

REFLECTIONS OF SECOND WAVE FEMINISM IN *THE FEMALE MAN* AND *THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS*

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Abstract: Women science fiction writers of the 60s and 70s reflected second wave feminist ideologies in their fictional works. The distinctive narrative techniques of science fiction genre brought out various aspects of feminist ideas in different ways. Issues related to gender and sex were embedded in the elements of science fiction such as parallel universes, androgynies, intersex, mindreading, planets, aliens, and inventions. Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), through these elements, raise questions about gender equality, body politics, ethics, and social constructions. These science fiction novels have themes that are closely related to the central texts debated among second wave feminists such as Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Le Guin and Russ apply feminist theories to unconventional lives and societies, whose uniqueness or oddity helps readers think outside of the box. By presenting alternative societies, they unfold how male domination can cause sexual objectification and gender inequality, and anatomic differences in science fiction worlds creates an awareness concerning constructed gender roles. Moreover, the second wave feminists' emphasis on sexual freedom, birth control, and marriage are illustrated through the multi-faceted outcomes of these multi-directional utopic and dystopic societies. This paper aims to bring together second wave feminist ideas and science fiction through an examination of two works, *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Female Man*, both of which present resisting interpretations of traditional gender issues. Unorthodox approaches to gender, the peculiar structure of the societies, and body politics will be analyzed through the narratives and elements of science fiction. Furthermore, this paper will illustrate how these novels challenge conventional definitions of gender and sex in the light of second wave feminism.

Key Words: feminism, science fiction, American novel, gender.

***THE FEMALE MAN VE THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS* ROMANLARINDA İKİNCİ DALGA FEMİNİZMİN YANSIMASI**

Öz: 1960'lar ve 70'lerin kadın bilimkurgu yazarları, kurgusal eserlerinde ikinci dalga feminist ideolojileri yansıttılar. Bilim kurgu türünün kendine özgü anlatı teknikleri, feminist fikirlerin çeşitli yönlerini farklı şekillerde ortaya çıkardı. Bu eserlerde cinsiyet ve cinsiyetle ilgili konular, paralel evrenler, androjenler, interseks, akıl okuma, gezegenler, uzaylılar ve icatlar gibi bilim kurgu unsurlarına yerleştirilmiştir. Ursula K. Le Guin'in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)

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ve Joanna Russ'ın *The Female Man* (1975) adlı yapıtları bu unsurlar aracılığıyla toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği, beden politikaları, etik ve sosyal inşalar hakkında soru işaretleri uyandırır. Bu bilim kurgu romanları, Simon de Beauvoir'ın *The Second Sex* (1949) ve Betty Friedan'ın *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) gibi ikinci dalga feministler arasında tartışılan merkezi metinlerle yakından ilgili temalara sahiptir. Le Guin ve Russ, feminist teorileri, benzersizliği veya tuhaflığı okuyucuların kalıpların dışında düşünmesine yardımcı olan alışılmadık yaşamlara ve toplumlara uygular. Alternatif toplumlar sunarak, erkek egemenliğinin nasıl cinsel nesneleştirmeye ve cinsiyet eşitsizliğine neden olabileceğini ortaya koyarak, bilim kurgu dünyalarındaki anatomik farklılıklar üzerinden, inşa edilmiş cinsiyet rollerine ilişkin bir farkındalık yaratırlar. Dahası, ikinci dalga feministlerin cinsel özgürlük, doğum kontrolü ve evlilik konularına yaptıkları vurgu, bu çok yönlü ütöpic ve distöpic toplumlardaki alternatif yaşam biçimleri üzerinden örneklendiriliyor. Bu makale, her ikisi de geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet meselelerine karşı direnen yorumlar sunan *The Left Hand of Darkness* ve *The Female Man* adlı iki eseri inceleyerek ikinci dalga feminist fikirleri ve bilim kurguyu bir araya getirmeyi amaçlıyor. Toplumsal cinsiyete, toplumların kendine özgü yapısına ve beden politikalarına yönelik alışılmışın dışında yaklaşımlar, anlatılar ve bilimkurgu öğeleri üzerinden incelenecektir. Ayrıca bu makale, bu romanların ikinci dalga feminizm ışığında geleneksel toplumsal cinsiyet ve cinsiyet tanımlarına nasıl meydan okuduğunu göstermeyi hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: feminizm, bilim kurgu, Amerikan romanı, toplumsal cinsiyet.

1. Introduction

The Left Hand of Darkness takes place on another planet, Gethen, where people are intersex. Although they are androgynous in their daily life, during kemmer, a period of mating, they become male or female randomly. Gently Ai, a man from Terra (Earth), visits Gethen and offers them to join Ekumen, League of Worlds. During his visit, he finds the chance to observe Gethenians and compare this intersex society to his own people. Although, at first, he is welcomed by Gethenians, later he encounters hostile attitude and is imprisoned. Estraven helps him escape and they start a thorny quest. During their journey, they become intimate with each other and discover one another's complicated nature.

In *The Female Man*, there are four main female characters, who are actually same person but live in parallel universes. Joanna lives in a world similar to the U.S. in the 1970s, and Jeannine lives in a world, where the Depression has not ended and the Second World War has never happened. Financial crisis and poverty show parallels with the seventies in the U.S., since America experienced a recession because of the oil embargo (Gorelic 63-64). Also there was stagflation (high inflation rate) during the period because of the Vietnam War expenses (Campagna 117). Janet is from utopian Whileaway, where males became extinct because of a plague 900 years ago and the Whileawayans live peacefully in their single gendered society. Jael is an assassin, living in dystopian world, where there is a constant war between men and women. Without any rational explanation, they are able to visit alternative worlds and explore

them. Joanna calls herself “female man,” because she challenges male dominated society, but she does not change psychically or psychologically.

