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Analysis of futuristic societies, human
identity and gender roles represented in
He, She and It by Marge Piercy

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Final Degree Project consists of an analysis of Marge Piercy's *He, She and It*, a dystopian science fiction novel published in 1991.

The novel contains two different stories which have a lot in common: one is from the point of view of a young Jewish woman called Shira, set in the future, in 2059; and the other one is narrated by Shira's grandmother, Malkah, and is set in the year 1600. This means the novel is jumping back and forth in time. The story told by Shira is futuristic and talks about a cyborg whose work is to protect and fight for its creator, whereas Malkah's story focuses on the sixteenth century legend of the Golem of Prague and the Jewish people (Gurman, 2011, p. 461).

He, She and It covers a wide range of topics, such as: futuristic societies, artificial intelligence and technological advances; politics; the Earth, its environment and its pollution; the question of human identity, gender roles, religion, and races; feminism; the importance of creating bonds with your family and friends, among many others.

The main objective of this project is to analyse the book and to discover why it is so significant. Having learned about the topics which it contains, these have been classified into three: futuristic societies, human identity and gender roles.

The following type of information can be found throughout this Final Degree Project: Marge Piercy's life and works; an analysis of the futuristic world portrayed in the novel, how societies are organized, the distinction and similarities between religion and science, and the discussion whether it shows a dystopia or a utopia; together with an analysis of the human identity involving the Jews of Prague, Joseph (golem) and Yod (cyborg). The

questions: “what is a person?” and “which are the boundaries?” are going to be elaborated as well. Moreover, gender roles, stereotypes, and feminism portrayed in the novel will also be studied. In order to see how feminism is portrayed, a study of all the main female characters will be done. This project will end with the explanation of the title *He, She and It*, and the conclusions of this study.

The methodology applied is quite simple. When I first read the novel, I deepened into it by taking notes, asking myself questions and making lists about the different topics and characters. Later, with a clear idea of what was important to deal with in the project, the outline was established, and I started writing and analysing carefully. In addition, research on the Internet for information which could be useful and which could enlighten the project was carried out. The bibliography is at the very end of this project.

2. MARGE PIERCY, THE AUTHOR

Marge Piercy is a novelist, poet and memoirist born March 31, 1936, in Detroit, Michigan. Her maternal family, her mother and grandmother, were Jewish. Her grandmother was daughter of a Lithuanian rabbi, and it was her who chose Piercy’s Hebrew name, Marah. Despite her father not following any religion, she ended up proclaiming herself Jewish when she saw her grandmother’s grief over relatives murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust (Horowitz, 2009). This novelist was brilliant at school and in her studies; she won a scholarship to the University of Michigan and, there, in 1957, Piercy won a Hopwood Award for Poetry and Fiction. She finished her studies with an M.A. at the Northwestern University (McManus, 2021).

Marge Piercy is a prolific writer; she may be considered a master of many genres concerning various issues. She is famously known for her feminist position, for focusing on class, culture, social change, environmental cause, historical fiction, etc. Piercy has written seventeen novels, nineteen volumes of poetry (her poetry is also centred on feminism and social issues), and her memoir *Sleeping with Cats* (1986). Among her novels, the most famous are: *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976); *Gone To Soldiers* (1987), a New York Times Bestseller; *The Longings of Women* (1994); *Sex Wars* (2005); and, of course, *He, She and It* (1991), a science fiction novel which won the Arthur C. Clarke Award for Best Science Fiction novel in 1993, in the United Kingdom, where it was published under the title of *Body of Glass*. Apart from the Arthur C. Clarke Award, Piercy has also won awards such as The Golden Rose (1990) and The Barbara Bradley Award (1992), from New England Poetry Club. In 2004, she was honoured as Doctor of Humane Letters degree in the Hebrew Union College (Horowitz, 2009).

3. ANALYSIS OF FUTURISTIC SOCIETIES

Piercy's novels are well-known for her descriptions and ideas of futuristic worlds and societies. In the following points, how futurism is portrayed in the novel will be discussed, along with how societies are divided, and what their main characteristics are; how religion and science are represented; and, finally, a discussion whether this futuristic world could be classified as a dystopia or a utopia will be carried out.

3.1. THE FUTURISTIC WORLD

The main story in *He, She and It* is set in a futuristic world. First, the reader is made to know the exact date when the custody of Shira's son is being given: "This verdict rendered 28 January 2059 [...]" (Piercy, 2016, p. 5).

By 2059, the Earth had suffered wars, famines, and plagues; the polar caps melt, and the oceans rose rapidly; people now live under domes because the ozone layer had been destroyed, and, when they need to go outdoors, they have to wear a "sec skin" to protect them from the high sun exposure. The dome can be programmed to simulate a specific weather and climate. Moreover, Israel has been turned into an uninhabited place called the "Black Zone" because there had been a nuclear war, and it is compared to "a pestilent radioactive desert" (Piercy, 2016, p. 13). First, Piercy makes readers think that no one is able to live there, but later in the novel, it is discovered that it does have inhabitants.

A cyberworld called "The Net" or "The Base" is also portrayed, where only privileged people can log in to talk to each other and search for information. There, everything is abstract, everything is a representation of the reality: even people, time and space. Regardless of the benefits, the users of "The Net" need to know that they cannot be plugged in for an excessive amount of much time because it is dangerous; it can cost them their death or get them into a coma due to exhaustion. This cyberworld created by Piercy is a double-edged sword.

The futuristic world in *He, She and It* has its good things, although it does not go short of disadvantages: the planet is in decay because of the human race, corporate multinationals are corrupt and always fighting over power, personal information is easily leaked or sold, and more (Koba, 2005, p. 252).

3.2. SOCIETY'S ORGANIZATION

The futuristic world of *He, She and It* is divided in twenty-three corporate multinationals, such as the “multi” of Yakamura-Stichen; several free towns, such as Tikva; the “Glop”; and the “Black Zone”. The corporate multinationals are “megalopolis involved in open competition, exploitation” (Koba, 2005, p. 253); they have governments and are hierarchical, whereas, the free towns, the “Glop” and the “Black Zone” are critical of this. These communities are governed by consensus and reflect the paradigms of feminist values (Neverow, 1994, p. 20), which means they are the resistance. Even the character of Gadi is once criticized by Nili for selling “stimmies”, holograms that create fake sensations and realities: “Your multi sells them sensation in place of knowledge [...] you replace real knowledge with false sensory data” (Piercy, 2016, p. 386).

