

UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID

FACULTAD DE FILOLOGÍA



TESIS DOCTORAL

Exploring Other Worlds: Dismantling Women's Otherness in Selected Feminist
Science Fiction

Explorando otros mundos: desarmando la otredad de las mujeres en una
selección de ciencia ficción feminista

MEMORIA PARA OPTAR AL GRADO DE DOCTORA

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EN ESTUDIOS LITERARIOS PRESENTADA POR

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Quisiera agradecer la labor de mis directores, Carmen y Eduardo, y su apoyo sobre todo en los últimos momentos en los que las fuerzas y las ganas flaqueaban.

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Abstract/Resumen

Abstract: “Exploring Other Worlds: Dismantling Women’s Otherness in Selected Feminist Science Fiction”

Throughout history, women have been relegated to the status of Others, confined by stereotypes ingrained in patriarchal society. Their voices have been stifled, yet they persistently strive to carve out a space for themselves to be heard. Thankfully, literature has often served as that crucial space where women encounter alternative representations that prompt reflection on their societal position. The concern for women’s issues, which later fueled the emergence of feminism, has long permeated literature, including the genre under study: science fiction (SF.) Within the literary realm of SF, authors have found avenues to explore the unknown, realms of the Others and societies where these distinctions dissolve. This has provided a platform for feminist writers to contemplate women’s roles in society and their potential, free from the constraints of gender, sexual hierarchies, and patriarchal norms.

This dissertation builds upon this foundation by analyzing SF worlds crafted by women authors. Sally Miller Gearhart’s *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (1978), Sheri S. Tepper’s *The Gate to Women’s Country* (1988), Nicola Griffith’s *Ammonite* (1992), and Naomi Alderman’s *The Power* (2016) serve as exemplary realms illustrating feminist endeavors to deconstruct patriarchal narratives surrounding women. Employing various narrative tools, these authors aim to challenge the notion of women as Others. Considering that patriarchy finds its foothold in legal, biological, sexual, psychological, educational, and religious frameworks, it is logical to analyze the social structures, belief systems, expressions of sexuality and reproduction, concepts of motherhood and family, and educational systems within the worlds created by Gearhart,

Tepper, Griffith, and Alderman. These authors present matriarchal societies, post-apocalyptic landscapes, female-only planets, and female-dominated worlds that effectively dismantle the sexual Otherness experienced by women in patriarchal societies. In these settings, women are emancipated from conventional roles such as mothers or wives, enabling them to embrace diverse identities as witches, Amazons, doctors, *viajeras*, presidents, priestesses, prophets, or even drug dealers. They benefit from access to education and legal systems that prioritize their interests and worship Goddesses who uphold and empower their newfound roles. They are entirely liberated from male involvement, even extending to reproduction, with some of these societies embracing parthenogenesis as a viable option. These worlds offer women the opportunity to delve into a multitude of possibilities that have historically been denied to them.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that these four worlds are not without their flaws. The exclusion of men and technology in Gearhart's *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women*, the implementation of eugenics in Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*, the complete absence of the male gender in Griffith's *Ammonite*, and the portrayal of corruption among women and violence against the oppressed in Alderman's *The Power* are indicative of a reversal of sexual hierarchies, wherein men become the oppressed and women the oppressors. While this outcome contradicts feminist objectives, the failure of reversed systems to ensure an equitable and functional society highlights that neither sex is inherently suited to hold power alone. This underscores the urgent need for a shift in power dynamics, which must entail the elimination of sexual hierarchies, thereby eradicating the concept of oppressed and oppressor sexes.

Resumen: “Explorando otros mundos: desarmando la otredad de las mujeres en una selección de ciencia ficción feminista”

A lo largo de la historia, las mujeres han sido relegadas al estatus de Otro, confinadas por estereotipos arraigados en la sociedad patriarcal. Sus voces han sido silenciadas, sin embargo, persisten en esforzarse por abrirse un espacio para ser escuchadas. Afortunadamente, la literatura ha servido frecuentemente como ese espacio crucial donde las mujeres encuentran representaciones alternativas que incitan a reflexionar sobre su posición en la sociedad. La preocupación por los problemas de las mujeres, que posteriormente alimentó el surgimiento del feminismo, ha permeado durante mucho tiempo la literatura, incluyendo el género bajo estudio: la ciencia ficción (CF.) Dentro del ámbito literario de la CF, los autores han encontrado vías para explorar lo desconocido, los reinos de los Otros y sociedades donde estas distinciones se disuelven. Esto ha proporcionado una plataforma para que escritoras feministas contemplan los roles de las mujeres en la sociedad y su potencial, libres de las restricciones de género, jerarquías sexuales y normas patriarcales.

Esta tesis toma estas ideas como base al analizar cuatro mundos de CF creados por autoras. *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (1978) de Sally Miller Gearhart, *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988) de Sheri S. Tepper, *Ammonite* (1992) de Nicola Griffith y *The Power* (2016) de Naomi Alderman sirven como ejemplos ilustrativos de los esfuerzos feministas por deconstruir las narrativas patriarcales que rodean a las mujeres. Empleando diversas herramientas narrativas, estas autoras buscan desafiar la noción de las mujeres como Otro. Considerando que el patriarcado encuentra su base en marcos legales, biológicos, sexuales, psicológicos, educativos y religiosos, resulta lógico analizar las estructuras sociales, sistemas de creencias, expresiones de sexualidad y reproducción, conceptos de maternidad y familia, y sistemas educativos

dentro de los mundos creados por Gearhart, Tepper, Griffith y Alderman. Estas autoras presentan sociedades matriarcales, panoramas postapocalípticos, planetas exclusivamente femeninos y mundos dominados por mujeres que dismantelan eficazmente la otredad sexual experimentada por las mujeres en las sociedades patriarcales. En estos entornos, las mujeres están liberadas de roles convencionales como madres o esposas, lo que les permite abrazar identidades diversas como brujas, Amazonas, médicas, viajeras, presidentas, sacerdotisas, profetisas o incluso traficantes de drogas. Se benefician del acceso a sistemas educativos y legales que priorizan sus intereses y adoran a diosas que sostienen y potencian sus nuevos roles. Están completamente liberadas de la participación masculina, incluso en lo que respecta a la reproducción, ya que algunas de estas sociedades abrazan la partenogénesis como una opción viable. Estos mundos ofrecen a las mujeres la oportunidad de explorar una multitud de posibilidades que históricamente les han sido negadas.

Sin embargo, es crucial reconocer que estos cuatro mundos no están libres de defectos. La exclusión de hombres y tecnología en *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* de Gearhart, la implementación de la eugenesia en *The Gate to Women's Country* de Tepper, la completa ausencia del sexo masculino en *Ammonite* de Griffith y la corrupción de las mujeres y la violencia contra el sexo masculino en *The Power* de Alderman son indicativos de una reversión de las jerarquías sexuales, donde los hombres se convierten en los oprimidos y las mujeres en las opresoras. Aunque este resultado contradice los objetivos feministas, el fracaso de revertir el sistema para asegurar una sociedad equitativa y funcional destaca que ni un sexo ni el otro está inherentemente capacitado para ejercer el poder solo. Esto subraya la necesidad urgente de un cambio en las dinámicas de poder, que debe implicar la eliminación de las

jerarquías sexuales, erradicando así por completo el concepto de sexos oprimidos y opresores.

Introduction

The following dissertation emerged from years of studying and researching, during the degree in English Studies and masters in Literary Studies, female figures as characters and authors, finding a pattern that is repeated throughout history: women have always been Others¹. Women have been defined by the dominant subject: the white, heterosexual, adult male, an idea explained by thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, who affirmed that women were treated as such due to foundations on biology, psychology, history, myths, education, and society, which the patriarchal discourse appropriated to preserve the dominance of the male subject. Over the centuries of patriarchy, women have been deprived of their voice. This inability to reaffirm themselves leaves women as living stereotypes (mothers, wives, witches, prostitutes, spinsters, etc.) who would never be allowed to be part of the norm, only defined by it. It is easy to recall instances of stereotypes embodied in female characters like the young, quasi-divine woman who is idealized like the Virgin Mary, or her antonym, the terrifying, attractive temptress who needs to be eliminated so that the status quo is reestablished like Salome or Medusa. These stereotypes have been illustrated in literary texts throughout history, which have helped in their perpetuation as well as the reaffirmation of women as Others.

Despite their being Others, women have always had the need to express themselves to find their place within society, being literature one way of doing so, although their unprivileged position would entail difficulties in this field. Of course, writing—a man’s world—was a task that distanced women from the established female roles, so becoming authors was not exempt from the struggle for those who were

¹ In this dissertation, “Other” will be capitalized to distinguish it from the common pronoun or adjective. When capitalized, it refers to individuals who deviate from what is considered the social norm.

looking for their space in society. Many women writers were forced to draw on male pseudonyms so that they could be published. Such is the case of famous writers like the Brontë sisters in their early works, George Eliot, Louisa May Alcott, or Alice Bradley Sheldon, known as James Tiptree.

In any case, women have always endeavored to find a room of their own and their entrance into the literary spheres enabled the exploration of new worlds and representations of women who were not depicted by men. These spaces and images of women would continue evolving and widening with the inclusion of feminism in literature. From the first to the fourth waves of feminism², women have managed to, firstly, contest the literary canon of authors and readers who were mostly male and distorted the image of women, and secondly, to be represented in a wide range of roles which were not limited by the dichotomy divine-fearful that the patriarchal discourse fixed. By the mid and late 20th century, many feminist writers were fighting for the idea of developing a “female” language, creating a new imaginary to escape the patriarchal one (e.g.: focusing on the female body through maternity, menstruation, etc.), while others reinvented and appropriated elements from the patriarchal discourse in an attempt of fighting patriarchy with its tools (e.g.: reinventing the figure of the witch.) Regardless of the methods, women were gaining momentum in the field and were gradually increasing their representation in all genres, including the one that concerns this study: science fiction (SF)³.

² The consensus about the starting and ending dates of the waves has not been reached yet, and it often depends on the perspective of the experts. If the Western point of view is considered, the first wave would start with the Suffragist movement, the second would be inaugurated with Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* in 1949, and the third would initiate in the 90s. However, there is also controversy surrounding the beginning and end—if there is actually one—to the third wave, rising the debate of our being in the fourth wave of feminism.

³ From this point on, we will refer to science fiction as SF. This abbreviation has been chosen because, as John Rieder suggested, “sci-fi” is more associated with the audiovisual sphere (2.)

From its beginning, SF became a literary genre which gave rise to new possibilities for authors. Initially, as with every other literary trend or genre, SF was a field reserved for certain male authors who were knowledgeable about “hard sciences” such as physics and used this knowledge to create stories with certain appeal for the readers. During the 20th century, along with the development of feminism and the increasing presence of female authors in literature, SF opened to new forms of science, often known as “soft sciences,” like psychology or sociology, which allowed the genre to be used by a wider range of authors (Tidwell, “No Longer Estranged” 29.) With this new event, SF became a great tool for writers who wanted to speculate about those who had never had a voice in history. The genre paved the way for the exploration of the world of the uncanny, a world in which the Others might have stopped being so. The entrance to the world of the unknown through heterogeneous characters (cyborgs, aliens, robots, etc.) and spaces (unknown islands, different planets, etc.) makes possible the analysis of various aspects that concern society: class, ethnicity, science, gender, etc. Like this, SF also suited perfectly feminist authors who started speculating about women without the limits of a pre-established patriarchal society.

What the exploration of the limits of genders (the stereotypes associated with sex) and the sexual hierarchies that genders impose in unknown worlds entailed is the reflection on that same topic in the actual world, along with a demand for a change regarding women’s social position. SF seems to be a perfect tool for this since what is portrayed in its stories belongs to the realm of the possible, of what could be real but “has not happened yet” in the readers’ world (Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* 9, 16.) SF stories show a possible outcome for the readers’ world⁴, given the appropriate

⁴This alludes to the notion that under suitable conditions within the readers' reality, the scenarios depicted in science fiction narratives could become feasible. For instance, with advancements in technology and

circumstances, and feminist authors who forged their way into this genre exploited it to show that a reorganization in society is within the possibilities of the readers' world.

With the title "Exploring Other Worlds: Dismantling Women's Otherness in Selected Feminist Science Fiction," this dissertation presents an analysis of various worlds created by women. These worlds aim to challenge the notion of women as the Other and serve as strong examples of feminist efforts to dismantle sexual hierarchies. They highlight that a society cannot function effectively when there exists a sexual hierarchy when one sex⁵ is considered secondary. Through SF, the female voice finds a new horizon to explore, in which women can develop a fundamental role in society, creating their rooms where they can dispose of the prejudices attached to their sex, and they can examine themselves by applying their perspective, unpolluted by patriarchy. Given these ideas, the dissertation will focus on the examination of four books: a collection of stories and three novels that belong to the SF genre, written by female authors of UK and US origins. The selected authors and works are Sally Miller Gearhart and her *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (1978)⁶, Sheri S. Tepper with *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988)⁷, Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992) and Naomi Alderman's *The Power* (2016.)

This selection aimed to illustrate the characteristics of texts from two distinct centuries. This comparison facilitates an analysis of how the questioning of the idea of women as the Other and the dismantling of sexual hierarchies are depicted in various texts from those eras. Moreover, it enables a chronological exploration of the evolution

science, it is conceivable that the readers' world might encounter extraterrestrial beings or the reality of parallel universes.

⁵The term "sex" is employed here consciously, as later on will be clarified. The concept of sexual hierarchy posits that an individual's social position is determined by their sex. Gender, however, serves as the mechanism of oppression through which this sexual hierarchy is sustained.

⁶ From now on referred to as *The Wanderground*.

⁷ From now on referred to as *The Gate*.

of both SF and feminism in literature and underlines the continuity of themes from one century to another. As with any other trends or movements, SF and feminism have evolved and have played an extraordinarily significant role during the 20th and 21st centuries. Towards the end of the 20th century, SF experienced a peak of popularity which the genre has carried until today. Not only was this popularity perceived in the literary field, but it also conquered other media like TV or cinema with examples such as *Star Trek* (1966) or *Star Wars* (1977), which marked a milestone for the genre. Meanwhile, feminism in the second half of the 20th century evolved to the second and third waves, acquiring popularity and becoming widespread. Considering this, the selection of authors seems appropriate to see how SF and feminism were represented and combined in literature during the last decades of the 20th century. However, it is also necessary to glimpse at the legacy that women in the 21st century have received regarding feminist SF and how they attempt to contribute to it in a world that has become interconnected and globalized.

It is significant to emphasize that the authors chosen for this dissertation are exclusively women and of white ethnicity. This particular selection raises the possibility of bias within the study. Regarding the chosen female authors, it should be highlighted that the selection has been consciously made to give female writers of SF the recognition that so many times has been denied to them. In this dissertation, women and their works are, therefore, the protagonists. On the other hand, although we are well aware of the intersectionality of Otherness, the topic of ethnicity, or any other intersectional aspect, has not been tackled in this study with the conscious purpose of analyzing exclusively sexual Otherness, as to pave the way for future lines of research which can address further matters. Furthermore, the authors and texts are linked by their

exploration of topics, subgenres, and the theme of Otherness, a connection that will be demonstrated throughout this study.

By delving into the examination of the four chosen pieces of feminist SF, this research aims to address the subsequent questions: do the authors liberate women from engrained patriarchal stereotypes associated with their sex, or do they sustain these stereotypes within their characters and narratives? What strategies do these authors employ to deconstruct the imposed sense of Otherness? Do they prove the need for a reorganization in society which implies the abolition of sexual hierarchies? To shed light on these subjects, the dissertation will be divided into three main sections: “A Space in History: A Brief Revision of Feminism and SF,” “A Chance to Prosper” and “Rebirths and Awakenings.” Beginning with the theoretical framework needed to understand the texts and the authors, “A Space in History: A Brief Revision of Feminism and SF” will map a historical revision to explain the social categorization of women as the Other. Within the feminist discourse, it is posited that patriarchy derives its foundation and sustains itself through various cornerstones such as law, biology, sexuality, psychology, education, and religion. Within this chapter, an exploration of these foundational pillars will take place, to underlie their role in upholding the notion of women’s Otherness. This analysis will significantly contribute to the subsequent examination of the selected texts, as it establishes a focal point on these pillars within the context of the newly created fictional worlds.

The concept of Otherness will be also tackled, taking as reference prominent figures and works like Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), Luce Irigaray’s *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1985) or “The Question of the Other” (1995), or Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1970.) These authors held the belief that society was divided into the norm—representing social expectations of individuals—and the realm beyond

it. Throughout history, women have predominantly found themselves in the latter category. The feminist movement⁸ responds to this discriminatory state of affairs by striving to empower women with a position that aligns with their rightful status as human beings. This chapter also encompasses the exploration of the tenets of this movement, its development, and its substantial role within the realm of literature, since literature, reflecting on its cultural milieu, has significantly played a role in perpetuating the concept of women's Otherness. This chapter will also provide insights into the representation of women both as literary characters and as creators.

The opening chapter is also dedicated to an exploration of SF and feminist SF as literary genres. Frequently, terms like speculative fiction, fantasy, and utopia are used interchangeably, leading to a degree of confusion within the population regarding the essence of SF. Consequently, it becomes imperative to untangle these misconceptions by clarifying the distinctions among these terms. This clarification is drawn from the insights of experts within the field, including Darko Suvin, Brian Attebery, Judith Merril, and others. In pursuit of an exhaustive exploration of the genre, this chapter also delves into the diverse themes encapsulated within SF and feminist SF. Encompassing fields from technology to religion, it also navigates the spectrum of subgenres such as utopian SF, (post)apocalyptic SF, or space opera. Furthermore, this chapter addresses the roots of SF and feminist SF, which some assert trace back to the Gothic tradition, with Mary Shelley, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe as pivotal figures. Others, however, contend that the origins of SF can be traced back to figures like Plato, Thomas More, and Francis Bacon. Additionally, this chapter offers an exploration of the

⁸The term is employed in singular, as in this dissertation, the feminist movement is perceived as one that has undergone evolution. While theories of identity and gender studies commonly associated with feminism will be referenced, it is pivotal for this dissertation to conceptualize feminism as a political and social movement with women as its political subject, defined as individuals biologically born female, which aims to eliminate genders, as they serve as the apparatus that perpetuates oppression and sexual hierarchy.

evolution of the genre, spanning from the pulp magazines of the 19th century through the middle of the 20th century characterized by a sense of pessimism, and on to the emergence of the New Wave movement from the mid-1960s to mid-1970s. This narrative journey extends to the genre's revival in the 1990s and its evolution through the 21st century. The first chapter, then, will establish the basis to justify the analysis of the four primary texts selected for the study.

The subsequent chapters, titled "A Chance to Prosper" and "Rebirths and Awakenings," form the core of this dissertation. Organized chronologically, the textual analysis begins within the context of the US and subsequently transitions to the UK providing a general overview of the genre's development in both regions. This contextualization also involves an exploration of the prevailing state of feminism and SF during the respective periods and geographical locations of the authors. Following this contextual groundwork, the analysis proceeds to dissect the primary texts. Initially, it focuses on discerning the reasons for their classification as SF works, followed by a thorough exploration of their *Other* worlds—the worlds conceived in the novels. This examination encompasses the characters, the social structures and belief systems that shape them, their expressions of sexuality and reproduction, their perspectives on motherhood and family dynamics, and ultimately, their systems of education and historical narratives.

Concluding this study, the final part undertakes a comparative analysis of all four texts, evaluating the efficacy of their constructed *Other* worlds in terms of dismantling or sustaining the concept of sexual Otherness and sexual hierarchies. Within this conclusion, a discerning observation emerges: the chosen authors craft societies where women inhabit the position of the norm. This transformation is achieved through a skillful blend of various characters, methodologies, and foundational elements that

frequently stem from the pre-existing patriarchal discourse. However, these authors resourcefully infuse these elements with a feminist intent. For instance, there is a deliberate reimagining of traditionally gendered figures such as witches, or deities now portrayed as female. This strategic narrative move serves to foster a favorable environment for women within these fictional worlds. Nevertheless, these *alternate* worlds are not without their flaws, often presenting new iterations of sexual hierarchies where men are relegated to “the second sex.” Rather than representing an unsuccessful outcome, these worlds emphasize the feminist need for a shift in power dynamics, ultimately leading to the dismantling of sexual hierarchies.

Considering all the previous information, an inquiry emerges as to the relevance of this study. Firstly, it must be highlighted that this dissertation deals with two trends that are remarkably important in the social sphere of the 20th and 21st centuries such as feminism and SF. The impact of these trends permeates even academic domains which allow spaces, like this dissertation, to highlight and revisit texts which contribute to the acceptance and reinforcement of both feminism and SF. Many scholars have devoted their research and publications to the analysis of feminism and SF, as the two became progressively popular. Throughout this dissertation, the reader will find references that encompass texts from the second half of the 20th century to the present day. Not only do these texts approach SF and feminism, but many already deal with the question of the Other in the genre, which altogether forms the key to the dissertation.

A captivating approach to begin discussing the status of the issue of the most relevant texts that concern this dissertation would involve referencing the celebrated American author, Ursula K. Le Guin who published “American SF and the Other” in 1973. In this essay, Le Guin explores the theme of the Other in US SF, focusing on the portrayal of alien or non-human characters and cultures in the genre. She argues that SF

often reflects the dominant culture's fear of the unknown or the Other, which can lead to the reinforcement of stereotypes and prejudices. Le Guin discusses how the portrayal of the Other in SF can be a reflection of social biases and prejudices, perpetuating a sense of superiority and reinforcing the idea of the alien as a threat. She emphasizes the importance of representing diversity and challenging stereotypes in SF, advocating for a more nuanced and inclusive approach to depicting non-human or alien characters. Throughout the essay, she encourages writers to use the genre to challenge traditional notions of identity and to create more complex and empathetic portrayals of the Other.

Following Le Guin's work, Sarah LeFanu wrote *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (1988.) The author also invites the reader to think about the possibilities of the SF genre when it is intertwined with feminism. Lefanu argues that SF is a natural home for feminist writers, despite the male-dominated history of the genre. She grapples with the concept of essentialism⁹ which refers to the idea that there are inherent, unchanging traits associated with sex, and navigates a tricky course between the deconstruction of genders. As it is explained below, the last decade of the 20th century was a prolific period for SF articles and collections of essays that highlighted the prevalence of the genre.

In 1991, Lucie Armitt published *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Essays on Women and Science Fiction*. The book examines the representation of women in SF literature and delves into how the genre has both reflected and influenced social perceptions of gender roles. The essays analyze various themes such as the portrayal of female characters, feminist perspectives within SF, and the role of women writers in

⁹ Essentialism is a theory that underlines the idea that any entity possesses innate and universal traits. The theory has been present in many fields, but if the scope is reduced to feminism, the term indicates that there are inherent feminine and masculine characteristics, as opposed to existentialism which denied this, arguing that those were products of society. In texts such as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Luce Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974), or Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), the concepts of essentialism and existentialism are explored with a feminist perspective.

shaping the genre. The book also encompasses references to how women have been portrayed as the Other in SF, often being depicted as alien or non-human entities, or as marginalized individuals within futuristic societies. Additionally, the book analyzes how women writers have used SF as a platform to challenge traditional notions of Otherness, subvert stereotypes, and advocate for sex equality and inclusivity.

Further research on the topic of feminist SF has been carried out by notorious scholars such as Robin Roberts who explores the portrayal of women in SF in the book *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction* (1993.) In this book, Roberts proves that women have always been present in SF, although their depictions have always been made from a male point of view. She adds that far from rejecting the genre, women writers take these representations and subvert them to create new paradigms, which allow them to destroy myths and reshape them so that they favor women's experiences. Apart from taking the reader through a journey of the interpretation of women in SF, the book examines the works of several authors, including Sheri S. Tepper, Joanna Russ, Octavia Butler, and Ursula Le Guin, to highlight the feminist themes that the authors face.

In 1993, another book that aimed to explore the combination of Otherness, feminism, and SF was published: *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* by Jenny Wolmark. The book argues that SF can be used to develop feminist themes, such as the preestablished relations between sexes. It also analyzes how SF can be used to study postmodernist themes, such as the fragmentation of identity and the blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction, which lead to the challenge of culturally rooted ideas of the self and the Other. Wolmark specifically centers on several SF authors, including Joanna Russ, Octavia Butler, and Samuel R.

Delany. She highlights how these authors use SF to explore feminist and postmodernist themes, and how their work has influenced the genre of SF as a whole.

Some of the previous texts paved the way for studies like this dissertation. Such is the case of Le Guin's work, which serves as a crucial foundation for this dissertation when she explores the concept of Otherness in SF texts. However, her exploration extends beyond sexual hierarchies. Hence, this dissertation presents a more focused approach to exploring the complex theme of the Other. It forges a link between Otherness and women in the realm of SF, with a focus on depicting women as Others, a consequence of the sexual hierarchy imposed by patriarchal society. Additionally, it examines the diverse approaches utilized by various authors to confront and contest this portrayal. Other texts like LeFanu's illuminate the intersection of SF and feminism, while they also delve into specific manifestations of this intersection. While these earlier essays and books align with the scope of this dissertation, it is essential to recognize that they were published over three decades ago. Thus, it becomes imperative to provide a contemporary analysis that incorporates perspectives from the 21st century.

The themes and viewpoints introduced in the preceding texts have been significantly expanded upon in the 21st century, extending into the contemporary era. Scholars and writers have displayed a growing fascination with the convergence of SF and feminism, frequently referencing and dissecting the texts selected in this dissertation. Among the most commonly encountered publications since the early 20th century are collections of essays and handbooks that cover the history of the SF genre and its evolving manifestations. One of the most renowned of these collections is *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (James and Mendlesohn 2003.) The essays explore the history, themes, and cultural significance of SF, and a wide range of topics, including the origins of SF, its relationship to other genres, and its role in shaping

popular culture. They also examine how SF has been used to explore social and political issues, as well as its impact on literature, film, and other forms of media. The book includes Veronica Hollinger's essay called "Feminist Theory and Science Fiction" which explores how feminist ideas are depicted and examined within SF literature, addressing themes such as gender, power dynamics, and social constructs. Through a critical lens, Hollinger highlights the role of feminist thought in shaping and influencing the evolution of SF.

Another compilation of essays that adds information to the previous is David Seed's *A Companion to Science Fiction* (2005.) It is a comprehensive reference work that offers a broad and insightful overview of the SF genre. The book covers its history, its key themes, major authors, and various media adaptations. It also delves into critical and theoretical approaches to the genre. Within contributions from numerous experts in the field, the collection incorporates the work of Marleen S. Barr called "Feminist Fabulation," an essay that derives from her book *Feminist Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction* (1992.) Barr challenges the literary canon and its systematic exclusion of a wide range of important women's writing and dissects the reasons why women writers use SF as a tool to create worlds to confront patriarchy.

Over the subsequent years, numerous handbooks focusing on the genre and its various branches emerged. Notable instances include *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy: Themes, Works, and Wonders* (Westfahl 2005), *Green Speculations: Science Fiction and Transformative Environmentalism* (Otto 2012), and *The History of Science Fiction* (A. Roberts 2016.) One publication that has been particularly useful for this study is *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Mark Bould et al. in 2009. Similar to preceding anthologies, *The Routledge Companion* offers a rich collection of essays that trace the evolution of SF as a genre,

from its origins in the 19th century to contemporary manifestations. It delves into prominent themes such as time travel, encounters with extraterrestrial life, and dystopian societies, across various media platforms, including literature, film, television, and video games. The book also explores critical approaches to the genre such as feminist, postcolonial, and psychoanalytic theories.

Among the notable essays of this collection, Jane Donawerth's "Feminisms" stands out for its comprehensive exploration of the history of the feminist movement, its political evolution through different waves, and its representation within the realm of SF. Donawerth does not only examine how feminist works address issues like women's access to education but also emphasizes the intersectionality of the movement, incorporating considerations of race and gender expression. Furthermore, the book includes Gwyneth Jones's chapter "Feminist SF," which provides a deeper examination of the fusion of the literary genre with the feminist political movement. Jones traces the subgenre's origins back to Mary Shelley and offers insights into the works of acclaimed authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, and Octavia Butler. The essay also acknowledges several other significant authors whose contributions have shaped the field.

Simultaneously with the release of these anthologies, compilations of essays addressing the intersection of feminism, SF, and women were also coming to the forefront. One of the first books to appear in the 21st century regarding these topics was *Women, Science, and Fiction: The Frankenstein Inheritance* by Debra B. Shaw, published in 2000. In this book, Shaw examines the portrayal of women in science and fiction, with a focus on the implications of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in shaping these representations. With this foundational text as a means, Shaw delves into the intersections between gender, science, and literature, exploring how women have been

both marginalized and empowered in the context of scientific narratives and the genre of SF. She discusses how Shelley's work has influenced the depiction of women in SF and the broader cultural understanding of the relationship between women, science, and technology. Shaw highlights how *Frankenstein* reflects social anxieties about scientific progress and its potential consequences, as well as the role of women in the creation and control of knowledge. In her book, Debra B. Shaw does not only examine Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* but also delves into the works of several prominent female authors in the SF genre.

Another noteworthy book that compiles a collection of significant essays addressing the intersection of gender and SF is *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction* by Brian Attebery (2002.) The book studies how SF challenges and redefines traditional gender norms, offering a platform for the exploration of alternative gender identities and relationships. Attebery examines how SF narratives have evolved, tracing the shifts in the portrayal of gender and sexuality within the genre. Attebery analyzes various key works of SF, focusing on how they depict and challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes. Through his analysis, Attebery highlights how SF serves as a platform for critiquing social constructs of gender, offering readers new perspectives on the limitations and possibilities of gender roles: "SF writers are more than willing to disrupt the binary gender code with such concepts as a literal third sex, a society without sexual division, gender as a matter of individual choice, involuntary metamorphosis from one sex to another, gender as prosthesis, and all manner of unorthodox manifestations of sexual desire" (Attebery 9) He also emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical and cultural contexts in which these narratives were produced, as well as the impact that the reflection of these stories can have on the readers' world.

In 2009, a publication that served as an encyclopedia of SF and women was published in two different volumes. This was Robin A. Reid's *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy (vol. 1 and 2.)* These two volumes serve as comprehensive reference books, delving into key concepts and essays related not only to the SF genre but also to the realm of fantasy. They provide a valuable starting point for distinguishing between the two genres encapsulated within the broader term speculative fiction. *Volume 1* offers historical insights from the Middle Ages, presenting an analysis of the unknown and the unexplainable from a feminist perspective, that later will serve as a key point for SF and fantasy. It also highlights the historical contributions of a diverse group of women in shaping and engaging with SF and fantasy literature, media, and the arts. In *Volume 2*, readers will find a compilation of entries encompassing crucial concepts in both fantasy and SF. These entries cover various subgenres, topics, approaches, and influential authors essential to understanding the intricacies of these two speculative genres. Notably, the entries also refer to the distinctive writing styles and stories of notable authors such as Gearhart, Tepper, and Griffith, analyzed in this dissertation.

The year 2009 seemed to be fruitful for feminist SF experts as other two significant texts were published: Gwyneth A. Jones's *Imagination/Space Essays and Talks on Fiction, Feminism, Technology, and Politics* and Helen Merrick's *The Secret Feminist Cabal: a Cultural History of Science Fiction Feminisms*. Both books serve as essential resources for comprehending the SF genre combined with feminism. The first book examines the definition of SF and, from a feminist perspective, explores various SF tropes either employed or deconstructed by feminist SF authors. Meanwhile, Merrick's work delves into the historical role of women in the SF genre, tracing how their writings have evolved into a distinct subgenre within SF over the years, earning a

significant place in the canon and garnering critical attention. She also delves into the contemporary challenges that feminism and SF encounter in the 21st century.

The preceding handbooks and literature serve as essential touchstones for this dissertation; in fact, many of them have played a pivotal role in structuring and clarifying the theoretical framework. However, a notable gap lies in their insufficient emphasis on the unique Otherness experienced by women, a focal point that this dissertation aims to underscore. Some references acknowledge that SF itself has often been relegated to the margins within academic discourse, particularly in the context of SF penned by women. Others argue that SF provides a rich landscape for women writers to illuminate gender-related concerns, with several works analyzing pivotal texts that contribute to this narrative. While the link between women and SF is clear, none of these analyses appear to establish a direct link between the notion of the Other as it pertains to women and how SF authors strive to dismantle this paradigm by challenging rooted sexual hierarchies. Whereas the aforementioned texts demonstrate a clear insufficiency in this respect, examining the critical reception of the four primary texts within this dissertation could offer insights into the themes of Otherness, women, and the strategies SF authors employ to confront this challenge. At the beginning of the analysis for each selected text, a gathering of the relevant existing literature will be presented.

The literature previously mentioned and that which will be presented in each section indicates sustained scholarly attention on the intersection of SF and feminism over several years. Notably, many of the scholars mentioned earlier have already articulated ideas that bear significance for this dissertation. However, this study holds particular relevance as it goes beyond a mere analysis of how four feminist authors utilize the various elements offered by SF to construct worlds that contribute to the

eradication of Otherness and sexual hierarchies. This dissertation is especially pertinent because it keeps alive and intensifies the necessity of constantly revisiting the position that women occupy in society, and this is extremely relevant in a world in which, although it seems to have progressed, women are still mutilated, chained, belittled, deprived of freedom, or die every day solely due to their birth as “the second sex,” relegated to the status of the Other.

The central objective of this dissertation is to illuminate the alternate worlds envisioned by authors—the domains that pertain to the realm of the Other. In doing so, these authors skillfully deconstruct the prevailing sexual hierarchy, thereby enabling both women and men to assume positions as autonomous agents within the readers’ world. In essence, this study serves as a beacon, shedding light on these narratives that endeavor to dissolve the boundaries that confine women, empowering them as active participants, like men, in the reality they inhabit.

1. A Space in History: A Brief Revision of Feminism and SF

To establish a comprehensive context for this study, it becomes imperative to situate the discourse of feminist SF within history and culture. To achieve this, the term “feminist SF” will be dissected into two distinct segments. Firstly, an examination will be conducted into the historical and cultural position of feminism, encompassing its manifestations in literature and society. Within this framework, the chapter will also explore the social position of women, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, leading to an exploration of the pivotal concept of Otherness. Secondly, the second part of this study will endeavor to examine the origins and evolution of SF. This division then will pave the way to point out the characteristics that make the two—SF and feminism—converge and give rise to what is called feminist SF.

1.1. A Room for Women: Revisiting Women’s Role in Society and Feminism

To gain a comprehensive grasp of feminism’s significance in society, it is imperative to analyze the historical journey of women. This exploration aims to elucidate the influences that relegated them to the status of Other within patriarchal societies¹⁰. Since the selected authors belong to the United States and the United Kingdom, this journey through the history of women will be concretely focused on those geographical scopes, although it can be extrapolated to the history of Western cultures. Western societies collectively hold notions about women that contribute to the development of cultural, educational, psychological, sexual, legal, and religious frameworks. These ideas

¹⁰ The idea of a society or a system dominated by men in which women do not play any important part because they do not have the option is a definition of what feminists would call “patriarchy.” Kate Millett in her book *Sexual Politics* (1970) defines ‘patriarchy’ as “the birthright priority whereby males rule females” and affirms that “our society, like all other historical civilizations, is a patriarchy” (25.)

together create a compendium that serves the purpose of perpetuating the social inferiority of women.

Starting with the legal aspects, women have always been dependent on their male family members: “Traditionally, patriarchy granted the father nearly total ownership over wife or wives and children (....) Classically, as head of the family the father is both begetter and owner in a system in which kinship is property” (Millett 33) When unmarried, women were subject to their fathers; however, provided that their fathers were not present, they became dependent on their brothers or any other close male relatives. Ultimately, what determined whose property women were was “kinship” (either blood or marriage), as Kate Millett claimed (33.) This had a dual implication. Firstly, women were consistently regarded as belonging to someone else, thereby being deprived of agency. Secondly, this connection to a male figure was essential for their survival in society, highlighting their dependence on this bond for the reason that marriage and family were “means of survival and the only justification of her [woman’s] existence” (de Beauvoir 503) These two institutions—marriage and family—are crucial to a patriarchal society (Millett 33), since they imply women’s forced dependence on men. In short, women could not fend for themselves without men.

As it can be perceived, this dependence on men left women in a social inferior position, which even laws played their part in perpetuating. Laws supporting women’s state were passed, considering them simple objects. For instance, in the United Kingdom and the United States, the law protected women’s dependence on men, referring to the fact that women “lacked control over [their] earnings,” and in light of that fact they could not “choose [their] domicile” or “manage property” (Millett 67). In this way, the husband was the legal “owner” of his wife’s property, and should the

husband die, “the state might pick over his property” (Millett 67). Given this legal overview, not only did women not have their property, but also they were considered as one.

The feminist movement, in its origins, fought for the possibility of women to be independent of their husbands or male relatives to own property, to get divorced; in short, to be subjects, owners of their lives, and not just mere objects condemned to pass from one male subject to another. Nevertheless, it was not an easy quest, since law was not the only means through which society sustained women’s inferiority; another notorious line of reasoning was biology. As Pam Morris suggests, “women have suffered from a long tradition of what is generally called ‘biological essentialism,’ that is the belief that a woman’s ‘nature’ is an inevitable consequence of her reproductive role” (1-2). This reproductive role—to perpetuate the species, to be mothers—has been for a long time in history the only social role women have had since it was not an individual choice but a social duty. In response to this, Simone de Beauvoir argues that motherhood merely represented an additional path through which women surrendered their autonomy. She asserts that this was primarily due to social expectations and the fact that women’s physical and emotional aspects became wholly dedicated to the new offspring. This caregiving role consequently stripped them of fulfilling their other individual needs (615). Therefore, through marriage and maternity, women’s roles were reduced to social utility, instead of allowing them to fulfill individual goals.

The reproductive duty was not the only trait associated with women based on the biological differences between the sexes. For thinkers like Aristotle (around the fourth century BCE), there was another biological difference that distinguished men from women: there was a passive sex (women) and an active one (men.) Passivity is one of the characteristics that are more extendedly rooted in the figure of women throughout

history, which philosophers like Aristotle explained through the role of the fluids that intervene in reproduction: the female seed—for them, menstruation—was the weak one, while the male seed was the strong one (de Beauvoir 45) This difference in the role of fluids extrapolated to the social sphere, providing yet another biological reason for women’s inferiority. Sigmund Freud, in his *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (1905), also mentioned this tendency in women to passivity, arguing that “the tendency to sexual repression certainly seems much greater [in girls], and where partial impulses of sexuality are noticed they show a preference for the passive form” (70) This assertion is a leitmotif in Freud’s theory of sex, which also relegates women’s role in sexuality and anatomy, as well as in social life, to a secondary position.

Freud’s psychoanalytical theories exerted significant influence in Western societies, playing a pivotal role in shaping perceptions of sexuality. However, his perspectives on female sexuality faced resistance within feminism due to the derogatory stance assigned to women. The only notion from Freud’s theories accepted by feminists is the idea that children have an “original predisposition to bisexuality,” later employed to argue that gender is a social construct (Freud, *Three Contributions* 11.) Essentially, Freud’s exploration of sexuality suggests that girls become conscious of their sex by observing males and automatically assuming the superiority of the male organ, as she is perceived to only “lack” it (Freud, “Female Sexuality” 25.) This differentiation leads to the concept of penis envy, followed by the masculinity complex (Freud, “Some Psychological Consequences” 13.) The girl’s sense of disadvantage upon realizing the absence of a penis, coupled with the desire to obtain one, culminates in a wish for a baby as a substitute for the unattainable penis (Freud, “On the Sexual Theories of Children” 16.) Freud depicts the girl as the perpetual Other, engaged in an endless struggle to possess and acquire attributes similar to her male counterpart.

Freud's thoughts and accounts on female and male sexuality were enough to prove that women were just the other sex, "the lacking Other, belittled and devalued" (González-Barrientos and Napolitano 372). But, in addition to Freud's assertions, medical documents based on the anatomical and physiological differences between the sexes—for instance, male's "heavier musculature" (Millett 27)—showed the weak nature of women as well (Potts 21; Dinshaw 14.) Acknowledging physical differences and the superiority of the male body, as those documents and Freud's theories did, was the way of "grant[ing] patriarchy logical as well as historical origin" (Millett 27.) As Millett emphasized in her assertion, biology served as the instrument through which patriarchy could provide tangible proof favoring the notion of women as the vulnerable and submissive gender. However, following in the footsteps of Simone de Beauvoir, feminists consider this argument insufficient to endorse women's disadvantaged status.

With the perception of women's physical inferiority came the perception of an inferior intellectual capacity, which permeated the fields of education and psychology (Millett 58). The intellectual inferiority was explained as "natural" and was perpetuated by not allowing women to receive an equal education to that of men (Friedan 93). In this way, every mentioned aspect that contributes to women's inferior position is actually "culturally encouraged" (Millett 28), using education. In Betty Friedan's words, education is "the matrix of human evolution" (301), so if women were not allowed to be formally educated, how could they evolve? how could they escape that position they were subjected to? Women's restriction to education, then, functioned as a way of reinforcing the current patriarchal system. It was not until the 19th century, in the United Kingdom and the United States, that girls and women could receive formal education (Madigan 1). Before that, their education was reduced to the domestic sphere. For instance, in the medieval United Kingdom, education was received either from the

family or the Church, in many cases this only happened when the family wanted the girl to pursue a religious life (Hall 197).

In the 19th century, before finally being allowed to receive education, British girls were taught at home by governesses or in “dame schools” (Barnard 2). The education girls received in these schools or by governesses was based on gender and the social ideas related to the biological sex; they received instruction in sewing, household management, culinary skills, laundry, and etiquette, with higher-class individuals also learning the art of refined conversation and servant management (Martin 8-9). This was also the case in the United States. There, girls attended schools with the same purpose as in the United Kingdom, while boys were prepared to access superior schools called town schools. Only in the 19th century were girls accepted in those superior schools (Madigan 1). Later on, in the same century, in the United States, some women’s colleges like Mount Holyoke opened while others started admitting women and offering “education unquestionably equal to that of men” (Millett 75). During that same period, the situation was analogous in the United Kingdom. Women’s colleges like Cheltenham Ladies’ College or Queen’s College opened their doors. Besides, the University of London became the first institution “to award degrees to women” by the end of the 19th century (Millett 75).

The 20th century brought with it a more accessible education for women, although there were still differences to amend. Madigan affirms that at the beginning of this century, US girls were still “required to take domestic science or home economics” and in the “1960s girls were channeled into occupational choices that were limited to four categories: secretarial, nursing, teaching, or motherhood” (2). The decade of the 70s was decisive for both countries. In the United States, the Education Amendments, Title IX of the Civil Rights, were passed in 1972, making it “illegal to discriminate in public

schools on the basis of sex” (Madigan 2). In the United Kingdom, a law concerning education, among other aspects, was also passed in 1975. This was the Sex Discrimination Act which forbade any discrimination based on sex or marital status. In this way, the path was paved for women who desired to be educated. However, it was not until the second part of the 20th century that women had the opportunity to be formally educated in the same conditions as men. Up until that point, if women received any form of education, it was often a biased form that reinforced established stereotypes. Their education primarily revolved around preparing them for roles as mothers and wives. Even though some women did manage to access education during the 20th century, a considerable number of them remained confined to their households, striving to fulfill the roles of devoted wives and mothers while their husbands typically served as the breadwinners.

Even though education was a great pillar of patriarchy, other aspects contributed to its permanence. Religion played as well a “critical role (...) in supporting and perpetuating patriarchal culture and the oppression of women” (Crosby 241). One argument to explain this could be the representation of the Judeo-Christian religion as a male God, as Millett affirms that

there is some evidence that fertility cults in ancient society at some point took a turn toward patriarchy, displacing and downgrading female function in procreation and attributing the power of life to the phallus alone. Patriarchal religion could consolidate this position by the creation of a male God or gods, demoting, discrediting, or eliminating goddesses, and constructing a theology whose basic postulates are male supremacist, and one of whose central functions is to uphold and validate the patriarchal structure. (28)

According to this passage, the pagan goddesses from polytheist religions disappeared, yielding to a unique and powerful male God. The reduction of all the power to the idea of an almighty God that is imagined as a man provides yet another reason to found and support the masculine superiority that exists in society. Along with the image of a male

deity, the Church and the Bible served as instruments through which Christian ideologies permeated society. This was often achieved through narratives such as myths, which played a significant role in portraying the prescribed social and religious roles for both men and women. Illustrating these concepts can be effectively accomplished by examining a prominent instance, such as the Myth of the Fall, which will prove valuable for the subsequent literary analysis that will be undertaken in this study¹¹.

In this myth, Eve is created from Adam's rib, which has been interpreted as a subordination or submission, because the two sexes were not created in equal conditions: one—the man—emerges straight from the male God, while the other—the woman—derives from the man. To this lower origin, it must be added that it is Eve who breaks the laws in Paradise by being persuaded by the devil in snake form. This episode triggers the idea that women are weak and yield easily to temptation. At the same time, she persuades Adam to break the rules with her. Here, Eve is described as a temptress who has the power of persuasion and can doom a man. She is guilty of Adam's sins and his expulsion from Paradise, which, in turn, means that it is "the female [who is] the cause of human suffering, knowledge, and sin" (Millett 52). Women become, then, the ones to blame for all the wrong in the world and, because Eve was the cause, her punishment must be greater than that of Adam. It is not enough to expel her from Paradise, but also "painful childbirth is designated Eve's punishment for sin so that woman's creative capacity becomes an index of her guilt and submission" (Morris 20). So, even giving birth, which is women's only social role, is a reminder of their guilt. In addition to this punishment, there are other consequences for the sin: women are to

¹¹ The Myth of the Fall recalls the Myth of Pandora, with the same interpretations and consequences for the image of women. Some other religious myths related to women are the Virgin Mary, Salome, Lilith, or Magdalene.

please their husbands and be ruled by them. Consequently, right from the start of the myth until its conclusion, women find themselves positioned within a framework of subservience. This narrative confines them to two mere social roles: that of motherhood, and dutiful wives. This paradigm becomes a focal point that the chosen female writers endeavor to challenge or eradicate within the texts under analysis.

Religion defended in this way two important institutions to reinforce women's submission: marriage and family. Simone de Beauvoir asserts that women could only accept this situation because they were hoping to get into paradise, another Christian concept (749.) She affirms that the idea of an ideal place and a better life made them accept their inferior role in life without questioning it (de Beauvoir 749) Therefore, the idea of sacrifice and guilt has been exploited by religions to keep women as Others, as inferior, and without the right or will to shift that. Apart from the social roles and behaviors, religious myths have actively contributed to explaining men and women's nature, which many times involved the denigration of women images, depicting them at times as temptresses, virgins, witches, whores, etc., being all of them qualities which led to women being idealized or else condemned and demonized. The Myth of the Fall explained before contains the description of a dual woman: Eve is a weak person who can be tempted by a snake, but also a *femme fatale* who can persuade Adam to sin. This implies a quality, which will be consolidated through other myths, not only in religious terms, and will define women: duality or ambiguity. The perception of women will always oscillate from being an individual to idealize or to divinize (like the Virgin Mary), to being an individual to fear and condemn (like Eve or Lilith); they will always be outside of the "norm." For some, women are mothers, wives, virgins, muses, priestesses, nuns, or goddesses; for others, they are stepmothers, *femmes fatales*,

prostitutes, mad women, witches, shrews, or villainesses¹². And this, partly, is thanks to the portrayal that religion does of women. Through myths, women's position as subjugated, as secondary, is spread in society. Myths are, then, another instrument for patriarchy to consolidate feminine stereotypes. Mary Ellman (1968) gathers and summarizes this in nine stereotypical qualities that define femininity in a patriarchal society (formlessness, passivity, instability, confinement, piety, materiality, spirituality, irrationality, and compliance), and two stereotypical characters (the Shrew and the Witch¹³). These qualities and characters have their origins in myths, but also in all the previously explained social, psychological, or biological aspects.

Myths have an imperative role in society since they are “several ways the human being, body/psyche, perceives, understands, and relates to the world” (Le Guin, “Myth and Archetype in Science Fiction” 74.) To this, Ashley King adds that “myth is pervasive” (88). Myths, therefore, are stories that attempt to explain the world and its functioning, which will be transmitted through time and that will influence society. The problem lies in the fact that the representation of the world as it is known—that is to say, the amount of myths that teach different aspects of the world—, as Simone de Beauvoir says, is made by men, and “they describe it from a point of view that is their own and that they confound with the absolute truth” (196). Joanna Russ agrees with de Beauvoir and expands on that idea in the following fragment:

Culture is male (...) What it does mean (among other things) is that the society we live in is a patriarchy. And patriarchies imagine or picture themselves from the male point of view. There is a female culture, but it is underground, unofficial, minor culture, occupying a small corner of what we think of officially as possible human experience. Both men *and women* in our culture conceive the culture from a single point of view –the male. (Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* 80-81)

¹² Examples of other well-known myths that may have contributed to these traits are the Nine Muses, the Sirens, Hera, Circe, Medusa, Penelope, the Parcae, the Amazons, the Mad Woman in the Attic, the Angel in the House, etc.

¹³ These are deeply explained in *Thinking about Women* (1968.) The one pertaining to our study is the Witch, which will be developed further later on.

Therefore, myths have also been created by men, leading to the one-sided vision of women, who had not glimpsed the chance of defining and creating their images. Myths, thus, also played their part “in persuading women of the naturalness of their fate” (Fallaise 89). In this way, women have assumed their position and have not been able to change their situation until the arrival of the feminist movement. This situation will be changed by women who, applying the tenets of the movement and helped by the genre of SF, will be able to give women their room to prove that it is not their “fate” to be relegated to Others.

This relegation has been facilitated through various mechanisms employed by patriarchy to rationalize its perpetuation. Through this analysis, it becomes evident that women have been cast into the role of the Other, signifying that they are not considered the reference. Instead, the attributes that define them are traced back to a superior category assumed by men, which serves as the reference point and social norm:

As both the primitive and the civilized worlds are male worlds, the ideas that shaped culture regarding the female were also of male design. The image of women as we know it is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of the “Otherness” of women. Yet this notion itself presupposes that patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set himself as the human norm, the subject and referent to which the female is “other” or alien (Millett 46).

Millett summarizes in this fragment what has been analyzed in the previous section: laws, society, sexuality, education, religion, myths, etc. have been modeled by men. For this reason, women cannot define themselves if it is not about men. Then, men become the universal, while women are just the other sex, the alien. Simone de Beauvoir already dealt with this idea, which can be observed in the following excerpt:

Humanity is male, and man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself; she is not considered an autonomous being. (...) And she is nothing other than what man decides (...) She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other. (26)

De Beauvoir's line of thought in this fragment refers to the fact that genders have traditionally been essentially defined in relation to the sexes. The essentialist conception of genders implies that women and men have been bestowed with some social traits that are specific for and come along with their sex. These characteristics define the "essence" or "nature" of women and men. For instance, one could say that being aggressive is an essential trait attributed to males while being emotional is an essential characteristic associated with females. These two features, according to essentialism, are psychological consequences of the biological sexes. Nonetheless, de Beauvoir stands in opposition to this fundamental notion, contending that neither a feminine nor a masculine essence is innately linked to one's biological sex. She argues that genders are not preordained but rather products of social construction. To put it differently, individuals may be born with a particular biological sex, yet they do not inherently possess the social attributes, stereotypes, or roles that are tied to it. Instead, these aspects are acquired when they are in contact with the social and cultural realm. De Beauvoir expressed this thought in her well-known statement "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (330). This assertion implies that essentialism is not a solid argument with which to support men's superiority and, consequently, women's inferiority, because, in the end, the sexual hierarchy can only be explained in the context of a society, not just by "natural" or biological terms. Nonetheless, this essentialism, as it has been explained before, has been used historically to place men in a privileged position, which leaves women as the second sex, the oppressed, the Other.

The question of the Other (or the oppressed) started to flourish, according to Luce Irigaray, in the 19th century, when society started paying attention to "children, the mad, 'savages,' [or] workers" ("The Question of the Other" 7). Irigaray affirms that, even though the attention towards these "other" people was increasing, "the fundamental

model of the human being remained unchanged: one, singular, solitary, historically masculine, the paradigmatic western adult male, rational, capable.” So, those others were Others in relation to a referential model, and, as Irigaray suggests, the Other was “experienced in a hierarchical manner.” This means that it is the *One* (or the dominant) who gives the *Other* such category, as de Beauvoir affirmed in this statement: “It is not the Other who, defining itself as Other, defines the One; the Other is posited as Other by the One positing itself as One” (27) So, in this hierarchical relation, the Others are defined by “their inadequacies with respect to the ideal [the One]: age, reason, ethnicity, culture, and so on” (Irigaray, “The Question of the Other” 7.) These inadequacies include sex.

Provided that the referential model is the western adult male, being female is an inadequacy. This supports Irigaray’s claim that men “ha[ve] reduced all Otherness to a relationship to himself” (Irigaray, “The Question of the Other” 10). Like this, women become objects of the “models and laws devised by male subjects” (Irigaray, “This Sex which is not One” 86). Women play no part in defining their social role or even in their “inner life or consciousness” (Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* 82), and they have “to maintain the social order without intervening so as to change it” (Irigaray, “This Sex which is not One” 185). To some extent, this becomes a predicament from which women cannot escape: they are defined by the norm, but they have assumed those definitions and perform them until those images are perceived by them as their fate, so they cannot elude the status quo. As was pointed out previously, this status quo limited the social role and created images of women that could be contradictory. Regardless of the role or image, all attributes by which women can be defined derive from a masculine perspective; therefore, women do not have a definition of their own and do not have a purpose unless it is related to men, and this does not only concern the social sphere.

Women's bodies and sexuality are defined in relation to that of men, as it was mentioned in the previous section. Even though this view of women as the Other of men is perpetuated mostly through biological, anatomical, and psychoanalytical explanations, there exist other factors that contributed as well to this perspective. To dismantle these rooted ideas of Otherness and help women create their definitions and roles, among other reasons, the feminist movement emerged.

Reaching a stable definition of feminism has been controversial, and it has been in constant evolution. Scholars, given the complexity of the term, have tried to shed light on the concept by suggesting many definitions, some of which will be mentioned to create one that is relevant to the interests of this dissertation. A straightforward explanation of the controversial term would be the one proposed by Robin Anne Reid: "Feminism names the interdisciplinary political understanding focused on questions of social justice and inequality in the status and treatment of women" (117). Reid brands feminism as a political movement, which is a recurrent label shared by all the authors that we will name in this section. For instance, Denise Thompson asserts that "from the outset, it should be obvious that feminism is a social enterprise, a moral and political framework concerned with redressing social wrongs" (7). These "social wrongs" and "inequality" that Denise Thompson and Reid name are also mentioned by Pam Morris who, in addition, expands the main idea of feminism, saying that it focuses on two premises:

1) that gender difference is the foundation of structural inequality between women and men, by which women suffer systematic social injustice, and (2) the inequality between the sexes is not the result of biological necessity but is produced by the cultural construction of gender differences (1).

As these critics suggest, feminism takes as a starting point the injustice and inequality problems derived from gender differences. As Denise Thompson asserts, this

gender difference, which is upheld by biological arguments, is culturally transformed as “male domination,” and feminism has the purpose of “challeng[ing] it” (8). The feminist movement, then, stands up for the rights of women in a society in which they are not considered equal to men and are treated as inferior. Feminism is a necessary political movement that, using Denise Thompson’s words, “challenges” this patriarchal system. Drawing on Kate Millett’s definition of politics—“power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another” (22)—, it can be noticed that the social position of women is a consequence of a political system, which in this case is patriarchy (men control women.) To dismantle the political patriarchal system, feminism must be as well political.

The feminist objective of questioning males’ domination over females does not mean that feminism regards only women; in fact, it is, according to Mary S. Van Leeuwen, a task that involves everyone that forms society:

I will define a feminist as a person of either sex who works to bring about social, economic, and political justice between women and men in a given society. Such work is motivated by a conviction that the devaluation of women and their activities is wrong and that the systematic disempowering of women in relation to men is unjust. Feminist activity thus focuses on the situation and needs of women, even though it may eventually benefit people of both sexes. It assumes that women and men share a common humanity but also that their different experiences (whatever their origin) must be taken into account (33-4).

Van Leeuwen proposes in this excerpt that feminism would not only be beneficial to women because equality involves all human beings; thus, the whole society should play a part in this movement. She also gives a detailed explanation of her definition regarding feminism and, again, the words “political justice” are used. Along with the previous definitions of feminism, Van Leeuwen mentions the idea that the movement focuses on the search for equality and the dissolution of a system that does not take women into account.

These principal aims are clear, but it is also important to clarify that the movement is not fixed, it evolves as society progresses. A brief account of this evolution is given by Jane Donawerth:

feminists in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries defended women against misogynist stereotypes, while later feminists argued first for women's right to education and to preach (sixteenth to nineteenth centuries), then for marriage reform and for women's right to divorce (eighteenth to twentieth centuries), and then for women's right to vote, inherit property, and share ownership in marriage property (from nineteenth to twentieth centuries) (214).

As it is described, the movement has been in constant evolution affecting both the private and public lives of women. Feminism through the years has occupied itself not only with the idea of social and political equality between men and women but also with the idea of embracing the difference. This implies the widening of the concept of women. So far we have referred to what Morris calls "mainstream feminism" (165), which is the political movement that "tended to articulate the viewpoint of white, heterosexual women as *the* woman's view" (Morris 165). Feminism began as a movement for the liberation of women, being these women white and middle-class, probably because they were the only ones with slightly more presence in public social matters (Millett 26)¹⁴. However, as the 20th century moved on, so did feminism. The movement became more inclusive, paying attention to diverse kinds of women regarding their class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Furthermore, it involved the differences between women and men. Feminism moved to believe that that women did not need to be equal to men; on the contrary, women needed to highlight their sexual traits, and their sexual specificity, to achieve a society that respects both sexes.

As feminism evolves, it becomes clearer that it is a political movement that stands for the abolition of patriarchy; that is, the elimination of a system that is hierarchically

¹⁴ It is worth noting that while they might occasionally wield power, their social class generally didn't afford them any definition beyond being perceived as the "Other" in comparison to men. (Millett 26)

organized in terms of sex¹⁵, being men the dominant and women the oppressed, the resulting secondary position of women in all spheres (education, social rights, working life, private and political lives, etc.). As it has been explained, women have not escaped this position, because of the different patriarchal supports which have contributed to the creation and perpetuation of genders. The social stereotypes which form these social constructs known as genders are in the spotlight of feminism because they are the basis of patriarchy. A feminist society will be one in which, without genders, people will enjoy social justice and equality. The ultimate feminist objective is, therefore, the abolition of gender stereotypes associated with the sexes, which now make the sexual hierarchy endure. The feminist aim concerns women regardless of their origins or characteristics and proposes that there is a need for women to assume their real position in society and use the voice that they have been lacking. This position of inferiority and marginalization that women suffered has been historically justified but the feminist movement has worked from its origins, as it will be explained in the next section, and still works to break with the masculine cultural point of view, to destroy the myths surrounding women and to give voice to a culture that was silenced by a masculine one.

Even though sex inequalities have been present throughout history, the feminist thought started to gain importance at the end of the 19th century in the United Kingdom and the United States, when the words ‘feminist’ and ‘feminism’ “entered the English language” (Donawerth, *Feminisms* 214)¹⁶. From this moment, as Kristeva suggested, the feminist movement in Europe and the United States undergoes different phases

¹⁵It is important to clarify that while patriarchy is rooted in gender concepts—social stereotypes associated with biological sex—it ultimately hinges on sex as the foundational element since, at birth, individuals are assigned one of two genders solely based on their biological sex.

¹⁶ The fact that the terms were made official at the end of that century does not imply that the feminist thought was not present before that time. Donawerth listed some injustices that women had to deal with before “feminism” was known as such: between the 14th and the 19th centuries, women fought against misogynist stereotypes, for the right to education or to preach, etc.; from the 19th century, she explains that the struggle moved on to matters such as marriage, divorce, the right to vote, or to inherit (*Feminisms* 214).

which are known as waves. The first wave (late 19th - early 20th centuries) dealt with “political demands” like “equal pay,” “taking power in social institutions,” “rejection (...) of the attributes traditionally considered feminine,” etc. (Kristeva 18-19). In this first wave, feminists achieved some privileges for women, although these privileges were oriented toward the “Universal Woman” (white, middle-class, and adult) who wanted to be socially and politically equal to men (Kristeva 19). The second wave emerged in the 1960s, which considered that there is not just *one* type of woman. This wave defended the sexual difference and the value of being a woman, although it rejected the “femininity” (or the attributes associated with being a woman) imposed by patriarchal society but celebrated the female body. This second wave is the wave that looks for “sociocultural recognition of women”; it follows the idea that women need to find their “own identity” (Kristeva 19). As R. Claire Snyder summarizes, “classic second-wave feminism argues that in patriarchal societies women share common experiences, and through a sharing of their experiences (...) they can generate knowledge about their oppression” (184).

The Feminine Mystique is believed to have marked the starting point of this wave, which is characterized by a division of the movement into two branches known as liberal and radical, although there will eventually be four lines of thought including the cultural and the socialist feminism¹⁷ (Snyder, “What is Third-Wave Feminism?” 181.)

¹⁷ Cultural feminism is a significant strand within the feminist movement that emerged during the second wave. According to Linda Alcoff, cultural feminism adopts an essentialist perspective, emphasizing the unique qualities and values associated with women and seeking to revalue them within the social context (408). Unlike earlier feminist waves, which often emphasized women’s entry into traditionally male-dominated spaces, cultural feminism instead posits that “women’s world is full of superior virtues and values, to be credited and learned from rather than despise” (411, 414). Socialist feminism integrates Marxism to the feminist ideology. It emerged as a response to liberal feminism, which aimed to achieve equal access in political, educational and economic contexts (Bowman 703). Socialist feminists believed that such ideas only benefitted middle-class women and condemned them to the same state that men suffered in the economic context (Bowman 703). They argued that society needed a transformation, as women did not only need to enter the workforce, but needed also certain conditions like “reorganizing the family” (703).

The liberal branch of feminism is known for highlighting and raising awareness of the oppressed position of women. These liberal feminists were concerned with the professional and personal spheres of women, blaming their oppressive situation on their absence in the public spheres. They aimed to achieve political and legal equality, mostly by introducing women to the labor market. The radical feminists, for their part, underlined the deeply rooted patriarchy and aimed to eliminate it by scrutinizing every aspect of life, every scientific or cultural discipline. The “the personal is political” slogan of this radical branch of the second wave summarizes what these feminists were after: to revise what was considered as private, like family or sexuality, and uncover what was sustaining them, “the roots” of that system. Whatever concerned women’s lives was to be analyzed and restructured (Snyder, “What is Third-Wave Feminism?” 184.) Radical feminism paved the way for difference feminism, which assumed the sexual difference between men and women but emphasized the idea that this difference does not imply a sexual hierarchy.

The third wave, which emerged in the 90s, continues with this idea of “difference and specificity,” although the focus of this wave is to destroy gender oppositions and to open the movement to every aspect related to women: sexuality, class, ethnicity, etc. (Kristeva 21; Reid 118.) Donawerth names the third wave as “Generation X feminism” and explains that it has “emphasized women’s collective political action and global issues” (“Feminisms” 215.) Contrary to the second wave, the third wave feminists “reject the universalist claim that all women share a set of common experiences” but still highlight the importance of individual experiences and their richness, as “there is no one way to be a woman” (Snyder, “What is Third-Wave Feminism?” 185.) The category of woman is, thus, blurred, with the consequent decentering of the feminist movement. Feminism “seeks to avoid exclusions based on race, ethnicity, religion,

sexual orientation, gender identity, and so forth. It recognizes that women in different subject positions often have very different perspectives” (Snyder, “Third-Wave Feminism” 259.) The third wave of feminism also saw the emergence of Judith Butler's groundbreaking contributions, solidifying her as a pivotal figure in queer theory. The philosopher introduced the concept of the performativity of gender in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), arguing that gender is not something that one inherently possesses, but rather something that is continually enacted or performed through various actions, behaviors, and language within specific social contexts. Contrary to traditional views that see gender as a stable, essential aspect of individuals, Butler argues that gender is performative rather than innate. This means that gender is not predetermined by biology or anatomy but is constructed and reinforced through repetitive social actions and behaviors. Butler extends her argument to propose that sex itself is a social construct, suggesting that both gender and sex are contextual and subject to change based on societal, temporal, and individual factors. This undermines the conventional practice of categorizing individuals into binary terms, as both sex and gender are fluid concepts. Such fluidity opens up the possibility for a myriad of diverse gender expressions beyond traditional binary categories¹⁸.

It must be said that not all experts consider this to be the only division of the phases or waves of feminism, especially in Europe. Nuria Varela suggests that the previous division corresponds to the “Anglo-Saxon feminist theorists,” because they consider that the first wave of feminism started with the Suffragist movement while for other theorists like herself, it started with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution

¹⁸ While acknowledging the significance of Judith Butler and her theory, it must be noted that her perspective does not align with the focus of this dissertation. Butler's ideas primarily pertain to the study of identity rather than a political and social movement centered around women as political subjects. Furthermore, Butler's assertion that sex and gender are synonymous contradicts the premise of sexual hierarchies. In this dissertation, it is crucial to acknowledge that power dynamics within a patriarchal society are deeply rooted in the concept of sex. This is evident from the moment of birth, as individuals are assigned one of two genders based on the sex they are born with.

(36). According to Varela, this is because this was the time when “the principle of equality” appeared for the first time and, paradoxically, women were still excluded from it (Varela 29). For her, the second wave began in the 19th century with the Seneca Falls Convention on the Rights of Women (1948) while the next wave started with the publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) (32, 34). She agrees with Donawerth about the period of “postfeminism” and situates it from the 80s to the 90s, affirming that the decade entailed a complete revision of feminism (Varela 101). Taking these two perspectives regarding the waves of feminism, Varela now debates whether we find ourselves within the fourth wave of this “tsunami,” as she defines feminism (36). The fourth wave is a new phase of the movement which, according to Kira Cochrane, started in the second decade of the 21st century and is characterized as a global phenomenon (Varela 78; Cochrane). This phenomenon is primarily attributed to technological advancements, which enabled feminist activism to extend its reach into social media and the broader landscape of the internet (Varela 251, 252; Cochrane). Thanks to cyber activism, the movement has managed to become intergenerational and, following the spirit of diversity, it has also become intersectional (Varela 93; Cochrane). From the end of the 20th century, feminism believes that there are multiple oppressions (age, ethnicity, class, origin, etc.) which intersect with sex and, therefore, have to be addressed by the movement. So, as Varela affirms, the movement is now feminist, international, ecologist, and anti-racist (96, 236). It focuses on social matters and systemic problems such as “everyday sexism,” the objectification of women in advertising and sex industry, rape, abortion, “misogynistic murders,” gender violence, etc. (Varela 223, 226, 228, 343; Cochrane.) Apart from cyberactivism, the fourth wave of feminism is characterized by its protests, strikes and demonstrations, which, unlike in other waves, entail an immediate impact all over the world. Varela

affirms that the turning point occurred in March 2018 with the first global feminist strike. In this strike, women in 170 countries were called by the feminists for a strike to support women's rights, especially focusing on gender violence.

As can be noticed, throughout the feminist revolution, the objectives of the movement became wider. The aims of the first correspond to what we called before "mainstream feminism," which is addressed to white, heterosexual, middle-class women. The second wave implies a political turn in the movement that is followed by a wider concept of feminism in the third wave which includes aspects like ethnicity, class, or sexuality. Most importantly, what the third wave started was the idea of an inclusive movement which extended widely until it reached its fourth wave. Feminism and its evolution entailed a rethinking of the patriarchal discourse that dominates society; thus, an exercise of reconceptualizing has to be carried out in society so that patriarchal laws, and its institutions (marriage, family, etc.) are redefined for society to become a space in which individuals can live in a situation of equality, regardless of their sex (Phoca 50-51). This brief revision of the waves of feminism is crucial for the analysis to understand the selected writers and texts in their contexts, as they will be inscribed in different waves. Thus, Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1978) and Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate* (1988) belong to the second wave of feminism; Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992) was published during the third wave; and, finally, *The Power* (2016) was launched in the context of the fourth wave.

