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## Women's Journey from Victimization to Final Triumph over the Patriarchal Society in Margaret Atwood's *The Testaments*

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### Abstract

Women's suffering under the inhuman system of a patriarchal society is a central theme in most of Margaret Atwood's literary works, especially in her latest novel, *The Testaments* (2019). She does not limit her writing to describing the victimization of women under men's control and aggressive power. However, she also devotes an integral part of her novels to highlighting the hope to end such suffering and to achieve the final triumph through individual female protagonists. Those few heroines have the power to end the injustice and inhumanity of the patriarchal society, despite its aggressive and violent structures and armies, leading other women to get their physical and spiritual freedom. The current study focuses on these aspects of Atwood's writing, namely the suffering and the hope to achieve justice, regardless of the path those brave individual female protagonists will take. The researcher introduces several paths to end such suffering, including the unity between women's bodies and minds, the collaboration among the fellowship of women, and finally, women's ability to read and write their own stories. However, discussing this topic leads to another critical question to which the researcher hopes to find a suitable answer. Does telling stories of different women living in patriarchal societies shows that they all deserve to have their freedom.

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## الملخص العربي

تعد معاناة المرأة تحت وطأة السيطرة اللإنسانية للمجتمع الذكوري المتخلل في مجتمعاتنا المعاصرة من الموضوعات المهمة التي نقاشتها الكاتبة النسوية الرائدة مارجريت آتوود في أعمالها الأدبية وعلى وجه الخصوص رواية الوصايا الصادرة في عام ٢٠١٩. إلا أن مناقشات الكاتبة آتوود تختلف في فحواها وتفصيلها عن بقية كتابات رواد الحركة النسوية في الغرب ويتمثل هذا الاختلاف في عدم حصر القضية بإظهار المرأة كضحية مستسلمة للمجتمع الذكوري وسطوته الغاشمة ولكن دائما ما تخصص جزء كبير من عملها الأدبي لتوضيح كيفية إمكانية المرأة كسر هذه السطوة لوضع نهاية حاسمة لمعانها وتحقيق الانتصار الكامل من خلال بطلات قائدات قدرات على إحداث الفارق. هؤلاء النساء المتفردات عن غيرهن يمتلكن القوة اللازمة والقدرات الخاصة لقيادة المجتمع النسوي للحرية الجسدية والروحية ودحض المجتمع الذكوري وتقويض أعمدته المتأصلة في المجتمع البشري منذ قرون بعيدة. تناقش الدراسة الحالية الأداء الروائي الفريد للكاتبة بشقيه المتلازمين في توضيح المشكلة والحل المناسب لها والذي قد يختلف من شخصية إلى أخرى ومن زمان إلى آخر. إلا أن ومناقشة هذا الأمر، تسرب الباحث إلى سؤال محوري سيحاول الإجابة عليه بنهاية بحثه وهو هل تستحق جميع أعضاء المجتمع النسوي والذي يعيش بالفعل تحت سطوة المجتمع الذكوري هذه الحرية الجسدية والروحية أم أن هناك بعض منهن لا يرتقين لمثل هذه المنزلة الفريدة.

### Key Words:

Femisim – Marget Atwood – The Patriachal society – the vitimization of women – third wave of feminsim -

### 1.0 Introducing the Study

Feminism is one of the leading literary movements that dominated the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, addressing the issues of the injustice and marginality of women's individuality and identity in patriarchal societies. Margaret Atwood is considered one of the leading figures in that movement. Her writings play an essential role in representing the corrupt system of the dominant patriarchal societies.

Nevertheless, Atwood not only limits her writings to showing the ugly realities of these unjust social systems, but she also stresses the role of the female protagonist as the future hope to redress such systems. Those brave individuals can succeed in freeing themselves and their female allies from those unfair systems. Atwood, as a postmodern feminist, regards the only solution to end the unjust system of the patriarchal regimes as saving them from their inhuman activities, which can be achieved through the fellowship of women who cannot be silenced forever. In the current study, the researcher will represent several solutions to end women's suffering under the domination of the patriarchal society.

