



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***DEVIATION AND MOBILITY IN FEMALE CHARACTERS  
STIMULATED THROUGH 'STRUCTURE OF FEELING'  
IN SELECTED AMERICAN NOVELS***

**AZHAR NOORI FEJER**

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UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA  
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**By**

**AZHAR NOORI FEJER**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**January 2015**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in  
fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**January 2015**

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The publication of John Updike’s *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984) made the author subject to much attacks and hostility. Feminists saw the book to be greatly offensive towards modern women. The three witches in the novel are depicted as carefree, malicious and murderers. Actually, this modern image of women varies significantly from the traditional ‘True Woman’ image that was predominant in American culture for a quite long time. This thesis traces the development in the female character in the works of four selected American authors between the years 1850s – 1980. The female characters were not notable before the 1850s. Generally, the predominant images were the good and the bad; hence, the American female character remained a stereotype. A steady deviation happened in the depiction of this character; the old, feeble, subordinate, passive woman was substituted with a strong, dominant, and sometimes daring figure. The study reveals that the deviation in the depiction of the female character is due to the ‘new structure of feeling’ that particular American authors possessed. These authors were influenced by different changes in life as a whole. In this study, I use a cultural materialist approach in which I return the literary texts to their historical context, and show the political commitments of the period. I also show the different genres and techniques the authors employ in order to come out with a developed female character. The textual analysis is based on social feminism approach since cultural materialist analysis often has political agendas. In my exploration of the stages of the female character’s development in American fiction, I focus on Raymond Williams’ concept of ‘structure of feeling’ to show the new sense of life these authors had attained that stimulated them to make an obvious ‘deviation’ during the second half of the nineteenth-century. I also display how this continuous deviation has led to the presentation of ‘individual mobility’ within the turn of the twentieth-century, and to ‘social mobility’ in the second half of the century. In my exploration of the deviation and the development in the female

character, I focus on Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1848), and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, (1859). Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963) exemplifies 'individual mobility', and, the final stage is going to be with John Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984) which represents 'social mobility,' and the modern female image. The four authors were evoked by their 'structure of feeling', wished to present certain characteristics of women that were overshadowed by American patriarchal society.



Abstrak tesis dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PENYIMPANGAN DAN MOBILITI WATAK WANITA YANG  
DIRANGSANG MELALUI ‘STRUKTUR PERASAAN’ DALAM  
NOVEL-NOVEL AMERIKA YANG TERPILIH**

Oleh

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Penerbitan *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984) oleh John Updike telah menyebabkan pengarangnya ditentang dan dimusuhi. Pihak yang berfahaman feminisme melihat buku ini sebagai sangat menyakitkan hati wanita moden. Tiga orang ahli sihir dalam novel ini digambarkan sebagai tidak kisah, berniat jahat dan pembunuh. Sesungguhnya, imej wanita moden seperti ini sangat berbeza berbanding imej tradisional ‘Wanita Sebenar’ yang utama dalam budaya Amerika untuk masa yang panjang. Tesis ini mengesan pembangunan watak wanita dalam karya empat pengarang Amerika yang terpilih antara tahun 1850-an-1980-an. Sebelum 1850-an watak wanita tidak begitu ketara. Umumnya, gambaran utama adalah buruk dan baik; yang menjadikan watak wanita Amerika kekal stereotaip. Penyimpangan dalam gambaran watak telah berlaku secara tekal; wanita tua, lemah, kurang penting, pasif telah diganti dengan watak kuat, dominan, dan kadang kala berani. Kajian menunjukkan penyimpangan gambaran watak wanita adalah disebabkan oleh ‘struktur baru perasaan’ yang dimiliki oleh pengarang-pengarang Amerika yang berkenaan. Pengarang-pengarang ini dipengaruhi oleh pelbagai perubahan dalam kehidupan secara keseluruhan. Dalam kajian ini, saya menggunakan pendekatan materialis budaya di mana saya mengembalikan teks-teks sastera mengikut konteks sejarahnya, di samping mengambil kira komitmen politik pada zaman itu. Saya juga menunjukkan pelbagai genre dan teknik yang digunakan oleh pengarang dalam membangunkan watak wanita. Analisis teks yang dilakukan adalah berdasarkan pendekatan feminisme sosial kerana analisis materialis budaya sering mempunyai agenda politik. Dalam penerokaan saya tentang peringkat-peringkat pembangunan watak wanita dalam karya fiksi Amerika, saya memfokuskan kepada konsep ‘struktur perasaan’ Raymond William bagi menunjukkan rasa kehidupan yang baru yang dimiliki oleh pengarang yang merangsang mereka melakukan ‘penyimpangan’ yang ketara dalam tempoh separuh kedua abad kesembilan belas. Saya juga

