

From Hermaphroditic Humanoids to Female Cyborgs: Feminism and
Gender in Late Twentieth-Century Science Fiction Literature

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INTRODUCTION

The digital age has provided feminism with new means to reshape and propagate itself, giving birth to so-called online feminism. The “#MeToo” and “#TimesUp” movements on social media, aiming to raise awareness of sexual harassment of both women and men, are only the most recent examples of online feminist activities taking place all over the world. These movements are part of a chain reaction that started with the first wave of feminism in the nineteenth century and ends with contemporary fourth-wave feminism. From the first to the last feminist wave, literature, or simply the act of writing, has not only given women a voice, but also an opportunity to openly address and discuss topics such as gender equality and sexual freedom. Focusing on second-wave feminism, this thesis explores the representation of gender and the expression of the predominant feminist ideas in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (1975) and Pamela Sargent’s *The Shore of Women* (1986). The introductory part of the thesis will provide a concise overview of the feminist activities that took place from the 1960s to the 1980s, before moving on to the field of gender theory. In the main part, the three novels mentioned above will be analysed using a feminist perspective.

THE EMERGENCE OF SECOND-WAVE FEMINISM

Feminism, rather than a clearly defined term, is an ever-evolving phenomenon that evades temporal fixity and endeavours, broadly speaking, to advocate gender equality and combat the oppression of women, whereby the more specific objectives change in accordance to historical circumstances. The timeless and versatile nature

of feminism is highlighted by Jane Hawkins, who explains that “Feminism is not a game with a scorecard, a set of goal posts, and a ten second warning bell. [...] Feminism is about human women trying to live human lives. It is a path rather than a place. You never fully ‘get there’ or ‘win’” (in Gomoll 118). Since ideas of gender, sexuality and sexual freedom are constantly changing, goals of feminism inevitably undergo changes too, making the women’s demand to be treated like human beings, instead of the “woman” that society has constructed, the only constant objective of feminism. The differing feminist goals are today categorised into four waves, beginning with the suffragettes in the nineteenth century and ending with the contemporary feminist movement endeavouring to oppose sexual harassment and violence against women through social media (Munro 22-23). This thesis will focus on second-wave feminism, which lasted approximately from the 1960s to the 1980s, and its relation to “soft” science fiction literature that contains sociological and psychological rather than technological themes.¹ The second wave had its roots in the physical, economic, political and cultural oppression of women by men and patriarchal institutions in general, and women’s position in the 1950s in particular. In the wake of the Second World War, the American home became the safe haven in a world threatening to be annihilated by a potential atomic war, while a renewed sense of stability was gained by starting a nuclear family (Ruiz 147, 149).² Although the so-called “togetherness ideal” advocated joint parenthood and equal distribution of household duties, the domesticity cult still prompted women to hold their “natural”

¹ Although themes of “hard” science fiction such as technology and biology do play a role in the novels treated in this thesis (in particular in association with artificial reproduction), they are not explained in much scientific detail. More importance is attached to social aspects and the psychological development of the characters.

² The name “nuclear family”, coined in the 20th century, refers to a family unit consisting of a heterosexual couple and their biological or adopted children and has its origins in the industrialisation period of the nineteenth century (Chambers 20). Since the functions traditionally fulfilled through the kinship system, for instance education and production, were transferred to social institutions, the extended family became obsolete and the nuclear family became the new ideal (Chambers 21).

positions as housewives and mothers (Ruiz 152, 153). The gendered distribution and segregation of roles and spheres were thus still a norm, entrapping women as “housemakers” in the sphere of the home while the male “breadwinners” worked in the outside sphere to provide for their family (Ruiz 154). Although many women reaccepted their roles as housewives, Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) showed women that their roles as mothers, wives and housemakers made them increasingly unhappy. It was Friedan’s idea of a woman liberated from traditional gender roles, capable of choosing what she wants to do and who she wants to be, that opened the way to the more radical feminist movements of the late twentieth century.

The second wave arose in two main movements, mostly referred to as liberal equality feminism and radical feminism. The former “asks for equality in the sense of sameness of attainment, and therefore treatment, and justifies it via sameness, ‘androgyny’,” claiming that men and women are, in the first place, both human beings and the biological differences between both sexes should thus not be a decisive factor in their participation in social, economic and political domains (Evans 13). The liberal movement is usually associated with the National Organization of Women, an organisation founded in 1966, centring mainly on female equality before the law and in employment (Baxandall and Gordon 2). Among the organisation’s major achievements were the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974, giving every individual equal rights when applying for a loan, and the Women’s Educational Equity Act of 1974, aiming to abolish gender discrimination in education (Freedman 85). Nevertheless, Judith Lorber points out that, albeit promoting equal treatment for men and women, liberal feminists failed to completely remove the belief that men and women were marked by inherent differences (10).

Radical Feminists believed that “constructs such as masculinity and femininity should be abolished and new, nongendered categories for organising personal and social life must be formulated and adopted” to grant women real freedom (Enns and Sinacore 472). Indeed, despite the liberal feminists’ success in gaining female access to traditionally male spheres, women’s lives were still deeply affected by patriarchy as they continued to be undervalued, harassed and discriminated at work and in other public domains because of their sex (Lorber 16). To eliminate the idea of inherent female inferiority that justified men’s treatment of them, radical feminism sought to free women of the culturally constructed binary oppositions that defined women’s and men’s behaviour and attributes as inevitably “feminine” or “masculine” respectively. Radical Feminism appeared in the form of groups in 1967 and 1968, one of their most significant contributions being the foundation of consciousness-raising groups (Baxandall and Gordon 4).

In these self-help groups, women opened up about the various problems they encountered in everyday life, ranging from physical abuse to self-hate, and learned that those negative experiences were not self-inflicted but resulted from their discrimination under patriarchy. This lesson mirrored second-wave feminists’ central slogan “the personal is political,” which declared that women’s negative experiences all had their roots in the political and social structures of their society (Freedman 87). In the same context, an anti-violence movement gradually emerged, during which radical feminists extended the definition of rape by campaigning for the criminalisation of marital rape, date rape, sexual harassment and domestic violence, terms then inexistent in the legal system (Freedman 282). Moreover, support groups and help hotlines were installed to encourage women to voice their experience,

thereby challenging victim blaming and raising awareness that rape and violence against women was widespread and real (Freedman 285).

The sexual revolution, too, was an essential milestone of the feminist movement, as it drastically remodelled attitudes towards sexual freedom and the ownership over the female body. Up to the 1940s, scientific and psychoanalytical experts defined healthy female sexuality as passive, vaginal and dependent on men while maintaining that women had an inborn desire for heterosexuality and motherhood (Gerhard 22). These theories served to maintain gender power relations by making the male partner and his sexual organ the active entity during intercourse and the woman the passive receiver who necessitates the male sex organ to climax. Clitoral sexuality, in turn, “represented the chaos of women behaving like men, of women overpowering men, and of women rejecting their passive and maternal destinies” since clitoral stimulation not only avoided pregnancy, it also implied female sexual autonomy by making the male member dispensable (Gerhard 41).

Postwar sexologist Alfred Kinsey challenged these scientific and psychoanalytical assumptions in *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Female* (1953), simultaneously inspiring second-wave feminists to reclaim female sexuality. Kinsey destroyed the stereotype of the passive, undesirous female by showing that more than half of the women he interviewed masturbated regularly and thus clearly had an autonomous sex drive (Morantz 574). Furthermore, he refuted heterosexuality as an inborn female desire and destigmatised clitoral sexuality; some interviewees reported having engaged in homosexual activities during which, according to Kinsey’s statistics, orgasms were more frequent than during heterosexual intercourse, suggesting that clitoral orgasms were not only normal but also more probable than vaginal ones (Morantz 573). The sexual revolution consequently

sparked several new movements, including the gay liberation movement and the reproductive rights movement leading to the availability of the contraceptive pill in 1965 and the legalisation of abortion in 1973 in the majority of the American states (Freedman 236-237). With the heteronormative boundaries and the constant fear of pregnancy weakened, feminists prompted women to experiment sexually and reassume control over their own bodies.

Second-wave feminism also had a profound effect on literature and the arts. The idea of a liberated woman prompted various writers to bring the new feminist ideal to life in their works. Science fiction, associated with futuristic worlds where scientific progress has created norms and laws inapplicable to the contemporary world, revealed itself as an especially convenient genre to grapple with themes such as gender, sexuality and sexism. Ursula K. Le Guin equates science fiction with “a thought-experiment” which is not meant “to predict the future [...] but to describe reality, the present world” suggesting that the genre allows one to imagine alternative realities in defamiliarised settings, thereby investigating and criticising the elements that prompted one to create the alternative world in the first place (“Introduction” xiv). Suzy McKee Charnaz further highlights the freedom that science fiction offers by stating that “instead of having to twist ‘reality in order to create ‘realistic’ free female characters in today’s unfree society, the SF writer can create the societies that would produce those characters [...] as the healthy, solid norm [...] SF lets women write their dreams as well as their nightmares” (in Gomoll 4). Charnaz is here referring to utopianism, defined by Lyman Tower Sargent as “social dreaming,” the act of envisioning either a society reflecting our hopes, dreams and the possibility of a better place, or a society reflecting our fears and the possibility of the aggravation of the present world’s conditions (3).

Some science fiction writers, like Joan Slonczewski in her novel *A Door into Ocean* (1986), reimagined feminist utopias where gender norms are subverted, patriarchy has been replaced by matriarchy or men have disappeared from the planet altogether. Dystopian worlds, as in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) depicted and criticised gender segregation, male patriarchal power and female oppression. Bammer ascribes the emergence of Utopian science fiction during the second wave to the intrinsic similarities between the genre and feminism, suggesting that feminist writers "oriented towards the future, yet grounded in a present they were committed to changing, [...] were simultaneously situated in the (historical) Now and the (utopian) Not-Yet" (54). Regardless of the differences between feminist branches, utopianism was a literary mirror image of the feminist mindset and hence the most useful tool to explore the issues that feminism as a whole was concerned with. In order to adequately examine the multifaceted views on gender, this thesis will centre on three novels exhibiting both utopian and dystopian aspects and presenting three different types of communities. Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (1986) is set in a single-gender community, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) takes place on a genderless planet inhabited by humanoids and Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975) is set in both mixed-gender and single-gender parallel universes.

(DE)CONSTRUCTING GENDER: JUDITH BUTLER AND SANDRA L. BEM³

Although women in literature and women in the real world differ from each other in the sense that the former are fictional while the latter are not, Joanna Russ challenges this idea of the “real woman” by accentuating that neither is, in fact, real. Both types of women, Russ argues, are social constructs: “Men have *invented* women. That is, the nightmare/ecstatic dream/fantasy projection one finds all over literature [...] In fact men [...] have actually created real-women-as-they-are. We are all creatures of our culture but the power differential [...] runs one way” (in Gomoll 85). Just as women in literature often represent the author’s idealised or stereotyped idea of a woman, women in the real world are expected to behave, think and act according to their culture’s definition of a proper female.⁴ These specific characteristics attributed to the female and the male sex, categorised as “feminine” and “masculine,” are known as gender.

“Biology is destiny” is a doctrine prescribing that one’s genes, anatomy and reproductive system control the development of one’s behaviour and character traits, in short, who one is going to be. For centuries, variations of this creed have been used to establish and justify the inferiority/superiority binary regulating the relation between women and men while simultaneously determining what is naturally feminine or masculine. Feminists of the second wave rejected this restrictive and discriminating doctrine and instead aspired after a self-actualised selfhood

³ Deconstruction is here not used in its poststructuralist sense but is meant to describe “a strategy of disruption and transformation with regard to every and any kind of essentialism”, in this context the essentialist binary oppositions of man/woman and feminine/masculine (Bennett and Royle 184).

⁴ That men too, are victims of their masculine gender role is a much-discussed topic in the academic field of men’s studies. This thesis, however, is more concerned with women’s studies and thus centres on the female rather than the male sex.

independent from one's biological sex, prompting them to make the distinction between sex and gender.

Judith Butler, a renowned gender theorist, explains this discrepancy by stating that "whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (*Gender* 10). Whether one is biologically a man or a woman does not predefine one's behaviour or character traits. The notions of femininity and masculinity describe the sets of attributes imposed on each sex by their society but can, in effect, be appropriated by either sex. Butler even goes as far as to say that sex is a social construct too, and gender must thus be seen to "designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established" (*Gender* 11). The sex dichotomy only serves to naturalise and facilitate the installation of the gender binary, and the attribution of a sex thus inevitably also imbues one with a specific gender. To support her argument, Butler turns to Foucault's hermaphroditic Herculine to show that not everyone can be categorized into one of the two sexes (*Gender* 122).

Sandra Bem, an American psychologist who specialised in the field of gender studies, also perceives sex as a social construct, underlining that some cultures recognise more than two sexes (*Lenses* 80). A closer look at Bem's gender theory and concept of gender lenses will follow after the discussion of Butler's work. To avoid the restrictions that both gender and sex entail, science fiction novels like Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* are set in a world where all individuals are hermaphroditic and the gender/sex dichotomy is thus nonexistent. According to Joanna Russ, in a genderless world "[t]here is no longer anyone to tell you who you are, what you 'ought' to do or be or feel, and it becomes frighteningly clear [...], that

sexual dichotomy or polarity are social constructs and not natural facts” (in Gomoll 98). Genderless worlds allow one to discover one’s identity, stripped of the gender norms that society imposes.

The idea of the real self, or rather the absence thereof, is also discussed by Butler, who posits that in western society people can only become “intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility” (*Gender* 22). A person only becomes an integrated, understandable part of society when his/her behaviour reflects “a coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire” (*Gender* 23). Every sex has specific gendered attributes, a fixed sexuality as well as a predefined desire, each of these characteristics being aligned and organized around the “heterosexual matrix” (*Gender* 36). Butler’s heterosexual matrix is a normative, binary structure that produces and maintains gender roles by categorising women’s femininity and men’s masculinity as opposing, immiscible attributes expressing the respective sex. The matrix also naturalises heterosexuality by appointing man as woman’s natural sexual partner and vice versa, and by presenting both sexes’ desire as strictly heterosexual. People who deviate from this matrix, transvestites and homosexuals for instance, are only recognised by society as “developmental failures or logical impossibilities” to be discriminated and stigmatised as abnormal (*Gender* 24).

