

T.C.  
DOKUZ EYLÜL ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ  
BATI DİLLERİ VE EDEBİYATLARI ANABİLİM DALI  
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI PROGRAMI  
YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ

**SUBVERSION OF IDENTITY IN MARGE PIERCY'S  
*SMALL CHANGES* AND  
*WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME***

**Pınar Aytuğ İNAM**

Danışman  
**Yrd. Doç. Dr. Füsun ÇOBAN DÖŞKAYA**

2011

**YÜKSEK LİSANS**  
**TEZ/ PROJE ONAY SAYFASI**

2007800686

**Üniversite** : Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi  
**Enstitü** : Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü  
**Adı ve Soyadı** : Pınar Aytuğ İNAM  
**Tez Başlığı** : Subversion of Identity in Marge Piercy's Small Changes and Women on the Edge of Time  
**Savunma Tarihi** : 12.01.2011  
**Danışmanı** : Yrd.Doç.Dr.Fusun ÇOBAN DÖŞKAYA

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Oybirliği (X)

Oy Çokluğu ( )

Pınar Aytuğ İNAM tarafından hazırlanmış ve sunulmuş "**Subversion of Identity in Marge Piercy's Small Changes and Women on the Edge of Time**" başlıklı Tezi (X) / Projesi ( ) kabul edilmiştir.

Prof.Dr. Utku UTKULU  
Enstitü Müdürü

## Yemin Metni

Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak sunduğum “**SUBVERSION OF IDENTITY IN MARGE PIERCY’S *SMALL CHANGES AND WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME***” adlı çalışmanın, tarafımdan, bilimsel ahlak ve geleneklere aykırı düşecek bir yardıma başvurmaksızın yazıldığını ve yararlandığım eserlerin kaynakçada gösterilenlerden oluştuğunu, bunlara atıf yapılarak yararlanılmış olduğunu belirtir ve bunu onurumla doğrularım.

Tarih

10/01/2011

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## ÖZET

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Marge Piercy'nin *Küçük Değişimler* ve *Zamanın Kıyısındaki Kadın* adlı  
Romanlarında Kimliğin Altüst Edilmesi

Pınar Aytuğ İNAM

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Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı Programı

Toplumsal cinsiyet teorisi, toplumsal cinsiyetin doğal olarak önceden verilmiş bir şey değil, toplum tarafından şekillenmiş bir yapı olduğu üzerinde durur. Toplumsal cinsiyet teorisi “kadın” ve “erkek” kavramlarının heteroseksüel ataerkil sosyal düzene hizmet eden üretimler olduğunu savunur ve bu yapıların, öncelikle “kadın” kavramını feminist çalışmaların öznesi olmaktan çıkararak, yapıbozumcu bir yaklaşımla altüst edilebileceğini öne sürer. Dahası, toplumsal cinsiyet teorisi, cinsiyet rollerini gerçekleştirmede ortaya çıkan başarısızlıkları açığa çıkararak ya da normlara doğal olarak uymayan bireyleri örnek göstererek, heteroseksüel sosyal düzenin bu sahte yapısının altüst edilebileceğini belirtir. Bunun yanı sıra, toplumsal cinsiyet teorisi, cinsiyetin betimleyici değil, performatif bir yapısı olduğunu ortaya koymanın, onun doğal olmadığını kanıtlayacağını ileri sürer.

Bu çalışmada bir sosyal yapı ve performatif davranışlar bütünü olarak toplumsal cinsiyet üzerinde durulmuş, bu toplumsal cinsiyet normlarının ve bu normların gerektirdiği rollerin dayatılmasının, bireylerin “yaşanabilir yaşamlar” sürdürmesine engel teşkil ettiği ortaya konulmuştur. Bireylerin iç dünyaları ve yaşam boyu deneyimlerini detaylı bir biçimde yansıtan ve bu alanda oldukça etkili birer örnek olan Marge Piercy'nin *Small Changes* [*Küçük Değişimler*] ve *Woman on the Edge of Time* [*Zamanın Kıyısındaki Kadın*] adlı romanları örnekleme açısından incelenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Feminizm, Postyapısalcı feminist yaklaşım, Toplumsal cinsiyet, Altüst etme, Marge Piercy.

**ABSTRACT**

**Master Thesis**

**SUBVERSION OF IDENTITY IN MARGE PIERCY'S *SMALL CHANGES*  
AND *WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME***

**Pınar Aytuğ İNAM**

**Dokuz Eylül University**

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**American Culture and Literature Program**

Gender theory puts the value to the claim that gender is a socially-oriented frame rather than a natural given one. Gender theory supports that woman and man are fabrications that serve on behalf of heterosexual patriarchal social order, and suggests that it should be undertaken with a deconstructive approach, by taking the concept of woman from the center of the feminist struggles. Furthermore, gender theory expresses that by revealing failures in actualizing gender roles or by showing individuals that are not convenient according to norms naturally, this artificial structure of heterosexual social order can be subverted. In addition to that, gender theory assumes that revealing that gender has a performative characteristic rather than an expressive form may also reveal its unnaturalness.

In this work, gender as a social construction and as a performative set of acts is discussed and it is made clear that the impositions about gender norms and roles constitute obstacles for individuals to live “livable lives”. Marge Piercy’s novels *Small Changes* and *Woman on the Edge of Time* are analyzed in this context as they are texts about individuals’ insights and life experiences.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Poststructuralist feminist approach, Gender, Subversion, Marge Piercy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Feminist literary criticism acquires different dimensions after 1970s in order to criticize the misogynist stereotypic representations of women in literary works and to contemplate on how women should write to remove false assumptions about themselves. With Simone de Beauvoir in particular, the concept of “women” has lost its significance as the subject matter of feminism; feminists started to deal with the notion that “woman” is a social creation rather than an inevitable reality. Thus, they become aware that struggling for the name of “woman” will help the prevailing social structure to sustain its ground. This judgment has paved the way for gender theory which claims that genders are the fabrications that work for the heterosexual patriarchal hegemonies, for the status quo.

Before gender theory, Shulamith Firestone argues that elimination of sexual polarization is essential for the sake of all individuals, claiming that not only women but also children and men suffer in gender-oriented societies. This notion is close to gender theory’s assumptions. Feminists dealing with gender aim at uncovering the artificiality of genders and the insubstantiality of the gender binarism. Similarly, Firestone states that it is possible that the current social structure can be changed into a sexless society (Firestone, 1970).

Judith Butler, as one of the most prominent feminists studying according to the assumptions of gender theory, states that gender identities that are supposed to be inherent, coherent, and stable can be revealed to be performative acts and utterances, and incoherent and not-perfect embodiments (Butler, 1990). Also as a post-structuralist, Butler makes use of Derrida’s deconstruction theory and suggests that these gender constructions can be subverted, no matter how substantial their ground may seem. To subvert them Butler offers that feminists should expose the failures in performing gender and also uncover the imitative structure of gender.



Unlike separatist feminists, Butler and Firestone adopt supplementary feminist policy, denying “naturalized” polarization, providing opportunity to imponderable gender proliferations. They do not put the value on “woman” solely; the life of every individual is precious for them. What’s more the path to freedom for all identities passes through elimination of gender polarizations, even elimination of the concept of gender totally.

The aim of this work is to assert that genders are social fabrications that may change after it is made clear that they are unstable, fluid and unnatural structures of the hegemonic culture. It will be claimed that revealing the unsteadiness of genders may result in a social transformation. Thus women and all individuals who suffer in the prevailing social order may have more “livable lives”; free from performing genders that are not naturally expression of their essences. The notion that genders are social fabrications that place limits on individuals’ acts and do not allow them to live according to their essence will be proved through an analysis of the gender configurations and accomplishments in Marge Piercy’s novels *Small Changes* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*. To expose the unnaturalness of gender, these novels are appropriate texts since they present examples with regard to gender acquisitions and actualizations, and the existent contradictions between gender-based actions and inner feelings. Exposing failures in gender acquisitions and feelings that contradict with gender norms, Piercy shows that there is another reality hidden behind performances. Through this way, Piercy aims to reveal her notions to the society and make her readers aware that other kinds of lives are possible.

Every chief character in *Small Changes*, for instance, presents an example for the theory that people do not live their essence expressively in prevailing social order, but they try to live in according to the expectations of the society in which they are a part of. Furthermore, they all live inconvenient life styles in some parts of their lives; they deny adopting assigned gender roles. That inconvenient live styles and thoughts of individuals subvert the doctrines the society bears. Also these can be interpreted as alternate realities. And *Woman on the Edge of Time* can be assumed as a kind of declaration of feminist movements’ target. The novel creates a world in

which almost all concerns of feminism comes to an effective solution; there is no gender hierarchy, no death during child birth, no heavy house work responsibilities to women. Also men are not responsible for the outside works alone. People fulfill the needs altogether in a fair order and have the conscious that every individual's life is essential and valuable. With this respect, *Woman on the Edge of Time* is certainly one of the most astonishing works in feminist arena: it displays how a genderless world could exist and marks out for fulfilled lives to people.

In part I of this work, feminism and its evolution process will be observed at length: how woman realized that they are seen as inferior to men and made to believe that they have certain roles to perform in the society and thus they are kept away from their realities, and how “woman” as a subject matter comes into focus. In part II, gender theory will be examined and its assumptions and foundations will be stated, mostly in the light of the doctrines of Judith Butler and Shulamith Firestone who claim that there is a vital need to wipe out sexual discrimination. In part III, an elaborative examination will be carried out to set for the performative presence of genders. This part will consist of character examinations in *Small Changes* in concern with failures in gender role actualizations and interrogations of alternative identity realities and the change it results in the minds of individuals in *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Finally, in the conclusion part, the reality that internalization of genders as the essences of the individuals is hard to achieve will be once more emphasized.

## CHAPTER I

### FEMINISM AND FEMINIST CRITICISM

#### 1.1. FEMINISM

At the core of feminist studies lies a desire to change society: A society which values men and considers women valueless and as invisible beings. Therefore, feminism starts from revealing the existing inequality between men and women, and then heads towards to undermine this unfair social condition.

Biology is at the center of the sexist dichotomy: Sex as a kind of class “sprang directly from a biological reality: men and women were created different, and not equally privileged.” (Firestone, 1970; 8) However, as Shulamith Firestone asserts in her influential work *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), the biological differences between men and women are not the only reasons that resulted in this problematic binary system; it is “the reproductive *functions* of these differences” that helps the system to become firmly established (8). Those reproductive differences regulate and sustain the family, the foundational institution in society. Firestone claims that there are some essential facts about this “biological family”:

1) That women throughout history before the advent of birth control were at the continual mercy of their biology– menstruation, menopause, and “female ills,” constant painful childbirth, wetnursing and care of infants, all of which made them dependent on males (whether brother, father, husband, or clan, government, community-at-large) for physical survival. 2) That human infants takes an even longer time to grow up than animals, and thus are helpless and, for some short period at least, dependant on adults for physical survival. 3) That a basic mother/child interdependency has existed in some form in every society, past or present, and thus has shaped the psychology of every mature female and every infant. 4) That the natural reproductive difference between the sexes led directly to the first division of labor based on sex, which is at the origins of all further division into economic and cultural classes and is possibly even at the root of all caste (Firestone, 1970; 8-9).

The first division of labor occurs within the family, and thus certain sex roles are assigned. The female is charged with the housekeeping chores, childbearing and

childrearing, while the male is supposed to maintain the existence of the family. Kate Millett comments on this division of labor as follows: “The limited role allotted to the female tends to arrest her at the level of biological experience. Therefore, nearly all that can be described as distinctly human rather than animal activity ... is largely reserved for the male” (Millett, 1970; 44)

Each family, regulated by the male members, constitutes the society at large, and the male turns out to be the *maintainer*, the *regulator* of the whole society. Thus, it becomes inevitable for the male half of the society to determinedly preserve this order which exists on behalf of them. Then, patriarchy rules over everywhere.

According to feminists, culture is also dominated by patriarchy. That means the lives of men, the lives of women, the life in the world as a whole is represented by the male point of view. As Joanna Russ conveys, “[b]oth men *and women* in our culture *conceive* the culture from a single point of view—the male” (Russ, 1995; 81). The male reality is assumed as the only Reality; not only by men but by women as well. However, different sex roles assigned to them result in different life experiences, and in the male culture, women’s experience remain misrepresented or unrepresented. As Firestone also indicates,

women have no means of coming to an understanding of what their experience is, or even that is different from male experience. The tool for representing, for objectifying one’s experience in order to deal with it, culture, is so saturated with male bias that women almost never have a chance to see themselves culturally through their own eyes. So that finally, signals from their direct experience that conflict with the prevailing (male) culture are denied and repressed (Firestone, 1970; 178).

In 1963 Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique* in which she claims that women are lost in a false belief system. According to this patriarchal system, women are supposed to find the meaning of their lives within their family; they are expected to identify themselves through their husbands and children. Examining cultural materials like fictions, magazines, manuals, and revealing “how all media collude in stereotyping and conditioning women to accept the restricted roles of homemaker and mother,” Friedan asserts that culture is in the service of the

patriarchy (Humm, 1994; 40). Furthermore, according to Friedan, this system which establishes a false or inadequate reality for women creates a mental suffering. However, unaware of any reality outside the patriarchal system, women cannot portray or define their problem, and to reify “the problem that has no name” Friedan calls it “the feminine mystique.”