Since the beginning of the feminist waves, interrelated theories and analyses have been developed to reflect gender-based oppression and discrimination. Along with the cultural revolutions of the 1960s, the second wave brought about significant transformation on the issues of marriage, reproductive rights, discrimination based on race and sex. In these decades, female writers voiced their problems and challenges to deconstruct accepted social norms on gender and sexuality. As *The Second Sex* inspired female writers, literature was used as a means of discovery on experimental narrative techniques, unconventional themes, and body politics. Moreover, women succeeded in gaining their rights in legal sphere such as the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and the Women’s Educational Equity Act of 1972 (De Hart 615). Despite the backlash in the following decade, third wave feminists owe to the accomplishments of the second wave, and elaborated on individuality, diversity, and intersectionality. *The Female Man* and *The Left Hand of the Darkness* are two science fiction novels that also brought about transitional cues between two waves as they share a common discussion ground on patriarchal depictions of women, stereotypes, body politics, and language.

2. Gender

Norms

Science fictional figures in *The Left Hand of Darkness* become functional elements to challenge traditional gender roles and are able to defy stereotypical women representations. These different worlds and unconventional gender roles prove that social rules and values are constructed and gender biased. The new planet, Gethen, puzzles the protagonist, Gently Ai, since he is from another planet called Terra, whose citizens are used to adopting standard norms of patriarchal society. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ai finds it difficult to adapt into Gethen society, whose members are androgynous. It turns out that Ai treats them with fixed gender roles, stereotypical sexist images. For instance, he considers a homeowner as a female because s/he fits into the stereotypical image of his landlady. As he states, “I thought of him as my landlady, for he had fat buttocks that wagged as he walked, and a soft fat face, and a prying, spying, ignoble, kindly nature” (Le Guin ch. 5). Although both physical and psychological characteristics are thoroughly different than humans, Ai cannot help comparing them to his own people. In one of the occasions, he contemplates with his gendered-society norms and says, “He was so feminine in looks and manner that I once asked him how many children he had. He looked glum. He had never borne any. He had, however, sired four” (Le Guin

ch. 5). Obsessive gender-based thinking process of Ai perplexes him and he does not know how to behave in Gethen. As he puts it, “cultural shock was nothing much compared to the biological shock I suffered as a human male among human beings who were, five-sixths of the time, hermaphroditic neuters” (Le Guin ch. 5).

Moreover, encountering with an intersex society creates an awareness in Ai along with the reader. Ai tries to figure out the manners of Gethenians and he fails since he is used to being aware of “gender” subconsciously as he talks to his landlady or is used to prejudging people and categorizing them as male or female by looking at their appearances. Simon de Beauvoir’s and Judith Butler’s ideas on the performativity or artificiality of gender could be illustrated in these worlds, since they change the cultural and social understanding of the gender as well as gender-biased roles. Although Butler cannot be categorized as “second-wave feminist critic”, her theory illuminates two alternative worlds’ notion of gender. For her, “gender is always a doing” and there is no such thing as “gender identity” since “that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (*Gender Trouble* 34). As Beauvoir suggests “one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman” (301), Ai’s conventional perspective proves that gender is defined by society. Ai confesses he finds it hard to comprehend a genderless society:

Though I had been nearly two years on Winter I was still far from being able to see the people of the planet through their own eyes. I tried to, but my efforts took the form of self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own. . . . For it was impossible to think of him as a woman, that dark, ironic, powerful presence near me in the firelit darkness, and yet whenever I thought of him as a man I felt a sense of falseness, of imposture: in him, or in my own attitude towards him? His voice was soft and rather resonant but not deep, scarcely a man's voice, but scarcely a woman's voice either... (Le Guin ch. 1).

The norms Ai learned in his society define what is “feminine” or “female.” According to Ai, a female cannot be that dark or powerful. He uses physical features such as voice to determine Estraven’s gender. He feels forced to interpret the body through sex since this is how he is dictated to define and categorize people. Again, Ai’s attitude presents an example for the constructed nature of gender. Not only are the actions performative but also the body. As Butler discusses, the body is more than a physical entity, but rather an active, dynamic extension of identity. It plays an important role in performing in relation with cultural and social norms (*Bodies that Matter* 521).

While Le Guin's novel distorts the conventional gender definition by presenting intersex characters, Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* displays Janet, a visitor from a single-sex world to deconstruct the understanding of gender and reveals stereotypical roles in Jeannine's world. In this regard, Janet does not understand the conversation between Jeannine and a man at a party since she is not used to be insulted by opposite sex. In Jeannine's world, females must be submissive and obedient. Otherwise, they would be cursed and be insulted by men. For instance, at a party, Janet does not know how to act like a "lady" since she is from a different world and does not have any clue about how to be a "woman." When she refuses a man, he swears and curses her "she was so ball-breaking, shitty, stone, scum-bag, mother-fucking, plug-ugly that no normal male could keep up an erection within half a mile of her" (Russ ch. 3). However, she looks puzzled since she does not know whether this sexist language is insulting as her world has a different concept of gender (Russ ch. 3). Similarly, she does not know what an erection means since in her world, "children have as one genotypic parent the biological mother (the 'body-mother') while the non-bearing parent contributes to the other ovum ('other mother')" (Russ ch. 3). As reproduction is completely based on female gender, the man's words are meaningless for her. She does not have to be attractive or beautiful for anybody.

