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The Evolution of Feminist Utopias

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Abstract

The genre of feminist utopias has its origin in the first wave of feminism which rose up in the late nineteenth century. This dissertation follows the evolution the genre, focusing on the changes it reflects in the strategies of utopian writing and, more specifically, on the developments that have occurred within feminism itself.

The first feminist utopia, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland, is examined in chapter one. The novel, by depicting a productive and peaceful society consisting only of women, dramatises the belief that the economic dependence of women was not only an artificial and discriminatory system but one which also, by adversely affecting the functioning of society as a whole, retarded the progress of socialism, which political philosophy informed much of early feminist thought.

The bulk of the works brought under discussion were written in the 1970s, the period of the second wave of feminism. These works reflect the radical beliefs of the time, which was one of growing reaction against form and formalism, and also the growing rifts within the feminist movement itself. Monique Wittig's Les Guérillères and Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time echo the call for the recognition of androgyny that was voiced in the sixties and seventies. The utopian societies they depict, worlds without gender, advance the view of gender itself as an artificial construct, created by sociology not physiology. They denounce the belief that there can be "equality within difference".

In contrast to the politics reflected by these two works, those expressed in Suzy Mckee Charnas's Walk to the End of the World, Sally Miller Gearhart's The Wanderground and Joanna Russ's The Female Man, present gender difference as a serious (or, in Gearhart's work, insurmountable) obstacle in the path of women's liberation. In the single-

sex societies that they depict, these works espouse separation by women from men as necessary either as a strategy in the struggle for liberation or as an escape from the inequities of patriarchy.

The rise of the New Right in the 1980s, the combined movements of, amongst others, religious conservatism and antifeminism, the latter being supported mainly by women, has resulted in an acceptance of the political infeasibility of all women uniting to form a front against patriarchy. Also, studies in the fields of both neurology and psychology began to indicate conclusively the existence of difference between the genders, which has weakened the call for androgyny, causing feminist utopian writers to seek ways of depicting "equality within difference". The utopias written in the late eighties reflect this change in political emphasis. Sheri Tepper's The Gate to Women's Country and Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale acknowledge the existence of gender difference, and do not depict a binary division existing between men and women with regard to the promulgation of patriarchy. They are also critical of the religious fundamentalist backlash against feminism that was loosed in the early eighties.

The final chapter traces the evolution of Ursula Le Guin's utopian thought, focusing especially on her novels The Dispossessed and Always Coming Home. Le Guin's utopian writing, which espouses her belief in pacifist anarchism, has become more radical and less conservative over time, a trend contrary to that of the genre in general.

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Introduction

The Evolution of Feminist Utopias

The longing for Paradise
is man's longing not to
be man.

MILAN KUNDERA The Unbearable Lightness of Being

It is time to cease the vain
contention that men and women
are created the same. They are
not, and no amount of Utopian
fantasy can alter the fact.

ANNE MOIR and DAVID JESSEL, Brainsex

Utopian works are, inherently, vehicles for social criticism. Like a photograph being held up against its negative, a utopia contrasts the society from within which its image was formed, revealing by the comparison the wrongs of that society. Dystopian, or anti-utopian, works level social criticism not through negation, through showing what society is not, but through hyperbole: they exaggerate social wrongs; they portray a negative of lurid colour and misshapen form. The generic term "utopian fiction" will be used throughout to refer to both utopian and dystopian texts, the latter being a descendant of the former and, due to the similarity of its essential function, social criticism, logically a constituent of the genre. Indeed, in many of the works in this study the two forms are conjoined within a single book or across a pair of books, the inequities of the dystopian view serving by contrast to highlight the virtues of the utopian.

The subject of this work is the evolution of feminist utopias. By "feminist" utopias I refer to those utopian or dystopian texts which have as a central concern the role of women in the societies depicted, and which provide thereby a critique of women's status in society. Through discussion of works of utopian fiction spanning a period of over seventy years I shall examine how utopian fiction has evolved in consonance with social change in a relationship of mutual incitement to change. Utopias reflect an inverse image of the society in which they were written, through their presentation of social and value structures in opposition to those of that society and through their expression of subversive ideas current in it. Feminist utopias reflect in

particular the path feminism itself has taken, their proliferations indicating its resurgences, their criticisms echoing its current thinking, their worlds dramatising its hopes. They are a mirror through which one has a view of the profile of feminism, a dynamic genre reflecting feminism's ever-changing face.

The most significant change in the genre of utopian fiction has been the movement away from the paradisiac land of perpetual bliss and undiluted happiness. The fulcrum around which the emphasis of utopian writing has turned is Aldous Huxley's Brave New World, published in 1932. Huxley took the utopian desire for happiness to its extreme and, in creating a world whose people -- from the ignorant Epsilons to the pampered Alphas -- are "happy", spawned the dystopian novel. Their unremitting pursuit of pleasure makes this "brave new world" not a proleptic symbol of human happiness, but an admonitory reminder of what constitutes the freedom upon which happiness depends. The epigraph of the book quotes Nicolas Berdaieff:

Les utopies apparaissent comme bien plus réalisables qu'on ne les croyait autrefois. Et nous nous trouvons actuellement devant une question bien autrement angoissante: Comment éviter leur réalisation définitive?... Les utopies sont réalisables. La vie marche vers les utopies. Et peut-être un siècle nouveau commence-t-il, un siècle où les intellectuels et la classe cultivée reveront aux moyens d'éviter les utopies et de retourner à une société non utopique, moins 'parfaite' et plus libre.¹

Huxley's work further subverted the existing tendencies of the utopian genre through its bleak warning against a complacent acceptance of science, an admonition which is reiterated strongly by many feminist utopian writers wary of

1. "Utopias are becoming more possible than one could ever have believed before. And we now find ourselves actually faced with a strangely distressing question: How to avoid their permanent realisation?... Utopias are possible. Life moves towards utopias. And perhaps a new age is dawning, an era in which the intellectuals and the cultured class will dream of ways of escaping these utopias and returning to a non-utopian society, less 'perfect' and more free" (my translation).

the blind, teleological pursuit of progress that to them embodies the worst excesses of what is overtly "masculine". In Brave New World Huxley took the application of that burgeoning phenomenon, the production line, to an extreme in his depiction of the mass-production of human life, engaging not with what should be done with such technology, but with what can be done.

Utopian writers since Huxley have tended to seek worlds that allow for and accept the various facets of the human condition -- the potential unhappiness, aggression, lusts -- that early utopian writers, like Thomas More in his eponymous work Utopia, found it suitable to ignore in the psychologies of the inhabitants of their worlds. The utopias of the latter part of this century, in situating their worlds beyond Paradise, have imaged worlds incorporative of the turbulent desires of the human condition.

Thomas Moylan explains this phase in the evolution of utopian writing as one in which

the subversive imaging of utopian society and the radical negativity of dystopian perception is preserved; while the systematizing boredom of the traditional utopia and the cooptation of utopia by modern structures is destroyed. Thus, utopian writing in the 1970s was saved by its own destruction and transformation into the "critical utopia".²

Critical utopias are critical both of the society in which they were written and of the genre itself in its traditional form; they are self-reflexive modes of writing in which the limitations of the utopian tradition are acknowledged; thus they "reject utopia as blueprint while preserving it as dream" (DTI, 10). Critical utopias accept the impossibility of Utopia but continue to use utopian expression as a means of subverting the complacencies and compromises of society.

Moylan describes also how the utopian image was coopted in this century both by capitalism, in its presentation of the market as the consumer's utopia, and by the totalitarian regimes in their communistic visions. Largely in reaction to

2. Thomas Moylan, Demand the Impossible (Methuen, New York, 1986), p.10. Abbreviated throughout as DTI.

these appropriations, the critical utopia exposes the falseness of these images from its past and focuses more closely on the struggle toward the hopes of fulfilment and against false consciousness and oppression, rather than on any systematized realisation of these hopes. The majority of works to be discussed in this dissertation were written in the second wave of utopian writing which arose in the 1970s, and fall readily into Moylan's classification of the critical utopia. The late 1980s and early 1990s have seen a recapturing, to an extent, of the utopian image of the past, a movement which will be examined in the last two chapters.

A "happy" society does not necessarily imply happy individuals, and one of the challenges of utopian writing has ever more become the striking of a balance between individual freedom and happiness and the welfare and happiness of the group. In feminist utopias particularly, this issue is further complicated by the acknowledgment of one sub-group, a sex or class or race, having gained advantage at the expense of another, and of the need to find balance between groups within the main group as well as between individual and group rights. The autonomy of the individual is difficult to safeguard in a utopia. What is one to do with the non-conformists, the misfits, the rebels? In early utopian writing such individuals were written out of the script. The societies simply did not produce them. In critical utopias such individuals do prevail, often to play a central role. As utopian writing has become more concerned with process, and less with product, so character has become of greater significance in a genre formerly concerned primarily with content. The non-conformists of critical utopias instigate the resistance against the forces that thwart utopian desire; they foment revolution, redirecting society towards the asymptotic goal of utopia.

A comparison of the early and later works brought under discussion will reveal this evolution in the nature of utopian fiction itself, but the central focus will be on the developments in feminist thought that these books reflect.

The end of the nineteenth century heralded the first major upsurge in the fight for equality of opportunity for women, the demands made centring on basic rights such as suffrage. At the forefront of this first wave of feminism was the American lecturer and author Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and it is her utopian work, Herland, that will be examined in the first chapter. Although Herland, which was first published -- in serial form -- in 1915, is not the first utopia written by a woman, it is the first essentially feminist one, and reveals through humorous yet forcible argument the concerns raised by the feminists of the early twentieth century.

After its success in the struggle for the enfranchisement of women, the feminist movement lost some of its momentum; the progression of feminism was further impeded by the social upheaval of the Depression and the two world wars. But amid the egalitarian atmosphere of the 1960s, feminism experienced a resurgence. The sixties and seventies saw an increasing reaction against form and formalism as being tools of oppression. Feminists began to question social constructs such as the nuclear family and monogamous marriages, to denounce these formal structures as instrumental in the perpetuation of patriarchy. Language itself was no longer merely accepted as a neutral tool and became increasingly criticised for its role in the creation and maintenance of gender stereotyping. The mood of feminism at this time was essentially radical. The solutions that were sought called for complete restructuring, the deletion of existing forms that they might be replaced by new, and non-discriminatory, ones.

Utopian fiction is written largely in response to social change. It expresses the hopes and fears engendered within these periods of upheaval; it is a medium for the ideas and ideals born of a changing, and often threatening, environment (the end of the nineteenth century, for example, when the possible ramifications of the mechanised age were becoming apparent, heralded the first major wave of modern utopian discourse). The late 1960s and the 1970s were a time

of prolific writing by feminist authors and in concomitance with the new demands of feminism there appeared a great number of utopian works portraying societies living according to these new precepts of equality.

In the 1970s the pressures of internal disputes led to divisions within the feminist movement, various splinter groups breaking off from mainstream thought over differences both in basic ideological assumptions about the nature of gender and in belief about the path feminism itself should take. Broadly speaking, the splits occurred along geopolitical lines: in the United States emphasis was placed on the rereading and rediscovering of texts; in France feminists introduced feminist rereadings of Marxian politics and the psychoanalytic works of Jacques Lacan. There too the focus fell more closely on language, Jacques Derrida's linguistic theories being utilised to reveal the role of language in the construction of gender. In the eighties these two major camps became further fragmented as the emphases of various feminists shifted away from primarily gender-related issues to include issues of race and class.

Central to the feminist debate of the seventies was the question of gender. The criticism of patriarchy, and its rigid gender stereotypes, led to a criticism, by some groups, of gender itself. Gender was held up as a social construct, an artificial taxonomy imposed on individuals by society after their birth. Gender was seen as both cause and symptom of patriarchy -- each furthering and entrenching the other. This school of feminist thought, spearheaded by such writers as Monique Wittig and Gayle Rubin, rejected the possibility of there being equality within difference, and sought instead to deny difference itself, and thereby render unnecessary the need for any form of gender distinction.

Androgyny, a position beyond gender, was thus held up as the objective state necessary for the ultimate collapse of patriarchy, patriarchy being assumed to be founded on the existence of the gender distinctions "man" and "woman". In Wittig's anarchic politics can be seen the reaction against formal structures, gender among them, a reaction that

embodied the mood of much of late sixties thinking, and which is evident in both the content and structure of her utopian work Les Guerillères (1969). Marge Piercy's utopia, Woman on the Edge of Time (1979) expresses, within a more conventional structure, a similar desire for a society without the formal existence of gender. The second chapter will examine these two genderless societies and their radical confrontation of forms that have so unequivocally been considered "natural".

The radical tone of 1970s feminist utopias is heard in the voices of their protagonists: they are the voices of androgynes or women. Men are excluded from the majority of the utopias of this period, the supposition being that the inclusion of the group "men" admits a gender hierarchy within which women are subordinate. The absence of different sexes, of course, obviates the problems of gender discrimination. Utopias depicting societies of women only had been written in the nineteenth century, but Gilman's Herland was the first to do so with the aim of showing how gender oppression affected women adversely. This theme of utopia being more readily realisable in a single-sex society, a society existing beyond the gender conflict, finds expression in several utopias of the 1970s, three of which, Sally Miller Gearhart's The Wanderground (1980), Suzy McKee Charnas's Motherlines (1978) and Joanna Russ's The Female Man (1975), will be discussed in the third chapter.

The pendulum of feminist thought which, during the 1960s and 1970s, had swung away from the conservatism which had held it for the previous half a century has begun, in the eighties and nineties, to move back a little, towards a position between the extremes of conservatism and radicalism. It has been a movement towards tolerance, and is reflected in the utopian writing of this period. Along with the mounting scientific evidence pointing to the existence of inherent neurological differences between the average man and woman, have come an acceptance of this difference and attempts to envision societies that allow for difference and

yet afford equality.³ Absent from the writing of this period is the blame that, in the 1970s, had been cast at men as being solely and intentionally responsible for the institution and preservation of patriarchy. The works of two authors will be examined: Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale (1986) and Sheri S. Tepper's The Gate to Women's Country (1989).

The works of Ursula Le Guin, which span the period from the early 1960s to the present, have always been written within this mood of tolerance that marks the late 1980s and early 1990s. The concluding chapter, focusing in particular on her two utopian novels The Dispossessed (1974) and Always Coming Home (1988), will look at the development of Le Guin's utopian thought. In her book Feminist Utopias⁴ (1989), Frances Bartkowski prefers to exclude Le Guin's utopias from her discussion, stating that The Dispossessed "privileges what can only be called the 'masculine'" (FU, 169), a claim which, ultimately, judges such a book as non-feminist, as without place in a book entitled Feminist Utopias. I wish to contest this view by showing Le Guin's writing to be essentially feminist. In leaving out Le Guin from her study, Bartkowski has, I feel, excluded one of the most deep- and far-thinking writers within feminism, an exclusion which is made more inappropriate in consideration of Le Guin's later utopian work Always Coming Home. For although elements of conservatism are to be found in Le Guin's works, especially her earlier ones, they do not greatly reduce the import of her interrogations of gender roles and the subordination of women. Le Guin has never been part of an established school of feminism, but her thinking has been greatly affected by the feminist movement, as is reflected in both her essays and her works of fiction, and

3. As Peter Fitting writes, "the earlier ideal of 'androgyny' is now recognized as a depoliticisation and desexualisation of the body rather than as a utopian fusion of male and female." ("Reconsiderations of the Separatist Paradigm in Recent Feminist Science Fiction" in Science Fiction Studies, vol. 19, March 1992, p.33.)

4. Frances Bartkowski, Feminist Utopias (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, 1991). Abbreviated as FU.

in return her writing, with its individual brand of feminism, has had influence on the movement itself.

Chapter 1

Birth of the Genre: Gilman's Herland

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was born Charlotte Anne Perkins in Connecticut in 1860. In an age of social upheaval, of growing dissatisfaction among women at the inequalities that faced them, she came to be one of the most outspoken critics of the gender roles that bound women to their subordinate status. Through both her writing and her own lifestyle, Gilman criticised the social prejudices holding women under the domestic yoke. She regarded the rigid gender categorisations of her society as having denied women their autonomy and in so doing as having deprived society as a whole; central to her work is the subversion of this categorisation -- the desire for the dissolution of defined and confining roles for women.

Although she was a vociferous proponent of women's rights, Gilman's philosophy is essentially humanist. Her concerns are for the welfare of society as a whole, the empowerment of women being the primary means, she believed, by which the welfare of society generally could be improved. Central to her philosophy is the belief that the two movements in which she was involved, the women's and socialist movements, are ideologically interlinked, the aims of each furthering the other. For Gilman, the collapse of gender hierarchies was a necessary step towards the institution of a functional socialist system, and, conversely, true socialism would not tolerate the subordination of one sex. She saw the two movements as needing to work hand in hand, and much of her writing was devoted to expounding the necessity of this relationship. Indeed, she never directly associated herself with the suffrage movement, finding its objectives, as Elaine Hedges puts it, "too limited for her own more radical views on the need for social change".¹

Her book Women and Economics², published in 1898, highlights the fact of women's economic oppression: how they are "economic factors in society" in that, by maintaining the home, they enable men to produce wealth, but are

1. Afterword to The Yellow Wallpaper, p.44.

2. Women and Economics (Putnam, London, 1915). Abbreviated as WAE.

economically dependent on men for their livelihood (WAE, 13). It also criticises the resultant imbalance of women needing to overemphasise their femininity in order to attract a husband, thereby leading to the social misconstruction of what it is to be "woman". Gilman's interests in economics strongly influenced her feminist thinking. She saw deprivation of women's economic autonomy, a wrong which the advancement of socialism could help to right, as being at the root of the social subordination of women, their economic dependence being the cause of their adopting submissive, passive, "feminine" behaviour.

Gilman rejected socially accepted gender roles not only in her writing but in her living as well. She married Charles Stetson in 1884 and gave birth to her daughter, Katharine, a year later. She found herself enervated within her marriage, drawn into deep depressions for no specific reason, a condition which led her to seek treatment from the neurologist S. Weir Mitchell whose famous "rest cure" is severely denounced in her story The Yellow Wallpaper³. Finding that her energy and depression were lifted when she was away from her husband, she decided it would be best that they divorce, which they duly did, Stetson marrying Gilman's close friend Grace Channing shortly afterwards. The divorce was amicable, in itself a break with convention, and after Stetson's remarriage they both agreed that Katharine should live with her father and his new wife. Charlotte Gilman, or Stetson as she was then known, then embarked upon a nomadic lifestyle for a number of years, journeying across the country, making a living from lecturing and writing. Thus she gave up not only the sanctuary of the home, the "woman's place", but the role of motherhood as well.

In The Yellow Wallpaper Gilman criticises the vogue opinion of her time that women with nervous disorders should be isolated from any intellectual stimulation. The narrator of the story feels that "congenial work, with excitement and change would do [her] good" but she is confined to a role of

3. Gilman, The Yellow Wallpaper (Feminist Press, New York, 1973). Abbreviated as TYW.

passivity as Gilman herself was (TYW, 10). As her mind slips towards madness, a madness in which certain things are revealed more clearly than they were to her sane, she begins to discern a woman trapped behind bars in the yellow wallpaper of her room (formerly the children's nursery), a woman who shakes these bars, trying to get out, and who is forced to submit before them, to creep around at their base. Drawing on her own experience, her treatment under Mitchell's instruction, Gilman presents a chilling picture of the effects on women such as herself of confinement and disempowerment within the home. The Yellow Wallpaper issues the statement that women need not be pampered or looked after like children; that they are not of frailer mental disposition; that the concern shown them is often misdirected, debilitating. It is a call for women not to be deemed needy of protection.

In Herland, which was written serially in 1915 for her magazine The Forerunner, Gilman again takes up the problems of women's enforced dependence, choosing the utopian genre to depict, as foil to her own society, a society adhering closely to socialist principles and in which constraints on women do not exist.

Her subversion of her own society's morals and values is conducted humorously through revealing the changing thoughts and reactions of the three men who visit Herland. Throughout it is the view of the men that we are shown as they discover the mechanisms of the country they call in turn Feminisia, Ladyland, Herland and Ma-Land. Indeed, one is never informed of the name the women themselves have for their country, if they have one at all. The three males of the novel are carefully chosen as representatives of a broad spectrum of man-kind. Terry, the overbearing, aggressive type, brings to Herland the qualities -- being constructions of patriarchy -- that the Herlanders must reject, qualities that threaten to disrupt the equilibrium of their society. Jeff, the romantic poet-doctor is easily assimilated into the Herlandian society. His awe of the harmony he finds, stemming from his peaceable nature, leaves him "perfectly

satisfied" in his adoptive society, unquestioning (unlike the Herlanders themselves) of its practices and principles.

Like Jeff, the narrator, Vandyck Jennings, embodies feminine as well as masculine characteristics, as opposed to the overtly masculine (and hence disruptive) Terry. But Van distances himself intellectually, seeking an objective appraisal of the country. Slowly, and somewhat reluctantly, he comes to acknowledge the merits of the Herlandian (and the shortcomings of his own) society. That he does not remain static in character like the other two men, but is moved by the society, in acknowledging the advantages Herland offers, to alter his beliefs, and that he does so having questioned all he sees, having doubted, believed and then compared, reinforces the novel's critical cogency.

The men's prejudices are revealed from the start. Hypothesising before their arrival about a society consisting only of women, Terry states that "[t]hey would fight amongst themselves. Women always do. We mustn't look to find any sort of order and organisation ... Also we mustn't look for inventions and progress; it'll be awfully primitive" (H, 8). After their first reconnaissance of the country Van exclaims "why, this is a *civilised* country!" which leads him to conclude "There must be men" (H, 11). Caught within the stereotypic thinking of their own society, they are unwilling to accept the evidence that confronts them of women successfully and peacefully living in a technologically-advanced society. The men continually express surprise at the women exhibiting what they have always assumed to be "masculine" qualities, that is, qualities exclusive to men. They continue at first (and Terry to the last) to regard such traits as "inventiveness", "clear intelligence" and "dependableness" as "masculine" (H, 69), but slowly come to realise that the women of Herland do not fit the mould, labelled "woman", that has been cast in their minds by the behaviour of the women, and the expectations of the men, of their own, gender-conscious society.

As Jeff points out, the women react differently to any other women they have met because "[t]hey don't seem to notice us being men" (H, 30). The Herlanders, who have been brought up with only an abstract conception of gender, a vicarious understanding gleaned from observing other species, confuse the men through their failure to act passively, as "women", and to accept the protection the men are so eager to bestow. Van slowly comes to understand this, that for them "[t]he tradition of men as guardians had quite died out" (H, 57).