Since the heterosexual matrix can only be upheld through the people who continue to perform the “regulatory practices”, any activities expressing the dominant conventions of gender, Butler concludes that gender is performative, something we *do* rather than something we *are* (*Gender* 33; emphasis added). Gender, Butler explains, “is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to

be actualized and reproduced as reality" ("Performative" 526). People internalise their feminine or masculine roles not only by observing and mimicking each other but also through the stereotypical portrayals of gender in the mass media. It is through the repetition of these acts that the roles become normalised and are simultaneously sustained. Nevertheless, Butler emphasises that one can also decide to use a different, non-gendered script and thereby destabilise the heterosexual matrix. The image of a heterosexual-matrix-resisting woman was also a popular figure in feminist science fiction, as can be seen in the characters of Jael and Janet in Joanna Russ' *The Female Man*. While Jael is the embodiment of conventionally masculine aggressiveness and strength, Janet's exclusively female community defies the heterosexual matrix by portraying lesbianism as the only and most favourable form of sexual relation.

Butler's heterosexual matrix can be equated with Bem's concept of "gender polarization", the division of the sexes into opposing categories of femininity and masculinity and the distribution of "mutually exclusive scripts" to each sex determining their sex-specific behaviour (*Lenses* 80-81). While Butler's work focuses on how gender works and how gendered behaviour is propagated, Bem's work centres on gender schema theory, the processes by which people become gendered and how sex-specific characteristics are transmitted from one individual to another. When a person receives new information through an experience, the mind tries to associate the incoming information with one's preconceived ideas, known as schematic processing ("Gender" 355). Bem believes that people become gendered from an early age on when "the developing child is learning content-specific information, the particular behaviours and attributes that are to be linked with sex" and then "learns to process information in terms of an evolving gender schema"

(“Gender” 354-355). Since these gender schemata act as filters, children are prone to process exclusively information relevant to their own sex, resulting in them learning to adapt not only their behaviour, but also their very identity to their sex, thus becoming what Bem terms “sex-typed” individuals.

In *The Lenses of Gender* (1993), Bem extends her theory by exploring how society and culture contribute not only to an individual’s acquisition of these gender schemata, here called “gender lenses”, but also to the internalisation of so-called “lenses of androcentrism”, which make the wearer believe “that male are the privileged sex and the male perspective is the privileged perspective” (*Lenses* 139, 144). As an example of androcentrism Bem mentions the gendered separation of employment still apparent in the 1990s, when women mostly occupied pink-collar or sex-related jobs, such as secretaries, nurses and prostitutes, which mirrored their roles as wife, mother or sex object (*Lenses* 144). Androcentrism and gender polarization manifested themselves in various other social activities, ranging from domestic violence to more harmless activities such as dressing boys in blue clothes and girls in pink clothes (*Lenses* 145-146).

These androcentric and gender-polarised practices are observed in everyday life as well as in the mass media and popular culture and work to “program different social experiences for males and females, respectively, and they communicate [...] that the male-female distinction is extraordinarily important” (*Lenses* 146). Bem’s account also explains why some people might be hesitant to go against Butler’s heterosexual matrix and be performative in their gender expression; having internalised all the ideas of what is a proper man and a proper woman and having constructed an identity based on those norms, “gender-inappropriate impulses not only produce a certain level of conflict and contradiction within the individual psyche;

they also constitute an eternal threat to the male or female selves that people work so hard to construct” (*Lenses* 149). As this thesis will show, this is apparent in the character of Jeannine in *The Female Man*, who is desperately trying to adhere to the gender norms of her world while simultaneously struggling with her secret wish to be freed of them. A gendered self, then, “is both a product and a process”, as it is created through the internalisation of gendered lenses through the observation of and engagement in social practices and involves the process of shaping one’s life and personality according to the dominant gender norms (*Lenses* 152). Similar to Butler, Bem also lists nonconformists, people who are considered deviant because of “the mismatch between the sex of their body and the gender of their psyche” such as homosexuals or women who swap their conventional housewife role for a professional career (*Lenses* 170). Taking the example of homosexuals, Bem suggests that those people can only validate their identity, or in Butler’s words, become intelligible, by separating themselves from the dominant culture that defines their identity as abnormal. In a community of nonconformists not subjected to the gender norms of the dominant culture, “they could develop a psychological identity as a member of a deviant sexual group, rather than as an isolated – and pathological – individual” (*Lenses* 172). Gender separatism was a widely used trope in the field of feminist science fiction, and Pamela Sargent’s *The Shore of Women* will show that even in women-only communities, dominant cultures can emerge, new norms are fixed and, inevitably, unintelligible nonconformists are born.

ANDROGYNY: UNITING THE TWO SEXES

The culturally prescribed existence of two sexes and two sets of sex-typed behaviours has been criticised not only by gender theorists, but also by various feminists of the late twentieth century. Shulamith Firestone, whose *The Dialectics of Sex* (1970) was one of the most important works of radical feminist literature, demands “not just the elimination of male *privilege* but of the sex *distinction* itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally” (11). This could be achieved through the use of reproductive technology, which would relieve the woman of her maternal role as the carrier and bearer of children. According to Firestone, women’s supposed inferiority, rather than being the result of patriarchal systems, has its roots in the differing reproductive systems. “Biology itself-procreation,” she argues, “is at the origin of the dualism [...] [t]he biological family is an inherently unequal power distribution” (Firestone 8). From early on, woman’s childbearing capacity and other “female ills” resulting from her biological constitution not only made her dependent on men, who were unburdened by nature, she was also perceived the natural caretaker of children.⁵ As a result, the patriarchal institution of motherhood was established and woman’s “biological destiny,” the nuclear family, was determined (Firestone 8, 207). Inspired by the medieval family groups that consisted of a large number of people and therefore had a “more loose, permeable form” than the rigid nuclear family, Firestone proposes a new family structure. She names this new structure “households”, where several parents would live together with their children (146, 230). In those households there would be no

⁵ Firestone indeed perceived pregnancy and childbirth as “female ills”, not only because they imprisoned the woman in her maternal role, but also because of how they affected the female body. Mentioning the deformation of the female body during pregnancy, Firestone concludes that “Pregnancy is barbaric”, subsequently drawing attention to the physical stress that women have to undergo by stating that “childbirth *hurts*” (198).

gender-specific chores nor a gender hierarchy, and the responsibility for children would be shared among all the community members. Moreover, Firestone argues that women's biology prevented them from accomplishing the same jobs as men, which lead to the division of labour and is at the origin of the contemporary sex-typed employments (9).

Sandra Bem has a similar view, stating that "sex is a narrowly construed biological concept that does not need to matter outside the domain of reproduction" (*Lenses* 149). One's biological sex should not be taken as a factor dictating our behaviour and personality because it is "limiting human potential, allowing each person only that half of the total personality potential that matched the cultural definitions of gender appropriateness" (*Lenses* 153). Hence, if sex no longer determined one's gender, feminine and masculine behaviours would not exist and instead be merged into one. It is important to mention, however, that Firestone wants to literally remove sexual difference by separating women from their reproductive function, while Bem only targets the cultural significance of sexual difference.

Andrea Dworkin not only posits gendered behaviour as an obstruction to a complete self-realisation, but also challenges the categorisation of humans into two discrete sexes, claiming that "'man' and 'woman' are fictions, caricatures, cultural constructs. As models they are reductive, totalitarian, inappropriate to human becoming. As roles they are static, demeaning to the female, dead-ended for male and female both" (174). Instead, she suggests humans exist on a sexual continuum where male and female are only two of the several possible sexes, and where everyone possesses cross-sexed traits (Dworkin 183). Although differing in their approach and degree of radicalism, these three writers ultimately suggest the same

idea, namely androgyny and the possibility of human sexualities outside the heterosexual matrix.

Although the concept of androgyny has existed for centuries in different forms, it is only through the emergence of the second-wave feminist movement and its contestation of gender norms that androgyny became a significant critical concept (Singer 22). From the 1960s to the 1970s, androgyny was a “protean concept whose function shifted according to the discourse that constructed it,” meaning that the definitions depended on the contexts in which androgyny was used, ranging from sociology to psychoanalysis (Hargreaves 97). Since this thesis adopts a feminist approach, a feminist definition of androgyny will be used. Androgyny, as defined by Catharine R. Stimpson, refers to any individual who “will behave as if it were both feminine and masculine. That is, in thought, feeling, and action, the androgyne will flesh out those characteristics we have subsumed under the term ‘feminine’ and [...] ‘masculine’” (238). Androgyny promised to free individuals of what Bem and Butler would call their gendered scripts, allowing individuals to transcend the norms circumscribed for their sex. No longer would women be reprimanded for being unfeminine or men be debased for being unmanly. Nevertheless, Maaïke Meijer points out that androgyny also received much criticism, including the argument that androgyny presupposes the existence of femininity and masculinity, thus reaffirming gender polarisation (47). Other feminists disapproved of androgyny since they believed that before adopting a “masculine side” women must first accept their “feminine side” and abolish the negative connotations femaleness has gathered over the years (Meijer 44). Whether the novels treated in this thesis embrace or criticise androgyny will become clear through the analysis below.

ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS

With consideration to the feminist ideas of the late twentieth century and the gender theories elaborated above, the following analysis will show that notions of gender, androgyny and feminism are interlinked in Le Guin's, Russ's and Sargent's novels. As will be seen, the three writers perceive androgyny as favourable and sometimes even indispensable for women's freedom.

CHAPTER 1: URSULA K. LE GUIN'S *THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS*

The Left Hand of Darkness (1969) tells the story of the human Genly Ai from Terra, who has been sent to the planet of Gethen as an envoy. The idea of androgyny is embodied in the Gethenians, humanoids who are all born hermaphrodites. Human hermaphrodites are intersexual beings who have the primary sexual characteristics (testicles and ovaries) and/or secondary sexual characteristics (features such as growth of body hair and breast development) of both sexes and can thus not be categorised as either sex (Singer 30). Theoretically, then, hermaphrodites do not have certain sex roles and in turn do not adopt specific gender roles either. Although a rare phenomenon in the real world, Brian Atterby suggests that hermaphroditism could be used in literary fiction as the "disruptive third," a role conveying the idea that the binary gender system could be challenged (8). Le Guin's novel explores the various positive effects androgyny can have on an individual and society in general, and describes the challenges encountered by the heteronormative mind when confronted with the "disruptive third".

GETHENIAN BIOLOGY AND SOCIETY

The Gethenians have a sexual cycle of twenty-six days that is in consonance with the lunar cycle, implying that their sexuality is something natural not bound to social conventions and prescriptions. For approximately twenty-one days they are in “somer,” meaning that they are sexually neuter and asexual. On the twenty-second day they enter “kemmer,” which can be thought of as the oestrus period of female mammals. Being hermaphrodites, Gethenians have a “clitopenis” and only completely develop one of the two sexual organs in the presence of another Gethenian in kemmer (“Coming of Age” 8). Gethenians are thus “sequential hermaphrodites” who can produce both eggs and sperm alternately (Avis 133). Which sex they develop is completely random and out of their control, as it is provoked by the partner’s hormonal level. A Gethenian in the presence of someone with a dominance of female hormones will develop male organs, and vice versa (96-97). If the female partner becomes pregnant, her body prepares for the pregnancy and lactation period by developing enlarged breasts and a wider pelvis (97). Once the lactation period is over, s/he reassumes her/his androgyne form.

According to the investigator who has written the report on Gethenians’ sexuality, only biological but no behavioural changes occur during kemmer, and Gethenians’ sex is thus completely unrelated to their personality. Consequently, “the distinction between a maternal and a paternal instinct is scarcely worth making; the paternal instinct, the wish to protect, to further, is not a sex-linked characteristic” (106). Moreover, since “[n]o physiological habit is established” when a Gethenian becomes sexed, no one is forced into a sex role but only adopts it during and shortly after pregnancy (97), evoking Bem’s belief that sex should only matter in the domain of reproduction. The Gethenian sexual system thus actualises Firestone’s feminist

vision of a “diffusion of the childbearing and childrearing role to [...] men as well as women” and abolishes the institution of motherhood which was considered restrictive by several feminists (206). The disappearance of gender might be a utopic vision for women, but not so for men, as the investigator notes. Since the probability to become pregnant is equally high for every Gethenian and the role of mother is only a transient one without the obligations that come with it in the society of Terra. Female Gethenians have more freedom than women elsewhere. At the same time, “nobody here is quite as free as a free male anywhere else” (100), since male privilege is inexistent in Gethen and no one is spared the “female ills” of women (Firestone 8). Yet the novel cautions against an exclusively utopian view of Gethen in terms of gender: some Gethen regions such as Orgoreyn use hormonal injections to enable Gethenians to choose their “preferred sexuality,” which threatens sex equality by instigating a sex hierarchy (97).⁶ Likewise, “perverts” or “halfdeads” are labels given to Gethenians who remain in Kemmer too long and consequently develop a “permanent hormonal imbalance” towards one sex (67). Although they do not become social outcasts, they “are tolerated with some disdain,” suggesting that albeit a heteronormative matrix does not exist on Gethen, they still have a system that creates deviants (67). Androgyny, the novel hints, does not preclude the existence of certain norms nor the possibility that a sex hierarchy could eventually surface.

