

Representations of Married Women in the Works of Sevim Burak and Ursula K. Le Guin

Sevim Burak ve Ursula K. Le Guin'in Eserlerinde Evli Kadınların Temsili Sultan KOMUT BAKINÇ*

Abstract

Women have been regarded as weak, emotional, caring and thought to be suitable for some jobs and not for the others; due to the biological differences, they have been regarded as the nurturers of the family, the care taker of house. The belief that it is women's duty to generate the future has made house the only place where she belongs and thus becoming a confined space for not only wives but also unmarried women. The oppression that most women suffer from since the very beginning originates mainly in families and further develops in patriarchal societies. This article revisits the works of Sevim Burak and Ursula K. Le Guin as two authors whose societal and cultural backgrounds, treatment of the novel genre, and narrative styles are completely different from one another. claims that due to their experience of womanhood in patriarchal societies, they explore similar themes in their works. They portray women characters who are systematically oppressed by dominant ideological apparatuses. In this context, this article argues that much as Burak and Le Guin differ in representing the oppression they experience in their peculiar ways, they both consider marriage as a form of individual oppression, which indicates that regardless of the cultural differences, experiences of women are similar in patriarchal societies so are the ways they are included in literature.

Keywords: Marriage, Oppression, Feminism, Commodification, Sevim Burak, Ursula K. Le Guin

Öz

Her daim kadınların karakter yapıları zayıf, duygusal ve müşfik olarak addedilmiş ve onların sadece belirli meslek gruplarında çalışabilecekleri düşünülmüştür. Biyolojik farklılıklar sebebiyle de evin ve ev halkının bakımı kadınlara yüklenmiştir. Geleceği inşa etmenin kadınların görevi olduğu inancı, evi kadınların ait olduğu tek mekan haline getirmiş ve böylece evler, evli veya bekar olmaları fark etmeksizin, tüm kadınlar için birer hücreye dönüşmüştür. Kadınların ilk zamanlardan itibaren muzdarip olduğu bu baskı ilk olarak aile içinde oluşmakta ve daha sonra ataerkil toplumlarda etkisini giderek arttırmaktadır. Bu makale, yazı üsluplarının yanı sıra yeni edebi türler de yaratmış; birbirine taban tabana zıt iki farklı topluma, dine ve geçmişe ait iki önemli yazar olan Sevim Burak ve Ursula K. Le Guin'in eserlerini yeniden ele almakta ve yazarların, ataerkil toplumlarda edindikleri kadın olma deneyiminden yola çıkarak benzer feminist konular üzerinde durduklarını iddia etmektedir. Yazarların çalışmalarında bireysel ve toplumsal güçler tarafından sistematik olarak baskı altına alınmış kadın karakterler ile karşılaşmaktayız. Bu bağlamda makale, Burak ve Le Guin'in bu baskıyı kendilerine özgü biçimlerde ifade etmelerine rağmen, her ikisinin de evliliği bir tür bireysel baskı olarak gördüğünü ve evliliğin kadınlara yaptığı baskının çalışmalarına benzer şekillerde yansıdığını iddia etmektedir. Bu durum, hangi toplumda olursa olsun, kadınların yaşadıkları deneyimlerin birbirine yakın olduğunu ve bu deneyimlerin edebiyata da bu şekilde yansıdığını kanıtlamaktadır.

Keywords: Evlilik, Baskı, Feminizm, Metalaştırma, Sevim Burak, Ursula K. Le Guin

Introduction

Women have been oppressed by patriarchal and sexist power structures, repressed by the formal and informal conventions of heteronormativity, stereotyped through gender roles and degraded and subjugated by the very language and literature they adopt. The commodification of women through marriage are the most common ways through which women are oppressed. This article is a means to compare two writers Ursula K. Le Guin in American Literature and Sevim Burak in Turkish Literature through their works in order to analyse how marriage is represented in their works. It puts forward the claim that despite the linguistic differences their works present and two authors having lived in different societies with contrasting religions, traditions and conventions, they formulate patriarchy in similar ways.