memaparkan bagaimana penyimpangan yang berterusan ini telah menyebabkan 'mobiliti individu' pada awal abad kedua puluh, dan menjadi 'mobiliti sosial' dalam separuh kedua abad tersebut. Dalam penerokaan saya tentang penyimpangan dan pembangunan watak wanita, saya memfokuskan kepada *The Scarlet Letter* (1848) karangan Nathaniel Hawthorne, dan *Our Nig*, (1859) karangan Harriet Wilson. *The Bell Jar* (1963) oleh Sylvia Plath adalah contoh bagi 'mobiliti individu', dan, peringkat terakhir adalah *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984) oleh John Updike yang menunjukkan 'mobiliti sosial' serta gambaran wanita moden. Empat pengarang ini telah dibangkitkan oleh 'struktur perasaan' mereka berhasrat untuk memaparkan watak-watak tertentu wanita yang telah ditenggelamkan oleh masyarakat patriarki Amerika.



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I certify that an Examination Committee has met on date of viva voce to conduct the final examination of Azhar Noori Fejer on her Ph.D thesis entitled “Deviation And Mobility In Female Characters Stimulated Through ‘Structure Of Feeling’ In Selected American Novels” in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Ph.D in English Literature.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

If only woman had been satisfied to remain protected, how much pleasanter the world, even the changing modern world might be today! – Ellen Glasgow from *They Stooped to Folly*

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

During the second half of the 20th century, the image of the free, strong, and malicious women appeared in the works of American authors. This image varies remarkably from the traditional prevailing image of the 'True womanhood' during the 19th century. It also differs typically from the two images of the good women and bad woman dominant in the works of major American male writers during the first half of the 20th century (Millet 1970; Gamble 2001). Obviously, a change has happened in the portrayal of the female character and it is part of an ongoing wide transformation in the whole life.

A continuous historical process of change is happening in human's life. Continuous revolutions are taking place everywhere: in politics, economy, and in culture. These revolutions have their influences on all institutions including literary writings forms and traditions. Consequently, to attain a comprehensive understanding of any literary work, we must reach to a full understanding of the culture in which that work is a product because a literary work is a cultural product.

There are various explanations given to the word culture because scholars differ in their interpretations of this term. T. S. Eliot, in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, indicates: "effective culture is that which is directing the activities of those who are manipulating that which they call culture" (110). According to Kenneth Allan, "culture functions as an ideology that produces or is based upon type of false consciousness and works to oppress group of people" (*The Meaning of Culture*, 100). Meanwhile, many Anthropologists consider culture to be "the meaning behind that which human produce" (Lassitter 2008, 40). Cultural materialists like Dollimore & Sinfield (1994) regard culture to be continuous and pertinent history. This study follows a cultural materialist approach – utilizing Raymond Williams' concepts and theories. Hence, the researcher is going to be confined to the theorist's definition of the term.

The theory of culture is explained by Raymond Williams as "the study of a whole way of life," (*Long Revolution*, 1961, 67) and the value of art works is to be determined by the whole situation in which these works were expressed. Hence, art should be considered as an activity just like other activities in society: the production, the politics, the raising of families. When we study art, Williams adds, we should not relate it to society, but we must study all the activities and their interrelations, without giving priority to anyone in particular (66). The relation between these activities should be studied actively, so it would be understood adequately. When we examine particular art works, we should collectively analyse

their “essential kind of organization, the relationships which works or institutions embody as parts of the organization” (67). Actually, this is the method that is adopted in analysing the literary texts subject of this study.

### **1.1.1 Recovering the ‘Structure of Feeling’**

When we examine the works of any past period, we should restore the literary text to its historical context in order to analyse it accurately. While we recover all the previous elements which are actually abstracts, we can gain the sense of another element; it is the

felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in which the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living...which is neither the character nor the pattern, but as it were the actual experience through which these were lived. For we find here a particular sense of life, a particular community of experience hardly needing expression (68).