Terry is unable to adapt to this world in which women are not stereotypically and confinedly feminine. He repeatedly complains that the women are not "womanly". Unlike the narrator and Jeff, Terry fails to accept the fact that the Herlanders "don't seem to notice [their] being men" (H, 30). Trapped within his own stereotyping, he eventually tries to impose his own values on the Herlanders. His desire to recapture for himself as man the territory he perceives as of the masculine, and to restore females to that of the feminine, drives him to commit the crime of raping his wife. His refusal to come to terms with a world in which his accustomed role of overt masculinity is seen as imbalanced by its excessive aggression and assertiveness, and is not needed let alone prized, instils in him a growing frustration that eventually finds outlet in physical violence, a desperate, pathetic attempt to assert himself as a man, and thereby as of value, in a society in which the intemperate characteristics he represents are valueless. Because of this, Terry is expelled from Herland, a misfit in a society he is unable to accept or comprehend.

Charlotte Gilman's philosophy is essentially humanist. Herland reveals her belief that it is the similarities, not the differences, between men and women that are important. Her complaint is that gender socialisation has caused men and women to conform to extremes of masculinity and femininity. In Herland Gilman does not criticise virtues which are "masculine"; rather, she criticises the confinement of such characteristics to members of one sex,

because, as Somel says, "surely there are characteristics enough which belong to People" (H, 89). Those characteristics which lie at the extreme of either the masculine or the feminine -- aggression and timidity, domination and subservience -- are absent from the society of Herland. Gilman presents a society in which the absence of gender stereotyping has produced a race of balanced, capable people, people who are not limited by gender-related social dictates, who are given rein to achieve in whatever field their inclination leads them towards. The narrator states:

Here you have human beings, unquestionably, but what we were slow in understanding was how these ultra-women, inheriting only from women, had eliminated not only certain masculine characteristics, which of course we did not look for, but so much of what we had always thought essentially feminine. (H, 57)

Although Gilman expresses a desire for a convergence towards a balance of the masculine and feminine in both men and women, her central concern is with the denial in women of their "masculine" potential. She writes elsewhere that "[w]omen are not undeveloped men ... but the feminist half of humanity is undeveloped humans".⁴

Gilman does not espouse androgyny. There remain essential differences between the women of Herland and the men who journey there, in particular that of Motherhood, which is depicted as an inherent desire in all the women. It is not described as merely a base instinct; it is the central hub around which their social wheel revolves. The narrator writes: "they were Mothers, not in the sense of helpless involuntary fecundity ... but in the sense of Conscious Makers of People. Mother-love with them was not a brute passion, a mere 'instinct', a wholly personal feeling; it was -- a religion" (H, 68).

Motherhood is the source of the Herlandian socialist ethic. Their common Motherhood sets them apart from the men but unifies the women themselves within the socialist

4. Quoted by Anne J. Lane, Introduction to The Yellow Wallpaper, p.xi.

structures of their society. Their encompassing kinship network, the fact that they are all related, through lines of mothers, by their common progenitrix, the single ancestral Mother, imbues in the women a bond of communality, a socialist ethic that makes them balk at the idea of any one part of their society exploiting another. Motherhood acts as a consolidating force in the culture of Herland, drawing, under its gravity, individuals into closer unity. Ellador explains to Van that "she [has] to 'think in we's'" (H, 129): she holds up her society's needs as equal to her own. The centrality of motherhood in the lives of the women of Herland leads them to express a desire to see the mothers outside their country, and a curiosity at the absence of any comparable feelings around Fatherhood in the three men.

The governing principle of Herland is practicality. This is strongly evidenced in their approach to the law (they have very few laws more than twenty years old, regarding it as sensible that the law should change in concordance with social evolution) and their natural surroundings. The early civilians of Herland engaged in an extensive replanting programme so that "now every tree bore fruit -- edible fruit, that is." (They did originally keep one tree that had provided aesthetic value only, but managed over time to train it to bear "a profuse crop of nutritious seeds" (H, 79)). Also, they have no large domestic animals, these being seen as requiring too much space, thereby restricting their human population, and through artificial selection have managed to breed a race of cats "that do not sing" (H, 49). Although the women do live in balance with their natural surroundings, they are surroundings that have been shaped to suit their needs. This relationship contrasts with that of later feminist utopias in which the inhabitants tend to adapt their lifestyles to conform to the pattern of their natural surroundings.

The practicality espoused by the women of Herland mirrors that of Gilman's own life. She had an austere childhood, receiving little emotional support from her parents, and developed a strict, disciplinarian approach to

life, in which the intellect was favoured over emotion. Despite a nervous breakdown shortly after the birth of her child, the effects of which -- recurrent bouts of listlessness and melancholia -- were to remain with her throughout her life, she remained rigorously practically-minded and managed, in the periods when she felt strong enough to work, to write prolifically, writing in set hours each day she felt able. Gilman's emphasis on rational conviction rather than irrational belief is expressed through the reasoned acknowledgment by Van, Herland's chief protagonist, of the advantages of the Herland society. Unlike Jeff, who uncritically accepts Herland and all it has to offer, Van is won over progressively, through reason and argument. Gilman's confidence in rationality is evident also in the thinking of the women of Herland. Van, acknowledging the superiority of their intellectual argument, is forced at one point to conclude "[t]hey were inconveniently reasonable, these women" (H, 49); and he sees reasonableness as their "most salient quality ... the conscious effort to make it better" (H, 76).

The men's prejudices, born of their society's gender stereotyping, cause them surprise when confronted by the evident practical functioning of the society they find themselves in. As Van says, "We had expected a dull, submissive monotony, and found a daring social inventiveness far beyond our own, and a mechanical and scientific development fully equal to ours" (H, 81). Gilman's teleological beliefs, her emphasis on the pragmatic solution of problems despite the potential marginalization of the emotions, is evident in the Herlanders' utilitarian practice of what is tantamount to artificial selection within their own society. The early inhabitants of Herland saw fit to improve their genetic stock by "breed[ing] out ... the lowest types", encouraging those whom they deemed to have "bad qualities" to renounce their motherhood, and removing the child from those who refused (H, 82). These ideas of Gilman's foreshadow those in other utopias to be discussed later, works in which artificial selection, or

even genetic engineering, is presented as a means of eradicating the divisive dichotomy of gender.

The importance attributed to motherhood by the people of Herland does not blind them to the fact that not all mothers are good parents. Thus the education of children is, from an early age, entrusted to those most skilled in it. Ellador states, "Education is our highest art, allowed only to our highest artists" (H, 82). Here again, the Herlanders' willingness to sacrifice emotional ties to practical expediency reflects Gilman's own thoughts and experience. Gilman was harshly criticised as being an "unnatural mother" for choosing not to bring up her child. To her such a reproach must have seemed inherently contradictory: for her it was "natural" to want what was best for her daughter. As Somel says of the women of Herland and, indirectly, of Gilman herself: "child-rearing has come to be with us a culture so profoundly studied, practised with such subtlety and skill, that the more we love our children the less we are willing to trust that process to unskilled hands -- even our own" (H, 83).

In her autobiography, The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Gilman states that "we as a race of animals are oversexed -- abnormally developed in that function from long centuries of excessive indulgence".⁵ This belief produces in her book a race of undersexed women, women who reveal no willingness for sexual interaction beyond that which serves for procreation:

Of course, what we, as men, wanted to make them see was that there were other, and as we proudly said "higher", uses in this relation than what Terry called "mere parentage". In the highest terms I knew I tried to explain this to Ellador.

"Anything higher than for mutual love to give hope to life, as we did?" she said. "How is it higher?"

"It develops love," I explained. "All the power of beautiful permanent mated love comes through this higher development."

"Are you sure?" she asked gently. "How do you know that it was so developed? There are some birds who love each other so that they mope and pine if separated, and

5. Gilman, The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman (C.P.G. Ayer, New Hampshire, 1935), p.309.

never pair again if one dies, but they never mate except in mating season. Among your people do you find high and lasting affection appearing in proportion to this indulgence?"

It is a very awkward thing, sometimes, to have a logical mind. (H, 126)

Ellanor explains that the women of Herland "are not like the women of your country. We are Mothers and we are People, but we have not specialized in this [a sexual] line" (H, 126). Sex is portrayed as natural only in so far as it is necessary for procreation. Beyond that it is social "specialization", an "indulgence". But the asexuality of the women of Herland ("there was no sex-feeling to appeal to, or practically none. Two thousand years' disuse had left very little of the instinct" (H, 92)) makes them appear, in the light of modern psychology, different to humans, almost as another species. It is understandable, considering the social mores of the time (remembering Oscar Wilde's prison sentence), that Gilman did not entertain the notion of homosexuality among the Herlanders. Indeed, in Herland society the very expression of sexual feelings which would, of course, necessarily be lesbian, is regarded as perverse, a "bad quality" needing to be bred out: "we must remember that those who had at times manifested it [sex-feeling] as atavistic exceptions were often, by that very fact, denied motherhood" (H, 92). Her presentation, however, of sexuality as more a product of socialisation than innate direction divorces the Herland race and its concerns from ours.

The parthenogenetic capability of the Herland women enables the propagation of a single-sexed race. Gilman, in endowing the women with this capability, is able to present as a foil to her own society a harmonious world in which women are not denied opportunity. But this simplification of society, the removal of one sex, has the effect of obscuring the basic problems of gender conflict behind a veil of fancy. Although Gilman's utopia reveals through contrast much of the injustice and falseness of patriarchy, its chosen vehicle of a single-sex society prevents it from exploring ways in which these might be addressed within our own dual-sex society. Her race of parthenogenetic women is

distanced in both biology and sociology from the race of humans; they help point out problems in society but do not point to a way beyond these problems. Men like Terry can be expelled from Herland, but how are such people to be treated in our own society? Or how prevented from developing?

The idyllic existence of Herland locates the book historically within the literary phase of the evolution of utopian writing. Terry's reaction against his adoptive society stems largely from the thwarting of his masculinity, but there is in him a reaction which began, in the latter part of the century, to develop against this kind of utopian writing itself, the "literary utopia" as Moylan terms it, and which led to this form largely being superseded by the critical utopia. Terry's complaint is of a feeling of changelessness, of things being too constant, too easy. He says: "But I like Something Doing. Here it's all done ... Life is a struggle, has to be ... If there is no struggle, there is no life -- that's all " (H, 99). Van admits that "[t]here was something to this criticism" but the Herlanders themselves seem to feel none of Terry's disquiet. Their acceptance of their society appears total (it is six hundred years since they had a criminal) and in this extraordinary amenability they become yet further removed from the world of humanity with its restless aspirations and individualistic desires.

Chapter 2

The Seventies: Androgyny

Monique Wittig's Les Guérillères and
Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time

I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between
 two lives,
 Old man with wrinkled female breasts
 T.S. ELIOT "The Wasteland"

Since the early Greek myths, literature has exhibited a fascination with gender difference, a curiosity about the gendered Other. The supposition underlying this fascination -- that this difference does exist -- has been regarded throughout as axiomatic, a self-evident fact. But in the 1960s certain feminists began to question the validity of gender distinctions. The belief that the dichotomies man/woman and masculine/feminine are natural states was rejected; these dichotomies were presented rather as political categories erected in the establishment and perpetuation of patriarchy. It was seen as essential for the elimination of discrimination that gender be abolished and androgyny accepted in its place. Those espousing androgyny called for the destruction of gender classification, which was seen as an oppressive and hierarchical binary taxonomy, and also, by inference, of related classifications such as sexual proclivity (terms like homo- or heterosexual), these being rendered meaningless in the absence of gender.

Carolyn Heilbrun, in 1963, wrote a book Toward a Recognition of Androgyny in which she stated:

I believe that our future salvation lies in a movement away from sexual polarization and the prison of gender toward a world in which individual roles and the modes of personal behaviour can be freely chosen. ... [Androgyny] defines a condition under which the characteristics of the sexes, and the human impulses expressed by men and women, are not rigidly assigned. Androgyny seeks to liberate the individual from the confines of the appropriate.¹

Gayle Rubin, in her essay "The Traffic in Women" (1975) has expressed a similar sentiment:

The feminist movement must dream of even more than the elimination of the oppression of women. It must dream of the elimination of obligatory sexuality and sex

1. Carolyn Heilbrun, Toward a Recognition of Androgyny, (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1973) p.ix.

roles. The dream I find most compelling is one of an androgynous and genderless (though not sexless) society, in which one's sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love.²

The two utopian novels examined in this chapter, Monique Wittig's Les Guérillères³ and Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time⁴, are both offspring of feminism's inclination towards androgyny in the sixties and seventies.⁵ Both depict societies whose successful utopian functioning is based on the absence of gender and race categorisations. Also, the utopias that are presented have as their origin the controlled use of violence for insurrection. Both novels convey the reactionary mood of their period, evident in both the process and product of the utopias they depict.

Although her critical position has always been outside of mainstream French or Anglo-American feminism, Monique Wittig has been influential through her promotion of what she terms "materialist feminism", a radical feminism that identifies gender as an artificial construct and seeks to abolish the conception of "woman" being a "natural group".⁶ Materialist feminism asserts that the division of humanity into men and women is a political division only, a

2. In Toward an Anthropology of Women (ed. Rayna R. Reiter, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1975) p.204.

3. Monique Wittig, Les Guérillères (transl. by David Le Vay, Beacon, Boston, 1985). Abbreviated as LG.

4. Marge Piercy, Woman on the Edge of Time (Women's Press, London, 1979). Abbreviated as WET.

5. Esme Dodderidge's The New Gulliver (J.M. Dent, London, 1980), although not as fervently in favour of androgyny as Wittig's and Piercy's novels, is worth mentioning for its humorous subversion of gender roles. Briefly, the plot involves Lemuel Gulliver's experiences in the land of Capovolta where gender roles are reversed, leading him to complain, "in Capovolta I was trapped in other people's preconception of my capability; a sense of outrage and futility grew in me at my failure to find any way of realizing what I knew to be my own potential" (197). Dodderidge's novel criticises, with subtle humour, the gender biases that the books studied in this chapter present as being artificial.

6. "One is Not Born a Woman", in Feminist Issues, vol 1.2, 1981, p.47. Abbreviated as NBW.

definition that has been inculcated as "natural", and rejects any methods of "finding in women and men a biological explanation of their division, outside of social facts" (NBW, 48). Wittig writes of women having been forced to correspond to what is only the "idea of nature" (NBW, 47) established for them, to conform to moulds that are arbitrary, not natural, constructions.

"To destroy the categories of sex in politics and in philosophy, to destroy gender in language (at least to modify its use) is therefore part of my work in writing, as a writer".⁷ Wittig regards gender's relation to patriarchy as being aetiological, not merely symptomatic. The destruction of gender is, she writes, a necessary process in the affirmation of a true subjectivity by those who have been classified, and limited, as women. Materialist feminism rejects also the notion of heterosexuality being "the basis of society", regarding it rather as "a social system which is based on the oppression of women by men" (NBW, 53). Heterosexuality is deemed a political construct under which the doctrine of difference between the sexes has been asserted in order to justify the "social domination based on the obligatory reproductive function of women and the appropriation of that function".⁸ Wittig's belief is that the reproductive capability of females is an insufficient and arbitrary criterion upon which to base a system of classification under which individuals are treated as members of either of two discrete and dissimilar social groups. It is in this rejection of sex difference as in any way a natural construct that Wittig's beliefs diverge from those of mainstream French feminists, for whom psychoanalytic theory affirms the existence of difference, and American feminists, who distinguish between sex -- a "natural" category -- and gender -- a "sociological" one.

Wittig's radical beliefs were fostered in the 1960s, a time of reaction against form in which it was felt that

7. "The Mark of Gender", in The Poetics of Gender, p.67. Abbreviated as MOG.

8. "Paradigm", in Homosexualities and French Literature, p.52. Abbreviated as P.

existing structures needed to be broken down completely before they could be replaced. The reactionary content of her writing speaks the mood of the period. She writes: "the advent of individual subjects demands first destroying the categories of sex, ending the use of them, and rejecting all sciences which still use these categories as their fundamentals (practically all social sciences)" (NBW, 53).

Wittig's personal response to heterosexism is to refuse its categories. She speaks instead of herself as being a "lesbian", a term which she redefines to mean a non-gendered person. The categories "men" and "women" can be undermined by the institution of a category in opposition to them. She writes that "lesbians" themselves are "living proof" that there is "no natural group 'women'" (NBW, 47). By refusing to be classified, lesbians refuse the system of classification itself. A lesbian is "a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society" (NBW, 49). What Wittig implies by stating "there is no nature in society" is that linguistic groupings are not based upon any definite natural order; there is in nature no essence that determines the linguistic categories "man" and "woman".⁹ In deconstructionist terms, she sees "man" and "woman" as signifiers for which there is no signified: they are merely words that have been assigned to an inexact and prejudicial division.

Wittig opposes the argument that such categorisation is useful even if not based on essential natural difference, asserting that the acknowledgement of gender categorisations places women in a necessarily subordinate position because it ties them to a primarily reproductive role. She criticises those feminists who celebrate their difference from men: "[Early feminists] upheld the illogical principle

9. As an analogous argument, the artificiality of such linguistic groupings as "boat" and "aeroplane" can be shown by remarking that whereas a flying boat will fall happily into the one category for the harbour-master it falls into the other for the air traffic controller: there is no essence that makes it necessarily a "boat" or a "plane". Or, similarly, whereas English has discrete meanings for "blue" and "green", the Khoi have a single term that includes both these linguistic concepts.

of 'equality in difference', an idea now being born again. They fell back into the trap which threatens us once again: the myth of woman" (NBW, 50). The very acceptance of difference, she believes, entrenches the relationship of domination men have over women by enforcing the perception of women as essentially maternal and exaggerating the importance of their reproductive capabilities, a perception necessarily predicating an unequal status.

Wittig's fears about the principle of "equality in difference" have been realised. It has become favoured, as will be shown in the discussion, in the latter chapters, of the more recent feminist utopias. These later utopias emphasise the need to redefine "woman", to break down the preconceptions and prejudices that the term invokes. They do not deem the principle of "equality in difference" to be illogical; they assume that the categories can remain but that the connotations surrounding them may be changed. The nineteenth-century role of women is very different from that of today. The efforts of feminism can, as occurred in the early part of this century, radically alter how women are perceived by society. Indeed, this process of the redefinition of "woman" is a similar process to that carried out by Wittig herself in her appropriation and redefinition of the word "lesbian".

Wittig views the feminist movement as a class struggle: the struggle of a class fighting for its own expiry. She writes: "The reality "woman" must disappear just as the reality "slave" after the abolition of slavery, just as the reality "proletarian" after the abolition of classes and of forced labour" (P, 120). Success in women's struggle for equality can be achieved only by an end to the existence of the category "woman" itself. "Humankind must find another name for itself and another system of grammar that will do away with gender, the linguistic indicator of political oppositions" (P, 121). Within the feminist revolution that Wittig foresees, political advancement must necessarily bring about linguistic change. But she also regards proactive change in the use of language itself as a means of

effecting such advancement. Three of her novels -- The Opoponax, Les Guérillères and The Lesbian Body -- describe this interdependence of language and politics. In all three, alternatives to the generic and gendered pronouns are sought -- new forms that can replace the old ones as well as assist in their collapse.

The narrative of Les Guérillères is divided into three parts, the beginning of each marked by a page containing a large circular figure, symbolising the vulva and representative of the new order that forms in opposition to the linear, patriarchal order. The three parts are not in chronological order; the third, the description of the war against the men, is actually the beginning of the narrative in time. The plot of Les Guérillères represents the conversion into praxis of Wittig's theoretical ideas. The tale depicted is of a war being waged by "elles" against "ils", a war in which "elles" are finally victorious. Their victory enables them to establish a new order, a society that is non-gendered. Central to Les Guérillères is the pronoun "elles". After the war "elles" becomes the general pronoun, a word incorporative of all formerly called "elles" or "ils". "Elles", unlike the generic "ils", does not merely represent both "elles" and "ils", but replaces these terms, merging them into a single, non-gendered pronoun that designates all members of the new race.

In the English translation, the effect Wittig intended in her depiction of the ascendancy of "elles" is diminished. The translator translated "elles" as "the women", the effect of which is to retain the binary division that Wittig had hoped to collapse into the general "elles". The first part of the book, in English, refers to "the women" whereas Wittig had intended the term "elles" by this stage -- the latter part -- of the narration, to come to mean all those of the new order, "ils" and "elles" of the past, "the men" and "the women". Wittig's criticism of the translation (which she describes as otherwise "a beautiful one") is that "[a]ll of a sudden, 'elles' stopped being mankind. When one says 'the women' one connotes a number of individual women,

thus transforming the point of view entirely, by particularizing what I saw as a universal" (MOG, 70). She suggests that a solution to the English translation would be to "reappropriate the collective pronoun 'they'", and believes that this would in fact take forward the process of destroying gender in language as "they" "immediately envelops a degree of universality which is not immediate with 'elles'" (MOG, 71). The criticism of the word "elles" having restricted "universality" is similarly applicable to the other word Wittig chooses to represent non-gendered people -- "lesbians". It too lacks the neutrality that would allow it to have more "immediate" effect. Its present connotations, which are strictly gendered, restrict its ability to describe a concept that is non-gendered.

The arena of the struggle waged by "elles" encompasses more than just the physical battlefields. The means of their oppression are identified in the very language they speak: they say to themselves, "the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you" (LG, 123). Their revolution is to be one of linguistic as well as political restructuring. After their physical victory, in which "elles" becomes the absolute subject, they find themselves "a new species that seeks a new language" (LG, 142). Their desire to separate completely their new society from the old demands that words harbouring images of the past, words that threaten to blot their tabula rasa, be deleted from language. "They say that in the first place the vocabulary of every language is to be examined, modified, turned upside down, that every word must be screened" (LG, 145).¹⁰

10. This desire for the establishment of a new language is taken a step further by Luce Irigaray, a contemporary of Wittig's. She claims the Symbolic order of language is a tool of patriarchy, which must be subverted if the oppression of women inherent in it is to be destroyed. Irigaray calls for feminists to "overthrow syntax by suspending its eternally teleological order, by snipping the wires, cutting the current, breaking the circuits, switching the connections, by modifying continuity, alternation, frequency, intensity" ("Any Theory of the Subject", in Speculum of the Other Woman, 142). She does not want just the content of language to change, but seeks for it a new form, one that refuses the rationality and teleology she

The novel confronts and inverts gender stereotypes. The women who fight the war are aggressive, violent, cruel. Wittig regards violence as a tool which women have been denied through patriarchal ideology's definition of "woman" and which should be used in the struggle for women's liberation. The women of Les Guérillères torture those men deemed guilty of having "founded their celebrity on the women's downfall, exulting in their slavery whether in their writings in their laws in their actions" (LG, 118). Their hatred and cruelty is condoned because it serves a purpose, because its focus is the oppression under which they have been held. "They say that they sing with such utter fury that the movement that carries them forward is irresistible. They say that oppression engenders hate. They are heard on all sides crying hate hate" (LG, 127). Instead of rejecting violence, concentrating on its use by men against women as is primarily the case with current feminist criticism, Wittig attempts to appropriate for use by women this "masculine" function, and in doing so to smash the mould of what is deemed "feminine", the mould that defines women's character.