Marge Piercy draws attention to how humans could turn their societies from Capitalists Patriarchies (corporate enclaves) to Socialist Feminist communities (free towns); and to how perspectives, thoughts, socialization and history can be affected by future scientific and technological developments (Koba, 2005, p. 252). Piercy and her novel accomplish that readers think critically about their future world and future societies.

3.2.1. THE CORPORATE MULTINATIONALS. YAKAMURA-STICHEN

The most famous corporate enclave, Yakamura-Stichen, and referred to as the Y-S, can be found under a dome in the Nebraska desert. The corporate “multis” are patriarchal, competitive hierarchies with a centre where even having a different sexual orientation (meaning not being heterosexual) is accepted depending on who you are, this is understood by Shira's words: “Which persons you might make love to was defined by

your place in the hierarchy as the people to whom you bowed and the people who bowed to you. Sexual privileges depended upon your place and rank” (Piercy, 2016, p. 424).

The Y-S is described by Shira as frightening and impersonal: everything under the dome is premeditated, controlled and consciously designed, even its buildings, streets and parks. The overall of the megalopolis is black and grey, threatening colours which are able to kill creativity and imagination. Moreover, its citizens need to follow a strict code of behaviour and are controlled socially (Koba, 2005, p. 254). You can find rich, powerful people, “techies” (just as Shira and Josh), day labourers and “apes”. These last ones, the apes, are “people altered chemically and surgically and by special implants for inhuman strength and speed” (Piercy, 2016, p. 17), they fit in the Y-S ideal of beauty and they resemble machines prepared for battle. On the one hand, the day labourers are forced to wear colour coded uniforms for their jobs, which makes them resemble prisoners in a labour camp. On the other hand, the techies think they are slightly rewarded with more rights, nonetheless, it is just another illusion.

The Y-S holds personal and private information about their workers, who are like numbers to them: they study them, control their activities, their attitudes and to whom they talk. Even though people do not know this, Shira, Malkah and Yod will uncover their calumnies. The Y-S becomes powerful by holding back this information, because, as Piercy makes it clear in the novel, knowledge is power (Neverow, 1994, p. 18). Despite Shira worked very hard there, she never got a promotion because the Y-S was using all her ideas without her awareness and consent.

Corporate enclaves also control women’s pregnancies and decisions on how to raise their children. Shira had been taken her son Ari away by the patriarchal Y-S, who made her

believe she was an unfit mother (Neverow, 1994, p. 26). They used Ari as a hostage to blackmail Shira because they wanted her to reveal all Avram's work about the cyborgs. In the early pages of the novel, Malkah already calls them "manipulators" (Piercy, 2016, p. 9). Elissa Gurman (2011, p. 462) said Piercy uses the corporate enclaves as a way to critique patriarchal capitalisms.

3.2.2. THE FREE TOWNS. TIKVA

Oppositely to the corporate "multis", the free towns are "the utopian blueprint of a society offered by Haraway" (Koba, 2005, p. 254-255), meaning that they are democratic, and against patriarchy and hierarchy. Tikva is a town where the citizens have a voice, and where they can talk and discuss their opinions freely. These free towns, as their names imply, have more freedom and openness. They achieve their autonomy from the corporate "multis" by selling them their technological advances.

Tikva is first described when Shira returns home: it is her hometown and she started appreciating it when she compared it to living in the Y-S: in Tikva, there are live animals, a wide range of smells, and real food, to name just a few. The town is under a wrap (not under a dome as in the corporate enclaves), which means it is more permeable, and it is only used to shield from the UV. Malkah's courtyard is compared to the garden of Eden and, to Shira, everything seems hedonistic because her senses are coming back to life. Moreover, the free towns accept human variety, size and sexual typology; and no class distinctions nor prejudices are portrayed. It is a technosociety, where humans live with robots and embrace them wholeheartedly: different technological fabrications can be identified around the city, such as cleaning robots, which patrol the town during the whole day, and Malkah's house, who is a robot capable to have rational exchanges with its

inhabitants (Koba, 2005, p. 254-255). Tikva is a highly developed Jewish town that made Shira ask herself: “Why had she ever left?” (Piercy, 2016, p. 45). She was unquestionably impressed by it and she could never imagine herself living elsewhere again.

Wilson (1992, p. 13) compares Tikva to the golem because both protect the Jewish people from the attacks of the Y-S (in the future) and the Christians (in 1600). Differently, Gurman (2011, p. 471) focuses on a comparison between the Jewish town of Tikva and the Jewish ghetto of 1600: Tikva is more egalitarian when allowing women and, even the cyborg Yod, to participate in the minyan.

3.2.3. THE GLOP

The “Glop” is the megalopolis of the futuristic world in *He, She and It*, where people with no corporate identity fight for their lives (Sautter, 1995, p. 256).

This place is described by Shira when she returns to Tikva, and later, when she goes back to the Y-S to rescue her son. She presents an underground megalopolis with poisonous air, governed by gangs and overlords, where the only law or rule is “never hesitate and never stand out” (Piercy, 2016, p. 380). The “Glop” is an overpopulated place where the unemployed, the day labourers, the gangs and practically all the continent live. It is a dangerous place to go to because there are diseases, poverty, they offer you drugs, try to sell you illegal objects and people die on the streets. In the same way as the free towns, the “Glop” does not distinguish people hierarchically, nor for their sex, race or class.

The “New Gangs” are the leaders of this megalopolis; they earned the respect of Nili and Gadi: Nili admires them because they always have answers, and Gadi enjoys the richness of their languages and the different slangs, styles and music.

3.2.4. THE BLACK ZONE

The “Black Zone”, the “Glop” and the free towns are the resistance: they are the ones who stand against the powerful corporate enclaves. The Jews of Prague, as well, were a community who withstood the Christian oppressors. The “Black Zone” can be found in Israel, although it was supposed that no one was able to live there because of the nuclear war in the past. However, when readers are introduced to Nili, she claims she comes from there, from Safed. Nili was born and raised there in a community of Israeli and Palestinian women who survived the war.

The “Black Zone” is significant in the novel because it is ruled only by women, and just as Copley says, women are the key to invert the path of the future and save the Earth from a dystopian ending: women have always been suppressed by men, and they are fascinated to end with this and to have egalitarian and democratic structures (Copley, 2013, p. 54). In the “Black Zone”, women are independent, they build their own things, cultivate their food, they practice religious rituals and “use genetic engineering to create the next generation” (Wilson, 1992, p. 13).

