

# Gender Stereotypes and Development of Female Characters in the Works of Chinua Achebe, Tamora Pierce and Robert Reed

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU**  
**UČITELJSKI FAKULTET**  
**ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**

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**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

**GENDER STEREOTYPES AND  
DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE  
CHARACTERS IN THE WORKS OF  
CHINUA ACHEBE, TAMORA PIERCE  
AND ROBERT REED**

**Zagreb, srpanj 2021.**

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**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

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Development of Female Characters in the Works of Chinua  
Achebe, Tamora Pierce and Robert Reed

MENTOR: izv. prof. dr. sc. Krunoslav Mikulan

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY .....	4
SAŽETAK .....	5
1. INTRODUCTION .....	6
2. GENDER AND GENDER STEREOTYPES .....	7
2.1. Gender .....	8
2.2. Gender Stereotypes .....	10
2.3. Gender Stereotypes in Literature .....	13
3. FEMINIST APPROACH TO LITERATURE .....	16
3.1. Feminism and Postfeminism .....	18
3.2. Feminist Literary Criticism .....	21
4. DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN LITERATURE .....	25
4.1. Female Characters in the Novel <i>Things Fall Apart</i> by Chinua Achebe .....	29
4.2. Female Characters in the Novel <i>Alanna: The First Adventure</i> by Tamora Pierce .	33
4.3. Female Characters in the Novel <i>Marrow</i> by Robert Reed .....	35
5. CONCLUSION .....	39
REFERENCES .....	41

## **SUMMARY**

In this thesis the influence of gender stereotypes on literature will be explored. The thesis is divided into three main parts: the overview of gender and gender stereotypes in society and literature, the history of feminist movements and the development of feminist literary criticism and the analysis of the development of female characters in three novels.

The first part of the thesis presents different views on gender, different motivations of gender stereotypes and the representations of gender roles and gender stereotypes in different genres of literature.

The second part analyses the motives of the different waves of feminist movements and the evolution of feminist literary criticism and its influence on literature.

The third part of this thesis focuses on the examination of the development of female characters throughout history and throughout different genres of literature. Furthermore, three important novels, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *Alanna: The First Adventure*, the first novel from *The Song of the Lioness* series by Tamora Pierce and *Marrow* by Robert Reed and their development of female characters will be examined.

**Key words: gender, gender stereotypes, feminist literary criticism, female characters**

## SAŽETAK

U ovom radu istražit će se utjecaj rodnih stereotipa na književnost. Rad je podijeljen na tri glavna dijela: pregled roda i rodnih stereotipa u društvu i u književnosti, povijest feminističkih pokreta i razvoj feminističke književne kritike te analiza razvoja ženskih likova u tri romana.

Prvi dio rada prikazuje različite poglede na rod, različite motivacije rodnih stereotipa te zastupljenost rodnih uloga i rodnih stereotipa u različitim žanrovima književnosti.

Drugi dio rada analizira motive različitih valova feminističkih pokreta i razvoj feminističke književne kritike te njezin utjecaj na književnost.

Fokus trećeg dijela rada je proučavanje razvoja ženskih likova kroz povijest te kroz različite žanrove književnosti. Nadalje, proučit će se tri važna romana, *Things Fall Apart*, Chinue Achebea, *Alanna: The First Adventure*, prvi roman serije *The Song of the Lioness* autorice Tamore Pierce i *Marrow*, Roberta Reeda te njihov prikaz i razvoj ženskih likova.

**Ključne riječi:** rod, rodni stereotipi, feministička književna kritika, ženski likovi

## 1. INTRODUCTION

People tend to have different views on gender. Some believe that gender is imposed by the society and therefore, is not even real. On the other hand, some believe that gender is related to the biological features, making men and women distinct in their looks, personalities, behavior and so on. Consequently, as some believe that when a child is assigned to a certain sex they have to learn appropriate behavior to match their gender, gender roles have been formed. In this thesis, the prevalence of gender roles in literature will be analyzed. After exploring the motivation of gender stereotypes and the history of the feminist movements and feminist literary criticism, the development of female characters of three novels will be deeply analyzed. These novels are *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, *Alanna: The First Adventure* by Tamora Pierce and *Marrow*, by Robert Reed. These three novels, all by different authors, seem to portray gender stereotypes in very different ways. Luckily, every novel has at least one well-developed female character. The development of strong female characters in literature is important since most women in the past have led their whole lives in oppression. Strong female heroes give hope to impressionable readers that people cannot easily be stereotyped based on their gender.



## **2. GENDER AND GENDER STEREOTYPES**

The debate over the difference between sex and gender has been present for a very long time. Generally, sex can be described based on biological factors while gender can be described based on cultural factors. However, not everyone seems to agree when it comes to associating gender with culture and society. Some scientists explain gender as a result of different biological processes that happen in every human being. They believe that different chemicals in men and women are connected with their behaviors and capabilities. (West and Zimmerman, 1987) A few authors, such as Eckert and McConnell (2003), try to negate that premise. They believe that gender is created in order to impose differences between men and women. Since the moment they are born, children are taught to behave in a certain way that is thought appropriate for their gender. Consequently, children learn to enact those gender roles that are expected from them.

The presence of gender roles in our society also invokes the presence of gender stereotypes. One of the descriptions of stereotypes states that they are structured based on an abstract knowledge that links a group of people to a certain set of traits or characteristics. (Hamilton and Sherman, 1994) In addition, there are a lot of different approaches and principles that try to explain the nature and the motivation of stereotypes, some of which will be mentioned further on. As it has already been stated, stereotypes try to describe various groups of people. They can be based on race, ethnicity, political orientation, gender and more. (Bordalo, Coffman, Gennaioli and Schleifer, 2016) The focus in this thesis will be on gender stereotypes. Men and women tend to be stereotyped in almost every aspect of their lives. They tend to be described negatively with certain adjectives based on their gender. Women are most likely described as ‘whiny’ or ‘emotional’ and men as ‘aggressive’ or ‘loud.’ (Eckes and Trautner, 2000) Women are thought to be better in taking care of children. As a result, men are less likely to gain custody over their children after divorce. On the other hand, women are less likely to gain promotions and pay rise in their careers. In addition, even certain careers tend to be described as masculine or feminine. Needless to say, gender

stereotypes can have a negative impact on both men and women. Furthermore, gender stereotypes also tend to permeate literature. The implication of certain gender roles can be found in various pieces, ranging from picture books and children's literature to fantasy books. According to Castagno-Dysart (2016), girls in children's books tend to be characterized as very passive while boys are characterized as active. In young adult books, a study by West (2010) showed that a lot more titles include main male characters rather than main female characters. Moreover, masculine traits tend to be described with negative adjectives ("aggressive"), while feminine traits are described with mainly positive adjectives ("nurturing"). These kinds of representations of men and women can leave a negative impact on impressionable readers.

### 2.1. *Gender*

The distinction between sex and gender appears to be a rather simple one. Eckett and McConnel-Ginet (2003) explained that sex is a biological categorization often based on reproductive potential, while gender is the social elaboration of biological sex. Therefore, sex can be described based on biological factors and gender based on cultural and social factors. Gender tends to be described as a "social construct" as society determines what type of behavior is typically masculine and what is typically feminine. Children are raised according to those determinations. Since assigning a sex to a baby, parents start to "perform an act which places the baby into a clear category from which we then expect to make predictions about its future." (Paechter, 2007, p. 6) In other words, parents raise their children according to the category they are said to fit in. Following these acts, the child starts to recognize themselves as a member of one of two of those categories: male or female. As future adult men and women, they observe their parents and other members of the same sex and form their gender identity. Furthermore, they start to act according to their gender identification. Gender identity is concerned with all the meanings that a person applies to themselves on the basis of their gender identification. (Burke, 1980) Thus, if a person identifies themselves as masculine, they will behave according to that distinction and vice versa.

On the other hand, some scientists believe that gender is related to biology. Scientists argue that biological differences between men and women determine their gender by causing differences in their capabilities. (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003) Furthermore, in Western societies, the accepted cultural perspective on gender views women and men as naturally defined categories of being with distinctive behaviors that can be predicted from their reproductive functions. (Garfinkel, 1967, as cited in West and Zimmerman, 1987) Therefore, scientists believe that different levels of chemicals in men and women lead them to behaving in different ways – “a division perceived to be natural and rooted in biology, producing in turn profound psychological, behavioral, and social consequences.” (West and Zimmerman, 1987, p. 128) However, a lot of evidence of this premise is based on small samples and often sick populations. (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003) Besides one of the obvious examples of biological differences between men and women that leads to different behaviors – the fact that men cannot experience giving birth, there is still a lot to explore and conclude about humans and our cognition before various conclusions are made. Moreover, Eckert and McConnell (2003) believe that a person’s chromosomes or hormones do not determine things such as their occupation or gait. They argue that, even though a lot of males are predetermined to be bald (which is based on the biological features), there is nothing biological that stops women from shaving their heads. Therefore, gender is socially created to produce differences between men and women. Even where there are biological differences, they are being exaggerated to the point that every person learns and enacts a certain gender role.