The absence of gender, Susan Margarey asserts, entails “consequences for every other aspect of life [which] constitute immense differences from the society on Earth from which Genly Ai [...] come[s] — implicitly, our society in the late twentieth

⁶ Orgoreyn is described as the dark side of Gethen, where a façade of equality hides the omnipresence of class distinction, corruption and thirst for political power. Choosing a preferred sex, most likely the male one, is just another sign of the upper-class inhabitants’ lust for power.

century” (130). These differences can be seen as manifestations of second-wave feminist goals. In accordance with the endeavours of the sexual liberation of the 1970s, sexual freedom and tolerance is an essential part of Gethenian society. When in kemmer, Gethenians can visit so-called kemmerhouses where “groups may form and intercourse take place promiscuously among the males and females” and where everyone “however poor or strange” can participate (99). Conventions dictating female sexual repression and male sexual dominance are inexistent, and thus “[a]bstinence is entirely voluntary; indulgence is entirely acceptable” (190). Even incest between siblings is allowed until one of them becomes pregnant (98). This mirrors the belief of radical feminists such as Dworkin that “[t]he incest taboo [...] teaches us the mechanism of repressing and internalizing erotic feeling” (189); in order to become wholly androgynous, one’s sexual desire must be allowed to be directed at any being. The virtual absence of rape and the unrestricted availability of the contraceptive pill on Gethen are further feminist utopian visions and seem to foreshadow the anti-rape and reproductive rights movements of the 1970s. The nuclear family, which both Firestone and Dworkin consider as a manifestation of the biological family that consolidates sex roles and gender binaries, is also absent on Gethen (13; 190). As an alternative to the nuclear family, Dworkin proposes an “extended family, or tribe” (190), reminiscent of Firestone’s concept of “households”. This is implemented in the novel in the form of Gethenian “Hearths,” where Gethenians live together with their multi-generational families (“Coming of Age” 3).

Religion, too, has been affected by the absence of gender. Besides being a quintessential part of Gethenian culture, it is also extremely important in the context of androgyny. Contrary to Christianity, the Handdara is a “religion without institution, without priests, without hierarchy, without vows, without creed” (57). Christianity has

been a frequent target for feminists, not only because contemporary gender roles are partly based on biblical doctrines, but also because Christian institutions such as marriage maintained and normalised the heterosexual matrix (Dworkin 171, 174). Meijer even refers to it as “the ultimate patriarchal religion” (22). Handdara, which is inspired by the eastern Taoist religion, is devoid of such sexist assumptions (Margarey 131). According to Dworkin, sexist creation myths such as the genesis of Adam and Eve have been deliberately selected to sanctify the gender hierarchy and obscure the fact that “original myths all concern a primal androgyne-an androgynous godhead” that would challenge gender polarisation (162). Among those myths is Taoism, which unifies binary opposites, embodied in the principles of yin and yang, in the androgynous “Great Original” (Dworkin 167). For the Handdara, “[d]uality is essential,” but not in the same way as it is for Genly’s culture (252). While Terran culture is obsessed with a dualism defined by mutually exclusive binaries, Gethenians’ duality is redefined in positive terms, as it brings the opposing, yet mutually completing, forces together. The Handdara, then, is portrayed as an extension of the Gethenians’ androgynous nature, combining femaleness and maleness in a balanced, harmonious self.

ANDROCENTRISM AND MISOGYNY IN GENLY’S NARRATION

A large part of the novel is told from the perspective of Genly, and it is through him that the novel explores the obstacles involved in the process of accepting androgyny in a heterosexual culture. As Wendy Pearson notes, Genly, habituated to Terran single-sexedness and sex-specific behaviours, “invariably misrecognizes the Gethenians by trying to impose a normative Terran gender schema onto Gethenian behaviour, stereotyping particular traits as ‘masculine’ or feminine’ in ways that are

meaningless on Gethen" (77). Indeed, even after spending two years on Gethen, Genly admits that he still fails to "see the people of the planet through their own eyes" and instead sees them through the gender lenses that prompt him to associate every attribute with a specific sex (12). During dinner with Estraven, for instance, Genly describes his host's charm and tactfulness as "womanly," just as he later on characterises Estraven's habit of calculating their food rations as "house-wifely" (13, 259). That Genly's gender system is ineffective on Gethen becomes clear in situations where his Terran gender categories fail him. Estraven, for example, has "scarcely a man's voice, but scarcely a woman's voice either" (13). Due to his/her "dark, ironic, powerful presence" he/she cannot be a woman but thinking of him/her as a man is impossible too, as it generates a "sense of falseness, of imposture" (13). The implication here being that labelling Estraven a woman would presuppose that women can have a powerful presence, something unimaginable to Genly's androcentric mind, while labelling him a man would be a degradation of the male sex. Simply accepting that an individual can be both feminine and masculine is virtually impossible for Genly's heteronormative mind. For him, gender categorisation is instinctive and inevitable, and he cannot help "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 [his] own" (12).

Genly's androcentric perspective gives priority to the male sex, only seeing the Gethenian as a woman after imagining him/her as a man first and thereby making the woman the conventional second sex. Similarly, the automatic use of the male pronoun is another effect of his androcentric mindset. Discussing *The Left Hand of Darkness*, David Glover and Cora Kaplan were not the only critics who complained that "for most of the time masculinity is imaginatively as well as

grammatically, the default mode of subjectivity" (71). However, Christine Cornell argues that eliminating Genly's androcentric perspective "would fundamentally alter the experience of reading this novel" (323). Genly embodies feminism's greatest obstacle: convincing the conditioned mind that gender binaries can be transcended. It is the process which witnesses Genly developing an androgynous -a genderless- understanding of humanity, that constitutes an integral part of the novel. Hence, giving Genly a non-androcentric perspective would have wrongly implied that he already had a gender awareness that he, in fact, only acquires by the end of the novel.

Another androcentric perspective is that of the investigator who visited Gethen before Genly arrived, and who had the same difficulties coming to terms with the Gethenians' hermaphroditism. She wrote that "This is almost impossible for our imagination to accept. What is the first question we ask about a newborn baby?" (101). As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the answer is, of course, sex. This question prompts the reader to consider how deeply the idea of two discrete sexes is embedded in the minds of Terran people. The investigator believes gender to be something of value, something men and women strive for, maintaining that "[a] man wants his virility regarded, a woman wants her femininity appreciated" (101). The feminist goal of women being "respected and judged only as human beings" is for her "an appalling experience" (101). Seeing the anti-feminist and androcentric view implied in these statements, it comes as a shock when the investigator reveals "I am a woman" by the end of the chapter (103). Even women, the novel hints, have internalised gender and androcentric lenses to such an extent that they accept, even welcome a gender inequality that is more than obvious to the reader (103).

It is not only Genly's heteronormative world-view, but also his masculinity that is threatened by Gethenian nature. For Genly, "[c]ultural shock was nothing much compared to the biological shock [he] suffered as a human male among human beings who were [...] hermaphroditic neuters" (50). Atterby explains the psychological effect hermaphroditism has on the male sex, claiming that "[t]o shift from masculine to feminine is to lose both rank and purity, for femaleness is nearly always coded as something messier and darker and more dangerous, as well as weaker, than maleness (135). The Gethenians' ambisexual nature thus symbolises a loss of masculinity, and Genly's subconscious fear of effeminacy manifests itself in his overt misogynistic perspective. As Cornell observes, the "[q]ualities and behaviour Genly finds suspicious or disconcerting he categorizes as feminine; what he is impressed by or approves of he categorizes as masculine" (318). Indeed, Genly interprets eavesdropping as a sign of "effeminate intrigue" and his incapability to understand Estraven as a result of the latter's "effeminate deviousness" (8, 15). Estraven's "refusal of the abstract" is also termed feminine (228), mirroring the Victorian theory, which even persisted through the twentieth century, that only men were capable of reasonable and abstract thinking (Brabeck 441). Masculinity, on the other hand, is associated with the positive "capacity to mobilize" (51). By stating that Gethenians are "like women [,they] did not behave like men", Genly directly links androgyny to femaleness, positioning them in a binary system that portrays them as lacking the agency that men possess (51). Genly's misogynistic stance is not limited to his categorisation of behaviours, as it also affects his perception of Gethenians' physical appearance. Genly refers to his landlord as "landlady" because of the Gethenian's "fat buttocks that wagged as he walked, and a soft fat face" that identified him/her as female (50). Likewise, the guards at Pulefen farm seem "to [his]

eyes effeminate” because of their “gross, bland fleshiness, a bovinity without point or edge,” as do the prisoners who have a similar “flabbiness and coarseness” to their bodies (189). Genly’s tendency to body-shame is highly evocative of one of the main goals of second-wave feminism, which consisted in challenging the sexist and misogynistic representations and expectations of the female body. According to Bell Hooks, advertisements, magazines and the fashion industry of the twentieth century conveyed beauty ideals that forced women into a specific physical shape and shamed those who did not correspond to the ideal, awakening in women the feeling that their “value rested solely on appearance and whether or not [they] were perceived to be good-looking, especially by men” (31). Genly embodies this sexist, demeaning mind that reduces women to and judges them solely by their physical appearance.

Genly’s misogyny and his inability to accept the Gethenians’ hermaphroditism is intrinsically tied to otherness, which, as John Pennington observes, “here becomes a complex metaphor for gender; the other, the alien, the unknown” (355). Otherness is defined as “the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group (“Us,” the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups (“Them,” Other) by stigmatizing a difference – real or imagined – presented as a negation of identity” (Staszak 2). While Genly’s heterosexual Terran culture represents the in-group and the norm, the Gethenians’ hermaphroditic nature is stigmatised as a deviance from that norm. Hence, when Terrans are sexed beings and therefore humans, it follows that Gethenians, lacking discrete sexes, are inhuman. This point of view is adopted by Genly, who assimilates Gethenians to animals, asking “Can one read a cat’s face, a seal’s, an otter’s? Some Gethenians [...] are like such animals” (16). However, the novel destabilises the power relation between self and Other by making Genly an

Other as well. Genly is considered a “sexual freak” (34) and the rest of the Ekumen universe is perceived as a “society of perverts” by the Gethenians (34, 38). The novel thereby resists an exclusively heteronormative perspective, suggesting that sex and gender norms are relative rather than universal, something Genly realises when he says that Gethenian “perverts or abnormals” are “normal, by our [human] standard” (67). The Other is also closely linked to feminism, as the same binaries that divide the self from the other also separate women from men. As Simone de Beauvoir puts it, “Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself” and in this relation she “is the negative, to such a point that any determination is imputed to her as a limitation” (26, 25). As a result, “[h]e is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other” (Beauvoir 26). Man is the representative of humanity, the norm against which women are to be measured and judged, not having an ontological existence but only ever existing as the deficient version of man. Looking back at Genly’s misogynistic evaluation of Gethenians’ female side and his use of the male pronoun, it becomes clear that he embodies the patriarchal mind that considers man as referent and woman as lacking Other. Nevertheless, the following part will show that Genly is not consciously scornful of the female sex but has internalised this misogynist attitude through ideological interpellation on his home planet Terra.

GENLY’S TRANSFORMATION: OVERCOMING THE HETERONORMATIVE MIND

The Left Hand of Darkness can be separated into two parts. While the first part of the novel follows Genly’s gendered perspective, the other part, according to Pearson, “tracks a kind of undoing of gender-or at least of Genly’s perception that gender is immutable and immanent- and an alteration in Genly’s perception of who is

and is not human" (77). A first change in Genly's perception is witnessed at Pulefen farm, where prisoners are being chemically castrated, meaning that they are given drugs to subdue kemmer (90). Genly actively deothers the Gethenians, realising that, being robbed of an essential part of their nature, the prisoners "were without shame and without desire [...] but it is not human to be without shame and without desire" (190). A shift in the human/inhuman binary occurs, as the Gethenians' hermaphroditism becomes the human norm while the chemical castration denotes the inhuman. After being rescued from the farm by Estraven, Genly's newly defined sense of humanity also prompts him to deother Estraven. Noticing that "Estraven asleep looked a little stupid, like everyone asleep", Genly focuses on the similarities rather than the differences between Terrans and Gethenians, which also leads him to see Estraven "for the first time [...] as he was"; not as an alien Other, but as a human (215-216). During his subsequent travels over the glacial ice with Estraven, Genly is repeatedly confronted with his fear of emasculation. He is hurt in his masculine pride because his poor health necessitates the constant care of Estraven, who "was a head shorter than [him] and built more like a woman than a man" (235). Paradoxically, it is this masculine pride that makes Genly see how imprisoning and limiting his culture's gender norms are, realising that he is "locked in [his] virility" while Estraven enjoys greater freedom being devoid of the "standards of manliness" (230, 235).

Nevertheless, Genly's metamorphosis is far from complete, as he still has to acknowledge and accept the feminine side he sees in Gethenians and in Estraven in particular. Indeed, already in the beginning of the novel Genly admits that it is probably Estraven's femininity that makes Genly distrust and dislike him (13). Barbara Bengels maintains that the "trait that Genly initially dislikes about Estraven

isn't merely his androgyny but rather his femininity because Genly simply hasn't come to terms with [...] that which is womanly. Women are "other" to him and he has no ansible [Terran communication device] to reach them" (55). The process of deothering the woman, which is necessary for Genly's switch from the heteronormative to an androgynous perspective, happens in two stages, the first one being his acknowledgement that "the Other is [...] the woman he can never understand on his home planet because of the constructed and performative categories that have kept men and women apart" (Laevenworth 129).

When Estraven asks whether Terran women are different from men, Genly cannot give a straightforward answer, seeming unsure and undecided when he finally replies "No. Yes. No, of course not, not really," thus showing that he does not really know how to define a woman outside a gendered context (252). Woman for him, is an amalgamation of stereotypes ("women tend to eat less") and patriarchal doctrines ("the heaviest single factor in one's life is whether one is born male or female") (253). By confessing to Estraven "[i]n a sense, women are more alien to me than you are" Genly finally acknowledges that he, like the majority of Le Guin's contemporary society, only knows women in terms of gender and sex roles (253). Nevertheless, he still has not accepted Estraven's female side, which becomes clear when he tells Estraven "With you I share one sex, anyway" (253). The second stage, then, is Genly's acceptance of Estraven's female side, and occurs when Estraven is in kemmer. Noticing that Estraven's face has become "as soft, as vulnerable, as remote as the face of a woman," Genly sees what he "has always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man" (266). Having accepted androgyny as a human sexuality, and more importantly, confronted his ignorance of femaleness, Genly can finally trust Estraven completely. The

friendship and love that develops between them is significant, as it symbolises Genly's defiance of the heterosexual matrix by loving an individual who is not specifically female.