Thus, feminists come up with a conclusion that women are *intentionally* “kept from achieving an authentic picture of their reality” (Firestone, 1970; 178). Their essence is lost in the certain norms that are assigned to them at birth and they take what has been taught to them as real. Furthermore, *that Real* make women invisible while highlighting men in the social, economical, and political arena. Heading from this awakening, feminists struggle for revealing the *unrealness of that reality*. It “emphasizes the ways in which social convention has tended to operate on behalf of the dominant group, and norms of femininity have worked in the interests of men.” (Belsey and Moore, 1989; 4).

## **1.2. FEMINIST CRITICISM**

### **1.2.1. Analyzing Patriarchal Literature**

*Once upon a time, and a very sad time it was, though it wasn't in my time, nor in your time, nor in any real time, there was a man who told secrets to other men. And the man was a Critic King and the other men were his vassals. And no woman ever heard the secrets. And no woman ever read the books which the secrets were about. But the king had a daughter. And, one day, the daughter read the books and heard the secrets. And the daughter saw that secrets were not real secrets and the books were not real books. And she was very angry—Maggie Humm*

*[W]e are saying no to a whole series of oppressive ways, images, and falsehoods that have been perpetrated against women both in literature and in literary criticism—Josephine Donovan*

Literature is one of the most powerful and influential domains of culture. As in one of her essays Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes, “[t]he role of the literature in the production of cultural representation should not be ignored” (Donovan, 1989; 175). Literature is the documented shape of the prevailing cultural and social life, and it itself shapes the culture and society it originates in. In that sense, in a patriarchal society, literature turns out to be a patriarchal one as well. In fact, Maggie Humm emphasizes that literature is an “important means of patriarchal power as the family” (Humm, 1994; 33).

Representing the assumptions and behaviors in society that work on behalf of the male, literature creates a concrete social reality which provides patriarchy with keeping both sexes in their places and consolidates it. However, as Schumacher indicates, “[d]ivisions along the lines of masculine and feminine are abstractions applied to life by those who live it, and applied to literature by those who criticize it” (Donovan, 1975; 36). Thus, feminist critics have realized the importance of rejecting such *political* positions existing in literary arena, as Josephine Donovan puts it in her *Feminist Literary Criticism*,

feminists believe that women have been locked off in a condition of lesser reality by the dominant patriarchal attitudes and customs of our culture. We find these attitudes and customs reified in the institutions of literature and literary criticism. Feminist critics –like feminists in every area– are engaged in negating these reifications (Donovan, 1975; 74).

Kate Millett, with her epoch-making *Sexual Politics* (1970), is one of the first feminists who “chose to attack patriarchy through literary criticism” (Humm, 1994; 2). In this study, which “rocketed her to international fame,” Millett interrogates the relationship between the two sexes in a political aspect and comes up with the term that gave the book its name (Stimpson, 1992; 251). For the purpose of verifying her theory that “sex is a status category with political implications,” Millett examines the novels of D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, and Norman Mailer, and shows that approaches adopted in these works are patriarchal, sexist, and even misogynist (Millett, 1970; 48). In the light of the literary analysis of the works of these widely-read authors, Millett reveals that the male dominated literature embodies individuals

with regard to the sexual classes they belong: “aggression, intelligence, force and efficacy in the male; passivity, ignorance, docility, ‘virtue,’ and ineffectuality in the female” (Millett, 1970; 52). Furthermore, according to Millett, these ascribed traits are “based on the needs and the values of the dominant group and dictated by what its members cherish in themselves and find convenient in subordinates” (Millett, 1970; 49). Millett claims that the aim of sexual politics exist in patriarchy is to make women’s *place* –their being regarded as inferior– firmly fixed and thus enable their oppression to be permanent, and literature is one of the most beneficial means to achieve its goal (Millett, 1970; 50).

Two years after the publication of *Sexual Politics*, in her essay “What Can a Heroine Do? or Why Women Can’t Write?” Joanna Russ claims that in the prevailing literature controlled by patriarchal ideologies women have no place both as a heroine and as a productive writer: “Our literature is not about women. It is not about women and men equally. It is by and about men” (Russ, 1995; 81). Russ indicates that although there *are* women in novels, they exist dependent on the male protagonists. She does not occur in the novel on behalf of *herself*, she is there because she is identified by her relation with a *man*. Russ asks the following rhetorical questions: “Our literature is full of women: bad women, good women, motherly women, bitchy women, faithful women, promiscuous women, beautiful women? Plain women? Women who have no relations with men ...?” (Russ, 1995; 81) And her answer is immediate: “Oddly enough, no.” (Russ, 1995; 81) Then, referring to some plot summaries she has presented at the beginning of her essay, she continues: “[Y]ou will find not women but images of women: modest maidens, wicked temptresses, pretty schoolmarms, beautiful bitches, faithful wives, and so on.” (Russ, 1995; 81) For Russ, even those hero-dependant women cannot be said to exist as they are not real representations of women. They are either “depictions of the social roles women are supposed to play and often do play” or “Cloud-cuckooland fantasies” in Russ’s words (Russ, 1995; 81).

In fact, there were women writers who write –free from cultural limitations– their own inner feelings, their own life experiences, their own realities, instead of

writing within the borders assigned to them by patriarchy or being male-minded-female writers. But works of those writers were either harshly criticized and then ostracized or totally ignored. One of those novels that were brought into light during the second-wave feminism from the corners they had been thrown away was *The Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin. The novel tells the story of Edna Pontellier who refuses to pay attention to the social rules she is supposed to obey as a wife and mother. Moreover, Edna is a woman who is totally *aware* of her sexuality and is not just satisfied with the existence of her husband and her children. Edna is open to the life outside her family. Therefore, in male-directed culture in which women are supposed to be grateful to their husbands and devoted to their family, the fate of *The Awakening* is not surprising. As Sandra M. Gilbert writes in her introduction to *The Awakening and Selected Stories* (1984):

[R]eviewers of *The Awakening* made it very clear that they did not consider Kate Chopin's masterwork "an excellent story," that they felt no compassion for "the torment" of Edna Pontellier, and that, in deed, they intended neither to "listen" nor "sigh." The novel "leaves one sick of human nature," complained one critic; "it is nor a healthy book," declared another; "the purport of the story can hardly be described in language fit for publication," asserted a third. Even a sister novelist like Willa Cather, who admired Chopin's art and who was eventually to produce her own tales of lost ladies, deplored the fact that the author had "devoted so exquisite and sensitive ... a style to so trite and sordid a theme." Within a few more months, the libraries of St. Louis, Chopin's native city, had banned the book; Chopin was shunned by a number of acquaintances; and, according to her biographer Per Seyersted, she was refused membership in the St. Louis Fine Arts Club (Gilbert, 1984; 8-9).

Literature is used to sustain the patriarchal order, the order, and to present role models for women and keep them in their "inferior" places. Naturally, a book like *The Awakening* was a threat: its publication might cause the "corruption" of the "healthy" society. Therefore writers of such immoral books had to be discouraged. And writers whose aim is to make women aware of the false ideologies imposed this on them through literature: Seventy years after the case of *The Awakening*, Kate Millett lost her job at the English Department at Barnard just before the publication of *Sexual Politics* (Stimpson, 1992; 254).



In an essay edited in *The Feminist Reader* (1989), an anthology, Dale Spender claims that literature has been “institutionalised” in favor of men since the eighteenth century (Belsey and Moore, 1989; 28). She begins her essay, addressing her literary education:

[M]y introduction to the ‘greats’ was (with the exception of the famous five women novelists) an introduction to the great men. ... There was no reason for me to be suspicious about what I was being taught. I was a student in a reputable university being tutored by experts who referred me to the literary scholars who, without qualification, asserted the ascendancy of men (Belsey and Moore, 1989; 21).

Later in the essay Spender explains that she found out that what those *experts* were teaching was not right at all. Contrary to their assertions that Jane Austen was the “starting point” in women’s literary history and that she was one of the very few women writers, there *were* “a whole gallery of women: women from different backgrounds, different regions, and with different concerns, who all published well-acclaimed novels by the end of the 1700s” (Belsey and Moore, 1989; 22-23). Spender states that these women novelists had about six hundred novels one hundred of which were really good but they did not have their place in contemporary literary arena (Belsey and Moore, 1989; 24). Furthermore, according to these observations, Spender passes a judgment on the situation as following:

[W]hen the pronouncements of literary establishment are perused for the case against the worth of these women writers, a curious omission comes to light. *There is no case against them.* If these many novels have been evaluated, the findings are not contained in the official literary records. And when the worth of women writers is not being based on any consideration of their writing the only conclusion which can be drawn is that their worth is being determined by their sex (Belsey and Moore, 1989; 25).

According to feminist critics women were denied writing by the opposite sex in various ways but for just one common purpose: to conserve men’s superior position in every area of life and to continue to make use of women by pressing them close through the assumptions imposed by literature. And it worked: women were oppressed for a very long time, they could not find access to their realities, even they were not able to know that their reality was different than they were told. As

Showalter also writes, “[w]omen are estranged from their own experience and unable to perceive its shape and authenticity, in part because they do not see it mirrored and given resonance by literature. Instead they are expected to identify as readers with a masculine experience and perspective, which is presented as the human one” (qtd. in Donovan, 1975; 15).

By exposing the prevailing sexual policy imposed on women in literature feminists took the first step; they “had dwelled long enough on the evils of our low status, lack of prestige, exploitation, and self-abasement,” to realize “the need for female readers to see their own experiences mirrored in literature” (Donovan, 1975; 34-15). As Marcia Holly stated, “[l]iterature has a most immediate impact on us ... impact not to continue to collude in society’s oppression of women” (Donovan, 1975; 45-46). Thus, second step in literary criticism came into play.

### **1.2.2. Women’s Writing**

*So she talked to other women. Through nights and days and dreams and waking the women talked together. And the king and his vassals grew old and died. The women looked at each other’s golden faces and heard each other’s golden voices– Maggie Humm*

*If the canon is an attempt to shore up the status quo, if the masterpieces don’t mean what they pretend to mean, then artists must throw away the rules altogether in favor of something else– Joanna Russ*

Feminist criticism, according to Catharine Stimpson, has three sections which, inherently, “have supplemented, corrected, and overlapped with each other”: “the defiance of sexual difference, the celebration of sexual difference” and one more which will be referred in the next title (Greenblatt and Gunn, 1992; 259, 251). In the defiance of sexual difference, which is explained briefly in previous title, feminist critics reject the assigned values to women claiming them wrong. Likewise, they assert that women’s reality is different than the “reality” represented in and *imposed*

*through* literature, and furthermore they declare that literary canon exists on behalf of patriarchy that means on behalf of men. However, after such a challenge it is necessary to show “the truth” which the male literature has failed to represent and render that truth of woman’s identity worthy and unique. And, thus, the second section emerges: the celebration of sexual difference.

In the well-known and accomplished essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” (1975), Hélène Cixous encourages women to write themselves for themselves, inviting women to writing at the very beginning of her essay:

Women must write herself: 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. Women must put herself into the text –as into the world and into history– by her own movement (Warhol and Herndl, 1991; 334).

Later in the essay Cixous puts the main reason like this:

I have been amazed more than once by a description a woman gave me of a world all her own which she had been *secretly* haunting since early childhood. ... I wished that that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire *so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow; my desire have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs. Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst– burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune. And I, too, said nothing, showed nothing; I didn’t open my mouth, I didn’t repaint my half of the world. I was ashamed. I was afraid, and I swallowed my shame and fear. I said to myself: You are mad! What’s the meaning of these waves, these floods, these outbursts? Where is the ebullient, infinite women who, immersed as she was in her naiveté, kept in the dark about herself, led into self-disdain by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallocentrism, hasn’t been ashamed of her strength? Who, surprised and horrified by the fantastic tumult of her drives (for she was made to believe that a well-adjusted normal woman has a ... divine composure), hasn’t accused herself of being a monster? Who, feeling a funny desire stirring inside her (to sing, to write, to dare to speak, in short, to bring out something new), hasn’t thought she was sick? Well, her shameful sickness is that she resists death, she makes trouble (emphasis mine. Warhol and Herndl, 1991; 334-335).*

As for Cixous, women must write their experiences, their feelings, and whatever happens to them so that the other woman could read and learn that she is not the only one who has experiences beyond the spoken, beyond the ones that were taught her from the male perspective. Cixous claims that while there are only a few women who depict femininity in their writings, the majority of the women write from the male point of view which “obscures women or reproduces the classic representations of women”(Warhol and Herndl, 1991; 336). Thus she asserts that women must “liberate the New Woman from the Old by coming to know her—by loving her for getting by, for getting beyond the Old without delay, by going out ahead of what the New Woman will be ... in order to be more than her self” (Warhol and Herndl, 1991; 336).

