced at the party, Joanna, Bobbie and Charmaine’s replacement, Roger, decide to visit her. They find a remote control with her name and,

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

although they do not realise that it is used to control her, the audience has a privileged insight since they are able to witness that once the trio click the buttons of the remote Mrs Sunderson's body starts to transform into a robotic figure (*The Stepford Wives* 34:45- 35:10). Likewise, when Walter is in the Men's Association, the men reveal that their wives are automatons. For example, when Ted calls his wife to give Walter the money he owed him, Ted's wife literally functions like an ATM. She retrieves the money out of her mouth after inserting his credit card as evidenced in the following screen capture from that scene (see figure 4). The fact that Mrs Sanderson was rendered into a money-retrieving machine reflects a clear desire for the men in Stepford to objectify their women, not only to be good wives but to become the fulfillers of their every whim and desire. In correlation, the film reflects a severe case of injustice towards women who are being minimised into objects—a fetishization that persists into the 2000s.



Figure 4: Mrs Sanderson providing money of her mouth like an ATM (*The Stepford Wives* 2004, Paramount Pictures).

As for Joanna, unlike the book or the previous film, by the end of this version she is neither attacked nor does she attack Bobbie or end up a robot like the rest of the women. Instead, once she witnesses Bobbie's transformation, Joanna angrily heads to the Men's Association. There, with Joanna's supposed transformation, the viewers also witness Walter while he vents on all the things Joanna should not have had: a better job than his, a better income than his, or being a better player than he is. Walter was indeed faking his reasons, yet they still make sense to all the men because they are the reality of a patriarchal ideology which believes that women cannot/should not be superior to men in any field. This fact is also a reflection of real life where men are intimidated by successful women where they rather marry women who are less educated than they are or at least less accomplished. The reflection of the patriarchal mind-set is quite important for this analysis since it further supports the

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

claim that the adaptations were altered to correspond to real life and to the current status of women in the American society. In this version the women are not replaced by robots, they are turned into female cyborgs by the implementation of five nanochips in their brains. Fortunately, the film does not end with Joanna sashaying at the supermarket with her new attire (*The Stepford Wives* 01:11:20- 01:11:48). Instead, the grand finale of the film is at a ball where Joanna reveals she was never turned into an automaton because Walter could not betray her like the rest of the men betrayed their wives. The film's ending also discloses the real person responsible behind that sexist atrocity and additionally reveals that something more sinister is at play—a point to which will be discussed later in the chapter. By chance, the women were not dead; ergo they could be saved and be brought back to their normal self, and the men are punished for their misogyny.

The combination of the modifications made in this filmic version appears to serve and transmit a particular message. The world might not have changed as people would think: though on the surface women appear to have gained more independence and rights—there are still gendered expectations that persist regarding women in patriarchal societies. Even in the 21st century's version of the novel, men are still depicted as preferring and enjoying slave-like women possessing beautiful bodies and simple minds. Conversely, the inclusion of different types of characterizations and characters displays the changes the world or, precisely, the US witnessed between the 1970s and the early 2000s. Equally, the winding up of the story ventures to a different field than that of male-female oppression but suggests a new type of female subjugation through the re-visioning of Claire Willington's character—elements to be further explained later in this chapter.

3.3.1.2. *Sharp Objects*

The first and only adaptation of Flynn's *Sharp Objects* was released twelve years after the book's publication. The creators of the television series mainly focused on preserving the major events of the novel inasmuch as to have Flynn as one of the writers of the screenplay and did not accept major changes to its narrative (Nguyen np). The plotline remained intact with only few additions to the original story. It is believed that since both the book and the series belonged to the same time period, with merely a twelve-year gap between the two, there would have been no logical purpose to bring any substantial changes into play since they both reflect current societal values. Nonetheless, there are certain additions which must be brought to light since, though they might be subtle, they reveal some aspects which can heavily

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

influence this analysis concerning how women in the 21st century are not only victimised by men to being victimised by each other.

The television series, despite preserving the core elements of the plot, does not open in the same way as the novel. The first scene parades flashbacks disguised as a dream sequence depicting Camille's memory of her sister Marian and herself as children roller skating through the town of Wind Gap before sneaking back into their mother's house. The scene then cuts to a shot of going up the stairs then cutting to a shot of the now adult Camille sleeping in her room in her own apartment. Young Camille from the dream attempts to cut her adult version's hand and that is when the adult Camille wakes up (*Sharp Objects*, Ep.1 01:40 -04:52). Starting the show with Camille's past as part of a dream sequence is an insight into her subconscious insinuating that the audience must be made aware that she is still a prisoner of her past life, Wind Gap, her mother, and her self-harm. Consequently, Camille's flashbacks and hallucinations tend to focus on her childhood and memories of her sister—events that re-occur during the show yet are not a significant part of the novel. In correlation, these hallucinations, dreams, and flashbacks implemented in the show's plot play a significant role in understanding Camille's psyche and personal trauma. In turn, this intimate knowledge of Camille's psyche helps to understand female suffering as a result from being harmed by the other women in her life—the idea of women-women oppression to be discussed in this chapter.

Accompanying the uncanny story of *Sharp Objects*, the plot in the television series emphasizes the element of suspense. In the novel there is one major suspect during the entire story, John Keene, until they discover the true killer. However, in the series, the viewers are kept on the edge of their seats speculating which of the men the killer could be with a list of suspects consisting of Bob Nash, Kirk Lacey (Amma's history teacher), Alan Crellin, along with some slight indications to chief Vickery and overall insinuating that one of them might have done it (Nguyen np). The focus on Bob Nash centres on being portrayed as an aggressive father towards his daughters while being questioned by Camille, unlike his character in the novel who is portrayed as a broken father trying to take care of his family (*Sharp Objects*, Ep.1 42:58- 43:55). Also added to the plot of the television show is an in-depth look into Camille's time in the psych ward for self-harmers. In the book, the readers only have a brief description of what Camille experienced once admitted to the psychiatric clinic and how her mother never visited her. Yet, in the show, the third episode is dedicated to Camille's encounter of a young girl named Alice in the psychiatric clinic, with whom she develops a

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

close bond. The bond is interpreted as a result of Camille's yearning for her deceased sister Marian. The girl in the psyche ward commits suicide which results in another unexpected loved-one's loss for Camille and another unprocessed emotional crisis. Upon beholding the comatose girl Camille feels the urge to cut herself; she uses the toilet's screw to cut her arm, viciously, before being stopped by the nurses (*Sharp Objects*, Ep.3 48: 20- 49:08). This incident makes a clear link between Camille's self-harm and the loss of her sister Marian which also explains why she reacted the same way after Alice's suicide.

By episode four a different event is added to the show's narrative—a special day specific to Wind Gap known as Calhoun Day. The story of Zeke Calhoun, the founding father of Wind Gap and the Southern soldier in the Civil War is told in the novel, however, without dedicating a school play, a special day, or a party to it. In the show, Amma and her friends prepare for and act the play about Calhoun and his wife, Mille. Calhoun is supposed to have married a young girl (too young that Camille refers to him as a paedophile) who sacrifices herself to keep him hidden from the soldiers only to be chained to a tree and violated by Union soldiers. In the play, Amma, who acts Millie's role, wished to hypertextualize Millie's original story and instead of being violated until she loses her baby, she chooses to fight instead (*Sharp Objects*, Ep.4 13:08- 13:42). Amma's history teacher refuses on the grounds that it was not the proper way in which women helped their husbands at war. Amma's urge to create a "female militia" perhaps stems from the truth that she was, herself, powerless and needed to take matters into her hands—and disguises it as a (non-genuine) interest in women's rights and the bond between girls. Like the book, the television series posits Amma as the true killer—this explains how she does not only wish to be all powerful but that she is extremely inclined to violence as well. Uncanny as it may seem, even Adora was not satisfied with how the play focused on women sacrificing themselves for men and being victims instead of fighting back stating that "it is that way only because it is written by men" (*Sharp Objects*, Ep.5 09:10- 09:15). This may hint that Adora knows, personally, the violence women can commit and that, if given the chance, women would not have stood around and waited for men to violate and burn them at the stake. But the story as written by a man, speaks of a woman who silently met her horrific death simply to adhere to societal expectations of a southern woman during the time of the civil war. For those who read the novel, they are familiar with the history of young girls' abuse in Wind Gap which includes bullying and rape. Hence, once Camille refers to Millie as her "great-great-great-grand victim" (Boucher np) it appears that Millie's story is the original crime against women in Wind Gap. Moreover, Wind

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Gap is described as a town which harbours great evil for women that when Millie's rape story is recounted, Camille remembers her young self being gang raped by a group of boys in the woods. Camille's rape story is told in distraught flashbacks and by her conversation with detective Willis (*Sharp Objects*, Ep.4 21:26- 22:11). The way in which Camille's story is told reflects her own distraught nature especially that she did not believe it to be rape but a young girl's consent to intercourse—though once she sleeps with the detective she questions if he abused her the way those boys did. As a matter of fact, Camille was verbally abused by her mother since infancy so it seems as if her childhood trauma affected her judgment to the difference between abuse and consent.

When adapting *Sharp Objects* for television, it is noticeable that there are other altered events in addition to the aforementioned such as the jumbled post finale scenes, revealing how Amma killed the girls. For instance, there are some omitted or altered scenes like Camille's and Adora's heated conversation in episode four when Camille gets home drunk. She and Adora exchange some hurtful words (mostly on Adora's side) unmasking Adora's evil nature to the readers. Adora admits she never loved Camille and threatens to carve her name onto the last blank space on Camille's body, right in the centre of her back (Flynn 132). This scene in the show is altered into gentler words and Adora only blames Camille for not loving her. As for Natalie and Ann (the murdered girls), their ages were altered from ten and nine years old to fourteen and thirteen. It seems that the girls' ages were changed to focus on adolescence as key to both Amma and Camille's lives. Camille started carving in her teens and Amma committed the murders around the same age—highlighting that adolescence can be a critical time for girls when they either break or get broken.

The idea that adolescence plays a vital role in girls' lives is discussed by a number of scholars, for example, in Mary Pipher and Sara Gilliam's introduction to *Reviving Ophelia*, they state that during the period of girls' adolescence "Everything is changing—their body shapes, hormones, skin, and hair. Equanimity is replaced by imbalance" (30). As a result, girls occupy a troubled stage when they are no longer a child nor are they fully women which leads them to the ultimate question "What is my place in the universe" (Pipher and Gilliam 30). The issue of adolescence is very relevant in *Sharp Objects* specifically because girls like Amma, Camille, Ann and Natalie "face intense pressure to conform to societal norms and gender roles while also exploring their own identities and potential" which can even shape their beliefs and behaviors in the long term (Sloan et al 427-435). This is both the case of Amma and Camille who were ruined after what they experienced as teens because of their mother's

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

and society's pressures and expectations. On the other hand, there are other slight changes such as Camille's city house being altered from Chicago in the book to St Louis in the series which is an alteration that has no real influence in the story or the analysis.

Having been remade in the same century did not allow *Sharp Objects* many alterations but there are some nonetheless. These modifications and the additional scenes prove to heighten the intensity of the message and the extended timeline a television series allows for plot enhancements. The show vividly portrays the creepy town and the uncanny victimised and violent women in it since, as a television series, it has a longer screen time to explore and delve deeper into the story and its characters' development. Having said that, it is still essential to analyse the portrayal of characters and their characterization in the show in comparison to the book so as to better comprehend contemporary societal ideas and ideologies the adaptation wishes to reflect.

3.3.2. Interfigurality and Characterization

Whenever a literary creation is adapted for the screen, its characters are inevitably moulded to fit the visual medium—this act of transporting characters from a work to another is referred to as interfigurality (Muller 104), and if these characters change considerably, it means that interfigurality is hypertextualized in the new version. Hypertextuality, which according to Voicu Simandan entails re-writing a story while satirising it (qtd in Mirenayat and Soofastaei 536), refers to the changes implemented in characters to send a specific message and, in some cases, influences or changes the ending of the story. As previously argued those modifications might also stem from the influence of the temporal period in which the characters are re-written. Additionally, the direction the story takes also plays an essential role in transforming characters especially if the genre of the work is altered, which is the case for *The Stepford Wives*.

3.3.2.1. In 21st Century Stepford

In the 2004's remake of *The Stepford Wives*, interfigurality reveals certain and clear alterations in characters' personalities. It is not simply about adding new characters but also about the modifications made to the already existing ones and the effect of these alterations on how the story reflects reality. As such, exploring interfigurality is essential for making a link between characters, the representation of female oppression and the status of women in 21st century USA.

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

When the 21st century Joanna Eberhart was introduced to the screen, she did not play the role of a part-time photographer. In the screenplay, Joanna, as mentioned earlier, is a high ranked television executive at a famous television network. Since women in the 21st century started to occupy more roles in the public sphere, Joanna had to reflect the new stereotype of the successful city woman. Yet, she did not occupy any type of job, her occupation focused on the degradation of men and the elevation of the female sex which instantly sets her as a radical feminist who does not seek equality with men but to take revenge and cement a female superiority. When Joanna is introduced in the film, she is described by the show host as “the most successful president in the history of [their] network, and for the past five years has kept [them] at the very top of the ratings” (*The Stepford Wives* 03:22- 03:30). Such a description denotes how effective and intelligent Joanna is and her professionalism is also communicated through her attire. As showcased in figure 5, Joanna mostly wore black with a short slick haircut with minimal accessories—an attire for a functional professional appearance as opposed to the overdone aesthetic of the Stepford standard which prioritizes the male gaze.



Figure 5: Joanna at the television network being praised for her successfulness (*The Stepford Wives* 2004, Paramount Pictures)

Despite not looking like a Stepford wife, when Joanna was fired from the network she, ironically in her ‘natural’ state, resembled a walking robot which was about to malfunction (*The Stepford Wives* 10:38- 11:00). Once she steps into the elevator, she lets her guard down and has a mental breakdown about losing her job. Yet with success comes failure and women were believed to be successful in only one part of their lives, concluding that career women

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

are inadequate wives and mothers (Mackey 11). Joanna seems to reflect this stereotype since it is revealed that she could not remember her own wedding anniversary until reminded by her husband and she then admits that their marriage was at a critical stage because of her wrong decisions to prioritize her work over her family and husband (*The Stepford Wives* 12:30-13:05). Joanna's admission is orchestrated in a way which supports the misogynist view that even in the 21st century women with careers are unable to balance their professional and family lives. This expectation of working inside and outside the home continues to dominate social expectations for women and those who are unsuccessful are depicted as a sign of weakness and proof that women should remain in the domestic space—as Joanna is about to do. According to the patriarchal ideology, women like Joanna have to abandon their careers and take care of their husbands, children, and households while the husbands enjoy their female servitude. A traditionalist view of gendered roles is highlighted: women are not allowed to enjoy any accomplishments of their own besides those which serve their husbands and their families.

For Bobbie Markowitz, there are but a few changes in her characterization though between the 1975 version and the 2004 version the casting choices support a clear distinction of her physical appearance. Paula Prentiss (1975's Bobbie) had a model's figure while Bette Midler (2004's Bobbie) is short and plump. The 2004 casting decision is believed to be a better choice to contradict the stereotyped image of how the Stepford women should look and also shows the contrast in her appearance after being transformed into the Stepford standard. The difference between Bobbie before and after the transformation is depicted in the following images where she changed from a shapeless frumpy appearance to a blond beauty with an hour-glass figure (see figure 6 and 7).



Figure 6 and Figure 7: Captures of Bobbie Markowitz before and after her transformation into a Stepford wife (*The Stepford Wives* 2004, Paramount Pictures)

Additionally, Bobbie in the 2004 version is also a writer which gives her more semblance of independence than Bobbie from the novel. Likewise, the role of Charmaine as the only other independent woman in Stepford is replaced by a gay man, Roger Banister. The introduction of Roger reflects societal views on same sex couples; a stereotype of effeminate gay men as taking on the “wife” role. The implementation of a character like Roger, duly, supports the idea that adaptations are influenced and sometimes guided by the temporal influence since Roger reflects contemporary social realities on the screen. Queer issues and their acceptance in the USA became more prominent in the 21st century and thus the inclusion of a homosexual in the film makes it more relatable to the American viewers. Nevertheless, Roger was added as another Stepford victim despite not being a woman—his characterization reflects the Stepford commitment to preserving both male and female roles. When first introduced to the audience Roger represents the cliché type of a gay man by wearing colourful clothes and acting overly feminine and sensitive—thereby placing him in the stereotypical role of ‘wife’ and his partner as the husband. In Stepford a feminine-like man was not accepted which led to Roger’s transformation from a vibrant, funny gay guy to a manlier (normative) version of himself (see figures 8 and 9). In Roger’s own words after his own Stepford transformation he realises that “being gay doesn’t mean a guy has to be effeminate or flamboyant or sensitive” (*The Stepford Wives* 52:53- 52:59).



Figure 8 and Figure 9: Roger before and after his transformation into a Stepford husband (*The Stepford Wives* 2004, Paramount Pictures)

Roger's character reflects a traditional gendered binary of expected behaviour within the patriarchal context that men are supposed to be manly and women feminine. As for Walter, he is, to a certain extent, similarly depicted in the film as in the novel; though the film extends his characterization to reveal more positive (pro-feminist) traits which are revealed at the end of the film. Unlike Walter Eberhart (Peter Masterson), Walter Kresby (Matthew Broderick) is not a weak man who allows his wife to be transformed into a robot. Even though there was only one mastermind who started the Stepford plan to perfect women, the husbands are the ones who accept to follow the plan and change their women. Walter, as already mentioned represents the updated 21st century men who support their women in and outside the home—an indicator that this version of *The Stepford Wives* reflects contemporary societal realities. In Frank Oz's version, Walter is a man in love with his strong independent woman who does not seem to adhere to Stepford's dominant patriarchal ideologies and values. Though he is depicted as the hero of the show, he is only a hero because he supported the female cause.

An essential addition to the film version is the character of Claire Willington — introduced to the viewers looking like a Barbie doll out of a 1950s commercial (see figures 10, 11 and 12).



Figure 10, Figure 11 and Figure 12: Claire Willington (*The Stepford Wives* 2004, Paramount Pictures)

Claire's clothing reflects Stepford: mid-calf length flowery dresses, gorgeous ball gowns and perfectly coiffed hair and make up. She is constantly exuberant and viewed in social gatherings for women leading and controlling their conversations toward everything feminine. Before the final reveal of Stepford's mastermind, it appears that Claire is also the victim of her husband Mark Willington (who is then a replacement for Dale Coba in the novel). Whenever something wrong happens to the women, Claire pretends to resort to Mark in order to solve the issue: for example when Mrs Sunderson fell to the floor at the festival while dancing and displayed a seizure-like condition (*The Stepford Wives* 25:50- 26:30). Mark is the image of the "fascinating Rake"—manly, arrogant and masochistic (Pavilik 15), and though similar to his predecessor, by the end of the film the idea of the evil patriarchal scheme is destroyed and replaced by an evil matriarchy.

Joanna's transformations are essential not only because she is the main protagonist but also because she is the representative of the shift in the female status: in the novel she was still a housewife who possesses some feminist ideas but, by 2004 film version she is an independent career woman who espouses feminist values. Though Joanna is characterized as a feminist in the novel, she is depicted as a housewife that wears casual colourful clothes and has photography as her hobby—regardless, she too ends up becoming the Stepford female robot at the end of the narrative. Similarly, in the novel Bobbie is beautiful before and after the transformations, and she was opinionated, but not a radical feminist as her 2004 version.

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

By the end of the film, Claire Willington (who did not even exist in the novel) is revealed to be the mastermind of the entire Stepford scheme which brings the viewers to the final and most crucial twist in the plot. Due to the importance of Claire Willington's influence on this analysis, her character is to be further investigated in conjunction with the hypertextual changes added to the ending of *The Stepford Wives* as they are inherently associated with her character.

3.3.2.2. In 21st Century Wind Gap

Though, unlike *The Stepford Wives*, *Sharp Objects*' adaptation focuses on preserving the essence of the original novel, upon investigating interfigurality between the novel and its adaptation several alterations can be identified. These alterations might be subtle to the audiences, but they still carry meaning and play a definitive role in illustrating contemporary societal views. Furthermore, interfigurality allows a detailed examination into characters development in the television series and their influence on the overall recreation of the novel's storyline.

In the process of reading a novel, a reader is dependent on his/her imagination to follow character and plot development and also to imagine how characters look like. Yet, in film and television shows, the viewers are already gifted those figures by the makers. This stipulation alludes to the visual medium's creators influence on how the viewers perceive a character from book to screen. For instance, Camille Preaker is played by Amy Adams who is often seen in light comedic works such as *Drop Dead Gorgeous* (Dir. Michael Patrick Jann, 1999), *Enchanted* (Dir. Kevin Lima, 2007), *Night at the Museum* (Dir. Shawn Levy, 2009), amongst others. In these films Adams tends to portray the beautiful, gentle, and naïve girl—whereas in *Sharp Objects* she represents a beautiful naïve girl who is a self-harming disturbed young woman. Hence, the choice of actress is in itself a hypertextual interfigurality—to her established film repertoire and her role as Camille Preaker.

The fact that Camille is not the narrator in the show liberates her from being considered an unreliable narrator and allows her the benefit of doubt than in the book where she is often drunk whenever she is recounting events. Furthermore, Camille in the mini-series is portrayed as a more animated person—she is more emotional, and yet less perceptive than her character in the book. In the mini-series Camille was unable to discover that Adora killed Marian without the help of Detective Willis who provided her with Marian's medical files for her to understand what Adora did to her (*Sharp Objects* Ep.7 40:25- 41:15). After realizing Adora's

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

crime, Camille heads to see Jackie (Elizabeth Perkins), Adora's best friend. In the book when Camille confronts Jackie, she is depicted as calm despite her confusion of what she learnt about her mother. Nevertheless, in the mini-series the viewers witness a frustrated and angry protagonist who regrets her obliviousness and naïveté to her mother's actions (*Sharp Objects* Ep.7 41:15- 45:55). Further evidence of Camille's extensive emotional damage is the bond she forms with Alice at the rehabilitation centre which is not discussed in the novel. On screen, Camille manifests strong feelings of attachment to Alice due to the trauma from her sister's death and, when she witnesses Alice's suicide, Camille returns to cutting herself just like she did once she lost her sister.