The necessity of redefining society pursued by feminism is represented in every sphere. The values modeled by patriarchal society are also portrayed in cultural aspects, which include literature. Joanna Russ affirmed that "our literature (...) is by and about men" (*To Write Like a Woman* 81.) In the same way as society is structured by men, so is literature. Literature has been predominantly written by men, providing a patriarchal

imaginary for both men and women. In literature, narratives often intertwine with myths and entrenched stereotypes of women, highlighting their ambiguity and duality. Simultaneously, these elements also contribute to the perpetuation of such stereotypes. Then, female characters do not act like representations of actual women but like “images of women” (damsels, witches, stepmothers, lovers, wives, prostitutes, etc.) that normally “exist in relation to the protagonist (who is male)” (Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* 81.) Women’s role in literature as characters is relegated, like in real life, to a secondary position which complements and helps define the main character, who is generally male (Hollinger 125)

It was not until the 19th century with the emergence of female writers like Mary Shelley, Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, and Emily Dickinson among others that women had more access to images of women described by women or had a prominent voice in literature. Nonetheless, although women’s voices were increasingly present in literature, this fact did not imply that their characters and novels escaped patriarchy. For a text to be considered feminist literature it must possess certain characteristics. The term “feminist literature” was proposed by Elaine Showalter in 1977 to describe a growing body of literature that explores women’s experiences, perspectives, and challenges through a feminist lens. Feminist literature must bring to light the situation of women in society, becoming thus a resource for those who want to change it and for those who need to be informed. Feminist fiction’s purpose is to dismantle the images, myths, stereotypes, and conventions that surrounded women while providing a voice to a culture that was unknown. Moreover, this kind of literature does not need to be written by women; however, women’s inclusion in literature as writers, readers, and important characters was indicative of feminism growing and bursting into all spheres of society.

The growth of the movement and the inclusion of women in the literary spheres gave rise to what is known as feminist literary criticism. Like the movement, feminist criticism

contests the hegemonic representations of a patriarchal culture that does not recognize its “others.” Like other critical discourses, it works to create a critical distance between observers and observed, to defamiliarize certain taken-for-granted aspects of ordinary human reality, “denaturalizing” situations of historical inequity and/or oppression that otherwise may appear inevitable to us, if indeed we notice them at all (Hollinger 129).

Some time ago, literature was an important, if not the only, means to transmit values, thoughts, or traditions. Many of the stereotypes and images of women have been conveyed through it either in oral or written texts. Feminism, therefore, works in the literary field to try to transform or “defamiliarize” those images, until they stopped being used as stereotypes. There exist several ways of doing this, but even though there are different perspectives, they all try to remove the idea that women are defined with respect to men and, therefore, are personifications of the word Otherness. As Morris claims, “Feminist literary criticism as a recognizable practice begins at the end of the 1960s, with the project of rereading the traditional canon of ‘great’ literary texts, challenging their claims to disinterestedness and questioning their authority as always the best of *human* thought and expression” (37). To carry out this project, feminist criticism can focus on different aspects. Elaine Showalter suggests that there are two main ones: women as readers and women as writers (268).

Showalter calls the first case “feminist critique,” which is concerned with “the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history” (268). In this case, the feminist critique acts to raise awareness of the conventional portrait of women elaborated throughout literary history. It allows the text to have another interpretation, rather than the traditional one, which can show fascinating aspects like “sexual codes,”

and can help start undoing some stereotypes associated with women (Showalter 268). On the other hand, the other focus that feminist critics can consider is women as authors. In this case, the matters that can be studied are “female creativity,” “female language,” “the individual or collective female literary career,” or “studies of particular writers and works” (Showalter 268). This kind of criticism is what Showalter calls “gynocritics,” which deals with women as “producer[s] of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres, and structures of literature by women” (Showalter 268)¹⁹. From this point of view, Showalter suggests that the artistic creation of women has experienced three distinct phases.

The first phase is called the “feminine phase” (from 1840 to 1880) in which female writers imitated the dominant culture and “internalized” the values of patriarchal discourse. The second phase is the “feminist phase” (1880-1920), or the phase of political awareness, in which authors protest patriarchal values and fight for autonomy. Finally, the last one is the “female phase” (1920-present), in which authors look for their own identity, rejecting “imitation and protest” while experiencing self-discovery (Showalter 270; Morris 66; Moi 66.) The authors that belong to this last phase defend the need to create room for the development of women as writers but also as individuals. The authors with whom this dissertation deals belong to this last phase²⁰.

This idea was also developed by other famous thinkers like Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva. All these thinkers aim to destroy patriarchy and to create a new type of writing that belongs to women, untied to the patriarchal discourse. Cixous

¹⁹ Showalter’s influence in feminist criticism is unquestionable; however, she has been judged by her effort to insert women’s literature in the literary canon which she herself criticized. To delve into this debate, consult the following: Eagleton, Mary. “Literary Representations of Women.” *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 105–119.

²⁰ While the authors of the dissertation have been considered in this recent phase, it is plausible that “the female phase” has already transitioned into a new iteration.

relates her thoughts regarding this in “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1976.) She elaborates on the idea that women need to write about themselves and for themselves:

I shall speak about women’s writing: about *what it will do*. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement (Cixous 875).

To do this, she proposes a series of ideas to draw on, arguing that “women’s imaginary is inexhaustible (...): their stream of phantasms is incredible” (Cixous 876). The ideas that she exposes are based on Freud’s psychoanalytical thoughts about women’s sexuality that placed them as the castrated Other, as lack, or as an object. Cixous rejects Freud’s assertions and affirms that women are not the Other anymore, because by “dislocating” this position, they make it their own (Cixous 887). She also claims that women need to regain power over their bodies by creating from it: women need to “return from afar, from always: from ‘without,’ from the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond ‘culture’” (Cixous 877). In this way, the *écriture feminine*, as Cixous calls it, is writing the female body.

Because women had been kept in the darkness, now, according to Cixous, it is time they “wrote their self.” For her, this kind of writing cannot be theorized since the possibilities are endless, but women’s writing necessarily means a rupture with the patriarchal discourse. To do that, women need to write their sexuality, their bodily functions (menstruation, giving birth, breastfeeding, etc.), in short, experiences that only women can go through. Luce Irigaray also stresses the idea of writing the body because she also supports the necessity of a specific woman’s writing²¹. She believes that this specificity is because women have a specific language and that the aim of this should be

²¹ These ideas based on the importance of bodily experiences have been criticized with the rise of the transgender/queer theories which defend that “women” are not only those who menstruate or give birth. This refers to trans people who do not identify with the sex they were born with.

to point out the differences between two different subjects (men and women) rather than subject (men) and object (women) (Irigaray, “The Question of the Other” 10-11.) As it can be seen, she also rejects the idea of women being defined by men, because she considers them a subject of the same importance.

Julia Kristeva also defends the same idea²². She believes that women need to find their kind of writing by means of “finding a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnamable repressed by the social contract” (Kristeva 25). Kristeva suggests that “sexual difference (...) is translated by and translates a difference in the relationship of subjects to the (...) social contract: a difference, then, in the relationship to power, language and meaning” (21). This suggests that patriarchal discourse is created and limited by that social order, but it also implies that meanings are not absolute and, therefore, another discourse can transform them. She claims that this is the purpose of the “feminist subversion” which will “try to discover, first, the specificity of the female, and then, in the end, that of each individual woman” (Kristeva 21). If we extrapolate this to literature, it can be said that feminist discourse could have the capacity to find new meanings to already-existing resources such as myths, archetypes, and worlds. For instance, writers can rewrite myths to deconstruct and rebuild their meanings. As it can be noticed, literature becomes a resource for feminism to give voice to the sector of society that has been silenced throughout history, not only by allowing women to respond to canonical texts but also by allowing women to express themselves through writing, to find their discourse, of creating their own identity. One of the literary genres that they will explore is SF, which will be explained thoroughly in the following section.

²² While Kristeva delved into this concept, she also voiced reservations regarding its implications, citing essentialist notions.

1.2. Rethinking SF

After having reviewed the role of women in society, as well as the concept of feminism and its development in literature, the study must focus now on feminist SF²³. However, before delving into feminist SF, it is important to disambiguate the confusion surrounding SF itself. This literary genre is problematic to define since there is no consensus among the experts. Some critics consider that SF belongs to a wider literary trend known as speculative fiction, as Inge-Lise Paulsen affirms:

I shall use the umbrella term “speculative fiction” to include not just Utopian literature in a narrow sense but also the related areas of science fiction and fantasy, and I shall do this because these areas—in spite of a lot of important differences—share the element of ‘speculation.’ Through ‘speculation,’ or ‘thought experiments,’ writers of speculative fiction achieve a freedom to look at reality as something relative and ask themselves, ‘Now what if...?’ (103).

So, speculative fiction is a term that includes fiction that deals with exercises of speculation or conjecture that try to find an answer to the question that Paulsen reflects above. Judith Merril’s understanding of speculative fiction helps expand on this idea: it is a literary category that works with “stories whose objective is to explore, to discover, to *learn*, through projection, extrapolation, analogue, hypothesis-and-paper-experimentation, something about the nature of the universe, of man, of ‘reality’” (27). Moreover, speculative fiction “pushes the boundaries of the known and the experienced and incorporates elements of the numinous, the magical and the inexplicable...” (Polack 1). Speculative fiction is, then, a term that includes texts that are concerned with the exploration of irrational, supernatural, magical, or futuristic elements that differ from the real world, and yet help shed some light on humanity’s present and reality. According to these definitions, speculative fiction is a wide term that includes works

²³ According to Merrick, this term is “formalized” in 1978 “in the title of an article by Pamela J. Annas in the critical journal *Science Fiction Studies*: ‘New Worlds, New Words, Androgyny in Feminist Science Fiction’” (*The Secret Feminist Cabal* 119).

that belong to supernatural fiction, horror fiction, SF, fantasy, utopia,²⁴ or dystopia, amongst others. It will be useful to describe and compare the last three which are the ones pertaining to this study and are often confused.

On the one hand, SF is considered to be indirectly involved with aspects of reality or *possible* aspects of reality (Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* 9.) By “possible,” Joanna Russ suggests that the components present in SF might not exist in our current reality, but they remain coherent through rational explanations or could potentially manifest in the future under suitable conditions. By “indirectly,” Russ indicates that SF incorporates temporal, spatial, or character elements that diverge from the reader’s familiar reality yet retain a sense of familiarity. The reader, then, finds that “science fiction renders temporal relations uncertain and makes the familiar appear strange, and its fantasies of the future provide a critical view of the present” (Wolmark 8) Either turning the strange into familiar or turning the familiar into strange, SF provokes the same effect: a reflection on the reader’s reality, on the consequences or improvements of the actual state of affairs. Wendy G. Pearson, Veronica Hollinger, and Joan Gordon also believe so:

science fiction notoriously reflects contemporary realities back to us through the lens of a particular type of imagination, one associated with the future, with the potentials of technology, and with the important idea that life does not remain static; what we know today may be entirely different tomorrow (3).

The authors here highlight two of the key traits of SF: future and technology. To the issues of unknown future times—and, therefore, spaces—, now technology—or science in general—is added. The peculiarity of the science or technology used in SF texts is that it might not be familiar to either the reader or the writer, which can be the reason why Ursula K. Le Guin refers to SF as “experiments of the imagination” (Le Guin, “Is

²⁴The term utopia is highly controversial, since some critics consider that it is a literary genre on its own, while others think that it is a subgenre of speculative fiction or of SF.

Gender Necessary?” 163.) Authors are required to engage in “experimentation” within their writings, delving into alien locations, unimagined technologies, and even nonexistent languages. This forward-looking exploration and the ability to create without limitations contribute to making SF a promising genre, owing to its capacity to encompass a diverse number of issues.

Nevertheless, because SF can surpass the confines of reality, it is often taken as fantasy. This confusion may be logical since both SF and fantasy are genres within the range of speculative fiction, so they will work with the unknown and its relation to reality. However, while fantasy portrays the unknown as something that is impossible—that cannot occur in reality—, SF handles situations that have not happened yet but *can* happen²⁵. In this way, fantasy contradicts the real world, while SF connects with it (Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* 16.) Russ’s explanation backs Tzvetan Todorov’s, who in his *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1970) suggests three types of literature associated with the fantastic or non-realistic: the fantastic, the marvelous, and the uncanny (42) From all of them, Todorov relates SF to the marvelous, which “corresponds to an unknown phenomenon, never seen as yet, still to come—hence to a future” (42) For him, SF is a synonym of what he calls “scientific marvelous” and explains that in these works “the supernatural is explained in a rational manner, but according to laws that contemporary science does not acknowledge” (Todorov 56) In other words, the “supernatural”—what is unknown—in SF narratives is perfectly logical and plausible although it requires an explanation, while in fantastic fiction, the supernatural does not require an explanation, it is simply assumed or explained by irrational means.

²⁵ It is important to clarify that even though the events in SF stories can happen, it does not mean that they will occur. Authors do not predict; they speculate.

For example, the time travel trope would work differently in SF and fantasy. On the one hand, in SF, time travel would be possible thanks to science and technology, so even though it is not real in the readers' world, it might be at some point in the future. On the other hand, time travel in fantasy would occur for magical reasons, for example, spells or charms, and, consequently, it is impossible in the real world. So what happens in SF is the following: "(...) the unreal is not emphasized, but rather explained; or to be more accurate, the fantastic in SF is coded as real rather than unreal, without being any more or any less a code. SF, then, involves the thrill of seeing the unreal become the believed real" (Bagwell 40-41). What is supernatural in the reader's world is the real in SF, it is something that fits within the narrative employing a rational explanation, but in fantasy, the supernatural just happens and there is no logical explanation for it; it simply occurs.

To the idea of the "possible," the rational, Fernando Ángel Moreno provides another key element for SF which is the effect that SF stories provoke in the reader. Due to this effect, Moreno differs from Todorov's idea of SF belonging to the "marvelous." He explains this affirming that fantastic literature causes a feeling of unease or terror, the marvelous provokes amazement and SF stimulates reflection (94). This reflection, according to Russ, has its origin in the alienating effect (*To Write Like a Woman* 23). This phenomenon emerges from the blend of the recognizable and the unfamiliar that readers encounter when engaging with a SF text. The reader is immersed in an unfamiliar yet partly recognizable fabricated world. Simultaneously, the elements they recognize from their reality are transformed into something strange when placed within an unfamiliar setting. This compels readers to interrogate and discern the resemblances or deviations from the real world, consequently navigating their path through the narrative (Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* 20). They find themselves entangled between

two realms, needing distancing from each reality to establish connections and contemplate their real context.

These ideas are based on two key concepts in SF theory, cognitive estrangement, and novum, introduced by Darko Suvin in 1979. Csicsery-Ronay affirms that cognitive estrangement “conflated two distinct (...) ideas of estrangement from earlier literary theory: *ostranenie* (de-familiarization) from the Russian Formalists, and Berthold Brecht’s *Verrfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect)” (118). Along with this, cognitive estrangement is related to the concept of novum: “the novum is the historical innovation or novelty in a sf text from which the most important distinctions between the world of the tale from the world of the reader stem. It is, by definition, rational (...)” (Csicsery-Ronay 118). According to Brian Attebery, the novum depends on “a set or presuppositions (...) [which] include ideas about the physical world, social realities, and the organization of lived experiences” (33). The novum represents an element, an event, or scenario that lacks familiarity (“the supernatural”). However, through rational explanation, it allows speculation within narratives and triggers a collapse in the reader’s perspective, leading them towards reflection. As a result, the world portrayed within a SF narrative is grounded in the realm of readers and writers, yet diverges in certain aspects that induce cognitive estrangement. This estrangement, as previously described, encompasses the alienating or unfamiliar effect, serving as a vital criterion for categorizing a text as SF (Suvin 118; Freedman 22). To these requirements, Russ adds that SF possesses a didactic purpose due to the exploration of behaviors and situations related to the individual and society (*To Write Like a Woman* 5, 6). Betty King agrees with this saying that “SF has always been the ideal genre for (...) exploration because of the experimental and speculative nature of its approach” (xiv), but this is not something exclusive to SF; fantasy or utopias can do so as well. Since the

differences between fantasy and SF have been stated above, it may be useful to explain the differences with utopia to help define further the literary genre affecting this study and because the texts to be analyzed later could be regarded as utopias. First, it is essential to start by exploring the meaning and origins of utopia:

The term utopia originates from Greek words *outopia* (“no place”) and *eutopia* (“good place”) and usually signifies a nonexistent, ideal place. Because the word *utopia* has both these meanings, it encourages a variety of connotations, ranging from a better and possible social design that we should seek to imitate, to a different vision of reality intended to shake readers out of their common way of perceiving the world around them, to a mere flight of fancy aimed at entertaining readers. Often, the utopian genre has been used as a platform for presenting political and social agendas to a wide audience (Reid 308-309).

The term was coined by Thomas More in his work *Utopia* (1516), which also gave origin to the literary genre, although other authors like Plato or St. Augustine wrote about ideal places before (Reid 309; Moreno 248.) The literary genre of utopia, at least in its beginning, was concerned with essays about ideal societies, which focused on ethical, economic, or political aspects of a society (Moreno 248; Murphy 479; Aldiss 65.) Utopias also carry with them the idea of speculation, since, although they take place in contexts that do not exist, these kinds of texts were written to reconfigure the society of the time, normally, into a better one in the future. Nevertheless, it must be said that utopias do not always involve an improved society. The positive utopia, which derives from the same Greek words as the genre itself, is the one that describes an ideal society that “contrast[s] with our present one” (Aldiss 65) In this case, readers have the feeling that their society needs to change in order to achieve that better state. By contrast, two types of text confront this “good society”: the dystopia and the anti-utopia. The former depicts a flawed society, worse in comparison to the readers,’ in which nobody would want to live (Moreno 248), while the latter portrays and criticizes a utopia (or eutopia, a good place.) In the first case, readers realize that society needs to

change in order *not* to achieve that appalling state, but in the second, readers reflect on why the utopia is not such.

The confusion between utopia and SF seems logical since they certainly have some common characteristics. However, while utopian stories normally develop in “no places”—and, therefore, in “no times,”— SF can take place in a variety of places and times that include existing ones, although they are generally modified²⁶. In terms of time, although SF normally deals with future societies, certain subgenres can make use of tropes that defy this²⁷. Another aspect that differentiates SF from utopia is that SF normally includes some scientific and technological elements, which in utopia are not necessary. Even though they diverge in some points, some critics would say that utopias (and dystopias) are, in fact, subgenres of SF (Moreno 248; Murphy 478-483; James 249-259.) Given the information that has been exposed here, utopia can truly be both a separate genre and a SF subgenre. Utopia, without a doubt, influenced SF stories, themes, places, etc. But for utopian texts to be regarded as a SF subgenre, they need to keep certain traits such as being fictional stories that include some other characteristic like the technological or scientific aspect, the novum, or the cognitive estrangement.

It is crucial to mention that texts can exceed the limits of a certain literary genre, belonging to more than one at the same time. The prevalence of this trend escalated during the 1980s with the rise of postmodernism, particularly notable within the realms of SF and fantasy genres, owing to their inherent affinity and proximity. so there may be works with fantasy and SF traits. For example, *Beauty* (1991) by Sheri S. Tepper combines these two genres. It is a retelling of the tale of Sleeping Beauty, in which the

²⁶ The modifications of existing places are a resource for making the familiar become uncanny and the other way around, giving rise to the cognitive estrangement previously explained.

²⁷ Although SF authors normally locate their stories in the future, they can also take place in the past. For example, the uchronia is a subgenre that rewrites a time in history that the author believes needs another ending. An example of this is Philip K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), where the Axis Powers won WWII.

author describes the time travels of the main character, Beauty, to different future societies in which magic is disappearing or has disappeared. Utopia and SF can also be encountered in the same text. A text that corresponds to this description is *Brave New World* (1932), a dystopian SF story, which describes a society in which individuals are created artificially to form a utopian society.

To sum up, SF can be defined as a literary genre encompassed within the broader category of “speculative fiction.” SF addresses contemporary issues by adopting a temporal and spatial perspective that diverges from the reality of both the reader and the writer. This divergence allows readers to draw comparisons between the two realities, aided by characters, elements, locations, and times that are uncanny yet still recognizable, leading to moments of reflection. Additionally, SF narratives present scenarios that are conceivable, whether set on another planet or detailing the lives of robots. This plausibility is typically grounded in scientific and rational explanations, an integral aspect of SF, combined with a temporal setting distinct from the time of writing, frequently set in the future. Given that SF is not confined to the constraints of the actual world, the genre’s only limitations are those of plausibility. This characteristic renders it an ideal literary category for exploration, introspection, and discovery, encompassing not only scientific realms but also extending into the social domain.

The realm of feminist SF predominantly centers on the social sphere. It operates from the premise that women have traditionally inhabited a marginalized position within the readers’ society, and it navigates through the boundless possibilities offered by SF to envision realms where patriarchal structures have been dismantled. For a work to be classified as feminist SF, it must both critique the social realities faced by women and encompass the defining traits of an SF narrative: the novum, cognitive

estrangement, plausibility, unconventional temporal and spatial settings, and so on. Feminist SF, therefore, involves the exploration and speculation regarding the circumstances of women within unfamiliar temporal and spatial dimensions, and unfamiliar characters, which give rise to societies set in the future, on distant planets, inhabited by aliens, androids, and beyond.

According to Marleen S. Barr, feminist SF—which she calls feminist fabulation—is “feminist fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the patriarchal one we know, yet returns to confront that known patriarchal world in some feminist cognitive way. It provides ‘cognitive estrangement’ (...) from the patriarchal world by depicting a feminist vision that confronts the patriarchal world” (145). The uncanny yet recognizable element in SF stories is the absence of patriarchy and, of course, this shift from the readers’ world has to be rationally explained. Another way of putting it is that feminist SF stories “whether set in various futures or on alternate worlds, all consider ways in which technology changes gender relations and social roles” (Reid 119), and aim “(...) to highlight, challenge, or alter social, cultural and political structures regarding sex, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, and ability. (...) Their idea is to address and, perhaps, redress the marginalization of certain members of society” (Calvin 21).

SF texts focus on the belief that women occupy the position of the Other in society to create texts where they could “carve out a space for women to talk together, explore their experiences, and use those experiences to create new identities and patterns for social interactions (Attebery 7). Precisely, SF is the ideal genre to speculate about the possibilities of these new identities and social interactions, since “science fiction is generically concerned with the interpenetration of boundaries between problematic selves and unexpected others and with the exploration of possible worlds

(...)” (Haraway 70). As SF is a genre that allows the “exploration of possible worlds,” it involves the creation of different worlds without prejudices, without social hierarchies, without genders, etc.

In SF there is place for the invention of societies in which power relations are inverted, in which there is only one sex or a multiplicity of them, in which gender roles are questioned, in which social institutions are reconsidered, etc. Therefore, feminist SF questions the type of culture and society that surrounds us, which is, as argued previously, a patriarchal one. For LeFanu, SF is a suitable genre to reflect on patriarchy, for which she sets out some reasons:

Perhaps it is the position of science fiction on the periphery of mainstream fiction that makes it so open to borrowing from elsewhere, from physics and fairy tales, from philosophy, folklore, myth. And perhaps it is the position of women on the periphery of mainstream (patriarchal) culture that makes SF so suitable a genre for them to work in (99).

Whether it is the options that SF opens up for authors or the multitude of themes it encompasses, women’s voices discover in SF an uncharted realm to traverse. Within this realm, they are free to speculate and uncover the authentic roles that women hold within society—roles distinct from those that have been imposed upon them. Moreover, SF allows writers to forge a realm where they can liberate themselves from the biases of gender. This liberation provides a canvas for introspection, enabling them to engage in an exhaustive self-examination. Therefore, feminist SF “test[s] the limits of the dominant ideology of gender by proposing alternative possibilities for social and sexual relations which conflict with the dominant representations” (Wolmark 55). The challenge to patriarchy that feminist SF entails is accomplished through a wide range of themes and subgenres.

1.2.1. Themes and Subgenres of SF

SF stands as a literary genre characterized by its nearly boundless nature, providing authors with the opportunity to examine a diverse spectrum of themes. These themes span from matters of sexuality, power dynamics, and religion, to voyages into outer space and beyond. The genre's range encompasses texts that delve into scientific advancements, at times even presaging forthcoming events and innovations. Meanwhile, other works indulge in speculation about distant planets, societies shaped by post-apocalyptic circumstances, technological progress, and the intricate repercussions of technology on the human body. Within SF, technology and science act as versatile instruments for exploration, offering not only a lens to investigate formal scientific concepts but also a platform to scrutinize the social sphere. This gripping domain reviews the evolution of humanity, how individuals adapt to novel technologies, the transformation of human relationships, and humanity's interaction with other sentient creatures, thereby weaving a narrative tapestry that extends beyond the conventional confines of reality.

An instance of a literary work that employs SF conventions to delve into the intricate fabric of the social landscape, with a specific emphasis on the dynamics of sex and gender, is Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* (1979.) Butler uses the same SF trope that H.G. Wells used for his seminal SF work *The Time Machine* (1895): time travel. Butler's main character, Dana, who lives in 20th-century California, travels back in time to 1815-1830, where she finds herself on a plantation. There, she experiences what being a slave is and, what is more, what being a female slave is. Dana lives what slaves lived back then (being whipped, beaten, psychologically abused, etc.) in addition to what female slaves lived (maternity, the sale of their kids, rape, etc..) The author compares this situation to Dana's life in 20th-century California, where she is married

to a white man (in the present and the past, when they both travel in time, they have to suffer prejudices and opposition to their relationship.) Butler writes what we can call “soft SF,” since there is no focus on scientific matters, but on black history, ethnicity, and gender.

Another example of a novel that explores sex and gender, using the trope of interplanetary encounters and the alien, is Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969.) The novel is set on a different planet, called Gethen, where an envoy called Genly has been sent. On this planet, Genly struggles with its culture and society since the individuals who inhabit it are androgynous²⁸. Due to his background, Genly is moved by prejudices (ideas of masculinity and femininity in his planet Terra, which is an allusion to the readers’ prejudices) and sees them as men with women’s traits.

Authors, then, have infinite possibilities to examine, but from all the themes that SF can deal with, there is one that is especially relevant for this study: Otherness. This theme encompasses further aspects such as ethnicity, class, and gender; in short, any matter that implies exploring the different, the uncanny:

The question involved here [in SF] is the question of the Other –the being who is different from yourself. This being can be different from you in its sex; or in its annual income; or in its way of speaking and dressing and doing things; or in the color of its skin, or the number of its legs and heads (Le Guin, *American SF and the Other* 209).

Otherness is portrayed in SF stories using different resources, as Le Guin affirms. One of these resources, which is possibly the most characteristic one, is delving into the interaction of individuals that are from different worlds, as *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) does. The most common SF icons related to this are probably aliens or robots. Gwyneth A. Jones explains that aliens “allow us to discuss social, political, and

²⁸ When they are in *kemmer* (their sexual cycle), one of the members of the couples develops female organs while the other develops male ones. If they are pregnant, both members of the couple have female organs during the gestation and the breastfeeding period.

psychological permutations of human Otherness” (36), while robots, which are “beings” created to serve humans, can entail discussions about class, slavery, racism, or even moral questions (Jones 33-34; Moreno 326.) However, more types of characters can be used as resources to explore Otherness. Moreno categorizes the iconic characters in SF that can represent Otherness into four categories: humans (including cyborgs and clones), mutants, aliens, and artificial beings (Artificial Intelligence, robots, androids, or superdeveloped computers) (Moreno 323-329) Depending on the approach, these characters allow authors to explore Otherness in different terms such as ethnicity, class, or sex.

Otherness in sexual terms is an ideal theme for SF authors who apply a feminist approach to explore sexuality and gender outside the limits of patriarchal society. Such is the case of the previously-mentioned *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), James Tiptree Jr. with her “Houston, Houston, Do You Read?” (1976) or Joanna Russ in *The Female Man* (1975.) Tiptree’s short story takes place in a future where Earth has become uninhabitable due to environmental collapse and overpopulation, and three male astronauts from the 20th century are on a mission when they find themselves pulled through time and space and end up on a spaceship in the distant future. There, they encounter a society composed entirely of women who have achieved a harmonious way of life after a global catastrophe that extinguished all men. The women initially treat the male astronauts as curiosities and objects of study, but as the men adjust to their new surroundings, they begin to realize the extent of the damage that their sex has caused on Earth and the potential for a better future in the society they have encountered. The story explores themes of sex, power, and social norms.

For its part, Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (1975) explores different subgenres and tropes of SF through a story that includes parallel universes, role reversal, and the

battle of the sexes. The novel follows four women from parallel universes who are all versions of the same person and explores their experiences and interactions in a male-dominated society. The four women are Joanna, a woman from a world similar to the reader's; Jeannine, from a world where the Great Depression never ended; Janet, from a world where women have gained power and men are oppressed; and Jael, from a world where men and women are engaged in a brutal war. As the women encounter each other across the different universes, they struggle to reconcile their differing experiences and perspectives on gender, power, and sexuality. Along the way, they confront and challenge the social norms that have oppressed women in all of their respective universes. Some of the themes dealt with in this novel are androgyny, homosexuality, sexual intercourse with other species or with robots, etc.²⁹

These reflections on sexuality lead to the questioning of other themes like reproduction, the perpetuation of the species, or even the rethinking of the concept of maternity. These issues combined with technology and science can result in fictional societies in which individuals are cloned or genetically modified, as in Octavia E. Butler's *Dawn* (1987.) The protagonist of this novel, Lilith Iyapo, is a human who has been rescued by an alien species called the Oankali after Earth has been destroyed in a nuclear war. The Oankali are genetic engineers who can merge their genetic material with that of other species, including humans. Lilith and other survivors are brought aboard the Oankali spaceship and given the opportunity to mate with the Oankali and produce a new hybrid species. The Oankali argue that this is necessary to save humanity from self-destruction, as they see human aggression and hierarchical tendencies as a

²⁹ Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) is a perfect example of what is considered a hybrid. Here she creates a story mixed with utopia, dystopia, uchronia and futuristic society in a novel about parallel universes. In this novel, these resources are used to explain women's stereotypes and inferiority in the actual world, while she also explores sexuality (for example, Janet is a lesbian, only because the nonexistence of men in her world has made the word "gender" disappear.) Considering the different combinations of genres and subgenres, SF becomes a literary genre with infinite possibilities and subgenres, which are proof of its value for writers.

flaw in our DNA. Through Lilith's experiences, the novel explores themes of identity, power, and agency. The exploration of Otherness through the different resources explained above contributes to the combination of other questions such as politics, ethics, morality, religion, etc. In short, SF can encompass multiple themes because of its versatility.

As it occurs with the themes and topics, SF encompasses a plethora of subgenres³⁰, but for this study, it is convenient to concentrate on certain significant subgenres that are related to the selected texts. These include utopian, apocalyptic, hard and soft, and space opera. Utopian SF, which combines the elements necessary to create a SF story that possesses a critical view of society, raises questions about matters such as ethnicity, politics, power, gender, science, etc. Utopian SF stories can also deal with better societies than the readers' (utopia or eutopia) or worse (anti-utopia or dystopia.) Examples of this subgenre could be *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, or the renowned dystopia, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) by Margaret Atwood. The former tells the story of a group of male explorers who discover a secluded country, Herland, where women live together in a peaceful and harmonious society, free from the oppression and

³⁰ Some captivating subgenres of SF could be the uchronia or alternate history, speculations of what would have happened if an event in the past had gone differently. The purpose of alternate histories is to raise "questions about time, linearity, determinism, and the implicit link between past and present. It considers the individual's role in making history and foregrounds the constructedness and narrativity of history" (Hellekson 453). *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) by Philip K. Dick or *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* by Mark Twain (1889) are examples of uchronies. Another subgenre related to uchronias is the steampunk. It is a subgenre whose stories take place in a technological Victorian Era with coal as the primary source and focus on mechanical aspects (Moreno 263-64). So, it is an alternate history with some specific characteristics. Tim Power's *The Anubis Gates* (1983) and William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine* (1990) are examples of this subgenre. A subgenre that exemplifies that limiting genres is a difficult task is weird fiction, which is a hybrid subgenre of horror, fantasy, and SF (Miéville 510). China Miéville describes it as "rather breathless and generically slippery macabre fiction, a dark fiction (...) often featuring nontraditional alien monsters" (510). This critic also affirms that this subgenre was initiated by H. P. Lovecraft and other authors like Arthur Machen made contributions to it (Miéville 510). Some examples are Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936), Robert Jackson Bennet's *City of Stairs* (2014), and China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000). To know about more subgenres, some manuals can be consulted: *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003), *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (2009), *Teoría de la literatura de Ciencia Ficción: Poética y retórica de lo prospectivo* (2010), *Science Fiction* (2000), *Strange Divisions and Alien Territories: The Sub-Genres of Science Fiction* (2012), *The Science Fiction Handbook* (2009), etc.

violence of patriarchal culture. The society is based on principles of cooperation, education, and maternal care for children. The women have achieved a high level of technological advancement and can live sustainably in their environment. As the male explorers interact with the women of Herland, they come to realize the flaws and weaknesses of their society and the benefits of a world based on feminist principles. In addition, this novel is extremely important for our analysis, as it sets precedents in terms of tropes later used by other feminist SF writers. One of these is parthenogenesis since the women in Herland reproduce asexually without the need for men's intervention. *Herland* (1915) offers an alternative vision of what a society could look like if it were free from the constraints of patriarchy. On the other hand, Atwood's novel deals with a dystopian society that, due to a radical religious group, is now dominated by men. Here women are divided and dressed according to their role in the house (handmaids, wives, cooks, etc.), and deprived of their names. In this case, the dystopian aspect is used to explore what would happen if gender roles were exploited to the extreme.

Apocalyptic (or post-apocalyptic) SF is another of the subgenres employed by SF authors. These stories revolve around survivors of a certain catastrophe (a plague, a nuclear holocaust, natural or technological disasters, etc.) that the Earth has undergone (Moreno 268). The combination of disasters and SF involves a pessimistic view of societies and destroys the idea of progress, although sometimes the apocalypse is the necessary catalyst for change (Mousoutzanis 458). Post-apocalyptic SF can be related to dystopias since they portray how the planet becomes a place that everybody would avoid, but also to utopias if the result—probably, after many years of recovery—is a better society than before the catastrophe. A famous example of post-apocalyptic SF is *The Shore of Women* (1986) by Pamela Sargent, which portrays a society that had survived a nuclear holocaust caused by men. In this society, women live happily in their

cities without men, although they still have to keep the peace and prevent the male sex from evolving (becoming subjects, rather than passive objects) so that they do not overthrow women.

Another well-known subgenre is hard SF, whose stories are closely related to science since the logical explanation that the authors describe to provide plausibility is rigorous and derives from a previous study (Moreno 266). It is called “hard” SF because the thought experiments are based on what was called “hard” sciences: “physics, astronomy, geology, chemistry, meteorology” (Samuelson 494). However, as other sciences were being introduced into SF the adjective “hard” was changed into “soft” (Samuelson 494). Soft sciences are psychology, sociology, ecology, etc.³¹ In this case, the plausible explanation is not as technical as in the case of hard SF. An example of hard SF written by women is *The Calculating Stars* (2018) by Mary Robinette Kowal. This novel takes place in an alternate history where a catastrophic meteor strike accelerates the space race in the 1950s. The story revolves around Elma York, a mathematician and former World War II pilot who becomes a human computer for the newly formed International Aerospace Coalition. As she and her colleagues work to design and build spacecraft to escape Earth, Elma must confront the sexism and racism that pervade the male-dominated aerospace industry. It is a hard SF novel that focuses on the technical and scientific aspects of space exploration; however, it also deals with topics such as sexism or racism. Under the label soft SF, we find titles like *The Dispossessed* by Ursula K. Le Guin. This novel takes place on two different planets, one that represents capitalism and one that represents anarchism. The story follows Shevek, a physicist who travels between the two worlds, as he challenges gender-based roles and explores the potential for cooperation and equality.

³¹ Critics like Russ also include history or politics under the label “science” (Russ, *Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction*).

Although the previous subgenres have counted with numerous writers and readers, space opera is probably the most famous subgenre and, because of that, it is often used as a synonym of SF (Westfahl, "Space Opera" 197.) Moreno defines this subgenre as stories that revolve around adventures and that are usually set on other planets and cosmic distances (462) One example of a space opera is *Ancillary Justice* (2013) by Ann Leckie. The story takes place in a vast interstellar empire ruled by the Radch and follows a character named Breq, who was once an AI-embodied starship but is now confined to a single human body. Breq seeks revenge against the ruler of the Radch, leading to an epic space opera filled with political intrigue, complex characters, and exploration of themes such as identity and power.

As it could have been perceived in the previous examples, feminist SF can encompass the same themes and topics and can raise the same questions as the standard SF³² does; the only perceivable difference would be the approach since feminist SF authors will apply a feminist perspective to reflect on women and their situation. For example, instead of creating an alien, feminist SF would make them androgynous to eliminate gender differences; other authors would speculate about how dangerous gender roles are if taken to the extreme; others would reflect on the chaos men bring to an only-women society like *Herland* (1915); others draw on biotechnology to eliminate violence like *The Gate* (1988); others look for alternative systems to rule equally or deal with religions in which God is female like *The Wanderground* (1978) or *The Power* (2016); others justify the extinction of men in other planets or future societies through a natural disaster or disease like *Ammonite* (1992), etc. In essence, feminist SF authors endeavor to shed light on the Otherness that women endure, thereby illuminating and examining the unique conditions they experience.

³² When it is necessary to distinguish from feminist SF, the general sphere of SF will be called "standard."

However, the use of the same resources or strategies that other authors used before in “standard” SF poses a difficulty from a feminist viewpoint: the text can be trapped in the patriarchal discourse. Feminist fiction attempts to show that women and their ideas, experiences, and worlds are as valuable as men’s. This affirmation implies that feminism considers women’s culture different from that of men. For that reason, the objective of literature would be to create a women’s fiction that highlights women’s issues. But, paradoxically, some feminist fiction seems to draw on references that derive from patriarchal culture (traditions, resources, images, etc.) because, in a way, it is their only reference. This triggers two different interpretations of feminist fiction and, consequently, feminist SF. The first is that feminist fiction does not fulfill its function of giving voice to women because “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde 2). Audre Lorde’s famous quote implies that systems of oppression and inequality cannot be effectively dismantled or changed using the same methods or tools that created and perpetuated those systems in the first place. In other words, if the existing power structures and tools that have enabled oppression are relied upon to bring about change, the inherent biases and structures of those tools will likely continue to support the existing power dynamics rather than challenge or overturn them. To create meaningful change, it is necessary to find alternative, transformative approaches and perspectives that operate outside the confines of the established norms and structures.

The second way of interpreting the use of patriarchal resources is that feminist fiction uses “the master’s tools” to “dismantle the master’s house.” This idea suggests that, indeed, feminist writers can appropriate elements of the patriarchal discourse to eliminate it. For instance, it can be said that Le Guin appropriated the resource of the “alien” in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), added to it the characteristic of androgyny, and attempted to dismantle the patriarchal idea of a society ruled by a

single-sex while attempting to destroy the association of gender roles to biological sex. Le Guin's use of the alien is, of course, a reworking of the already-existing one, which has been added the issue of sex and gender. This use of the trope supports what Barr thinks feminist SF is: metaparadigmatic and metafictional. For her it is metaparadigmatic because it is "fiction which subverts patriarchal patterns and models" and "imagine[s] a social revolution directed towards changing patriarchy" and it is metafictional because it is "fiction about patriarchal fiction, to unmask the fictionality of patriarchy" with the didactic function of "learning about how patriarchy is constructed" (Barr, *Feminist Fabulation* 144). For Barr, appropriating patriarchal resources in feminist SF would be a possible way of helping the feminist vision, but it would not be sufficient to destroy the patriarchal discourse, as Wolmark also points out in the following quotation:

Feminist appropriations are inevitably partial because they remain embedded within the conventional narrative structures of the genre, but they can nevertheless alter the focus of the narratives to reveal the equally embedded nature of the power relations within which the subject is constructed, and which define the relations between self and other... Feminist appropriations of science fiction are not, then, incapacitated by the encoding of patriarchal discourse in the generic narrative structures of science fiction: they are cultural interventions which result in texts that are recognizably structured by partiality and difference, rather than unity. Awareness of the power structures inherent in gender relations makes it possible for the writers of feminist science fiction to reuse the conventions of the genre, but not to expel entirely the assumptions about gender and social relations on which those conventions rest. (...) However, even though the narratives may present strong female heroes or women-only worlds, they can offer only incomplete solutions to the problems of unequal power relations. (54-55)

By using patriarchal references feminist writers, therefore, confront the quandary of actually dismantling patriarchy's discourse, but even though they do not manage to eliminate the patriarchal discourse, their cultural products are valid to bring to light the unequal situation of the sexes.

Regardless of its efficiency or its failure in dismantling the master's house, the demystification of traditional stereotypes, linked to matters that specifically concern

women will be a recurrent tool for feminist SF writers. Some of these specific subjects are maternity, lesbianism, sex inequality, gender violence, etc. (Mains 62.) Nonetheless, a SF text needs to meet specific criteria to be considered feminist. Merely featuring women in the narrative is insufficient. In some way, it must portray the situation of Otherness that women suffer, so that it provokes a reflection on the readers. So a feminist SF text must have a novum (an invention, a novelty) related to sex or gender, which contributes to the cognitive estrangement of the readers. This cognitive estrangement must make readers think about women's situation in their reality and lead them to the question of what should be changed in their society for women not to be the Other.

1.2.2. Origins and Evolution of SF

Due to the wide variety of subgenres and the extensive amount of themes SF can deal with, its origins could seem arduous to track; however, many critics have determined one author as the pioneer of this speculative genre. This prominent figure is none other than Mary Shelley with her novel *Frankenstein* (1818) (Aldiss 3; Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* 126-127; Moreno 336; B. King xi.) Russ claims that “every robot, every android, every sentient computer (...), every non-biological person (...) is a descendent of (...) *Frankenstein*” (*To Write Like a Woman* 126-127.) In addition, Moreno explains that Shelley's novel depicts “the first android with existential conflicts like the ones later developed by authors like Asimov (1982) or Dick (1968)” but it also speculates about the possible consequences of a new scientific discovery: galvanism (my trans.; Moreno 336-337.) Besides all these essential tropes that *Frankenstein* inspired, Shelley gave rise to the iconic SF character of the mad scientist (Jones 38) It is especially interesting for this study that Shelley is considered as a precursor of SF, because *Frankenstein* is the work of a woman, writing about an unusual topic for women:

creation by scientific means. Shelley's novel is not, however, canonically considered a SF novel, but a gothic one because of the employment of resources like the monster (to represent Otherness) or the North Pole (to represent the exotic) commonly associated with romanticism and, more specifically to gothic literature. Therefore, the origins of SF are attributable to the gothic genre from which SF rescues some resources such as the exotic places, the unusual times, or the uncanny (castles, monsters, etc.) (LeFanu 28)

Apart from the resources, Sarah LeFanu also finds a converging point between gothic and SF which is that their emergence means a rupture from the previous literary conventions and "produce[s] a literature that can be at once subversive and popular"

(25) Other authors that are normally named as precursors of SF are H. G. Wells³³ or Edgar Allan Poe³⁴ (Aldiss 23; Evans 13; B. King xi; Moreno 343; Tresch 116.)

³³ Brian Aldiss affirms that another renowned author owes his methods to Mary Shelley (23). The author is H. G. Wells who is considered the other pioneer of SF (Aldiss 23; Evans 13; B. King xi; Moreno 343). Shelley's influence is clear, for example, in Wells's novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), where the author writes a similar story to that of *Frankenstein*, using the already-famous figure of the mad scientist (Evans 21). Arthur B. Evans considers Wells a SF precursor because he experiences the world "through scientific eyes," using science as "an enabling literary device to enhance the verisimilitude and deepen the emotional impact of his fantastic visions" (21). A parallelism can be found in the case of Jules Verne and his *voyages extraordinaires* (1863-1905). Brian Stableford says that "the essence of Verne's method was the carefully constrained extrapolation of contemporary technology, and he became famous for the application of hypothetical locomotive technologies to laborious exploration and leisurely tourism" (20). Verne also explained his extraordinary stories through science and, therefore, made them plausible. So, certainly, even though these authors' works are not labelled as SF, they stand as clear antecedents of the genre. There is no doubt that these authors' contexts constituted a perfect frame to develop science-related novels. They lived the Industrial Revolution, which brought with it scientific progress, new inventions and improvements in the lives of the population (Aldiss 10-13). This industrial growth and the different technological improvements resulted in an increasing interest in progress and the future, which created products like Wells's or Verne's works (Evans 14).

³⁴ The critic John Tresch explains that SF owes to Poe's stories, through examples such as "The Balloon Hoax" (1844), "The Unparalleled Adventures of One Hans Phaal" (1835), or "Some Word with a Mummy" (1845), among others. Tresch affirms that Poe paid "rigorous attention to detail aiming at logically consistent verisimilitude," as SF authors do (116). In addition, he comments on the fact that those Poe's tales that could be defined as SF involve some kind of "vessel or machine that allows for displacement 'off the map'" (Tresch 116). So, Poe uses the resource of exotic or unknown places, often used in gothic fiction, which is also a key device in SF stories. Moreover, Poe speculated about the new scientific discoveries that were in vogue. For instance, just as Mary Shelley did, Poe used galvanism to bring the body of a pharaoh back to life in "Some Words with a Mummy" (Tresch 117). Poe's focus on speculation about the technological progress of his time, along with the pessimistic spirit of his works, may have also influenced the pessimistic accounts of future societies in, for instance, dystopian SF (Tresch 124). In short, "his tales, like the sciences of his time, focused on devices for exploring space, time, and matter. The encounter between incommensurable worlds, in which the assumptions of what counts as 'logical' must give way in the light of new experience was as central to his fiction as to the age in which it appeared" (Tresch 120).

By considering all these authors as pioneers, critics date the origin of SF back to the 19th century, although it is possible to go even further back in time to analyze texts that can be branded as the seed of SF. For instance, Adam Roberts considers that SF “started with Copernicus” (4). He affirms that the Copernican Revolution, along with the works of Galileo and Kepler, was the cause of texts such as Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) (A. Roberts, “The Copernican Revolution” 10). Aldiss adds that *Utopia* is a work that derives from Plato’s *Republic* (c. 380 BF), which he considers the first utopia ever written (Aldiss 58, 65). Margarete Keulen, for her part, considers that there is another important antecedent to SF which is Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1621) (15). She suggests that, although all three works previously mentioned are in search of the ideal society, Bacon’s is planned on “reason and science” (Keulen 15). Determining these texts as the origins of SF entails that not only is SF related to gothic, but also that it is indebted to the utopian genre.

Feminist critics like Jane Donawerth or Gwyneth A. Jones tracked the origins back to another utopian author, Margaret Cavendish, and named her the real precursor of SF or at least of feminist SF with her work, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing-World* (1666) (Donawerth 215-216; Jones, *Feminist SF* 484.) In Cavendish’s world, women are free to receive education and this ideal place is fraught with technology and science to which women have access (Donawerth, *Feminisms* 215.) Like Shelley, Cavendish is a pioneer regarding the use of science in her world, since it was considered a masculine field, especially in the 17th century. Although Donawerth and Jones attribute Shelley the importance that other critics also bestowed on her concerning SF, they believe that Cavendish deals explicitly with women's issues in a

time when women were not able to express themselves freely. Shelley's novel, on the contrary, is not always considered as a feminist work, because it does not deal with women's issues; in fact, all its important characters are men (Jones, *Feminist SF* 484; Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* 124.) Nevertheless, *Frankenstein* is a controversial novel in this respect and has also been praised by feminist critics. For instance, it could be argued that the absence of important feminine characters is a declaration of intentions, meaning that society itself lacks women's voices (Attebery 37) Moreover, the monster is often interpreted as an analogy to women, stressing the idea of Otherness, alienation, and marginalization (Attebery 37) In any case, both Shelley and Cavendish represent important milestones for SF and point back at two different elements to consider regarding its origins. On the one hand, SF draws on gothic elements to create its stories, especially, with the use of exotic places, times, and characters. On the other hand, SF is highly influenced by utopias, from which it takes also the unknown places and times, the reflection, and the optimism or pessimism of the different societies.

From SF's origins until the second half of the 20th century, the presence of women in the genre was scarce but not inexistent. Many feminine characters filled SF stories, above all in pulp magazines, even though they were not complex and deep characters (Mains 39; Davin 46.) Normally, these feminine characters found in pulp magazines reinforced women's stereotypes, embodying mainly *femme fatale* (sexualized, strong, and independent), who generated chaos (and also provoked awe) and had to be defeated by men (R. Roberts 40-42; Attebery 85.) It is also frequent to find mythological characters like Medusa or the Amazons, as well as the female version of Frankenstein's creature (R. Roberts 46) Although these characters are represented from the patriarchal perspective, in later periods, they will become a recurrent source for women writers who rewrite those representations so that they portray women's strength and

independence (R. Roberts 46; Attebery 85.) Nonetheless, until the 1950s, the few women writers who devoted their time to SF dedicated their works to utopias (Davin 49) Perhaps, the most famous one is the already mentioned *Herland* (Gilman 1915), which is preceded by another remarkable work called *Mizora: A Prophecy*, written by Mary E. Bradley in 1889 (Albinski 46) The book is presented as a series of journals and follows the protagonist, Edna Gordon, on her journey to a hidden, advanced civilization called Mizora. This civilization is an all-female society that has achieved great scientific and technological advancements. The Mizorans have eliminated war, poverty, and disease. They live in harmony with nature, have their focus on education, gender equality, and communal living. The novel serves as a social and political commentary, envisioning an ideal society free from flaws and injustices.

The 50s brought with them “the age of acceptance” (B. King 77), a period in which women’s participation in SF as readers and writers increased (Merrick, *The Secret Feminist Cabal* 89.) For example, Judith Merrill started being an influent figure in the genre at this time, along with others like Marion Zimmer Bradley or Alice Eleanor Jones, whose works started in the magazines *Other Worlds* (1957) and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (1955) respectively, Katherine MacLean, C. L. Moore, etc. From the 60s—“the age of rebellion” (B. King 108)—, with the growing presence of feminism, the number of women authors begins to stand out. Some of the most notorious female writers in SF like Le Guin, Russ, James Tiptree Jr., Naomi Mitchinson, etc. started to be published in this period (Merrick, “Fiction” 106.) Merrick asserts that at this moment SF changes its tone and becomes a more mature genre that deals with matters like the exploration of sexual identity and gender while it also reproduces and analyzes the fact that women have never been protagonists throughout

history, reclaiming the need for equality (Merrick, *The Secret Feminist Cabal* 44; 47; 57.) With this new maturity, SF faces the 70s and 80s, the period of the *New Wave*.

In this period, SF becomes the chosen genre for an “increasing number of women writers” (Merrick, “Fiction” 106)³⁵. The 70s witnessed the beginning of feminist SF literary studies, although it was not until the end of the decade that the term “feminist SF” was coined³⁶ (Merrick, *The Secret Feminist Cabal* 105.) In addition to the growing inclusion of women, SF faces a shift towards “thematic and stylish experimentations” (Higgins 73) In New Wave SF stories, the purely technological and scientific aspects are not as imperative as they were in other periods when hard sciences were a requirement; the stories evolved to include sciences like psychology, ecology, anthropology, etc., also known as “soft” sciences (Moreno 375) The authors belonging to this period understood that the key for a SF story to be valuable was plausibility, and this plausibility was to be reached through a varied range of ways which included soft sciences as Russ explains in the following fragment:

One very important point (...) is that standards of plausibility—as one may apply them to science fiction—must be derived not only from the observation of life as it is or has been lived, but also, rigorously and systematically, from science. And in this context “science” must include disciplines ranging from mathematics (which is formally empty) through the “hard” sciences (physics, astronomy, chemistry) through the “soft” sciences (ethology, psychology, sociology) all the way to disciplines which as yet exist only in the descriptive or speculative stage (history, for example, or political theory.) (Russ, *Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction*)

Although the widening of the label “science” was starting to permeate the genre, the inclusion of the so-called “soft” sciences generated a debate in the SF world: authors

³⁵ David M. Higgins explains that the number of women as readers, editors and writers increased considerably. Several anthologies and magazines included some works of famous writers like Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Vonda McIntyre, Carol Carr, etc., but Higgins suggests that probably the most interesting figure of the period was Judith Merril who, apart from contributing to the genre with her own stories, published two anthologies: *England Swings SF* (1968) and *Annual of the Year's Best SF* (1956-1966) (74-5).

³⁶ As mentioned before, according to Merrick, this term is “formalized” in 1978 “in the title of an article by Pamela J. Annas in the critical journal *Science Fiction Studies*: ‘New Worlds, New Words, Androgyny in Feminist Science Fiction.’” (*The Secret Feminist Cabal* 119)

and critics doubted whether soft SF was SF at all, arguing that this genre's stories should rely exclusively on hard sciences (Higgins 79). The implications of that assertion went beyond the questioning of what SF was, it also involved a gender question since soft sciences were mostly associated with women (R. Roberts 5; Merrick 108; LeFanu 3; Davin 39, 44). So not only was the debate related to the limits of SF stories, but also to what masculine and feminine writing was.

The debate implied that the "real" SF was the one considered "masculine" because they were the ones who predominantly used scientific motifs in their tales, making science the main concern. This brings back the idea that men were traditionally related to the rational. The predominant use of science as a rational explanation for the events that took part in the story made the tale more objective and less personal or emotional compared to those stories that used "soft" sciences (attributed mostly to women), which focused on the evolution of the story and the characters rather than science. However, according to LeFanu, this matter goes beyond SF:

it is too simplistic to say that male writers of science fiction concern themselves only with technology or 'hard' science at the expense of the development of character and the consequences in social terms of technological development. Such a distinction not only posits a crude sexual dualism—masculine is hard, feminine is soft—(...) but it also denies the connections that in good science fiction should be made. The fact that male writers all too often don't concern themselves with the personal or the private (...) has to do with privilege, power, and the division of labor between the sexes. (123-124)

So, the question of women authors as the Other emerges also in SF. As LeFanu suggests, even women's SF is not considered as such, due to the different approach that the majority of the female writers had to the genre.

Although it is not completely accurate to attribute soft sciences only to women, there is a reason why most women SF writers might use it:

At stake in such criticism is the implicit privileging of hard or masculine physical sciences over soft feminine sciences like psychology, linguistics, ecology, and sociology. Women, who had been actively excluded from the study of hard sciences until the late twentieth century, have not historically been part of the technocratic elite, and the prejudice against soft sciences in SF reflects a lingering bias against scientific domains considered less objective and more feminine. (Higgins 79)

As we see, the reason why soft sciences were mostly used by women until the late 20th century is a matter of education. Lisa Yaszek explains that even though the 20th century, with the inclusion of women in superior studies, allowed women to study sciences, they “were generally hired to work in the soft disciplines of anthropology, psychology, and home economics rather than the more prestigious, male-dominated fields of the hard sciences, medicine, and engineering” (233). She also adds that like science, SF was considered a male field, although “women were vital members of the early SF community, and their stories addressed the interrelations of science, society, and gender in creative ways” (Yaszek 233). The question is that SF in the second part of the 20th century was changing, not only because women were acquiring more presence, but also because the field was not exclusive to the traditional “hard” sciences.

Like this, the New Wave gave rise to a new kind of SF with the following characteristics:

This new generation sought to combine SF’s extrapolative power and sense of wonder with avant-garde literary experimentation and an emphasis on the soft sciences (such as psychology and sociology) in contrast to the hard physical sciences (physics, biology, mathematics) championed by traditional SF. New Wave writers of the 1960s were determined to reject and/or expose the ideological underpinnings of pulp conventions. They were critical of technological progress, suspicious of national power and imperialism, and devoted to a celebration of sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll. In some cases, New Wave writers emphasized the dystopian decay of Western culture in order to critique the social and political conditions of their time (Higgins 74).

The experimentation in terms of content and form regarding the SF genre was the perfect frame for feminist SF, although its focus changes and widens to embrace difference and inclusive models of society (Donawerth, *Feminisms* 220.) Not only is

this period remarkable for its experimentation and inclusion, but it is also important because many significant texts and authors appeared at this time. To the works of the authors named above, we need to add remarkable texts such as Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (1986), Suzy McKee Charnass's *Walk to the End of the World* (1974), Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* (1979), Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979), Doris Lessing's *Sikhasta* (1979), Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate* (1988), and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976.)

Apart from the prolific results of the New Wave, its literary experimentation paved the way for the emergence of cyberpunk, which started in the 80s. Roger Luckhurst defines cyberpunk as “a conscious hybrid, a mix of hard SF traditions, with an interest in subjective mental states and literary experiments derived from the New Wave” (203). Cyberpunk is, then, a type of SF that mixes elements of hard SF with social matters; thus, it explores how technology can affect society or even human bodies. Cyberpunk entails the exploration of the difference, of the Other, and entails a revolution in feminist SF. Results of this exploration are Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991) and Marge Piercy's *He, She, and It* (1991).

From the 90s, SF undergoes a moment of “revival or reworking of older models” (Kincaid 175). So, in this period, we find works that belong to new space opera, new weird, new hard SF, etc. (Luckhurst 221; Kincaid 174). Even though SF works from the 90s onwards have been updating models of older periods, the genre has never ceased to be productive. Currently, SF has become a popular genre, according to Adam Roberts who affirms that “tropes and features once associated only to science fiction appear in all manner of cultural texts, indicative of the need of art to deal with an increasingly technological, alienated and mediated social reality” (A. Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* 479). He also supports this popularity not only looking at the sales of the genre

but also by saying that SF, along with fantasy, have become “global metaphors for a cultural generation” (A. Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* 479). He specifically refers to two of the most successful streams of contemporary literature which are also represented in cinema: young adult and superhero stories. Roberts exemplifies their popularity by naming successful fantasy sagas like *Harry Potter*, and *Twilight*, SF ones such as *Hunger Games* or *Divergent*, and superhero stories like any of the Marvel Cinematic Universe³⁷, which have been so successfully made into films (A. Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* 479-480). With these examples, Roberts illustrates the evolution of SF, affirming that the popularization of the genre has made no impact on the culture of SF itself; it just has created commercial titles (*The History of Science Fiction* 493). Although his analysis might be biased, it is clear that nowadays SF has become an essential genre, at least regarding cinema. It is also important to mention that, in the examples mentioned above, women are also present, even as protagonists. Such is the case of the series *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which is an excellent example of the current popularity of the genre³⁸. Margaret Atwood has recently published the sequel to *The Handmaid’s Tale: The Testaments* (2019), probably due to the popularity of the series. Women have never stopped contributing to feminist SF and, although nowadays SF is creating cinema blockbusters, in literature, there are also interesting authors like Naomi Alderman who wrote *The Power* in 2016, whose series was released

³⁷J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series began its journey in 1997 with the publication of *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, concluding in 2007 with *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. The entire series was adapted into films, with the first movie hitting theaters in 2001 and the final installment in 2011. Stephenie Meyer’s *Twilight* debuted in 2005, followed by three additional novels that wrapped up the saga in 2008. These books were also adapted into films, released between 2008 and 2012. *The Hunger Games* trilogy, which started its publication in 2008 and ended in 2010, likewise saw its cinematic adaptation from 2012 to 2015, garnering considerable success. The *Divergent* series consists of three novels released from 2011 to 2013, each spawning a film adaptation released from 2014 to 2016. Lastly, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, born from the vast volumes of comics, took flight in 2008 with the release of *Iron Man*, embarking on a successful cinematic journey with numerous films inspired by the comic book characters.

³⁸The TV series, created by Bruce Miller and initially premiered on Hulu, debuted its first episode in 2017. The series spans five seasons, with an upcoming sixth season set to premiere in 2025.

in March 2023 on the platform Amazon Prime, and Christina Dalcher who debuted with *Vox* in 2018.

What can be extracted from this revision is that SF is a practical genre for the exploration of hypothetical situations in which science, technology, and social matters are mixed. These hypothetical situations allow writers to examine the world of the unknown, of the Other, from different perspectives like political, scientific, or social, or different trends. Feminist authors, like Sally Miller Gearhart, Sheri S. Tepper, Nicola Griffith, and Naomi Alderman, have taken advantage of the possibilities that SF offers and have used the genre to examine, speculate, and reverse the situation of women, who have been historically treated as Other. The works that will be examined—Gearhart's *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (1978), Tepper's *The Gate* (1988), Griffith's *Ammonite* (1991), and Alderman's *The Power* (2016)—have been selected to explore chronologically the evolution of feminism within the SF genre and the evolution of the tools that the writers display to tackle the issue of women's Otherness. These authors, although they belong to different geographical areas and different periods, have SF as the bond that unites them, and it will become their instrument to show the possibilities of women when they are not left in the unprivileged side of society; they will create *other* worlds, with new rules and new values that will entail new consequences for women. By analyzing their texts, we will see what resources and tools they use to represent or challenge women's Otherness to try to prove if the authors have disposed of prejudices or stereotypes, or if, by contrast, these stereotypes, along with the idea of Otherness, are perpetuated.

2. A Chance to Prosper

The two novels selected for this chapter are *The Wanderground* (1978) written by Sally Miller Gearhart (1931-2021) and *The Gate* (1988) by Sheri S. Tepper (1929-2016.) Before analyzing these two works, it would be interesting to explain briefly the context which surrounds them, from the 70s to the 90s. It must be said that the 60s paved the way for a tumultuous period for the United States, since “the country was deeply divided over Vietnam, over the place of minorities and women in American society” (Woods 351) In addition to this division, United States citizens had to face the “end of significant economic growth” but they witnessed the rise and the growth of social movements (Woods 351) Among these, in the late 60s was the ecologist or environmentalist movement. The decade of the 70s started with a milestone for this movement, since, in 1970, the first Earth Day was celebrated (Jenkins 349; Woods 384.) Moreover, Philip Jenkins affirms that the 60s observed a highlight in the feminist movement with Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) (348.)

Regarding feminism, it would be interesting to remind the reader that, according to the UK feminist theorists, the period in which the selected texts are inscribed is the second wave of feminism (from the 60s to the late 80s), which highlighted the idea that the only difference between men and women was the biological sex. It focused primarily on issues such as reproductive rights, gender equality in the workplace, and sexual liberation. While these issues were crucial and brought about significant social changes, critics argued that second-wave feminists often neglected issues of class and ethnicity. One of the main criticisms was that second-wave feminism was largely led by and centered around middle-class, white women, which resulted in the experiences and concerns of women from other socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnic groups being

marginalized. Black women, working-class women, and those facing other forms of marginalization felt that their perspectives and struggles were not adequately addressed within the mainstream feminist movement. These criticisms led to the rise of intersectional feminism in the late 80s, which acknowledges that women's experiences are shaped by various intersecting factors, including race, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability, among others. It emphasizes the importance of addressing these interconnections and recognizing the different forms of oppression and privilege that women face³⁹. However, back in the 60s and 70s, as Randall B. Woods affirms, feminism was already “bound” to other social movements such as those concerning “African Americans, (...) Mexican Americans, [or] Native Americans” or environmentalism, in a way that they contributed to each other “and were inspired by each other’s examples” (376).

Feminism, before becoming intersectional and inclusive, concerned about all women, continued women's struggle to get the position in society they deserve because there were still factors to reconsider. For example, in the 70s “most of the jobs (...) were sexually segregated” and “culture continued to teach” what a woman should be and do: she should be “a helpmate to her spouse,” she should “glory in their femininity, which (...) [was] limited to the roles of wife, mother and income supplementer” (Woods 363-364). Although feminism played an important role, the decade of the 70s was not a period of agreeable ease for the movement. The US faced “economic hard times,”

³⁹ Here are some remarkable texts that have argued about these issues in feminism: bell hooks and her *Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism* (1981), where she examines historical and contemporary experiences of Black women in America and critiques second wave feminism for its failure to address the specific issues faced by Black women; Angela Davis's *Women, Race, & Class* (1981), where she explores the intersections of race, class, and gender, and critiques the second wave feminist movement for its exclusion of black women; Kimberlé Crenshaw's “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics” (1989), where she introduces the concept of intersectionality and argues that second wave feminism fails to adequately address the experiences of black women.

which “deepened antifeminist sentiment as men became resentful of women competing for scarce jobs in the workplace” (Woods 368).

In light of this economic and social commotion, the late 70s witnessed the rise of the “New Right,” which was present in the following decade as US citizens turned to a more conservative way of life due to Ronald Reagan’s policies (1981-1989.) As opposition to conservatism, feminism began to get radical⁴⁰ with two remarkable references: Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* (1969) and Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) (Varela 35) Moreover, Jenkins pinpoints that a fraction of feminism started to “adopt ‘separatist’ stances” and paid more attention to lesbianism (348) He also highlights that the feminist campaigns and discourses focused on sexuality, including aspects such as abortion and rape (Jenkins 348) Despite the antifeminist backlash by the conservatives and probably thanks to these “radical campaigns,” the 70s entailed great progress in terms of the rights for women, as Higgins explains: “right to use contraceptives,” banning “sex discrimination in schools,” “woman’s legal right to abortion,” illegalization of “credit discrimination based on race [or] gender,” criminalization of “marital rape” (77.) So, despite the return to conservatism, second-wave feminists in the 80s kept fighting for their rights, regarding abortion, sex- or ethnicity-based discrimination, or “sexual harassment laws,” and the movement widened even more to adapt to the new tendencies (Burkett)

Feminism was changing with the social movements that surrounded it and it was also influenced by the period of postmodernity (Varela 76-77). This is well known for blurring limits and questioning concepts that had been assumed until the moment as it

⁴⁰ The term “radical” makes reference to origin, the root of women’s position in society. For radical feminist, the root of women’s disadvantages lies in genders (the social construct that surrounds the sexes) and, therefore, they aim at abolishing them with the objective of liberating the sexes from established roles.

happened with the concept of “women,” from the 80s, and also with the concept of feminism itself (Varela 77). The 80s were, therefore, a convulsive period for the movement since every concept, every objective, and every attitude were questioned. New theories related to feminism started to appear, as we mentioned in previous sections, questioning and criticizing the “mainstream” feminism, which was addressed to middle-class, white, heterosexual women. The need for intersectionality continued during the 80s, highlighting the fact that there was not one homogeneous identity for women (Varela 95-96). This concept was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics,” published in 1989. Crenshaw argues that traditional feminist theory tends to focus exclusively on sex, overlooking how race overlaps with sex to shape the experiences of black women. Crenshaw’s focus is that these forms of oppression and discrimination intersect and affect one another, leading to unique experiences and forms of marginalization that are not effectively addressed by mainstream feminism. This concept addresses the idea that there is not a unique definition for what a woman is and, therefore, the movement needs to reconsider its tenets and approaches.

The early 90s witnessed the emergence of a theory that questioned the concepts of feminism: queer theory. This field of studies suggests that there is no fixed identity and that there are no binaries, either in sex or gender. As Varela explains, “the queer theory is a group of ideas which maintain that sex and gender are not inscribed in human nature, but that they are a social construct, which varies according to the societies and can vary throughout a person’s life” (my trans.; 107.) Queer theory brought with it a total revolution since it destroyed binarisms and the basis of patriarchal society and feminism itself. In this last period of the 20th century, feminism suffered many changes.

The concept of “postfeminism” also appeared during this time, becoming a wide umbrella under which we can group all the branches, theories, or works that question the previously established ideas of mainstream feminism (Varela 101). As we said, they reflect on the concept of women, rejecting its universalization, they question heterosexuality and explore the concept of “marginality” (Varela 102). All these aspects found their way into literature and feminist SF was no exception.

The social changes of the 70s lived together with technological progress (Higgins 74). Both of these matters were interesting materials for the literary field of SF, leading to speculations about the future, outer space, and technological destruction (Higgins 74). In addition, the social importance that feminism acquired in the period, along with the changes that it suffered is also represented in feminist SF. SF became a genre “suitable for the exploration of sexuality, sensuality, and androgyny” (B. King 108). Merrick suggests that SF witnesses an increase in the number of women writers; this entails a revolution, which consists of a fight between hard and soft SF (Merrick, “Fiction” 108). As previously discussed, this was a way of questioning “female” writing, since soft sciences were mostly practiced by women. One of the possible reasons for this assertion is that women’s access to the so-called “hard sciences” was limited until the second half of the 20th century (Higgins 79).

As a reflection of the changes that feminism was undergoing, feminist SF had to address aspects such as gender, sexuality, or ethnicity, although, according to Merrick, this latter issue was treated “less often” (Merrick, “Fiction” 108.) The 70s was an important decade for feminist SF since the first critique regarding “SF’s representation of women consciously informed by the women’s movement” was published in 1970 under the title of “The Image of Women in SF” by Joanna Russ, eight years before the term “feminist SF” was coined (Merrick, *The Secret Feminist Cabal* 105, 119.) During

this period, SF was undergoing its “New Wave” age. The New Wave was characterized by the inclusion of literary experimentation and openness to the so-called “soft” sciences, and this “flexibility” allowed female authors to explore situations, spaces, characters, and times which were devoid of male dominance. But it is important to highlight that, according to Merrick, feminist SF writers did not “reject SF’s tools and tropes” (aliens, mutants, etc.) but rather they “reconceptualized” them (Merrick, “Fiction” 108.) This reconceptualization entailed the deconstruction of tropes previously used to the detriment of women and the possibility of providing a new meaning for both the tropes and women.