As “writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures,” Cixous writes, challenging the “marked writing” of phallogocentric economy, which privileges the male, and adopting a new kind of feminine writing, which Cixous herself names “*écriture féminine*,” women will have access to their reality repressed in the unconscious and be able to present this *enlightenment* to others in order to undermine the prevailing status quo (Warhol and Herndl, 1991; 337). In other words, this act of writing is also a kind of gun to be used in the battle of sexes:

An act which will not only “realize” the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal; it will tear her away from the superegoized structure in which she has always occupied the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything, guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being “too hot”; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and not for having any; for nursing and for not nursing...)—tear her away by means of this research, this job of analysis and illumination, this emancipation of the marvelous text of her self that she must urgently learn to speak. A woman without a body, dumb, blind, can’t possibly be a good fighter. She is reduced to being a servant of the militant male, his shadow. We must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing. Inscribe the breath of the whole woman.

An act that will also be marked by woman's *seizing* the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based *on her suppression*. To write and thus forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become *at will* the taker and initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process (Warhol and Herndl, 1991; 338).

Cixous settles in her essay that language and grammar, also mastered by patriarchy, are to be challenged and manipulated, too. Women have to create a new language. Otherwise, woman as “a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very sounds” is always in threat “within the discourse of man” as Cixous warns passionately:

Beware, my friend, of the signifier that would take you back to the authority of a signified! Beware of diagnosis that would reduce your generative powers. ‘Common’ nouns are also proper nouns that disparage your singularity by classifying it into species. Break out of the circles; don’t remain within the psychoanalytic closure. Take a look around, then cut through! (Warhol and Herndl, 1991; 343, 347-348)

Luce Irigaray’s views are similar to Cixous in that they both claim that women must adopt a different language. To reach their authenticity and to break the oppressive bonds of phallogocentric Western culture women must reveal their hidden desires, write them in their own words, realizing that women “have been caught up in a world structured by man-centered concepts, have no way of knowing or representing themselves” within it (Warhol and Herndl, 1991; 359). Relating to this, in her work *This Sex Which Is Not One* (1977) Irigaray writes,

The rejection, the exclusion of a female imaginary certainly puts woman in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology, as waste, or excess, what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) ‘subject’ to reflect himself, to copy himself. Moreover, the role of ‘femininity’ is prescribed by this masculine specula(riza)tion and corresponds scarcely at all to woman’s desire, which may be recovered only in secret, in hiding, with anxiety and guilt (Warhol and Herndl, 1991; 354).

Just as Cixous says “[y]our body must be heard” Irigaray calls women to write their sexuality (Warhol and Herndl, 1991; 338). She claims that woman’s

liberation lies within her body; as for her, “women must recognize and assert their *joissance* if they are to subvert phallogentric oppression at its deepest levels” (Warhol and Herndl, 1991; 360). Therefore, writing their bodily experiences and desires is necessary, and writing them in a separate new discourse is far more necessary:

If we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language it will have too few gestures to accompany our story ... Be what you are becoming, without clinging to what you might have been, what you might be. Never settle. Let's leave definitiveness to the undecided; we don't need it. Our body, right here, right now, gives us a very different certainty (qtd. in Humm, 1994; 105).

However, according to the introduction to *The Feminist Reader*, these feminists have different views about the limits of the women's writing. While Irigaray's “womenspeak” is rendered as a “female language” and can be written only by women, Cixous's *écriture féminine* is defined as a “feminine discourse” that enables both men and women to write it: “Cixous is less inclined than Irigaray to ground language in an essential sexuality, although her claim that under patriarchy women have a more immediate relation to *écriture féminine* than men leads her ultimately towards essentialism” (Belsey and Moore, 1989; 14).

Contrary to Cixous or Irigaray, Elaine Showalter sees no urgent necessity to write in a different language. However, she agrees upon that women must write about women; “even if they continue to do so from within a patriarchal culture” (Belsey and Moore, 1989; 7). Sharing the same views with other feminist critics that analyzed dominant literature, Showalter also claims that women's writing is suppressed in the patriarchal culture. According to her, women's writing exists within a kind of “subculture” and like all subcultures feminist writing passes through three phases. In *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), regarded as one of “the most influential of the accounts of women's writing in its difference from men's,” she explains these phases as following (Belsey and Moore, 1989; 7):

First, there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalization* of its standards of art and its views on

social roles. Second, there is a phase of the protest against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally, there is a phase of *self-discovery*, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. An appropriate terminology for women writers is to call these stages, *Feminine*, *Feminist*, and *Female* (Showalter, 1999; 12).

However, later on, those separatist views began to leave their places to something new. Showalter, for instance, changed her essentialist stance claiming that gynocriticism stage was over and it was time to deal with gender binarism and sexual difference in works of both men and women. Her *Speaking of Gender* (1989), as for Humm, reveals the shift in her studies (Humm, 1994; 20).

Additionally, there was diffusion in feminist literary arena. There were women from different ethnic groups who claimed that their realities were not only different than men but also different than white women as well. There were women who were lesbians and who stated that their realities were far more different than other women. And “the more we multiply the number of ‘women’s differences,’ the more we fragment the category of women and the less universal ‘a woman’s voice’ becomes. The more particular a ‘woman’s voice’ becomes, the more numerous the differences become—not only between men and women but among women” (Greenblatt and Gunn, 1992; 262). And, as a result, they all come up with new different feminist literary approaches. Furthermore, the only literary approach that serves all of these existing differences was the poststructuralist stance. It was inevitable for feminism, with a history that bears Simone de Beauvoir who already said “one *becomes* a woman,” to welcome the declaration of poststructuralism: there is no fixed essential truth, it is all about the logocentric tendency.

### **1.2.3. Poststructuralist Feminist Criticism**

“The recognition of differences” is the third section of feminist criticism according to Catharine Stimpson: “a movement into pluralism” (Greenblatt and Gunn, 1992; 251). Feminists trying to prove a unique woman identity see that there was no *natural* unity. Women are united by “their roles as daughters, wives, and

mothers” or they were united “around a political cause” and such unities, as Showalter writes, are “the implied unities of culture” (Warhol and Herndl, 1991; 275). A woman becomes a member of “women” by cultural impositions and men suppress women with the help of cultural assumptions and that also means that a man becomes a man by cultural impositions, too. Furthermore, no matter how pleasant or dreadful the life one has, those experiences are not the inherent results of one’s existence. Nellie Y. McKay puts it like this: “We, women and men of our time, have come out of a history which has separated us for hundreds of years, in the many different situations of our lives, and has left us with the difficult task of attempting to locate our common center amidst confusions of hierarchies and multiple oppressions” (qtd. in Greenblatt and Gunn, 1992; 263).

There is a construction of social reality –which is mostly on behalf of men– with the help of phallogocentric discourse, and feminists consider it necessary to subvert that social structure. At this point, the ways of feminism and poststructuralism intersect in that they both reject the social order in which some certain groups are regarded as “Other” (Humm, 1994; 137). Also, they both aim to “attack on universal values” and “desire to explore multiple kinds of discourse” (Humm, 1994; 135)

Universality of values enables the values themselves to be assumed as natural. And people are classified according to that natural values and those classes become the facts of human beings. However, poststructuralists reject those imposed “facts” and claim that it is the result of the phallogocentric institutions. As, distinguishing facts into two as brute facts and institutional facts, J. R. Searle also writes “[i]nstitutional facts ... require special human institutions for their very existence. Language is one such institution; indeed, it is a whole set of such institutions” (Searle; 1995, 27). Therefore if phallogocentric discourse is undermined, then those created facts will be refuted, too.

In poststructuralist feminist criticism, critics aim at clearing away the misogynistic assumptions and representations of women in literary works. For this



reason, they attack the belief that there are inherent femininity and masculinity. These poststructuralist approaches bring with them gender theory: the claim that, different than sex, gender is a socially constructed structure and it works on behalf of the male.

## CHAPTER II

### GENDER THEORY

*Before being seen that way, they first had to be made that way—  
Monique Wittig*

*Feminism is about the social transformation of gender relations—  
Judith Butler*

Though gender theory comes on the scene after 1980s, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), one of the first major work of feminism, lays the foundation of this theory. Beauvoir's assertion that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" divides gender and sex qualifying sex as a biological fact and gender as a compulsory identification, a construction (de Beauvoir; 1973, 301). In the light of Beauvoir's work and poststructuralism's doctrines, feminists realized the need of abandoning the assumptions about essential gender realities. The ground of oppression of women was those gender attributes that were imposed on human beings by predicating them on biological differences.

The most striking argument on gender shows itself in Judith Butler's canonical work *Gender Trouble* (1990). Butler begins her book by questioning the category of "women" as the subject of feminism and she claims that the adoption of "women" as the subject of feminism is problematic. As for Butler, believing that "women" is a group of natural beings who have common interests and attempting to reach freedom on behalf of that "women" means accepting the norms imposed by the heterosexual regime and, in this way, serving heterosexual regime itself:

Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms—that is, through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control and even "protection" of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice. But the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures. If this

analysis is right, then the juridical formation of language and politics that represents women as “the subject” of feminism is itself a discursive formation and effect of a given version of representational politics. And the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation. This becomes politically problematic if that system can be shown to produce gendered subjects along a differential axis of domination or to produce subjects who are presumed to be masculine. In such cases, an uncritical appeal to such system for the emancipation of “women” will be clearly self-defeating (Butler, 1990; 2).

In that sense it becomes insufficient to search for ways of representation of women in language or, generally, in life. In addition to that, as Butler suggests, feminists should examine how this category of women “is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought” (Butler, 1990; 2). What’s more, the justifications Butler puts forth to explain that the category of women is a production of the power that values heterosexual order and assuming “women” as the subject of feminism will be autodestruction for feminism paves the way for her following claim: “there may not be a subject who stands ‘before’ the law, awaiting representation in or by the law” (Butler, 1990; 2).

In the first place, Butler asserts, if there was a subject and if the subject of feminism was “women,” then there had to be a unity, a common identity among the members of “women.” However, due to several factors commingled there is not the required unity for the subject to be valid. Butler explains it as following:

If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out “gender” from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained (Butler, 1990; 3).

In a similar vein, Monique Wittig states in her acclaimed essay “One Is Not Born a Woman” (1981) that there are lesbians who believe in the notion that there is a natural difference between women and men in spite of the fact that this notion is in contradiction with “practical facts” about lesbians and their “ways of living” (104).

Furthermore, she writes, regarding this notion of division as the truth, “we naturalize history, we assume that ‘men’ and ‘women’ have always existed and will always exist. Not only do we naturalize history, but also consequently we naturalize the social phenomena which express our oppression, *making change impossible*” (emphasis mine. Abelove, 1993; 104).

According to these accounts, the subject of women fails to be assumed as fixed and perpetual, and therefore Butler sees a need for a new kind of feminist politics “to contest the very reifications of gender and identity, one that will take the variable construction of identity as both a methodological and normative prerequisite” (Butler, 1990; 5).

## **2.1. SEX AND GENDER**

As Rosalind C. Morris also writes in her essay, “[t]he categories of sex and gender have fallen under the shadow of radical doubt and become the objects of an effort to retheorize the very nature of social subjectivity” (Morris, 1995; 568). The reason of appealing to sex/gender division is to reveal the difference between female/male distinction and woman/man distinction. First one is the sex distinction which is derived from the biological facts. However, the latter is a gender distinction and it is a cultural production as “man” and “woman” themselves are cultural constructs. Butler says some feminists adopted this stance from Levi-Strauss who asserts “there is a natural or biological female who is subsequently transformed into a socially subordinate ‘woman,’ with the consequence that ‘sex’ is to nature or ‘the raw’ as gender is to culture or ‘the cooked’ ” (Butler, 1990; 37). Genders are, Wittig says, “political categories and not natural givens” (Wittig; 105). Similarly, on the concept of “woman,” Beauvoir says “[n]o biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (de Beauvoir, 1952; 249). And giving consideration to these assumptions, Butler comes to the conclusion that there is no continuity between

sexes and genders: “If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way” (Butler, 1990; 6).

On the grounds of this opinion Butler puts forward that it is not necessary for genders to preserve their dualism since it is not based on a fixed morphological and inherent binary as sexes. That is to say, since gender is a social structure and has no natural ties with sex, then gender becomes a “free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one” (Butler, 1990; 6). Additionally Butler goes further to question character of sex and asserts that if this fixed dualism of sex is proved to be wrong, then it can be revealed that the distinction that is said to exist between sex and gender does not exist at all. Right after this assertion Butler writes:

It would make no sense, then, to define gender as the cultural interpretation of sex, if sex itself is a gendered category. Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which “sexed nature” or “a natural sex” is produced and established as “pre-discursive,” prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts (Butler; 1990, 7).

Like Butler, Sedgwick also observes the problem about sex and gender differentiation. She bases this problem on haphazard usages of terms sex, gender, and sexuality. Therefore Sedgwick creates the term “chromosomal sex” which means “a certain group of irreducible, biological differentiations between members of the species *Homo sapiens* who have XX chromosomes and those who have XY chromosomes” (Greenblatt and Gunn, 1992; 273). As for Sedgwick “sex” alone, certainly unrelated with sex/gender distinction, means “sexuality”: “the array of acts, expectations, narratives, pleasures, identity formations, and knowledges, in both women and men, that tends to cluster most densely around certain genital sensations *but is not adequately defined by them*” (emphasis mine. Greenblatt and Gunn, 1992; 274-275). Finally, Sedgwick describes “gender” as

fully and rigidly dichotomized social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviors –of male and female persons– in a cultural system for which ‘male-female’ functions as a primary and perhaps model binarism affecting the structure and meaning of many other binarisms whose apparent connection to chromosomal sex may often be exiguous or nonexistent (Greenblatt and Gunn, 1992; 273).