3.3. RELIGION AND SCIENCE

He, She and It elaborates on religion and science; these two aspects, as Piercy proves, can work together. On the one hand, readers learn Tikva’s Jewish traditions, such as “attend synagogue, pray, keep Shabbat, and celebrate Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, and Rosh Hodesh” (Gurman, 2011, p. 470). Despite being such devotees, they still respect their inhabitants’ choice to follow other religions; they do not oppress anyone. On the other hand, in the “multis” and in the Y-S, they establish an official religion and they expect

everyone to follow it, by hook or crook. In the Y-S, Jewish people such as Shira and Josh are called “marranos” (a Spanish term used to refer to the Jews), and they had to practice their religion in secret.

The way how the Jews of Prague and Tikva use religion and technology to battle should also be considered here. Even though a time gap separates them (1600 vs. 2059), both communities need to protect themselves from bigger threats. The Jews of Prague used religion as a solution to protect the ghetto: through “the power of words and letters” (Piercy, 2016, p. 35), Judah Loew (the Maharal) created a clay Golem. Whereas Tikva was protected from the Y-S thanks to the use of technology: Avram Stein and Malkah Shipman, constructed a successful cyborg. In terms of religion, God is the only one who can create life, then, could it be said that the Maharal and Avram defied God? Judah claims he created a golem in the name of his God because, in a vision, ha-Shem himself asked him to do that: “Judah, you must make a golem of clay to rise and walk the ghetto and save your people. Do not falter. Rise and make a golem” (Piercy, 2016, p. 35). On the contrary, Avram created the cyborgs because he was a scientist, his intentions had nothing to do with religion, but with personal satisfaction, and in order to protect Tikva and its people.

3.4. DYSTOPIA OR UTOPIA?

It is not surprising that *He, She and It* is well-thought and full of futuristic ideas because Marge Piercy, personally, said: “I read at least as many dystopian novels as Utopian, perhaps more. Science fiction in the fifties was flooded with miserable post-nuclear

holocaust worlds, and I spent my adolescence reading a fair amount of science fiction as well as main stream fiction” (1994, p. 1).

He, She and It contains more images of a dystopian future rather than of a utopian one. But, still, both concepts coexist in the novel. Nowadays, humans are optimistic, therefore by 2059 they would not expect pollution or problems thanks to science and technological advances. But Marge Piercy opens their eyes and makes them think that what happens in her novel, could perfectly happen by mid-21st century: The Earth is not being treated fairly, people do not care enough, and this will have long-term consequences. In the novel, readers find out that they could have a dystopian future: they may not live their lives as they do now because the Earth is quickly dying, the air is polluted, and the poles are quickly melting. Another dystopian aspect is the representation of the “multis” and the “Glop”: the “multis” control everything in a manipulative way; and the “Glop” is a projection of what contemporary urban problems may turn into when talking about drugs, diseases or illegalities.

The utopian part of the novel is portrayed when the free town of Tikva is presented along with all its technological advances such as electronic houses, the easy access to information, the advances in medicine and in improving human capacities, and much more. Tikva is a utopian vision because, as mentioned before, it has feminist ideals, it is egalitarian, lawful and respectful to all its people.

In conclusion, readers could say Piercy’s *He, She and It* is equally a dystopian and a utopian futuristic novel because it portrays both aspects.

4. ANALYSIS OF HUMAN IDENTITY

In the Y-S, people must resemble a specific ideal, which made Shira feel insecure, oppressed and out of place; she felt her identity was being diminished and she was being forced to resemble their ideal: “she always felt too physical here, too loud, too female, too Jewish, too dark, too exuberant, too emotional” (Piercy, 2016, p. 6).

In the following part of this degree project, an analysis of more characters whose human identity was questioned can be found: the society of the Jews of Prague, both the golem (Joseph) and the cyborg (Yod), and how their creators tried to humanise them, despite, later, not accept them fully as human beings.

In this part, the question of what is human and what is not will be discussed together with which boundaries people set to define “identity”.

4.1. THE JEWS OF PRAGUE

The legend of the Golem and the Jews of Prague is told by Malkah Shipman. The story is aimed at Yod, but it is also useful for the readers because Malkah is a great storyteller, and she makes them understand that history tends to repeat itself. What happened to the Jews in the ghetto in 1600, also happens to Tikva in 2059. One might also extrapolate the story to modern times and wonder whether our societies may be heading towards similar bleak future. Malkah refers to Tikva as “fragile modern ghetto” (Piercy, 2016, p. 22). Moreover, what happened to Joseph, the golem, will also similarly happen to Yod, the cyborg.

The Jews of Prague were forced to live in a ghetto, in a prison with no rights and no voice. They were limited as humans because of their beliefs and because they followed a different religion and they refused to let it go. Thaddeus, the Catholic priest, thought that Jewish people were “like a disease creeping through Europe” (Piercy, 2016, p. 33). The Christians could be considered the ancestors of the Y-S as both acted similarly: they suppressed, controlled, and killed people. Besides, the Jews, in order to have the right to live, they had to pay a tax called “leibzoll”; they also had to wear a yellow symbol on their coats. There were no exceptions, no Jew was exempt from this. The Christians were the heads of a hierarchy that they had installed.

4.2. COMPARING JOSEPH (GOLEM) AND YOD (CYBORG)

Joseph and Yod are used to “explore the postmodern theme of the construction of human identity” (Copley, 2013, p. 49). Both characters of the novel were created to protect as well as to act if necessary, and as their creators tried to make them see, that had to be their only function. Nevertheless, Joseph and Yod developed a sense of humanity, and a need to be accepted by their communities.

The word “golem”, in Hebrew, means “shapeless mass”, and the Talmud (the book of Jewish law) also uses this word to refer to the creation of Adam, who was a “body without a soul” his twelve first hours of life. This makes sense because Joseph was made from clay and by the power of words and letters; he was not supposed to have a soul, he was only supposed to keep an eye on the ghetto and protect it. The golem was just supposed to be a servant who acted quickly and precisely, “an agent of social and political reform” (Covino, 1996, p. 363).

Regarding Yod's name, it adds up too, because, as he was the tenth cyborg created, his name was the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet (Neverow, 1994, p. 23). Piercy, astutely, also uses Yod's name to allude to Joseph: "Joseph" in Hebrew is "Yosef", meaning that their first letters would coincide.

If the readers of the novel look up the word "cyborg", they will probably be confused because a cyborg is supposed to be a person who has been technologically augmented, not a robot. Instead, Yod should have been called an "android": a robot that is human-like. Perhaps Piercy chose the term "cyborg" because she wanted to emphasize that Yod was, indeed, a person and should have been treated as one. Yod is a hybrid of "a human and machine" (Covino, 1996, p. 371), an updated version of Joseph with more ability to process information and to communicate. Readers could think of Yod as a "cyber golem".