3. Stereotypes

On the other hand, Jeannine, in every aspect, has conventional and inferior roles that serve for men. She is raised in such a way that she has to accept men's arrogance and harassment. She learns how to obey men's orders. As she narrates one of the traumatic events of her childhood, she says: "When I was thirteen my uncle wanted to kiss me and when I tried to ran away, everybody laughed. He pinned my arms and kissed me on the cheek; then he said, 'Oho, I got my kiss! I got my kiss!' and everybody thought it was too ducky for words. Of course they blamed me" (Russ ch. 4). Evidently, the society assumes that if something is wrong, it is definitely women's fault. For instance, "Man's bad temper is the woman's fault. It is also the woman's responsibility to patch things up afterwards" (Russ ch. 3).

Along with stereotypical women images, there are stereotypical macho-type male characters. In *The Left Hand of Darkness* Ai is the only male and is portrayed as a stereotype who carries out all the characteristics of a member of a patriarchal society. The things he encountered in the intersex society bewilder him. He fails when he acts with his prejudiced manners. When Janet visits Jeannine's world, they go to a party, where they talk to stereotypical males. With their assertive masculinity, they insist on harassing the girls. They brag

about themselves and patronize girls with words like “You're just beginning to enjoy yourself. The party's warming up . . . Give us a good-bye kiss” (Russ ch. 3). In another instance, men appear as snobby figures who tell women what they can do or cannot do (Russ ch. 8).

Imposing gender roles in Jeannine's world has similar methods with the world of 50s and 60s. Joanna Russ explicitly criticizes how popular culture and ideology cause a false construction of gender. Even the songs serve for men. As she states,

I enjoy being a girl, I'm so glad I'm female, I'm all dressed up, Love will make up for everything, tra-la-la. Where are the songs about how glad I am I'm a boy? . . . polishing floors for The Man, being perpetually conscious of your appearance for The Man, being romantic for The Man, hinting to The Man, losing yourself in The Man. (Russ ch. 4)

Her criticism is also reflected by another feminist Susan J. Douglas. She discusses how songs, media, and popular culture of the period are sexist and manipulative. As she states, “my generation grew up internalizing an endless film loop of fairy-tale princesses, beach bunnies, witches, flying nuns, bionic women, and beauty queens, a series of flickering images that urged us, since childhood, to be all these things all the time” (18). As Russ states her awareness of sexist lyrics, Douglas highlights how important girl bands since they create rebellion against patriarchy and unity among women (84-98).

In terms of gender roles, Russ focuses on central issues which are criticized by second wave feminists. Women still have the same problems for decades, they are entrapped in home sphere, their roles are defined by men. In her words, “Separate but equal, right? Men make the decisions and women make the dinners. I expected him to start in about that mystically-wonderful-experience-which-no-man-can-know crap, but he didn't. Instead he took me to the window and showed me the expensive clothing stores across the way” (Russ ch. 4). In her essay “Politics of Housework,” Pat Mainardi discusses that housework is seen as woman's job and she claims housework should be shared, which is a way of liberation for women. She focuses on men's statements on housework and what they subtly mean. Russ, ironically, uses men's perspective on housework and depicts women's problems that are captured in Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*. Women's problems are ignored and they are imposed on them by patriarchies which believe that the women should “seek fulfillment as wives and mothers” (Friedan 11). Women felt depressed and experienced the problem that has no name. Russ ironically reflects how a woman must feel. A woman is supposed to be happy with the demands of domesticity. In a sarcastic way she says, “I like doing housework, I care a lot about how I look . . . I don't press my point in conversations, and I enjoy cooking. I like to do things for

other people, especially male people” (Russ ch. 3). However, it does not solve the problem. Jeannine is stuck in the role that society shaped for her: “Whenever I act like a human being, they say, “What are you getting upset about?” They say: of course you'll get married” (Russ ch. 4).

4. Motherhood, Birth Control, Drug Use

Accordingly, in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the border between the sexes and stereotypical gender roles are debated. When Estraven asks the difference between man and woman in Ai’s world, Ai does not know how to answer, and says, “No. Yes. No, of course not, not really. But the difference is very important. I suppose the most important thing, the heaviest single factor in one's life, is whether one's born male or female” (Le Guin ch. 16). Although he does not want to admit the inequality between sexes, he has to admit that women do not often become “mathematicians, or composers of music, or inventors, or abstract thinkers” (ch. 16). As being dissatisfied with his own answer, he needs to add that “But it isn’t that they’re stupid” (ch. 16). Nevertheless, he comes to realize the gender inequality in his world.

Even in formal education, the patriarchal assumption is that the purpose of women must be their families and children. As Ruth Rosen states, “‘Experts’ rushed to reposition homemaking as a profession” (14), and for men, women should be trained in housekeeping with courses like home economics rather than science (40). Russ touches upon the similar problems. In her words, “They say: of course you’re brilliant. They say: of course you’ll get a Ph.D. and then sacrifice it to have babies” (ch. 4). This approach is also sharply reflected in Friedan’s work. Since women determined themselves to “feminine fulfillment,” they, “who had once wanted careers, were now making careers out of having babies” (12). Women were not considered as serious in academic fields and they were infantilized by suggesting ridiculous education programs. If a woman aims for a serious education, the society claims the family should be prioritized, which naturally becomes an obstacle for women’s careers. When Jeannine declares her dissatisfaction with life, the narrator asks “What is there that you want and haven't got? . . . Do you want to be an airline pilot? Is that it? And they won't let you? Did you have a talent for mathematics, which they squelched? Did they refuse to let you be a truck driver? (Russ ch. 6). Russ repeatedly uses this sarcastic language to delineate women’s problems. In a way, women’s roles in society always become a matter of mockery.