## **2.0 the Unity between Women's bodies and Mind**

Julia Kuznetski addresses the concept of women's marginalization and suffering under the domination and corruption of the patriarchal society. In her analysis of Atwood's two prominent novels, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and its sequel *The Testaments* (2019), Kuznetski emphasizes the concept of women's bodies as both the symbol of suffering and the icon of victory. The biological and bodily differences between men and women are used as excuses by the totalitarian patriarchal society of Gilead to marginalize women from the center, leaving the whole area for men to dominate and control (2021: 291). Facing the extinction of the human race, the leaders of the Gilead society, a fictional place where the events of the two novels were set, have decided to make good use of women's wombs to solve the problem. Ironically, the natural bond between man and woman that saves the extinction of the human race since the beginning of creation is spontaneous and instinctive (Ibid: 298). Consequently, it does not require any political or social interference. Such unnatural interference paves the way to the final doom of the Gilead regime from the beginning of creation. Agnes, one of the three female protagonists in the Testaments, discovers all these aspects of corruption in Aunt Lydia's secret documents that were left to be discovered by a future savior who can challenge and reconstruct the patriarchal society of Gilead (Ibid 298). Agnes reads:

Handmaids had been forced into illegal acts, then blamed for them; Sons of Jacob had plotted against one another; bribes and favors had been exchanged at the highest levels; Wives had schemed against other Wives; Marthas had eavesdropped and collected information, and then sold it; mysterious food poisonings had occurred, babies had changed hands from Wife to Wife based on scandalous rumors that were, however, unfounded. Wives had been hanged for adulteries that had never occurred because a

Commander wanted a different, younger Wife. Public trials—meant to purge traitors and purify the leadership—had turned on false confessions extracted by torture. (pp. 307–8)

Here, the corruption is not only limited to the male characters. It is practiced by both sexes who attempt to achieve personal benefits from the unjust regimes. This passage also shows that the individual's actions are no longer concerned with the leading cause of the establishment of a regime. Instead, their actions mainly concern their lusty desires and dreams of power (Ibid: 295). Atwood (2019) herself emphasizes this in her novel. She declares, "Totalitarianism may crumble from within, as they fail to keep the promises that brought them to power" (417). Nevertheless, the unity between women's bodies and minds becomes women's new weapon to overcome the injustice and domination of these regimes. Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau disagree with Judith Butler in visualizing how women can solve the ultimate and inventible doom of the patriarchal society. They state that the collaboration of women's bodies and minds is the only path that can break the domination of the male-controlled regimes. They argue that such unity will "reaffirm individual growth, spirituality, and actions that counter contemporary global discourses of fear, alienation, and disempowerment" (2020: 203). Butler, on the other hand, focuses only on the importance of the female body as a man's weapon to discriminate against female personalities (2004). Onega and Ganteau highlight the importance of the body in relation to the mind. Women's bodies can be the source of their marginalization and banishment from the center of power. However, it is not enough for women to regain their appropriate position to lead the human race. This can only be done through the dynamic relationship between the mind and the body (2020: 205). Ironically, the society of Gilead has done its best to deprive women of all sorts of power except for their minds, as represented in the category of Aunts. The Gilead society gives the Aunts the required freedom to move between houses, libraries, and even police headquarters. Consequently, they become the required weapon to regain everything stolen. Kuznetski stresses the importance of the unity between the body and the mind through her analysis of Aunt Lydia's personality. She states that

Although she was forced to cooperate for survival, her mind was never extinguished. When she wept, her "third eye" kept thinking and planning revenge, which she carries out by recording her story, her indictment of Gilead, and addressing it to a hypothetical future reader (2021: 294)

Here, Aunt Lydia is imprisoned in the symbolic world of patriarchal society to the extent that she only thinks about her physical survival. This superficial image hides another version of a protagonist who can plan, avenge, lead, and achieve victory.