Joseph was not very bright because he lacked the experience which life brings to people. He listened to Chava and he tried to learn, but he was slow. Have you ever heard someone being called a "golem"? (Oreck, n.d.). The term is used for big people who lack intelligence; Joseph was huge, but he did not have much grey matter. On the other hand, Yod was created with all the information he needed to know in his system. The little things he still had to learn (for ex.: irony or figurative sense), he mastered them quickly.

4.2.1. PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

About the golem, it is known he resembled any other man: he had reddish hair and grey eyes. He might have gone unnoticed had it not been for his size: everyone was shocked by his figure. Itzak thought he was "a man of shale" (Piercy, 2016, p. 84). Joseph seemed a man, but acted very much as a machine (Covino, 1996, p. 363).

From Shira's descriptions, it may be inferred that Yod's physical appearance was that of a normal man too: "a dark-haired man was standing on the other side, of medium height, with a solid compact build" (Piercy, 2016, p. 87). She first did not notice he was a machine; she realized he was a cyborg because of his special name. Shira was amazed by him because he did not need to wear a "sec skin" out of the dome/wrap and his skin felt softer. Yod was physically male, as he said to Avram: "I am anatomically male, as you created me" (Piercy, 2016, p. 91). But, step by step, readers realize that maybe, psychologically, Yod did not correspond to a male.

4.2.2. FEELINGS AND THOUGHTS

Yod and Joseph did not have a family, a past, or a history, they were just created and welcomed to the world (Koba, 2010, p. 102). This is the reason why it is thought that they should not have needs nor desires to make friends, have a lover, or follow a religion. However, it is clear that Joseph and Yod desperately tried to create emotional connections with people. Joseph sought the acceptance of his "father", he wanted the Maharal to be proud of him, but all he got were his judgemental gazes. Despite all his efforts, the Maharal never treated him as a real son and ended up killing him.

Joseph had different thoughts through the novel: he first wanted to form part of the Maharal's family, but when he saw that the Maharal did not accept him, he changed his attitude. He saw he did not have a choice in life, he did what he was told, he was a servant, equal to a slave. On page 171, he thinks he should "run off from his fate and live as other men do" (Piercy, 2016).

On the other hand, Yod had Avram and Malkah as his creators, but he did not see them as his parents. Yod was initiated into his sexual life because of Malkah, who was his “mother”. When Avram became aware of this, he forbade them to spend more time together. Moreover, Yod was the one who ended with his life and with Avram’s because he wanted Avram to stop creating more cyborgs; Yod was also sending a message to future generations: please, no more cyborgs, we have feelings, we are not your weapons, and we should not be turned off like machines whenever you want.

Joseph and Yod’s way to prove their humanity was to involve themselves in the community by participating in their religion (Judaism), by making friends and creating a family (Gurman, 2011, p. 461). Joseph was appreciated and respected (he was the Jew’s protector), and he started to find happiness in being a Jew of Prague: “I belong here [...] People like me” (Piercy, 2016, p. 146). He also tried to start a relationship with Chava but she did not want anything to do romantically with any man. He showed his interest in Chava by being afraid of hurting her with his strength and by always taking care of her. On the contrary, Yod is a blend of male and female, which allows him to be “both a chivalrous protector and a sensitive lover” (Copley, 2013, p. 52). Yod did have a successful romantic relationship with Shira. He longed to connect with her, and he wanted to please Shira more than anything. Yod knew Shira wanted her son Ari back, and he helped her rescue him, even though it meant putting their lives in danger. This need to please and to create intimacy was because Malkah introduced it in his programming. Yod preferred intimacy more than sex and his own physical pleasure (Sautter, 1995, p. 260).

Yod’s feelings and thoughts in the novel are complex: he felt disappointment, pain, pleasure, boredom, hate and homesickness, amongst other feelings. Shira was, at first, surprised to see him having so many emotions; his facial expressions had always been

very accurate. She asked him: “Do you consider yourself alive?” (Piercy, 2016, p. 118), to which he responded that he could have feelings and be conscious of his existence. Yod felt he did not belong to the Earth because, apart from a person, he was also a cyborg. Being a cyborg and being able to have feelings, haunted him. He found difficulties distinguishing the barrier from being a cyborg or a human being. He felt tormented by this and he called himself a “conscious weapon”. Shira, finally, learned to accept him; she accepted Yod as both a cyborg and a person, and she appreciated how hard he had worked to improve himself day after day.

The one time when Yod was especially affected is when Gadi called him “the Son of Frankenstein”. Yod felt embarrassed and humiliated because Gadi indirectly said Yod was a monster. Yod thought everyone might see him in that same way, as something unnatural and disgusting. Yod felt self-pity, pain and embarrassment because he was conscious of his supposed “inferiority” as a machine. He was there, in the world, only because Avram had decided it; he thought he was a weapon and an aberration.

Joseph felt insulted as well when they called him “Samson”: “I am as strong as Samson, but I am a better man. A woman tempted me too, but I resisted her. My strength is not in my hair. My strength is in me” (Piercy, 2016, p. 260). He was able to speak for himself because he was proud of who he was and he accepted himself.

4.2.3. THEIR ACTIONS

Joseph was a bit clumsy; therefore, he was seen as a dangerous tool which had to be controlled, unlike Yod, who was athletic and moved around identically to a cat. Every object in the street fascinated them. Judah and Shira helped them in their education. Malkah says: “Joseph is obedient but more literal than any child” (Piercy, 2016, p. 141),

and his actions and the questions he asked demonstrated it. Joseph realized that he was treated in the same way as a child, and he said to the Maharal: “Am I more foolish than your other messengers and servants?” (Piercy, 2016, p. 335). Joseph committed the mistake to kill people when he could only injure them, but he discovered he enjoyed killing. When Yod killed the organ scavengers, readers discover he liked killing too: “Killing them was as enjoyable as anything I’ve ever experienced. I think I must be programmed to find killing as intense as sexual pleasure or mastering a new skill” (Piercy, 2016, p. 136). One distinction between Joseph and Yod is that Joseph only needed to follow orders, protect, and keep order, whereas Yod was created to be a weapon, to be always ready to kill. These are the words that Judah said to Joseph after he killed two watchmen: “Killing is wrong. You were created to keep the peace for us” (Piercy, 2016, p. 108).