Parallel universes in *The Female Man* present alternative gender roles, where Russ shows the reader stereotypical roles are not obligatory, they are dictated, forced performances. Science fictional, utopic, and dystopic elements unfold the unseen part of gender relationships. For instance, both of the novels

display how motherhood and child care might be different. In *Whileaway*, “Food, cleanliness, and shelter are not the mother's business; Whileawayans say with a straight face that she must be free to attend to the child's “finer spiritual needs” (Russ ch. 3). A Gethenian can randomly be a father and in the next kemmer can be pregnant. In Gethen, as Ai puts it, “nobody and everybody was responsible for them” (Le Guin ch. 8). The mother has no psychological and physical burden of motherhood, since, actually there is no “motherhood.” Childbearing and child raising are shared equally by the society and nobody is “tied down” to stereotypical motherhood role (Le Guin ch. 7). In *Orgoreyn* children over one year old do not live with their parent or parents (Le Guin ch. 7).

Interconnected to parenthood, second wave feminists kept focusing on a consciousness raising on birth-control, although it was manifested by the first wave feminists such as Margaret Sanger. As Alix Kates Shulman suggests, “[m]any complained bitterly that their men never took responsibility for birth control, for children, for the progress of their relationships” (593) birth control was still problematic. Other than that, birth control and drug use imply moral values and sexual freedom. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, although drugs and contraceptive indicate a certain sense of freedom, there are different usage areas. Since Gethenians are only reproductive during kemmer they do not often need contraceptives and there are less rules determining sexual relationships and less repression by the society. Naturally, “abstinence is entirely voluntary; indulgence is entirely acceptable. Sexual fear and sexual frustration are both extremely rare” (Le Guin ch. 13), and usage of drugs is a matter of choice. In *The Female Men*, free usage of marijuana indicates that kind of freedom, but *Whileawayans* neither need contraceptive nor narcotics since it is a peaceful society and childbirth is done artificially.

However, when Ai is imprisoned, he sees that various drugs are used to repress prisoners and channel their emotions. The administration gave drugs to the prisoner to keep them out of kemmer, which also affects their daily life since they feel “lifeless” as a side effect. This is reflected by Friedan’s observation that as anxious mothers and housewives, “women were taking tranquilizers like cough drops” (26), so that they do not feel depressed. This obsessive use of tranquilizers was also caused by paternalistic doctors. The medical institutions were male dominated and they were also prescribing uncontrolled drugs on pregnant women which affected babies. For instance, thanks to Pat Cody’s questioning, a drug called diethylstilbestrol that is given to pregnant women to avoid miscarriage, turned out to be very hazardous for children (Rosen 179).

Apart from birth control and drug usage, the novels elaborate on parental roles. Unlike fixed, stereotyped parenthood and motherhood, “[t]he parental

instinct varies as widely on Gethen as anywhere. One can't generalize" (Le Guin ch. 8). Shulamith Firestone, a feminist writer and activist, discusses that the biological family has several mischiefs such as that relationship between mother and child affects psychology of mother and baby, reproductive nature of women causes sex-biased jobs (226). However, it is thoroughly different in Gethen and actually, by showing how odd motherhood in Gethen, Le Guin illustrates how motherhood is essentialized. Gethenians "unpossessiveness" on their children bewilders Ai and he says, "Only in that unpossessiveness does it perhaps differ from what we call the "maternal" instinct. I suspect that the distinction between a maternal and a paternal instinct is scarcely worth making; the parental instinct, the wish to protect, to further, is not a sex-linked characteristic" (Le Guin ch. 8). All these utopic equality and biological advancement might be impossible for today's world, but it helps the reader to raise questions about gender equality to contemplate on role-reversal. For Kathy Rudy "the reproduction of daily life" is an essential question asked in the novel: "Who does the nurturing, the cooking, the cleaning, the washing, the child care, the errands, the gift buying, the grocery shopping, and the like is a quintessentially moral question. . . . A world that deconstructs gender and decenters sexuality—in order to be moral—must be a world where the reproduction of daily life is shared by all" (36). Therefore, the means of production, reproduction, and labor gains a political aspect which treats women as an inferior category and Le Guin's novel depicts the contrast between Gethen, where everything is rearranged and where there is no biased gender role, and Ai's planet Terra.

As the above analysis has shown, by generating new approaches, transgressing boundaries, Russ's work reconfigures the society and individuals to empower feminist movement. Therefore, Donna Haraway's ideas and Russ's fiction have strong connections since they try to explore the relationship between body and identity. They ask the "what if" question to reconsider enforced norms and restrictions on women. Haraway uses "cyborg" metaphor for eradicating all essentialist assumptions. She considers all humans as a cyborg, a machine, which is "a creature in a post-gender world," and it "has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity" (Haraway 385), which deconstructs all cultural and political discourses. With this regard, Le Guin's and Russ's science fictional characters are excluded from gendered myths, roles, dogmas, or phallic anxieties. Russ even satirizes this idea and says, "I'm a victim of penis envy (said Laura) so I can't ever be happy or lead a normal life" (Russ ch. 4). As Haraway's cyborg myth, the characters are "about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions" (385). For instance, Ai observes and takes some notes about

the life in Gethen and highlights that “[a] child has no psycho-sexual relationship to his mother and father. There is no myth of Oedipus on Winter” (Le Guin ch. 7). This discovery is very odd and valuable for him since he has never experienced such a life, which is not constructed by male dominance. Moreover, both novels reflect how Freudian psychoanalysis have influenced gender and contributed to male perspective, which was criticized by second wave feminists. Unlike Freud who based his ideas on “anatomy is destiny,” feminists rejected this biologic determinism, which defines women as passive, timid, and inferior. Feminists developed new theories by rejecting Freudian ideas, which claim women should aim sexual pleasure to comply with male dominancy (Code xxiii).