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Oppression

Pat Mainardi declares that "...the oldest form of oppression in history has been the oppression of 50 percent of the population by the other 50 percent" (Mainardi, 2007, p. 293). Not only men oppress women, but also patriarchal institutions and society itself exert power on women. Women have been regarded as the nurturers of the family, the care taker of house along with the members of it. The idea that it is women's duty to generate the future has made the house the only place where she belongs. The house, in this way, becomes a cell for women. Sara Ahmed discusses narratives of women's vulnerability as a factor that confines them within home She says:

They not only construct 'the outside' as inherently dangerous, but they also posit home as being safe. So women, if they are to have access to feminine respectability, must either stay at home (femininity as domestication), or be careful in how they move and appear in public (femininity as a constrained mobility). (Ahmed, 2004, p. 70)

As a result, women are forced to stay in their houses and be dutiful. Even if they leave their safe places, they have to be cautious about their manners in the public space. Oppression of women originates mainly in family and it further develops in patriarchal society, we can analyse forms of oppression in Sevim Burak and Ursula K. Le Guin's selected works under two categories; individual forces of oppression and collective forces of oppression.

Individual forces of oppression are the ones that most women experience in their own houses behind closed doors. In this form, oppressors are generally family members, relatives or partners of women. That is, oppression comes from an immediate person and thus it is more personal. A woman is firstly oppressed by other individual/s close to her, becomes the victim of collective forces of oppression during her integration into society. Individual forces of oppression in the works of Burak and Le Guin can be observed in the examples of representations of daughters and wives. On the other hand, collective forces of oppression are the ones that oppress women and restrain their lives not only by the individuals around them, but the whole society, institutions and mind sets that they produce. Thus, in this kind of oppression, even though there are individuals who perform the specific action, it is not only the person who performs the action but also the mind set which makes the performer perform the action.

The commodification of women is a well-known form of collective forces of oppression. Commodity means "an object or process produced for the purpose of exchange or sale" (Buchanan, 2010, p. 92). The commodification of women is referred to and studied by many scholars from different perspectives (Acero, 2009; Widdows, 2009; De Leon, 2000). To be clear, what is meant by the commodification of women, however, is the exploitation, subordination and objectification of women. Portrayed as the commodities of men, women are thought to be the mothers of the future generation and as objects of desire Luce Irigaray expresses such a perception indicates exploitation. She writes:

[A]ll the social regimes of "History" are based upon the exploitation of one "class" of producers, namely, women whose reproductive use value (reproductive of children and of the labor force) and whose constitution as exchange value underwrite the symbolic order as such, without any compensation in kind going to them for that 'work'. (Irigaray, 1985, p.173)

The fiction of Burak and Le Guin displays that marriage is used as a means of commodification; women are treated as objects that can be bought and sold through which the family gains profit: they can either change their positions in the society by getting a familial relationship with a high class society or exchange their daughters with money or property such as land, gold etc.

Marriage and Commodification

Burak and Le Guin formulate marriage as a form of both individual and collective forces of oppression and illustrate the very similar ways through which marriage oppresses women; how women are constructed as wives and have been confined in their houses and how they are commodified through marriage.

The most significant metaphor for marriage in Burak's stories is the metaphor of cage. Burak uses the cage metaphor in order to make evident that women are trapped in their houses or small environments as a result of their marriages. It can be claimed that, for Burak, being married turns out to be some sort of captivity in the end. For instance, her story, "Puss-in-the-Corner" (Köşe Kapmaca), is based on the letters of two women, Cavidan and Gönül. In this story, we have two female characters who change places at the end of the story. Gönül is a model working at a model house and Cavidan is a regular customer who looks very sophisticated and rich, especially to Gönül who looks up to and even is jealous of her. The story goes on with Cavidan's letter in which we learn everything from her point of view and understand that Cavidan had a tricky game in order to get Gönül's job; her each action was planned in detail and at the end she achieved her goal. She explains that all the clothes she wore were very cheap and bought from bazaar, not from Paris and she is not a wealthy woman she just played with them and finally made Gönül leave job and became the model to the place. With this little game of hers, she is the one who wins, not Gönül. As can be understood, after complex relations, these women exchange roles and Cavidan starts to work at the position that was previously held by Gönül. On the other hand, Gönül becomes a lover to Cavidan's ex-boyfriend Mümtaz. It is realized that the whole exchange has been the plan of Cavidan from the very beginning. The author makes a criticism about marriage as well as being a housewife using Cavidan's letter as a tool. She writes: "You are a creature living in dreams and who was born to love and be loved. You might be a tender housewife. Do not get me wrong, other housewives, indeed, have less qualifications than you do" (Koçakoğlu, 2013, p.67).¹ This comment is an indication that Burak criticizes housewives who rely on their husbands and become their loyal, willing *slaves*. Cavidan makes it clear that Gönül can get married to Mümtaz, her ex-boyfriend. The word choice that Burak uses also proves that she is in fact against marriage. In her letter, she writes that: "Yes, your golden cage is ready and do not hesitate to go inside! God bless you and make you happy. Dear child" (Koçakoğlu, 2013, p.68). Burak uses the cage metaphor for marriage to show directly that marriage undeniably limits and furthermore ends one's freedom. She describes the cage as "golden" inasmuch as in patriarchal societies marriage is hailed as the most important step in one's life and it promises happiness for most people. At the end of the story, Cavidan is portrayed as an independent and clever woman who is as free as a bird, unlike Gönül, who is destined to be confined in a cage.