On the other hand, Adora Crellin is presented as a manipulative and controlling mother and wife in the mini-series, for example, her relationship with her husband Alan (Henry Czerny) reflects how indifferent she is to his feelings by showing his frustration through a muffled scream in the house patio (*Sharp Objects* Ep.3 49:22- 49:28). This incident happens after Adora refuses Alan's wishes to spend the night with her, reflecting not only her controlling nature but also adding to the suspicions that she occupies the role of oppressor and Alan as the oppressed. It is a proof that Adora is too evil since she treated everyone around her badly: from poisoning her daughters, to biting babies, to being over controlling with her husband and friends, and that she had an affair with another man and that is why she refused her husband's affection. As a matter of fact, there are various scenes in the mini-series which allude to an extramarital affair between Adora and chief Vickery—such as in episode four when Alan seemed displeased with Vickery's visit. There is also a suggestion that Vickery often visited Adora since Alan offered him "the usual" drink (*Sharp Objects* Ep.4 24:25- 24:52). In episode five, Jackie insinuates that Adora had some intimate connection with the chief when she said "those Crellin girls sure do like their boys with badges" (*Sharp Objects* Ep.5 22:46-22:50)—a reference to Camille and detective Willis' connection while also referring to Adora. Furthermore, proof of Adora's control over the men around her is demonstrated in her conversation with Vickery when she threatens to remove him from his job if he does not allow Calhoun Day to take place—underscoring that she had more power than he does (*Sharp Objects* Ep.4 28:08-29:05). Ergo, the series appears to focus on highlighting female control over men through Adora's character who, like Claire Willington, seems to orchestrate everything that happens in her town. Thus, both Adora and Claire reflect the wicked matriarchy which translates to the patriarchal idea that women are not suited for power since Adora and Claire demonstrate how women with power use it for evil and not for

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

good—thus, it would have been better if they did not possess any power. Adora's disguise in the perfect attire to disguise her true nature is similar to Claire Willington's since Claire too used the guise of the perfect Stepford wife to hide her murderous nature.

In the same vein, the HBO adaptation allows space to develop the character of Amma Crellin in more depth. All the twisted facts about Amma in the book are also reflected in the series, such as her wish to watch the pigs being slaughtered, her drug use, her overtly sexual tendencies, and her murderous nature. Yet, some additional scenes such as Calhoun Day, show a different side to Amma. Despite Amma being portrayed as childish in the novel, in the mini-series she exhibits a higher understanding of female nature as demonstrated by her wish to hypertextualise Millie's story to reflect her perception of how women should behave when under attack. Amma preferred resorting to resistance by creating the first female militia (*Sharp Objects* Ep.4 13:07-13:40), that is, she and the rest of her friends who play the wives of the other soldiers gather to fight the union troops alongside their husbands. Amma was undecided since, on the one hand, she was still a child at heart who continued to seek approval from her mother; while on the other hand, she manipulated her friends, Camille and even Adora. Hence, like her mother, Amma also used her docile, doll-like façade to hide her inner malice. In the eerie scene at the end of the mini-series when Camille discovered that Amma was the serial killer by finding the girls' teeth in her mini house, the only thing Amma thought to say was "don't tell momma" (*Sharp Objects* Ep.8 47:00- 47:36). Amma's fear of Adora shows that even a monster such as Amma was terrified by the person who oppressed her for so long and arguably turned her into a serial killer. The fact that the mini-series does not depict Amma in the act of killing the girls might minimise the horrific truth of her actions as a serial killer. However, the addition of a scene after the series' end (episode eight) reflects an animalistic Amma who bares her teeth while strangling one of the girls to death as if she was an animal.

Evidently, there are not many substantial changes in the characters' personalities despite moulding them into the visual medium. However, through the visual medium the audience is able to see the twistedness of the written work on the facial and bodily expressions of the characters. In correlation, the visual medium shall play a crucial role in studying and analysing the psychology of the characters and how they display psychological turbulences and psychopathic tendencies. It is also essential to reassess the ending of the story through the visual version in order to reveal the effect of temporality and the role of adaptation in rewriting stories based on societal changes through time.

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

3.3.3. Hypertextuality through the Winding Ups

The process by which an original source of fictional writing is remade with a different ending is known as hypertextuality. The latter entails modifying, criticising or satirising the original work (Mirenayat and Soofastaei 536). The gist of hypertextuality lies in recreating a different end for the original work, a different winding up i.e., not only a different end but also a closing to a previous end which at the present does not seem appropriate to the present times. The new ending, then, destabilises the audiences and also reflects the societal and temporal shifts between the time in which the original work was made and the time of the creation of the new adapted version.

Frank Oz's filmic version of *The Stepford Wives* reflects hypertextuality wherein the ending was reversed: the novel ends with Joanna turning to a Stepford wife due to her husband's treachery and the male masterminds of the Men's Association. However, in the latest filmic version, Walter is unable to sacrifice his wife for the idealized woman that Stepford men are supposed to crave. In the film, Walter conspires with Joanna to reveal the evil plan of the Stepford men and, more surprisingly, it is Walter who brings an end to the women's robotic state (*The Stepford Wives* 1:16:56- 1:18:00). Walter saving the women from being Stepford wives might undermine the role of women just as much as them being Stepfordised did. In both cases it shows that women still need a man to save them—reinscribing them as victims. Nonetheless, it was clear since the start that this new version of *The Stepford Wives* is different, not only did a man rescue the women, but everything that occurred to the women was not premeditated by a man. It is only by the very end of the film that the town discovers that it was not a male agenda, nor a patriarchal scheme—instead it is a woman (Claire Willington) that was the real orchestrator of the Stepford scheme—she is the evil Stepford matriarch. The conclusion which might be drawn from the introduction of this unexpected twist is that when strong women hold too much power they can become evil.

The real mastermind in the 2004 film is assigned to Claire Willington, a former “brain surgeon and genetic engineer. [She] had top-secret contracts with the Pentagon, Apple and Mattel” (*The Stepford Wives* 01:22:40-1:22:51). Despite all her achievements her husband, Mike, betrayed her with his young, Stepford-like secretary. It is then that Claire hatches her Stepford plot—and even though Mike passes away before the Stepford plan was conceived, Claire carries it out. In order to implement the robotic Stepford wife transformation, the Mike which the male community looked up to was, in reality, a robot version (a Stepford husband) invented by Claire because she knew the men would only follow a man, but behind the

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

curtains she was the master puppeteer. The way in which Mike is revealed to be an automaton, is also the way in which the directors relay another message about male/female dynamics in 21st century US. Though it was Walter who destroyed the nanohips which made the women robots, it is Joanna who saves Walter from Mike's deadly blow when she herself strikes him to the head and everyone sees his mechanical head falling to the ground (*The Stepford Wives* 1:20:30-1:21:10). In this scene, the woman saves the man as it is also revealed that it is a woman who wished to oppress other women, and create a town founded on traditional patriarchal values where men were authoritative and women were feminine and submissive—and for such a reason the next step in her agenda was to transform the men too (*The Stepford Wives* 1:20:50- 1:24:25). The fact that the film allowed Joanna and Walter to save each other transmits a particular message about the harmony which should occur between men and women where neither person is docile, and neither is controlling and instead they can exist in an equal partnership. In the same vein, even though the men believed they were changing the women to meet their desires, Claire was aiming to change the men to make them appreciate their housewives. However, Claire neglected the fact that the women in the 21st century do not dream of being housewives and hence she ended up oppressing her own gender in the process of trying to recreate a simpler world for women when they were only housewives whose sole focus was the household and not the workplace until they end up cheated on by their husbands such as herself.

Based on the ending of *The Stepford Wives*, it is evident that the 2004 version hypertextualised the original story and displayed a different ideology from the 1975 film. It is the ideology of the 21st century US where women became more independent and occupied the public sphere along with men. The question whether men accept this change or not is answered in the film itself since the men in Stepford transformed their successful women into the stereotypical perfectly submissive housewife. As already clarified, hypertextuality often functions due to the influence of the time-based transfers. Since the 1970s, society has witnessed the beginning of second wave feminism characterized by women's fight for equal rights. In Levin's novel the men eventually were the victors, not necessarily to show that women cannot overcome patriarchy but instead to expose the misogynist view men have of women and the fact that women still needed to fight for their personal freedoms. In contrast, Oz's filmic creation not only exposed the men and liberated the women, but he also hinted to a new type of oppression, a woman on woman oppression through Claire Willington's plot. It

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

also reveals a reversal in gender roles where the men had little influence in the story controlled by a female protagonist.

Conversely, *Sharp Objects* does not exhibit a hypertextualised ending. Setting aside the minor changes in the events and characters, the end of the story does not present significant alterations besides from that of keeping Amma's murderous nature more enigmatic (the only scene of her committing the murder is added in flashes after the end of the mini-series). Ergo, the fact that *Sharp Objects* did not welcome changes to its ending further attests to the claim that the temporal influence plays a considerable role in analysing hypertextuality. Flynn's novel was published in 2006, only two years after the release of Frank Oz's *The Stepford Wives* insinuating that there could be many things in common between the two works as they belonged to the same time period. Indeed, the woman on woman oppression theory can also be applied to *Sharp Objects* since Joya oppressed and mistreated Adora, and Adora did the same to her girls. As for the 2018 television series adaptation, there are not as many significant changes in the female status between the novel and the 2018 adaptation—thus hypertextuality could not have functioned in a way to transform the story because that would mean it would not correspond to the current status of women in the American society. However, the adaptation does feature the realities revealed in the novel about the realities lived by women and girls in the American society which are in most cases neglected by film and series makers due to their heavy content which discusses the psychological bearings of female oppression on women.

3.4. Discourse in the Adaptations

3.4.1. Dialogic Resemblances between Adaptations

In the previous chapter, dialogism was the analytical approach used to investigate the relationship between feminine and feminist dialogues in the selected novels to expose the differences in female personalities, between those who seek equality and independence and those who prefer docility. In this chapter, dialogism will inform the comparative study between the 21st century's adapted versions of *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects* in order to highlight the similar aspects between the two in terms of the feminine-feminist dichotomy—that is, the clash between independent career women (feminist) and perfect housewives (feminine) and how this clash can result in woman-on-woman oppression.

Mikhail Bakhtin's studies on dialogism postulate that language is understood when there is a dialogue taking place, i.e., when two different speech mechanisms interact they

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

create meaning (117). The outcome of this contact is translated as “dialogized heteroglossia” (Bruhn and Lundquist 30) which refers to the dynamics resulting from the clash between two distinct speakers. As such, dialogism or heteroglossia denotes a dialogic relationship between different languages, or speech types: such as a dialogue between speakers of different backgrounds, or different understandings. Yet it is not solely restricted to speakers, for Bakhtin concludes that a dialogic connection can also occur between different texts (Zappen 65). Furthermore, texts can be of different genres and displayed in different forms, “Dialogism is the dialogue of texts and writers from different generations and horizons” (Mouro 22). As already established, films and television series are also textual materials since they comprise of scripts and linguistic interactions and thus, a dialogic study could also be applied to visual media.

On that note, dialogism is going to be utilised as an investigative tool to analyse the dialogic connections between the adapted versions of the selected novels since it is acknowledged that they both discuss unstable women suffering from the restrictions of societies in different manners. In *The Stepford Wives*, Joanna, before moving to Stepford, used to be a successful television executive while Camille Preaker is a career woman pursuing her profession as a journalist. However, both Joanna and Camille are the victims of dominant feminine women: Claire Willington and Adora Crellin look down on these independent characters. In *The Stepford Wives* (2004), the first dialogue between Claire and Joanna exposes a condescending attitude towards women wherein Claire enthusiastically speaks about Stepford:

Claire: The town is over two hundred years old. It was founded by George Washington, and Martha just loved it...

Joanna: What is that? Up on the hill?

Claire: Well, that's our Stepford Men's Association. Where all our wonderful guys can get together and stay out of our hair. Am I right?

Joanna: Where do the women go?

Claire: To the Simply Stepford Day Spa. (*The Stepford Wives* 17:50- 18:25)

This interaction reflects Claire's enthusiasm and pride in a sexist town which privileges men, while displaying Joanna's utter confusion of what makes Claire so fervent in speaking about this institution. In fact, to better grasp the innuendoes behind the dialogue it is necessary to watch it in order to witness Claire's strange unnatural excitement in contrast to Joanna's surprise which is, truly, the most important part of the dialogic exchange occurring here. In *Sharp Objects*, a different type of dialogue takes place between Camille and Adora where it

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

dovetails around a similar notion of one woman oppressing another. Camille speaks about the reasons for which she is staying at Adora's house:

Camille: Yeah, I'm here about Natalie Keene, and that other little girl, Ann Nash.

Adora: To write a story?

Camille: Yes, Mama. It's a newspaper.

Adora: Camille, I just don't understand why a young woman like you would want to even dwell on such things.

Camille: Well, it could be an important story, and being from here...

Adora: I just can't have that kind of talk around me. Hurt children. Just...Don't tell me what you're doing, what you know. While you're here, I'll just pretend you're on summer break. (*Sharp Objects* Ep.1 26:50-27:38).

It may sound as if Adora really sympathised with the dead girls and was too fragile to discuss such horrors, but Adora's fragility was just a façade for her malice because she killed her own daughter and even tried to poison her other two daughters. Therefore, Adora's pretences of being uncomfortable about Camille's job has nothing to do with her sympathy but with wishing to oppress Camille—especially since her words hint at that a young lady must not occupy an unfeminine job (such as journalism) which revolves around writing about crimes and murders.

Further evidence of female degradation by another female is reflected in another dialogue between Joanna and Claire where Claire introduces Joanna to the women in the Stepford Spa while indirectly insulting her appearance (see figure 13):

Claire: Are we ready to work out?

Stepford Women: Oh, yes.

Claire: Places and poles, please.

Joanna: Wait, you work out dressed like this?

Claire: Well, of course. Whatever we do, we always want to look our very best. I mean, why, imagine if our husbands saw us in worn, dark, urban sweat clothes with stringy hair and almost no makeup? (*The Stepford Wives* 18:50-19:25)



Figure 13: Joanna and Claire in the Stepford gym (*The Stepford Wives* 2004, Paramount Pictures)

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Indeed, as evidenced in figure 13, Joanna looked exactly as Claire described. Joanna believed that a woman should have the freedom to dress however she wished without being pressured to please a certain person, especially not a man. Yet, Claire epitomises the patriarchal ideology which requires women to look beautiful for their men, even in the gym. Satirically, the film shows this idea through women wearing mini dresses, heels and full makeup to workout. Camille, similar to Joanna, fell victim of her mother's condescending remarks when she takes her shopping for clothes to look more feminine on Calhoun Day. At the shop's entrance, Adora and her two daughters are greeted by the shopkeeper where they exchange a small dialogue:

Shop keeper: And who is this lovely creature?

Adora: This is my eldest daughter.

Camille: Camille. It's a pleasure.

Shop keeper: Hello.

Adora: She takes after her father. His coloring, his temperament. (*Sharp Objects* Ep.5, 11:46-11:55).

Adora's reply shows that she wanted to be distinguished from her daughter as if she did not belong to her and, like Claire, she hinted at the disapproval of seeing girls wearing predominantly black colours. Despite not being mentioned in the dialogue, the viewers can see that what Adora hinted on by the word *colouring* meant Camille's dark attire in contrast to Amma's and the shopkeeper's brighter appearances (see figure 14):



Figure 14: Camille, Amma and Adora at the clothes' shop. (*Sharp Objects* 2018, Ep 5, HBO)

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Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Through a subtle dialogue from *Sharp Objects* in episode five, there is a clear insinuation that Wind Gap was also a racist oppressive town:

Detective Willis: So, what is this thing, anyway? Calhoun Day. So what, it's Confederate pride?

Camille: We don't use the 'C-word' here in Missouri.

Detective Willis: Right. Bite my tongue. Silent racism is best. (*Sharp Objects* Ep.5 26:29- 26:42)

Calhoun Day, as explained earlier, is a festive ceremony to celebrate how Millie protected her confederate husband Zeke Calhoun from the northerners during the Civil War. In the same vein, in *The Stepford Wives*, the fourth of July's festival celebration in Stepford also reflects a racist attitude when Bobbie complains to a group of men saying: "We are celebrating our nation's birthday, but there are almost no African-Americans, no Native Americans, no Asian Americans" (*The Stepford Wives* 22:30-22:36). *Sharp Objects* and *The Stepford Wives*, in this sense, share a dialogic relation where they denote that both of their settings are of an oppressive nature, not only towards women, but other minorities as well. The settings of both stories also carry a number of disagreeable similarities akin to the fact that there is an insinuation that both towns killed their women either physically or psychologically. In the first episode of *Sharp Objects*, Adora's and Camille's discussion about the girls include hints on how evil the town is, as well as Camille's conversation with Curry in episode five when she also speaks about how the town has affected her:

Adora: 'Wind Gap Murders its Children.' Is that what you want people to think?

Camille: Well, it can be really helpful to get information out. (*Sharp Objects* Ep.1 27:21- 27:28)

Camille: It's just that whenever I'm here, I just...I just...I feel like a bad person.

Curry: Oh, Camille. (*Sharp Objects* Ep.5 20:20-20:35)

Despite Adora saying "children", she clearly meant girls since both victims were females. As for Camille, it is apparent that since her arrival in town she needed alcohol to be able to function in a town where women were supposed to be feminine, and only occupy themselves with gossip. For Stepford, once Roger is transformed, Joanna frustratingly vents to Walter about the impact of the town on its women:

Joanna: This place does something to people. All of the women are always busy and perfect and smiling, and all of the men are always happy.

Walter: And that's a problem because...?

Joanna: Because it's not normal, Walter. (*The Stepford Wives* 54:10- 54:25)

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

It is, in fact, *not normal* to be that perfect because the town, led by the Men's Association, killed the freedoms of its women and replaced it by flawlessness and docility. Hence, Wind Gap and Stepford share the concept of forcing women into a mould that not all of them wish to occupy. The town has an influence on women to change into feminine, docile wives as a façade to the ugliness beneath—either of being robots or monsters.

Along with the women in both adaptations, even the men are shown to be weaker than their wives or treated badly by women as if they were an inferior sex. In several episodes of *Sharp Objects* Alan is depicted as a passive husband whose only interest is to listen to music and satisfy Adora's needs even though she gives no importance to him. Instead Adora would often dismiss him as it was the case in episode three:

Adora: As if I'm a bad mother.

Alan: You do everything you can for your children.

Adora: You're good to me, Alan.

Alan: Then perhaps I should stay with you tonight. Just in case.

Adora: I'm sure that won't be necessary.

Alan: Good night. (*Sharp Objects* Ep.3 36:54-37:29)

The interaction between Adora and Alan shows that they neither shared the same room nor intimacy and that Alan, unnaturally, had to ask permission from Adora to stay with her. Adora, on the other hand, possesses the power to refuse him without caring if Alan's feelings would be hurt because she is the stronger and the controlling half in their relationship. The dynamic between Adora and Alan help expose that Adora's perfect-housewife façade is only pretence for the town but in truth she is not the perfect housewife and Alan is not the stereotypical patriarchal idea of the proper husband—just like Claire was the controller and Mike was her own creation. For Joanna and Walter, moments before Joanna was supposed to become a Stepford wife Walter divulges all of his inner insecurities in their marriage concerning his status compared to his wife's:

Joanna: How could you do this?

Walter: Ever since we met, you've beaten me at everything. You're better educated. You're stronger, you're faster. You're a better dancer, a better tennis player. You've always earned at least six figures more than I could ever dream of. You're a better speaker, a better executive...Don't deny it.

Joanna: I wasn't going to.

Walter: Well, don't I get anything?

Joanna: You got me.

Walter: No, I got to hold your purse. I got to tell the kids that you'd be late again. I got to tell the press that you had no comment. I got to work for you.

Joanna: With me.

Walter: Under you. (*The Stepford Wives* 1:03:30-1:04:13)

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Walter's admissions serve as a way to reflect that women, when given the freedom, can achieve much more than men. Yet the dialogue also hints at the impact of the reversal of gender roles on men since it may cause men to start to feel emasculated and inferior to their women.

The final dialogic connection between the two works is a sign of a matriarchal ideology where women hold power and men are positioned as the docile ones. In *Wind Gap*, Adora is introduced as the wealthiest woman and the person who holds control over the town. Adora is perceived as both influential and manipulative since she appears to be the one in charge through various incidents; whether at the Keene's funeral when everyone was waiting for her to start the ceremony or at Bob Nash's home when she interrupts Camille's interview (as if she had some unnatural control over the Nashes). Nonetheless, the most significant incident is Adora and Chief Vickery's discussion about Calhoun Day in episode four:

Adora: Is there a break in the case?

The chief: You'd be the first to know...However...

Adora: Ah, the 'however.'

The chief: Mm. Calhoun Day, Adora. It's not appropriate given the events...

Adora: Ahh. Well, you do have the power as chief, to do whatever's in the interest of public safety.

The chief: I do.

Adora: And some have the power in this town...to remove you as chief.

The chief: Oh, that's what I love about you, Adora. You never pull your punches. (*Sharp Objects* Ep.4 28:07-29:19)

This dialogue indicates that Adora is the person whose power enables her to remove chief Vickery from his position and to do whatever she pleases in town without anyone objecting. Likewise, in *Stepford*, Claire Willington proved to be the matriarch who controlled both the men and the women. In the final scene of the film Claire reveals:

Joanna: All of this, Mike, the wives, Stepford, this was all your idea?

Claire: Yes. All I wanted was a better world. A world where men were men and women were cherished and lovely...A world of romance and beauty, of tuxedos and chiffon, a perfect world.

Joanna: But you were married to a robot.

Claire: The perfect man. And all I wanted was to make you, all of you...into perfect women.

Joanna: We don't need to be perfect. How could you do this to us?

Claire: Because I was just like you. (*The Stepford Wives* 1:21:45-1:22:38)

Claire's confessions are proof to her oppressive attitudes towards independent females. Though, she herself was once a strong career woman she decided to use her intelligence to

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

destroy female autonomy and replace it by docility and compliance. In *Wind Gap*, Adora was over-controlling of her two daughters, yet it was Amma who destroyed the autonomy of other girls like Claire. While Claire replaced the women with perfect automaton housewives, Amma killed those girls who were considered as independent or tomboyish and for this reason Claire, Adora and even Amma represent oppressive women who target other women and/or girls.