5. Polarization

As a result of deprivation of gender complex and anxiety caused by gender roles, in both of the novels, single-sex society or genderless society is depicted with utopic features. They become peaceful societies. Ai is surprised that “on Gethen nothing led to war. Quarrels, murders, feuds, forays, vendettas, assassinations, tortures and abominations, all these were in their repertory of human accomplishments; but they did not go to war” (Le Guin ch. 5). Interestingly, Ai’s observation on peaceful Gethen serves a male perspective and he sees this amicable society as negative, inferior and “feminine.” As he puts it, “They lacked, it seemed, the capacity to mobilize. They behaved like animals, in that respect; or like women. They did not behave like men, or ants” (Le Guin ch. 5). He stresses a passivity in Handdaraata, another society in Gethen, and blames them for being ignorant, “obedient to their rule of inactivity or noninterference” (Le Guin ch. 5). Even their religion, Handarra, is not structured on hierarchal, patriarchal rules and figures, they have no priests, no vows, Ai is not sure “whether it has a God or not” (Le Guin ch. 5).

At the same time, the passive and peaceful state is associated with nature. Intersex and female oriented societies are related to vegetarianism and ecology. Ai gives factual information about eating habits and says, “[t]here are no large meat-animals on Winter, and no mammalian products, milk, butter or cheese; the only high-protein, high-carbohydrate foods are the various kinds of eggs, fish, nuts, and the Hainish grains” (Le Guin ch. 1). Ai deliberately focuses on eating habits since he knows food politics is related to gender. When Estraven asks him what difference females and males have, he says everything depends on gender including food (Le Guin ch. 16). Ai, from a male point of view, relates peaceful ecological life, and nature to femininity. This essentialized opinion is eradicated by Sherry B. Ortner, a cultural anthropologist, who discusses the link between woman and nature in her essay “Is Female to Male as

Nature Is to Culture.” For Ortner, the social tendency seeing woman as closer to nature is just a cultural essentialism. She concludes her essay, “it must be stressed again that the whole scheme is a construct of culture rather than a fact of nature. Woman is not in ‘reality’ any closer to (or further from) nature than man” (251) because her false assumption is caused by “institutional forms that reproduce her situation” (251). Correspondingly, Ai’s views represent—he is literally a representative of his nation as a messenger—patriarchal domination that tries to pacify women.

Ai’s pessimist point of view and prejudiced connection between femaleness and peace turn into a celebration point for Whileawayans in *The Female Man*. Only-female society finds no reason for fighting. Whileaway presents a utopic world, where there is no need for men and if there is no man, there is no threat: “There’s no being out too late in Whileaway, or up too early, or in the wrong part of town, or unescorted. You cannot fall out of the kinship web and become sexual prey for strangers, for there is no prey and there are no strangers—the web is world-wide” (Russ ch. 4). Unlike Ai’s view, women in Whileaway are not passive or weak and Russ breaks the conventional idea that only men are strong. Rape and violence were in the agenda of second wave feminists. For instance, Laura X pioneered a company to unfold hidden rapes and struggled for marital rape to be accepted as crime (Rosen 184). According to Susan Brownmiller’s definition, rape is “a crime not of lust, but of violence and power” (15). With this regard, a man Janet meets in New York, gives a rape statistic to prove men’s power and says, “take into account that there are more than two thousand rapes in New York City alone in every particular year. I’m not saying of course that that’s a good thing, but you have to take it into account. Men are physically stronger than women, you know” (Russ ch. 3). In this regard, Russ’s Whileaway highlights the direct link between patriarchal, masculine power and rape as a weapon for women’s subordination.

On the other hand, Russ creates another parallel universe, where there is a constant war between men and women, and Jael, an assassin, is from this world. There are also radical feminists who favor this kind of war against men, who are seen sheer enemy. Jael’s world presents a strong connection with SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) Manifesto, which is written by Valerie Solanas, and claims man as incomplete females. In her words, “The male, because of his obsession to compensate for not being female combined with his inability to relate and feel compassion, has made of the world a shitpile” (202). Similarly, as it passes in “Redstockings Manifesto,” all men, without exception, are seen harmful and they dominate women: “*All men* receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. *All men* have oppressed women” (221).

Even before the second wave feminism, scholars presented aggressive resistance as a method for women. For instance, revolutionary philosopher Franz Fanon says, “Anger... frees women from the inferiority complex and from despair and inaction; it... restores her self-respect” (94), and Jael tries to exclude men from her world by destroying them. She prefers to fight against patriarchy with terror and violence. As she says, “For every drop of blood shed there is restitution made; with every truthful reflection in the eyes of a dying man I get back a little of my soul; with every gasp of horrified comprehension I come a little more into the light. See? It's me!” (Russ 2839). However, Russ's opinion on that kind of extreme feminism is ambiguous. She both sympathizes with her and ridicules her. As she states, “I would like to be Jael, twisted as she is on the rack of her own hard logic, triumphant in her extremity, the hateful hero with the broken heart, which is like being the clown with the broken heart” (Russ 3080).