Williams termed this element as the “structure of feeling,” this element is evident in the contrast between generations who never talk quite “the same language” (69). It is something that is not taught or learned but acquired as each new generation has its own ‘structure of feeling’ which seems not to come ‘from anywhere.’ ‘Structure of feeling’ is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organisation. For this reason the arts of a period seem to be of great importance because these arts include characteristic approaches and tones in argument. The ‘structure of feeling’ is something that is associated with the individual and his relation with the world around him. The new ‘structure of feeling’ a writer forms is the motive for the deviation he makes in his writing whether it is in the style, technique, characterisation, or in the theme.

### **1.1.2 Deviation of the Female Character in American Fiction**

Raymond Williams states that there is a historical process, a far-reaching transformation ongoing. It has taken a long time, transforming men and institutions. It is continually expanding and deepening, and people cannot comprehend it because they are all within this changing content. This process of change involves democratic, industrial, and cultural revolutions that are progressing and interacting. He also clarifies how literary development, partially effected by educational opportunities, methods of life, and communication systems, also participates in change. Writers are influenced by their social origins and educational history. There are certain motives that usually lead the individual to ‘deviate’ from his group of origin. However, we cannot assume that there could be an autonomous creation and that the creative individual is acting freely since the individual usually grows according to a learned pattern (279). Williams uses the term ‘deviation’ to describe the change that happened in literary writing.

Williams states that an outstanding literary development took place within the mid-19th century. It is shown through the new rising groups, and their contribution to literature through their deviation in themes, techniques, forms, and characterization

etc. Deviation is the participation of the “new social groups in much of the original social thinking of the nineteenth century.” Williams also considers it as “a positive correlation” (280). ‘Deviation,’ is described as a movement in which

all social classes, educational patterns and methods of life are represented, often with marked individual variations from inherited social norms; perhaps the only factor that is significant, since this would certainly have a relation with part of the character of the movement (ibid).

Those new social groups have great influence on much of “the most original social thinking of the nineteenth century” (ibid). One of the most “positive correlations” between society and literature is women group in the major period of the Victorian novel. This period has witnessed the emergence of a more standard social history of the principle contributors. This study shows how American women novelists of ‘Domestic fiction’ had sincerely participated in the development of the female character in American fiction. Through writing this new genre they made a ‘deviation’ in the female character. They have shown their female characters to be much stronger than the female character in the prevailing sentimental novels.

American literature is very rich in novel writing, especially from the early decades of the 19th century when both women and slaves were allowed to write and publish their works. Women novelists appeared as a minority group, and they practiced writing – especially ‘domestic fiction’ that promoted women’s issues. Women writers experimented with this literary genre and it became a very popular one.

Women novelists made certain ‘deviation’ while using the genre of ‘domestic fiction’. The deviation is presented in the portrayal of the heroine who seems to be stronger than the sentimental female. The sentimental female is usually portrayed as “an innocent and ignorant young girl,” who is subject to “seduction and betrayal,” and finally faces “her subsequent death in childbirth” (Davidson “Introduction,” p. xvii). While the protagonist in domestic fiction has faith and morality which she has already gained from her mother who usually embodies the qualities of ‘True womanhood.’ Barbara Welter, in ‘The Cult of True Womanhood,’ (1966) describes the attributes of ‘True Womanhood’ to be “divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.” Putting them all together, they would signify “mother, daughter, sister, wife-woman.” With them, a woman “was promised happiness and power,” and without them, fame, achievement and wealth were all considered “ashes” (152). So, the female in ‘domestic fiction’ is saved from temptation by her faith and morality, and she is not a prey to vicious men’s seduction any more.

Hence, these women writers presented a slightly developed image of women. The popularity of this fiction, with the influence of some feminists’ activists, in addition to particular personal changes inspired a male writer – Nathaniel Hawthorne, to depict Hester Prynne that is considered the first well-developed female character in American fiction. Kreger (1999) describes Hester as “the only significant female protagonist in the nineteenth century” (317). Domestic fiction also has encouraged a minor African-American writer – Harriet Wilson to disregard the usual ‘slave narrative’ genre conventions and present Frado. African American women were

generally excluded from the cult of 'True womanhood.' The 'cult' included only white upper and middle-class women who did not seek work for they were financially supported by male members of their families. Frado is a free black girl who becomes indentured servant to a Northern white family, though black, she embodies most qualities of 'True womanhood.' So, both writers 'deviated' in presenting the female character each stimulated by his 'structure of feeling.'