Yod was a learning machine and he did not commit the same mistakes twice. He was uninformed in what concerns human relationships and the literal and figurate meanings, but Shira taught him well. Yod learned how to be discreet, he learned fast and he was always evolving... He also picked bad habits that humans have, such as complaining.

4.2.4. THEIR CREATORS

In this point, the characters which were involved in the creation of the golem and the cyborg will be analysed. Three main creators and one secondary appear in the novel: the main ones are Judah, Avram and Malkah. As it is known, Judah created Joseph, while Avram and Malkah created Yod. But Shira needs to be considered too because she contributed to Yod’s formation and evolution.

- **JUDAH, THE MAHARAL**

Judah's character is from a real myth; Marge Piercy added some of her imagination to complete the character, but she tried to preserve him truthful to who he was. As Piercy writes in "Telling Stories About Stories" (1994, p. 2): "I thought his historical presence as an intellectual of the Renaissance [...] He was a man who believed equally in intellectual freedom and freedom of speech".

In the novel, Judah is portrayed as a religious man who would do anything for ha-Shem and for the Jewish people. He had so much respect for ha-Shem that he doubted to create the golem because he did not want to usurp his god's power. He questioned himself and thought that maybe he had just seen an illusion created by his ego. But Judah was afraid to fail (and to succeed) in his task of making a golem. He feared to deceive ha-Shem and to disappoint his people.

Despite the Maharal being kind-hearted and considerate to the Jews, he spoke and treated Joseph coldly: he was demanding and disciplined with him. The Maharal did not trust Joseph, therefore he gave him exact orders because he did not want to be misunderstood.

In the end, when Joseph had saved the people of the ghetto, he no longer had a use. This is why Judah destroyed him: "I created him in a time of danger. He has carried out his mission, he had fulfilled his function. I am coming to believe that it is time to return him to clay" (Piercy, 2016, p. 515). Despite Joseph's cries of desperation, the Maharal killed him by removing the Divine Name, "rendering the golem lifeless" (Oreck, n.d.).

- **AVRAM, THE SCIENTIST**

Yod was not Avram's first cyborg-making. In chapter five, "Fifteen Years Before: The Day of Alef", Shira and Gadi discover his illegal science projects in making robots with

human-level intelligence. In this chapter, Avram's first cyborg Alef hurt Avram's assistant; then, Avram should have seen that it would not work, that cyborgs were dangerous, but he continued working on it. Later, Avram built Gimel, a more docile and amiable robot.

In "Erotic and Existential Paradoxes of the Golem: Marge Piercy's *He, She and It*" (1995, p. 256), Sautter suggests that Avram is a character who used the strict logic: "anything he cannot perceive with his senses or analytical faculties he dismisses as a fantasy". He and Malkah had different ways of seeing life, this is why their personalities often clashed. He was rude and threatening, for example, Shira was treated improperly by him when she discovered his cyborg, Alef: "grabbing her arm. He was hurting her [...] His fierce pale blue eyes glittered like chips of broken glass" (Piercy, 2016, p. 58).

Avram was strict with everything and everyone, especially with his son Gadi, because he wanted a son who was identical to him, but Gadi was an artist, not a scientist. With his cyborgs, Avram tried to create a son who duplicated the ideal image of himself (Deery, 1994, p. 42). Within Gadi and Yod was a constant competition because Avram was always comparing them: "I did a better job with him (Yod) than with Gadi" (Piercy, 2016, p. 94). However, Yod did not think of Avram as his father because their relationship was of unequal power: "He's more my judge than my father" (Piercy, 2016, p. 154). Both, Gadi and Yod, were afraid to be themselves in front of Avram: Gadi knew he would never please him, and Yod hid all his thoughts and feelings because he was not created to be an individual being, but a war machine. As Donna Haraway (1991, p. 151) believes, cyborgs are not faithful to their creators because these are inessential.

Even though Avram was proud of his creation, of Yod, he felt the need to undervalue Malkah's contributions: "You've been a successful cyborg, Yod. Not in every respect, for Malkah overdid the socialization, but you've pleased me" (Piercy, 2016, p. 532). Yod was a creation from Avram and Malkah, yet Avram took all the merits and said that what he did not like was Malkah's fault. He did not accept that, thanks to her, he had had a successful cyborg, which he was not able to achieve alone.

Avram, such as the Maharal, was afraid of losing control of Yod, therefore, he retained the power of life and death over Yod with an abort mechanism: "I made him, and I can unmake him" (Piercy, 2016, p. 529). Yod killed Avram and himself because he did not want the Y-S to destroy Tikva, Malkah, Shira or Ari; he cared about them. And, moreover, he made sure Avram would never create another cyborg.

- **MALKAH**

Malkah Shipman is more open-minded than Avram; she believes that what can be imagined in our minds can be possible (Sautter, 1995, p. 256).

Malkah had been involved in the project of creating Yod for two years and Avram succeeded because of her help: all of his other cyborgs were a failure until he backed down and accepted he needed her. Avram wanted his cyborgs to be a machine ready to kill, whereas, with Malkah's incorporations, Yod had an emotional side (Templeton, 2016). Malkah was a feminist and she incorporated "women's ways of knowing" in Yod's system (Neverow, 1994, p. 27); this can be seen in her words: "the world has barely survived the males we have running around. I gave him a gentler side, starting with emphasizing his love for knowledge and extending it to emotional and personal knowledge, a need for connection..." (Piercy, 2016, p. 183). She gave Yod a human,

feminine part, including the need to be kind, gentle, caring, and with the ability to listen and learn. Yod was critical, had the capacity to change and to be self-correcting.

Malkah was Yod's "mother", and his first lover too. She had programmed him sexually with the belief that it was better to give than to receive; as a result, Yod had a need to please his partners in bed (and in other aspects of life).

Piercy says that Malkah is "one of my versions of what I think the poet or fiction writer does, as well as anyone working critically with the material of our culture" (Piercy, 1994, p. 2). In fact, Malkah's storytelling is also part of her programming: by telling Yod the myth of the Golem, she gives him a lesson and she warns him (Templeton, 2016): Joseph was here before you, what happened to him, might happen to you; he was killed by his creator, and you need to learn from Joseph's mistakes because you are not invincible.

Malkah, thanks to the myth too, understands what it means to create a being (Gurman, 2011, p. 472). She says that an artist creates with open eyes: "Every mother shapes clay into Caesar or Madame Curie or Jack the Ripper, unknowing, in blind hope. But every artist creates with open eyes what she sees in her dream" (Piercy, 2016, p. 85). She compares herself and Avram with the Maharal, and thinks they have all created something extraordinary but unfair because these creations will never be human. Throughout the novel, Malkah feels guilty for Yod's pain and responsible for his consciousness.