### 3.0 The Fellowship of Women

In another study, Katarina Labudová introduces the same concept in Atwood's novel, *The Testaments*. She agrees with Kuznetski in showing the injustice of the patriarchal society as represented in women's suffering and men's domination. Nevertheless, Labudová visualizes that concept through food metaphors, arguing that food is an essential tool to show control and influence. In the Gilead's society, food is used to indicate power distribution. If women want to eat, they have to be utterly obedient to the system. Thereupon, women are left with two tragic options: whether to accept the injustice of the patriarchal society or to survive hunger outside that society. This simple fact explains most women's submissiveness in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Even Aunt Lydia, one of the three protagonists of *The Testaments*, accepted that deal to maintain her existence. However, she knew that eating was only a means of survival that could not satisfy her spiritual hunger for freedom. Ironically, women are consumed like food through pregnancy and lactation (Labudová 108). In other words, the patriarchal society feeds women only to sacrifice their bodies for the sake of getting children. After birth, women are devoted to raising their children to be great leaders in the case of a male child or to be another sacrifice for the female children.

Representing the injustice of the patriarchal society was not the only difference between Labudová's and Kuznetski's studies and analyses of Atwood's novel. They also differ in setting out the solution. While Kuznetski focuses on the unity between the women's body and mind, Labudová stresses the collaboration and partnership of the female victims to overcome the injustice of the Gilead society (103). Labudová argues that *The Handmaid's Tale* presents the author, Atwood, through the maid's voice, Offred. Then, in *The Testaments*, she introduces the voices of three female protagonists who have witnessed the tragedy of women's suffering and their final victory. In the sequel, Atwood chooses the genre of witness or testimony literature, aiming to paint the events with an authentic touch of the past (Ibid: 101). In other words, the author who chooses the word "tale" as a title for the first part of the story decides to change the genre of her writing from narrating a tale to reading three different testimonies of three different female protagonists living different life experiences. The collaboration of these three testimonies is the source of the authenticity of the narrated. Axel

Gelfert (2014) argues that “although the act of bearing witness is usually an individual one, it contributes to what is sometimes called ‘sensemaking’ – the social activity of giving meaning to collective experiences” (17). The protagonists’ testimonies include their everyday struggles, suffering, and activities. Despite their different experiences and involvements, their testimonies support each other and stress the same message of the corruption of the Gilead patriarchal system. Each testimony indicates the truth and the authenticity of the other two testimonies. Dominick LaCapra agrees with Gelfert in explaining the true nature of the testimony. She argues that “Testimonies are significant in the attempt to understand the experience and its aftermath, including the role of memory and its lapses, in coming to terms with – or denying and repressing – the past” (86–87).

Regarding the literary function of testimonies to present the actions of the novel, Labudová disagrees with both Gelfert and LaCapra. According to Labudová, using three different testimonies indicates that women’s loyalty and sisterhood to each other are the real reasons behind women’s victory over the unjust system of Gilead society (101). During the survival phase of society, women used to feel jealous and betray each other to guarantee their survival. This act of betrayal helps to increase the solid grounds of Gilead society.

In *The Testaments*, these three different testimonies indicate the women’s collaboration and devotion to each other. This is stressed in Daisy’s own words after escaping from Gilead: “We could have been swept out with the tide and ended up in South America, but more likely picked up by Gilead and strung up on the Wall. I am so proud of Agnes – after that night, she was my sister” (2019: 397). According to Labudová, women can easily overcome the unjust system of any patriarchal society through their unity, spiritual trust, and loyalty. Thereupon, if women could not overcome their instinctive jealousy and natural needs to survive, which are used as essential tools of any tyrannical system to impose its control and domination, they would not be able to achieve any victory. They will remain eternally slaves to both their instinctive needs on the superficial level and in the tyrannical regimes on a deeper level. Here, Labudová does not deny that women may surrender to such regimes to survive in the same manner as Aunt Lydia. However, she insists that such surrender should be on the superficial level hiding beneath it another deeper layer that includes a brave soul and an actual image of a protagonist that can plan, observe and achieve victory.

#### 4.0 Women's Ability to Write their Stories

In a third study of Atwood's *The Testaments*, Jordyn Weiss addresses women's suffering in the totalitarian patriarchy of Gilead and their final triumph through a detailed analysis of Aunt Lydia's character. Weiss assumes that the author skillfully applied Butler's gender theory to Atwood's portrayal of Lydia's different personalities. According to this analysis, Lydia changes from a cautious female character in a pre-Gilead masculine modern world to an obedient servant in the Republic of Gilead, and finally to a free rebel who has mainly contributed to the destruction and downfall of the unjust system of Gilead. These three different personalities are merely three cultural voices conflicting inside her conscious and unconscious mind. According to Butler, gender is not a matter of biological differences between men and women. Instead, it refers to the social trait patterns imposed on the individual to compose his/her identity. She states:

[g]ender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; instead, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self (179).