The combination of these dialogic instances creates a basis for the feminine-feminist ambivalence which denotes the existence of a clash between those female characters characterised by docility and those who seek and portray female independence. This dichotomy also reveals a hidden oppressive nature of women directed towards their societies and specifically other females (which generates from the oppressed women's urge to serve as agents of patriarchy). Nonetheless, it is still important to take into consideration other elements besides dialogues in order to behold the full picture of an evil domineering matriarchy, not in the sense that women are independently oppressing their gender, but that there are women who internalized patriarchal values that they chose to police other women who choose independence. The next section focuses on studying the intertextual connections between both visual medias concerning the status of women in both stories whether as victims or as perpetrators.

3.4.2. Intertextual Connections in Adaptations

Films and television series are recognized as “a textual system that is complete within itself and the author, if at all present, is only a part of the system” (Awung 7-8). Intertextuality as a collage of influences from an original work adapted by an artist to create another literary work can also be used to decipher connections between literary works and their adaptations, and in turn to gauge links between different visual creations. Intertextuality can be utilised as a way in which a researcher analyses the process of taking certain elements from the written form and how they are adapted to the screen. As such, this section explores the intertextual resemblances between the 21st century's adaptations of both literary works in respect to the oppression of women and feminism.

The first intertextual allusion between the two works is the protagonists' influence by second wave of feminism's endeavours to fight the social expectations around women's ideal physical appearance. In fact, “Feminist criticisms of makeup, high heels, and miniskirts have been well documented by scholars, and nearly every history of the so- called second- wave

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

feminist movement recounts the protest” (Hillman 155). This feminist protest is an indication of some women’s refusal to accept the male gaze as the defining standard of feminine ideals. In these two images from *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*, Joanna and Camille represent, through their dark attires, the feminist refusal to adhere to the unrealistic, gendered expectations of perfection dictated by hetero-patriarchal value systems and the male gaze (see figures 15 and 16).



Figure 15 and Figure 16: Joanna Eberhart and Camille Preaker from *The Stepford Wives* (2004, Paramount Pictures) and *Sharp Objects*, Ep 3 (2018, HBO)

As mentioned earlier in the dialogic analysis, Joanna typically wore only black clothes and kept her hair short in a bob haircut. Camille, on the other hand, had long hair, but not shiny blond hair (which reflects her lack of care with her appearance). In contrast, the antagonists of both stories, Adora and Claire, appear as the representatives of the femininity rejected by feminists; they looked like twins in shoulder length blond hair, slender figures, baby blue eyes, and often dressed in gowns and frilly summer dresses (see figures 17 and 18).



Figure 17 and Figure 18: Claire Willington from *The Stepford Wives* (2004, Paramount Pictures) and *Sharp Objects*, Ep 5 (2018, HBO)

Though Adora and Claire reflect the ideal feminine figure by representing the values and expectations of their social context, they were also the matriarchs who take control over their respective towns. In Wind Gap everyone aspired to please Adora, both men and women, whereas in Stepford Claire controlled the men by using her automaton husband Mike to head the movement to transform women into submissive automatons to create a utopian society. Furthermore, Adora seems to be inspired from the world of Stepford; specifically in terms of how identical their physical appearances are and how they both criticise and look down on women who are different (such as the protagonists Camille and Joanna) because they do not fit their heteropatriarchal definitions of the femininity.

Aside from the intertextual allusions shared by both stories, the visual mediums also make use of paratextuality in connecting the narrative modalities of film and television. The 2004 production of *The Stepford Wives* opens with an intertextual collage of 1950s commercials that are centred on housewives and house appliances where the women look delighted and exuberant to have electrical appliances they get to use at home (*The Stepford Wives* 00:43- 03:10). The women in these commercials smile and dance as they do their home chores looking perfect in their maxi dresses, heels, and well-coiffed hair while the men are shown seated, reading the newspaper or driving cars (see figures 19 and 20).

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche



Figure 19 and Figure 20: Commercials included in the beginning of *The Stepford Wives* (2004, Paramount Pictures).

These commercials depict the socio-cultural context of 1950s US when the ideals expected from women were to preserve their role as housewives and perfect wives who look pretty and happy while doing their domestic chores. One of the commercials is taken from a famous 1950s promotional film directed by Victor D. Solow entitled *Design for Dreaming* (1956) (Eveleth np). This short film shows a sleeping beauty in her chamber before a disguised man enters her room through her closet and takes her to the GM Motorama show at the famous Waldorf hotel. This intertextual allusion entails references to the Cinderella fairy tale, where the woman is taken from her domestic life and is magically gifted and dressed in a ball gown. At the show this woman is fascinated by the different car models displayed and while her companion offers her one car of each model she is magically brought back to the reality of her kitchen with a feeble background narrative of a male voice saying: “Better get her to the kitchen quick!”. In the kitchen, she is once more spellbound by the domestic appliances, not cars, but kitchen electrical appliances—expeditedly removed from the public sphere and returned to the restrictive domestic space of the home (ibid). The epitome of this intertextual element is that during the 1950s women were expected to remain in the kitchen, and it is there that they were expected to feel fulfilled no matter how far their imagination took them beyond the restrictions of their domestic life. In addition, these commercials reflect the physical appearance expected of women even in their kitchens due to the male gaze which, as asserted by Laura Mulvey, strives to “produce the image of woman as ‘signifier of sexuality’ and has striven to create a sexual politics around representation that displaces and alters previous discourses” (75). This further elucidates that the male gaze plays an assertive role in constructing a hetero-patriarchal and misogynist view of the female body and its position within the domestic space.

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

As for the commercials included at the opening of the film, they appear to establish a socio-cultural subtext for the rest of the film. Since women are suspected of being transformed into robots in the original story, the collage of these commercials signify that women—in their perfect summer dresses, perfect smiles, and their love for house chores—will also be transformed into identical mechanical devices akin to the domestic appliances women enjoy using in their homes. The idea of turning women into domestic appliances can be concluded from the last eight commercial scenes focusing on identical women dancing and smiling in a rather too pleasant (too perfect) way to be realistic (*The Stepford Wives* 02:50 - 03:10). The implementation of these intertexts reveals how hetero-patriarchal values *domesticate* women—to the point of rendering them *robotic*. The act of transforming the women is a metaphor for how women are oppressed in the real frameworks of the sociocultural context within which they are required to appear pleasant while they occupy their homes and do their domestic chores. Equally, women who seem too unreal and more like the women in commercials are also present once the story of *The Stepford Wives* begins. As seen from an intertextual point of view, women in Stepford looked very similar to the women in commercials, even at the gym, in the supermarkets, or on the golf course. The women with an intertextual connection to the commercials are closely affected by the domestic appliances they use in the home: this effect is palpable when the ladies start imitating washing machines at The Stepford Spa. In this sense, intertextuality is used to allude to the 1950s obsession with domestic appliances and how the women in Stepford are to become automatons—that is domestic devices to service their husbands and their families. When once again considering the cars commercial implemented in the beginning of *The Stepford Wives* film it also appears that the patriarchal ideology of the Men's Association performs the *Design for Dreaming* just like cars are designed, because they turned their women into objects out of their misogynist fantasies.

Like Stepford, female oppression in Wind Gap is exercised by expecting women to fit a certain mould, a mould where they have to be blond and look pretty similar to Camille's high school mates and Adora's friends. These women also seem to function as an extension of the male gaze as agents of patriarchy which seek to police one another on what is considered "proper" feminine conduct. Once a woman displays non-normative behaviour, in the sense that this behaviour is not lady like, the women start to gossip and attack the woman in question. It does not necessarily mean that the women are consciously following a patriarchal ideology, but it can also reflect an internalized understanding of the patriarchal ideologies

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

ingrained into their own psyche. At the beginning of episode one, a paratext is included in the opening of the show as flashbacks. This paratextual tool is an assortment of scenes before the beginning of the actual story accompanying the cast and crew's names. In *Sharp Objects* this assortment, which is not found in novels, includes faint reoccurring images of Amma, the pigs at the slaughterhouse, woods, blood dripping, and Marian while Camille drives her car through Wind Gap (*Sharp Objects* Ep.1 00:15- 01:30). These images serve as an introduction and a basis for the mystery and malice which are soon to be revealed in the story but it also introduces Wind Gap to the viewers as a blond woman from the 1950s commercials included in *The Stepford Wives*. This welcome sign to Wind Gap, depicts a woman as the representative of domesticity which is then juxtaposed with a faded poster which shows a heteronormative couple (see figures 21 and 22). This visual alludes to the importance of married life in Wind Gap, yet important just on the surface while the true meaning of marriage has faded in town—just like the poster. This reality is seen in Adora and Alan's marriage, as already explained, Adora appears to be the perfect wife to her husband yet in reality he asks for permission to be close to her and she refuses.



Figure 21 and Figure 22: The posters in Wind Gap in the beginning of *Sharp Objects* (2018, HBO)

These images represent the hetero-patriarchal ideal that women are expected to fulfil and how women are required to reflect the stereotype of the married, blond, and (abnormally) beautiful female. Those who do not follow this stereotype are considered abnormal and are treated as outcasts.

The visual mediums also share historical intertexts which allude to oppression and the struggle for freedom: for example, the celebrations of Independence Day and the Civil War. Those two historical events are not directly linked to female oppression and yet they represent forms of subjugation of minorities which can be paralleled with the situations experienced by

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

women. In Stepford, the people celebrate the Fourth of July in a town's festival during this celebration there is a clear contrast between Joanna and the rest of the women in town—she is shown to be uptight and unable to enjoy the event while the other women are dressed impeccably and are celebratory. Additionally, it is at this festival that the viewers first discover the women in Stepford are robots because of Mrs Sunderson's accident. As such, this historical intertextual element serves to highlight oppression in the USA and that, despite gaining independence; women were not included in it as equal citizens. Similarly, in Wind Gap the people gather to celebrate Calhoun Day which is just as important for the townspeople as the Fourth of July. Camille, like Joanna, finds herself uncomfortable wearing a white dress and also being around the townspeople. Calhoun Day, as previously mentioned, celebrates a woman's sacrifice for her husband, a woman who decides to accept all the violations of men and not fight back. This intertextual incident reflects the imposition of patriarchal gender expectations of women via the socio-cultural codes that define their environment and that subject them to externally defined roles.

Furthermore, the adaptations also include architextuality in the sense that the latter refers to the connection between a certain genre of art and others which seem to be influenced by or alluded to (Mirenayat and Soofastaei 536). The adaptations indeed refer to different genres of entertainment besides films and television shows such as references to books, or other literature besides the novels that inspire the adaptations. In *The Stepford Wives* allusions to books begin with Bobbie Markowitz since she is herself portrayed as a writer in the 2004 film. The books she writes focus on a wife's dissatisfaction with her husband as well as a daughter's frustration with her mother—which is also relevant when analysing the relationship between Adora and her daughters. The book Bobbie wrote about her mother was entitled *I Love You, But Please Die* whereas the last book she wrote reflected her urge to punish men by castrating their manhood for turning their wives into female automatons. Bobbie's second book is about the gender-based oppression she experiences in Stepford and is written about her (and women's) frustrations when challenging the heteropatriarchal power hierarchies of their society. On the other hand, Joanna represents the intellectual female shown through an architextual reference when, excitedly, she tells the Stepford women about her latest read of “the Third volume of Robert Caro's *Life of Lyndon Johnson*” a biography of one of the United States' presidents. This architext is implemented to show Joanna as the epitome of an educated woman who reads to cultivate herself and not to please men. Nevertheless, the other Stepford women are hardly interested in her book; they prefer to speak about the “The

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Heritage Hills Special Edition Golden Deluxe Treasury of Christmas Keepsakes and Collectibles” a Christmas handbook to ensure their husbands enjoy the best Christmas celebration and that they function as perfect wives.

In *Sharp Objects* the connection between films and literature is different, eerie yet also creative and foreboding. Camille, the self-harmer, considers herself a book for those who were brave enough to read. Instead of words on paper Camille uses her skin to write about her agony. In the show Camille’s inner thoughts are not heard as in the novel, instead the series makers found a way in which the viewers could read Camille, or more precisely read about her personal struggles. There are various words which can be read throughout the series’ episodes such as “vanish” in episode one, which is both an architextual allusion and a paratext since it is also the title of the episode. The hodgepodge of the words Camille carves on her body epitomises her dissatisfaction with herself or the eeriness she felt because she did not fit in with what Wind Gap would consider a good girl. That is, a delicate girl who seeks to: look beautiful, be married and have children rather than being a self-harming journalist who investigates horrible murders. There are also words which are not necessarily written on Camille’s flesh but that are still targeted towards her. For example, the camera shots mimic Camille’s line of sight to show the road sign which reads “Last Exit to Change Your Mind” which Camille sees through her car’s windshield, and “Don’t Be a Victim” a sign Camille finds at the entrance to Chief Vickery’s office (see figures 23 and 24).



Figure 23 and Figure 24: Signs directed to Camille from *Sharp Objects*, Ep 1 (2018, HBO)

Both signs are aimed to either save Camille from Wind Gap or to empower her enough to endure her stay in town. In episode two the word “Whatever” on Natalie’s pink t-shirt denotes her rebellious nature in comparison to the feminine restrictions of her surroundings. The t-

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

shirt does not represent Natalie's true personality since she was known as a wild tomboy which is understood from its feminine colour (pink). In episode six a different word is shown alluding to the degradation of women wherein the word "barren" does not only suggest Camille's lack of children but also the fact that women were believed to function as mothers and if they do not, they are incomplete in the eyes of society and that is exactly how Camille felt. Moreover, there are numerous words which appear throughout different episodes alluding to femininity such as "petticoat", "cupcake", "lipstick", and "kitty"; they are allusions to a set of ideals of femininity Camille refuses to accept. All the words shown in the series are believed to be self-inflicted and are communicated with point of view shots from Camille's perspective: it is Camille who chooses, sees, and carves the words emphasizing Camille's intimate connection to them.

Through the intertextual analysis of *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects* it is evident that both the film and television series share a perspective on depicting the oppression of women and how it is not only executed by men but women too can function as the agents of patriarchy and harm one another. The background influences and the textual materials the screenwriters seem to include in both works reflect a rejection of the externally imposed ideal of feminine perfection and a wish to highlight female struggle to fit into heteropatriarchal value systems. Camille and Joanna are both representatives of that struggle and, though in the novels the events are seen solely from their point of view, in the adaptations the narrative mode gives a more comprehensive view of the repressions intrinsic to patriarchal dominant ideologies of both towns and their impact on its women, not to mention how women harm and police one another.

3.4.3. Narrative Shifts

Seymour Chatman asserts that "diegetic narratives" are texts such as "novel, epic, and short story"; while "mimetic narratives" are the visual texts such as "movies, cartoons, and plays and, by extension, cinematic shots and sequences are, too, narrative texts" (Bal 5). Visual media tells a story with characters and settings and hence they require storytelling: inasmuch narration in literature has many differences from narration in films and television series. Yet, there are also similar aspects such as point of view, focalization, and reliability which could be used as references to analyse the narrative shifts between the novels and their adaptations and also to understand characters more thoroughly.

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

3.4.3.1. Point of View and Focalization

Literature is often based on the point of view of the narrator who could be a main character, a secondary character, or even an unknown narrator. In that sense, the narrator could either follow a first person or a third person point of view that is to be either all-knowing or partially knowing as well as be objective or subjective (Diasamidze 160). In visual media, it is the camera's role to depict the events and relay them to the viewers. In most films and television series the camera functions as a third person point of view that is, an unknown narrator and yet still it is bound by following a certain character or even multiple characters (McAfee np). As such, it is evident that literature and cinema share the aspect of point of view.

In *The Stepford Wives* the events mostly follow the protagonist, Joanna Eberhart as in the novel, but there are also instances when the narrative shifts via the camera shots, from Joanna to other characters such as her husband Walter. For example, there is a certain scene where Walter is revealed the secret of the Stepford wives in the Men's Association. The scene begins by a game of two robots, a female and a male one. The female robot is dressed in pink while the male is black and is named Zeus. The game primarily entails Zeus as aggressively bumping into the female robot, which instantly brings the image of rape to one's mind. The game does not end until the pink robot is undressed while the men roared and cheered for Zeus with fervour (*The Stepford Wives* 37:23-38:43). The game is shown to the audiences while the camera follows Walter since he, unlike Joanna, has access to the Men's Association—therefore, by following Walter the camera shots provide the viewers with proof of the misogynistic nature of the Men's Association. This scene from the 2004 film version is not part of the novel because in the novel there is no proof of the male agenda and hence this scene from the film further elaborates Joanna's claims about a hidden scheme for transforming the women.

At the same time, the camera's point of view follows Joanna leading the viewers into a gathering with the Stepford women as they discuss Christmas decorations—revealing to the audience further insight into their docile natures, in contrast to Joanna and Bobbie (*The Stepford Wives* 38:44-41:38). Then the camera shifts back to Walter where the Men confess their ploy to turn all the women into robots. The men first laugh at Walter's hopes of Joanna changing on her own and then they introduce him to the robotic version of Mrs Sanderson who functions as an ATM (*The Stepford Wives* 41:38-44:22). As a third person's point of view the camera alternates between Walter and Joanna in parallel shots to provide the visual medium with proof to what the men did and aimed to do to all the women in Stepford—

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

female oppression which encloses women within the domestic sphere while destroying their individual identities. The viewers are also given the unique insight into the Stepford transformation when the camera follows Roger as he is about to be Stepfordised i.e., turned into the Stepford version of the perfect husband—that is, manly and masculine (ibid 45:58-50:25). In the novel it is difficult for the readers to figure out if Joanna’s calculations about the male ploy to transform the women is real because they never witness a transformation, yet in the 2004 film the various camera shots allows the viewers to witness not only Joanna’s transformation but also Roger’s. As a result, the camera presents a third person point of view which, though limited, is still privy to the men’s nefarious plans and then exposes it to the viewers. In correlation, focalization based on Manfred Jahn in *The Stepford Wives* film remains “fixed” as it is in the novel because all events are seen through the camera from a third person point of view without any introduction of a first-person point of view. Allowing the camera to transmit all events to the audiences, without any subjectivity of characters, gives the story more credibility—especially since the audience is finally able to see what the men did in the Association and that it is not simply Joanna’s unproved hypothesis.

In *Sharp Objects* the camera mostly follows Camille, yet it does not reflect a first-person point of view like the novel, it is a third person point of view which depicts different scenes and characters with the focus on Camille as the protagonist. Owing to the freedoms of the on-screen narrative perspective the viewers can have an insight on other characters such as Adora. As already mentioned, while in the novel everything is seen through Camille’s eyes, in the film the viewers can surmise that Adora most likely had an affair with chief Vickery and, more importantly, that she has power over him and the town. This narrative shift allows a vision into the domineering nature of Adora not only towards women but men as well. While in the novel Alan is both passive and indifferent, in the film, despite his passivity, his agony is noticeable in scenes such as the muffled scream when being ignored by Adora—which is amplified by the use of various point of view shots. The fact that Alan’s character is given more insight in the film helps in supporting the claim that even men were oppressed in *Sharp Objects* while supporting the theory of the reversal of roles.

Unlike *The Stepford Wives*, *Sharp Objects* does not adapt a fixed focalization with only the camera’s point of view; in fact, it adopts a variable focalization by featuring Camille’s first-person point of view. In this case, the first-person point of view is essential due to the use of flashbacks of her memories and also due to her disturbing visions of seeing words written in different scenes. However, the audiences automatically associate those words with Camille

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

because the shot from which the words are being shown are always from the direction in which Camille sees them as they are also considered as the words which she carved on her flesh. This narrative shift also helps in highlighting Camille's psycho-emotional struggle as the words which reflect her insecurities and feelings are implemented as part of the narrative mode of the series.

The first-person point of view is essential in understanding Camille's personality through her background story: first her relationship with Marian, the loss she experiences when Marian dies, the gang-rape by her classmates, her self-harm, and the most recent is her relationship with Alice in rehab and Alice's suicide. The culmination of Camille's flashbacks and the words she sees constructs the image of an oppressed daughter and unstable woman damaged by her mother's abuse and control, as well as the societal expectations she is required to fulfil.

3.4.3.2. Reliability and Linearity

Besides point of view and focalization, reliability is another narrative aspect which must be taken into consideration when analysing the plot and characters. As stipulated by Rimmon-Kenan, an unreliable narrator is one who is featured by their "limited knowledge, his personal involvement, and his problematic value scheme" (103). In other words, unreliability entails lack of knowledge which reflects the incomplete narrative in addition to the involvement of the subjectivity of the narrator which can suggest dishonesty about events and characters. In *The Stepford Wives* novel, the narrator is, to a certain extent, reliable due to the lack of subjectivity and personal involvement, yet somehow lack of knowledge and the gaps in the narrative leave the readers uncertain about Joanna's fears being legitimate or imagined. However, in the 2004 adaptation, the third person point of view appears more reliable because it is neither subjective nor does it leave many gaps for the viewers to fill. For instance, the camera provides proof of the men's actions when showing Joanna's and Roger's transformations.

In *Sharp Objects*, the novel, the narration is unreliable because Camille's first-person point of view is compromised by her drunken episodes and her fragile mental state. In the adaptation, the narrator's role is communicated through the camera which means that Camille is part of the story and not the one responsible for telling it. The camera's point of view, then, shifts the narrative from an unreliable one to a reliable narrative by narrating the events objectively. This, in turn, insinuates that Camille was not exaggerating the events; and the women are just as despicable as she described them: Adora is just as abusive and the town is,

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

indeed, a horrific place. Despite the camera telling Camille's story and that of other characters from a third person point of view, Camille is still depicted as an excessive drinker—but this time her drinking does not necessarily influence the narrative. The fact that Adora is shown to be controlling and unstable is not attributed to Camille's perception of her mother. In this case, the camera is objective which means Adora is truly a manipulative and abusive mother and wife and when the truth is revealed that Adora killed her own daughter, everything comes into place.

On the other hand, scenes which are filmed from Camille's point of view are debatable because there is no proof to their reliability especially that unreliability is considered the product of subjectivity and Camille is unable to be objective once she is immersed and affected by her memories. This aspect does not necessarily reveal reliability nor the lack of it, but rather is aimed at reflecting Camille's inner instabilities and revealing more about how her character is shaped. Furthermore, the nature of the narration also influences the way the events are perceived by the viewers. There are four types of narration which are influenced by temporality. In the novel *Sharp Objects*, the events are told in an "ulterior" manner, that is, the events already occurred and are narrated to the viewer which is the same case in *The Stepford Wives*. However, the cinematographic nature of both adaptations also shifts the type of narration to a "simultaneous" one where actions occur at the same time of narration (Rimmon-Kenan 93). This type of narration gives a sense of freshness to the events because the viewers get to witness them at the exact time they occur, making the events more vivid and impactful.

