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FROM ANTI TO PRO: AN IMPERIOUS NON-RESISTANCE TO HETERONORMATIVITY IN *THE WRITER*

Karşıtlıktan Yanlılığa: *Yazar* Adlı Eserde Heteronormativiteye Mecburi Bir Teslimiyet

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ABSTRACT

Heteronormativity, a sub branch of queer theory, has emerged as the legitimisation of heterosexual practices with privilege over sexual fluidity by various institutions. The unequivocal acceptance of heteronormativity embedded in society overshadows less-favoured sexual orientations, hindering these minority groups' representation and reflection in society. Theatre as a form of art production serves as a medium to appreciate the diversity of sexual orientations by performing related plays on stage or, at least, giving voice to the concerns of individuals with so-called abnormal sexual tendencies. Still, heteronormativity subjugates to the end of appealing to the spectator, which is to be criticised by playwrights as in *The Writer*. In this metadrama, the power struggle between the female Writer with homosexual tendencies and the male Director with a conventional mindset induces turbulence and aggravates the communication between the two. Despite the Writer's efforts to denaturalise heterosexuality through staging a homosexual scene in a mystic sphere, her attempt faces difficulties from the Director, and she finds her scene on stage in an implicitly heteronormative form. Hence, the imposition of gender binaries on the Writer's lesbian couple displays how heteronormativity is embedded in the ending of both Hickson and the Writer's plays and how it predominates the Writer's deep convictions who has been opposing the heteronormative formations.

Keywords: heteronormativity, queer, patriarchy, *The Writer*, Ella Hickson.

ÖZ

Kuir teorinin bir alt dalı olan heteronormativite, heteroseksüel eylemlerin zamanla yerleşik hale gelen çeşitli davranış kalıpları tarafından cinsel akışkanlıktan üstün tutularak meşrulaştırılması olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Topluma yerleşmiş olan heteronormativitenin toplum tarafından benimsenmesi, daha az ayrıcalık tanınan cinsel yönelimleri gölgede bırakarak, bu azınlık grupların toplumdaki temsilini ve yansıma-

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sını engellemektedir. Bir sanat türü olarak tiyatro, sahnede bu tarzda oyunlar sergileyerek veya en azından sözde anormal cinsel eğilimleri olan bireylerin endişelerini dile getirerek cinsel yönelimlerin çeşitliliğini ortaya koyma aracı olarak hizmet eder. Yine de heteronormativite, *The Writer*'da olduğu gibi, oyun yazarlarının bir oyunun seyirciye hitap etme gerekliliğini eleştirmesine rağmen üstün gelmektedir. Bu meta dramada eşcinsel eğilimli kadın Yazar ile geleneksel zihniyete sahip erkek Yönetmen arasındaki güç mücadelesi türbülansa neden olur ve aralarındaki iletişimin frekansını şiddetlendirir. Yazar'ın eşcinsel bir sahneyi mistik bir ortamda sahneleyerek heteroseksüelliği doğallıktan çıkarma çabalarına rağmen girişimi Yönetmen tarafından zorluklarla karşılaşır ve örtük olarak heteronormatif bir biçimde sahne bulur. Dolayısıyla, Yazar'ın lezbiyen çiftine cinsiyet ikiliklerinin dayatılması, heteronormativitenin hem Hickson'ın hem de Writer'ın oyunlarının sonunda da görüldüğü gibi oyunun tamamına nasıl yerleşmiş olduğunu ve heteronormatif oluşumlara karşı çıkan Yazar'ın derin inançlarında nasıl hakimiyet kurduğunu gözler önüne serer.

Anahtar Sözcükler: heteronormativite, kuir, ataerkillik, *Yazar*, Ella Hickson.

Introduction

Does it scare you that the future might speak a language that you can't understand? (Hickson, 2018: 70).