The decade of the 80s in SF followed a similar pattern. The New Wave coexisted with a new SF trend: cyberpunk. While New Wave writers, also called “humanists,” opted for the exploration of “human choices and philosophical problems,” cyberpunk writers were concerned with “cybernetic and information technologies, a literary style inspired by film noir and hard-boiled detective fiction, (...) and an embrace of left-wing and/or libertarian sensibilities” (Higgins 80). The disruption caused by cyberpunk provided a powerful image for feminist theorists, introduced by Donna Haraway in her influential essay “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century” (1985): the cyborg. In her work, Haraway challenges traditional notions of gender, identity, and embodiment. Haraway views the cyborg as a hybrid entity that blurs the boundaries between human and machine, nature and culture. She sees the cyborg as a disruption of fixed categories and oppressive structures. According to Haraway, the cyborg represents a potential for liberation from essentialist thinking and binary divisions, such as male/female, human/animal, and physical/digital. This combination of human and machine contributed to the idea, already introduced by queer theory and postmodernity, of diluting the boundaries of gender, but it goes even

further. Since a cyborg is neither a human nor a machine, aspects such as sexuality will have to be reconsidered. Even the concept of human or machine will have to be rethought. So, as Higgins explains, the cyborg “challenge[s] the stability of (...) conceptual categories” such as “human/animal, man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual,” etc.; it moves beyond the binaries (80).

Other matters related to technology and sciences caught the attention of writers, for instance, cloning, genetic engineering, and the creation of separatist societies or worlds, which are especially relevant for the authors selected for this section (Higgins 81). Sally Miller Gearhart and Sheri S. Tepper wrote their works in periods where feminism was gaining importance, but also suffering a backlash from the rising conservatism. Maybe, the significance of one is due to the rise of the other, to the necessity of getting stronger in the presence of a stronger enemy. SF as well was gaining popularity and becoming more “mainstream,” due to events such as the release of *Star Wars* (1977), and was opening to literary and social experimentation (Higgins 79). The speculative literary genre, then, seems the perfect arena for the two writers who wanted to explore the possibilities of women in worlds where they are not oppressed and treated as the Other. Our goal now is to examine whether the authors succeeded in their endeavor to eradicate the sense of Otherness and oppression associated with women, thereby enabling their freedom, or if instead, the perpetuation of sexual Otherness persists.

2.1. *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (1978) by Sally

Miller Gearhart

Sally Miller Gearhart (1931-2021) was a North American writer, activist, and professor, who dedicated her life to fight for LGBTQ rights (Cole; Otto 135.) She worked in

different universities around the United States, but it is relevant that she was “the first open lesbian to be granted tenure at a major university in the United States” (Cole.) Gearhart is recognized as a feminist SF and fantasy writer who treats lesbianism and environmentalism in her works. These traits are what form the unifying thread in her collection of stories *The Wanderground* (1978), which revolve around the Hill Women. The collection does not center around the main characters but instead portrays a community of women who have chosen to live in harmony with nature, having escaped from a male-dominated, technology-driven city. These stories depict the workings of a female-only society and highlight how the Hill Women have forged a powerful sense of community. Within this community, they enjoy the freedom to grow, explore, and cultivate their unique identities, creating a nurturing space where each woman can evolve and thrive on her terms.

The remarkable use of SF in *The Wanderground* (Gearhart 1978) has rendered the text a pertinent resource to be explored by numerous researchers. For example, LeFanu dedicates a part of her book *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (1988) to the analysis of one of Gearhart’s collection of stories. She states that this collection of stories is a feminist “dream of elsewhere” that challenges traditional gender roles and social norms.

Before LeFanu’s book, other scholars had manifested interest in Gearhart’s *The Wanderground*. Such is the case of Inge-Lise Paulsen and the article “Can Women Fly? Vonda McIntyre’s *Dreamsnake* and Sally Gearhart’s *The Wanderground*” (1984.) Paulsen’s text examines how these novels use SF to explore feminist themes, particularly the idea of women’s empowerment and the rejection of patriarchal structures of power. The article argues that both novels offer alternative visions of the future that challenge traditional gender roles and offer new possibilities for social and

political change. *The Wanderground* is analyzed in the article as an example of feminist SF that envisions a world free from male domination and violence.

Another text that analyzes Gearhart's text is *Radical Imagination: Feminist Conceptions of the Future in Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy, and Sally Miller Gearhart*, written by Margarete Keulen in 1991. It is a book that examines the representation of feminist ideas and visions of the future in the works of three prominent writers: Ursula K. Le Guin, Marge Piercy, and Sally Miller Gearhart. The book delves into how these authors use SF as a means to challenge traditional gender norms and explore alternative social structures, offering readers a glimpse into a more equitable and inclusive future. The book emphasizes the role of literature, specifically SF as a tool for inspiring social change and promoting progressive feminist ideals. Overall, the book provides a comprehensive examination of how these three writers use their works to challenge the status quo and imagine alternative futures that prioritize sex equality and social justice. Regarding *The Wanderground*, Keulen elucidates that the novel centers on an idealized society emphasizing collectivism, depicting the potential of a peaceful world dominated by women, functioning in self-reliant female communities.

A decade later, in *Women, Science, and Fiction: The Frankenstein Inheritance* (2000), Shaw analyzes *The Wanderground*, reclaiming the significance of this text even decades after its publication. Shaw emphasizes that Gearhart's novel presents a utopian society where women coexist harmoniously with nature, liberated from the constraints of a patriarchal society. The author underscores how Gearhart's narrative critiques the impact of technology on reinforcing existing power structures dominated by men. Additionally, she highlights the narrative's emphasis on the potential of women's bodies and intellect to challenge and undermine traditional patriarchal norms.

In 2010, the publication of *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* edited by Gregory Claeys marked a significant event. Within this collection, Alessa Johns's essay titled "Feminism and Utopianism" presents an insightful analysis of Gearhart's work. Johns positions Gearhart's narrative as a paradigmatic instance of a feminist utopia, where women coexist harmoniously with nature, liberated from the constraints imposed by a patriarchal and technologically driven society. Johns highlights how Gearhart's vision aligns with the fundamental attributes of feminist utopias, emphasizing the community's commitment to education, the significance attached to history for social progress, and the profound connection with the dynamic natural world.

According to Christy Tidwell, who authored "No Longer Estranged: Women, Science, Science Fiction" in 2011, the portrayal of the connection with the natural world in Gearhart's text is romanticized. This romanticization, as Tidwell argues, leads to the rejection of science in Gearhart's narrative. Tidwell asserts that Gearhart characterizes science as masculine and perilous, while simultaneously glorifying the connection between women and nature to the point where they acquire "magical" abilities (37.) Tidwell suggests that this perspective reinforces an essentialism that relies on the "inherent goodness of women" (64), a stance that aligns with stereotypes and contradicts feminist principles. Furthermore, Tidwell contends that *The Wanderground* deliberately avoids the "rational, scientific, or practical" (47), hindering a nuanced exploration of gender reflections. In 2021, Tidwell recovered the text to expand on this view in an essay called "'The Revolt of the Mother': Romanticizing Nature and Rejecting Science in Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* and Other Feminist Utopias." In this case, she focuses on ecofeminism and the limitation that rejecting science and romanticizing nature can have in texts like Gearhart's.

Tidwell's perspective contradicts a previous text written by Eric C. Otto. He devotes part of his book to *Green Speculations: Science Fiction and Transformative Environmentalism* (2012) to the analysis of *The Wanderground* focusing on the natural world and how Gearhart denounces the ideologies of dominance in her book. Otto's book investigates the intersection of SF and environmentalism, exploring how speculative narratives can inspire transformative thinking and action in the face of pressing environmental challenges. He affirms that the speculative visions offer not only warnings about potential dystopian futures but also hopeful visions of sustainable societies and innovative solutions to ecological crises. Otto argues that *The Wanderground* exemplifies such visionary storytelling as the Hill Women symbolize a rejection of technological values associated with men and an embrace of the natural world linked with women. The natural environment serves as a liberating realm for women, allowing them to fully realize their feminine capabilities. While Otto acknowledges the essentialist nature of this concept, which he sees as lacking in terms of feminism, he asserts that Gearhart effectively critiques "the ideologies of dominance," which parallel humanity's domination over the natural world (84.) Therefore, for Otto, *The Wanderground* is a SF text that roots in ecogism but does not align perfectly with feminism.

While numerous scholars refer to *The Wanderground*, this dissertation primarily relies on the aforementioned texts as the foundation for analysis, as they distinctly serve as the starting point for delving into it. Many experts designate Gearhart's work as a model of a feminist utopia within the realms of both SF and the fantastical. Their viewpoints revolve around the attributes of the utopian society envisioned by Gearhart for a future world and the opportunities it presents for women. Moreover, given Gearhart's emphasis on nature, some scholars in ecofeminism accentuate the positive

aspects outlined in the world of the Hill Women, while others illuminate its ecological and feminist limitations. While these sources will be referenced, it is noteworthy to highlight that their analyses lack the perspective adopted in this study. Although the link to nature and the utopian characteristics are crucial, this study aims to underscore how Gearhart utilizes these elements, among others, to reverse the Otherness that women experience in the readers' world.

2.1.1. A Feminist Ecotopia

The Wanderground portrays a society where women live independently, separate from men. Within this context, women can fully embrace their lives, develop their own identities, and form a strong sense of community. The Wanderground, the place where the Hill Women reside, provides a nurturing space that allows women to have both individual and collective voices, enabling them to escape the oppression they experienced in a patriarchal society (Paulsen 106.) The collection of stories presents an ideal society for women, similar to a utopia (LeFanu, *In the Chinks*; Otto, *Green Speculations*.) By exploring this utopian vision, the stories prompt reflection on our current social circumstances and offer a glimpse into a future that strives for equality and empowerment.

The Wanderground differs from the society of the time in which it was written in several aspects. The first and dominant trait is that it is a female-only society. Men, however, have not disappeared from Earth; they are relegated to the City (a reduced space outside the Hills.) This separatism⁴¹ allows the Hill Women to be completely

⁴¹ Separatism in feminist terms is a political ideology that defends the separation of women from men in order to achieve feminist goals. Feminist separatism is a form of radical feminism that holds that opposition to patriarchy is best done through focusing exclusively on women and girls. The idea behind feminist separatism is that women need to separate themselves from men in order to create a space where they can develop their own culture, values, and political goals, free from male influence (Anderson 437-48.)

independent of men in every single aspect, including reproduction. So, the didactic purpose of this collection of short stories is to reflect on the possibilities of women without intermingling with men, without being oppressed by and subjected to them. Given this, *The Wanderground's* premise is that women in the real world are not enjoying their deserved position in society, they are conditioned and dominated by a patriarchal system that does not allow them to develop freely. It is, therefore, a feminist text because the subject of study is the situation of women. Robin Roberts describes feminist utopias as follows:

Historically and ideologically, feminist utopias represent a midpoint between the early science fiction dystopias and later feminist science fiction. Through the notion of a utopia, a world that is both perfect and nonexistent, feminist writers create a separate space for women (...) feminist utopias enact the strategy of separatism through alternative science, a reworking of myths about mothering and the valorization of qualities identified as feminine: an emphasis on community, home, and family. This paradigm functions in response to male-dominated science fiction. (66)

As Roberts suggests, the society portrayed in the stories is an “outopia” (“no place”), because it is imaginary, based on a nonexistent place. The geographical space where the Hill Women live, the Wanderground, does not exist in our current world. At the beginning of the book, the author includes a map to help readers imagine this place that she created. The map shows two great divisions, the Wanderground and Dangerland, and a small space that corresponds to the City. Some hints in the book, such as the mention of Minneapolis, Cleveland, or Philadelphia (Gearhart 163, 164), suggest that this imaginary society is located in the United States, possibly in the future. Nonetheless, from the readers’ point of view, the society is nonexistent.

Added to “outopia,” our selected book is also a “eutopia” (‘good place’.) Joanna Russ determined some of the traits that make this type of society a “good place”:

They are explicit about economics, and politics, fairly sexually permissive, demystifying about biology, emphatic about the necessity for female bonding,

concerned with children (...), non-urban, classless, communal, and relatively peaceful while allowing room for female rage and female self-defense, and serious about the emotional and physical consequences of violence. (*To Write Like a Woman* 58)

The Wanderground complies with all these characteristics except the explicit reference to economics and politics. Despite this, by reading the stories, the reader can deduce that the Wanderground does not follow the same economic and political patterns as known to the reader. In terms of politics, the word that could define the Wanderground's system is "anarchy" (Albinski 160), but it works similarly to a tribe, since "government does not exist (...) although there is sometimes a council dealing with work assignments," rotations, important matters, etc. (Russ 136; Albinski 160.) All decisions in the Wanderground, regarding work assignments and other issues, are made in community through an assembly or *gatherstretch*. For example, in the short story titled "The Gatherstretch," women from all around the Wanderground connect mentally, an issue that will be addressed later on, to decide about a meeting with the Gentles⁴². So, this women-only society allows its members to live in a way in which there is no hierarchy or domination over each other, including the natural world itself.

The society can be described as a non-violent community due to the absence of hierarchies and classes, and the necessity of respect among the women to make the system work. Russ pinpoints that, although these societies tend to be nonviolent, "the violence that does occur in these stories (...) is that of (...) natural disaster, social collapse, and/or something that may have occurred in the past but is not happening in the present" (138.) The stories in *The Wanderground* are located in a place and a time after "the Revolt of the Mother" took place. During this event, the earth (mother, for the Hill Women) rose against the abuse of technology, which in *The Wanderground* is a

⁴² The Gentles are men who do not follow the principles of the City, live outside it, and have started living by the values that the Hill Women have established. We will explore these characters later, since they are a good example of Otherness in the collection of stories.

synonym for the abuse of male power, as it is explained in the story named “The Remember Rooms.” One day, men and women discovered that technology did not work and that men had no power outside the frontiers of the City and “neither do their penises, making literal the critique of technology as a representation of phallic power; men who leave the City and try to rape the hill women simply fail” (Tidwell, “The Revolt of Mother” 153.) The earth or “mother” simply rejected male oppression and brutal force against women:

“Once upon a time,” began Bessie, “there was one rape too many. Once upon a time.”

Clana was relieved to be able to spin back into the past, hearing for a while a firm narrative voice from Bessie. “The earth finally said ‘no’. There was no storm, no earthquake, no tidal wave or volcanic eruption, no specific moment to mark its happening, It only became apparent that it had happened, and that it had happened everywhere” (Gearhart 171-172).

Although the event is called “The Revolt of Mother,” it took place in a non-catastrophic way. Unlike what takes place in the City, all that concerns nature and women is carried out peacefully. By contrast, the City, still ruled by men, is a dystopian society in which they exert massive control over women, torturing, hunting them, and turning them into automatons: they are just objects who obey what men command. Thus, although the focus of the stories, as the title of the collection suggests, is the utopian Wanderground, there is a negative utopia depicted in the City where violence is still present, the place where no woman would ever want to live. The City is the remains of a totalitarian society, presumably, one of how our real society could end up being.

In the City, everything that exists out of the norm is answered with violence; such is the case of homosexuals, who are prosecuted. In this context, the Wanderground represents a peaceful and permissive society where individuals can freely explore their sexuality. However, the separatist nature of the society implies that lesbianism is the sole possible sexual orientation for those seeking intimate connections. With

lesbianism, the traditional values associated with love (marriage, family, etc.) and sexuality like “ownership, [or] reproduction” are abolished. For Russ, this permissiveness and lesbianism in utopian societies serve a specific purpose:

that of expressing the joys of female bonding, which—like freedom and access to the public world—are in short supply for many women in the real world. Sexually, this amounts to the insistence that women are erotic integers and not fractions waiting for completion. Female sexuality is seen as native and initiatory, not (...) reactive, passive, or potential” (142.)

The quandary that arises from these separatist societies is that women are capable of being independent from men in terms of sexuality, but also in terms of reproduction. In the case of the Hill Women, they do not need men to perpetuate, as they rely on nature to reproduce parthenogenetically⁴³. If the traditional ways of love and reproduction are abolished in the *Wanderground*, so are the traditional aspects that come along with reproduction: family, motherhood, and child-rearing. As it happened with the decisions, the three issues are approached in community, since the community acts as the family (Albinski 160). Children (all female) are raised and educated by all women in this quasi-tribal community. Although there is no presence of babies in the book, some of the characters like Clana or Gynia are kids and, through them, the reader can experience the way they are educated, which is one of the fundamental aspects of feminist utopias.

Then, it could be said that *The Wanderground* gathers the following characteristics of a feminist utopia:

(1) Feminist utopians see education and intellectual development as central to the individual and women’s empowerment; (2) they embrace a view of human nature as malleable and social rather than determined, fallen and individualist; (3) they favour a gradualist approach to change, a cumulative approach to history and a shared approach to power; (4) they view the non-human natural world as dynamic rather than as an inert receiver of human impulses; and (5) they are usually pragmatic (Johns 178).

⁴³This is “a form of reproduction in which the egg develops into an individual without being fertilized” (Seabra 69).

Even though *The Wanderground* encompasses these traits, it must be mentioned that it cannot be considered a pure utopia. The text presents traits that could lead to affirming that it is SF. To prove this statement, it is necessary to find several concrete aspects: the text must deal with technology or science and must include a novum that contributes to the cognitive estrangement of the readers.

As for technology, it only works in the City, similar to violence. After the revolt of the earth, women escaped from the City to the hills and started to function and live thanks to nature. When escaping the City, women escaped technology, which is relegated to the men's space, a minor square if we see it on the map. The only explicit reference to technology in the book is found in the following fragment:

Machines outside the City, continued Evona, were working no better than usual. Breakdowns were still consistent - planes faltered after less than an hour's flight, trains and autos ground to a stop after short bursts of speed, sails and oars were still the only means of progress over water. Natural-grown food was still a luxury, the chemical substitutes still the standard. Communication with any other surviving city was limited to runners. Horses and mules and other beasts-of-burden still refused male riders or drivers (Gearhart 138).

Technology, parallel to the patriarchal regime of the City, is outdated and failing, because of the rebellion that nature caused. Technology and science are, therefore, relegated to a secondary position⁴⁴ (Tidwell, "The Revolt of Mother" 152) Nonetheless, the abuse of technology is the trigger that causes the change. The world, after all, has rebelled against technology, causing the return to nature. In contrast to the City, in which all that is needed to survive is produced by humans, i.e. artificially, the Hill Women's system revolves around nature. It provides solutions for all their needs: food, shelter, etc.; the Hill Women know and respect this. For them, nature equals

⁴⁴ Notice that this could also have a feminist implication, since technology has traditionally been a "male" field. Gearhart could have given prominence to what traditionally was linked to women, reassuming the idea of "reworking myths" to provide a new meaning for them.

women. They are the same, so respecting nature implies respecting themselves and vice versa.

This importance attributed to nature and women gives Gearhart's book a feminist and ecological perspective. As we mentioned, in the 70s, the environmental movement gained importance and Gearhart is not indifferent to it. This ecological approach, along with all the traits explained before, allows us to add to the collection of stories the label "feminist ecotopia." Otto gives an accurate description of ecotopias in the following passage:

Ecotopian fiction portrays worlds far different from the ordinary world that it contests, articulating ecologically conscientious life ways hitherto contained or eradicated by modern social, political, economic, educational, and religious life. Ecotopian fiction is an instructive "educational machinery," a cognitive estranging lens through which readers can compare their world with that proposed in fiction and as a result better perceive the inadequacies of current worldviews and practices (*Green Speculations* 49.)

As Otto suggests, the novelty lies in the emphasis on nature and the absence of technology, leading to a contrast with the "original" world—the world of the reader—thus creating cognitive estrangement. Although not explained through the hard sciences, the importance of nature and the focus on women are two factors that form the novum in *The Wanderground*. Following the ecological perspective, the focus on nature leads to the reflection that the natural world in the readers' society is being abused, by issues such as overconsuming societies or overpopulation (Otto, *Green Speculations* 59-60.) Gearhart reverses the situation, acknowledges the environmental problem, and attributes the main importance to the natural world (women's world) rather than to the urban life (men's world) represented in the City. So separating nature from the urban world means separating female from male which is another resource that contributes to the novelties in this text (Shaw, *Women and Science Fiction* 131.) Nature and separatism turn the familiar unfamiliar and vice versa, creating the alienating effect and cognitive

estrangement. It leads the reader to see the City, the urban space, as alien, along with the individuals that inhabit it, rather than the opposite. The Otherness—the unfamiliarity—is subverted, and the readers are placed as Others when they find themselves immersed in a world where the rules have changed and the norm that shapes society is now being a woman and living in nature.

Nature provides food and shelter, while it also rewards them with special abilities (telekinesis, telepathy, communication with animals...) Thanks to the Revolt of the Mother, women can reconnect with special abilities hidden and repressed inside them. According to Otto, the Hill Women's relation with nature and their consequent abilities were "innate feminine potentials" that could not have been developed if women had stayed in the City, where they were oppressed by the technological patriarchal system (*Green Speculations* 85.) These skills are part of Gearhart's novum and they are inherent to women; if this is the case, they are biologically explained and, therefore, could have the rational explanation that SF texts need. Nevertheless, the truth is that the text does not provide any rational explanation for these abilities, so it could be assumed that they conform to a fantasy trait. Tidwell finds this characteristic inadequate in representing the capabilities of the Hill Women, as it merely romanticizes their connection with nature while disregarding science, thereby rejecting a rational explanation of the possibilities for women in this world ("The Revolt of Mother" 153.) From this trait, it could be inferred that the text combines elements of utopia, science fiction, and fantasy. In any case, these abilities act as a metaphor for the liberation of women and their infinite possibilities in this ideal society. Thanks to their liberation and nature, now they can exploit these abilities to the maximum: they can communicate with every single natural element (water, animals, rocks, etc.), they can speak telepathically, they can move objects with their minds and they can even fly.

It cannot be forgotten that, before that liberation and their escape from the urban world, the Hill Women at some point in their life also contributed to the abuse of the mother (earth) in the same way as men do⁴⁵. Now, their task in this new place is to respect and serve it. This is what Zephyr suggests by describing herself—and by extension all Hill Women—as a “happy slave to her environment” (Gearhart 128). As “slaves” or “servants,” they have to protect the mother from “the slayer”: “To work as if the earth, the mother, can be saved./ To work as if our healing care were not too late./ Work to stay the slayer’s hand,/ Helping him to change/ Or helping him to die” (Gearhart 211). “The slayer’s hand” refers to all people who have abused the earth. It is especially addressed to men, but, as it was said, they include themselves in this: “We have worn his crown./ We have shared the slaying” (Gearhart 209). The solution for people to stop being “slayers” is to change and if they do not change, they will end up dying, because of evolution. It is important to highlight that the Hill Women do not kill anyone; violence, as we said, is almost eradicated. Rather, they believe in evolution, and they think their way of life is the one that will prevail; so, people living in the old way (in the City) must adapt or eventually die. In this Other world, the survival of the fittest is marked by the Hill Women’s way of living.

Through this depiction of the Hill Women’s life, the author “hope[s] to engender a new notion of community. (...) community goes beyond human social interaction. A community is instead a total ecological field, a life system, and even a form of life” (Otto, *Green Speculations* 59.) Indeed, the Wanderground is a whole new system governed by nature. Everything in this community possesses life, which makes it even more important for the Hill Women to respect it. The point of their system is to not

⁴⁵ This extrapolated to the idea that nature is women’s world also suggests that women have themselves contributed to their oppression by allowing technology—men—to rule.

overconsume; they just take from nature what is strictly necessary and they always ask the “mother” for her consent, as can be seen in this passage:

Among other things not quite so important she [Clana] told them that she would never without their full consent take life from any of them, that she knew them to be as much of her flesh as was her own body, that she yielded to their need of her even to her own dying if their touch with the mother required that (Gearhart 30)

Clana⁴⁶ communicates with snakes so that they allow her to explore the hole in which they are. Clana explains to the snakes by *mindstretch* (one of the Hill Women’s abilities which consists of communicating with animals) that she will not kill them without their consent and immediately she gives them her consent to kill her if that is what the mother wants. There are further examples of this in the collection of stories. In the story “Krueva and the Pony,” Krueva and Ursula⁴⁷ find a hurt pony and a famished cat waiting for it to die. The Hill Women warn the cat that “If it is deemed good by the pony itself and by us that it return to the mother, then we will help it to go and leave the body so that in the round of life you may gain sustenance from it” (Gearhart 61). Although Krueva and Ursula fight for the pony to live, it decides that it is ready to go. After this, it gives its consent to the cat: “I commend my body to my sister, the cat. May she feed well” (Gearhart 62). The Hill Women and all the creatures in the Wanderground understand that they must respect each other and that they have to use the gifts from the mother responsibly.

Another example that shows Gearhart’s ecological perspective and the importance bestowed on nature in her collection of stories is found in “Alaka’s Journey.” In this story, Alaka has to travel to Seja’s⁴⁸ ensconcement, and to do so she must cross a river.

⁴⁶ Clana, as well as the other characters from the collection of stories mentioned in this study, is not a protagonist in the traditional way. She is part of a collective story and characters here are used as a tool to explain the way of life of the Hill Women. In this case, Clana provides an example of the psychic abilities that the Hill Women can possess.

⁴⁷ Similar to Clana, Krueva, and Ursula exemplify the psychic abilities of the Hill Women, particularly in their unique connection and communication with animals.

⁴⁸ Seja’s role in the story will be explained later.

Instead of just diving in, Alaka asks the water for permission: “‘Earthsister,’ she said aloud to the water, ‘I want to join you’” (Gearhart 11). When she manages to cross the river, with the help of some fish, a tree offers her to dry and warm her in exchange for the water that soaked her. The tree also provides her with wooden shoes (Gearhart 13-14). The connection with nature is such that they can even draw on the earth to restore their strengths using a ritual called *earthtouch* (Gearhart 7-9). The previous examples depict some of the abilities that nature provides if asked respectfully and that every creature and element in this natural world possesses life and, so, must be respected.

As we can see, nature and separatism go hand in hand in *The Wanderground*, and this focus on women and nature allows Gearhart to create a text characteristic of the second wave of feminism. Second-wave feminists placed significant importance on the value of womanhood and recognized the inherent diversity among women. They emphasized that there is no singular, universal definition of womanhood, but rather a multitude of distinct experiences and identities. However, it is important to note that the concept of intersectionality, which acknowledges the intersecting forms of oppression faced by individuals, was further developed and explored in later waves of feminism. Intersectionality expanded the understanding of how various social, cultural, and political factors, such as race, class, sexuality, and more, shape women’s experiences. Nonetheless, despite these differences the fact that they are women unites them, so they defend the rights of every woman. On a second level, second-wave feminists believed that there are actual differences between men and women, but these differences are not enough reason to allow the supremacy of one over the other (in this case, man over woman.) The tenet of believing in differences among women and women and men made second-wave feminists try to explore female identity deprived of the patriarchal chains. This perspective allowed writers like Gearhart to explore the female self and its

concerns. One of the resources to do so is the creation of female-only worlds, adopting a separatist perspective. With this collection of stories, Gearhart inscribed herself in what Showalter called “the female phase” of women’s literature and wrote under the label that Cixous called *écriture féminine*. For these theorists, it was time that feminist writers explored the female world, addressing matters that only female bodies could undergo (motherhood, menstruation, lesbianism, etc.) Gearhart attempts to do so by creating a world based on separatism, which precisely allows women to live without patriarchal rules and be surrounded by women who will enable each other’s development. One of the consequences of exploring their identity is the emergence of supernatural abilities exclusive to women. This could be considered essentialist, but, as it was said, it is a trend in the second wave, when writers started exploring qualities and events exclusively related to women. It is relevant to point out that the abilities developed by women are exclusive to them (except for some men who will be addressed later) but are not used for hierarchical purposes. Women utilize these traits with the aim of survival, peaceful living, and rescuing those still confined within the City. However, in the Hill Women’s society, there exist numerous other qualities absent in the patriarchal world of the City, such as the sense of community, the absence of violence, the rejection of hierarchies, and the return to nature as opposed to the City’s individual, patriarchal, domination-based, and urban way of life.

The situation in *The Wanderground* is, therefore, a reversal of the situation in the contemporary readers’ world, which can only occur in the context of a separatist society. Whereas women in the real world are considered as the Other of men, suffering a secondary position with respect to the norm, which is, according to feminists, a patriarchal regime ruled by white, heterosexual The Long Dozen is a group of twelve women who keep contact with all settlements around the Wanderground. Four

settlements form the Wanderground; each of them has four representatives men, in *The Wanderground*, the circumstances are the opposite. Women are the norm, they are the majority, their position within this imaginary world is the dominant and the regime is a matriarchy in a natural space, in which there are no hierarchies, no violence, no oppression, and no confinement.

The concept of Otherness, or that which deviates from the established norm, is exemplified by those living in the City who adhere to the rules of patriarchal, technological, and artificial lifestyles. Yet, it is also embodied by individuals known as the Gentles, who neither conform to the City's dictates nor are fully integrated into the Hill Women community. In terms of space, the City is a small part of the whole extension in which these societies (the Hill Women, the Gentles, and the people in the City) coexist without intermingling. A similar dynamic is observed among the Gentles, a community residing in a limited land area that has been granted to them by the Hill Women. The majority of the region is occupied by the Hill Women, indicating their numerical dominance and making the residents of the City and the Gentles the minority populations. Within Gearhart's world, anyone who does not belong to the Hill Women is depicted as the Other. This portrayal highlights the social and cultural distinction imposed on those outside the dominant group and underscores the power dynamics and marginalization experienced by the City inhabitants and the Gentles.

Taking all the previous discussion into account, the way has been paved so that the world of *The Wanderground* can be thoroughly explored in the following section. The subsequent analysis is needed to explore Gearhart's treatment of Otherness and decide whether she challenges patriarchy or falls into its same discourse. The content will be organized into three distinct sections. The first section delves into the status quo of Gearhart's world and the foundational principles she employs to sustain it. The

second section focuses on the individuals who assume the role of the Other within this world. Finally, the third section engages in a discussion regarding the functionality, or lack thereof, of this new world in terms of liberating women from the sense of Otherness they experience in the reader's reality.

2.1.2. The Wanderground's Status Quo

It seems only fair that this section starts with the analysis of the focus in the stories, examining how these women are described, what kind of values and beliefs they have, how they interact with each other, and how their society works. First, it must be remarked that, as Keulen asserts, the narration of individual stories of some of the Hill Women does not mean that they work as different focuses with individual relevance; on the contrary, they serve as a tool to portray their whole society (52). Having said this, some instances in Gearhart's collection of stories refer to these women as witches or Amazons (64, 195). Both figures emerged from different myths, created within the context of the patriarchal discourse.

Referring to the witch, Robin Roberts explains that the figure "represent[s] nature" and she is a "primarily Christian figure (...) although there are classical models for her, such as Medea (...) (26). Roberts also attached some characteristics to the witch, such as the fact that she is human and that is "unknowable, uncontrollable, with unexplainable powers" (R. Roberts 26). The idea of a human with unknown, supernatural powers provokes what is known as the uncanny. In turn, this unfamiliarity provokes an aura of attraction and revulsion (Ellmann 143). This duality has been traditionally linked to women and it is perpetuated by religious and classical myths. The witch, being one of these myths, perfectly encompasses these dual feelings which have also been present in literature. Ellman dissects this duality and this dichotomic

representation explaining that calling women witches or “sorceresses” was a way of justifying men’s passions and actions because it was women who tempted and enchanted them (140). This idea is connected to the figure of the *femme fatale*⁴⁹.

Moreover, Ellmann suggests that witches are associated with domesticity and nature in the sense that their magic was related to the manipulation of herbs and the mixture of “vile broths in pots” (141), which was also used as an excuse for their hunt:

Midwives, women healers and ‘wise women’ were respected figures in so-called ‘primitive’ societies. In medieval Europe midwives had developed a sophisticated natural pharmacy of herbal medicines. However, as the practice of medicine became more institutionalised, women were systematically excluded. *The Malleus Maleficarum*, a witch-hunter’s guide of 1486, states that ‘if a woman dare to cure without having studied, she is a witch and must die’ (Gamble 322).

For Ellman, this persecution was a reaction to what was perceived as different or could not be explained (41.) This difference, in the case of women, was related mostly to the idea of escaping the “standard” scope for women or living outside “patriarchal control” (141; Gamble 322.) Witches’ relation to nature does not only encompass a profound knowledge but also the capability to survive independently, which often challenges social expectations and triggers feelings of rejection.

The reference to witches in Gearhart’s book is mostly linked to this idea of difference, although it will be seen that the idea of using herbs is also present. In any case, it was women who did not fit with the City’s model and did not follow the rules the ones who were called witches. As such, they were to be cleansed, in the same way as witches were in the past:

⁴⁹ It might be interesting to remind the reader that the *femme fatale* also represented a figure of ambiguity and duality. She is the woman who attracts and tempts men to manipulate them, and she does so by means of her mysterious and attractive womanly powers. Examples of *femme fatale* can vary from Eve to Salomé. To delve into this archetype here are some useful references: “The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat” (2015) by Samantha J. Carrick, *Dangerous Women: The Perils of Muses and Femmes Fatales* (2011) by Laura Adler, *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women* (2010) edited by Patrick Henry.

Once some hunter found a whole homeopathic pharmacy—a cave full of herbs and potions. Then there were some tales of tribal gatherings of women, peyote circles, covens. And that’s what did it. It was the reemergence of that word, *witch*, that sent the men at the station up the wall. They laughed the hardest of all at the notion of witches and then their eyes would become very narrow, very hard. About that time things got serious. That’s when the New Witch Trials began. It’s no wonder there was a news blackout. I’ve never seen the powers-that-be try so hard to keep anything quiet. We had FCC orders to hold a tight lid on the information.

It began in a small town above Minneapolis. Over a period of several months three boy babies were found abandoned in cars and laundromats. The cryptic notes found with them were traced to a group of women and girls living out in the boonies. They were all arrested without much protest and then tried together for a trumped-up list of misdemeanor and felonies. There was a lot of public interest, but even so they would have served only a minimum jail term. The wind changed and blew against them when one of the women insisted that the group’s last three children had been by virgin birth, that there had been no male sires. That was the turning point (Gearhart 164).

As we can see, many of the actions described in the passage lead us to the ideas of unfamiliarity, difference, and domesticity. For instance, they work in a homeopathic pharmacy (“a cave”) with alternative remedies made of “herbs” and referred to as “potions.” This suggests the idea of domesticity, linked to brewing “vile broths.” Besides, the word “potions” implies that those women have some kind of magic, of unknown power, which makes those concoctions work. The magic is also found in the possibility of giving birth without “male sires.” Furthermore, the Hill Women maintain a distinct bond with cats, commonly regarded as the familiars of witches. They incorporate cats into their remembering ceremonies, rituals during which they revisit their history, with the feline companions contributing additional details that may have slipped from the Hill Women’s memory (Gearhart 150.) All these aspects make these women different from the other women in the City, which leads men to hunt them in a series of events that Gearhart calls the “New Witch Trials.”

The women called “witches” are the Other, the different, the oppressed, within the City walls. They are defined as targets to be hunted since they do not comply with the definition of women according to the City’s rules: the City’s women are not “magical,” and they do not have any connection with nature. In the City, these “witch”

women cannot survive because of their condition of Other; consequently, they are forced to live “out in the boonies,” away from the City which oppresses them. Initially, living outside the City’s confines implies that they live outside the norm. However, this soon changes when more and more women flee to the countryside, leaving a small and enclosed space for the minority to live in the City. So, even though it is the Hill Women who must originally flee from the City, it is also them who manage to achieve freedom, having become whole individuals who are not oppressed and can develop without restrictions.

It is in the countryside where the “witches” become actual witches. They are now called the Hill Women and have special abilities developed thanks to their total connection to nature. The image or the myth of the witch, which was created in the context of a patriarchal system is taken and rewritten by Gearhart so that it favors women. The myth is “deconstructed” and “refashioned” to reverse the situation and reconfigure the image of women. It is the witches, who have powers that emerge from the earth *herself*, who are the norm in *The Wanderground*. They are not different anymore, they are not confined, and neither do they have any relation with men. They have become the norm by which society is structured in Gearhart’s world, which leaves the rest of individuals as the embodiment of Otherness.

Not only are the Hill Women described as witches, but they are also connected to the Amazons, another archetype that belongs to the imaginary of strong and independent women. In the following passage, a Gentle addresses one of the Hill Women as such:

You want us out of your life so you won’t have to deal with our so-called violent energy, but you’d perish tomorrow on your rotation if gentles were not in the City aiding you.’ He pushed himself up until he was squarely in front of her. ‘Face it, Amazon woman. We’re not just your protectors anymore. (Gearhart 195).

A similar reconstruction as Gearhart does with the figure of the witch occurs when she describes her women as Amazons. Authors such as Karen Bruce or Keulen trace the origins of the Amazon back to Greek mythology (Bruce 7; Keulen 55.) Greek mythology described the Amazons as a “matriarchal” tribe in which “men either served as household slaves or were barred from Amazon territory altogether” (Bruce 7.) They also got rid of male babies, keeping only females. As it is widely known, Amazons were said to cut off “their right breast to improve their archery and spear-throwing,” which gives them their name, since “amazons” means ‘no breast’ (Bruce 7-8.)

LeFanu explains that the figure of the Amazon has been mostly used in the “Gothic tradition” and SF since it represents “the castrating mother,” a “symbol of all that is most feared and loathed as Other” (*Feminism and Science Fiction* 33.) As a symbol of fear, loath, and rejection, the Amazon’s fate in the patriarchal discourse is death or submission (LeFanu, *Feminism and Science Fiction* 33; Keulen 56.) This is supported also by Bruce who mentions different legends which depict this inevitable fate for Amazons:

For instance, Heracles battles the Amazons and rapes their queen, Hippolyta, before giving her in marriage to Theseus. (...) The Iliad presents a more complex version in its account of Achilles’ defeat of Penthesilea. As he kills her, he notices her beauty and falls in love with her. In death, therefore, the female warrior becomes a passive object of desire (8.)

As we see, Amazons are punished for what they are, women who represent “strength, agency, and power” (LeFanu, *Feminism and Science Fiction* 33), something which contrasted with the image of the ideal woman as weak, submissive, and dependent. Even though the Amazons did not have the benefit of a decent end beyond death in the patriarchal discourse, this changed when “during the 1960s, (...) feminists reclaimed Amazons as a source of pride and an alternative to patriarchy. Amazons became

associated with separatism and lesbianism” (Bruce 8; Keulen 56.) This is Gearhart’s interpretation of the women in her work.

Several aspects of the separatist society of the Wanderground remind the readers of the Amazon tribe. For instance, it is a matriarchal society, in which all decisions are taken in assemblies. In addition, all the kids in this society are female and there are no men among them. The Hill Women’s attitude towards men, even the Gentles, is hostile and mistrustful, always expecting the worst from them, because they believe it is in their “maleness” to be violent and cause chaos (Gearhart 195), because of their thirst for power:

“what were the others like?”

“They are driven,” Wenadi would say. “Driven in their own madness to destroy themselves and us and any living thing.”

“Their madness. Is it like Clea’s?”

“No. Hers was the madness of too full a vessel. Theirs is the madness of power.”
Jacqua pondered all that (Gearhart 3).

This excerpt shows that the Hill Women believe that men will do anything for power, even destroying themselves and everything around them. This is what is rejected in the Wanderground, a society in which all that is taken is done respectfully and through consent. Men’s thirst for dominating is what makes the Hill Women suspect that they will never stop trying to invade their territory. A way in which they try to prevent and anticipate this possible destructive episode is by allocating spies in the City. The Hill Women spies work on a rotation basis and, following the cross-dressing tradition, they must act and dress like men to live in the City, to enter a men’s world. They stay alive by connecting with their sisters in the countryside, as well as with their sisters and the Gentles in the City. The Gentles are also the only men allowed in the Wanderground. The rest of the men (in the City) are not even used as servants, unlike in the Amazon tribe.

So, although the Gentles compare the Hill Women to Amazons, there are also differences between the two tribes. The first is that the Hill Women simply reject to mingle with men because the relationship between opposite sexes has always ended up in violence, which leads us to the second difference: the Hill Women are not violent; they are not warriors. In the Wanderground, violence is essentially associated with men, so in a women-only society, this factor is meant to disappear. So does slavery. Notwithstanding that the Wanderground is a peaceful society and that its inhabitants are not warriors, the description of one of the characters suggests the opposite:

Seja was a warrior—strong, righteous, brave, committed. She rode bare-breasted under a brilliant helm of crescent horns and flanked by bold and bright-clad sisters. Stonefaced, powerful, beautiful, highly-trained and self-disciplined, she was the virgin, the one-unto-herself, the spirit of the untrodden snow, whose massive hands were as unflinching in battle as they were gentle in love. And her sword rang on the shields of men who dared to violate the sanctity of womankind. Here was no passive damsel, here none of the forgiveness of the soft supine woman. ‘He who rapes must die.’ A simple maxim by which to live your life, by which to die yourself if that is necessary. Now there was the fighter, flushed with valour, sworn to death or triumph and now here was the calm victor, not rejoicing in the kill but looming over her vanquished enemy at this very moment about to let fall the fatal blow.

‘My enemy by definition cannot receive my love. My enemy by definition is the one I kill.

‘It is not in his nature not to rape. It is not in my nature to be raped. We do not co-exist.’

Seja, the woman-of-war. Seja, the righteous killer. The ringing battle cry, ‘Enough!’ and the thunder of defiant hooves, the sloshing of avenging swords.

The earth began to move again. The vision vanished. (Gearhart 26-27).

This description is done from Alaka’s point of view, as she is watching a vision in Seja’s mind. In this episode, Alaka and Seja are discussing the appearance of Margaret, a woman from the City in Hill Women’s territory who was raped by two men *outside* the City (Gearhart 1-6, 18-28). When Seja retells the story telepathically to Alaka, she experiences “murderous energy” (Gearhart 25), and Alaka and two more Hill Women accompany her in the trance. This is Seja’s reaction towards a violent act from men; however, Seja is no murderer and no warrior; the Hill Women are only allowed to hurt themselves.

The Hill Women do not only differ from Amazons in the idea of violence and their relationship with men: the Hill Women also escape Amazon's fatal destiny. They are not killed or submitted by men; they manage to continue living in their world. What will end up disappearing is patriarchy. In the same way as with the figure of the witch, Gearhart reclaims the image of the Amazon and modifies it so that the Wanderground community can be its version of the mythological tribe. With this perspective, the myth transmits an image of women who can live independently, without men, and who are not different from the ideal of the dominant system, since the system that rules in this new world is theirs.

The definition of the Hill Women as reimagined witches and Amazons already hints at the way of life in this imaginary and ideal Wanderground. So far, we know that, like the Amazons, they live in a matriarchy, that they can defend themselves, although violence is not normally allowed, and live independently of men. The Hill Women have also developed their full integrity as subjects only by separating from men, which has allowed them to acquire special abilities, like witches. They also reproduce without the service of men and trust nature as a source of shelter, food and their powers. However, these are not the only characteristics that define the Wanderground and the Hill Women and contribute to the dismantling of sexual Otherness towards women.

When the Hill Women are defined or compared to Amazons, implicitly, their social system is exposed: they live in a matriarchy and they live without men. It was also mentioned previously that there is no explicit government in the Wanderground although occasionally they make decisions in assembly. The only reference to any actual form of government is found in the story called "The Gatherstrecht," when Zephyr mentions The Long Dozen:

The Long Dozen. The women who had called this gatherstretch. Who were they this term? She made herself remember: Doceturva, Beula, Chelyssa, Three-Fold from here, from the Western Ensconcement; Troja, Orino, Batya, Three-Fold from the Eastern Ensconcement; Nova, Li, Annatoo, Three-Fold from the Kochlias; Earlyna, Egathese, Chthona, Three-Fold from the Outposts. The Long Dozen—long because there was always another created—came together across the hills every evening of their term. They brought to each other for sharing or decision all the woman-matters, from threats of external danger to work rotations or the discovery of a covey of quail at a meadow's edge. From her own time of serving as one of the Three-Fold Zephyr knew the extent of the happiness and the depth of the pain that went with being one of the Twelve (Gearhart 132).

The Long Dozen is a group of twelve women who keep contact with all settlements around the Wanderground. Four settlements form the Wanderground; each of them has three representatives who gather to make decisions such as the City spies' rotation and to share information regarding any matter that concerns the whole community. As Zephyr explains, the Dozen rotates every term; she was part of the group once. In this way, the reader is explained that in this society there are no hierarchies as each woman will eventually be part of the Long Dozen. Furthermore, in this passage, the Long Dozen have called a *gatherstretch* to inform all Hill Women about a meeting with the Gentles, who are about to communicate some unexpected news. In this case, all Hill Women are invited, and they all have a vote in the assembly.

Although the reader knows how the Wanderground functions in general, in terms of the organization of each settlement or "ensconcement," Gearhart does not stress any particular system. Zephyr's passage shows that they have work rotations, which suggests that the settlements function by dividing the work between their members. An example of the division of work can be found in the encounter between Alaka and Notu-ka who says "After your rest we'll meet. We both cook this evening" (Gearhart 19). Notu-ka's statement implies that they have been assigned to cook together, presumably for the whole settlement which in this case is the Western Ensconcement.

Gearhart does not delve into politics or economy any further, but these clues are enough for the reader to feel that the society of the Wanderground differs from the readers' world. Encompassed in these differences from the readers' reality, it can be seen that Hill Women do not overconsume, they take from their environment whatever they require to survive, nothing else. This relates to the ecological perspective that Gearhart gave to her stories, where nature is treated as the provider, almost in a religious way. The Hill Women define themselves as "happy slaves" to "the Mother," to nature. Nature, concretely the earth, is treated as feminine ("mother") and it is the source of life, shelter, and survival. It is also the place where every living thing will eventually return.

Everything related to asking something from the earth like giving birth, taking what they need to survive (food, energy, etc.), and even dying will entail a ritual that connects the Hill Women with their origin and end: nature. Rituals are their only way of worshipping nature. They ascribe a sense of "spiritual quality" to the stories and contribute to the idea of a tribal community, that needs to act collectively to ask what they need from nature (Shaw, *Women, Science and Fiction. The Frankenstein Inheritance* 132). For instance, in "Red Waters," Evona connects with Alaka because she feels "diffused" after her watch in the City. Alaka, Evona, and Cassandra (a dog) start a ritual so that Evona can restore her energy:

Alaka spread fan-fashion over half her horizons. Folded. Spread again. No disturbance. As she removed her warm boots and wool socks, she rigged a half-power open condition (...) "Help me?" she shortstretched to Cassandra. The dog fell into rhythm beside her, nudging and scratching the leaves away. When they had uncovered a patch of dirt about the size of a moderate fire ring Alaka placed her bare feet firmly on the cold earth, legs apart in an accustomed wide stance. She caught Cassandra's eye. (...)

"Breathe with me, Evona." Alaka closed her eyes. She dropped her consciousness to her stomach and locked into Evona at diaphragm level. They began. First in counterpoint, then in harmony, finally in unison. In the miles between the City and the forest's edge, the breathing, the moving, the earth-surgings among the three of them structured a voiceless liturgy. (...)

“(...) Soon, Alaka.”

“Or deep, Evona,” chanted Alaka.

“Soon.”

“And deep.”

“Red waters.”

“Deep.”

“Deep.”

“Deep.”

“Deep.”

They spoke together. “Deep. Soon.”

Alaka withdrew slowly. She was spreading a final span and putting her boots back on when Ursula appeared (Gearhart 8-9).

In this event, Alaka, Evona, and Cassandra synchronize their breathing and accompany it with a chant. This is done after clearing the ground of leaves and sticks so that Alaka can feel the earth in direct contact. After the chant is sung and the ritual is done, Evona is ready to end her watch fully restored. Just as in this ritual the earth provides energy, the earth also asks the Hill Women to return to *her* when their days finish.

The ritual and the concept of death in the Wanderground are worth studying. First, it must be said that Hill Women can decide when they are ready to leave, as long as they are not killed or hunted by men from the City. This is an ability that they share with the other living beings in their world, as was seen with the pony, which decided when it was ready to die and allowed the cat to eat its flesh. The first instance of this death choice is found in Pelagine’s story:

“Time to go for sure.” Pelagine was nearing her death. She had known it since the solstice less than a week ago, and had chosen the spring as the appropriate dying season for one so old, for one who lived in so many other forms as well - or at least so it seemed in her dreams. To release this old body was more than appropriate now. It hankered to be dust again, to relax the tension that holding itself together had required all these scores of years. To let go and scatter. To let go and drift. To let go and be at ease again with the family of dust. (Gearhart 84)

Pelagine has decided that she will die in spring; once the Hill Women decide the date for their death when that time comes, they die in a ritual. The ritual of death consists of sharing with all the Hill Women the history of the dying woman, by means of songs. Then, all the women who are gathered, chant and proceed to share her holdings. Once

the woman dies, she still contributes to the natural world, like, for example, Artilidea, another character who decides when to die, as sustenance for other animals, and she still lives in the collective memory of her tribe. The event of death in the Wanderground is seen as another stage of life, as a cycle since they will still be part of this natural world that they somehow worship. Their last chant in the ritual of passing reminds them of how they must act to take care of the environment, of the earth, of the Mother. Their task is to protect nature and, consequently, respect women.

The necessity for respecting both nature and women is vividly portrayed through the ritual of seeking permission. In stark contrast to the City, where men often assert their desires without regard for others, leading to tragic occurrences like rape (Gearhart 26), purges (Gearhart 90-91)⁵⁰, or *Cunt Hunts* (Gearhart 174)⁵¹, the concept of “violation” or “invasion” has no place when it comes to interacting with beings in the Wanderground. Here, consent is vital, as exemplified by Alaka’s interaction with the water, Clana’s encounter with the snakes, or Ursula and Krueva’s connection with the cat and the pony. This ritual of seeking permission underlines the deep connection between women and nature, emphasizing the notion that harming nature is equivalent to harming women, and vice versa (Albinski 171.) That is one of the reasons why the earth revolted in Gearhart’s world. Traditionally, in contrast to men’s association with science and art (knowledge, reason, stability), women have been associated with nature (savage, unstable, emotional) (Ellmann 61) Simone de Beauvoir wrote in *The Second Sex* the following words which relate to this idea:

⁵⁰ A persecution of women who did not fit within the City norms, for example, lesbians. Before the Wanderground was established, the City also passed a series of regulations like dress codes or curfews for women, polygamy became legal, and women that looked suspicious were caught (Gearhart 91, 93, 165.) The purge is connected to the New Witch Trials explained earlier in the study.

⁵¹ A sport that men practiced in the Hills, which consisted of going to hunt women that escaped from the City (Gearhart 174).

Man finds shining stars and the moody moon, sunlight, and the darkness of caves on woman; wildflowers from hedgerows and the garden's proud rose are also woman. Nymphs, dryads, mermaids, water sprites, and fairies haunt the countryside, the woods, lakes, seas, and moors. This animism is profoundly anchored in men. For the sailor, the sea is a dangerous woman, perfidious and difficult to conquer but that he cherishes by dint of taming it. Proud, rebellious, virginal, and wicked, the mountain is woman for the mountain climber who wants to take it, even at risk of life. (...) she is the special object through which he subjugates Nature. (210)

As de Beauvoir wrote years before Gearhart's text was published, many images and myths refer to the connection between women and nature. Many of the metaphors written by de Beauvoir lead to the conception of women as ambiguous and dual. For instance, she asserts that women are often related to the sun's light but also to shadows, to a wild flower, but also one grown in a garden (in a domestic sphere.) Nature and women are both sublime and dreadful, free and submissive. They are considered divine and awe-inspiring but also as something unknown yet to be explored and conquered. De Beauvoir also creates a metaphor of an alpinist violating the mountain. This is a suitable parallelism to what Gearhart does in her book.

Gearhart draws on the traditional linkage of women and nature and establishes the ritual of asking permission when requiring something from nature as an analogy of asking permission from women. This implies that neither nature nor women are "to be mastered and penetrated for (...) [their] secrets" (Donawerth, *Frankenstein's Daughters* 24.) De Beauvoir's alpinist would not have had the chance of "violating" the mountain in the *Wanderground*⁵². So, in the Hill Women's world, "the violence to nature, which seems intrinsic to (...) [the inhabitants in the City], is also associated with violence to women who depend on nature for drawing sustenance" (Shiva 266) The link between nature and women is transformed by Gearhart into something religious or spiritual. Religion in this collection of stories is connected to nature, which is an analogy of

⁵² The main conflict in *The Wanderground* is related to this unwanted "penetration": there are rumors about men having entered the countryside, which means that they are penetrating nature without its consent, threatening the Hill Women's lives. This rumor is narrated in Seja and Margaret's story.

women; therefore, the Hill Women's worship of nature means that they also worship the values that only Hill Women can have because of their condition as females.

By relating religiousness and spirituality to nature and women, Gearhart also destroys the patriarchal religious images and values. As was explained in previous sections, religion was a source for the creation of misogynistic myths that reinforced patriarchal visions of women as mothers, wives, submissive, temptresses, etc. The masculine symbolism attributed to the almighty God, in any of his versions, also contributed to this perpetuation of women as inferior. Gearhart simply rejects any aspects related to the Judeo-Christian imagery of God and suppresses any literal mention of religion. Along with the "political" system and the organization of the Wanderground, the treatment of religion contributes to the idea of unfamiliarity in the collection of stories. The idea of a male God disappears, and the focus is now nature, treated as a female origin and end. In this context, Gearhart can rewrite the already-existing mythology that in some cases derived from religion, for example, bestowing "normality" to witch-like women, and changing the fatal destiny of "Amazons."

Gearhart uses the shift of focus on religion to change the meaning of not only myths associated with women but also of the traditional values in society. It has been explained how religion works as a pillar to sustain the patriarchal values in the readers' society: it told women what their role as wives was and gave importance to the heterosexual family as a nuclear foundation for society to work. The Wanderground changes these parameters by changing the focus of religion. Those traditional values proposed by the patriarchal religion are no longer in use in this new world: women are not told how to behave in marriage and the heterosexual family is not the norm anymore. With this shift, many other old values, like the conception of sexuality or love, also evolve to adapt to the new order.

Overall, separatist societies like the Wanderground, with their worshipping of female traits, are a resource widely used by lesbian second-wave feminists, who considered that “the goal of feminism should be to promote awareness of heterosexuality as a position into which women are coerced by patriarchal authority” (Shaw, *Women, Science, and Fiction* 129.) In female-only societies, as there are only women, homosexuality seems to be the only possible sexual orientation. Nevertheless, this is a matter of choice, since there are men in the City and even in the countryside, as is the case of the Gentles. The Hill Women, however, through the years have learned that mingling with men can only bring violence and oppression against them; therefore, they have rejected any kind of relationship with men.

Debra Shaw suggests that lesbian separatism implies “that women’s primary orientation is homosexual and that heterosexuality is achieved only incompletely and with the requirement that women subsequently identify in accordance with masculine ideas of femininity” (129.) By surrounding the Hill Women with women, they are deprived of the chains of patriarchy, allowing them to keep their primary orientation. In Gearhart’s *The Wanderground*, lesbianism is the norm, whereas heterosexuality is seen as something strange, as Otherness:

She dropped back into her first-tellings, when she was only a girl-child and sat at gatherings with her mothers⁵³. In the singing and the playing of the tales of men there ran the thread, “We once had hope for them, but even that hope they snuffed out.” Rage. Sadness. All mixed with tenderness and love. Love men? The idea did not fit. It was uncomfortable and backwards in her mind. She tried it on from every angle but it would not adjust (...) Yet somehow once it had been so. Maybe it was a different kind of love,” she mused. “Or maybe they were gentles.” (Gearhart 2)

Jacqua cannot imagine loving men. She has been raised in a context where she has been exposed to women loving and bonding with other women. However, heterosexuality was the norm in the past, whose representation is the City, where women’s only option

⁵³ Notice that she does not refer to parents, but “mothers.” This will be explored later.

was to be in “love” relationships with men because homosexuality was condemned. From several testimonies, the reader knows that many actions against homosexuals took place in the City. For instance, “some bars known to be gay went out of business” or women who “would rather be with women than with men” were “rounded up” by other women and forced to leave the City (Gearhart 91, 165.) Those who were lucky found a place in the countryside, and those who were not got killed. In the City, the only possible sexual orientation was heterosexuality, even by “state laws” that “require[d] every woman to be married” and allowed exclusively men to be polygamous (Gearhart 165.)

These principles are considered traditional and old by the Hill Women, since they coerce women and do not entail any benefit for them. In the Wanderground, they do not require laws that make women identify as lesbians or be married. The Hill Women are free to love or not. Yet, if they love someone, their love will differ from the old ways. Love stories such as Jacqua and Ursula’s shed light on the new kind of love that the Hill Women value:

Lightly in her memory she touched her long-ago warm soft days with Ursula, Ursula who had been her learntogether. She had not forgotten the feeling of needing for life itself Ursula’s simple presence. They did not speak their warmth beyond each other to their sisters. They had become hidden with it. It began to eat away at their freestanding selves. Hence the saying ‘There are no words more obscene than “I can’t live without you.” Count them the deepest affront to the person.’ Jacqua had not forgotten. In the end she had understood the importance of never feeling that way again (Gearhart 3-4).

One of the values that the Hill Women attach to love is freedom. Sentences such as “I can’t live without you” in this world mean possession, which is associated with the values of the individuals in the City. As they have escaped the confinement of the City, their love has also become free and open. Possessive, exclusive, or overprotective love is considered old-fashioned and contrary to the principles of the Wanderground, where the Hill Women can live freely as long as they respect each other.

With this free and open love comes the disappearance of institutions such as marriage. Examining the social role of women, it becomes evident that historically, marriage served as the primary avenue for women's survival in a society where their prescribed roles were limited to that of a wife and mother. This persisted until the 20th century, which witnessed an emergence of opportunities for women, albeit with certain constraints. Marriage was a way to perpetuate women's dependence on men and to reduce women to property, which passed from the father to the husband. Marriage was, consequently, a pillar of patriarchy. This is exactly what marriage means in the City, where it is considered a requirement for women. In the Wanderground, marriage is a reminder of the old values of possession and ownership, which are connected to patriarchy. It is men who have this "madness of power", "a pathological desire to conquer" (Gearhart 3; Paulsen 108), power even over their wives. In a women-only society, this is eliminated so "they can heal each other and themselves" (Paulsen 108.) Women can survive on their own and they do not have any specific role such as wives or mothers; in fact, they perform all roles. Separatism, lesbianism, and this open conception of love also affect the other institution that is crucial to the maintenance of patriarchy: the family. In the Wanderground, women have developed the ability to reproduce without men, transforming the concept of motherhood and, along with all this, transforming the concept of family.

To explain the new concept of family, it must be said that the Hill Women do not require men to reproduce. They reproduce parthenogenetically, a process which is undergone in community and, as usual in their tribe, it is done in a ritualistic manner. The first reference to this is made by Seja when she says "We sang all day. It's mid-moons and the eggs are passing down. Remember?" (Gearhart 15). In this brief statement, the reader already realizes that the process of pregnancy entails a ceremony

in which all Hill Women are united to sing. The next fragment already refers to how the pregnancy is carried out:

“Yes. We’re from the Eastern Ensconement. (...) We’re planning implantment and want to have it in the deep cella. Four of us who have seen implantments here are urging the rest of us towards this place.”

Both Manaje and Li smiles. “Are you to be the flesh mother?” Manaje asked.

“Yes. I’m already so full of mugwort and thyme that I feel like I could do it right now all by myself.” All the women laughed. Fora saw something akin to disgust in Li’s headshake. She pushed a short question around the look.

Li responded. ‘It’s children. They’re not my favourite people. I need lots of distance from them still. I’m glad you’re willing to take one on and I’ll do my turns at the learnings but don’t even hint that I be a sevensister much less a bearer... (...)’ Fora found herself joining the relieved laughter of the two women. (...)

Li nodded beneath some embarrassment. “Anyway, I do honour your desire and that of your six sisters. I own my carjery. Actually the deep cella is a wondrous place, ancient and sober. I wish you well in the implantment, in the egg-merging, and in the bearing of new life.” (Gearhart 47).

This passage firstly reveals that the ritual of pregnancy is done communally in groups of seven: one of the Hill Women will be the “flesh mother” and the other six sisters will accompany her in the task of motherhood. It is also explained that the flesh mother must be administered “mugwort and thyme” so that she can carry the baby in her womb. This use of herbs drives us back to their condition of “witches” and their contact with nature, which provides them with anything necessary, even to reproduce.

The passage also gives a clue related to the conception of motherhood that the Hill Women have. Even though as a community they give importance to being mothers, not all of them share the same opinion. Li, for instance, is not fond of children, so she has decided not to be a sevensister or a bearer⁵⁴. This implies that being a mother is not the only role that the Hill Women can play in the Wanderground, they can choose whether they want to be one or not, contradicting the premises of the patriarchal tradition which affirmed that women’s only mission in society was to be a mother and

⁵⁴The term “sevensister” signifies a woman who belongs to a group of seven individuals entrusted with accompanying one of their own, known as the bearer, during the implantment ceremony. The bearer chooses to carry and deliver a new member into the Hill Women community. Additionally, the sevensisters play a role in the upbringing and education of the newborn.

perpetuate the species. Going back to the ritual, Fora's daydream continues analyzing all the elements:

Fora imagined herself marching in the cavalcade of her own sowing and implantment. A long line of women surging down the path, their arms and voices linked to each other, carrying with them the oils and the sweet scents, the fire, the water, the necessary green living plants. Beside them and before them, whatever small animals wished to come, whoever could make the long trek. She marched with their steps, beginning now to see specific sisters (...) Entwined by her own arms were Tolatilita and Phtha, two of her seven sisters, and behind them Yva marched, carrying in her cradled hand the precious egg-laden liquid. Yva of all the seven sisters was past egg-producing and as a reminder of her own part in the motherhood she had balanced on top of the small vial of living ova a large and wildly painted chicken's egg, aglow with her own name in gothic lettering. Yva was flanked by Lyssa and Rhoda and following them came (...) Juda. Fora reached out in her mind to touch each one (Gearhart 49-50)

As can be seen, the ritual must be performed with a large group of women who want to participate in the event. More plants, oils, and natural elements⁵⁵ are used in the implantment along with a vial full of eggs. However, the reader is not able to experience through Fora the following steps of the rite, since, as she announced, she only came to the cella to check the place for her future implantment, and this description of the first steps of the ceremony is only a vision that she is imagining.

The cella holds significant symbolism within this ritual. For a's journey into the deep cave serves as a metaphor for the implantation and development of the egg within the womb, described as "a womb to enrich a womb." (Gearhart 50; DelRosso 217) Moreover, the cella is traditionally associated with rituals, being the chamber within a temple where the deity's image resides. In this context, with nature being the deity, conducting the ritual in this sacred space elevates maternity to its most profound connection with the natural world. For Paulsen, "this ritualization (...) is an ambitious attempt to build alternatives to the patriarchal religions by means of a spirituality and a system of ethics based on female principles" by which women help and support each

⁵⁵ All reference the witch.

other (108-109.) Regarding the process, parthenogenesis is related to cloning and, in Gearhart's stories, serves as a symbol for "self-sufficiency and self-government" (Seabra 69) The Hill Women have developed to the point of being autonomous in every single aspect including reproduction, which leaves men as unnecessary in their society. In this case, the role of using the opposite sex for reproduction (as it happened with women in the readers' reality) is not reversed but erased.

The Hill Women's method of reproduction also reconfigures the traditional concept of motherhood. It was explained in the previous excerpt that the ritual of implantment was done in groups of seven. This is not reduced to the implantment rite, it continues when the flesh mother gives birth. When talking about Jacqua, it was already seen that she does not refer to her parents or her mother, but to her "mothers" (Gearhart 2.) Clana also mentions "one of her mothers" in the text (Gearhart 151.) This, along with Fora's explanation of the ritual of implantment, shows that motherhood is carried out in community, not only by the biological mother. The seven sisters that take part in the implantments will later play the role of mothers to the baby, by providing whatever the kid needs, although the whole community will take part as well through, for instance, education. This approach towards motherhood and family dismantles the conception of the man as provider and the woman as caretaker and reconfigures the traditional idea of family formed by the parents (a man and a woman) and the children. Separatism, lesbianism, and men's expendability construct the basis for a homosexual family.

According to Maria Aline Seabra, this new conception of family has philosophical and psychological interpretations. On the one hand, being a women-only family erases the idea of women having to depend on men, since there are no men to depend on. They are completely autonomous and self-sufficient concerning their

reproduction and so are in terms of family. The sevensisters contribute equally to the family. On the other hand, the existence of only one sex in the family “signal[s] the end of the Oedipus Complex” and all other complexes and ideas that Freud used to explain male and female sexualities (69.) Since the family is formed by women, there is no passive or active sex anymore, they cannot be considered the castrated counterpart of men, and they cannot experience penis envy or masculinity complex; in short, they can start being defined by their own rules and experiences, unattached to men’s. The only attachment that the Hill Women have is to each other. This plays a significant role in the task of motherhood, in the idea of family and the functioning of the society and community, and has to be transmitted in this way to the new individuals of the tribe.

Education plays a vital role in the community since the Hill Women believe that it is an essential tool to transmit their values to future generations and contribute to their task of preserving nature and, consequently, women. Like many things in the Wanderground, education is also communal. The girls are paired in twos with their “learntogether.” For example, we know that Ursula was Jacqua’s learntogether when they were younger, or that Bintu is Clana’s (Gearhart 3, 29). In addition, they must gather in the “Remember Rooms,” where a ritual is made for the kids to learn their history and the other women to remember it. Through Clana, the reader experiences the ritual of the rememberings. Now that Clana is seven, she can attend the gathering in the room full of women and cats:

They [cats] were the most regular attendants at the rememberings. And they were necessary, too. They filled in missing connections in the stories and added portions that the remember-guides occasionally forgot. Sometimes, it was said, as many as thirteen cats (and sometimes kittens) came to a remembering. Ordinarily, though, there were four or five and sometimes only two. If none came then the rememberings would usually be postponed, for few remember-guides trusted even their special training without the help of catwatch (Gearhart 150).

Two things can be deduced. Firstly, cats are needed in these gatherings since they seem to be a trustworthy source of stories. The presence of cats in the stories and history of the Hill Women further underscores their deep connection with nature. Additionally, it alludes to the association of cats as familiars of witches, a common portrayal in folklore and literature. Secondly, some women are trained to be “remember-guides,” who are the ones in charge of telling the stories of other women who contribute to the collective history (or, rather, *herstory*) of the Hill Women. Alaka is one of these remember-guides and explains their task in the following excerpt:

In her function as a remember-guide Alaka had re-channelled thousands of rapes, thousands of killings and tortures, re-channelled them hundreds of times, scenes of the most sordid and grotesque nature, atrocities she had not dared to experience without memory shields. It was in fact the job of a remember-guide to call up and re-play, for those who did not know it, all or any part of the Hill Women’s violent backgrounds. Decades ago each woman who had escaped to the hills had offered usually with great pain - the memory of her city experience, however dramatic or mild, however heroic or horror-ridden. Her experience as she had known it had been added them to the vessels of memory kept within the person of every hill woman. ‘Lest we forget how we came here,’ From countless seemingly disconnected episodes the women had pieced together a larger picture so that now they had some sense of what had happened during those last days in the City. Over the years as women had joined them the memory vessels had been added to: more and more stories, more and more horrors, and sometimes a narrative that brought with it some hope or humour. As a woman shared, she became part of all their history (Gearhart 24).

As it can be perceived, the remember-guides act as storytellers, who retell the stories of the women who founded their society and the ones who form it. All these stories become part of the collective history. Debra Shaw believes that this collective history, retained in the memories of the remember-guides and cats, “unites the generations and provides a living mythology” (135.) In addition, the stories told in the rememberings remind them of a dystopian past, which is in fact the present in the City, in which women did not enjoy a favorable position. Remembering this past is important for the Hill Women who need to preserve their way of living so that they do not come back to that undesirable situation.