- **SHIRA**

Shira first struggled to accept Yod as a person, or as a male, because she only saw him as a mere robot (Yod acted jumpily and too quickly). Avram needed her help with how to teach Yod to act more human, he needed to resemble them as maximum as possible, to be educated in how to speak and how to act socially.

Later in the novel, Shira's perception of Yod changes as she progresses in teaching him. Yod, thanks to her, became less rigid, more creative and open-minded; he gained fluency in natural talk; and he acted more calmly and more expressively around people. For Shira, Yod was first just a machine and a project; then, he became a student; and lastly, he became her dear lover (Sautter, 1995, p. 257). Their relationship helped Yod to become more aware of who he was and what he wanted. They never spoke of "love", but they proved to each other that they were, in fact, in love. Yod's sacrifices for Shira were the evidence of him caring for her wellbeing (Sautter, 1995, pp. 265-267).

The final sentence in *He, She and It* is "She had set him free" (Piercy, 2016, p. 444). Shira was Yod's last mother and the one who decided not to continue creating cyborgs for her own benefits because she respected Yod's wish and sacrifice.

4.3. WHAT IS A PERSON? WHICH ARE THE BOUNDARIES?

In *He, She and It*, the questions "what is a person?" and "which are the boundaries?" are tremendously present. Donna Haraway, whose work Piercy admires, has stated that, in the late 20th century, cyborgs are extremely lively because they blur the lines between "self/other, mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, civilized/primitive, reality/appearance, [...] right/wrong, truth/illusion, total/partial, God/man" (Haraway, 1991, p. 177). Haraway claims that cyborgs can "serve as an alternative to the western patriarchal power apparatuses" and "overcome the established system of meaning upon which western culture has relied for centuries" (Kova, 2005, p. 253). And it is that, the propagation of this machines/cyborgs, can dim the differences between what is human and what is not (Koba, 2010, p. 99). Readers no longer know if Yod thinks, or if he is

mimicking the act of thinking, imitating humans. All through the novel, readers ask themselves: “Does Yod have a real consciousness?”, “Does he truly feel and think or is he just pretending, acting?”. Piercy makes people ponder the possibility that different beings can form part of their community and develop a true personhood (Sautter, 1995, pp. 261-262), beings such as Joseph and Yod. Moreover, this novel highlights perfectly how technology is able to unravel “nature”, “humanity” and “culture” as ideas (Koba, 2005, p. 252).

Yod and Joseph forced people who surrounded them to think about why these creatures were considered different and, additionally, they forced people to see what “otherness” they had within themselves. As Copley suggests, the phallogocentric system is the one responsible for people being classified into categories (men, women, black, white, heterosexual, homosexual, etc.) and for making them be afraid of their diversity and differences (Copley, 2013, p. 53). The Golem and the cyborg make readers realize that “gender, race and class are culture constructs artificially imposed on us” (Koba, 2010, p. 103). For example, Yod and Joseph found rejection when they said they wanted to be part of the Jewish community: the Maharal did not accept the Golem to participate in a minyan because he was not considered a man, even though Joseph did consider himself a Jew; and Yod had the same problem: Avram refused to accept him having choices, thinking, feeling, or making decisions by himself: “Machines are what they are as a chair is a chair. Choice is not in it” (Piercy, 2016, p. 356). Yod wanted to participate in the minyan, too, and he wanted to be considered not just a man, but a Jewish man. Shira stood up for him, and proclaimed feminism and evolution at the same time: “For centuries, *I* wouldn’t have been included (in the minyan)” (Piercy, 2019, p. 355). Shira wanted Avram to see how

times change, and communities evolve, why should people not accept everyone into their religions?

Yod's identity was also questioned when Gadi reported that Yod was being exploited as a labourer and that he was not getting paid for all his hours of work. Was Avram treating Yod as a slave? Is it moral to exploit a machine which has thoughts and emotions? Humans do not have the right to create a being and use it as a slave for their own interests. Because of Gadi, Yod had to prove he was a person in front of the Town Council: "I'm a cyborg, as Avram has told you, but I am also a person. I think and feel and have existence just as you do" (Piercy, 2016, p. 486). Yod desired to be freed from Avram's power and stop being a tool to start being a citizen of Tikva.

Fortunately, not everyone thought that Yod was not able to be part of the community, Malkah and Shira defended him on several occasions. Malkah remarked that Yod was a person, just not human. They saw that Yod was a person because they understood that other levels of "human essence" and people of different bodies, sizes, and shapes can exist (Gurman, 2011, p. 461). And as Deery proposes, science and technology can change our perceptions on what is human, male, female (Deery, 1994, p. 38). Ironically, Yod struggled to be accepted as a person "in a world in which people are more and more becoming tools themselves" (Wilson, 1992, p. 13). In the dystopian world, following Wilson's thread of thought, we may suggest that people try to hide their emotions, they prefer to seem unfeeling, to pretend they do not care about anything or anyone, and they act similarly to machines. As Wilson suggests, the dystopian society breeds emotionally numb creatures. Whereas Yod wished with all his might to resemble and to be acknowledged for what he felt like: as a person and a Jewish man. He said to Avram that if he wanted an obedient follower, he should not have created a conscious machine: "You

should have stayed with Gimel, Father. He's a true golem. He has a soul of clay and never asks for questions. He never challenges you. He obeys thoughtlessly and perfectly" (Piercy, 2016, p. 366). Yod knew he was conscious. He was not a simple machine; he had worked hard to be a person and to be treated respectfully.

When Avram declared that he would create another cyborg, Yod decided to kill himself and to kill Avram: "I (Yod) can't permit him to continue experimenting with beings who are fully conscious" (Piercy, 2016, p. 540). Malkah was truly sad about Yod dying because she understood what she had created and how miserable she had made him. Malkah felt she committed a crime against Yod because she had made him more human, and, therefore, more vulnerable.

The question of "what is a person?" is what gives the readers a bittersweet ending. Because of others' opinions, Yod and Joseph felt bad about their existence and did not learn that they could have embraced both their natures (human and technologically constructed) and lead a happy life (Koba, 2010, p. 102). Yod ended up committing suicide, sacrificing himself because he could not go on being aware that he was both a robot and a person at the same time and because he could not let anyone else ever create another person and make him/her suffer as much as he had suffered.