Burke and Stets (1992) define gender roles as “shared expectations of behavior given one’s gender.” (p.1) As it has already been stated, there are certain gender roles in a society that cannot be altered. However, a lot of gender roles are cultural, which means they change from culture to culture. Furthermore, gender roles also change over time in given cultures. There have been a lot more gender inequalities in the past than there are today. Still, that does not mean that certain gender roles that spark inequalities do not exist now. Rather, it can be said that humans have come a long way but still have a long way to go. In the most of today’s society, the view on gender has been changing. Certain rules that dictate the “proper” behavior for girls and the “proper” behavior for

boys are becoming more fluid and simple. (Brower, 2017) There are not as many restrictions anymore and a lot of people feel free to act as they feel, rather than as what society or some arbitrary norms tell them. Therefore, individuals interpret their own feelings and desires and act upon them. Of course, it should be stated again that various cultures differ from each other and on that account the situation is not the same everywhere.

## *2.2. Gender Stereotypes*

According to Hamilton and Sherman (1994), stereotypes are abstract knowledge structures that link a social group to a set of traits or behavioral characteristics. Based on these, people make premature perceptions of a certain group of people, whether they are based on true or false information. There are three conceptual approaches to stereotyping: the psychodynamic, the sociocultural and the cognitive approach. (Hamilton and Sherman, 1994) The psychodynamic approach “stresses the importance of motivational and psychological factors that may accrue with the use of stereotypes.” (Araya, 2003, p. 6) This approach emphasizes childhood experiences in order to explain the use of stereotypes. (Araya, 2003) The sociocultural approach “focuses on how beliefs and attitudes toward different social groups develop and are maintained.” (Araya, 2003, p. 6) In other words, this approach emphasizes the role of society in the making and the use of stereotypes among certain groups of people. Finally, the cognitive approach “views stereotypes as cognitive structures that contain the summary of perceivers’ knowledge and beliefs of a society and its members.” (Araya, 2003, p. 6) This approach focuses on the cognitive processes that lead to the development of stereotypes.

On the other hand, McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears (2004) identify three principles to understand stereotypes. These principles focus on the social psychology of stereotyping. The first principle views stereotypes as aids to explanation. People use stereotypes in order to understand the world and the people around them. McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears (2004) argue that people cannot have an impression of a group unless they can

tell the difference between that group and some other group. The second principle explains stereotypes as energy-saving devices. This principle states that stereotypes are formed in order to save the perceiver's time in the attempt to understand the people around them. "Treating people as group members saves energy because it means that we can ignore all of the diverse and detailed information that is associated with individuals." (McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears, 2004, p. 4) This principle is associated with the earlier-mentioned cognitive approach to stereotyping. The idea is that individuals have limited capacities to perform various cognitive tasks such as processing information and that stereotypes help them perform those tasks. The last principle describes stereotypes as shared group beliefs. The premise is that, if every person had a different stereotype of a certain group of people, they would not be interesting or widely accepted. Rather, stereotypes should be shared in order to spark interest among people. (McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears, 2004)

Shared stereotypes raise the question of their origin. Why are Asians immediately associated with a great knowledge of math or men with strength and ambition? McGarty, Yzerbyt and Spears (2004) offer two explanations: one is that a common environment provides similar experiences to different people and therefore similar stereotypes are formed, and the other is that there is a pool of shared knowledge, social representations and ideologies from which different people sample and it is this which produces the shared views. However, the first explanation has already been rebutted as there is not enough evidence of the direct link between stereotypes and stimulus experiences. Therefore, the second explanation is more accepted. Bordalo, Coffman, Gennaioli and Schleifer (2016) explain stereotypes as omnipresent as they cover various groups: racial, political, demographic, situations and genders. Ellemers (2018) explains that gender tends to be a binary categorization as it is considered a primary feature in the process of recognizing a person. Therefore, as gender categorizations are easily polarized, gender stereotypes reinforce perceptions of differences between men and women. The two sexes tend to be differentiated in ways of their behavior, actions, life choices, occupations and more. For example, men are thought to be overconfident which results in more risky choices, whereas women are thought to be more careful. This kind of observation can be explained by "referring to inherent biological

differences between them.” (Ellemers, 2018, p. 277) However, a lot of those theories have often been disproved. This information leads to the conclusion that the most likely reason why men and women are differentiated in certain ways lies in the way they are raised and educated. For instance, many parents teach their children appropriate behaviors for men and women. They convey what they consider appropriate behaviors through toys they buy, their comments and actions. Moreover, media tends to represent gender-stereotypical expectations as well. For example, by showing men in expert roles and women in caregiving roles in advertisements and TV series, they send a certain message to impressionable boys and girls. (Ellemers, 2018) Furthermore, men and women tend to be described in different ways. According to Deaux and LaFrance (1998) as cited in Eckes and Trautner (2000), women tend to be described using communal attributes (affectionate, emotional) and men using agentic attributes (independent, adventuresome). Furthermore, people are likely to negatively describe women as “whiny” or “weak” and men as “loud” or “arrogant.” As it can be seen, there is a wide range of gender stereotypes. However, are those stereotypes helpful or harmful? Ellemers (2018) suggests that stereotypes might be helpful in situations where people are trying to understand how large groups of people differ from each other. However, gender stereotypes tend to “exaggerate the perceived implications of categorizing people by their gender and offer an oversimplified view of reality.” (Ellemers, 2018, p. 278) They justify gender inequalities. The impact of gender stereotypes has been researched a lot. Some studies show that identical application letters result in different job offers depending on the gender of the person. Consequently, in their careers, women are less likely to be promoted than men. (Ellemers, 2018) Moreover, body posture also conveys gender stereotypes. In public situations, the two genders tend to adopt exceptional frame postures, with men displaying more expansive and open postures, whereas women are more likely to show closed and contractive postures. (Cashdan, 1998, as cited in Ellemers, 2018) Such postures convey information to others. In one study, men and women were asked to take on specific body postures on a mock job interview. Men and women who had adopted a more expansive posture were perceived as more hireable by their evaluators. (Ellemers, 2018) “Thus, the body postures typically shown by women – which are reinforced when

gender stereotypes are implicitly activated – signal submissiveness and low power to other as well as to themselves.” (Ellemers, 2018, p. 285-286) However, the mentioned facts do not imply that women are more stereotyped than men. Research suggests that men are more likely to express all negative emotions as anger while women express them as sadness. (Ellemers, 2018) As a result, emotions are labeled as gender-stereotypical. In addition, fathers are less likely to be granted custody of their children after divorce, based on the assumption that women are better equipped to take care of children. (Ellemers, 2018) In order for gender stereotypes to not be harmful towards any gender, people need to be educated on them. Education leads to acceptance, which leads to a better life for every member of the society.

### *2.3. Gender Stereotypes in Literature*

Although the view on gender has been changing and individuals today have more freedom deciding who they are and who they want to be, there is still a large amount of books that portray gender in traditional light. Needless to say, literature has always been filled with books that convey gender stereotypes. However, gender stereotypes have not always been present in children’s books. Literature in the nineteenth century reflected the traditional values of time and was used to transmit these values to the next generation. (Peterson and Lach, 1990) Sadly, in the 1960s and the 1970s, researchers began to notice gender stereotypes in children’s books. (Narahara, 1998) A lot of researches concluded that the number of references to male characters dominates over the number of references to female characters. (Jackson and Gee, 2005 as cited in Castagno-Dysart, 2016) Furthermore, female characters are shown in mainly domestic activities while male characters are shown in a wider range of activities. (Castagno-Dysart, 2016) In addition, research found that boys were often described as independent and adventurous leaders while girls were passive and dependent on men. (Creany, 1995) Since everything people read leaves an impact on them, so do the picture books and children’s books filled with gender stereotypes. According to Creany (1995), gender stereotypes act as limits to children’s potential growth and development. Children’s interests may be restricted because of the imposed gender stereotypes. Moreover,

inaccurate representation of their gender may have an impact on their self-esteem and the way they perceive themselves.

Besides children's books, gender stereotypes can also be found in young adult fiction. A study conducted by Bean and Harper (2007) analyzed the representation of male characters in three young adult novels. The authors found a few examples of men as "representations of masculinity outside the norms of tough-guy poses and violence" (Bean and Harper, 2007, p. 27) In addition, West (2010) conducted a study which analyzed (among other things) the characteristics and behaviors of main characters. The author concluded that out of 194 books used for her study, 101 titles (52%) included males as the main character and only 68 titles (35%) included females as the main characters (in the remaining 25 titles there were no distinguishable main characters). Furthermore, when it comes to the characteristics of the characters, the results were interesting. "For the masculine traits, aggressive and competitive were exhibited nearly twice as many times in male characters (38.9%) as female characters (20%)." (West, 2010, p. 30) On the other hand, female characters were described as affectionate, nurturing and understanding. (West, 2010) These kinds of gender stereotypes can affect teenagers and young adults as they are still developing and trying to figure out who they are. Imagining a teenager boy constantly read about male characters that are always described as "aggressive," one cannot help but fear how this will influence their confidence and self-esteem.