However, Butler rejects the notion of a fixed chromosomal sex, too: “[S]ex, as a category that comprises a variety of elements, functions, and chromosomal and hormonal dimensions, no longer operates within the binary framework that we take for granted” (Butler, 1990; 109-110). Furthermore, she justifies her claim with a quotation from Anne Fausto-Sterling’s article “Life in the XY Corral”:

the four XX males whom they studied were all sterile (no sperm production), had small testes which totally lacked germ cells, i.e., precursor cells for sperms. They also had high hormone levels and low testosterone levels. Presumably they were classified as males because of their external genitalia and the presence of testes... Similarly ... both of the XY females’ external genitalia were normal, [but] their ovaries lacked germ cells (qtd. in Butler; 1990; 108).

Butler writes that trying to identify a person’s “sex” or “gender” recouring to gene researches refute the notion that the external genitalia can reveal one’s sex and therefore gender: “if external genitalia were sufficient as a criterion by which to determine or assign sex, then the experimental research into the master gene would hardly necessary at all” (Butler, 1990; 108).

As a result, Butler claims that “sex was always already gender,” and gender is used to settle the “naturalness” of sex (Butler, 1990; 7). Both sex and gender are social constructs and they are products of “certain highly regulated practices” (Butler, 1993; 1).

## **2.2. GENDER REGULATIONS**

That gender is not fixed and is not free-floating, either, brings Butler to the conclusion that gender is not a concrete reality but a structure, “a form of social

power” (Butler, 2004; 48). Gender is a “norm,” says Butler, not a kind of “model that individuals seek to approximate” (Butler, 2004; 48). Gender is used as a means to create “intelligibility” zone on behalf of human beings: “persons are regulated by gender, and ... this sort of regulation operates as a condition of cultural intelligibility for any person” (Butler, 2004; 52). Creating that intelligibility zone gender serves the reproductive and heterosexual aims of patriarchal society: “The desire to determine sex once and for all, and to determine it as one sex rather than the other, thus seems to issue from the social organization of sexual reproduction through construction of the clear and unequivocal identities and positions of sexed bodies with respect to each other” (Butler, 1990; 110). To “heterosexualize” desire, for the sake of reproductive biological family, gender binarism is needed to be constructed and sustained. That means certain sexes come to existence “through the regulatory practices that generate coherent identities through the matrix of coherent gender norms” (Butler, 1990; 17).

Gender –as a means of heterosexual reproductive hegemony– itself is determined by a set of sanctions and taboos that work as “the ego ideal” within the patriarchal society. Butler writes:

[b]ecause identifications substitute for object relations, and identifications are the consequence of loss, gender identification is a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition. This prohibition sanctions and regulates discrete gendered identity and the law of the heterosexual desire (Butler, 1990; 63).

Among those sanctions and taboos, the most important beings are the taboo against incest and the taboo against homosexuality. These taboos canalize gender acquisition and preserve the family unit, thus this also preserves the patriarchal social order:

This process of internalizing lost loves becomes pertinent to gender formation when we realize that incest taboo, among other functions, initiates a loss of a love-object for the ego and that this ego recuperates from this loss through the internalization of the tabooed object of desire. In the case of a prohibited heterosexual union, it is the object which is denied, but not the modality of desire, so that the desire is deflected from that object onto other objects of the

opposite sex. But in the case of a prohibited homosexual union, it is clear that both the desire and the object require renunciation and so become subject to the internalizing strategies of melancholia. Hence, “the young boy deals with his father by identifying himself with him.” (Butler, 1990; 57-58)

As explained in the quote above, these sexual prohibitions result in dispositions which, Butler says, Freud assumes as natural, but she herself does not: “Far from foundational, these dispositions are the result of a process whose aim is to disguise its own genealogy. In other words, ‘dispositions’ are traces of a history of enforced sexual prohibitions which is untold and which the prohibitions seek to render untellable” (Butler, 1990; 64).

Deriving their very origin from these prohibitions, there are only two gender identities being woman and man, and any “identity” apart from these genders are not acceptable. As Butler indicates it, “[t]he cultural matrix through which gender identity has become intelligible requires that certain kinds of ‘identities’ cannot ‘exist’— that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not ‘follow’ from either sex or gender” (Butler, 1990; 17).

When Butler states that some kinds of identities are not allowed to live their lives, it is evident that she claims, in the heterosexual regime, they are not just the members of “the category of women” who suffer. While “woman constructs” suffer within the patriarchal society, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transsexuals etc. are rendered totally invisible at the very beginning and excluded from society. At this very point, bell hooks’s claim “feminism is for everybody” reaches significance, and the need to reveal that genders are unnatural constructs of patriarchal society and that the borders that two genders help to establish cost some lives to become painfully and sorrowfully unlivable becomes vital.

### **2.2.1. Gender Norms and Gender Roles**

Acquiring a gender within the contemporary patriarchal world involves a set of identifying norms and roles which “are and are not realizable” (Butler, 1993; 126). When a baby is born, its gender is already determined: that is if it has a penis, then it



is a boy, a male; if it has *no penis*, then the baby is a girl, a female. In “Doing Gender” West and Zimmerman put this as following; “[w]e do not think, ‘Most persons with penises are men, but some may not be’ or ‘Most persons who dress as men have penises.’ Rather, we take it for granted that sex and sex category are congruent-that knowing the latter, we can deduce the rest” (West and Zimmerman, 1987; 132). Thus, from the start it is already settled whether the baby will be raised according to feminine or masculine traits. Baby boy is raised up to be a strong man who will be a breadwinner husband first of all. Similarly, a girl learns that she is supposed to be a faithful wife and a self-sacrificing mother and housekeeper.

What’s more, although “genitalia are conventionally hidden from public inspection in everyday life” people “continue through our social rounds to ‘observe’ a world of two naturally, normally sexed persons. It is the *presumption* that essential criteria exist and would or should be there if looked for that provides the basis for sex categorization” (West and Zimmerman, 1987; 132) Drawing on Kessler and McKenna’s example of a child “who, viewing a picture of someone clad in a suit and a tie, contents, ‘It’s a man, because he has a pee-pee’ ” West and Zimmerman write:

Translation: “He must have a pee-pee [an essential characteristic] because I see the insignia of a suit and tie.” Neither initial sex assignment (pronouncement at birth as a female or male) nor the actual existence of essential criteria for that assignment (possession of a clitoris and vagina or penis and testicles) has much -if anything- to do with the identification of sex category in everyday life (West and Zimmerman, 1987; 132).

Therefore it is understood that there are other necessities to fulfill to be regarded as a woman or a man. For instance, women are expected to have long hair, wear make-ups, wear skirts, colorful t-shirts etc., and be slightly built, while men are supposed to be big-bodied, have moustache and beard, and short hair, wear trousers and ties. In addition to such traits women are expected to have a natural maternal instinct as well. With regard to sexuality, to identify as a woman one must desire a man, and to identify as a man one must desire a woman: “Gender is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that sexual desire be directed toward the

other sex.” (qtd. in Butler, 1990; 73) No other kinds of desires are acceptable than heterosexual desire.

These are the main features and assigned roles of “agreed-upon identities” (Butler, 1990; 15). Thus, an individual who is not able to be put into one of the two categories of male and female (because of the inadequacy in identifying the individual according to *its* physical features among which genital organs are the most significant one), or who fails to fulfill certain sexual and social gender roles is not regarded as human. In other words, to be regarded as human one must have a gender, and to have a gender one must have one of the two genital organs. As a result, it can be inferred that “the norms that govern idealized human anatomy thus work to produce a differential sense of who is human and who is not, which lives are livable, and which are not” (Butler, 2004; 4).

### **2.2.2. Normalization**

When it is taken into account that gender is a norm, then exposing a “problematic” human being that cannot be defined with existing pair of genders to some “normalization” processes becomes inevitable. Thus, it can be said that gender as a norm not only “refers to the aims and aspirations that guide us, the precepts by which we are compelled to act or speak to one another, the commonly held presuppositions by which we are oriented, and which give direction to our actions” but it also “refers to the process of normalization, the way that certain norms, ideas and ideals hold sway over embodied life, provide coercive criteria for normal ‘men’ and ‘women.’ ” (Butler, 2004; 206)

For instance, as Butler explains, an intersexed child is subjected to a surgical operation which is assumed as “correction” (Butler, 2004; 53). The reason set for the operation is that “children born with irregular primary sexual characteristics are to be ‘corrected’ in order to fit in, feel more comfortable, achieve normality” (Butler, 2004; 53). Beings like the intersexed child are regarded as “developmental failures and logical impossibilities” and they are not assumed suitable for the society since

one cannot define them as a woman or a man (Butler, 1990; 17) So, after the operation, the intersexed being obtains one of the two acceptable sexes within heterosexual matrix (female or male), and also meanwhile obtains a gender identity derived from his/her sex, and *becomes* a part of the society, and *his/her life also becomes valuable*.

Similarly, there is the gender identity disorder diagnosis. According to the diagnosis, boys with feminine traits or girls with masculine traits are “in some way ... ill, sick, wrong, out of order, abnormal” (Butler, 2004; 73). That means when people who have “no problem anatomically” behave in a way that does not fit in their gender roles and norms, they are pathologized. Or, people who want to undergo a surgery and become the other sex are exposed to psychological and physical examination and after the “diagnosis” they can undergo the surgery.

However, Butler makes a point of the fact that other surgery demands like breast reduction or menopausal ingestion of estrogen do not require the proof of stable mental health (Butler, 2004; 83). The reason is that such demands serve for the consolidation of gender norms, thus for heterosexual matrix.

### **2.2.3. Abjection and Exclusion**

In the face of all that regulations and normalization applications, “beings” that do not *fit in* appear. The reason is, as Butler again and again states in her works, that those gender identities “can never be fully internalized” because they are not innate features of human, and rather they are the unnatural enforcements of culture (Butler, 1990; 141). However, those who do not achieve to fulfill –or who do not want to fulfill– the needs of being man or woman are qualified as “queer” even more harshly as “perverse” by the society. They are *abjected* because they are “what disturbs identity, system, order,” they are “what does not respect borders, positions, rules,” they are “the in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (Kristeva, 1982; 4). Furthermore, Butler says, “the production of the *unsymbolizable*, the *unspeakable*, the *illegible* is also always a strategy of a social abjection” (Butler, 1993; 190).

Moreover, these “beings” are not regarded as human; they do not exist in society’s lexicon and they do not have human rights as a result. They are totally drawn out from society and become nothing. “[W]hen we defy these norms,” writes Butler, “it is unclear whether we are still living, or ought to be, whether our lives are valuable, or can be made to be, whether our genders are real, or even can be regarded as such” (Butler, 2004; 206).

This kind of abjection and exclusion is necessary for the society to preserve its order for these “abnormal beings” generate a threat. Butler explains it as following:

Only from a self-consciously denaturalized position can we see how the appearance of naturalness is itself constituted. The presuppositions that we make about sexed bodies, about them being one or the other, about the meanings that are said to inhere in them or to follow from being sexed in such a way are suddenly and significantly upset by those examples that fail to comply with the categories that naturalize and stabilize that field of bodies for us within the terms of cultural conventions. Hence, the strange, the incoherent, that which falls “outside,” gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of sexual categorization as a constructed one, indeed, as one that might well be constructed differently (Butler, 1990; 110)

In other words, “keeping things out of view ... is taken by Butler as a form of social regulation and control. It is a form of regulation in the same way that “out of sight, out of mind” forecloses the possibility of resistance and disputation” (Digeser, 1994; 658).

### **2.3. GENDER PERFORMATIVITY**

For an idealized heterosexuality, certain discrete gender identities are produced with the help of taboos and sanctions. And these gender identity’s stability and naturalness are constantly sustained by gender attributes themselves and by naturalization processes and exclusion policy. Further, these genders’ sexualities are regulated by these very prohibitions and notions of normality and naturalness for the sake of reproductive aims of heterosexual culture. Butler, who asserts that this heterosexual order is “a fiction”, writes:

the construction of gender coherence conceals the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual, and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender –indeed, where none of these dimensions significant corporeality express or reflect one another (Butler, 1990; 135-136).

That is to say, constructed gender identities do not allow other possibilities to come to the surface. For instance, if one's sex is male, in more accurate words, if one's assigned sex is male, then *he* has to feel and behave like a man whether *he* feels like a man or not. Unless one does it, one becomes no body as Butler indicates “[d]iscrete genders are part of what ‘humanizes’ individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right” (Butler, 1990; 139-140).

“To do gender” means *to act* according to certain gender attributes. Butler, after all the assumptions above, comes to the conclusion that gender practices are “not expressive but performative” as they are done with respect to the expectations of the patriarchal heterosexual society (Butler, 1990; 141). Just this reality is hidden so well that those two existing genders and the attributes identified with them are supposed to be innate, natural, and preexist. In Butler's words:

[A]cts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. ... [A]cts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality (Butler, 1990; 136).

