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AUTHORS: Esengül SAGLAM CAN

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### A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON KATE CHOPIN’S “A RESPECTABLE WOMAN” AND SEVGİ SOYSAL’S “TANTE ROSA AFOROZ EDİLİYOR”

#### KATE CHOPIN’İN “A RESPECTABLE WOMAN” VE SEVGİ SOYSAL’IN “TANTE ROSA AFOROZ EDİLİYOR” ESERLERİ ÜZERİNE KARŞILAŞTIRMALI BİR İNCELEME

Esengül SAĞLAM CAN\*

#### ÖZ

Feminist edebiyat eleştirisi, edebî bir eserde kadınların neler yaptıklarına, erkeklerle nasıl etkileşime girdiklerine, toplumdaki rollerinin neler olduğuna, ahlaki ve sosyal kodların onlar için neler ifade ettiğine odaklanır. Bu eleştiri kuramı, okunan her metne yeni değerlendirmeler, tarihsel, toplumsal ve disiplinler arası bakış açıları sunar ve beraberinde kadın yazarların eserlerini farklı bir perspektifle ve kadın duyarlılığıyla sunmaları önem kazanır. Bu makalede, eserlerinde sadece kadının bireysel duygularını anlatmakla kalmayıp içinde bulundukları toplumların ataerkil yapısını da eleştiren Kate Chopin ve Sevgi Soysal’ın öykülerindeki kadın karakterler ve temalar karşılaştırılmaktadır. Feminist edebiyat eleştirisi çerçevesinde incelenen Chopin’in “A Respectable Woman” ve Soysal’ın “Tante Rosa Afroz Ediliyor” öykülerinden hareketle yazarların kadınlık kültürünü eserlerinde ne şekilde ele aldıklarına ve kadın imgesini nasıl şekillendirdiklerine odaklanılmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, her ne kadar farklı zaman dilimi, toplum yapısı ve kültür ortamında bulunsalar da kadın

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\* Arş. Gör., Yıldız Teknik Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, Türk Dili Ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, E-mail: esengulsaglam@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-3614-0219, İstanbul, Türkiye.

yazarlar ve kadın kahramanların ataerkil toplum düzeninin politikaları karşısında benzer özellikler taşıdıklarını göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Kadınlık, Feminist Edebiyat Eleştirisi, Kadın Yazarlar, Kate Chopin, Sevgi Soysal.*

## ABSTRACT

Feminist literary criticism focuses on what women are doing in a fictional work, how they interact with men, what the moral and social codes for women are, and what the women's role in society is. Feminist criticism provides new evaluations and historical, social, and interdisciplinary points of view to every text. It is also thought that women writers look at the world differently and create their works within a predominantly female sensibility. This study presents a comparative analysis of the themes and heroines in the short stories "A Respectable Woman", by Kate Chopin, and "Tante Rosa Aforoz Ediliyor", by Sevgi Soysal. Sevgi Soysal and Kate Chopin not only describe the individual feelings of women but also criticize the patriarchal structure of society in their works. By doing a feminist reading, it will be tried to understand the aims of Chopin and Soysal while describing and demolishing the cult of ideal womanhood in their writings. In this article, the woman image will be problematized in the light of feminist literary criticism, and it is examined how this image is shaped in these short stories. It is aimed to show that although the authors and short stories' protagonists are from different eras, societies, and cultures, the reflections of politics, controlled by patriarchy, have similar characteristics.

**Key Words:** *Womanhood, Feminist Literary Criticism, Woman Writers, Kate Chopin, Sevgi Soysal.*

## INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a doctrine based on women's rights struggles in a patriarchal society. Feminist literary criticism, shaped around the works of researchers such as Virginia Woolf, Kate Millet, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, is based on interpreting literary creations around the image of a woman and examining the relation of the image in question with the place of women in the patriarchal order. According to Berna Moran, feminist literary criticism developed in the 1960s as a part of the feminist movement and started by revealing the attitude towards women in the works of male writers. It turned to women writers,

determined the features in their works, and tried to prove that women writers formed an independent tradition in the history of literature. Then, it stated that language was a tool to humiliate and oppress women in patriarchy. In this regard, the critics draw attention to women writers who have a different tradition and discourse because of the fact that women have been exposed to the same oppression in history. In these circumstances, it is expected for women writers to comprehend the world and life more distinctly than male writers. But differences are not due to a natural dissimilarity; these are the results of similar tensions in women's experiences in the community. Women form a subculture in communities; therefore, there is a unity or a similarity between the experiences, behaviours, and values in women writers' works. (2002, p. 255/262)