Clana is eager to learn about the origin of her world and continues narrating her experience in the Remember Rooms. She says that the ritual starts with “Naming of the Names,” a moment to honor the women who have given their stories to the community, to be used in the remembering. What the reader learns through Clana is that at a certain time, women started fighting for their rights such as free abortion (Gearhart 153) and men started taking measures against this “rebellion,” like prosecuting and killing those who did not follow the rules (curfews, ways of dressing, isolation, etc.) and did not fit in the standards (the so-called “witches,” hippies, lesbians, etc.) (Gearhart 164-165.) Women started escaping to the countryside, but still were prosecuted:

Since large numbers of women had started escaping the cities a new sport had become popular (...) *Cunt Hunts* they were called: small bands of men, usually three or four at most, packed up what gear they would need and set out for the day or the weekend to see what womanflesh they could find in the hills. Sometimes they got permission from the owners of the land who - with a quiet wife hovering in the background - usually granted it for a price. Other times they roamed the back roads indiscriminately, night and day, with spotlights and ‘scope rifles, often drunk, often loud, always together, and always dangerous. Eileen had described for them all an encounter with such men. She had been raped again and again, beaten, teased, tortured and disfigured, then left alive only because the men had passed out long enough for her to crawl away. Most others who were caught weren’t that lucky (Gearhart 173-174)

In light of the violence and oppression inflicted on women in the City and outside the City through events and games such as the Cunt Hunts, the Purges, or the New Witch Trials, “the earth finally said ‘no’” and the Revolt of the Mother took place, as it was explained previously (Gearhart 172.) The violent stories and the suffering of the women who founded their world remind the Hill Women not to make the same mistakes as men, not to be destructive and violent.

It is important to highlight the idea that in this world all women receive the same education from the age of seven. They aim to make them aware of the privileged situation in which they are now. However, this is just the focus of the remembering. The Hill Women are continuously learning from the very beginning when they moved

to the hills, using experience and exploration, as Clana did in the episode with the snakes. Education, which is key in the Wanderground, prevents them from assuming the position of the Other, which is now portrayed by the individuals in the City, where education seems to be a luxury. In the City, women live in isolation and are confined to the domestic spheres, where they do not seem to receive any kind of education. This restriction of education prevents women in the City from evolving and escaping the oppression they suffer and, therefore, are advocated to live in a secondary position. As will be noticed in the following section, women in the City are not the only ones who assume this position.

2.1.3. The Other in The Wanderground

Within the City's population, both men and women coexist. However, they do not embrace or adhere to the values, organization, or characteristics prevalent among the Hill Women, which serve as the social norm in this world. As a result, the power dynamics shift, and those residing within the City find themselves embodying the role of the Other, distinct from the established cultural framework of the Hill Women. Similarly, in the countryside, there exists a colony of men known as the Gentles, who also fall under the umbrella of the Other. Both groups occupy secondary positions in relation to the Hill Women and their society. They are not representative of the norm or the universal; instead, they are defined by what distinguishes them from the Hill Women. They stand as outsiders to the Wanderground, challenging its existing order.

In *The Wanderground*, the importance lies on the communities rather than on individuals, but some of them seem to be more significant than others. The Hill Women's society is described through the stories of certain women who possess a name; the reader has the chance to even meet some of the individuals who form the

Gentles. This is not the case with the men in the City. They do not have a voice in this collection of stories. Everything that is known about them is through the descriptions of their acts, which are told through the Hill Women's stories. They are, therefore, defined by the Hill Women and are opposite to what these women are.

The reference for the reader is, then, the society and the individuals described above: the Wanderground and the Hill Women. The Hill Women consider the men in the City as individuals who are mad for power and domination, who are the slayers of women and the earth (Gearhart 3, 208.) The Hill Women believe that men's values will perish, either because they will eventually change or die. This needed change implies abandoning their old-fashioned values which are contrary to the Hill Women's. For instance, they will have to abandon their artificial and technological life to be in line with nature, because only by respecting nature will they also respect women and vice versa.

The men in the City are also, as opposed to the Hill Women, violent. Their dominance in the City depends on their violent and repressive acts. They prosecuted the "witches," they killed women and men who did not fit into their standards (homosexuals, hippies, etc..) Their supremacy in the City is maintained through a totalitarian government that establishes curfews, patrols, dressing codes, etc. (Gearhart 91-92.) These rules are especially addressed to women, who are supposed to be confined so that they do not rebel against them, as the Hill Women did. However, this oppression is covered by an illusion of privacy. Individuals believe that they are free and that they have their own space within the City walls, but the truth is that the government is constantly aware of all their movements (Gearhart 120-121.) Besides, the idea of privacy comes along with the idea of possession, ownership, and individualism which again contrasts with the Wanderground values. This prevents the individuals

from the City from trusting each other, prioritizing individuality over community. Trust and sharing, in the Wanderground, are key values for the society to function, as well as the idea of not owning anything. Everything that the Hill Women have is communal and comes from nature, so they do not have the right to possess it.

Moreover, the men in the City are heterosexual or, at least, they act as such to survive. If they were homosexual and they expressed this freely they would have been prosecuted, exterminated or they would have escaped to the countryside. Heterosexuality is the only condition allowed in the City. Men have to marry women, although they can marry more than one woman (Gearhart 165.) Only men can enjoy polygamy, which exemplifies the inequalities existing among the sexes. Men's role in these marriages is the one of providers, while women stay at home playing the role of wives and mothers. In short, the men in the City are all that the Hill Women are not: they are urban, violent, totalitarian, individualistic, and incarnate the old-fashioned values of oppression, possession, and ownership. Their only sexual tendency is heterosexuality, which leads to the traditional conception of marriage, family, and their role as providers.

Like the men, the women in the City do not have a voice either in the stories, except for just one character that has recently arrived in the Wanderground from the City: Margaret. However, all that is known about women in the City is revealed by the Hill Women's account, rather than by any of the women who live or come from the City. One of the most clarifying descriptions of how these women are appears in Ijeme's story. Ijeme lets Ursula inside her mind to see what is troubling her. Like this, Ursula discovers that Ijeme had an encounter with a woman in the City which occurs as follows:

The woman scooted into the room, her every motion a contradiction of brazenness and insecurity. (...) The woman sat automatically.

Ijeme looked at her unbelievably. She was a thing out of history to the hill woman: a thickly painted face, lacquer-stiffened hair, her body encased in a low-cut tight-fitting dress that terminated at mid-thigh; on her legs the thinnest of stockings, and the shoes—were they shoes?—Ijeme could not believe they fit the same part the anatomy that her own boots covered. How could she walk in these spindly things? And with the flimsy straps that fasten them to her ankles and feet? The dangles that hung from the woman ears jangled in tune with her bracelets. She clutched a cloth-covered purse to her side.

Amazed as she was, Ijeme knew that she was in the presence of woman—but not a woman as she knew women. This was the city edition, the man’s edition, the only edition acceptable to men, streamlined to his exact specifications, her body guaranteed to me shuddered, limited, dependent, and constantly available. (...) She tried not to feel pity, tried to hope that the woman’s dress was a free choice. ‘Though that’s doubtful,’ she thought as she looked at her visitor (...)

Vacant eyes stared at her as she went to the refrigerator and poured some dark liquid into a cup. She paused as she closed the door to look at her own clothes, her man’s clothing: flat, comfortable boots, cotton socks, long work pants circled at the waist with a belt, a cotton work shirt. Underneath, her breasts were forced into flatness by the cloth binding she wore on the job or whenever she went out. (...)

Ijeme looked again at her, judging her age to be forty-five or so, trying to be much younger. (Gearhart 67-68.)

Many ideas are remarkable from this passage and all of them suggest that the women in the City are opposite to the Hill Women. According to Tidwell, “these women are barely recognizable as women to the Hill Women because of their lack of freedom (“No Longer Estranged” 42.) The women in the City “have so fully taken on the identity that men imagine for them” (Tidwell, *No Longer Estranged* 42): they wear make-up, their hair is perfectly combed and styled, they wear tight-fitting dresses and high-heel shoes. They also use jewels that embellish their ears and wrists. As Ijeme pinpoints, this is “the man’s edition” of women. As opposed to the Hill Women who dress comfortably and according to their choice, the women in the City are forced to follow certain impositions to live and survive in that society.

This, of course, is not a matter of how they dress; it is rather a matter of free will. Ijeme’s account shows that women are closer to automatons than to autonomous individuals. They live up to the standards of men who do not consider them anything beyond objects of desire. A significant aspect of the Hill Women is that they refuse this

treatment, even in the City. To avoid being treated like objects, Ijeme, like all the Hill Women in their shifts as spies in the City, has to draw on cross-dressing. They refuse to “dress up” as women from the City and choose to cross-dress as men to fit in a world made and ruled by them. This is the only way in which they may have a voice in the City; otherwise, they will be just like the woman in Ijeme’s room, a woman with no agency to change the state she is living in. This woman does not even know how to form full sentences; she only utters words like “fuck,” or “dyke” (Gearhart 69, 70.) The remarkable scarcity of language and the deliberate selection of words by the author highlight how women have been subjected to social conditioning in the City, inducing them to oppose those who deviate from the norms in their space. The subsequent events in the story further contribute to the role women play in the dynamics of the City.

This woman is, in fact, a prostitute who has gone with Ijeme, believing that she was a man, to have sex. Ijeme tried to prevent this to happen but the woman was insistent up to the point that Ijeme feels that she is being raped by a woman (Gearhart 70.) When the woman takes off Ijeme’s clothes she discovers that Ijeme is a woman and the unnamed woman goes out to the fire escape to give Ijeme away, but she falls and dies. After this, some men found her and gathered around the corpse saying:

‘Get her out of here. She’s a mess.’
‘Where’d she drop from?’
‘I dunno. You find out.’
‘I’m finding out nothing. Don’t look to me like she belonged to nobody. Hey, buddy. She belong to you?’
Ijeme’s voice, ‘No, I heard the noise...’
‘Yeah, me too,’ another voice. ‘What a screecher.’
‘Well, she was too old to bear so it’s no loss. Get her I.D. there. Help me clean it up, Joe.’ (Gearhart 71.)

This conversation serves as a confirmation that women in the City are treated as mere objects, possessed by men and exclusively valued for their reproductive capabilities. They are reduced to fulfilling the purpose of bearing children or providing leisure for

men. Furthermore, through Ijeme's experience of feeling raped and subsequently betrayed by another woman, the reader discovers that women in the City have internalized patriarchal roles. Ultimately, it is the women within the City who uphold the existing system within that space. To ensure the City women's survival, a transformative change is necessary, and this can only be done with the help of the Hill Women.

This is what Margaret's story suggests. Margaret arrives at the Wanderground dressed in armor, after being raped when she was escaping the City (Gearhart 22.) In the frontier of the Wanderground, Margaret finds Seja, a Hill Woman who helps her. Seja is Margaret's bridge to a new world where she can dispose of the old values represented by her armor. By taking the armor off, Margaret abandons the City ways and starts her transformation into a Hill Woman or, in other words, into a free subject. The women in the City are, therefore, the opposite of the Hill Women, the Other of the Hill Women. They are individuals (if one can say so) who are controlled and modeled by men. Their autonomy and freedom are overshadowed, becoming objects without the possibility of uttering their opinions or rebelling against their situation. Their only task is to play their designated roles in that society which are, in the same way as was explained in previous sections, being mothers, wives, and prostitutes.

Of the individuals who embodied Otherness in the stories, the Gentles are the most similar to the Hill Women. It was explained previously that the Gentles are a group of men who live in the countryside, following the principles of the Hill Women. They are "men who knew that the outlaw women were the only hope for the earth's survival. Men who, knowing that maleness touched women only with the accumulated hatred of centuries, touched no women at all. Ever" (Gearhart 2-3). The earth herself has allowed them to live in the countryside because they have renounced the principles

of the City, the principles of masculinity, of patriarchy. They have also renounced their sexuality as Evona affirms: “The country gentles had long since found it a relief not to be sexually active—that’s why they were able to be in the country—and probably could not perform sexually even in the heavy energy of the City” (Gearhart 138). The Hill Women accept them in their territory knowing that they do not represent a threat because of these factors (Tidwell, “No Longer Estranged” 42).

Nevertheless, not all the Gentles survive in the countryside. Jacqua narrates an episode in which some Gentles went to the Hill Women to ask for their help to survive. The reason they were dying was that “they had been unable to sustain their man-ness, and, though they had tried, unable to grasp their own woman-ness” (Gearhart 3)⁵⁶. They must abandon their masculinity to survive in the women’s world. Unless they do this, they will not be able to coexist with women. Although the Hill Women accept their presence, some of the women do not fully trust them, mainly because they still see that the Gentles are male, and “to some of the women it did not matter that the Gentles were men sworn to isolate themselves from women; if they were men then there was no reason for concourse with them” (Gearhart 136.) To these suspicious Hill Women, possessing a penis is a synonym for threat. That is why they, despite having rejected the principles of the City, can still be defined as the Other of the Hill Women.

Due to their maleness, there are certain behaviors that the Hill Women relate to men; therefore, for the Hill Women, male equals “man-ness” and that is the reason why they cannot achieve some of the characteristics of the Hill Women. For instance, they do not have special abilities, they cannot connect with nature in the same way as the Hill Women do, and they cannot perpetuate their species. The fact that, although they

⁵⁶ This would be a point in which Gearhart is not able to escape the essentialist perspective that attributes the inherence of certain qualities, behaviors, and roles to certain sexes, although presumably she refers to the idea of “man-ness” and “woman-ness” that the patriarchy proposes.

share values, they are still different, simply because of their nature, makes some of the Hill Women reject them. Nevertheless, the two “tribes” are aware of the fact that their relation is based on commensalism, as they obtained a benefit from each other. As mentioned previously, the Gentles and the Hill Women work together in the City, spying, aiming at anticipating attacks and eliminating the old values. In exchange for this cooperative work, the Gentles are allowed to live in the Hill Women’s territory, but they do not mingle with them, because they want to respect their wishes of not meddling in the Hill Women’s lives (Gearhart 187.)

Despite this cooperation, the Gentles are aware of this feeling of uneasiness among the women because they believe that “women and men can do nothing but violence to one another” (Gearhart 187.) The only way to coexist peacefully is that they change completely and, though the Gentles are somehow unsure of achieving this change, they are working on it. One thing for them is sure: they cannot dispose of their maleness, but they can disassociate it with what being a man has been characterized by in the City. While establishing roles for women in the City, men’s roles are also defined. If women are at home, men are outside; if women are oppressed, men are the ones exerting the oppression. This patriarchal society also defines the role of men, although the entire system is planned for their benefit. However, the Gentles do not fit with this system. They do not want to be the executioners of women; they do not want to follow rules with which they do not agree. In the same way as the Hill Women, they have to flee the City to develop their identity unattached to the roles that the system attributed to them.

Gearhart’s stories suggest that the Gentles had to work even harder than the Hill Women to survive in the countryside, because of their maleness. Again, the situation from the patriarchal society, in which women had to work harder to free themselves, is

reversed. Only towards the end of the collection of stories, in the story called “Meeting the Gentles,” the reader glimpses a bit of light for this group of men (Gearhart 181-196.) They have gathered with the Hill Women to discuss several issues. One of these matters is that the Gentles are starting to develop special abilities. When working in groups in a ritualistic way, they can contact mentally a series of animals. On this occasion, the Gentles declaim the final lines of Poe’s “The Raven” with some crows (Gearhart 192-193.) They explain that this ability is not like the Hill Women’s ability to contact and enfold every natural thing; theirs is similar to a bridge, a space that links two places (Gearhart 193.) As opposed to women’s direct connection to nature, the Gentles only connect by means of a text, written by a man. This ability is what men, without the chains of patriarchy, have developed to put the two worlds (men’s and women’s) in contact. They prove the necessity of the two worlds to coexist respecting each other, and they also imply that these special abilities, although with differences, are not exclusive to women, and, therefore, are unattached to sex. By including men within this new world, Gearhart disposes of the essentialist idea and suggests hope for the coexistence of the two sexes.

When the Gentles escape from the City, where the patriarchal system is present, they can prove “the possibility of new, egalitarian forms of interaction between the sexes” (Johns 183.) If the situation changes, they might be able to coexist in the same space, although the Hill Women’s insistence on each of the tribes having their separate life shows that the Gentles still have a long way to go. Even though the Gentles differ from the other Others as they have a voice and they adopted the Hill Women’s way of living, they remain still outside the norm, enjoying an unprivileged position compared to the Hill Women. Nevertheless, it seems that they have a chance of evolving and consequently acquiring their position as subjects at the same level as the Hill Women.

Through this perspective, Gearhart contemplates the readers' world, proposing that the hierarchical relationship between the sexes may evolve if they recognize their relationship as dialectical, with both sexes being treated as subjects.

2.1.4. Advocating for Equality

The previous sections analyzed the tools and resources that Gearhart uses in her book *The Wanderground* to explore the situation of Otherness that women suffer in the readers' world. Her focus is to speculate about the possibilities of women in a world where they enjoy the main position in society and are deprived of the stereotypes attributed to them by the patriarchal discourse. All the tools and resources seem to contribute somehow to the idea of reversing or dismantling the role of women in the readers' world. Gearhart's stories, at first glance, seem to destabilize, contradict, and rewrite the images of women inherited from the patriarchal discourse that defined women as the Other of men. However, this discourse is still present in Gearhart's book. First, patriarchy is the system of the City, where men rule over women, relegating them as the Other of men. The presence of this system is probably used to contrast opposite worlds. Secondly, the patriarchal discourse is presented through myths and images of women when Gearhart uses the link between nature and women or describes women as witches or amazons. Yet, these images and myths are rewritten to dismantle their original meaning and create a new image of women. It could be said that Gearhart uses the patriarchal discourse to rework it to create a new image for women, bestowing a different meaning to already-existing myths and images. However, it could also be affirmed that by using the patriarchal discourse she is still perpetuating it. By drawing upon the same language, symbols, and narratives that have historically marginalized women, there is a potential for the patriarchal system to persist in subtle ways within her work.

For instance, the resource of placing a dystopian society in which women are treated as objects and property, relegated to the position of Others, within her imaginary world, could be interpreted, indeed, as a perpetuation of women's Otherness. By contrast, it could also be interpreted as a useful tool for the reader to compare the two opposite societies (firstly, the Wanderground and the City, and, secondly, their world and Gearhart's world) and conclude how necessary a remodeling of the system is. This interpretation can be justified by the fact that, far from being the rule, patriarchy is just the Other of the Hill Women's system. The City and its system seem to be getting smaller progressively, and both the Hill Women and the Gentles work peacefully to make it disappear. When this finally happens, the Wanderground will be this ideal/utopian state. But while the City and its patriarchy exist, the Wanderground is only ideal for those who live in it.

Meanwhile, men in the City still enjoy a position of superiority. This superiority within the walls of the City is achieved by forcing their values through a totalitarian government, which allows them to exert massive control over women and other individuals who do not fit with those values. They control women because they fear they can escape and reduce, by doing so, their power. The existence of subdued women in the City implies that the stereotypes and images of women from the patriarchal discourse are still prevailing and it is what defines them. The women in the City are wives, mothers, or prostitutes, roles which revolve around men. They also act according to men's decisions and laws, which make them the Other. Moreover, the women in the City suffer this condition doubly: not only are they the Other to men, but also the Other to Hill Women. They do not fit in any of the groups. For men, they are objects; for the Hill Women, they are both victims and accomplices of men. Women's Otherness is, then, not eliminated in Gearhart's stories. Women still suffer the condition of Other and

Gearhart's world does not make them escape patriarchy. The image of women as weak, dependent on men, and without a voice is perpetuated through the women in the City. Nevertheless, as it was suggested, the portrayal of women in the City can be interpreted as another resource for the reader to reflect on the necessity of change. So, Gearhart's writing about patriarchy is, as Barr asserted, a way of analyzing and rejecting it (144.)

The Wanderground's rejection of patriarchy is clear because the main focus lies on the depiction of an opposite system, which is the norm in the world of the stories: the Hill Women's system. Their system is a matriarchy that defends the right of each woman to develop freely without any kind of oppression. Contrary to the patriarchal system, the matriarchy in the Wanderground does not use its predominant and growing position to subdue the opposite sex. Men can live according to their own rules, as long as they respect the Hill Women's. This principle is also practiced in the City, where the Hill Women acting as spies attempt to provoke a change in the men and women in the City, instead of killing or oppressing them. However, the Hill Women believe that they need to evolve separately.

By creating a separatist world, Gearhart allows the narrative to be exclusively about them. She writes about women, paying attention to matters that concern them. Focusing only on women and their concerns gives them a voice to them, allowing them to become subjects rather than men's objects. Gearhart takes the necessity of women rewriting their image and creates the Wanderground, a world of freedom for women, where they can explore their selves and start a process of self-discovery. Within this self-discovery process, the Hill Women can find what being a woman is and experience events that are exclusive to females, like their supernatural abilities. Although the Gentles also develop certain abilities towards the end of the collection of stories, it is important to remind the readers that their abilities are not the same as the Hill Women's

but exclusive to Gentles. Although this differentiation of abilities seems to agree with the essentialist perspective from which feminists tried to escape, it shows that both sexes can develop supernatural abilities. Gearhart draws on the second wave of feminism's idea of difference, which implies that their sex-exclusive abilities are not a synonym of a sexual hierarchy. Although the Gentles are Others, they are so because they do not fit within the Hill Women's society; they do not have the same privileges since they have not evolved to the same point as the Hill Women have. In addition, the Hill Women do not exert any kind of power over them, which reaffirms the idea that sexual hierarchies are not present despite the differences between the sexes.

Lesbianism and motherhood are also exclusive to the Hill Women and also aim at destroying all the patriarchal institutions that repressed women in the City. Like this, there are no marriage contracts, the Hill Women do not expect the members of their tribe to be wives or mothers, and if they decide to bring kids to the world, motherhood is not individual. They do not practice exclusive love and even heterosexuality is strange for them. By attaching these values to the Hill Women, Gearhart destroys the traditional patriarchal image of women as wives and mothers and dislocates them from a confined space. They are now in nature, they manage to get food, and shelter, work for the tribe, and take care of the family, all at once. They are not angels of the house anymore. They are witches and amazons who have found their true self in nature.

The use of these myths and the analogy of women and nature are worth reviewing since they can seem contradictory. On the one hand, Gearhart continues with her purpose of destroying the patriarchal image of women; on the other hand, she uses resources that come from the patriarchal legacy such as the figure of the prostitute or the Otherness of women in the City. The utilization of resources like the ones mentioned above stresses the intricate nature of breaking free from the patriarchal discourse, for it

reveals that images and myths have taken root within the collective imaginary. These deeply ingrained cultural narratives and stereotypes pose a significant challenge to dismantling patriarchal structures. However, meanings are not absolute. Gearhart uses those resources to modify the image of women and attribute a new meaning to them. For example, nature is not treated as something savage, unstable, and mysterious, but it is the urban space that plays that role in *The Wanderground*. The situation, then, is a reversal of the patriarchal discourse, now the unstable, emotional, and savage are the men in the City. In the same way as with this redefinition of the traditional connection between nature, Gearhart takes the myth of the witch and the amazon, which embody strong, independent women, and uses them in favor of women. Although prosecuted and executed in the City, the witches and amazons, described under Gearhart's feminist perspective, manage to escape patriarchy's claws and, consequently, escape a fatal end. They are the ones that prevail. In *The Wanderground*, amazons, and witches become the norm. Whoever is not a witch or an amazon is the Other and those Others will not survive unless they undergo a process of change. By rewriting or reinventing patriarchal myths, Gearhart aligns with Lorde, who emphasized the importance of creating new narratives that do not perpetuate women's Otherness. Gearhart portrays myths in a way that challenges and disrupts the traditional patriarchal stereotypes associated with them; it can be seen as a form of resistance. It involves using these existing symbols and archetypes to create new narratives that empower and liberate rather than reinforce oppressive norms. Reimagining these myths can serve as a means of reclaiming power, asserting agency, and offering alternative representations of marginalized identities. It allows for the exploration of different possibilities, challenging the limiting and often negative portrayals that have been perpetuated by the dominant culture. Nevertheless, as shown in the City, Gearhart does not destroy patriarchy utterly, rather, she dissects it so

that the reader can see how it is constructed and proposes how the world could change if there was no hierarchy based on sexual premises.

Gearhart shows that it is hard to escape from the patriarchal discourse, as it is hard for women in the City to escape the system. Nevertheless, Gearhart's point of view is that of optimism as she believes that the City will keep getting smaller and its values will eventually disappear. Moreover, optimism for the coexistence of women and men as equal subjects is also perceived, despite their differences, and the key to this is found in the figure of the Gentles. Both the Hill Women and the Gentles have rejected patriarchy. For now, they understand that men and women have to live separately until both of them achieve the state of equal subjects. Gearhart's work underscores that patriarchy fails to benefit any sex, emphasizing the urgent need to dismantle the structures of oppression and dominance that perpetuate one sex's subjugation over another. If the patriarchal system persists, it risks reducing women to mere shadows of agency, by depriving women of their roles as autonomous individuals. In such a scenario, women risk becoming voiceless and devoid of influence in a world shaped and dominated by men.

To sum up, the treatment of Otherness in *The Wanderground* does not eliminate the representation of women as Others in the readers' world. This situation is still perpetuated in the City. Gearhart has not managed to isolate women from the patriarchal discourse; however, women's Otherness in the City serves as a comparison to the world of the Hill Women where they are not the Others of anyone. It is evident that Gearhart successfully erases women's Otherness in the real world in her portrayal of the Hill Women. She accomplishes this by reinterpreting existing archetypes like the witch or the Amazon to reshape women's circumstances. Additionally, Gearhart introduces a new discourse for women by drawing on separatism, a common tool in the second wave

of feminism. Furthermore, by challenging the concept of sexual Otherness and applying it to both men and women within the City and its system, she exposes the inequalities experienced by women in the readers' world. This shift in perspective prompts readers to consider the flip side of the coin. What if men were the Others? The author intends to highlight the disparities and shed light on the systemic injustices faced by women. By presenting an alternative reality where men experience the marginalization typically endured by women, it emphasizes the need for equality among all individuals and challenges readers to question the existing power dynamics. Gearhart's collection of stories transmits optimism regarding the social relations between men and women and suggests that Otherness will eventually disappear, when women and men achieve the state of subjects of the same importance, despite their differences.

2.2. *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988) by Sheri S. Tepper

Sheri S. Tepper (1929-2016) is another US writer who spent her life writing SF, fantasy, horror, and mystery novels. She received several awards for novels such as *Grass* (1990) or *Beauty* (1991), but she wrote over thirty novels divided into sagas and auto-conclusive books. Before dedicating her life to writing, she worked as director of Planned Parenthood (Vint 297). This experience marked the themes and issues that were treated in her writings since mostly Tepper focuses on feminism and reproduction. Along with feminism, her novels also dealt with ecological matters (Vint 297). As it can be noticed, Gearhart and Tepper shared similar interests.

Her work *The Gate* (1988) is probably her best-known novel and, although it is not so much concerned with environmental issues, it does focus on feminism and reproduction. This novel revolves around a post-apocalyptic future that has been reorganized into separate communities of women and men, although the separation is

not absolute. Women rule this world and, by controlling it, their purpose is to achieve a state of the ideal society. This element of the novel is similar to that of Gearhart; however, in Tepper's novel, the way to achieve the ideal society is to undertake the secret task of eliminating the violent masculine gene using selective breeding. As was the case for Gearhart, Tepper is a recognized author in the field of SF literature, and her novel *The Gate* (1988) is relevant for this study since it delves deeply into the exploration of gender roles, power dynamics, and the social structures that perpetuate inequality, while building a fictional world based on a post-apocalyptic society which has allowed women to take the reins of their lives. Besides, the novel allows this study to explore how the trends in SF and feminism had changed a decade after *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (1978) was published.

Regarding the text chosen for this study, it is worth noting that numerous essays and chapters in collections are dedicated to *The Gate* (Tepper 1988.) The novel's extensive coverage of topics, including reproduction, religion, prostitution, and homosexuality, adds to its appeal as a text for analysis. One of the approaches that authors have taken to Tepper's text is analyzing the separatist society and how that element affects the critique of gender relations. In his essay titled "Reconsiderations of the Separatist Paradigm in Recent Feminist Science Fiction" (1992), Peter Fitting specifically explores the separatist theme within the novel. Fitting concludes that *The Gate* is an essentialist work that does not solve the gender issue; instead, it merely inverts the power dynamics. According to Fitting, Tepper's attempt to eradicate violence while retaining the presence of men results in women adopting a level of violence that they want to eliminate. Authors, such as Wolmark, have adopted a parallel perspective to Fitting's. In *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* (1994), Wolmark recognizes Tepper's utilization of SF as a means to

explore feminist concepts and explicitly discusses the inversion of Otherness in *The Gate*, where men are positioned as the Other. However, Wolmark's interpretation indicates that the novel merely flips the roles of women and men without genuinely addressing the underlying complexities of gender relations (Wolmark 81-82)

Other analyses have delved into the exploration of technology and reproduction in *The Gate*. An example is Marie Louis Davis's dissertation, titled "Sexuality and Reproduction in Dystopian Fiction" (1995.) Davis's work investigates themes such as eugenics, reproductive control, and sexual control in dystopian literature, particularly examining their connection to the portrayal of lesbianism as either a pathology or an absence. Davis contends that Tepper's novel qualifies as dystopian because it introduces a breeding program that restricts women's autonomy in choosing their sexuality and reproductive paths. According to Davis, Tepper's endeavor to create a world favoring women inadvertently results in limiting their freedoms. Wendy Pearson also takes Davis's approach in "After the (Homo)Sexual: A Queer Analysis of Anti-Sexuality in Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*" (1996.) Her analysis focuses on Tepper's portrayal of homosexuality, unequivocally asserting that the novel is fraught with homophobia and prejudice. In her view, *The Gate* does not envision a world of endless possibilities for women; rather, it imposes limitations on women's choices.

In 1999, another dissertation on *The Gate* was published: "The Unguarded Gate: Infiltrations of Patriarchy in Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*" (Zitner-Crawford). Thorun Zitner-Crawford conducts a thorough analysis of how Tepper's world is rooted in traditional structures that originally gave rise to sexual hierarchies. According to Zitner-Crawford, Tepper's approach to separatism involves perpetuating stereotypes, rendering the novel essentialist. In this sense, Zitner-Crawford explains the elements in the novel to conclude that Tepper's only achievement is the perpetuation of

the conflict between the sexes. A more optimistic interpretation is the one provided by Lorna Jowett who dedicates to it an essay called “The Female State: Science Fiction Alternatives to the Patriarchy—Sheri Tepper’s *The Gate to Women’s Country* and Orson Scott Card’s *Homecoming* Series” (2000). In her examination, she meticulously explores various elements that contribute to the formation of Women’s Country, encompassing aspects like breeding and reproduction, technology, environment, religion, government, and war. She recognizes Tepper’s novel as a “critical utopia,” envisioning the gradual dissolution of patriarchal societies while emphasizing women’s reclamation of power and knowledge. Nevertheless, she concedes that this envisioned world is not a practical solution for patriarchy, as it harbors its imperfections, notably explicit homophobia. Gwyneth Jones in her *Imagination/Space Essays and Talks on Fiction, Feminism, Technology, and Politics* (2009) also offers a critical view of its narrative due to the negative depiction of homosexuality.

Naomi Stankow-Mercer continues with the contributions to the analysis of *The Gate* that follow Davis’s perspective in her dissertation “Dystopian Visions: Women, Men, and Equality in *The Gate to Women’s Country*, *The Outlander: Captivity*, and *The Shore of Women*” (2003.) Stankow-Mercer extensively examines these texts to ascertain whether they portray egalitarian societies. Her conclusion asserts that Tepper’s world is inherently elitist, establishing an unequal and dictatorial state. Contrary to providing opportunities for women, it is argued that this world instead imposes limitations on them.

Diane P. Thompson published in 2004 a book called *The Trojan War: Literature and Legends from the Bronze Age to the Present*, from which she dedicates a chapter “*The Firebrand* and *The Gate to Women’s Country*: Women Revisit the Trojan Past” to the study of Tepper’s novel. The noteworthy aspect of this chapter lies in Thompson’s

approach, which centers on analyzing the Trojan War and its characters in the novel. Thompson particularly references a play within the novel titled *Iphigenia at Ilium* and underscores its significance. According to her, the play symbolizes the suffering endured by women and children due to male violence. The Trojan War serves as a parallel to the hardships women have faced in Tepper's post-holocaust society because of men. The lessons drawn from the play and the Trojan War justify women now having control and influence over society to effect positive change. However, while Thompson acknowledges Tepper's call for societal transformation, she criticizes the novel for suggesting that selective breeding is necessary for this change to occur.

In 2008, Shiloh Carroll published "Both Sides of the Gate: Patriarchy in Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country*," an essay that focuses on the treatment of patriarchy in the different societies portrayed in Tepper's novel, beyond Women's Country. The author differentiates between Women's Country, men in the garrison, and the Holylanders as examples of three different approaches to patriarchy. The women strive to establish a utopian and egalitarian society, contrasting with the warriors who adhere to a code of male domination aimed at overthrowing Women's Country. The Holylanders, on the other hand, embody a form of patriarchy rooted in religion, portraying the most unfavorable conditions for a woman to endure. Through the examination of the three societies, Carroll reads Tepper's text from a more positive perspective, considering that it portrays "warning signs for the beginnings of patriarchy, shows the horrendous outcome of patriarchy taken to the extreme, and examines the fall of patriarchy as a social system" (Carroll 34.)

Tidwell also offers reflections on this text, focusing on the intricate connection between science and women depicted in *The Gate*. Her analysis delves into the functioning of Tepper's world and the role of science within the narrative, having the

eugenics program as the foundation of the society. According to Tidwell, one could interpret *The Gate* positively as a case demonstrating that transferring science and dominance from men to women does not necessarily alter the established patterns and does not transform the world into a better and ideal place. With the same interpretation, Kim Horner published the article “Whose Right to Choose? Control of Women’s Reproductive Rights in *The Gate to Women’s Country* and *A Door into Ocean*” in 2022. In this instance, Horner directs attention to the reproductive rights of women, emphasizing the constraints imposed when decisions are centralized within a specific group rather than individuals, even if the group is comprised of women. The author engages in an in-depth analysis of the power structures depicted in the novel, highlighting their impact on the crucial issue of reproduction, which holds significance for second-wave feminists. Horner’s conclusion offers a positive interpretation of the novel, viewing it as a work that prompts reflection on questions of equality and rights within worlds characterized by clear hierarchical structures.

As can be seen, while *The Gate* is widely regarded as a landmark in feminist SF, its reception is diverse, encompassing both supporters and critics regarding its classification as a feminist work. Scholars have delved into various aspects of the novel such as separatism, technology, science, the portrayal of patriarchy, and the prevailing power structures within Tepper’s world. These diverse perspectives offer valuable ideas and references, all of which will be incorporated into the analysis presented in this dissertation. The primary focus taken in this study, however, centers on Tepper’s creation of a role-reversal world from a feminist standpoint. This dissertation thoroughly explains Tepper’s world and defends it as a critique of a society marked by a sexual hierarchy that contributes to the disadvantages experienced by one sex or the

other. Therefore, in alignment with this concept, *The Gate* underscores the imperative to eradicate sexual hierarchies to, in turn, eliminate sexual Otherness.

2.2.1. A Post-Apocalyptic Novel

Controversy arises concerning what type of text *The Gate* is. For authors such as Gary Westfahl or Michael Levy, the work can be defined as a post-nuclear holocaust SF work (Westfahl, *The Greenwood Encyclopedia* 101; Levy 159); for other authors such as Gwyneth Jones, Tepper's novel is a feminist utopia, and others like Shiloh Carroll affirm that it is both "a feminist utopia and a 'battle of the sexes' novel" (Jones 75; Carroll 25.) It is not incompatible that Tepper's text belongs to all three SF subgenres, and it must be added that, as it happened with *The Wanderground*, Tepper's novel is not pure SF, it includes some fantastical traits.

On the one hand, *The Gate* is the story of a post-apocalyptic world. Morgot, the protagonist along with her daughter Stavia, a doctor and a member of the Council of Marthatown, explains in the novel that their society is located on Earth after a "great devastation" took place "three hundred years ago" (Tepper 346). She also suggests that the great devastation was caused by the weapons created and used by men. In Morgot's speech, the exact cause of this devastation is not found; however, the reader has some hints in another fragment of the book:

"You walk across that place, a few days later all your hair will fall out and you'll start dying. Still, a bleak desolation isn't as dangerous as some of them, because you can see it. Some of them, you can't see. The rock looks all right, and the plants, but it will kill you just as surely as this one. The one south of Marthatown is like that. We call them masked desolations when they're like that."

"How do you know it's there?"

"We've still got some pre-convulsion radiation detectors. Whenever we send an exploration team, we send a detector with them. Or a good map."

"A desolation," repeated Stavia, staring at the bare, black place until it was hidden behind a hill, lost in the tree-specked ranges. "How did they make it?"

"With their evil weapons. You know that." (Tepper 121)

In this passage, Stavia and Morgot talk about areas around Marthatown that still suffer the effects of the great devastation (also known as convulsions.) Morgot explains that these areas are radioactive and that the reason why they are like this is because men used “their evil weapons” three hundred years ago. The radiation that Morgot talks about may lead to interpreting the disaster as a nuclear holocaust, after which only a few humans survived and were able to reconstruct civilization as they know it (Tepper 346-347.) This episode had other consequences, like the disappearance of several animal species such as reindeer, and the inability to cure certain diseases like cancer, due to the scarce resources (Tepper 58; 74.) Since the characters of this novel are living with the consequences of this nuclear holocaust, it can be said that *The Gate* is what Westfahl, Levy, and the title of this section affirm: a post-nuclear holocaust or post-apocalyptic SF.

Nevertheless, this is not incompatible with the other two definitions. For Tepper’s text to be a feminist utopia, it must comply with certain characteristics. First, *The Gate* explores a situation that is more favorable for women than their situation in the readers’ world. Women in this world are the rulers, an idea that contradicts patriarchy and implies a role reversal that triggers a reflection on the actual world. An instance of this situation is found in the following passage:

‘Back there, with the Holylanders⁵⁷, I kept thinking, that was how it used to be, wasn’t it? Before the convulsions. Before Women’s Country, that’s how it used to be for women. To be shorn like sheep, and bred whether they wanted to or not, and beaten if they didn’t...’

Morgot rocked, murmuring. ‘No, no. Not that bad as a general rule, I don’t think. Love existed, after all. Some men and women have always loved one another. Not all cultures oppressed women. Some did shave heads. Some allowed beating. Other cultures were quite advanced, at least in principle. And we have to remember that many women did not resent their treatment because they’d been reared to expect it. Of course, it was even worse than that for individual women or in certain places.

⁵⁷ The Holylanders are an outsider society, whose members live outside the walls of the women’s towns and under a patriarchal system.

The Council keeps some old books in a locked room under the Council Chambers.
(...)’ (Tepper 335).

This exchange between Stavia and Morgot highlights that three centuries ago, in the pre-convulsion era, women faced varying degrees of oppression. This historical context serves as a touchstone for readers, initiating reflection on the potential for social transformation. In the present, within Women’s Country, women no longer experience subjugation by men and have attained an improved status compared to the past. However, it is essential to recognize that this newfound social structure is not necessarily ideal.

This status is discerned through various aspects, including the secret eugenics initiative undertaken by women. This clandestine selective breeding program appears to be rationalized by their aspiration to create an ideal society lacking violence, particularly violence against women. In this perspective, the desired outcome justifies the means employed. This eugenics endeavor contradicts Russ’s notion of feminist utopias as inherently peaceful; instead, it reveals that women are utilizing their influence to reshape their society for the better, even if it entails manipulating their inhabitants⁵⁸. In addition to this undercover strategy, women orchestrate conflicts among garrisons, resulting in the gradual elimination of warriors⁵⁹. Their objective is to gradually eradicate violent men⁶⁰. Consequently, Women’s Country, although maintaining a prohibition on violence within their settlements, is not characterized by overall peace.

⁵⁸ It will be shown that this manipulation is exercised over men and women, since only the Women Council and a few more know about the program.

⁵⁹ Almost all men in this society live in garrisons, outside the city walls, and are called “warriors” because they are supposedly in charge of protecting Women’s Country.

⁶⁰ We will see later that women allow only those who demonstrate that they are not violent (by coming back to their country) to live.

In the realm of sexuality, Women's Country diverges from another of Russ's utopian ideals. This departure is evident in elements such as the eugenics program and the event known as the Carnival, which represents the sole occasion when men and women can engage in sexual activity. This arrangement implies a lack of sexual permissiveness, with heterosexual relationships being enforced since they have successfully eradicated what they term the "gay syndrome" (Tepper 91.) This further underlines that this society falls short of being truly ideal, as its members are not afforded complete freedom in matters of reproduction and sexuality. Moreover, the idea that women live in towns also opposes Russ's idea of non-urban utopias. Even though these women do not live in a technological city, they do live in an urban space, adapted to the situation after the great devastation. They live in towns named after women (Marthatown, Susantown, Abbyville, etc.), but they draw on natural resources since technology almost disappeared after the devastation.

By contrast, *The Gate* aligns with Russ's definition of feminist utopias by emphasizing the importance of female bonding, the necessity of collective effort to advance toward an improved world, and the explicitness of economics and politics. Within Women's Country, each small town displays its thriving industry, facilitating trade among their respective products. Concerning the political landscape, the towns are governed by Councils consisting exclusively of women, who hold an esteemed status within their communities. This presence of an elite group indicates that the notion of a completely classless society is absent in Tepper's narrative. In addition, it is worth noting that councilwomen possess a singular privilege distinct from other women: they exercise control over the process of reproduction.

As evident, *The Gate* diverges from many of the characteristics proposed by Russ regarding feminist utopias. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the

ultimate goal in *Women's Country* is indeed the creation of a utopian society. However, the methods employed to achieve this aim appear dystopian in their impact on men and certain women. The novel also exhibits certain elements that resonate with the "battle of the sexes," although it does not fully conform to this category either. The term was coined by Joanna Russ and refers to stories that depict female-only worlds or worlds dominated by women, which propose a role reversal from the patriarchal world. These stories are also characterized by a confrontation between the two sexes and they are normally violent (Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* 143-144.) This resource is both used by feminists and antifeminists and in the end, it seems to conclude with the idea that "women cannot handle power" because they "abuse" it (Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* 41-42.) Because of this, the female world has to return "to the normalcy of male dominance by male visitors from our society or male renegades from the world of the story. These men overthrow a gynocracy that is both awesomely repressive and completely inefficient. The method of overthrow is some form of phallic display: flashing, a kiss, rape" (*To Write Like a Woman* 143-144.)

Given the revelation of the women's eugenics program, the manipulation of the inhabitants, and the orchestration of wars between garrisons, it is evident that Tepper's narrative is marked by violence, oppression, and manipulation. The presence of these elements, particularly the eugenics program and the wars, implies that women are wielding their power in a manner that could be seen as an abuse of power in pursuit of creating a better society. Concerning the concept of the "return to male dominance," while Tepper's story does not involve visitors from our world, it does allude to male renegades within the story's world. One of these renegades, Chernon, plays a pivotal role in overthrowing the gynocracy. He commits a grave act by raping Stavia, which subsequently destabilizes their society. However, contrary to Russ's depiction, in

Tepper's novel, women continue to rule the world. Despite the outcome, it can be argued that Tepper's story aligns with Russ's description of "battle of the sexes" narratives.

Both post-apocalyptic and "battle of the sexes" narratives are recurrent themes in SF, and the focus on reproductive technology is another common motif. In a world where technology has largely vanished due to men's misuse, the control wielded by women over the few remaining technological resources adds to the sense of estrangement experienced by readers. Similar to *The Wanderground*, the concepts of separatism and role reversal contribute to the novel's defamiliarizing effect. This role reversal is rooted in the imperative survival of the human species, given that men were responsible for the nuclear holocaust. In response, women assume control, determining that separatism is the optimal social structure. The society is divided into women's towns and men's garrisons, with the latter situated on the outskirts of each town and being dependent on Women's Country. Much like Gearhart's work, Tepper employs separatism, a trend among second-wave feminists, to explore matters that exclusively concern women, such as reproduction and motherhood. However, it is worth noting that separatism in this novel is not absolute. Some men are permitted to reside in Women's Country, specifically boys up to the age of five and servitors. The rationale behind this allowance is that women perceive these groups as harmless. This perspective aligns with an essentialist viewpoint that characterizes violence as a masculine trait. Women believe that boys under five are non-violent because they have not had contact with warriors, and servitors are deemed non-violent due to their rejection of living in the garrison.

In summary, the novelties of separatism, women's dominance, selective breeding, and the role of technology and science form the novum of this narrative. Readers

encounter aspects of this world that resonate with their own experiences, but they also encounter those innovations that provoke a sense of defamiliarization, prompting reflection on both Tepper's society and their own. However, this sense of estrangement cannot be attributed to technology or science alone. Similar to Gearhart's Gentles in her novel, some servitors in Tepper's narrative possess inexplicable abilities. While not universal among servitors, a subset of them exhibits unique gifts (Tepper 118.) For instance, characters like Joshua and Corrig possess the gift of premonition or "clairvoyance" (Tepper 228.) The focus on these mystical abilities is not prevalent throughout the story, and it stands as the only element that defies rational explanation. This suggests that Tepper's work can be regarded as a hybrid of SF and fantasy, blending the rational and the inexplicable to create a rich and multifaceted narrative.

The genre classification of the novel provides readers with significant insights into the narrative tools and resources employed by Tepper to emphasize the reversal of Otherness. The novel skillfully combines elements of post-apocalyptic world-building, a thought-provoking battle of the sexes storyline, intricate role reversals, and elements of both SF and fantasy. This unique blend of genres forms the perfect ingredients for exploring the possibilities available to women. It allows Tepper to create a compelling framework where social norms and power dynamics can be scrutinized and subverted, offering readers a profound exploration of agency, and the potential for transformation. Thus, in *Women's Country*, women become the majority, they rule and are the ones who define men's positions and roles in society. Women relegate men to a place outside their towns and are being eliminated, without their knowledge. In this story, men are relocated as the Other with respect to women, who are now the reference and the center. Yet, men are not the only ones alienated in this story; servitors, some women in

Women's Country, and men and women outside the town walls can also be defined as Others.

The upcoming section will delve into the exploration of Otherness within Tepper's work. As in the previous analysis, this section will be divided into examining the established status quo in Women's Country, the fundamental principles supporting its functioning, and the individuals who undertake the role of the Other within this society. Lastly, it will initiate a discussion aimed at dissecting Tepper's methodologies, seeking to determine whether she effectively reshapes the perception of women inherited from patriarchal discourse or, on the contrary, perpetuates it.

2.2.2. Women's Country

In the same way as in *The Wanderground*, women in *The Gate* are the protagonists of the story. They act as the norm from which the rest of individuals are defined in this future version of the world. So, it might be useful to examine them and their society first. To begin with, it must be said that the main women in Tepper's novel are based in Marthatown, one of the many towns around Women's Country. They live separately from men, ruling their towns and men's garrisons. Women are in charge of the survival of their towns, and they have to provide food, clothing, etc. for the warriors in their garrison:

'I've heard him,' muttered Stephon. 'One of the twenty-two asked him the other day why we let the women run things, and old Sandom said, "I'm sitting here at my leisure, boy, wearing fabric I got from Women's Country, drinking beer made from Women's Country grain. Tonight little Bilby will fix my dinner and he'll do it with Women's Country meat and beans and cheese. You want to get out in those fields and dig? Get yourself all muddy and cold? You want to be a shepherd, boy? Let the women run things. They like it, and why should I bother?"' (Tepper 80)

Stephon, a member of the warriors, confides in Michael, their commander, expressing concerns raised by some warriors regarding the role of women in leadership. One of the

elder commanders responds by explaining that women in power provide the warriors with a life of ease, as women cater to their every need. This arrangement appears to put women at a disadvantage since only the warriors enjoy these benefits without any effort on their part. Notably, during times of scarcity, warriors remain unaffected, as all the sacrifices and rationing are suffered in Marthatown (Tepper 113.) However, the idea is to ensure that warriors have everything they require to prevent any rebellion against female leadership. Even if, despite the luxuries, warriors contemplate rebellion, it is crucial to remember that women also have their plans. They can call upon other garrisons from different towns to confront each other, effectively diverting men's attention with comforts and wars, which in turn reduces their numbers. This strategy allows women to continue pursuing their goal of transforming their world into an ideal one.

Apart from the fact that women hold the reins of power in this new world, our understanding of them is primarily shaped by the perspectives of Morgot, Stavia, and Myra. However, it is important to note that their vantage point within Marthatown provides only a partial view, as they belong to the privileged strata of society. First and foremost, Morgot is a young mother raising five children: Jerby, Byram, Habby, Stavia, and Myra. Yet, she transcends the role of a mother, symbolizing independence and a persistent commitment to the values of their emerging society. Morgot is a member of the Council, a position that bestows importance upon her and her family. Moreover, she holds the title of "chief medical officer of Marthatown" (Tepper 34; 54.) Morgot's standing within the town hints at the broader social possibilities for women in this future world. Here, women have the opportunity to engage in the public sphere, pursue education, and work in various fields. This highlights that, while motherhood is highly

regarded in Women's Country, women's roles in society extend well beyond this singular facet.

Morgot's daughter, Stavia, assumes the leading role in the novel. Through the use of flashbacks, readers gain insight into both Stavia's present as a thirty-seven-year-old woman and mother of three, as well as her past, specifically the ages of ten to twenty-two. Alongside Myra, Stavia provides a window into the lives of children and the transition to adulthood in Women's Country. For her part, Stavia displays a strong dedication to her studies and shares with her mother, Morgot, the values of independence and a deep respect for their society's principles. Myra, on the other hand, is depicted as a malleable and whimsical young girl, showing a particular fascination with warriors, notably one named Barten. Myra's infatuation with warriors serves as a lens through which readers explore the formation and progression of relationships with them.

Both Myra and Stavia eventually become mothers, but their paths diverge significantly. Stavia follows in Morgot's footsteps, joining the Council and specializing in botany as a physician (Tepper 33; 198; 220.) In contrast, Myra is compelled to leave Morgot's household upon becoming a mother. She dedicates herself to her studies intending to become a mathematician, despite her true passion for dance (Tepper 207.) By and large, the lives of Stavia, Myra, and Morgot are the lives of every other woman in Women's Country; however, Morgot lives in a privileged position, being a councilwoman. In this case, the privilege that she enjoys or suffers is that she is one of the few women who know the secret of their society:

'How many of the women know?'

'Very few, actually. The women on the Council, of course. Very few others. We put clues here and there, for those with the wits to see them. Most women don't know anything about it. We can't risk telling the ones who talk too much. Or the

ones who drink a lot during carnival. Or those who are still young and silly, Who fall in love with warriors...' (Tepper 337-338.)

This passage unfolds near the conclusion of the novel, following a grave transgression by Stavia. During an expedition, she defies a crucial rule and meets with Chernon, attempting to escape Women's Country. In the course of their elopement, Stavia tragically experiences sexual assault at the hands of Chernon. This horrific event leads to her pregnancy, marking the first instance in years where a woman carries the child of a warrior. The consequence of this pregnancy is the disruption of the women's carefully crafted plan to build a world free from violent men (Diane Thompson 191.) In the wake of these events, Morgot decides to reveal the closely guarded secret to Stavia: their compliance with the demands of their society involves covertly engineering social change for the sake of an ideal future society. However, the moral implications of their actions are complex, as they manipulate the rest of society without their consent.

In other corners of society, women remain blissfully ignorant of this covert scheme, living under the deceptive façade of freedom, much like the warriors who are also shielded from the inner workings of Women's Country. Despite the moral complexities surrounding their actions and hidden agenda, one undeniable trait defines this society: it is men who have become dependent on women. Within this society, women have attained a remarkable degree of autonomy and self-sufficiency, even though they receive assistance from the servitors in their midst. By elevating women to the roles of rulers and providers, and granting them the capacity for independence from men (with the sole exception of reproduction), Tepper effectively reverses the roles rooted in patriarchal societies. Women now enjoy the freedom to live without the constraints imposed by a patriarchal framework, although, as we shall see, they still live with certain constraints inherent to their society.

Women in this world have the opportunity to pursue any occupation, and while motherhood remains a part of their lives (albeit voluntarily), it does not dominate their existence. Similar to individuals like Morgot or Stavia, women can actively participate in public life, breaking free from the confines of the private sphere. They must, however, contribute in some manner to the improvement of their society. The possibility of engaging in public life and even governing their towns signifies that women in this world gain access to roles previously denied to them in the readers' world. In stark contrast, men, except for servitors, are limited to a role as warriors and are entirely reliant on women for their survival. As a result, women wield complete authority, with the potential to misuse it. Tepper skillfully subverts traditional gender roles, placing women in the exact position that men hold within a patriarchal system. Consequently, the concept of Otherness is inverted and shifted onto men, though not exclusively so.

To know more about women in *The Gate*, it is necessary to explore their society. So far, it was said that their situation is a reversal of the readers' world and also a reversal from the past society in the novel, both of which are considered patriarchies. Equally to the Hill Women, women in Tepper's work live in a matriarchal system. However, in this society, women do have a government that is not based on assembly. The government is reserved for a few women who are responsible for making the important decisions:

'Councilwomen are not elected by the people,' she told him in answer to a question. 'They are chosen by other members of the Council.' (...)

'(...)There's no specific number for the Council, and some women get put on and some women don't, that's all. Most of those on the Council are medically trained, I do know that. I think that's because the Council has to maintain the health of the city...'

(...) Joshua spoke from the doorway. 'Servitors have one or more fraternities in each city. The Council in each city often seeks the opinion of the fraternities if they have opinions worth seeking. (...)'

Stavia stared at him, mouth open. 'I knew about the servitors' fraternities, but I didn't know that.'

'No one speaks of it from the steps of the Council Chambers, Stavvy. It wouldn't sit at all well with the warriors, would it? Still, don't you think it's reasonable? After all, none of you women have ever had to make such a choice as we have made. Most of you accept your way of life without much judgment of it. Donal and I have chosen your way as our own. Wouldn't you find that interesting if you were on the Council?' (Tepper 154-155)

Women's Country is governed by a Council comprised exclusively of women, who are selected by their fellow Council members. Consequently, the population cannot elect their leaders or representatives. This arrangement, as pointed out by Stavia, is deliberate and rooted in a specific rationale: only individuals meeting certain criteria are suitable for shaping the envisioned utopian society. At this juncture, it is worth noting that Stavia remains unaware of the ongoing eugenics program concealed within Women's Country. Hence, the information she imparts to Donal is inherently biased, serving as a manifestation of the Council's preferred narrative for dissemination throughout the town.

Based on Stavia's limited knowledge concerning the Council, readers gain insight into the fact that a majority of its members possess a background in medical training. This training serves a concealed objective: the control of reproductive processes within the town. It can be inferred that the entire organization of Marthatown, as well as other towns in Women's Country, is intricately linked to the control of reproduction and the eugenics initiative. In essence, the Council's ultimate aim is the eradication of the aggressive masculine gene, which necessitates their collaboration with servitors. Through this partnership, councilwomen can meticulously examine the factors that lead individuals to choose to return to Women's Country and discern the distinguishing traits that set them apart from warriors. Nonetheless, it is crucial to note that while servitors can assist councilwomen in their research, they cannot interfere in Council decision-making processes.

In addition to their role in reproductive control, councilwomen wield authority over the allocation of resources in Women's Country. When resources become scarce, the residents of Marthatown suffer the cutbacks, as the garrisons must be adequately provisioned. To facilitate this allocation, Women's Country operates a trade system, wherein each town specializes in offering distinct goods:

They all had warehouses where the food from the communal fields and flocks was stored and from which those stores were allotted, so much to each family, so much to the garrison, so much to trade with other towns. In Marthatown they stored wool and hides, grain and dried fish, and some root crops. In Susantown they stored apples and smoked meat, flax fiber and linseed oil. Up at Tabithatown they stored dried mushrooms and cut lumber. The town always smell of sawdust and pitch and rang with the scream of the saw at the watermill. All of them had a market section full of little shops and booths. They all had craftsmen's alleys where the weavers and quilt makers and candle makers and seamsters lived; every city had its candle shops and herb shops and scrap reclamation centers and streets lined with square, courtyarded houses where grandmothers lived with their daughters and granddaughters and baby boys and servitors.

All the cities had a Council Hall where the medical officers worked and the scarce commodities were allocated—drugs and glass, raw and worked metal. They all had plazas with gates that led out to the garrison ground. They all had streets where the provisioners of the garrison worked, and they all had carnivals, though not all at once. (Tepper 191-192)

The councilwomen divide the production of each town into supplies for families, for their garrisons, and trade with other towns. In the case of Marthatown, women produce wool, dried fish, and some crops, which are exchanged for other products from different towns such as Susantown or Tabithatown. Another feature of these towns is that they also have scrap reclamation centers so that the waste is reused. This is especially important in terms of steel and metals. After the convulsions, the steel industry almost disappeared, leaving Women's Country with few resources that were used to produce "razors and scalpels and other medical equipment" (Tepper 108.) Something similar happened with electricity. This resource is only used to make glass and medicine (Tepper 194.) This is indicative of the idea that although they live in urban areas, their resources are almost rural.

Apart from this knowledge about the supplying, the trading system, and the few resources, the previous passage sheds light on the configuration of the towns, which is similar in all of them. For example, craftsmen (or, rather, craftswomen) have alleys where they live, and the common housing consists of “squared, courtyarded houses.” In these houses, the whole family lives together: grandmothers, their daughters, their granddaughters, boys until the age of five, and each woman’s servitor⁶¹. It is also explained that all towns have a plaza with a gate that leads to the garrisons, and they also have Council Halls, where the councilwomen perform their tasks. Besides the urban organization, each town in Women’s Country shares similar customs and traditions. The narrator mentions the tradition of carnivals, which is the key festivity and is related to reproduction.

Other aspects such as religion are shared throughout Women’s Country. Tepper does not bestow too much importance on spirituality or religion but several references lead to think that the beliefs before the convulsions have been eliminated⁶². For example, Marthatown possesses a “Temple of the Lady,” showing that in Women’s Country, women worship a goddess called Lady or Great Mother (Tepper 8, 16.) The pre-convulsion idea—which corresponds also with the readers’ world’s idea—of a masculine God does not exist anymore. Not too much is known about the new religion and the Great Mother:

If she were older, then she could have tried a bigger promise, and maybe Great Mother would have paid attention. At age ten one didn’t have much bargaining power. Of course, Morgot and Myra would tell her there wasn’t any reason to make promises or seek changes because the Great Mother didn’t bargain. The deity didn’t change her mind for women’s convenience. Her way was immutable. As the temple servers said, ‘No sentimentality, no romance, no false hopes, no self-petting lies, merely that which is!’ Which left very little room, Stavia thought, for womanly initiative. (Tepper 16)

⁶¹There are exceptions. For instance, as it was mentioned, Myra has to abandon Morgot’s house.

⁶² Even for the warriors, the idea of God does not apply. They worship their masculinity and fatherhood, as it will be explained later.

At the age of ten, Stavia stands witness to Jerby's imminent departure for the garrison, a consequence of his reaching the age of five. In her innocence, she begs the Great Mother for Jerby to remain with them, oblivious to the social imperative that mandates such sacrifices (Tepper 15.) Within this passage, what becomes apparent about the Great Mother is her unwavering authority, as she is the driving force behind the established norms in Women's Country. It becomes evident the Goddess serves as a legitimizing force for the operational mechanisms of Women's Country (Diane Thompson 190.) This includes the tradition of sending boys to their warrior fathers and the provision for the possibility of renouncing these boys should they choose to remain in the garrison indefinitely.

After women leave their kids in the garrison, they have also a ritualistic moment to thank and give offerings to their Goddess:

Sylvia and Morgot each took a cup from the attendant and filled it, spilling some toward the Lady's Chapel for the Lady, then sipping at it, drawing the time out. Myra took their offering to the poor box outside the chapel door, then sat on the well coping, looking sulky. Stavia knew that Myra just wanted to get it over with. There was no necessity for stopping at the well. The water was purely symbolic—at least when drunk directly from the well like this—and offered no real consolation except a reminder that surcease would come if one didn't fight it. 'Accept grief, the priestess said at services for the lost ones. Accept grief, but do not nurse it. In time it will go.' At the moment, that was hard to remember, much less understand. (Tepper 19)

They must go to the Lady's Chapel, give an offering to the Great Mother, and drink from the Well of Surcease. Doing this is a symbolic action to remind women that they have to make sacrifices so that they can live better in the future. So, the Goddess is also a superior being to whom they commend themselves when they make sacrifices, similar to Judeo-Christian traditions.

Another trait of the religion in Women's Country is that the Goddess has "servers" or "priestesses" (Tepper 19.) With the figure of the priestesses and the temple,

it can be assumed that a cult is present in Marthatown. Although the worshipping is addressed to the Great Mother, not to a male God, it seems that this new religion shares with the past one the idea of monotheism and a specific place for cult. Throughout the novel, other rituals are associated with the Lady, such as the parade on the first day of summer:

The street curved and climbed as it followed the gentle upsweep of the city wall, made up of the back walls of houses, and joined to the public thoroughfare by twisting flights of narrow stairs. Behind them, down the hill and through the western wall, the Processional Road ran out to the shore where the fishing boats bobbed in rocking clusters along zigzagging piers. On the first day of summer the entire populace, led by the Council, paraded down from the hill to the shore to beg the kindly regard of the Lady on the honest effort of the fisherwomen and farmers and herdswomen. Shepherds led rams with ribbons on their horns and the farmers had bells on their wagons. (Tepper 111)

In this parade, the inhabitants of Marthatown commend their harvest and productions to the Lady. So, the Goddess is also perceived as a deity who favors or disfavors the inhabitants of the world. In the same way as they do with their harvest, women also commend their warriors to the Great Mother when they go to battle (Tepper 140-141.) From all these fragments, it can be perceived that the figure of the Goddess acts similarly to the figure of the male God in pre-convulsion times. The Great Mother is also the source of faith and hope for the women in this new society.

Although not much more is known about the Lady, the fact of referring to a superior being as a female destabilizes the patriarchal pillar of religion. But, similarly to what the patriarchal discourse did, women (those who know about the secret) use the Goddess as a justification for the subjection and manipulation of men. Moreover, by calling the Goddess “Great Mother,” Tepper also reverses the idea of God as father and source of life. This also highlights the importance of the figure of the mother in this new society. Although motherhood is something voluntary and women play other roles in this new world, it seems to be a valuable contribution to their society. By describing a

superior being as a female, religion supports women's position and actions, in the same way as patriarchy used it to support men's superiority and women's submission.

In Tepper's narrative, the dynamics of religion, government, and laws do not favor men, including servitors. Instead, women assume the role of the norm and the social reference point, while the concept of Otherness is ascribed to the male segment of society, contrasting starkly with the pre-convulsion era or the readers' world. Men find themselves relegated to an inferior position within Women's Country. Both servitors and warriors are utilized with the shared objective of perpetuating the species, albeit only servitors are chosen for this crucial role, as the fundamental aim of women is to eradicate warriors and their proclivity for violence. Although warriors do not make any substantial contributions to society, despite their own beliefs, they do play a role in matters concerning sexuality and love.

As opposed to Gearhart's use of separatism to explore lesbianism, this female society is not a resource for women to explore their sexuality without limits. There is only one possible sexual orientation in Tepper's world: heterosexuality. In Women's Country, women can only have relations, either sexual or affectionate, with men. The absence of homosexual individuals is due to a correction of a biological condition during pregnancy:

"I heard—I heard he even forced one of the boys."
'Chernon! That's absolutely forbidden.' Stavia bit her lip. Even in pre-convulsion times it had been known that the so-called 'gay syndrome' was caused by aberrant hormone levels during pregnancy. The women doctors now identified the condition as 'hormonal reproductive maladaptation,' and corrected it before birth. There were very few actual HNRMs⁶³—called HenRams—either male or female, born in Women's Country, though there was still the occasional unsexed person or the omnisexed who would, so the instructors said, mate with a grasshopper if it would hold still long enough. If the warrior had indeed 'forced one of the boys,' it had almost surely been done out of viciousness and dominance, not from any libidinal need. Libidinal need was fully accepted as a normal and useful fact of life.

⁶³ The abbreviation stands for "hormonal reproductive maladaptions" (Tepper 91).

Viciousness was not; rape wasn't tolerated in Women's Country. 'He could have been executed for that,' she said soberly. 'I can't imagine why he wasn't.' (Tepper 91)

Back in pre-convulsion times, homosexuality, or "gay syndrome" was caused by an imbalance of hormones. In the past, it could not be fixed, but now the doctors in Women's Country can "correct" this condition before the kids are born. The effort to eradicate the "disorder" of homosexuality implies a negative attitude towards it, which is also found towards bisexual individuals who are branded as promiscuous. According to Wendy Pearson, *The Gate* replaces "sexism with homophobia, so that the only histories revealed are, in a sense, the old dialectical ones of (...) separation and bigotry" ("After the (Homo)Sexual" 208.) As it is seen in the passage, homosexuality is considered vicious, because it is genetically impossible to feel attraction for the same sex.

The elimination of homosexuality also posits limitations to women's freedom. They are not free to explore their sexuality, as they have been genetically manipulated to love and feel attraction to men. Pearson affirms that "not only are there no lesbians allowed in the Women's Country, but there is also no allowance for any woman who might prefer asexuality or autoeroticism or who is not sexually attracted to macho warriors" ("After the (Homo)Sexual" 210.) With this premise, women in this new world find themselves just as constrained by heterosexuality as women did in pre-convulsion times. This imposition is not exclusive to women; men too have been genetically engineered to experience attraction towards women. Nevertheless, in terms of sexual expression, men enjoy greater freedom than women. Their leisurely lifestyle allows them to indulge in hedonism. Monique Wittig posits that heterosexuality is enforced within patriarchal societies, thus reinforcing the hierarchical dynamic between the

sexes. Consequently, the enforced heterosexuality within Women's Country perpetuates power imbalances between men and women.

While women can only have sexual relations during carnivals, warriors are allowed to unleash their "libidinal needs" whenever they want. If it is not carnival, warriors cannot have sex with women within the town walls, so they have to satisfy their needs outside of it. That is why they draw on Gypsies (Tepper 53.) Some women among the Gypsies work as prostitutes outside the limits of each town. As women in Women's Country allow prostitution⁶⁴, it is their responsibility to make sure that prostitutes do not transmit illnesses to warriors and they, in turn, to the women in town. Morgot, for example, oversees the inspection of the Gypsies, who live outside Marthatown and its garrison, to avoid some diseases that are incurable in this resourceless post-nuclear world (Tepper 54, 58.) This control on sexual health is also conducted in Women's Country before and after carnivals.

The carnival, a celebrated tradition occurring biannually and spanning a fortnight (Tepper 89), represents the only occasion when women and warriors inhabit the same space harmoniously. During this festivity, women have the opportunity to engage in sexual encounters with warriors, referred to as "assignments." To partake in these assignments, women must undergo a "checkup" where they receive a discreet implant, unknown to both women and warriors, aimed at preventing pregnancies resulting from these liaisons (Tepper 88, 330.) Failure to pass this medical examination confines women to their homes, rendering them ineligible to participate in the carnival's assignments. Alternatively, women can opt out of the assignments altogether, exempt

⁶⁴ The issue of prostitution is a contentious and multifaceted subject that often sparks debate among feminists. Whereas some feminists argue that prostitution undermines the principles of freedom central to feminism and helps to objectify women and their bodies, others advocate for the rights of sex workers, striving to secure safer and improved working conditions for them. Here are some sources that exemplify the two streams: "The Emergence and Undermining of Sex Worker-Led Freelance Feminism" (Simpson), "Feminists for Sex Workers: Our Manifesto" (Eswa), and "On 'Respecting Sex Workers'" (Murphy).

from the medical checkup. However, any woman without the required implant who ventures out during the assignation period risks being placed in “detention,” as it jeopardizes the underlying eugenics scheme (Tepper 86.) Beyond this prerequisite for women seeking relations with warriors, the remainder of the town, comprising both women and warriors, indulges in a period of joyous celebration:

Carnival time gathered momentum. Habby and Byram and Jerby all home, with Joshua and Margot fixing special meals and giving presents. Popcorn by the stove, holiday pies, the whole family off to see the magicians or the fireworks together. Except for Myra. She went flitting out every morning with flushed cheeks and a giddy laugh, her usual trousers changed for short, colorful gowns (...) going twice a day to the assignation house, drinking beer and wine and dancing with Barten in the carnival taverns until all hours of the night.

There was no time to miss her or worry about her with the dozens of itinerant clowns and magicians; the rockets screaming into the evening sky; the acrobats; jugglers; jongleurs; the city full of the sound of music and drums and choirs. There were song contests between the warriors and the women—which the warriors almost always won. Warriors had a lot of time to practice, all the time they weren’t fighting or practicing fighting, or engaged in their interminable sports contests. They sang battle epics, mostly, though they did do some amusing songs and some of the old folk songs and love songs that everyone knew (...) The women didn’t have nearly as much time to practice, but they sang nonetheless, and the town resounded with voices (Tepper 95-96.)