Many other examples of 'deviated' female characters can be found through surveying the era from the second half of the 19th century to the early decades of the 20th century. These females exist mainly in the fiction written by women novelists like Harriet Beecher Stow's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Rebecca Harding Davis *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861), Elizabeth Stoddard's *The Morgesons* (1862), Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), etc. These authors' works are not included in this study because they belong to the group of women writers whose writings and issues stimulated other major writers and minor groups to deviate in presenting the female character in American fiction. This continuous diverge in the portrayal of the female led to the change in the female image within the turn of the 20th century. Writers from other classes were also inspired to depict new and more developed images of women within their own institutions that were growing and developing.

### **1.1.3 Individual and Social Mobility in the Twentieth Century**

The theme of mobility during the 18th century was very limited. 'Individual mobility' appeared to be very limited because the individual belonged to institutions which were very powerful and rigid (284). Williams clarifies that the individual could not compromise with the institutions in relation, so, he usually ends by being destroyed, "first in character and then actually" (ibid). This denotes an implication of control in the situation. So, the individual either submits, or deteriorate.

Generally, mobility is now discussed primarily in individual terms and the writer is sometimes taken as an example. Just like other artists he "may be born in anywhere, and can move, as an individual, very rapidly through the whole society" (283). The most effective writers, states Williams, are mainly the result of a "combination of individual mobility with relative stability of institutions," and this leads to "the sense of a deadlock" (284). This sense of 'deadlock' is felt when the individual rages at the institutions which are available to him but he can make no change, or he accedes and consequently suffers "rapid personal deterioration" (ibid). The individual suffers alone and there is no solution to his problem – the sense of 'deadlock'. Many twentieth century American female fictional characters exemplify individual mobility such as: Edna in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899); Lily in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905); Virginia in Ellen Glasgow's *Virginia* (1913); Helga in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* 1928, etc.

Individual mobility in this study is exemplified by Sylvia Plath's female who, according to many critics, is considered to be Plath's persona (Boyer 2004; Baldwin 2004; Kumlu 2010). Esther, the protagonist in the novel, suffers because she tries to oppose the rigid and traditional views concerning women prevailing in American society during the first half of the 20th century. It causes her a mental breakdown and attempt of suicide. But finally she is forced to accept her society's ways of life in order to survive. Individual mobility proofed to be unsuccessful in bringing change

in the individual's situation; therefore, writers came out with a better solution – 'social mobility.'

'Social mobility,' according to Williams, is the real experience mobility. In this experience, we have a group of individuals rising and causing change instead of one individual rising against institutions. Williams believes that social mobility is more successful because, here, the "whole social groups are moving into new ways of life," consequently society changes (285). It is a recurrent theme in modern American fiction like in: Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988) Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* (2001), Richard Russo's *Empire Falls* (2001), Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012), etc. It is shown in the relations of brotherhood or sisterhood shared between the protagonist and people around him/her. Updike emphasises the sisterhood of the three witches shared in his novel. When they are distracted by the new comer, they started to lose their power and were easily controlled by that stranger. But, they later manage to overcome his bad impact on them through their unity.

'Structure of feeling' is the stimulus that evokes any writer to make change. The development in the female character in American fiction started in the mid-nineteenth century with deviation from the predominant sentimental female image. Successive deviation has led to change and the appearance of individual mobility in literary writings. Within time individual mobility proved to be ineffective, writers turned into social mobility as a means to bring change in society.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

The ideas and images which shaped American minds from 1840 to 1900 were urging towards perfection. Intellectual historians and literary critics made the 'American Adam' a stock figure of cultural interpretations. The authentic American was a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities (Lewis 1955; Reising 1986). He was the product of American patriarchal culture and expected to start a new history. The myth of New World Adam was envisioned by poets, philosophers, and reformers (Noble 1969). Eve was ignored because she was the cause behind the original Adam Downfall. Writers minimized her role so there would be no fall in the American version of the myth.