Marriage is always aligned with the house, the place where women are confined as a result of physical and/or psychological confinement. In the story "The Big Bird", a woman is portrayed mostly in her house. The narrator tells that: "She opened the doors of her house/ Untied the braid of her hair" (Burak, 2011, p.41). The quote creates an ambiguity because getting out of the house or going into it changes the meaning of the text completely. The author does not specify whether the woman opens the door to get in to her confined space or to get out to public space, where she is more independent. Yet, the second line might be a hint to show that she is going out when we consider her braid as a symbol of captivity. Hence, open-

¹ Sevim Burak's early stories were not included in her short story collections. They have later been compiled and included Bediha Koçakoğlu's book "Big Sin; Sevim Burak with Her Unknown Stories". As a result, instead of Sevim Burak, Koçakoğlu's book is referenced in this article.

ing the doors and untying the braid might allegorically be the first step towards freedom. Seher Özkök explains the same two lines as well. She also believes that the house is the only place that the woman in the story exists and she leaves this place (Özkök, 2014, p. 80).

Similarly, in “The House with Mother-of-Pearl” (“Sedef Kakmalı Ev”) Burak criticizes relationships which are not institutionalized, yet still demonstrate the characteristics of marriage. Nurperi is a young woman who lives with Mr. Ziya since she was given to the family at age of fifteen. The relationship between them is not made explicit by the author but it is implied that she is not just a caretaker but they have a sexual relationship. That is, the woman is not only mentally but also physically exploited by Mr. Ziya. Kane and Sanchez suggest women’s economic dependence on men becomes a more brutal form of oppression in some cases and they add that these are “typical components of marriage and family” (Kane and Sanchez, 1994, p.1080). Burak, likewise, portrays Nurperi as a woman who has spent all her life to an old man with the hope of being able to inherit the house when the man dies. Yet, she cannot help questioning her actions, as a matter of fact, all her life: “Why has she been feeding, cleaning, shaving an old man for forty years? She still does not know why she has been doing some things and not the others.” (“Burnt Palaces” 12). We know that she has spent all these years alone seeing as she “couldn’t talk to Mr. Ziya.” (“Burnt Palaces” 12); he was always talking about himself. “He spoke silently and uttered the words one by one. As the years passed, he would want whatever he sees outside. He always wanted.” (“Burnt Palaces” 12) Mr. Ziya is depicted as a selfish person who just cares about his needs, his comfort and his ego. Asim Bezirci claims that he is an impotent man; and he believes that as a result they do not have children (Bezirci, 1965, p. 45). Ziya’s impotence is a possibility given that Mr. Ziya does not like the male cat at home. “He was watching the cat from morning to evening. He wanted that the cat did not climb trees, walk around or pee but sit by the window just like him. Finally, he sent the cat to butcher and had his testicles cut” (“Burnt Palaces” 13). Finally, having the cat’s testicles cut, Mr. Ziya achieves his goal and the cat becomes a lazy and in a way useless character at home and does not pose any danger to Mr. Ziya, which allows Ziya to secure his position as a man, a master, the superior at home. Salah Birsal, however, claims that this cat is Nurperi’s secret lover (Birsal, 1992, p. 256).