Gender performativity is not a “free play” that one does on his/her own will, it is not “self-representation” either (Butler, 1993; 95). When a baby is born the society identifies it as a boy or a girl and then he/she is supposed to act according to this gender norm. Thus, inevitably, performing gender is what individuals do to have a place within community, to be a “one” without any questioning of internalization. Butler explains it as follows:

To the extent that naming of the “girl” is transitive, that is, initiates the process by which a certain “girling” is compelled, the term or, rather, its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm. This is a “girl,” however, who is compelled to “cite” the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject. Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment. Indeed, there is no “one” who takes on a gender norm. On the contrary, this citation of the gender norm is necessary in order to qualify as a “one,” to become viable as a “one,” where subject-formation is dependent on the prior operation of legitimating gender norms (Butler, 1993; 232).

That’s why there occur concepts as “real woman,” “real man” or “natural sex” (Butler, 1990; 140). The impositions such as being “a man” or “a woman” or having “normal heterosexual sex” are hard to totally incorporate as they are not what individuals feel, desire, want or act like intrinsically. They are not internalized self-representing actions either; they are the imitations and repetitions of the actions of other members of the society. They are what society wants them to do, and this ends up with failures.

The injunction *to be* a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated. Further, the very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum, to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a variety of different demands all at once. ... There is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains “integrity” prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very “taking up” is enabled by the tool lying there (Butler, 1990; 145).

### **2.3.1. Reiteration**

When gender is understood as a socially constructed structure and not a reality, a natural given, then its permanency bears suspicion. As Butler states, the concept of gender is up to be understood as a “constituted *social temporality*” (Butler, 1990; 141). However, its temporariness is hidden behind compelled, imposed repetitions of gender norms. And that these certain gender attributes are repeated to protect and sustain the status quo once again sets forth that gender is performative and that gendered subjects act under certain assigned features, rather than under their inner feelings or desires.

Butler denotes gender performativity as “a public action,” “a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism” (Butler, 1990; 140; Butler, 1993; 95). Performing gender norms repeatedly is not an individual act; all the members of the society perform their genders repeatedly as expected; to be admired and to remain within the society. Thus gender norms turn out to be a set of automatic actions “already socially established” and done over and over again regardless of will, comprehension, or desire (Butler, 1990; 140).

### **2.3.2. Drag and Imitation**

Butler declared that the notion of true gender is illusion claiming that gender attributes are all performatives that are cultural impositions independent from the essence of the individual. Thereupon she suggests that drag (and other practices such as cross-dressing, and the butch/femme identities) as an example reveals the “inevitable comedy” within heterosexual gender assumptions (Butler, 1990; 122-137). Butler also points out that drag reinforces the notion of gender performativity (Butler, 1990; 138).

Drawing on Esther Newton's explanations, Butler puts forward that gender is like drag, it is different than the essence, the original self, and further it is only performative and open to subversions:

At its most complex, [drag] is a double inversion that says, "appearance is an illusion." Drag says ... "my 'outside' appearance is feminine, but my essence 'inside' [the body] is masculine." At the same time it symbolizes the opposite inversion; "my appearance 'outside' [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence 'inside' [myself] is feminine." (qtd. in Butler, 1990; 137)

This conclusion asserts that true gender identity can never be reached as it is nothing other than a fantasy. In addition to that, the example of drag shows that gender has an imitative structure as well (Butler, 1990; 137). Gender attributes are incorporated by imitating others as it is not expression of the self, and drag shows that opposite genders can be performed as "successful" as individuals who have that gender. Then, the difference between the imitation and the original disappears: "As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original, they imitate the myth of originality itself" (Butler, 1990; 138).

#### **2.4. SUBVERSION AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION**

*Gender is a place, one which can be entered or left, not an identity. Every time we act, we act gender. Thus, gender is like a character. It can be changed at will— Julia M. Allen and Lester Faigley*

In her book *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) Firestone claims that elimination of sexual polarization is necessary to put an end to women's suffering. Firestone also states that this would be a betterment of society as a whole. The first reason is that the sexual polarization brings along a biological family unit which is working only on behalf of men regardless of women and children (Firestone, 1970; 40). However she also states that men suffer, too: being protectors of the families, and having responsibilities is another burden. Secondly, Firestone asserts, sexual polarization obstructs other identities such as homosexuals and bisexuals to live their lives freely (Firestone, 1970; 243). Further, Firestone declares that this prevailing social order is



a created one and that it can be created again. Thus, she searches a social structure that enables all members of the society to have *livable lives*, and she states that the only effective solution would be the elimination of sexual polarization entirely.

Twenty years after Firestone's claims, when unspeakable become more speakable, and people dare to share their *realities* with others a little less fearless, Butler declares the same need again: the elimination of "sexual polarization," that is now called "gender binarism" within the scope of gender theory. In different words and in different ways but for the same reason: to enable livable lives for all the sufferers of gender binarism: women, men, bisexuals, homosexuals, transsexuals... and for *all the other identities that we cannot know today*, under the threat of punishment in domineering social condition. As Butler writes:

That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 1990; 141).

Thus, Butler suggests a way for social transformation through dealing with gender relations. Genders which are not given and fixed but socially constructed and arbitrary and which are simultaneously used to enable sexes –Being aware of that the distinction made between sex and gender *presents* sex as a natural given, Butler regards sex as the same constructed structure as gender: "the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (Butler, 1990; 7) – with a "natural" status are in fact a set of norms. And these gender norms can be subverted and shown to be only illusions, through practicing gender norms themselves with "the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction" (Butler, 1990; 141).

Through subversion of gender relations "that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power," the unnaturalness of gender can be revealed (Butler, 1990;

34). Thus, the notion of gender may be disappear, and simultaneously other not performative and compelled but expressive identities may emerge: “The loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilizing substantive identity, and depriving the naturalizing narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their central protagonists: ‘man’ and ‘woman’ ” (Butler, 1990; 146).

As Firestone also does in her work, Butler searches for ways to open up possibilities for all people who were “[restrained from] experimenting with other social forms that could satisfy their emotional needs as well or better” (Firestone, 1970; 251). And for the sake of livable lives, the elimination of gender binarism entirely is proved to be the best way in social transformation.

## CHAPTER III

### SUBVERSION OF GENDER IDENTITIES IN MARGE PIERCY'S *SMALL CHANGES* and *WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME*

#### 3.1. MARGE PIERCY

*“For me, writing fiction issues from the impulse to tell the story of people who deserve to have their lives examined and their stories told to people who deserve to read good stories. I'm responsible to many people with buried lives: people who have been rendered as invisible in history as they are powerless in the society their work creates, populates, cleans, repairs and defends.”*

An accomplished writer, poet, and social activist Marge Piercy was born into a working-class family on March 31, 1936 in Detroit, Michigan. She was the daughter of a Jewish mother who has strong ties with Judaism and an unreligious Welsh-English father. She grew up during World War II and was beaten because of her Jewish heritage. During a long illness period in her childhood she changed “from a streetwise tomboy into an avid reader” (Shands, 1994; 3). She was a brilliant student, and she got a B.A. from University of Michigan in which she went with a scholarship. Then a year later in 1958 she completed her M.A. in Northwestern University. She worked at several universities as a lecturer and she gave several workshops.

Piercy was a passionate activist, particularly as a purposeful feminist, and she struggled through fiction to heal the world's wounds, and up to now she wrote sixteen novels: *Going Down Fast* (1969), *Dance the Eagle to Sleep* (1970), *Small Changes* (1973), *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1977), *The High Cost of Living* (1978), *Vida* (1980), *Braided Lives* (1982), *Fly Away Home* (1984), *Gone to Soldiers* (1987), *Summer People* (1989), *He, She and It* (1991), *The Longings of Women*

(1994), *City of Darkness, City of Light* (1996), *Storm Tide* (1998; co-authored with Ira Wood), *Three Women* (1999), *The Third Child* (2003).

Piercy also published several poetry books, *The Moon is Always Female* (1977) being the most appreciated one, and she wrote a play, *The Last White Class* (1979) with her husband Ira Wood and several essays and reviews.

Being a woman who has a Jewish background and is a member of working-class, her works mostly contain the issues of gender, race, and class. The individuals in her novels are mostly the ones from the margins of the society. As Shands writes in her work on Piercy, “Never neutral, [her] narrative agonistically sides with the disadvantaged, oppressed, or exploited” (Shands, 1994; 13). However, it cannot be said that Piercy is a separatist; she longs for an end to the oppressions in society, rather than a vice versa change in the hierarchies. Her stance can be observed as she remarks her notion about men/women binary, “I want to argue in defense equally of women who want to work to create a female culture and of those who want to contribute to what has been a male culture and change it to a broader, less oppressive culture” (qtd. in Shands, 1994; 17).

Piercy’s prose has a distinctive style since it simultaneously has its place in social realism and postmodernism. Piercy, deconstructs ruling ideological discourses with a realistic narrative; she depicts injustices and life struggles in society, but also presents examples that resist or subvert the status quo as well. From this perspective, she is “highly innovative” as Patricia Marks says, and “well-worth exploring both for its challenging political perspectives” as Shands puts it (qtd. in Shands, 1994; 10; Shands, 1994; 2).

In the feminist arena, the importance of Marge Piercy as a writer is indisputable. Her works demonstrated the people’s experiences in the dominant social condition, and their inner feelings, and how they are *performing*, her works also revealed how unhappy and restricted the people are, and how they are wounded within their fake lives without the realities hidden deep inside them. In this manner,

Piercy contributed to the 1970's consciousness raising attempts through fiction which had the considerable impact on people; she showed the woman, in fact all people, that they are *not* their essences, that there is a sea of opportunities and differences behind the predetermined traditional identities and lives given. Piercy not only uncovered the disturbances and wrongs within the society, but she presented solutions in her works as well. She explained how people can achieve to reach a new understanding of themselves and others.

From such a feminist perspective, Piercy's third and fourth novels, *Small Changes* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*, are considered as the most comprehensive and the most effective ones among both all her novels and American feminist literary arena. Catherine R. Stimpson writes that Piercy's characters in *Small Changes* exhibit "the creation of a new sexuality and a new psychology, which will permeate and bind a broad genuine equality" (qtd. in Shatzky and Taub, 1997; 280) *Woman on the Edge of Time* is used as a course book in women's studies classes around the world for it allows analysis in depth on feminist concerns. And Piercy says that she herself loves it most, too, and in her essay "Mirror Images" she explains her reasons which are the same for all *Woman on the Edge of Time* admirers:

*Woman on the Edge of Time* is my favorite of my novels. I simply think it's the best I've done so far. My first intent was to create an image of a good society, one that was *not* sexist, racist, or imperialist: one that was cooperative, respectful of all living beings, gentle, responsible, loving and playful. The result of a full feminist revolution. To try to imagine people of such a society was my hardest task. (Kimball, ed.; 1981; 193)

### **3.2. SMALL CHANGES: IN SEARCH OF A "TRUE" IDENTITY**

#### **3.2.1. Plot**

*Small Changes* depicts the stories of two women who have different backgrounds and different future plans: Beth and Miriam. After finishing high school Beth marries her boy friend Jim, sure to have the perfect marriage. But things don't turn out as she hopes and she runs away from her husband and her marriage to an

entirely new life, now aware of what marriage really is. She has a relationship with another man, then she lives in a women's commune, and finally she ends up being a lesbian and escapes to freedom with her real family: Wanda, the woman she loves and her children. Miriam is an independent, intelligent and flamboyant woman who is determined not to end up like her mother; but to have a career. She has a relationship with two men, Phil and Jackson, and lives an untraditional life. However, later, she marries with her boss, Neil Stone, and has two children. This sudden and unexpected turn in her life changes both her outside appearance and her spirit totally. These two women's lives intersect with each other. The only thing they have in common is that they are both women living in a patriarchy and have been raised with the doctrines of how men and women are supposed to be.

### **3.2.2. Gender Identities vs. Subversive Acts and Thoughts**

#### **3.2.2.1. Beth, the Turtle**

*"I couldn't learn to hustle. So I was a victim, a loser. But that isn't the whole universe! We can get outside of our roles, finally! We can!"*

*Small Changes* starts with a chapter titled "The Happiest Day of a Woman's Life," referring to a wedding day of Beth who "has been raised to look to marriage as the main avenue to fulfilled womanhood and to harbor romantic illusions of marriage as the beginning of 'real' life" (Shands, 1994; 53). However, despite what has been taught to her and what is being expected of her at the time, Beth does not feel as excited and happy. She feels uncomfortable in the wedding dress and shoes, and like somebody else in that make up on her face, and further she sees the wedding ceremony as "being given away" (*Small Changes* 13, 14, 17). She, nevertheless suppresses the dangerous thoughts surfacing, puts "a pretend smile" on her face, and "tried to fix her mind on what she had to say" to carry out the ceremony as required (*Small Changes* 13, 18). In this wedding ceremony Beth *performs* a bride-to-be woman with a smiling face and all her beauty, though deep inside she realizes that all

those preparations and actions and images have nothing to do with what she really is and wants.