During the carnival, people from the town (excluding servitors who had to stay at home to avoid confrontations with the warriors) and the warriors from the garrison spend their time enjoying entertaining leisure activities and contests (Tepper 88.) By and large, this festivity is what traditionally has been understood by it, as Jennifer C. Vaught explains: “the word ‘carnival,’ which literally means ‘carne-vale,’ can be translated as ‘Farewell to the flesh.’ Traditionally, people celebrated this holiday period by indulging excessively in food, drink, sex, and violence” (4.) Added to these, Mikhail Bakhtin affirms that carnival is often associated with “profanation” and “blasphemy,” which includes “carnivalistic obscenities linked with the reproductive power of the earth and the body” (123) Carnival in *Women’s Country* is, in fact, a time when people can drink and eat excessively and are allowed to have sex (twice a day for two weeks); violence, nonetheless, is excluded in Tepper’s version.

As it was explained, this is the only time when women and warriors mingle, which means that “people who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free familiar contact on the carnival square” (Bakhtin 123). This is possible because “the laws, prohibitions, and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it, that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age)” (Bakhtin 122-123). Thus, the rules that dictate life in Women’s Country do not apply during this time: warriors coexist with women; women are allowed to have sex and entertain themselves; warriors can be in town, take part in leisure activities and contests, and even win some of them, as opposed to their unaware loss with Women’s Country’s plot. Carnival is, thus, a festivity in which “the generally accepted rules of polite behavior are overruled in favor of the temporarily reigning spirit of Carnival” (Danow 3). During Carnival, the world is pictured upside down, while the real state of affairs is disguised and working undercover (Bakhtin 122). The reversal of the status quo is used to give an illusion of happiness and prosperity; however, while “the behavior, gesture, and discourse of a person are freed from the authority of all hierarchical positions” during Carnival, they are being defined “in noncarnival life” (Bakhtin 123). Therefore, as Vaught affirms, carnival is a “limited period of misrule that ultimately reinforces the status quo (...)” (7). This status quo, under this atmosphere of celebration, is taking place in the assignation houses.

The assignations⁶⁵ serve as a reinforcement of the established order, intricately woven into Women's Country's grand design. The process behind these assignations is cleverly disguised to instill a sense of free will. For instance, women have the liberty to select their preferred warriors, creating the illusion of freedom and empowerment, as they believe they are choosing the fathers of their future offspring. Meanwhile, warriors find contentment in contributing to the perpetuation of the species. However, it is well understood that neither women nor men enjoy genuine freedom in this context. Women are effectively directed on when and under what conditions to engage in sexual activity; they are stealthily inseminated with servitors' sperm, all without their knowledge, solely to further the cause of the ideal society. Warriors, too, are strategically used as pawns to maintain the equilibrium of the ideal society's plot, minimizing any potential disturbances by making them feel included. Consequently, everything concerning sexuality in this novel is meticulously orchestrated to uphold the status quo. Warriors are afforded the freedom to satisfy their sexual desires, whereas women are granted this privilege solely during the carnival period. This apparent disadvantage for women is yet another sacrifice they must endure to ensure the successful execution of the plot, ultimately leading to the realization of an ideal society.

Contrary to initial appearances, this society allows space for powerful, uncontrollable emotions such as love to flourish. Love is an emotion that women often cultivate towards servitors. The relationships between women and servitors are rooted in something deeper than the physical realm, as physical connections are primarily reserved for warriors and the carnival festivities. While these relationships are accepted, they appear to hold validity primarily within the confines of private life. In the public

⁶⁵ Myra will have an assignation with Barten. Myra's age at this point is not specified, although it is known from earlier chapters that she is older than seventeen. So, these assignations start no sooner than seventeen and end when women stop being fertile (Tepper 198).

sphere, servitors are regarded as helpers. Furthermore, in Women's Country, women are not allowed to marry, either servitors or warriors. Consequently, the institution of marriage has been abolished within Women's Country, mirroring a shift seen in *The Wanderground*. This transformation reflects women's newfound independence, demonstrating that women are not possessions and can sustain themselves without husbands. They can provide for themselves, which stands in stark contrast to the constraints of a patriarchal system.

Although love is a feeling reserved for servitors and adult women⁶⁶, it is something normal to see that young women develop feelings for warriors. It must be said that it is the custom for warriors until fifteen to visit their mothers several times a year, during this time they can interact with girls. It is possible, then, that during these times girls develop feelings for warriors and vice versa. This is what they call "infatuation":

“Infatuation makes otherwise reasonable women behave in unreasonable and illogical ways. It is a result of biological forces incident to racial survival”

‘And?’

‘And “Infatuation should be regarded with forbearance. Though episodic, it is almost invariably self-limiting”’ (Tepper 52.)

In this context, Morgot's intention is for Stavia to glean wisdom from Myra's infatuation with Barten, ensuring that she does not replicate the same error. Myra, swayed by Barten's assurances and ideas, has begun to exhibit "unreasonable" behavior. She has grown to disdain Morgot's servitor, Joshua, influenced by Barten's instructions, and is even contemplating joining the Gypsies. Myra's warrior has pledged to care for her beyond the confines of Marthatown's regulations (Tepper 51), enticing her to consider this alternative path.

⁶⁶ Adult women can feel attraction to warriors, but since they do not have any kind of relation beyond the carnivals, it is more common that they develop feelings for their servitors with whom they coexist, and use warriors to satisfy their needs during the biannual festivity.

Women in Women's Country believe that this infatuation can lead women to make unreasonable decisions, but they also believe that these kinds of feelings are part of their lives. Morgot affirms that many women have decided to join the Gypsies and have come back a few months after to the protection of the town (Tepper 52.) However, this situation does not favor Women's Country so women should try and leave romance behind:

'She's all mixed up between what her body wants to do and all the romantic, dramatic notions Barten had helped her work up for herself. Deathless love. Undying promises.'

'That's just Myra,' she said uncertainty.

'Well, it's any of us, Stavvy. I've heard a few of those same promises from young warriors. I've had a few romantic or sentimental notions myself, from time to time. We all like to invent worlds that are better than this one, better for lovers, better for mothers... For all I know, Barten believes it himself. Many warriors do.'

'(...) Barten knows what would really happen to Myra if she went out to the Gypsy camp, but he makes it into something else in the stories he tells her.'

'(...) It's one of the things we on the Council try to keep in mind, the need to keep sentimentality and romance out of our deliberations. Leave romance to the warriors: We can't afford it in Women's Country.' (Tepper 87)

The idea of infatuation or romance suggests that women still have the pre-convulsion conception of love as romantic and ideal. Like Myra, many women have believed in "deathless love" or "undying promises," which have been dismantled when they faced other stages of life. In Myra's case, these promises are soon to disappear since Barten's reputation precedes his name. He is known for tricking women in Marthatown to join the Gypsies with the sole purpose of having sexual relations with them out of the carnival time (Tepper 56-57.) If many women have suffered this, it seems that all the power acquired by women in the reorganization of the world after the convulsions is destabilized by men's simple tricks. As Septemius, a keen itinerant, affirms, "it is hard when your own female nature betrays you into believing that the ones who abuse you

need you or love you or have some natural right to do so” (Tepper 333)⁶⁷. Even Morgot believed in them at some point in her life, and even Stavia eloped with Chernon. Men, with their “violent gene,” are still manipulating young women. Morgot justifies women’s decision to elope or leave Marthatown by affirming that everybody goes through phases like this because they all like to think that there is a possible better world. Thus, everybody clings to ideal promises that can lead to this better state of affairs. This is, as a matter of fact, Women’s Country’s purpose. The “illogical” women’s responses to men’s tricks entail that Women’s Country has many steps to take yet, because men still have some power over women, which makes them vulnerable, and this contradicts their ideal state. However, it could also mean that the objective itself is but an infatuation.

In Morgot’s perspective, women, like everyone else, held firm beliefs in the possibility of a better world. To materialize this vision, women harnessed their influence to establish a new order, one that aspires to harmonious coexistence between the sexes, contingent upon the elimination of the violent masculine gene. Accomplishing this entails a profound act of social engineering through a rigorous eugenics program. In line with Morgot’s reasoning, this phase of social engineering is deemed a necessary precursor for the future society, much like infatuation represents another stage in the lives of women. This rationale appears to serve as a justification for what outsiders might perceive as the “unreasonable and illogical” methods employed in implementing the eugenics program. However, it also raises the possibility that the pursuit of the ideal society may be itself a fleeting infatuation, an aspiration that remains forever out of reach. Nevertheless, Morgot herself harbors an unwavering belief in the

⁶⁷ Notice here the essentialist use of “female nature” as if women were prone to infatuation due to an inherent trait. This falls into the patriarchal description of women, who are said to be emotional by nature. (Stankow-Mercer 30)

eventual realization of the ideal society, explaining why she argues that there is no space for romance within their country.

It appears that, when it comes to matters of sexuality and romantic relationships, women find themselves at a distinct disadvantage compared to men within this society. Firstly, women are genetically engineered to be exclusively heterosexual, limiting the exploration of their sexuality. They can only fulfill their libidinal needs during the carnival period, and they can only form deep emotional connections with servitors. In contrast, warriors are also genetically modified, but they have the freedom to satisfy their sexual desires at any time, as female prostitution is permitted. Additionally, they can engage in sexual relationships with women in the town during carnival festivities. However, it is important to recognize that this entire setup is meticulously orchestrated to enable Women's Country to eventually attain its ideal state in the future. In this context, women's current situation is not a disadvantage per se but rather a deliberate sacrifice they make in the present to secure a better future for themselves and society as a whole.

Since this whole plot is orchestrated by women, despite their unfavorable position, it is warriors who are the wronged in this plan. It is important for women's purposes that warriors see themselves in a superior position. The idea that they contribute to perpetuating the species and defending the town makes them feel indispensable; moreover, their sexual freedom⁶⁸ and their idle life make them believe that they are in a clear position of advantage. Nevertheless, the truth is that they are progressively being eliminated. Although women are perceived as Others from the warriors' point of view, who believe women are closer to slaves than to independent

⁶⁸ This freedom refers to the possibility of unleashing their needs, but not to the possibility of exploring other sexual tendencies, since this has been medically erased.

individuals, it is warriors' position as victims of Women's Country's plot that turns them into the true Other. They live outside the predominant system, they adapt to women's rules, and they believe that their role as protectors and perpetrators is necessary in Women's Country.

In contrast, the concept of warriors serving as perpetrators is deceptive. This is because Women's Country's government, trade, religion, and customs are centered around the implementation and concealment of the eugenics program, in which warriors have no role. The eugenics program is painstakingly executed by the councilwomen during both the pre- and post-carnival periods. Two weeks after the carnivals, women are required to pass a second medical examination⁶⁹. Initially, this examination is done to prevent diseases after sexual intercourse, but it is at this moment when they inseminate women with servitors' sperm (Tepper 330-331.) As it was mentioned before, this is done without women's knowledge; servitors, by contrast, provide their sperm willingly (Tepper 331.) After a few weeks, women will know if they are or not pregnant.

This procedure is revealed to the reader by Septemius, who has noticed that the checkups for prostitutes take less than the post-carnival examinations. Morgot confirms his suspicions and explains the whole situation to Stavia after they discover that she is pregnant by Chernon:

'We're selecting, aren't we?' she said. 'And we'll keep doing it, on and on, and the years will go by, and eventually, all our sons will come home, is that it? No more penis worshipers? No more trumpets and drums and games. What will we do then, Morgot?'

'We won't have any more wars,' Morgot said, holding her tightly. 'Theoretically. No wars at all' (Tepper 339.)

⁶⁹ The first one, before the carnival, was carried out to get the implant to prevent their pregnancy.

Stavia realizes that they are selecting the sperm of those who have rejected the values of the warriors: the servitors. This, as Morgot says, implies that eventually, their society will be free of violence, although only theoretically. By carrying Chernon's son, Stavia becomes the only woman in Women's Country in years to have an actual warrior's baby. The rest of the women, meanwhile, have or will have servitors' descendants. But for the social engineering to work out, it is not enough to have servitors' babies, since this does not ensure that the male ones will not be violent. To make sure that the sons of servitors are not at all violent, boys need to *reject* the violent values of the garrison. That is why women must pass their sons to their warrior fathers when the boys turn five.

For a time, the boys will live in the garrison and will be reared by their "fathers" until they turn fifteen. In those ten years, boys can visit their mothers and families only in carnival holidays (Tepper 18, 23.) When they reach the age of fifteen, they need to choose between staying in the garrison forever or going back to Women's Country (Tepper 23.) Coming back to Women's Country, after ten years of experiencing violence and living among violent men, entails that these boys reject the violent values and agree to follow the rules in Women's Country. Once they decide to go through the Gate to Women's Country, they will start their studies, eventually become servitors, and serve women in a different town from their original one (Tepper 18.) Although this seems like a ritual created to favor or to give the illusion of choice to men, this is how Women's Country disguises its social engineering plot. Those who decide to stay at Marthatown's garrison are doomed. At best, they will live a long life unaware of their fate, believing that they are the key element for Marthatown to stand; at worst, they will be killed in one of their orchestrated wars. By contrast, those who stay in Women's Country have passed the test and have the right to live among women and reproduce.

They will be the chosen to perpetuate the non-violent society. Nevertheless, this selective breeding program does not finish there.

There is always the possibility that a servitor's son stays in the garrison. When this happens very often with one servitor's descendants, women will stop using his sperm to make sure that the number of warriors does not grow disproportionately. This is the case of Myra's father:

As a matter of fact, Myra was born before I knew. That pregnancy was by artificial insemination, of course. Later, after I was on the Council and had been told, I took the trouble to find out who he was. Not anyone I'd ever met, and, as it later turned out, not a satisfactory sire. Almost none of his boy children return. We've stopped using him (...) I believe, however, that he was Chernon's father as well (Tepper 337.)

As can be seen, there are other criteria added to being a servitor that have to be taken into account for the creation of a better society. This is not only related to men or servitors but also to women. Some of them, according to the council, are not worthy of having descendants. Morgot confirms this to Septemius saying that "There are a good number of sterilizations done every year (...) Tubal ligations. Hysterectomies." (Tepper 334.) Among these unworthy subjects, some have left the town for a while, falling for the fake promises made by warriors; also those whose male kids have all stayed in the garrisons, etc. Myra is one of these. As the daughter of a servitor whose descendants are problematic, she embodies the rebel of the family. She becomes a mother of three boys but, after having them, she is told that she cannot carry any more babies; the doctors have done a hysterectomy for her because she got an infection after the last labor (Tepper 206.) This could be true, or it could mean that Marthatown has decided that she cannot have any more kids, since these boys are presumably going to end up in the garrison, due to Myra's problematic genetic heredity.

The fate of Myra's sons is not explained in the novel but the fate of Stavia's is. Her son will follow his father's steps. Dawid, as the only actual son of a warrior, was genetically predestined to decide to stay in the garrison and reject the values of Women's Country (Tepper 9-11.) Although it was the result of Dawid's decision, Stavia will have to live with the idea of sacrificing her son for just the theoretical idea of a better society. The rest of the women also have to make the sacrifice, but they are unaware of the purpose; for them, if their sons decide to be part of the garrison, they will become defenders of the town. In any case, this is something integrated into their lives as mothers.

As everything revolves around the eugenics program in Women's Country, motherhood is also a key role for women; they are the ones in charge of giving birth to the future members of society. Being mothers becomes, then, a contribution to society. In this sense, the meaning is similar to the patriarchal society, but it must be remembered that in Women's Country, women are neither forced to be mothers nor reduced to this biological role. They can contribute to society in varied ways. Due to the importance placed on motherhood, it is characteristic that women have more than one kid so that society is expanded quickly:

'They're prolific in Women's Country,' he went on. 'Scarce a woman among them has fewer than three or four. When they have expanded as far as they can, they must set up a new town. I saw it done, once, far northwest of here, in the forest country. Women and warriors marching out to set up a new wall and a new garrison.' (Tepper 194)

Since assignations start from the age of seventeen or eighteen, it is common that at an early age, they stop having kids, although it is women's own decision to keep or stop having babies. For instance, in the same carnival where Myra has her first assignation with Barten, Morgot decides not to participate (Tepper 31-32.) If they want to be mothers, they will have to accept that their sons will go to the garrison and that they

may even decide to stay there. For those who know the truth, this is even more painful, since they are aware of their sons' fate if they do not come back to Women's Country.

It seems that women in this post-nuclear world still perform the role of carers: "Myra subsided into outraged and sulky silence. Her romantic dream of motherhood had been riven into sharp edged fragments by late-night feedings, constant diaper washing, and a baby who persisted in looking and acting like a baby, not like a young hero." (Tepper 105.) Women have to rear their children on their own (with the help of servitors), without the intervention of fathers, while they also take care of the governance of their towns and garrisons, but this is also part of their plot. As they do not want to mingle with warriors, they decide to keep them away until their sons turn five. In this way, women can educate their kids until that age, allowing them to acquire their values with the hope that they reject the warriors.' Fathers in Women's Country are important from that age and only with regards to sons. If, on the contrary, the baby is a daughter, warriors do not recognize her as their own and the baby girls live fatherless: "Michael laughed. 'Warriors don't have daughters. They may beget an occasional girl, my friend, but we don't have daughters. You ought to know that! No, you've got to use girls for what they're good for. Forget daughters'" (Tepper 83.) Meanwhile, girls live with and are reared by the mothers in Women's Country. Mothers will take advantage of the separation from their sons to educate their daughters in the values of Women's Country. This, as Carroll argues, is "an act of war against patriarchy" since it implies a rupture with the main patriarchal foundation: the family (26.)

Not many women consider warriors the fathers of their children since they do not perform any role in the family. That is why new girls in Women's Country do not take their father's name: "MRTM. Morgot Rentesdaughter Thalia Marthatown, No one else in Women's Country had those initials. No one else had Stavia's either. SMRM. Stavia

Morgotsdaughter Rentes Marthatown. Thalia was her great-grandmother” (Tepper 55.)

Their names are formed from their mother’s and grandmother’s, totally disassociating themselves from any warrior or even servitor. Moreover, women do not know their fathers and do not ask about it:

‘You’re curious, I know. However, we don’t consider it good manners to discuss our fathers, Stavvy. It has no relevance in Women’s Country. You know that. We don’t ask. It was decided a long, long time ago that we’d all get along better here in Women’s Country if we just didn’t talk about that. Who Myra’s male biological progenitor was doesn’t matter at all unless she gets involved with some warrior who’s too closely related to her. If that were the case, of course I would tell her.’ Morgot sounded stilted and rehearsed, and Sativa realized that this, too, was a speech she had planned to give, if not to Stavia, then to Myra. ‘Or, if I didn’t, the assignation mistress would tell her. We do keep records.’ (Tepper 134-135)

As Morgot says, fathers have no relevance in Women’s Country and it is not necessary to know who they are. Despite this, they keep records, although they refer to servitor’s sperm, instead of warriors, and they are only used to inseminate women with a servitor’s sperm different from their biological fathers. The irrelevant role of fathers in women’s lives makes the figure of the mother acquire importance. It contributes to the reconfiguration of the pre-convulsion/reader’s world family. The parents live separated and only boys have the chance to grow up with two referential figures (though girls have servitors), although at fifteen they have to renounce one of them. Also, the figures of the father as the provider and the mother as the carer are eliminated; both of them are embodied in the mother, who becomes the central figure of the family⁷⁰. The patriarchal family is destabilized in this new conception and leaves the father as the unnecessary figure.

Women’s Country conceptions of reproduction, motherhood, and family contribute to the reversal of roles in different degrees. In terms of reproduction, Tepper uses the resource of artificial insemination. This is a common resource used in feminist

⁷⁰ This links with the religious figure of the Great Mother, as another way of formalizing that women are the center in every aspect of this new world.

SF works because “the scientific transformation of reproduction allows women more personal freedom” (Donawerth, *Frankenstein’s Daughters* 15.) In this scenario, artificial insemination is harnessed as a tool to fashion individuals who will play a pivotal role in shaping a better future society. While this grants women control over reproduction, it is important to note that they still rely on men for their genetic material. Nonetheless, it is women who hold the authority to decide who is deemed suitable for this task. This selection process encompasses both servitors and women, yet it does not translate into increased freedom for women, as they remain manipulated for society’s benefit. The control over reproduction primarily confers freedom to those women in positions of power, even though they, too, are subject to insemination for the same central social goal. Artificial insemination represents the means through which they aim to attain future freedom, emphasizing the fact that they are not entirely free in the present moment.

Besides, the use of artificial insemination reduces men to the role of sperm source, and this entails a reversal of Otherness. In this way, women (at least a few of them) have now reproductive power and men are used for their seed; women then have rejected their pre-convulsion reductionist use as bearers⁷¹, although they still bestow importance to motherhood as a service for society. Reproduction is also used to submit and control men, which makes both warriors and servitors the Other of women. In the case of servitors, they willingly provide their sperm and, though women listen to their experience, they do not have any power in their decisions; they are simply reduced to sperm providers and helpers. Warriors, for their part, are unaware of their subjection to women’s decisions including the matter of their reproduction or even of their roles as fathers. Warriors and fatherhood are presented in a rather negative way, as warriors

⁷¹ Women are also used as bearers outside Women’s Country. This is found, for example, in the Holylanders’ society.

“want only to train their sons to become warriors and abandon other pursuits” (Westfahl, *The Greenwood Encyclopedia* 208.) Nevertheless, the position of women in this situation does not show a better attitude than theirs, as they are willing to pass their sons and accept the warrior’s rejection of daughters so that their plan comes to fruition.

Separating their children by sex allows Women’s Country to educate and rear girls who will believe in and follow the values of their society, and it also helps them establish a new conception of family. Along with the negative representation of fatherhood, the conception of a family that revolves around the mother also leaves men in a position of inferiority. Women are the central figures who become providers and carers, so again both warriors and servitors are the Other. Warriors perform the role of fathers, only for a while and only for boys, so their role is just dispensable; if their plot succeeds, their figure will eventually disappear. Servitors, for their part, provide the sperm but they do not play any role in the children’s lives⁷²; they are also unessential as part of the family. On the contrary, motherhood and women are key for this society to evolve.

In Women’s Country, women have attained near-total autonomy from men, except in the reproductive process, where they rely on servitors’ sperm. Education plays a pivotal role in their achievement as self-sufficient individuals. On one hand, education enables them to excel in a wide range of roles, from councilwomen to farmers and doctors. Furthermore, it empowers them to impart crucial lessons to younger generations, preventing the recurrence of past pre-convulsion-era mistakes. On the other hand, education stands as a foundational element, both justifying and ensuring the fulfillment of Women’s Country’s mission.

⁷² In some cases, servitors can live in the same house as their children, as is the case of Stavia and her brothers (not Myra), who live with their biological father, Joshua. However, the children do not know about this, so he is willingly reduced to the figure of the servitor.

To begin with, education is compulsory for every woman in the different towns. It is only addressed to women⁷³ and servitors, but it is forbidden for warriors:

‘The garrison has a library.’

‘Romances, Stavia. Tales of battle. Sagas. Designs for armor. Hygiene. Maintenance of garrison property. You know! Nothing about real things. Nothing about medicine, or engineering, or management.’

‘Those are women’s studies.’

‘I know what they are. I just said you made me feel ignorant, that’s all.’ He looked hurt again. ‘It isn’t a nice feeling.’

‘I could lend you some books, while you’re home. I’ll even give you some old ones to take back with you if you want.’ She made the offer before she had time to think (...) Giving Women’s Country books to a warrior was absolutely forbidden!

‘I couldn’t do that. (...) They’d have me up on charges.’

(...) ‘You’re not allowed to read?’

‘Not things like that. Not womanish things.’ (Tepper 93-94)

The passage illustrates the existence of sex-specific domains of knowledge, with certain fields reserved for women and others for men. Applying the principles of education discussed in earlier sections, it becomes apparent that this division of “subjects” serves to reverse the social dynamics from the pre-convulsion era or the readers’ world. In those times, women were limited to studying topics deemed useful for their roles as wives and mothers, such as sewing, cooking, etiquette, and domestic management. This restriction was enforced to maintain women in subordinate positions, subject to men’s authority.

In Women’s Country, the situation is markedly different. Women have access to a diverse array of knowledge, as Chernon suggests, encompassing fields like “medicine, engineering, or management.” This broad spectrum of knowledge empowers women to sustain their society independently of men. In contrast, the warriors have access to only a limited selection of books, strategically curated to prevent them from harboring intentions of challenging women’s authority. The education provided to the warriors is designed to perpetuate their roles as passive individuals without a voice in significant

⁷³ Itinerant women, who do not live in Marthatown or any other town, are encouraged by councilwomen to study when they are installed in the itinerants’ quarters of the different towns (Tepper 244).

matters. Consequently, education serves as a means to solidify and perpetuate their newly established roles in their post-apocalyptic world.

For women to cover all aspects of their society, their education is divided into three areas of expertise: arts, crafts, and science⁷⁴. All women, therefore, are experts in three fields within the three areas and they learn about them throughout their lives. When women are clear about what their best skills are and which areas they are interested in, they will have time to study them thoroughly. For instance, once Stavia knows that her science is medicine, her “instructresses” inform her about the medical institute in Abbyville. To become a doctor, she has to take a “nine-year course,” which is divided into “seven years’ study plus two years internship” (Tepper 50.) But their education does not end when they finish their specialization:

Except for these semiannual holidays, school went on year after year, all year around. No matter how old they were, almost all the women in the city were studying something.

‘After the convulsions,’ Margot said, ‘a lot of knowledge was lost because people didn’t know anything outside their own narrow areas, and the books were gone. Even if you’re seventy, you should be learning something more in case it’s needed.’ (Tepper 89)

Their lifelong learning process is considered a service to society since everything that they learn can contribute in some way or another to their future needs. Even though they are experts in three different fields, they also know some notions of others. For example, Stavia is an expert in gardening, but she might as well know “pottery” or even “construction skills” (Tepper 207.) Even within their expertise fields, they study different subjects or aspects:

All the drama students had to learn how to make costumes and do makeup and build sets, in addition to learning the part of at least one character in the play. Since the play wasn’t very long, Stavia had decided it was really easier just to memorize the whole thing. Then in Sciences division she’d be studying physiology, which

⁷⁴ For example, Myra’s art is dance, Morgot’s is poetry and Stavia’s art is drama (Tepper 207, 220, 198). In terms of science, Myra’s is mathematics and Morgot and Stavia’s is medicine (Tepper 207, 34, 198). However, only Stavia’s craft, gardening, is made explicit in the novel (Tepper 198).

she was good at, and in Crafts division there'd be some kind of practical gardening project which would be fun. There was always a new section of the Women's Country Ordinances to memorize or an old one to review. And in addition to all that, because she had turned ten, women's studies would start this year: management, administration, sexual skills. (Tepper 32)

For example, as Stavia's art is drama, not only does she have to study how to act or perform, but also how to make costumes or build sets. Furthermore, their education covers other issues, apart from their three areas of expertise, which are common to every woman, as can be seen in the passage. They all have to know about management and administration so that they can contribute to the preservation of their society as it is known.

Another subject of importance in their education pertains to sexual skills. This subject bears resemblance to a sexual health course, aimed at providing knowledge about what individuals can expect when they engage in sexual activity for the first time, potential health risks and diseases, and more. However, its primary emphasis lies in the idea that "pleasure is meant to be mutual" (Tepper 277.) It was previously noted that in this society, women's exploration of their sexuality is somewhat restricted, as they are required to engage in heterosexual relations and can only have sex during carnivals. Nevertheless, women are educated to understand that, in these sexual encounters, they are not passive objects, but sentient beings entitled to experience pleasure. Their role is not solely to accommodate to men's desires. In addition to this shared education, women also receive instruction in physical self-defense (Tepper 288.) This implies that the warriors' role as protectors is somewhat symbolic, as women possess the capability to fend for themselves and ensure their safety.

Certainly, the education system in Women's Country serves as a means to elucidate how their society has evolved compared to the pre-convulsion era. Firstly, education imparts the crucial notion that the preservation of the human race hinges on

women holding positions of power. With this objective in mind, education also serves as a tool to reinforce women's understanding of their role in society, thereby preventing any regression to the pre-convulsion era when they were marginalized and demeaned. Councilwomen have access to a range of books which talk about diverse cultures in the past and, while Morgot acknowledges that while some cultures were not oppressive towards women, many did exhibit such oppression (Tepper 335). Historically, women's education, or the absence thereof, often shaped their perception that their social role was the one they inherently deserved. In Women's Country, however, women receive an education that enlightens them about the fact that their place in society is not secondary but essential. While books and lessons are instrumental in reinforcing this understanding, the most powerful tool for reminding women of their significance in Women's Country is a theatrical production, arranged to be performed every summer carnival, called *Iphigenia at Ilium*:

'The play's a comedy.'

'Comedy!'

'Well it is, Corrig. The audience laughs.'

He made a face at her, trying to make her smile. 'There are some things about Women's Country I still find difficult to understand. How old were you when you first did that play?'

'Oh, about ten or eleven, I suppose. We did it every year in school, taking different parts, building sets, making costumes.'

'So you've been doing it for at least twenty-seven years. I should think you'd pick something else to do for a while, but Joshua says you Councilwomen never get tired of it.'

'It isn't that we don't get tired of it. It's that the play is part of the ... part of the reminders. You know that!.' (Tepper 37)

The play, which according to the audience is a comedy, is a tradition in Women's Country. Girls start learning and performing it from the age of eleven and continue performing it if they become members of the Council. As Stavia says, this play reminds society of the place that women occupied in pre-convulsion times, and it suggests that this situation must not be repeated.

Continuing with the play, Corrig explains the argument, when he reads the notes to students:

“The play is based upon a millennia-old pre-convulsion story concerning a conflict between two garrisons, the *Greeks* and the *Trojans*, brought about when a Trojan warrior abducted a Greek woman named *Helen*. The *Greek* garrison pursued the couple to the city of *Troy* (also called *Ilium*) and laid siege to the city. This siege lasted for ten years, largely because of mismanagement among the Greek forces, but in the end the Greeks succeeded in conquering the Trojans and in destroying the city. The action of the play takes place after this destruction, outside the broken walls of Troy. Appendix A at the end of your drama book lists the names and attributes of some of the Greek and Trojan warriors such as Agamemnon, Menelaus, Odysseus, Hector, etc., who are referred to in the drama. Appendix B contains an outline of the original book upon which this play is based. Appendix C gives the history of the play together with comments on its significance to Women’s Country.’ (Tepper 37-38)

Iphigenia at Ilium is “an ironic retelling of the story of the fall of Troy, from the point of view of the women who were the silenced victims” and it is also “based on the Iliadic tales and Euripidean tragedies as *Iphigenia at Aulis*⁷⁵” (Wolmark 94; Wagner-Lawlor 126.) In this play, only one important character is male, Achilles, who represents masculinity and is portrayed as the enemy of women (Pearson, “After the (Homo)Sexual” 207.) The protagonists of the story, apart from Iphigenia, are Hecuba, Andromache, Polyxena, and Cassandra; among the characters, Achilles, Polyxena, and Iphigenia are ghosts (Tepper 38.) All the female characters included in the play have been known as individuals who are next to men or have some kind of relation with important male figures; they have not been known for their roles and actions. Iphigenia is known to be Agamemnon’s daughter, while Hecuba is Hector’s mother and Priam’s wife, and the same can be applied to the rest:

HECUBA (...) One time I had the name of Priam’s Queen. Once Priam died there was no Priam’s Queen. Andromache was known as Hector’s wife, but when her Hector died, whose wife was she? Our place was here at many-towered Troy, and when it fell, what place was ours to hold? All that we were, we were by others’

⁷⁵ This play was written by Euripides and narrates the myth of Iphigenia’s sacrifice. In this myth, Agamemnon is commanded by the goddess Artemis to sacrifice his daughter in order to gain favorable winds for the Greek fleet to sail to Troy.

strength; all that we had, we had because of place. Place gone, strength gone, we are nothing today.” (Tepper 203)

None of them is known to have a voice in this war, but in Women’s Country, they have the opportunity to be heard. The play begins with the women “at the foot of the broken walls of Troy,” crying for their loss and their future, while they are being watched by some warriors (Tepper 39.) They are waiting for Talthybius, the messenger for the Greeks. He will tell them what the Greeks have decided to do with them: Cassandra will be taken home with Agamemnon to please him, Polyxena will serve Achilles’ tomb, Hecuba will serve Odysseus, and Andromache will have a similar destiny; as for Astyanax, Hector’s son, the Greeks have decided to sacrifice him out of fear that he would take revenge after his father’s death. After Talthybius tells them their respective roles, Iphigenia appears as a ghost to tell them the news that Polyxena has been killed by some men, when she was in Achilles’ tomb (Tepper 41-44)⁷⁶.

Subsequently, the ghost of Achilles appears looking for Polyxena, his servant. Iphigenia tells him that when they are dead the rules from the living do not apply, so Polyxena is no longer his slave; she has become “her own ghost” (Tepper 63.) Achilles demands Polyxena but Iphigenia reminds him that “in the place of shades, we are all equal...” (Tepper 63.) Iphigenia affirms this because she herself was a victim of Achilles’s tricks and her father’s when they were both alive and Agamemnon offered her, without her knowledge, as a sacrifice to Artemis⁷⁷; to carry out the sacrifice, “he sent Odysseus” to convince Iphigenia’s mother to wed her to Achilles when she accepted, they took Iphigenia to the priests who sliced her throat (Tepper 69)⁷⁸. So far, men are represented as individuals who take advantage of their power to trick, use,

⁷⁶ The fates of these characters in the myth are the same as Tepper mentions in her play.

⁷⁷ In Euripides’s play, Iphigenia sacrifices willingly, but this turn of events differs from the original myth (Bakogianni 3).

⁷⁸ This is a parallelism of what happens to Stavia in the central plot. She is convinced by Chernon to have an encounter outside the walls of Women’s Country. She accepts, believing that Chernon loves her, but he only uses her to give him a son. Thus, both women are tricked by warriors.

enslave, sacrifice, and kill women. But they do so with men as well, as was the case of Astyanax. The women and ghosts in the play discuss that men are all about destruction and death, and they raise their kids to be the same as they are (Tepper 163.)

The theatrical performance serves as a poignant reminder of the pre-convulsion era, painting a critical picture of Greek warriors with the consequent negative portrayal of men. These men are depicted as wielding their power recklessly, causing widespread devastation without concern for the consequences, whether it be the loss of their descendants or even the endangerment of the entire human race (Jowett 178.) It underscores that patriarchy is ultimately a system that leads to catastrophe: men employ their assumed superiority to govern through fear and violence. However, this approach proves futile in the long run because, ultimately, men, like women, meet the same fate—death.

In this narrative, Achilles's story serves as a prime example. Despite his power and superiority, his ultimate destiny aligns with that of women: death. Hecuba, Andromache, Iphigenia, Cassandra, and Polyxena collectively remind Achilles of the deeds that earned him "honor" during his lifetime, including acts of violence, plundering, and sexual violence. Nevertheless, these actions did not elevate his importance in death (Tepper 328.) In the realm of Hades, such privileges cease to exist; the deceased are all equal, for in death, distinctions fade away.

Furthermore, the realm of Hades renders the presence of warriors like Achilles redundant. There is no property to plunder, no one to subject to violence or sexual assault, and no lives to take, as all those within Hades are already deceased and "can't be killed again" (Tepper 361, 362.) In this dimension, violence ceases to exist. This transformation is particularly advantageous for women, who have borne the impact of

men's wars, impulses, and wrath throughout history. As Polyxena succinctly puts it, "in hell, we need not damn ourselves by trying to defend ourselves" (Tepper 361.) For these women, Hades is as follows:

IPHIGENIA (...) Like dream without waking. Like carrying water in a sieve. Like coming into harbor after storm. Barren harbor where the empty river runs through an endless desert into the sea. Where all the burdens have been taken away. You'll understand when you come there at last, Achilles...
Hades is Women's Country. (Tepper 362)

Hades is portrayed as an idyllic haven for women who have endured a history of abuse, oppression, and a lack of control over their own lives. Within Hades, they can exist freely, unburdened by pain or responsibilities. This is the message that the councilwomen aim to convey to the inhabitants of Women's Country: their space is a place where women have reclaimed their power, found their voices, escaped the grip of men's violent impulses, and have the autonomy to live and provide for themselves. Even the comedic tone of the play underlines the sense of celebration. Ultimately, the play serves as a tool for indoctrination, propagating the Council's ideology, which posits Women's Country as the ultimate ideal (Wagner-Lawlor 127.) However, the reality is that Women's Country falls short of this idealized portrayal.

In the play, women had to die to be free; in Women's Country, it is the same: women are sacrificing themselves, as they sacrifice their sons, for the sake of the ideal society. However, this seems to be the only solution, as Hecuba proposes:

HECUBA I had a knife in my skirt, Achilles. When Talthybius bent over me, I could have killed him I wanted to. I had the knife just for that reason. Yet, at the last minute I thought, he's some mother's son just as Hector was, and aren't we women all sisters. If I killed him, I thought, wouldn't it be like killing family? Wouldn't it be making some other mother grieve? So I didn't kill him, but if I had, I might have saved the baby. I'm damned to think of that, that I might have saved Hector's child. Dead or damned, that's the choice we make. Either you men kill us and are honored for it, or we women kill you and are damned for it. Dead or damned. Women don't have to make choices like that in Hades. There's no love there, nothing to betray. (Tepper 362)

The choice women face is stark: either they sacrifice their sons and themselves in the present to avoid such sacrifices in the future, or they perish at the hands of men. Through the strategic transformation of their society, which involves the gradual elimination of warriors, women envision a future akin to Hades—a utopian society where they would no longer be forced to make agonizing choices, such as taking a man’s life or struggling for their survival because violence itself would cease to exist. The transformation of Women’s Country into a realm resembling Hades holds the promise that men will no longer be driven by violence, and women will no longer need to exert their power to protect themselves from men.

The audience attending the summer carnivals in Women’s Country finds great entertainment in this play, viewing it as a comedy, unaware of the intricacies of selective breeding and social engineering occurring behind the scenes. They enjoy the depiction of powerful and resilient women in the play, all the while subconsciously absorbing the message that violence and power have historically been associated with men or that all women are interconnected as sisters, compelled to collaborate for their well-being and the betterment of humanity.

However, for those who are privy to Women’s Country’s clandestine eugenics program, the play does not elicit the same comedic response. Instead, it serves as a stark reminder of the hidden truths and complex realities within their society:

Stavia leaned over Joshua, putting her cheek against his own, her eyes fixed on the half-empty garrison ground, seeing in her mind the thousands who had marched away. Gone away, oh, gone away. Wetness ran between her face and his as he—servitor, warrior, citizen of Women’s Country, father—as he wept. Wept for them all. (Tepper 363)

Stavia and Joshua are intimately familiar with the inner workings of Women’s Country. They have willingly embraced their roles within society, understanding that their involvement necessitates difficult sacrifices. These sacrifices include the harrowing act

of taking the lives of their sons, as well as the sons of others. They are also aware of the intricate manipulation of women, a strategy they are committed to until the day when all warriors are eradicated, and deserving individuals can coexist in harmony.

In stark contrast to Hecuba's tragic narrative, the women in Women's Country have taken up their knives not to perpetrate harm but to prevent it. They have chosen to eliminate men who pose a threat, who might enslave them, and who could lead humanity to its destruction. Their decision to kill men, though it carries a weight of moral consequence, is driven by the hope that such actions will ensure a future where no one must make such dire choices again. Their choice is a profound sacrifice, intended to break the cycle of violence and ensure a safer and more harmonious future.

Through education, women in Women's Country are injected with a deep appreciation for their collective position, fostering a sense of unity and a recognition of the historical violence perpetrated by men over centuries. Aligned with the core values of Women's Country, education equips women with access to a wide spectrum of knowledge, enabling them to safeguard their established roles. In contrast, warriors are deliberately restricted in their access to knowledge. Much like the patriarchal system they have replaced, education is used to uphold gender roles, albeit in reverse. Education not only justifies women's actions, positions, and authority but also keeps warriors marginalized. By imparting them with knowledge that is either irrelevant or only applicable within the confines of their garrisons, warriors are denied the tools necessary for self-sufficiency and independent living. Consequently, warriors become the Others—individuals who must remain separated to ensure social stability, individuals who lack the skills to survive on their own, and whose education is restricted to maintain their dependency on women and discourage rebellion.

The portrayal of history in the play and books further reinforces the idea of men as the Other. They are associated with the catastrophic events of the nuclear holocaust, which, in turn, justifies their exclusion from positions of power. According to this perspective, entrusting men with authority carries the risk of repeating such catastrophic mistakes. This mirrors the historical role of women in pre-convulsion times when patriarchy dominated. Within that context, history, as presented from a masculine standpoint, depicted women as contributors solely to the perpetuation of the species, while education beyond motherhood and wifely duties remained inaccessible to them. In the patriarchal setting, history and education were instruments that validated women's secondary status and cast them as the Others. In the reversed social framework of Women's Country, warriors have inherited this role.

2.2.3. The Other in Women's Country

While describing the features of Women's Country, the position of the warriors has already been presented. Warriors live outside the walls of Women's Country and depend totally on the town that they are assigned to, in this case, Marthatown. Their established role in society is to be the defenders of the town and the reproductive source of the species, although these roles are just appearances (Tepper 11, 350.) When they are not performing these tasks, they live an idle life in the garrisons, without access to education, training for their battles, fixing their equipment, and playing games (Tepper 116-117.) Carroll explains that their society functions similarly to the Spartans: "they interact with the women very little, except during Festivals," "their sons are sent to them for training at an early age," and "the men are supposed to spend all of their time in training" (31.) Their lives, following the Spartan tenets, revolve around the ritual in which women hand over their sons, deciding on becoming a warrior at the age of fifteen; and carnivals, where they can interact with women.

When warriors in Women's Country are entrusted with their sons, they are assigned an additional role—fatherhood. However, the novel portrays the concept of fatherhood in a negative light, as warriors do not acknowledge their daughters (Tepper 83.) This focus on male descendants emphasizes their commitment to transmitting exclusive masculine values, with honor being the principal among them. For warriors, everything they do is guided by the belief in the importance of honor. For instance, having sons is considered honorable because they are seen as the bearers of warrior values, tasked with ensuring the continuation and preservation of these values in future generations. The relationship between fathers and sons is highly revered within the garrison, drawing parallels to Greek traditions with references to figures like Telemachus and Ulysses (Tepper 24-25.) Telemachus, in particular, is invoked in the ritual when sons are introduced to the garrison; he symbolizes the ideal son, one who defends his father's honor (Tepper 24.) Given the immense significance placed on this aspect of warrior life, it is common for each warrior to have at least one son (Tepper 167.)

Linked to this is the notion of protecting women, who are essential as the bearers of sons. For warriors, it is considered honorable to protect women because, according to their dogma, women are incapable of safeguarding themselves (Tepper 166.) This perspective reduces women to the role of bearers and portrays them as vulnerable beings who require the protection of warriors. Consequently, the honorable path, as defined within this framework, involves warriors remaining within the garrison, fulfilling their mission as protectors of women and defenders of the community.

Along with fatherhood and honor comes power and masculinity. As women, they have an essentialist perspective. They believe that some attributes are inherently

feminine and others are masculine. The worship of their masculinity is represented by a penis statue located in the garrison:

‘It’s an erection suitable for a parade ground,’ he muttered.
It took her a moment. ‘I see. What is it, really?’
‘Just what it looks like,’ he muttered again. ‘Blooded warriors take their oaths of honor on it. It’s a symbol of shared manhood.’
‘Penis worship?’
‘It’s symbolic,’ he said resentfully.
‘Yes,’ she agreed in amazement. ‘It certainly is.’ (Tepper 95)

For the warriors in Women’s Country, their sense of manhood is a unifying force, setting them apart from women and serving as the source of their power, fatherhood, and their role as protectors of women. This closely mirrors what women in Women’s Country do with their femininity. They highly value their femininity, believing it is what distinguishes them as non-violent and worthy rulers of the new world. However, there is a key difference: while women in Women’s Country pray to a higher entity, warriors in the garrison worship their masculinity. From the perspective of warriors’ values, it becomes evident that the garrison is the only space where remnants of a patriarchal system are still preserved. This is permitted by women, who understand the warriors’ need to experience violence and assert their superiority, to keep them content. In this way, the garrison serves as a controlled outlet for patriarchal tendencies within the broader framework of Women’s Country’s role-reversed society.

The warriors’ complete conformity to Women’s Country’s social structure is never assured. Women are acutely aware that, given their history of domination and tendencies toward violence, warriors may eventually attempt to seize control. It is also part of women’s strategic plan that warriors harbor suspicions. When there are signs of rebellion brewing among the warriors, women often become privy to these developments through servitors, spies, or even itinerants. In response, they organize battles or attacks on the garrisons, creating disruptions until the tensions simmer down

(Tepper 333.) The inherent challenge with warriors lies in their persistent inclination to assert their masculine power and, in some cases, their libidinal desires.

For instance, while it is common for warriors to frequent prostitutes, as previously discussed, some find this arrangement unsatisfactory. They resort to deceptive tactics to entice women from the nearby towns to join the Gypsies' camp, where they can engage in sexual encounters without the constraints imposed by Women's Country's rules. Following such encounters, the women are often abandoned there, only to be later rescued by councilwomen during routine examinations, as exemplified in Tally's case. These actions are not viewed as honorable within Women's Country, but they are carried out nonetheless (Tepper 167.) This highlights the ongoing challenge of managing the warriors' tendencies and ensuring the stability of the society.

As warriors still live in a patriarchal society, oblivious to what is happening in Women's Country, they believe in their rights because of their assumed indispensable position. Stavia suffers this in her flesh when Chernon rapes her outside the protection of Marthatown (Tepper 274.) He does so under Michael's orders, his commander in Marthatown's garrison. He decides to use Chernon to find clues from Stavia and Morgot regarding his suspicions about their sons and their decisions to stay in the garrison (Tepper 250.) When Stavia goes out on an expedition to gather herbs, Chernon is told to go to her encounter. Chernon, who also has doubts about what they do with their sons, decides that the best way to ensure that Stavia is carrying his son is by raping her. Like this, warriors are portrayed, as opposed to women, as impulsive, violent, and thirsty for power and superiority. Although their values are supposed to be duty and honor, "their desire to dominate causes them to fall short of such an ideal" and end up being the opposite (Carroll 32.) They represent all that women are not; and, because women have suffered their dominance in pre-convulsion times and even on some

occasions in their new world, the implementation of the eugenics program is justified. Women are violent and manipulative for the sake of society, but men are such just for the sake of it.

Despite their proclivity for violence, the warriors in Women's Country are, in their own right, victims of the prevailing system within the society, effectively making them the Other. They are entirely subject to women's authority: they rely on women for sustenance, for procreation, and more. It is women who dictate when they can become fathers, and it is women who determine their fate through the orchestration of wars with other garrisons. The primary advantage warriors enjoy is a life of leisure, where they can fulfill their libidinal desires at will, dedicate their time to training, and avoid bearing any real responsibilities.

In adopting this hedonistic lifestyle, men have distanced themselves from the traditional notion of being providers and bearing social and familial responsibilities. Compared to the pre-convulsion era, their roles have undergone a complete reversal. In the contemporary Women's Country, women have assumed the roles of providers and maintainers of society and family. However, men continue to be viewed as inherently violent, just as they were before. This implies that while their social roles have evolved, certain ingrained traits and stereotypes persist. Even the transformation of social norms has not completely eradicated these deeply rooted gender stereotypes. The only exceptions to this traditional gender vision within Women's Country are the servitors, who have managed to escape their expected roles to some extent. However, they too remain as Others within this society, highlighting the complexity and persistence of social norms and expectations.

While warriors are the most obvious embodiment of Otherness in Women's Country, other inhabitants of this new world also occupy a secondary position within the society. Within the protected walls of Women's Country's towns, Otherness can be found among servitors and the women who remain unaware of the selective breeding program. Servitors are men who, at the age of fifteen, made the conscious choice to return to Women's Country and willingly rejected the values associated with warriors. They are permitted to live within the protective confines of Women's Country precisely because they represent a "new version" of men, having renounced the violent traits and principles of warriors after being exposed to them. From the perspective of warriors, servitors are not regarded as true men; they are often labeled as "dishonorable," "cowards and physical weaklings," and even "womanish" (Tepper 166, 90.) This rejection of servitors as true men goes so far as to exclude them from certain physical traits such as beards, which are reserved exclusively for "true" masculine men (Tepper 108.) For the women of Women's Country, however, servitors have earned the privilege of living alongside them and assuming the role of fathers to their sons. This acceptance is granted because servitors have actively rejected the toxic masculinity perpetuated by warriors, aligning their values more closely with those of the women. As a result, servitors represent a unique category within this complex social structure, offering a glimpse of what it means to challenge masculine norms and embrace a different path.

Their rejection of masculine values entails their adaptation to women's world. In exchange for choosing Women's Country's ways, they have some privileges compared to warriors. For example, they have access to education:

"They said there was an opening here, so I chose to come to Marthatown.'
'And you began to study?'
'That's right. (...) In the servitors' school. All warriors learn is how to read and write and sing and do a bit of arithmetic. Servitors have to start over. Though we

do have it a little easier than you women. Since we get a late start, we're allowed to specialize.'

'And you specialized in medicine.'

'I had to learn something that would change things. I became a medical assistant, and met Morgot, and ended up in her house. Because of Corny.'

'Returnees don't have to learn a craft, do they? Or an art?'

'Oh, we can, if you like. I have an art, you know? One of the mysteries.' He made a comic face.

'I've never heard of it.'

'It's mostly a servitors' study,' he grimaced, 'though not entirely. And please don't repeat what I've said. I shouldn't have mentioned it.' Though the look in his eye told her he had mentioned it just to see what she would say, and do. (Tepper 118)

While warriors typically focus their studies on subjects relevant to the maintenance and functioning of the garrison, servitors have a broader educational scope. Servitors are encouraged to study a wide range of disciplines that can contribute to the betterment of Women's Country as a whole. In addition to their specialized studies, servitors are required to learn about the inner workings of Women's Country, which includes subjects like mathematics and history (Tepper 154.) Moreover, Joshua mentions in this passage that, in addition to his specialized field of study, he has delved into the art of "mystery." This concept is related to servitors and some women within Women's Country, although it is not simply a subject of study but rather a unique gift or ability possessed by certain individuals:

'My nieces have it, too. I've known a few others who have it. It's a valued trait among showmen this ability to hear trouble at a distance, to know where people are, to know what's going to happen. The old words for it were telepathy, clairvoyance. They are very old words, from before the convulsions, though I think they were only theoretical then. Tell me, did you women plan it?'

She shook her head. 'It just appeared. Like a gift. A surprisingly high number of the men who came back had it, that's all.'

'Perhaps because they had it, they chose to come back.'

'We've considered that.'

'And, of course, you've bred that quality in.'

'We've tried,' she admitted. 'We had hoped many women might turn up with it, but there are very few women with the talent. It does tend to breed true in sons. I am glad to know about your nieces. For a time we worried that it might be sex-linked.' (Tepper 332)

As Joshua suggests, they do not know how or why this gift appeared, but they know that it is almost exclusive to servitors. Septemius explains that his nieces possess the gift as

well, but Morgot affirms that only a few women in Women's Country have it. It is a useful gift in Women's Country since it can be used to save girls who have been conned by warriors like Stavia or predict the rebellions from the garrisons and act consequently. So, besides their roles as sperm providers and whatever occupation they have, some of them are useful because of this gift. Such is the case of Joshua and Corrig, Morgot's and Stavia's servitors respectively.

In addition, as their name suggests, servitors are the helpers of women inside and outside the house (Tepper 17, 154.) They are "highly respected" among women and because of this they are consulted by councilwomen, but servitors do not participate in Council's decisions or any other public matters (Tepper 331, 155.) Although their position within Women's Country is improved with respect to warriors', it is not at all an advantage for them. They are being used by women and there are some sacrifices that they agreed to when they came back to Women's Country. First, they are not regarded as fathers to their sons and daughters, since not many women know that they are the biological fathers and their part in the plot cannot be discovered. Secondly, they cannot love freely; their love, if they are lucky enough to experience it, is constrained to the private houses of their "matrons" (Tepper 20, 13.) And, thirdly, they cannot explore their sexuality freely, as they are not even supposed to take part in carnivals, mainly to avoid confrontations with warriors, and they can only experience heterosexual love (Tepper 88.)

Servitors, by rejecting the garrison and embracing life within Women's Country, indeed enjoy certain privileges such as participating in the propagation of the species, gaining access to education, and the opportunity to live among women while contributing to their society. However, in making this choice, servitors have also willingly forsaken other privileges that warriors continue to enjoy. They have sacrificed

their sexuality, their social relationships, and even the right to experience fatherhood. In parallel to the sacrifices made by women, who give up their sons and leisure time for the greater good, servitors relinquish their privileges for the benefit of future generations. The relegation of servitors to this secondary position within society highlights a certain level of skepticism or mistrust towards men that persists in Women's Country. However, it is important to understand that this subordinate position for servitors is expected to shift when warriors eventually disappear. Once this transition occurs, servitors will move from being the Other to being equals within the society. In the meanwhile, servitors serve as sperm providers and offer their assistance in achieving this transformative goal.

Through this narrative device, Tepper effectively reverses the social roles of men and women as they were in the readers' world or pre-convulsion times. Servitors' roles within Women's Country are clearly defined by the dominant power, which, in this case, is women, and their worth is measured in terms of their utility to women. Consequently, servitors are positioned as the Other in relation to women, but they also occupy a similar role in relation to warriors due to their rejection of the values that traditionally define men. From the warriors' perspective, servitors are labeled "unmanly" because they have taken the dishonorable step of returning to live among women, which involves the rejection of their sexuality and a fundamental aspect of a man's life—fatherhood. Warriors regard servitors as inferior due to this deviation from the norms and values they uphold, further highlighting the complex interplay of power dynamics and gender roles within Women's Country.

Within the complex social structure of Women's Country, servitors are, at the very least, aware that their sperm is being used for a purpose, even if they may not fully understand the reasons behind it. However, there is another segment of society that is

equally being manipulated: women. Only a select few women, as Morgot explained, are privy to the knowledge of the selective breeding program aimed at shaping a better society. This group consists of Council members and a few astute individuals who can interpret the signs left by the Council (Tepper 337.) Some women are explicitly informed, as in the case of Stavia, but others are regarded as untrustworthy and are kept in the dark (Tepper 338.) Councilwomen must decide not only which individuals are worthy of knowing their plan, but also which women are suitable for procreation (Tepper 334.) Those who are not aware of the secret are used by councilwomen in much the same way as servitors.

The manipulation of women occurs when they are inseminated with servitors' sperm without their knowledge or consent. In this context, women's roles, irrespective of their other occupations, include bearing children who are suitable for the future society. If their descendants are considered unsuitable, they may eventually die (sons) or be rendered incapable of reproducing (daughters.) Women may undergo procedures like hysterectomies or sterilizations if they are unworthy of reproduction. Councilwomen may justify these measures by attributing the women's inability to procreate to supposed infections (Tepper 334.) In essence, women outside the Council do not have control over their bodies or reproduction; these matters are determined by the Council, which holds authority over all aspects of this society.

Women in this new world find themselves subject to the decisions of councilwomen, who constitute the true dominant and ruling group. However, Women's Country is organized to protect and ensure their autonomy as individuals. Despite this, women still lack complete freedom in matters of love, sexuality, and reproduction. Nevertheless, councilwomen believe that their ultimate goal of creating an ideal society justifies the absence of total freedom. They are not proud of their abuse of power but

view it as a necessary evil. Councilwomen refer to themselves as “the Damned Few” (Tepper 334), acknowledging the fact that their manipulation, abuse of power, and secrecy render the rest of women as Others who are being used without their knowledge or consent, although their position has evolved compared to pre-convulsion times.

Regardless of whether they are aware of the plot or not, all women in this society share the same role. Even councilwomen must be inseminated with servitors’ sperm and are required to sacrifice their sons. The primary distinctions lie in the councilwomen’s power to make decisions regarding reproduction, social matters, and their knowledge of the society’s inner workings. However, according to councilwomen themselves, this is not an advantage, as they carry a tremendous responsibility and are fully aware of the moral ambiguities inherent in their actions. As the women within the walls of Women’s Country’s towns, other individuals suffer the distinction of Others.

Outside the towns, there exist groups of individuals who do not live under the ordinances of Women’s Country. Gypsies live right outside the towns in camps and are formed by men and women who have decided to live under different rules. In Marthatown’s case, the camp is led by a man called Jik (Tepper 54.) Most of the Gypsy women who live with him work as prostitutes to satisfy the needs of warriors, in exchange, he gives them shelter and food (Tepper 58.) According to Morgot, these women are “no better than a slave,” who “have been taken captive” and “don’t even know it” (Tepper 59.) However, for them, this is the life they have chosen because they did not fit in Women’s Country:

‘I just wasn’t suited for town, you know? Too clean. Too neat. Too much expected of you all the time. Studies and work and crafty things no more time to yourself than a dog with the itch. Somebody after you all the time to cook better or weave better or be responsible for somethin.’ I’d rather be out here, travellin’ around. Jik’s an old villain, but he’s not bad to us, really. Some of the men are all right. We have some times.’ (Tepper 58)

The Gypsies hold the belief that Women's Country operates under many rules and that women are expected to conform to these rules, indicating that they are not entirely free. In this passage, Vonella, one of the prostitutes, implies that she finds her place in this lifestyle because it allows her to live without the extensive responsibilities that women within the towns bear. She recognizes, however, that she remains dependent on Jik, as she does not even earn her own money, and acknowledges that her role is limited to being an object of pleasure for the warriors. Vonella's perspective sheds light on the complex dynamics and constraints within Women's Country, suggesting that even within a society that strives for independence and autonomy, there are still individuals whose freedoms and choices are restricted, and who remain subject to the influence and control of others.

Women in circumstances similar to Vonella's often find themselves compelled to remain in the Gypsy camp, as the unique way of life they lead makes them ineligible to live within Women's Country. However, Women's Country assumes responsibility for their health. Doctors such as Morgot conduct inspections of the Gypsies to ascertain if they carry any infections that could indirectly affect the women living in the towns. It appears that Women's Country is primarily concerned about the potential transmission of infections to the women in its towns, but the Gypsies themselves are not considered individuals entitled to the same privileges.

Gypsies are neither permitted to reside in the towns nor do they receive access to essential resources such as food, shelter, employment, or education from Women's Country. This means that Gypsies, particularly Gypsy women, occupy a position as the Other in relation to those living under the protection of Women's Country. They are unable to enjoy the same privileges as women in the towns, primarily because they do not conform to the roles that the new society has prescribed for its residents. This

underscores the notion that Women's Country, while striving for a more equitable and autonomous society, still maintains hierarchies and distinctions among diverse groups of people based on their adherence to established norms and roles.

In addition, Gypsy women are controlled by and depend on men, either Gypsy men or warriors. In the Gypsies' case, their position with respect to pre-convulsion times or the readers' world is not reversed. They still suffer marginalization and Otherness; not even being women saves them in this new world. As opposed to the individuals in towns, Gypsies are considered as unnecessary in this society, with the exception of their task of helping warriors with their libidinal appetites, and that is why they live separately from the towns. As Wolmark affirms, "walls and gates [in *The Gate*] signify those ideologically created boundaries"; they are "metaphors for sexual and psychic difference" (93.) In this sense, Gypsies have rejected Women's Country principles, not only moral ones but also sexual. Gypsies can explore and live sexually which women and servitors in the town cannot; however, this sexual freedom does not mean that they are free, since they are used for economic purposes. Their values, which include this sexual labor and oppose Women's Country's, make Gypsies useless for their project of the ideal society. This justifies their living out of the walls and their survival without the protection of the town, except in matters that could affect women in the towns directly, like sexual health.

Along with Gypsies, there is another group of individuals who live out of the towns but are, contrary to the previous, well-regarded in Women's Country. The itinerants, as their name suggests, are individuals who travel around the different towns of Women's Country. Since their carnivals do not take place at the same time, itinerants move around to make their money as clowns, acrobats, magicians, showmen, etc. They do not live in a specific town, but they always have a place outside them:

Through the marketplace ran the Itinerants Road, which led down (...) through the eastern gate to the huddled itinerants' quarters outside the wall. There were only a few dozen people living in the itinerants' town now: a score of oldsters existing on the charity of the Lady, part of an acrobats' troupe, staying near Marthatown so the girls could attend Women's Country schools, (...)' (Tepper 112)

Itinerants enjoy more privileges than Gypsies. First, they have access to towns because they work there, and, secondly, the female itinerants have access to education. This is because itinerants are people who have not rejected Women's Country's values, but their nomadic occupation prevents them from settling permanently in any of the towns. While the novel does not delve into the specific details of the itinerants' way of life, it is apparent that they do not conform to the traditional practices of warriors. They adopt a lifestyle in which women and men coexist together, and both sexes have the option to apply for residence in Women's Country. This suggests that itinerants have found a unique middle ground that allows them to uphold Women's Country's values while not fully adhering to the roles and norms established within the towns (Tepper 137, 270.)

In the case of itinerant women, as long as they show interest in pursuing education and contributing to society, they have the option to live within the town and embrace Women's Country's values. As for itinerant men, after settling outside a specific town, they have the opportunity to apply to become servitors and reside within the town walls (Tepper 270.) However, while itinerants are tolerated in Women's Country, they are not granted the same privileges as those who are officially recognized as town residents until they fully settle and formally accept the society's values. While they continue to live in proximity to various towns, itinerants are considered as Others because their way of life differs from that of Women's Country. This is primarily because women and men coexist together without men taking on the role of servitors, but the fact that itinerants do not exploit women's bodies, as Gypsies do, grants them a special privilege compared to them. Women's Country perceives itinerants as potential candidates for integration

into their society. Therefore, Women's Country believes that once itinerants decide to settle permanently, they can become part of the society or, at the very least, they will not pose a threat to it.

The remaining group of individuals, who live outside the towns of Women's Country, is the Holylanders. This group is completely isolated from the towns and garrisons and represents a patriarchal system in which women are treated as objects, slaves, and bearers. After Stavia is raped by Chernon, they are captured by this group of people, who live in the south of Marthatown. Their society is characterized by being misogynistic, ultra-religious, polygamous, and violent (Tepper 230.) In this land, in which women have allegorical or biblical names (Chastity, Charity, Perseverance, etc.), women are the opposite of what they are in Women's Country. They are submitted to and abused by men.

For instance, when they have their first period and become "unclean," they are considered ready to "breed" and be married (Tepper 231.) The marriages are arranged, so girls of thirteen could end up marrying a man of seventy. There are, however, some similarities with Women's Country. For example, men and women live separately and the kids receive different treatments depending on their sex. First, they have to live longer than a year to be given a name; then, if they are boys, they will go to "Papa's house" when they are six to learn how "to read and write so they could discuss the Scriptures" (Tepper 233.) On the contrary, if they are girls, they will live with their mothers and become wives, mothers, and slaves to men. In Women's Country, separatism has the same purpose in terms of perpetuating their different roles, but the roles are completely unlike.

The role of women in this land is portrayed through Susannah. Since she was fourteen she has had eleven pregnancies (Tepper 234.) For male Holylanders, this is the duty of women. “Decent women” have to be mothers and servants to their husbands, they have to hide and shave (Tepper 261.) If they are not like this, women have to be “tamed” by “tying them up” or “breaking their legs” (Tepper 290.) When Stavia is captured, this is how they receive her. It is women who are in charge of shaving and beating her, until they realize that Stavia is pregnant (Tepper 302.) In short, women in this society are demeaned. As Carroll affirms, “the Holylanders remind the warriors that they are larger and more aggressive than the women and can attain power over them by sheer violence” (27.) Their ideals show Chernon that men can use force against women to make them do what men need or want, and this is something that Chernon transmits to his commander (Tepper 342.) The garrison plans a plot to capture as many councilwomen as they can so that they can take over. Carroll pinpoints that the only reason why they want to capture them is to use them sexually since women already provide them with the rest (29.) However, because they have never been able to submit them in this post-convulsion world, Chernon’s information about the Holylanders proves to be useful.

Warriors’ idea is, then, to transform their world into one in which they become powerful only because they use force, and they can submit women sexually. They want to be superior to women and use them as slaves, like in Holyland. Inside the Holylanders’ society, women are the Others of men. As in a patriarchal system, men are providers and fathers and use education, religion, and biology to perpetuate each gender’s roles. Thus, women will continue to be inferior since they cannot access education, religion situates them as such, and they are reduced to their biological role of bearers. Female Holylanders embody what warriors represent in Women’s Country.

On the other hand, the whole Holylander society is considered the Other of Women's Country. They are a minority and their way of living contrasts with the dominant values of Women's Country. And because they differentiate from that norm, they have to live outside it to survive. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the society will persist since Women's Country's purpose is to save the Holylander women and leave men to die in the wilderness (Tepper 341-342.) This suggests that there is no hope for those men who have been raised to be violent and, like warriors, they have to be eliminated; however, for women, there is still hope. They can embrace Women's Country's values and start living as agent and autonomous subjects (as far as Women's Country allows them.)

The introduction of Holyland in the story serves to contrast the two societies, ultimately highlighting that both societies are founded on sexist principles. However, the novel suggests that Women's Country justifies its actions as a means to an end, in contrast to Holylanders who resort to violence against women merely to maintain men's superiority. Additionally, the fact that warriors in the story express a desire to implement the Holylander ways with the women in Marthatown indicates that their violent tendencies toward women persist. This provides a reason for women to seek the elimination of these men. In this context, these three groups—Gypsies, Holylanders, and the warriors—represent varying levels of Otherness and imply that individuals must be worthy and useful to Women's Country to receive protection.

However, within these groups, some individuals may be considered for inclusion within Women's Country, particularly female and male itinerants and female Holylanders. The rest, such as Gypsies and male Holylanders, are not regarded as worthy or useful to Women's Country. Male Gypsies are seen as exploiting women for financial gain, which is not tolerated, and Women's Country cannot risk the health of its

residents by protecting Gypsy women. Male Holylanders, due to their values and abusive behavior towards women, are considered violent individuals who must be eliminated. This further underscores the complex and hierarchical dynamics at play within Women's Country, where individuals are evaluated based on their alignment with the society's values and their potential contribution to its goals.

2.2.4. A Rejection of Sexual Hierarchies

The previous section explained the tools and resources that Tepper uses in her post-apocalyptic world, dominated by women, to explore the consequences of women having the power. It can be perceived that the previous resources are used to reverse the sexual Otherness that women experience in the actual world. This entails that women's roles will be contrary to the ones established in the patriarchal system. Tepper's use of the role-reversal technique places women as dominant and men as Others. However, women do not dispose of their Otherness completely.

The novel's primary focus on Women's Country underscores the dominant position of women in this post-apocalyptic world. Women in Women's Country enjoy complete independence and possess the ability to work outside the home, care for their families, access education, and even participate in public life if selected by the Council. The patriarchal system of the past has been reshaped in favor of women, and various patriarchal foundations such as biology, psychology, education, religion, and law are used by women to justify and perpetuate female superiority. The central theme revolves around the idea that women can have power, independence, and identity separate from their association with men. Men, on the other hand, have their roles in this society defined by the dominant group, making them entirely dependent on women and often reduced to the role of the sexual Other.

The initial intention of the system created by Tepper was to eliminate the concept of sexual Otherness associated with women, but this Otherness is now transferred to men. Men's primary function in Women's Country is to serve as sources of sperm, and they are relegated to this biological role. Warriors, in particular, are used by women to satisfy their sexual needs twice a year, maintaining the illusion that warriors have an indispensable role. However, the actual source of sperm used for reproduction is servitors. In this context, sexuality and reproduction remain the only aspects that still connect women to men, and this contributes to the reversal of the concept of Otherness.

Reproduction is done through artificial insemination, so men's role in it is simply reduced to their biological implication. Women's Country's artificial insemination bestows on women the capacity to control their bodies. In theory, this would let them decide when they want to be mothers and whose sperm they want to choose, without physical or sexual implications. Yet, this is not the case in Women's Country. Councilwomen control who is apt to reproduce, whose sperm is used, etc. What is supposed to be a source of freedom for women turns out to be a source of oppression; however, this oppression comes from the same sex. In the same way as warriors believe that they are essential in this society, councilwomen make the other women believe that they are free to choose the fathers of their kids through the Carnivals. Carnivals create an illusion of freedom for women and warriors, while they also perpetuate the status quo established by the Council: firstly, because warriors are not allowed to reproduce; secondly, because women are inseminated with servitor's sperm without their knowledge; and, thirdly, because even their sexual orientation is imposed⁷⁹. All this shows that neither warriors nor women are in a position of advantage or freedom. Warriors are the Others, but so are those women who are unaware of Women's

⁷⁹ Women's Country has managed to eliminate what they call the "gay syndrome," so they can only have sex and feel attraction to their opposite sex.

Country's plot. Nonetheless, the Otherness that women suffer is not a matter of sexual hierarchy but of status: it is Councilwomen who have a privilege over the rest of the female citizens.