That Genly's perception of gender has changed after his journey can also be seen when he goes back to Karhide, the place where he was originally stationed. Rather than categorising King Argaven, who recently had a miscarriage, as either feminine or masculine, Genly observes "[h]e looked like a woman who has lost her baby, like a man who has lost his son" (313). In fact, his whole perception of what is "normal" and "human" has been shaken up and, as a result, the novel witnesses "not simply the incorporation of the Gethenians into the human, but the displacement from the human of all other Ekumenical races" (Pearson 78). Indeed, when visitors from Terra arrive on Gethen, Genly remarks "they all looked strange to me, men and women, well as I knew them" (318). Now that he knows that there is more than just man and woman, he can no longer view the world from a heteronormative perspective, nor can he perceive Terrans as humans. The old norm that separated the gendered human self from the genderless inhuman other is substituted by the norm that denies the existence of two discrete sexes and embraces the existence of androgyny. According to this new norm, the Terrans, embodying a heteronormative perspective, become the "strange animals" while hermaphroditic Gethenians, embodying androgyny, become the symbol of humanness (318).

CHAPTER 2: JOANNA RUSS'S *THE FEMALE MAN*

Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) is about four women who live in distinct universes and have completely different personalities but are, in fact, genetically the same

person. As Ritch Calvin points out, the novel uses the science fiction trope of parallel universes to demonstrate “the effects that environment [...] has on the development and realization of the genetic potentialities of DNA [...] and the ways in which personality, identity, gender, and sexuality are social and cultural constructs” (97). While Jeannine and Joanna are two women living in worlds dominated by men, Janet and Jael represent their potentially future selves who have developed their identity in an environment where patriarchy has been, or is in the process of being, abolished. Using the four women, who are all at different stages of female emancipation, Russ’s novel demonstrates that social and cultural norms and constructs can and must be demolished to enable female freedom.

JANET: “THE STRONG ONE”

The first character to be introduced is Janet Evason, who visits the different universes to observe and engage with their inhabitants. According to Tatiana Teslenko, Janet “represents the ideal woman who grew up with no genderbiased constraints on her life and, therefore, was able to develop her human potential in full” (133-134). Janet lives on the planet Whileaway, where men have become extinct through a plague centuries ago. Even the vocabulary has been adopted to the all-women community by banning words such as “man” and “he” (9). Since there is no trace of men left in society nor in the minds of the inhabitants, Whileawayans do not define themselves as man’s “other” nor as “women”. This is evocative of the goals of several radical lesbian feminist groups such as The Radicalesbians, who believed that women must stop defining themselves in relation to men and instead form lesbian relations where a new identity could be created (21). As radical feminist Monique Wittig explains, a lesbian is not a woman since “what makes a woman is a

specific social relation to a man,” evoking Butler’s concept of the heterosexual matrix, through which woman are defined by their desire for the opposite sex (250). Hence, similar to Le Guin’s Gethenians, Whileawayans are freed of gender roles and can develop their identities as androgynous humans rather than moulding their personality according to their sex. Nevertheless, seeing that Whileawayans have completely eliminated heterosexuality while Gethenians have not, Russ’s feminist approach is ultimately more radical than Le Guin’s; heterosexuality, the novel suggests, inevitably precludes female freedom.

As Keith Booker and Anne-Marie Thomas state, the absence of men in Sargent’s city also affects social organisation, as it gives the women “a measure of empowerment and the opportunity to develop a society without the built-in structures of patriarchy” (88). In fact, the society of Whileaway resembles that of Gethen in many ways. Rape is inexistent in Whileaway, thus “[t]here’s no being out too late in Whileaway,[...] or in the wrong part of town. Or unescorted” (80). They enjoy sexual freedom and diversity, incest being allowed and polygamous marriages being the norm (52, 53). As a lesbian community, Whileaway has substituted the concepts of mother- and fatherhood with co-mothering, thereby erasing gendered parental roles. Moreover, motherhood does not come with the conventional obligations, meaning that “[f]ood, cleanliness and shelter are not the mother’s business” (49). As heterosexual reproduction has been replaced by the merging of ova, women here are in control of their bodies and childbearing is no longer a female duty, but something like a “vacation” (19).

Like the Gethenians, Whileawayans have removed the nuclear family and instead live in extended families of twenty to thirty members, which do not have to be blood relations but can be joined by anybody (51). However, whereas the bond

between child and family is still relatively strong in Gethen, Whileawayans want to eliminate the interdependence between child and mother completely. Children leave home already at the age of four or five and are sent to schools where they are taught to become autonomous, androgynous individuals (49). Their education system rejects feminine passivity and instead endorses masculine agency, making their training “heavily practical” (50). The skills they are taught are not sex-typed, as they learn both conventionally masculine ones (“shoot and swim”) and traditionally feminine ones (“to dance, to sing, to paint, to play”), allowing the children to engage in activities that are not accessible for women in patriarchal societies (50).

The gendered segregation of labour has been abolished too, and age, not gender, is the decisive factor in employment eligibility. At seventeen a Whileawayan girl works where she is needed, at twenty-two she “is able to do any job on the planet” (50, 51). Their androgynous nature is also reflected in their religion, their God being neither entirely female nor entirely male.⁷ This can be seen in the marble statue of their female “God,” the adjective and the noun already oxymoronic, who is “as awful as Zeus” and “is a constantly changing contradiction, [...] indescribable” (102).

Nevertheless, the escapist connotation of “Whileaway” gives the utopian community a critical undertone. Whileaway not only suggests that Janet is *away* from the troubles the other three Js have to face, but it is also reminiscent of the verb “to while away”, which, as will be seen in the chapter of Janet, already hints that the Whileawayans have not played an all too active part in the creation of their utopia.

⁷ Since there have not been any men for several years, the new generations are oblivious to what it means to be a woman or feminine and they are thus indeed androgynous by nature. Only the first few generations after the eradication of men who still knew the terms “woman” and “feminine” were probably androgynous by culture but not yet by nature.

The name “Whileaway” thus transforms part of the novel into a Horation satire.⁸ The novel does not undermine the positive aspects of nor denounces the Whileawayan community. It simply reminds the reader that the community is already a step closer to female freedom, but still several steps away from being perfect.

Being part of this community, Janet did not have the confined childhood a girl in a parallel universe would have had. Whereas the girl of twentieth-century America, preparing for her role as housewife, “is required to stay home; her outside activities are watched over. She is never encouraged to organize her own fun and pleasure” (De Beauvoir 401), Janet was allowed to enter the outside sphere alone and even killed a wolf at the young age of thirteen (1). The usage of female violence is another characteristic that distinguishes the Whileawayan from the American girl. As physical violence is conventionally associated with masculinity, the American boy is taught and encouraged to be violent and aggressive in his behaviour, while the girl is prohibited from using violence or engaging in any activity related to it. According to Beauvoir, violence is an essential component of human identity as it is “the authentic test of every person’s attachment to himself, his passions, and his own will” (398). Believing themselves weak, vulnerable and incapable of violence, girls lack the self-assertion and will power that men possess and are consequently “doomed to docility, to resignation” (Beauvoir 398). In Whileaway, however, female violence is not only a skill taught at school, it is also a social custom; In case of “temperamental incompatibility” between two women, Whileawayans solve the problem by duelling (41).

⁸ The Horation satire, named after the Roman poet Horace, is a form of humorous critique that uses a gentle rather than a harsh tone to subtly criticise someone or something (*Encyclopedia of Literature* 558). It is often described in opposition to the Juvenalian satire, similarly named after the Roman poet Juvenal, which uses a more biting tone and is merciless in its expression of contempt of its targets (*Encyclopedia of Literature* 616).

The discrepancies between the Whileawayan and the American mentality come to the fore when Janet visits Joanna, who lives in 1960s America. When Janet appears on television for an interview, her attire, judged unfeminine by Joanna's society, already subverts gender norms, which Joanna notices when saying "She was well dressed (in a suit) [...] *He* [the interviewer] was dressed in a suit" (8). To the heteronormative audience, her whole posture seems masculine when she stands on the stage "hands in her pockets, feet planted far apart" (8). The interviewer is depicted as the embodiment of the narrow-minded, androcentric and heteronormative perspective. He is convinced that "[o]ne sex is half a species," implying that women are incomplete beings without the male sex and that women-only communities cannot work since they need the other sex to be functional (10). Man, in his opinion, is necessary to enable "[s]ex, family, love, erotic attraction," completely ignoring the possibility of lesbianism and same-sex parenting (10). In comparison to the satirical, yet gentle, critique of the Whileawayan community, men in Russ's novel are clearly attacked in a form of Juvenalian satire. The interviewer becomes the object of ridicule, the whole scene a satire of androcentric arrogance. The reader, fully aware that the Whileawayan society does function, even prospers, without the male sex, perceives the interviewer as a presumptuous chauvinist.

When Joanna takes Janet to a party, it becomes even clearer that Janet is completely oblivious to gender norms and that her personality and mindset are incompatible with American men's behaviour. When the host takes hold of Janet's arm to keep her from leaving, he replies to Janet's "Let me go" with a flirtatious "Ha ha, make me" (45). Although Joanna's society interprets the host's action as a flirting tactic, Janet sees it for what it really is, namely a systematic disregard for a woman's voice, and thus decides to throw him to the floor. The insults he subsequently uses

are evocative of his society's double standard, according to which powerful men are honourable whereas powerful women are pejoratively labelled "Ball-breaker," "Prude" or "cancerous castrator" (46). Hilary M. Lips maintains that the purpose of such insults is to make the woman feel "unwomanly or unfeminine," thus intimidating her into acting according to her gender (22). The novel satirises men's use of these insults by making the host look them up in a book titled *WHAT TO DO IN EVERY SITUATION* (46); when men do not know how to respond to powerful women, insults are randomly used to defend themselves against the loss of masculinity that these women represent. Although the conventional feminine response would have been "Girl backs down-cries-manhood vindicated", the insults do not affect Janet since she does not see herself as a woman nor as feminine (47). Instead, she "laughed," "roared" and "shrugged" and then breaks the man's arm (46, 47). Men, she concludes, are "savages" (47).

JOANNA: "THE WEAK ONE"

Joanna did not enjoy a genderless upbringing like Janet, as she underwent a gender enculturation process primarily directed by her parents. Taking a feminist approach to analyse the identity development in young American women, Emily Hancock underlines that the gender socialisation process, through which the girl acquires her gender lenses, only begins at puberty. As a young girl, she still enjoys genderless freedom, but at puberty "along comes the culture with the pruning shears, ruthlessly trimming back her spirit. Adults who left the girl to her own devices anticipate her blossoming femininity and nip her expansion in the bud" (Hancock 11). Hancock's observation is also visible in the novel. In kindergarten, Joanna was oblivious to her passive, inferior feminine role as she "bossed them [the children]

around,” “beat up a little boy” and believed that “the world was a matriarchy” (200, 201). As a teenager, however, she was taught to perceive femininity as a privilege when her parents told her “how fine it was to be a girl” (146). They encouraged her to focus on her physical appearance by reminding her of the “pretty clothes” she could wear, and fostered her role as future housewife by telling her that she “did not have to climb Everest” but could remain at home “while [her] prince was out doing it” (146). Joanna felt guilty for not meeting these gender standards and she was “trying (desperately!) to find someone [...] to tell [her] it’s OK” to be ambitious, arrogant, self-loving and powerful like men (198).

As attributes such as passivity, obedience and selflessness that American society associates with womanhood were not compatible with Joanna’s androgynous mindset, she feared “she failed miserably and thought it was [her] own fault” (146). Maaïke Meijer indicates that being forced into an unwanted gender role entails “a psychological mutilation, an internal process of suppressing a side of yourself [...] you end up as [...] Madame or Sir, while you actually know very well that you are not who you are” (3). Although Joanna was “told [she] was a woman”, she did not see herself as one, insisting “I’m a telephone pole, a Martian, a rose-bed, a tree, a floor lamp, a camera, a scarecrow. I’m not a woman” (*Female Man* 199, 147). Trying, and failing, to suppress her masculine side while being forced into the role of a woman by her environment, Joanna gradually developed an inner conflict between her masculine self and her feminine self. Indeed, Florence L. Wiedermann maintains that gender socialisation in a patriarchal culture leads to a woman’s “[f]ragmentation of self” and an experience of “self-conflicting roles” (19). This theory can be applied to Russ’s Joanna, who “live[s] between worlds”, some days enjoying cooking, doing housework, flirting with men, but on other days despising her feminine role and she

“wake[s] up enraged [...] get[s] into quarrels, shout[s] [...] and [is] very badly dressed” (107-108).

Joanna’s self is not only fragmented in terms of gender, but also with regard to gender consciousness. As Teslenko states, “Joanna is already partially aware of the need to be transformed” into a self-realised woman, but she is still under the influence of “societal brainwashing” (145-146). Joanna’s feminist self has realised that humanity is defined male while woman is the inhuman “other,” stating that “[y]ou can’t unite woman and human any more than you can unite matter and anti-matter” (147). She is aware of woman’s position as man’s servant, doomed to do everything for “The Man” (29). Similarly, she knows that society believes a woman’s “most important job in the world” to be motherhood, and that a woman is expected to “wear long hair and lots of eye make-up and tight clothing” to objectify herself and please the male gaze (133, 146). Simultaneously, Joanna’s conditioned self still adheres to gender norms, the weight of which she is literally carrying on her shoulders as they are embodied in the “little blue book” (masculine behaviour) and her “own pink book” (feminine behaviour) that she carries around in her purse (47). That she is still under the influence of compulsive heteronormativity becomes apparent when she takes Janet to the party. Joanna’s main goal is for Janet to “meet that man” that every woman is destined to find and thus discover “The Meaning Of [...] life” (31, 30). While her feminist self knows that the search for a man is only an “opera scenario,” a theatre performance that every woman is forced into, her conditioned self needs to cast Janet into the role of the conventional woman (30). She thus tries to feminise Janet’s physical appearance by putting lipstick on her, dressing her and teaching her the feminine do’s (“Janet you must”) and unfeminine don’t’s (“Janet, we don’t”) (30,

31). The socialised part of her fragmented self is symbolically portrayed when she sees Jeannine reflected in her bathroom mirror (24).