In her marriage, people, including her husband Jim, are always telling Beth how she is supposed to act as “Jim’s wife” and they never ask her about her feelings and needs: She is supposed to be content when she has sex with Jim because he “had been with plenty of girls, plenty, and they had all told him how good he was,” and she is supposed to be good at cooking because Jim “didn’t get married to eat shit,” and she “ought to have a baby” because “that was what God had made [women] for” (*Small Changes* 26, 27, 33). About their quarrels with Jim and being beaten by him she is advised by her mother and sister “to avoid open fight, to turn aside, to make the soft answer and pretend not to hear and not to see and not to understand” (*Small Changes* 28). Further, when she asks help from her sister about their sexual problems after Jim’s calling her “frigid,” her sister says Beth “that men expected you to act a certain way. She told Beth to notice how women acted in movies. That was how you were supposed to be, and Beth had better start doing it right, or she’d find herself out in the cold” (*Small Changes* 26). Beth understands that, like the wedding ceremony, marriage itself is also a kind of enactment; as a woman she has to behave in a certain way that is already assigned to her as a woman; what’s more, if she has difficulty in fulfilling her roles, she *had better* observe other women around, on movies and in magazines and *imitate* them, otherwise as her sister warns her she would be punished for not obeying the rules. In this sense, a woman’s performing as a wife becomes “a strategy of survival within compulsory systems,” as Butler defines, against the “clearly punitive consequences” in case of a failure (Butler, 1990; 139).

Although her story starts with a conventional wedding and a marriage, Beth, as Shands states, “represent[s] a female avant-garde committed to change” in the novel as a whole, rejecting all the roles that are stuck to her and escaping to an entirely different life as the novel progresses (Shands, 1994; 49). In fact, she gives the clues even at the very beginning of the novel that she will hold on to a slow but determined change towards having selfdom and worthiness as a human, identifying herself with the turtle:

She was the turtle going round and round the chicken wire searching for a way out. ... [Turtles] were slow but dogged. Maybe it took them a long while to get someplace, even to figure out where they wanted to go, but then they kept stubbornly at it. They were not beautiful but they carried what they needed. They were not particularly brave and the idea of running from a wild turtle would make a child laugh. Threatened, they had a shell they could draw into and tuck up inside. They were cautious and long-lived. No one could teach a turtle to do tricks (*Small Changes* 33).

Noticing the destructive effects of marriage, the smallest unit of the whole dominant social structure, Beth chooses to live a life out of conventions. She rejects it when Tom Ryan, the man she is in relationship with, offers to live together, though it costs their break up. Similarly, Beth's mother also disapproves her living alone and tries to discourage her saying, "I don't know how you're going to end up, Bethie! Your father won't hear your name! And you'll be lying in some alley with your throat cut like those poor girls you read about in the paper" (*Small Changes* 259). This is not only a discouraging speech but a way of threatening Beth with *exclusion* as well: "Your father won't hear your name" means if you insist on living such an inconvenient life you will be dismissed by your father –the master of the family– from the family. As Chafe explains, "the act of challenging prevailing norms mean[s] living on the edge of alienation and apart from the security of those who accepted the status quo" (Chafe, 1978; 74).

If Beth didn't really aware of the artificiality of the identity that is imposed on her, she would give in and keep on performing her womanhood according to norms. However, having realized "shaping up as a woman" and becoming "the wife of her husband" is not something she can do sincerely; she does not want to pretend like what she is not and adopt a *strategy* against the ones she loves, after all she is the turtle that can not be taught to do tricks. Further, Beth wants to "learn how to be person in her own right in the world" (Chafe, 1978; 74). Thus, she embarks on toward finding an identity that really *identifies her*, and the poem she writes demonstrates her confidence and determination on the way she has chosen:



*Everything says no to me.  
Everybody tell me no.  
Only I say yes.  
I have to say it again and again  
like a singer  
with only one song.  
Yes, Beth! Yes, Beth! Yes, Beth!  
Yes!  
(Small Changes 256)*

On women living alone, Ayşe Kirtunç writes as follows:

Women living alone develop a spiritual power and balance independent from being “something of someone,” using the power hiding deep inside them. They do not negate sense and sensibility, but think that human mind can examine relationships from a larger frame. Thus, polarized “woman” and “man” identities in society reach a new harmony beyond gender categories. They free themselves from the restricting ties of gender roles, and discover the vividness, energy and maturity of being “human.” (Kirtunç, 1994; 48; translation mine.)

Resisting the social order that says marriage is a necessity for a woman to be a whole person and gain a “full life,” Beth chooses to live alone and find her own way (*Small Changes* 288). By this means, as Kirtunç describes above, she discovers that the important thing is to be able to exist independently as an individual in the society, to be able to show up with her own identity as “Beth” and enjoy it.

This awakening paves the way for Beth’s the most subversive attitude in the novel: having a sincere love relationship with a woman, Wanda. And as Shands writes, “What develops into a lesbian relationship between Beth and Wanda is the only truly fulfilling love relationship in the novel” (Shands, 1994; 58). Beth explains their relationship as follows:

It was loving. She loved Wanda as Wanda. She could not imagine Wanda younger or with unlined skin or with her hair all black or her waist tiny as she said it had been before she bore children. She felt jealous sometimes when she met someone, man or woman, who had known Wanda before. But she fought that. All that living had gone to cure this salty woman to just the right taste for her. Wanda did not close her in a box-shaped intimacy, and she fought herself no to clutch. It was a sureness. (*Small Changes* 398)

Beth loves Wanda without restricting her, just like Wanda loves her. And they do not try to manipulate or suppress each other's selves like they are exposed to in their marriages, on the contrary, they "face outward and struggle to change [such] things that hurt [Beth] and hurt others" (*Small Changes* 417). Having said that, it is worthy of notice that the lesbianism of Beth and Wanda can not be considered as the "the displacement and appropriation of men, and so fundamentally a matter of hating men–misandry" as the society that sets the heterosexuality as a norm define it (Butler, 1993; 127). We see this when she had relationship with Karen, the first woman she slept with. Beth breaks up with her and her reason explains that the thing she cares for is not to lose her freedom and identity under the suppression of those – whether men or women– who, feeling superior to the other in the couple, try to control him/her. And as the society bestows that superiority feeling mostly to men, she identifies that act of suppression with "The Man," but not with all of the men:

She liked Karen, but somehow that did not open into loving her. ... Somehow Karen was more the man in their couple and she was more the woman, and Karen seemed to want it that way. In bed they were equal and that was good, but out of bed they were maybe not quite equal.

Karen easily took a hard line with her, telling her about the world and laying down axioms and criticizing her naïveté, and too easily she slipped into passivity. She felt her identity oozing away. Somehow she did not get the private space she needed. (*Small Changes* 264)

What's more, in one of the quarrels she makes with Jackson –one of the men who represent patriarchy in the novel– she rejects the notion that there is always heterosexuality behind lesbianism saying: "Not all women are into playing butch and femme. In fact, being with women is one way of getting away from those roles. Second, I don't have any particular sexual identity" (*Small Changes* 345). Apparently what Beth and women like her have created is a genderless society in which restricting and domineering rules do not oppress individuals and hinder them to reach their selfhood.

### 3.2.2.2. Miriam, Mrs. Stone

Miriam's story is the very opposite of Beth's. We first get to know her as Miriam Berg, a "flamboyant woman who was a graduate student in computer sciences" (*Small Changes* 41). According to Beth, this woman who is said to "have too many boy friends at the same time," "exuded a sexual aura she seemed well aware of, and one she enjoyed as much as any passer-by" (*Small Changes* 42). However, as the novel progresses, Miriam who initially resists to the patriarchal doctrines she has been raised with finds herself in an oppressive marriage.

The significance of Miriam within the scope of gender identity subversion is that she serves as a model to the claim that "gender is ... a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" and that it "is a norm that can never be fully internalized" (Butler, 1990; 141). In fact, the character of Miriam exhibits two kinds of subversive acts: The first one is "the parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity," and "the failure to repeat, a de-formity" in her performing her gender roles is the second one (Butler, 1990; 141). The former occurs when Miriam lives an unconventional independent life with two men, Phil and Jackson. Although she does not seem to be the kind of woman who does housewifery, she acts as one. Beth observes:

Back and forth on her bare feet she went, bringing glasses and then a loaf of Italian bread, plates, bologna and cheese, setting them on [Jackson's] cleared desk while he watched with a sucked-in smile of which only a little escaped. ... she moved gracefully around him in a parody of feminine subservience, a playfully over-acted domesticity. ... If Dorine had been serving them, nobody would have noticed, though the actual act would have been the same. By playing servant with that conscious touch, Miriam made it more flattering to Jackson, to them. (*Small Changes* 68)

Here, Miriam turns into a serviceable woman. Though this serviceable manner is ascribed to all women as one of the natural features of them and though Miriam herself is a woman, she does not do the service out of an internal impulse; on the contrary, she consciously imitates what other "conventional" women such as

Dorine, the real serviceable woman character in the novel, do. After all, else where in the novel, despite of the fact that she has been raised up by a traditionalist mother who wants her daughters to perform their femininity, we see Miriam protesting her mother when she criticizes Miriam's not ironing her brother Mark's shirt and refusing her demands, saying "I don't want to pretend I'm somebody else!" (*Small Changes* 118-119). Furthermore, every one in the room is aware that what she is doing is just performing. This type of subversion of inherent gender identity displays that "the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation" (Butler, 1990; 138).

At first, Miriam is presented as a daring, free-spirited and nonconformist against the doctrines she has been raised with. For instance, though during her adolescence she reads books –her father gives her– such as "Why It Is Right to Wait" and "Why Woman Are Naturally Monogamous" which impose patriarchal assumptions on sexuality, Miriam becomes just the very opposite what is taught on the books: She regularly has sex with two men she lives with and she decides "she enjoy[s] polygamy" (*Small Changes* 82, 222). However, one day Beth learns that Miriam has survived hard times and taken therapy, then has got married with her boss and become *Mrs. Stone* (*Small Changes* 266). "Miriam Berg was no more." (*Small Changes* 270) And when Beth visits Miriam, she notices that all Miriam's notions about conventional marriage and being someone's wife have changed:

But I feel good as a woman now–Neil's done that for me. I don't feel like I'm battling all the time in every area of my life. For the first time in my whole life, somebody really loves me. ... I can enjoy being a woman. So I can do all kinds of things I never did, like cooking, like baking. And they give real pleasure to people, and to me. (*Small Changes* 272)

But then, in the chapter titled "I'm Good and I'll Prove It," we read that this sudden change of Miriam takes its source from the manners of men she works with. When she goes to Washington with her team for business reasons, Wilhelm Graben, one of the men in her team, confuses her mind and she finds herself in his bed. Then,

[S]he had left Washington scared. Scared she was becoming what Wilhelm had suggested. Scared of losing herself. Scared of falling into a mire of being used, abused, handled, disregarded, degraded. Miriam, twenty-five-year-old bag of sexual tricks and good times for busy gentlemen. ... She felt chilled to the bone, frozen like winter mud through to her spine. She had indeed followed her curiosity into his elegance and cynicism and learned something, but the face this knowledge wore was the skull. Back to Neil, quickly. ... She stared at the white masses of cloud and longed to be back with Neil instantly. Right now to fall into his arms and tell him *Yes, Yes, Yes*, quickly before he changed his mind and turned from her. (*Small Changes* 306-307; emphasis mine.)

It makes her feel “like a whore” (*Small Changes* 306). Women who choose not to marry and live alone are exposed such treatments from the men around them and at work; they are regarded as potential mistresses. This is another way of discouraging women about having lives of their own, having self-esteem. Social order requires marriage, and if a woman does not choose to live traditionally, men consider they are entitled to harass her mind and body. And Miriam can not cope with it; unlike Beth who rebels saying “Yes” to her self, she obeys the social order saying “Yes” to Neil’s proposal of marriage: “to survive within ‘the Man,’ that is, the system” (Shands, 1994; 44). Though she is uncertain before going to Washington. (*Small Changes* 302).

That is to say, society influences Miriam to believe that marriage is inherently the most convenient, safest and honorable life style for a woman, and she surmises that she will be happy in this way. Afterwards Miriam tries hard to become “the wife of her husband” and “the mother of her children.” Nevertheless she experiences so many failures about being a housewife, a mother, and a faithful woman. When her baby, Ariane, is born:

They were bound in animal linkage and that bond was the most real thing she could still feel. But she was frightened. She did not feel that she loved her baby. This strange animal in her lap with its smells and its loud cries, the fierce desires that shook it, she was not quiet sure what she was doing with it. They belonged to each other through and animal bond but she felt so little else, she was terrified.

When she looked sideways at Neil, she felt distant and alien from him too. He was not bound to the baby by the chain of feedings and hours, yet she could feel love loosed in him toward Ariane. He hovered over her, crooning and

gazing, and very gently with the tips of his fingers caressed her nose, her ears, her fingers. ... She sat and wept for her baby, for herself, because she was a bad mother. She did not love Ariane, she did not love Neil, and she could not stand herself. She was empty and harried and oozing and spent. Poor Ariane! Poor Miriam! (*Small Changes* 324)

With the baby, Miriam's responsibilities have increased; Ariane needs her care all the time. That upsets her. Besides she believes she has to have an absolute affection to her baby, and the fact that while Neil loves the baby passionately though he has no "natural maternal" ties with her, the absence of such attributes in her makes Miriam feel like she is a bad mother. Firestone writes that the coercive childrearing role makes women alienated from the baby and she asserts, "If a parenthood instinct does in fact exist, it will be allowed to operate even more freely, having shed the practical burdens of parenthood that now make it such an anguished hell" (Firestone, 1970; 260). Thus, Miriam fails to fulfill social expectations, but her attitude reveals that the source of mothers love for their children is not out of a "maternal instinct." Further, what Miriam tells reveals that childrearing and caring and love can be, Firestone states, "a simple physical desire to associate with the young" not peculiar to women, rather inhere in men as well (Firestone, 1970; 260).