Heteronormativity, which emerged out of queer theory, is a relatively recent theory despite the controversies it has received since 1991, the year the term was introduced in. It is intimidating for the heterosexual mentality which does not accept a future whose boundaries are not predetermined by heteropatriarchy, and this is the very core of what the epigraph above implies. As a subbranch of the harshly criticized queer theory, heteronormativity bears a resemblance to its doctrines. The word "queer" is dichotomic by nature primarily due to the unacceptance of homosexuals and thus their being addressed as "queer" with negative connotations. However, with the institutionalisation of queer studies, "queer" has gone into a change in meaning, referring to all sexual orientations outside heterosexuality. In *Tendencies*, Sedgwick touches upon the necessity of not rejecting the initial meanings of queer for it could negatively affect the development of the theory: "[G]iven the historical and contemporary force of the prohibitions against every same-sex sexual expression, for anyone to disavow those meanings, or to displace them from the term's definitional center, would be to dematerialize any possibility of queerness itself." (Sedgwick, 1993: 8).

Queer theory has overcome gay and lesbian studies with a broader field consisting of a multitude of sexual orientations beyond the two. The origin

of the theory is attributed to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*. The cornerstones of heteronormativity are existent in the just mentioned theorists' works as well as those of Adrienne Rich, Monique Wittig, and Michel Foucault. However, Michael Warner is highly inspirational in the emergence of the term heteronormativity with his *Fear of a Queer Planet*, which is one of the most influential books that have been written for scrutinizing heteronormativity. Edited by Warner, the book with several articles by a variety of authors supports the necessity of queerness beyond homosexuals' acceptance in heterosexual society. It stems mainly from the fact that heteronormativity functions as a tool to divide individuals into "acceptable and unacceptable" outlawing - since the lawmaker is patriarchal- and rejecting actions and behaviours based on gender (Habarth, 2008: 2). Heteronormativity by definition is divisive with the superiority of heterosexuality. In order to enable non-heteronormativity to have a voice, "actively imagining a necessarily and desirably queer world" is a necessity (Warner, 1991: xvi).

Heteronormativity has seemed to prevail in society partly due to capitalist reasons. To provide the bourgeoisie with a labour force is to maintain production, which is only possible through "the so-called biological nuclear family." (Mitchell, 1974: 379). Since the heteronormative family formations yield "the means of reproduction without which society wouldn't exist", heteronormativity lies at the heart of capitalism (Warner, 1991: xxi). Thus, if heteronormativity holds the economic power, it inevitably indicates that heterosexuality is the privileged sexual orientation among dominant social classes, and it results both from and in the formation of heterosexual cultures' prevalence as the so-called normal, set and standard societies. As Mitchell elucidates, a heteronormative family formation is what capitalism calls for:

> With compulsory education, prohibition of child labour and restriction of female labour, with the increased national wealth from imperialism, the working class was gradually able to follow the middle-class example of cultivating the biological family as, paradoxically, indeed almost impossibly, the main social unit. The biological family thus becomes a major cultural event under capitalism and asserts itself in the absence of prominent kinship structures (Mitchell, 1974: 379-380).

In order to rethink the established ideas by the heterosexual norms and their practitioners, heteronormativity based on patriarchy is suggested to

be deconstructed. Deconstruction of heteronormativity infers experiencing one's gender without any external oppression as well as having the freedom of adhering to non-normative expressions of gender and sexuality. As a subcategory of queer and the opposition to established ideas concerning gender, homosexuality requires homosexuals to be exposed to social exclusion, if not all, in many areas of life. It has its traces in the play *The Writer*, too. Trapped in a heteronormative life with rules imposed on them, the female protagonists in the play and the play within the play feel isolated in the realm of both the real and the fictional worlds. As a lesbian oppressed by her boyfriend and her male employer, Hickson's protagonist and her protagonist's protagonist find themselves in the middle of an endless power struggle with the male Directors. Despite the Writer's initial decisiveness about making her voice heard about the issues of marginalisation of homosexuals and inequality of women, especially the ones homosexual women are exposed to, her efforts fail. Eventually, heteronormative formations in the Writer's play prevail.