JEANNINE: "THE LITTLE ONE"

Jeannine Dadier, the youngest and most oppressed woman of the four, lives in a world where the Great Depression never ended and second-wave feminism never emerged. Since conventionally female jobs were less affected by the Great Depression than male jobs, many women entered the workforce during that time, thus leading to a subversion the breadwinner/housemaker binary (Milkman 76). Nevertheless, due to society's hostility towards this role reversal, traditional gender roles were reinforced all the more (Milkman 85). Hence, regardless of Jeannine's part-time job as a librarian, Mark Brake and Neil Hook posit her world is still "stuck in a pseudo-Victorian conservatism, a male dominated order" (170). Indeed, Jeannine is the traditional housewife whose main occupation consists in completing the household tasks, spending every free minute making endless lists of the things she still has to do: "There are dishes to wash, soot on the window sills, soaking pots to scour [...] That awful job of scrubbing out the toilet, whisk-brooming the furniture. Clothes to iron" (103). In the rare occasions when she decides to ignore her household duties, such as cleaning the window and sewing, she changes her mind again because Cal, her partner, "doesn't like them [windows] dirty" and will complain "You didn't sew my clothes" (105). The household chores are not shared between them since "[o]f course nobody else helps" the woman in her natural sphere (104). Jeannine thus has to take "her clothes and his clothes" to the laundry service, she must "pack her lunch and Cal's", and she has to "mend Cal's clothes and her own" (104), the repetition of her/his highlighting the unequal work distribution.

Jeannine belongs to the type of women who define themselves primarily through their physical appearance. According to feminist writer Germaine Greer, whose work *The Female Eunuch* (1970) was a key text of second-wave feminism, this obsession with looks can be seen as the outcome of American society's association of femininity and beauty. This association, already present in the societies of classical antiquity, has led to the stereotype of the woman to whom "belongs all that is beautiful, even the word beauty itself. All that exists to beautify her. [...] She is the crown of creation, the masterpiece" (Greer 51). Similarly, Firestone criticises that women can only achieve "individuality" and "social legitimacy" by adhering to the beauty ideals imposed on them by society (152). Due to the unattainability of these beauty ideals, many women are "left scrambling," trying and failing to live up to the irrational ideal (Firestone 152). Worried that she does not meet the beauty standards of her culture, Jeannine is constantly "checking the lines around her eyes in her pocket mirror" and "looking in the precious full-length mirror" to detect possible imperfections (2, 15). She wants her beauty to be recognised, "laugh[ing] beautifully, gloriously, throwing her head back" to convince her onlookers of her "beautiful body" (26).

Jeannine's conventionality also expresses itself in her obsession with marriage, she being the only character who "lives the marriage plot, arranging her life around the goal of finding a man" (Donawerth 112). Similar to Joanna, Jeannine has internalised her gender role through the influence of her family. When Jeannine visits her family, her mother immediately proposes her to go to the block dance where a potential suitor could be found and her brother immediately asks her "When are you going to get married?" (110). Completely ignoring the fact that Jeannine has a job, her family relentlessly reproaches her that she "got to do something with [her]"

life" (113), implying that a woman's success in life is measured by her capacity to find a husband rather than by her ability to find employment. Since marriage is essentially a marker of social conformity, whom Jeannine marries is insignificant. This is underlined when Jeannine asks her brother jokingly "who shall I marry?," whereupon her brother replies "with complete seriousness" that she should marry "anybody" (114). Hence, Jeannine has been taught to consider marriage not as an act of love, but as a female duty where personal feelings and standards matter nothing.

Looking for a potential suitor has become an almost robotic instinct for her. When meeting men, she simply makes a "swift calculation" of their character "that was quite automatic by now" (117). That her freedom of choice is completely negated becomes clear when she meets "X," the depersonalised name already suggesting that he could virtually be any man (121). Although "he [is] fat and plain" and she does not "like[] him particularly," Jeannine tries to convince herself "that he wasn't really so bad-looking" and that she "could make herself feel something about him" (117).

More than just providing social recognition, marriage has the power to make Jeannine exist. According to Kerstin W. Shands, Jeannine "depend[s] solely on the man in accordance with patriarchal ideology to provide meaning and identity" (194). This is also evocative of Beauvoir's statement that woman's "whole existence is a waiting [...] she is waiting for a tribute, men's approval, she is waiting for love, she is waiting for gratitude and her husband's or lover's praise; she expects to gain from them her reasons to exist, her worth, and her very being" (736). Indeed, Jeannine is constantly daydreaming about a "[t]all, dark, and handsome" stranger who "will come to save her" from her meaningless existence, again underlining her physical

appearance (“I have big eyes”) as the only significant part of her identity (105, 15, 16). She waits for a man who will see her “loveliness, [...] recognize it, make it public, make it available” and who will “come and show [her] to [herself]”, imbuing her with an identity she, as man’s “other,” cannot construct herself (107). Jeannine is completely man-identified, hoping to find her *raison d’être* in a man and waiting to be defined through the eyes of the male sex. This lack of existence is symbolised through Jeannine permanently disappearing as she becomes “entangled with the souls of the furniture” in Joanna’s apartment, “vanishes dimly into a cupboard” or sinks “down into a collection of glass plates” (92, 139, 152).

In fact, Jeannine can be seen as the embodiment of Betty Friedan’s feminine mystique. According to this concept, “the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity,” which consisted in taking care of “her own body and beauty, the charming of man, the bearing of babies, and the physical care and serving of husband, children and home” (Friedan 37, 31). They “gloried in their role as women” and perceived themselves lucky to belong to the female sex (Friedan 4), a belief shared by Jeannine who claims “I enjoy being a girl [...] I wouldn’t be a man for anything” (86). Nevertheless, Friedan observes that many women did not find fulfilment in their feminine role and instead felt depressed and had “a vague undefined wish for ‘something more’,” which Friedan later on identifies as a wish to access employment and be more than just housewife, mother or wife (54). Jeannine, too, “want[s] something else” out of life than marriage and her relationship with Cal but does not yet know what exactly she is missing (121). She fights with constant sadness as everything around her “makes her cry, seems to say to her, ‘You can’t’” (103).

Similar to Joanna's, Jeannine's self is fragmented, the subconscious part of her yearning to break free from her oppressive gender role while the other one convinces her of her inability to do so. Friedan also recognises this "inner" split in the women she interviewed, who were struggling with the conflict of their "inner voice" and "the voices of the feminine mystique" (296, 364). Jeannine's inner voice sometimes comes to the surface, manifesting itself in the form of Janet, the embodiment of female freedom. When her brother physically forces her to rejoin the block dance to "introduce [her]" to a potential suitor, Jeannine seems to transform into Janet, warning him "Touch me again and I'll knock your teeth out" (112). Likewise, Jeannine dreams of Whileaway and sees Janet reflected in the mirror of the theatre building (103, 121). Her conditioned self, however, "did not want to admit that Janet existed" (87).

Unlike Joanna, Jeannine has yet to acknowledge that the source of her dissatisfaction is the feminine role she continues to perform dutifully. She still wrongly believes that "marriage will cure it all," prompting her to accept Cal's proposal (127). After doing so, her mood changes immediately, everything seeming "indubitably good and indubitably real" and she becoming "breathless with joy" at the prospect of finally coming into existence through marriage (128). Nevertheless, while the denying part of Jeannine "loves herself", the other side of Jeannine "is desperately tired and knows there is no freedom for her" (128). In a conversation with Joanna, Jeannine unsurprisingly reveals "I have everything yet I'm not happy", proving that marriage is not "The Solution. Fulfilment" after all (147, 123). Since all four Js have a similar stance on marriage, it seems to be the novel's aim to prompt the reader to draw the same conclusion, namely that marriage is not a solution but a hindrance to female freedom.

JAE: THE ONE WITHOUT BRAND NAME

The last woman to appear is Jael, who lives in a world which, as Catherine McClenahan observes, “blend[s] the worst-case environment we connect with Jeannine and the freedom and energy of action we identify with Janet” (121). These two environments, known as Manland and Womanland, are single-sex communities that have risen from the unresolvable conflict between men and women. In contrast to Joanna’s and Jeannine’s worlds, the phallus has here ceased to be a symbol of power, the “Have-nots” (women) being the powerful society members while the “Haves” (men) are the inferior, less developed ones (158). The Manlanders, who “cultivate their muscles and let their health and minds rot” and instead let the Womanlanders “do their thinking for them,” are intellectually inferior to and less technologically progressed than women (167, 163). Women, for instance, no longer depend on the male sex for reproduction while Manlanders, oblivious to artificial reproduction, have to buy male infants from them (160).

During a symposium on women in science fiction, Joanna Russ was asked whether women would invent men if they did not exist. Russ answered with the counter question “If masters did not exist, would servants invent them? (Hardly) If servants did not exist, would masters invent them? (Of course [...])” (in Gomoll 86). Russ realises her theory in *The Female Man*, where Manlanders virtually construct their own women, whom they still perceive as the “Servants.Of.The.Race” (170). Manlanders make those among them who fail to become “real-men” according to their patriarchal criteria undergo sex-change surgeries, artificially reproducing not only sex differences, but also the gender system (160). While the latter are referred to as “the changed,” the men who refuse to undergo surgery become “half-changed,” as they merely become female in the sense that they perform female stereotypes

and “grow slim, grow languid, grow emotional and feminine” (160, 161). Both labels are, in fact, euphemisms for transvestitism and homosexuality and serve to underline male hypocrisy. Indeed, Jael maintains that “[r]eal homosexuality would blow Manland to pieces” (173). Most of the changed and half-changed live in “harims and whore-homes,” their main role consisting in pleasing the real-men sexually; “what *they* like” is immaterial since they are sex objects not entitled to human rights (161). The gender roles of Jeannine’s and Joanna’s worlds are reproduced as well: Only the changed or half changed take care of the infants since “child care is woman’s business” and the changed assume the roles of housewives and sex objects. This can be seen in the Manland Boss’s wife, who walks into the room “with a tray of drinks - scarlet skin-tights, no underwear, transparent high-heeled sandals” (163).

Although the name “Womanlanders” implies the female sex, Jael cannot be identified as either sex. While Janet’s androgyny has been enabled through the absence of men, Jael’s is due to her cyborg nature.⁹ Being part human and part machine, her teeth look like “a fused ribbon of steel,” she has “silver hair,” “most unnatural” eyes, claws as fingers and a laugh that sounds like the screech of a “mechanical vulture” (152, 153, 175). Cyborgs, as Anne Marie Balsamo defines them, are “hybrid entities that are neither wholly technological nor completely organic” and “are definitionally transgressive of a dominant culture order [...] because of the indeterminacy of their hybrid design” (11). The female cyborg in particular is transgressive since sci-fi literature and films usually presented man-machine rather than woman-machine couplings, adhering to the masculinity/technology, femininity/nature associations (Balsamo 18).

⁹ In her essay “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1984), Donna Haraway discusses the possibility of a cyborg being that is both machine and human, even using Russ’s Jael as a literary example. Nevertheless, Haraway’s essay won’t be used in the analysis of this novel as she draws mainly on socialist and materialist feminism, branches irrelevant to the purpose of this thesis.

Inherently destructive of the technology/human binary, the cyborg also dismantles other binary oppositions such as culture/nature and female/male (Balsamo 33). As a result, the cyborg's body stops being a signifier of a specific sex or gender and instead becomes a robotic androgyne. Jael's sobriquet "The Woman Who Has No Brand Name", then, is expressive of the Manlanders', Joanna's and Jeannine's incapability to classify Jael into a specific sex group (151). Her body does not make sense in their cultural context and their gender lenses are thus ineffective in evaluating Jael, who is neither man nor woman according to their culture's criteria. Jael not only transcends the heterosexual matrix with her body, but also through her sexual relation with Davy. Albeit looking like a human male, Davy is just an appliance, "a lovely limb of the house" controlled by the central computer (192). Opposing feminists who saw technology as "distinctively and distinctly male," used to fulfil the goals of a culture built on male values (Rothschild 66), Russ's novel seems to suggest that technology can be used by women to dominate and even substitute men.¹⁰ Jael uses Davy as butler, as "monster-pet" lying "curled up [...] at [her] feet" and mainly as sex-toy (190, 178).

Even though radical feminists like Dworkin perceive heterosexual intercourse as an expression of male dominance where "women [are turned] into objects and men into exploiters" (*Intercourse* 12), this power relation is subverted in Jael's case. In fact, their relation cannot even be described as heterosexual. As the 1940s and 1950s witnessed the emergence of the heavily contested field of theoretical

¹⁰ Some cultural and eco feminists, who both cherished the association between women and nature, criticised technology. While the former saw it as a threat to female nature, the latter perceived it as a man-made weapon to dominate the natural environment and women. Many feminist works such as Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1978) or Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980) express these feminist critiques of technology. Discussing the opposition of nature and technology and its significance for feminism, however, exceeds the scope of this thesis and the topic will therefore not be treated in depth.

cybernetics, many science fiction authors expressed their discontent by associating technology with “abnormal” sexuality in their stories (Hollinger 145).¹¹ *The Female Man* destigmatises technology and simultaneously dismantles the notion of “abnormal” sexuality. Accordingly, Veronica Hollinger remarks that Jael “works exactly to disrupt the naturalized relations among sexed bodies, sexual desires, and gendered behaviours which maintain heterosexuality’s psychological and social hegemony” (145, 152). Since neither Jael nor Davy are entirely human nor culturally sexed, their sexual relation cannot be categorised and thus undermines the very notion of heterosexuality.

Jael is portrayed as the embodiment of female rage, which Russ defines as “the most formidable taboo women have to cope with”, being a privilege reserved for men (in Gomoll 97). Jael not only defies this taboo, she also uses it against those who have constructed it in the first place, namely men. Her greatest ambition thus consists in “fir[ing] these stranglers, theses murderers, these unnatural and atavistic nature’s bastards, of the face of the earth” (166). To achieve this goal, she has tracked down the three other Js to ask them for their support in her war against the Manlanders. Her mercilessness towards the opposite sex is underlined when she kills the Manland Boss after he has virtually proposed to rape her: “It doesn’t matter what you say.[...] This is what God made you for. [...]You want it” (173), thereby condensing three rape myths in one sentence. The murder is portrayed like a reverse-rape, where Jael’s androgynous nature is highlighted when she “produce[s]

¹¹ This association was everything but coincidental. Indeed, this period also gave rise to the so-called “homosexual menace”, when the American society reacted to the increasing number of lesbian and gay individuals by discriminating against homosexuals and stigmatising them as abnormal and sick (Ruiz “Intimate Dilemmas” 240). Although *The Female Man* was published more than twenty years later, the gay rights movement and feminists’ discussions of technology prove that the debates over homosexuality and technology were far from over.