American fiction before the 1850s, hardly presented any notable female character. The most outstanding authors mostly paid attention to the male character while the female character remained a stereotype (Freibert 2002). American fiction "was a fiction without heroines," Charles Augoff states (qtd. in Greer 1948). The theoretical model of story which was the vehicle of cultural essence, as Baym (1981) clarifies was the: "melodrama of beset manhood." This melodrama "is presented in a fiction which... can be taken as representative of the author's literary experience, his struggle for integrity and livelihood" ("Melodramas of Beset Manhood"). The situation continued because only "few authors of the second part of the 19th century thought profoundly about or greatly imagined any women" (Greer 1). This tendency toward the female character reflects American culture and its patriarchal dominated society.

It seems that women, in real life, were also reduced to an inferior position, marginalised and considered lesser beings. Even women writers were not considered major writers by critics simply because their stories were about women. Baym states that

The certainty here that stories about women could not contain the essence of American culture means that the matter of American experience is inherently male. And this makes it highly unlikely that American women would write fiction encompassing such experience (“Melodramas”).

However, women writers have undoubtedly dominated American literature commercially and numerically since the mid-19th century. ‘Domestic fiction’ has presented a “deviated” female character that is strong and moralistic. This new image of the woman was a contribution to American fiction. Its influence is traced in two trends: First, it has influenced major authors to write about women issues. Secondly, it inspired women from other ethnicities to write about their issues.

Actually, ‘domestic fiction’ is but one of the many factors that have led to the deviation in the portrayal of the female character. The industrial revolution, the civil war, feminist movement, education, and cultural changes all integrated and collaborated to form a ‘new structure of feeling’ in particular writers. Their contribution participated in developing the female character in American novel. The deviation turned into a consistent, ongoing change. The outcome of this change is the new image of woman that we have today. The development took place through a long period of time. Today American authors in general, pay much attention to the depiction of the female character, and usually present her in a well-developed image.

There is a huge amount of studies conducted on women’s issues. Some of these studies have dealt with the development of the female character such as: (Varnum, 2003; Carr, 2003; Gigante, 2004; Camden, 2005; Rosen, 2007). However, a few have traced the complete development from the passive, subordinate weak female to the new, strong, dominating figure in modern American novels. In fact, the available studies mostly attribute the development to one factor in life – politics, economy, society, or cultural changes. These studies usually concentrate on one factor and neglect the others. In addition to the fact that none of them has traced the whole change from the traditional stock character to the new, well- developed one.

The female character in American fiction went through three stages of development. First, there is the ‘deviation’ from the innocent, weak, and ignorant female in the mid-19th century to the image of ‘True Woman,’ and the continuous development that occurred on this image. Secondly, we have the ‘individual mobility,’ with the image of the ‘New woman’. This image reflects the women who expressed a “distressing disinterest in the female domestic sphere—especially an overt disgust with housework... and a shocking desire for ‘fellowship’ with men” (Cogan 1989, 258). Finally, we have the third stage with ‘social mobility’ and the dominant image of the ‘Modern Woman’. Stuart Brown defines modern woman as the female who manages to find a role in a patriarchal dominated society; she has more options “to follow individual desire as opposed to the hegemonic notion that marriage, child

bearing and homemaking are solitary occupations to which [she] can abide in modern society ("Modern Woman").

Cultural studies seek to search representations of marginalised social groups and their need for cultural change (see p.23). Feminism is among the theories that are adopted in cultural materialists' textual analysis for women were oppressed and marginalised for long. In this study, there are many references to feminism in America because the discipline of women's history began actually there. The United States had established the pattern that most western countries later followed. Miriam Schneir states that the real impetus of the woman's movement began there, and the United States is known as "the world centre of old feminism," (1994, xv). American patriarchal society has witnessed much cultural changes because of this movement.