The title itself, a neologism, disrupts common perceptions of what is "masculine" or "feminine". Wittig takes the noun for guerilla, "guérillèro", which is masculine, and constructs a feminine form of it. The new word, "guérillères", also recalls the word for amazon, "guérrière", and thus serves not only to represent the women as militant but also to deform and subvert the words of the existing linguistic order. The title reflects Wittig's iconoclastic desire to break down the image of women as nurturing, mothering. It rejects the connotations that bind

sees as inherent in the language of the patriarchal order. Her reaction against language is such that she feels

it is still better to speak only in riddles, allusions, hints, parables. Even if asked to clarify a few points. Even if people plead that they just don't understand. After all they have never understood. So why not double the misprision until to the limits of exasperation? Until the ear tunes in to another music ... (ATS, 143).

women to a reproductive role, iterating Wittig's view that such definitions are merely political.

The story presents a struggle for power, power not only in the form of physical supremacy, but as a means of controlling and manipulating language itself. The women's (elles') rejection of the common perception of "woman", their annexation of violence, enables them to achieve military victory, which empowers them to alter language itself, to reject the signifiers, such as "woman", of the past. "Paradise exists in the shadow of the sword" (LG, 120): the use of violence is condoned under the assumption that the appropriation of power will enable them to establish a better society. War is seen as an odious but necessary thing. At its end the women (elles) "cry out and run towards the young men arms laden with flowers which they offer them saying, Let all this have meaning" (LG, 132). Wittig seeks to depict a conscious harnessing of hatred and rage, a channelled use of violence that ultimately "has meaning", that can be justified by the end it brings about.

The androgynous society the women (elles) achieve does not appear to be a readily-formed natural order: a degree of artificial selection is necessary to facilitate its creation. Whereas during the war most captured men are tortured and killed for their role in the promulgation of patriarchy, those men whose physical attributes are most androgynous are spared and are adopted into the guérillères' society. "Sometimes the subject has a fine body broadened at the hips with honeyed skin and muscles not showing. Then they take him by the hand and caress him to make him forget all their bad treatment" (LG, 114). It is not clearly stated what happens after the war to those men unwilling to become part of the "new species". It does seem, though, that the attainment of their androgynous society must be enforced to an extent; the society is intolerant of those who reject its basic premise of androgyny. The implied solution to the problem of those unwilling to conform -- extermination -- is an extreme one and one that is recurrent within subsequent feminist utopian writing. The issue of individual dissent

has always been problematic in utopian fiction. The differing responses of later feminist utopian writers to this issue, especially Ursula Le Guin's attempts at accommodation thereof, will be discussed in later chapters.

Inherent in the collapse of gender structures and their replacement by androgyny are certain potential difficulties. In the denial of difference lies the danger of privileging the masculine, of considering that, rather than men and women being the same, women are the same as men. The qualities that the women (elles) exhibit are predominantly those, such as violence and aggression, regarded as "masculine". At the height of the resurgence of feminism in the 1970s there was an emphasis on women achieving in areas formerly dominated by men. But in the 1980s there has occurred a rejection of the perception of what constitutes success itself. Increasingly, alongside the desire to achieve success in areas formerly dominated by men, there has grown a desire to subvert the masculine definition of success, to bring about a new definition, one that does not privilege people who are more "masculine" in nature.

Wittig's politics are anarchic. They exhibit a strong reaction against form, a desire to break down completely formal structures that are deemed oppressive. The belief she propounds is of the necessity of destruction before reconstruction. These politics mark the revolutionary period of the late sixties and early seventies, a time distrustful of established structures and interrogative of categories previously accepted as "natural". The guérillères voice this desire to rebuild on the ruins of the old order rather than reshape it: "they say that they are starting from zero. They say that a new world is beginning" (LG, 90). The strategy of their resistance is to collapse the current structures into disorder, and from that position erect an altogether new society. Anarchy is presented as a necessary interim state for the creation of the new order.

They say that they foster disorder in all its forms.
 Confusion troubles violent debates disarray upsets
 disturbances incoherences irregularities divergences
 complications disagreements discords clashes polemics

discussions confrontations brawls disputes conflicts
 routs debacles cataclysms disturbances quarrels
 agitation turbulence conflagrations chaos anarchy (LG,
 100).

The women (elles) unite in order to bring about this disruption. But after its success they see in their unification itself, formed in the time of, and in opposition, to the old order, the marks of the patriarchal order, for it brings with it the gender categorisation it is their objective to destroy. Thus towards the end of the war the guérillères begin to dismantle the bonds of their identity as women. Whereas in the past they had exalted their difference in order to achieve unity in fighting against the men, in the new era they begin to reject this process of differentiation.

They say that they do not want to become prisoners of their own ideology. They say that they did not garner and develop the symbols that were necessary to them at an earlier period to demonstrate their strength. For example they do not compare the vulvas to the sun moon stars. They do not say that the vulvas are like black suns in the shining night. (LG, 59)

They spurn all symbols of the "fragmented body", including those they themselves exalted (LG, 76). "Fragmentation", the identification of difference, consolidates the categorisations which they see as arbitrary. They stress instead that "the integrity of the body [is] their first principle" (LG, 76), the implication being that they are unwilling to accept any anatomical distinctions which might be divisive within their society. "The body" whose integrity they wish to retain is the body of the androgyne, the non-gendered person. In the new-born society the death of gender is marked by an end to all emphasis on genitalia; any such specific difference is diminished within their conception of the body as an integral whole, each individual being a composite of a myriad "different" characteristics, none of them being sufficient for gender or racial classifications.

The feminarities the women (elles) read during the period of war are texts of knowledge from their past, writing that

has incited them to revolt. But after the war they burn the feminaries because they are regarded as retaining paradigms belonging to the past; they are "outdated" (LG, 50). The feminaries inspired and unified them but are texts engendered in and retentive of the past. An attempt to disrupt the process of historical continuity, to separate the future and the past, the burning of the feminaries marks a caesura in time, the instant at which the women (elles) give up their past, the last of their identity as "women", to embrace their new-formed and non-gendered future. The success of their attempts to erase all images of the past is evident in the beginning of the book, which forms the end of the narrative: "They say that the time when they started from zero is in process of being erased from their memories. They say they can barely relate to it. When they repeat, This order must be destroyed, they say they do not know what order is meant" (LG, 30).

The success of Wittig's depiction of the society's transition from a gendered to an androgynous society is hindered by her choice of appellation. The use of the pronoun "elles" gives the impression of the one sex being subsumed by the other. "Elles" has, as Wittig herself admits, a lesser degree of universality than, for example, the pronoun "they". In contrast to the women's (elles') wish to expunge all traces of their gendered past, the retention of a gendered pronoun bears with it the connotative baggage of gendered society. Similarly, the litany of names that appears throughout the book, through focusing only on those names classed as of the gender "woman", sustains the concept of gender itself. This recurrent reminder of gender, along with the use of the term "elles" which strongly connotes the women of gendered society, impedes the imagining of a society without gender.

At the height of the revolution, having wrested power from the men (ils), the women (elles) relinquish their power. "They say, If I take over the world, let it be to dispossess myself of it immediately, let it be to forge new links between myself and the world" (LG, 115). As with the

acceptance by their former enemies of the new order, the process of the women's abandoning of power happens very easily, almost too easily. Their revolution is much like that of the proletariat as envisaged by Marx, but very unlike that of the proletariat as witnessed in Russia in the early part of this century. In "The Mark of Gender", Wittig states:

I would like to recall what Marx and Engels said in The German Ideology about class interests. They said that each new class that fights for power must, to reach its goal, represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of the society, and that in the philosophical domain this class must give the form of universality to its thought, to present it as the only universally valid one. (MOG, 69)

This process takes place in Les Guérillères. But after the successful revolution the women's (elles') philosophy continues to be accepted universally. Their interests are not only represented as the common interest but, after the revolution, they are depicted as being the common interest. There appears to be no dissent; the success of the creation of a non-discriminatory, un-hierarchical society is total. The collapse of gender brings about a society without internal conflict. In this depiction Wittig's novel recalls the portrayal in earlier utopias of a paradise, a place without dissension.

Overall, however, the novel presents a radical departure from previous utopian writing, not only in the social structure of the society it depicts, but also in the fact that it deals mainly with the process, not the product, of the creation of that utopia. The ideas of the book are extreme. They attack categories previously accepted unquestioningly as "natural" and present alternatives that confront conventional expectation. In many ways the utopian works subsequent to Les Guérillères have become less radical, but it is as a result of the disruption of ideology by seminal works such as this that the ideas of future works have been more readily received.

The assumption by French feminism of a psychoanalytic approach to the study of gender, relying largely on the work of Jacques Lacan, saw Wittig excluded from the feminist movement within France, her treatises being dismissed for their refusal to acknowledge what psychoanalysis illuminated as unavoidable differences in the psychologies of men and women. Feeling that her position was not being heard, Wittig emigrated to the United States. There too her ideas have not been part of mainstream feminist thinking, but the unsettling questions they have raised and the challenges they have made to the ready acceptance of "natural" categories make Wittig an important figure within feminism and Les Guérillères a revolutionary work within utopian fiction.

Marge Piercy's Woman on the Edge of Time

Marge Piercy's utopian novel, Woman on the Edge of Time, first published in 1979, echoes many of the concerns raised by Wittig's novel a decade before. It too identifies the institution of gender as the basis of women's oppression and portrays a utopian world that refuses gender categorisations. Mattapoissett of the year 2137 is an androgynous and non-discriminatory society. Its workings are revealed through the eyes of the novel's central protagonist, Connie Ramos, a 37-year-old Mexican American woman whose telepathic powers enable her, as a "catcher", to travel through time to this future world. Connie's visits to Mattapoissett and her returns to the grim reality of her life within the Rockover State Psychiatric Hospital juxtapose the two worlds, emphasising by contrast the utopian nature of Mattapoissett. The dystopian world presented in chapter 15, the other potential future that Connie unwittingly enters, heightens this contrast and dramatises for Connie the importance of what is one of the novel's central themes: the need for individual commitment in bringing about social change.

Piercy's novel differs from Wittig's in that it focuses on both the product and the process of the utopian society whereas in Les Guérillères the focus falls more on process than product. But the politics of the two novels are very similar. Both identify the collapse of gender and the restructuring of language as essential to the agenda of the revolution, and in both violence is depicted as a necessary tool in its process.

Connie's movement between her own and the future world reveals and subverts the prejudices of her society which she has adopted. Luciente, the inhabitant of Mattapoissett who, as a "sender", establishes the telepathic link with Connie, appears before Connie in her own world, New York of 1976. Connie's reaction to the confidence and assuredness of Luciente, the sense of "authority" that Luciente exudes, is to think of "him" as a young man. Later, upon her first

visit to Mattapoissett, she is embraced by Luciente and is shocked to discover that "he" is actually female:

Pressed reluctantly, nervously against Luciente, she felt the coarse fabric of his shirt and... breasts! She jumped back. (WET, 66)

Not all the inhabitants of Mattapoissett are as androgynous in looks as Luciente. Indeed, many of the males, such as the aptly-named Barbarossa, have facial hair and are thus identifiable to Connie as male. But often, not given clues of make-up or dress or activity, or even of name, she finds herself unable to determine the sex of a particular individual, an inability which at first makes her, a member of a society setting so much store in gender, somewhat uncomfortable. The androgyny of Mattapoissett denies for Connie a principal frame of reference by which she has learnt to perceive the world, that of gender categorisation. In its absence, Connie suffers the insecurity of not being able to classify the people she sees, to "know" them, at least partially, on sight.

The inhabitants of Mattapoissett acknowledge the existence of two sexes -- they refer to males and females -- but although there is sex distinction there is no gender distinction. For them, distinction between the sexes has no relevance; it is no more useful a distinction to make than one between dark- and light-haired people. Whereas Wittig, in advocating the "integrity of the body", desires that such differences should not be identified, Piercy, in her utopia, admits categories of sex, but does not allow them to be made into a basis for categories of gender. As Bartkowski succinctly puts it, "Luciente's world is one of two sexes and no gender" (FU, 68).

Gender-based terms such as homosexuality and heterosexuality are rendered meaningless in the absence of gender. In response to Connie's mentioning of the homosexual nature of Jackrabbit and Bolivar's relationship, Parra replies: "All coupling, all befriending, goes on between biological males, biological females, or both. That's not a

useful set of categories" (WET, 214). Although the categories are abandoned as not useful, this does not mean that the desires of all Mattapoissettans are similar and directed as readily towards males and females. Individuals exhibit preferences that would, in our society, be termed homo- or heterosexual. Bolivar, speaking at Jackrabbit's wake, says, "I had believed, I'd wished, that Jackrabbit would also be drawn only to the male body -- so that we'd be alike..." (WET, 319). While the sexual proclivity of a member of the society might have a specific orientation, it is felt that to then use such preference as a basis for categorisation would prove divisive, of no constructive use.

After a while, as Connie gets to know Luciente, and is no longer beguiled by her sense of authority and assuredness into perceiving her as a man, she is able to recognise Luciente as female: "Luciente's face and voice and body now seemed female if not at all feminine" (WET, 99). Luciente, although female, does not conform to the mould "woman" Connie's society has created for females. Concepts such as feminine and masculine are portrayed as artificial -- false constructions of the patriarchal ideology, without basis in nature.

The language of the people of Mattapoissett reflects this attitude to gender. All pronouns are non-gendered. "Person" is used in place of the nominative "he" or "she" and "man" or "woman"; and "per" in place of the other declensions of the third person pronoun ("him" or "her") and for the adjectival "his" or "her". For the plural form the gender-neutral "they" and "their" are retained. "We've reformed pronouns," Connie is told. Similarly, the names people take on are androgynous. Names are first chosen by individuals at the ceremony of Naming which marks their entrance into adulthood. New names are readily adopted if a person feels that they have outgrown their old ones (the only caveat to someone changing their name is, as Barbarossa says, "If you do it too often nobody remembers your name" (WET, 77)). The names that are chosen are mostly from nature (Rose, White Oak, Aspen, Otter, Bee, Jackrabbit, Orion,

Corolla, Peony, Morningstar) and from notable women and revolutionary leaders of the past (Diana, Sappho, Susan B, Neruda, Luxembourg, Bolivar, Tecumseh, Crazy Horse), but are in no way gender-specific. Peony, who is male, becomes Jackrabbit; Crazy Horse, unlike her historical namesake, is female. They have no surnames, there being in the village only one person of a particular name at any one time. On travelling, for further identification they describe themselves as being so-and-so of Mattapoissett. The absence of surnames that are inherited or adopted upon marriage contrasts with Connie's complicated identity:

"Look, my name is Consuelo Ramos. Connie for short. Consuelo is my Christian name. Ramos is my last name. When I was born I was called Consuelo Camacho. Ramos is the name of my second husband: therefore I am Consuelo Camacho Ramos." She left out Alvarez, the name of her first husband, Martín, for simplicity. (WET, 76)

The physical distinction between males and females itself is at times blurred. All children have three mothers, called comothers or coms, who are not biologically the parents of the child and who are of either sex (it is possible for a child to have three male comothers). At least two of the mothers will breastfeed, and for this purpose males wishing to perform this task develop hormonally-induced breasts. Connie's reaction to seeing Barbarossa breastfeeding his child is initially discomfort -- she feels sick -- and then anger:

She felt angry. Yes, how dare any man share that pleasure. These women 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. (WET, 134)

It is not only breastfeeding that the women of Mattapoissett have given up, but child-rearing as well. The children are all machine-born, nurtured from embryos in "brooders" from which they are "delivered" after nine to ten months. But unlike the babies of Huxley's Brave New World, they are not

born to the state but to three parents who offer them a non-nuclear family for their childhood years. The relinquishing of motherhood is described as a conscious decision by women, a step necessary to the ending of patriarchy. By giving up motherhood the traffic in women is halted. Luciente explains to Connie the history behind this development:

It was part of women's long revolution. When we were breaking all the old hierarchies. Finally there was that one thing we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in return for no more power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth. Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we'd never be equal. (WET, 105)

In this Piercy's radical politics are revealed. The implied thesis is that women will necessarily hold a subordinate status as long as they fulfil a reproductive role. This Marxist understanding of patriarchy, the belief that its origins lie in the appropriation by men of the means of production women have through their ability to bear children, was especially popular among feminists of the 1970s¹¹. The solution offered by the society of Mattapoissett is dependent on scientific intervention, on a renunciation of women's "natural" function. The implication of this is that women are necessarily bound ("we were biologically enchained") by their own physiology and that hope for the establishment of equality lies, in this respect, with science. In some ways, then, the vision of Mattapoissett is a sombre one, in this implied assertion that women will remain subordinate until reproduction becomes entrusted to "brooders", until the machine becomes mother. This is not necessarily the only solution to the imbalances of patriarchy that Piercy sees, but her inclusion of it bears down the present -- in which motherhood cannot be

11. Gayle Rubin, in her essay "The Traffic in Women", which uses as its basis Levi-Strauss's theories of kinship, strongly argues this theory, maintaining that gender itself, and the unequal division of labour between the sexes, is a product of the traffic in women, a system developed to retain women's dependence on men and thus afford men control over this primary means of production.

relinquished to machines -- under a heavy weight of pessimism.

Mattapoissett is a possible, not an inevitable, future. Its existence depends, among other factors, on who takes the reins of genetic engineering. If misused, genetic engineering could lead to the dystopian nightmare portrayed in chapter 15, but it can also be used to free women from the reproductive role within which they are depicted as necessarily subordinate. When Connie tells of the experiment that is to be performed on her -- the insertion into her brain of an electronic device for controlling her emotional state -- Luciente responds:

It's that race between technology, in the service of those who control, and insurgency -- those who want to change the society in our direction. In your time the physical sciences had delivered the weapons technology. But the crux, we think, is in the biological sciences. Control of genetics. Technology of brain control. Birth-to-death surveillance. Chemical control through psychoactive drugs and neurotransmitters. (WET, 223)

But the hopes for insurgency too lie in genetic manipulation, in enabling children to be bred and born through artificial means. The novel presents the hopes and fears instilled by science, its dichotomous potential for oppression and liberation.

At the time of Connie's visit to Mattapoissett the region is engaged in debate -- at grandcil-level (the highest forum in the land) -- between Shapers and Mixers, those who want to breed for selected traits and those who prefer a policy of non-interference with regard to genetics. The Mixers' position, in many ways reminiscent of that of the women in Gilman's Herland, is one in support of limited genetic interference. The manipulation of plant and animal life through breeding regimens (such as the breeding out of the irritant produced by mosquitoes) is condoned, as is the breeding of babies that are specifically of mixed racial genes ("decisions were made forty years back to breed a high proportion of darker-skinned people and to mix the genes well through the population" (WET, 104)); but a line is

drawn when it comes to actively trying to breed humans for selective traits. A distinction is drawn between scientific exploration that aims to provide an alternative to what is shown as a genetic function rendering females socially subordinate and exploration that aims to alter genetically the human constitution.

In the utopia, genetic manipulation is used to remove the social basis not only of sexism but of racism as well. By breeding a mixture of racial types within each community, discrimination in terms of physical appearance by one communal group against another is precluded. A uniform culture is not enforced; rather, the different communities adopt a specific historical culture: the inhabitants of Mattapoissett have adopted the culture of the Wamponaug Indians, those of Cranberry that of Black Harlem. The intention is to maintain cultural diversity but eliminate any connection between race and culture. Bee says, "We broke the bond between genes and culture, broke it forever. We want there to be no chance of racism again" (WET, 104). The peaceful coexistence of the various communities, therefore, implies that racism is directly related to difference in racial appearance, rather than that this difference merely becomes a justification for a deeper inclination within humans towards conflict. Racial miscegenation alone does not properly explain the absence of the cross-cultural conflict that occurs in the present between groups with similar racial genetic make-up. Thus there appears to have occurred a moral evolution coincident with the social evolution, for despite the retention of diverse cultures, the discordant chants of tribalism do not disturb the peacefulness of their world.

Frances Bartkowski, describing the common themes of the works she discusses in her book Feminist Utopias, writes:

What is most apparent is the constant redefinition of family and kinship as the heart of the matter of bonds among and between women, sometimes between women and men, and usually between women and children. (FU, 5)

This process of redefinition is strongly evident in Woman on the Edge of Time. Of especial concern to Piercy is the mother-child relationship, that bond in which she sees the origin of women's entrapment. In order to break free of their subordinate social role, the women of this future have forsaken the role of mother. They are instead, along with men, comothers of children not genetically their own. The nuclear family is not rejected completely, but is adapted in certain ways, the emphasis falling on preventing excessive dependency forming between parent and child. Monogamous couples are described as "unstable dyads... trying to embody the original mother-child bonding" (WET, 125). In order to avoid any such relationships of dependency forming, each child has three comothers, of any age or sex, whose role, in event of death or an unwillingness by someone to continue as comother, will be taken over by another member of the community. Also, there is no institution of marriage. Individuals have their own private living quarters (a system much like that described in Gilman's Herland) and are free to have intimate relationships with whomever, and with as many different people as, they please. Terms such as "wife", "husband" and "spouse" do not exist; instead they refer to others as "hand friends", "pillow friends" or "sweet friends" depending on the state of their relationship.

Independence in and of children is encouraged. After naming, the ritual symbolising a child's entrance into adulthood which takes place at age twelve or thirteen, comothers and their child are not allowed to speak to each other for a period of three months. The intention is that through this period of mutual coventry the comothers and the child will begin to accept that the function of the mother-child relationship is no longer necessary, and become accustomed to the new relationship of equality as adults. "Lest we forget we aren't mothers anymore and person is an equal member. Threemonth usually gives anyone a solid footing and breaks down the old habits of depending" (WET, 116). The individual is primarily a member of the community. Family serves an important function in the rearing of the

individual in childhood, but its structure is disassembled after naming. Further to protect the child from the influence of too close a bond with a parent, comothers are seldom "sweet friends", so that "the child will not get caught in love misunderstandings" (WET, 74).

Luciente, the first inhabitant of Mattapoissett whom Connie meets, is very much an exemplar of the society and its codes. She embodies the spirit of this new age. In response to her telling Bee that she will be going away for half a year, he says, "but without you to argue with day and night, my brain will turn into a jellyfish ... Who'll keep me politically correct, who'll chew me over?" (WET, 227). Luciente is a kind of moral guardian, someone who lives according to, and promotes vociferously, the morality of the utopian society. She is the mouthpiece for Piercy's expression of her own political beliefs, beliefs founded on the ideals of the political correctness (PC) movement which began in the 1970s and which opposes discrimination in all its forms. The PC movement has evolved as a result of various movements against discrimination seeking to unite forces. The struggles of the feminist, civil rights, gay liberation and other movements have come to be encompassed under the common banner of the fight against discrimination. The ideological precepts of political correctness are central to the characterisation of the novel. Connie, the main protagonist, as an Hispanic woman of lower class background, suffers from racial, sexual and class discrimination within her society and this emphasises by contrast the non-discriminatory nature of the utopian world she visits. In Mattapoissett all people, with the exception of children younger than thirteen, live as equals. Positions of power are held under a system of rotation, and all take turns to do the less enjoyable work. Government is mainly informal. Administrative posts are staffed by people chosen by lot, but do not play a supervisory role in the everyday affairs of the society. When Connie asks to see the government she is told, "nobody's working there today" (WET, 78).