Nurperi’s body and emotions are exploited, her relationship with other people even with her cat are restricted and she has been left lonely and miserable in her confined space. Nurperi’s dependence is a temporary one; one that she hopes it will finish one day. She does not internalize this dependence or submission voluntarily, but she has to accept it. Pam Morris states that: “Young women are not financially dependent, their whole upbringing inculcates submission and dependence” (Morris, 2005, p.306). As a result of her submission, Nurperi’s life becomes so unbearable that she has to create a dream world. In this overlap between dreams and reality, Nurperi is portrayed in a scene in which her oppressor’s funeral is arranged. The narrator mentions about this funeral so often throughout the story that we understand Ziya’s death is the only solution, her only dream. Burak uses a kite as a symbol for her desire to be free and first draws an analogy between the coffin and a kite and later herself and the kite; that is, the coffin becomes a kite for her. She writes: “She thought about the resemblance between coffin and kite, kite and herself and other things that resemble each other; finally she could draw resemblance between everything. Thinking and thinking, she reached at the most obsolete parts of her life” (Burak, 2011, p.11). A kite, as we know it, might represent freedom because it flies, but it also represents dependence inasmuch as it has a strip that is held by someone. As a result, much as she knows she will feel independent with the death of Ziya, she will still feel confined because of the traces of her past.

Rıza Soylu asserts that in Burak's stories one important theme is "...the oppressed, unhappy women. She always writes about unhappy women." Soylu gives Nurperi as an example of a woman whose life "starts and ends in the kitchen" (Soylu, 2015, p.187). At the end of the story, or at the end of her dreams, Nurperi cuts her hair and sticks it to the dark bottom of a pan in the kitchen, where she has spent her forty years, cooking, cleaning, pleasing, that is, being a slave to Ziya. This ending might also be considered Nurperi's illumination inasmuch as she finally knows that there is no gain in this painful path. Through this character, Burak displays women's economic and interpersonal dependence to men and to what extent a woman's life becomes miserable as a result of this relationship. Rather than solely creating a dependent character, after pointing to the relationship, she makes us walk through Nurperi's inner life, her dreams and fears along with her experiences. Thus, she uses *écriture féminine* doctrines in her writing and shows what's hidden through the character's experience.

On the other hand, most women in Le Guin's fiction experience marriage in different ways; depending on the world the author creates, marriage can be frustrating, restrictive, oppressive and exploitative, but in her idealized worlds, marriage is not a traditional institution. According to Lisa Hammond Rashly "Le Guin embodies gender as a provocative process, constructing selves vested in female bodies and identities, but at the same time, refusing what she terms "sexualist reductionism" (Wave, 285); that is, reducing those bodies to their sex and gender. In these performances, Le Guin challenges her readers' and her own understanding of both gender and genre, an ongoing feminist process..." (Rashly, 2007, p.23)

In her novels *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed*, Le Guin creates two different worlds where sex, gender, gender roles and patriarchy are questioned. Le Guin mentions in her article "Is Gender Necessary? Redux." that writing this "feminist" book (*The Left Hand of Darkness*) was an experiment for her. She asserts "The experience is performed, the question is asked, in the mind. Einstein's elevator, Schrödinger's cat, my Gethenians, are a simply way of thinking. They are questions, not answers; a process, not a statis" (Le Guin, 1987, p.159). Le Guin clearly states that creating these idealized worlds, she was trying to do an experiment which could show us the possibility of a world without genders. Those were the years when gender was questioned and theorized and Le Guin was doing the same experiment with her imagination. She believes one of the important functions of science fiction is "this kind of question-asking; reversals of a habitual way of thinking" (Le Guin, 1987, p. 159). Accordingly, in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, she presents us a world which destroys all the assumed, usual way of thinking, way of life. One of the goals of feminine writing is "to deconstruct the patriarchy always of conceiving the world, women have to get rid of binary oppositions in language" (Pekşen, 2005, p. 9). Because male/female difference is the most basic binary, the new language must be bisexual and "open to both sexes"(Pekşen, 2005, p. 9). Thus, Le Guin's novels can be regarded as the examples of feminine writing.