In favor of radicalism or not, Russ depicts various approaches that existed in the second wave feminism, which is the reality of it: “People had already begun gathering in like-minded communities before the war: Traditionalists, Neo-Feudalists, Patriarchalists, Matriarchalists, Separatists (all of us now), Fecundists, Sterilists, and what-have-you. They seemed to be happier that way. . . . There was increasing separatism, increasing irritability, increasing radicalism” (ch. 8). For Russ, the increasing polarization caused a split, which, again, have similarities with second wave feminism since it was weakened by quarrels and trivial issues.

6. “Straightness” and Homosexuality

Russ makes use of the science fiction elements to illustrate multi-vocal feminist voices within the feminist movement. Science fiction and fantastic novels are able to grasp different point and raise multiple voices since their nature convenient to present alternative responses and crossing the boundaries in terms of gender roles, both novels have unique perspectives. Especially, they play with norms, conventions, and “straightness.” Le Guin's novel delivers subtle and subversive criticism on heterosexual society while Russ uses lesbianism for defining self-identity. Le Guin reverses the social scenario, and Ai's “straight maleness” is illustrated as a perverse idea.

Ai cannot adapt to new society not only Gethenians are intersex, but also he loses his superiority as a male. As Charlotte Bunch defines, “What makes heterosexuality work is heterosexual privilege” (254). Patriarchal society is content with the “straightness” of people because in this way males have control over them. Since Ai has lived his life as a male in a male-dominated soci-

ety, he was not aware how privileged he was until he started to live with Gethenians. He confesses that “The First Mobile, if one is sent, must be warned that unless he is very self-assured, or senile, his pride will suffer. A man wants his virility regarded, a woman wants her femininity appreciated, however indirect and subtle the indications of regard and appreciation” (Le Guin ch. 7). Gender is not a reason for appreciation on Winter because everybody is judged and evaluated as a human being, not as a male or female.

Correspondingly, he finds this experience dreary because he is, for the first time, valued not by gender but by human being. It directly deprives him of power and he does not know how to act. What kind of manner he should follow in an intersex society is very hard to answer because during his entire life he treated people according to their status and sex, but now, “four-fifths of the time, these people are not sexually motivated at all. Room is made for sex, plenty of room; but a room, as it were, apart. The society of Gethen, in its daily functioning and in its continuity, is without sex” (Le Guin 1208). A social life not based on sex is horrible for him and he gradually longs to be one of them. As Ai states, “more and more often I longed for anonymity, for sameness. I craved to be like everybody else” (Le Guin ch. 1). This proves that what is defined as “straight” or “normal” depends on majority and the definition can easily be changed. Ai’s so-called straightness is perverse and Gethenians are surprised to hear the existence of such society. When they hear about it, they say, “So all of them, out on these other planets, are in permanent kemmer? A society of perverts? . . . I thought he [Ai] was joking. Well, it may be the fact, but it's a disgusting idea” (Le Guin ch. 3).

Gethenian sexual life, which is weird for Ai, is very common and acceptable for Gethenians. Although kemmer usually happens between two persons, “groups may form and intercourse take place promiscuously among the males and females of the group” (Le Guin ch. 7). Some relationships, defined as incestuous by Ai, might be common among Gethenians. They are also tolerated to those, who are defined as “perversive,” but their definition has a different meaning. As Ai explains, “Excessive prolongation of the kemmer period, with permanent hormonal imbalance toward the male or the female, causes what they call perversion; it is not rare; three or four percent of adults may be physiological perverts or abnormal-normals, by our standard” (Le Guin 849). However, unlike Ai’s people, who ostracize minor groups such as lesbians and gays, Gethenians do not exclude “their minor groups from society, they are tolerated” (Le Guin ch. 5).

Gethenians also show tolerance to Ai’s perversity though he finds it more difficult to accept their “abnormality.” Estraven is the closest person to Ai and despite his perversion, Estraven accepted him as human being. He helped him

to escape the prison. However, Ai was not able to accept him. As Ai confesses “I had been afraid to give it. I had not wanted to give my trust, my friendship to a man who was a woman, a woman who was a man” (Le Guin ch. 18). His answer proves that gender plays a direct role in trusting somebody for him. Through his escape from the prison, Estraven risks his life to guide him long and fatal journey. During this time period, they get closer and an emotional relationship emerges between them. However, they avoid this “abnormal” relationship. When Estraven is in kemmer, he tries to stay away from him and avoids touching him. Ai also experiences a similar sexual tension. Ai does not want to define it as “love” instantly, but he knows a feeling, which is more powerful than friendship rises. However, he feels anxious because of sex difference (Le Guin ch. 18).

Ai’s experience is depicted as a confession of a man, who comes out of a closet homosexuality. He is anxious and he feels sexual interest in somebody, who is definitely not the opposite sex for him. Le Guin delineates one of the problems of homosexuals by using an intersex and a male character. It turns out that Ai does not know everything about himself, and this relationship leads him to discover himself. Both of them are anxious and they do not know how to confide in each other. Ai identifies himself as a “straight male,” which makes the situation very difficult for him. Estraven is also anxious since he might transform into a male during his kemmer. According to Ai, they touched each other in “the only way” they “could touch,” but it is ambiguous what he means by “touch.”