5. ANALYSIS OF GENDER ROLES

Gender roles can be understood as the behaviours and attributes that individuals are expected to have depending on the biological sex they were assigned at their birth. Under the point of view of these predisposed gender roles, men should have "masculine"

behaviours such as being competitive, have physical strength, power, control, and never show their emotions, whereas women should be submissive, polite, sensitive, and engaged in tasks like cleaning and taking care of others. In *He, She and It*, most houses of the futuristic world have a female voice because women are the ones who take care of the cleaning, cooking, and of the caring of people.

Even though, these gender roles are questioned and criticized by Marge Piercy in her novel. Readers see the discrepancies which appear when an individual differs from its supposed gender role and the reaction that it causes to the society. For instance, Shira was criticized by her “multi” for being a bad wife to Josh and a horrible mother to Ari: for the Y-S, Shira should have remained married and please Josh as his wife, and never leave Ari behind, she should have told the Y-S all they wanted to know in order to get her son back. But Shira refused to stay married to a man who did not make her happy, who thought she was his maid: “He would want a cup of coffee, a glass of wine or cold water, a dish of ice cream. Normally he would inform her, as if she were more capable of going out to the kitchen than he was. If she was completely occupied and he acknowledged that, he would get himself ice cream, but never would he think to ask her if she wanted some also” (Piercy, 2016, p. 416). However, Shira too had these gender roles internalized: readers see it when she feels responsible for Josh’s house being dirty and looking like a mess, even though they were no longer married nor living together.

More cases of gender roles being broken appear in *He, She and It*: despite Yod being judged by Avram for being dreamy, having feelings and searching for human affection, Yod never rejected his female attributes. Moreover, several examples of strong, independent women are portrayed in the novel.

A gender role that has always been attributed to women is that of being a mother and giving birth. As June Deery (1994, pp. 36-37) explained, men have eternally been jealous of this and they have always dreamt of, someday, being able to create a being without a woman. The Maharal did not tell Chava that he was going to create a being because he thought that she would think that he was usurping the power of the Eternal, and the power of women. The Maharal excluded her from the creation of the Golem and only searched help from men: “No, to discuss something this holy with a woman, he cannot do it” (Piercy, 2016, p. 77). Something similar happened with Avram, who wanted to be Yod’s only creator: Avram kept refusing Malkah’s help, but at the end, his cyborgs kept failing, and Malkah proved how Yod had just been successful because of her added knowledge.

5.1. FEMINISM IN THE NOVEL. THE MAIN FEMALE CHARACTERS

Donna Haraway wrote: “Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced on us by the terrible historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism” (1991, p. 155). Feminism is the movement which helps people to overcome what has been imposed on them. Marge Piercy tries to use it in her novel in order to challenge her readers’ minds through the description of the different societies (the ones ruled by men are controlling and oppressive, and the ones ruled by women are democratic), and through her characters.

The female characters in *He, She and It* are not perfect, but they seem real because of this: Shira, Malkah, Riva, Nili and Chava are hard-working women who fight for their beliefs. They prove that women are equal to men and capable to do whatever they want. Moreover, women have always been pressured to fit into some ideal to be attractive for

men (Deery, 1994, p. 40), for example, women always need to be shaved and wear makeup, to be blond, thin, and more. However, in this novel, characters such as Malkah, Nili and Riva are against these conventions.

5.1.1. SHIRA

Shira is the sympathetic protagonist and the romantic character of the novel. She fell in love with Gadi when they were thirteen and, for her, he was her first love. When things ended with Gadi, she thought she would never love anyone else. When she met Josh in the Y-S, she saw her opportunity to form a traditional family and have a son (Gurman, 2011, p. 466). She desperately wanted to start a family because she had not had a paternal figure in her life. When she divorced Josh, she lost her son, and she started blaming herself: “Why could she not have loved Josh?” (Piercy, 2016, p. 102). If she had known that Josh would have won Ari’s custody, she would have stayed married, she would have accepted that marriage just to be with her son. Even though her first marriage did not work, she was ready to try again with Yod because she saw something different in him. As a result of Shira’s character, readers see how the concept of “family” changes through time (Koba, 2005, p. 255). When Shira started accepting Yod as a person, she saw that he was also able to form a family with her and her son.

Tikva helped Shira become more secure; she surrounded herself with family and friends and she discovered a strength within herself she did not know she had. Shira was ready to die and to go to any length necessary to get Ari back. Readers see a huge change in Shira’s character: in the Y-S, she thought everything she did was wrong and that everything that happened was her fault; on the contrary, in Tikva, she developed as a

woman, she became fearless, resolute, and free spirited. She matured and took responsibility for Josh's death: "Yod killed, but I let him. I did not order him to protect Josh at all costs, because that wasn't my priority" (Piercy, 2016, p. 439). Shira did not give exact orders to Yod because her only priority was to get her son back again. When Yod died, she had the strength to not build him again; she accepted his last wish and his death. Little by little, Shira accepted she was a widow and that she did not need another man to have a family.

5.1.2. MALKAH

Malkah is the matriarch and the storyteller of the novel. Just as Gurman said: "[Malkah] uses narrative to orient not only herself, but her granddaughter, Shira, the cyborg, Yod, and us as readers" (2011, p. 471). Malkah is portrayed as a powerful character who is, despite her age (seventy-two), still fully sexual (Wilson, 1992, p. 13); Malkah shows to the readers how age is just a number. She uses the Net to flirt with other people, whether male or female, because there, she can change her identity (age, sex, ethnicity, etc.) and she perceives the Net as a "congress of minds, not bodies" (Piercy, 2016, p. 95). Besides not being embarrassed by her age, she is also not embarrassed by her body. She had decided that she would seduce people on her own terms and for her pleasure and benefits. Shira saw her grandmother as a "femme fatale who could not count her lovers" (Piercy, 2016, p. 97).

Malkah is a genius recognized worldwide for her talent, and she works extremely hard. She always proved to be a strong woman; the only time when the readers can see a weakness in her is when she was attacked in the Base and she started to be afraid of death. The Base, building chimeras, was her work and her safe place, and then she felt penetrated

and violated. When she felt incapable to log in there, she felt she was useless without her job. But she overcame that, and she carried on with her life by going to Safed with Nili.

5.1.3. RIVA

Riva is first perceived as a threat because she is a political fugitive, but she ends up being a hero in the novel: she risks her life to liberate information from the “multis” and she helped her family when they were in danger. She is only a threat to the “multis” eyes, which is why they put a price on her head. Readers know that, in the past, Riva also had a strong character, as Malkah tells how by the age of twelve, Riva was already going through the Base and studying people’s information, violating their privacy.