In *The Gate*, motherhood is portrayed as an important and positive role within the society of Women's Country. While women are not reduced solely to the role of mothers and have the power to decide when to get pregnant and when to stop, motherhood is primarily seen as a means of contributing to the preservation and betterment of their society. This perspective differs from the second-wave feminist view of motherhood, which aims to empower women in their roles as mothers and emphasizes the personal development and fulfillment that motherhood could bring. In the novel, motherhood is more of a transaction aimed at shaping the ideal society rather than a personal choice or source of empowerment for women. This emphasis on motherhood as a means of creating children who are well-suited to live in the ideal society also reinforces the notion that men, whether warriors or servitors are entirely unnecessary within the institution of the family. This, in turn, serves to perpetuate the dominant role of women and stresses the concept of Otherness applied to men, who are depicted as inessential in this social structure.

All these aspects which are controlled by councilwomen can be carried out in this society thanks to separatism. This separatism is not absolute as servitors can live among women. The idea is that only by separating those who caused destruction in the past and those who abused women (warriors or violent men) can women start exploring their possibilities. However, it turns out that neither councilwomen nor the rest of women in this new world are free. The former are chained to the responsibilities that their society demands, and they have to make the same sacrifices as the rest, with the addition of

being aware of the plot. The rest of the women are controlled by them and do not have a say.

Despite the efforts to eliminate women's Otherness and establish a society where women are dominant, it becomes clear that complete elimination of Otherness is not achieved. The perspective of warriors in the story perpetuates the notion of women as others. Warriors consider themselves superior and view women as their servants, providing all the necessary resources for their survival. They believe that without them, women would not be able to fend for themselves and are essentially weak and dependent. Interestingly, women in Women's Country encourage warriors to maintain this perspective as it serves their purpose in the eugenics program. This strategic manipulation of warriors' perceptions helps ensure the success of the program. However, from a broader perspective, warriors' viewpoint perpetuates traditional female stereotypes found in the patriarchal discourse. This viewpoint stands in contrast to the ideals of Women's Country. In essence, the novel uses the contrasting perspectives of warriors and the society of Women's Country to analyze and compare the possibilities of a women-ruled world with the patriarchal system. It points out that the elimination of Otherness and the establishment of gender equality are complex issues that go beyond mere role reversal and can have unintended consequences.

In other collectives or minority societies outside Marthatown, the patriarchal discourse is also present. In these cases, women preserve their position of Other based on sexual reasons. The first of these collectives is the Gypsies. In this outcast society, women work as prostitutes and depend on a man, who controls their earnings and provides them food and shelter. Women, however, go to the Gypsy camps claiming that they do not fit within Women's Country ideals. On the one hand, this suggests that women are free to leave the towns, but, on the other hand, it implies that their only

destiny, if they leave, is to survive by depending on men. Once they decide to leave Women's Country, they are not welcomed back. This means that Women's Country does not accept any women, just the fitted ones. Prostitutes do not meet the requirements so they cannot be protected by Women's Country. The requirements also exclude Gypsy men who have decided not to live either as warriors or servitors. Their job is to earn money through women's bodies, so their ideals are not welcomed in the towns. Through the collective of Gypsies, the patriarchal image of the prostitute is perpetuated, since their role is reduced to please men, who believe they have the right to pay another man to enjoy a woman's body.

Holylanders also represents a patriarchal society, which places Otherness on women. Their society, based on religious principles, polygamy, and female slavery, suggests that women have not been able to dispose of their inferior position. As it happened in *The Wanderground*, the existence of women who live in a worse position than the dominant group of women means that Otherness has not been disassociated from their sex and that there are some aspects to improve also in this new world. As it was explained, the insertion of the Holylanders in *The Gate* is a resource that makes it easier for readers to compare a society in which men are rulers and a society in which women are superior. In this way, it can be interpreted that this outsider community and Women's Country itself are societies that oppress the opposite sex. It is clear, though, that Women's Country seems to be more beneficial for women than Holyland. However, there is something that differentiates them. While Holylanders oppress women to perpetuate male superiority, Women's Country's oppression of men is done thinking about the future of humanity and women. Men are the ones who caused destruction in the past; they are inherently violent.

This subjugation is also based on an essentialist perspective but by creating a selective breeding program in which warriors (violent men) are the direct victims, the initial essentialism is dismantled. On the one hand, this suggests that violence is not an inherent trait exclusive to males and that either sex in a position of superiority will end up abusing their power and committing the same mistakes. It is an ironic use of essentialism which proves that attributing inherent traits to sexes is unjustified as both of them can be violent, emotional, etc. It shows that Women's Country is "based on gender domination and inequality, with the balance tipped in favor of women not men," in the same way as patriarchy (for example, Holyland) is based on sex domination and inequality, in favor of men (Wolmark 82.) This is precisely how Joanna Russ describes "battle of the sexes" stories, in which the reversal of roles resulted in the abuse of power by women.

This failure of women's ruling can have a feminist or an antifeminist interpretation. On the one hand, *The Gate* can be interpreted as a failed attempt to create a world dominated by women. It could be that in her intention of creating an ideal world, Tepper has managed to create a dystopian state, which entails an antifeminist reading since it contributes to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. For instance, women's most valuable social role is motherhood, they still serve men, they do not have control over their reproduction, prostitution is allowed, prostitutes and lesbians are not welcomed, women are portrayed as manipulative and they use sex to keep warriors under control, as if they were *femme fatale*. From this point of view, women have not been disposed of their patriarchal stereotypes; however, this idea can also be interpreted from a feminist perspective.

The interpretation may be too obvious or naïve, but Tepper may have created this world to show that the dominance of one sex over another is never an option. In this

world, not even their privileged position gives women the possibility of reaffirming themselves as free subjects, because they are manipulated by their sex, and they have to fulfill the requirements of the society to be in it. This is not at all an ideal society, and it does not succeed in eliminating women's Otherness⁸⁰. So, a system based on sex dominance will not be favorable or beneficial for either sex. As it happened with *The Wanderground*, the sexual Otherness, regardless of the dominant sex, will disappear when the two sexes coexist and are treated as two different subjects. It is not possible that one of the sexes changes while the other remains static. To prove this impossibility, Tepper creates her other world, which triggers the reflection on both her matriarchy and the readers' patriarchy.

Tepper's use of role reversal in *The Gate* serves as a literary device to explore and challenge sexual hierarchies. By reversing the roles and making women the dominant sex within the confines of Women's Country, Tepper highlights the flaws and inequalities inherent in patriarchal systems. The reversal allows her to demonstrate that any system based on the domination of one sex over the other ultimately fails and is detrimental to both sexes. The novel, in essence, serves as a critique of patriarchal societies by portraying the consequences and limitations of such systems. Tepper's intent is not necessarily to argue for the permanence of a matriarchal or role-reversed society but rather to encourage reflection on the need for a more equitable and just social order where both men and women are treated as equals.

The novel suggests that the eradication of sexual hierarchies and the removal of sexual Otherness are possible only in a society where both sexes are regarded as subjects rather than objects. The idea that both Gearhart and Tepper advocate for is the

⁸⁰ Only in the town are women free of sexual Otherness. However, they still suffer Otherness in terms of status or class.

importance of equality between the sexes. They suggest that an effective and just society must prioritize the treatment of men and women as equals while recognizing that women, like men, should have the freedom and space to explore their full potential as autonomous individuals. This shared perspective highlights the importance of moving away from oppressive sexual hierarchies in favor of systems that promote true equality and mutual respect between the sexes.

3. Rebirths and Awakenings

For this section, the chosen texts are *Ammonite* (1992) written by Nicola Griffith (1960-), and *The Power* (2016) written by Naomi Alderman (1974- .) Both authors' texts are inscribed in a subsequent period with respect to the previously analyzed works, which will mark the difference since they will draw on resources from the third and fourth waves of feminism. The selection of these authors aims to analyze the progression of the SF genre and the feminist movement chronologically, offering a context distinct from the earlier analyzed works. Notably, both feminism and SF were fervently developed in the USA before gaining momentum in the UK. Hence, examining these texts provides valuable insight into how the earlier waves of feminism and earlier stages of SF have influenced writers closer to our time.

By studying Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992) and Alderman's *The Power* (2016), we can obtain a deeper understanding of how SF authors have embraced and incorporated the principles and themes of feminism in their works. These authors' narratives are likely to reflect the evolving attitudes towards gender, power dynamics, and social structures, which are characteristic of the third and fourth waves of feminism. Analyzing these texts allows us to explore how the SF genre has evolved, addressing gender-related themes and female representation. As such, the aim is to examine the contributions of these British SF authors and their engagement with the feminist perspective, shedding light on the transformation of both SF and feminism within a more contemporary framework.

The 1990s and 2000s in the UK were a period of significant social and political change, marked by economic uncertainty, devolution, social unrest, and a shift in foreign policy. This period saw the rise of New Labour under Tony Blair, who

introduced significant reforms to the welfare state and public services, alongside controversial military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Social issues like the minimum wage, identity politics, and immigration also came to the forefront of public discourse (BBC.) Apart from this, and similarly to the rest of the world, the country witnessed important technological progress, which would define the world in the subsequent years: the emergence and growth of the Internet. It grew up to the point that by the beginning of the new millennium around 400 million people were able to connect and use the Internet around the world. By 2016, the amount of Internet users ascended to around 3.4 billion (Internet Live Stats.) Along with this technological progress, the decades of the 90s and 00s experienced other social advances. For example, in 1994, the Church of England implemented its decision to order women as priests (BBC.) In the way towards equality, the 00s witnessed the introduction of same-sex couples' legal rights in 2004 and the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2013 (BBC.) On a global level, the focus was also placed on the environment and preoccupation about climate change arose. This paved the way for the Kyoto Protocol in 2005, which aimed at controlling emissions of carbon dioxide (BBC.)

During this time, the feminist movement around the world continued to evolve from the groundwork laid in previous decades. The era witnessed the emergence of both the third and fourth waves of feminism. The third wave brought about significant changes as it embraced a more inclusive approach, prompting introspection and critical examination of its principles and ideals. The movement shifted its focus towards addressing collective and global issues, incorporating an intersectional perspective (Donawerth, "Feminism" 215; Snyder 185.) Intersectionality in feminism, as previously discussed, emphasizes the interconnectedness of social categories such as race, sex, class, sexuality, and ability, recognizing how they intertwine to shape unique

experiences of oppression and privilege, which rejected the idea that there was a universal woman. With feminism influencing every aspect of women's lives, it became evident that the movement was steadily seeping into the fabric of society

The culmination of these ideas gave rise to what is now known as the fourth wave of feminism. After navigating through internal challenges, the movement expanded its scope to address global issues on a worldwide scale. Embracing the trend of globalization seen in other domains, feminism itself became a global force during this fourth wave. Experts like Nuria Varela and Kira Cochrane pinpoint the origins of this wave in the early 21st century, and it continues to shape the present. The fourth wave builds upon the intersectionality established in the third wave, recognizing that the oppression of women cannot be isolated from other factors such as ethnicity, class, age, and sexual orientation. Significantly, this wave of feminism centers on diversity, adhering to the principles set by its predecessors. The arrival of the Internet and the power of social media have made fourth-wave feminism truly intergenerational. Across the globe, numerous women have become cyberactivists, using these digital platforms to analyze, condemn, and combat systemic issues like everyday sexism, the objectification of women, and gender violence. Through their collective efforts, fourth-wave feminists continue to strive for a more equitable and just society.

The political and social panorama had an impact on SF works, which continued with the tendency of the previous decades. Thus, the two most common SF subgenres in the early 90s were cyberpunk and humanist SF (Higgins 80.) Michael Levy affirms that during this period cyberpunk was already living its second generation (160.) As it was explained, cyberpunk was an interesting resource for SF writers who wanted to expand boundaries by questioning concepts such as the human body, or even death (Kincaid 176) Feminist SF would use the cyberpunk trend to blur gender boundaries and

“unsettle heterosexuality as natural” (Donawerth, “Feminisms” 220)⁸¹. While the 90s marked a significant trend, the literary genre of SF experienced a period of uncertainty. This decade served as the inception of what would later be termed the decline of the genre. (Kincaid 174-175.)

This decline referred to the idea that SF was not creating new trends but revising and reworking already existing ones. Thus, what was found from the 90s was a return to “older models,” which would be branded with the adjective “new” before them (Kincaid 174-175.) The most popular subgenres during this revival were new space opera and new hard SF (Higgins 83; Levy 160; Kincaid 177.) These two subgenres were especially useful resources for authors like Mary Gentle or Gwyneth Jones who were representative of the “British Renaissance” (Kincaid 177-178, 181.) There is no consensus among the experts on the origin and nature of this British Renaissance but, according to Kincaid, it became important “around the turn of the century” (Kincaid 175.) Although British writers drew on already-existing trends and models of SF, Levy, and Kincaid agree with the idea that the literary quality of these writers was noticeable (160; 178.)

This return to previous models of SF, with a change probably influenced by the “literary experimentation and belated ‘modernism’ of the New Wave,” allowed SF writers to “develop alternative SF visions” while dealing with the social and political

⁸¹ However, although it has been used by feminist to contest some of the preestablished social ideas related to gender or sexuality, cyberpunk has also raised issues related the portrayal of women in its stories, as many of the female characters were sexualized. Carlen Lavigne affirms that, before women writers had taken part in the subgenre, cyberpunk “was criticized for being misogynist and classist,” since it represented “a white, middle-class, heterosexual and very male perspective” (Lavigne 1). On the one hand, Lavigne argues that the main figure of cyberpunk (the cyborg) may not blur any dichotomies as, for example, Haraway would state. Lavigne argues that “when a cyborg becomes recognizably human, it is unable to challenge the human stereotypes, classifications and expectations guiding its performance—as, in order to become recognizably human, the cyborg must behave in predictable ways and operate according to dominant social norms, thus abandoning its own potential for liminality” (83). She affirms that cyborgs do not escape the social stereotypes according to their sex, thus, male cyborgs suggest are strong and “invincible while female cyborgs were sexually exploited” (83).

aspects of the period (Kincaid 178; Higgins 83.) So, for instance, SF works included reactions to the “Thatcher era,” explored the consequences of “global warming and ecological catastrophe,” and reflected on “gender issues,” “global terrorism,” “postcolonialism,” or even “religion” (Levy 158-159; Kincaid 174.) The emergence and rise of the Internet and cyberspace were also present in SF since it provided a new vision for the cyberpunk subgenre which used cyberspace to speculate about the consequences of, for example, uploading one’s “identity and environment (...) into advanced computer systems” (Kincaid 176.) The growth of the Internet and globalization made it possible for people to access more easily literary texts, which also fostered the rise of popularity of the SF genre. In terms of literature, the new century made popular young adult and superhero fiction, which became also attractive in the audiovisual sphere (A. Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* 479-480.)

By the 2000s, women had already gained importance in the SF field, which was translated into a growth of female writers, readers, and editors. Examples of editors are Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Ellen Datlow, Susan Allison, Julie E. Czerneda, and Shelly Shapiro (Higgins 82-83.) For their part, some British authors that are representative of this period are Nicola Griffith, Gwyneth Jones, Nina Allan, Mary Gentle, and Jaine Fenn, amongst others. The presence of women was also noticeable in the cinematographic sphere. Along with the popularity of young-adult fiction came the popularity of fiction with female leading roles, which are not necessarily feminist, but started making relevant the necessity and demand of important female roles. Although many of these audiovisual texts, being or not young-adult, come from the United States, some British representations can be named like *Kiss Me First* (2018) or *Black Mirror* (2011-2023.)

Nicola Griffith and Naomi Alderman write their works within the large period from the 90s to these days. The period is characterized by a social and political scene that is far from being stable. The United Kingdom undergoes global crises, and internal conflicts, but also witnessed the growth of the Internet and the range of possibilities that it offers. In social terms, feminism is immersed in the third and fourth waves, which entail the embrace of diversity and the necessity of going global to put an end to injustices regarding the sexes. For its part, SF suffers a standstill in terms of genre innovation, but many authors, including a wide number of women, rework already-existing genres. The chosen authors also used previous genres to explore the consequences of a world in which women do not occupy the position of Others. The objective of the forthcoming analyses is to explore how they address the concept of women's Otherness and whether they succeed in eradicating their oppression or, conversely, if they sustain it.

3.1. *Ammonite* (1992) by Nicola Griffith

Nicola Griffith (1960-) represents the first among the British authors selected for this study. While she generally refrains from categorizing or labeling her works, it is evident that her fiction shares common elements with SF (Booker and Thomas 151; Baker 154.) Notably, Griffith has received numerous awards for her novels exhibiting these characteristics. Her most renowned work, *Ammonite* (1992), is notably set on another planet, and she also incorporates SF elements in *Slow River* (1995), a fusion of the cyberpunk and thriller genres (Booker and Thomas 151.) A key aspect to consider in Griffith's fiction is the inclusion of lesbian characters and the portrayal of vibrant female protagonists who navigate and redefine their identities in new environments (Booker and Thomas 152; Baker 154.) This, in essence, forms the premise of *Ammonite*.

The novel revolves around Marghe, an anthropologist who goes to the planet Jeep (colonized ages ago by Earth people) to try a vaccine against a virus that affects everyone on the planet. The peculiarity of the virus is that only women survive it, so the population of Jeep is entirely female. While Marghe is trying the vaccine, she will study Jeep population to find out how they reproduce and survive, what kind of relations the tribes have, etc. This journey around Jeep will serve Marghe as a self-discovery or initiation journey, in which she will have to rethink herself.

Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992) is frequently referenced in various essays and books, cited often as an illustrative example of a female-only world. However, among those that have been accessible for this dissertation, only a limited number provide a comprehensive analysis of the text. To begin with, Elizabeth M. Wulff published her dissertation called "Exploring Alternative Notions of the Heroic in Feminist Science Fiction" (2007.) Within this work, Wulff delves into the concept of heroism across various feminist SF texts, emphasizing characters and their interactions with the surrounding environment. Specifically, she devotes a chapter to the examination of *Ammonite*, considering it an illustrative example of how individuals can embody heroism free from gender stereotypes, given the shared physicality of all inhabitants (viewed as female from an Earth-centric perspective.) Wulff contends that Griffith's narrative constructs a world devoid of divisions, allowing characters to be defined by their personalities, detached from gender. Through an extensive analysis of characters, the environment, and interrelations on the planet Jeep, Wulff concludes that Griffith successfully weaves a narrative centered on themes of change, belonging, and community. This narrative unfolds as a cyclical process wherein characters continually learn from their surroundings and interpersonal connections.

Tidwell's already-mentioned dissertation "No Longer Estranged: Women, Science, Science Fiction" (2011) also delves into the intricacies of *Ammonite*, focusing on three selected texts within her study, albeit with a nuanced shift in emphasis. Within her exploration, she positions Griffith's novel as an illustrative case challenging traditional dichotomies. Specifically, she states that *Ammonite* disrupts the dichotomy between science and nonscience by seamlessly incorporating both elements. The narrative revolves around scientific research on a distant planet, involving a virus that facilitates communication between the indigenous inhabitants, blending scientific inquiry with more spiritually resonant themes like the trances experienced by the protagonists. Beyond this scientific duality, Tidwell asserts that *Ammonite* challenges assumptions about self and Other, male and female, and internal and external. She elaborates on the dissolution of individualism, emphasizing that the collective takes precedence. In this world, traditional distinctions between sexes and genders disintegrate, and the self and the Other converge, creating a dynamic and interconnected narrative landscape.

In 2017, Nicola Griffith personally validated the concepts previously underscored by other scholars through the publication of her dissertation. "*Ammonite, Slow River, The Blue Place, Stay, Always, and Hild & Norming the Other: Narrative Empathy via Focalised Heterotopia*" delves into an analysis of her literary creations, exploring how she successfully normalized the Other. In her examination of *Ammonite*, she elucidates that the SF genre provided her the opportunity to navigate uncharted territories teeming with unfamiliar flora, fauna, and people. Significantly, the term "people" assumes paramount importance within the novel, as she contends that her envisioned world transcends the confines of being solely "of women"; it is a realm of people where distinctions based on sex and gender have been eradicated. According to

her perspective, within this narrative, women/people can experience their humanity unencumbered by the constraints of gender and sexual orientation, existing as individuals who develop in harmony with their environment.

A few years later, Reni Synnøve expressed her interest in Griffith's novel in the paper titled "Exploring the subversion of the sex and gender dichotomy in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite*" (2020.) The author's objective is to draw connections between the two novels, particularly emphasizing how the SF authors challenge prevailing notions of sex and gender. Regarding *Ammonite*, Synnøve details how Griffith envisions a world where women are depicted as fully realized human beings and active agents. The analysis suggests that Griffith advances the concept of a world free from sex and gender categories, surpassing Le Guin's approach by describing characters in a neutral language that refrains from attributing masculinity or femininity to any of them. Despite the prevalent focus on the body throughout *Ammonite*, Synnøve contends that Griffith addresses it from a non-gendered perspective, enabling readers to empathize with the protagonists and normalize people who would have been Others.

In a subsequent study titled "Symbiotic Adaptation in Posthuman Feminist Environs: Viral Becomings in Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite*" by Şafak Horzum, featured in a collection of essays in 2023, the author explores the deconstruction of dualisms achieved by Griffith in *Ammonite*. The analysis correlates this deconstruction with a pivotal element in the novel, identified by Horzum as the catalyst for transformative possibilities: the virus in Jeep. Horzum asserts that the virus serves as the ultimate embodiment of the Other, encapsulating all human fears associated with the unknown. This viral entity alters the physical and psychological attributes of the individuals in Jeep, and only through a deeper understanding of it do Marghe and the "terrene"

inhabitants unravel the intricacies of their planet. The virus, according to Horzum, functions as a tool facilitating the dismantling of hierarchies and Otherness, permeating every facet of Jeep's societies, including reproduction, motherhood, trade, and government. The author contends that Marghe's willingness to let the virus transform her becomes the key to establishing a "horizontal" connection with the people in Jeep. This transformative process, in turn, enables Marghe to achieve a profound self-awareness.

The most recent essay associated with *Ammonite* is Jenny Bonnevier's contribution titled "Making Babies and Making Home in an All-Female World: Reproduction, Sexuality, and Belonging in Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite*," featured in *Populating the Future: Families and Reproduction in Speculative Fiction* (2023.) Bonnevier's exploration revolves around the theme of reproduction in Griffith's creation of a female-only world. She argues that Griffith skillfully portrays reproduction as an intricate experience extending beyond mere physical intercourse. According to Bonnevier, *Ammonite* suggests that reproduction is not just a biological process but also a mental one, involving a trance known as deepsearch, intricately intertwined with the sense of belonging. The inhabitants of Jeep undergo parthenogenetic reproduction, necessitating the involvement of the virus. This unique method of reproduction without male involvement is attributed to a genetic mutation, reshaping various aspects related to reproduction, such as sexuality and family. Bonnevier asserts that the planet prompts a reconsideration of concepts like family, as it is no longer tied to blood relations but rather to individual choice. Regarding sexuality, the author contends that heterosexuality is conspicuously absent due to the absence of sexes, transforming sexuality into a human matter.

By all the literature concerning *Ammonite*, it is evident that Griffith's novel has maintained a significant presence in academic discourse from its initial publication to the present day. This study introduces a perspective to the existing analyses of the novel by specifically focusing on the theme of Otherness and its intricate connection to women. Expanding on the foundation established by earlier works that highlight the transformative impact of an all-female society on familiar elements like family dynamics, reproduction, flora, fauna, and social relationships, this dissertation embarks on a thorough investigation with a distinct objective. The analysis seeks to clarify how the introduction of these unique elements within the women-only planet actively contributes to dismantling the concept of women's Otherness.

3.1.1. An Interplanetary Fiction

Ammonite has a difficult classification within the subgenres of SF. What is completely clear is that it is an interplanetary fiction since Marghe's story is set on Grenchstom's Planet, also called Jeep due to the pronunciation of its initials "GP" (Griffith, *Ammonite* 5). She is an anthropologist from Earth, hired by an interstellar corporation called Durallium Company. In this case, Marghe is sent to Jeep not only to "study over a million people who had been out of contact with humanity for two or three hundred years," but also to try a vaccine (FN-17), created by Dr. Sara Hiam, against a Jeep endemic virus, homonym to the planet (Griffith 2, 5-6, 10).

With this backdrop, the narrative can be characterized as interplanetary, as it unfolds a tale involving both Earthlings and inhabitants of distant planets and galaxies. This signifies a level of human advancement that permits interstellar travel and even the establishment of an intergalactic dominion. Furthermore, the notion of an interstellar corporation venturing into the conquest and colonization of foreign galaxies and

celestial bodies hints at a form of imperialism that extends beyond the boundaries of Earth. This brand of imperialism is fundamentally driven by economic motives, whether it be the extraction of valuable minerals and resources or the offering of extraterrestrial vacations (Griffith 11, 254.) This concept of interstellar imperialism, coupled with the theme of colonization, evokes memories of the “interstellar conflicts” and “adventures” commonly found in space operas (Sawyer 505.) While Griffith’s novel does not explicitly detail the conquest process, it introduces a conflict element that aligns with the conventions of the space opera subgenre.

The Company operates an orbital station known as *Estrade*, serving multiple purposes, including communication and functioning as a “research and decontamination facility” (Griffith 6.) Positioned at the midway point between the planet and the Company’s military presence, the station plays a pivotal role in overseeing Jeep. The Company’s forces monitor Jeep from their orbital military cruiser, named the *Kurst*, stationed nearby. The *Kurst* remains on standby, awaiting confirmation of the vaccine’s effectiveness. The Company holds the belief that the virus could be weaponized, and the vaccine’s success would grant them control over Jeep. Conversely, if the vaccine fails, the employees stationed on the planet might consider rebellion and the potential use of the virus to harm Company personnel (Griffith 18-19.) Should a rebellion arise, those on the planet would need to traverse *Estrade* before reaching the *Kurst*, the Company, or any other planet; it represents the sole exit route for employees seeking to escape this alien world. Consequently, if escape becomes necessary but the vaccine has failed, the *Kurst* could simply disable the orbital station, leaving the planet and its inhabitants isolated.

As the story goes on, Marghe decides not to take the vaccine to experience the virus and its effects which will be essential to living and surviving on this planet. At

some point, she needs to send a message to Commander Danner at Port Central to warn her about this decision, but Danner receives the message incomplete. At the camp, Danner is betrayed by her assistant who sends this information to the *Kurst* (Griffith 262.) Danner, aware of this, manages to save Hiam and her team, who worked there, before the *Kurst* detonates *Estrade*, kills all employees that were there, and isolates Jeep forever (Griffith 370.) This storyline may remind, as it was said, of a space opera story, but the idea of colonizing galaxies and planets entails that it is also an invasion story.

The invasion story will be used by Griffith as a resource to explore the idea of Otherness, but in this case from the point of view of an individual's origin and belonging. In this sense, Griffith exploits the "anthropological approach in [her] portrayal of an alien society" (Synnøve 60). Thus, the novel revolves around individuals from a distinct planet, where only females have survived an endemic virus. This unique premise shifts the focus of Otherness in the story away from sex and towards ethnicity. This aspect is noteworthy for our study because the absence of sexual Otherness allows these individuals to develop without the constraints of gender stereotypes. Consequently, as Marghe confronts, learns, and adapts to an unfamiliar setting and way of life, it becomes a means of self-discovery for her. Thus, her journey on Jeep not only explores the planet but also represents a journey of self-construction.

The author employs the traditional bildungsroman narrative, which concentrates on the psychological growth and development of the characters. In this context, *Ammonite* can be categorized as humanist SF, a prevalent trend during the 1990s. The psychological emphasis, coupled with the significance of social sciences such as anthropology (Marghe's profession), also suggests that this novel falls into the realm of soft SF. However, other sciences like biology play a vital role, particularly in explaining phenomena like reproduction, which is affected by the endemic virus.

Marghe's personal development, as well as the transformation of the native inhabitants, is intricately tied to the absence of men. As seen in previous texts, this absence provides authors with an opportunity to speculate about the potential of female characters confronting new circumstances and environments free from the constraints of patriarchy. The dearth of male presence gives rise to utopian elements within the novel, particularly from a feminist perspective. One of the key features associated with utopian narratives is the setting of the story in an imaginary or nonexistent place. In this instance, Marghe's journey unfolds on a planet distinct from Earth, a realm that exists solely within the confines of the narrative. As there is no real-world reference for this planet, *Ammonite* undeniably embodies this utopian characteristic. Furthermore, the novel embraces the concept of separatism, a common theme in feminist utopias. Due to a virus that kills mainly men, after years of evolution, the natives of Jeep have become a female population and have already forgotten that another sex existed.

Jeep's separatism is not a situation to which women are forced to turn so that they can survive, as was the case with the Wanderground or Women's Country; in Jeep, it is the result of evolution, which favors women⁸². By creating a world in which the population can only be female, Griffith manages to dispose of the category of "gender" and even of "sex." This has affected the way of life of the native women who, opposite to the patriarchal belief, have been able to perpetuate their species and survive without the help of men. In addition, this separatism has also altered their language. For example, the word "woman" has lost its "Earth" meaning and has become a synonym

⁸² This idea recalls Darwin's survival of the fittest, which so often has been used to justify men's superiority. In this case it is women who are the ones fitted to survive Jeep's virus.

for people⁸³; also natives do not understand or recognize words such as “father” (Griffith 56.)

Furthermore, Griffith’s world is explicit about its economic and political systems. Different tribes in Jeep are connected through their economic system called *trata*, a system of alliances that will be explained thoroughly later on. In terms of politics, each tribe has its system, but they all live on a matriarchal basis. As far as what is explained in the novel, it is known that the tribes in Jeep do not function on a hierarchical basis, although some of them like the Echraidhe have a leader chosen by the tribe. Whether or not they have a leader, tribes in Jeep seem to be classless and seem to make decisions in assembly. Outside of Jeep, however, hierarchies are present, as can be seen in the Company.

Other elements that suggest that *Ammonite* is a feminist utopia are women’s connection with nature, sexual permissiveness, and lesbianism⁸⁴. First and foremost, it is evident that women on Jeep lead lives deeply intertwined with nature, and their societies are predominantly non-urban. They reside in settlements akin to Ollfoss, or they adopt a nomadic lifestyle, much like the Echraidhe or the Singing Pastures communities. In matters of sexuality, Jeep bears resemblance to the situation described in *The Wanderground*. As a world exclusively inhabited by women, Jeep abolishes the social constructs that once subjugated women to male dominance. In this world, conventional notions of marriage or exclusive romantic partnerships are not part of the equation. Instead, women engage in sexual relationships for the sake of pleasure, rather than strictly for reproductive purposes. Moreover, on this female-only planet, lesbian

⁸³ This is problematic because from the natives’ viewpoint, this word has been given another meaning, but from Marghe’s perspective, the word is fraught with Earth connotations.

⁸⁴ Notice that, since it is a women-only world, the word “lesbianism” has also lost its “Earth” meaning as there is no need of distinguishing from any other sexual orientation.

relationships become the norm. Such female-only worlds or societies are a recurring theme among feminists who argue that lesbianism remains marginalized in the real world. By creating such alternative worlds, they provide a space to explore sexualities and orientations outside social norms without the fear of repression. Certainly, the presence of separatism and lesbianism necessitates a reimagining of the traditional family structure, which diverges significantly from the patriarchal model, as we will delve into later.

The previous aspects correspond to the definition of feminist utopias that Russ establishes but there is one element that makes *Jeep* an imperfect world: the presence of violence. Not only is violence present through the Company, but also among the tribes in *Jeep*, concretely through the Echraidhe. One of its members, called Uaithne, will persuade the tribe to undertake a crusade against other tribes, raiding and stealing from them. Although this issue will be solved by Marghe, the presence of violence shows that women can also be violent for power and dominance; however, they can also use dialogue to come to terms and live peacefully, as it happens in the final events of *Ammonite*.

Regardless of the subgenre categorization, Griffith's world possesses some characteristics that make it undeniably SF, because they trigger readers' cognitive estrangement and consequently provoke a reflection on their reality. This is managed with the introduction of a varied range of novelties that constitute what is known as *novum*. The first novelty found in the novel is the presence of futuristic technology related to outer space. It is assumed that for the story to be set on another planet, the technology on Earth has to have evolved to the point of allowing space travel. The existence of spaceships, orbital stations, and an interstellar company, which colonizes other planets, proves so. In addition to this technology, there are some other devices like

the “wristcom” that all Company workers wear in Jeep. This bracelet is used to locate the workers, to voice-record whatever they want to inform about, etc. (Griffith 24, 63.) Another instance is the “Search, Locate and Identify Code” (SLIC), which is a personal code that works with satellites in order to locate workers whose wristcom does not work or has been lost (Griffith 24.) Despite its presence, technology does not have a protagonist role in the novel, since it does not seem to work properly in Jeep’s environment, due to electromagnetic storms (Griffith 332.) However, technology enables the story to happen.

The presence of human inhabitants on planets distinct from Earth introduces a thought-provoking element that fosters cognitive estrangement. The setting immerses the reader in an environment that is simultaneously familiar and uncanny. Alongside Marghe, readers must navigate the challenges of adapting to this unforgiving milieu, coexisting with peculiar flora, fauna, scents, colors, illnesses, and even unfamiliar societies, all while facing the inherent risks of this new environment. The most distinct divergence from Earth is the singular female population of Jeep, a consequence of an endemic virus. This virus, paradoxically, is the very foundation of life on Jeep, as it triggers transformative changes in women’s bodies, enabling them to acclimatize and survive in this unique world while also granting them the ability to reproduce. Consequently, the virus has effectively induced mutations in these humans. It is both the creator and sustainer of the female-only society on Jeep, while simultaneously posing a threat to the wider universe, as it holds the potential for the complete extinction of men. This presents an opportunity for readers to contemplate their world, where the notion of men becoming extinct is inconceivable.

In summary, the elements discussed in this section offer the author an opportunity to delve into the dynamics of a female-only world devoid of patriarchal dominance and

explore how women would interact and thrive in such conditions. As we will explore in the following section, Griffith employs a range of narrative tools to prompt readers to question the notions of Otherness and domination, underscoring that these concepts are subject to perspective. From Marghe and the readers' standpoint (representing the colonists' perspective), the inhabitants of Jeep are viewed as aliens or the Other. However, from the perspective of the natives on Jeep, it is the women from Earth who are perceived as the aliens.

In the upcoming section, readers will undoubtedly observe a distinctive departure compared to the other analyzed texts. This deliberate choice stems from the recognition that Griffith's world diverges from the others, as her characters are fully realized individuals, while those in the other texts could be considered as collective representations. This unique structure aims to offer readers a deep insight into Griffith's innovative concepts and narrative devices and how they impact the novel's protagonist, Marghe. Our exploration will commence with an analysis of the characters hailing from the Company, who originally came from Earth. This will be followed by an examination of the individuals inhabiting Jeep. Finally, the last section will engage in a discussion on the theme of Otherness in *Ammonite*, probing how Griffith skillfully disassociates the concept from sex.

3.1.2. The Company

Since the novel deals with different female communities with their systems, the organization of the analysis will follow Marghe's journey and encounters. As it was mentioned, Marghe works for an interstellar company that owns several planets around the universe. The Durallium Company colonizes planets for economic purposes and is formed by a wide number of workers from different scientific disciplines. The situation

in Jeep is quite exceptional as the Company has found that there is a virus that kills men. Jeep's virus would wreck the Company's economic exploitation of the planet since no one would want to travel, build, or work there. The virus also presents a threat to males around the universe and the Company believes that it can be used by those in Jeep (workers and natives) as a biological weapon in case they rebel. The Company has, then, carried out a vaccine as a counterweapon to control the virus and the people. Marghe is the one who will try it, while she also studies the native peoples.

Marguerite Angelica Taishan, also known as Marghe, delved into the field of anthropology and was recruited by the Company to contribute to the Settlement and Education Councils (SEC) (Griffith 11.) Having previously served the Company on another planet, she is regarded as the ideal candidate for exploring Jeep. This is attributed to her "ability to spend large periods alone, an innate belief in herself, a prodigious linguistic talent, and superb physical fitness," complemented by her adept control over both her physical and mental faculties (Griffith 30.) Despite appearing perfect for the task, Marghe is currently grappling with a personal crisis: the protagonist cannot overcome her mother's death and does not speak to her father. This internal struggle prompts her to accept the offer and leave her home planet as a form of self-deception (Griffith 11, 31.) Upon accepting the opportunity, her ties to Earth are completely severed, as Dr. Sara Hiam⁸⁵ enlightens her about the irreversible nature of journeys to Jeep—once individuals land there, they do not return (Griffith 5.) Marghe is now preoccupied with questions surrounding her identity and the necessity to craft a new one that aligns with the unique demands of Jeep.

Despite the identity crisis that she will undergo in Jeep, her lack of sense of belonging is something rooted in her personality:

⁸⁵ The doctor who created the vaccine against Jeep's endemic virus.

She had lived alone for as long as she could remember, her father and mother had always been so busy. She had buried herself in study, in observation and analysis. People were there to be watched, not related to. And now her mother was dead and her father estranged, and she had no friends. She had no friends, because whenever she began to get close to someone it felt like unknown territory, and it scared her; she ran away to a new place, to find new people to study, people to whom she did not necessarily have to be a person back. (Griffith 193)

Marghe is acknowledged as a capable and resilient woman, adept at navigating challenging circumstances. However, her competence contrasts with her struggles in facing personal issues, and she finds herself disconnected from others. Rather than forming connections, she is more at ease observing and studying people. The absence of meaningful attachments and a sense of belonging defines Marghe's narrative, enveloping her in feelings of loneliness, alienation, and a pervasive sense of being an outsider. At this point, she personifies the concept of the Other. As Marghe embarks on her journey across Jeep, these emotions intensify, reaching a pinnacle. It is through her interactions with Company personnel and her exploration of the diverse peoples of Jeep that she begins to grapple with herself and the world around her. This transformative process entails coming to terms with her own identity and establishing connections that challenge her previous inclination towards detachment.

Upon arriving in Jeep, Marghe assumes the role of an outsider, confronted with unfamiliar faces and an entirely new planet. As she ventures beyond Port Central and delves deeper into the heart of Jeep, the sensation of being a genuine stranger in an alien environment intensifies (Griffith 46.) In her interactions with the inhabitants of Jeep, Marghe embodies the Other, symbolizing a distinct and unfamiliar presence in this unexplored world:

She had nobody; no kith, no kin, no community. Danner, Letitia, Cassil⁸⁶... they all sat in the center of a webwork of colleagues, friends, lovers. Family. She was alone, and scared. All she had was herself and her breathing exercises and her FN-

⁸⁶ Danner and Letitia are respectively the commander and a technician at Port Central. Cassil is a farmer in Holme Valley, with whom Marghe has to make a deal.

17. (...) She was alone on a strange and dangerous world, and she knew it showed on her face. (Griffith 55)

This marks the first instance when Marghe grasps the significance of belonging to a community on Jeep. Although Marghe may not initially identify with Port Central, she recognizes that their shared origins and occupations connect them. This becomes her sole link to a sense of belonging and an avenue for forging agreements.

Marghe's subsequent encounter is with the Echraidhe, a belligerent nomadic tribe that treats her as both a captive and a commodity. This distressing experience intensifies her sense of isolation to the extent that she begins to doubt whether she will ever find her place in this world:

She was alone. No one was going to rescue her. Not Sara or Danner, not Lu Wai or Letitia. Not even Aoife⁸⁷. As Cassil had said, she was alone, an orphan under this sky. No one knew her. Here she was Stranger Woman, or the SEC rep. Not Margherite Angelica Taishan, not Marghe. She wondered if that person existed anymore. (Griffith 146)

As Marghe continues her journey, her sense of not belonging intensifies, pushing her identity crisis to greater heights. This is predominantly due to her solo navigation through eerie scenarios on a foreign planet that is meant to be her new home. As she confronts these situations, she experiences a profound sense of being "utterly human" in an alien world (Griffith 54.) Marghe emerges as the embodiment of the Other in a hostile environment—someone who does not conform to the planet's norms, its tribal distinctions, and does not adhere to its customs.

Marghe's story will allow the readers to empathize with her, feeling alien themselves. But her perspective also creates the opportunity to see the native peoples as Other:

⁸⁷ Aoife is one of the member of the Echraidhe, who possesses the title of *Agelast*, the next leader of the tribe. She will be in charge of Marghe while she remains their prisoner.

A wirrel shrieked. Marghe went very still. This was not Earth; this was Jeep, a planet of alien species, a place where the human template of dual sexes had been torn to shreds and thrown away. This was something new. She knew these people had evolved cultures resting on bases very different from those of any Earth people; she did not know whether that made these women human or something entirely Other.

She shook herself. The question, What was humanity? was as old as the species, one she never expected to answer (Griffith 53.)

As she struggles with her identity crisis, Marghe confronts profound questions about her humanity, what sets her apart from the women of Jeep, her purpose in Jeep, the nature of the alien, and the subject of study itself. During her time with the Echraidhe, Marghe ceases to be the observer studying aliens; instead, she becomes the alien, the object of study (Griffith 96.) She experiences a profound sense of Otherness, the sensation of not fitting within the norms of this world and its various tribes. In addition to being perceived as the Other and the stranger from the Echraidhe's perspective, Marghe also becomes the possession of the tribe.

The Echraidhe consider Marghe as a possession solely because they seized her while she was trespassing "the stones of the ancestors" (Griffith 138.) Her connection to the tribe is not one of communal inclusion but rather a status as one of their possessions (Griffith 139.) As Wolmark contends, "those who are different are objectified and are denied the capacity to be active agents in the creation of their own subjectivity; in taking a sense of their own Otherness, they are disempowered" (27.) Marghe lacks agency, a voice, and the freedom to move independently. In her quest to construct her identity, she senses the imperative need to break free from the tribe to reclaim her agency as a subject. Against unfavorable weather conditions and lacking food, shelter, and weapons, Marghe undertakes a perilous escape, risking her life in the process. Throughout this journey of self-discovery, she realizes that she would rather face death as a free subject than live in captivity under the dominion of a violent tribe (Griffith 142.) The Echraidhe, employed as a narrative device, serve to highlight the diversity of

societies within the same world. Despite being a tribe comprised of women, they exemplify hierarchical values. This hierarchy, however, is not gender-based but tied to origin or ethnicity, manifesting as the oppression of those deemed outsiders (Wulff 211.)

Having experienced life with the Echraidhe and navigating a perilous journey, Marghe comes to a profound realization—survival on this alien planet hinges on her ability to adapt (Griffith 178.) Faced with a profound sense of Otherness and loneliness, Marghe, with the assistance of Leifin, a healer in Ollfoss who loves hunting to use the pelts for clothes, successfully reaches Ollfoss, the place she believed to be the origin of the tribes in Jeep. Within the confines of Ollfoss, Marghe’s ongoing journey of self-discovery unfolds. While she has already determined that her freedom is worth risking her life for, the next phase involves uncovering and establishing her own identity on this unfamiliar and challenging planet.

Right from the outset in Ollfoss, the women there extend a sense of community to Marghe, aiding in her recovery by providing clothing and sustenance (Griffith 180.) Marghe begins to feel a sense of belonging within this community. Initially sparking curiosity among the women, she does not perceive herself as a stranger, as they show a willingness to hear her story. In a gesture of gratitude for the healing she received, Marghe decides to remain in Ollfoss, contributing her efforts to work for the women and the community. While she starts to recognize her usefulness and feels a growing sense of fitting in, a lingering uncertainty persists regarding her true identity (Griffith 196.) Crucial moments for her self-development unfold, primarily guided by Thenike⁸⁸, who shows her the secrets of Jeep. Among these revelations is a critical insight into the virus. Facing a shortage of the FN-17 vaccine, Thenike advises Marghe to cease its use

⁸⁸ An inhabitant of Ollfoss who will become Marghe’s lover and companion.

and embrace the virus. This transformative step is seen as a means for Marghe to discover her authentic self and understand her role in this world, integrating with “Jeep’s nonhuman alterity outside” and finally acquiring a position of “horizontality with her surroundings” (Horzum 107.) The virus catalyzes Marghe’s disassociation from Otherness.

As Marghe establishes roots in Jeep, she simultaneously disassociates from Port Central and Earth (Griffith 209.) While recognizing that these places evoke memories of her origin, she realizes that her true belonging is to Jeep. As her body adapts to survive the virus, her mind undergoes modifications, leading to a deeper understanding of both Jeep and herself. Post-virus, she becomes prepared to undertake *deepsearch*, a ritual enabling women to comprehend their history, forge connections, conceive, and discover their new identities. Marghe’s *deepsearch* takes her back to her childhood and connects her with her mother, who, through a dream, suggests Marghe’s new name:

She was on a thin and misty beach; her mother walked from the shadows and held out her hand. On her palm was the ammonite.

“Primitive cultures thought they were coiled snakes, petrified, and called them snake-stones,” Acquila said. “But the word ‘ammonite’ comes, of course, from the medieval Latin, *cornu Ammonis*, horn of Ammon, due to its resemblance to the involuted horn of Ammon, or Amun, the ram-headed god of Thebes.”

She put the cold thing in Marghe’s whole right hand. “His name, Amun, means ‘complete one.’ He acquired the power of fertility formerly invested in Min, the ancient Egyptian god of reproduction.” She looked amused. “Min was very popular. But his time passed.”

Her mother had faded, leaving the ammonite. Marghe had not been surprised when it sank into her hand. And now she was herself, and more. The complete one. (Griffith 240)

Marghe’s sense of belonging in Jeep solidifies, and upon being embraced by the family and undergoing the virus, she experiences a profound connection with the world. Now attuned to the nuances of the planet, its women, and her essence, she feels a sense of wholeness. In recognition of this completeness, she chooses to name herself Marghe Amun (Griffith 241.) Having discovered her new identity and a place where she truly

belongs, Marghe's quest shifts toward understanding her role in this unfamiliar yet embraced planet. Despite undergoing a transformative journey into a new woman, Marghe acknowledges the influence of her past on her evolving identity. Recognizing her affinity for exploring new people and places, she embraces the role of a *viajera*, akin to Thenike (Griffith 270.) *Viajeras* are women who can remember stories from around Jeep, they act as living history and witness important pacts, as well as solve arguments. Marghe emerges as a bridge between Earth and Jeep, with a mission to foster peace among the tribes and instigate lasting change on the planet.

The central narrative of *Ammonite* intricately weaves Marghe's transformative journey, presenting her as a beacon of independence who liberates herself from entrenched patriarchal stereotypes. Marghe becomes the embodiment of a woman granted the opportunity to carve out her distinctive identity in a world unburdened by sexual hierarchies. Her character transcends the role of a mere representative of a collective; instead, she serves as a living testament to the idea that women can and should chart their paths of self-discovery, unshackled from externally imposed conditions. Marghe's story unfolds as a compelling narrative of individual empowerment, highlighting the crucial importance of women uniting and forming a collective, diverse unity. This unity is not constrained by homogeneity, as women possess the agency to define themselves in myriad ways. In essence, Marghe emerges as a symbol, underscoring the necessity of affording women the space and autonomy to shape an inclusive identity. This empowerment enables them to live freely, amplifies their voices, and positions them as active agents in the unfolding narrative of their lives. Marghe's journey becomes a powerful call to dismantle restrictive norms and cultivate an environment where women can authentically and boldly embrace their multifaceted identities, and where women can stop considering themselves as Others.

In her quest for identity across Jeep, Marghe encounters two distinct “institutions” affiliated with the Company: *Estrade* and the *Kurst*. The former presents itself as an orbital station, marking Marghe’s initial interaction with fellow individuals. *Estrade*’s crew consists of three women whose responsibilities include overseeing communications between the Company and Jeep, managing preparations for those destined for Jeep’s surface, and conducting quarantines and decontamination for those departing Jeep (Griffith 1-2.) Notably, the latter task has never been, and will not be, executed, as Dr. Hiam asserts that no one returning from *Estrade* has ever come back (Griffith 5.) The crew members are Nyo, specializing in satellite systems, Sigrid, a remote communication expert, and Dr. Sara Hiam, a physician renowned for creating the FN-17 vaccine to combat Jeep’s endemic virus:

SEC rules meant that Hiam was not allowed to culture the virus, or bioengineer it, so the vaccine was not made of killed virus. What she had done instead was identify the short string of amino acids, peptides, that folded up to form the actual antigen of the viral protein, map out the amino acid sequence, and then biofacture a combination of different peptides, matching different regions of the viral protein, in the hope that one or more of the synthetic peptides would fold up to mimic an antigenic site present on the viral protein. She had linked those to inert carrier proteins to help stimulate the immune system (Griffith 20.)

Hiam assumes the crucial role of overseeing Marghe’s preparation for the vaccine and monitoring its outcomes throughout the entire dosage regimen. The efficacy of the vaccine is of paramount importance as their survival hinges on its success. In the event of the vaccine’s failure, the *Kurst*, a military cruiser of the Company, holds the ominous responsibility of isolating Jeep. This isolation is achieved through the drastic measure of eliminating *Estrade*, the sole means of leaving the planet.

Port Central, the established crew on Jeep, comprises the Mirrors, designated as “Company Security members” due to the distinctive “mirror-visored helmet” they wear. Alongside them are various specialists essential for the colonization and exploration of the planet, including botanists, geologists, climatologists, ecologists, anthropologists,

doctors, and more (Griffith 27, 254.) Unsurprisingly, the crew is exclusively composed of women, as they are the only ones capable of withstanding the Jeep virus. The central figure in this ensemble is Hannah Danner, the acting commander of the Mirrors. As the narrative unfolds, Danner serves as the eyes on Port Central, offering insights into the camp's developments while Marghe ventures into the depths of Jeep. Danner serves as a parallel to Marghe, sharing a common experience of uncertainty, isolation, and a profound sense of alienation in their respective environments. Much like Marghe, Danner grapples with feelings of not belonging, struggling to find her place within both Port Central and the unfamiliar planet. Specifically, within her crew, the weight of responsibility compounds her sense of isolation, creating a unique set of challenges that she must navigate:

She fingered the insignia sealed to her epaulets. She might wear the two stars of a commander, but in her head she was still a lieutenant, playing at command, as though it were a test after which the real brass would unplug her from the simulator and point out all her mistakes, patting her on the back for any smart moves. But here there was no one to tell her if she had made any smart moves, no one to talk to about anything. Command isolated her more effectively than a deadly disease. (Griffith 77)

Danner struggles with the realization that she bears the responsibility of ensuring the survival of her crew, fully aware that their departure from the planet may never be a possibility. Despite her insecurity in navigating a strange world where she holds no inherent power, she must issue orders to guide her crew through the challenges of survival. Adding to her sense of disconnection is the deliberate avoidance of “entangling with GP communities and residents” by her crew (Horzum 113.) Port Central, in her perspective, becomes a metaphorical “sophisticated prison,” a confining trap where she and her crew exist while the native inhabitants are free in their world (Griffith 76, 157.) This perception fuels her belief that they could never integrate into

this world without the protective shield of the Company, its advanced technology, and the conveniences it provides.

Similar to Marghe, Danner shares the feeling that, despite their mission to study the planet and its inhabitants, the crew is the outsider—the aliens in this foreign world. However, she perceives Marghe’s presence as an asset, recognizing the potential for her to facilitate connections with the natives (Griffith 37.) Like Marghe, the crew begins to entertain the notion that Jeep could become their new permanent home, evident in their activities such as making clothes and embellishing their living quarters like colonists. This shift in mindset is reflected in the Mirrors’ acknowledgment that they do not anticipate leaving Jeep (Griffith 37.) Some Mirrors take a more drastic step by leaving Port Central and immersing with the natives. This offers Marghe and Danner a glimmer of hope that humans can genuinely integrate into the planet (Griffith 58-59.) At this moment, Danner briefly identifies with the native women, acknowledging the potential for a harmonious coexistence between the Mirrors and the inhabitants of Jeep.:

It was the first time she had really, deep down, thought of the indigenous population of Jeep as women. Not aliens, or natives, or beings to be taken into consideration from a humanitarian point of view, but women like her, like Marghe, like Teng or Vincio or Letitia Dogias. *Like us.* (...)
And then she understood why it was only now that she was able acknowledge the humanity of Jeep’s natives: because it was only now that she understood that Company, the ones with the power, held her, a Mirror commander, in as little regard as they held the inhabitants of this world. It was only now that she understood, for the first time, that despite her title, her uniform, and the two stars on her shoulder, she was as helpless as any native herder or farmer or sailor. (Griffith 88-89)

The commander, Danner, recognizes that their differences boil down to their diverse origins. Despite briefly identifying with the natives, this connection wavers when she becomes entangled in the external conflicts between tribes. Amid tribal conflicts, Danner reverts to viewing the natives as strangers, perceiving them as savages who roam Jeep with violence fueled by a legend (Griffith 337, 341.) The commander, not

wanting to immerse herself in what she perceives as the tribal issues of these “savages,” distances herself and reverts to a colonist perspective.

Once again, she regards the inhabitants of Jeep as aliens, a sentiment captured in a sentence that encapsulates the overarching theme of the novel:

“And, Day, when you’ve finished your walk, I’d like you to come back and sit in on my talk with the journeywoman. I’d like your input. Sometimes T’orre Na⁸⁹ can be a bit, well, a bit alien.”

“I imagine she feels the same way about you.” (Griffith 259)

Day, a Mirror who “went native,” urges Danner to adapt to Jeep’s rules for survival, emphasizing that the concept of being an “alien” is subjective. T’orre Na and Day attempt to convince Danner of this perspective, but their efforts coincide with a message from Marghe indicating she contracted the virus. Misinterpreting the message, they assume the vaccine failed, unaware it was Marghe’s choice to discontinue it. A Mirror called Vincio informs the *Kurst* (Griffith 261.) Aware of potential spies, Danner prepares for the evacuation of *Estrade* and Port Central headquarters (Griffith 262, 265.) Faced with the need to prioritize her crew’s safety, Danner opts not to intervene in the natives’ conflicts. T’orre Na notifies Marghe that this decision breaches *trata*, signifying that Danner will not receive assistance from the native tribes (Griffith 293.)

Danner and her crew confront the stark reality of being abandoned in an alien world, severed from their former lives: “But we’re not officers anymore, not any of us, Danner wanted to say. But she did not, because if they were not officers, then what, who, were they? She knew she was not yet ready to face that question; none of them were. They would live the fiction a little while longer...” (Griffith 317.) The quote encapsulates their collective uncertainty, as they are no longer officers, leaving them to ponder their identities in this unfamiliar terrain. The crew is compelled to reassess their

⁸⁹ A *vijera* who witnessed the *trata* between Marghe and Holme Valley.

roles and identities in this new world, one that must now become their home. Much like Marghe, Danner and her crew embark on a self-discovery journey to acclimate, fit in, and unravel the mysteries of Jeep. Marghe recognizes that the crucial first step towards achieving harmony lies in *trata*, compelling her to ensure Danner does not dismiss this opportunity. Acting as a bridge between “terrenes” and native women, Marghe endeavors to foster peaceful coexistence by highlighting and embracing their differences. Her efforts underline the need for everyone to undergo transformation and adapt to one another.

While the novel does not explicitly narrate Danner and her crew’s transformation and self-discovery, it implies that they, too, must follow Marghe’s path to feel complete in their new home. This narrative is fundamentally one of change, where each character undergoes necessary transformations to fit into and survive on the ever-evolving planet (Wulff 217.) Natives and “terrenes” alike must adapt to a new order that prioritizes respecting each other’s differences. To explore these differences, the concept of the Other, examine their coexistence and understand the nature of change, it is essential to delve into the space they inhabit, their tribes, origins, and the intricate relationships that bind them together.

Danner, the Company, and its employees play a pivotal role in shaping the concept of Otherness, as they function as colonists. To them, the native women are the Other, often regarded as “savages” and the subjects of study, leading to a perceived need for protection from them. However, from the perspective of the native inhabitants, Port Central represents the Other, but this Otherness is primarily rooted in their origins rather than their sex. The “terrenes” are seen as the alien invaders who have encroached upon Jeep, posing a significant threat. This narrative resembles a colonization story, albeit one in which the colonists must adapt to the alien world of Jeep.

In its role as a colonist, the Company embodies hierarchies, and within this oppressive role, it also intertwines with sexual hierarchies. Primarily through the *Kurst*, it symbolizes a remaining vestige of patriarchy (Booker and Thomas 287.) This notion is supported by Safak Horzum, who asserts that even Danner is embedded within this remnant of “patriarchal authorities” (113.) Jeep, on the other hand, poses a threat to patriarchy due to the presence of a virus capable of eradicating men. Horzum suggests that “by wiping out the male population of original settlers, Jeep acts as a leveler of hierarchies” and “introduces an alternative way of living founded on horizontal relationality” (105.) According to Booker and Thomas, the virus not only endangers men but also the institution of heterosexuality, a cornerstone of the patriarchal system (287.) The removal of men and heterosexuality results in the eradication of sexual hierarchies, thereby dismantling sexual Otherness and eliminating discrimination and prejudices related to sexual orientation. This shift prompts a reassessment of the patriarchal family structure, as traditional parental roles are no longer bound by the conventional male-female pairing. As a consequence, this restructuring carries implications for patriarchal values traditionally associated with women.

The virus obliterates the concept of gender (culturally imposed roles based on sex) and the category of sex itself, leading to a singular, unified existence. This upheaval would undermine the foundations of patriarchy, a system founded on dichotomies and the domination of one sex over another. Jeep, with its myriad possibilities for women, is perceived as a threat by the Company, which parallels how patriarchy regards feminist principles. In the narrative, rather than being eradicated, the patriarchy is merely endangered. Both Company workers and natives of Jeep exist under its surveillance. While momentarily free during isolation, there is a constant awareness that the Company could potentially return:

There's a whole world here, and Company won't forget it. They might be gone for now, but they haven't given up. Company never gives up. They'll keep at it, on and on, until they find a vaccine, or cure, and then they'll be back. It might be five years, or it might not be until that daughter of yours is grown, Marghe. But they'll be back. And when they do, they'll be holding our destruction, the destruction of all the communities of this world, in their syringes or their sprays. Without the virus, the people of this world don't have children. No children and we die. (Griffith 371)

In this passage, Hiam underscores the Company's capability to eliminate the inhabitants of Jeep through the development of a virus-neutralizing vaccine, effectively putting an end to the perpetuation of the inhabitants of the planet. Hiam argues that the Company is poised to seize the opportunity to conquer and colonize a new world, reaping potential benefits even at the cost of the extinction of Jeep's native population. The justification for this potential extinction lies in the virus empowering women and posing a threat to the Company's male dominance. In this context, the Company is willing to assert its authority, even if it means oppressing and potentially exterminating an entire population. This mirrors the way patriarchy, as a system, exercises dominance regardless of the consequences of oppressing the opposite sex. Both the Company and patriarchy justify oppression in the name of preserving their privileged positions and maintaining power.

Their dominance is rooted in systems of domination. The Company relies on imperialist and colonialist oppression driven by economic motives, while patriarchy enforces oppression based on sex. It appears that the lives of Jeep's inhabitants have not escaped the clutches of patriarchy, as they are under the Company's watch. Under this premise, the "loss of men is treated as a problem, not a solution," as their disappearance does not ensure freedom and development for the people of Jeep (Booker and Thomas 286.) While women on Jeep are free from sexual Otherness⁹⁰ within their community as they are just regarded as people, from the Company's perspective, Jeep women become

⁹⁰ The fact that patriarchy is portrayed as existing beyond the borders of Jeep does not imply that women within the planet do not suffer oppression, even though this oppression is not tied to sex.

the Other. They are women who have mutated to survive on a planet where no man lives; therefore, they are seen as strange and potentially dangerous. They embody a threat to male dominance as they are favored by the endemic virus.

3.1.3. Grenchstom's Planet (Jeep)

Marghe will have the opportunity to gain insights into various facets of this unfamiliar world through her interactions with the different tribes, including their economic and political systems, religious beliefs and mysticism, concepts of family and motherhood, perceptions of love, as well as attitudes towards sexuality and reproduction. Before delving into these distinct aspects, it is worth discussing the environment in which these tribes reside—planet Jeep. As mentioned earlier, the Company refers to the planet as Jeep, derived from the initials GP, representing Grenchstom's Planet. Humans discovered Jeep around “two or three hundred years” before the narrative's timeframe, but the initial colonists lost contact with Earth during that period (Griffith 6.) According to the Company's research, these pioneers were “adept bioengineers,” enabling them to blend “genetic material from Earth flora and fauna” with “indigenous species, and vice versa” (Griffith 39.) This bioengineering prowess allowed them to create “viable crops and livestock” necessary for survival on Jeep (Griffith 39.) The initial colonists had to acclimate to the challenges of a planet featuring two moons, a diurnal cycle of twenty-five and a half hours, and distinct food, drinks, smells, etc., compared to those on Earth (Griffith 31, 34, 38, 39.)

The planet was rediscovered by the Company five years before Marghe's landing. “Satellite surveys” detected human population on the planet and “remote atmosphere testing” showed that the planet could be lucrative for the Company (Griffith 13.) After a while on the planet, they discovered two key aspects: “Jeep's natives were one hundred

percent female, and there was a virus loose. The two were connected, of course. The incidence of infection among Company personnel was one hundred percent. Eighty percent of the Company's female personnel recovered; all of the men (...) died." (Griffith 14.) What eluded the Company's understanding was the method by which the female indigenous population managed reproduction without the involvement of men. This becomes a focal point for Marghe as she endeavors to unravel the mystery. In addition to these pivotal details, the available reports in Marghe's possession indicate that Jeep's population is "estimated at under one million," residing in small groups or tribes, each characterized by its distinct features (Griffith 16.) Notably, these tribes exhibit variations in language. While each tribe has its specific dialect, the root language is a blend of "twenty-first-century Earth English, with some evidence of a secondary tongue based on Spanish" (Griffith 16.) Upon delving into the analysis of these dialects, Marghe discovers the presence of words from Zapotec, Basque, Welsh, Greek, and Gaelic (Griffith 16, 275.) This linguistic diversity is just one facet of the disparities among the tribes, a topic that will be further explored in the subsequent analysis.

Holme Valley and Singing Pastures are the first two tribes that are presented in the novel. The former is a tribe of around "four hundred women and children" (Griffith 52.) It is a community based on farms, as they possess vast fields. They relate to Singing Pastures because of this. The latter is a community of herders, who "drives their herds down from the pastures to winter in the valley" (Griffith 53.) Despite their connection, they form two different communities. As Marghe explains, "they even use different calendars dictated by different moons: the valley people divide the year into fifteen months of eighteen days each; the women of the pastures reckon with a ten-month calendar, each month twenty-seven days long" (Griffith 53.)

Their connection is established through *trata*, an exchange system akin to bartering. This represents the closest instance of an economic transaction that Marghe encounters in Jeep, alongside a credit system on the coast. However, *trata* transcends mere trade; it embodies a system of alliances and support. As explained by Horzum, “Trata ... means a custom of trade based on oral and behavioral actions of giving and taking among GP communities ... this give-and-take system also shapes families and communities more effectively than money-based financial orders” (106.) *Trata* serves as the initial step toward a connection that can “continue for generations,” extending between “two people, between two or more kiths, or between several communities. Frequently, it was all three, each exchange resonating with another in the web” (Griffith 55.) Importantly, a *trata* is not considered valid until witnessed by a *viajera* (Griffith 57.) Therefore, *trata* marks the initial stride for Earth’s aliens to integrate into Jeep, as it is “a mode of ‘becoming’” (Wulff 192):

Trata is a serious matter. (...) The most important thing is that, to the women of Holme Valley, we are no longer strangers. This means that if something terrible happened, for example the microwave relay failed, or we ran out of food, Holme Valley would be bound to help us. Of course, it also means we have to help them, but the major point is we are no longer alone on this planet. We have allies. The alliance cannot be dissolved until there’s been some trading (...) by both parties. What will probably interest you most is this: we are now involved in this world. We have a stake in the culture. Because of that, we will be considered when and if the journeywomen make any changes that could affect us. Danner, do you understand this? It’s important. We’ve become part of the social network, here, like... oh, part of the cultural food chain. We’re linked with these people. From now on, what they do—all of them, any of them, because the *trata* network is woven right through these communities, linking each with another—will affect us, so they’ll consider us and our needs before they do anything. (Griffith 83-84)

In this context, Marghe elucidates to Danner that *trata* establishes a connection between them and the tribe, obligating them to assist the tribe in times of need. The pivotal juncture arrives when Port Central aligns with Singing Pastures and Holme Valley to confront Uaithne. At this juncture, they metamorphose into another tribe, earning trust and facilitating *trata* with other tribes. Consequently, Holme Valley and Singing

Pastures emerge as the crucial tribes through which “terrenes” gain recognition and acceptance in Jeep.

Trata exemplifies the capability of women to establish and manage their economic systems independently, without relying on the presence of men. Griffith herself asserts that this economic model is on par with any other, highlighting that it serves as a testament to women’s growth and their ability to create their systems, just like any other group, because fundamentally, they are individuals, *people* (376.) Holme Valley and Singing Pasture stand as two tribes that offer insights into the diverse roles and occupations that women in Jeep undertake. These examples merely scratch the surface of the myriad possibilities within their world. Consequently, this diversity gives rise to distinct behaviors and values, unique to each woman and her respective tribe, which may differ significantly, as exemplified by the initial prevalence of violence within the Echraidhe tribe.

As Marghe continues with her trip towards Ollfoss, she will face two tribes that “are shaped by the harsh, ever-snowed, scarcely fertile environment on Tehuantepec” (Horzum 111). The initial tribe Marghe comes across is the Echraidhe. This tribe exposes Marghe to distinct features, including their governance system, as well as shared aspects across Jeep, such as family structures and the significance of mythology, legends, and rituals in their society. Regarding the Echraidhe, Marghe discerns their Gaelic origin, evident in their Gaelic names like Aoife or Uaithne, prominent members of this tribe (Griffith 72). They are a tribe of “one hundred and eighty-three” women, led by the *Levarch* (Griffith 103, 69). The position of *Levarch* is not passed down through hereditary means; instead, the leader must select her successor, referred to as *Agelast* (Griffith 102). In the event that the *Levarch* chooses to step down due to old age, the *Agelast* assumes the leadership role (Griffith 379). While the tribe adheres to

the authority of the *Levarch*, this title does not come with hierarchical privileges, except for the responsibility of making decisions in the best interest of the tribe. All possessions are held communally, and anything or anyone captured by the tribe becomes the property of the community (Griffith 100-101, 135-136).

The Echraidhe tribe is structured into “fifty-four tents, or yurtu” (Griffith 103.) Observing the dimensions of their *yurtu*, Marghe deduces that the tribe’s population is diminishing, and its members are likely undernourished, presumably due to the absence of *trata* agreements (Griffith 103.) The Echraidhe’s refusal to engage in *trata* is rooted in their adherence to old values. As explained by Aoife to Marghe, the Echraidhe adopt a strategy of taking what they need, a survival approach grounded in their historical practices: “The old ways work well enough” (Griffith 115.) These “old ways” involve sustaining themselves through raids on the Briogannon, Singing Pastures, or Ollfoss (Griffith 115.) While not all members of the Echraidhe tribe may endorse this method, their code of “tribe before self” compels them to follow the Levarch’s leadership (Griffith 115.)

The division into *yurtu* is also indicative of their social and economic units. They divide the tribe’s property into these *yurtu* so each of them claims several *taars* and horses, although they are tended communally (Griffith 104.) Individuals residing in the same *yurtu* also function as a kind of family. Their conception of family diverges from Marghe’s Earth-born idea, as “Griffith’s imagination of all-females households and communities liberates the concept of family from gendered (and mostly patriarchal) boundaries” (Horzum 110.) Starting from the fact that there are biological mothers, “choose-mothers”—those who are preferred by the children as carers—and “tent mothers”—those who are “over the age of about twenty” and share the tent with a child (Griffith 105, 379, 381.) In addition, the *yurtu* can be organized around *soestres*. These

are “children, two or sometimes more, born at the same time to different mothers who share the same yurti” but only “after their mothers somehow synchronize their biorhythms” (Griffith 105, 125.) Along with the *soestres*, the *yurtu* can be inhabited by other women who “might or might not be biologically related;” they are the “tent sisters” (Griffith 105.) The birth of *soestres* is used among the Echraidhe to reinforce ties between the tribe’s families/yurtu, so as Marghe affirms the term has “biological as well as social significance” (Griffith 106.)

The term *soestres* gives Marghe a clue about the reproduction of women in Jeep. As far as she knows after a while being the Echraidhe’s prisoner, women synchronize their biorhythms by stimulating “each other’s ova to divide” (Griffith 125)⁹¹. So, women reproduce by parthenogenesis. Similar to other science fiction writers, like Gearhart before her, Griffith employs the trope of parthenogenesis as a means of emancipating women. With parthenogenesis, women are no longer dependent on men for reproduction, thereby freeing their bodies. This approach transforms sexuality and reproduction into “a human experience,” a universal aspect not dictated by sex (Bonnevier 47.) However, for this process to happen, women need to have immersed previously in *deepsearch*. Marghe explains that “the rite of passage is attended by a ritual trance, called *deepsearch*, which, the Echraidhe claim, allows the adolescent to somehow access the memories of her ancestors. The trancing is so deep that psychosis may occur, or may go on so long that it becomes physically detrimental to the subject” (Griffith 125-126.) This is something common to all the tribes in Jeep: accessing the memories of their ancestors is a necessary step to becoming an adult and conceiving and reproducing on this planet.