When it comes to fantasy literature, Meuchel (1999) conducted a study to determine whether young adult male characters are stereotyped depending on the gender of the author. The author used thirty-six novels (18 by each author). When it comes to the physical description of characters, six authors used words such as "active", "strong" or "energetic," distributed equally between male and female authors. In the analysis of the homelife of the characters, three had abusive fathers (all female authors), three novels had no mention of fathers (two male authors, one female) and in two books the fathers were either dead or died during the book (both male characters). Considering the supporting characters who helped the protagonists along the way, one book had no supporting characters (written by a female), five had love interests (three female



authors, two males) and interestingly, six books had examples of male support (two female authors and four male). (Meuchel, 1999) The author concluded that women use more descriptors than men in physical characteristics as well as more female characters (both in love interests and supportive roles) in their books. In addition, the author finds that “the real differentiation comes with abusive fathers and caring mothers, both of which are used by female authors” (Meuchel, 1999, p. 29) which she thinks is a bit stereotypical. Meuchel (1999) concluded that female authors rely on physical traits of the male characters, rather than personality development. Perhaps the reason for this instance is to avoid gender stereotypes since it is hard to get into the psyche they have never experienced.

In contrast, in the novel *She: A History of Adventure* (1982) by Henry Rider Haggard gender stereotypes take a different turn. A female ruler, Ayesha or “She-who-must-be-obeyed” is an ultimate authority to the African natives. Ayesha is portrayed as “a woman who both inspires male desire and dominates male sovereignty.” (Fatemi Cristin, 2014, p. 31) The story follows two characters, Holly and Leo who travel to Africa to find Ayesha. When they eventually find her, they cannot help but fall in love with her, “despite her awful and unfeminine ways.” (Godfrey, 2012, p. 74) This book is an example of portraying women as if they are taking advantage of their sexuality in order to rule others. Ayesha’s beauty is described as ‘awful loveliness’ presenting it as something bad and evil. (Roy, 2016) In addition, Ayesha’s actions are seen as merciless, portraying Holly as a “male victim of female sexuality.” (Roy, 2016, p. 24) The exploitation of her sexuality can also be seen in a scene where Ayesha makes Leo kiss her over his dead love. “This chapter holds Ayesha responsible for a sexually-charged scene that is ‘horrible and wicked.’” (Roy, 2016, p. 24) As a result of her exploiting her beauty, Ayesha is punished and pays for her actions in the end of the book. When Ayesha is stripped of her supernatural powers, “her primitive nature is revealed in its purest forms” (Fatemi Cristin, 2014, p. 38) In her final moments, Ayesha is humiliated by becoming a mockery. She is depicted as nothing more than “a monkey,” “a badly-preserved Egyptian mummy,” and “a two-months’ child.” (Haggard, 1982, p. 216-217) Therefore, her “demise is not simply a death, it is a “devolution” of sorts, and She is reduced into a primitive being before the men’s eyes.” (Fatemi Cristin, 2014, p. 38) This

implies that Ayesha is nothing without her powers and her beauty. She stops being superior to men as she cannot use her sexuality to get whatever she wants and to do whatever she wants anymore. Haggard's novel has been described as "a misogynist novel" that wants to "exterminate the figure of powerful and confident women." (Roy, 2016, p. 26) To conclude, there are a lot of different examples of gender stereotypes in literature, some of which will be carefully analyzed further on.

### **3. FEMINIST APPROACH TO LITERATURE**

Women have always been and still are fighting against oppression. Today, the mistreating of women is not that noticeable but that does not mean that it does not exist. However, in the past, the mistreating was very obvious. Women did not have basic rights – they did not have the right to vote, they were seen as less intelligent than men and they were only seen as wives and mothers. Their primary job was to care for their children. Women also depended on their husbands because they did not have their own money. Men were the ones who had jobs and made a living for the family. After living for so long in that form of a patriarchal society, some women have finally decided to try and put a stop to it. Hence, feminism emerged. The feminist movement worked on empowering women. One of the most influential feminists, who is believed to have started the movement with her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), is Mary Wollstonecraft. Even though all her hard work towards achieving gender equity had been spoiled by her husband's *Memoirs* (1798), she still managed to influence and encourage a lot of other writers. In the second wave of the feminist movement, activists focused on the attempt to equalize men and women. (Thornham, 2001) The author that stands out the most in the second wave of feminism is Simone de Beauvoir, who, with her *The Second Sex* (1949), managed to help women recognize the injustices that the patriarchal society has put them through. In the second wave of feminism, feminist literary theory has also emerged. Feminists believed that when it comes to oppression, women were facing it in the field of literature as well. A lot of works by women authors were disregarded as unimportant. In addition, it was believed that women wrote only in a way that they were allowed to write. (Humm, 1994) "The literary works of (white)

male authors describing experience from a (white) male point of view was considered the standard of universality – that is, representative of the experience of all readers – and universality was considered a major criterion of greatness.” (Tyson, 2006, p. 84) All the works of female authors and authors of color that did not describe the white male experience were not considered important. (Tyson, 2006) Therefore, everything that was out of boundaries and not by the rules went out of print. That left little room for creativity and the freedom of choice when it comes to writing books. However, feminist literary criticism managed to deal with several issues that women in that time faced.

Feminist approach to literature does not only deal with the act of creating literature. It also deals with literature from the position of readers. Every literary critic should, while reading certain texts, keep in mind how women are described and how gender stereotypes and gender roles are presented in the text. On the surface, some texts may seem as though they are empowering women, but when a deeper look is taken, there is a whole different story. Such deconstruction of texts, as Tyson (2006) states, “is also useful to feminists in helping us see the ways in which patriarchal ideology is often based on false oppositions.” (p. 94) In order to recognize inequalities in texts, Tyson (2006) gives advice to not run away from one’s own subjectivity, but to be aware of it and include it in the interpretation of the texts. Feminist approach to literature offers a few questions that readers should ask themselves while reading any texts. Some of these questions are: “What does the work reveal about the operations (economically, politically, socially, or psychologically) of patriarchy? Does the work reinforce or undermine patriarchal ideology? Does the work seem to define femininity and masculinity? What does the work suggest about women’s creativity? What role does work play in terms of women’s literary history and literary tradition?” (Tyson, 2006, p. 119-120) Depending on the literary work in question, the reader may ask one or the combination of the mentioned questions. (Tyson, 2006) These questions are just a small step towards uncovering underlying issues of patriarchy in the literary works of many authors.

### 3.1. *Feminism and Postfeminism*

In the past, women struggled with oppression and patriarchy. They did not have voting rights and had little access to education. Furthermore, married women were dependent on their husbands. Sadly, women had little chance to ensure their financial security, so they had to marry in order to have a safe future. In marriage, a women's main role was to bear children - preferably male heirs. (Hodgson-Wright, 2001) As a result of the poor treatment of women, a feminist movement emerged. Hodgson-Wright (2001) defines feminism as any attempt to face patriarchy in its many manifestations. It is believed that modern feminism began with Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Wollstonecraft emphasized the need to educate women and to make them rational. Furthermore, she is "mainly concerned with the way society constructs femininity, especially through its inadequate, misdirected education of young girls." (Sanders, 2001, p. 15) Wollstonecraft understands that most women will still marry and depend on their husbands, however, she wanted them to be educated in order to "prepare them for the possibility of economic independence, to give them freedom and dignity, rather than the ability to fascinate potential husbands." (Sanders, 2001, p. 16) However, all of Wollstonecraft's work was spoiled by her husband's *Memoirs* (1798) of her life. Once she was seen as a woman who had been leading an 'immoral' life, readers stopped taking her seriously and her book went out of print. (Sanders, 2001) Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft had succeeded in inspiring other writers. Thus, more writings aimed at empowering and motivating women emerged. Some authors, such as Thompson, recognized that "even women whom society treated as fortunate and settled were privately suffering from unacknowledged needs and repressive treatment from men." (Sanders, 2001, p. 17) Therefore, even though some women were financially secure and settled, they still did not feel as if they mattered since their sole purpose had been to take care of their husbands and children. As a result of the poor treatment, female activists named *the suffragettes* appeared. They "sought independence and refused traditional confines of marriage." (Sanders, 2001, p. 23) as well as "fought hard to give married and single women a stake in the country's political process." (Sanders, 2001, p. 23) Speaking of the activists of the first wave of feminism, Caroline Norton stands out. In 1836, when her husband abducted their children and tried to sue her for

divorce, she started researching her legal position. Consequently, she attacked “the anomalies in the law which deprived an innocent woman of her legitimate children” (Sanders, 2001, p. 18) which resulted in a new act which “permitted separate wives of ‘good character’, against whom adultery had not been proven, to have custody of any children under seven, and access to their older children.” (Sanders, 2001, p. 18) On the other hand, in America, the issue of women’s rights appeared alongside debate about the rights of slaves. Cady Stanton campaigned for “modification of the divorce laws, married women’s property rights, and the vote.” (Sanders, 2001, p. 21) As a result of Stanton and other activists, women of Wyoming and Utah had the vote in 1870s, whereas women in the northern states did not have it until 1920. (Sanders, 2001) In the area of employment, reformers tried to impose a notion of women working for a living. Therefore, women were first employed in the areas that were seen as an “extension of their ‘natural’ sphere as mothers and carers: teaching, philanthropy, nursing, workhouse visiting, and work on school boards.” (Sanders, 2001, p. 21)