Last, but not least, the linearity of the narrative also plays a role in the narrative shift because it determines the simplicity and/or complexity of the story. In fact, looking at the characters' past (Camille's, Adora's and Claire's) presents the viewers with the gist of their personality which makes nonlinearity an essential aspect in both stories especially in terms of female oppression and psychological instability. Gerard Genette introduced "analepsis" which is a term used to denote events told by the narrator after they occurred in "the form of flashbacks" (Mouro 40) and these flashbacks result in a nonlinear narrative which creates a link between the past and the future (Huang 97). In *The Stepford Wives*, the nonlinear narrative is only introduced in Frank Oz's film when past events are not communicated in the form of visual flashbacks but are revealed once Claire's true nature is exposed. In the final scene of the film Claire Willington goes back in time and narrates the story behind her master plan:

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Because I was just like you. Overstressed, overbooked, under-loved. I was the world's foremost brain surgeon and genetic engineer. I had top-secret contracts with the Pentagon, Apple and Mattel. I was driven. Exhausted. Until late one night, I came home to find... Mike. With Patricia. My brilliant...blond... twenty-one-year-old research assistant. It was all so...ugly. Then early the next morning, as I gazed across the breakfast table at their lifeless bodies, I thought... "What have I done?" But more importantly...what I could do to make the world more beautiful? I had the skills. But I needed help to realize my larger vision. And so I made...Mike. Because he was someone other men would listen to. And then I asked myself, "Where would people never notice a town full of robots? Connecticut." So I decided to turn back the clock, to a time before overtime, before quality time, before women were turning themselves into robots. (*The Stepford Wives* 1:22:36-1:24:17)

The shift between the present and past narrative helps to shed light on the rationale behind the idea of Stepford. Claire's story is one among many of those women who chose to be successful and independent and forgot that a traditionalist patriarchal society would never appreciate them. Instead, men would fall for the first young beautiful and unaccomplished (therefore personally non-threatening) woman they come across and, as such, Claire thought to render all women into the image of Patricia. Claire aimed to prevent smart, independent women from being cheated on by reverting to the "safety" of traditionalist gender roles—erasing gains achieved by the feminist movement and returning women to the domestic space.

In the television adaptation of *Sharp Objects* the narrative nonlinearity is not new since the novel utilised it through Camille's flashbacks of her childhood memories as well as through Adora's stories of her mother Joya. What is in common between Camille, Adora and Claire is that even Camille and Adora's reflections about their pasts allows the viewers a better understanding of their motives. Camille harmed herself because of how her mother treated her as a child, because she was raped, and most importantly because of the trauma of her sister's death and not knowing how to overcome losing a sister at a very young age without her mother's support. On the other hand, Adora's aggressive controlling nature was also the outcome of Joya's abuse. In episode six Alan goes back to the past and introduces Joya, Adora's mother, for the first time in the show:

Alan: Yeah, you really are like your grandmother. She would stand guard over this house like a witch. The only time she ever smiled was when you refused to nurse from Adora.

Camille: Well, it has been really nice, Alan. Thank you.

Alan: Camille, Adora has had a hard life. Joya would come into her room in the middle of the night, and she would pinch her. She said that she was worried that Adora would die in her sleep. You know what I say? She just liked to hurt people. (*Sharp Objects* Ep.6 21:34- 22:05).

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Or in the final episode when Adora attempted to justify her ill-treatment of Camille as a child by speaking of the horrors Joya committed against her:

My mother, you never did know her like I did. Once, Joya woke me in the dead of night. I was seven, eight. She didn't say a word to me. Just shook me awake, walked me outside. Barefoot, in my nightgown. I knew better than to open my mouth when Joya was punishing me. It was the same whether I'd done something wrong or not. She drove me to the woods, walked me in deep, sat me down and left me. Took me hours to get home. When I finally made it, I walked in that door, and my mother said, "You're home." I believe if you had asked her she would have said what she was doing was right. We all have bad childhoods. (*Sharp Objects* Ep. 8 23:52-24:48)

These narrative flashbacks create context to Adora's bizarre nature and also reveal another woman who hurt her daughter—an example of intergenerational trauma. Hence, nonlinearity served as a tool to explore the cycle of female deviance starting with Joya and ending with the serial killer Amma.

The adaptation of the novels introduces a number of shifts in the narrative techniques of the stories. Despite sharing similarities, the dis-similarities expose women who suffer psychological deficiencies, women who are forced to follow patriarchal social constructs and also those women who surrendered to patriarchy and served as their agents. The third person point of view grants more credibility to the female protagonists revealing the good side of the story by uncovering the evil nature of the female antagonists (such as matriarchs and deranged women). Henceforth, the next step which must be taken is to further investigate the personalities of both types of characters (defined as "good" and "bad") and how they both participate in the dynamics of women-women oppression.

3.5. Female Characters and the Deranged Psyche in the Selected Novels

3.5.1. Joanna Eberhart

Joanna Eberhart in the novel is quite different from Joanna in the 2004 film version. While the film-version of Joanna is an independent career woman, in the original work Joanna is a housewife who was required to be domesticated and to keep her talent of photography as a side-lined hobby. Furthermore, when Walter heads to a Men's Association meeting, Joanna is left to take care of the housework that needs to be done, a task she would typically never do—unlike Carol who is the compliant housewife while her husband enjoys himself at the Men's Association. Instead, Joanna ponders what she will be doing the upcoming nights while Walter stays home (ibid 16). Joanna's struggle to be equal to Walter in this new environment is also apparent when she does not hesitate to move Walter's papers, tools, and contracts from

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

the centre of the desk to make room for her photography kit—literally taking back space (ibid 17). In a more symbolic level, Joanna is showing that, just like Walter, her work is also important, and she too needs space to work. If one were to interpret Joanna's actions from a Freudian perspective, one could liken it to the envious "masochistic side, sometimes in conflict with a more sadistic desire to attain to the masculine position of greater freedom, in social terms" (Blumenfeld 82). Simply put, Joanna is experiencing what Freudian theorists have labelled as "penis envy" (ibid), that is feeling jealous of the liberties men possess and women do not because patriarchal ideologies do not allow women the same liberties as those enjoyed by their male counterparts.

The culmination of what Joanna goes through since her arrival to Stepford includes: both Charmaine and Bobbie turning into Stepford women; and her husband Walter beginning to neglect her (like the typical Stepford husband)—both of which instil in Joanna a sense of self-doubt. The effect of being in Stepford did not go unnoticed for Joanna, as she was sleeping alone more often compared to how few times, she and Walter slept apart in the span of 10 years prior to their arrival in Stepford. Joanna also reflects on how she enjoyed a different type of freedom prior to her marriage and how it felt good to "feel like Joanna Ingalls again" (Levin 18). The female struggle between being a wife and a mother and being free of all responsibilities—that is Joanna's struggle between self-love and the desire to "love others" (mainly her husband and children) (Blumenfeld 81-82). During the same night she woke up to a rocking bed and the sounds of faint moans only to find Walter pleasuring himself in bed next to her. He turned around in embarrassment saying that he did not wish to wake her, but as the good wife that she was, she would not let him sleep with his urges unsatisfied (Levin 20). One moment, Joanna yearned to be single again and moments later she was proving to be a "good" wife concerned about not sexually fulfilling her husband—this illustrates the complexity of Joanna's inner conflict between her individual desires and the expected stereotypical duties of the "good" wife.

On a different night, after Walter and Joanna have intercourse, she asks Walter whether he was satisfied with her. She questioned whether she was enough for him or not, and then she wondered "Are you – having an affair with Esther?" referring to his secretary. Though Walter strongly denied having an affair; Joanna still had trouble sleeping that night (Levin 82). And there it was, the argument with Walter when he would allude that she, somehow, was not enough. When both of Joanna's friends transformed into Stepford wives, she demanded to move away from town, yet Walter tries to convince her that Bobbie and

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Charmaine changed willingly: “It wouldn’t hurt you to look in a mirror once in a while... You’re a very pretty woman and you don’t do a damn thing with yourself any more” (Levin 101). When offended by his words, Walter would call his wife: “irrational and – a little hysterical” (ibid 101)—thereby dismissing Joanna’s feelings and rejecting her legitimate response as a sign of hysteria, “the first mental disorder attributable to women” and to women alone (Tasca et al 110). From the field of psychological studies, Jean-Martin Charcot was the major figure who studied hysteria wherein with “careful observation, physical examination, and the use of hypnosis, Charcot was able to prove that hysterical symptoms, while produced by emotions rather than by physical injury, were genuine, and not under the conscious control of the patient” (Showalter 147). Hereafter, hysteria was found to be the outcome of emotional turbulences which could occur in both genders and manifests itself in the form of seizures or paralysis with hypnosis as the best way to control it and alleviate its effects. However, despite proving that even men could have hysteria, it remained a strictly female malady (ibid 148). As a result of their exchange, Walter suggests that Joanna visit the town’s male psychiatrist, whose wife, according to Joanna was already “one of them”, that is a Stepford wife (Levin 102). In truth, Joanna’s fears were very well grounded because the sudden transformation of Charmaine and Bobbie was unnatural, and hence Joanna had every right to fear the effect of the town on her personal physical and psycho-emotional well-being.

Instead of seeing the psychiatrist suggested by Walter, Joanna chooses to visit Dr Fancher, a female psychiatrist in a different town who identifies trauma as the reason behind Joanna’s fears and suspicions and asks Joanna to consider undergoing therapy (ibid 110-111). In Meera Atkinson’s article on female trauma she highlights the idea that the main generator for female stress and trauma is predominantly the unfair oppression of women by a domineering patriarchal society (np), and looking at Joanna’s situation, the reasons behind her heightened nervousness is her fear of being rendered into a puppet for men. After Joanna’s visit with Dr Fancher, she decides to head to the library for more research on the men and women in Stepford and after reading stacks of reports and papers about the town’s inhabitants, mainly the men who were masterminds; Joanna could not resist but to laugh and keep laughing. Joanna’s reaction can be interpreted as an indication that she could be a borderline hysteric—but this response can be traced back to the impact of the town’s restrictive patriarchal and misogynist ideologies.

Scholars have often explained that when women are too vulnerable and unable to transcend the oppressive rules of society they often can “become insane or commit suicide”

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

(Qasim et al 385). More so, it is women who reject gender roles and societal oppression who are labelled mad by a male-dominated society whereby “‘madness,’ whether it appears in women or in men, is either the acting out of the devalued female role or the total or partial rejection of one’s sex role stereotype” (Chesler 56). Thus, it is quite probable that Joanna lost her grip on reality due to the oppressive situation she fell into and being portrayed as hysterical and mad because she is refusing to abide by Stepford’s societal norms.

3.5.2 Amma Crellin

3.5.2.1. Unhinged Amma

Amma Crellin is a thirteen-year-old girl that is nothing like her peers—she is nothing but atypical. On her first encounter with Camille at home, Amma zoomed in on Camille’s mini-room in her dollhouse and with “A small finger poked the bed. ‘I hope you enjoy your stay here,’ she murmured into the room, as if she were addressing a tiny Camille no one could see” (Flynn 42). Behind her doll-like appearance Amma was frightening—her mental instability is transparent when one closely examines her actions—for example, when Amma’s dollhouse table did not match her mother’s, she threw “a full-blown tantrum, her face mottled in anger...Amma yelped, and smashed the table on the floor, where it was in pieces, then buried her face in the sofa cushion and wailed” (ibid 55), undeniably she was a “horrible little girl” (ibid) as Camille noted. It can be acknowledged that Amma, just like Joanna in *The Stepford Wives*, releases pent up frustrations via what could be interpreted as an uncontrolled emotional outburst—a hysterical tantrum.

Amma continues to display more unhinged behaviour at the breakfast table, first by comparing herself to Cinderella’s evil sister and then by wishing to be killed—all in the attempt to gain as much attention as possible. Amma also reveals a darker disturbed mind when she shares her idea about death: “When you die, you become perfect” just like Princess Diana (ibid 62). Her true competition was Camille, because she was Adora’s first, and Amma was used to being worshiped outside her home by her friends and the town’s people and adored at home by her mother (ibid). Her fixation on being everyone’s favourite further unmasks her mental instability. For example, at Natalie’s makeshift shrine, she steals the items left for the dead girl because simply she “didn’t want anyone to get more attention than her”—that is why she wished to be dead before, because Ann and Natalie were having a larger audience than her (ibid 71). Her awkward behaviour seems like a cry for attention and for that reason she urges Camille to write about her. Ostensibly, Amma’s appearance works in

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

harmony with her actions, while she acted unassuming when wearing sundresses, she behaved wildly in her “miniskirt, platform sandals, and a tube top” (ibid 70). Moreover, Amma was the leader of her blonde group for her beauty and spiteful nature allowed her to exercise control over others—an updated mini version of Adora. When one of the blondes, Jodes, touches Amma inappropriately she strikes her face “as if disciplining a cat” (Flynn 70). In conclusion, Amma was physically violent and displayed “aggressive disrespect” towards the dead girls (Flynn 71); there was nothing gentle about her or her friends.

Amma and her friends act much older than their age and are sexually experienced despite their childhood appearance of innocence. According to Adora’s friends, Amma and her gang would raid parties and seduce all the boys there—they would do things even adult women “didn’t do till [they] were old married women—and then only after the transaction of a few nice pieces of jewelry” (ibid 78). Coincidentally, one night, while with detective Willis, Camille met her sister and her friends with a group of older boys, the girls looked too seductive with: “Long blonde hair, heart-shaped faces, and skinny legs. Miniskirts with tiny Ts exposing flat baby tummies” (ibid 101). The girls’ appearance is one of physical maturity and being “way overripe” for their years as well as too vulgar for their age by the standards of their southern small town (ibid). When approaching Camille and the detective, Amma acts in a despicable manner, rudely prying into their whereabouts and their sexual activities, not to mention making sexual advances towards the detective. She used a priapic word to address the detective and “made her words sound sexual” (ibid 102) culminating with her ridiculing Camille by wedging a lollipop into her hair, simply to demean her in the presence of detective Willis (ibid 103). Such behaviours were only hints to Amma’s inner monstrosity which is only revealed at the end of the novel.

Thus, Amma’s characterization incorporates a duality of superficial childhood innocence with aggressiveness and sexuality, leading to psychopathy. Amma’s psychopathy is defined by “low levels of emotional reactivity (callous unemotionally, shallow affect, and bold-ness), glib interpersonal style (superficial charm, egocentricity, and deceitfulness), antisocial tendencies (poor behavioural control and aggression), and a parasitic lifestyle typified by impulsivity, irresponsibility, and a lack of long-term planning” (qtd in Semenyna 1). At the pig slaughter house, Amma enjoys watching “nearly-comatose” pigs being spread for breast feeding and then decapitated by machines: “Amma sat down cross-legged and gazed, fascinated. After five minutes she was in the same position, now smiling and squirming” (ibid 90). Amma is not an innocent child; she demonstrates characteristics of

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

being a callous monster who could find pleasure in the anguish of a helpless creature. In addition, she seems to have developed bizarre literary and historical interests akin to “Joan of the Arc and Bluebeard’s wife and Princess Diana—all martyrs” (Flynn 109). She was also seen “reading a book called Greek Goddesses”, which Camille predicted would yield more insalubrious martyr inspirations for her sister (ibid 110). Though Amma ran her school and was the most popular girl, she still socialised with Natalie for a while before she became uninterested (ibid 112), or more precisely, before Amma decided to murder Natalie.

According to Amma’s history of bullying, she and her followers were also cruel to unpopular girls like a fat girl who they forced to serve them lunch and eat like an animal, and another girl who they pressured to reveal her genitalia to her classmates and speak “dirty things”; or when they staged the rape of another girl (Flynn 192). As for Ann and Natalie, they were tormented by Amma because they were different: Natalie was forced to “cut her hair off”, and Ann to expose her “privates to the boys” (ibid 119). Despite her rare moments of gentleness, like offering Camille a joint to make her feel better, Amma is most of the time mean and hurtful to everyone around her except for Adora. Seemingly, Amma’s brain or feelings do not seem to function properly, she admits to her rare capacity to be kind, however these moments could only happen at night when “everyone’s asleep and everything’s quiet” (ibid 121).

Furthermore, Amma took everything to the extreme: not only did she smoke weed (as witnessed again while she was by the Wheeler’s pool) but she also, a day before, suffered a hangover after drinking too much alcohol to bury her disappointment with Camille (ibid 125). After smoking a joint at the Wheeler’s pool, Amma plays sexual mind games with John Keene as she sexualizes the task of applying sunscreen. As a result, Camille realizes that “Amma’s sexual offerings seemed a form of aggression” (ibid 134)—when seducing John her actions transition from eroticism to sexual and psychological bullying by cruelly alluding that his sister’s death was his fault (ibid 135). One could interpret Amma’s behaviour as her personal methodology to garner much needed attention from others.

3.5.2.2. Victim or Psychopath?

Setting aside Amma’s abnormal behaviours one should note that she was raised in what could be considered an abnormal environment where she was not nurtured by a normal mother. Adora was peculiar, she would pluck her eyelashes under stress, was overbearing with her daughters, and attempts to render them doll-like and not to mention that she poisoned them,

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

sometimes to death (as in Marian's case). More so, Amma had to sleep in a room next to a dead sister she never knew (Flynn 146) which generated eerie feelings that Marian is still there especially since Adora always reminded her girls of how wonderful Marian had been. Even in her death the shadow of Marian's perfection loomed over both Amma and Camille.

After Camille's and Amma's encounter at Garrett Park, the sisters head to a house party where Amma gets drunk on vodka. Notwithstanding, Amma's highly intoxicated state, she also takes prescription pills; which she forces Camille to take as well (ibid 154). Amma had her own way to convince people around her to do what she wanted, including Camille. After the party, the intoxicated girls unconsciously find themselves at Adora's front door, sharing stories about Adora's bizarre character. Amma admitted to her sister that Adora often spoke in her sleep, uttering names "Joya, Marian...you" referring to Camille (ibid 159). Amma had to grow up in the hands of a sick woman and she reveals how Adora's over-care oddly makes her sexually aroused (ibid). Unconsciously, Amma realizes that her mother's weird nature and odd idea of motherly nurturance moulded her into the child she is now. Amma believed that once "you let people do things to you, you're really doing it to them", and this did not only include boys who touched her, but even Adora who supposedly took care of her (Flynn 160). Amma believed she had control over those who touched or treated her inappropriately (ibid) and yet she often showcased instability and psychopathy through tantrums or violent acts like smacking her friend or killing other girls. In different words Amma was struggling between keeping the façade of the evil strong girl and the troubled abused little girl her mother created.

Inwardly Amma suffers because of her mother's over-care and protectiveness to the extent that she is not only forced to be a doll in Adora's version of the world, but she almost cost Amma her life. . In her own world Amma had control, she was wild and free and due to Adora's abuse Amma becomes somewhat unstable and the psycho-emotional and physical abuse ultimately impacts her own sanity. As a young psychopath, Amma is characterised by lack of empathy, emotional reactivity and being gifted with a superficial charisma; yet she lacks modesty and control over her aggressiveness (qtd in Semenyna 1)—not to mention a lack of a sense of morality since she tends to act out on impulse. There are also early indicators of Amma's psychopathic behaviours such as when she "snatched a firefly from the air, held it between two fingers and ripped out its back end. Wiped the light around her finger to make a glowing ring. She dropped the dying bug into the grass and admired her hand" (Flynn 161). Also, the scene where she is admiring the pig being slaughtered, Amma once more neglected the pain in a dying creature and focused on what mesmerized her, like the

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

glitter on her fingers. These examples of a lack of empathy align with the characteristics assigned to a psychopath even if Amma is still a child who is confused and worried about not being loved but feared by her friends. In fact, Amma graded her behaviours from A to F, though she tended to judge herself too harshly. Evidently, she was scared that love was not enough, and thus, she preferred to be feared because it is safer, something she had learned from “Machiavelli” (ibid). The mention of Machiavelli by Amma denotes that, despite her different layers of a feminine doll or an evil girl, Amma was also smart which, in fact, is highly associated with the idea that she could be psychopathic, since psychopaths are known for their high intelligence.

Amma had more things in common with Ann and Natalie than she wanted to admit. She was as defiant and violent, if not more and she was extremely smart too. According to her IQ test, she was “supposed to be in tenth grade”, but like Natalie’s mother, Adora did not want her daughter to stand out like a sore thumb (for being too smart for a girl) (ibid 162). Amma believed that Adora’s restraints suffocated her; she needed an escape—unfortunately Amma’s reaction was to lash out by harming others, unlike Camille whose harm is self-directed. In truth, Amma chose to harm others and she relished in it like a true psychopath: “‘I love it’ she screamed” (ibid). Amma yearned for true love, because what she found in Adora was conditioned by obedience, instead she searched for true, honest affection from Camille. Amma sensed that Adora “hated” her, or at least “didn’t like” her just in a different way that she disliked Camille, because Amma gave Adora what she wanted, an obedient, feminine doll for a daughter—a replica of her young self (Flynn 164). The relationship between Amma and Adora is not simply on the familial level, the fact that their names were synonymous also alludes to a higher psychological connection between the two characters. Adora’s name which derives from the verb ‘to adore’ and Amma’s name which comes from the Spanish word ‘ama’ (meaning to love) insinuates that the two characters were two sides of the same coin. Alternatively, Amma seems to function as an extension of Adora especially with her mini Adora house that Amma obsessively wanted it to be identical to her mother’s. On the second morning of their hangover Amma “sat naked on the floor in front of her huge dollhouse, a thumb in her mouth”, as if rendered into a toddler-status by Adora’s medical “attention” (Flynn 170). Adora constantly gave Amma pills and medicines to make Amma “fall asleep all hot and drooly” in order to display her bedbound daughter to her friends (ibid). Nevertheless, the aftermath of an over-caring Adora often left Amma troubled, not simply from being poisoned but also from being showcased like some sort of circus animal.