On the other hand, the discussion of “wrong body” is more of an issue of the third wave feminism since various definitions of masculinity were discussed in the later decades. Ai’s experience could be examined as a reflection of cross-gender identity and even queer theory. Nevertheless, within the scope of this study, Russ’s lesbianism can be underscored in the form of resistance as a feminist, and self-identity. Joanna discovers her lesbianism after she meets Jean because she “shows Joanna the possibilities of anger and violence against men, lesbian love” (Teslenko 146). As it is defined in “The Woman-Identified Woman,” Joanna accepts lesbianism as “the rage of all women” (Radicalesbians 239). She uses lesbianism to decode woman. In other words, she refuses to be labeled as “woman” which is constructed and defined by patriarchal society. Accepting the label means accepting obedience: “In exchange for our psychic servicing and for performing society’s non-profitmaking functions, the man confers on us just one thing: the slave status which makes us legitimate in the eyes of the society . . . The consequence of internalizing this role is an enormous reservoir of self-hate” (Radicalesbians 241). Instead of being shaped by the “woman” role, she prefers to shape it and she prefers to be subversive to

heterosexuality, which she sees “as an ideology and as an institution,” because it “upholds all those aspects of female depression” (Bunch 253).

When Joanna gives up and tells her mother that she does not want to be a girl, her mother, as a stereotypical, conventional mother, says no, and says, “being a girl is wonderful. Why? Because you can wear pretty clothes and you don't have to do anything; the men will do it for you” (Russ ch. 4). Her rejection of being a girl has a similar reason with why she is involved with lesbianism because “[l]esbian-feminism is based on a rejection of male definitions of our lives and is therefore crucial to the development of a positive woman-identified identity, of redefining who we are supposed to be in every situation” (Bunch 254). Therefore, Joanna deliberately chooses lesbianism to protest all performative roles shaping her.

Her first lesbian relationship has a similar tension as Ai's anxiety. She feels ashamed and when Janet indulges in an affair, she thinks it is a serious crime (Russ ch. 4). She looks confused at her first lesbian act since she tries to break the norms. In her words, “I've never slept with a girl. I couldn't. I wouldn't want to. That's abnormal and I'm not, although you can't be normal unless you do what you want and you can't be normal unless you love men” (Russ ch. 4). Her words suggest that she forces herself to be heterosexual. Adrienne Rich discusses that society imposes heterosexuality on women. Although women have resisted patriarchal power thanks to “lesbian existence,” they had to take heterosexual roles in order to “survive economically . . . in order to remain respectable . . . because coming out of ‘abnormal’ childhoods they wanted to feel ‘normal’” (351). Russ depicts the same crisis and dilemma in Joanna, who says, “To do what I wanted would be normal, unless what I wanted was abnormal, in which case it would be abnormal to please myself and normal to do what I didn't want to do, which isn't normal” (Russ ch. 4). As Rich discusses, “the lie of compulsory female heterosexuality” traps lesbians, who avoid defining themselves, and they are forced to live the society's “normal,” which is actually abnormal for them (353). Therefore, lesbianism in both of the novels, is not only an ordinary sexual tendency, but also a strategic approach to challenge the norms that restrain women.

Even during sexual affair, she keeps thinking about norms and “straightness,” and she says, “One of us had to be male and it certainly wasn't me. Now they'll tell me it's because I'm a Lesbian, I mean that's why I'm dissatisfied with things. That's not true. It's not because I'm a Lesbian. It's because I'm a tall, blonde, blue-eyed Lesbian” (Russ ch. 9). In other words, she comes to a realization that being lesbian is not the problem. It is fitting into the stereotypical male interest as a “tall, blonde, blue-eyed” woman, because they tell her she is

not happy, must not be happy with the situation. Joanna's long, detailed description about her first lesbian sex illustrate how it might be hard to break the conventions and to come out of the closet. However, after making love with Laura, she comes into self-realization, she rediscovers herself: "If this is possible, anything is possible. Later we got stoned and made awkward, self-conscious love, but nothing that happened afterward was as important to me (in an unhuman way) as that first, awful wrench of the mind" (Russ ch. 9). Obviously, lesbianism helps her to both identify herself and rebel against conventional norms of male-dominated society.

7. Language and Narrative

As Ai discovers a new world and set of systems, Russ's characters seek themselves through discovering each other and all these complex phenomena require redefinitions on a literary level. Since feminist science-fictional, utopian works deal with new norms and reconfigure conventional gender roles, they undoubtedly have to lean on language and perspective. Butler argues that

the symbolic is understood as the normative dimension of the constitution of the sexed subject within language. It consists of a series of demands, taboos, sanctions, injunctions, prohibitions, impossible idealizations, and threats—performative speech acts, as it were, that wield the power to produce the field of culturally viable sexual subjects: performative acts, in other words, with the power to produce or materialize subjectivating effects" (69-70).