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, for instance, Le Guin creates a world of androgynous people whose relationship with each other is mostly non-sexual. These people experience a period which is called as kemmering and in this period they "develop both male and female sexual and reproductive organs." (Rashly, 2007, p. 23) A couple can vow to each other and they can always be together in their kemmering periods. Though the period seems to be form of marriage, a vow does not oppress women or men; it is just a sign of mutual love and respect. Ong Tot Oppong, a woman investigator who goes to Gethen to gain information about these androgynous people, their life and culture, asserts in her notes about the Gethenians that "The furthest extreme from this practice is the custom of vowing kemmering (Karh.oskyommer), which is to all intents and purposes monogamous marriage. It has no legal status, but socially and ethically is an ancient and vigorous institution" (Le Guin, 2000, p. 120). Vowing kemmering is, indeed, like a marriage without its legal status. However, be-

cause the people are androgynous and have a kemmering once a month for a few days, they come together in their kemmering period. Except for this period, they are fully free and independent. Here it is important to emphasize that vowing kemmering is a mutually arranged tradition and pleases just the couple, not the society or families, as on Earth. While reading the novel, as readers, we think about the possibility of a world similar to the one she created; a world where females and males are equal and not judged by their sexes and there are no gender roles, no sexism, no need to feminism.

In another novel *The Dispossessed*, Le Guin compares and contrasts two worlds, one is the utopian Anarres; the other is Urras which represents the Earth. In the storyline, anarchist people from Urras leave the earthlike planet with a woman leader Odo so as to establish a new life and they move to the moon Anarres; thus, their life must be something that they couldn't experience in the earthlike Urras. The protagonist of the novel is Shevek from Anarres, who wants to cease the problems between the two worlds and establish a relationship through a science project. Le Guin shows us how these two worlds differ in several issues concerning women's position in the society, including marriage. For instance, we learn from Shevek that they do not have marriage as an institution but there are couples who would like to be together and may have a child together. We also learn that Odo, who is the spiritual leader and reformer of Anarres, condemns marriage as an institution. On Anarres, people's partnership is not an institution, no one owns the other; there is no legal status or social force to be together. Le Guin writes that:

He knew from Odo's writings that two hundred years ago the main Urrasti sexual institutions had been "marriage," a partnership authorized and enforced by legal and economic sanctions, and "prostitution," which seemed merely to be a wider term, copulation in the economic mode. Odo had condemned them both, and yet Odo had been "married." And anyhow the institutions might have changed greatly in two hundred years. (Le Guin, 2003, p.18)

During his visit to Urras, Shevek has a chance to see the differences between his world and Urras. The main difference is that women and men are equal in Anarres; however, in Urras, women are portrayed as inferior to men, they are objectified. Marriage, as a collective force of oppression is unusual for Shevek. When he is asked whether he has a wife in Anarres, he says "no." When he finally understands what they mean, he explains that they do not use the words husband and wife. He states:

"Oh-yes. A partner, our children. Excuse me, I was thinking of something else. A 'wife,' you see, I think of that as something that exists only on Urras."

"What's a 'partner'?" She glanced up mischievously into his face.

"I think you would say a wife or husband." (Le Guin, 2003, p.199/200)

Words are important; using the words 'wife' and 'husband' is the first step to discriminate man and woman in a marriage and impose that they are different. When a woman has a title or a status of *wife*, her position in the society changes; she loses her freedom and is forced to bear responsibilities as a married woman. As a result, in Le Guin's idealized world, the words *wife* and *husband* are not in use. Instead, they use *partner* which clearly demonstrates that two people are equal, have similar responsibilities, work together to achieve, to build something, namely, love.

Shevek's position as a visitor, a stranger in the society enables him to observe, to understand, to perceive and to interpret the society and more importantly compare it with his. At the same time, people around him learn about a utopian world, in which people are not positioned and valued according to their sex. One important representative of Urrasti women is Veä through whom we learn about women's reaction towards a patriarchal society. Veä is the wife of one of Shevek's hosts during his time on Urras. Having had a discussion with a man

about women's inferior position in the society, Shevek wants to discuss the issue with a married woman from Urras so as to understand how women feel about their position. The dialogue between them shows that Vea has internalized submission just like most married women in the real world.

"I want to know, is an Urrasti woman content to be always inferior?"

"Inferior to whom?"

"To men."

"Oh—that! What makes you think I am?"

"It seems that everything your society does is done by men. The industry, arts, management, government, decisions. And all your life you bear your father's name and the husband's name. The men go to school and you do not go to school; they are all the teachers, and judges, and police, and government, are not they? do you let them control everything? Why do not you do what you like?"

"But we do. Women do exactly as they like. And they don't have to get their hands dirty, or wear brass helmets, or stand about shouting in the Directorate, to do it."

"But what is it that you do?"