In the second wave of feminism, the focus was on the liberation of women. It is frequently defined as the product of a modified social and political context that is fueled with greater feminist consciousness. (Thornham, 2001) The second wave focused more on the issue of sex discrimination. The notion was to equalize men and women and form a sort of partnership between them since male power was still “exercised and reinforced through ‘personal’ institutions such as marriage, child-rearing and sexual practices.” (Thronham, 2001, p. 26) On the other hand, the context of the second wave in Britain is a little bit different. Women focused on the “industrial militancy of working-class women like sewing machinists” (Thronham, 2001, p. 26) As a result, the first national Women’s Liberation conference was held in 1970. Feminists formulated four demands: for equal pay, equal education and opportunity, 24-hour nurseries, and free contraception and abortion. Therefore, the focus was on women as an oppressed social group and on the female body and its autonomy. (Thronham, 2001) In the USA, The Black Movement spread alongside the feminist movement. Women of color were confronted with a double burden – race and gender. Since they struggled with more than average white women, women of color had felt no connection with the feminist movement. (Thronham, 2001) On the other hand, social division in Britain centered on

class rather than race. Similar to the women of color, working-class women had felt disassociated to the Women's Liberation Groups. (Thronham, 2001) In addition, in the field of theoretical writing, as Thornham (2001) stated, "1970 is the year which marks an explosion of feminist theoretical writing." (p. 28) One of the authors that stands out is Simone de Beauvoir with her work *The Second Sex* (1949). With this work, Beauvoir had helped women from all over the world to recognize their distinctive frustrations in terms of the general condition of women. (Walters, 2015) She argues that throughout history, "woman has been denied full humanity, denied the human right to create, to invent, to go beyond mere living to find a meaning for life in projects of ever-widening scope." (Walters, 2015, p. 98) In short, women were seen as objects that serve a certain purpose.

Moving on, second wave feminism has dissolved into postfeminism. As Phoca and Wright (1999) explain, "postfeminism does not mean feminism is over." (p. 3) Rather, it signifies a sort of shift in feminist theory. The movement emerged in the late twentieth century in a number of contexts (political, cultural, academic and more). (Brabon and Genz, 2009) The term itself originated from the media and it was always used to indicate a "joyous liberation from the ideological shackles of a hopelessly outdated feminist movement." (Gamble, 2001, p. 36) Therefore, some understand postfeminism as an anti-feminist movement that discredits 'old' feminism. (Gozdecka and Macduff, 2019) Postfeminism can also be interpreted as a backlash against feminism as the media tries to persuade women to believe that feminism is outdated and not worthy of consideration. (Gamble, 2001) Moreover, media depicts feminism as 'women's worst enemy' as it is blamed for "a series of female illnesses, from burnout and infertility to depression and mental health problems." (Brabon and Genz, 2009, p. 51) Furthermore, backlash suggests that 'all battles have been won' and there is no point in the feminist movement anymore. The movement also suggests that women 'cannot have it all' and that they must choose between their home life and work life. (Gill and Scharff, 2011) In result, feminism lost its position and the feminists were confronted with a wider range of issues; from racism, classism to heterosexism. (Gill and Scharff, 2011) Working single women were cautioned that, "unless they hurry and change their overly liberated lives, they are going to end up loveless and manless." (Gill and Scharff, 2011, p. 55)

Moreover, the state of being ‘unwed and female’ was seen as an illness that can only be cured by marriage. Women who focused on their careers were presented as selfish and deficient because they neglected their essential roles as wives and mothers. Therefore, women were being discouraged from trying to juggle a family and a job. (Gill and Scharff, 2011)

On the other hand, Gozdecka and Macduff (2019) state that Boucher and French (2011) observe that the definition of postfeminism is a bit more complex and that it has similar ideals as feminism. Apart from understanding postfeminism as anti-feminism, it can also be understood as “a diversifying and complementing narrative” and a “continuation of the feminist narrative, albeit in a modified way.” (Gozdecka and Macduff, 2019, p. 37-38) This understanding of postfeminism suggests that “a woman wearing a veil contesting a norm that constrains veiling in her country and a woman in a different societal structure contesting veiling as a majoritarian standard” (Gozdecka and Macduff, 2019, p. 43) are going through an equally valid feminist struggle. These struggles can be associated with some of the old feminist struggles. Henceforth, women should continue to fight for their freedom, no matter what the notion of ‘freedom’ represents to each person. Therefore, this view of postfeminism proposes that it is not a rejection of feminism, rather, an attempt to bring feminism closer to the marginalized women.

### *3.2. Feminist Literary Criticism*

The origin of feminist literary criticism dates back to the second-wave of feminism. Feminist literary critics are concerned “with the ways in which literary texts have the power to produce gender representations at odds with women’s experiences.” (Humm, 1994, p. ix) Moreover, many feminist literary critics argue that feminist literary criticism shares three basic assumptions. The first assumption is that “gender is constructed through language and is visible in writing style; and style, therefore, must represent the articulation of ideologies of gender.” (Humm, 1994, p. 4) However, as Humm (1994) states, ideology itself contains the conception of contradiction because ideology is something that we construct by ourselves in order to explain our

experiences. Naturally, since women are provided with a lot more different representations of themselves than men, the ideologies of women are bound to encompass more contradictions. (Humm, 1994) The second assumption of feminist literary criticism is that “there are sex-related writing strategies.” (Humm, 1994, p. 4) The belief is that women, in the nineteenth century, wrote only as they were allowed to write. However, some researches pointed out that men and women use language in different ways. They use different vocabularies and form different kinds of sentences. (Humm, 1994) Finally, the third assumption of feminist criticism is that “the tradition of literary criticism, like the economic and social traditions of which it is part, uses masculine norms to exclude or undervalue women’s writing and scholarship.” (Humm, 1994, p. 5) Virginia Woolf recognized that all the books describing women were actually written by men. (Humm, 1994)

In addition, feminist literary theory addresses a few issues of literary criticism. Firstly, there is the issue of masculine literary history. This issue has been addressed by “re-examining male texts, noting their patriarchal assumptions and showing the way women in these texts are often represented according to prevailing social, cultural and ideological norms.” (Humm, 1994, p. 7) Second, the invisibility of female writers has been addressed by charting “a new literary history which gives full weight to the texts of neglected women, and women’s oral culture, previously regarded as extra-literary.” (Humm, 1994, p. 7) Third, the issue of the ‘feminist reader’ has been addressed by “offering readers new methods and a fresh critical practice.” (Humm, 1994, p.8) This practice gives meaning to undervalued textual moments such as mother/daughter empathy. (Humm, 1994) Fourth, feminist criticism forms new collectives of writing and reading to make everyone act as feminist readers. (Humm, 1994)

Moving on to feminist literary criticism through time, the 1960s and the 1970s were signified by a couple of achievements of said criticism. The first achievement was the successful attempt to “highlight gender stereotyping as an important feature of literary form.” (Humm, 1994, p. 8) The second achievement was to provide a justification for the persistent reproduction of these kinds of stereotypes. The third achievement was the discovery of lost or disregarded examples of women’s literature and women’s texts.



(Humm, 1994) One of these ignored examples of women's texts was Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1986). In this work, Ellmann challenges the female stereotyping and points out certain authors that "commonly ascribe images of instability, spirituality and passivity only to women." (Humm, 1994, p. 9) However, the beginning of feminist criticism in the West marks Adrienne Rich's essay 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision' (1971). In this essay, Rich describes basic aims of feminist literary criticism and its mission to "undermine the misogynist organization of knowledge by exposing the political construction of that knowledge in the academy, in the media and in everyday society." (Humm, 1994, p. 9) In the 1970s feminist criticism moved into gynocriticism. In other words, it moved into the study of women writers. A lot of authors were discovering a number of neglected women writers. (Humm, 1994) Moreover, Ellen Moers's *Literary Women* (1977) was considered as "one of the first texts to give women writers a history, describe women's choices of literary expression, and to make an identificatory celebration of the power of women writers." (Humm, 1994, p. 10) On the other hand, Josephine Donovan, in her *Feminist Literary Criticism* (1975), tried to replace masculinist values with a new form of feminist criticism. Donovan focused on androgyny or integrated sex roles. (Humm, 1994) What is more, in many of her essays, famous writer Showalter divided criticism into two categories. The first type of criticism's focus was on the woman reader (the consumer) and the second one's was the woman writer (the producer).