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Amma was also abused by her mother: she was both coerced to be a perfect doll, almost like the Stepford wives, and also drugged and displayed like an ailing creature. She was smart because she did not always take those pills, sometimes she only pretended to do so to appease her mother. However, when she takes the pills, Amma says, “Sometimes I get all hot and crazy and she has to give me cold baths. Sometimes I need to throw up. Sometimes I get all shivery and weak and tired and I just want to sleep”, evidently, she was being poisoned (Flynn 171). The impact of the drugs given to Amma was not simply aimed to harm her, but to preserve her in a childish state since she was often dressed to look like a doll and (more disturbingly) asked to act like one too. Instead of being a drunk preteen who “pimped out her friends to older boys for laughs”, she was to remain a “tweaked and feverish” little girl “modelled after a child on a 1950s family show” by Adora’s control and drugs (ibid 194).

As the history of the female status indicates, when women are unable to break through oppression, they “become insane or commit suicide” (Qasim et al 385). As for Amma, she was oppressed in the sense that she was forced onto two personalities, a doll for her mother and a wild aggressive being with vile tendencies in her nature. After her mother’s arrest for the girls’ murders, Amma became obsessed with female serial killers, and she still frequently visited her mother in jail. One might think she loved her mother and she tried to see the good in her, or to understand her at least (ibid 212). Yet, Adora was never the murderer, Amma was.

3.5.3. Adora Crellin

3.5.3.1. Unhinged Adora

Like Amma, Adora possesses some ambivalent traits: at Natalie’s funeral she seemed genuinely sorrowful and later that day she presented Camille with a body “lotion” she bought her, as if she cared about Camille’s battered skin and her self-harm issues. Nevertheless, when seeing some of Camille’s scars, and when speaking of Marian’s death, she shows no understanding of Camille’s own feelings. In addition, she was rude when she commented on Mrs Keene’s “heartfelt” words, “I didn’t care much for that open letter Jeannie Keene read...It’s a funeral, not a political rally. And why were they all dressed so informally?” (ibid 40). Adora jumped from the informality of the letter and did not realize its sentimental value but instead focused on the dress code, as if that was the most important thing at the little girl’s funeral.

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Adora's emotions and logic do not seem to function properly, for example, despite her pretences to sound willing for some quality time with her daughter, she quickly returns to her spiteful nature when Camille's job is mentioned—"she snapped" at Camille demanding her to say that she had "errands to run, or friends to see" instead of the truth (41). Adora pretended to be too frail against the horrors of reality such as the deaths of Ann and Natalie; the same deaths that Camille, as a journalist, has been contracted to write about, and yet Adora kept poisoning her daughters. In reflection, no matter how Adora faked frailty she was still a dominating woman filled with malice: she controlled her husband and the people in town, as well as used (and poisoned) her daughters to appear as the perfect caring mother.

In fact, Adora's fake fairy-tale-like nature, i.e., acting like a fairy-tale princess whose only care is to look beautiful, marry the prince and live happily ever after, was forcibly projected onto Amma. As mentioned earlier, she dressed her defiant daughter like a doll for her own satisfaction, and she had such a strong influence on Amma that she was "learning to speak just like Adora", adding to the fact that she possessed an identical mini dollhouse to that of her mother (ibid 42). Adora Crellin was not only influential domestically, but she was "the schmoozer in the family—even the guy who sprays for termites once a year sends doting Christmas cards", she had this matriarchal aura to her which influenced both men and women (ibid 51). Focusing on Amma, she was treated nothing like Camille, she was doted on and spoiled rotten, because she obeyed Adora unlike her older sister. Adora, however, doted on her obedient daughters and also poisoned them with "foul solutions" (ibid 54). As for her rebellious daughter, Camille, she was ignored for "half a decade", and when Camille was finally visited in the hospital, Adora only showed her compassion in front of the doctors and nurses as part of her façade as a good mother. Camille says:

When we were alone, she talked about the foliage and some new town rule that required Christmas lights be taken down by January 15. When my doctors joined us, she cried and petted and fretted at me. She stroked my hair and wondered why I had done this to myself...Then, inevitably, came the stories of Marian. She'd already lost one child, you see. It had nearly killed her. Why would the older (though necessarily less beloved) deliberately harm herself? (ibid 59).

Even at times when Adora feigned care, she could not resist the urge to direct the sympathy of the doctors toward her, as a mother who lost a child, and might lose another. Adora was certainly self-centred and perhaps it is why she developed a Munchausen by proxy syndrome which entailed Adora harming her girls, causing them to become ill all to gain the sympathy of people around her.

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Likewise, when Ann and Natalie are mentioned, Adora always veers the attention toward herself, of how sad she is to lose them, pretending that “Every tragedy that happens in the world happens to” her (Flynn 63). This example can also be an indicator that Adora may also be a narcissist as she displays certain narcissist traits such as “an inflated view of the self, a lack of warmth or empathy in relationships, and the use of a variety of strategies for maintaining the inflated self-views” (Campbell and Baumeister 423). In correlation, the strategies in which Adora used to maintain her inflated self-views are reflected through her Munchausen by proxy: which could also align with a diagnosis of psychopathy since she had no sense of morality as her only motive was to preserve her status as the perfect mother.

Moreover, Adora fakes sadness about remote calamities happening in the world while she enjoys life in her luxurious home, like her year-refuge in her lavish room after Marian’s death. It was “A gorgeous room: canopy bed the size of a ship, vanity table studded with frosted perfume bottles. A floor so glorious it had been photographed by several decorating magazines” (ibid 63). While Adora would lie in a beautiful dress waiting for her sympathetic visitors to lament her loss, her 13-year-old daughter Camille was left to conquer her own sorrow and loss of her younger sister, as she “never got to go in” her momma’s room to have at least one warm hug (ibid 63). For the people of Wind Gap, Adora “was like a cake topping: the most beautiful, sweet girl Wind Gap had ever raised” (ibid 68), for they were oblivious to her deceitful deeds.

3.5.3.2. Victim or Psychopath?

According to Barbara Almond the relationship between a mother and her child is a critical one since when a mother gives love and nurtures her child she unconsciously expects a sense of gratification given by her child’s obedience (24). If this exchange is not properly made, and the child might be rebellious, the mother unintentionally feels hatred towards the child and, in extreme situations like in *Sharp Objects*, this can lay the foundation for the child developing abnormally, such as becoming a psychopath or not (Almond 124). Perhaps like Amma, Adora’s oppressive mother, Joya, helped awaken the psychopath tendencies in her because, just like Adora, she also cultivated monstrous traits in Amma.

Joya also exhibited narcissistic traits in her way of raising her child that she often abused and hated her to the extent that Adora developed psychopathic tendencies as well—leading Adora to kill her own child. It was the “same house, different crazy lady running it”, referring to Adora and her mother Joya who were two narcissistic mothers. In the same vein,

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Camille contemplated the possibility that Adora was a bad mother simply because “she had no practice” as she had an awful mother who died only when Adora was seventeen (ibid 75). Adora was supposedly abused by that mother which might be a partial indication to her motives to harm her daughters as well. The way Joya raised Adora did not allow her to become a good mother, she infected her with the same narcissistic tendencies she herself possessed. Ergo, Adora, as a mother was abusive too, she did not allow her daughters to grow up in a healthy home, or to be loved by their own mother unconditionally.

Nonetheless, there was no denying Adora’s insecurities and strange behaviour, even her friends feared her. When Jackie (Adora’s closest friend) was about to divulge some secrets about Adora, the rest of her friends tried to stop her by derailing the topic, because they feared Adora’s wrath—and Adora’s wrath meant that Jackie would become an outcast. She managed to warn Camille by urging her to go back to Chicago, saying that Adora is hurtful towards no one in particular, but considering that Adora did kill her daughter, it means Camille was the one in danger (ibid 78). Whereas Camille was somewhat perplexed about what Jackie said, Adora only proved her right. As Camille was having another interview with the Nashes, Adora breezed in like royalty with her usual queen-like attire, interrupted Camille’s interview and dismissed her, as if she owned the Nashes home and hearts: “She looked more comfortable in the Nash house than Mrs Nash did” and Mr. Nash spoke about her “as if she were some big-hearted patron”. Apparently Adora had more to her than meets the eye, she actually “tutored Ann in English and spelling. [She] and Ann were very close” (ibid 84). Adora’s duplicity continues, while she always rejected Camille for her rebellious nature, she devoted time to tutor wayward Ann and Natalie. It was unimaginable to ponder on Adora’s “noblesse oblige extending to spending afternoons with an unkept girl from the west side of town” (ibid). She would work with the girls “have them over to [the] house, feed them after school. Sometimes she’d even come by during recess ...outside the fence, watching them on the playground” (Flynn192). To any reader, this description makes Adora resemble a mad paedophile stalking little girls.

Camille and Adora’s relationship is flawed from the start. Adora, despite being the image of the good mother to the outside world, with Camille she was never a nurturing caregiver. When pondering on her childhood Camille reveals:

As a child, I don’t remember ever telling Adora my favorite color, or what I’d like to name my daughter when I grew up. I don’t think she ever knew my favorite dish, and I certainly never padded down to her room in the early morning hours, teary from nightmares. I always feel sad for the girl that I was, because it never occurred to me

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

that my mother might comfort me. She has never told me she loved me, and I never assumed she did. She tended to me. She administrated me. Oh, yes, and one time she bought me lotion with vitamin E. (ibid 86)

Clearly Adora had no motherly affection towards Camille to the extent that her daughter suspected that her mother never liked children in the first place. Maybe the idea of children intrigued her before being a mother, but once she gave birth she discovered otherwise. It is not only that Adora hated children that was peculiar, but it was the fact that she pretended to love them in public while she harboured a kind of “jealousy, a resentfulness” towards them (Flynn 87). Camille recounts:

Even I, in public, was a beloved child. Once her period of mourning for Marian was over, she'd parade me into town, smiling and teasing me, tickling me as she spoke with people on the sidewalks. When we got home, she'd trail off to her room like an unfinished sentence, and I would sit outside with my face pressed against her door and replay the day in my head, searching for clues to what I'd done to displease her. (ibid)

But then, it was not only Camille, or just her daughters, but all children. In one of Camille's ghastly memories of her mother, she recalled her being affectionate with a child when in the company of others and biting the baby when she was left alone with her: “She pressed her lips hard against the baby's apple slice of a cheek. Then she opened her mouth just slightly, took a tiny bite of flesh between her teeth, and gave it a little bite. The baby wailed. The blotch faded as Adora snuggled the child. And told the other women it was just being fussy” (ibid 88). What Adora suffered from is explained by psychologists as a narcissistic tendency highly associated to the female gender. It is also explained as existing in conflict with self-love and altruism which is the impulse to “love others” and to be a loving, “nurturing mother” (Blumenfeld 81-82). In other words, Adora's self-love defeated her urge to care for children and this correlates to her Munchausen by proxy illness since it reflects Adora's need for attention. Camille was not surprised that Amma was unstable just like Adora because she was abused since childhood due to Adora's own narcissism. Because of her façade of the “good” mother, Adora urged Camille to accompany her shopping for dresses so the whole town could see her taking care of her daughter, and to make sure Camille would be appropriately dressed for Adora's party. Adora alleged that it was also a good opportunity for them “to catch up” (Flynn 106). However, when in the store, and after the mention of Camille's father, Adora did everything to bring the conversation to a halt (ibid). In front of the store owner, she called her “sweetheart”, but as they were alone, she ignored her pleas to know more about her father.

Adora, as a narcissist, showed no sympathy after seeing how severe her older daughter's self-harm cutting was, instead Adora considered the shopping trip a disaster and that she had a

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

“horrible” day, forgetting that it was Camille who was humiliated and exposed (Flynn 108). Moreover, Adora constantly blames Camille for everything bad that happened in her presence, from her being cut by thorns to the moment Amma became ill. She attacks Camille: “Your sister is sick. She’s worried herself into a fever since you’ve been home” (ibid 125). Setting aside everything which transpired between mother and daughter, Camille’s bewilderment with Adora’s hatred towards her causes Adora to admit “I think I finally know why I don’t love you” (ibid 131). It appears Camille reminded Adora of her mother, Joya, who was also “Cold and distant and so, so smug”. More than that, Joya was an awful mother who, according to Adora, revelled in Camille’s disobedience, and when Adora was a child, she would “pinch her” in her sleep simply to hurt her (ibid 144). Adora blamed her mother’s in-existent love and abuse for her own lack of affectionate emotions towards her own daughter—and although Camille had no blame in the matter, Adora punishes her because she cannot punish her own mother (ibid 132). Joya’s lack of affection and influence was impactful on Adora’s psycho-social development—and can be identified as a source of her metamorphosis into the pathological attention seeker and monster who hated her children and only used them as a tool to acquire attention and devotion from people and to control them, like the Nashes.

Adora revealed the rationale behind her caring for Natalie and Ann, they only reminded her of her wilful incorrigible daughter. She wished to tame them instead of Camille because they were still little girls who she can control, unlike Camille who escaped and returned as an adult. Adora also saw these girls as “little pretty animals” never as human little girls with a mind of their own (Flynn 132). Aside from Adora’s peculiar mannerisms and attitudes, she also disclosed a tendency to falsify truths about her daughters. For instance, in a conversation between Adora and Camille, Adora claimed that Camille forgot what Adora wore to Marian’s funeral, or when she once again alleged that Camille refused “to put [her] hair up in curlers for [her] school picture. Instead [she] cut it all off”—however, this was not Camille but rather Ann who did so as Bob Nash recounted (ibid). Adora is an unreliable character as well as she is a narcissistic psychopath traumatized in childhood by her mother’s ill-nature and as a consequence she develops evil tendencies to the extent that she blames an infant for her defiance. In turn, Adora’s repetition of her own mother’s behaviour creates a similar monster in her own daughter Amma—an intergenerational cycle of abuse imparted by Adora’s narcissistic obsession for attention. Adora attacks Camille: “Even from the beginning you disobeyed, wouldn’t eat. Like you were punishing me for being born. Made me look like a

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

fool. Like a child” (Flynn 132). But how could a helpless new-born punish a grown-up woman? Adora was hallucinating and creating her own validation for hurting her daughter because, as Almond explained, motherhood sometimes requires gratification by the child’s obedience (24). When Adora could not receive that sense of fulfilment from Camille she started hating her because she did not fall in line with Adora’s façade as a good mother.

Adora was child like because she could not complete her proper growth: she could not develop feelings of empathy or sympathy, love or a sense of guilt—all markers of a psychopath. Elliot Leyton stipulates that the psychopath is characterised by suffering from emotional development issues at a very young age when an infant is unable to have feelings of “sympathy, remorse, and affection” (qtd in Venas 2). She was not sympathetic towards Jeannie Keene at the funeral, nor did she love her daughter, and neither did she feel guilt for murdering Marian and poisoning her other girls. For instance, in the few conversations Adora and Camille had when she got back to town, Camille often found herself exhausted because their conversations would usually be emotionally draining and re-traumatizing. One particular conversation ends with Adora admitting that she had wished Camille had died instead of Marian. Adora goes as far as to threaten her: “‘The only place you have left,’ she whispered at me... ‘Someday I’ll carve my name there’. She shook me once, released me, then left me on the stairs” described Camille (Flynn 133). Adora’s daughters already knew that she was “troubled”, she spoke in her sleep, nightmares haunted her about her mother and daughters (ibid 159). Nonetheless, she still liked to take care of Amma, or poison her more precisely but, she never loved her either (165), she only liked how compliant she was.

3.5.4. Camille Preaker

3.5.4.1. Unhinged Camille

Upon finding Natalie’s body Camille was stunned by the scene of the toothless strangled girl, yet her focus was not on her death but rather on the girl’s injured knee. Camille’s reasoning does not seem to function appropriately; what use would the dead girl have of a band-aid? Yet all that Camille thought about while investigating the murder and, at Natalie’s funeral she felt like she had “to sneak in and put a fresh Band-Aid on her knee” (Flynn 29). At the funeral, Camille’s defiant un-lady like behaviour resurfaces: she was polite, but she was still adamant about fulfilling her task of finding out information about Natalie. She did not stop despite Adora forbidding her to take notes; she was “feeling stabbingly defiant. But still blushing” (ibid 31). Camille was too apprehensive, like she dwelled on Natalie’s injured knee, she pondered on the priest’s words whether “the tooth for a tooth part disturbed anyone else” but

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

herself (ibid 23). Camille did not seem to think much of the young girl's death, it did not resonate within her, and instead it was everything that surrounded Natalie's passing which intrigued her. Furthermore, if Camille was rude, she was not oblivious to it. Being uninvited to the funeral did not stop her from attending nor from barging into the Keenes' home. She admitted "I was rotten. I didn't approach the family, didn't announce myself. I walked through their home and I spied, my head down in my beer like a shamed ghost" (Flynn 34). However, Camille's reasons for being there were genuine, which could not be said about most of the women there, like her mother and her high school friends.

Like focusing on Natalie's knee instead of her death, at the Keenes' home Camille fixates on Mrs Keene's necklace rather than on the fact of being humiliated and kicked out of her house, "I stood on the stoop blushing, thinking to myself what a nice detail that heart necklace would make in my story" (ibid 93). Camille demonstrates a sense of sympathy but was too dysfunctional to know how to express it—she was, to a certain extent, unstable like Amma and Adora. One would expect Camille to be the best to understand the Keenes and the Nashes for she too had lost a sibling, yet all that she saw was her job as a journalist. She deceived and lied to get the information she needed for her story, like she lied to Meredith saying she remembered her (ibid 93). Nevertheless, Camille was also a people pleaser: upon meeting Richard for dinner, and after slightly embarrassing him, she could only think of ways to make it up to him. She began by telling him of the horror stories in Wind Gap, her own stories, when her mother bit a baby, when she witnessed a near rape of a classmate at school and when she herself was violated by a group of boys while in school (ibid 97-99). What astonished detective Willis more was not Camille's stories, but the fact that she believed that she was not raped, though she was only thirteen and drunk at the time. Camille had the wrong understanding of what intercourse being consensual meant; she furiously exclaimed "I'm so sick of liberal lefty men practicing sexual discrimination under the guise of protecting women against sexual discrimination" (Flynn 99). The idea that men often used sexual discrimination to protect women would have been somehow plausible, but in Camille's case she was not an adult with a sober mind but a drunken child. She did not wish to admit how abnormal her childhood was—how she matured much earlier than typical, and became sexually active at a very young age, only by thinking about it "the word *wicked* blaze up by" Camille's pelvis (ibid 101; original emphasis). Although young Camille was a rebel since the start, her older self lost her flirtatious skills over the years: while Richard Willis was plainly flirting with her, she was almost certain she did not "remember the drill" of schmoozing a guy (ibid 51). This

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

fact about Camille, further proves that she had no inter-personal skills and social life, even as a grown independent woman.

When Camille met her mother's friend Jackie at Natalie's funeral; she revealed the frailty of her connection to her mother, as a teenager "It was Jackie, not Adora, who slipped [her] first box of tampons, winking that [she] should phone her if [she] needed instructions" (Flynn 36). What Jackie did and Adora did not were "[s]mall huge gestures" every daughter should experience with her mother (ibid). The funeral left Camille troubled and exhausted, and the town and her mother's home proved to be toxic for her as well,

I drank more vodka. There was nothing I wanted to do more than be unconscious again, wrapped in black, gone away. I was raw. I felt swollen with potential tears, like a water balloon filled to burst. Begging for a pin prick. Wind Gap was unhealthy for me. This home was unhealthy for me...I walked to the door a bit blurrily, the vodka giving me that first necessary layer to deal with this particular place on this particular day. I'd been good about booze for six months, but nothing counted here. (Flynn 40)

Even as an adult, Camille continues to suffer from the trauma of her childhood—and attending Natalie's funeral only triggers memories of losing her sister leading her to deal with her psycho-emotional pain by using alcohol to numb what she feels. That pain, in fact, is also associated to her mother's verbal abuse which Camille attempts to cope with through cutting her flesh. Cutting and self-harm for psychoanalysts such as Freud are understood as results of "trauma", "ego, castration, penis envy, and the like", while for feminist thinkers it is attributed to issues of "gender and protest, and rebellion against bodily norms" (qtd in Gurung 33). In Camille's case she agonized both from the trauma of losing a sister at a young age and from her mother's abuse at a time when Camille's body was changing in puberty—two possible elements that may have driven her to cutting and self harm. Camille believed the only way for her to survive Wind Gap is by drowning herself in alcohol, yet her task as a journalist to report the crimes forces her to remain in town. For Camille, Wind Gap had an extremely negative influence on her, for instance when Chief Vickery would address Camille, he uses the word "miss", which in Wind Gap had no positive connotation but to mean a spinster. That is why Camille felt "a jab at [her] unmarried state. A single woman even a hair over thirty was a queer thing in these parts" (ibid 42). It is not that Camille did not like men, for she did, though she carried a sense of body shame when she first meets Detective Willis: "I pulled my sleeves down over my hands, balled the ends up in my palms, leaned on one leg... I stood silent as a schoolgirl, hoping Vickery would introduce me" to detective Willis (Flynn 44). She did so both to hide her scars and to better her posture while she did not think of it before when

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

she was only talking with Vickery (ibid). In truth it was the town's effect which nourished her timidity—had she been in Chicago, she “would have jabbed [her] hand out, announced [herself] with a smile, and enjoyed the reaction. Here [she] stared at Vickery and stayed mute” (ibid). Visibly, the town had a numbing effect on Camille's sense of independence which, much like Adora, endeavours to render her more submissive, and by extension, more feminine.

Camille not only struggled to be herself in Wind Gap, but also grappled with competing with the memory of her doll-like obedient sister, Marian, who was adored even after her death. Camille who refused docility was still suffering from her mother's bias to her dead sister, Camille wished she “could stop trying” to please her mother but she could not (Flynn 59). Camille knew she could not be Adora's favourite because, simply, Camille's interests were not a husband, a house, sundresses and a bunch of children. Camille was enthralled by ugliness and the sinister and she could only find them in her profession as a journalist. When asked by her stepfather what was good information for her, she said “Well, I've been doing some more high-profile stories, I've covered three murders just since the beginning of the year” (ibid 61)—Adora was repulsed by Camille's reply. Camille, however, was duplicitous, she did not seem to realize if she wished to impress Adora and gain her affection, or repulse and anger her. The instance Adora showed her irritation upon the mention of the girls' deaths, Camille only pushes further instead of stopping as to not displease her mother, “I am upset and unnerved, and instead of being comforting, you attack me” Adora pleaded (ibid 63). It was as if Camille's subconscious despised Adora's fake frailty because she knew Adora's true evil self, she knew her mother hated children, more so, girls who were “wild” and non-compliant like herself. Be that as it may, as already stated, Camille still had an urge to be loved by her mother like Marian was and that is why upon discovering Amma's middle name, Camille felt a jab of jealousy, for it was *Adora* (Flynn 70). Camille and Adora epitomise the mother-daughter conflict, the daughter does not know if to please or unnerve the life-giver, if to love her mother or to loathe her.