This article is thus intended to demonstrate the heteronormative formations in Ella Hickson's metadrama *The Writer* despite the protagonist's preliminary efforts to not give in to heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy. The Writer in the play initially aims to bring into light the privilege given to the straight male Director due to his assigned gender and his being opinionative about cisgender, hence staging an act plotting a power struggle between a female writer and a male director. Moreover, the Writer's creativity when she intends to include solely homosexuality in her play is cramped since the Director asks her to write the following act in a more "masculine" way. Having have to relinquish the original form of the play, the Writer gives in to heteronormativity, rewriting her play for appealing to the audience mentioned by the Director. If not solely due to economic reasons, which are in the hands of men serving heterosexual social practices, she is trapped in compulsory heterosexuality. Having no political existence as a lesbian, she resorts to the shores of patriarchal heterosexuality. This article thus will put forth the heteronormative formations in the metadrama and manifest the anticipated future which the Director is uneasy about.

Gender Hierarchy, Compulsory Heterosexuality, and Heteronormative Family Formations

> The institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this

> differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire (Butler, 1999: 30).

Gender hierarchy is an essential constituent of heteronormativity. The hierarchy between the male sex and the female sex may indicate that gender is a cultural designation, a designation set by the heterosexual culture for the continuation of the heteropatriarchal system. In *The Writer*, the gender hierarchy and the power struggle it brings along are existent throughout the play. They are revealed not only in Hickson's play but in the Writer's play, as well. The Director's active intervention in the Writer's writing process of her play may indicate that he is the dominating one in the relationship between the two. During the power struggle in the Writer's play between the Writer and the director, the addition of the rape scene for dramatic intensity by the male Director takes the idea of gender hierarchy even further since the rape victim is traumatized by the rape, and the alleged rapists are inextricably men. The protagonist in the Writer's play gets into conflict with the Director, drawing attention to the sexual oppression she endured due to her role as a female student inferior to a male professor.

> "I wanted to believe that I was a good writer.
> You were good, that's why I offered you a job.
> You also tried to kiss me.
> They're separate things" (28).

An eighteen-year-old student's admiration for a middle-aged professor is not something unexcepted, especially if she is an ardent writer-to-be. However, the Director's, just because he thinks it to be his right to do so, attempt at kissing that girl in a pub is justified by his calling the two things "separate". Without a single attempt at trying to perceive her sexual orientation and/or tendency, he, with a heteropatriarchal mindset, dares to get intimate with her. Such a manner is in accordance with what Wittig interprets as the concept of the unconscious, the one and only unconscious that is the irresistibly heterosexual mindset (1992: 31). Accordingly, in the case of the Director as a devotee of heteronormativity, he leaves no room even for the likelihood of a woman's sexual attraction to another woman or the possibility of their bisexual identity.

The two directors are not the only ones oppressing the queer protagonists in the play. The bisexual Writer's Boyfriend forces her to change the message she has wanted to convey and turn the play into a movie script for getting on with their life in prosperity. Namely, for better economic condi-

tions and fame, he demands her to sell what she stands for. There is not so much implication or clue about why the Writer is in a relationship with the Boyfriend. One can assume that it stems from the social assertiveness about cisgender, that is, the correspondence between one's gender identity with the assigned sex at birth. For that reason, the Writer is likely to be in a straight relationship, belying her bisexual orientation. Born into a heteronormative world, most young individuals and young adults tend to adhere to what heterosexuality necessitates in the years ahead, adding new social experiences to the built ones (McDonald et al., 2011). As a young woman, the Writer expects a heterosexual future as it is reinforced. However, the Writer herself utters that she does not enjoy sex with him. Her answer to the Boyfriend's question about what emotional state she is in when she is reluctant to sleep with him is as follows: "Going to the gym, I'm always glad I've gone afterwards. Once it's done." (51).

Her utterances above demonstrate a denial of her current relationship and heterosexuality because she is imposed on dwelling like a heterosexual woman in a straight relationship. Nevertheless, she does not take pleasure in their most intimate moments. She feels relatively fulfilled once it ends, finding herself with the feeling of relaxation after the ejaculation, or the imposed idea on her that "heterosexual romance…is the great female adventure, duty, and fulfillment." (Rich, 1980: 654). Furthermore, the Writer's interest in poetry and the magic of the words are seen as feminine by the Boyfriend. When he recalls the phone call that she had had with a person who read poetry to the Writer and made her less lonely after years, he does not show empathy towards her. On the contrary, he calls it "escapism" from reality (48). Though he has no single clue about the speaker's gender, not even the assigned one, he calls the person a "he", as in the heteropatriarchal way of thinking. What if it was a "she"? The Boyfriend is so far from this idea that when he considers the likelihood of the Writer's having sex with someone else, he eschews minor sexualities and focuses on men as he believes her to have sexual intercourse with the male Director only. Men often tend to be appalled because of the potential of lacking access to women, and thus they disavow the possibility of a woman's intimacy with another woman (Rich, 1980: 649). So does the Boyfriend.