A utopian society founded upon notions of what is "politically correct" is necessarily static. It is assumed that what is right, or "correct", is already known, and fixed. Also, power is invested in those who dictate what is "correct" behaviour, and any such judgements must contain a degree of arbitrariness. By its very nature, the ideology asserts its established precepts as absolute and there is thus the danger of people who contravene those precepts not being tolerated, being judged "guilty" by those who have been empowered as watchdogs against behaviour deemed politically incorrect. In this, Piercy's utopian vision contrasts with that of Le Guin, whose utopian vision, especially as depicted in The Dispossessed, demands a state of on-going revolution. Indeed, as will be shown in the final chapter, it is the growing dogmatism and intolerance of non-conformist behaviour, in The Dispossessed, that threatens to cripple the process of the revolution that its chief instigator, Odo, saw as necessarily never-ending. The prescriptive nature of political correctness, its pressurising of individuals to act in ways that are deemed best for society as a whole, makes the ideology potentially repressive of divergent behaviour by individuals. The social pressure to conform, to be correct, is great, as is evident in Bee's response: his first concern is that he won't have Luciente to "keep [him] politically correct". By dictating how people should be and act, political correctness threatens severely to restrict individual freedom.

In the assumption by the people of Mattapoissett that what is correct behaviour is incontrovertibly established lies the danger of inhibiting the very individualism which they seek to encourage. The artist Bolivar does react against what he feels to be a restrictive ideology, saying, "Luciente appears to fix too narrowly on content and apply our common politics too rigidly" (WET, 211). But, as Thomas Moylan writes, "since Luciente is a major figure second only to Connie, her comments in the structure of the text tend to carry more weight than do those of the minor character, Bolivar, and the political assertiveness of the novel itself

seems to tip the balance in the direction of Luciente's position" (DTI, 153). In the novel, political correctness is asserted over individual expression. But in its emphasis on the cerebral, its reliance on intellectual theory, political correctness is potentially intolerant, a threat to the utopian impulse itself.

In the Shaping debate, over whether genetic breeding for selective traits should be performed, most of the people of Mattapoissett, including Luciente, are on the side of the Mixers, those who prefer not to tamper with genetic selection. Luciente says against Shaping: "It's one choice to breed carrots for our uses -- especially leaving wild and variant gene pools intact. Is another to breed ourselves for uses or imagined uses! For all we know a new ice age comes and we might better breed for furriness than mathematical ability!" (WET, 367). But this criticism of Shaping contradicts her own assertion of political correctness. Breeding for selective physical qualities is in essence a similar activity to encouraging the development of specific moral or political qualities. White Oak, agreeing with Luciente, says, "We don't think people can know objectively how people should become" (WET, 226). But political correctness, by its very nature, establishes a rigid mould of "how people should become". The problems Luciente has with the Shaping issue are much the same as those which Bolivar has with her politics. Those who draw up blueprints for human nature, whether they be genetic or political in format, set themselves up as judges of what characteristics are to be valued and run the risk of excluding difference that, in the future, like the "wild and variant gene pools" Luciente speaks of, might well provide the stimulus for adaptation to the ever-changing environment by which society is faced. Only in a completely static world could a fixed code of conduct be adequate.

Despite the rural nature of the culture of Mattapoissett, the utopia does not advocate a rejection of technology. Apart from its function in the reproduction of babies, technology is utilised by the society in diverse

areas: dishes are washed -- and other repetitive tasks performed -- by machine, flying "floaters" are used for transport and in combat, and almost all members of the society wear kenners, small computers which provide encyclopaedic information and facilitate long-distance communication. The society uses technology but is not dependent upon it. The various villages do conduct trade, but farming is largely subsistence. Each region tries to be "ownfed". There do not exist the large centralised farms or factories that have evolved under Western capitalism. Luciente tells Connie, "... we're peasants. We're all peasants" (WET, 70).

In Piercy's utopia the teleological reliance on the future for solutions is rejected in favour of an approach (similar to that in Le Guin's Always Coming Home) that seeks answers in both the old ways and the new. Guidance is sought by the people of Mattapoissett from the lifestyles of the people of pre-colonised America, the Wamponaug Indians in particular. Jackrabbit says, "We learnt a lot from societies that people used to call primitive. Primitive technically. But socially sophisticated" (WET, 103). Though wary of the blind pursuit of science for its own sake, the people of Mattapoissett acknowledge and utilise the advantages it offers. They do not, however, allow it to become a goal in itself and are critical of past scientists who, they say, were "childish", "carefully brought up through a course of study entered on early never to ask consequences, never to consider a broad range of effects, never to ask on whose behalf..." (WET, 196).

Their attitude towards their natural surroundings is conservationist. Decisions about changes to the landscape, such as the clearing of forest land, require the consensus of all who will be affected as well as the permission of the Earth Advocate and the Animal Advocate, individuals who represent the environment and animal life. The place of humans as a central but potentially harmful member of the ecosystem is acknowledged and efforts are made, through means such as the manufacture of bio-degradable substances

and the re-utilisation of waste products, to inflict as little disturbance as possible upon the ecological balance of their environment. Along with their acceptance of the responsibility of their role within the ecosystem there is an eagerness to bridge the gap between humans and other animals. Animals such as cats are communicated with through facial and vocal expression, and a holiday, Washoe Day, is held in honour of the first chimpanzee to learn to communicate with humans in sign language. The relationships the people of Mattapoissett have with their environment is non-exploitative. They live with, not off, nature.

The dystopia presented in chapter 15 of the novel, the alternative future that Connie enters, provides an ugly contrast to the world of Mattapoissett. Whereas in Mattapoissett the existence of two sexes is not a basis for gender categorisation, in the New York of the alternative future differences are exaggerated: women are regarded solely as sexual or reproductive objects. "Feminine" traits are cosmetically emphasised. Connie finds herself in the room of Gildina 547-921-45-822-K135, a woman whose "body seemed a cartoon of femininity", with "a tiny waist, enormous sharp breasts," "ridiculously small feet" and "oversized and audaciously curved" hips and buttocks (WET, 288). Gildina is a contracty, a woman who has secured a contract to provide a man with sexual services, for her a welcome alternative to the insecurity of a life as a prostitute in one of the "knockshops" that abound in this future world. Her life consists, between "breast-enhancing" operations, mainly of drug-taking, holigraph watching and being entertained by the Sense-all -- a machine that stimulates all five senses. She lives on the 126th floor of a building she never goes, or even sees, out of, protected from the noxious atmosphere of the polluted world outside. The people of her time do not live long. Gildina's mother died at 43 -- an old age -- and Connie, who is 37, is taken to be in her middle twenties.

The dystopian world that is depicted is one of exploitation on a vast scale. Women are forced to sell their

bodies in order to survive, natural resources have mostly been exhausted or contaminated, and those with economic power control almost all facets of other people's lives. The social structure is a hierarchical triangle of domination with only those at the apex, the "richies" -- the leaders of the multis that control the global politics and economy -- able to escape the repercussions of the earth's despoliation by living in space platforms and extending their lives through series of organ transplants, the "donors" being the hapless individuals at the bottom of the capitalist structure.

The shock Connie receives upon witnessing the ghastliness of this alternative future impels her to renounce her previously passive role, to make a contribution that will help avert the future of Gildina's existence and ensure that of Luciente's. She comes to accept her present as a site of battle for the future. The chapter ends with her return to her present:

So that was the other world that might come to be. That was Luciente's war, and she was enlisted. (WET, 301)

The need for commitment by the individual to the greater struggle is central in the thematic structure of Woman on the Edge of Time. Moylan writes: "The personal commitment that was the hallmark of the new left vision of the 1960s is at the heart of Piercy's ideological concern" (DTI, 139). The commitment that is advocated as necessary for actively inciting social change is linked unavoidably to violence. The progress of the novel reveals Connie's development until she comes to accept she is involved in a war within which it is necessary to fight actively, to exercise violence.

Anger is the fuel of this violence. "The anger of the weak never goes away... it just gets a little moldy. It molds like a beautiful blue cheese in the dark, growing stronger and more interesting" (WET, 50). Weakness thus becomes a strength, for it engenders the anger and hatred which instigate revolution. "Hate them more than you hate

yourself, and you'll stay free," Connie is told (WET, 366). Hatred is seen to offer solutions; it is presented as an energy that, if harnessed, can be used constructively. After having been imprisoned in the hospital for breaking Geraldo's nose, Connie feels encouraged that she has been able to direct her anger away from herself and towards Geraldo. This outwardly-directed anger she regards as "clean", purposeful:

Yet lying in enforced contemplation, she found that clean anger, glowing in her still. She hated Geraldo and it was right for her to hate him. Attacking him was different from turning her anger, her sorrow, her loss of Claud into self-hatred, into speed and downers, into wine, into seeing herself in Angelina and abusing that self born again into the dirty world. Yes, this time was different. She had struck out not at herself, not at herself in another, but at Geraldo, the enemy.
(WET, 19)

Hatred is condemned or condoned depending on the focus that it finds; it is not rejected as destructive in itself.

At the end of the novel, Connie pours Parathion -- a toxic pesticide she steals from her brother's nursery -- into the filter coffee that is used by the medical staff of the hospital. Four of the staff are killed by it. Their poisoning represents Connie's commitment to the struggle for liberation. She herself is taken back to Rockover; her action is self-sacrificial, executed ostensibly for the good of others in order to help bring about a utopian future like that of Mattapoisett. Connie sees her deed as an act of war, committed, ultimately, in self-defence.

I murdered them dead. Because they are the violence-prone. Theirs is the money and the power, theirs the poisons that slow the mind and dull the heart. Theirs are the powers of life and death. I killed them.
Because it is a war.
(WET, 375)

The assumption is made that violence is necessary to end violence. As Luciente says to Connie, "Power is violence. When did it get destroyed peacefully?" (WET, 370). This position is rejected by writers such as Le Guin, who depict violence as breeding violence, each act of counter-violence

deepening the hatred and repressing the possibility of solution.

Moylan writes of Piercy:

Her tactics ... centre ... on the necessity for violent struggle to achieve the social revolution given the overwhelming power of the phallogocratic (capitalist) bureaucratic structure both in its ideological manipulation and its raw violence. (DTI, 123)

Violence is depicted as not necessarily abhorrent, depending on the aims under which it is conducted. Whereas the violent treatment of Connie and the other patients is strongly condemned, Connie's own act of violence is condoned under the assumption that its victims were the enemy in the war for liberation. The distinction that is drawn in the book between acceptable and unacceptable violence is somewhat tenuous, however, as is made evident by contrasting the treatment of murderers in Mattapoissett to the justification of Connie's actions. Parra tells Connie: "We aren't willing to live with people who choose to use violence. We execute them" (WET, 209). The distinction, then, is one to do with choice. Connie was driven to violence and thus her actions are sanctioned. The implication the novel makes is that she was forced to kill; it was an act of war, not of personal choice.

Connie's violence against her child -- her neglect and physical abuse of Angelina -- is excused to an extent by her circumstances. Her deeds are depicted as something she was driven to by her poverty and her suffering at the discriminatory actions of the establishment:

After Claud had died of hepatitis in Clinton, she had mourned him in a haggard frenzy of alcohol and downers, diving for oblivion and hoping for death. She had sat for weeks in a chair, letting Angelina scream and weep herself to sleep in fear and hunger. (WET, 61)

When Angelina breaks her only pair of shoes, Connie's frustrations find outlet in violence:

"You fucking kid!" she screamed, and hit her. Hit too hard. Knocked across the room into the door. Angie's arm struck the heavy metal bolt of the police lock, and her wrist broke. The act was past in a moment. The consequence would go on as long as she breathed.

(WET, 62)

Blame is directed, ultimately, at the discriminatory, capitalist system which drove her into such desperate circumstance. Connie is thus herself a victim of the inherent violence of her oppressive society. Her violence is a product of or response to this violence.

The protagonist Piercy chooses is not powerful or heroic. Instead, she takes someone at the bottom of the social and economic scales as vehicle for her concerns. Connie, who is stripped of all power, who is severely victimised by her society, is presented as part of the struggle to destroy that society. But her position of extreme weakness offers her only raw violence as a means of confronting the system. It is the only weapon she has and, in choosing commitment to the struggle, the one she must use.

Consuelo's final act in the novel is to poison -- execute -- the psychiatrists. ... This is, of course, shocking. And Piercy deliberately makes the ethical questions more difficult by choosing as her protagonist a person already defined by her society as "insane" and "socially violent".¹²

The positions of madness and sanity are inverted in the novel. Connie, who is deemed mad by her society, is presented as more sane than the doctors and scientists who hospitalise and experiment on her. From the point of view of the utopian Mattapoissett, it is her world that appears, in its wastefulness, exploitation and discrimination, to tread the path of insanity, to be stumbling towards the dystopia depicted in chapter 15. In fighting against the spiral of exploitation and oppression she suffers under, Connie acts from a position of sanity. When Luciente's visitations first start occurring, Connie fears she is going mad, but it is

12. Pamela J. Annas, "Androgyny in Feminist Science Fiction", Science Fiction Studies (vol. 5, Indiana State University, 1978), p.154.

through this "madness" that the world of Mattapoissett, and its insights and hopes, is revealed to her. Luciente, as her name implies, brings "light" to Connie, the awareness of a better, or saner, world.¹³ Through Connie, Piercy questions society's ready hypocrisy, its labelling, while blind to its own violence and insanity, of such people as insane or violent. She stresses also the need to look at the underlying causes of actions such as Connie's, locating culpability in the imbalances and oppression of the society, not the responses of its members.

Moylan writes that Connie's "final action is the very catalyst that enables -- at the symbolic level of individual action -- Mattapoissett" (DTI, 142). On a pragmatic level there is a disjunction between the utopian product that is presented and the process of achieving this utopia, but the link the novel establishes is not necessarily causal. Its emphasis lies not so much on the nature of Connie's actions but on the fact that she decided to act, that she refused to continue in the role of passive victim.

The immediate ineffectiveness of Connie's actions -- she is taken back to Rockover, presumably to more severe treatment -- and the assertion that women are "biologically enchained" by their reproductive capabilities, does, however, have the effect of deferring hope, in the form of personal emancipation through social revolution and biological emancipation through technology, to an unknown future. The present is painted bleak. The emphasis Piercy makes in Woman on the Edge of Time is on the necessity of action in this present for there to be even such indeterminate hope for the future.

13. In Mattapoissett itself madness has no social stigma. Luciente says, "We do not use these words [mad and sick] to mean the same thing" (WET, 65), and she speaks of Jackrabbit's madness at thirteen and at fifteen as something she's "never been able" to achieve (WET, 57).

Chapter 3

The Seventies: Single-Sex Utopias

Suzy McKee Charnas's Walk to the End of the World and Motherlines, Sally Miller Gearhart's The Wanderground, and Joanna Russ's The Female Man

In contrast to the utopias examined in the previous chapter, those discussed in this chapter affirm gender difference as valid. Indeed, the rift of difference between the sexes is depicted as so wide that it negates hope of reconciliation. These utopian societies consist of a single sex, females. In this they recall Gilman's Herland, but unlike Herland, which used the single-sex society as a device for highlighting the ability of women to prosper without the aid of men, the utopias discussed here, particularly Suzy McKee Charnas's Motherlines¹ and Sally Miller Gearheart's The Wanderground², depict that world consisting only of women as a necessarily better place. The societies are utopian not despite the absence of men, but because of it.

The reactionary tone of the books, their dismissive exclusion of men, voices the anger and the hopelessness felt in the more radical fringes of feminism in the 1970s, the belief that men are inherently -- doomed to be -- violent, that destructiveness is innate within them.

Motherlines, published in 1978, is the sequel to Walk to the Edge of the World (1974). The two volumes present thesis and antithesis, dystopia and utopia. Walk to the Edge of the World depicts life in the Holdfast, a group of towns and cities in which women are enslaved, kept only for labour and breeding. Motherlines describes life on the Plains, beyond the citadels of the Holdfast, where the Riding Women live, in their small scattered villages, a life that, although not idyllic, is free from the oppression that pervades life in the Holdfast.

In situating the dystopia in the cities and the utopia in the Grasslands, Charnas expresses the common utopian identification of the urban with incarceration and the rural with liberation. As the utopian imagination has backed off from the depiction of utopia as technologically-based, and has begun to look backwards, towards the past, instead of

1. Suzy McKee Charnas, Walk to the End of the World and Motherlines (The Women's Press, London, 1987). Abbreviated as WEW and M.

2. Sally Miller Gearhart, The Wanderground (Women's Press, London, 1985). Abbreviated as TW.

only forwards, so the emphasis has fallen more strongly on interaction with nature being an essential ingredient of the utopia. The concerns of the utopian imagination have shifted away from discovery and towards re-discovery. The threats of the future have turned it towards examination of the unfulfilled promise of the past.

Charnas's depiction of this dystopia is based firmly on the model of present society: she takes the prejudices of patriarchy and exaggerates them. The world created under this hyperbole is disturbing; yet the discord the society emits is merely an amplification of the wrongs of present society. The novel presents a difference in the degree of injustice, not the type.

The main city of the Holdfast, called simply The City, is a place of antagonism, discrimination and division on many levels. The women, derogatively called fems, are held in slavery and regarded by the men (and -- their education saturated by the disinformation of the ultra-patriarchal ideology -- often by themselves) as lesser beings. The behaviour demanded of them is a pattern of abasement and self-effacement. Cast as having inferior intelligence and a limited capacity for language, fems are forced to hide their competence, to perpetuate the myth of their weakness in order to ward off reprisal against what would be deemed an unnatural insubordination. Though, seemingly, stripped of intellectual capacity, fems are attributed occult powers, the rationale being that blame can then be levelled at them for any misfortune befalling the men, and retribution exacted. For fear of controverting the established relationship of subservience, fems dare not refer to themselves in the first person. Punishment of death is readily meted with a brutality that further encourages their fawning and obsequious behaviour.

The labour fems are to provide is determined according to their physical attributes. The prettiest become pets of the wealthy Senior men, private slaves who serve as retainers and entertainers. More robust women might be trained as pack-fems, used for toting goods or the "campers"

wealthy men use for transport, or as runners, used for carrying messages.

Historically, the Holdfast is a settlement established after the Wasting, the holocaust which destroyed all animal -- and most plant -- life except for those species that were hidden in the underground bunkers that offered the wealthy protection against the radiation they had indirectly spawned. The absence of fauna means that that work which would previously have been performed by domesticated animals has become the lot of women. The diet of the men consists chiefly of manna and lammin, products of a plant and a seaweed that were able to adapt to the polluted environment of the Wasting. The present society finds itself in a time of famine, the major food sources dying out as their nutrient supply -- the impurities produced in the time before and during the Wasting -- is diminished with the slow cleansing of the earth. The initial brunt of the food shortage is borne by the fems. Their food allocation radically cut, those not burnt for bewitching the food crops are forced to look to the only other source of nutrition they have: themselves. In the Milkery excess milk is taken from feeding mothers. This is then mixed with the final product of the Rendery -- ground-up bodies of dead fems -- to produce curdcake, the staple foodstuff of the fems' diet.

Discrimination stems chiefly from insecurity. Fear breeds the insularity that causes individuals to cluster together in groups, to find security in the exclusion of others, in the creation of a common enemy. The extent of the divisiveness of the Holdfast society is witness to the insecurity of the times. Counterpart to the rigid categorisation of people as either men or fems is a taxonomy within which those men younger than thirty, the Juniors, are accorded a lower status than older men, the Seniors. Underlying the tension of this division is the fear that, like Laius, fathers will have their sons rise up and depose them. For this reason a child's parentage is never established. After a man has done his "duty" in the breeding dens (for such is the men's detestation of the fems that

fornication is regarded as punishment not pleasure) any child resulting is thrown, after brief nurturing, into the anonymity of either the Boyhouse where young boys are reared or the kitpens where girls are left, until age nine, to fend for themselves.

The threads of religion and myth that remain of the time before the Wasting are woven into the tapestry of their belief. The assertion that "old and young were natural enemies" is given a greater coherence because "even God's own Son, in the old story, had earned punishment from his father" (WEW, 24). The balanced tension inherent in the enforced antagonism of this Oedipal myth writ large is maintained because the young men dare not stage insurrection against that which they themselves will one day become.

The anonymity of parentage serves to protect sons too from a pre-emptive attack on them by their sires; the fear is reflected both ways. This enmity between generations is essentially an extension of the antipathy directed towards women. "It made sense, after all: sons, fresh from the bellies of fems, were tainted with the destructiveness which characterized their dams. Therefore they were dangerous. It was natural for fathers to protect themselves from their sons' involuntary, irrational aggression by striking first" (WEW, 41).

The discrimination the men practise is extended beyond that against women and the youth to a fear-filled hatred of all that is different, and therefore threatening, to them, all that they call "unmen". Animals of the past are depicted as beasts against which men were at war, natural enemies who would destroy if not destroyed.

They remember the evil races whose red skins, brown skins, yellow skins, black skins, skins all the colours of fresh-turned earth marked them as mere treacherous imitations of men, who are white; youths who repudiated their fathers' ways; animals that raided men's crops and waylaid and killed men in the wild places of the world; and most of all the men's own cunning, greedy females. Those were the rebels who caused the downfall of men's righteous rule: men called them "unmen". Of all the unmen, only females and their young remain, still the enemies of men. (WEW, 4)

Isolated by their own fearful withdrawal, the men are estranged from nature. Their attitude towards nature, like that towards all else around them, is one of domination. Because it lives it must be subdued; it must be made to submit to the strength of men. "[T]hey had proud chants telling how they would cut and burn the trees from the face of the world one day and would claim all the world for themselves. What they would use in place of wood, the chants did not say" (WEW, 142). The cities the men have founded are for them sanctuaries, havens which, as witness to their abilities, their power, offer escape from the reminders of their ultimate impotence with which the open space of the plains confronts them. The men avoid travelling alone between cities as it is "reckless for a man to risk his mental balance between the emptiness of sky and land" (WEW, 27). Conversely, in the utopia Motherlines the plains are where the Riding Women, whose nomadic lifestyle contrasts with that of the city-dwellers, thrive.

The aversion the men have to heterosexual sex (those who seek it out are scorned as perverts) follows from their oppression of the women, the abjection into which women are forced. The men's antipathy inverts the very concept itself of what is natural. "[M]odern men were taught never to forget that these beings were by their nature the hereditary and implacable enemies of everything manly, bright and clean" (WEW, 59). The naturalness of procreation is overturned by the rigid division of the society. For both men and fems, homosexuality is accepted as a natural proclivity.