[her] own" erection by extending her phallic claws and using them to penetrate the Boss's skin (175).

Rage, then, is Jael's main fuel for female violence, whereas Janet uses female violence "for sport yes [...] for hatred no"(). As Jeanne Cortiel states, Janet does not understand the usefulness of rage since she is "oblivious to social struggle", ignorant of what it means to grow up as a woman in a patriarchal society (88). Unlike Janet, Jael was not genderless from the beginning but was brought up in a Christian society with traditional views where every woman knew "in her bones that radical inferiority" to men (187). Being indoctrinated with the concept of inherent female guilt, which considered women as the descendants of Eve who shared her guilt for the "Original sin," women accepted their inferiority and men exploited it (187). Jael, for instance, was "convicted of rape" because she was guilty of being "out late at night [...] in the wrong part of town" and wearing a "skirt [...] that provoked him", making her rage indisputably justified (186). Only by releasing her rage, instead of internalising it like Joanna and Jeannine, could Jael become the powerful being she is now, mirroring Russ's belief that "only after going through the Gehenna of rage [...] one comes out into the light" (in Gomoll 100). That female rage and violence are necessary steps towards female freedom is later on proved by Jael, who reveals that it was not a plague, but Womanlanders who eradicated the men on Whileaway and made it the utopia it is today (205).

THE TRANSFORMATION OF JOANNA AND JEANNINE

Arno Heller proposes that "[t]he novel at large portrays a coming to consciousness that leads the woman from immature passivity and mental

fragmentation to an active way of life where inner conflicts are overcome" (274).¹²

Both Joanna and Jeannine are inspired by Janet and Jael to challenge patriarchy, transcend their gender role and rid themselves of their fragmented identity. For Joanna, this process starts at her workplace. As a female professional in a male-dominated workplace, Joanna is immediately reduced to and evaluated through her sex, as if she was wearing "a sandwich board that says: LOOK! I HAVE TITS!" (129). She has realised that, as a woman, she is not respected nor taken seriously by her male colleagues, who are relentlessly "giggling and [...] chuckling" in her presence and commenting on her "physique" (129). To avoid this discriminating treatment, Joanna has learned to become a "neuter, not a woman at all but One Of The Boys" by mimicking her male colleagues behaviours (129).

Although Amanda Boulter argues that this "gender performance is a necessary disguise" teaching Joanna to become a female man (161), this thesis contends that rather than making her a female man, her performance hides her wish to completely rid herself of her femaleness. Indeed, Susan Gubar explains that "[m]ale mimicry that presents itself as an act of assertion can, paradoxically, partake of 'feminine' self-denial, even self-hatred, for the male façade or persona may be an attempt born of shame to deny, hide or disgrace the female self" (485). This behaviour is observable in Joanna, who denies her femaleness by undergoing "a certain disembodiment" in order to become one of the men (129). She is also consumed by self-hatred, pejoratively labelling her female self "a sick woman, a madwoman, a ball-breaker, a man-eater" and degrading her female body, saying "I don't think my body would sell anything. I don't think I would be good to look at"

¹² Translated from German: "Der Roman stellt insgesamt einen Bewußtseinsprozeß dar, der die Frau aus unmündiger Passivität und psychischer Fragmentierung in eine aktive, innere Widersprüche überwindende Lebensgestaltung führt."

(131). Nevertheless, Joanna is partially aware that she is degrading her own femaleness and thereby reaffirming patriarchy. When impersonating her male colleagues, “laugh[ing] at blue jokes, especially hostile ones” directed at women, her subconsciousness resists the male mimicry by repeating “No no no no no no” (129).

Since “[a]ndrogyny is post-feminist” and the “[p]re-requisite to this is finding the female in yourself [...] and accepting it” (Meijer 129), the first step to become a female man requires Joanna to stop denying and depreciating her femaleness. Only by giving her femaleness “the kiss of reconciliation” can Joanna become a truly androgynous individual (135). The old Joanna, much like Le Guin’s Genly, has thought of the female sex in exclusively negative terms and only in relation to men, comparing it to a “mirror and honeypot, servant and judge [...] the vagina dentate and the stuffed teddy bear he [man] gets” (130). The new Joanna has disposed of the negative connotations associated with femaleness, encouraging herself “you are a strong woman, you are God’s favourite, and you can endure” (135). Joanna also rejects the concept of woman as “other” and man as the only legitimate representative of mankind, realising that humanness transcends sexual differences. She thus concludes “I too am a Man and not at all a Woman” (135). As a human, her qualities are no longer restricted to one gender, and she can finally become the androgynous female man. Joanna assimilates androgyny to an electrocution process, during which the woman becomes the “conduit” between one end of the wire (femaleness) and the other end (maleness), and the unification of both is the source of a new form of power. Her newly gained androgynous nature manifests itself in female violence inspired by Jael, prompting Joanna to “shut the door on a man’s thumb [...] for no reason at all” (197). As an androgynous individual, and

inspired by Janet, Joanna rejects compulsory heterosexuality and becomes a lesbian (202).

Jeannine's transformation is much shorter and is triggered mainly by Jael who "glued herself to Jeannine's ear," replacing the voices of the feminine mystique with her own voice, introducing Jeannine to man-hatred and the joy that comes from killing men (157). The impact of Jael's influence can first be seen in the change of Jeannine's gaze, which no longer reflects "timidity" nor is it "suffering," and later on in her "calm" reaction to the murder of the Boss (159, 176). The ultimate transformative moment occurs when she agrees to let Jael's army hide on her planet, since it is the first time she has found "the courage to make some sort of change in her life" (118), finally making a decision that neither society nor her family has imposed on her. Considering that Jeannine is now sincerely "happy" despite not being married, one can conclude that the "something more" she was missing was an identity independent from men, which she has now found as Jael's helper (206).

CHAPTER 3: PAMELA SARGENT'S *THE SHORE OF WOMEN*

Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (1986) resembles Russ's novel in its portrayal of a technologically advanced "women-only" community and in its segregation of women (living in the cities) and men (dwelling in the wilderness outside the cities' walls). Unlike Russ's novel, however, *The Shore of Women* suggests that single-gender communities are regressive rather than progressive in terms of feminism.

LESBIAN SEPARATIST FEMINISM

Sargent's all-women communities can be seen to embody lesbian separatism, a form of radical feminism which, according to separatist feminist Marilyn Frye, seeks female freedom through the "separation of various sorts or modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles and activities which are male-defined, male-dominated and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege" (63). There were different degrees of separatism in late twentieth-century America, ranging from excluding men from one's company to the more radical action of building a women-only community (Shugar "Separatism" 675). Some women-only communities, Daniel River maintains, even demanded the banishment of boy children from their midst (185).

The exclusion of the male sex was seen as a precondition for female freedom and a harmonious life, since lesbian separatists believed that all men were not only perpetuating the oppression of women, but also "the inherent cause of every destructive aspect of life on earth" (Shugar "Lesbian" 43). Intrinsically tied to this supposition is another separatist attribute that is often associated with cultural feminism, namely the adoption of an essentialist view of human nature. Since men are responsible for the destruction of earth and the creation of patriarchal systems, separatists have deduced that men must be "naturally competitive, hierarchical, domineering, divisive, parasitic (especially on women), death-oriented, possessive, emotionless, and generally nonsupportive or nurturing of others" (Shugar "Lesbian" 43-44). Women, "by virtue of not being men [...] were characterised as nurturing, life-giving, cooperative rather than competitive, passionate, connected with all living beings, nonhierarchical, nonoppressive" (Shugar "Lesbian" 44).

In terms of sexual orientation, lesbian separatists only allowed lesbianism, as they perceived heterosexuality as the "essence (the very substance) of heteropatriarchal, or phallocratic power" (Claudie 474). They believed that women who are in a heterosexual relationship are inevitably dependent on, dominated by and identified through the male sex, and affirm patriarchy by conforming to the socially accepted sexual standard. Since heterosexuality, according to lesbian separatists, meant "men first" (Bunch 66), one of the main aims of lesbian separatism was to "put women first in all ways" and create a society which "valued women" and recognised women's true worth (Boyd 214).¹³

THE SEPARATIST COMMUNITY IN SARGENT'S NOVEL

Several of the characteristics described above can be found in the all-women community in *The Shore of Women*, where the sex-segregation occurred after a nuclear holocaust that devastated the whole world and forced humans to live in underground shelters (95). While men were sent outside to hunt and explore, women remained inside to look after their children and develop methods of selective breeding to avoid the biological transmission of defective genes (96). Paradoxically, it is precisely the creation of sex-typed spheres, a common target of criticism among feminists, that enabled women to take control by building cities and leaving men in the wilderness. While the women have developed into a technologically-advanced community, the men have formed a less advanced hunter-gatherer culture, most of them being nomadic and all of them depending on wildlife for food.

¹³ The definition of a woman's «true worth» was, of course, relative rather than universal. Anti-essentialist radical feminists, for instance, did not agree with cultural feminists that women found their true value in female qualities such as childbearing.

The women are not only culturally, but also permanently physically separated from men, as their community is almost wholly self-sufficient, only using male sperm for artificial insemination.¹⁴ Being an all-women community, yet “bound by [their] biology to the men outside”, they give birth to boys and send them outside at the age of four (123). Hence, their community reflect the belief of lesbian separatism proponents such as Valerie Solanas, who maintains that the only relevant “male function is to produce sperm” (5). By erasing the boys’ memories before they leave, thus making them oblivious to the existence of the female sex, Sargent’s women ensure that the concepts of male privilege and male dominance cannot emerge in the first place. In fact, women not only eliminate male dominance but completely subvert the power relation. Men only know women in the form of “the Goddess,” whom they pray to in shrines outside the cities’ walls, the place where their sperm is harvested. Similarly, only the “Mothers of the city” are aware of the existence of the male sex, thus allowing the other women, who only know men as “fabled, distant creatures,” to develop an identity that is not male-defined and completely independent from men (121).

Since lesbianism is the only woman-defined relationship, it is also the only acceptable form of relation in the cities. Heterosexuality, in turn, is considered a “disgusting” deviance by the female inhabitants (27). Aware that men “beat and killed women [...] raped and terrorized whole cities,” all women have come to perceive heterosexual love as “an evil” and “of course, a trap” created by men to dominate and “enslave” the opposite sex (97-98, 96, 92, 233). Moreover, the woman-defined

¹⁴ The opposition of technology and nature here has a critical undertone. Although the women of the city believe in a goddess of nature, they actively disrupt the natural cycle of life by using artificial reproduction. The novel exposes this hypocritical side of the community by hinting that the women of the city can only survive by going against their own principles. This critique is absent in *The Female Man*, where neither Whileawayans nor Womanlanders have a special connection to nature.

community reject the male definition of female physiology. As Greer points out, late twentieth-century American society continues to follow the Victorian doctrine that menstruation was a sign that women, unlike men, “were too weak, too vulnerable to irrational influences to be allowed to control their own lives” (Greer 55). This is not true for the all-women community in Sargent’s novel. Instead of considering menstruation as a female weakness, the women in the city “celebrate[] menarche” as the girl’s entry into womanhood and her acquisition of independence (6). After her first menstruation, the girl leaves her mother’s house and can start studying for her future job (25).

The valorisation of the female sex is also visible in *The Shore of Women*, where “any woman’s life was [...] precious” and is elevated to the community’s greatest treasure (4). Consequently, any attempt to kill a woman is punished with immediate expulsion from the city (4). The cities’ social organisation is based on the principle of putting women first, too. Indeed, their communities are composed of “Mothers of the City” and “those [they] serve,” the former having as primary job to serve the latter by “keep[ing] their lives as peaceful and untroubled as they are” (11, 70, 26).

Similar to lesbian separatists, Sargent’s women have banished men not only because of their treatment of women, but also because they are convinced that “the world had been devastated and poisoned in ancient times by the weapons men had controlled” and thus “the survival of civilization demanded that women [...] remain in control” (92, 95). The essentialist conception of the two sexes is also discernible in Sargent’s novel. The inhabitants of the cities believe that men and women “have different natures [...] Men destroy, women build and nurture” (98). The inherent difference in their personalities is mainly due to physiology, men being the way they

are because they lack women's unique ability "to give life" and "carry [...] children inside [them]" (9, 98). Hence, men have "a propensity for violence that was both genetic and hormonal," while women are "less driven and able to channel their aggressiveness constructively" (92, 95). Nourishing their physical capacities more than their spiritual ones, men's "minds are narrow and incapable of higher intellectual functions" (9). Reflecting Solanas' argument that men are "emotional cripples" who are "incapable of [...] love" (1), the men in Sargent's novel have "feelings [that] are shallower" than women's and "[o]nly women are capable of [...] love" (9). Sex as the determining factor in an individual's personality and behaviour is a concept heavily contested by feminists. The all-women community, however, presents it as an ideal, already foreshadowing the critical tone the novel will adopt.

THE DYSTOPIAN SIDE OF THE ALL-WOMEN COMMUNITY

Austin Booth and Mary Flanagan describe *The Shore of Women* as a utopian narrative in which separatism "is invoked as a necessary precondition for cultural and social change" and "mount[s] a critique of the unequal power hierarchies maintained by patriarchy" (5). Notwithstanding the positive aspects of the all-women community, which have been outlined above, this thesis argues that Sargent's novel cannot be categorised as a purely utopian work. Instead, this thesis will treat the novel as an "ustopia", a mixture of utopian and dystopian elements (Atwood 85). Although dystopia and utopia are, at least within popular discourse, known as binary opposites, Margaret Atwood asserts that one need only "scratch the surface a little, and [...] you see something more like a yin and yang pattern; within each utopia, a concealed dystopia; within each dystopia, a hidden utopia" (85). Separatism, albeit

having its advantages, is the novel's primary subject of criticism and becomes an obstacle, rather than a precondition, to positive social change.