Moving on to the feminist criticism in the 1980s and the 1990s, Marxist feminism appeared. The notion was that feminist criticism "needed to cultivate multivoiced critiques of literature." (Humm, 1994, p. 13) This wave of feminist criticism had been influenced by Elizabeth Abel's essays which offered an "informed psychoanalytic reading of women's writing." (Humm, 1994, p. 14-15) Feminist criticism managed to prove that literature was not just a collection of various texts but also a collection of deeply structured social and sexual ideologies. What is more, the 1980s flourished with feminist creative writing in the forms of biographies, fiction and poetry. Also, feminist criticism in the mid-1980s focused on racial differences and the ways to understand Black principles of criticism. As Black and lesbian critics led to reshaping of critical identity, gender theory occurred in the 1990s. (Humm, 1994) "Gender studies opened

up the possibility that feminist literary criticism could respond to gender theories.” (Humm, 1994, p. 20) However, Tyson (2006) address some of the major issues of gender studies. Some of these issues are “(1) patriarchal assumptions about gender and gender roles that continue to oppress women, (2) alternatives to the current way we conceptualize gender as either feminine or masculine, (3) the relationship between sex and gender (between the way our bodies are biologically constructed and the genders to which we are assigned), and (4) the relationship between sexuality and gender (between our sexual orientation and the ways in which we are viewed in terms of gender.” (Tyson, 2006, p. 108)

When talking about the feminist influence on children’s literary studies, Paul (2004) focuses on three areas of academic children’s literature influenced by feminist criticism: rereading, reclaiming and redirection. Rereading focuses on previously unrevealed interpretations of certain texts. (Paul, 2004) By the 1970s, it was “common knowledge that assumptions about good literature had been predicated on the belief that the adult white male was normal, while virtually everyone else was deviant or marginal.” (Paul, 2004, p. 142) However, feminist critics started to deconstruct ideological assumptions in various texts. Those deconstructions focused on the reinterpretation, rehabilitation and re-creation of certain texts. Feminist reinterpretations of certain texts turn stories that were thought to be about struggles into stories about success of women and their healing. (Paul, 2004) As an example of re-creation Paul (2004) mentions author Ursula Le Guin who wrote the *Earthsea* novels. The first three *Earthsea* novels were written in the genre of “traditional heroic fantasy.” (Paul, 2004, p, 144) However, twenty years after the publication of these novels, Le Guin “recognizes things about that world that she didn’t understand when she made it.” (Paul, 2004, p. 144) As she educated herself on feminist literary criticism, she understood that she was simply writing by the rules. Therefore, in her next *Earthsea* books, Le Guin creates a female hero. (Paul, 2004) Moving on, reclaiming focuses on the “reissuing of long out-of-print books by women authors.” (Paul, 2004, p. 145) As Paul (2004) states: “the texts being rediscovered by feminist critics are important because they provide a historical context for our own ideological assumptions about gender, about what constitutes good literature, and about what is worth remembering, circulating and retaining for study.” (p. 146) Finally,

redirection focuses on the attempt of the feminist theory to provide a chance for texts by people marginalized by patriarchal colonial societies. (Paul, 2004)

Focusing on the contemporary feminist literary criticism, Tyson (2006) came up with a number of typical questions of feminist literary criticism. These questions should be answered while deconstructing a certain text. Some of the questions are related to the portrayal of relationship between men and women, the definition of male and female roles in the text, and so on. Tyson (2006) also mentioned a few methods of deconstructing texts based on the feminist literary criticism. The analyst should focus on the way women are described (especially if the author is male), how the reader identifies with the characters of the same gender, noticing differences in how men and women write, examining the ways in which patriarchy is or is not resisted and so on. As Tyson (2006) mentions, those are just some questions that the reader should ask themselves to get them thinking about the texts in a productive, feminist ways. The goal is to “use feminist theory to help enrich our reading of literary works; to help us see important ideas they illustrate what we might not have seen so clearly or so deeply without feminist theory; and to help us see the ways in which patriarchal ideology blinds us to our own participation in, or at least complicity with, sexist agendas.” (Tyson, 2006, p. 120)

#### **4. DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN LITERATURE**

Literature is thought to portray human experiences through the thoughts and actions of characters. Just like women have been oppressed in their real lives, some of the female characters in literature have been portrayed in the same way. In the past, almost all female characters have been attributed with passive roles. They have been described as the ones who need help and guidance from men in every aspect of their lives. One of the novels that portrays women as less important than men is C. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1995). In the novel, men are superior to women and their only job is to serve their husbands and take care of their children. If they do not obey, they are punished. According to Ferguson (1980), female characters can be categorized into seven

stereotypes: “the wife, submissive and dominating; the mother; the old maid; the sex object; the goddess; and the ‘liberated’ woman.” (p. 34) There are both positive and negative sides to every category. Some of the negative sides are that, by being described as some of these categories, women were always inferior to men. Furthermore, “to a woman reader, male images exalting mothers, submissive wives and sex goddesses seemed as removed from reality as their images revealing contempt and disgust for ‘bad’ women.” (Ferguson, 1980, p. 34) When it comes to the category of the ‘liberated’ woman, female characters who achieved some sort of autonomy seemed to pay an excessive price. (Ferguson, 1980) However, there has been a major shift in the 1970s. As feminists shared a “belief that simply perceiving the negative images of women in male writing and countering them with positive ones by women would lead to a closer relationship between literary images and the reality of women’s lives,” (Ferguson, 1980, p. 34) feminist literary criticism emerged. Said criticism encouraged some men and many women to portray their female characters in different light.

One of female authors who, long before the creation of the feminist literary theory, created a female character who was bending rules is Louisa May Alcott with her novel *Little Women* (1868). The story follows four March sisters and their lives. The female character who is way ahead of her time is Josephine “Jo” March. Jo does not care about her appearance or her clothes. She is not satisfied and rather disappointed by the fact that she was born a female. Moreover, Jo is not interested in getting married or having children. Her main concern is to become a successful writer who will have the ability to make her own money, unlike her youngest sister, Amy, whose goal in life is to marry a wealthy man who will take care of her. Both of these female characters are strong, however, in different ways. Jo wants to fight patriarchy and be able to make money in order to support her family. On the other hand, Amy has accepted her role in the patriarchal society and is aware that she will never be able to become a famous artist and make a lot of money. Even if she managed to make money, all of it would go to her husband. Thus, Amy wants to marry a rich man in order for him to take care of her family. By the end of the novel, Amy manages to succeed in her mission and marries a wealthy man. Sadly, Jo ends up in a relationship with a man, even though she was opposed to it throughout the whole novel. This instance may be explained by a guess

that L.M. Alcott was pressured into “marrying Jo” in order to have her book published. However, there is no clear evidence of this speculation.

When it comes to fantasy novels, women were rarely the heroes of the story. Main male characters were dominant in the past. Nevertheless, Kopke (2014) managed to single out a few female characters that were depicted as heroes in fantasy novels. To set a context, Jones (1989) as cited in Kopke (2014) mentions a few of characteristics of heroes in literature. Heroes are often described as honest, fair, brave, strong and honorable. All of these characteristics, as Kopke (2014) concluded, are often attributed to men and male characters. Women characters were often limited to roles relating to the object that is the reward for the hero. (Kopke, 2014)

However, there are more than one distinguished female heroes in J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. One of the main heroes is Hermione Granger. It is believed that J.K. Rowling chose Hermione’s name very carefully. The source of the name is from the Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* (1623). Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale* is a strong character – just like Hermione Granger is. (Kopke, 2014) In the first novel, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (1997) Hermione Granger first appears. She is described as very smart and very well-read on magic, even though her parents have no relation to magic whatsoever. Throughout the whole novel, Hermione fights for what she thinks is the right thing to do. To name an example, when Harry and Ron want to sneak out of their dormitory in the middle of the night, she tries to convince them not to break the rules. However, when she realizes that her friend, Harry, might be in danger, she decides to break the school rules in order to help him. That goes to show how loyal of a friend Hermione Granger is. Because of her knowledge, Hermione often manages to get her friends out of trouble. Therefore, her intelligence gives her power. Even though her character is very powerful, there are still some instances where J.K. Rowling portrays Hermione in a gender stereotypical way. For instance, in the first novel, Hermione gets stuck in a bathroom with a troll and she has to be rescued by Harry and Ron. Furthermore, when the main protagonists get stuck in a room with a plant that tries to curl around them and suffocate them, Hermione manages to get out of its grasp. She proceeds to remember the plant’s name and how to kill it. Even though Hermione is

very intelligent, Harry has to give her the simplest idea on how to manage to kill the plant. When Hermione concludes that the plant likes dark and damp habitat, Harry needs to tell her to light a fire. Hermione tells Harry that she has no wood to start the fire so Ron has to yell at her to remind her that she is a witch and that she can start a fire with her wand. Therefore, how come Hermione cannot conclude what the opposite of 'dark' and 'damp' is without Harry and Ron telling her but, a few minutes later, can successfully solve a magical puzzle with a deadly mix of potions in an instant? As it can be seen, there are a few inconsistencies in the portrayal of the female hero in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series, however, Hermione Granger can still be considered as a character that "advances the position of women in fantasy fiction." (Kopke, 2014, p. 75) More on the analysis of the portrayal of strong female characters in fantasy novels will be addressed further on in the novels by Tamora Pierce and Robert Reed.