"Why, run the men, of course! And you know, it's perfectly safe to tell them that, because they never believe it. They say, 'Haw haw, funny little woman!' and pat your head and stalk off with their medals jangling, perfectly self-content."

"And you too are self-content?"

"Indeed I am."

"I don't believe it."

(The Dispossessed, 2003, p.280/1)

The argument Shevek puts forward is very evident and understandable. He summarizes everything that women experience in a male centered society by focusing on issue of professions, adding the very important issue of surname, as well. However, Vea, a perfect representative of internalized submission, defends herself and other women saying that to run the men is their responsibility, in a sense, their profession. The dialogue also proves that though Vea is an example of dependence and submission, she claims to be self-content because of her conceptual submissiveness. By means of Vea, Le Guin displays how women have been taught to be happy and consent with the conditions they have to endure. In Anarres, on the other hand, women are self-sufficient and independent. By reinventing the very same institutions, Le Guin shows the reader the possibility of another life in which women are not constrained by marriage, do not find themselves confined in cages, and lead their lives without submission, subordination or exploitation.

Commodification

Commodification of women is not stated directly in the works of Burak, rather she implies it through different examples. As mentioned earlier, in "The House with Mother-of-Pearl" (Sedef Kakmalı Ev), Nurperi is an example of commodified women. She is given to Mr. Ziya at a very young age. In the text, it is not given clearly but implied that there is a sexual relationship between Mr. Ziya and Nurperi. The beginning of her commodification, that is, how she begins to live in this house is not stated in the story, but we know that Nurperi is oppressed by Mr. Ziya in different ways. Most unfortunately, in time, Nurperi internalizes submission and her commodification becomes a choice even if it is not voluntarily. She impatiently waits for Mr. Ziya's death so that she might inherit the house they live in.

Similarly, the main character of "The Victory of the Squatter House", (Gecekondunun Zaferi) Melike is a woman who is commodified by her parents. Melike's mother is the oppressor because she wants her daughter to get married to a rich older man who can take care of her and the family even though Melike has a boyfriend. Burak depicts Melike as a very sad, unhappy girl in a gloomy atmosphere whose mother believes marriage will solve all the problems she has. She even tells this openly to her daughter: "You will be saved if you marry Mr.

Nazmi” (Koçakoğlu, 2013, p. 82). The girl does not want to marry him; on the other hand, she is in a dilemma about the issue. She has boyfriend Tahir with whom she prefers to live in a squatter house rather than living in a cozy house with another man. In this very example, Me-like’s commodification through marriage is desired by her own mother. The mother wants her daughter to get married to a rich building contractor although she does not love him. Her body and emotions alike are to be exchanged for profit the rich man might provide. The profit which the family hopes to get is not specified in the text, it may not be something concrete; yet, through this marriage, they might have a chance to position themselves in a higher place in the society.

As a result, we can claim that in the given works of Burak married women are represented as weak, depressed and confined in spaces as a result of marriage. Moreover, they are objectified and commodified, both their bodies and emotions are exploited by the collective forms of oppression.

Le Guin, however, shows the commodification of women more clearly and directly. In *The Wild Girls*, in particular, marriage is portrayed as a principal form of commodification. In the story, Le Guin creates a world where class matters much more than anything else. As mentioned earlier, two girls from the lowest class (Dirt people) are enslaved by a man. It is a patriarchal and capitalist society and one way of accumulating capital is to go hunting for a new commodity, in this case, a young woman. In the society, women’s body and beauty are the most important commodities they have; if they stay virgin until they get married, they can have important candidates of marriage, namely, buyers. Bela, as a member of middle class society, goes slave hunting with his friends and enslaves two girls; Modh and Mal, one becomes his wife and the other is exchanged for profit. Throughout the story, we learn that women are considered as a meta and marriage is the exchange of this specific commodity (the woman) for money, field or precious stones. In Marxist terms, the exchange-value is the capital the owner pays for the woman and the use-value of a woman must be defined in relation to her physical condition such as beauty and virginity. When Bela first enslaves the girls, he talks to them:

“You’re going to live in heaven on earth,” he said. “A lot of food. Big, rich huts to live in. And you do not have to carry your house around on your back across the world! You’ll see. Are you virgins?”

After a while they nodded.

“Stay that way if you can,” he said. “Then you can marry gods. Big, rich husbands! These men are gods” (Le Guin, 2002, p. 8).