Reviewing the effects of separatism, Kristine J. Anderson observes that separatist communities are “inherently plagued by dark shadows which stain the brightness of the utopian vision,” asking whether one can “really assume that women are incorruptible by the temptations of power, or that the oppressed have none of the faults of the oppressors?” (86). A similar critique has been directed at lesbian separatist feminism and its essentialist tendency, which was denounced for perpetuating sexism, oppressive behaviour and sex inequality by “deepen[ing] divisions between men and women” and systematically demonising all men because of their sex (Peacott 3, 38). This sexist behaviour is also visible in Sargent's novel, in which it often appears in the form of othering. Men are referred to as inhuman “creatures” or “beasts” with “deformed” bodies and women constantly remind themselves “they aren't like us” to maintain the assumedly unshakable discrepancies between the dominant in-group (women, us) and the inferior out-group (men, they) (7, 159, 121, 9). Even Laissa's little brother Button, who has not done anything to deserve the insulting treatment of women, is subject to othering simply because he is male. Jenna, one of Laissa's friends, bullies Button, calling him “a little beast” and comparing his sexual organ to a “wretched [...] little sausage” (27). Button's sex is taken as a justification to treat him badly, the girls pushing him away and swinging him around the room, ignoring that “he screamed” in protest (27-28).

As “other” to the female sex, the boys in the cities are reduced to something not worthy of a name or individualization. Accordingly, one of the women reminds Button's mother that he's “only a boy. He doesn't need a name” (7). Their character being predefined by their sex, the boys are void of individual personalities and thus

“[o]ne boy is like another” and every attempt to “change the natures of men” will inevitably fail (7, 98). This kind of essentialist thinking was indeed common among some lesbian separatists in 70s and 80s America. Landras Moontree, who lived in a separatist community, believes that no man could be “educated to change [...] males are a genetic mutation, who biologically possess the traits that make them violent and death-oriented” (248-249). Similarly, discussing women and their wish to become pregnant, separatist Bev Jo warns future mothers that “no matter what you do, if you have a boy, he will terrorize and attack girls, and later, adult women, and statistically will very likely be a rapist” (317).

Sexism also takes the shape of inherent guilt, a notion already mentioned in connection with Russ’s Jael, only that it is here transformed into inherent male guilt. Women have rewritten the bible, as it were, making the male sex exclusively responsible for “fall[ing] away from grace” (18). The female sex is reimagined as the omnipotent Goddess, and men as the fallen angels who have been cast out of “Her realm” for trying to usurp her (49). As a result, men have been indoctrinated to live with “a stain on [their] soul,” doomed to pay for their “ancient sins” and “ancient crime” (18, 49, 55). The women use that guilt to make men visit shrines, where their sperm is harvested without them knowing, promising them that they would “move closer to redemption” by doing so (49). Just as childbearing was perceived woman’s opportunity to deliver herself from Eve’s sin, sperm donation is here portrayed as men’s sole means of redemption.

In fact, Sargent’s Goddess is not purely fictional. As Rene Denfeld explains, the second-wave feminist movement indeed witnessed the creation of an “empowering religion for women” with a “female-centred deity” (131). Similar to separatist and cultural feminists, followers of the female religion perceived women as

“the better sex”, superior to men because of their biology and their reproductive system in particular (Denfeld 143). Accordingly, they believed in prehistoric matriarchal cultures where women were venerated and society resembled a paradisaal Eden (Denfeld 134). In Sargent’s novel, the women try to recreate this kind of matriarchal Eden in their cities.

In many ways, however, the Goddess in the novel reaffirms patriarchy rather than subverting it. Accordingly, Jenny Wolmark points out that the novel contains the “oblique suggestion that the cities reproduce many of the repressive aspects of patriarchy” (97). Although the women believe that the Goddess “is the only way [they] can control” men, by rewarding them for good actions and punishing them for bad ones, they fail to realise that they are also putting women on a pedestal. During the Victorian era, women were seen as the incarnation of morality and goodness. Pedestalisation, which Denfeld labels “a prison [...] a cage of high expectations” referred to the action of romanticising women and creating an ideal that all women were forced to live up to (226). The statues in the shrines that show the Goddess as Venus and the Virgin Mary are also forms of pedestalisation, as they create the image of woman as natural beauty, mother and virginal purity. Hence, the women of the city are recreating and transmitting the repressive ideal of womanhood that second-wave feminists sought to destroy. Following Denfeld, the novel seems to suggest that the essentialist tendency of separatist feminism “has the potential to turn back the tide of woman’s progress” (239).

The Goddess not only pedestalises women, she also displays them as sex objects. Inside the shrines, men are shown “images of women, naked and seductive,” which are “needed in order to condition” them (11-12). Men are taught that by doing good deeds, they are rewarded with “the blessing,” in other words, sex

(12). Bound to wires and tubes formed like female genitalia, and wearing so-called “mindspeaker circlets,” today known as virtual reality headsets, men are given the visual and tactile sensation of having intercourse with a woman (11-12). These images not only normalise women’s position as sex object, it also naturalises rape, as it teaches them “that the lady seeks their embrace and rejoices in it” (311).

Convinced that men’s nature cannot be altered, the women implement a self-fulfilling prophecy by conditioning men to become the very embodiments of patriarchy that women should prevent them from becoming. The repercussions of this conditioning are experienced by those women who have been expelled from the city and are forced to live among men. Birana, who joins Arvil’s band after being expelled along with her mother, risks to be used as the band’s communal sex slave, realising “They would use me as they used the images presented to them by mindspeakers” (163). Nallei, a woman who lives with a male band who take her for the goddess, is forced to sleep with the band members to legitimise her status as goddess, whose role it is “to give them such blessings” (311). Nallei is aware that the women society is at least partly responsible for how men treat her, stating “They’ve been conditioned to long for [...] a woman’s form [...] Our cities have done their work all too well” (311).

QUESTIONING THE CITY: LAISSA’S AWAKENING

The novel is not only dystopian in its sexist treatment of men and in its usage of patriarchal practices, but also in its depiction of female freedom. Gorman Beauchamp points out that “Utopians tend to assume that there is one, and only one, right method of doing everything and consequently that all other alternatives must be rigorously excluded, by whatever methods the society has at its disposal” (467). In order for a utopian society to exist, there must be a homogeneity in the beliefs and

behaviours of its inhabitants, which almost inevitably jeopardises individual freedom. It is through Laissa's perspective that the restrictions placed on the inhabitants by the city are uncovered and the social system is questioned. Laissa is introduced as one of those utopians who rigidly follow society's norms and avoid contact with women who oppose those norms, in particular Birana and Zoreen. Birana is the black sheep of the community, not only physically stronger and more daring than the other girls, but also the only girl who constantly questions her teachers (5). While the other girls only seldom use the mindcaster, a device allowing them to experience the outside world as virtual reality, Birana demonstrates her curiosity and willingness to see what is beyond the city's walls by using the mindcaster as often as possible (163).

This kind of "deviant" behaviour was also known in American lesbian separatist communities, proving that complete social homogeneity was wishful thinking rather than a realistic possibility, and that the separatist ideology was resting on an unsound footing. Indeed, discussing the consequences of masculine behaviour in 1970s lesbian separatist communities, Shugar stresses that "the existence of such behaviour, if not reframed, effectively could challenge the ideological structure separatists have built" ("Lesbian" 44). Essentialism stipulates fixed gender scripts for each sex, thus excluding androgyny as an option and marking everyone as a social deviant who does not follow the gendered script. This theory can also be applied to the novel. Since Birana's traits are masculine from an essentialist point of view and/or constitute a threat to the city's norms, Laissa has often "wondered whether [their] city could hold her wilder spirit," implying that Birana's personality does match the expectations of the all-women community (5). To eliminate the threat that Birana represents, Laissa ended their friendship,

whereas the city takes a more drastic measure: Birana is expelled from the city along with her mother, who has wounded another woman and thus broken one of the most important separatist laws. Zoreen is excluded from Laissa's circle of friends simply because the latter chose to study "history and human culture," centring on the period when men and women still lived together and therefore stigmatised as a study program for "perverts and disturbed women" (27).

Nevertheless, there are hints that Laissa has only made these decisions because her society demands it and because she is "shielding [herself] from her [friends'] disapproval" (65). To show conformity, she suppresses a part of herself that is not only "oddly drawn to a few of the old stories" like Zoreen, but also "had many of the same questions" that Birana had (5, 27). The same duality can be observed when her friends harass Button. Although secretly wishing to comfort her little brother, Laissa refrains from intervening because she could not let them see that she "cared about him", an affection that could potentially lead to "disgrace" and "shame" (28, 8). Albeit no longer man-identified, the women of the separatist community are similarly restricted as women in a patriarchal community because they are prohibited from developing an identity independent from the dominant ideology of the city.

It is only after her brain chemistry tests show that she should become a historian, whereupon she moves in with Zoreen, that Laissa's suppressed self gradually surfaces. Questioning the essentialist doctrine of her society, she envisions gender as a social construct, created by one's environment rather than inherent to one's nature. Imagining being brought up in the wilderness, she asks herself "Would I become like a man? Would men, living here, become more like us?" (92). Fari, Laissa's history mentor, constantly nourishes Laissa's questioning mind, reminding her that "men are born of our bodies and share certain traits. Are they as they must

be, or have the lives they must lead made them that way?,” thereby deothering men and suggesting the gender theory that behaviour is independent from one’s sex (124). Zoreen, too, influences Laissa and contributes to the development of her rebellious self. Zoreen undermines her city’s belief that men do not have an “ethical sense” and are all equally responsible for the nuclear holocaust, informing Laissa that “[t]here were many men who saw what was coming and tried to work against it” (95). Women, then, are only opposed to history because they want to hold on to their belief “that men always had certain innate limitations, [...] to believe otherwise raises a lot of questions about the ways things are” (95).

While historians “don’t deceive [themselves] about how things really are” in the cities, the other women are afraid to see that not all men are bad because this avowal would render their reign and treatment of men unjust. Fari also highlights the gender bias and the similarities between the all-women community and the patriarchal society, stating that “Men sinned in the past by denying us a full life, by ruling over us. [...] Now we rule over them and call it right” (124). Laissa recognises the sex inequality as well, realising that if some men were just as compassionate and intelligent as women, then their “way of life was not merciful and not just, but only a cruel necessity, a way to survive” (97). Women have not expelled men because they were all bad, but because they wanted to eliminate every slight risk of another nuclear holocaust. Laissa thus contemplates an alternate reality of a mixed-gender world, where women “could have been helping men adapt” to their ways of life instead of simply expelling them (98).

When Zoreen takes Laissa to the top of the wall, “the sight of the world beyond the wall” shows Laissa the extent of women’s confinement in the city. Similar to the women of a patriarchal society, the women in the cities remain stuck in the

inside sphere, while “men have more freedom” in their outside sphere (101). The city actively reproduces the gendered segregation of space instead of abolishing it. The women’s “training and the fear instilled in [them] of wild, untamed regions” makes them incapable of surviving in the male sphere, forever imprisoning them in their female sphere (115).

The women are not only spatially, but also psychologically restricted. Kathy Rudy noticed a similar psychological restriction when she was living in the lesbian community of Durham in the 1980s, positing that the Durham community “was a world that marginalized itself with its hypertrophied attachments to lesbian identity” and gave women “the constant pressing feeling that [they were] being left out, that [they were] missing something” (206). By adhering to society’s standards, never venturing beyond what they know and prohibited from behaving and thinking outside the city’s norms, women inside the walls are “only variations on a theme, [...] individuality [...] an illusion” (101). Like Rudy, Laissa links the incapability to develop an individual identity different from the collective lesbian identity imposed on her by the separatist community to the impression that she is missing out on something: “We hid from the world instead of exploring it; I began to think we hid from ourselves as well” (114). She thus imagines what would happen if she liberated herself from the city’s hegemony, able to think individual thoughts rather than being indoctrinated with the city’s beliefs: “If I dwelled apart from others, how then would I see the world? What would I continue to accept, and what would fall away?” (115).

The event that convinces Laissa to turn her back on her society occurs when her mother suffers a mental breakdown after being forced to separate from her son Button and give Arvil the order to kill Birana, who is still a threat to the community since she could reveal the city’s secrets to the men (126). Eilaan, a Mother of the

City, subsequently coerces Laissa into doing her mother's job, that is making sure that Arvil succeeds in his mission, threatening to kill Button if she refuses.

Recognising the corruption and injustice of her society, yet forced to comply with Eilaan's request, Laissa resolves to resist the city by "open[ing] [the city's] darkest ways to the light" (129).

Aiming to show women the outside world and prove that not all men are maleficent, thereby making the city's doctrines void, Laissa leaves the city to dwell in the shrines, where she writes down the tales that men tell her (438). Although Laissa's conditioned self is still repelled by some of the tales, her new, tolerant self is fascinated by them (442). Laying her preconceived idea that men cannot change aside, Laissa hopes that "the men might someday show that they were worthy of better treatment" (443). Similar to Le Guin's Genly Ai, it is the prospect of love between two seemingly different species that triggers a paramount change in Laissa. It is only after hearing Birana's and Arvil's story and seeing that their heterosexual love is genuine, that Laissa's doubts are completely erased and she even agrees to become their child's surrogate mother. She no longer perceives men as other or enemy, but as women's "brothers" (468). Nor does she accept the essentialist concepts of man and woman, instead embracing the possibility of androgyny, acknowledging "[t]here is something of us in them and something of them in us" (468). Laissa believes that if men and women succeed in "reshap[ing] [themselves] and become another kind of being" freed from the restricting essentialist concepts, then they might find a way to coexist peacefully again someday (469).

DEFYING THE CITY: THE RELATIONSHIP OF ARVIL AND BIRANA

Arvil and Birana are two of the most significant characters. Through their relationship the novel dismantles gender essentialism and destigmatises heterosexuality. As Wolmark proposes, Birana, among others, is “required to transgress the physical and cultural boundaries shaping [her] perceptions, in order to change and progress” (98). Indeed, Birana’s expulsion from the city allows her to move towards androgyny, form her own perception of men and even redefine heterosexual love. Even though Birana is stronger and more courageous than the other girls of her society, her bravery and strength are useless in the outside world. No longer protected by the walls and exposed to men, Birana’s “fear of the outside nearly overwhelmed” her and “[f]or the first time in [her] life, [...] saw [herself] as physically weak” (198, 163). While Russ’s Jael is the dominant sex in both *Womanland* and *Manland*, Sargent’s women are still the inferior sex in the male sphere, meaning that the roots of patriarchy have still not been effectively dealt with.