This study displays how deviation in literary writing is related to a larger change in a "whole way of life". Williams (2011) describes change as an outcome of "explicit reaction and habitual forms and ideas which continually extend and deepen," (12). This provokes a 'new structure of feeling' in life, and defines new expectations. The deviation was carried on by individual authors who made some deviation in their writing and presentation of the female character. The four authors in this study are examples of writers who were stimulated by their 'new structure of feeling'. The consistent deviation continued from one generation to another till it finally led to change in form, style, and characterization.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are: (i) to trace the development in woman's status in American's society and its influence on the representation of fictitious female characters in the works of particular American authors; (ii) to show that there are actually many factors behind change in literary writing since an author is influenced by different discourses in life which actively interact to give him a new 'structure of feeling' that provokes him to make change; (iii) to show that only particular authors do respond to their new 'structure of feeling'; (iv) to focus on the characters' responses to the surrounding, environment or the setting in which they are portrayed. I scrutinise the female characters with regard to their submission or contestation against the patriarchal system, and also expose how these characters varied the convention and rules they were put under; (v) to highlight the difference between women's attitude towards their duties, motherhood and marriage during the chosen phase, and trace the progress in woman- man relationship in these novels.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

Change is an ongoing transformation in individuals and institutions. Many studies have been conducted on the development of the female character in American fiction; however, most of these studies either traced the change in the work of one particular author, or works of group of authors whose female characters share a common variation. Few studies traced the change within a certain period of time, but they are usually limited within one stage of the development. Rare studies have traced the total change from the weak, dependent, passive, submissive woman to the strong, dominant, liberated one (see Ch. 2, pp.55-61). Scrutinizing four chosen texts

written by both male and female American authors over a period of 130 years, and dealing with them from a cultural materialism perspective is innovative. Moreover, during the years 1850-1980, the American novel had developed from a middle-class cultural product to a complete literary genre.

Cultural materialism gives attention to all cultures in society without making distinction between high and low cultures. In the past, women were marginalised and neglected as a minor group, but they struggled like other minor groups – the working class, African-Americans, Native-American, Asian-American, etc., to raise and prove themselves as essential groups in society. Williams has shifted gender and sexuality as groups of analysis in his work thus feminist critics, in general, neglect his concepts and theories in spite of their validity. I suggest that both the pragmatism of his concepts and theories, and the innovative method he uses are fairly applicable to feminist studies since his theories are written about and for minor and marginalised groups.

This study adopts Williams' theory of deviation and mobility that is based on his concept of 'structure of feeling.' This concept cannot be generalised on all authors because only particular authors do believe and pursue change, while many other writers rather confine to the dominant social character. The study also shows that female characters actually go through three stages in their development; deviation, individual mobility, and finally social mobility. It reveals how the third stage is the most effective one since it brings the full change.

Finally, the field of literary theory and its application in the analysis of the literary texts is a new experience in cultural studies in both Malaysian and Iraqi academic institutions of which the researcher is a product.

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

This study focus on the change that occurred on the female characters in definite works in American fiction, specifically *The Scarlet Letter*, *Our Nig*, *The Bell Jar*, and *The Witches of Eastwick*, with reference to findings of new historicism, Socialist feminists, post-colonialism feminism, and gender studies, within the framework of Raymond Williams and cultural materialism. Cultural materialists consider all discourses in life to be essential while analysing the literary work. Moreover, Williams' concept of 'structure of feeling' explains clearly how change occurs as a result of historical factors, and not through social changes.

### **1.6 Limitation of the Study**

To take an investigation into the area of women's new status and its effect on life, this study is engaged in a critical reading of selected American fiction written between the 1850s and the 1980s. During this period, the American novel developed and reached completeness. The study concentrates on the first and second waves of feminism since women managed to attain equity and gained their rights within the second wave. These texts are written by both male and female authors, and reflect the gradual deviation in the female character. Through a critical examination of the development in female character, the study suggests the various influences of different factors that had led to this development.

This study is limited to four novels written by different authors, namely Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1848), Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963), and John Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick* (1984). In these novels, the authors 'deviated' in one way or another in presenting their female characters. Their books reflect a desire to present different females stimulated by their new 'structure of feeling'. The popular writings of domestic novels during the mid-19th century have inspired major authors, such as Hawthorne, to present a female character with a quite different perspective. It has also influenced an African-American author –Wilson who is from a minority group, to contradictorily portray her black female embodying the qualities of 'True womanhood'. Definitely the deviation has been carried on by writers from other minor groups, yet this work cannot cover them all.