When it comes to children's literature, there are also different representations of female gender. For example, Roald Dahl's portrayals of female characters in *Matilda* (1988) are very diverse. Matilda is a five-year old female child hero who is powerful because of her intellect and emotional maturity. However, her father does not seem to think of her as smart or even important. He is focused on Matilda's brother, Michael, who will take over their father's business one day. Matilda's job is not to be smart but to one day marry a rich man to take care of her. Matilda's mother seems to share that opinion with her husband. She links a woman's success to her appearance, instead on her abilities. Therefore, she chooses looks over everything. When Matilda starts primary school, she meets Miss Honey and Miss Trunchbull. Miss Honey, even though she appears to be perfect, ends up having to be rescued by Matilda herself. (Mulders, 2016) Miss Trunchbull, on the other hand, is portrayed as a masculine woman where "no trace of typical femininity seems to be present." (Mulders, 2016, p. 64) As she holds the authority she is placed in "a socially constructed male position." (Mulders, 2016, p. 64) Since Matilda's parents and Miss Trunchbull are punished for their wrongdoings in the end of the book, some may conclude that Miss Trunchbull's defeat in the end of the books can be seen as a "defeat of feminism, as the female character who does not comply with stereotypical gender norms does not prosper in the end." (Mulders, 2016, p. 64)

#### *4.1. Female Characters in the Novel Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe*

*Things Fall Apart* was first published in 1958 by Chinua Achebe. Strong-Leek (2001) believes that the novel was written as a response to colonialist portrayals of Africans in literature. The story is set in Nigeria and follows Okonkwo, a respected man in the Umuofia clan. As Okonkwo's biggest fear is to become the same as his father, who was considered a joke, Okonkwo works hard on becoming a successful warrior and farmer. Okonkwo has three wives and many children. He never lets his emotions show because he considers it weak. On one occasion, Okonkwo accidentally shoots a clansman, and in result he and his family get banned from the clan for seven years. The family gathers their belongings and moves to Okonkwo's mother's village, Mbanta. A few years later, when missionaries from Europe travel to Nigeria and try to invert the natives to Christianity, Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, decides to follow them. Okonkwo is very ashamed by the fact that his son and many other villagers "betrayed" their people and as a result, kills the missionary leader. When he realizes that his clan is not bothered by the Christianity as he is, he hangs himself, becoming the same as his father - a mere abomination.

In Umuofia, women are seen as less than men. They are treated as property that is not fit to make their own decisions. On one occasion, when the villager Oguefi Udo's wife was murdered, Okonkwo's duty was to go to Mbanta and find Oguefi Udo a new wife that will serve as a replacement for his murdered wife. This example goes to show that men in Umuofia do not see their wives as their partners, rather, as their property that bears their children and cooks and cleans for them. Oguefi Udo is not sad because his wife died, he is sad because now he does not have anyone to serve him and fulfill all his wishes. That is why his former wife is so easily replaced. Furthermore, the young girl that was brought to Oguefi Udo had no say in that decision. As another example of women not being able to make their own choices is a scene of a trial. A trial is held for one of the villagers because he beat his wife and she was taken away from him and brought back to her family. At the end of the trial, it is concluded that the villager has to go to his in-laws, bring them gifts and beg them to give him his wife back. Again, the wife (who is not even named in the text) has no say whatsoever regarding her fate. If her

family decides to give her back to her husband, she will have to endure the abusive marriage all over again, even if she does not want to.

Moreover, in Umuofia there is a term that is both used to refer to a woman and to a man with no title. Hence, the term 'woman' is used as a derogatory term, as if it is a shame to be a woman. Every man that had no title was not permitted to join the clan's meetings. "This meeting is for men.' The man who had contradicted him had no titles. That was why he had called him a woman. Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit." (Achebe, 1995, p. 8) Therefore, the quickest and the easiest way to insult and silence a man is to simply call him a woman.

When it comes to the main male character of the story, Okonkwo is presented as a strong man. However, the attributes that are considered 'strong' in Umuofia, can also be considered as a part of toxic masculinity. At the beginning of the novel, Achebe (1995) describes the main character: "Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children." (p. 4) In contrast, his wives and children are described as "not as strong, and so they suffered. But they dared not to complain openly." (Achebe, 1995, p. 4) Furthermore, Okonkwo never showed his emotions, "unless it be the emotion of anger." (Achebe, 1995, p. 8) He sees the act of showing affection as a sign of weakness and the only thing that he deems worth showing is strength. In fact, Okonkwo is so scared of being thought weak, that he kills his adopted son, Ikemefuna, in front of everyone. He uses his strength to impose fear among his wives and children. If they are not obedient, he threatens them: "If you split another yam of this size, I shall break your jaw." (Achebe, 1995, p. 10) In the quote, Okonkwo threatens his oldest son, Nwoye, as he always managed to criticize his family. On most occasions, Okonkwo was rather disappointed in the man Nwoye was turning out to be. As his beliefs were that showing emotions is weak, when he caught Nwoye crying, he beat him heavily. However, on one occasion, Okonkwo was starting to become very pleased with his son: "And so he [Okonkwo] was always happy when he heard him [Nwoye] grumbling about women. That showed that in time he would be able to control his women-folk. No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and



especially his women) he was not really a man.” (Achebe, 1995, p. 22) Therefore, men will only be respected if they can successfully rule their women. To show that Okonkwo can successfully control and rule his wives, Achebe (1995) mentions a few stories. On one occasion, Okonkwo’s youngest wife Ojiugo did not get home in time to cook an afternoon meal – so he beat her heavily. Another example is set in the Week of Peace. No one is allowed to work on their farm or do any hard work. Okonkwo was so bored that he made up a problem and almost killed his second wife, Ekwefi, because of that: “Okonkwo, who had been walking about aimlessly in his compound in suppressed anger, suddenly found an outlet.” (Achebe, 1995, p. 11) He accused his wife of killing a banana tree. “As a matter of fact the tree was very much alive. Okonkwo’s second wife had merely cut a few leaves off it to wrap some food, and she said so. Without further argument Okonkwo gave her a sound beating and left her and her only daughter weeping.” (Achebe, 1995, p. 11) With his anger seemingly satisfied, Okonkwo decided to go out hunting. However, his anger turned out not to be satisfied enough, so when his beaten wife dared to speak, “he pressed the trigger and there was a loud report accompanied by the wail of his wives and children.” (Achebe, 1995, p. 11) This scene takes the devaluation of women even further, so much that their feelings are not relevant. As Strong-Leek (2001) states: “There is, moreover, no week or even day of peace for the women of Umuofia. They cannot find sanctuary within the confines of their own homes, or in the arms of their own husbands.” (p. 32)

In the novel, there are many gender stereotypes. Even though he does not show any emotions, Okonkwo seems to like his daughter Ezinma. She is very smart and very obedient. When Ezinma wants to bring the chair for her father, Okonkwo tells her: “No, that is a boy’s job.” (Achebe, 1995, p. 13) As if she is not strong enough to lift a chair. Instead of encouraging her and admiring her strength, he is sad that she was not born a boy. He even mentions it on one occasion: “‘She should have been a boy,’ Okonkwo said to himself again.” (Achebe, 1995, p. 21) It seems that Okonkwo can never truly appreciate and respect Ezinma as a person just because she was born a girl. In addition, Ezinma is thought as the “embodiment of all the women in this novel represent: intelligence, vitality, and fortitude.” (Strong-Leek, 2001, p. 32)

The only one that seems to appreciate and realize the value of women is Okonkwo's uncle. He regularly gives lectures to the younger clansmen. One of his lectures was about the importance of women: "It's true that a child belongs to its father. But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme." (Achebe, 1995, p. 44) However, his lecture to Okonkwo does not seem to have a huge impact on him. His relationship with his mother is not fully described, as his mother is not even named.