Traditional family formation is desirable to homosexual partners although it remains unattainable to many. In Act V, the Writer and the Girlfriend's emulation of a heteronormative family is obvious through the mention of the urge to have kids (80), having sexual penetration (84), and

making tea for the male partner (86). As in a 2019 study (Pollitt et al.), normative gender expression is opted for by a significant amount of sexual minority young adults. However, they also perceive impediments to family formation established by the grand institutions. Traditional men, the Director and the Boyfriend in the play, have an attitudinal nexus, and that is heteronormativity. Gender and heteronormativity are inextricably linked in conventional society since the standard types of gender are determined as male and female by heteronormativity. What could break this chain is the dismissal of firmly established institutions and the dismantling of oppressive social hierarchies focused on patriarchal power and its rigid gender roles. Nonetheless, people who violate any norms of such institutions are stigmatized and marginalized. So is the Writer. She tends to reject the conventional roles intertwined with heteronormativity, and she disavows particularly marriage because it does not appeal to same-sex couples.

The Writer never openly puts into words that she is a lesbian or has homosexual tendencies. Societal expectations around her determine her gender expression in public. To demonstrate, she is asked by the Director if she has a boyfriend (23) and if she has a sexual attraction to older men (25). Such questions, knowingly or unknowingly, might cause her to adopt a heterosexual lifestyle as she is already in a forced hetero relationship with a male partner. Still, in Act III, she challenges the Director's requests from her concerning playwriting. The Writer and the girlfriend Semele realize their sexual activities in a misty forest among a tribe, that is, in an unrealistic setting exact opposite of the Director's wish. In such a mythic scene, "a hermaphrodism of the soul", that is, their homosexuality comes out and actualises itself (Foucault, 1978: 43). No protagonist in the play has both the male and female reproductive function as a hermaphrodite. What is alluded to here is that the Writer's lesbian versions as a submissive one with Semele in Act III and the dominant one with the Girlfriend in the last act function as a reverse of two things rolled into one just like the nature of a hermaphrodite.

The Writer is initially decisive about her own message to be heard. Therefore, she casts about a sphere untouched by heteronormativity. She is not uneasy about the first bit of her play where her fictional Writer gets into a power play with her fictional Director because she thwarts the heterosexual formations via an assertive female character. Nonetheless, such a scene does not appeal to and is far from pleasing the overwhelmingly male spectator as the Director claims. It is the sense of fighting against men,

which justifies the theory that patriarchy prevails in the end. Namely, one does not get into a struggle with a thing they do not believe to be more powerful than themselves. Such an argument by the Director demonstrates the oppression by heterosexuality as heterosexuals prevent sexual minority people from "speaking unless [they] speak in their [heteronormative] terms." (Wittig, 1992: 25). Hence the Director's insistence on the power struggle in the first act of the Writer's play.

> WRITER. Two people, you and me, standing on stage intellectual back-and-forth is dialectic, one oppressing the other, it's wordy it's Stoppard, it's Pinter, it's power struggle, it's patriarchy – that's what it is, it's how it's learnt and how it's meant to be, it's elitist. It's of an entirely different politic to what I'm trying to /
> DIRECTOR. / It's good drama. It's what works - It's the definition of good drama. (67).

Heteronormative family formations in the play are existent in the domestic acts where the setting is indoors, particularly an apartment block or a house. The romanticization of the home, a term which I borrow from Adrienne Rich, is at the forefront in such settings. The Boyfriend's insincere efforts to make the Writer happy seem redundantly absurd since it is forced heteronormativity. Moreover, because the Writer's experimental act with a tribal woman lacks a domestic environment, the Director is not moved "[b]y the running around in the forest" (67) and thus harshly opposes that part of the play. It justifies that, in a heteronormative mentality, the fluidity of human sexuality is beyond the realms of possibility.