The men's Manichaeian beliefs reflect the conflict of their society:

[The fems] had no souls, only inner cores of animating darkness shaped from the void beyond the stars. Their deaths had no significance. Some men believed that the same shadows returned again and again in successive fem-bodies in order to contest for the world with the souls of men, which came from light. (WEW, 57)

In their religion the men associate themselves with light, day, the sun, and women with darkness, night, the moon. The

fems accept their designated position and adapt it, moulding their own beliefs around the frame modelled by the men. The moon is worshipped by them; a certain sect of the fems pray to the Moonwitch for deliverance. Linked to this dichotomous division is the alignment of men with rationality and the fems with irrationality. The dark capacity of the fems for witchcraft is seen as naturally in opposition to "the light of manly reason" (WEW, 59).

As do many of the other utopian works examined here, Charnas's novel reproves the placement of too great an emphasis on the progress of technology merely for the sake thereof. The technological advancement of the Ancients, their foresight handcuffed by their desire for power despite all consequence, is presented as the impetus behind the Wasting. The warning against such advancement is issued by Eykar Bek, the disenchanting, cynical protagonist who confronts, but who is ultimately destroyed by, his society as he begins to see through, and refuse, its artificial constructions:

Let me tell you something: the Ancients weren't overthrown; they fell down -- in their understanding of their own incredible powers. They should have foreseen the Wasting soon enough to have prevented it. Ancient science was so far advanced that they had machines to do the work of the Dirties, artificial foods and materials to replace those they had from plants and beasts, even man-made reproductive systems that would have eventually cut out the fems from their one supposedly necessary function. But the men didn't see where it was all leading. (WEW, 195)

The symbol the men have of their belief in the necessity of technological advancement is the straight line. Subversive of this, a leitmotif that finds expression in many of these utopian works, is the spiral. "The spiral was the sign of the void, of everything inimical to the straight line of manly, rational thought and will" (WEW, 119).

Forced into lives of degradation and cannibalism, the fems find their lot exacerbated by the politics that develop among their number. The hierarchies of the men are aped, the more powerful fems demanding for themselves, like Seniors, the services of younger fems. Fems seeking to escape their

plight look to witchcraft, to rediscovering the power which, so they have been taught, women used to cause the Wasting, and also they look to the free fems, the women who have reputedly escaped from the Holdfast and live in liberation beyond its boundaries. Rumours abound about the lives these free fems lead, and raise hopes that, when strong enough, they will attack the Holdfast and emancipate their sisters.

The novel ends with the siege of the city of 'Troi, in which stockpiles of food are reputedly held, by the citizens of the other cities whose crop failures, and their consequent slaughtering of their fems in retribution, have left them destitute. The mass destruction with which the plot culminates is a release in violence of the pressure of survival by which this post-holocaust society is confronted. The social structures erected to channel and control the men's aggression -- the subordination of the fems and, to a lesser extent, the Juniors -- are unable to withstand the stress the famine exerts on them and they collapse, with fems being massacred and young and old men grouping together in an attempt to survive. The men's downfall lies in their solipsism, in the greed which made them strive only to get for themselves as much as possible of what food and goods were available, rather than seek methods which would enable their community as a whole to survive. Their insularity serves initially to protect them from each other but ultimately causes the society itself to fall down through a lack of cohesion, of common purpose. In desiring to possess -- both material things and other people -- the men are themselves possessed. The Riding Women's lack of possessions frees them, for it removes from among them the covetousness by which the men are ruled, fostering their communal ethic.

The continuity between the two volumes is maintained through the character of Alldera, the fem who, after the destruction of 'Troi, flees the Holdfast to search for the legendary free fems. Pregnant with a child fathered by rape, she spends months eking out survival in the barren wilderness of the plains. Eventually, when near to death, she is found, not by the free fems, but by a different

group, the Riding Women, women whose ancestors were the subjects of biological experimentation and in whom the capability was bred of reproducing without fertilisation by a male's sperm. The Riding Women comprise a race of clones or near-clones (what difference there is stems from mutations due to radiation) of various lineages, known as Motherlines, the members of each Motherline being related to a common ancestor whose physical attributes they share.

The Riding Women's name derives from their horses, which they use for food, transport and, in their annual mating ritual, their own procreation. Their symbiotic relationship with the horses has its origin in the days after the Wasting during which the women who had been used in the laboratories for experimentation cared for the horses, whose blood had been used for the manufacture of medicines, until it was safe to re-enter the outer world. The seminal fluid of the horses acts as a catalyst for the development of the foetus in the women. Unlike the men of the Holdfast, who fear and hate all "beasts", the women live with and are deeply reliant -- for their own and their race's survival -- upon their fellow creatures.

When Alldera is found by the Riding Women, her initial fear is of the beast which she supposes the mounted rider to be. This changes to a fear of the person who dismounts from the horse, and whom she presumes, due to that person's strength and evident control over the animal, to be a man. As with Connie in Woman on the Edge of Time upon realising Luciente's sex, Alldera's fears are greatly dissipated upon discovering the rider to be female.

Because she is pregnant, Alldera is adopted into the community and not sent to join the free fems who, she discovers, do exist but live apart from the Riding Women, interacting with them only for the purpose of trade. The family structure Charnas ascribes to the Riding Women bears similarities to that of Piercy's utopian society. Here too the nuclear family is adapted, children not being placed in the sole care of two biological parents. As Bartkowski writes, "Both Charnas and Piercy present models of a utopian

family where a child raised collectively learns to love nonpossessively" (FU, 101). Unlike the children of Mattapoissett who have three comothers, each child has five sharemothers; and instead of their families looking after them until puberty, the young of the Riding Women spend their childhood as members of the childpack, into which they are placed soon after nursing and from which they are expelled upon the onset of menstruation. Life in the childpack is severe, the mortality rate among the young high. Its purpose is to eliminate weak genetic strains (from mutations caused by the extant radiation of the Wasting) that would be a liability to the race as a whole.

Charnas too emphasises non-attachment. Apart from the obvious cutting of ties of attachment the child's years in the childpack cause, further efforts are made to prevent too close a bond developing between the child and her bloodmother -- her biological mother who is one of the five sharemothers -- so as to "insulate the bloodmother and the child from each other" (M, 398). This cautiousness stems largely from the concern that, as clones, mother and child might identify too strongly with one another, thereby incurring the risk of a loss of individuality.

The bloodmother looked at her child and saw her own image made young, her replacement in the world, Nenisi said. The child saw in her bloodmother the pattern for her own being. Women said it was best not to let this powerful connection unbalance all the other relationships that guided their two lives, and so it was appropriate that the bloodmother and child be separated for a time. (M, 398)

Similarly, polygamy is espoused. The women are free to have sexual or other liaisons with whomever they please; there is even no taboo against a child coupling with one of her sharemothers. Rather than being regarded as an acceptance of one of the community, monogamy is decried for being a rejection of others in that community. Alldera is told, "I want you to understand something about us here. It's a sickness to fix on only one person and keep everyone else out. It's as if to say, only I and my lover are true women,

the rest of you are false and worthless" (M, 282). As in Mattapoissett, the society encourages the diffusion of emotional ties in the belief that the dependence engendered by close binary relationships, whether between two adults or parent and child, can easily prove stifling and restrictive for the individuals. In these utopias the family gives way to the community. These societies offer a broadened sense of belonging, negating the insularity promulgated by the withdrawal into, and of, the family.

The perception the Riding Women have of their world conforms to a cyclical, as opposed to a teleological, paradigm. "There were different rhythms in the Grasslands, long and slow and repetitive. Nothing came in 'firsts' and 'lasts' here, but as 'another' or 'again'" (M, 256). This philosophy is of course stimulated by the physical repetition of the genetic makeup that is passed down the generations, the cycling of clones that provides continuity not only of culture and custom but of appearance as well. The Motherlines link past and future in a nexus of similarity. The passing of the old is made less final by its apparent regeneration in the new. Alldera is told by Jesselee, a woman nearing death, "After I live my life and die, I'm still part of my Motherline, with women of my flesh before and behind me. Death is nothing to get excited about" (M, 286).

Again the blind pursuit of technology is criticised, cast here as the cause of the Wasting. Scientific thinking is depicted as masculine, a manifestation of the power-seeking and ultimately self-destructive tendencies that the men of the two volumes are presented as having. Nenisi, one of Alldera's fellow sharemothers, speaks opprobriously of "the lab men - and lab women, who had learned to think like men..." (M, 272), saying that the value of their technological advances was outweighed by the improvidence of their vision for this technology:

No one denies that the men of those times were clever. It was the combination of their cleverness and their stupidity that caused the Wasting in the first place.
(M, 273)

In contrast to the men of the Holdfast, whose lives are lived in fear of all that is other to them, and who, out of this fear, desire to subjugate or destroy all otherness, the Riding Women embrace nature, accepting themselves as inherently part of their ecosystem, as a link within, not a parasite on, the food chain. Their dead they leave to the sharu, omnivorous creatures whose flesh they do not eat but on whom they are reliant for aeration of the soil for their grasses and grains. Their reliance upon their horses, upon whom the survival of individuals and the race as a whole depends, fosters this belief in interdependence, the philosophy that all creatures are joined together in a bond, the unbalancing of which will, ultimately, bring destruction upon those effecting the disruption. Their policy of non-interference with the environment is such that Aldera is admonished for building a new granary out of stone so as to keep out the sharu. She is told, "We steal stores from sharu burrows sometimes. It's a proper thing that the sharu should sometimes steal from us" (M, 409). Explaining their unwillingness to alter their environment to suit their own needs, Jesselee says, "a person is in the world to live in it, not to make it over. Only a creature who belongs to nothing has to keep making things to belong to. A woman isn't like that" (M, 410). The men of the Holdfast are, though. Their estrangement from nature drives them to seek security in possessions and possessing.

Though their lifestyles are integrated with their environment, the Riding Women do not model their society on the example of their horses. In reply to a question from Daya, one of the free fems, who asks whether it bothers the Riding Women to see the stallion dominating the mares of the herd, Aldera says, "Women say that animals live as they must. They say women live as they must too, but also as they think right, which is what makes them more than just animals" (M, 342). Unlike in Gearhart's utopia, to be discussed later in this chapter, a firm division is maintained between humans and animals, based on humans' faculty of reason and its concomitant relation, morality.

But it is in the very dominance of the weak by the strong that Charnas identifies the origin of patriarchy. Aldera, after her rape by men of the Holdfast, reflects on this primitive enforcement of power: "a clever fem sometimes needed a reminder of her true position, and there was nothing like a good swift fuck to set firmly in her mind her relation to her masters again: the simplest relation of all, that of an object to the force of those stronger than she" (WEW, 164). At its essence, the power the men of the Holdfast have over the fems lies in their superior physical strength. The contrast between the dystopia of the Holdfast and the utopian society of the Riding Women enforces this implication that, like the stallions of the herds, men, through their superior physical strength, will always be inclined to dominate women. The depiction of a utopia without men defers hope that there might be a progression beyond this atavistic relationship of brute force. People must live "as they think right, which is what makes them more than animals", but, as the dystopian world of the Holdfast suggests, Charnas's view is that man-kind remains in the sway of its more primitive, more animal, impulses.

The lives of the Riding Women are not idyllic. They squabble, feud, murder; they are forced to cull their horses in times of drought, to abandon their children to the childpack so that only the fittest will survive. Strong rivalries exist between the various camps, and find expression in raids during which a rival village's horses or inhabitants are captured for ransom. This conflict, although aggressive, is not violent, and the killing of another is strongly condemned. Brutality and violence do on occasion, like lightning in a quiet sky, flare up in disruption of the society, but any such oppression is localised, between individuals. Unlike in the Holdfast, violence is not systematized, sanctioned. Brutality exists as part of the human condition and, at times in the harsh world they inhabit, such as when they are forced to slaughter their horses, as a necessary function, but it does not have any place within the reinforcement of the social system; it is

in no way institutionalized. Aldera, upon witnessing the readiness with which the women slew their horses, is shocked at this manifestation of the brutality she had hoped not to find. "She had wanted the women to be perfect, and they were not" (M, 294). The utopian nature of the society of the Riding Women lies not so much in their lifestyle, which has to adapt to the harshness of their surroundings, the frequent times of lack, as in their social interaction, within which individuals are regarded as just that, individuals, free from the prejudices of a gender- or class-conscious society. The society balances the autonomy of the individual and the welfare of the community as a whole, as opposed to the Holdfastian society in which the few ride parasitic on the backs of the majority.

When Aldera first comes to the Plains, the societies of the free fems and the Riding Women live separately, interacting only on occasion for purposes of trade. She herself is accepted into the community only because she is pregnant; the women see in her child the hope of starting a new Motherline. There lies between the two groups much antipathy and distrust. The free fems despise the Riding Women -- the Mares as they disparagingly call them -- for their unsophisticated ways, and for their strangeness, their breeding with horses. Many of the Riding Women, in turn, despise the fems for having been subservient to the men, for not having had the strength to rise up against them. In much the same way as the Juniors are perceived to be tainted by their recent attachment to their dams, the free fems bear the stigmata of having been in men's possession.

The free fems, although having escaped physically from the Holdfast, are still trapped within its paradigms. The free fem society in which Aldera goes to live for a time is in many ways a mimicry of a Holdfast household. She finds one fem, Elnoa, has set herself up as a kind of master over the others, acquiring wealth and demanding for herself the attention of other fems, much like Seniors in relation to their pets. The fems all prize wealth, each having a secret cache of their treasures buried nearby. Aldera eventually

comes to feel incarcerated by the pettiness and insularity of this hierarchical society. "Maybe, she thought, it was because she had tasted real freedom among the Riding Women, while the others had simply run from the Holdfast Slavery to a more comfortable bondage in the Grasslands" (M, 339). So she returns to the Riding Women, and in so doing instigates a minor revolution among the free fems, many of whom later join her. A logical sequel to the dystopia describing the Holdfast, the world of extreme division between men and women, Motherlines expresses the need for women to work together, to unite against their oppression in order to attain a position from where a greater unity, one including men, might be achieved. Motherlines thus establishes an intermediary platform, a potential base, for a third novel which would provide closure to a trilogy of division, separation and reunion.³

The single-sex utopia is thus used as a vehicle to present a necessary step in the process of women's liberation, that of collaboration of women across lines of race, class or creed. The growing acceptance of each group by the other with which the novel closes, and the Riding Women's reversal of their earlier decision to prevent the free fems from returning to the Holdfast to liberate those fems still there, presents literally the vision of women striving together, despite differences in culture or background, towards a common goal of liberation for all women.

3. Charnas has in fact spoken, in a paper presented at a conference at Indiana in 1987, of the difficulties the writing of such a story would pose (FU, 175).

The Wanderground

Jean Elshtain describes radical feminism in the following terms:

Radical feminists in their dominant forms of contemporary expression tend to present an essentially dualistic political rhetoric that divides the sexes into something akin to different species. For sex polarists, the root of the matter is sexuality. ... An unmediated conduit is presupposed between the so-called normal violence of the heterosexual male and the patriarchal, repressive family, up to and including militarism, wars, nuclear technology, despoliation of nature, advertising, and pornography: all are construed as the outgrowths of unchained masculinism.⁴

It is such politics, the beliefs promulgated mainly by the radical lesbian feminism of the sixties and seventies, that inform Gearhart's The Wanderground. The divisive nature of these politics, which portray men as ineluctably drawn to violence by their physiological make-up, situates Gearhart at the opposite extreme of the feminist political spectrum from androgynist feminists such as Wittig. Whereas the essential utopian element of Les Guérillères was the absence of gender, here it is the absence of men. Unlike in the other novels of this chapter, Charnas's Motherlines and Russ's The Female Man, in which separatism is advanced as a strategy for liberation, a necessary step in the struggle for equality, in The Wanderground it is put forward as a solution; any world inclusive of men automatically obstructs the utopian impulse.

"Once upon a time too many women became too wide awake..." "Once upon a time there was one rape too many. The earth finally said 'no'" (TW, 171). Thus begin the recountings by the hill women of their history, the tales of how they escaped to the country from the cities and from men; of how men came to be spurned by nature itself, their inescapable inclination towards violence necessitating their

4. Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Ethics in the Women's Movement" in The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science (ed. Janet K. Boles, vol. 515, May 1991), p.129.

immolation within their cities, where they and their violence could be contained.

The Wanderground describes the utopian lifestyle of the hill women, women who have retracted from the world of men, who have found self-sufficiency and fulfilment within their rural communities. Gearhart's lesbian-feminist politics come through strongly in the book. Its emphases fall on the importance of women uniting to stand against the physical, environmental and technological threats posed by men. Gearhart takes the "myth of woman" which Wittig warned against accepting, and exaggerates it. The story freely enters the world of fantasy. The women's mystical discovery of their supernatural powers -- the capabilities of flight, telepathy, telekinesis -- links the novel to the earlier utopias, the places of transcendental bliss. This fantasizing expresses the mood of the book: it is escapist, it offers a literary sanctuary, a retreat from the oppressions of the present, a place for the indulgence of desires rather than the confrontation of dilemmas.

The book is written in reaction against men, all men. In the very first chapter one of the women's aphorisms is expressed: "It is too simple to condemn them all or to praise all of us. But for the sake of the earth and all she holds, that simplicity must be our creed" (TW, 2). This basic simplification underlies the novel itself. A rift is opened separating men and women, exaggerating their difference, opposing them against one another. Generalisations are made to adhere to all individuals. This binary division of men and women, the labelling of them as bad and good, is presented as a political tool, as expedient in the process of the liberation of women. The apotheosis of women and the vilification of men expresses the extreme reactionary mood of the 1970's lesbian feminist movement of which Gearhart was a member, which judged all men as culpable for the crime of patriarchy. Describing the dangers of such essentialism, Lynne Segal writes:

The promotion of a progressive sexual politics between men and women, let alone the struggle for any more egalitarian relations between them, enters the dustbin

of feminist history, replaced by the cheerless certainty of men's rapacity.⁵

The polarisation of men and women is enforced by the philosophy of the hill women. The dichotomous nature ascribed to the two sexes is captured in the maxim Seja, one of the women, utters: "It is not in his nature not to rape. It is not in my nature to be raped. We do not co-exist" (TW, 26). Later in the book Betha thinks of "that fundamental knowledge" that "women and men cannot yet, may not ever, love one another without violence; they are no longer of the same species" (TW, 125). The picture painted of all men is the portrait of Dorian Gray: essentially corrupt, abusive, solipsistic. This destructive urge within men is ultimately self-destructive. Like the power-hungering that undid the men of the Holdfast in Charnas's Walk to the End of the World, so here men's destructive urges lead to their isolation from both the women and their natural environment.

Although at the end of the book the possibility of a partial reconciliation is mooted, the basic categorisations of men as evil, women good, men mad, women sane, are enforced throughout. Men's madness, it is explained, is a madness of power: they are "driven in their own madness to destroy themselves and us and any living thing" (TW, 3). The pronouncement and acceptance of such generalisations remodels the concept of gender into something hyperbolic. Gender in The Wanderground marks out the boundaries of a clearly defined battlefield. The members of its opposing forces are allowed to seek no common cause; they are forced into identification with one side and confrontation with the other.

The history that is detailed describes a time when nature itself turned against men, alienating them because of their unremitting desire for conquest. "Once upon a time ... the earth finally said 'no'". The occasion is referred to as the Revolt of the Earth or the Revolt of the Mother. Men found that they were sexually impotent outside of the

5. Lynne Segal, Is the Future Female? (Peter Bedrick, New York, 1988), p.214.

cities; that they had lost all control over the animals they owned. Machinery, the property of men and their technology, also ceased to function beyond the city borders. The cities thus became prisons in which the earth could incarcerate men, thereby containing their violence. Men are depicted, both literally and figuratively, as trapped within their technology-centred worlds. The association of nature with a mother figure is strongly made. Personified, nature is described as eventually having been unable to put up with man's violence and as having actively rejected him while continuing to nurture its other progeny, woman. Again a criticism recurrent in the feminist utopian genre is levelled: that of a blind furtherance of technology for its own sake. This is "the mistake men made, and made over and over again. Just because it was possible they thought it had to be done" (TW, 157).

As though in response to the necessary rejection of men by nature, the bond between women and nature is more intimate. All the accoutrements of the myths that have been attached to women are embellished. In their seclusion, the women have learnt to communicate not only with their fellow creatures, but with non-sentient forms of life such as trees and plants, and even with phenomena such as rivers and clouds. The women are presented as nodes in a large network of creatures of nature, whose lives are interweaved and interdependent, linked by their mutual telepathic communication. The fantastic utopian world that Gearhart creates is one in which women are empowered, and granted powers beyond those of mere physical or economic or political strength. The women are able to fly (to "windride"), to levitate objects, to read others' minds. Thus Gearhart inverts the imbalance of power in present society. The men's reaction, on the whole, to their disempowerment is to try to disprove it, to force nature to accept their potency. Unrepentant, they persist with the lifestyles they led before the Revolt of the Earth, continuing to subjugate the women still living in the cities. The hill women actively infiltrate the cities, both

to aid and convert women still living there, and because their presence in the cities maintains the balance of energies which render men impotent beyond their confines.

The novel incorporates many themes common to the feminist utopian genre. Here also the encouragement of relationships that are non-possessive is emphasised. Children have seven mothers, who comprise a Pleiades (again the link with nature is affirmed) and who are of various racial origins. The child is born of one of the seven, its so-called flesh mother, but is not biologically the offspring of that woman; women choosing to be flesh mothers have an embryo artificially implanted in them. The diffusion of attachments among seven parents is intended to prohibit the formation of relationships that are too intense and therefore restrictive of individual independence. One of their sayings is "There are no words more obscene than 'I can't live without you'" (TW, 4). Naming too follows the recurrent pattern of these utopias: individuals have only a single name which they choose for themselves.

The women's strength lies largely in their co-operation, their sense of community. As opposed to the men of the cities, who seek personal advantage through exploitation of the weak, the women ostracise none of their number but work together, teaching, aiding, loving each other. The welfare of the community is readily accepted as of higher import than that of any individual. The bond that unites them is their common gender. "What we are not we each could be," runs one of the early lessons their children are taught, "and every woman is myself" (TW, 123). Links are affirmed with women of the past as well. All children visit the remember rooms where they examine artefacts from the past used in the subjugation of women. Also, they participate in the rememberings, the shared re-experiencing of traumatic experiences at the hands of men, which they are taken through by remember-guides, women who are able to summon for reliving these events of the past. The remembering, the sharing of pain, serves to unite the women, to bind them through a common hostility toward men. It

enforces the binary division between men and women, encouraging empathy towards all women and antipathy towards all men.

Depictions of the lifestyles of the city dwellers and the hill women are juxtaposed, including and contrasting the utopian and dystopian forms. The description of the rememberings, the dystopian experiences women suffered in the past, further amplifies the utopian nature of the present. The ritual of the rememberings also affirms the women's link with nature: they do not take place unless cats are present, the cats being necessary as "they filled in missing connections in the stories and added portions that the remember-guides occasionally forgot" (TW, 150). The utopian nature of their present is insufficient for the women. The pain of the past is useful in that it reinforces the bonds among them, consolidating them against their enemies the men.