Adora is not what one expects as a “normal” caregiver, as already explained Adora is a narcissistic psychopath who expected obedience from her children and adoration from her surroundings, yet she was a harmful mother who even killed one of her children. Furthermore, Camille was never allowed into Adora's good graces, nor did Adora ever hug or truly love Camille. Even at thirteen, with the tragedy of a lost sibling, Camille was distanced in the large mansion while Adora was pampered by her husband and the town's people in her luxurious

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

room (Flynn 64). It was no surprise for Camille to nurture a duplicitous personality, she was (in her own words) a complicated girl; beautiful on the outside and damaged on the inside: “Big blue eyes, high cheekbones framing a small triangle of a nose. Full lips that turned slightly downward at the corners. I was lovely to look at, as long as I was fully clothed” (ibid 66). By fully clothed it means when Camille was fully silenced for her carvings were her voice since the words she cut on her flesh expressed her most intimate inner struggles. Let alone being a teenager, even as a new-born baby Camille was tossed aside “in some far corner room, kept quiet by the maid”, while Adora would restore her reputation in society by marrying Alan after having a child out of wedlock (Flynn 68). Camille would be left without any feelings of belonging to grow up under the supervision of a distant mother and a father she never knew. Even her father’s name was “fake: Newman Kennedy”, after Adora’s favourite “actor, and president” (ibid). Adora not only prevented Camille from having genealogical roots, or an individual identification (ibid 69) but she also prevented her from having a connection with and a sense of belonging to her own family. Although she claimed that Camille should be Alan’s daughter, she never allowed the two any closeness, leaving Camille an eternal stranger to Adora’s new life with Alan. Once in Chicago, a blind man asked if there was anyone near, and the moment she uttered the words “I’m here...it felt shockingly comfortable”, as though it was proof of her existence (Flynn 85). Even when in solitude and when “panicked”, Camille would utter these words to herself, to assure herself that she exists still, because more than often she did not feel that she belonged (ibid)—all of this factoring in to Camille’s need to cut her flesh because in doing so she could feel pain and could feel alive. Camille agonized between a wish to exist and another to vanish, and maybe that is why *vanish* was her last word to carve onto her skin. Adora never mothered Camille, and Camille could never tell Adora of her favourite things, or of her nightmares as a child, because simply “it never occurred to [her] that [her] mother might comfort” her (ibid 87). The amalgamation of Camille being abandoned at a very young age without having roots or without experiencing a mother’s love for years and then losing the only person whom she shared a connection with, her sister Marian, Camille could only find solace in self-harm.

Due to Camille’s strange nature, even the men she admired had to be as deranged as her or at least have seen ugliness—like detective Richard. He was someone like herself in that he has also seen horrendous crimes as part of his work, and that meant for Camille that he might be able to see her ugly side and still be with her (Flynn 128). As previously mentioned, the emotional instability Camille experiences stems from Adora openly admitting that she does

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

not love Camille because she reminded her of her own mother. Moreover, one of the reasons why Adora gets closer to Ann and Natalie was because their wildness reminded her of Camille, she admitted: “I tried to be close with those girls, those dead girls...They reminded me of you, running around town wild. Like little pretty animals” (ibid). From a different perspective, disturbed Camille had contradictory beliefs about child abuse, while she attacked Richard about her being violated at the age of thirteen, claiming that it was a personal choice, when witnessing Amma’s flirtatious banter with John she felt uncomfortable and thought, “I didn’t like John Keene flirting with Amma, no matter how provocative she was being, She was still thirteen” (ibid 135). She even lied to Richard when he asked about her first time, she said “Sixteen...Older seemed more appropriate” (ibid 151). After she and Richard are finally physically intimate, she realized that something was certainly wrong with the situation. She could not decide if she had “been mistreated. By Richard, by those boys who took her virginity, by anyone” (Flynn 152), because she simply blamed herself for all the bad things in her life as a result of the trauma she carried due to Adora’s psycho-emotional abuse. Camille thought she “*got what she deserved*” (ibid; original emphasis)—because she was rebellious, she deserved to be violated and exploited.

Historically women were often judged based on two stages of their menstrual cycle and its impact on their mental stability: either prior to having it or once the month’s cycle is done. A woman was seen as “the real [her] being the non-premenstrual self” or “the non-[her] being the premenstrual self” (Squire 86). The premenstrual self is flawed, and grim and generally pessimistic, while the non-premenstrual self is “perfect” and effortlessly stable, level-headed. Most importantly, it lives up to the “cultural representations of the perfect ‘woman’” (Squire 86-87). Moreover, Jane Ussher explains how menarche (the onset of menstruation) was often linked with monstrosity when she postulates that having menarche marks the phase in which a girl transforms into a fully grown woman, a woman who is perceived as a “deadly man-eater” and as an outcome she becomes a “disturbing presence who must be carefully contained” by the restraints of society (19). Differently put, girls are not considered a threat until they become physically mature because it is then that they must be made aware of what the society expects from them in adulthood—that is docility and obedience. Camille, as a child, acted like normal little girls, she said “I still remember CeeCee Wyatt, Calhoon High prom queen from when I was a girl. I once bought eleven drugstore lipsticks trying to find the exact shade of pink she wore when she said hello to me one morning” (Flynn 93). Camille’s dilemma did not manifest itself until the onset of menarche: Camille “became quite suddenly,

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

unmistakably beautiful”, and it was the influence of having her catamenia (ibid 57). She became obsessed with her newly discovered beauty, but within that obsession there was still Adora’s mistreatment and Marian’s death. The equation of broken hearted, abused Camille with a new unexpected beauty led to Camille’s obsession with cutting her flesh. Her new beauty allowed Camille people’s affection and appreciation, something she never had even by her mother and that led her to ponder even more on the relationship she had with Adora. As she recounted: “I adored tending to myself, wiping a shallow red pool of blood away with a damp washcloth to magically reveal, just above my naval: *queasy*. Applying alcohol to the bloody lines of: *perky*. I had a dirty streak my senior year, which I later rectified. A few quick cuts” and other more obscene words were brought back into the realm of social acceptance (Flynn 57; original emphasis). Camille also added “The last word I ever carved into myself, sixteen years after I started: vanish” (ibid). Camille’s unprocessed feelings manifest themselves in the form of self-harm as a way to find relief. The word “vanish” in itself either marked Camille’s wish to make all her struggles vanish or as mentioned earlier a reflection of her feelings of not *existing*.

3.6. Stereotypical Psychological Female Typologies from Novels to Adaptations

Whether in the novels or in the visual adaptations, both chosen works feature mentally unstable women. In the novel *The Stepford Wives*, Joanna displays minor mental instabilities whereas in the film psychological weaknesses are attributed to the new character added to the show, Claire Willington. In analysing the mental instabilities depicted in the adaptations the focus in *The Stepford Wives* is on Claire while in *Sharp Objects* it is on Camille, Adora, and Amma as the representations of mentally unstable and/or troubled women. This section focuses on exploring the psychological nature of these characters both in the novels and the adaptations and how unstable women were often labelled within certain stereotypes. According to social work researcher, educator, and practitioner in the field of mental health, Jennifer. M Martin, three major typologies of the madwoman in the Western world during the 20th century are: “the Lucia”, the “suicidal Ophelia” and “the Crazy Jane” (10). The upcoming sections explore a common ground between the psycho-emotional instability of the characters in the shows and how they reflect these three categories of insane women as identified by Martin. Moreover, insanity in women was often understood by literary critics, such as Michelle Foucault, “both as an outlet for creative anger and as a woman’s only means of escape from a patriarchally repressive society” (Smart 119). Ergo, female insanity in this

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

sense is also going to be explored based on its relation with the act of oppression by a patriarchal society or by women who work as the agents of patriarchy.

3.6.1. Claire Willington as the Lucia

One of the three archetypes of the madwoman in history as defined by Jennifer Martin and Elaine Showalter is Lucia of Lammermoor—a character from a famous play whose story revolves around a young lady being forced to marry a man she did not fancy and that she eventually murders. She loses her mind and starts singing and dancing celebrating his death or her loss of sanity performing a “virtuosic double aria before dying” (Poriss 1). Though in *The Stepford Wives* there are no women being forced into arranged marriages, Claire Willington from the 2004 adaptation of *The Stepford Wives* does murder her partner and is considered to have freed herself from the restrictions of patriarchy.

Unlike some of the other main characters in both adaptations, Claire Willington is only introduced in the 2004 film version of *The Stepford Wives*. Claire’s background story reveals that she used to be a successful woman whose husband clearly was not satisfied with her over-achieving accomplishments and ends up cheating on her with a younger more beautiful woman. From a feminist point of view, Claire’s husband reflects ideologies of an oppressive patriarchy because he could not appreciate his wife’s achievements and instead sought solace in a less accomplished (less threatening) woman. Historically, women were believed to suffer from a conflict of whether to be good wives and mothers or to celebrate their individual desires (Blumenfeld 81-82). As a successful professional, Claire is depicted as having selfishly chosen her own desires over “taking care” of her husband—and, as a result, is to blame for her husband’s cheating. Eventually, Claire loses her grip and kills her partner who represents patriarchal values like Lucia who was affected by her desires for true love. Just as Lucia refuses an arranged marriage and ultimately murders her suitor as representative of the patriarchy—Claire kills her husband for his betrayal. According to Helen Deutsch and Sigmund Freud the outcome of women falling into that inner turmoil and choosing their own wants is a “masochistic side, sometimes in conflict with a more sadistic desire to attain to the masculine position of greater freedom, in social terms”, that is women would tend to imitate male behaviours of dominance as they suffer from “penis envy” (ibid 82). For Claire, her masochistic side was manifested through her ploy to control the men in Stepford through her robot husband Mike and her ability to manipulate them in order to manufacture a perfect town with perfect women.

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Furthermore, Claire is thought to be a more troubled version of the Lucia because after destroying the patriarchal restrictions she suffered from, Claire found herself as the orchestrator of the very patriarchy of which she was a victim. The robotic women Claire created represent the perfect image of women in the eyes of a hetero-patriarchal institution which claimed that “women differ from healthy men by being more submissive, less independent, less adventurous, more easily influenced, less aggressive, less competitive, more excitable in minor crises, more easily hurt, more emotional, more conceited about their appearances, less objective, and less interested in math and science” (Chesler 67). The latter categorization reflects the women in Stepford who are, in simple terms, beautiful dolls. Having felt the trauma of rejection by her husband, one could say that Claire may have had a psychotic break after which she decides to institute a traditional patriarchal society of “perfect wives”—a return to the (less complicated) domestic space. That is, after murdering her husband and his lover, Claire found safety in returning to a traditional role of a docile woman who is, on the surface, beautiful and agreeable, but beneath her docility lays an ability to destroy other women’s freedoms. To a certain degree, Claire’s character development details how some women who choose to oppress other women do so to be accepted by their patriarchal societies and/or to protect their space in that society (Chesler 2). Claire did not create female automatons because she wanted to hurt women; instead, she wanted to preserve her status in society and in the town of Stepford and recuperate her status as a happily married woman. Claire did not want the women in Stepford to suffer her fate of becoming a murderer or falling into madness—a madness discussed by Helen Gilbert and Susan Gubar as the only refuge and outcome for most women who chose an independent path of success in a predominantly patriarchal society (qtd in Koscher 109), or like the Lucia who chose to eliminate the patriarchal restrictions in her life by murdering her husband to be. As such, the 2004 *The Stepford Wives* film makes a clear link between madness and female oppression in its depiction of Claire—a woman, who after suffering the trauma of being rejected by her husband for her independence and success as a scientist not only commits murder but also institutes a patriarchal society where women are transformed into good (automaton) wives.

Nevertheless, Claire transcends the Lucia typology because she does not only kill the patriarchal representative in her life (her husband), but she becomes the patriarchal agent in town by controlling her automaton husband. In the process she ends the social freedoms of all Stepford women in a similar manner by targeting a specific type of women: those who were married, successful in the public sphere and independent. Claire kills the identities of these

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

women one by one with a period of cooling off between each “life” that she “kills”—making her a serial killer. Though Claire did not physically murder the women she did, however, murder their humanity by transforming them into automatons—therefore a serial killer of women’s humanity.

3.6.2. The Ophelia between Mother and Daughter

Introduced in the second chapter of the novel, both Adora and Amma display anomalous behaviours which are believed to be closely relevant to the typology of the suicidal Ophelia as defined by Elaine Showalter. Ophelia is a literary character introduced by William Shakespeare who is known as the grief-stricken madwoman. The unstable women who were considered to belong to the Ophelia typology corresponded to a certain attire by “wearing white, keeping their hair unbound and unruly, and wearing wreaths of flowers and branches on their heads” (qtd in Sigurdardottir 5). For example, Amma is depicted wearing a white nightgown, in the last episode, with flowers as a crown on her head, disorderly hair and looking like a version of Ophelia (see figure 25).



Figure 25: Amma as Ophelia from episode 8 in *Sharp Objects*, Ep 8 (2018, HBO).

Charcot and Freud stipulate that the Ophelia typology of female madness is also characterized by “hysteria and mental breakdown in sexually turbulent adolescence” (Showalter 148). As such, Amma’s character seems to correspond to the latter since she was an adolescent girl who suffered under her mother’s oppression, poisoning, and toxic affection. Furthermore, the effects of Adora’s toxicity (figurative and literal) on Amma is embodied in her excessive care igniting sexual urges in Amma since, as previously mentioned, each time Adora would

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

pamper Amma, Amma would feel the need to indulge in her sexual urges. Similarly, Amma would confess to Camille that she would let people do things to her while she, in fact, is the one exercising control over them through the interaction. In a sense, while Amma gives up her body to a male to use it, in return, she asserts her control on him—this can be interpreted as Amma’s desire to regain a sense of control over her life which Adora prevented her from having by treating her as a docile child doll. Not to mention how Amma also displayed her hysterics through her tantrums over the dollhouse’s furniture (*Sharp Objects* Ep.2 50:06-50:15). Besides falling into a seizure, Amma also tended to trouble family members such as humiliating Camille in the parking lot in front of detective Richard, which is not simply another sign of hysteria (Maines 23) but also an indicator of Amma’s psychopathy in bullying and demeaning those around her to assert her power.

On the other hand, despite not looking dishevelled like an Ophelia, Adora Crellin still displayed hysterical tendencies. As previously noted, hysteria has been historically established from a heteropatriarchal and misogynist perspective as a female illness; however, it was associated to a specific type of females—typically upper-class white women (Briggs 246). In Adora’s case, she was the wealthiest woman in Wind Gap and the most admired along with belonging to the upper class. Furthermore, in the history of medicine hysteria in upper class women was featured by “nervousness” and it “was often characterized as an illness caused by “overcivilization”” (Briggs 246). Adora’s decorum and extreme politeness in public reflects the *overcivility* leading to hysteria because at home Adora would often showcase nervous breakdowns like when she harmed her hands with flower cuts and exaggerated her pain to blame it on Camille. Adora’s hysterics are also often associated with her exaggerative nature, after Marian’s death she spent a whole year in her room while people visited her to show their sympathy. As a matter of fact, Adora’s hysterics were substantially associated with her Munchausen by proxy illness which explains her exaggeration of sadness to receive the attention of people around her. Another instance which shows Adora’s nervousness is when her daughters supposedly would get sick while, in fact, she is the one who sickened them by forcing them to take medical concoctions. Furthermore, mothers who were found to suffer from Munchausen by proxy were discovered to suffer from hysterical personality disorder (Cömert 87). Consequently, Adora’s resemblance to the Ophelia mostly lies in the effects of her hysterical condition on the way she used her daughters by poisoning them to receive attention. At the time in which the Ophelia typology was first introduced in the 1800s to the field of psychology studies, Munchausen by proxy had not yet been

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

recognized. However, even without Munchausen by proxy being a common point between Adora and the Ophelia they share a few hysterical tendencies such as the urge to trouble family members, constant nervousness, and the desire to gain attention from others along with being an over civilised upper class white woman.

Moreover, the Ophelia was the favourite choice of male psychologists upon her discovery because she was the most docile type (Sigurdardottir 5), and this further emphasises her resemblance with Adora and Amma. Though they were both mentally deranged and ended the lives of other people, publicly Adora was the mirror of the quintessential feminine housewife, while Amma was the perfect little doll for her mother. Nevertheless, Adora does possess hysterical tendencies such as nervous fits, and her Munchausen by proxy condition shows her commonalities with the Ophelia. As for Amma, in addition to her hysterical behaviour which included tantrums, over-nervousness, and troubling family members her attire also adhered to the stereotypical representation of Ophelia. Amma and Adora share similar mental disorders or a similar typology of the madwoman but, as discussed, they also share ability to murder.

3.6.3. Camille, the Crazy Jane

From the onset of *Sharp Objects* (both the novel and series adaptation) Camille is displayed as a troubled young woman who suffered a great loss and oppression in her hometown by her own mother. As a result, Camille develops a severe condition of self-harm which leads her to be admitted to a psychiatric institution. Hereafter, Camille's self harm tendencies towards her body sets her as the Crazy Jane type of madwoman, especially with her wish to reject a patriarchal town like Wind Gap and an oppressive mother like Adora.

The Crazy Jane classification of mentally unstable females, like the previously discussed typologies, was a prominent figure in the arts, such as ballads, poems or paintings as a madwoman characterised by violent propensities (Sigurdardottir 5). The reasons for considering a violent woman as a Crazy Jane is attributed to her urge to voice her rejection and break free of society's constraints in an aggressive manner (Galvin ix). For Camille Preaker, based on the town's perception, she is a feminist—a label first assigned to her by her high school friends. By a feminist, it means she chose to move away from her hometown and become a career woman who, at the age of thirty, is neither married nor does she have children. As such, she reflects breaking free from the suffocating and undermining nature of a patriarchal society which expects the women from Wind Gap to be housewives and mothers,

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

and certainly not dwell on vicious crimes of little girls as Camille does as part of her career as a journalist. Nonetheless, Camille had a special way in which she voices her rejection against, not solely a patriarchal dogma but, even her own family's oppression. Ergo, the violent features in Camille as the Crazy Jane lies in her urge to cut her flesh to *write* words to *voice* her resistance of the repression she has experienced. As stipulated earlier, self-harm in girls is highly associated with childhood trauma and in Camille's case such trauma came from her mother and the town of Wind Gap as representatives of restrictive patriarchal ideologies and value systems.

From a different perspective, Camille's mental instability and self-harm is believed to be predominantly related to her relationship with her mother. In psychology, boys are often believed to develop an Oedipal complex while girls might develop an Electra complex where the girl feels attraction to her father and despises her mother (Melton 555). Nonetheless, it is not always the case, for not all girls despise their mothers, sometimes the relationship between a daughter and a mother is more complicated than that—such as that of Camille and Adora. Camille does not know if she wishes to please her mother or riles her even further to rebel against her mother's excessive control and her pretence of femininity by discussing murder with her. As discussed by psychologist and researcher Anna Motz, young girls are often thought of as “an extension of their mothers” (16), as the mothers see themselves in their daughters as their own reflections. Hence, once young girls feel the rejection of their mothers, like Camille who always felt like her mother hated her, the young girls can fall into a psychological dilemma of whether to keep a good connection with their mothers or to break away from them. Once falling into this situation most girls find release in self-harm as a method to be released from their confusion and identity loss (Gardner 72). Likewise, Camille's frustration with her mother led her to self-harm—Camille started cutting when Marian died because she did not fully process the loss of her sister due, in part, to the fact that Adora isolated herself from Camille. Camille deep down sensed that Adora wished it was Camille who had died and not Marian since Camille was never the “perfect daughter” Adora wanted her to be: feminine and obedient girl to her mother's desires and expectations and thus worthy of her mother's love. Hence, Camille decided to find a way in which she would reject her mother's and Wind Gap's oppression by cutting her flesh—a physical representation of a Crazy Jane and her aggressive rejection of her society's oppression.

As already highlighted, the words in which Camille carved onto her body not only reflect her childhood trauma but also her inner conflict between the femininity her mother and

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

town expected of her, and her free-spirited boyish nature. In that respect, Camille resembles the Crazy Jane in her struggle against societal norms as well as to the effects of her childhood trauma induced by her sister's loss and her mother's rejection of her—two emotional traumas that triggered her to self-harm.

3.7. From Deranged to Criminal Females

Evil can be manifested in various forms among which violence, crime, and murder tend to be the most prominent. Evil is also often associated with the deranged workings of the mind (Patterson and Zackheos vii) wherein human beings sometimes resort to unlawful or unnatural acts such as murder because of societal impacts on their mental stability and peace of mind. Criminal psychologists have found that men tend to be more violent and unlawful than women—wherein men are more prone to violence by force of nature (Connell 83) on the other hand women, when forced, can resort to aggression.

In a sense, women can also be evil. As a matter of fact, women were “placed at the epicentre” of explanations on evil since the beginning of time (Patterson and Zackheos vii), for instance:

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, evil is entwined with the female as can be witnessed in the story of Adam and Eve. In Hindu mythology, according to Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, ‘Women are not only the abstract cause of a number of evils and sins in the world, they are also used as the specific instruments of gods to corrupt individual sages and demons.’ (Patterson and Zackheos vii)

Furthermore, Anthony Patterson and Mriena Zackheos give the example of the pagan goddess, Ishtar who is associated with evil precisely during her menstruation (ibid). The effect of the menstrual cycle on women has been historically depicted as being connected with female urges of violence. Nichole H. Rafter and Elizabeth A. Stanko stipulate that the reasons for which women often surrender to vehement evil drives is related to their biological composition which postulates that women are “gripped by biological forces beyond [their] control” referring to the menstrual cycle (Rafter and Stanko np). Furthermore, menstruation also contributed to women being more emotional and irrational to the extent of hysteria—making them more prone to be carried away by violent tendencies (ibid). Moreover, women's use of violence was found to be the result of the accumulation of the patriarchal and societal restrictions on women's lives and freedoms such as being forced to be married, to become housewives and to be docile (Lewis-Horne 233) which is the case of Claire Willington from *The Stepford Wives* as well as Camille, Amma and Adora from *Sharp Objects*. In other cases, according to Kelleher and Kelleher,

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

women may also turn to violence as an outlet for feelings of “greed, jealousy, self-defense, revenge, or psychopathology”, (qtd in Lima 7). In both *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects* no one suspected that women could commit awful deeds like turning women into automations, killing their own daughters or killing little girls and horrifically maiming their bodies. In these stories the viewers were introduced to women not only as victims, which is the preferable status of women in the eyes of patriarchy, but in both stories there are women who kill and also those who harm themselves.