⁹¹ Similar to what was explained in the ritual of implantment in *The Wanderground*.

During her time among the Echraidhe, Marghe comes to understand the profound significance of rites and rituals within the tribal cultures. Among these tribes, the rite of passage plays a pivotal role, serving not only as a means for individuals to discover their own identity but also to establish their connection within the fabric of the planet itself. *Deepsearch*, in particular, takes on a dual role of mysticism and education for them. It holds a mystical aspect as an integral part of their belief system, comparable to how others hold the faith “in their gods, in reincarnation, in hellfire and damnation” (Griffith 126.) Through *deepsearch*, they forge a link with their past, delving into their history, and in doing so, they gain insight into their individual selves. This connection to their past also serves to validate their present beliefs and legends. Many of these legends often reference ancestors whom the tribes of Jeep hold in high regard. Simultaneously, these legends serve as a means to elucidate various aspects of their world, including the viral presence and their unique reproduction methods.

The first element related to their beliefs, past, rituals, and legends is the megalith that Marghe finds before being captured by the Echraidhe:

“There are twenty-seven stones ranged in a circle but I can’t judge how perfect its dimensions are. The purpose of these stones is unclear, but it should be noted that the tribes in this area utilize a twenty-seven-day lunar calendar. (...) The tool marks appear weathered to an extent incompatible with the surmised landing date of the first settlers. These stones are very old.”

They were impossibly old. These stones should not be here, unless humans had landed on Jeep hundreds, thousands of years earlier than supposed; or unless whoever, whatever, had quarried these megaliths, carefully shaped them with crude tools, and raised them up, was not human. (...)

“Even assuming their makers are long dead, I feel sure they’d still be a focus of ritual activity. On a plain like this, stones this size would really mean something.” (Griffith 66-67)

The existence of the megalith raises the possibility that a civilization predating the initial human colonization might have existed. Marghe contemplates that the megalith could be utilized for some form of ritual. Later, Aoife clarifies that the megalith predates the existence of the Echraidhe, and each year they gather there to “thank the

spirits” and experience the magic. There are speculations about the builders of the stone ring, with rumors suggesting the *goths*, creatures described by few and considered “half-mythical.” These beings, believed to be intelligent and bipedal, are thought to have constructed the megalith, possibly “driven from their usual habitat by warm-blooded aliens” (Griffith 117.) However, none of the Echraidhe admit to having personally seen a *goth*, rendering them as “tales from the past” (Griffith 117.)

Alongside the *goths*, there exist other legends within the tribe, one of which revolves around the goddess of death. According to Echraidhe's beliefs, there exists a spirit world where the goddess of death holds the title of the “goddess of all.” Allegedly, some inhabitants of this realm rejected death and discovered a place where the goddess could only manifest in spirit. Eventually, “her spirit awoke” and unleashed “a great sickness;” those who survived were granted a “miraculous gift: children.” The Echraidhe maintain that the spirit of these individuals persists among them, “so that all who come after may remember back to what once was, and what may be again” (Griffith 111.) The legend also prophesies that the goddess of death “will rise again in her chosen one, and that there will be an accounting” (Griffith 111.)

Marghe interprets the legend as a narrative about the first colonists, where the goddess of death symbolizes the virus intertwined with their reproductive methods (Griffith 111.) Furthermore, Marghe notes similarities between the concept of the chosen one and the “messiah myth” present in other Earth cultures, highlighting that Echraidhe’s beliefs are not entirely dissimilar from those she already knows (Griffith 111.) Interestingly, one member of the Echraidhe, Uaithne, believes herself to be the chosen one. This conviction stems from an intense *deepsearch* that ultimately resulted in the destruction of Aoife and Uaithne’s relationship as *soestres*, strained relations

between the Echraidhe and the Briogannon, and, consequently, precipitated the decline of their tribe.

The pivotal aspect of Uaithne's narrative lies in her role in the hostile relations with the Briogannon, the neighboring tribe sharing the same land as the Echraidhe. Initially forming a single tribe with shared origins, the reason for their division remains unknown (Griffith 120.) Despite the separation, their tribal characteristics remained similar, and their mutual relationship persisted until Uaithne's involvement. Her actions, particularly the killing of her Briogannon lover, prompted the Briogannon to declare a "blood feud against Uaithne." Subsequently, they conducted raids on the Echraidhe, vowing not to engage in romantic relations with them anymore (Griffith 123-124.) This marks Uaithne's significant contribution to the decline of her tribe. As previously explained, the Echraidhe lack economic ties with any other Jeep tribe, making the Briogannon their sole potential connection for survival, a connection they lost due to Uaithne's actions.

However, the significance of a living legend extends even deeper within the tribe. Uaithne emerges as a force driving chaos and eventual transformation. She orchestrates the overthrow of the Levarch, seizing leadership of the tribe with the self-appointed title "Death Spirit." Under this persona, Uaithne instigates a war, even going so far as to eradicate "half the Briogannon" to coerce them into supporting her cause. Additionally, she launches a campaign of destruction, targeting the "flocks and herds of Singing Pasture" (Griffith 260.) In her role as the Death Spirit, her objective is to inflict harm and death. Together, Marghe, Danner, and the tribes from Singing Pastures and Holme Valley collaborate on a plan to persuade the Echraidhe and Briogannon tribes to reconsider their positions and embrace change (Griffith 350-351.) This change encompasses the abandonment of the old ways followed by the Echraidhe, the necessity

of collaboration with other tribes, and the imperative of preserving the flocks and herds for the survival and continued population growth of the planet (Griffith 251.) Aoife, convinced of a better future for her tribe, saves them by killing Uaithne and assumes the role of the new *Levarch* (Griffith 366.) Uaithne's death symbolizes the transformation in Jeep (Wulff 217)—the demise of old ways and the dawn of a new era for the planet (Griffith 357.)

While Marghe's experience with the Echraidhe may not have been the most favorable, her time as their captive or property provides her with valuable insights into the intricacies of Jeep. It becomes evident to her that the women of Jeep do not conform to a single mold. They exhibit a range of governance styles, such as the Echraidhe with their *Levarch* and *Agelast*, and they lead diverse lives, some of which necessitate transformation for their survival. The Echraidhe, as a violent and brutal tribe known for their raids and theft, exemplify two essential points: firstly, these antiquated practices render them a stagnant and declining community, one that may eventually vanish unless they adapt; secondly, it underlines that women in this world are also capable of violence, cruelty, killing, plundering, and subjugation. The Echraidhe, convinced proponents of the "tribe before self" mantra and defenders of the "old ways," serve as a metaphor for the imperative need for all individuals to evolve and adjust to the ever-changing world that surrounds them.

The Echraidhe tribe serves as a compelling example, illustrating that the women in this world are "utterly human," because humanity "mean[s] cruelty as well as love" (Griffith 107.) However, Griffith also posits that humanity hinges on "the capacity to change" (Griffith 107.) In this regard, the Echraidhe come to recognize this truth towards the story's conclusion. Initially, their resistance to adapting to the new challenges presented by their world, such as the concept of *trata*, was leading them

down a path of decline. To ensure their survival, they had to view the other tribes not as objectified entities to be raided and killed for survival, but as fellow human beings. Overall, the most vital lesson Marghe gains from her encounters with the Echraidhe and Briogannon is the undeniable “humanity” of the native inhabitants of Jeep. Griffith emphasizes that women are not a homogenous group; they are not solely embodiments of peace, nor are they static beings. These tribes encapsulate the central theme of this narrative: the imperative of change and evolution. This relevant message parallels the call for women in our world to have the freedom to do the same.

On a profound level of analysis, the Echraidhe tribe operates as a symbol of patriarchy (Horzum 113.) Griffith skillfully depicts how patriarchy, embodied by the “old ways” of the Echraidhe, is on a path of decline and destined to dissipate. The narrative suggests that a more inclusive and harmonious dynamic is poised to replace the traditional patriarchal structure for the benefit of all sexes. In the world of Jeep, akin to our reality, distinctions between individuals, particularly women in this context, should be recognized and respected. However, the novel also suggests that the intertribal relationships within Jeep must undergo a transformative process; in the same way, relationships between the sexes must also transform. This is essential to prevent the establishment of new hierarchies based on sexual differences, ensuring equal opportunities. The overarching theme implies a call for social evolution, emphasizing the need for a paradigm shift away from patriarchal structures and towards more equitable and inclusive systems that honor the diverse contributions of individuals, irrespective of their sex. In doing so, Griffith’s narrative advocates for a future in which the outdated “old ways” are replaced by a more egalitarian and collectively beneficial order.

Marghe's journey on Jeep forces her to shed the preconceived notions she carried from Earth, as the unique environment of Jeep challenges and reshapes her established beliefs. One striking illustration of this transformation lies in Echraidhe's unconventional concept of family, structured around *yurtu* and *soestres*, which fundamentally dismantles the patriarchal notion of family. This, in turn, prompts her to reevaluate their reproduction methods, leading to the realization that they reproduce parthenogenetically, entirely without the involvement of males—a sex that simply does not exist on this planet. This stresses the remarkable independence of women from the influence of men in this world. Jeep's conditions empower women to lead tribes, establish their economic systems, sustain themselves, and reproduce autonomously. Unlike in a patriarchal framework, women here are not confined to the role of motherhood, although they perceive the act of bearing children as a divine gift from the goddess of death. It is also through their legends passed down among these tribes that they elucidate the myriad possibilities this world offers. Marghe's exploration continues in Ollfoss, where she further delves into these aspects.

While Marghe gains a deep understanding of Jeep during her time with the Echraidhe, she experiences a sense of confinement as she is treated merely as an object. Her decision to escape, despite the risks, leads her to the inhabitants of Ollfoss, a renowned settlement in Jeep celebrated for its lush gardens. Here, she embarks on a transformative journey encompassing love, sexuality, and pregnancy, finding her place within a new family and forging her identity in this unfamiliar world. Initially, Marghe intends to explore Jeep while undergoing the vaccine trial. She hopes to journey to Ollfoss in search of insights into the origins, history, and reproductive practices of the native population (Griffith 35.) Her interactions with the people of Ollfoss, particularly

Thenike, along with her post-virus survival, grant her the knowledge to unravel the enigmas of Jeep.

In Ollfoss, Marghe encounters a profound exploration of the notion of family. While her introduction to this concept began with the Echraidhe, it is in Ollfoss that she has the opportunity to become an integral part of one, setting her on a path to discover her own identity. Much like the Echraidhe, families in Ollfoss are structured around households rather than biological connections. Comparable to the *yurti* within the Echraidhe, these Ollfoss households are primarily economic units. Contrary to Earth's understanding, the unions and families in Ollfoss are not necessarily built upon "biological ties" (Horzum 111.) In sharp contrast, Jeep's familial structure does not hinge on blood relations. In this framework, all members of the family or household hold equal importance. Consequently, when decisions need to be made, each member possesses a vote, and unanimous agreement is essential (Griffith 203.) Their notion of family is akin to an alliance among individuals, entailing the responsibility of caring for one another, irrespective of any blood connections. Within these families, a nucleus forms and operates unconditionally.

This concept of family stands in stark contrast to the patriarchal model, as Jeep's society consists of a single-sex one, which effectively dissociates women from traditional patriarchal roles. This eradicates the notion that one sex (males) should be the provider while the other (females) assumes caregiving responsibilities. Instead, women take on all roles and each family member shares responsibilities that contribute to the collective well-being. Furthermore, the formation of couples and families in Jeep is not contingent upon love alone. While love does exist on this planet, it is detached from patriarchal norms and closely tied to sexuality. Marghe's exploration of both love and sexuality is facilitated by her relationship with one of the members of her newfound

family, Thenike. As evident, the primary aspect to note is that relationships in Jeep are exclusively homosexual. Much like what occurred in *The Wanderground*, the absence of the opposite sex inevitably leads to homosexual relationships. However, far from being imposed, homosexuality in this society is a direct consequence of the virus and has become the prevailing norm in Jeep. The book makes no mention of heterosexuality except in the recollections Marghe has of her parents. Consequently, just as the distinctions between “sex” and “gender” blur in Jeep, the category of “sexual orientation” fades away, leaving only one possibility: women loving or engaging in sexual relationships with other women. On Jeep, where “women” equates to “people,” love and sexuality cease to be contingent on one’s sex and instead become a matter of attraction to other individuals; just like reproduction, sexuality becomes “a human experience” (Bonnevier 47.)

In addition to her exploration of love, Marghe embarks on a journey to discover her sexuality with Thenike, an integral part of her self-discovery process deeply intertwined with the endemic virus. Initially, while Marghe is undergoing the vaccine regimen, her instincts are suppressed, as expressed in the text: “the vaccine you took, the poisons, the adjuvants, they would have kept away, pushed down, your need for sex” (Griffith 228.) It is only when Marghe withdraws the vaccine that she begins to feel truly alive again. This awakening culminates when she immerses herself in Jeep’s environment, willingly allowing the virus to infect her. During this transformative process, her body undergoes changes or “mutations” to adapt to Jeep’s unique conditions. These adaptations extend to her sexuality, as her newly “mutated” body heightens her senses and allows her to explore and derive greater pleasure from her sexuality. The virus, therefore, serves as the connective thread, influencing aspects of

Marghe's identity, ensuring her survival, shaping her sexuality, and, notably, impacting her potential for pregnancy.

To ensure their ability to reproduce, the natives of Jeep must have undergone both the virus infection and the *deepsearch*, a transformative process that enhances their senses and adapts their bodies to the unique reproductive methods of the planet, specifically, parthenogenesis. This particular mystery had intrigued Marghe, as she could not fathom how a population could perpetuate itself without male involvement. Becoming pregnant in Jeep is also a ritualistic undertaking. To synchronize their pregnancies, two women must prepare in advance:

They fasted one day, ate lightly of the same things at the same times the next, repeated the cycle, over and over. Fast, eat, fast, eat. As much as possible, they did everything together: walked, ate, cooked, bathed. (...) Day after day, night after night they spend together, and Marghe began to feel a fierce energy building between them, heating and shrinking, pulling them in, like a star about to go nova (Griffith 243-244)

As it can be seen, reproduction is almost a process of symbiosis, helped by the virus. Once they have undergone this process of connection, the virus, which has enhanced their senses, will help them perform and be aware of the parthenogenesis that will lead them to be pregnant:

And Marghe was standing before the cathedral that was Thenike's body and all its systems, as Thenike stood before hers. She stepped inside. (...) She stopped and looked in a side chapel where bronchioles narrowed to alveoli. She wandered on, noting cells and bones and connective tissue, glands and tubes. Ovaries. (...) Thenike was ovulating, and because Marghe knew their rhythms were matched, she knew that this would be happening in her body, too (...) The electrum thread inside shimmered and sang, and the ovum almost... changed. (...) The virus had altered everything. (...) She reached out again, and the thrumming electrum strand that was the virus coiled and flexed and the cell divided. Marghe searched memory of those long-ago biology lessons: mitosis. But altered, tightly controlled and compressed by the snaking virus until it resembled a truncated meiosis. Chromosomes began their stately dance, pairing and parting, chromatids joining and breaking again their chiasmata, each with slightly rearranged genetic material. But the chromatids did not then separate again and migrate to the cellular poles in a second anaphase; instead they replicated. (...) As they multiplied, Marghe felt the tight tension, the connection between these cells that would divide and multiply inside Thenike, and those that would grow

inside her own body: fetuses. Fetuses that might one day be born as *soestres*.
(Griffith 248-249)

Griffith explains thoroughly the process of parthenogenesis, drawing on biology and the virus. Jeep natives reproduce without the fertilization of the cells, and this is something possible thanks to the effects of the virus, which contributes to the “mutation” or enhancement of their bodies. The narrator here describes how *soestres* are conceived, but those who have undergone the virus can conceive without the necessity of linking with someone as Marghe and Thenike do. The only difference is that those who do not conceive simultaneously will not give birth to *soestres*.

As it was explained in *The Wanderground*, this process of reproducing without the need for sperm reinforces the idea of independent and autonomous women, who do not require men for the task. In Jeep, there is no other viable way of reproducing because men simply do not exist. But, either for Marghe, who is eager to understand how they perpetuate the species without men, or the reader who only knows about conventional ways of reproduction in humans, Jeep’s parthenogenetic pregnancy is a mark of adaptation to the environment and, therefore, of independence and survival.

This new conception of reproduction also affects the concept of motherhood, which was already presented when talking about the organization of the family. Marghe will be the biological mother of the *soestres*, but later they will “become active participants” and decide who their chosen mother will be (Wulff 204.) Then, motherhood is a communal task. Not only the biological mothers are the ones who will take care of and raise their daughters; they will be part of the tribe and they will decide who takes care of them and which family they belong to. This decision bestows on the young individuals of the tribe a great deal of individual responsibility and reinforces the idea of autonomy among the women of this planet (Horzum 111)

This autonomy and integrity of their identity start with this decision, at the age of seven or eight, but it is not completed until they undergo *deepsearch* (Griffith 216.) In this ritual, daughters will disassociate from their mothers, as they decide their own name and identity, and their occupation and place within the tribe and world. That is how, for example, Thenike chose her name which means “‘ring true’ or ‘deep and clear,’” as she considers herself (Griffith 246.) Thenike also discovered in her *deepsearch* that her role in this world is to be a *viajera*. This is an essential occupation in Jeep:

“So *viajeras* teach. What else do they do?”

“Depends on the *viajera*. We witness agreements between kiths and communities; we judge disputes; sometimes we allot land to herders (...) When a family moves, or hits a burn, or simply splits into two, they need to use other land. *Viajeras* remember which land is in use, and which of that available land would be suitable for the family that’s asking for it. We remember. We remember which family might quarrel with which, and make sure they’re given the use of lands that don’t adjoin. We travel and tell news, we sing songs and spin stories, we lead pattern singings and *deepsearch*, we heal broken bones and old resentments, but mostly we remember.” (Griffith 189.)

Thenike explains that *viajeras* play a pivotal role in Jeep’s society. These women traverse the planet, collecting stories, disseminating news, singing songs of bygone times, and bearing witness to remarkable events when needed. They also lead various rituals and serve as something akin to the embodiment of justice. Furthermore, *viajeras* are entrusted with the vital task of transmitting the history of their world, making them a cornerstone of education within their society. It is worth noting that, despite having their own family and tribes, *viajeras* are the sole individuals in contact with all the tribes, endowing them with unparalleled knowledge of their world. This is intimately linked to their most crucial attribute: an extraordinary capacity to remember the past and stories in a manner that sets them apart from other women. As the saying goes on Jeep, “*Viajeras* don’t forget” (Griffith 212.)

This importance bestowed on memory is crucial for the women in Jeep, who worship their ancestors. *Deepsearch*, as it was mentioned, is a ritual in which they

access the memories of their ancestors to learn from them. This educational and mystical ritual, often led by a *viajera*, is completed by the *viajeras*' singing. This is also performed in the form of a ritual in which they tell stories that have a historical and didactical purpose. For example, Gerrel once asks Thenike to sing "about how the rivers first decided to run to the sea" (Griffith 219.) To proceed with the singing, *viajeras* need to create the appropriate atmosphere. The result is that she and her audience are carried away into a trance in which, far from listening passively, they live the story (Griffith 220-221.)

As Thenike suggests, *viajeras* have the privilege of having lived many lives through the memories of their ancestors. When Thenike tells Marghe the story of Jeep before the current tribes inhabited it, Marghe actually can feel—to be—one of those antecessors, which are none other than *goths*⁹², those half-mythical creatures that the Echraidhe taught her about:

"But you've never been a..."

"Goth? Perhaps not. But part of what you call the virus may have part of what we call the goth embedded in its essence."

Marghe realized that Thenike was telling her that the virus contained goth DNA and some of their memories. And then the virus became part of human DNA. She shook her head. That was not possible. She was not even sure she believed that goth existed.

But the stones existed; she had been there. And they were impossibly old. (Griffith 224)

Viajeras bear the profound responsibility of transmitting the entirety of Jeep's history, legends, and beliefs, all preserved within their exceptional memories. The significance of memory and the past is paramount, as it enables present generations to learn from past errors and follow the footsteps necessary to ensure the continued existence of their tribes. Moreover, the past furnishes an explanation for the functioning of Jeep's world,

⁹² *Goths*, beings often shrouded in mystery and regarded as semi-legendary, are described as intelligent and bipedal, they are believed to have erected the megalith on Jeep. Marghe considers them to be the indigenous inhabitants of the planet. (Griffith 117)

including the enigmatic connection with *goth* DNA through the virus. This mystical yet central link elucidates how humans not only survived in the past but, even more crucially, how they managed to perpetuate their species without the presence of males. Ultimately, every facet of this world operates thanks to the virus, including the *viajeras*' capacity to induce a "mass trance" and their unique ability to maintain privileged memories.

Marghe makes a resolute choice to embark on the path of becoming a *viajera*. She feels prepared for this role, having successfully followed Thenike into the trance and experienced the past, a feat not attained by many other "terrenes" (Griffith 224.) Her mission now entails mastering the skills of drumming and singing while embarking on journeys across Jeep to acquaint herself with the various tribes. In doing so, she not only seeks to expand her knowledge but also intends to contribute her own stories and wisdom to the tribes and the world at large. Ollfoss serves as the fundamental place where Marghe fully explores her own identity and cultivates a profound sense of belonging. However, Marghe continues with the quest of developing her identity and her new role ultimately guides her towards North Haven.

North Haven, a neighboring seaport to Ollfoss, serves as the next significant juncture in Marghe's journey. It is here that she comprehends the true significance of *viajeras* and, finally, assumes the role herself. Furthermore, North Haven exposes her to another prevalent economic system that thrives along the coast. While perhaps not as central to her identity as Ollfoss, this experience enriches her understanding of the planet and its diverse inhabitants. Upon her arrival in North Haven, the first striking observation Marghe makes is the astounding diversity of women who inhabit Jeep:

Apart from its size, what struck Marghe about North Haven was its life: women on the stone wharfs, unloading fish and baskets of what looked like turtle shells,

mending nets and splicing ropes, tossing buckets of water over piles of fish guts while fast cadaverous-looking birds quarreled over the mess. It was noisy: women called greetings and shouted insults, water crashed against the stone wharfs and hissed up to the wattle quays farther down the coast, and baskets and ropes creaked as catches were hauled up from the decks. (Griffith 277)

Up until this point, Marghe had encountered a wide spectrum of women with diverse occupations: herders, farmers, healers, hunters, *viajeras*, and more. However, her arrival in North Haven reveals yet another facet of the women of Jeep—they have ventured into the domain of the sea, with some embracing roles as sailors and traders. This realization dawns upon Marghe, illustrating that the women of Jeep have successfully forged careers akin to those on Earth, all without the presence of a male population. This revelation strongly stresses the author’s predominant message: that women in this world are indeed people in every sense of the word, capable of achieving the same feats as men have on Earth (Griffith 376.)

In the same line of thoughts, Marghe finds out that in North Haven the economic system varies from *trata*. On the coast, they have a “credit system,” which is explained by Thenike as follows:

Zabett and Scathac⁹³ gave board and lodgings on a barter system; if an individual or crew had a large item that was worth more than the number of nights or meals needed, then the innkeepers gave them credit, in the form of clay disks. One disk equalled one night. Because of their fixed value, and because the sailors traveled from one place to another, mixing with other travelers, the clay disks had begun to assume the status of portable wealth in those places—ports and well frequented areas, especially around the coast. Protocurrency. Several years ago, Touk the innkeeper in Southmeet, had arranged with the two northern innkeepers to honor their credits if Zabett and Scathac would honor hers. They agreed, and now the disks were becoming more popular as currency. (Griffith 287)

Thenike further elaborates that this credit system is predominantly a “coastal phenomenon,” with the predominant economic system in the rest of Jeep being *trata* (Griffith 287.) The credit system is reserved for interactions with strangers, as it arose from the need to establish trustworthiness among sailors who stopped in North Haven,

⁹³ Innkeepers of North Haven

not all of whom could be vouched for. This economic diversity, alongside the prevalence of *trata*, reinforces to Marghe that women are entirely self-sufficient and capable of crafting various economic systems, distinct tribes, and diverse ways of life. Ultimately, Griffith seeks to underscore that women are not a homogeneous entity; their customs, occupations, and personalities can vary significantly depending on the region or tribe they belong to. The author aims to depict the realistic diversity of women's behavior across the planet.

In North Haven, Marghe also gains a profound appreciation for the pivotal role that *viajeras* play in Jeep. Their stories are highly valued currency, finding a place in every inn and on every ship. They serve not only as a source of entertainment at sea with their tales and songs but also as mediators in conflicts due to their privileged memory, often acting as the voice of justice. It is in North Haven that Marghe mediates a conflict between a crew of sailors and Zabett, the innkeeper, marking her first active involvement in such a role. Additionally, it is here that Marghe begins to share her own story. After this episode, Marghe's sense of belonging and affirmation in this new world is greatly strengthened:

She was a viajera. For the rest of her life she would travel and tell stories and judge disputes. (...) She had found what it was she had been looking for: she had a place in the world, a place she had made. (...) She was Marghe Amun. The complete one. She felt at peace. (Griffith 291)

As she expresses, acting as a *viajera* is what finally gives sense to her new identity, with the consequent name-changing. According to Dana A. Heller and Adriana Cavarero, this name-changing inflates Marghe with the power that completes her identity within this planet (qtd. in Wulff 207.) In Jeep, she has found a place where she belongs and where she has a purpose. She has undergone a self-discovery process that has

culminated with a sense of integrity, although she still has various aspects to learn and explore, just as she has to learn and explore the planet.

3.1.4. The Need for a Change

The preceding sections have aimed to dissect the various elements that collectively shape the world of Jeep, highlighting the resources employed by Griffith to construct a realm devoid of patriarchy and the alienation of women. This envisioned world, absent of these oppressive forces, provides women with the opportunity to forge their integrated identities as individuals possessing voices and purpose. In *Ammonite*, Griffith does not strive to establish a flawless utopian society or describe a homogenous collective of women. Instead, she grants her characters the freedom to evolve, imbuing them with distinct personalities that encompass both violence and peace, cruelty and kindness—in essence, humanity itself.

The techniques and tools utilized in this novel share similarities with the works of Tepper and Gearhart, aiming to dismantle the Otherness often imposed upon women in patriarchal societies. However, unlike the previous texts, Griffith achieves her objective on the planet Jeep, eradicating the concept of sex-based Otherness. This transformation is what ultimately renders Jeep an ideal environment for women to attain autonomy, independence, and agency over their own lives.

Nevertheless, the planet does not start as an ideal paradise. Certain aspects require change for it to become an ideal world, and this is the central theme of the novel. The narrative explores how different societies on the planet adapt and evolve to coexist harmoniously, transcending their inherent differences. It also delves into how individuals undergo personal transformations in tandem with their changing societies. As stated in the introduction to the novel, it can be aptly labeled as a “self-discovery”

tale in which the protagonist embarks on a quest to uncover her identity and the requisite knowledge for this journey. Marghe must undergo a profound metamorphosis, crafting a newfound, self-discovered identity that aligns with a new world—one that compels her to shed preconceived notions about family, love, sexuality, education, religion, motherhood, etc.

Indeed, the discovery of Marghe's new identity necessitates the abandonment of her preconceived *terrene* notions. The vaccine serves as a metaphor for this transformation. Only when she ceases taking the vaccine, effectively letting go of her terrestrial conceptions, and willingly allows the virus (the knowledge about Jeep) to permeate her, does she begin the process of self-discovery intertwined with her exploration of Jeep. The virus becomes Marghe's metaphorical apple, much like in the myth of the Fall.

In the myth, the Company endeavors to prevent Marghe from being infected with the virus, much like Adam and Eve are forbidden from partaking in the tree's fruit, fearing God's wrath for their disobedience. Eve's desire for knowledge leads her to eat from the fruit without contemplating the consequences, ultimately resulting in their expulsion from Eden. Similarly, Marghe's longing for knowledge about Jeep drives her to heed Thenike's guidance and voluntarily halt the vaccine regimen, permitting the virus to infiltrate her body. This viral intrusion grants her access to a wealth of new knowledge, culminating in her and her colleagues' exile from Earth, like Eve from Paradise. However, unlike Eve, Marghe and the women in Port Central experience a far more positive outcome in their isolation and exile. They adapt, survive, reproduce, and live free from any form of oppression. Moreover, in contrast to Eve, Marghe becomes the catalyst for positive change on Jeep, effectively ending the Echraidhe's oppressive raids and archaic practices. Thus, while the myth and Marghe's story bear similarities,

the conclusion is decidedly favorable for Marghe and her fellow women, who escape the fate intended for them by the Company and establish a thriving existence on a planet that fulfills the prerequisites for their unoppressed lives.

Griffith underscores the notion that women can only thrive and realize their full potential in societies or worlds that permit such freedom. This requires not only women to transform but also the societies they inhabit, echoing the changes witnessed in the tribes on Jeep. The feminist movement plays a critical role in advocating for a fresh perspective in society. Feminists highlight the injustices that have historically perpetuated women's disadvantaged status and assert that only through the transformation of these elements can women achieve autonomy and cultivate their identity. Much like in *Ammonite*, women must engage in a process of "cleansing," shedding the harmful influences and burdens imposed upon them by patriarchy. By rejecting the barriers to their growth, a new identity emerges and continues to take shape.

Jeep stands as a purposefully crafted world with the explicit intention of portraying women as "people," fully capable of self-creation, self-expression, and self-discovery. Within this world, the author deftly constructs a realm inhabited by individuals who possess their political organizations, economic systems, mythology, religion, rituals, and even a distinct mode of reproduction. In essence, these women have established their own set of rules and have successfully perpetuated their species without any need for male intervention. While some elements of the novel may draw from familiar concepts and ideas, it becomes abundantly clear, especially when compared to the other novels analyzed, that Griffith masterfully constructs a narrative that empowers women to become individuals free from the stereotypes imposed by

patriarchy. The only character in the story still connected to these labels is Marghe, who, in the course of the narrative, successfully discards them.

To achieve this perspective of women as individuals, Griffith employs the ingenious device of an endemic virus on the planet. This virus not only enhances female bodies but also eliminates the male population. In doing so, it effectively erases the categories of gender and sex, transforming women from being perceived as “the second sex” into “the one and only sex.” The existence of just one sex renders the very category of “sex” obsolete, as there is no longer an opposite to define. While the category is still used from the terrene perspective, it serves to highlight the fact that the planet’s inhabitants are what we, from our Earthly perspective, would call females. However, from Jeep’s viewpoint, they are simply people, and as such, they are no longer associated with sex-based Otherness.

Marghe’s integration into Jeep serves as a striking illustration of the world Griffith has crafted. By constructing a world devoid of gender or sex distinctions, Griffith enables Marghe (and all the individuals on Jeep) to be completely disconnected from the Otherness and marginalization that women often face in a patriarchal society. The initial challenges Marghe encounters are related to a different form of Otherness, stemming from her peculiar origin as an Earthling. From the natives’ perspective, she is the outsider, the alien, which leads to her being treated as a stranger. However, Marghe perceives the natives as aliens from her standpoint. Griffith skillfully presents two perspectives to readers: they can either empathize with Marghe, feeling like aliens themselves, or they can perceive the natives as aliens. Thus, Griffith uses the traditional concept of the alien to delve into questions about dominance and marginalization, challenging preconceptions about who the alien truly is and who holds the dominant position (Wolmark 27.)

Initially, Marghe, along with readers, might assume that the colonizing Company and its employees, including herself, constitute the dominant group. However, her perspective shifts dramatically when she becomes captive to the Echraidhe, realizing that she is the alien, the Other. This sense of Otherness begins to transform once again when she feels accepted in Ollfoss. This dual perspective on Otherness, where one may not always know who the “different” or the “alien” truly is, suggests that, depending on one’s point of view, every individual can be the Other to someone else. Consequently, there exists a dialectical relationship that emphasizes the necessity of recognizing everyone as a subject, allowing them to develop holistically. In essence, as Griffith herself articulates, “We are all different. We are all people” (376.)

In addition to struggling with social Otherness or alienation, Marghe must contend with her own internal Otherness, engaging in an inner battle to find her voice and achieve a sense of completeness and integration. She strives to become a subject and an autonomous individual, no longer a stranger even to herself. Marghe’s self-discovery unfolds as she explores the diverse peoples of Jeep and begins to understand them. On Jeep, she comes to the realization that to truly know others, she must treat them as sentient subjects rather than objects of study. She acknowledges that despite their differences, acceptance is key.

Griffith’s narrative draws attention to how crucial the figure of the Other is in defining the figure of the One. There exists an interdependent relationship that need not be grounded in dominance, oppression, or hierarchies. This insight becomes evident as the Echraidhe abandon their old ways in favor of *trata* agreements, and as other tribes follow to ensure the effective functioning of their world. Fundamentally, *Ammonite* conveys the necessity of change and growth. This accentuates the idea that society must adapt, evolve, and change to accommodate new ways of thinking. From a broader

perspective, this aligns with the feminist movement, which is in a constant state of change and growth.

Among the three works analyzed this far, *Ammonite* stands as the sole work to effectively eliminate sexual Otherness by erasing the category of sex, as previously explained. However, the disassociation of women from sexual Otherness is exclusive to the world of Jeep. Beyond this world, the patriarchal system persists. As previously mentioned, the Company serves as a representation of patriarchy, embodying domination within this universe. Jeep, much like the feminist movement, poses a threat to the Company's power and men throughout the universe due to the virus. Yet, paradoxically, the Company, as the dominant entity, wields the privilege of potentially destroying Jeep through the *Kurst*, a military cruiser. The *Kurst* assumes the roles of religion, education, law, psychology, and all the other aspects discussed in the first chapter concerning patriarchy; it forms the foundation that ensures power remains concentrated in the same hands.

So, while sexual Otherness has been eradicated on Jeep, the natives and the Company workers left on the planet are still perceived as the Other in the eyes of the Company, and likely by all men who feel threatened by the virus. The Company and the *Kurst* ultimately depart from Jeep, leaving their workers and the natives in isolation. Nevertheless, they retain the ability to return with a new vaccine or advanced technological weaponry. However, they are unaware that their weapons are ineffective within Jeep; the planet rejects their power, and its inhabitants have no intention of launching an attack against the Company or any other males beyond their planet. Instead, they coexist, collaborate, and are prepared to disseminate the ideals of change and acceptance.

3.2. *The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman

Naomi Alderman (1974-) is the last of the chosen writers for this study. She is from London and is a professor of Creative Writing at Bath Spa University. She is the author of several awarded novels—one of which, *Disobedience* (2006), has been made into a movie—and short fiction. She has also participated as a writer in *Perplex City* (2004-2007), an alternate reality game, and several apps that hint at her interest in post-apocalyptic fiction like *The Walk* (2011-)⁹⁴, or the “fitness game and audio adventure” *Zombies, Run!* (2012-)⁹⁵ (Alderman, “Naomi Alderman. Novels and Games”.) Alderman also presents *Science Stories*, a radio program about the history of science, and has also written a Doctor Who novel called *Borrowed Time* (2011) (Alderman, “Naomi Alderman”.) Recently, she has also published *The Future* (2023.)

Although her first novels cannot be ascribed to SF, Alderman has a close relation with the genre and has participated in many projects associated with it. She is “a member of the XPRIZE Sci-Fi Advisory Council” and has been mentored by none other than Margaret Atwood (Alderman, “Naomi Alderman”.) Alderman’s novel draws on SF and is indebted to Atwood. This novel is called *The Power* (2016.) It revolves around a society in which women develop the power to electrocute people. Due to this new power, women start taking control over society and every aspect of it changes to favor them. Like this, women start a war against men to acquire power and place themselves as the first sex.

Plenty of literature has explored *The Power* (2016) since its publication, especially since in 2023 Amazon Prime launched a series based on the book.

⁹⁴ *The Walk* is an app for walking, which counts the steps as the player solves a thriller game.

⁹⁵ *Zombies, Run!* consists of a running game in which the players are runners who have to survive a zombie apocalypse.

Researchers like José M. Yebra started paying attention to Alderman's novel. In his essay "'Acheronta movebo' Violence and Dystopia in Naomi Alderman's *The Power*" (2018), Yebra examines the novel with a specific emphasis on the character of Allie, later referred to as Eve, and her utilization of electrical power to institute a theocracy perceived as equally perilous as the patriarchy she purportedly opposes. Yebra posits that the novel offers a compelling exploration of the paradoxical nature of combating violence with violence. This essay constituted the beginning of a large research that resulted in Yebra's book *The Poetics of Otherness and Transition in Naomi Alderman's Fiction*, published in 2020, where he also devotes part of the analysis to *The Power*.

In 2020, Alyson Miller published an essay called "'Day of the Girls' Reading Gender, Power, and Violence in Naomi Alderman's *The Power*" where she directs her attention to the violence embedded in Alderman's narrative. Miller contends that the novel portrays a form of extreme violence, characterizing it as women's reaction to "cultural misogyny" (2.) Additionally, Miller notes Alderman's use of archetypes, particularly the monstrous-feminine, which Alderman concretizes to accentuate various social issues. For instance, the literalization of the monstrous-feminine enables Alderman to illuminate the social horrors and suggests that the power shift only sustains an ongoing imbalance that causes the suffering of one sex over another.

Małgorzata Warchał also expressed her interest in Alderman's novel in "'She Cuppeth the Lightning in Her Hand' Spirituality, Domination, and Violence in *The Power* (2016) by Naomi Alderman." In this examination, Warchał delves into the female characters within the novel, specifically centering on their involvement in religion, crime, and politics. Simultaneously, she scrutinizes how the power shift has led to a dystopian outcome. Warchał's analysis illuminates the dystopian nature of Alderman's world, drawing parallels with contemporary society. She interprets the

novel through three lenses: the potential for a world with reversed gender roles, a narrative of revenge, and the inherent difficulty in constructing a utopian society. According to her perspective, despite the power shift, inequality in the world persists, underscoring the indifferent nature of those in control and the impossibility of changing.

In 2022, Tuhin S. Sen published a paper titled “Naomi Alderman’s *The Power*: A Speculative Feminist Dystopian Fiction Mirroring the Here and Now,” aiming to illustrate that Alderman’s novel serves as a pertinent critique of sexual hierarchies present in contemporary society. Sen contends that *The Power* effectively portrays a role reversal in violence, easily recognizable to female readers, reflecting instances from their real lives. Sen suggests that this inversion of roles and the unsettling depiction of violence serves to prompt contemplation on analogous situations occurring in a world where sexual hierarchies are inverted, representing the readers’ reality. According to Sen, the novel sheds light on the inequality and imbalances constructed by prevailing sexual hierarchies.

In 2023, a collection of essays called *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Science Fiction* (Yaszek et al.) was published. Within this book, Marleen S. Barr wrote a chapter titled “Naomi Alderman’s *The Power* and New Feminist Science Fiction Superheroes.” There she elucidates the evolution of the portrayal of female heroes in SF, tracing the shift from a male-oriented depiction to one that aligns with feminist ideals. Using Alderman’s novel as a case in point, Barr illustrates how the representation of female heroes has undergone a profound transformation, empowering women to contemplate the extent of their impact and their potential to effect meaningful social change. Barr contends that Alderman introduces a novel archetype of a female superhero grounded in “everyday heroism” (304.) Within *The Power*, Alderman creates a transformation of the female body, shifting its portrayal from one of sexualization to

strength and intelligence. This transformation allows women to harness their bodies as a potent force for violence, deviating from the conventional depiction of idealized heroes. Ultimately, Alderman's narrative illustrates that social imbalances persist as long as a society remains founded on the mistreatment of those under the control of the Others.

Debra B. Shaw has devoted her research to *The Power*, in a chapter called "*The Power: Naomi Alderman and Archaeologies of Gender*," included in a collection of essays called *Women, Science and Fiction Revisited* that was published in 2023. The chapter adopts a fascinating perspective on Alderman's novel by centering on the utilization of archaeology as a means to substantiate the power shift in the narrative. Shaw posits that Alderman goes beyond merely proposing a "weaponized" archetype of women (136); she meticulously constructs a detailed framework that serves the purpose of validating the new social order. According to Shaw, archaeology and the discoveries it yields function as a mechanism to redefine a history previously interpreted through the patriarchal lens. It becomes a tool to affirm the legitimacy of the novel's new order, challenging the notion that history is flawed due to its interpretation being rooted in "gender-biased assumptions." (Shaw 137)

The literature surveyed in this review indicates that *The Power* has emerged as a notable exemplar of the tradition of role reversal. Furthermore, Alderman contends that this inversion of roles does not necessarily lead to the utopian vision traditionally associated with a society governed by women. Scholars have shown a keen interest in the theme of violence within the novel, recognizing it as a critical element that underscores how sexual hierarchies contribute to enduring social imbalances for one sex or the other. Despite numerous essays delving into various aspects of *The Power*, the intriguing aspect lies in the interconnected exploration of these elements, all converging

to dismantle the concept of women's Otherness and sexual hierarchies, which forms the central focus of this dissertation.

3.2.1. A Battle-of-the-Sexes Novel

The premise of *The Power* may lead the readers to think that this novel has a clearer classification than some of the previously analyzed texts. It can be considered a battle-of-the-sexes novel, much more explicit than *The Gate* was. *The Power* depicts the story of a women-dominated world (Russ, *To Write Like a Woman* 143-144.) In this case, the novel primarily focuses on the ten years leading up to the world's transition to being dominated by women. The story explores the development of women's empowerment and the social adjustments required to adapt to this unexpected and potentially disruptive shift in power dynamics. The newfound power grants women physical superiority, enabling them to inflict harm or exert control over others with their bare hands, ultimately offering them the opportunity to assume dominance. With women's increased physical power, society experiences a reversal of gender roles, leading to a corresponding shift in the sexual hierarchy. Thus, the title of the novel refers to both the electrical power and the social power that women acquire thanks to it. Alderman employs the concept of role reversal to depict what a world dominated by women might entail, viewing this shift in power as an opportunity for social revolution and a chance for women to seize control over their lives and political institutions, ultimately challenging oppressive structures (Warchal 91.) Alderman further articulates this perspective in her blog when responding to questions from her readers:

The novel in some ways is like an exercise given to artists – my mother is an art teacher – where you copy an ‘old master’ upside down. That is a technique that draws you to look at what is actually there, not what you imagine to be present in Van Gogh's Sunflowers or a Bourgeois sculpture. When it's upside down, your preconceptions go away and you can see very clearly what is really present (Alderman, “Naomi Alderman”)

The central exercise in the novel is to overturn the readers' familiar world, revealing its true nature and exposing underlying realities. The outcome, however, is far from an idealized world, since Alderman "infuses her text with violence to show the limits of both patriarchal and matriarchal societies predicated on the inhumane treatment of others" (Barr, "Naomi Alderman's *The Power*" 304.) Women in the story believe that their newfound electrical power grants them the right to respond violently to the oppression they experienced when they occupied a position of inferiority (Yebra 3.) Driven by a thirst for revenge, they incite a war between the sexes. Men become objects of women's dominance, subjected to rape, violence, humiliation, and even death. In turn, men rebel and carry out acts of terrorism against the oppressive rule of women, leading to actual battles between the sexes.

Given the presence of violence and cruelty, some readers might categorize the novel as a dystopia. In fact, José M. Yebra classifies it as such (2.) However, Alderman herself refutes this categorization, stating, "I don't think my novel is a dystopia, in the sense that it's really just an inversion. The things that happen in it aren't worse than the things that happen in our world today. So if the novel is a dystopia, our world is a dystopia" ("Naomi Alderman".) *The Power* can be seen as a radical reversal of the readers' world, wherein certain aspects, such as the actual war between the sexes depicted in the novel, are taken to extreme levels or portrayed with ironic and dramatic tones. Alderman's work serves as an exercise in turning the world on its head, challenging readers to consider the implications of power dynamics and social structures. Whether classified as a dystopia or not, the novel ultimately portrays the abuse of power, culminating in women becoming the dominant sex and rulers worldwide.

As previously mentioned, the narrative of the novel spans only the ten years leading up to women's complete domination of the world. However, Alderman employs a narrative device that provides glimpses of the characteristics of the world that emerges after women achieve full dominance. This device involves the introduction of letters at the beginning and end of the novel, exchanged between the fictional Naomi Alderman and another fictional writer named Neil Adam Armon⁹⁶. These letters form a frame story that functions as a context for the main story (a novel written by Armon and called *The Power: A Historical Novel*); from them, several elements can be deduced about the two writers' world.

The letters exchanged between fictional Naomi and Neil reveal that they inhabit a world that has experienced a catastrophic event referred to as the "Cataclysm." This event transpired when various factions in the old world failed to reach a consensus, leading to global conflict and war. As women begin to assert control, men respond with acts of terrorism and military aggression, eventually culminating in a global war, led by a prominent character named Allie or Mother Eve. These letters provide insight into the fact that women have established a matriarchal system marked by abusive methods and extreme violence. This ironic reversal, in which methods once perpetrated against women are now employed by women, serves as a critique of the readers' world.

Additionally, *The Power* can be categorized as soft SF. The novel does not specify a precise time for its events, leaving readers to assume they occur either in a time closely resembling the present day or in an undetermined future. However, the

⁹⁶ As it can be perceived, the name of the fictional writer is an anagram of Naomi Alderman. The author explains that the letters are a nod to *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), a dystopian novel as well composed of two stories: the main one revolving around the handmaid Offred, and the frame story which shows several characters in a seminar about the totalitarian state of Gilead, using Offred's story as prove. *The Handmaid's Tale* can be considered a precursor of *The Power* since Alderman herself has confessed the influence. Atwood's texts depict a dystopian world in which women suffer terrible consequences of being subjected to an extreme patriarchy; Alderman's text, as Alyson Miller suggests, "might be read as the revenge fantasy of Gilead's women" (403) since it depicts a world in which women have taken over.

novel's global scope, encompassing locations such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Delhi, Riyadh, Nigeria, and Ukraine, points out the widespread impact of the electrical power phenomenon on women worldwide. This global revolution mirrors the principles of the fourth wave of feminism, which also emphasizes addressing violence against women's bodies and leveraging media and cyberspace to promote feminist ideals on a global scale. The importance of the internet and media within the story aligns with the novel's reflection of its author's contemporary context.

Despite the familiarity with real-world countries and the utilization of media and the internet in the narrative, the novel introduces elements of unfamiliarity through its unspecified time and the emergence of the mysterious electrical power within women's bodies. While the power may initially appear fantastical, it is systematically explained in the novel through various scientific disciplines, including biology, anthropology, and archaeology. Some conspiracy theories are also mentioned in internet forums, but the novel primarily attributes the power to the presence of a unique organ, referred to as the "skein," located in girls' collarbones. This organ contains electro-receptors that enable a form of electric echo-location, providing a rational foundation for the power's existence in the story (Alderman, *The Power* 19, 20.) The power is not limited to newborn girls but is also present in young girls and can even awaken in older women, who had it previously in an inactive state (Alderman, *The Power* 63.)

The concept of an inactive organ suggests that the power may have existed in women's biology for a long time but remained dormant until recent events. Various scientific theories presented in the novel lend support to this idea. Experts in human biology and prehistoric imagery appearing on morning TV shows discuss the potential origins of the power. They display archaeological findings, including images and statues of a "Holy Mother" dating back five hundred years, depicting carved eyes in her hands,

the same body part from which the power emerges (Alderman, *The Power* 34.) While such images are typically interpreted as representing mythical or symbolic behaviors, the experts entertain the notion that they might depict historical events, indicating that the power could have existed but remained inactive (Alderman, *The Power* 34, 63.) These findings and the existence of surrounding mythology contribute to the verisimilitude of the power, negating the notion that it is purely fantastical.

Online rumors suggest alternative origins for the power, with some individuals believing it to be the result of a post-World War II experiment. According to these rumors, a liquid called “Guardian Angel” was created to protect against gas attacks, with just a drop capable of safeguarding an entire town (Alderman, *The Power* 122-123.) UrbanDox, a prominent user in the “Freedom of Reach” forum who advocates against women, claims that Guardian Angel was developed by “peaceniks and do-gooders” after World War II. They believed that men had their chance to rule the world and failed, leading them to pass the torch to women (Alderman, *The Power* 178.) Regardless of its specific origins or the various conspiracy theories surrounding it, the power is presented as a biological phenomenon or something that has triggered a biological evolution. Margot, one of the novel’s main characters, describes it as feeling natural. While not all girls or women possess it, and some boys may also exhibit the power, it appears to be explained biologically (Alderman, *The Power* 171)⁹⁷. However, some people believe those who possess it are witches or devils, and that their revolution means the apocalypse (Alderman, *The Power* 41, 45-46.)

The novum in *The Power* primarily centers around the introduction of the electrical power that women gain, leading to a profound role reversal in society. This

⁹⁷ It must be said that although in the novel the power is electricity and has a biological explanation, it is actually a metaphor for any kind of power. That is why not everybody develops the electrical power, since not everybody is made for ruling.

power shift creates a sense of unfamiliarity within a previously familiar world, prompting readers to reflect on their society through the premise of “what would happen if women had the power to take control of the world.” As women acquire electrical power, their influence and dominance in society grow. This shift places women in an advantageous position over men, gradually making them the social norm due to their newfound power. Consequently, anything that does not align with the definition of women in this world becomes the Other. Men, once dominant, now find themselves in a position of inferiority in Alderman’s world. This “gender-reversal scenario mimics the treatment of women under different stages of patriarchy and suggests that the present is equally dystopian as the imaginary future” (Warchal 96.) In the following section, we will delve deeper into this imagined future, exploring its foundational principles and the concept of the Other within this world. This examination will provide readers with the essential components needed to engage in discussions about how Alderman constructs a world that challenges the notion of women’s Otherness.

3.2.2. The New Order

The central narrative of *The Power* revolves around four key protagonists, with three of them being women. As the novel unfolds, the increasing prevalence of women in this empowered role prompts a deeper exploration into the origins of their electrical abilities and the consequent shifts in their social status. The story begins by introducing Roxy Monke, a character intricately connected to a London crime family. She is described as “the daughter of a London crime family with three older brothers; she was never supposed to take over the family business but she starts to have other ideas” (“Naomi Alderman. Novels and Games”.) Roxy emerges as one of the initial girls to manifest the extraordinary power, a decade before the cataclysmic events. The catalyst for her abilities lies in a tragic incident: the abuse and murder of her mother, ostensibly

orchestrated by her father's adversary (Alderman, *The Power* 10-11.) In the aftermath of her mother's murder, Roxy experiences "a feeling at her finger's ends, a prickle in her thumbs" that later courses through her entire body (Alderman, *The Power* 7, 9.) In the subsequent years, Roxy becomes important, wielding her powers to assume control of the family's illicit drug trade, even developing a drug that augments electrical abilities (Alderman, *The Power* 159-160.) However, her hard-earned reputation becomes futile when her father betrays her. In a shocking turn of events, Bernie and her brother, Darrell, conspire to kidnap Roxy, extracting her "skein" to implant it into Darrell's body.

Roxy's journey bears a striking resemblance to Allie's. Allie, a 16-year-old of mixed ethnicity, resides in Jacksonville with her adoptive parents, Mr. and Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor (Alderman, *The Power* 30, 37.) These devout individuals passionately believe that their adoption and upbringing of Allie align with their virtuous interpretation of God's will (26-27.) Allie's emergence of power is a response to a series of abusive and repeated acts of rape perpetrated by Mr. Montgomery-Taylor, with his wife as his accomplice (30-31, 318.) Guided by an internal voice, Allie ultimately takes Mr. Montgomery-Taylor's life and embarks on a new path (32, 40.) Her journey leads her to a convent for girls, where she recognizes people's need for something new to believe in (Alderman, "Naomi Alderman. Novels and Games".) Adopting a new identity as Eve, she gradually establishes a new religion and order with the aim of "saving women," an endeavor that has global ramifications (Alderman, *The Power* 42, 46, 106.)

On the other hand, Margot, a divorced mother of two and the Mayor of New England lives in the shadow of her colleague Daniel, the State Governor, who consistently opposes her proposals (Alderman, *The Power* 19, 20.) Margot's awakening

to power is instigated by her daughter Jocelyn (Jos), and with mastery comes a newfound ambition (Alderman, *The Power* 25, 71.) Among her ambitions is the establishment of a training camp for girls, a direct challenge to Daniel's beliefs that girls pose a danger akin to terrorism (Alderman, *The Power* 85, 88, 90.) Initially conceived as a sanctuary for girls struggling to control their powers, the camp evolved into a globally renowned military institution. This newfound fame propels Margot into the role of Governor.

Tatiana Moskalev, introduced to readers through Tunde, the fourth main character and a male journalist covering the global revolution, learns of the girls' training camp. Tatiana, having recently founded a matriarchal state called Bessapara, envisions the military girls as her private army in her war against men (Alderman, *The Power* 98, 222.) She established this new state after allegedly assassinating her husband, President Viktor Moskalev, and proclaiming herself as the new president of Moldova (Alderman, *The Power* 94.) As can be seen, the main female characters in the story develop their extraordinary abilities as a response to the systemic physical and psychological abuse inflicted by men on women, including acts of violence, rape, discrediting, and overshadowing. This newfound power emerges across diverse corners of the world and among women of various backgrounds. Roxy, Allie, Margot, Jos, and Tatiana represent a rich tapestry of women, each with distinct ethnicities, religions, and origins. They collectively illustrate how the fight against a dominating system transcends individual differences, making it a global and collective struggle.

Throughout the novel, other instances of women around the world reacting to abuse come to light. For example, in Nigeria, Tunde's homeland, a young girl employs her newfound power to confront a persistent male stalker (Alderman, *The Power* 16-17.) In Riyadh, Tunde reports on women "swarming the city" in protest against the

oppressive policies that restrict them from even holding hands with men or driving (57-58.) This protest is triggered by the tragic deaths of two young girls who were caught “practicing their devilry together” (56.) In Delhi, riots erupt as women protest against their government’s actions (132.) In Moldova, women liberated from sexual slavery form a paramilitary group to challenge a system that supports abuse against them (95.)

As Barr suggests, “women harness electricity to protect themselves and inflict harm, even death. Their bodies become more powerful than men’s. The global shift from patriarchy to matriarchy unfolds as women retaliate with the same physical violence they’ve endured” (“Naomi Alderman’s *The Power*” 306.) Consequently, women are reshaping the world order, signaling transformations in various aspects that have historically disadvantaged them, including religion, political systems, and education. Their goal is to establish female supremacy, which they intend to maintain through brutal force, corruption, and the abuse of power. This shift seeks to liberate women from their position as Others. However, men do not surrender easily, leading to a fierce battle between the sexes. Ultimately, the novel explores the concept of power, with Alderman noting that “power doesn’t care who wields it” (*The Power* 296.) In a power struggle won by women, it is men who bear the weight of Otherness, experiencing abuses, rapes, harassment, humiliation, physical torture, mutilations, and more. Nonetheless, even among women, there exists a form of Otherness. Derogatory terms like “Blanket,” “flat battery,” “Gimp,” “Flick,” “Nesh,” and “Pzit” emerge to label women who cannot or will not defend themselves. These terms illustrate sexual Otherness and are tied to new stereotypes that define the category of ‘woman’ (Alderman, *The Power* 64.)

In Alderman’s world, akin to a patriarchal system, gender roles are indeed established, but with a noteworthy reversal of perspective. Here, women are aligned

with traits like strength and power, in stark contrast to traditional norms. Anyone who deviates from these stereotypical expectations faces marginalization as the Other:

Ryan says, [to Jos] ‘You’re not weak. You’re not. Not to anyone who knows you, not to anyone who cares. And what would it matter if you were? People are allowed to be weak.’

But that’s the question, really.

There are advertisements on hoardings now, with sassy young women showing off their long, curved arcs in front of cute delighted boys. They’re supposed to make you want to buy soda, or sneakers, or gum. They work, they sell product. They sell girls one other thing, quietly, on the side. Be strong, they say, that’s how you get everything you want.

The problem is that feeling is everywhere now. (Alderman, *The Power* 258)

Women like Jos, who experience fluctuations in their power, or those without a “skein,” are categorized as Others. This classification arises because those deemed lacking the strength to defend themselves are perceived as deviating from the expected norms of femininity. This highlights how Otherness among women relates to the diversity within gender roles and their failure to conform to established parameters that define womanhood in this new social structure. This example accentuates that the new order is far from efficient, as it fails to achieve the feminist objective of eliminating gender and sexual stereotypes. As Miller aptly observes, “while a matriarchy might also resemble the corruptions of the patriarchy, its function in the narrative is not to suggest a new way of being, but rather to underline an existing dynamic in which self and other perpetually collide” (Miller 407.)

It is important to note that before gaining full control over the world, girls and women possessing the power were also subject to being treated as Others. Some were called “witches”⁹⁸, some were said to be “possessed;” some women would not want the *skein* at all and some disguised as boys “to shake off the meaning of power” (Alderman, *The Power* 17, 42, 70, 171.) The world was gripped by fear of the unfamiliar, as men

⁹⁸ Ironically, Alderman describes some of her female characters as witches, performing ceremonies in the woods, being obsessed with the moon and sacrificing men to show them their power (Alderman, *The Power* 268-70). This is another example of what was already present in Gearhart’s collection of stories: the reworking of myths to favor women.

faced the prospect of relinquishing their rooted power, while women, in greater numbers and with increasing power, were reshaping the established order. As women's power grew, some boys even began adopting a style of dress associated with girls in an attempt to project a semblance of power, as they adapted to this new era dominated by women (Alderman, *The Power* 70.)

The world's organization after women assume control largely mirrors the previous system, with one notable exception: the emergence of Bessapara. Aside from this distinctive state, the economic and political structures remain intact. The pivotal difference lies in the fact that the world has transitioned into a "women's world," where laws and regulations favor women, in contrast to patriarchal systems. As previously mentioned, Alderman's novel charts the shift from a patriarchy to a matriarchy, with initial disparities emerging on a social level. These differences later translate into new legislation and regulations, especially within Bessapara, where the transformation is most pronounced.

Global society contends with the perceived threat posed by this newfound power. In the United States, for instance, schools opt to segregate the sexes into separate classrooms and even create boys-only buses. In some instances, exclusively boys' schools are established (Alderman, *The Power* 21.) Society is in the process of adapting to this shifting power dynamic, with some individuals responding by implementing protective measures, while others react with fear and take steps to counteract it. Margot takes a proactive approach to the growing power. She believes that instead of isolating or suppressing it, fostering and safeguarding those who possess it is the way forward. As mentioned earlier, Margot establishes a local training camp for girls that gains widespread recognition. For Margot, this camp represents not only a means to assist girls with their powers but also a strategic move in politics. It enables her to forge

alliances with countries worldwide by offering the camp's graduates as potential soldiers. As women progressively gain power across various spheres of society, reactions from men intensify. Male protests and acts of terrorism begin to emerge, epitomized by a group known as "Male Power" (Alderman, *The Power* 170, 174.)

Men react to instances of abusive power, such as those demonstrated by Tatiana Moskalev. Initially introduced in the novel as the wife of Viktor Moskalev, the President of Moldova, Tatiana evolves from being associated with a man to becoming a powerful and influential figure in her own right, albeit through unconventional means. After Viktor's sudden and unexpected death, which occurs five days after Tatiana discusses how she acquired electrical power with Tunde, she assumes the presidency. The circumstances surrounding Viktor's demise leave the reader speculating about Tatiana's involvement, though it is not explicitly confirmed (Alderman, *The Power* 97-98.) Regardless, Tatiana not only possesses electrical power but also wields significant political authority. This position allows her to establish the first recognized matriarchy in this new world order, Bessapara:

Tatiana Moskalev brings her wealth and her connections, a little less than half her army, and many of her weapons to a castle in the hills on the borders of Moldova. And there she declares a new kingdom, uniting the coastal lands between the old forests and the great inlets and thus, in effect, declaring war on four separate countries (...) She calls the new country Bessapara, after the ancient people who lived there and interpreted the sacred sayings of the priestesses on the mountaintops. The international community waits for the outcome. (Alderman, *The Power* 98)

Tatiana has successfully established a state where women can enjoy newfound freedom (Alderman, *The Power* 155.) However, this liberation comes at the expense of men's freedom, exemplifying another facet of how the reversal operates in this new order. While all the female characters in the novel eventually engage in actions that suggest the abuse of power, Tatiana stands out as the most prominent exemplar. She explicitly articulates that her goal is not to exterminate men but to "humiliate them,"

demonstrating that their power “pales in comparison” to the power women now possess (Alderman, *The Power* 189.) Her tyrannical methods are vividly illustrated in her treatment of men and the laws she institutes in Bessapara.

In one instance, Tatiana becomes embroiled in an altercation with a waiter who mistakenly brings her the wrong bottle of brandy. Although he apologizes, she replies, “just like a man (...) Does not know how to be silent, thinks we always want to hear what he has to say, always talking talking talking, interrupting his betters” (Alderman, *The Power* 229.) She proceeds to shatter the bottle and compels him to lap up the spilled liquid from the floor strewn with glass shards. Tatiana’s words convey a sense of irony and a reversal of gender roles. It is now women who occupy a position of superiority, and Tatiana believes that her authority allows her to treat men in a manner akin to how women were previously treated, if not worse. Although this incident involving the waiter is a private matter, she employs her power to enact new public laws that relegate men to an inferior social standing:

‘Thus, we institute today this law, that each man in the country must have his passport and other official documents stamped with the name of his female guardian. (...) Any man who does not have a sister, mother, wife or daughter, or other relative, to register him must report to the police station, where he will be assigned a work detail and shackled to other men for the protection of the public. Any man who breaks these laws will be subject to capital punishment. This applies also to foreign journalists and other workers.’

‘(...) No man may take money or other possessions out of the country.’ The Minister for Justice turns the page. There is a long list of proclamations printed close together in small type. Men are no longer permitted to drive cars. Men are no longer permitted to own businesses. Foreign journalists and photographers must be employed by a woman. Men are no longer permitted to gather together, even in the home, in groups larger than three, without a woman present. Men are no longer permitted to vote—because their years of violence and degradation have shown that they are not fit to rule or govern.

A woman who sees a man flouting one of these laws in public is not only permitted but required to discipline him immediately. Any woman who fails in this duty will be considered an enemy of the state, an accessory to the crime, one who attempts to undermine the peace and harmony of the nation. (Alderman, *The Power* 243)

This passage can be intricately linked to the earlier section on the role of women in society. It serves as another poignant example of how the patriarchal social norms are

upended to favor women in the novel. In patriarchal societies, which still exist in some parts of the world, women historically had male guardians, were prohibited from driving cars or voting, could not manage property or businesses, and had limited control over their earnings. Now, within the novel, it is men who experience these restrictions. The objective of these new laws is to curtail men's freedom and subject them to the new regime. Consequently, men find themselves in an inferior social position, lacking a voice, and relying on women for their survival.

Apart from the legal aspect, their matriarchal system, similar to patriarchy, relies on another fundamental pillar: religion. Religion plays a significant role in the narrative, embodied through Allie, whose aspirations align with Tatiana's. Having experienced abuse at the hands of men, Allie yearns for a world where women can live freely. Her journey begins when she hears a voice that possesses a "Biblical way" of speaking to her (Alderman, *The Power* 40.) This voice, which Allie believes to be the voice of God, transforms her into a kind of Metatron, serving as God's earthly mediator⁹⁹. Both figures—God and Metatron—in the novel will be modified with respect to the Judeo-Christian traditional ones in the fact that they are both female. Allie's contact with God starts when she is in a convent.

There, Allie's interactions with girls who possess the electrical power shed light on the shared experiences of abuse these girls have endured. As mentioned earlier, some were erroneously believed to be possessed by demons, while others were abandoned due to accusations of witchcraft (Alderman, *The Power* 42.) Witnessing the quandary of

⁹⁹ This is the idea of the novel, although the author points out that readers might interpret this as a real voice or rather as an effect of a trauma, referring to the "Third Man Syndrome." It refers to a phenomenon where individuals in extreme or life-threatening situations report perceiving the presence of an additional person, despite being alone. This additional presence often provides comfort, guidance, or support to the individual during moments of distress or danger. The term originated from T.S. Eliot's poem "The Waste Land," where he mentions encountering a mysterious third figure in a dangerous situation. (Alderman, "Naomi Alderman. Novels and Games")

these girls, Allie becomes acutely aware of the urgent need for change in order to empower women. Her ultimate mission is to “save the women,” all women, and she is resolute in making this vision a reality (Alderman, *The Power* 106.) Her first step towards this transformation is changing her name to “Eve,” a choice celebrated by the voice inside her, as it alludes to “the first of women” (Alderman, *The Power* 42.) Later, she assumes the title of “Mother Eve” and reimagines religion, using it as a foundational pillar for the new order.

One key concept within this new religion is the notion of God. Allie refers to God as “She,” while also believing that “God is neither woman nor man but both these things. But now She has come to show us a new side to Her face, one we have ignored for too long” (Alderman, *The Power* 78, 80.) This dismantles the traditional patriarchal image of God, suggesting that the divine transcends sexual categorization and cannot be used to justify male or female supremacy. However, Allie contends that the era of male dominance has ended, and it is now time for God to favor women by revealing its female aspect. This newfound female aspect permeates every facet of religion, from myths to images to Scriptures. According to Robert G. Pielke, the act of ascribing a female side to God is, strictly speaking, considered atheistic (231.) Nonetheless, Allie, or Mother Eve, does not deny the existence of God; rather, she rejects the notion that God is exclusively male.

Much like patriarchal religions employ myths to establish why men hold a superior social position, the new order’s religion provides its own rationale for why women should occupy that position. Allie elaborates on this in the subsequent passage, following her assertion that God possesses a new female aspect:

They say, “But what about Jesus?”

Eve says, “Jesus is the son. But the son comes from the mother. Consider this: which is greater, God or the world?”

They say, for they have learned this already from the nuns, “God is greater, because God created the world.”

Eve says, “So the one who creates is greater than the thing created?” (...)

Then Eve says, “So which must be greater, the Mother or the Son?”

They pause, because they think her words may be blasphemy.

Eve says, “It has already been hinted in Scripture. It has already been told to us that God came to the world in a human body. We have already learned to call God “Father.” Jesus taught that.”

They admit that this is so.

Eve says, “So I teach a new thing. This power has been given to us to lay straight our crooked thinking. It is the Mother not the Son who is the emissary of Heaven. We are to call God “Mother.” God the Mother came to earth in the body of Mary, who gave up her child that we could live free from sin. God always said She would return to earth. And She has come back now to instruct us in her ways. (Alderman, *The Power* 80)

Allie’s explanation reshapes the focus of religion, with the Mother, personified through Mary, assuming the central role. Her approach involves repurposing existing Scriptures, arguments, and ideas known to the people, infusing them with new meaning to align with her mission of establishing a justified foundation for a new order, as Yebra suggests, “the allegedly (apocryphal) Book of Eve, where all Mother Eve’s sayings come from, is a religious document that holds up violence against unjust laws” (4.) This mirrors the manner in which the patriarchal order has historically been justified over the centuries. As Simone de Beauvoir asserted, religion “confirms the world order,” emphasizing the necessity of crafting a religion tailored to women to uphold and validate the new matriarchal order (de Beauvoir 749.) According to Warchal, Allie, or Eve, “reconceptualizes monotheistic, patriarchal religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as less hostile to women.” Alderman’s narrative thus draws upon the Judeo-Christian tradition in an ironic exercise to lay the groundwork for a religion that stands as “a clear rejection of all aspects of patriarchal moral and spiritual authority” (Warchal 91-92.)