One would be wrong to assume homosexuality to be all about sex. "[R]egulation of marriage and family life, divisions of waged and domestic labour, patterns of economic support and dependency" are equally significant (Jackson, 1999: 26). As for what queer people demand in life, it is not mere sex and sexuality that they pursue and fight for. Besides, and above all, they aspire to be active and seen in any area of social life. However, penetration is linked to oppression in heterosexuality, and only through a heterosexual understanding, intimacy is solely linked to sex (Haywood et al., 2018: 108-109). Consequently, the practice of sexual intercourse via a dildo in Act V manifests the adoption of a heterosexual formation. The need for or keenness on an artificial penis is symbolic of the power between the binary oppositions the feminine and the masculine. Consequently, the problem of sexual identity that has reached today is historically construct-

ed, depending on the characteristics and the norms of the given era (Griggers, 1994: 179).

The Director's comment on the Writer's experimental writing in Act III is highly opinionative. Alleging that traditional styles scare her, he likens her breaking of traditional forms to "sleeping with girls" as "a hobby" and "a holiday", all serving as a whim (71). With a conventional mindset, the Director disregards the contentment the Writer has about the queerness in the act. She seems to be satisfied with the disclosure of her and her protagonist's sexual identity only in Act III. In the previous act, however, her mental sphere seems ambiguous when the Boyfriend plays with her mind, trying to make her believe that they have a baby (55). The cry of the baby, which the protagonist hears a few times, functions as a way of reminding her that she is supposed to experience maternity. The Boyfriend's such oppression is juxtaposed with the Director's oppression of the Writer, and they both play the expert whose advice reflects "...male needs, male fantasies about women, and male interest in controlling women." (Rich, 1980: 634). In this case, it is the queer Writer's abiding by the rules which are made by the patriarchal Director. Subordination of queerness, thus, is carried out through rewarding the ones from the minor sexualities, and for the Writer's part, it is a financial reward within a capitalist world.

Heteronormativity and Capitalism

Either through legal or cultural impediments, women have always been economically inferior to men. It cannot be told for queer people with the extent to this certainty because they have had to keep their identity hidden in the workplace. That is the case in this play, as well. The Writer tends to avoid admitting her sexual orientation. She never says it aloud, yet it reveals itself through her creativity in writing, which is her occupation. Still, as long as she submits to her male employer and his wishes who could be the patriarchal "expert" that is tackled above, she is rewarded in the workplace by getting paid.

The Director's subtle controlling behavior of her writings pursues the policy of economics and thus capitalism. One of the main reasons for that is put into words by the Director: "[The drama] has to sell tickets" (69). As Monique Wittig asserts, the differences between the categories "masculine and feminine" and/or "male and female" uphold a heterosexual system through ideology, politics, and economy in the hands of men which a lesbian would refuse voluntary participation in (1992: 2 & 13). In the Writer's

case, the gender hierarchy reveals itself mostly economically since there is a persistent pressure on her as a female employee by a male employer to bear on: "Do you know how many versions of you I get at my office door every day?" (69).

The Writer's creativity is precluded due to upholding hierarchal, capitalist relations. As a woman supporting queer people, and a potential lesbian herself, she acts upon the expectations of a female writer in the heterosexual matrix. She writes a play to the end of conveying a message, her message, their message. However, capitalism in a heteropatriarchal world prevents her from doing that. When she suggests to "[d]ismantle capitalism and overturn the patriarchy", she is accused of being overambitious and is answered by a peal of laughter (23). Economically disadvantaged women endure sexual violence and yet remain silent in order to be employed by cisgender people like the Director (Rich, 1980: 642). Surrender to their rules seems to be the only way to appeal to the audience and their expectations. The economy as a product of cultural forces necessitates a heterosexual world ignoring sexual and gender minorities, and that is the policy of heteronormative social construction of homosexuality and heterosexuality. This policy is challenged mainly by the marginalised groups of people's endeavour to "undo the profound heterosexism in culture." (Pierceson, 2016: 9).