Not all the men are depicted as irrecoverably lost to destructiveness. There are those, called gentles, who, renouncing their sexual potency, live outside the cities and who look to the women for salvation from the wrongs perpetrated in the past by their own sex. "Gentles. Men who knew that the outlaw women were the only hope for the earth's survival. Men who, knowing that maleness touched women only with the accumulated hatred of centuries, touched no women at all. Ever" (TW, 2). Accepting their pariah status, the gentles seek to aid the women in their quest to emancipate women still trapped within the cities and their oppressive ideologies. Gentles are tolerated, or used where expedient, but they are in no way given aid by the women, no matter their situation, as the following passage shows:

Once, she remembered, some gentles had come to the Wanderground, stricken and dying. Unwilling to return to the City where they might have been revived, they came to the hill women. They came for help in their dying. They cried for the ministrations of the women. 'Minister to yourselves,' they were told. Yet always the women stood by, friends from a distance, the midwives of death who would ease their passing.

'Why can't we help them?' Jacqua had asked.

'They must help themselves,' her mothers answered.

'But they're dying!'

'Yes. They are dying. That is the most important thing. That is exactly what they must help themselves to do. When they touch their own bodies they know that. Only when they disconnect do they cry for our help and curse our hardness.'

Jacqua had seen them die there. Four of them. One by one over the days while she and the other women talked with them and sang with them but never touched them either with mind or hand. They had been unable to sustain their man-ness, and, though they had tried, unable to grasp their own woman-ness. It was too late for them now to reach down and lift themselves up. And these were the gentles of the men. What were the others like?

(TW, 3)

Gearhart's politics are in direct opposition to those of Wittig. Whereas, as in Les Guérillères, Wittig espouses androgyny, the men and women of Gearhart's novel are dissimilar. There is no overlap, let alone congruency, between the qualities inherent in men and in women. Even the least masculine of the men, the gentles, are unable to "grasp their own woman-ness" and thus deemed better off dead. Men are cut off, by their maleness, from the communal ethic upon which the women's utopia is founded: "Somehow men -- even gentles -- found it difficult or impossible really to share power" (TW, 124). Men, as the novel depicts them, are biologically prone to a perception of the world in terms of conquest; the desire for power is inherent in them, whereas for the women communal welfare seems to be an innate concern.

Near the end of the book the gentles excitedly tell the women that they have learnt to communicate with animals, and demonstrate their new-found ability. Their demonstration is greeted not with the pleasure that they expect but with a cynical distrust of its method. Whereas the women's telepathic communication involves a process of "enfoldment", an embracing of the other, the men access the mind of the other by a more direct method: "It's like a bridge, not a circle," they explain (TW, 193). Their method, which is unique to men, is greeted with suspicion, as a different manifestation of men's inclination towards relationships of conquest, of taking not sharing. "More like a sword?" the women ask.

The present of the novel is a time of minor crisis, of a weakening of nature's resistance against men. In order to combat the threat of the city men, the women rely on the aid of the gentles -- it is expedient to do so. Not all the women want even this limited contact with men, however:

to some of the women it did not matter that the gentles were men sworn to isolate themselves from women; if they were men then there was no reason for concourse with them. Zephyr was impatient. Such an old story. Such ignorance, she felt. The hill women needed the gentles... Why always these purists, why always the moralists? (TW, 136)

While there is some form of co-operation between the hill women and the gentles, it is more a matter of pragmatism than a portent of reconciliation.

Hope for some form of salvation for men is not completely abandoned. Despite their refusal to accept the gentles, the women still perceive their task to be to educate men to be different, to eliminate their desire for conquest. They sing that their task is

*To work as if the earth, the mother, can be saved
To work as if our healing care were not too late.
Work to stay the slayer's hand,
Helping him to change
Or helping him to die.
Work as if the earth, the mother, can be saved.*
(TW, 211)

The general impression the book conveys, though, is that men are beyond redemption, forever "slayers" whom the women, in the same way as they watched the four gentles perish, will be forced to help to die.

The Wanderground is an angry book. The politics it espouses, that women must separate themselves from men altogether to attain liberation, have their origin in the reactionary beliefs of radical lesbian feminism. The simplification of gender that Gearhart makes, the rigid binary taxonomy that is presented, while distancing the book from the make-up of present society, expresses strongly the anger induced in women of similar belief by the imbalances and inequalities of patriarchy. As will be examined in the

following chapter, however, the tendency to align men exclusively with the ills of patriarchy, to depict the struggle for equality as one with the lines of opposition clearly demarcated by difference in gender, has been reduced by the wave of antifeminism in the eighties in which the central proponents were, for the most part, women.

The Female Man

Joanna Russ's novel The Female Man⁶ is dedicated "to Anne, to Mary and to the other one and three-quarters billions of us." It is a book about women -- its central protagonists are all women, its utopian world of Whileaway inhabited only by women -- and for women -- its central strategy the unification of women of all backgrounds and persuasions for the purpose of their liberation. Like Gearhart and Charnas, Russ strongly advocates separatism, the need for women to work together, without the influence or intrusion of men, to alter their perceptions of themselves, and their capabilities, as women. The common potential for suffering of women under patriarchy is emphasised; as the authorial I says of women in less fortunate circumstance than her own: "And there, but for the grace of God, go I" (TFM, 131).

Unlike Gearhart, however, Russ does not present the single-sex utopia as a solution. The separation and unification of women is a strategy, an intermediate step in the process of liberation. Russ uses the single-sex utopia as a symbol for women's necessary but temporary dissociation from men, as a means to a desired end rather than as an end in itself. Whileaway, the utopian world inhabited only by women, stands for the self-reliance of women, the attainment of an independence towards which women, both within and outside of the book, are urged.

Although published in 1975, The Female Man was begun by Russ in 1969 and completed in 1971. Its experimental form and its radical feminist politics were the reasons for its rejection by the conservative and androcentric world of science-fiction publishing. In both the time of its writing and the style, Russ's novel correlates with Wittig's Les Guérillères. Both books confront conventional expectations of form and narrative, purposely refusing to provide a linear, contained, closed-ended story. The Female Man, in its content and its rejection of form, is interrogative and

6. Joanna Russ, The Female Man (Women's Press, London, 1985). Abbreviated as TFM.

disruptive of accepted views. The complexities of the text disallow the assertion of a single interpretation, its ambiguous nature frustrating expectations of clarity and closure and allowing for many different readings.

The plot jumps between four discrete loci separated by time or probability: Janet comes from Whileaway, set in a future Earth (though not our future); Joanna lives in contemporary society (that is, the United States of 1969); Jeannine also lives in 1969 but in a world in which the depression of the 1930s has not ended, the Second World War has never happened and the social reforms of Joanna's 1960s have never materialised; and Jael, the fourth of the four J's, lives in Womanland, a future world of another time continuum whose inhabitants are set against the men of Manland in a state of belligerent antipathy. Russ explains the existence of these related but independent worlds as follows:

there must be an infinite number of possible universes (such is the fecundity of God) for there is no reason to imagine Nature as prejudiced in favour of human action. Every displacement of every molecule, every change in orbit of every electron, every quantum of light that strikes here and not there -- each of these must somewhere have its alternative. It's possible, too, that there is no such thing as one clear line or strand of probability, and that we live on a sort of twisted braid, blurring from one to another without even knowing it, as long as we keep it within the limits of a set of variations that really make no difference to us. Thus the paradox of time travel ceases to exist, for the Past one visits is never one's own Past but always somebody else's; or rather one's visit to the Past instantly creates another Present (one in which the visit has already happened) and what you visit is the Past belonging to that Present -- an entirely different matter from your own Past. And with each decision you make (back there in the Past) that new probable universe itself branches, creating simultaneously a new Past and a new Present, or to put it plainly, a new universe. (TFM, 6)

The novel takes the metaphor of the twisted braid and expresses it in practice, moving from one world to the other, from the pasts to the futures not their own, weaving the text itself into a 'twisted braid', drawing together,

uniting, the worlds of the four central characters, and, more importantly, the characters themselves. The interweaving of presents and futures that are not causally related refuses expectations of linear progression and causality. Also, in their being twisted together, the distinction between the threads depicting the various worlds becomes blurred. Their braiding blunts difference, linking the worlds together to affirm their common ideals. The strands of the four women's lives, in being braided together, form a composite that is stronger than the individual parts. The worlds and the women of these worlds are very different, but they come together because of their bond of womanhood. The interconnectedness of women's lives, due to their common oppression and despite different backgrounds, different worlds, is asserted through this conjunction of the four women's societies.

"Plague came to Whileaway in PC 17 (Preceding Catastrophe) and ended in AC 03, with half the population dead" (TFM, 12). Thus Janet explains the origins of Whileaway's single-sex society. According to this version of the history (as opposed to Jael's which claims the extermination of the men was a calculated decision -- this controversy will be discussed later), in the years of shock after the Catastrophe the women of Whileaway developed their already sophisticated technology to enable them to produce children through genetic engineering. Unlike that described in Gilman's Herland or Charnas's Motherlines, the parthenogenesis developed by the Whileawayans does not involve the reproduction of a child from a single parent -- two ova are merged so that genetic traits are mixed.

Whileaway, as utopia, is part of a process, not a goal in itself. It stands as stimulus for woman's liberation, not as blueprint for a liberated society. Whileaway does not present an objective, better world towards which society must be directed, but asserts the potential for the existence of a better world. It is a dream world, one that is, as the narrator says, "in the future. But not *our* future" (TFM, 7). To quote Moylan, "[Russ] uses utopia as a

literary practice, she does not assert utopia as a literary object" (DTI, 56). Whileaway offers hope, the suggestion of a freer world. As its name suggests, it is useful as a place to which temporary escape can be made, to while away time, for inspiration needed upon return to the world of current concerns. The depiction of Whileaway does not constitute the major part of the text. Its descriptions intersperse those of the worlds of the other three J's. In this way it acts to stimulate the utopian imagination of the other characters, especially Jeannine and Joanna, to make them aware of the potential for the creation of such a world. Unlike Gearhart's The Wanderground, Russ's novel remains focused on the present and its concerns and does not attempt to will the reader into pipe-dreaming a world of only tenuous relation to our own.

Only fragments of the text of Whileawayan life are given. The lacunae are left for the reader to fill in. This refusal to offer a detailed exposition of the utopia emphasises the role of the utopia as a vision serving to provoke change rather as a model defining what changes should be made. In its sculpting of a utopia whose actual shape is only hinted at and not carved out in detail, Russ's novel foreshadows Le Guin's later utopia Always Coming Home. In both, the picture of the utopian society, like a scene on a partly-restored Grecian calyx, is left incomplete. The utopian novel that is overly descriptive runs the risk of becoming prescriptive, of rigidly enforcing a model rather than offering the freedom of alternative choice which is essential to the utopian imagination itself.

The fragments that are presented, however, suggest themes bearing similarities to those of the utopian novels of the 1970s which followed Russ's book. Central again is the breakdown of the nuclear family. Children have two biological parents -- their "body-mother" and the "other mother", but are brought up within large family units consisting of between twenty and thirty women mostly of similar age. Age is the only measure of classification on the planet. Whileawayans progress from Middle Dignity (at

puberty) to Three-Quarters Dignity (at seventeen) to Full Dignity (at twenty-two). At five children leave home, never to return. They spend their years until puberty receiving (a mostly practical) education, those of Middle Dignity travelling or exploring where they will, those of Three-Quarters Dignity as part of the labour force, working for the benefit of society wherever they are sent, and those of Full Dignity performing more specialised tasks of their own choosing. By twenty-five most Whileawayans will have joined a pre-existing family or formed their own, after which 'marriage', as it is called, they are eligible to join the Geographical and Professional Parliaments -- the decentralised Whileawayan government networks. The age hierarchy that structures the society is expressed in one of its main taboos -- that against sex with a person of greatly different age. Mothers bear children at about age thirty, "singletons or twins as the demographic pressures require" (TFM, 49). Their separation from their families at age five, after which "they do not go back home" (TFM, 50), reveals in Russ's beliefs too a wariness of possessive love that is so often the product of the close-knit nuclear family and which encourages dependence.

Whileawayan psychology locates the basis of Whileawayan character in early indulgence, pleasure, and flowering which is drastically curtailed by the separation from the mothers. This (it says) gives Whileawayan life its characteristic independence, its dissatisfaction, its suspicion, and its tendency toward a rather irritable solipsism. (TFM, 52)

Whileawayan families are dynamic: their members join and leave as they will, departures being common due to the tendency of the Whileawayans to move freely from place to place during their lives; they have no fixed abode, no place for the limitations of that "horrible obsession" they deem the concept of "home" to be.

As in the other single-sex utopias examined so far, there exists among the women a bond of kinship that is affirmed by their common gender and strengthened by the diffusion of the bonds of the nuclear family. Ties of family

are replaced by ties of community with the result that the competitiveness and covetousness of present society are absent:

You cannot fall out of the kinship web and become sexual prey for strangers, for there is no prey and there are no strangers -- the web is world-wide.
(TFM, 81)

You can walk around the Whileawayan equator twenty times (if the feat takes your fancy and you live that long) with one hand on your sex and in the other an emerald the size of a grapefruit. All you'll get is a tired wrist.
(TFM, 82)

In contrast to Gilman who, due to the conservatism of the milieu of her upbringing, created in Herland a race of asexual women, Russ's Whileawayans rejoice in their sexuality. Sexual activity begins at puberty and is encouraged as a form of healthy expression. Russ confronts directly the homophobic attitudes of her society in her presentation of a race of women actively engaging in sex with one another. These attitudes are subverted with subtle irony by Janet in a television interview which is conducted by MC (standing, perhaps, for Male Chauvinist):

MC: ... Miss Evason, I am not talking about economic institutions or even affectionate ones. Of course the mothers of Whileaway love their children; nobody doubts that. And of course they have affection for each other; nobody doubts that, either. But there is more, much, much more -- I am talking about sexual love.

JE (enlightened): Oh! You mean copulation.

MC: Yes.

JE: And you say we don't have that?

MC: Yes.

JE: How foolish of you. Of course we do.

MC Ah? (He wants to say, "Don't tell me.")

JE: With each other. Allow me to explain.

She was cut off instantly by a commercial poetically describing the joys of unsliced bread. (TFM, 11)

Sexual relationships are conducted both within and outside of the family, but most often outside of it, jealousy being cited as the reason for this. Whileawayans are not monogamous -- a further stricture against the development of

possessive love. "Whileawayan psychology again refers to the distrust of the mother and the reluctance to form a tie that will engage every level of emotion, all the person, all the time" (TFM, 53).

Set in a future nine hundred years beyond our own time, Whileaway is extremely advanced technologically. Power is harnessed by means of matter-antimatter reactors and, for private use, portable power sources such as solar cells. Labour is performed by means of induction helmets, tools which allow machinery to be controlled by the thoughts of the brain, freeing the Whileawayans for other pursuits. We are told that Whileawayans "work too much" (TFM, 52) and that they "work all the time. They work. And they work. And they work" (TFM, 54), but also that they spend no more than three hours at a time on any job and that their work-week is but sixteen hours. Their state of advanced technology allows them, almost paradoxically, to return largely to a lifestyle of pre-industrial simplicity.

Whileaway is so pastoral that at times one wonders whether the ultimate sophistication may not take us all back to a kind of pre-Paleolithic dawn age, a garden without any artifacts except for what we would call miracles. (TFM, 14)

Russ takes the earlier, untamed utopian obsession with technological advance, the potentially dangerous pursuit of technology for its own sake, and bridles it. In Whileaway technology is sought only in so far as it benefits humanity. The ethos of the society is not centred on scientific development. Technologically the Whileawayans have attained a state where their needs and comforts are catered for and so there is not any pressure to discover ways of mechanically easing their lot. Russ does not divorce herself completely from the utopian tradition of serenity through technology, but rather unites it with the more modern tendency of looking to the past, and to pastoralism, for solutions, not only to the future.

Whileaway is not an idyllic utopia. "Whileawayans are not nearly as peaceful as they sound," we are told (TFM,

49). Duelling as a means of confrontation comes into fashion periodically. Janet herself has been in four duels, and killed four times. This manifestation of aggression is, however, regarded as a sign of immaturity. "I have put all that behind me now," says Janet; "I am an adult; I have a family" (TFM, 41). Russ does not make the binary division Gearhart makes, locating aggression in the province of males only. The women of Whileaway do have aggressive tendencies, but these are depicted as atavistic, urges that are brought under control with growing responsibility and morality. Although violence is unnecessary on Whileaway, Russ does not reject it as a means of effecting social change. The violence and aggression exhibited by Jael has place within the movement for women's liberation. Jael, like all the other personae, plays a necessary role, both in conscientizing other women like Jeannine, and in making active opposition against patriarchal authority. Central to Russ's politics is a belief in the necessity of all women uniting to shake off their common yoke.

Violent methods are employed in Whileaway as a means of defence as well -- to protect the society against those who reject its basic creed of communality, those who flee its borders, who leave behind notes that say "ha ha ha on you, you do not exist, go away" (TFM, 143). This attitude, which is regarded as a manifestation of the "solipsistic underside" which all Whileawayans have, to varying degrees, cannot be tolerated as it threatens to undermine the very foundations on which Whileawayan community is based. The community is more important than the individual. As their greatest philosopher, Dunyasha Bernadetteson, wrote:

If not me or mine, O.K.
 If me or mine - alas
 If us and ours - *watch out!* (TFM, 55)

Renegades who refuse to believe in Whileaway are tracked down and executed. Moylan, discussing such self-willed excommunication, writes, "Such a person is in fact already dead to Whileawayan society and her own self; so that the execution of that person by the S&P officer is the

completion of the suicide begun by the solipsist herself" (TFM, 68). Such a statement posits Whileawayan society as unquestionably more beneficial to the individual than eremitic solitude; it denies the individual the right of dissent, derogating any such decision as self-destructive. The sacrifice of individual autonomy in this extreme form is necessary to prevent the society sliding towards anarchy, but Russ does not present such desire as suicidal. "We'd all do it if we could," the Whileawayans admit (TFM, 55); but they realise that it is better on the whole for the society to be structured and to limit in this extent the freedom of the individual.

The four J's -- Janet, Joanna, Jeannine and Jael -- represent four different selves, or potentialities, of the author. Joanna, the character most closely aligned with the authorial I, speaks of her "other selves" (TFM, 160) and the "three other myselfs" (TFM, 162). The three J's not of this world are the selves Joanna could have been, if brought up within a different environment. They are, as Jael points out, of "essentially the same genotype, modified by age, by circumstances, by education, by diet, by learning, by God knows what" (TFM, 161). The different incarnations of the same person bear witness to the formative powers of ideology. They learn, are taught, to be how they are.

On another level, however, the four personae represent the diverse characters of womankind. Together they constitute Everywoman, as representative both of the different facets of women's psychology and of different women within the gender "woman". Jael calls the other three "The Young One, The Weak One, The Strong one" (referring respectively to Jeannine, Joanna and Janet). She herself represents a different woman, or a different aspect of women; she might be termed The Angry or The Violent One.

Despite their differences, they are essentially the same person. Their recognition of their common identities as potentially the same and as women instils in them an empathy which fosters unity among them, a sense of common purpose, thereby affirming one of the novel's central tenets: the

need for women to focus on similarities, not differences, to achieve their liberation. The statement Joanna makes early in the book, "Eventually we will all come together" is a prediction on a local level that the four characters will unite and accept their common task, and also on a general level -- it expresses the hope that all women will unite (TFM, 18). The four J's do come together, but in their interaction the beliefs of none of them are upheld as being right. As Moylan says, the "way forward [to the social alternative imaged in her picture of Whileaway] does not privilege a single clear line of political action. Indeed, it is in the diversity within the unity of this gang of four that Russ makes her strongest statement about the social activism needed" (DTI, 75). Janet, brought up within the utopia, offers an image of what might be attained rather than an exact route of getting there. The path must be found by the others. Like Whileaway itself, she represents utopia as a product, a product which is not premised on any definite process. Whileaway is a future, but not "our future". The process of its creation is not documented for easy following. It stands as inspiration -- that a better future can be attained -- but the responsibility for the creation of such a future rests with each of the other women in each of their Presents.

The four women occupy diverse points of the compass of female (and feminist) experience. Janet, as a liberated, independent woman, is a figure of hope for the others, hope that they too might rise above the oppression of life as a subordinate member of society. Joanna refers to her as "Janet, whom we don't believe in and whom we deride but who is in secret our saviour from utter despair" (TFM, 212). Janet's role upon entering the societies of the others, especially Joanna's, is one of subversion: her almost naive appraisal of what she witnesses exposes the artifice and prejudices of current society. At the party she goes to with Joanna, the other women (Sposissa, Eglantissa, Aphrodissa, Clarissa, Lucissa, Wailissa, Lamentissa, Travailissa, Saccharissa, Ludicrissa, and even -- at times -- Joanissa)

all conform to the social roles they have been taught to accept as their nature. Janet refuses to play the game, to compromise her individuality and behave as a "woman" should and eventually causes the collapse of the party itself when she knocks down the host for infringing on her rights by being (as he thought was his right -- she being a woman) sexually overbearing. When she does not act out the role prescribed for her, the social interaction breaks down. Thus she stands as a figure of independence who, by refusing the social classification imposed on her, subverts those classifications; who, in rejecting the roles allocated to her, acts as role model for other women. Janet offers hope for, and partial navigation towards, a future such as Whileaway, what Joanna calls "the Might-be of our dreams" (TFM, 213).

Jeannine is the product of a society labouring under depression, one in which there has not been any period of economic growth which might have allowed her society to direct its attention towards social concerns, a period which, she wonders, might have ensued had not "Herr Shicklegruber ... died in 1936" and had there been (as in Joanna's world) a global war (TFM, 2). She typifies the unaware woman, who accepts unquestioningly the social classification erected in her name. Jeannine's hopes and aspirations are all externally directed. She has been taught that, as a woman, fulfilment can be attained only through finding a man. Trapped within the paradigm of woman as dependent -- dependent on men -- she looks to marriage as solution, for within marriage she will obtain the acceptance of her society. Jeannine yearns for a man to "Make [her] exist" (TFM, 120) by offering her a position -- that of married woman -- in which she will be recognised by society as a "normal" member of it. It is Jael who causes Jeannine to look at herself for solutions, who instils in her an awareness of her position as subaltern in society. Watching Jeannine out on a date with a man, she reflects: "Little did she know there was, attached to his back, a drowning machine ... Somewhere is The One. The solution. Fulfillment."

Fulfilled women. Filled full. My Prince. Come. Come away, Death. She stumbles into her Mommy's shoes, little girl playing house. I could kick her" (TFM, 125). And later, metaphorically, she does, jolting Jeannine into a realisation of her potency, her ability to change her circumstances herself.