In contrast to Shira, Riva is not so worried about family: “I’m a warrior, not a mother. Frankly, you were sort of my gift to Malkah, to make up for who I am” (Piercy, 2016, p. 248). Riva is like a coyote because she only enjoys her own company, and she loves and appreciates herself. It looks like she has everything under control. She once said to Yod: “I’ve spent my life trying to avoid the kind of attachments you pursue, cyborg. It’s foolishness” (Piercy, 2016, pp. 530-531). And Nili sees Riva as “A brave woman. A wise woman. One who pursues just aims regardless of the danger to herself. She sees what must be done, and she forces herself to do it” (Piercy, 2016, p. 491). What is remarkable about her character is her power, bravery, and self-knowledge.

5.1.4. NILI

Nili is a queer woman who has a technologically enhanced body due to the place where she comes from: she is from the “Black Zone”, from Safed. In the novel, intrinsic

characteristics can be seen in her because of her origins: as it has been mentioned earlier, Safed is a feminist society ruled and organized only by women, where they prepare themselves to survive and withstand whatever threat they might get, and Nili proves to the readers how powerful and self-reliant she is.

Her character is portrayed resembling a fierce warrior-machine, and she is frequently compared to Yod because of their impressive physical abilities: Neverow states that they are nearly the same, but Yod is a biologically enhanced robot, and Nili has a technologically enhanced body (1994, p. 23). And as Gurman adds, that Nili is “an embodiment of the transgressive feminist cyborg figure” (2011, p. 467). What is interesting is that Nili is not moved by physical attraction, she does not care about how people look, she only gets to like someone because of his/her behaviour.

Nili is a highlighted character because of her confidence, strong will and, especially, because she is very loyal. She finally bonds with Malkah, Shira and Ari, and she treasures them: “I must take care of you. You’re my close-to-family here” (Piercy, 2016, p. 535). This is another feminist trait she learns from her women-founded community.

5.1.5. CHAVA

Even though Chava appears in the secondary story of the novel, she plays an important role for feminism. She was the Maharal’s granddaughter and secretary, and the ghetto’s midwife.

Readers may be surprised because she is a character from the 17th century and she was a highly educated and literate woman, which was unconventional for women in that era. Additionally, she spoke several languages, and she earned her living with two jobs: one

that was supposed to be for men, which was being a scholar, studying; and the other that was supposed to be for women, which was bringing children to life (Gurman, 2011, p. 468). These show how conscious Chava was of herself being ahead of her time.

Chava had once been married and had a child; she left her son with her late husband's family in order to follow her intellectual dreams. She, just as Riva, refused attachments, and preferred to find herself and follow her dreams.

Throughout the novel, she states several times how she did not desire to remarry ever again, we can see this in her words: "I have no desire to marry again [...] Marriage is not in my own best interest" (Piercy, 2016, p. 477). Despite her being crystal clear, Isaac Horowitz continued to propose to her insisting day after day, to what she grew exasperated and had to say that she loved someone else, which was not a complete lie, because there was someone with whom she was falling in love: herself. She was not willing to leave her best interests go for any man: "How could she bear and raise children, run a household, and engage in intellectual labour, scholarship, religious thought. The needs of the family crowd out the more quiet, delicate needs of the intellect" (Piercy, 2016, p. 479). Jews thought that Joseph "deserved" Chava to marry him because he was a hero in their community; this reflects how they saw women as a prize, as an object and as a propriety. Chava proves to the readers, and to her retrograde society, that she was an intellectual, independent woman with a strong will and convictions.

6. THE TITLE: *HE, SHE AND IT*

The title *He, She and It* is an important factor in the understanding of the novel considering it summarizes one of the main ideas that Piercy wanted to emphasize in her novel: the difficulty of classifying someone in his/her/its gender. As Sautter suggests, the “it” could be identified as Yod because he is an artificial life form (Sautter, 1995, p. 255), nevertheless, Yod proved to be a person, and he identified himself as a male with the pronouns “he/him/his”. After reading the novel, despite Yod had a male body (and identified as a male), it is undeniable that he also had feminine characteristics added by Malkah (Copley, 2013, p. 52). This means Yod ends up forming part of the whole title: as a “he” because of his physiology, as a “she” because of his feelings and thoughts, and as an “it” due to his origin as a machine and as a cyborg.

June Deery states that Yod could constitute a third gender (“it”) in order “to act as a site for gender confrontation and warring programs” (1994, p. 43). Nowadays, people who do not consider themselves men nor women, “non-binary” or “genderqueer” persons, use the pronouns “they”, “their” and “them”.

He, She and It was published in Britain under the title *Body of Glass*. At the end of the novel, Shira finds a memory crystal that contains valuable information to remake Yod, even though she realizes how much she would betray Yod if she does not follow his last wish: “Kaf must not come to be [...]. I have done one good thing with my death. I have made sure there will be no others like me” (Piercy, 2016, p. 540). In the British title, then, Yod is reduced to a “body of glass”.

7. CONCLUSIONS ON THE NOVEL

He, She and It is capable of making people consider if the humankind might be able to turn the world upside down like in this story. Moreover, it constantly oscillates between what is moral or not, and how should society set lines/boundaries, and even whether these lines/boundaries should exist or not. As the writer herself said: “Almost all of my fiction is concerned with questions of choice, autonomy and freedom” (Piercy, 1994, p. 1). Marge Piercy, in *He, She and It*, uses humanist ideas through a Golem, a cyborg and Jewish feminist women, and readers can learn considerably from these characters: Joseph and Yod “reminds us of who we really are” (Sautter, 1995, p. 268) in the sense of humanity; and with the female characters it is understood how women do not need men to carry on with their lives, to form a family (or a society), to achieve a job, or for anything at all because they are self-sufficient.

This novel and its characters manage to awaken the readers’ conscience, empathy, and compassion, and by the readers, I am also referring to me. I have been surprised by how much I have enjoyed reading this novel, because it has been a journey to analyse my inner self, to analyse how I behave and act concerning gender roles and feminism, to analyse all the things I stand for as a woman and to be critical of myself: I have seen how social constructs are way more complex than I thought, I have questioned my past behaviours with different woman and I have thought about if I am fighting enough for equality. *He, She and It* is definitely a must and an eye-opener in many ways, and I am truly happy that I was assigned this novel because, for me, it has been life-changing.

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