The Writer's decisiveness about not modifying the play to the Director's will gradually declines. The final act is completely independent from the earlier act in which she discovers her experimental writing and her protagonist's sexual identity as the embodiment of her own sexual tendency. The Girlfriend in the last act is quite different than the utopian Semele as the girlfriend in Act III. The Girlfriend in the final act takes on an artificial wife-like attitude right after the usage of the dildo by the Writer (86). Her carrying a dildo in her bag all the time symbolises her adopting both a heteronormative and a heteropatriarchal stance in queer relationships. As Griggers elucidates, "the appropriated phallus", dildo, functions as "a material signifier of the imaginary ground for a historically manifest phallic regime of power." (1994: 181).

According to Field, lesbians and gays show resistance to the capitalist system, and they will not be modified in accordance with the requirements of the system. The only way to these sexual minority groups' liberation is the dismissal of the capitalist system which benefits from discrimination and homophobia (2016: 251). In the play, too, it is capitalism and heteropa-

triarchy with blind confidence in the authenticity of cisgender that govern the lives of the characters. For this very reason, women's relations with each other are crucial as a contributor to the system of the capitalist economy. Without the heterosexual family formations and compulsory heterosexuality, the reproduction force that capitalism relies on is shackled for labour force could be thwarted with a low birth rate by women resisting imperious maternity. Namely, homosexual women help to perpetuate the system, and since they may pose a threat to the integrity of capitalism, they are taken more note of in order to be kept under control. It is global capitalism that circulates among individuals, and since global capitalism is both a product and a counterpart of global patriarchy, female-female relations as social minority groups are an integral part of the circulation (Binhammer, 2006: 239). Therefore, the Writer is constantly under the orders of the Director who is the embodiment of capitalism. Women including the Writer are not permitted to express their sexuality and sexual orientation openly in workplaces. They cannot integrate queer or queerness in their creativity either since it could thwart their primary roles as "carers, providers, and workers". Because the institution of the heteronormative family is the centre of upholding the capitalist circulation, laws that are for families change perpetually. "Machismo" and "femininity" as components of capitalist sexuality lead to the intertwinement of desire and property, contributing to the development and prevalence of capitalist sexuality (Field, 2016: 72, 78, 229). For this very reason, when the Director puts emphasis on the power struggle between a male and a female, or a relationship between two women one of whom has masculine attributes, he aims a play which will sell.

Conclusion

Heteronormativity might not reveal itself overtly in the ordinary course of events since it is accepted as the "normal" by many people who have no experience of an exact opposite system. However, going deeper into the social areas of life, it is salient that heteronormativity is what has shaped life via assigned gender and roles in relation to it. Since theatre enables playwrights to shed light on the matters of gender hierarchy, compulsory heterosexuality, heteronormative family formations, and capitalism as constituents of a heteropatriarchal social life, plays, among which *The Writer* is, render possible such elements to rise to the surface and be open to scrutiny. Ella Hickson's *The Writer* is particularly significant for its conscious handling of a play in the play, both enriched in the way to manifest

heteropatriarchy and heteronormativity. The Writer's initial mindset about questioning the privilege of heteronormativity over queer gradually declines, and thus she yields a play accordingly. As an economically dependent woman, she feels compelled to abide by the rules of patriarchy, and in her case, the Director is the patriarchal figure to follow. Upon the demand of the Director, she functions as a tool by penning a play which serves the elements of heteronormativity with gender hierarchy. The Director's old-fashioned views of homosexuality are notable throughout the play. Identified as cisgender and aware of the privilege of heterosexuality, he uses this rigid social hierarchy to control sexual minorities, who, in the Writer's case is, a bisexual woman from the working class. In return, these minorities perpetuate the circulation of capitalism and feel obliged to serve the vicious circle of patriarchal capitalism which does not welcome queer on any account. The Writer's suggestion to alter the new world order, that is "[d]ismantle capitalism and overturn the patriarchy" (23), is disavowed by the Director for being optimistically utopian which would create a latent dystopian world for him, a world ruled by a queer majority, whose language he would not understand (70). Consequently, despite all the determined efforts by the Writers, heteronormativity predominates in the same manner as in the corporal, tangible world.

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