3.7.1. Women as Serial Killers

David Abramsen and Philip Q. Roche explain that aggression-based acts stem from the subconscious part of the mind where mental disorders and childhood trauma manifest themselves (qtd in Sathyanarayana Rao 4). Even when aggression develops into serial murder, the latter is still considered an outcome of “emotional development issues” wherein Peter Vronsky states that, due to child abuse, an infant might develop “a psychopathic personality” (qtd in Venas 2). However, in the case of female serial killers, trauma from infancy is not the only trigger because even trauma and abuse in adulthood can result in murderous urges. In fact, “repression, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, discrimination, outrageous social pressure” under the umbrella of gender roles stifled women and, in some cases, pushed them towards murder as the only release for their psychological failings (Huneycutt np)—such as the cases of Amma and Claire. Once aligning what creates a serial killer and specifically what triggers violence in women in both stories, it is evident that even Claire, Amma and Adora were abused at certain time periods of their lives. Hereafter, this section explores what makes these characters serial killers and what typologies of female serial killers they belong to.

Serial murder is defined as the repetition and recreation of the same crime with different victims. For Claire Willington, despite not physically killing the women in Stepford, she psychologically and mentally ended their human existence and replaced it by a robotic one. One by one, the women are taken under the guise of honeymoons or trips with their husbands to the Men’s Association to be tranquilized before having nanohips inserted into their brains. This act marks the end of those women’s human lives and the beginning of an existence as computer programmed robotic dolls. Though female serial killers tend to target men or family members and not necessarily other women, Claire’s victims were other females whom, as mentioned earlier, were most likely targeted for their feminist ideologies. As such, Claire is a figurative serial killer since she eliminates the *human* women to be replaced by robots just like a serial killer ends the lives of its victims to be replaced by lifeless corpses (D’Cruze 32).

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

The audience is not provided with insights into Claire's childhood and so there is no way of knowing if she suffered any child abuse. The only background story the viewers can access, is about her husband's infidelity: Claire becomes a female serial killer after having witnessed her husband's infidelity with a younger secretary because Claire was busy working. Her husband's betrayal traumatised Claire beyond repair that she resorted to murder to relieve her damaged heart and mind. After the murder, Claire abandons her job as a scientist and decides to live in a suburban town. She also decides to put in place a plan to eliminate women who resembled her old self and instead replace them with women more like her secretary: young, beautiful, and more desirable to men. Hereafter, as Sophia Huneycutt postulates, "outrageous social pressure" often lead women to insanity (np). In Claire's case the injustices she suffered on the hands of her husband because she did not fulfill his expectations leads her into the realm of insanity and murder.

Claire demonstrates traits typically assigned to the male serial killer typology of "power and control" wherein a serial killer wishes to act God-like through taking lives and yet still preserving them by mutilating the bodies or re-grooming them to exert his/her power (Walsh and Ellis 325). In this context, one can interpret Claire's actions as a desire to regain the power she lost because of her marital ordeal—further accentuated by her wish to take control of other women's lives. Furthermore, Claire re-groomed the women after reviving them as female automatons; she rendered them doll-like which translates as an action of power and control—the power and control she did not have in her own life. Analysing Claire's character has revealed that patriarchal oppression can indeed lead to trauma and, in this case, to serial murder. Since Claire functions as a patriarchal agent by targeting feminist women, she belongs to a male category of serial killers instead of a female one—the typology of power-control. The effect of the process of transforming women is highlighted in the contrast of Joanna's physical appearance before and after her transformation: from what is perceived as a depressed and overly masculine appearance to plastic-like overly happy Barbie doll (see figures 26 and 27):

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche



Figure 26 and Figure 27: Joanna before and after her transformation in *The Stepford Wives* (2004, Paramount Pictures).

The fact that Claire reflects a male serial killer typology instead of a female one adds to the idea that she imitated men and wished to have the same power they possessed—that is, she suffers from “penis envy” that sees itself personified via women-women oppression in her degrading women to dolls. Analytically, Claire wished to oppress women who portray masculine tendencies which, according to Andrea Waling, are rejected by patriarchal ideologies on the basis that women must act feminine as to not be rejected and condemned by society (974-975). Furthermore, Claire represents those women “who are controlled by patriarchal ideologies” to the extent that they participate in condemning other women and forcing them to follow the same restrictive feminine stereotype (Ore191). It might not have been Claire’s goal to become an agent of patriarchy but her own ordeal and her loss to male oppression found her refuge in the ranks of patriarchy to once again restore her place as a happy wife, only a deranged, killer at this phase.

In Jean-Marc Vallée’s television series *Sharp Objects* there is more than one serial killer: both Amma and Adora either succeed at murdering more than one female or at least attempt to do so—though not in an identical manner. Adora Crellin was guilty of poisoning her daughter, Marian, causing her death and of poisoning her other two daughters, Camille and Amma. If she had more time Adora would have been successful in her endeavours as she was about to murder Camille if the police had not arrived at the right time. She appears to belong to a mixture of the Black Widow and the Angel of Death typologies—these classifications refer to female serial killers who would poison and kill the people they cared

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

for. The Black Widow would often kill family members using toxin while the Angel of Death type were mostly nurses who worked in hospitals and murdered the people in their care (Froeling 102). Adora was not a nurse, but she played the role of one via her Munchausen by proxy when she would make her daughters ill with “medicine” and then tend to them as a doting mother.

Unlike Claire, Adora’s childhood is discussed both in the novel and the television series: as a child Joya would wake Adora in the middle of the night by pinching her, she would also peel her sunburns or lick a smudge on her body instead of cleaning it. Once, Joya woke seven-year-old Adora up in the middle of the night, drove her deep inside the woods and abandoned her there, leaving her alone to face the horrors of the dark wilderness (*Sharp Objects* Ep.5 23:52- 24:50). Such memories recited by Alan and Adora tell the story of Adora’s childhood trauma, trauma which is one of the documented causes that can turn individuals to violence, and in some cases, even serial murder (Venas 2). Being a psychopath or a sociopath can be related to an individual’s upbringing specifically one’s relationship with their controlling and abusive mother and, as a result, can only find one outlet for such pressure through rage (Kirkland and Cleveland 325). According to Freud a child’s repressed rage can disrupt the development of a child’s subconscious and in turn mutate into unhinged behaviours in adulthood (Venas 3). Adora, having been severely abused and ill-treated by Joya eventually became another version of her mother when she would hurt and humiliate Camille, force Amma to be a doll and poison her three daughters—killing Marian.

Freud’s understanding of the human subconscious mind along with his stratification of the id, the ego, and the superego can assist in understanding Claire, Adora and even Amma’s mental instability. These three characters allowed the id to take over—the subconscious part of the mind responsible for “psychic energy and the psychosexual desires” that is, the dark, lawless part of the mind accountable for primitive impulses such as murderous tendencies (Lifa and Lati 8). Furthermore, Claire, Adora, and Amma allowed the id, which is responsible for their carnal, animalistic, and violent natures, to prevail over their sanity to the extent that they became murderers. However, the id only took over because these women were traumatised by social or motherly abuse: Claire by her husband and the society around her and Adora by her evil mother. As such, Adora demonstrates inter-generational trauma—she is a woman abused as a child and who then continues the cycle by replicating a model of woman-woman oppression. Adora carries on the cycle of violence: as her mother harmed her she

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

strived to harm her daughters as well as wanting to keep them docile and doll-like—which explains why she never liked Camille because Camille was too wild.

In contrast, Amma ensured the continuity of the inter-generational cycle of abuse from Joya to Adora and, then, from Adora to herself. Amma’s own psychopathic nature, hence, was the result of childhood trauma and abuse, similar to Adora. Since infancy Adora dressed Amma like a baby doll and, unlike normal girls, she was not allowed to be sloppy or play freely in order not to ruin the perfect façade of a Barbie doll. More so, Adora used a severe method to control Amma and to ensure she remained dependent on her by constantly poisoning her and keeping her under her control and in her care—thereby building on the façade of the perfect mother who would dote on and care for her ill child and nurse her to health (or more specifically, death). The weight of all the manipulation and control Amma suffered at the hands of her mother led her to become a serial killer who targeted wild tom-boyish girls who were free of any social or familial constraints unlike her (see figures 28 and 29). Ann Nash, for instance “was plane, but she was smart, she...did for herself”, she never wore dresses, nor did she look put together, she looked more like a boy than a little girl (*Sharp Objects* Ep.1 43:23-44:44). Likewise, Natalie was “A spitfire, a contrarian, a tomboy, a goofball. Smart as a whip, she didn’t suffer fools” (ibid Ep.2 10:35- 10:58)—revealing that Ann, Natalie and even the last victim Lily were free spirited, tom-boyish girls whom Amma envied because they were everything she wished to be and could never be because of her mother’s over-bearing control.



Figure 28 and Figure 29: Ann Nash and Natalie Keene from *Sharp Objects*, Ep 1 (2018, HBO).

The way in which Amma ended the girls’ lives stems from what Freud referred to as repressed rage which takes over mental sanity, a rage that is consequential to a mother’s over control (Kirkland and Cleveland 325). As portrayed in figures 30 and 31, the way

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Amma strangling the girls shows how enraged she was and most certainly not because of them but more importantly because of her weakness in front of her repressive mother. Amma acts out against her mother's overbearing control by releasing her innermost anger through killing girls who had the freedoms she could not have—all as a way to regain control over herself.



Figure 30 and Figure 31: Amma strangling Natalie Keene from *Sharp Objects*, Ep 8 (2018, HBO).

Furthermore, once dead, Amma removes the girls' teeth as her serial killer signature (see figure 32) and uses them to build an ivory floor for her doll house to replicate Adora's ivory floor from her house. This action reveals two facts about Amma: first, she wanted to follow her mother's steps or that she is a continuation and an extension of Adora's insanity. Moreover, removing the girls' teeth can be interpreted as a way to take away the happiness they acquired from being free and wild and by removing their teeth they would never smile again—a symbol not only of their innocence and beauty but also of the freedom Amma could never possess.



Figure 32: Natalie Keene's toothless body from *Sharp Objects*, Ep 2 (2018, HBO).

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

As a serial killer, Amma cannot be classified under any specific serial killer typology neither by gender nor by age since there is no record of a thirteen-year-old serial killer. Moreover, Amma's reasons to commit the murders do not correspond to documented motivations typically assigned to serial killers. The category of victims that Amma chose to target is an example of woman-woman oppression. Similar to Claire, Amma targeted those girls who did not fit society's expectations of young girls such as looking beautiful and acting in a docile manner. However, Amma did not seek to re-groom them after the murders and so she does not belong to the same category as Claire. Based on a different categorisation, Amma can be considered an unorganised type of serial killer which tends to be less meticulous in her criminal acts (Foeling 98). Amma did not keep the murders identical since the bodies of the girls were found in different places showing her lack of organization and her confidence that she would not be caught. Indeed, Amma's shrewdness and appeal also set her up as a mixed serial killer who is both disorderly and careful (Foeling 98). However, Amma's young age and immaturity could be interpreted as the reasons for which she was not as meticulous in her crimes.

Though Amma is a different type of female serial killer, there are some common aspects that she shares with male serial killers such as the "hedonistic" type—a killer that murders to gratify their sexual desires or their hunger for "thrills or comfort" (Walsh and Ellis 324). Amma, equally, was often triggered by her urge to fulfil the sexual urges ignited by her mother's control and, as she explained to Camille, she found satisfaction in exerting harmful deeds: "sometimes you need to be mean, or you'll hurt" (*Sharp Objects* Ep.6 45:38-45:50). Amma's words are double-edged; on the one hand she was despicable by being mean to her friends John Keene and even her sister in public—as a defence mechanism to hide her own fragility. On the other hand, Amma's intentions behind the word "mean" meant her crimes of killing the girls, which she committed to remove a type of girls she could not stand to behold—girls who had the freedom to dress and act as they wanted, unlike herself. Those girls were neither expected to be flawless nor were they compared to their "perfect" dead sister such as Amma (ibid 53:30-53:40). Amma, like Claire, appears to be the representative of patriarchal oppression, not because she believed in its value systems and/or ideologies, but because she herself was forced to be feminine by dressing like a doll and acting in a feminine manner in the presence of her mother. Amma as her mother's victim could not kill herself, instead she killed those girls who committed what she wished to do and could not. She, like Claire, aimed to end the life of unfeminine

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

girls/women not just to relieve them of the rejection and harm their patriarchal societies would make them endure but as their personal retribution against their own victimisation.

The analysis of the three serial killers, Claire, Adora, and Amma reveals that they shared a common reason behind their criminal acts: all of them suffered within a repressive society as represented through men like Claire's husband or women such as Joya and Adora—all of whom support society's dominant patriarchal ideologies. In turn, those oppressed women including Claire, Adora, and Amma turned into matriarchs serving as the agents of patriarchy: Claire against the women in town, Adora towards her daughters and Amma towards unfeminine girls. The motivations the three women share revolve around jealousy and an urge to change their victims into docile versions of themselves. Eventually, all three females commit a type of female oppression in a quest to regain a sense of personal power they feel that they have lost.

3.7.2. Women as Victims

In *The Stepford Wives* 2004 film and the adapted series of *Sharp Objects*, the women are victimised on the basis of being *too* successful or *too* unfeminine, a female whose “'masculine' role made her an object of contempt” (Kristeva 27). As explained earlier, Claire is the mastermind behind the plan to create perfect women, yet her plan only succeeds because she worked behind the scenes while her robot husband Mike led the men in town to carry out her plan. On the other hand, Amma targeted girls by manipulating them and leading them into the woods to be killed and maimed.

Claire is not the only one to blame for the oppression of women—the men in Stepford, even in the 21st century, reflect patriarchal value systems that enclose women within restrictive stereotypes that support their egos. In fact, based on the feminist theory in film and Laura Mulvey's studies on the male gaze in cinema, women's depiction in films is based on how men desire to see women (Mulvey 75). Not to mention that visual media can also “communicate strong—some would even say cartoonish—gender stereotypes” (Andersen et al 262). Hereafter, the representation of women in Stepford as victims and the men as the culprits corresponds to the expected representation of men as masculine and controlling and women as passive and harmless. Even Claire, who indirectly controlled the men (eg. using her robot husband Mike to speak to the men instead of her), was a victim of her husband and she consciously, or not, surrendered to what the society wished her to be. She gave up her status as a successful scientist to become a Stepford housewife which means that even Claire is a

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

victim of patriarchy despite willingly choosing to revert to a pre-feminist state. Claire's choice stems from feelings of fear to be rejected from society and hence her only way was to return to a traditional and hyper-idealized female role vis-à-vis dominant patriarchal values.

Whether in the book or the film versions, women in *Stepford* are forced to become docile versions of themselves where they are victims of the patriarchal idealization of femininity whether it is exerted by men, such as in the novel, or by Claire Willington in the 2004 film. According to the American Psychological Association films often portray a "massive exposure to portrayals that sexualize women and girls and teach girls that women are sexual objects" (qtd in Andersen et al 262). Indeed, the *The Stepford Wives* film, though made in the 21st century, depicts a generation of men that still view women as objects to serve them as docile sexual dolls. It is not necessarily made for women to think of themselves as objects but for them to understand that the fight against misogyny is still ongoing since patriarchal ideologies and the male gaze persist. Nonetheless, it seems that the victimisation of women in the latest adaptation of *The Stepford Wives* was slightly altered with Walter's character. While in the novel he was just like the rest of the men who happily receive their Barbie wife; in the film, Walter represents the new man of the 21st century who stands by his independent wife and does not wish her to be his passive sexual object. Consequently, Walter's support of his independent wife prevents Joanna from being not only a victim of patriarchy, but from even being portrayed as a mentally unstable woman like she was in the novel.

In contrast, women in *Sharp Objects*, both in the literary and visual versions, are portrayed as victims who found release through madness. It is challenging to tackle each victim in Flynn's literary creation because some of the women in her story are mentally unstable. In the novel Camille says:

Sometimes I think illness sits inside every woman, waiting for the right moment to bloom. I have known so many sick women all my life. Women with chronic pain, with ever-gestating diseases. Women with conditions. Men, sure, they have bone snaps, they have backaches, they have a surgery or two, yank out a tonsil, insert a shiny plastic hip. Women get consumed. (Flynn 179)

Camille's words specifically highlight women's fragility in terms of misogynist patriarchal ideologies that have traditionally depicted and inscribed women as passive objects who are less rational and less strong. As explained earlier, the protagonist's mental fragility is closely related to the different types of abuse each experienced leading to their (gendered) victimisation. For instance, Adora was victimised by her mother until she developed

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Munchausen by proxy to gain the sympathy of people to fill the void of never being truly and unconditionally loved by her mother—a need that she tried to replace with the sympathy of people.

Amma, on the other hand, developed psychopathic tendencies since she was the victim of Adora’s mistreatment whereas Camille became a self-harmer to relieve her feelings of unworthiness. On the other hand, there are those victims who could not survive abuse such as Natalie, Ann and, more importantly, Marian. The following pyramid which was the outcome of further analysis into Adora’s relationship with her daughters (see figure 33) explains how victimisation worked in the Crellin/Preaker family and how it gave different results for each girl.

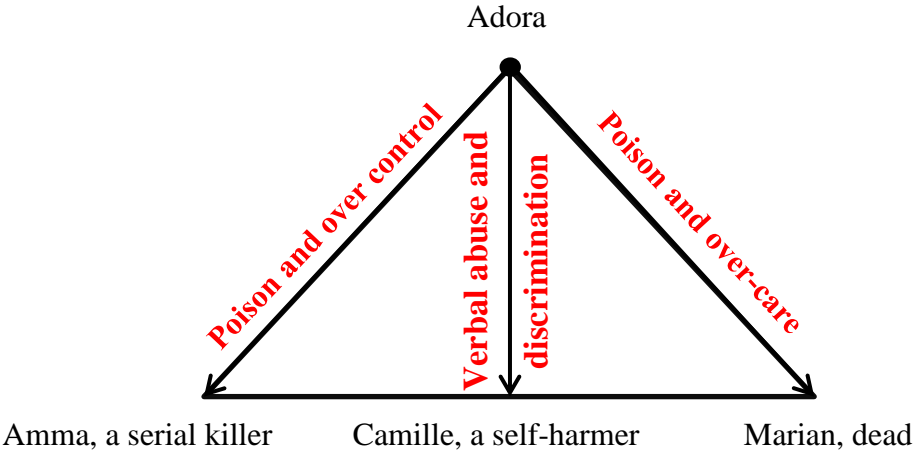


Figure 33: A pyramid which explains victimisation in the Crellin/Preaker family by Adora Crellin

At the top/peak of the pyramid is Adora as her daughters’ abuser and oppressor wherein she victimises them through similar methods. On the right side is Marian who was too docile and innocent; suffocated by her mother’s excessive care and fatally poisoned by Adora—the epitome of submissiveness. In the middle is Camille who was constantly reminded of how different she is from Marian: she is too wild and unpleasant in her mother’s eyes. In truth, Camille never allowed Adora to care for her and that spared her life from being poisoned because of Adora’s Munchausen by proxy. Instead, being labelled unworthy by Adora led Camille to develop a severe condition of self-abuse by way of cutting her body. As for Amma, who was controlled and constantly poisoned by Adora, she embraced her mother’s abuse and internalised it insomuch that she too became an abuser. On the spectrum of Adora’s abuse, each of the girls represent three different outcomes: Marian who accepted everything Adora gave her until her death; Camille who rejected Adora’s

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

advances falls into the pit of loneliness and rejection; and finally, Amma, who accepted oppression and internalised it, became a duplicate of Adora.

The analysis of the pyramid of abuse highlights that the story of *Sharp Objects* showcases different types of women and how they handle abuse. Marian was a doll and, according to Kotani and LaMarre, accepting to live as a doll signifies death either physically or metaphorically, because it might insinuate the end of freedom and independence for a woman. Hence, Marian's death could be interpreted as her escape from her mother's oppression since she was too young and weak to resist in any different way. Women, after all, could either relieve themselves through suicide or surrender "to life as a doll, pet, or robot" (Kotani and LaMarre 50). On the other hand, abuse in some cases can result in violent tendencies and even in committing murders; and societal and even motherly oppression can often lead girls to lose their mental sanity and eventually commit murder (Huneycutt np)—which is Amma's case. Adora's influence on Amma transformed her from the doll to the monstrous serial killer. As for Camille, self-harm is associated to a mother-daughter relationship (Gardner 72), and so it is evident that Camille's troubled connection to her mother found its expressive outlet through her self-harm (cutting).

Based on studies by Rosi Braidotti, the concept of woman and monster often overlap, hence it is no surprise that fairy tales often include female characters as witches, vampires, and other mythical monsters. It is believed the parallel between a monster and a female lies in the fact that the female body physically transforms during pregnancy where the female body does not belong to the normative static shape of the normative (male) body. Mothers, hence, like a monster shape-shift when they get pregnant, or girls do when they mature (Braidotti 65). Flynn's introduction of monster-like females, or more precisely monster-like mothers, such as Joya and Adora, seem to stem from the way early researchers understood women as monsters. Not only is the female body capable of procreation, female monstrosity in Flynn's characters also stems from the oppression they experience and how it renders them mentally ill—thus, their monstrosity does not necessarily lie in "physical distortion or abnormality" (Alkan Genca 162). Monstrosity, indeed, can be found even in those with great beauty. For instance, Adora, the epitome of femininity, suffered Joya's lack of affection and so she wished to remould her daughter Amma to replace the mother's love she never experienced. However, in the process, Adora only harmed Amma (physically and psychologically) and turned her into a different version of Joya, another monster.