Chopin and Soysal are controversial writers in their own countries. Kate Chopin is an American writer, once considered notorious by her period and ignored several times because of her unaccepted and extraordinary ideas implied in her novels and short stories. She was an example of a writer whose ideas were ahead of her time. By the early 1890s, Kate Chopin gained a national reputation for publishing her short stories. In her later works, Chopin dealt with young heroines stressed in traditional domestic conditions. Her literature career ended after *The Awakening* was published. Chopin's books were banned by the libraries of St. Louis, and she was removed from membership in the St. Louis Fine Arts Club. Her publisher cancelled the publication of the third short story collection. Chopin's works were condemned to be inappropriate for social criteria and morals, and Chopin and her literary works were forgotten for some time until resurrected in 1969. (Ed., 2022)

Sevgi Soysal's short stories and novels are not conventional episodic works, either. The themes of her stories are depression, solitude, distress, and sadness of the women. Sevgi Soysal's writings, criticising social inequity, gender injustice, and militarism, have been essential to understanding Turkey since the 1960s. After 12 March 1971, the reflection of the alterations appears in her works. Soysal tells about heroines' interior universes, dilemmas, and conflicts with society. Like Chopin, Soysal's novel, *Yürümek* -handling male-female relationships and the concept of marriage- was forbidden because of obscenity.

Butler says that "women" is a troublesome term, a struggle, and a cause for concern. (2014, p. 46) Most of Chopin's and Soysal's major characters in their short stories are

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“troublesome” women. Both “A Respectable Woman” and “Tante Rosa Aforoz Ediliyor” have lots of common features against the men-designed world, and these two short stories emphasize women’s similar positions and conditions at different times.

### **A COMPARISON OF “A RESPECTABLE WOMAN” AND “TANTE ROSA AFOROZ EDILİYOR”**

Chopin and Soysal deconstruct the image of virtuous womanhood, constructed by the patriarchal world in “A Respectable Woman” and “Tante Rosa Aforoz Ediliyor”. Through the short stories, both tell the experiences and status of ordinary female characters and deconstruct the traditional point of view of an ideal wife and mother.

In “A Respectable Woman”, Mrs. Baroda learns that Gouvernail, her husband's friend, wants to spend one or two weeks at Baroda's plantation. She feels disappointed because, Mrs. Baroda dreams of resting with her husband, Gaston Baroda, after a busy winter season. She has never encountered Gouvernail, although she has a prejudged idea about him. Mrs. Baroda thinks he will be an arrogant snob, but he is lovable and inoffensive in fact. She unexpectedly likes Gouvernail and becomes confused. However, the deepness of the interest disturbs her because she is “a respectable woman” with a good life, and she is undoubtedly not familiarized with these feelings. Mrs. Baroda wants to tell Mr. Baroda about her hazardous feelings but decides that she must control them by herself. The next day, she departs from the house and does not return until that Gouvernail leaves the plantation, because she must stay as a lady. Mr. Baroda wants Gouvernail to return the following summer. Mrs. Baroda first refuses, then she changes her mind, delighting her husband, who tells her wife that Gouvernail doesn’t deserve her displeasure. Mrs. Baroda kisses her husband and tells him that she “overcomes everything” and treats him “more nicely”.

In “Tante Rosa Aforoz Ediliyor”, Rosa, who is married for seven years, can’t go to church because she suckles her third baby. The season is winter, and children play snowball fights on the street. One snowball breaks the window of Rosa’s house, and she closes the hole with her breast. When the women return to their house from the church, they see Tante Rosa and condemn her husband, who doesn’t care about that. Then Rosa finds a letter in the chest and tries to remember who sent it. When she finds the writer of the letter, she devolves to her husband and children. The church excommunicates Tante Rosa, and this situation is

published in the journal *Sizlerle Başbaşa*. While Tante Rosa's husband is acclaimed as a hero in the village, everyone waits for her suicide. Tante Rosa doesn't care about anything, goes to a big city, and gets married again. Her new and handsome husband plays fiddle and Tante Rosa, who becomes a newspaper vendor, gains money by selling the journal of *Sizlerle Başbaşa*. In all short stories in *Tante Rosa*, like "Tante Rosa Aforoz Ediliyor", this journal is important for the heroine. Carol Dyhouse (2015) says that fashion magazines are one of the most important tools that shape women's lives and expectations. Magazines are in the position of reflecting the ideals and images of femininity presented to women. *Sizlerle Başbaşa* is used ironically by the Soysal for parodying the women who believe in the reality of the news in this kind of publication. The magazine is with Tante Rosa in every period of her life as a guide.

Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex* (1952), draws attention to the fact that society imposes on women certain missions, and it minimizes women's awareness levels. Roles are assigned to women by society, and the women maintain their lives without being able to recognize self-existence. It is dictated to women that living under the control of others is not a choice but a necessity of creation. Beauvoir also states that women are restricted in an area called a family. They are responsible for giving birth to children and taking care of their husband's will; in other words, a wife must be a "lady of the house" for the family's bliss. Her home comes in possession of her "(...) lot, the expression of her social value and her truest self. Because she does nothing, she eagerly seeks self-realization in what she has." (Beauvoir, 1952, p. 451) So, being a married woman means being a mother, a wife, and the lady of the house is the best position for the community. In "A Respectable Woman" and "Tante Rosa Aforoz Ediliyor", heroines question the lady concept and realize that they are controlled by the other. Both Tante Rosa and Mrs. Baroda come into a world of cognitive enlightenment, and experience self-realization.

According to Anne Phillips, the doctrine of husband control results in married women not having a legal position. Once married, women cease to be persons. (2012, p. 40) In "A Respectable Woman", the reader doesn't know Mrs. Baroda's first name, because she doesn't have independent visibility apart from her husband in the public. Like Beauvoir and Phillips, in the introduction of *Images of Women in Literature*, Mary Anne Ferguson remarks that

from a male viewpoint, the central and most desirable feature of female characters has been their inactivity. (1986, p. 6) The patriarchal world forces women to be passive, but Chopin and Soysal deny the accepted and learned notions of being a perfect, loving, and inactive woman.

Badinter says that three reasons set a woman up as an object in her husband's eyes: A woman is both a means of climbing the social ladder, an object that amuses the man's heart, and a suitable abdomen. (1992, p. 114) Tante Rosa and Mrs. Baroda are not typical female characters, because they defy the conventional role of women. Tante Rosa, firstly, is depicted as an ordinary woman who takes care of her husband and children. After she finds a letter from a man whose name is not remembered by Rosa, she becomes confused, decides to leave her duties, and then “locks the door” for her husband. The locked door symbolizes her desire to be an individual. While remembering the writer of the letter, she “awakes” and discards her social role, and regains her own identity taken by society.

According to Eagleton, women are both within and out of the masculine community and described as romantically idealized members or sacrificial exile persons:

“The woman is both 'inside' and 'outside' male society, both a romantically idealized member of it and a victimized outcast. She is sometimes what stands between man and chaos, and sometimes the embodiment of chaos itself. This is why she troubles the neat categories of such a regime, blurring its well-defined boundaries. Women are represented within a male-governed society, fixed by sign, image, meaning, yet because they are also the 'negative' of that social order, there is always in them something which is left over, superfluous, unrepresentable, which refuses to be figured there.” (Eagleton, 2003, p. 165)

Tante Rosa’s decision makes her a marginal woman in the eyes of society. Although Rosa is a Catholic woman, she doesn’t arrange her life according to religion. She doesn’t care about the community or the church and doesn’t want to have the responsibility of womanhood. Even though Catholics can’t divorce, Rosa doesn’t obey this rule and she doesn’t escape from the fight with society silently. Tante Rosa is strange not only in the fictional world but also in Turkish society. Hereupon Selim İleri says that the events, people, and atmosphere in *Tante Rosa* are quite strange to Turkish society. Because of that, the work has been criticized and has not been sufficiently evaluated. (1977, p. 6-7)

In "A Respectable Woman", Mrs. Baroda and her feelings change like Tante Rosa. When Mrs. Baroda meets Gouvernail, a kind and unpretentious visitor to the Baroda plantation, she feels puzzled about him. She doesn't determine what she wants and contends with her identity as "a respectable woman." Because if you are a married woman, being a respectable woman means being faithful and behaving like a model. After she feels a desire for Gouvernail, she acts as a good model because of social stress. However, then she insists on her husband to invite Gouvernail again because she is now sure what to want; now she doesn't want to be "a respectable woman". The final words of Mrs. Baroda have a hesitant meaning: "I have overcome everything! You will see. This time I shall be very nice to him." (Chopin, p. 3) She understands her desire and overcomes her guilty feelings. So, Mrs. Baroda implies that after crushing her suspicions and social limitations she decides to have an affair with Gouvernail. Like Tante Rosa, after realizing her feelings, Mrs. Baroda decides not to play the role of a respectable woman. This time Kate Chopin wants the readers to complete the short story with the actions of the "awakened" Mrs. Baroda.