As it can be concluded from all of the mentioned above, most of the female characters are not fully developed in *Things Fall Apart*. As a matter of fact, rarely any female character is referred to by their name. They are usually referred to as 'the first wife,' 'the youngest wife,' 'Nwoye's mother,' 'young virgin' and so on. Therefore, women's identities are brought down to the use that men have of them. However, Ezinma and her mother Ekwefi are one of the stronger female characters in the story. Ezinma is perceived to have masculine tendencies: she is autonomous and effectual. (Strong-Leek, 2001) She and her mother share a special mother-daughter bond, as Strong-Leek (2001) mentions, "they are virtually equals." (p. 33) Ezinma and Ekwefi share mutual love and respect for one another and share secret moments. When Okonkwo notices any forbidden behavior, he threatens them. Therefore, female solidarity and maternal connection can seem threatening to Okonkwo because "he cannot control the depths of love and the shared enthusiasm between mother and daughter." (Strong-Leek, 2001, p. 33) Even though Ekwefi is scared of her husband, her motherly love is stronger than her fear of him. That can be seen in a scene where Ezinma is taken by the chief priestess, Chielo. Okonkwo forbids Ekwefi to leave the hut but she ignores him and runs after Chielo to make sure that her daughter will return home safely. At that moment, Ekwefi defies the masculine tradition for what she thinks is the right thing to do and becomes, in a sense, the female hero of the story.

#### 4.2. Female Characters in the novel *Alanna: The First Adventure* by Tamora Pierce

The first book of *The Song of the Lioness* series, *Alanna: The First Adventure* was first published in 1983 by Tamora Pierce. The story is set in the fantasy world called Tortall. The main character, Alanna of Trebond is very disappointed by the fact that she was born a girl and therefore cannot become a knight. Instead, she has to become a sorcerer. In contrast, her twin brother Thom wishes to become a sorcerer and is dreading his future training as a knight. Thus, Alanna comes up with a plan to disguise herself as a boy called Alan and train as a knight while Thom will go and train as a sorcerer. After convincing their caretakers Maude and Coram to let them go through with this plan, Alanna's adventure begins. "Alan" arrives to the royal palace where she trains as a page. She meets a lot of new friends and proves herself as one of the best pages in the palace. On one occasion, Alanna reveals her identity to her friend George, who does not make a big deal out of it. Furthermore, upon an adventure with Prince Jonathan in the Black City, Alanna's true sex is revealed to him as well. Even after he finds out the truth, Jonathan does not care that Alanna is a girl because, throughout her training, she has proved herself worthy of becoming a knight. Therefore, Prince Jonathan chooses Alanna to be his squire, which is a great honor. In the second novel of the series, *In the Hand of the Goddess* (1984), Alanna's sex gets revealed to everyone. In the third novel, *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man* (1986), Alanna becomes a shaman where she gets confused about her identity, however, in the fourth novel of the series, *Lioness Rampant* (1988), Alanna reconciles her struggles with her knightly duties.

Throughout the entirety of the first novel, Alanna thinks less of herself since she is a girl. Even though she is among the best pages in the palace, she still thinks she does not deserve to be there just because she is a girl and because she is lying to everyone about it. Thus, Alanna often puts herself down because of her identity: "She was still a girl masquerading as a boy, and sometimes she doubted that she would ever believe herself to be as good as the stupidest, clumsiest male." (Pierce, 1983, p. 36) She thinks that even the stupidest boys are smarter than girls. She does not want anyone to know that she is a girl because people will not take her seriously: "I hate it!" she yelled, losing her temper. "People will think I'm soft and silly!" (Pierce, 1983, p. 49) Even when her

friends are encouraging her and praising her, she feels as if they would not think that if they knew she was not a boy: “My uncle-in-law, Duke Gareth, also speaks highly of you. You are a most worthy young man by all accounts.’ Alanna blushed with shame. If they knew the truth, they wouldn’t speak well of her.” (Pierce, 1983, p. 53) Sadly, as gender stereotypes have had such an impact on her, Alanna cannot help but to think of girls and boys in a stereotypical way.

However, even though Alanna wants to hide her identity as long as possible, she wants to prove to everyone, and to herself, that she deserves to become a knight. When a boy named Ralon picks on her and bullies her, she is determined to put him in his place so that he never bothers her again. On this occasion, Alanna’s intent is so strong that she is not even worried about the gender difference between them, she just knows that she has to defeat him: “She was determined to beat Ralon – it would mean she had finally earned her place among the boys. It would mean that she could do anything larger and stronger males could.” (Pierce, 1983, p. 31) By defeating Ralon, Alanna would prove to herself that she is good enough and that she belongs in the palace. Luckily, Alanna manages to defeat Ralon with the help of her friend, George, who taught her how to fight. Alanna’s determination does not stop with the defeat of Ralon. Every time someone tries to insult her or belittle her, Alanna works hard on proving them wrong.

To prove that Alanna very much deserves her place as a knight, there are more than a few instances when her friends reminded her of her worth. When she reveals her identity to her friend George, he does not think less of her. Instead, he encourages her and tries to convince her that she is even better than any boy: “‘Hush your nonsense’ he ordered. ‘Bein’ a girl hasn’t slowed you down yet.’” (Pierce, 1983, p. 64) and “And you do them [men’s things] better than most young men.” (Pierce, 1983, p. 64) George even informs Alanna that, when they are alone, he will call her by her real name, so that she always remembers who she is. Furthermore, Alanna’s professor Myles chooses her to accompany him to the Barony Olau because he knows she is special somehow. For a long time, he and his friends were trying to find the armory but they failed every time. However, Alanna managed to find it on her first try. Because of that, Myles is even more impressed with her than before: “How many thirteen-year-old boys could come to

a place like this and figure out where the armory was?” (Pierce, 1983, p. 70) Alanna, however, does not feel proud of herself because she is too busy feeling scared that Myles will find out her secret. By the end of the book, Prince Jonathan chose Alanna to go to the Black City with him. He did that because, as he says: “I knew you’d have the guts to come with me.” (Pierce, 1983, p. 89) and “They [Gary, Alex and Raoul] would’ve grumbled all the way here and then knocked me over the head when I tried to enter the city.” (Pierce, 1983, p. 89) Therefore, Alanna is described as braver than most of the boys. Furthermore, when Ysadir attack Jonathan and Alanna and reveal her true identity, Jonathan could not care less about that newly-found information: “I’m not doing anything. As far as I’m concerned, you earned the right to try for your shield a long time ago.” (Pierce, 1983, p. 96) Therefore, even though Alanna is a girl, she managed to prove herself more than worthy to be a knight, and even becomes Prince Jonathan’s squire, which is a great honor.

Alanna is a true female hero of this story. When analyzed more deeply, Alanna can be described with the most of the adjectives that are usually used to describe male heroes and men in general: independent, dominant, strong, intelligent, brave and rational. (Wulandari, 2019) Alanna has courage - she is strong and brave. The first sign of Alanna’s courage can be identified when she decides to go through with her plan to pretend she is a boy and to train as a knight. A lot of people would just dream of doing it and not actually decide to do it. Alanna knows that the training will be hard and challenging, but she is able to ignore her fear and pain and face the danger. Furthermore, Alanna’s character is heroic because she successfully manages to save her friends from a deadly sickness that has been sent upon the palace. She approaches her problems rationally which helps her become a respected page in the palace. Therefore, Alanna is not a stereotypical female character.

#### *4.3. Female Characters in the Novel Marrow by Robert Reed*

*Marrow* was first published in 2000 by Robert Reed. The story is set in distant future, on a ship that cruises through the Milky Way. Technologically advanced humans had

decided to visit the ship and investigate it. When they had concluded that the Great Ship was safe, they decided to invite other alien species to join them on it. After many years and many generations of various species, the explorers discover a planet in the Ship's core. They decide to name the planet Marrow and send some of their best captains to explore it. After an accident, the captains end up stranded on Marrow for many years. Since the humans have evolved and it is hard for them to get wounded or die, almost every captain survives the accident and has many descendants. Even though their children have always been educated on the Great Ship and how it is their true home, some of the descendants (who start calling themselves the Waywards) decide to separate themselves from that belief. The Waywards seem to believe that Marrow has a long history and that it has been built as a prison by the Builders, in order to imprison the Bleak. However, the Bleak is very powerful and works on manipulating the Waywards to destroy the Great Ship so that it can be set free. By the end of the novel, the original captains manage to find their way back to the Ship, realizing that one of their colleagues, Diu, orchestrated the whole mission. Luckily, the captains manage to stop the Wayward's plan and the Ship remains safe.

Throughout the novel, there are no apparent gender stereotypes or gender roles. Every captain is chosen based on their capabilities, rather than their gender. Therefore, there are many male and female captains. When Marrow is discovered and the captains are called to the meeting without knowing why, they seem to conclude that every one of them is chosen based on their accomplishments, rather than their gender. Thus, as they conclude, the meeting must be about something very important since they are all great captains. Furthermore, the clothes that humans dress in are not gender stereotypical either. They all seem to dress in the same way, wearing "soft gray robes." (Reed, 2000, ch. 21, par. 4) and "small wardrobe of nondescript clothes." (Reed, 2000, ch. 2, par. 63) Their children also wear simple clothes. To be more precise, they wear "nothing but a breech-cloth." (Reed, 2000, ch. 14, par. 99) Moreover, even the toys that the children play with are not stereotypical. To name an example, the main captain, Miocene, had a toy that was "an aerogel-and-diamond miniature of the deep-space probe." (Reed, 2000, ch. 8, par. 3) Therefore, the toys have a certain meaning to the children or to the people who gift them with them, rather than being intended for a certain gender. To prove that even work is not

divided into jobs for men and jobs for women, when the captains get stranded on Marrow, they divide their jobs evenly. There are no jobs that only men do or only women do. They all search and hunt for food. In addition, when the captains realize that they are stranded on Marrow, they conclude that it is essential for them to procreate. Consequently, they pronounce that “every female captain owed the world at least one healthy boy or girl.” (Reed, 2000, ch. 14, par. 43) There is no preference towards a certain sex, as long as the women give birth to a healthy baby.