Rather than being the helpless woman Arvil has to protect and provide for, Birana shows a willingness to become Arvil’s equal, an androgynous being. After finding out that Birana is not an aspect of the goddess but, in fact, a human like himself, Arvil in turn treats Birana as one of his band members. Aware that she has “no power” in the wilderness, Birana wants to learn how to hunt, skin animals and fight to acquire some of the power that men have (181). Laying her feminine peaceful nature aside, she learns how to use a sling and a bow, practising self-defense regularly (213, 316). Instead of treating Birana like a weakling, Arvil repeatedly orders her to “[s]teady [her]rself” whenever she seems to be afraid (185, 200), refusing to cast her in the role of the damsel in distress who needs to be protected by the male hero. The positive results of her training show when they are

attacked by other bands. Being assaulted by horsemen, Birana bites one man's hand, makes him trip and wounds him with a spear (187, 188). During another attack, Arvil is wounded and loses consciousness. Birana is thus on her own to fend off a horseman, whom she kills with her sling (211). The realisation that she can protect herself without Arvil's help has an empowering effect on Birana, who no longer feels her feminine weakness but instead senses something like masculine power: "This, I thought, is what a man would feel" (211). She later on uses this newly gained power to kill Yerlan, the Headman of Nallei's band, who wants to rape her (376).

Discussing Arvil's and Birana's relationship, Marleen Barr claims that they can only "come together after deconstructing the [...] ideological images the City perpetuates" (168). As long as Arvil sees Birana as the goddess and Birana perceives Arvil as the inherently violent male, they cannot bridge the gap that the City has created between them. The women of the city destroy the illusion of Birana as the goddess when they tell Arvil, via mindspeaker inside the shrines, that she is an evil aspect, an imposter of the goddess, who needs to be killed (113). Arvil, however, is "finding it hard to see evil in her" because Birana does not seem like "someone who sought to ensnare [him] in evil" (146, 152). Instead of blindly following another illusion created by the women of the city, Arvil forms his own view on Birana based on his experiences with her. Birana also helps to destroy the image of the goddess and the evil aspect that the women have implanted in Arvil's mind by telling him the whole truth about her society, why men were banned from the city and why she has been sent out, too. Finding common ground in the realisation that the injustice done to Birana equals the injustice done to men by the city, Arvil substitutes his image of Birana as the goddess/evil aspect for the image of "another imprisoned

soul reaching to [him] for help” (154). Moreover, not indoctrinated with the essentialist notions of gender, Arvil is the first one to realise that their sexual organ is the only difference between the two of them: “Except for my member and your female parts, we are the same” (230).

During her first days in the wilderness, Birana still perceives men as “beasts” and can only see kindness in Arvil because his physical appearance reminds her of his sister Laissa (159, 168). However, having spent some time with Arvil and his band, Birana admits that she has “seen vileness and ugliness of men but had observed other qualities as well,” even developing “a bit of sympathy for them” and seeing Arvil as a “true friend” (292, 202). Initially “hat[ing] the sight of [Arvil’s] body,” which she was taught to perceive as abnormal and repugnant, Birana gradually starts seeing “beauty in his form” (87, 232). Likewise, while she thought she “had much to fear from him” in the beginning, she later sees “gentleness in his eyes” and notices that he only becomes violent in self-defense (196).

Despite being able to cast off her prejudices against men, Birana is still heavily influenced by her society’s rejection of heterosexuality. She is constantly torn between her increasing feelings for Arvil and the knowledge that she is not supposed to have that kind of feelings for a man. When Arvil kisses her, she first returns the kiss before breaking away again, realising that she returned the kiss because she genuinely likes him (276, 291). Due to lifelong ideological interpellation, Birana believes that any woman in love with a man is abnormal and mentally diseased and is thus unable to accept her feelings for Arvil. Remembering the kiss, even longing for another one, she designates her thoughts as “sickness” and refers to her feelings as “sick and contemptible”, believing herself to be “deranged” (308, 326, 325).

Birana's inner conflicts are evocative of the struggles that many heterosexual feminists of the late twentieth century went through because of their sexual orientation. Like most other lesbian separatists, Charlotte Bunch, member of the lesbian feminist group The Furies, believed that "lesbianism is the key to liberation and only women who cut their ties to male privilege can be trusted to remain serious in the struggle against male dominance" (166). Straight women were seen as traitors in allegiance with the enemy, incapable of putting women first. Accordingly, Denise Thompson posits that lesbianism became a requirement for being a real feminist, whereas feminist heterosexuality became an oxymoron (23). Sargent's novel, however, seems to take Bell Hooks's position, who believes that "the suggestion that the truly feminist woman is lesbian [...] sets up another sexual standard by which women are to be judged" ("Ending" 153). By marginalizing heterosexual women, lesbian separatists mimic patriarchal cultures that have oppressed homosexuals because of their sexuality. Instead, Hooks suggests that feminism "should create a climate in which heterosexual practice is freed from the constraints of heterosexism and can [...] be affirmed" ("Ending" 155). It is Nallei who shows Birana that the wilderness, unlike her city, is a space where that kind of climate reigns. She tells Birana that her feelings are only abnormal according to the city's norms, reminding her "We're not in the city now [...] does it matter what they think?," thereby giving Birana the courage to acknowledge her feelings (326).

During her first sexual experience with Arvil, Birana first tries to "pretend he was not a man" but then realises that Arvil is not the man she was taught to despise but "a friend who loved" her (329). Arvil proves that man is not inherently a rapist, asking Birana to "show [him] how to give pleasure to [her]" and refraining from entering her because he feels that she is not ready for him yet (329). Instead they

only engage in mutual masturbation, which shows Birana that sexual experience does not have to be a demonstration of male dominance and female enslavement, but an act of shared love and power: “in return for the power I had given him over me, I had been given this power over him” (332). Contrary to her city’s teachings, according to which women “can find [pleasure] only with [their] own kind,” Birana discovers that intercourse with the opposite sex can give her “pleasure [...] something [she] had not expected, something [she] had thought impossible (233, 337).

Birana’s destigmatisation of and relation with Arvil can also be identified as a challenge to separatism. Whereas separatists saw all men as proponents of patriarchy, Bell Hooks argues that a “male who has divested of male privilege, who has embraced feminist politics, is a worthy comrade in struggle, in no way a threat to feminism” (*Feminism* 12). Besides Arvil’s willingness to treat Birana as his equal, already explored above, his rejection of patriarchy becomes especially apparent when they join the band on the lake. In this band’s camp, the patriarchal values of the pre-nuclear holocaust world are reproduced in their most extreme forms. Women here are constantly silenced, only allowed to speak when the men ask them to do so (399). The master-slave relationship, which Firestone refers to when stating that “woman has always been, if not man’s slave, at least his vassal” (2), is here literally restored. Men either “order the women about or wait to be served” (404). Women’s position as sex-object and gratifier of men’s sexual needs is here a matter of course, the men simply making “a quick gesture towards his groin” to show the women they wanted to have sex (404). Considering that the women “gave no sign that they sought this joining or welcomed it,” the novel clearly depicts these sexual relations as rape (404). Arvil immediately recognises the injustice of the band’s sex hierarchy and

takes the women's side when asserting that it "isn't right for the men to treat them as they do" (408). When one of the men demands that Arvil starts viewing Birana as the inferior being she, supposedly, is, Arvil angrily responds "I am her friend [...] as she is mine. She doesn't rule me and I do not rule her. It is not my place to command her" (403).

As it is clear that Arvil and Birana cannot find happiness with that band, they leave in the hope that someday they will find "a possible refuge, a place where men and women might have learned to love, to live as comrades" (415). Nevertheless, they are aware that for such a refuge to exist, the cities must undergo fundamental social changes. Although they are unable to trigger a revolution from the outside, their baby Nallei, whom they send to the city because she won't survive in the wilderness, "may try to change the way things are", becoming a beacon of hope for Arvil and Birana, and a proof of heterosexual love for the women in the city (425).

CONCLUSION

Clearly products of their time, the three science fiction novels analysed in this thesis explore and question the complex, multifaceted feminist ideas of the late twentieth century and are expressive of the multiple differences and incongruities between the diverse strands of feminism. The three writers put gender theories and feminist concepts to the test in their works, experimenting and critically engaging with them and simultaneously inviting the reader to join the investigation.

Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* was published in 1969, when second-wave feminism was still in its embryonic state and radical feminism had only just emerged. The Gethenians' society and hermaphroditic nature allows the reader to distance him/herself from the Western world and instead provides him/her an insight into a world where people are not defined nor constrained by their sex. Young Gethenians do not acquire gender lenses, nor do they perform a certain gender; they simply behave and act naturally and intuitively without a gendered script. The novel destabilises the heterosexual matrix by dissolving the boundaries between man and woman, reducing the two sexes to their reproductive definition and eliminating their Western cultural connotations. Since the Gethenians can be both mother and father, the feminist utopian ideals of the androgynous human being and women's liberation of their childbearing and rearing duties are, at least partially, realised. Although the idea of gender as social construct is characteristic of radical feminism, Le Guin's novel does not demonise heterosexuality or heterosexual intercourse, thus positioning itself in a less radical feminist discourse than Russ's novel. The absence of male demonisation is another factor that differentiates *The Left Hand of Darkness* from the radical feminist aspect of the other two novels. Genly Ai's androcentric, heteronormative mindset is meant to reflect Le Guin's contemporary society.

Introduced as the type of man that radical feminism condemned, Genly constantly uses gendered, misogynist stereotypes to categorise Gethenians as either man or woman, not accepting the possibility of a human with both sexes' attributes.

However, the novel does not agree with later radical feminists' belief that men cannot be changed. With the help of Estraven, Genly gradually learns to admit that his image of women has been completely distorted by the prejudices conceived by his Western culture and realises that gender is not a prerequisite to be human. His love confession and alienation from his Terran fellow men suggest that his perspective is no longer guided by the heterosexual matrix.

The publication of Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975) coincided with the emergence of radical lesbian feminism (Stein 91), characteristics of which can be found in the all-women community of Whileaway and the invariably negative portrayals of men. The four women living in distinct universes are at different stages of female liberation. Jeannine represents Betty Friedan's feminine mystique, who has acquired her gender lenses mainly through her family, dutifully performing the female gender by centring her life on household duties and searching for a husband. While Jeannine is completely unaware that the gender norms imposed on her are the source of her occasional unhappiness, Joanna is painfully conscious of the gender inequality of her society. Nevertheless, the inner conflict caused by being raised in a family that promoted the growth of her feminine and inhibited the development of her masculine side, still prevents her from completely laying off gender norms. Her failure to unify her two sides, to become androgynous, can be traced back to her unacceptance of her femaleness, which she has come to hate due to the negative experiences she associates it with. The Whileawayans are similar to the Gethenians in the sense that they are brought up as androgynous

beings oblivious to Western gender norms. Their freedom, however, is mainly due to the absence of men, which gives Russ' novel its lesbian feminist tone. Nevertheless, the Whileawayans' ignorance of what it means to fight for female freedom makes them a lesser feminist role model than the Womanlanders. Jael, like Jeannine and Joanna, was brought up in a conservative family and, unlike Janet, was not naturally androgynous. She only developed her androgyny by using her accumulated rage to defy both Mandlanders and her former culture's gender norms. Regardless of this critique, both Janet and Jael are portrayed as individuals inspiring female freedom. It is Janet's ability to stand up to the male sex on Joanna's planet and Jael's use of female violence that inspire Janet to become a female man and prompt Jeannine to change her life's mission from finding a husband to aiding Jael.

The themes treated in Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (1986) can also be understood as products of historical context, as they are consistent with the feminist activities around 1980s America. As a result of the pro-feminist men's movements that developed during the 1970s, American society in the 1980s witnessed the creation of the first profeminist "National Organization for changing Men", which aimed to support feminism as well as create a positive image of masculinity separate from its traditional meaning (Goldrick 199, 186). The destigmatisation of the male sex and the possible feminist collaboration of men and women, two of the main subjects in the novel, were thus the organisation's primary goals. Sargent's novel is the only one to criticise one of the feminist branches, more precisely lesbian separatist feminism, and thereby voices the intra-feminist conflicts that were part of second-wave feminism. Although an all-women community can be utopian from a radical feminist point of view, as seen in Russ' novel, *The Shore of Women* shows readers the manifold drawbacks that separatist feminism can entail.

Using Laissa as the mouthpiece of her critical stance, Sargent draws attention to the dangerous essentialist tendency of separatist feminism. In contrast to Le Guin's and Russ's novels, which promote the demolition of gender, the separatist community in Sargent's novel seems counter-productive in its feminist aims. Instead of freeing women of gender roles, the city recreates its own gender lenses and virtually forces all the women to adopt the same, gender-specific identity. Arvil's character is not only an incarnated critique of separatist feminism, as he is the living proof that not all men are violent beasts by nature, but it also clarifies the main difference between Sargent's and Russ' perspectives on feminism and men. Whereas the heterosexual relationship between Arvil and Birana positions Sargent, just as Le Guin, in the category of equality feminism, Russ's purely negative portrayals of the male sex equates her with lesbian (separatist) feminism.

Despite the multiple differences between the novels, there are also several similarities, reminding the reader that most feminist branches, albeit having different approaches and convictions, ultimately shared similar visions. The three writers seem to agree that leaving one's society's comfort zone, resolving inner conflicts as well as confronting and questioning social gender norms are necessary steps to achieve female liberation and instigate a change in conventional Western thought. The three novels are also tied together by the concept of androgyny, which is depicted as favourable in each of them. Genly acknowledges androgyny as a human attribute and simultaneously lays aside his gendered binary thinking. *The Female Man* depicts androgyny as an essential component of female freedom (Janet), as a source of power (Jael), and one of the most important endeavours of a feminist (Joanna). In Sargent's community, women are prohibited from presenting androgynous behaviour, which leaves them vulnerable, afraid of the outside and

powerless when confronted with the opposite sex. Birana, who develops traditionally masculine capacities during her adventures with Arvil, learns to protect herself and survive in the wilderness, proving that androgyny does not defile, but empowers the female sex. Finally, and most importantly, all three science fiction novels are both self-reflexive and timeless. They bring readers face-to-face with their own concepts of gender, reminding them that powerful women like Jael are still needed in the twenty-first century, where the fight for gender equality and sexual freedom is still ongoing.

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