As demonstrated by the dialogue above, if the women are virgin, they are worth a fortune, they can get married to filthy rich men, “to the Gods”. Luce Irigaray, in a similar way, asserts that a virgin woman is pure exchange value. She writes:

She is nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign of relations among men. In and of herself, she does not exist: she is a simple envelope veiling what is really at stake in social exchange. In this sense, her natural body disappears into its representative function. Red blood remains on the mother’s side, but it has no price, as such, in the social order; woman, for her part, as medium of exchange, is no longer anything but semblance. The ritualized passage from woman to mother is accomplished by the violation of an envelope: the hymen, which has taken on the value of taboo, the taboo of virginity. Once deflowered, woman is relegated to the status of use value, to her entrapment in private property; she is removed from exchange among men (Irigaray, 1985, p. 186).

It must be added that if the enslaved girls are too young to get married, they are brought up according to the owner’s needs and desires and when they are fully decorated with the man’s desires, they become their own wives. When Modh uses her charm to attract Bela and succeeds, the marriage is happily accepted because as stated by Nata, a member of the family: “They all liked her, and she would cost the House of Belen nothing” (Le Guin, 2002,

p.15). That night the women in the household kept her safe and “would not let anybody have her virginity, which was her value as a bride” (Le Guin, 2002, p.15). Families who exchange not only their slaves but also their daughters wait for the perfect time the exchange comes off. In the novella, Bela looks for the money, which he will get from his sister Tudju’s marriage seeing as they have paid a lot of money for another girl, Nata. Not surprisingly, they pay money when they want to get married to a girl from another house, too. It is a pattern; it is the tradition. We read that the family was “expecting to make a good profit in food-supply or clothing from Tudju's marriage” (Le Guin, 2002, p.12).

We learn that when the younger girl, Mal becomes thirteen years old, she has a ceremony and in that ceremony Ralo ten Bal, a member of upper class, sees the girl. As the narrator suggests; “She was marriageable now, and these Crown men might pay to marry her rather than merely use her. She was very pretty, and might bring back a little wealth to the Belens” (Le Guin, 2002, p.15). Le Guin even uses the term “bride- bargain” so as to show women’s position as commodities. As in all marriages, the exchange- value becomes the main problem and as a result of getting an incredibly high offer, Mal is sold as a commodity at the age of thirteen. In *The Wild Girls*, to conclude, Ursula K. Le Guin shows how women are accepted as commodities and exchanged for money. Even though the atmosphere she creates is not “earth”, we see a patriarchal society, in which women have almost no words to say about their own lives; marriages are arranged for them; they are exchanged for money like commodities. By portraying the girls as the commodities, Le Guin makes most women’s real life experiences visible to the readers. Readers start to empathize with characters; they question their own conditions and lives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, marriage, as an individual force of oppression, is explored in both Le Guin and Burak’s fiction in different ways. Burak predominantly shows marriage as an institution which oppresses women. In her stories, this oppression exists in two ways; before marriage women struggle to find the ideal husband for them and there is always a tension between themselves and their families and during marriage, when women are confined in their houses become unhappy, miserable, lonely housewives, feel weak under the obligations of marriage, look for ways to escape it. Cages are also used as a metaphor by Burak to point out women’s captivity in confined spaces. Le Guin, on the other hand, explores marriage in her fiction with the exclusion of institutionalized marriage. In *The Dispossessed* and *The Left Hand of Darkness*, it is not marriage that brings people together, but it is mutual love and understanding. The commitment is, thus, not to the institution but to the other person. As a consequence, marriage does not exist as an oppressive force for the people inhabiting these idealized worlds. This does not mean that marriage is portrayed as not being an oppressive force; rather, by showing idealized worlds, Le Guin implies the constraints of marriage in real life.

As for commodification, both Burak and Le Guin point out commodification of women as a form of oppression. This form of oppression is a collective force on women which makes their life miserable not by some individuals around them but by the majority of society. Women are considered as objects to be bought and sold for the benefit of the family or for the sake of women themselves. Thus, their virginity becomes an issue. They are objectified to fulfil men’s sexual desires, assumed to be the stocks, capitals in the hands of men. Patriarchy, as a matter of fact, is a system that protects men, and by so doing, encourages men to commodify women as they wish. This kind of commodification of women as a form of collective oppression is used as an important theme in Burak and Le Guin’s works.

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