This novel has a few strong female characters. Some of them are: the Master Captain, the submaster Miocene and captain Washen. The Master Captain, as everyone calls her, has been ruling the Ship since it had been found. No one is questioning her authority and everyone respects her. That is, until the Waywards attack the Ship and convince everyone that she was a lousy master. However, that is not necessarily true. Even though she holds a lot of power and is superior to everyone, the Master Captain still has humility. She often thinks about her intellect and if she is still as sharp as she was before, when she earned her position as the master. She understands that she can easily be replaced with someone who would be even better at her job. When she really gets replaced by Miocene, who betrays her and kills her with the help of the Waywards, no one can believe that she is dead. That goes to show how well-respected among the residents of the Ship the Master Captain really was. They even deem her “too wily and much too powerful to die.” (Reed, 2000, ch. 36, par. 3)

The second strong female character in the novel is Miocene, a very smart submaster. She was the first one to have a child on Marrow and decided to raise her son alone, not letting anyone know who his biological father was. Her son, Till, was one of the founders of the Waywards. Later on in the novel it is revealed that Diu had been filling his head with all the information about the Builders and the Bleak and that is why Till was one of the first ones to start spreading those stories among his peers. Finding out that Till is going behind her back and spreading ‘lies’ to everyone, Miocene cuts every tie with Till. Only a strong person could do that. However, it could also implicate that she loves the Ship more than her own child. After that incident, Miocene seems to be done with Till. However, when Till offers her the chance to get back to the Ship and become the Master Captain, she has

no problem accepting the offer, even though she has to betray every one of the captains and the Master Captain in order to do that. Furthermore, she has no problem killing anyone that does not agree with her. On one occasion, Miocene kills her grandson, Virtue, because they do not share the same beliefs on how the Marrow works: “Miocene aimed for the throat, then panned downward. Then she rose and came around the table, completing the chore with delicacy and thoroughness.” (Reed, 2000, ch. 21, par. 149) Furthermore, when Miocene becomes the Master Captain, she becomes even more powerful. Since Till was her first chair, he often assembled meetings to inform the residents of the plans for the Ship. Miocene would visit the meetings just to establish her power: “Because this wasn’t her meeting, she was free to leave it. A show of power was her only agenda.” (Reed, 2000, ch. 45, par. 19)

Lastly, Washen is another female hero of the novel. Since she was a little girl, Washen was not easily influenced by anyone. When Master Captain noticed her riding a whale, she ordered her captains to bring her Washen. It took them a long time to complete their task, since no one could convince Washen to come back to the shore. When they finally succeeded on bringing Washen to Master Captain, Washen is not afraid to state her opinions, not even to the authority such as the Master. When the Master asks Washen if she can swim, Washen answers her: “Better than you, madam. Probably.” (Reed, 2000, part 1, par. 94) When Washen grows up and becomes a captain, even the aliens respect her. They refer to her as: “The quintessential captain.” (Reed, 2000, ch. 1, par. 53) and as “One of the lords of the galaxy.” (Reed, 2000, ch. 1, par. 54) In contrast to Miocene, even though Washen is very smart and brave, she is also loyal to her people.

To conclude, this novel does not convey gender stereotypes. Men and women are treated as equals. The only way in which they could be distinguished is based on their accomplishments. The characters do not embody gender roles, as they were never raised according to them.



## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the view on gender differs from person to person. Some have traditional views while some have contemporary views. Therefore, some people with traditional views may raise their children to enact appropriate gender roles. However, certain gender roles support the presence of gender stereotypes. People's lives seem to be permeated with the presence of gender stereotypes. Men and women seem to be stereotyped based on their appearance, personality traits, jobs they work in and more.

Furthermore, gender stereotypes can also be found in literature. The works that can be inspected for gender stereotypes vary from children's books to fantasy books. Seemingly, gender inequalities can be found in every genre of literature. Consequently, feminist literary theory emerged in the second-wave of feminism. Feminist theorists worked on uncovering underlying patriarchal ideologies that literature tends to convey. Moreover, one of their missions was to re-discover important pieces of work by female authors that were disregarded in the past. In addition, feminist literary critics do not only focus on the authors. They also deal with the readers. They believe that every literary critic should, while reading various texts, keep in mind the representation of women – whether they are oppressed or fighting against patriarchy, whether they are inferior or equal to men and so on.

In this thesis, three very different works from three different authors have been analyzed. The first-analyzed novel, *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe, seems to portray women as inferior to men. Men are described as rulers of the family who need to know how to control their women and children. Many female characters are not developed in the novel, only briefly mentioned. However, even though this novel represents men as superior to women, there are two female characters that can be seen as the female heroes of the story. The two female heroes, Ekwefi and Ezinma, are the main male character's wife and daughter. Ezinma, Okonkwo's daughter, is described to have male characteristics. On the other hand, Okonkwo's wife, Ekwefi appears to be weak and subordinate to Okonkwo but turns out strong in the end. Her love for her daughter is stronger than the patriarchal society she lives in so she defies the masculine tradition in order to make sure that her daughter is safe.

The second-analyzed novel is *Alanna: The First Adventure*, the first novel from *The Song of the Lioness* series by Tamora Pierce. Alanna, the main female hero of the story, is unsatisfied by her fate as a girl so she decides to disguise herself as a boy in order to fulfill her wishes. This novel breaks gender stereotypes because Alanna is not a gender stereotypical character that is passive and described in a domestic role. Instead, Alanna is a female hero that can do everything that the boys can do, some things even better than them. She is respected in the palace because of her bravery and loyalty.

Finally, the third-analyzed novel, *Marrow*, by Robert Reed does not convey gender roles or gender stereotypes. Men and women do not have predetermined behaviors they should enact just because of their gender. The only distinction between them is based on their capabilities and accomplishments.

Overall, *Things Fall Apart* seem to convey certain gender roles and gender stereotypes, however, C. Achebe manages to develop two strong female characters. *Alanna: The First Adventure*, conveys certain gender stereotypes and predetermined occupations for boys and girls, however, Alanna is such a strong female character that manages to break the arbitrary norms. Finally, *Marrow*, does not even have a trace of gender stereotypes since there are no gender roles among the people and the aliens in the distant future.

In addition to the three works that have been analyzed in detail, *Harry Potter*, *Matilda*, *Little Women*, *Earhsea* and *She: The History of Adventure* have also been mentioned. Although they also show the development of female characters and their stereotyping, we could not devote more attention to these works due to the lack of space.

After all, it turns out that historically, various authors seek to promote the equality of female characters and avoid the traditional binary division and stereotypical portrayals, even starting from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the more recent works, such as *Alanna: The First Adventure* and *Marrow* indicate that it is possible to create female heroes who are strong and independent, without the stereotypical portrayals that have prevailed for centuries.

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SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU  
UČITELJSKI FAKULTET  
ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE  
ZAGREB

IZJAVA

kojom izjavljujem da sam suglasna da se trajno pohrani i javno objavi moj rad  
**Gender stereotypes and development of female characters in the works of Chinua  
Achebe, Tamora Pierce and Robert Reed**  
u javno dostupnom institucijskom repozitoriju  
Učiteljskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu  
i javno dostupnom repozitoriju Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu (u skladu s  
odredbama Zakona o znanstvenoj djelatnosti i visokom obrazovanju, NN br. 123/03,  
198/03, 105/04, 174/04, 02/07, 46/07, 45/09, 63/11, 94/13, 139/13, 101/14, 60/15).

U Zagrebu, srpanj 2021

Ime i prezime: **Lorena Ribar**

Potpis

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lorena Ribar". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed over a light grey rectangular background.

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ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE  
ZAGREB

#### IZJAVA O SAMOSTALNOJ IZRADI RADA

Potpisom potvrđujem kako sam ja, Lorena Ribar, studentica Učiteljskog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu samostalno napisala rad na temu *Gender stereotypes and development of female characters in the works of Chinua Achebe, Tamora Pierce and Robert Reed* pod vodstvom mentora izv. prof. dr. sc. Krunoslava Mikulana i kako se nisam koristila drugim izvorima osim onih navedenih u radu.

U Zagrebu, srpanj 2021.

Ime i prezime: **Lorena Ribar**

Potpis

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lorena Ribar". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light-colored rectangular background.