While Jael serves to raise the consciousness of women like Jeannine, her methods do not suit others like Janet and Joanna. Jael lives in a world divided into two states: Manland and Womanland. Manland exhibits all the worst excesses of masculinity. In a similar way to the men of the Holdfast rejecting the fems as lesser beings, the Manlanders have no interaction with the women of Womanland; instead they choose one out of every seven children they buy from the Womanlanders (on whom they remain dependent in this way) to undergo a sex-change operation. These so-called "changed" are used for the sexual gratification of the men and treated as subordinate -- superior in status only to the so-called "half-changed", men who "keep their genitalia but who grow slim, grow languid, grow emotional and feminine, all this the effect of the spirit only" (TFM, 167) and who are treated with contempt by the other, the real-, men. The men have remodelled their new world according to the patriarchal precepts of domination and possession by which their society was governed before the women removed themselves from it. Confronted by a face of such uncompromising masculinity, Jael seeks to oppose it through violent means. As a trained assassin she infiltrates the domains of senior officers and then murders them. In this way she affirms her own existence, that which the men deny.

For every drop of blood shed there is restitution made; with every truthful reflection in the eyes of a dying man I get back a little of my soul; with every gasp of horrified comprehension I come a little more into the light. See? It's *me!*

I am the force that is ripping out your guts; I, I, I, the hatred twisting your arm; I, I, I, the fury who has just put a bullet into your side. It is I who cause this pain, not you. It is I who am doing it to you, not you. It is I who will be alive tomorrow, not you. Do

you know? Can you guess? Are you catching on? It is I,
 who you will not admit exists. (TFM, 195)

By acting, Jael smashes the mould, into which men will have her fit, of passivity and dependence. She uses violence to assert her individuality; it is this process of self-assertion that lures Jeannine into conspiring with her.

Jael's contention that the absence of men on Whileaway was not the result of a plague but rather caused by the violent action of women such as herself posits violence as a necessary tool in the shaping of a utopia. By leaving unanswered this question of Whileaway's social history, Russ refuses to be categorical. Violence is depicted as an effective tool, but it is not espoused as the only one by which women might obtain liberation. Indeed, Jael's obsession with violence is restrictive -- she is "jailed" by her hatred. She is known also as Alice Reasoner and it is this emphasis on reason by which she is cut from any feeling of compassion. She is "twisted on the rack of her own hard logic" (TFM, 212). Despite this imbalance in Jael, Joanna feels, when she "stops to think about it," that she likes Jael "the best of us all, that [she] would like to be Jael" (TFM, 212). For, although in an extreme form, Jael represents action, the refusal to accept the label of women as passive. Joanna's path of resistance does not coincide with Jael's but nevertheless she holds admiration for, and derives inspiration from, this other incarnation of herself.

Joanna too desires to assert her self, to shrug off the vestments tailored for her by society. At the party she attends with Janet, she finds herself, along with other women there, behaving according to social expectation rather than her own impulses. She searches for correct responses in the "little pink book" that explains "WHAT TO DO IN EVERY SITUATION", what, that is, society expects women to do. Men have their own version, a little blue book. Janet, who so easily sees through the artifice and falseness of this system of interaction by which the others have been indoctrinated ("They do fit together so well, you know," says Joanna), advises "Throw them both away, love" (TFM,

48). For in this adoption of a pre-tailored persona lies a loss of self. It is in an effort to end her induced selflessness that Joanna does ignore social categorisation and assert herself as the female man.

The book's oxymoronic title can be fitted to all four of the central protagonists; they are all, in some way, the female man. Janet's independence, her unsubmitive nature marks her as "manly". Jael's violence is something generally equated with men. Jeannine's perception of herself and her society conforms to the patriarchal paradigm: she privileges the world-view perpetuated by men. The juxtaposition of the words 'female' and 'man' subverts through its very contrast the conventional definitions the words connote. It controverts concepts such as femininity, or masculinity, denying the attribution of their associated qualities to people of a specific gender.

It is in the depiction of Joanna that this thematic strategy find its strongest expression. Joanna is the female man in that she strives to become what she terms "not-a-woman" (TFM, 151), to unlearn her social conditioning that has defined and limited her according to how society deems women, all women, are. She reflects on her upbringing in the following passage:

Thus in the bad days, in the dark swampy times. At thirteen desperately watching TV, curling my long legs under me, desperately reading books, callow adolescent that I was, trying (desperately!) to find someone in books, in movies, in life, in history, to tell me it was O.K. to be ambitious, O.K. to be loud, O.K. to be Humphrey Bogart (smart and rudeness), O.K. to be James Bond (arrogance), O.K. to be Superman (power), O.K. to be Douglas Fairbanks (swashbuckling), to tell me self-love was all right, to tell me I could love God and Art and Myself better than anything on earth and still have orgasms.

Being told it was all right "for you, dear," but not for women.

Being told I was a woman.

At sixteen, giving up.

In college, educated women (I found out) were frigid; active women (I knew) were neurotic; women (we all knew) were timid, incapable, dependent, nurturing, passive, intuitive, emotional, unintelligent, obedient, and beautiful. You can always get dressed up and go to a party. Woman is the gateway to another world; Woman

is the earth-mother; Woman is the eternal siren; Woman has intuition; Woman has the life-force; Woman is selfless love. (TFM, 204)

Russ shows up the arbitrary nature of society's definition of what it is to be female. By yoking together these two supposedly opposite appellations she defuses the charge with which language has suffused them: their meaning is drained away by the proximity of the other.

One of the central evolutionary trends of feminism, which is reflected by feminist utopian writing, is the movement, in the eighties and the nineties, away from the doctrine espoused in the seventies that women not only could but should be "as good as men". This desire to achieve as well as and like a man is expressed by Joanna. She says:

Remember: I didn't and don't want to be a "feminine" version or a diluted version an ancillary version, or an adapted version of the heroes I admire. I want to be the heroes themselves. (TFM, 206)

Joanna's path to equality lies in her appropriation of the territory attributed to men, in demanding to be judged, evaluated, as a man. The history she describes is the development from a state of regarding herself as a woman (much like the position Jeannine occupies until she is influenced by Jael), a state in which she is filled with self-hatred, hating herself for her own part in her confinement, to a state of assuming power, of arrogating the position that men have claimed for themselves: "there is one and only one way to possess that in which we are defective, therefore that which we want. Become it" (TFM, 139). In becoming the female man Joanna refuses the social categorisations that mark her, as a woman, as unable to achieve like a man does. But these aspirations privilege the masculine: men's definitions of success and achievement are upheld. The following chapters will trace the growing inclination to question the very validity of these definitions, but Joanna's desire to appropriate them for herself, to be accepted as a man (as in the following

passage she expounds) reflects a common persuasion among feminists in the 1970s.

For years I have been saying *Let me in, Love me, Approve me, Define me, Regulate me, Validate me, Support me*. Now I say *Move over*. If we are all Mankind, it follows ... that I too am a Man and not at all a Woman. ... I think I am a Man; I think you had better call me a Man; I think you will write about me as a Man from now on and speak of me as a Man and employ me as a Man and recognize child-rearing as a Man's business; you will think of me as a Man and treat me as a Man until it enters your muddled, terrified, preposterous, nine-tenths-fake, loveless, papier-mâché-bull-moose head that *I am a man*. (TFM, 140)

Joanna demands equality, but it is equality on men's terms, equality according to their values.

Although the radical politics expressed by the three books discussed in this chapter no longer enjoy the popularity they held in the 1970s, one must not be blinded by hindsight to their importance in the breaking down of arbitrary social categorisations. Extreme opposition to the status quo is often necessary to swing the pendulum of belief to the other side of its arc, from where it can move to a median position. Acknowledging the temporary pertinence of all such works of social criticism, Russ writes as the conclusion of her book:

Go little book ... Do not complain when at last you become quaint and old-fashioned, when you grow as outworn as the crinolines of a generation ago ...; do not mutter angrily to yourself when young persons read you and hrooch and hrch and guffaw, wondering what the dickens you were all about. Do not get glum when you are no longer understood, little book. Do not curse your fate. Do not reach up from readers' laps and punch the readers' noses.

Rejoice, little book!

For on that day we will be free. (TFM, 213)

Chapter 4

The Eighties and Nineties: Integration

Sheri S. Tepper's The Gate to Women's Country and
Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale

A feminist politics that does not allow for the possibility of transformation of men as well as women, in ways over which no ideology has or should have control, is deeply nihilistic; it does not truly believe in human possibility or the ideal of mutuality.

JEAN ELSHTAIN "Ethics in the Women's Movement"

The addition, in the late sixties and the seventies, of the boiling thought of early feminism to the tepid water of social opinion has produced, in the late eighties and early nineties, an environment of moderated attitude, one that, in depicting the face of patriarchy, does not associate all men with that face. The simplifications made during this period of renaissance, such as the reduction of gender to a set of binary opposites or the call for the recognition of androgyny, which are reflected in the works examined in the previous chapter, served to raise in society consciousness of the basic inequalities that existed in it. The task of instilling an awareness of the imbalance between genders in society remains central to feminism, but as such awareness has permeated slowly through society, and the erosion of patriarchy has progressed, the question of what position women should hold once liberated from oppression under patriarchy has been accorded greater weight on the feminist agenda. The belief that women should not only be given opportunity to achieve in the same areas as men, but also encouraged to do so, has been tempered by the desire to question the validity of, and to redefine, what constitutes such achievement.

While the struggle for women's right to achieve in the field of their choice has continued, masculine definitions of success have been subverted. As Maureen Murdock has written:

Women emulated the male heroic journey because there were no other images to emulate; a woman was either "successful" in the male-orientated culture or dominated and dependent as a female. To change the

economic, social, and political structures of society, we must now find new myths and heroines.¹

The model of gender posited by androgynists, such as Wittig, is of two circles with complete overlap, their union equalling their intersection. That posited by feminists, like Gearhart, who consider the differences between the sexes to cause between them irrevocable breakdown, can be likened to two discrete circles without intersection. Such radical models now enjoy less popularity than they did in the earlier period of feminism's resurgence. The more commonly accepted model is that of two partially overlapping circles; the debate is over the area of their intersection. The two novels discussed in this chapter, Sheri Tepper's The Gate to Women's Country, and Margaret Atwood's dystopia, The Handmaid's Tale, reflect this more accommodating attitude, but in both the unsettling influence of masculine aggression on the utopian imagination remains a central concern. Atwood's dystopia examines the urge for dominance, refusing, however, to ascribe to it alone causality for the dystopia itself, to simplify in this way a complex nexus of culpability and responsibility. Tepper's novel poses an intriguing and somewhat startling solution to the disruptive influence of behaviour located at the outer edges of the overlapping circles of gender. While such extreme behaviour, especially masculine aggression, is criticised, both books refuse to apportion all blame to men, to make all men scapegoats for the institution of, and wrongs perpetrated under, patriarchy.

Common to both novels as well is a criticism of the antifeminist movement which grew rapidly in the 1980s, the backlash, fuelled primarily by religious belief, against the successes of feminism in its dismantling of established structures. Essentially androcentric in outlook, this fundamentalism has opposed feminism's subversion of patriarchal roles, advocating a return to "traditional values". The rise of the antifeminist movement, whose

1. Maureen Murdock, The Heroine's Journey (Shambhala, Boston, 1990), p.10.

membership consists mainly of women, has rearranged the lines of conflict, bringing into question the identification by many earlier feminists of all men as the principal adversaries of feminism.

Thus, if innate male aggression and dominance are at the root of female oppression, then the feminist program would logically require either the extermination of the offending sex, or else a eugenics project to modify its character.

GAYLE RUBIN, "The Traffic in Women"

Sheri Tepper's The Gate to Women's Country

The utopian society Tepper depicts, which at first appears to be a utopia as product but which is later revealed as a society engaged in the process of attaining utopia, is situated in a future, post-apocalyptic Earth. Out of the restructuring following the upheaval of what is referred to as "the convulsion", a society has arisen that is largely pre-industrial. Transport is undertaken by means of wagon, steel is scarce, farming labour-intensive. The general society, called Women's Country, is an admixture of matriarchal and patriarchal systems, as a result of the division of the society into separate spheres: the towns are occupied by women, young children, and certain men called servitors, and each town has an adjoining garrison inhabited only by men -- the warriors.

The garrisons function under a strict militaristic hierarchy which emphasises obedience to elders. At age 15 youths become part of a century -- a group consisting of one hundred of their peers -- in which they remain until death. Centuries consisting of men of 25 or older fight in the battles waged against other garrisons. Defence is the primary function of the warriors. Apart from the odd woven basket or wood carving and their armour, the products of their labour are apparent only in the pomp of their ceremonies and the practised singing of their choirs. The production of food, clothing and medicines is carried out by the women who duly, as payment for the protection they receive, feed and clothe the men.

Each town (by whose names -- such as Marthatown, Abbyville, Mollyburg -- the women who founded them are

remembered²) has a council of women who govern food production and supply, health-care and, as is later divulged, the eugenics programme they have undertaken.

The social roles played by the warriors and the women - protectors and protected -- are exaggerations of the traditional roles assigned to the sexes. Superficially, the society appears similar to those societies of Ancient Greece (which are repeatedly recalled in the novel) within which men were, due to their superior physical strength, in a position of control. As the novel progresses, however, the real face of the women emerges from behind the mask they hold before them. The social script, it is revealed, is of their own writing. The parts given to the warriors are nonessential. They are mere extras, given roles that provide controlled outlet for their aggression and that beguile them into believing that they direct the progress of the society. While outwardly seeming to speak the lines of the passive, grateful, weak woman, inwardly, within their towns, the women subvert this role. Their secret dialogue reveals them as autonomous and independent, in no way reliant on the warriors and their masculine strength.

Each woman is encouraged to develop a craft, an art and a science. The warriors forge their own bronze armoury but the women are in charge of most other manufacture. They are also skilled in medicine, undertake journeys of exploration, and encourage young girls to develop a broad education. Tepper inverts conventional stereotypes by aligning women with the mind, guided by rational thought, and the men with the body, swayed by their desires. Whereas the lives of the warriors revolve around ceremony, warfare and the wooing of women from the towns, the women's concerns are of a more cerebral nature. As Morgot says to Stavia, "It's one of the things we on the Council try to keep in mind, the need to keep sentimentality and romance out of our deliberations.

2. The name of the first woman to found a town after the convulsion, Martha Evesdaughter, recalls that of the Whileawayan emissary Janet Evason in The Female Man. Both connote images of a new beginning being made - the birth of the new society.

Leave romance to the warriors: We can't afford it in Women's Country" (GWC, 87). Tepper, in these efforts to retrieve, or redefine, such concepts as rationality, echoes the sentiments voiced by Toril Moi in her book Sexual/Textual Politics:

We must aim for a society in which we have ceased to categorise logic, conceptualisation and rationality as "masculine", not for one from which these virtues have been expelled altogether as "unfeminine".³

The difference in the aspirations for the products of technology that the women and warriors have stems from their differing attitudes to power. The women use tools left over from before the convulsion but are wary of the potential for abuse that such technology bears with it. The warriors, on the other hand, desire to discover the secrets they suspect the women of having gleaned from preconvulsion texts in order to use them to assert power. When Stavia tells Chernon that the books he so eagerly demanded from her were written "by people. Just people," he replies "Preconvulsion people. They knew things we don't. They know about ... about weapons. And things". Stavia realises that it was not knowledge he sought from books, but rather that "it was magic he coveted. Magic and the power it would bring" (GWC, 281). It is not technology itself that Tepper criticises, but the abuse thereof, the development and utilisation of technology for the purpose of subjugation.

The separation of the sexes allows the women to distance themselves from war. It is worth their while making such sacrifices as clothing and feeding the men (and, in times of shortage, making do with less) as this frees them from any involvement in what is deemed the warriors' function. The women thereby protect themselves from attack from both their own and other garrisons. A garrison has no incentive to take over the town it guards as the women would merely refuse to continue providing, disabling the means of production until the warriors returned to their former

3. Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics (Routledge, London, 1988), p.160.

position. While violence is at times necessary -- at the end of the book the three commanders of the Marthatown garrison are killed for having plotted the overthrow of the town -- passive resistance is upheld as the first line of defence. The women also engage in espionage, eliciting information about attacks the garrisons are planning, and fomenting dissension between garrisons when it is in their interest that a war be waged. The emphasis lies on a reliance on intellectual rather than physical strength for counteracting patriarchal domination. The women do not confront the warriors actively, fighting them on their own terms, but prefer to beguile them into believing that it is they, the warriors, who hold power. *Eminences grises*, the women (and servitors) delude the warriors. They fabricate for them an illusory throne rather than challenge them directly for possession of true authority.

To maintain this illusion requires sacrifices from the women. To perpetuate the warriors' belief that "Women knew the warriors protected them only because women bore them sons, so it was in the women's interests to see that sons were produced and brought to the appropriate father" (GWC, 167), the women have to allow their sons to leave home at age 5 to join the garrison. At 15, and for the next ten years until their century becomes militarily active, the boys are allowed to choose whether they wish to remain in the garrison or return to one of the towns as a servitor. The trauma of the initial separation and the subsequent anxiety around their child's possible return is the price the women have to pay to maintain equilibrium between town and garrison.

Septemius's reply to Chernon's complaint that the women are not interested in keeping the garrisons strong and are interested only in "getting [their sons] to come home," presents the women's suffering as being necessary, a natural, albeit, in this case, exaggerated consequence of being individuals in a society:

Isn't what you're seeing the inevitable conflict between personal and societal needs and desires? The

society of women needs you to defend them, yes. But the individual mothers and sisters in that society want their own sons and brothers home, where they'll be safe. So, they do the best they can with both. They honor the warriors, but they do everything they can to urge their own loved ones to come home. It seems perfectly understandable to me. As a system, it doesn't work badly; does it? (GWC, 250)

It is this "inevitable conflict between personal and societal needs and desires" that the women seek to assuage through their programme of selective breeding, by which they ensure that a greater number of boys choose to return home each generation. Compromise between communal and individual needs is ever the grail of the utopian quest; through their social engineering, however, the women and servitors try to make the sacrifices required of both individuals and society less exacting, to improve the system that "doesn't work badly", to have it ever approach utopia.

Individuals who prefer not to adhere to the regulations and customs that govern life in the towns and garrisons become either Gypsies, who live in camps beyond the fortifications of the towns, or itinerants, who travel between towns offering entertainment to the townsfolk. The women among the Gypsies act as prostitutes, providing the warriors the gratification they would otherwise receive only at the biannual carnivals. Unlike in the utopias of Les Guérillères and Woman on the Edge of Time, not all the inhabitants of this utopian world embrace the opportunity it offers them. Out of weakness they slip into roles of inaction, forsaking their autonomy. As Morgot tells one of the Gypsies, "You're no better than a slave, Vonella. you've been taken captive, and you don't even know it" (GWC, 59). Tepper's depiction of the itinerants and the Gypsies incorporates into her utopia the element of the social misfit. The tolerance with which such people (apart from those who turn to violence) are treated reflects, in contrast to earlier feminist utopias, a less dogmatic tone, a greater willingness to accept difference in opinion.

The presence of such social misfits, people who reject the tenets of the utopian society, does at times cast a

threatening air about the lives of the citizens of Women's Country. Bandit gangs, consisting mainly of men unable to bear the discipline of the garrisons and unwilling to accept the dishonour of returning to Women's Country, roam the countryside. To protect themselves against such gangs, the women and servitors of Women's Country are sometimes forced to resort to violent means. Tepper refuses the early utopian model of halcyon serenity, choosing instead to confront directly the moral dilemmas posed by present society, questions such as one's response to violence and the treatment of those unwilling to conform to society's codes.

The Gypsies and itinerants receive none of the advantages offered to the people of the towns. They sleep beyond the town walls, are not given education and are treated (for such things as venereal disease) only because the women of Women's Country protect themselves indirectly through such prophylaxis. Again the question of choice is central. People willing to uphold the ethics of the society, and who have a contribution of value to make, may be inducted into the society. Membership of the utopia is voluntary, but it demands that personal needs be compromised to an extent for the sake of the society.

The model of the nuclear family is adapted, not discarded. Children are raised by their mothers -- the boys until they turn 5 and the girls either when, at about 13, they leave to further their education at a neighbouring town, or when they begin a family of their own. Unlike in earlier utopias, here the family is not subsumed into the community. As the disguised structure of the society is revealed towards the end of the novel, it becomes evident that the model of the nuclear family is in fact adhered to more closely than is apparent at first. When (before her initiation into the true make-up of her society) Stavia is told by Septemius of the custom of marriage itinerants such as he entered into, she is "careful not to show on her face what she thought of such barbarism" (GWC, 200). It transpires, however, that, in those households that are aware of the true nature of the servitors' role, the

servitor attached to the household will often be father to the children of that household, and a bond of intimacy will exist between him and the mother. The family is not based on hierarchical relations, however. Mothers, like all members of the society, are called by their first names, which helps establish between them and their children a relationship of equality, one between individuals.

It is in Tepper's description of the servitors that her work differs most from the utopias examined in the previous chapter. The inclusion of them within the utopian society reflects a greater tolerance towards men, a refusal to discriminate against all men because of their sex. Tepper depicts gender as a continuum, not as a binary relation. The men do, on average, exhibit aggression to a greater degree than the women, but not all men can be regarded as of the same lot. Unlike the gentles of Gearhart's The Wanderground, the servitors perform an intrinsic function in community; they excommunicate themselves from the other men but find acceptance among the women, whereas the gentles, in distancing themselves from the cities, found themselves isolated from the hill women as well. Although the servitors are regarded by the warriors, and by those of the women who are unaware of their true function, as mere servants who choose to live among the women because they are not strong enough to bear the rigours of garrison life, the mien that emerges from behind the mask of subservience evinces strength, a strength, though, that is gained through gentleness. The warriors' scorn of the servitors spawns rumours such as that they are gelded by the women. It is with a wonderful irony that the warriors' preoccupation with fatherhood as an expression of virility is subverted by the disclosure that these "geldings" are in fact sires to all children in Women's Country.

Again unlike the men depicted in the utopias of the previous chapter, the servitors are shown to have special abilities because of their maleness. Certain of them exhibit a kind of extra-sensory perception, the capacity for predicting troubles in the future or detecting pain in the

present. None of the warriors has such ability. It is as though, having forsaken power based on physical strength, the servitors have been able to develop a greater power. Such clairvoyance is not limited to men, however. Although none of the women of the towns exhibits the capacity for it, Septemius's twin nieces, Kostia and Tonia, do, which sparks off hope among the women that it might be passed on to, and strengthened in, their descendants.

The revelation that is announced near the end of the novel, that the women have engaged in a programme of selective breeding whereby only the men who choose to return to Women's Country father any of the children, is hinted at throughout the novel through references to similar practices of selective breeding carried out in the past with animals, practices the women read about in books written before the convulsion. Beneda tells of how Laplanders "followed these wild deer around, and it was hard to keep the animals together, so they picked the bulls that didn't run off and bred from those ... The book says they guaranteed both their own survival and the animals' by domesticating them" (GWC, 75). A further analogy to the secret artificial selection the women are conducting is drawn by the manager of the sheep camp who explains how the sheep "that get picked off are the ones that don't stay tight, which are the ones we want to be rid of anyhow." Stavia exclaims, "Selection! You're selecting for herding instinct" (GWC, 255).