In another scene Miriam decides to give a New Year's party at their house, thinking she has not danced for a long time. When she is free-spirited Miriam Berg, she loves to dance, to be sexually attractive, and to flirt. However she is another woman after marriage, she has responsibilities to carry on. But during the party she fails to act in a convenient manner as a married woman. She forgets to *perform* her roles, letting herself be *herself*. Beth observes her and Neil:

Miriam was more beautiful dancing than she ever was still: and Neil did not like it. He saw that she was paying him no attention, that she did not act like his wife and the mother of his child. She was so involved in dancing she had nothing left over to care what she looked like or who watched or whether her hair was flying or she was sweating or whether other people at her own party were enjoying themselves. ... Neil stared and frowned and brooded. [Beth] felt coming off him not so much jealousy as fear, fear of the sudden unknown wild woman, dismay, roles confounded. (*Small Changes* 367)

This causes trouble between Miriam and Neil, he accuses Miriam of “become[ing] an exhibitionist” inappropriate for a real woman (*Small Changes* 368). This reveals that being a “real woman” who is aware of her limits as a wife and a mother –marrying a man and having children are preconditions of being regarded as a real woman (*Small Changes* 308)– is a matter of performing and becoming, not a natural and stable identity.

Patriarchy assumes women are inherently monogamous. And while Miriam says she enjoys being polygamous, after she gets married and takes her part in patriarchal society, she tries to be faithful to her husband thinking she has to do it that way. Except that she can not internalize the notion:

But the struggle could not get too close to the front of her attention. Somewhere in her Phil was still Phil and it was natural to touch him, it had always been natural. She never let herself think about being in bed with Phil, but her body remembered him. Old sensual memories drifted up along the nerves, murmurs of old good easy and communicative sex, natural and sensual. It was not to be remembered. Occasionally she dreamed of him, vividly. She enjoyed her sexual dreams: no one could make her guilty about what she felt in sleep.

She must not let them argue openly because she had no reasons except that she was married to Neil and he would not want her to. Neil expected her to be faithful. She had promised to be. That fidelity in that sense was a meaningless concept to her, alien, peculiar, was something she must never let herself be enticed into discussing aloud. She was afraid to argue with Phil, that she might not be able to defend Neil’s position. (*Small Changes* 381)

This attitude proves Butler’s claim right: genders are performative rather than expressive. Miriam act according to the rules, but in spirit she is somebody else. She is compelled to suppress her real being. Thus naturalness of gender attributes becomes insubstantial. Butler explains it as following, “this failure to become ‘real’ and to embody ‘the natural’ is ... a constitutive failure of all gender enactments for the very reason that these ontological locales are fundamentally uninhabitable” (Butler, 1990; 146).

Individuals are not allowed to behave and feel freely; on the contrary they are expected to act according to certain gender roles which are proved to be just a

construction in the hegemonic patriarchal structure. And trying to be what you are not is oppressive, live restricting, and inevitably obstructs self-actualization. Miriam comes to understand this more obviously in her marriage: “Growing up in a tight so-called happy family, [Neil] has fixed ideas about how wives are supposed to act, how I’m supposed to show I love him... He needs, he wants a quiet, controlled, contemplative life and that’s been hard for me to provide, because I’m not naturally that way...” (*Small Changes* 399-400). Miriam admits that she can not embody being a wife perfectly as she does not internally feel like it. She realizes that trying to act like somebody else has turned her into something spiritless that exists like a thing:

She: who was she? Mrs. Neil Stone. Vessel carrying embryo. Miriam Berg was dead. Miriam Berg had many troubles but she had been someone to be, a person anyhow. Mrs. Stone was nobody in particular. She would not be missed, except by Ariane. Phil was right: Neil could replace her by *Larousse Gastronomique* with pushbuttons. (*Small Changes* 390)

Afraid of being seen as a whore and being excluded, Miriam has persuaded herself that she wants marriage, she has thought she can achieve to become the kind of woman society expects from the females. Then, she confesses that this choice has destroyed her identity: “You think I always lie to myself. Sure, I’ve done a lot of that for years now. But oh, Beth, after a while the pain gets through. The pain gets through! I have so little self-respect left I need to prove to myself I’m still here. I can’t even love my children right if I’m a dishrag” (*Small Changes* 423). Even, to prove that she still exists, she decides to help Beth and Wanda to escape from the patriarchal society with all its oppressions, punishments. Nevertheless, she does not think she can get away from the patriarchal society as she has kids to care for and she does not want to: “I’m the mother of two children. I wouldn’t let them go for my life over again. They’re the world to me, Ariane and Jeffrey” (*Small Changes* 424). Yet she tries to exist as an individual, trying to specialize in her branch and starting to work again. And she tries to raise her children not according to the conventions but in a way that will teach them that “Differences make the world go round” (*Small Changes* 435).



### 3.2.2.3. Phil, “The Failed”

*“You don’t want a woman, you want a fucking domestic staff, housekeeper, butler, nanny, pastry cook, gamekeeper, wine steward. Why don’t you fuck a robot?”*

In the dedication part of the book, Marge Piercy writes “For me. For you. For us. Even for them.” Saying “them” she means men. As a feminist she is not a separatist. Like Butler and Firestone, she believes that sexual polarization is a construction and it can be removed. Therefore she does not assume men belong to a different group and women are to be against them; she denotes they, too, are made to believe this social construction and not aware of the realities. However she indicates that there are some men she dislikes:

I don't view men as biologically impaired. I believe sexism is culturally conditioned and that if you change the culture, you will change the kind of behavior which people with the various sorts of genitalia will consider appropriate. What I hate in men is what I consider ugly, brutal, violent, mean behavior—behavior damaging to women, *to men they consider inferior*, to children, to other living creatures with whom we share our biosphere. (emphasis mine. Piercy, [margepiercy.com](http://margepiercy.com))

In *Small Changes*, the character of Phil represents the men that are different from the men of patriarchy. As Shands writes, “The most positive male portrait is that of Phil Boyle. Described as the brother many women wish to have, a growing human being, ultimately he comes to embrace a principle of connection and cooperation” (Shands, 1994; 46).

Phil is a man who vacillates between being himself and being a man appropriate to the norms. We see that he bears unconventional notions about such things as sex, marriage, gender roles. In that sense, his presence in the novel acts as a subversion strategy.

“The family’s role in the production and reproduction of gender ... occurs through the socialization of children” says Maureen (Maureen, 2004; 6). In the case

of Phil we see that witnessing the violence her mother exposes by her father at the age of seven effects the formation of Phil's character. When Dorine says in a conversation that he is "too stoned to be good at getting power," Phil replies: "Listen, growing up where I did, the way you felt like a man was by hurting, by beating, by putting down. Well, I identified with my mother too much to make it that way" (*Small Changes* 428). Phil is sensitive unlike most men who survive unconsciously within the world of pretending. He values what others think and feel, and this makes it hard for him to perform his traditional male roles.

The most striking example of his *failure* in performing his role can be observed in the rape scene Phil remembers out of blue. He and some of his friends decides to rape a girl; "they were going to be men that night" (*Small Changes* 232). They waylay a girl whom they don't know, planning to rape her in turn. Phil is the third one to rape, and at first he feels excited: "At first he had held her from the behind before they got her down and the idea of the power of it had made him feel high. It was still exciting to see her lying there and know they could do anything to her. John was tearing her clothes open like a daydream, like the things he always imagined doing" (*Small Changes* 233). However, when they start, seeing the fear on her face, seeing what they *really* do to her, Phil loses interest. When his turn comes he has different things in mind though as a man he is expected to enjoy it:

She was bleeding, either because she'd been a virgin or because it was her period or just because they'd hurt her inside. Her mouth too was bleeding into the gag and her eyes were staring at him with horror. A gold chain around her neck was twisted to one side, cutting in. He found he didn't have an erection any more. Her body felt rigid with fear. When he prodded himself against her, she felt cold and oozy and he thought he could feel her pain. It wasn't like he thought it would be, it wasn't like the daydreams where woman yields and likes it and it's groovy. It was like four of them beating up on her. It was like his old man breaking his mother's jaw. He felt scared. He felt they could kill her. It would all be the same. They could break her legs and leave her in the street. They could slit her throat. It would be the same. He couldn't get it up. He felt cold all the way through and scared. (*Small Changes* 233)

Upon this, he does not want to do it. However, as a man, desiring to have sex with a woman lying before you is a social norm and he is expected to perform it,

otherwise he will be exposed to punishment. Thus, when Phil quits saying “She doesn’t turn me on,” others jeer at him, and worse, they try to *make it with him* “because he was just a woman too, he wasn’t a man like they were, he was a cunt” (*Small Changes* 233, 234). Fortunately a car appears and they release him, and they all run away. Phil interprets the situation as following: “Jesus, that would have done him in. Still he was glad he hadn’t taken his turn with her. It had nothing to do with sex. Each of them could have got laid that night if they’d wanted that. It had been a ritual, it was feeling powerful and being men together” (*Small Changes* 234).

“The social norms that constitute our existence,” says Butler, “carry desires that do not originate with our individual personhood” (Butler, 2004; 2). In exactly the same way, Phil individually does not find it amusing to have sex with a girl who is in pain and suffering, but the pressure of his friends’ existence there, deters him from confessing what he really feels. And he decides that it is a kind of ritual, revealing the ritualized structure of gender performativity. Additionally, it is worthy of notice that, this story shows how certain gender roles are carried with others; not alone, not out of will. Butler writes it in the introduction to *Undoing Gender*: “[Gender] is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another” (Butler, 2004; 1). The fear of punishment makes the individual act according to some certain expectations, thus it is once again prove that gender is not expressive, rather it is a set of acts that are carried as duties. And though Phil is aware of the unnaturalness and irrationality of the concept of manliness, he still cannot be sure if he has done the right thing when he has rejected performing his masculinity which reveals how patriarchal society is imposing gender norms to individuals:

[H]e still didn’t know, could not tell if he felt guiltier for having taken part in the assault or for not having been able to take part in the rape. He still could not know. Part of him mocked the idea of manhood that consisted of torturing a girl in an alley and part of him judged with his peers that he was less a man for not being able to get it up when they could. Part of him still thought he had failed. (*Small Changes* 235)

Most women in the novel have sympathy with Phil, since Phil does not “perform” as a father, unlike Miriam’s husband Neil who always acts as the father of Miriam, and judges her behaviors. Phil is not a representative of the patriarchal conscience; on the other hand he is an example for the belief that there is not one truth about the feelings and thoughts of individuals. Therefore, his presence in the novel is the other factor that subverts the realities the people in the society assumes true.

### **3. 3. WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME: ALTERNATE REALITIES**

#### **3. 3. 1. Plot**

*Woman on the Edge of Time* is the story of Consuelo (Connie) Ramos who briefly tells her life as following:

Consuelo, my given name. Consuelo’s a Mexican woman, a servant of servants, silent as clay. The woman who suffers. Who bears and endures. Then I’m Connie, who managed to get two years of college- till Conseulo get pregnant. Connie got decent jobs from time to time and fought welfare for a little extra money for Angie. She got me on a bus when I had to leave Chicago. But it was her who married Eddie, she thought it was smart. Then I’m Conchita, the low-down drunken mean part of me who gets by in jail, in the bughouse, who loves no good men, who hurt my daughter. (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 122)

Connie starts to have a contact with a [woman] from the future –named Luciente– after she is closed down to a mental hospital for using violence against her child. Luciente gets Connie to her future world, future country, Mattapoissett and shows her how things may change: Luciente’s world is harmonious, genderless, and peaceful one. Each person can live her/his sexual life just as he/she prefers (in fact in every area of live individuals have freedom). What’s more there is no sexual dichotomy at all. And as the novel progresses, this future world teaches Connie that she has to fight in order to gain freedom and peace, and not to suffer as a woman no longer.

### 3.3.2. *Woman on the Edge of Time* as a Feminist Science Fiction

*As for Piercy, the future presents a vision of hope—Frances Bartkowski*

Comparing science fiction novels to fantasy novels Russ writes that “its connection with actuality, with possibility, is one of its chief pleasures... *what has not happened* and *what could not have happened* (or *what cannot happen*) are not the same... So science fiction concerns itself with *what has not happened*; that is, its subject matter does not exist (Russ, 1973; 16).

When *Woman on the Edge of Time* is taken into account, a world such as Luciente’s has not existed yet. The reader comes to know about this world for the first time. However, it does not seem impossible. As Russ indicates, science fiction “writes about what is neither impossible nor possible” (Russ, 1973; 22). Maybe one day in the future technological developments will result in tube-born babies as in the novel, one cannot know it now. This fiction may come true, or it may never happen but “the fact is that, when the question of possibility comes up in science fiction, the author can only reply that nobody knows” (Russ, 1973; 22).