Butler here states that our social roles in society are not biologically determined. Instead, they are the outcome of the cultural influence of the surrounding background. Lydia's choice to be an obedient servant to the dominant regime of Gilead is an obligatory mask she decided to wear to adapt to the surrounding culture and preserve her survival. However, adopting such a role does not eliminate her true nature as a free individual that she would eventually embrace. Aunt Lydia shows her accurate understanding of such a role in the tyrannical regime of Gilead. Atwood clarifies it to her reader in the recorded testimony. Aunt Lydia says, "The regime needs me. I control the women's side of their enterprise with an iron fist in a leather glove in a woolen mitten, and I keep things orderly" (Atwood 62). The author's skillful use of vocabulary like "iron fist", "leather glove" and "woolen mitten" stresses the complicated role played by the aunts, including Lydia. This shows that fooling the political system of Gilead is not easy. The Aunt's role is a challenging and impossible pursuit that requires the specific qualities of a true protagonist like Lydia.

Nevertheless, Lydia does not acquire such traits accidentally. She was trained to play that role successfully in her previous life, long before the

downfall of the United States of America and the establishment of the Gilead Republic. Playing the cultural role of a woman is not a simple task in some modern societies, which may not be as tyrannical as the political regime of Gilead, but they are still culturally against women. She seems to be split between being a “surveyed” and a “surveyor.”

For example, John Berger writes that:

[a] woman must continually watch herself. Her image of herself almost continually accompanies her. While she is walking across a room or while she is weeping at the death of her father, she can scarcely avoid envisaging herself walking or weeping. From earliest childhood, she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continually. Thus, she considers the surveyor and the surveyed within her as the two constituent yet always distinct elements of her identity as a woman. She has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is usually thought of as the success of her life (1972: 60)

Thus, the complicated role of the Aunt in the Gilead’s strict culture is not entirely new to Lydia. Like many women in the modern world, she has genetically learned the required cultural traits to survive the aggressive world of men, even within its darkest visualization in the fictional society of Gilead. This process of wearing the cruel mask of the Aunt is triggered by the harsh and inhuman punishments done by the police forces of Gilead against women. This is represented in Lydia’s own words: “I put it on. What else should I have done?” (150). Here, Lydia wears the cultural mask of the Aunt, which, according to O. C. Gheorghiu and Michaela Praisler, is an obligatory step to protect her physical survival. They write:

[t]he choice given is simple: “eat or be eaten”; side with the male power to become powerful yourself. Cast away your femininity and punish others for keeping theirs. Lydia [...] chooses life over femininity and accepts to join the masculine ranks of the tormentors. Nevertheless, this bisexualization, or ... bi-genderization, ricochets as the acquired masculine traits completely, though ironically, take over the feminine ones. (2020: 92)

Lydia’s third cultural role in the novel is that of the female protagonist, who has participated in the downfall of Gilead’s tyrannical society. The difficulty of that role lies in the fact that it is not obligatory like the first two roles. In other words, Lydia has played the role of the suspicious observers who carefully measure her words and actions in the pre-Gilead society, similar to many women living in the modern patriarchal societies of today.



Then, she became an obedient servant of Gilead's patriarchal society. In these two phases, Lydia had no choice to choose or deny that role. It was a compulsory step forced upon her by the surrounding culture (Weiss: 5). Yet, the role of the rebel is a secret one, which she took with her complete free will. It is chosen to satisfy her ethical code and has nothing to do with her natural survival instinct. It could threaten her survival in the surrounding culture. According to Weiss, this role is the only hope for women to overcome the injustice and the inhumanity of the patriarchal society with its different versions, whether the real one we face in our world or the fictional one that Atwood represents in her novel (7-8). The only problem regarding this risky step is how to awaken that ethical code after being deeply buried in the unconsciousness of women. Only a few individuals like Lydia can interact successfully with such an ethical code through which she takes off all the cultural masks imposed on her by her society and reveals her true self, the one that can always change the surrounding world to a better place. This can only be done through writing skills. This is represented in Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa", where she describes the influence of women's writing:

A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as written, it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there is no other way. There is no room for her if she is not a he. If she is her/she, it is to smash everything, shatter the framework of institutions, blow up the law, and break up the "truth" with laughter. (2017: 949)

Weiss agrees with Cixous's notion of the Medusa, indicating that Lydia has successfully explored her authentic self by writing about her experiences and the events she has lived through. Without these records, the tyrannical world of Gilead have remained unchanged (11). However, Lydia, with her diary secretly written in her private study at Ardua Hall, has conquered the ultimate world of Gilead and destroyed it from its core. According to Cixous (2017):

[w]oman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as their bodies ... for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text ... as into the world and history ... by her movement. (941-3)

Here, both Weiss and Cixous introduce a new weapon for women to overcome the injustice of the patriarchal world by using their ability to write their silenced voices. The written records of women are eternal evidence that

patriarchal domination cannot silence. Similar to Kuznetski's suggestion of the unity between women's body and mind and Labudova's call for the ultimate collaboration and loyalty among women suggest that Weiss offers women a new weapon to use against the patriarchal dictatorship. This weapon is represented in the choice to write their stories creatively, reflecting all their ideas, emotions, and agonies.

Megan White, in a more comprehensive study, indicates that Kuznetski's suggestion of the importance of the unity of women's body and mind and Labudová's call for collaboration and harmony among the fellowship of women based on their trust and loyalty for each other are not separate topics. The study also shows that Weiss's idea of the positive impact of women's ability to write their stories as a trigger to their proper and free selves from their unconsciousness is an impartial part of both women's unity among each other and their unity of body and mind. To illustrate, the establishment of the Gilead society is based upon three main targets; the first is to illuminate the highly educated women by either killing them or killing their dignity (White: 2). This step will function in isolating women from each other. The killing of the potential female leaders while torturing the rest should scare all the women in society, motivating them to devote all their skills, emotions, and ideas to only one thing, which is how to survive. The second target of Gilead society is to stress the importance of women's bodies as the sole value of their existence. The third and final step of the totalitarian society of Gilead is to convince women of their inability to read and write and the unworthiness of the whole process of education (White: 4). Achieving these three goals, the male leaders of the Gilead society have succeeded in their purpose of silencing women's voices and consequently marginalizing them from any power. Women became only devoted to the process of reproduction and entertaining their male partners. White builds her assumption on Mario Klarer's analysis of Atwood's first novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, which explores Gilead's deliberate purpose to make women believe in their incapability of reading and writing. White states that "literate cultures have a stabilizing and innovative potential" and that "by controlling the very structures of language and thinking, the leading class can consolidate the basis of its monolithic state and keep all others in their assigned positions" (2).

Ironically, Agnes chooses to be an aunt not to educate herself and increase her knowledge but to escape getting married. Another writer who supports White's theory is John Guillory in his 2006 essay entitled "Canon". In this

paper, Guillory points out that what happened in Atwood's novel echoes what happened in the natural history of humanity before the middle of the eighteenth century. Only men were allowed to read and write during this dark period, whereas women were deprived of these two activities. Guillory states, "Great works could hardly be produced by women, if by and large only men were taught to write, or only men were in social positions which made possible a life of literary production" (238). He concludes that silencing women's voices is not strange to humanity and the patriarchal society. Atwood's use of this historical fact in her fictional world of Gilead mirrors what has already happened in the past. White gives another example from Atwood's novel to prove her assumption. Ofkyle, one of the maids in Gilead society, has sacrificed her body, which was cut open, to deliver a healthy baby boy.