Performativity of the language appears from the beginning of the novels. Russ tries to define a new gender and she defines it as "female man." Since language does not give an exact signifier for her gender, she prefers this term. Both novels, as in the example of "female man" startles the reader with unusual lexicon. It is possible to derive different meaning from "female man" because there is no correspondence in the language, and the author does not reveal what she means. However, "female man" suggests a social connotation rather than a physical ambiguity. Judith Halberstam discusses genders at borders and says "There are real and physical differences between female-born men who takes hormones, have surgery, and live as men and female-born butches who live some version of gender ambiguity" (554). Russ creates an ambiguity with her new gender. Just as the queer butch "represents fluidity to the transsexual man's stability," (Halberstam 556), female man might be interpreted as a free space that provides mobility and a dissolution of essentialist definitions. Le Guin presents similar fluid roles and states, "the king is pregnant," or Russ says "My mother's name was Eva, my other mother's name Alicia" (38). These sentences question the validity of gender roles via language and Russ wants to "avoid the explicit assumption of sex and/or mislead the reader" (Teslenko

128). Being a female man is not actually related to anatomic or psychologic changes. She manipulates the words to define her condition: “I’ll tell you how I turned into a man. First I had to turn into a woman. For a long time I had been neuter” (Russ 1917). She tries to explain that gender is not innate. According to her you can be neuter as well. Although Russ talks about being a female man, she does not make a certain definition or gives characteristics of female man. It is a vague condition an abstract state, which she chooses to create her own discourse on gender, because she knows that language “is not neutral but is inseparably connected to the social construct from which it is created” (Teslenko 166). For Russ, “man” is used synonymously with “human,” thus, man includes woman, which implies there is no such thing as man or female, but human, or in her terms female man.

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the problem begins with pronouns. Ai does not know which pronoun he should use for Gethenians. The inadequacy of patriarchal language explicitly appears in pronouns: “Wiping sweat from his dark forehead the man-man I must say, having said he and his—the man answers” (ch. 1) The language Ai used in his homeland fails in this intersex society. Although he tries to speak “insipidly,” it seems to him everything he speaks “take on a double meaning”. As Haraway states in her manifesto, cyborg politics is a defense method against the single-minded understanding. Language does not necessarily have to function as a communication system, but it must be deconstructed because it is, in the first hand, established by patriarchal structures. In this regard, women can achieve in reconstructing a language, which they can identify themselves with (391). Throughout the novel, Le Guin shows the failure of the language. Ai keeps searching for alternative terms to define characters and things, which have no correspondence with the language he speaks. Also he uses a paraverbal speech that stresses the uselessness of language.

On the other hand, writing becomes an ideological statement. The narrator holds the power of defining the gender. From a feminist perspective, Helene Cixous discusses that writing about yourself will help the women understand themselves better and will unfold the surrounding restrictions of auto-censor. Writing is a useful generator to find the power that lies in the self (Cixous 258). Only by feminist writing, patriarchal language can be deconstructed and can be transcended into a female perspective. In this sense, both novels try to display inadequacy of female representation in male writings. Thus, they write their own female history and create an alternative genesis. For instance, Gethen’s creation myth is narrated by an unknown narrator in a chapter, which is not patriarchal. According to this myth, Gethenians comes out of a homosexual relationship between two brothers. This is where the title of the novel

comes from, the left hand of darkness: “Light is the left hand of darkness/ and darkness the right hand of light/ Two are one, life and death, lying/ together like lovers in kemmer/ like hands joined together/ like the end and the way” (Le Guin ch. 16). Unlike dualistic view of Ai’s world, Gethenians try to reach unity. They do not have to be defined with binary oppositions. As Ai puts it, “There is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive. In fact, the whole tendency to dualism that pervades human thinking may be found to be lessened, or changed, on Winter” (Le Guin ch. 7). During their conversation with Estraven, Ai says, “You’re isolated, and undivided. Perhaps you are as obsessed with wholeness as we are with dualism” (Le Guin ch. 16). But Estraven does not totally agree with him and says “We are dualists too. Duality is an essential, isn’t it? So long as there is myself and the other” (Le Guin ch. 16). Thus, it could be stated that Le Guin creates a world, where gender dualism could provide a harmony, a unity rather than seeing it as a clash between two sexes, “superior” male against “inferior” female.

On the other hand, Russ follows a dualistic form, where women and men should be separated. She redefines the Adam and Eve myth: “Eve and the hereditary instinct that tells her to beware of apples. I took her by the shoulders, telling her again that it was a radar set. That it was extremely dangerous. That it would blow up if she wasn’t careful. Then I pushed her out of the room. ‘Put it back’” (Russ ch. 4). Thus, Russ seeks a harmony among women. Her novel is narrated by four women, where it is hard to distinguish voices. Later, Russ unfolds that the four women are actually the same woman. Her narration constantly uses “I.” There is no point of view that belongs to a man in her novel. Although Le Guin’s narrator is Ai, she gives spaces to several narrators and one of them is Estraven. Again, a non-male perspective reveals the inner facts of Gethen. Ai only preserves a patriarchal approach.

In conclusion, Le Guin’s and Russ’s works are capable of depicting problems of second wave feminism through their elements of science fiction which portray how gender roles could be different and how essentialism is influential on people’s thoughts. The novels’ utopic and dystopian nature creates diversity in gender issue and generates wider perspectives which shows parallels with second wave feminists’ aims. Intersex and female-gendered societies exemplify what Butler and Beauvoir discuss: gender and gender roles are artificial, constructed elements which have been defined by patriarchal powers. Everything from physical appearance to psychological states, is categorized through gender, which is proved to be performative. A reversal perspective, as these novels present, proves that societies liberated from sexist assumption would create a different world, where parenthood, motherhood, womanhood, and

manhood are deconstructed. Both novels question the meaning of “normality” and “straightness” through their intersex and “perverse” characters as well as elaborating on marriage, birth control, sex liberation. The artificial structure of social norms is also criticized through language and narratives, which prove that language is also performative and inadequate. While language labels, categorizes, and defines everything with a gender-biased perspective, writing history and myths are also strongly interrelated with patriarchal power, which exploits gender roles.

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