According to Özkırımlı, during her childhood, Tante Rosa has been surrounded by contradictions and prohibitions, and she pursues a personal way out of such an environment. (1977, p. 9) Similarly, when the character of Tante Rosa is psychologically examined, it is clear the conflict with the patriarchal society is explained by her unwillingness to play the role of true womanhood: "Tante Rosa left a letter in the back, left three kids, one in the teat. She left her husband and the church." (Soysal, 2002, p. 36) The metaphor of "the angel in the house" is a result of the cult of true womanhood. Women feel subordinated in a world designed for men. They digress from the angel concept, the formulation of motherhood, kindness, devotion, and purity, and want to be individual. So, the women reverse the holy imputation and turn into "the madwoman in the attic".

Like Tante Rosa, Mrs. Baroda discovers that her identity as a woman is more meaningful than her social substance as a reputable woman at the end of the story. First, she conflicts with herself and then determines to conflict with the rules of society. If "A Respectable Woman" and "Tante Rosa Aforoz Ediliyor" were written as typically conventional short stories, Mrs. Baroda and Tante Rosa would possibly preserve their marriages. Tante Rosa and Mrs. Baroda don't fit in men-designed forms, and they don't want



to accept directions and conventions. Both decide having a wealthy sentimental life is more acceptable than being the model of true womanhood. In brief, if there were one more page of “A Respectable Woman”, Chopin would describe Mrs. Baroda’s actions while pursuing her feelings and desires like Tante Rosa. Therefore, “Tante Rosa Aforoz Ediliyor” can be read as the continuation of “A Respectable Woman” because Mrs. Baroda gives hints understood with the character of Tante Rosa.

## CONCLUSION

The feminist movement, developed as a social and political struggle, advocates equality between sexes. Feminist literary criticism is based on the view that women writers have an important mission. Because patriarchal discourse in literature is insufficient to reveal women and women's problems. The male order, which is dominant in the world of literature as well as in society, causes women to appear in literary works under their desires. However, women writers open a big door in literature and displace patriarchal patterns. They create their discourse and universe of images and shed light on the adventures of women to discover themselves. In this context, it should be noted that both short stories contain strong feminist messages.

Kate Chopin was considered unreputable by her era due to the ideas mentioned in her novels and short stories and forgotten until her works were revitalized in 1969. Like Chopin, Sevgi Soysal was criticized because of Tante Rosa’s “immoral” character when the book of *Tante Rosa* was published in 1968. As it is seen, Kate Chopin’s rediscovery period and Sevgi Soysal’s writing period coincide with the 1960s, the years of the second-wave feminism movement. As a woman, while Chopin appears beyond her time, Soysal represents her own time, but both emphasize similar points about womanhood.

Most of all, Soysal and Chopin make the reader think at the end of the short stories: What does it mean to be a respected woman? Does society give honor to a woman, or is it enough for a woman to respect herself, even though being out of line? Mrs. Baroda faces a dilemma and hesitates between her feelings and social duties. Then her adventures end when she gets to know herself, decides to go beyond social norms, and experiences an awareness of femininity. In the process that Mrs. Baroda starts to individualize, Tante Rosa seems like gaining her freedom. However, as is seen in the other short stories of *Tante Rosa*, even this

awareness doesn't make Tante Rosa happy. Because social norms continue to work for those who are out of patriarchal lines.

Consequently, this study has remarked that the problems of the women have some similarities no matter in which place, civilization, and period they live. Power mechanisms, the concept of success as described by society, and gender roles preventing the development of the individual are all defined through the experiences of Mrs. Baroda and Tante Rosa. It is essential that from the perspective of feminist literary criticism, Mrs. Baroda and Tante Rosa seem to be models fighting with social norms to gain their lost identities.

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