After taking the baby, the other women throw her corpse away as it becomes of no use (8). Thereupon, Ofkyle's death and sacrifice are unworthy, though they serve the ultimate goals of the Gilead society. Similarly, Daisy sacrifices her blood to hide a microchip under her skin (10). This microchip contains Lydia's records of the cruelty and inhumanity of the Gilead society. Here, Daisy's brave sacrifice, though it is devoted to transferring the secret documents to Canada, is much more valuable than Ofkyle's death. Liberating the women of the world by listening to Lydia's witness and sympathizing with her suffering under the inhuman patriarchal society of The Gilead is more important than giving birth to a new member of that society. Lightening their mind, collaborating with other victims of the patriarchal society, and finally writing and reading each other stories all together pave the way to the downfall of The Gilead society.

The German scholar Michaela Keck, who approaches Atwood's novel from a completely different angle, addresses the final question discussed in the current study. While the previous four studies focus on the injustice and dictatorship of The Gilead society and the required skills for women to end their suffering under patriarchal domination, achieving their physical and spiritual freedom, the focus of Keck's analysis is on The Gilead society and its establishment. She assumes that it will be a biased analysis and feminist prejudice if we examine the establishment of The Gilead as a mere responsibility of men. A patriarchal society is a dominant culture whose formation is the responsibility of both men and women with equal shares (2022: 14). The injustice and cruelty of such a system do not mean that it indicates only the injustice and cruelty of men. Instead, it highlights the corruption of a social system in which both men and women share the ethical

guilt. This leads to the second point in Keck's study, which is whether all the women in The Gilead deserve to be freed from the injustice of the patriarchal society or only some of them. Such freedom costs Aunt Lydia her life and puts Daisy and Agnes in great danger. In other words, Offred, the narrator of *The Handmaid's Tale*, was utterly passive towards the cruel actions done in the society of The Gilead. This passivity may be forgiven because of her survival instinct.

Nevertheless, her love relationship with Nick is a reckless action that threatens her survival in society and turns her to be utterly dependent on her lover emotionally and physically (Keck 22). Here, Offred chooses survival over her freedom and then chooses love over her survival. This choice indicates the complicated process of Offred's life under the domination of the patriarchal society, to which she was initially passive. Then, she falls in love with one of its members. Thus, according to Donna Bickford Offred's vital choices, she is unworthy of getting the final freedom promised to all women (2023: 20). Her suffering is unquestionable.

Nevertheless, her choices are ambiguous and selfish. This example becomes more ambiguous and complicated when compared to Aunt Lydia's life. Before the publication of *The Testaments*, most critics of Atwood's novel devoted their analysis to condemning Lydia's participation in the political regime of The Gilead in *The Handmaid's Tale* (Wrobel 260). The crimes committed by Lydia, until she reached her powerful position as the highest Aunt in the regime, reflect her complete betrayal and unfaithfulness to women's rights and freedom. Nevertheless, the declaration of her double role in *The Testaments* indicates her clever manipulation of the patriarchal system to the extent that she has played an essential role in its downfall. Lydia's final suicide echoes Offred's death, which can make the readers wonder if their lives were wasted for the sake of women's freedom and rights or their gains of power and supremacy. Like Kuznetski's study on *The Testaments*, Keck concludes her study on *The Handmaid's Tale* by affirming that women are initially human beings who can make wrong choices and mistakes. They can also correct their mistakes or live with men passively (2022: 29-30). All women have the right to have equal rights and freedom from men's domination. However, not all women appreciate that virtue, preferring to live under man's control and domination, being satisfied with their little personal gain and power. Generalization in judging human nature in any critical analysis of a literary text is not a merit or a cleverness on the critic's part.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The current study represents a comprehensive analysis of Atwood's novel, *The Testaments*, indicating women's inevitable suffering under men's control and domination. Such suffering is linked with a constant hope to achieve equality or, instead, victory and freedom from the eternal prison of the patriarchal society. Through the events of her literary work, the author has ambiguously answered the question of whether all women deserve such a happy end. Some women enjoy living in that prison and enjoy their dependency on men. The complicated nature of human choices, regardless of gender, is a great mystery that no one dares to judge or even resolve. The author's suggestion of several paths to end man's domination and attain freedom for the fellowship of women is also significant. The three paths suggested in the current study, including the unity between women's bodies and minds, the collaboration among women supporting each other, and finally, women's ability to read and write their stories, all look promising and challenging.

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