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Nonetheless, even monstrous women like Adora and Amma are victims of patriarchy because they only reached this stage due to societal oppressions and restrictions. Like the women in *Stepford*, women in *Wind Gap* also suffer from the implications of the male gaze and its patriarchal gendered value systems. Adora, for instance, had to preserve her façade of the perfect southern girl, even after getting pregnant out of wedlock—a façade she recovered by marrying and establishing the “idyllic” family life with Alan. There are but slight hints that even Adora had to abide by the society’s norms. Adora shares her opinion with Amma about Calhoun Day’s play being based on a woman’s sacrifice for her husband because it was written by men. In that scene even Camille said she would never have thought Adora was a feminist (*Sharp Objects* Ep.5 09:09- 09:18). Yet, Adora was a strong independent woman, she had her own business, and she was also the dominant person in her marriage to Alan, but because of societal expectations she kept the image of the happily married woman. Amma, similarly, asked her male teacher to change the play to show women’s resistance but was met with refusal on the basis that women during the Civil War did not fight along with men (*ibid* Ep.4 13:30-13:41). As a result, one can conclude that Amma was only shown as her own mother’s victim—victim of the patriarchal expectations she forced upon her. In the scene of the play, the patriarchal expectations are demonstrated through a man, Amma’s history teacher, which further proves that even Amma was a victim of patriarchy.

Ira Levin and Gillian Flynn’s novels carry strong meanings and insinuations about women. Even after being adapted to the screen, the stories only prove to be further complicated as they continue to highlight the complex situations women can experience within their respective contexts. Women, based on the two works, not only suffer from male oppression, but also from female abuse and they even suffer from their mother’s physical and psycho-emotional abuse. As seen in the adaptations, the weight of the suffering women experience can translate itself in the form of surrendering to death, nervous tantrums, Munchausen by proxy, murder and even harming their own selves. Hereafter, patriarchal oppression even if carried out by women on women results in horrendous effects on the female psyche that transforms her into a serial killer or a self-harmer.

3.7.3. Women as Self-harmers

Self-harm, like hysteria and other mental illnesses, is highly attributed to women and women are more likely to harm themselves rather than harm other people (Pickard 72). As for its

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

triggers, it is believed that self-harm, specifically for women, is often associated with a set of elements in a “response to trauma” (Baumgaertner np). For Freud, it is associated with “ego, castration, penis envy, and the like”, while for feminist thinkers it is ascribed to matters of “gender and protest, and rebellion against bodily norms” (qtd in Gurung 33). In the selected works, self-harm is showcased in different manners, i.e., mental or physical self-harm which are to be analysed accordingly.

In *The Stepford Wives*, it is difficult to grasp if any of the characters harm themselves, yet it is evident that Claire Willington’s abandonment of her true self to take on the traditional role of housewife can be considered, from a feminist perspective, as one of the highest levels of self-harm. As already discussed, Claire imitated a patriarchal figure by undermining women and degrading them into doll-like automatons. As such, one may say that she is plagued by “penis envy”; she envied the power men possessed that she imitates the androcentric behaviour of controlling women and forcing them to fit certain stereotypes. In that sense Claire’s self-harm stems from her wish to possess as much power as men had to regain the power she lost once her previous life was shattered. She, according to Deutsch and Freud, develops a “masochistic side, sometimes in conflict with a more sadistic desire to attain to the masculine position of greater freedom, in social terms” (Blumenfeld 82). In other words, she develops a masculine side that craves power and control, not simply based on her love for power but, because of having lost everything in her previous life that mattered to her—her profession as a scientist and a loving husband.

In *Sharp Objects*, Adora self-harmed through plucking her eyelashes whenever she felt nervous, as well as through bringing herself extreme agony by harming her own daughters, though also coupled with certain pleasure because of Munchausen by proxy. Unlike Claire, Adora is a mother, and hence she found herself restricted by the society’s expectations of what a “good mother” should be. As claimed by Blumenfeld, adult women suffer an internal turmoil, a conflict between two urges whether to adopt “narcissism”, self-love, or altruism through the impulse to “love others” and to be a loving, “nurturing mother” (81-82). Adora, likewise, attempted to be the perfect mother in the eyes of society by caring for her girls even in illness, but in truth she was the reason behind their sickness, and she only cared for them to gain others’ sympathy. Nonetheless, as already highlighted, Adora suffered hysteria and Munchausen by proxy as the results of societal pressure and even her mother’s abuse. Adora’s abnormal behaviour, instead, can be understood as her failure in controlling her subconscious id. Adora’s case is relevant to Sarah LaChance Adams’ book entitled *Mad Mothers, Bad*

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

Mothers, and What a “Good” Mother Would Do, where Adams highlights that bad mothers who end up harming, abusing or even murdering their children are most likely insane, since good mothers cannot find it within themselves to purposefully harm their children (Adams 3). Even though some of the mothers who killed their children were not found to be clinically mad they still suffered extreme pressure that they eventually found relief in killing their offspring (ibid 3). Adora, in that sense, was not a bad mother by choice but because of having been victimised by her own mother and her inner struggles of being a perfect wife and mother in the eyes of society while she was inwardly damaged.

The primary example of self-harm in *Sharp Objects* is Camille’s obsession with carving words onto her flesh in a way to relieve herself from feelings of unworthiness, loss, and grief. Camille started cutting at the age of thirteen, when her sister died which coincided with the beginning of her menstrual cycle. In addition, at age of thirteen, Camille is gang raped by her classmates—a violent act exerted by the boys over her body—another way that trauma is written onto Camille’s body, not by her hand but by others (ibid). As previously discussed, Camille also experienced an unstable, flawed relationship with her mother which can also lead to self-harm—words such as “ripe”, “dirty”, and “sweetheart” were used by Adora to address Camille and were inevitably cut on Camille’s flesh as well. While “ripe” and “dirty” have negative connotations, words of endearment such as “sweetheart” had more of a negative influence on Camille because her mother never meant them to express affection towards her, but only to appear as a good mother in the eyes of society.

Self-harm, therefore, whether for Claire, Adora, or Camille is the result of social and familial oppression. For Claire, the pressure of a patriarchal society led her to jail herself in the body of a housewife; for Adora, the expectations of Wind Gap coerced her to harm not only herself but even her daughters; and finally, Camille who was not only the victim of her maturing body but also of her mother’s psycho-emotional abuse that she resorted to carving her flesh. It is apparent that women who harm themselves or others are most likely to do so when they are under the pressure of stronger, persistent external forces, specifically entities that aim to oppress these women physically and/or psychologically.

3.8. Conclusion

This chapter focused on analysing the adapted versions of *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*. The analytical process first aimed at identifying the similarities and differences between the written forms and their visual adaptations. This chapter explored the

Chapter Three: Adaptive Shifts and the Female Psyche

transformations and/or revisions in term of plot, characters, and the ending of both stories. Since hypertextuality served as the analytical tool, it was clear that the temporal space between the novel and the visual version governed the extent to which the works are distinct. In accordance, *The Stepford Wives*, written in the 1970s and adapted in 2004, proved to carry more differences than *Sharp Objects* which was both written and adapted in the 21st century with a short temporal gap of twelve years.

Despite the different extents to which both stories develop in the novels, *The Stepford Wives* film argues closer to the issues espoused in the original novel—the degradation of women and the wish of a patriarchal society to annihilate female independence and replace it by female docility. Though, in the film version, the misogynist plan was carried out by a woman, it was found that her incentives stem from her own struggle against male oppression. Likewise, *Sharp Objects* as a novel and a television series strive to expose the struggles women go through, even when women harm one another, or lead each other to violence and murder; they can still be victims of societal and patriarchal ideologies.

Furthermore, the comparative study between both stories with the critical approaches of dialogism, intertextuality and narration reveal a clear connection between both stories in that they both reveal types of women which are rarely discussed, i.e., deranged, violent women who not only harm men but even each other. Moreover, upon deconstructing both discourses, both adaptations depict a woman-woman oppression, along with strong matriarchs who are directed by patriarchal philosophies advocating for a specific (hetero-patriarchal) definition of femininity. Those matriarchs and their victims, ergo, suffer the effects of oppression which is visible through their mental instabilities. In conclusion, this analysis has strived to prove the grave effects of patriarchal oppression exerted by women that negatively impacts other women's psycho-emotional health. As a result, the mental instability of women under patriarchal oppression can be reflected through violence when women harm themselves or each other. That is, the genesis of female serial killers may stem from the need to preserve the expectations of patriarchy or form a resistance against it.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

The objective of this research analysis focused on the examination of the dynamic evolution of female representation in 20th and 21st century literary works of *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects* and how this representation changes due to temporal adjustments when adapted onto the screen as well as revealing new forms of female oppression. For the purpose of this study, this insidious type of oppression manifests itself through women who have internalized patriarchal ideals, which then result in physical, emotional, and psychological abuse towards their fellow women. Moreover, the study proposed that certain consequences of this pervasive oppression can lead women to mental instability and even violence. Specifically, the research investigated the emergence of female serial killers who target their own gender, and the correlation between this phenomenon and the “women-women” oppression discussed earlier.

This research analysis was based on the idea that gender inequality persists in the US despite the endeavours of female activists and feminist movements. Nonetheless, this study also highlights the idea that these inequalities are not only perpetrated by men but that women also play a role in degrading each other and enforcing patriarchal norms and expectations. The phenomenon of women oppressing and policing each other’s behaviour is a complex matter because it shows the gravity of a situation when women have internalized misogynistic ideologies and standards, leading to the perpetuation of oppressive, gendered societal frameworks. The consequences of this type of oppression manifest itself in the form of psycho-emotional trauma leading to mental instability. Throughout history, and mainly during the early 20th century, women’s mental illness has often been founded on female rebellious and non-conformist behaviour. Furthermore, it documents how societal oppression can result in mental breakdowns which insinuates that even women-women oppression can lead to mental health issues for women. As such, this thesis developed a critical analysis in three chapters each of which focused on specific queries concerning the shift in the female status, the rise of independent women and the emergence of female-female oppression along with the results of this new type of subjugation and its reproduction through visual adaptations.

The introductory chapter of this study provided a comprehensive overview of the scientific and literary background foundational for this academic study. The chapter delved into the conceptual framework of women as literary characters or real-life individuals in the US via Anglophone literature and their film adaptations, particularly in the 20th and 21st centuries. In doing so it examined the societal norms surrounding patriarchal expectations of women and the rise of the strong, independent female. The chapter examined the role of women in novel writing and the development of female characters in literature, which was

General Conclusion

attributed to feminist movements and the retrieval of previously overlooked women's literature. The introduction also considered important literary concepts such as dialogism, intertextuality, and narration, which are critical for understanding the feminine-feminist dichotomy in *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*. Psychology and criminology were other approaches considered as interpretative methodologies for literature and the novel, providing insights into female psychology and how an androcentric perspective of the world impacted (and continues to impact) the construct of female identity and mental health. Furthermore, the chapter analyses adaptations of literature into other forms of media such as film and television and compares the feminine-feminist ambivalence in the novels with their respective adaptations. The chapter concludes by highlighting the significance of intertextuality and hypertextuality as comparative tools between literary and visual media.

The second chapter of this thesis critically analysed both novels by examining key elements such as plot summaries, characterizations, and literary discourses. It is evident that both authors present the duality of feminine/feminist characters and/or docile/monstrous females, depicting the clash between these two archetypes and the female struggles they represent. The novels also showcase the impact of the external world, including feminist movements and some of their notable figures. Moreover, characterization of the protagonists revealed the clash between domesticity and independence, and how this can lead to female-female oppression and the portrayal of women as monstrous or mentally unstable. Additionally, the intertextual elements highlighted the dialogic relationship between the novels and their literary influences, revealing the connections between women, oppression, and dominant patriarchal ideologies and value systems. Ultimately, the analysis reveals that *The Stepford Wives* represents the patriarchal dominion, while *Sharp Objects* depicts the shift from male-female subjugation to women-women oppression. Although the novels provide valuable information for this study, further exploration of their adaptations is necessary to understand the impact of the temporal shift and how it affects female representation. The following chapter investigated the transformation of female representation through adaptation and its contribution to the portrayal of monstrous females resulting from woman-woman oppression.

The third chapter delves into the analysis of the adapted versions of *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects*. The critical analytical process involved identifying the similarities and differences between the written forms and their visual adaptations, exploring the transformations in plot, characters, and plot endings. The analytical tool of hypertextuality

General Conclusion

highlighted the temporal gap between the novel and the visual version, determining the extent to which the works differ. *The Stepford Wives*, written in the 1970s and adapted in 2004, carries more differences than *Sharp Objects*, which was both written and adapted in the 21st century. Despite the different extents to which both stories develop in the novels, *The Stepford Wives* film argued closer to the issues espoused in the original novel, such as the degradation of women and the wish of a patriarchal society to annihilate female independence and replace it with female docility and blind obedience. Similarly, *Sharp Objects*, as a novel and a television series, exposes the struggles women go through, even when they harm each other or lead each other to violence and murder. The comparative study between both stories, using the critical approaches of dialogism, intertextuality, and narration, reveals a clear connection between both stories in that they both reveal types of women that are rarely discussed: deranged and/or violent women who not only harm men but even each other. Both adaptations depict woman-woman oppression, along with strong matriarchs who are directed by patriarchal philosophies advocating for a specific (hetero-patriarchal) definition of femininity. These matriarchs and their victims suffer the effects of oppression, which is visible through their mental instabilities. In conclusion, this analysis strived to prove the grave effects of patriarchal oppression on women, which can manifest in different ways, but with a specific focus on female insanity and violence when oppression leads women to harm themselves or each other. In some cases this is evidenced by the genesis of female serial killers, either for the sake of preserving the expectations of patriarchy or as a form of resistance against it.

As far as the results of this study are concerned the first chapter provided a theoretical background to the shift in the female status from docile characters in the 20th century to more powerful and flawed female characters in the 21st century. Moreover, the second chapter engaged with the question of female representation in the selected 20th and 21st century novels, wherein *The Stepford Wives* shows a clear connection with second wave of feminism's demands for equality, freedom of choice and the freedom for women to control their own bodies. Indeed, the women in Stepford prove to be the reflection of the male desire to trap women in a domesticated state where the women's only purpose is to keep their houses clean and their husbands satisfied, physically and emotionally. On the other hand, the contemporary novel *Sharp Objects* reflects a change in female representation when rebellious female characters are introduced to showcase the rise of independent women. Moreover, Amma's and Adora's character representation seeks to unveil the hidden truth of women's

General Conclusion

psychological instability when oppressed by restrictive patriarchal ideologies. That is, though they appeared perfectly feminine on the outside they were monstrous killers on the inside.

Concerning the existence of female-female oppression, this analysis revealed that women in *Wind Gap* were oppressed by one another: Joya, Adora and Amma created a generational cycle of female oppression on the premise of preserving feminine perfection and docility. Furthermore, Camille is also considered as the ultimate victim of female oppression as she was systematically abused by her mother since childhood, raped by men and turned into a self-harmer to support the idea that woman-woman oppression can result in mental instabilities, trauma and psycho-emotional damage. Camille, Amma and even Adora all help in answering the question concerned with the consequences of female oppression wherein all three characters reflect a different type of mental damage. Adora suffered Munchausen by proxy which led her to kill her own daughter, Amma turned into a psychopathic female serial killer who targets unfeminine women and finally Camille turned into a cutter who voices her rejection of her mother's oppression on her own body.

The final chapter examined the role of filmic and television adaptations in representing the shift in the female status and representation in contemporary literature. Adaptations of literary works created in different time periods are inevitably influenced by the social and cultural contexts of their time. In particular, the adaptation of *The Stepford Wives* from the original 1972 novel to the 2004 film version demonstrates a notable shift in the representation of female characters from victims of patriarchy to female serial killers who psychologically murder other women to preserve their femininity and docility. This shift is exemplified by the addition of Claire Willington, a character who is nearly identical to Adora (in *Sharp Objects*) in both physical appearance and belief in the importance of femininity for social acceptance. Moreover, the revelation that Adora herself is a serial killer who targets her own daughters to maintain her idea of feminine perfection mirrors the plot of *The Stepford Wives* adaptation when Claire psychologically "kills" the women in town by transforming them into feminine automatons to preserve them in a permanent state of domestication. In this way, the existence of Claire serves to draw a parallel between the two works, highlighting the evolution of female representation in adaptations over time.

This study proved that though Ira Levin and Gillian Flynn belonged to different time periods and are of different genders, they both engaged in a dialogue of representation of female struggle based on their particular social contexts. They both highlighted the desire of a

General Conclusion

heteropatriarchal institution to preserve women in perpetual docility and also reflected women's reaction to this type of oppression and its consequences on their mental health. As for the adaptations discussed here, they have shown that the 21st century should be aware of the gravity of woman-woman oppression and its form of female psychological trauma resulting from this type of gendered expectations. Furthermore, the written and adapted works reflect the idea that female serial killers can also target their own gender especially if these serial killers were victims of childhood abuse related to adherence to inequitable gender roles and patriarchal expectations of being doll-like. Joanna Eberhart, Claire Willington, Camille Preaker, Amma Crellin and Adora Crellin were all expected to be embodiments of the ideal of docile feminine dolls. Even though some of these protagonists attempt to reflect this image, they ultimately fail because the external societal pressures exerted on them only made them sick women, mentally unstable and/or deranged to the point of becoming evil masterminds, serial killers, or self-harmers in reaction against these externally defined unobtainable ideals of the perfect woman.

In conclusion this thesis engaged in an interdisciplinary methodology to investigate the complexities of the pressures of socio-cultural expectations and patriarchal institutions on predetermining acceptable female behaviour. In its comparative study of *The Stepford Wives* and *Sharp Objects* the unobtainable ideals of female "perfection" demonstrate how societal pressures and expectations can negatively impact a woman's mental health to the point that she can lose her sanity and resort to taking the life of another, or even inflicting harm upon herself. This study was both exhilarating and rewarding in equal measure—the labyrinthine complexity of the female psyche is vast and multifaceted, and although this analysis has merely grazed the surface, it has identified crucial elements that help to fill an important gap in the study of female oppression and its relation to the troubled female psyche. As a devoted enthusiast of psychology, I must acknowledge that the selected works and their respective adaptations provided an abundance of rich and compelling material for my study. Indeed, it was a privilege to undertake this inquiry and gain a deeper understanding of the female psyche and varying forms of feminist struggles. Furthermore, I wish to express my interest in further exploring the psychology of the serial killer through Japanese Manga and Animes because I believe it to be a rich and yet not explored field, and as such I wish to close this thesis with a quote from Naoki Urasawa's Manga *Monster*.

General Conclusion

The end? What is the end...I've seen the end many times. What is the end...

I was born in a town that was straight out of a fairy tale. Many people died there, and when I walked away, I held hands with my other self. To me it seemed like we were the only two people in the world. Neither one of us possessed a real name.

- Johan Liebert



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Abstract

This thesis explores the intricate dynamics of gender oppression within American society, shedding light on a nuanced aspect often overshadowed in discourse: the phenomenon of "woman-woman oppression." While discussions typically focus on male-female oppression dynamics, this research ventures into the realm of feminine relationships, exposing how patriarchal constructs compel women to uphold traditional roles, often at the expense of their autonomy and well-being. Through an analysis of literary and cinematic works such as Ira Levin's "The Stepford Wives" and Gillian Flynn's "Sharp Objects," the study unveils the psychological ramifications of societal and familial pressures on women, elucidating how such oppression can drive some to violent extremes, particularly female serial killers targeting their own gender. The research underscores the significance of temporal shifts in media representations, illustrating their role in reshaping societal perceptions of women. Ultimately, the thesis posits that woman-woman oppression not only exists but also manifests dire consequences for women's mental health, sometimes culminating in acts of violence, emphasizing the urgency of addressing these complex dynamics within broader discussions of gender equality and societal progress.

ملخص

تستكشف هذه الرسالة الديناميكيات المعقدة لقمع المرأة داخل المجتمع الأمريكي، مسلطة الضوء على جانب معقد غالباً ما يتم تجاهله في الحوار: ظاهرة "قمع المرأة من المرأة". بينما تركز المناقشات عادة على ديناميكيات القمع بين الذكور والإناث، يخوض هذا البحث في مجال العلاقات النسائية، ويكشف كيف تجبر البنى الأبوية النساء على الالتزام بالأدوار التقليدية، غالباً على حساب استقلالهم ورفاهيتهم. من خلال تحليل الأعمال الأدبية والسينمائية مثل "زوجات ستيفورد" لإيرا ليفين و"أجسام حادة" لجيليان فلين، تكشف الدراسة عن الآثار النفسية للضغوط الاجتماعية والعائلية على النساء، موضحة كيف يمكن لمثل هذا القمع أن يدفع بعضهن إلى التطرف العنيف، خاصة النساء القاتلات المتسلسلات اللواتي يستهدفن نفس جنسهن. يؤكد البحث على أهمية التحولات الزمنية في تمثيل وسائل الإعلام، موضحة دورها في إعادة تشكيل النظرة المجتمعية للنساء. في نهاية المطاف، تقترح الرسالة أن قمع المرأة من المرأة ليس فقط موجوداً ولكنه يظهر أيضاً عواقب وخيمة على الصحة النفسية للنساء، وفي بعض الأحيان يؤدي إلى أعمال عنف، مشددة وعلى ضرورة التعامل مع هذه الديناميكيات المعقدة ضمن المناقشات الأوسع نطاقاً حول المساواة بين الجنسين والتقدم الاجتماعي.

Résumé

Cette thèse explore les dynamiques complexes de l'oppression de femme au sein de la société américaine, mettant en lumière un aspect nuancé souvent éclipsé dans le discours : le phénomène de "l'oppression des femmes par les femmes". Alors que les discussions se concentrent généralement sur les dynamiques d'oppression entre hommes et femmes, cette recherche s'aventure dans le domaine des relations féminines, exposant comment les constructions patriarcales poussent les femmes à maintenir des rôles traditionnels, souvent au détriment de leur autonomie et de leur bien-être. À travers une analyse d'œuvres littéraires et cinématographiques telles que "Les femmes de Stepford" d'Ira Levin et "Sur ma peau" de Gillian Flynn, l'étude dévoile les ramifications psychologiques des pressions sociétales et familiales sur les femmes, éclairant comment une telle oppression peut pousser certaines à des extrêmes violents, en particulier les tueuses en série ciblant leur propre genre. La recherche souligne l'importance des changements temporels dans les représentations médiatiques, illustrant leur rôle dans le remodelage des perceptions sociétales des femmes. En fin de compte, la thèse affirme que l'oppression des femmes par les femmes non seulement existe, mais entraîne également des conséquences graves pour la santé mentale des femmes, parfois aboutissant à des actes de violence, soulignant l'urgence de traiter ces dynamiques complexes dans des discussions plus larges sur l'égalité des genres et le progrès sociétal.