Therefore Russ’s claim that science fiction is “didactic” makes sense (Russ, 1975; 3). It has a strong tendency to be about various problems society deals with; it puts forward alternate solutions to these problems. From the feminist point of view, reading science fiction novels may open up possible futures in women’s minds, and thus provoke them to change the dominant social order as Russ tells science fiction “addresses itself to the mind” (Russ, 1975; 9). When it comes to writing, it can be said that science fiction novels are expressive in that science fiction writers create worlds that bear the principles of the world feminist struggle for. Similarly, on *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Bartkowski says, it is a “feminist representation of desire” (Bartkowski, 1989; 49). Piercy builds up a world in which all people – whether man or woman– live their lives to the fullest free from all kinds of hierarchy and binarism; absence of gender binarism being the most obvious one. Introducing

such a world to society, it is evidently aimed, may stimulate individuals to take part in feminist activities.

### 3. 3. 3. Gender Norms vs. Subversive Alternative Realities

In the *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Connie –as the person of our time– represents the patriarchal mind until the end of the novel and Luciente and [per] people represents the feminist mind that longs for equality among individuals in every aspect of live. Connie has gender norms in her patriarchal mind; according to her there are certain things a woman/a man can do, cannot do, can feel, cannot feel, can be and cannot be. For instance, when Connie first encounters with Luciente, she thinks Luciente is a “young man with his high, pleasant voice and his workman’s hands” (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 36-37). Luciente’s high voice and workman’s hands makes Connie think that Luciente is a man as she has learned throughout all her life that high voice and hands hard with work belong to men. The doctrines of patriarchy are so strong that she never thinks any other alternative. What’s more, though she notices some differences she still thinks that Luciente is a man: “He lacked the macho presence of men in her own family, nor did he have Claud’s massive strength, or Eddie’s edgy combativeness. ... She had taken dreaming about young boys. Maybe as she got older the boys of her dreaming soul would grow younger and more beardless, slender as matches” (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 36-37). Even in Mattapoissett, after learning that this society is genderless, Connie still tries to classify individuals as a woman or man: “A small figure with velvety black skin –she had to be a woman from the delicacy of her bones– a long neck, hair cut to her scalp in an austere tracery of curls, descended toward them, smiling slightly” (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 136).

Her desire to classify people as men or women according to their physical appearances derives its origin from the society she lives in. Like all men around her have a “macho appearance,” all women in her society have to have long hair. For this belief, even in hospital, women are expected to be seen with hair: “Get an assortment

of wigs for the women, for use while their hair grows out,” one of the doctors says (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 202).

In her visits to Mattapoisett, Connie shows an unending astonishment since all she sees is almost the opposite of what she has *learned*. Gender norms she has in mind always runs counter to the individual’s habits and appearances in Mattapoisett. She cannot set a bar against her settled thoughts and feels angry when she witnesses something that is opposite to what she has regarded true till that time. And when she learns that all individuals –whether male or female– can be mothers and all children are born in tubes and all have three mothers, she strongly rejects to understand it:

How could anyone know what being a mother means who has never carried a child nine months heavy under her heart, who has never borne a baby in blood and pain, who has never suckled a child. Who got that child out of a machine the way that couple, white and rich, got my flesh and blood. All made up already, a canned child, just add money. What do they know of motherhood. ... She hated them, the bland bottleborn monsters of the future, born without pain, multicolored like a litter of puppies without the stigmata of race and sex. (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 106)

And when she sees a [man] nursing:

He had breasts. Not large ones. Small breasts, like a flat-chested woman temporarily swollen with milk. Then with his red beard, his face of a sunburnt forty-five-year-old man, stern-visaged, long-nosed, thin-lipped, he began to nurse. The baby stopped wailing and begun to suck greedily. ... She felt angry. Yes, how dare any man share that pleasure. These woman thought they had won, but they had abandoned to men the last refuge of women. What was special about being a woman here? They had given it all up, they had let men steal from them the last remnants of ancient power, those sealed in blood and in milk. (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 134)

Or when she sees Bee (a man as for Connie) crying:

Big fat tears rolled down Bee’s broad face. Imagine Claud [Connie’s ex-husband] crying! Even when they sentenced him, he had grinned, shrugged and said out of the corner of his mouth, “Shit, could be worse. Time’s hard, but you do it, and it’s gone.” Once again they reminded her of children, even the men. (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 118)

Connie still has gender binarism in her mind; she cannot take into account that in this society, there is no gender. Thus, when she sees a [man] nursing, mothering or crying, she –as a patriarchy-oriented woman– stands against it. That’s why Bee is right when [he] says Connie that she is living in a “society with many taboos” (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 189). Connie cannot welcome any other realities that are new to her; she cannot accept them easily since she accept womanness and manness as the only truth, *the natural*.

However Luciente and [per] people are all present alternate identities in the novel. They exhibit that male can nurse, cry, do childrearing, be strong and elegant and graceful at the same time. And female can do all of the works that are expected to be done only by males in Connie’s [thus, in our] society. In Mattapoissett, three person mother one child, and they can be male or female. What’s more at the age of eleven, the children undergo a process which will prove that they are ready for being an individual as any member of the society. Thus, their ties with their mothers are broken; both the children and the mothers become free. And individuals can have sexual or sensational relationship any one they agree with. About this circumstances Frances Bartkowski writes; “The portrayal of these alternate systems of kinship subverts a fundamental law of the patriarchal sex-gender system with its overdetermined concern for paternity” (Bartkowski, 1989; 77).

Connie’s interrogation of differences of doctrines about truth between two worlds also opens the door of social change. Having been raised with restrictive rules about feelings, and been taught that there are some things that can never be felt or thought or spoken, Connie cannot understand the aim of doctors study of placing a machine to her mind to control that feelings and thoughts: “From an early age she had been told that what she felt was unreal and didn’t matter. Now they were about to place in her something that would rule her feelings like a thermostat” (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 282). If there are such things naturally cannot be felt and thought, then why there occurs a need to suppress or control or erase them.



Additionally, Connie's acceptance of this social system as better than hers as the narration progresses, novel exemplifies another and one of the most effective subversion of dominant patriarchal system. She accepts that the order in Mattapoisett is more *livable* than that of her world:

For the first time her heart assented to Luciente, to Bee, to Magdalena. Yes, you can have my child, you can keep my child. ... She will be strong there, well fed, well housed, well taught, she will grow up much better and stronger and smarter than I. I assent, I give you my battered body as recompense and my rotten heart. Take her, keep her! ... She will never be broken as I was. She will be strange, but she will be glad and strong and she will not be afraid. She will have enough. She will have pride. She will ... be loved for her strength and her good work. She will walk in strength like a man and never sell her body and she will nurse her babies like a woman and live in love like a garden... (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 141)

What Sojourner, one of the characters of Mattapoisett, says to Connie may well be the summary of the main message this didactic feminist science fiction novel aims to tell: "Yet instead of looking at each other with pleasure and thinking how much richer is the world in which everyone is not like me, each judges the other" (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 211).

### **3. 3. 4. Language of Mattapoisett**

"The deconstruction of power structures" can also be observed if the grammar of Mattapoisett is examined giving attention to the details (Shands, 1994; 76). In this novel, gender-free usage of pronouns is the most subversive technique in the feminist linguistic arena. All people whether male or female is called as "person" and pronoun is "per" for "his" and "her" and "its" in English language. What's more, though it is hard to adapt to the language at the very beginning of the novel, as the pages turn, reader becomes familiar with the language and this reveals that even the most settled orders also may be replaced by others.

The vocabulary of the language of Mattapoisett also exhibits the differences between two worlds. Luciente's having hard times while trying to understand the

word “prostitution”, for instance, effectively reveals that in this world, individuals – women, especially– do not sell their body for sex:

“We don’t buy or sell anything.”

“But people do go to bed, I guess?” ... “I suppose since your’re alive and got born, they must still do that little thing, when they aren’t too busy with their computers?”

“Two statements don’t follow.” Luciente gave her a broad smile. “Fasure we couple. Not for money, nor for a living. For love, for pleasure, for relief, out of habit, out of curiosity and lust.” (*Woman on the Edge of Time* 64)

Luciente’s world is the one which values all individuals equally, unlike Connie’s. From the feminist perspective, women are not seen as the properties of men. Each person is free to act and live as s/he pleases. Thus, inevitably, in Luciente’s language there is no room for the concepts such as “prostitution”. The vocabulary of Luciente’s language also subverts the truths of Connie’s world.

## CONCLUSION

Feminism's main aim is to make a radical change in society, since they claim that the prevailing social order causes many people, mostly and more severely women, to live restricted and unfulfilled lives, and suffer. In this social condition, women are invisible. Therefore, inevitably, feminists realized that it is necessary for the society to undergo a transformation not only for women, but also for other identities that do not fit in the existing gender identities and are excluded from society for this reason.

Many feminist writers invite women to write their realities to other women to prove that they are not alone in their restricted lives. According to them, writing about realities and exhibiting unwanted situations may cause an awakening. And in her groundbreaking work *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler asserts that exhibiting acts and feelings that do not match with the ones people have been taught to live according to would subvert the hegemonic culture's unnatural but "naturalized" doctrines. *Real* realities and variations in feelings and insights should be exposed to enable all identities to be lived freely. Through this tactic, the people would see that they all live in a patriarchally constructed reality which is in fact far from being the reality of all individuals.

As a passionate feminist, Piercy exemplifies how certain gender norms fall as a shadow on individuals and restrict their lives, suppressing their realities and inner feelings. Social order sets limits on gender acquisitions, settling norms about how one should act and feel. Piercy's characters reveal that this coercive and performative but not expressive gender acquisitions and actualizations result in unfulfilled lives. In addition to that, some of Piercy's characters are individuals who deny this oppressive social structure; they become self-confident individuals in the end who are aware of who they really are and who are content to be in a struggle to live their realities.

In *Small Changes*, Beth, as the most obvious example, escapes from the social order that demands her to obey certain gender roles. She realizes that what

society expects from her as a woman and a wife is not what she needs to be happy in life as told to her during her adulthood. Her new life style and her varied sexual choices make her “inconvenient” in terms of gender norms. However, it is evident that she becomes satisfied with her new life. Beth subverts many settled gender norms, but most evident one is that she does not want to live with a man who will be a financial support and provide her with a status with the ring they both have. Beth does not want to bear a child; she can be satisfied with raising her lover Wanda’s children. These are not the realities that a girl is raised with, but there, in the novel of Piercy, Beth lives with them.

Likewise, it can be inferred that Miriam loses her self-confidence and joy of living when she tries to live according to the heterosexual patriarchal doctrines she is imposed in during her childhood and adulthood. Additionally, it is also exhibited that she is more herself when she is living an “inconvenient” life. Miriam experiences several failures when she tries to perform her role as a woman, wife, and mother. Those failures of her are vital to deal with because of the fact that they reveal the artificial structure of naturalized gender identities. It is repeatedly emphasized in the novel that Miriam performs when she needs to act as a person she is not in reality. She does not feel like being a housewife, for instance, but she tries to do her best, and performs her role as she has seen from her mother and other “conventional” women she knows.

Phil is another subversive and also guiding character in the novel in that he is different according to the features assigned to males; his ideas do not match with expectations of society from men. Nevertheless, he is afraid to reveal his thoughts in fear of exclusion. With the help of Phil, it is understood that the exclusion policy hides very serious truths from people themselves. Even most men in the novel do not want to realize that they are different than they are told they are. They do not want to talk or even think about dreams that do not fit in the norms, they are afraid to be judged as not being “a real man”. However Phil is a character who breaks his bonds with patriarchy at the end of the novel; he realizes that there is another reality hidden behind the realities of patriarchy and show the courage to challenge society which

constitutes a precedent to readers. Also, Phil's presence in the novel also supports the idea that feminism demanding genderless society serves not only for women, but also for men.

With Connie and Luciente of *Woman on the Edge of Time*, it is revealed that certain realities that are regarded as unchangeably natural can be changed with totally new truths. Luciente's world is totally different from Connie's world, our world. Most shocking difference in the novel is that Luciente's society is a genderless one. No one is judged according to "per" being male or female. There is a never-ending equality. Both males and females do the same works and women do not have difficulty in doing the works that are assumed as "man's work" in our society. The differences between two worlds sign that everything may be in another way. It is shown in the novel that people themselves create what is real, what is not, what is natural, what is not, what is acceptable and what is not. And this, as a matter of fact, means that all doctrines can be changed into something else; something totally new, something never been come into minds of people before.

Exposing limited gender roles to individuals and not allow them to act in order to express their identities and inner thoughts and what's more imposing them to perform according to expected behaviors obstruct "livable lives", and result in suffering individuals. However, *Small Changes* and *Woman on the Edge of Time* show that small changes in individuals' lives can lead to bigger ones which will result in an effective social transformation. Therefore, these novels also give the message that narrating such identity transformations can pave the way for similar social transformations at large, as Firestone repeatedly indicates. With the help of these kinds of literary works, individuals may gain the courage to turn their attention to their real inner feelings, and may realize that genders are not inherent, identities can be proliferated, and all individuals can have a *livable life*, which must be the main aim of all feminist struggles.

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