Mobility is associated with the 20th century, as the individual became freer in her movement. Plath's novel exposes the new woman's dilemma for it reveals the conflict between women's aspiration and society's disregard of woman as mere domestic creatures. Male author presented no lively female characters during this era for they remained confined to the same repeated images, the aggressive woman or the passive servant, while their subjects were mostly concerning sexuality and the freshly redefined sexual politics between men and women (Millet 1970; Gamble 2001; Freibert 2002). To make a balance in the selection, the analysis starts and ends with male writers. Updike is considered the second American author, after Hawthorne, who truly desired to present a well-developed female character. The shift in women status from the oppressed to the oppressor, society's new view of women, and how all this is reflected in the authors' portrayal of the female will be some of the concerns of the study. This dissertation cannot cover all authors who contributed to the development because of limitation of both time and space.

## 1.7 Methodology

This study sheds light on the development of the female character in the works of four American authors, namely Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Wilson's *Our Nig*, Plath's *The Bell Jar*, and Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick* through textual analysis. Tracing these works chronologically, one can feel a deviation in the portrayal of the female character. Those writers made deviation in the presentation of the female from their counterparts. Their females are quite sensible, active, vivid, and independent. The characters seem to reflect a revolutionary potential for change and revolt against conventions and misconceptions of patriarchal order by rejecting rules and standards. They differ obviously from the traditional stock females in majority of American fiction. The gradual deviation within time turned into an obvious change; the weak, dependant, domestic creature finally became free, strong, and independent.

Accordingly, I use Williams' concept of 'structure of feeling' and his theory of 'deviation and mobility' to reveal the interaction of different discourses of life that provoked the change. Individual authors are influenced by changes around them. They would have new perspectives and sense life in a different way. I argue that each author new 'structure of feeling' has evoked a desire inside him/her to present a 'deviated' female image. Each author has a certain aim from his portrayal of the

female: Hawthorne tried to defy the prevailing image of woman at the time; Wilson desired to correct certain misconceptions about women; Plath wished to reflect a predominant tendency among women at the first half of the 20th- century; Updike anticipated in warning against certain tendencies that emerged within woman's liberation. To achieve this I employ 'structure of feeling' as proffered by Williams to expose the contribution of these writers to the female image in fiction. Williams' deviation and mobility theory will be used to trace characters' development chronologically first through deviation from the prevailing image; later as an individual mobile; and finally through social mobility.

## **1.8 Organization of the Thesis**

Chapter One, the introduction, presents the topic and shows the general outline of the thesis. Chapter Two starts with a short background of American feminism, while the rest of the chapter is devoted to the literature review that contextualises the present study within the body of related studies. The chapter includes a comprehensive literature review of past studies on: (i) Raymond Williams cultural materialism and women studies; (ii) the deviance in the female character; (iii) the novel and American life; (iv) the four selected authors and a comprehensive literature review of past studies on Hawthorne, Wilson, Plath, and Updike and their above-mentioned works. Chapter Three is devoted to the theoretical and conceptual framework of the present study to locate it within the body of the research.

The textual analysis is presented in three chapters: Chapter Four which chiefly focuses on the first two characters; Hester Prynne from *The Scarlet Letter* and Frado from *Our Nig* to display how these two females differ from their counterparts in personality and manners. Chapter Five shows Esther Greenwood from *The Bell Jar* as a vivid example for individual mobility in her rejection to conventions set by society, and her failure to make change. Chapter Six deals with social mobility and the analysis of three female characters: Alexandra Spofford, Jane Smart, and Sukie Rougemont from *The Witches of Eastwick* with their magical powers – in reference to feminists' sisterhood, which empowers them to subjugate others. As for Chapter Seven, the conclusion, I discuss the contribution of these authors to the development and how they varied in their portrayal and intentions; it also includes some recommendations for further studies.

## **1.9 Summary**

The dissertation attempts to trace the change in the female image as part of a change in life as a whole. People, within change sense life differently and form new structure of feeling. Certain writers reflected their desire for change in their literary writings. The study discusses selected novels written during specific period of time to shed light on the development that occurred on the female character. The discussion is led from a cultural materialism perspective. Raymond Williams' theories are much applicable on women since the working class and women were both minor groups who struggled to emerge. The researcher's contention throughout the study is to prove that the change in the portrayal of the female character is an outcome of a big change in life. It is a noticeable transformation that is reflected in the portrayal of the female character in fiction.

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