The inauguration of the new religion is marked by an unusual event—a “miracle” performed by Allie. In the convent where she resides, there is a girl named Luanne who

suffers from epileptic seizures triggered by excitement or fear. Allie, equipped with the ability to sense electrical currents in others, aids Luanne with gentle electrical discharges. Here, Alderman employs irony again, as Allie does not actually perform miracles; she possesses an ability that others have not yet mastered due to insufficient control over their newfound powers. Nevertheless, following this miraculous incident, the nuns and girls at the convent come to believe that Allie is “specially favored by the Heavens” (Alderman, *The Power* 77.) They perceive her as having a direct connection with God, and as a result, they eagerly obey Allie’s directives. The first divine command instructs them to proceed to the seashore, a decision applauded by the voice within Allie’s mind:

The girls wade out into the water (...) Something is going to happen out here. The dawn is braking.
They stand in a circle. They are all up to their waists, hands trailing in the cold, clear brine.
Eve says, ‘Holy Mother, show us what you want of us. Baptize us with your love and teach us how to live.’
And each of the girls around the circle suddenly feels their knees buckle under them (...) knowing that God has touched them and that this day they are born anew. They all fall to their knees in the water (...), they cannot breathe and then when they are lifted up they are reborn. (...)
They felt the presence of God around them and among them, and She was glad. And the birds flew above them, calling out in glory for a new dawn. (Alderman, *The Power* 78-79)

Allie’s efforts in her new religion incorporate elements from the Judeo-Christian tradition, such as encouraging girls to undergo baptism as a formal initiation for women. She personally administers this sacrament to the other girls in the convent, assuming the role of “Mother Eve.” In this role, Allie takes on the role of a priestess, challenging the traditional patriarchal doctrine that restricts women from holding positions of authority within the Church, including conducting masses or performing baptisms. Alderman also introduces new festivities for this religion, including a reinterpretation of Easter. Instead of adhering to the Judeo-Christian celebration of Christ’s resurrection, she reimagines it as “the festival of eggs and fertility and the opening of the womb. Mary’s festival”

(Alderman, *The Power* 81.) By giving new meaning to pre-existing festivities, she commemorates and elevates women.

In addition to these celebrations and the baptismal sacrament, this novel's new religion incorporates symbols, images, Scriptures, and temples. The symbol associated with this burgeoning religious movement is described as "a hand like the hand of Fatima, the palm containing an eye, the shock-tendrils extending from the eye like extra limbs, like the branches of a tree" (Alderman, *The Power* 86.) Allie prominently displays this symbol tattooed on her hands during her broadcast speech in Bessapara (186-187.) This symbol also appears in various archaeological findings included in Neil Adam Armon's novel, adding to the plausibility of the narrative (34.) These artifacts depict the Holy Mother, who supplants the central figures of the Judeo-Christian religion, God and Christ. This symbol signifies the newfound power that women have harnessed, believed to protect them from their adversaries or "evil," much like the Hand of Fatima is traditionally believed to do. Just as Alderman reinterprets Judeo-Christian beliefs and motifs, she reclaims and customizes the Hand of Fatima, emphasizing the figure of the Islamic version of Mary. This once again centers the focus of religion on women.

In keeping with the dynamics of patriarchal religions, Alderman underscores the need for a Scripture in her reimagined religion. Indeed, the initial pages of Armon's novel (the primary story) feature verses from "the Book of Eve" (Alderman, *The Power* 3-4.) Allie, or Mother Eve, takes responsibility for rewriting the Scriptures in collaboration with other girls, assuming the roles of both priestess and prophet or apostle. They selectively draw from the existing Scripture to serve their purpose and revise portions they find unsatisfactory, with a particular emphasis on stories of women like Ruth, Matriarch Rebecca, or Prophet Deborah (104, 225.) These women are

accorded special significance in the temples dedicated to the Holy Mother. The reader becomes acquainted with one such temple, located in Bessapara within Tatiana's castle. The castle's chapel has been transformed to include images of the Holy Mother in various scenes, such as "speaking to Matriarch Rebecca in the form of a dove" or "Prophet Deborah proclaiming the Holy Word to the disbelieving people" (225.) Here, Alderman displaces the image of the patriarchal, male God, shifting the focus to Biblical women. As Miller observes, "the most significant transformation emerging from the new spiritual order (...) is the reimagining of religious and spiritual texts to place female voices at the center. By choosing the pseudonym Eve, Allie is mindful of the need to rewrite a misogynistic narrative of sin, in which women are portrayed as bringing evil into the world" (410.) This rewriting of religious symbols, images, Scriptures, and temples serves the overarching purpose of establishing a foundation for the preservation of female superiority.

In addition, the word of God in this new order must be spread and, in this regard, Allie's speeches will have great prominence. Allie believes that "the time of the Gospels is over and there must be a new doctrine," so her mission will be to spread this message (Alderman, *The Power* 46.) This is what can be seen in the following excerpt:

In the late afternoon, Eve speaks to her congregation. They record it on their cell phones and send it across the world. Mother Eve wears a hood, the better to preserve her humility, for it is not her message she preaches, but the message of the Mother.

Eve says, '(...) They have said to you that man rules over woman as Jesus rules over the Church. But I say unto you that woman rules over man as Mary guided her infant son, with kindness and with love.

'(...) They have said to you that man and woman should live together as husband and wife. But I say unto you that it is more blessed for women to live together, to help one another, to band together and be a comfort one to the next.

'They have said to you that you must be contented with your lot, but I say unto you that there will be a land for us, a new country. There will be a place that God will show us where we will build a new nation, mighty and free.' (Alderman, *The Power* 83)

Firstly, Allie's use of media to disseminate her message underscores her strategic approach to spreading her beliefs. By employing media, she taps into a powerful tool for mass communication, enabling her to reach a wide audience. This choice mirrors the use of media in modern religious movements to evangelize and influence public opinion. Secondly, her message challenges traditional roles by asserting that it is women who hold authority over men. Importantly, she invokes religious foundations to support this claim, drawing a parallel to the same religious framework that has historically been used to bolster patriarchal systems. Allie's use of religion serves to empower women both individually and collectively, allowing them to reject their marginalization as "others" in society (Miller 409.)

Additionally, Allie dismantles patriarchal constructs using their own resources when she asserts that women require a new land that favors their interests. This concept harks back to the biblical narrative of the Exodus, where Moses led the already-liberated Hebrew people to the Promised Land of Israel. Allie draws this parallel to emphasize that women, like the enslaved Hebrews, need a Promised Land where they can live free from the constraints of the patriarchal system. In *The Power*, this Promised Land is symbolized by Bessapara (Alderman, *The Power* 186.) This analogy highlights the novel's exploration of the struggle for liberation and the quest for a new social order.

What is probably most interesting about Allie's vision is that she creates an inclusive religion that unites women from every part of the world and every religious belief:

Mother Eve records a message to go out over the footage. She says, 'I have not come to tell you to give up a single strand of your belief. I am not here to convert you. Christian, Jew, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Buddhist, if you are of any faith or none at all, God does not want you to change your practice.'
She pauses. She knows this is not what they're expecting to hear. "God loves all of us," she says, 'and She wants us to know that She has changed Her garment merely. (...) Jews: look to Miriam, not Moses, for what you can learn from her. Muslims:

look to Fatimah, not Muhammad. Buddhists: remember Tara, the mother of liberation. Christians: pray to Mary for your salvation.

‘You have been taught that you are unclean, that you are not holy, that your body is impure and could never harbour the divine. You have been taught to despise everything you are and to long only to be a man. But you have been taught *lies*. God lies within you, God has returned to earth to teach you, in the form of this new power. Do not come to me looking for answers, for you must find the answers within yourself.’ (Alderman, *The Power* 114-115)

In this passage, Allie (or Eve) issues a call for individuals to unlearn the traditional teachings they have received regarding their religion, particularly in relation to women. She acknowledges the diversity of beliefs, recognizing that people may worship different gods who are various manifestations of the same divine entity. However, she urges them to alter their perspective (Alderman, *The Power* 187.) Her message is clear: people should reorient their religious views to emphasize the female aspects of their faith for guidance and salvation. This shift redirects the focus from exclusively male figures to female ones, as it is now the era for women to hold dominion. According to her message, God has revealed Her female side to assist women in finding their rightful place in the world.

By attributing feminine characteristics to God and highlighting the significance of notable women in religious narratives, Allie seeks to rationalize the newfound female supremacy. She suggests that while God may exhibit mercy and bestow blessings upon both women and men, she has also arrived to “teach vengeance against those who have wronged” women (Alderman, *The Power* 187.) This portrayal implies that, much like the male aspect of God, the female aspect can be both merciful and vengeful. The prospect of divine retribution is employed to persuade individuals to embrace the new religious doctrines, reinforcing the idea that women now hold authority over men. The fear of God’s judgment serves as a compelling motivator for adherents to accept this power shift. This also reminds of *Ammonite* with the idea that women can be violent and vindictive just like men.

Allie serves as the embodiment of the new religion and, in a sense, the leader of the emerging “Church.” Her most notable ability lies in her capacity to preach and persuade people to adopt a female-oriented perspective on religion. Through her persuasive skills, she convinces followers that women are inherently superior to men by divine decree. Allie’s vision of a place where women can live freely aligns her with Tatiana, as previously discussed. However, another common trait connects them even more profoundly: an insatiable thirst for power.

Both Allie (Mother Eve) and Tatiana exhibit a powerful desire for power and are emblematic of the abuse of power and corruption at political and religious levels. Tatiana is presumably implicated in her husband’s murder, and Allie takes it a step further by killing Tatiana herself. The two characters develop a close relationship, with Allie serving as Tatiana’s counselor and confidant. Their trust deepens to the point where Tatiana designates Mother Eve as the de facto leader of the country in case of her incapacity. However, this trust is a construct created by Allie through manipulation and drugging (Alderman, *The Power* 251, 253.) Allie’s ultimate goal is to seize power by any means necessary, which ultimately culminates in her killing Tatiana and making it appear as an accident (294-295.) Subsequently, Allie ascends to the presidency of Bessapara (311.)

The portrayal of corrupt, violent women and power within a matriarchal society acts as “a strategy of resistance against cultural misogyny” and underscores the novel’s thematic exploration that the sex of those in power matters little; the result remains the same (Miller 2.) For Alderman, women with superpowers lose their humanity and become electrified monsters, reduced to mindless instruments of electricity itself (“Naomi Alderman’s *The Power*” 307.) As these “monsters” exert control over every aspect of life, they cease to be the oppressed sex. The organization and religious

framework proposed in the novel unmistakably position men as the Other, subject to women's whims, such as Tatiana's abuse of power or Bessapara's restrictive laws. The religious foundation also implies men's inferiority, grounded in scriptures and divine laws. Alderman employs irony and a role-reversal perspective effectively throughout the narrative, leaving no doubt that men are the ones who suffer in this novel.

Although *The Power* turns the readers' world on its head, it also undeniably shares similarities with it. For instance, within the novel's context, there appears to be a tendency toward inclusivity regarding sexual orientations and love. Examples of inclusiveness can be seen in characters like Tunde and Roxy (towards the end of the story), who form an interracial couple. Additionally, Jos and Ryan's relationship is another example of diversity in the narrative. Jos, in particular, can be described as bisexual, although it is not explicitly stated in the novel. There is a passage that suggests her bisexuality: "Jos quite likes girls. She quite likes boys who are a bit like girls. And Ryan was only a bus ride away" (Alderman, *The Power* 154.) However, it is worth noting that Jos faces ostracism not only because of her sexual orientation but also due to her inability to control her electrical power. She experiences fluctuations in her power, leading her to feel different from others. Her self-esteem issues, influenced by the opinions of her peers, drive her to certain chaotic actions, such as killing one of three men who try to attack the training camp she is in, partly because she felt pressured to prove herself (Alderman, *The Power* 206.)

Ryan, on the other hand, is a unique character because he possesses the power, unlike most boys. His power emerges due to a "chromosomal irregularity," which occasionally results in the appearance of a skein. The novel explains that not all boys with this irregularity survive; some die when their skein starts growing, while others are murdered because they are considered "weird" (Alderman, *The Power* 153.) Ryan's

“chromosomal irregularity” is reminiscent of intersexuality, which confers him certain female characteristics, potentially explaining the emergence of his power.

Jos and Ryan represent characters who deviate from the norm, both in the readers’ world and in the world of *The Power*. This makes them outsiders who face exclusion and discrimination, not only due to their sex but also because of their unique characteristics. As previously mentioned, girls like Jos are subjected to derogatory names because of their unstable powers and may also experience exclusion based on their sexual orientation. In one instance when Jos kills a man who attacks the NorthStar camp, the other girls derogatorily refer to her as “pzit” and insinuate that she acted out because she was attracted to the man, even though he was an attacker (Alderman, *The Power* 208.) It is important to remember that Jos belongs to the “first sex,” the group that has been historically oppressed by the other sex. So, while she may be treated as an outsider among her peers, she still enjoys certain privileges in society solely because she was born a woman and, thus, possesses the power, which confers social superiority¹⁰⁰.

Jos’s experiences in *The Power* highlight the rejection and discrimination she faces not only from her peers but also from her own mother, Margot. Margot creates the NorthStar camp with the intention of helping Jos gain control over her power and become more “normal.” Part of this normalization process, according to Margot, involves Jos distancing herself from Ryan and starting to like “normal boys” who are different from him. Margot is concerned about Ryan’s presence in their lives, as it could damage her reputation, and she fabricates a story about Ryan posting extremist messages online against women, pressuring Jos to end their relationship. She tells Jos

¹⁰⁰ Notice that this is similar to what Freud stated when delimiting the female sexuality, attributing the idea of power to the penis.

that once her relationship with Ryan is over, she can be just like “all the other girls” (Alderman, *The Power* 192.) This portrayal reveals that in the new order depicted neither society nor even Jos’s own mother accept her orientation or her relationship with Ryan. It suggests that the social pressure to conform to certain norms and expectations, particularly related to gender roles and relationships, persists even in a world where women hold significant power. The novel briefly mentions a lesbian couple when the new drug “Glitter” is introduced, with Shanti, a female drug dealer, getting stoned with her girlfriend. However, the novel does not provide further information about the inclusiveness or exclusion of homosexuality in this world. Margot’s insistence that Jos should be like “all the other girls” implies that heteronormativity might still be the dominant norm, but the novel doesn’t explore this aspect in depth.

One significant theme in the novel is sexual violence, which is portrayed in various forms, including rape, sex trafficking, and genital mutilation. The main characters develop their power as a response to the abuse they suffer from men. Similarly, women in Moldova, a hub for sex trafficking, use their power to resist the men who harm them and the system that enables sexual slavery. However, the novel also depicts a shift in power dynamics, with men becoming victims of sexual abuse, including male rape and penis curbing (this term will be explained in the section on Men in *The Power*.) This reversal of sexual dynamics serves to highlight how patriarchal power structures define the female body as an object for male pleasure, and in the new order, women who possess power use it for their own ends, just as men have done historically in patriarchy. This shift underscores the novel’s exploration of the abuse and corruption of power, regardless of the sex of those in control.

Aside from sexuality and love, two other subjects remain unexplored within the novel’s context, suggesting that they too might bear resemblances to the readers’ world.

The novel operates under the assumption that sexual reproduction necessitates the presence of both an ovum and sperm, mirroring the readers' familiar world. This implies that despite women holding a position of superiority in the new social order, they still rely on men for the process of reproduction. To put it more precisely, women exclusively require men for the act of reproduction. The spreading panic can be attributed to UrbanDox's theory on this matter:

“Women are just animals, says UrbanDox. Just like us, they want to mate, reproduce, have healthy offspring. One woman, though, she's pregnant for nine months. She can care for maybe five or six kids well across her life.”

“So...?”

UrbanDox frowns, like this is the most obvious thing in the world. “They'll only keep the most genetically healthy of us alive. See, this is why God meant men to be the ones with the power. However bad we treat a woman—well, it's like a slave.”
(...)

“See, people got slavery wrong. If you have a slave, that slave's your property, you don't want damage to come to it. However bad any man treated a woman, he needs her in a fit condition to carry a child. But now... one genetically perfect man can sire a thousand—five thousand—children. And what do they need the rest of us for? They're going to kill us all. Listen to me. Not one in a hundred will live. Perhaps not one in a thousand.” (Alderman, *The Power* 180)

As the social dynamics have undergone a complete transformation, men now experience what it means to be solely valued for their reproductive abilities. Within this new order, men find themselves entirely reliant on women for their survival and sustenance. Their very lives hang in the balance, subject to the whims of women. In this reshaped world, men's primary social function is to facilitate the continuation of the human species, a viewpoint that UrbanDox, the enigmatic figure fomenting fear in online forums, fervently advocates. This perspective implies that women might eventually embrace eugenics to reshape and engineer a new society, although it is worth noting that neither Armon nor the fictional Naomi ever hint at or mentions eugenics, even in a society that has existed in this manner for an extended period.

Nonetheless, the incorporation of this theory within the novel serves as yet another ironic exercise, positioning men as mere biological resources for perpetuating

the species, mirroring the historical treatment of women for centuries (Yebara 7, 9.) In keeping with the theme of role reversal, women, too, have distanced themselves from the traditional concept of motherhood. In the novel, only Margot and Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor assume the roles of mothers, yet their motherhood is far from ideal. For instance, as mentioned earlier, Margot prioritizes her public image over her daughter's happiness, while Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor, Allie's (or Mother Eve's) adoptive mother, hardly represents an ideal figure, given her awareness of Mr. Montgomery-Taylor's assault on Allie, which she considered a form of punishment for Allie's behavior.

These two examples illustrate that motherhood does not inherently confer nurturing qualities upon women. In fact, the fictional Naomi posits that the very fact that women are mothers is what makes them "aggressive and violent" (Alderman, *The Power* 333.) Alderman challenges the idealized notion of motherhood by asserting that the biological capacity to bear children does not necessarily equate to nurturing or kind attributes, qualities often associated with femininity. This contributes to the author's argument that a world governed by women need not be perfect or ideal; it could be as unjust as patriarchy, hence underscoring the feminist perspective's call for the elimination of sexual hierarchies. With this perspective on motherhood and the portrayal of female characters in the novel, Alderman contends that there are myriad ways for women to exist, and consequently, there are diverse ways for men to exist as well. In neither case does biology serve as a defining factor.

In contrast to the deconstruction of motherhood, it is essential to acknowledge that Allie-Eve, in her efforts to reform religion to justify women's superior position, redirects religious focus from the Son and Father to the Mother. Allie asserts that the Mother holds greater significance due to her creative abilities, proclaiming that "the one

who creates is greater than the thing created” (Alderman, *The Power* 80.) As previously discussed, this shift in focus serves as an ironic device Alderman employs to justify women’s dominance. However, Mother Eve’s endeavor to idealize the Mother does not prescribe a singular role for women in society.

The new social order acknowledges the vital role women play in the world, given their role in procreation. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs, the ability to be mothers does not inherently make women benevolent or compassionate. While the novel does not explicitly address reproduction or motherhood, women are no longer tethered to this singular social role. The new order empowers women to be more than just mothers, relegating men to the sole role of perpetuating the species, as the laws do not permit them to engage in any other pursuits. Consequently, men become objects at the mercy of women, solidifying their status as the Other.

Unlike men, women in *The Power* are gradually emerging as autonomous individuals. Education plays a pivotal role in their advancement, albeit receiving only brief attention in the novel. References to this topic become known through the depiction of training camps for girls endowed with the power and the archaeological discoveries detailed by the fictional author Neil Adam Armon in his novel. Education takes center stage, notably with Margot playing a pivotal role in shaping it. She champions the creation of secure spaces for girls who are developing their abilities and learning to harness their electrical power. This initiative seeks to distance women with the power from the perception of being aggressors and threats to society. It provides them with an opportunity to understand themselves and their unique abilities. Margot herself emphasizes the importance of these safe spaces, referred to as NorthStar camps, as they not only “create jobs” but also “keep the girls off the streets,” consequently reducing “street violence rates” (Alderman, *The Power* 148.) However, it becomes

evident that NorthStar camps are not centers of education but training grounds. Contrary to widespread belief, Margot employs these camps to train soldiers, as exemplified by the Tatiana episode. Thus, the NorthStar camps ultimately become spaces where women are trained to wield their powers in service to a select few governments. This highlights how political power can be misused, even when wielded by a woman. In this scenario, girls are transformed into tools at the disposal of powerful women.

Furthermore, one can argue that Allie/Eve also plays a role in education within the new order, albeit from a religious standpoint. Through her new doctrine, speeches, Scriptures, and symbols, Allie/Eve undertakes a process of deconstruction. She challenges people to unlearn what they have absorbed from the past. Allie/Eve's role embodies the deconstruction process, as individuals in this new era must relearn or adapt the knowledge they already possess to comprehend and endorse the fresh perspective. Allie/Eve constructs this novel viewpoint by building upon existing knowledge, particularly from various religions. She simply reverses the male-dominated religious perspectives into a female-centric one, permeating existing ideas with new meanings. In doing so, she contributes to laying the foundation upon which their new social system is built.

This paradigm shift is also evident in the context of history. As previously mentioned, the only references to history are drawn from archaeological findings, which indicate that women possessed power long before the Cataclysm occurred. However, this historical reality had been concealed after years of male dominance. The correspondence between the fictional Naomi and Neil reflects the fact that this aspect of history remains unknown in the new order. Neil asserts that

all the books we have from before the Cataclysm have been re-copied hundreds of times. (...) For more than two thousand years, the only people re-copying were

nuns in convents. I don't think it's at all stretch to suggest that they picked works to copy that supported their viewpoint and just let the rest moulder into flakes of parchment. I mean, why would they re-copy works that said that men used to be stronger and women weaker? That would be heresy, and they'd be damned for it. (Alderman, *The Power* 336)

This excerpt emphasizes how the dominant sex, in this case, women, have strategically employed history to validate their position of power. In this instance, it was nuns who undertook the task of copying selected books, ensuring that historical accounts lent legitimacy to women's dominance. This manipulation of history stemmed from the imperative that women in power must never exhibit any hint of vulnerability or defeat, as it could pose a threat to their matriarchal regime. Consequently, women were compelled to erase any historical events that might incite the oppressed to rebel against female authority. Thus, history serves as yet another instrument through which female supremacy cements its firm foundation.

Neil's statement, however, presents a challenge to the very foundation of this new order. Fictional Naomi concurs when she queries, "What you've written here [referring to Neil's novel] contradicts so many of the history books we all read as children; and they're based on traditional accounts going back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. What is it that you think happened? Are you really suggesting that everyone lied on a monumental scale about the past?" (Alderman, *The Power* 335-336.) This comment not only underscores the idea of women manipulating history to their advantage but also highlights that indoctrination applies in this world to both women and men. Consequently, it can be inferred that all individuals in this new order receive education, albeit one steeped in bias.

Another noteworthy aspect, found towards the conclusion of the novel in the correspondence between the two fictional authors, is the reference to "men's literature." Fictional Naomi proposes, as discussed in previous sections, that Neil could publish his

work under a woman's name to circumvent categorization based on his gender and integrate his work into the broader literary canon (Alderman, *The Power* 338-339.) Once again, the real Alderman employs irony to emphasize how hierarchies employ sex and gender to categorize every facet of life, thus excluding the opposite sex from all privileges. Despite men clearly being in a disadvantaged position, this new order represents a reverse of the contemporary world. It grants men access to education and the ability to express their ideas through mediums like literature. However, their creations and ideas continue to be categorized as "men's," perpetuating division and upholding men's status as the Other.

3.2.3. The Other in *The Power*

As elucidated in prior sections, the so-called "new order" is far from new. Rather, it represents a reversal of the patriarchal systems familiar to the reader. Consequently, men find themselves in the role of the oppressed, while women become the oppressors. The reader gains insight into the male perspective primarily through the experiences of one of the main characters, Tunde. He is a 21-year-old Nigerian photojournalism student who travels the globe to document the unfolding changes (Alderman, *The Power* 12.) His awakening to the shifting power dynamic occurred on a summer day when he attempted to kiss a girl named Enuma, only to receive an electric shock. This left him with a sense of humiliation and manipulation by Enuma (Alderman, *The Power* 15.) Several months later, he witnessed a girl at a supermarket defending herself with newfound powers against her attacker. This revelation opened Tunde's eyes to the fact that Enuma wasn't an isolated case; many women possessed these extraordinary abilities, capable of lethal force if desired (Alderman, *The Power* 16-17.) Tunde recorded the supermarket incident and shared it online, inadvertently sparking a global revolution.

This sudden notoriety turned Tunde into a media sensation, with news channels eager to obtain the full footage. He began to view this revolution as “his war, his revolution, his history,” believing it was his duty to document it (Alderman, *The Power* 55.) Thus, Tunde represents the male perspective in this narrative. His role is to reveal how the world is evolving and how men are being impacted. Importantly, his role can be embraced by both females and males. At the onset of the revolution, women inexplicably trust him and employ him to propagate their ideas and viewpoints, such as during the Riyadh riots. He was entrusted with filming and disseminating the events since he was the lone man permitted within the women’s demonstration (Alderman, *The Power* 55-61.) This pattern also recurs in Moldova, where Tunde secures an interview with Viktor Moskalev on sex-trafficking before his mysterious demise and gains access to Tatiana, the future president of Bessapara (Alderman, *The Power* 92-97.) Consequently, his role in the story is to provide a global perspective on this newfound power, demonstrating that it is a transnational phenomenon with universal implications.

Nevertheless, despite his informational privilege, Tunde remains a man and, therefore, is not immune to the consequences of the new power dynamics. One such consequence is the vulnerability men now face. With women gaining physical superiority, their social status has elevated, and they wield the ability to exert force over men. An illustration of this is seen in women’s capacity to coerce men, as Tunde himself experiences in a rape attempt in Delhi:

She has him on the ground now, she is wrestling with his belt and his jeans. She’s trying to pull them down without undoing the buckle, and they’re too tight to come over his hips. (...) he keeps thinking if I fight her off too hard she’ll knock me unconscious, and then she can do whatever she wants.
(...) He is ready for another shock; his body is tensed for it. And it is only when the shock does not come, when he realizes he is fighting with the air, that he opens his eyes and sees that three other women have pulled her off him. (...) They have thrown her down and they are shocking her time and again, but she will not lie still. Tunde pulls his trousers back up and waits, watching, until that woman with her long, thick oiled plait has stopped moving altogether. (Alderman, *The Power* 138)

In this event, the abuse of power is represented by some women who believe that they can force men because now they are the physically strongest. This again acts as an ironic example of what women suffer in patriarchal societies since strength and musculature have often been used as a justification for male sex superiority. Another remarkable aspect of this event is that Tunde is saved by other women. He has become the “damsel in distress” who needs to be saved. Tunde, fortunately, is saved, but Ricky, Roxy’s brother, is not. Ricky suffers a similar episode with worse consequences:

This time, Ricky got three girls, said they were sisters—but they didn’t look like sisters; he thinks it was a joke. One of them sucked him off by the kitchen bins outside the clubs whatever she did, made his head spin. He looks ashamed when he says it, like he thinks he should have done something different. When she was finished, the others were waiting. And he went, ‘Give me a minute, girls. Can’t do you all at once.’ And they were on him.

There’s a thing you can do to a bloke. Roxy’s done it herself. A little bit of a spark in the back passage and up he comes, neat as anything. It’s fun, if you want it. Hurts a bit, but fun. Hurts a lot if you don’t want it. Ricky kept on saying he didn’t want it.

They took their turns on him. They were just trying to hurt him, he says, and he was saying, did they want money, what did they want, but one of them got him in the throat and he couldn’t make another sound until they were finished.

The whole thing took half an hour Ricky thought he might die there. (...) Ricky kept very still until it was over, and didn’t say nothing and didn’t do nothing. Just waited for it to be done.

This is not what happens to a man. Except now it is. (Alderman, *The Power* 194-195)

Under the reign of women in power, men are not exempt from danger, which carries a stark irony in the context of the novel. This episode may seem merciless, but Alderman’s intention is to underscore that such occurrences are not unique to this transformed world; rather, they mirror the common brutality witnessed within patriarchal systems, with the key distinction being that, in the past, it was often perpetrated against women. Once again, Alderman illustrates the injustice of one sex’s superiority over the other. In a twist of fate, unlike Tunde, Ricky does not find salvation through the intervention of women. Instead, it is Roxy, his sister, who takes it upon herself to enact a plan for vengeance. Ricky being avenged by his sister represents

another instance of the reversal of the “damsel in distress” trope. In this transformed world, women possess the power to dominate and use men, but they also wield the ability to protect the vulnerable, in this case, men.

Ricky is not the only man raped in the novel and rape is not the only example of sexual violence against men. Another instance is “penis curbing,” which is explained in the novel with another archeological finding. Armon includes in his novel a piece of

Rock art discovered in northern France, around four thousand years old. Depicts the ‘curbing’ procedure—also known as male genital mutilation—in which key nerve endings in the penis are burned out as the boy approaches puberty. After the procedure—which is still practised in several European countries—it is impossible for a man to achieve an erection without skin stimulation by a woman. Many men who have been subjected to curbing will never be able to ejaculate without pain. (Alderman, *The Power* 248)

In her role reversal exercise, Alderman is also concerned with female genital mutilation and portrays this concern through the “penis curbing,” a procedure—as described above—which mutilates male genitals. Along with rape, penis curbing represents that men have assumed the role of the more vulnerable or, as a secondary character in the novel aptly puts it, “the first became the second”¹⁰¹. Consequently, men find themselves unable to independently protect and provide for themselves (Alderman, *The Power* 239.)

This vulnerability is also evident in the new laws enacted by women. Through Tunde, readers witness firsthand how these new regulations impact men. As previously explained, these laws stipulated that men had to have a female guardian, were barred from driving or establishing their own businesses, denied the right to vote or assemble without a woman present, among other restrictions (Alderman, *The Power* 243.) The enforcement of these laws against men’s freedom is particularly felt in Bessapara, extending to all foreigners, including journalists like Tunde. With the ascent of this new

¹⁰¹ Notice the reference to Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*.

order, Tunde, like other men, loses not only his job but ultimately his autonomy as a subject. He becomes an object, coming to life only when permitted by a woman.

Tunde is not the sole male voice in the novel, but he appears to be among the few who accept or comprehend the new order as a response to the historical mistreatment of women by men. It is crucial to recall that the origins of this transformation lay in women's reactions to male domination. Tunde may have recognized that it was merely a matter of time before the balance of power shifted. Others, however, do not share this understanding and react against the new reality. Instances of this resistance include men's protests and the emergence of a terrorist group known as Male Power. Yet, perhaps the most vivid embodiment of this opposition is UrbanDox.

As previously explained, UrbanDox embodies the old values that regarded women as valuable solely for procreation. His viewpoint is that the new order poses a threat to men's existence, as women only require a few men for the continuation of the species (Alderman, *The Power* 180.) Yebra points out that "the male anxiety about reproduction of classic science fiction is here displaced to the male body. (...) It is men who seem redundant, their sexual organs being disposable for reproduction, which, in its turn, is being replaced by replication" (4.) According to UrbanDox, men will now be used for procreation, and thus, there will be no need for a large male population. He predicts the decline of males and advocates for a Gender War to restore what he perceives as the natural order (Alderman, *The Power* 178)¹⁰². The details of this war are not narrated within the novel, but its outcome becomes clear through the exchange of letters between Neil and the fictional Naomi.

¹⁰² UrbanDox uses the term "gender" as an essentialist concept, since he believes that there are natural characteristics possessed by the different sexes. Thus, he believes that a gender war is necessary so that women go back to their "natural" place which is, for him, not the ruling position.

It is evident that if such a conflict occurred, it was ultimately won by women. This rebellious impulse was also exhibited by other male characters who refused to accept women's newfound power. Bernie and Darrell, Roxy's father and brother, fall into this category. They attempted to counter the new order by taking women's power for themselves. In this case, Roxy suffered the consequences, losing her skein as her family surgically removed it and implanted it into Darrell. Surprisingly, the skein functioned in Darrell, confirming his assertion that "power doesn't care who uses it" (Alderman, *The Power* 297.) The skein (representing power) worked in him because power does not discriminate based on gender; it is wielded by those who possess it, be they men or women. While some characters demonstrated that men made attempts to reinstate the patriarchal order, these efforts ultimately fell short. Women emerged as the dominant force, leading to a complete reversal of traditional gender roles. Consequently, in Alderman's world, men occupy the position of the clearest Others.

However, much like in patriarchal societies, in the fictional world of *The Power*, there are also other groups considered Others from the perspective of both the oppressors and the oppressed. One such group is exemplified by Jos, as previously discussed. She exhibited fluctuations in her power and did not conform to the new standard of womanhood, characterized by strength, violence, and stability. Even though women like Jos belong to the category of oppressors due to their sex, they do not align with the characteristics that define the new standard of women. Similarly, those women who do not possess the power at all constitute another group of Others. From the viewpoint of both the oppressors (women) and the oppressed (men), these women are considered outside the norm.

Another category is men with the skein. In the eyes of the oppressors (women), these men are perceived as Other because they do not fit neatly into the categories of

masculinity or femininity. These are not conventional notions but rather newly constructed ideas within the matriarchal society. Despite still being delineated by gender stereotypes, these concepts have undergone a reversal. Masculinity is associated with traits like vulnerability and emotional expression, while femininity is linked to strength and authority. Men with the skein exhibit characteristics stereotypically attributed to both genders, rendering it difficult for them to conform to established norms. A prime example of this category is represented by Ryan, Jos's boyfriend, who was born with a chromosomal irregularity. Men like Ryan are also regarded as Others from the perspective of the oppressed (men.) They are perceived as unusual because they share the power with women, which sets them apart from the new concept of masculinity, even extending to their DNA being altered. Equally, these men, like Ryan, are also considered Others from the perspective of the oppressors (women.) They are seen as peculiar because they share the power associated with women. This unique position defies conventional gender norms, causing them to be excluded from the category of men and women.

The cases of Jos and Ryan, previously associated with bisexuality and intersexuality in this discussion, exemplify conditions that deviate from social norms. Similar to how it occurs in patriarchal societies, these non-normative conditions are not readily accepted within the context of the matriarchal oppressive regime depicted by Alderman. Her narrative underlines the idea that a matriarchal oppressive regime is not inherently superior to a patriarchal one, as both can lead to discrimination and marginalization of individuals who do not conform to social expectations.

3.2.4. Irony and the Twist of Circumstances

The preceding analysis has provided valuable insights into the resources that Alderman has masterfully crafted in her world to portray a society where women are not relegated to the role of Others. *The Power* can be seen as a thought-provoking exercise that invites readers to reflect on their society through the clever technique of role reversal, interwoven with elements reminiscent of the “battle of the sexes” narratives (Dodson 127.) The outcome of this premise is a world that may appear dystopian from the male perspective, as they endure the challenges of female rule. However, according to the author, this story is essentially an inversion, with events that are not characteristically worse than those occurring in our contemporary world.

In Alderman’s narrative, the events closely parallel the struggles that women face in the reader’s world, and she uses this parallel to shed a spotlight on these issues. Furthermore, Alderman effectively illustrates how power can be wielded and maintained when those in a privileged position possess physical strength, allowing them to enforce laws, shape history, or even establish a new religion on which to base that power. In this “dystopian” world, it is women who hold this dominant position and represent the norm; anyone who deviates from these norms is cast as Others. While some women who do not entirely conform to the new definition of womanhood also experience this status, it is men who find themselves at a disadvantage, occupying the role of Others within the novel.

These positions of dominance and Otherness are primarily defined by women’s electrical power, which grants them physical strength and, subsequently, a sense of superiority. This power enables them to compel the rest of the population to adhere to their doctrines. As previously elucidated, one of the foundational aspects of patriarchy

rested on biology. In this new context, women hold a biological advantage, and this biological advantage serves as the starting point from which they reshape laws, education, history, and religion, effectively establishing these elements as pillars of the new order. Alderman, in essence, inverts the reader's world, employing the same tools and resources present in that world to highlight the realities faced by women in our contemporary society. The outcome of this exploration is that readers may not anticipate encountering a world as violent as their own. In contrast to the depictions offered by authors like Gearhart, Alderman's narrative suggests that women's worlds are not inherently better than men's. Through this exercise, she shatters the traditional perception of women as inherently gentle, sweet, and peaceful, revealing that there is no inherent guarantee of how women behave; they can just as easily be violent, merciless, and corrupt.

This line of thought aligns with Griffith's aim of presenting women as fully human. Being human encompasses the capacity for violence and cruelty, and women are equally capable of these traits as men. The utopian or idealized image of women is thus dismantled. However, this de-idealization does not signify that women are completely free from categorizations. Rather than eradicating classifications, the use of role reversal makes them more conspicuous. Women transition from the conventional perception of being peaceful, tender, and nurturing to one where they are seen as violent, aggressive, and powerful, among other traits. Defining what it means to be a woman in this new world inevitably leads to the redefinition of what it means to be a man. With the role reversal, it is assumed that men have shifted from being violent, aggressive, and powerful to being peaceful, tender, and passive. As women begin to assert dominance in this world, men become entirely dependent on women, with a consequent lack of opportunities. They are relegated to roles primarily focused on

procreation and domesticity, as exemplified by UrbanDox. This character also represents men who reject their newly assigned categorizations in this transformed world and strive for the restoration of the previous patriarchal order.

In summary, social conventions are fundamentally reshaped and persist throughout the novel. It is essential to remember that one of the literary devices Alderman employs is irony. Instead of eliminating gender categories, as might be suggested by the feminist movement, she redefines them, underscoring how little changes when one sex becomes dominant. In this manner, Alderman prompts reflection on the inherent flaws of a world in which one sex holds superiority, regardless of which sex that may be. The portrayal of the “gynocracy” in *The Power* as dystopian, akin to the real world, according to Alderman’s perspective, reinforces the idea that a single sex’s superiority is not the key to an efficient society. As Barr suggests, “Alderman proposes a new answer for feminist SF, which involves remaining human and humane by respecting the diversity of human bodies” (“Naomi Alderman’s *The Power*” 307.) Therefore, through her use of irony, Alderman’s overarching purpose is undeniably feminist.

Throughout their journey to power, women gradually distance themselves from the concept of Otherness, particularly thanks to the new categorization and definition of women. However, patriarchy still exerts an influence on them, as evidenced at the beginning of the novel when women progressively reawaken their power in response to patriarchal abuses, such as stalking, rape, and murders. Additionally, early on, some girls are abandoned by their parents and families who label them as “witches” or “possessed,” which serves as another clear reference to patriarchal discourse. In this context, “witches” were women who did not conform to the patriarchal definition of womanhood; they were powerful, intelligent, and independent, often living as outcasts.

In essence, they were different, much like the girls with electrical power at the outset of the revolution in *The Power*. However, the association of girls and women with electrical power as witches, and outcasts, gradually diminishes as having power becomes the new norm.

Patriarchal discourse continues to manifest itself in the form of resistance against the new order, such as the terrorist group Male Power and UrbanDox. UrbanDox, for instance, denigrates women by calling them animals and slaves, and deems their acquisition of power as unnatural, arguing that men should be the rulers. Examples like Margot's colleague Daniel, who believes that a mother cannot become a governor because she must prioritize childcare, and Mrs. Montgomery-Taylor, who complies with Mr. Montgomery-Taylor's crime of allowing Allie to be raped, further reflect the persistence of patriarchal attitudes that prevailed before the activation of electrical power.

The old patriarchal values linked to women are not entirely erased in this evolving world. However, women unite to challenge and overthrow these values, as seen in the correspondence between the fictional Naomi and Neil. Furthermore, they establish new pillars to underpin this transformation and to justify their authority. This serves the dual purpose of supporting their newly acquired power and ensuring its perpetuation. As they transition into the process of gaining power, the patriarchal attachment to women gradually fades away, except for sporadic protests and acts of terrorism.

Women provide a new definition of womanhood, which becomes the norm, leaving men in a subordinate position. Men lose their voice, their freedom, and their individuality, becoming mere objects subject to the mercy of women. This gynocratic world is as unjust as any patriarchal one. As outlined in the preceding sections, this

matriarchal regime combats patriarchy by enacting laws that restrict men's agency, depriving them of opportunities to grow and be free. The system has shifted to ensure that men experience the same unjust laws that women endured under patriarchal rule.

Apart from these laws, everything else undergoes substantial change in this system to perpetuate itself. As previously explained, pillars such as religion and history have been reshaped to favor women. The focus is on consolidating and justifying women's physical, social, divine, and historical superiority. This new matriarchal system possesses all the necessary tools for perpetuation. Consequently, women have liberated themselves from the sexual Otherness associated with them under patriarchy. They have broken free from the patriarchal chains and constraints that hindered their individuality. Therefore, the literary devices Alderman employs successfully serve to dissociate women from Otherness in the patriarchal sense. One of these devices is an exercise in replacement. In patriarchal societies, everything revolves around those who possess a penis—a symbol of power. Men, fortunate enough to possess it, enjoy privileged positions in society. In *The Power*, Alderman replaces the “phallus” and its associated attributes with electrical power. Consequently, women, fortunate enough to possess it, assume privileged positions in society. The electrical shock endows women with “the power” to establish a new paradigm. The purpose of this replacement is to provoke reflection on the absurdity of letting a biological trait dictate an individual's social position. The author speculates on this, demonstrating that a change in power from one sex to the other would not necessarily make the world better; it would merely shift the focus of oppression. This leads to the idea that neither a patriarchy nor a matriarchy represent the solution for living in an equal and just world. True liberation from oppression and Otherness can only be achieved through feminism. Alderman

emphasizes the importance of eradicating sexual hierarchies; however utopian this concept may seem.

To arrive at this conclusion, Alderman does not invent any myths or resources exclusively related to women. Rather, she takes the pillars and ideas that patriarchy has propagated over centuries and remodels them to fit the new gynocratic order. Her result is not the destruction of patriarchy, but *The Power* unquestionably scrutinizes the foundations upon which it is built. The entire novel is an exercise in irony, demonstrating that the term “dystopia” closely mirrors the real-world experiences of women. The author calls for a reevaluation of society, particularly concerning women, by depicting how men would suffer if an exact reversal were to take place. The novel also challenges the patriarchal discourse surrounding gender while speculating on what a woman’s world might resemble. In *The Power*, neither sex escapes the influence of gender stereotypes and patterns: men are defined in much the same way as women. Those who do not conform to these standards are labeled as Others, but there is a clear shift in the roles of oppressor (women) and oppressed (men.) Through role reversal and irony, Alderman helps “unmask the fictionality” inherent in patriarchy (Barr 144.) It illustrates that patriarchy is a constructed system and, as such, it can be remodeled. However, this remodeling must occur through a feminist lens, avoiding sexual hierarchies and gender stereotypes (Barr, “Naomi Alderman’s *The Power*” 307).

4. Conclusions and Final Remarks

Over the centuries, literature has served as a powerful tool for exploring social realities. While women have not always had equal access to this resource, they have managed to carve out a space for their own stories. This space has allowed them to examine their reality and their place in society. This dissertation seeks to analyze how four authors utilize SF and its available resources to shed light on the unfair situation of women within a patriarchal context and challenge the notion of women as Other. These selected authors have different objectives, often influenced by the historical periods in which they lived. However, they all converge on a central theme: emphasizing the need for social change and the eradication of sexual hierarchies in order to create a fair and equitable society for women.

The subject of this study is not entirely original in its theoretical foundation, as many feminist authors have paved the way for the examination of women's unfavorable position in society resulting from a sexual hierarchy that leads to the sexual Otherness of women. Feminist thinkers have traced the genealogy of women's Otherness throughout history, aiming to uncover the foundations of patriarchy and why it has been, and continues to be, justified and perpetuated. This study builds upon the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir, who dedicated *The Second Sex* to shedding light on women's situation due to their sexual Otherness and the stereotypes associated with their sex. De Beauvoir's line of thought argued that patriarchy rested upon several pillars that had existed for centuries. These pillars ranged from biology and psychology to medicine, laws, education, and religion, all of which contributed to portraying women as weak, incapable of self-sufficiency, and lacking the intellectual capacity to receive the same education as men. De Beauvoir paved the way for future feminists and has been both

followed and challenged by subsequent authors who have further developed her theories, emphasizing the need for women to build their own space in the world.

Applied to literature, authors like Cixous and Irigaray specified the imperative need for women to start writing their own stories, their own experiences, and to give voice to women who explore issues that concern them, rather than accepting the narratives shaped for them by men. Audre Lorde echoed this idea by emphasizing the need for women to create a discourse that aims to dismantle the patriarchal discourse. This study aligns with this concept and suggests that women can create such a discourse using various resources, including the creation of alternative worlds, the reinterpretation of myths, and the reinvention of the image of women. The ultimate goal is to dismantle or erase the sexual Otherness imposed by the patriarchal discourse.

Gearhart, Tepper, Griffith, and Alderman, the selected authors for the study, utilize a diverse range of resources, all of which share a common starting point: the patriarchal foundations of society. Their shared objective is to challenge and confront these patriarchal foundations, though they achieve different results. Some successfully eliminate the sexual Otherness associated with women, while others do not achieve the same level of success. Therefore, it is essential to examine the origins of the resources used by these authors, whether they are reworkings of patriarchal concepts or entirely original, and to assess their effectiveness in creating a discourse that dismantles women's sexual Otherness.

The first resource that these women authors employ is the literary genre of SF. Although SF was initially reserved for men with expertise in "hard sciences" like physics, women have found their place within this genre over the years. It provided an ideal platform for exploring women's potential without the influence of patriarchy.

Gearhart drew on the utopian roots of the SF genre, incorporating the ecological perspectives that was gaining prominence during her time. She added a touch of fantasy to create her alternative world, incorporating a significant feminist concept: separatism. This reinforced the idea that women needed a space of their own to explore their potential. Tepper also harnessed the power of SF, combining elements from battle-of-the-sexes stories and the feminist tool of role reversal. This combination created a world in which women seize control, allowing the author to speculate about whether a women-led world with a reversed sexual hierarchy could or not be an improvement over patriarchy. Tepper's alternative world took a step further into SF territory than Gearhart's, as her society was portrayed as post-holocaust. The nuclear holocaust, caused by men, left society in a precarious state and forced women to assume control.

The other two authors analyzed in this study employ strategies that prompt readers to engage more deeply with SF. This is because the settings and themes they select for exploration offer a more distinct novum in comparison to the works of Gearhart and Tepper. Griffith crafted an interplanetary narrative that included elements of space opera, although her text transcends such classifications within the genre. Griffith's novel can also be categorized as soft SF or humanist SF, intertwined with elements of invasion stories and the classic bildungsroman. *Ammonite* stands out as one of the most effective examples of eliminating sexual Otherness, particularly through Marghe's self-discovery journey involving female aliens or, more precisely, female mutants from a "terrene" perspective. Alderman, on the other hand, revisited the role reversal and battle-of-the-sexes story 24 years later than Tepper to highlight the dystopian events present in the real world. Her approach involves introducing an electrical power within female bodies, scientifically and biologically explained, that overturns the readers'

world. Women become physically stronger, enabling them to dominate the world through power, violence, and corruption.

The SF genre, while not specifically created by women, has provided female authors with a unique opportunity to shape alternative worlds that serve their purposes. In this case, the primary objective is to construct worlds that revolve around women, enabling exploration of their potential and the creation of new, empowering versions of themselves, as advocated by feminists. These alternative worlds challenge and debunk patriarchal beliefs about women, reshaping the way they are perceived. Each of these created worlds offers a fresh perspective on women through the portrayal of characters who defy patriarchal stereotypes.

Starting with Gearhart, she characterizes her women as a collective, blending elements of Amazons and witches. Gearhart deliberately reworks myths associated with negative portrayals of women within the patriarchal discourse, imbuing them with new, empowering meanings. For example, she establishes a women-only world akin to the Amazons, which involves a complete disconnection from men. This separatist approach allows women to develop independently without adhering to patriarchal norms. The Hill Women, in particular, have discarded all ideas related to men, including technology, and have embraced nature. By situating the Hill Women's world within nature, Gearhart draws upon the traditional link between women and nature. However, rather than using this connection to marginalize women, as the patriarchal discourse often does, Gearhart shifts the focus by ostracizing urban spaces. This shift normalizes the two mythical images of women, rather than portraying them as outsiders, and liberates witches and Amazons from their negative connotations imposed by the patriarchal discourse.

Tepper shares some similarities with Gearhart in her depiction of women. In her novel, women are also portrayed collectively within a separatist world that fosters autonomy and self-sufficiency. However, unlike Gearhart, Tepper does not draw directly from existing myths within the patriarchal discourse. Instead, she creates women who have forged their own identities since taking control. Their primary objective is to prevent another nuclear catastrophe, which they attribute to men, whom they presume to be inherently violent. In *Women's Country*, women are portrayed as complex individuals who can exhibit both violence and moral ambiguity. This is highlighted when it is revealed that women are implementing a eugenics plot without the knowledge of most men and women. Like this, Tepper challenges the notion of inherent characteristics tied to their sex, as women are no longer inherently nurturing and nonviolent.

Griffith and Alderman contribute to the portrayal of women as beings free from innate psychological or behavioral traits associated with their sex. Griffith accomplishes this by introducing female mutant aliens who exhibit characteristics independent of patriarchal influence. On their planet, Jeep, an endemic virus has eradicated the male members of any species, including mutated human-shaped aliens, from existence. The protagonists, descendants of Jeep's previous inhabitants, have been raised in a society that is completely unaware of the existence of males. Consequently, their world is devoid of patriarchal remnants, represented solely by the Company. The absence of men and any sexual hierarchy empowers women to shape a society that adapts to the planet's conditions rather than external stereotypes imposed on them. In this society, women are not influenced by cultural preconceptions about themselves and can express a wide range of traits, from kindness to cruelty and violence.

This is analogous to Alderman's portrayal of female characters in occupations traditionally unrelated to women, such as drug dealers, corrupt politicians, tyrannical leaders, or manipulative priestesses. Alderman employs the technique of role reversal to demonstrate that women are fully capable of occupying any position in society, even the undesirable ones, and that they can exhibit the same levels of corruption, violence, and tyranny as men. This attribution of humanity to women challenges the idealization-demonization duality that is often found in patriarchal discourse, and marks the beginning of women's liberation and reconstruction in Alderman's new order.

In these new worlds, two of them appear to be explicitly against men. While the starting point is that women have become the norm, leaving men as the Others, *Ammonite* breaks down the categories of sex and gender entirely, as there are no men in existence. Women do not experience sexual Otherness because there is only one sex, defined as "female" from the perspective of Marghe (the terrene, representing the readers.) In *The Wanderground*, men do occupy the position of the Other, but women in this world do not actively plan to oppose them. They allow the situation to evolve naturally, as men's numbers decline while the patriarchal City gradually disappears. The Hill Women establish a peaceful matriarchy without a specific plan to confront men but rather to liberate women from oppression.

On the other hand, Tepper's and Alderman's texts depict worlds where a battle of the sexes is taking place. Women are either in control or in the process of assuming power, and in both cases, they have plans to construct a more equitable society for themselves. This implies that women have become or are becoming the norm, while men are or will be oppressed based on their sex. In *The Gate*, men will gradually be eliminated through a eugenics program designed to save only those who voluntarily reject their violent tendencies. The gynocracy depicted in Tepper's novel and

Alderman's *The Power* is undeniably oppressive toward men. While Tepper's *The Gate* conveys this oppression more subtly, Alderman's novel is more explicit in its portrayal. Here men are subjected to violence, including killing, rape, torture, mutilation, and a loss of freedom. The new gynocratic society in Bessapara, in particular, enacts cruel acts and establishes laws that severely restrict men's freedom. The central goal of women's newfound power is not necessarily to eliminate men but to subjugate them, making them the oppressed sex. As men either become oppressed or vanish, women gain the freedom to develop as individuals and create and manage a new society.

These various texts speculate about the potential roles of women in society, including government and economy. They present a variety of organizational structures that prove to be as valid as those in the readers' worlds. However, these organizations are not entirely novel; rather, they are reimaginings of existing concepts. For instance, the societies in these texts often take the form of matriarchies because women are the norm. Matriarchies have occasionally appeared in the patriarchal discourse, such as in descriptions of Amazons. However, these patriarchal depictions typically served as a means to reestablish male sexual supremacy. In contrast, the matriarchies depicted in these texts are not overthrown, and they exhibit distinct characteristics.

For example, *The Wanderground* portrays a peaceful matriarchy characterized by tribal and communal living. The society has representatives known as the Long Dozen who make important decisions through assembly. In terms of the economy, the Hill Women do not engage in trade or transactions because nature provides for their needs, and whatever they take from it is shared communally within the tribe. Similarly, *Ammonite* features tribes organized into *yurti* (households) led by female heads. This society has a communal system of resource sharing, which reflects their close connection with the environment. These matriarchies differ from the patriarchal

depictions in that they endure without male subjugation and continue to thrive. The societies on Jeep, as depicted in Griffith's *Ammonite*, exhibit diverse forms of government and economic systems among the different tribes. For example, the Echraidhe tribe has a leader (*Levarch*) who designates her successor (*Agelast*), but the decision-making is conducted communally. They also have a system called *trata*, which involves economic and social transactions, including bartering and forming alliances.

Tepper's *The Gate* presents a distinct form of government led by an elite council of women who are trained in medicine and oversee various aspects of society. These councilwomen manage resources such as food rationing, energy allocation for medicine and industries, and trade between towns. This arrangement reflects their commitment to shaping their ideal society through a eugenics plan. In contrast, Alderman's *The Power* takes place in a contemporary setting akin to the reader's world, so there are no significant changes in the economic structures compared to the familiar world. However, there are specific instances in the novel, such as the tyrannical regime in Bessapara, where women exert power and enact oppressive policies. Overall, these depictions suggest that women possess the capacity to pass laws, exercise power, and govern as they see fit. Women's leadership and governance are portrayed as effective in eliminating women's sexual Otherness and perpetuating their preferred social structures. However, it is notable that in these worlds, this often results in the oppression of men, leading to the creation of sexually oppressive societies.

When it comes to religion, except for *Ammonite*, the other texts employ a reworking of patriarchal concepts related to spirituality. In Griffith's novel, religion revolves around ancestor worship, primarily used to explain the absence of men rather than to establish one sex's superiority. Gearhart's approach to religion is also in line with Griffith's, emphasizing worship as a means to foster women's development rather than

to justify their superiority. Both authors integrate tribal elements and a connection with nature into their spiritual practices.

The connection between women and nature in *The Wanderground* continues the themes found in myths of witches and Amazons, who traditionally lived as outcasts in natural environments. Gearhart reimagines this connection to nature, presenting it as a source of empowerment and survival for women in a world surrounded by nature. In contrast, the men in the City are portrayed as disconnected from nature and reliant on artificial technology. This reversal of the patriarchal discourse, where men are associated with technology and women with nature, positions nature as the norm in Gearhart's world. This portrayal suggests that the patriarchal system, built on artificial constructs, will eventually fade away as nature reclaims its dominance. Gearhart's depiction of nature as a spiritual provider serves as a symbolic representation of this shift. Importantly, this spiritual connection to nature does not serve to justify women's superiority but instead highlights the natural order's resilience against oppressive and artificial systems, ultimately allowing men to adapt or gradually fade away.

In *The Gate* by Sheri S. Tepper and *The Power* by Naomi Alderman, religion is explored as a resource to justify the status quo in a manner similar to how patriarchal societies have used religion. In Tepper's text religion plays a relatively minor role but mirrors the structure of patriarchal religions. The female Goddess replaces the male God as the divine figure, and this figure is used to legitimize women as rulers and the sacrifices made for a better future. This reflects a similar pattern seen in patriarchal societies, where religious beliefs are often used to justify established power structures.

Naomi Alderman takes a more substantial and transformative approach to religion in her novel. She introduces a complete reworking of the religious doctrine, shifting the

focus from the male God to a female Goddess. This transformation involves rewriting various aspects of religion, including the divine image, symbols, religious figures, and scriptures. Alderman's intention is to reverse roles, emphasizing women's power and superiority by the grace of God. In this way, religion becomes a tool of manipulation that women can use to their advantage. In general, the selected authors in this study manipulate religion to serve their purposes, either by creating a new concept of religion with familiar traits or by deconstructing and reinterpreting traditional religious elements to empower women.

In addition to religion, sexuality is also explored, impacting the representation of love, reproduction, and concepts of family and motherhood. Two of the texts, *The Wanderground* and *Ammonite*, portray lesbianism as the only possible sexual orientation. While both texts feature separatism, the reasons for this separatism differ. *The Wanderground* proposes separatism as a result of women's oppression in the patriarchal context of the City. Nature revolted making technologies stop, helping women escape from their oppressive state. By contrast, *Ammonite* depicts separatism because an endemic virus on the planet Jeep has exterminated the male population. In the separatist setting depicted, there exists only a singular avenue for forming sexual orientations. This arises from the fact that, in this particular context, women are either unwilling or unable to engage with men in any capacity. This aspect gains particular significance within the world of *Ammonite*, where, strictly speaking, being biologically female is the sole path for existence, and consequently, the only way of experiencing love, engaging in relationships, or reproducing. Consequently, the theme of reproduction undergoes a significant transformation compared to the readers' conventional understanding, as the involvement of both men and women becomes unnecessary.

In these two texts, women possess the ability to reproduce parthenogenetically, independently of men's sperm, effectively emancipating themselves from male dependence. This newfound autonomy also bestows upon women the roles of mothers, caregivers, and providers. The traditional notion of the patriarchal family is entirely dismantled in *Ammonite*, where men are non-existent, or in *The Wanderground*, where they are unable to interact with women. Within these contexts, men cease to be essential for sperm, financial support, or sustenance, eroding their traditional superiority within patriarchal family structures. While lesbianism exists in the readers' world, these authors use female-only relationships to subvert the established sexual hierarchy, repurposing existing social constructs to underscore women's positions.

Turning to *The Gate*, the theme of sexuality is a source of controversy, as this society enforces heterosexuality. In this post-holocaust world, homosexuality was eradicated, attributed to a perceived hormonal imbalance during pregnancy. Women successfully challenged this belief, resulting in a society where men and women can only engage in heterosexual relationships. The subject sparked controversy due to its insinuation that homosexuality is an ailment requiring elimination. Yet, an alternative perspective suggests that any form of sexual hierarchy is inherently oppressive, irrespective of who holds the oppressive role. In this context, portraying homosexuality as a disorder might be an ironic commentary, echoing a rhetoric often heard in patriarchal societies. Moreover, Tepper envisions a world in which women depend on men for reproduction, facilitated by controlled artificial insemination and the enigmatic Carnival. This event serves as the only occasion when warriors can connect with women and partake in sexual intercourse, all in the pursuit of ensuring the survival of the species. What may appear innocent is, in reality, a meticulously orchestrated plan by the elite of Women's Country aimed at forging a more peaceful society by eradicating

what they perceive as the violent gene inherent in warriors. The Carnivals, therefore, conceal a profound truth—they serve as a tool of social engineering in which the elite selects the suitable servitors' sperm for the future society. Sexuality and reproduction, in this context, appear to remain tethered to the patriarchal concept of essentialism, attributing specific inherent behaviors to each sex. Tepper, however, ingeniously repurposes this notion, having women employ it for their own agenda. In *Women's Country*, the elite assumes control over sexuality and reproduction, depriving both men and women of their freedom in these matters, thus serving as additional illustrations of the oppressive nature of the sexual hierarchy.

The dominance exerted by the elite in this post-apocalyptic world extends its influence into the conception of family and the role of motherhood. The patriarchal family is entirely deconstructed within this separatist society, where children live with their mothers, who are entrusted with providing, nurturing, and educating, especially concerning girls. For boys, the situation is different as they must spend time with their warrior fathers to ascertain if they possess the violent gene. If they do, they continue residing in the garrisons, separated from their mothers, awaiting either a fabricated war or their demise. Mothers are willing to sacrifice their bonds with their sons should this unfortunate outcome arise. Here, Tepper also employs the concept of motherhood as a social contribution but underscores that it is not the sole role that women play, as they now hold humanity's fate entirely in their hands.

In contrast, *The Power* does not explicitly address these themes, and its treatment of them is somewhat ambiguous. Based on the information presented in the novel, it appears that reproduction requires the involvement of both men and women, albeit with a satirical tone suggesting that men will be exclusively valued for their reproductive role. UrbanDox posits that women's power will reach a point where they will

selectively choose men for reproduction. Alderman employs irony to underscore the long-standing social role of women in reproduction throughout history. However, women do not require all men for reproduction, leading UrbanDox to suggest that women may ultimately seek to eliminate as many men as possible, as they are surplus to reproductive needs. Additionally, *The Power* offers a fresh perspective on motherhood, portraying it as the trigger for women's aggression. Presumably, their protective instincts drive them to behave aggressively, challenging the traditional qualities associated with motherhood. In contrast, men are depicted as emotional and nurturing. The author's role reversal method effectively places women at the center of *The Power*, not only in terms of reproduction but also in broader social roles. Nonetheless, as in Tepper's novel, the outcomes reveal the oppressive nature of sexual hierarchies.

Lastly, the selected authors employ two additional means to challenge the notion of Otherness associated with women: education and history. Once again, *The Wanderground* and *Ammonite* converge in their depiction of education as a foundational element for women's development and the propagation of their beliefs. Knowledge transmission in both worlds hinges on its communal nature, serving the purpose of understanding the past and future, as well as the individual quest for self-discovery within their respective environments. Both worlds incorporate unique rituals to facilitate these objectives. In *The Wanderground*, Remember Rooms archive the history and wisdom of every woman in their society, while *Ammonite* features *viajeras* who share stories of the past and the *deepsearch* ritual that connects Jeep's inhabitants with their ancestors and true selves. Regardless of the method, these texts underline the vital role that history and education play in society. For instance, *The Wanderground* contends that history instructs Hill Women about the necessity of their separatist, nature-connected path to avoid the oppression experienced in the City's past. Conversely,

Ammonite suggests that history is indispensable for comprehending the identity of its inhabitants and the unique functioning of their world.

However, the other two texts take a different approach to the role of history and education in their respective worlds. In Tepper's and Alderman's universes, history and education are manipulative tools employed to sustain and legitimize their societies. In Tepper's text only women have access to education, leaving men in a perpetual state of inferiority without recourse. Women, on the other hand, have unrestricted access to education (provided they live in towns or are itinerant) and are obligated to study three areas of knowledge that contribute to their society. Moreover, their curriculum includes the memorization of a historical play that serves to justify the functioning of their society. Through these elements, women in Tepper's world are subtly indoctrinated regarding their society's operations and the purpose behind their sacrifices—creating an ideal society for women. Tepper uses education and history similarly to how patriarchal discourse does: to validate and perpetuate the status quo. Alderman employs a parallel strategy in *The Power*.

Alderman crafts a world in which roles are reversed, but the means used to sustain this new order resemble those of patriarchies, with the intent of being different. Thus, just as laws, religion, and reproduction have been tools used to support the new female-dominated order, history and education also serve this purpose. History validates and lends credibility to the narrative. Archaeological discoveries of ancient wooden or metal figures serve as evidence of women's power, seemingly concealed during the oppressive period when men ruled but now reemerging to reveal women's true status. They also suggest that ancient societies worshiped a "Holy Mother," further establishing women's importance. Moreover, in the aftermath of *The Power*, it is evident that society has undergone a complete transformation, and history has been

manipulated to justify the new order. Neil Adam Armon confirms that nuns have altered books and information sources to portray women as strong and superior, rather than weak or submissive, as they were depicted during the male-dominated era. This reflects the truth behind George Orwell's famous quote, "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (37). This manipulation through education also extends to religion when Eve redirects its focus, providing women with a divine rationale for their social position. Once again, Alderman employs irony to reveal how elements previously employed by patriarchy are now repurposed.

In summary, the selected authors employ a diverse range of resources to construct and establish the foundations of their fictional worlds. Some of these strategies aim to deconstruct the patriarchal foundations that perpetuate women's status as the Other. However, many of these tools are rooted in the same patriarchal discourse they seek to challenge, ultimately reversing the roles to cast men as the "second sex" or the Other. *The Wanderground* envisions a separatist and ecological world that normalizes women while portraying men in a decadent, artificial, and technologically reliant city. Tepper creates a women-dominated society where women wield the power of selective breeding to create an ideal society devoid of violent men. Griffith's *Ammonite* eliminates sex and gender categories, emphasizing women (or the sole sex) as the norm in a world where only they can thrive. Finally, Alderman reverses roles, recognizing women as the original and powerful sex capable of exerting force and authority. These texts effectively employ variations of established resources to deconstruct sexual Otherness for women. However, these narratives do not completely dismantle the sexual hierarchy discourse but instead subvert it, although their ultimate aim may be to underscore the necessity of providing space for women and advocating for a society that

is not built upon sexual hierarchies, where one sex serves as the oppressor and the other as the oppressed.

This thesis establishes the foundation for future studies on identifying SF resources unique to feminist discourse. The search for these resources goes beyond just female authors, despite what was suggested in this dissertation. Examples of authors and their texts include Theodore Sturgeon's *Venus Plus X* (1960), Samuel R. Delany's *Triton* (1976), and Jeff Vandermeer's *Southern Reach* trilogy (*Annihilation*, *Authority*, and *Acceptance*) (2014.) Although their works do not explicitly support feminist beliefs, they explore inspiring situations that question readers' preconceived notions about social expectations. Moreover, it is crucial to admit that Otherness extends beyond just sex; factors like social class, age, disability, and ethnicity also play a role and were not explicitly discussed in this research. Hence, another path of investigation could explore the study of additional types of Otherness in SF writings, as there is a wide scope of this literature that delves into these interconnected aspects. An excellent example that deals with ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and power relationships is seen in N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth* series, which consists of *The Fifth Season* (2015), *The Obelisk Gate* (2016), and *The Stone Sky* (2017.)

Since this research centered on SF, a genre that is increasing in popularity and creating many audiovisual pieces, it could be interesting to take a comparative approach and explore both written and visual works that address the concept of Otherness in its different manifestations. In works like *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) by Philip K. Dick and its film version *Blade Runner* (1982) directed by Ridley Scott, themes of humanity, identity, and Otherness are explored, particularly in relation to artificial intelligence, androids, and existential conflicts. Another example is Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) transforming from an exceptional piece of

literature to a television show released in 2017, They provide rich material for comparison and exploring how the theme of Otherness is portrayed and understood in various forms of media.

The investigation into women's Otherness extends into different areas within the speculative fiction genre, going beyond SF literature and audiovisual works. A possible area for future study is exploring the concept of women's Otherness through the lens of fantasy, horror, and magical realism. These categories provide distinct structures for analyzing social norms, gender expectations, and the intricacies of women's sense of self. In the genre of fantasy literature, writers frequently craft elaborate fictional universes in which the unique qualities of women are represented through magical powers, legendary beasts, and social customs. Female main characters move through worlds where their identities are influenced by their connections to authority, fate, and the paranormal. This is exemplified in *Beauty* (1991) by Sheri S. Tepper as mentioned before in the dissertation and *Gate of Ivrel* (1976) by C. J. Cherryh. In the latter novel, Morgaine, a fighter and a sorceress, sets out on a mission to seal the portals connecting different realms. She struggles with her sense of responsibility and the outcomes of her choices while navigating a society controlled by male-dominated systems and conflicts for power.

Likewise, in the genre of horror literature, there is a deep exploration of the concept of Otherness concerning women. Female main characters in these stories frequently face social expectations, male-dominated systems, and supernatural dangers which act as both direct and symbolic obstacles. Novels like Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* (1959) and collections of stories like Carmen Maria Machado's *Her Body and Other Parties* (2017) offer chilling perspectives on the complex concept of female Otherness in the horror genre. In Jackson's book, we witness Eleanor Vance joining a

select group of people who are invited to spend the summer at Hill House, a mansion known for its haunting episodes. With Dr. John Montague, a researcher of paranormal occurrences, the team aims to gather proof of the supernatural. Upon their arrival, peculiar events disturb the mood, especially impacting Eleanor. On the other hand, Carmen María Machado's surreal narratives provide a unique viewpoint on the intricacies of women's desires, experiences and identity. Machado's stories mix fantasy, horror, and SF, offering an interesting and contemplative look at women's lives.

Moreover, magical realism combines fantastical elements with ordinary life, creating a rich environment to examine women's Otherness in cultural and historical settings. In magical realist narratives, female main characters could live in a similar context to those in SF with the consequent possibilities for them, although in magical realism, characters deal with both the realm of the real and the realm of the supernatural. Characteristic examples of the genre are Laura Esquivel's book *Like Water for Chocolate* (1992) and Isabel Allende's novel *The House of the Spirits* (1993.) Esquivel's Mexican novel revolves around Tita, a young woman who cannot marry or experience love because of a family tradition that dictates that the youngest daughter cannot get married and has, instead, to take care of her mother until this dies. Tita finds a way to express herself in cooking. Allende's story narrates the story of the Trueba family and how the family is influenced by Chile's political atmosphere during the 20th century. Supernatural elements, like the oneiric sphere and the world of spirits are intertwined with social instability. The genres of horror, fantasy, and magical realism also provide valuable examples that can contribute to the study of women's Otherness, as their realms without the limits of reality, allow women to expand their possibilities and escape sexual hierarchies.

In essence, this thesis acts as a foundation for further investigation of feminist discussions in SF, as well as promoting a broader study of Otherness that takes into account its various intersectional aspects. In addition, the representation of Otherness goes beyond SF into diverse literary genres, providing interesting opportunities for examination from a feminist perspective. Discovering if other genres offer authors the same opportunities as SF to explore women's potential, agency, and opportunities leads to new research paths. This analysis of comparisons not only widens our viewpoint but also deepens our understanding of how sexual relationships are portrayed and managed in various literary settings, and, ultimately, in our society.

5. References

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