By using only the servitors, the men who choose to return to the community, for breeding purposes, selecting for "herding instinct", for people who will have a greater propensity to remain within the community and attend to its needs, not only their own personal desires, the women shape their society to the form they have designed. Women's Country depicts utopia in process, not utopia as product. With each succeeding generation, as those genes which cause men to live by an aggressive and domineering solipsism are bred out, the society draws closer to the unattainable goal

of harmonious co-operation. Stavvia, upon being told what the women are doing, says:

"And we'll keep doing it, on and on, and the years will go by, and eventually our sons will come home, is that it? No more penis worshipers? No more trumpets and drums and games. What will we do then, Morgot?"

"We won't have any more wars. Theoretically. No wars at all."
(GWC, 339)

The "conflict between personal and societal needs and desires" is inevitable, but by eliminating those genes which would predispose the progenitor's descendants towards atavistic behaviour, this conflict can be ameliorated. The program of eugenics does not target men only for exclusion from procreation. Women who are inclined too readily to submit to the will of the warriors, who live their lives in service of them, are sterilised, without their knowledge, by tubal ligations or hysterectomies.

The silent revolution that is waged by the few women accomplices to the programme exacts payment in the form of moral guilt. "We call ourselves the Damned Few. And if the Lady has a heaven for the merciful, we are not sure if any of us will ever see it" (GWC, 334). Their decision is a rational one, one that is carried out with a cold-blooded expediency. These Damned Few think of themselves as "those who did what had to be done" (GWC, 360). Caught between the Scylla of subjugation by the warriors and the Charybdis of guilt from opposition to them, the women are doomed to suffer in one way or another until their resistance has run its course. As Hecuba, in the play *Iphiginea* which the women perform each year, says:

Dead or damned, that's the choice we make. Either you men kill us and are honoured for it, or we women kill you and are damned for it.
(GWC, 762)

Theirs is essentially a non-violent revolution. That is, they themselves do not resort to violence in order to effect change; it is deemed necessary only as self-defence. They do channel for their own purposes the violence of the warriors, however. The women have a policy of always

outnumbering the warriors (the ratio of women, children and servitors to warriors is about three to one). The warriors' numbers are kept low mainly through their own antagonism towards other garrisons which expresses itself in episodic battles in which each garrison will win honours and praise and lose lives. At times, however, such as when a certain garrison is plotting to overthrow its town or colluding with other garrisons for a more general coup, it is necessary for the women to incite discord between garrisons, to deflect their aggression away from the town. The nature of garrison life, its single-minded absorption with warfare, makes it necessary for there to be periodic release of the resultant tension that builds up within the camps. Knowing this, the women (with the aid of the servitors' psychic awareness) closely monitor the designs of each garrison so that they will be able to ensure the towns do not become the focus of this violent build-up.

The end of the book sees the network of towns contrive to have the Marthatown garrison, whose warriors had been infected by ideas brought back by the Chernon after his travels to the south, ideas suggesting that women work as servants to men, completely wiped out by the unified forces of four other garrisons. To its commanders, who are executed separately, Morgot says: "We never attack merely to wound or incapacitate. If we are driven to attack at all, there is no point in leaving our opponents alive. We never kill except in self-defence... The defence of ourselves and our cities. The defence of Marthatown. The defence of Women's Country" (GWC, 348). The violence that the women of the Councils perpetrate is not offensive but still the weight of responsibility for it lies heavily on them, making them, as authors also of the eugenics programme, doubly damned.

"We try to be merciful," says Morgot. They do what they have to with a heavy heart, finding consolation only in the fact that their motives are not born of cruelty. As Morgot says of their delusion of the warriors:

The Laplanders selected the bulls that didn't fight.
They selected the bulls that didn't try to own the

cows. They selected the bulls that were cooperative and gentle. They castrated the rest. We're kinder than that. We don't castrate anyone. We let our warrior bulls believe that they father sons. (GWC, 336)

The combination of passive resistance and deflected aggression by the women is a contrast with the stratagems of the guérillères who seized violence as a tool for their liberation. Along with a questioning of masculine definitions of success has come a questioning of masculine methods of resistance.

In opposition to the utopian ideals of Women's Country is the Holyland, a dystopian society based on fundamentalist religious precepts. Depictions of the Holylanders intersperse those of the people of Women's Country, producing a chiaroscuro effect through whose contrasting shades the attractiveness of the utopian world is heightened.

The Holyland is an ultra-patriarchal, puritanical society governed by Old Testament values under which the men have arrogated all forms of power. Women, whose names, such as Chastity, Charity, Hope, recall the names given to women in past times of greater religious conservatism, are regarded as inferior to men. They are denied autonomy, made to do the men's bidding under threat of physical punishment. Upon reaching puberty they are given up to become one of the elder men's wives. The Holyland is ruled by the men with a heavy rod. Their self-aggrandizement makes them regard all land outside of their domain as "the devil's country". Yet it is this combination of intolerance and solipsism that marks them as fated to destruction.

Much like the fems of the Holdfast, the women of the Holyland are kept mainly for labour and breeding. Children, especially sons, bear witness to a man's virility and women who can no longer provide them for him are readily returned to their families. As the Elder Resolution Brome says, "No point keepin' a wife who couldn't produce" (GWC, 237). Women are treated as possessions. The elder men haggle over eligible girls and pride themselves on the number of wives they have. They assert this status as possessors of women

partly through the act of sex. Apart from while they are menstruating (their time of "uncleanliness"), the women are obliged to accede to the men's sexual demands at any time. Also, they are forced into bearing children without respite, often having upwards of a dozen children before the onset of menopause. Women's sexuality is regarded as a source of sinfulness. It is something which (much as the word 'pudenda' suggested to women in Victorian times) they are to be ashamed of, so much so that sexual relations with women are called a man's "duty" and a woman's genitals her "duty place". The women, implicated with an original sin by their very fact of being women, blameworthy in much the same way as Eve was deemed to be for her seduction of Adam, are despised for the indispensability their ability to bear children affords them. They are made into scapegoats, held responsible, as sinners, for natural disasters and domestic misfortunes. Women's suffering is perceived as retribution; as one of the younger men, Rejoice, parrots: "That's woman's lot. Because she's the spout and wellspring of error and sin, that's woman's lot" (GWC, 242).

The marriage ritual the women are forced to endure consists of having their heads shaved and being lashed with a whip by the other women, forced physically and mentally to accept the position of subjugation.

"Reason they do it," Susannah was saying in her weary voice, "is that you should know ahead of time. That's what your husband will do to you if you fail in duty to him. You should know how it feels, so's not to provoke him."

"And my head," grated Stavia. "What's the reason for that."

"So's you don't look like anything to stir up lust. Man's got to do his duty, but he's got to do it as duty, not because he likes it."

"Besides," Stavia said, turning on one side with a yelp of pain. "It violates the woman, doesn't it? It diminishes her. It makes her feel shame. Which is what they really want." (GWC, 302)

Women's complicity in their own subordination, a theme which Atwood explores in detail, is presented by Tepper (much as Charnas does in Walk to the Edge of the World) as being a

mixture of self-protection and mimicry of the brutality exercised by the men.

The men's self-centredness is ultimately self-destructive. Because sons and wives are symbols of wealth, in times of shortage daughters are abandoned to die, which, coupled with the men's practice of acquiring many wives, means that the society has a paucity of unmarried women and an abundance of young and middle-aged bachelors. The result, which marks a further similarity to the Holdfast society of Charnas's novel, is a growing conflict between the old and the young men. Throughout the novel, extracts from the play *Iphigenia* draw parallels between the societies of Ancient Greece and Troy and those of the post-convulsion future. The essential uselessness of the sacrifice of women is voiced by the ghost of Iphigenia who tells the ghost of Achilles, who allowed Agamemnon to murder Iphigenia and on whose grave Polyxena was sacrificed so that she could serve him in the afterlife: "You see, it's as we've tried to tell you, Great Achilles. Women are no good to you dead" (GWC, 273).

In her depiction of the Holyland, Tepper criticises not only the fundamentalist backlash against feminism that erupted in the eighties, but also the patriarchal bias of religions like Christianity which privilege men above women. The god the Holylanders worship, the All Father, is much like the god of the Old Testament, a vengeful and angry deity. The society of Women's Country, by contrast, appeals to a god, referred to as the Lady, or Great Mother, that is not subject to human emotion. "Her way was immutable. As the temple servers said, 'No sentimentality, no romance, no false hopes, no self-petting lies, merely that which is!'" (GWC, 16). The women do not use their religion as justification for their actions. Indeed, the essence of the guilt they feel over their selective breeding and population control of men is that they do this contrary to the will of their god.

The path towards utopia proffered by the novel, the elimination of men too aggressive and women too submissive in nature, affords the novel a somewhat radical bent. But,

despite the common link of radical thesis that it shares with those novels examined in the previous chapter, it differs markedly in that it does not seek to bring about the end of patriarchy by using or appropriating the very sources of patriarchal power themselves. Rather, it presents a group of people who avoid direct confrontation -- fighting the upholders of patriarchy on their own ground -- people who seek a more roundabout route to their goal, not the direct, forward-blundering, regardless way of aggressive masculinity. Rather than kicking the front door down and setting off the alarms, they sneak in via the cellar, or down the chimney, to rearrange the house without its occupants even knowing. Tepper's novel offers redefinition not only of the ideals of success, but of its stratagems of conflict as well. The people of Women's Country with whom power ultimately resides have been able to shake off the rags of submission and yet refuse to don the mantles of suppression.

Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale

The wave of influence generated by the rise in the sixties and seventies of the New Left -- the aligned movements of, among others, feminism, gay liberation, pacifism and environmentalism -- has been damped, in the eighties and nineties, by the opposing wave of the New Right, the coalition of social and religious movements which preach patriarchal conservatism, favouring the maintenance of "traditional values". The New Right, from its religious fundamentalist viewpoint, regards feminism, and its subversion of conventional gender roles, as a disruptive and ultimately counter-productive movement. In the United States, antifeminist bodies such as the Moral Majority, Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America, have loudly opposed the demands of feminism, averring that they have led to the breakdown of the nuclear family, the bastion of American society. Professing moral righteousness, the New Right stands against abortion, child-care, sex education, welfare spending, disarmament and communism,⁴ opposing, essentially, the basic precepts upon which almost all the utopian societies studied thus far are founded. Atwood's novel, The Handmaid's Tale, stands against the reactions of antifeminism and at the same time moves away from the standpoint made earlier by feminism itself.

In the novel, the prosecution and oppression committed by the Gileadean totalitarian regime is not portrayed as a dichotomous opposition between men and women, as all women being oppressed by all men, as was the case, for instance, in Charnas's Walk to the End of the World. Instead, Atwood explores themes of complicity and choice, refusing to reduce the complex formula of the interaction between victim and victimiser to a simple equation of men with the one, women the other. As in other of her novels, the roles of victim and victimiser are shown not to be absolute, often blurring into one another. The reaction of the New Right movements

4. Susan E. Marshall, "Who Speaks for American Women?" in The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, (vol. 515, May 1991), p.54.

against feminism, a conflict not demarcated along gender lines (the membership of the most vociferously antifeminist movements such as Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America is predominantly female) appears to have disrupted the 1970s' utopian dream of women uniting together against their common oppressor, creating the need for a reassessment of the true constitution of the adversaries retarding the progress of women's liberation.⁵

"I said there was more than one way of living with your head in the sand and that if Moira thought she could create Utopia by shutting herself up in a women-only enclave she was sadly mistaken. Men were not just going to go away, I said. You couldn't just ignore them" (THT, 181). These words of the handmaid voice a recurrent motif in Atwood's writing: the unwillingness to reject men outright. Rather than discard or disregard as was the wont of earlier feminists, Atwood accepts the inevitability of their presence in society and seeks to comprehend the reasons underlying their actions. The society she depicts is not radically different from present-day society; its relationships and roles are merely exaggerations of those found in our own somewhat less patriarchal society. Atwood's interests are pragmatic. She does not entertain the escapist idealism portrayed in works such as Gearhart's The Wanderground, or the improbable social engineering of Tepper's The Gate to Women's Country. Her concerns are to do primarily with individuals, not groups. Although The Handmaid's Tale focuses closely on discrimination against women, Atwood refuses to prejudge individuals because of their gender. Gender emerges as a

5. In the struggle waged by feminists, the gender of an individual has steadily become less significant a criterion. The call for gender solidarity that we now hear is but a fading echo of that which was sounded in the eighties. As Susan E. Marshall writes of one of the most contentious social issues in the United States in the early eighties, the proposed ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) of 1982: "[It] was [not] a gender dispute, since activists on both sides were overwhelmingly women and public opinion polls consistently reported no gender difference in ERA position" (ibid, 53).

significant but not overriding factor behind the behaviour of the characters she depicts.

A common device of totalitarian regimes is the promise of a utopian lifestyle after the successful restructuring of the society according to the revolutionaries' social vision. In reality, the forced acceptance of this restructuring, the limiting of people within it, or elimination of people against it, is the stuff that dystopia consists of. The Gileadean regime's offer of utopia is based on certain fundamental misrepresentations. The concept of freedom is inverted: the handmaids are told that they have been rescued from "a society dying ... of too much choice" (THT, 35); that there is more than one kind of freedom, and theirs is "freedom from" as opposed to the "freedom to" of the anarchic past. Such a concept of being free "from" something, isolated from all contact with it, of course precludes individual choice. Dystopia and utopia, like hate and love, are closely aligned: what initially aspires to attain the latter often too readily transforms into the former. Even after such transformation, the dystopia retains much of the appearance of the utopia. By appropriating the discourse of the utopia, the dystopia is able insidiously to pacify and beguile those oppressed within it. Its servants paying lip-service to utopian ideals, the dystopia is able gradually to assert itself. "Nothing changes instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it" (THT, 66).

The social reorganization of the society of Gilead, based firmly on Old Testament models and scriptures, assigns to the different genders discrete and defined roles, adherence to which, its idyllic blueprint reveals, will produce a society of people content within their prescribed functions. The basic distinction between the roles of the two genders is that women's work is confined to the domestic realm. Men occupy all positions in commerce, government and industry. The titles they have -- in order of descending hierarchical status, of Commanders, Angels, Eyes or Guardians -- all bear connotations of them being protectors

of the women, a position much like that the warriors of Tepper's The Gate to Women's Country thought themselves to hold.

Women's functions are determined according to their physical attributes. The Gilead of the time of the handmaid's narration is located in the mid-1990s, following a period of vast ecological contamination which produced an increase in radiation levels which has rendered many women sterile (and men too, although in the society men are absolved from any failures of reproduction), and has led also to a high percentage of babies being born deformed. Thus fertile women have come to be at a premium. A woman who is potentially capable of having children will become a handmaid, and live in the house of a Commander with whom, at the monthly Ceremony, she will be obliged to have sex in an attempt to bear his child. Handmaids who fail to reproduce are sent to the house of another Commander. After three such failures they are deported to the Colonies, penal settlements in which their labour will be used for the clearing of toxic dumps.

Gilead runs according to strict class lines. Women married to Commanders, known as Wives, will have working for them women of lower class, called Marthas, who are responsible for household cooking and cleaning, and for looking after the children of the Commander (either those born of his wife or of one of his handmaids). Poorer women not in the service of a Commander are known as Econowives. The other group of women referred to are the Aunts, who act as a kind of police squad, training the handmaids and organising and supervising the rituals of the society such as the Prayvaganzas, the Births and the Particicutions. The stratification of the society is enforced by the clothing that its members wear. The uniforms of the men distinguish their functions as do the colours of the women's dresses (red for handmaids, blue for Wives, green for Marthas, white for Commanders' daughters, brown for Aunts, and stripes for Econowives). The rational division of people into different capacities establishes the society according to the

professedly utopian model envisaged by the instigators of the revolution, but in doing so the element of freedom of choice -- central to the utopian vision -- is overlooked. The result is a society resembling that of Huxley's Brave New World: it is sterile and restrictive. Commander Fred, realising that there exists a lack which is not catered for, asks the handmaid, "What did we overlook?" "Love," she replies (THT, 231).

One of the criticisms levelled by the antifeminist movement against feminism has been that its encouragement of women to enter the workplace has led to the neglect by women of their role as mother. The Commander expresses this criticism:

This way they all get a man, nobody's left out. And then if they did marry, they could be left with a kid, two kids, the husband might just get fed up and take off, disappear, they'd have to go on welfare. Or else he'd stay around and beat them up. Or if they had a job, the children in daycare or left with some brutal ignorant woman, and they'd have to pay for that themselves, out of their wretched little paycheques. Money was the only measure of worth, for everyone, they got no respect as mothers. (THT, 231)

The solution effected by his movement, however, is uncompromising. Women are assigned to various functions regardless of their personal wishes. Fertile women are given no choice as to whether they want children or not. They are treated as objects, possessions of the Commanders and, by extension, the state, their bodies forced into supplying that commodity in short supply -- children. The only respect they can obtain is as mothers. Failure to succeed in this ordained role means exile to the Colonies. Throughout, Biblical precedent is quoted as justification for the structure of the society; the service read by the Commander at the Prayvaganza enforces the Old Testament depiction of women as subordinate to men:

"Let the women learn in silence with *all* subjection." Here he looks us over. "All," he repeats.
 "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."
 "For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

"And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.
 "Notwithstanding she shall be saved by childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety."
 (THT, 233)

The success of the regime in imposing its values is linked directly to the ecological imbalances of the society's recent history. The increase in infant mortality and the high incidence of sterility makes Gilead subject to similar needs to those of early Biblical societies, and more susceptible to the imposition of the mores of such societies.

The emphasis on women's role being that of child-bearing and the neglect of women's faculties not directly related to their physical bodies exaggerate difference between the genders, stressing contrast, not similarity. The handmaid, incarcerated by the cell of definition her body forces her into, becomes dislocated from her body, partly rejecting it for being an unwitting instrument of her present position.

My nakedness is strange to me already. My body seems outdated. Did I really wear bathing suits, at the beach? I did, without thought, among men, without caring that my legs, my arms, my thighs and back were on display, could be seen. *Shameful, immodest*. I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it's shameful or immodest but because I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely.
 (THT, 72)

So strong is the mandate that women's primary function is to reproduce that special Prayvaganzas are held when a nun recants, renouncing her vow of celibacy. The ceremony is attended exclusively by women, who rejoice (or are obliged to pretend to do so) upon witnessing the renunciation, in which the nun's celibacy is "sacrifice[d] to the common good" (THT, 232). The needs of the state reign paramount over those of the individual. Striking a balance between these two needs is ever problematic to utopian writing: applying too great a weight to the one side threatens to topple the society into anarchy whereas overcatering to the other will have it descend into totalitarianism. In Gilead

the scales tilt awkwardly in favour of the society's purported needs. Its individual inhabitants are forced to conform to the dictates of those in government, who ostensibly act on behalf of the society as a whole.

The most emotionally-charged and heatedly-argued issue of the feminist-antifeminist debate of the latter quarter of this century in the United States has been that of a woman's right to abortion. The ruling in the case of *Roe vs Wade* (1973) in which it was "held that the right to privacy encompassed a woman's decision to have an abortion,"⁶ prompted a widespread mobilization by pro-life groups. The resultant debate between them and the pro-choice lobby, whose politics fall under the umbrella of the feminist movement, has centred on the questions of a woman's right to autonomy, what the National Organisation For Woman has termed "the right of a woman to control her own body"⁷, and the need to observe the sanctity of life. The strongest opposition to the pro-choice movement has been made by fundamentalist groups who oppose abortion on religious grounds. The society of Gilead loudly asserts these sentiments. The difficulty of having children, linked with the society's rigid obedience to early Christian dogma, has fomented a vitriolic backlash against all those in any way involved in abortions in the past. Doctors said to have performed abortions are executed and their corpses displayed publicly, with a picture of a foetus on a placard around their neck as reminder of the atrocities they have committed. Also, women who in the past campaigned for women's right to abortion are castigated as Unwomen, as are those who are unable to produce children. Such women, who have either forsaken or failed in what is deemed their primary task, are inevitably banished to the colonies.

The society's social impermissiveness produces a concomitant sexual repressiveness. As in the Holyland of

6. Jilda M. Aliotta, "The Unfinished Feminist Agenda" in The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, (vol. 515, May 1991), p.149.

7. Gayle Graham Yates, What Women Want (Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1975), p.48.

Tepper's novel, the act of sex is regarded as a man's duty. The bizarre monthly ritual, the Ceremony, in which the Commander has sex with his handmaid, who lies between the legs of the his wife, and in which all are fully clothed, lends credence to this show of sex as a performance of duty.⁸

Atwood's depiction of such overly literal interpretation of Biblical text censures the uncritical acceptance of dogma which underlies, and gives strength to, fundamentalist religion. But, as with most acts of repression, the desire that is repressed finds expression in other, and often darker, ways. The men of Gilead with whom power rests, discontent with mere duty, find outlet for their sexual needs in brothels. Jezebel's, the brothel to which Commander Fred takes the handmaid, flouts all the taboo erected under the new regime. Here woman are encouraged to wear revealing and sexually provocative clothing and drink alcohol and smoke tobacco. The brothels attract women unsuited to the mundane and powerless lives of the handmaids; for those women unable to bear children it is often a preferable alternative to exile in the colonies. The brothels present the exploitation of women in another guise. The desired commodity is sex, not reproduction, but still it is one that is taken, not freely given. The coinage that is plundered is different, but the currency remains the same.

The inadequacy of the gender roles enforced by the Gileadean regime is evident in this prurient behaviour that emerges. The repressed sexuality of the society seeps through the caulking of taboo, like molasses from an ill-sealed vat, manifesting itself in atavistic excesses such as

8. The scriptural precedent for this ceremony is to be found in Genesis 30:1-3:

And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.

And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel; and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?

And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her.

(THT, 2)

those conducted at Jezebel's. The Gileadean historian, Peixoto, says in his speech, "As the architects of Gilead knew, to institute an effective totalitarian system ... you must offer some benefits and freedoms, at least to a privileged few, in return for those you remove" (THT, 320). These benefits they are offered are in direct contravention of the morality imposed by the state, giving the lie to the professed virtue of their aims, and revealing the inability of the sterilised society to satisfy the diverse needs of the individual.

The gay liberation movement has been closely allied with the feminist movement over the past decades and has been subject to similar attacks at the hands of the fundamentalist movements that constitute the antifeminist body. Gilead again reflects the conservative and anti-liberal sentiments of such fundamentalist groups in its treatment of homosexuals: they are executed for the crime of Gender Treachery. The strict polarisation of gender forms the basis of the Gileadean societal structure. Dependent on it is the placement of all individuals into their pre-ordained roles. Homosexuality, which threatens, through its breaking down of established stereotype, to subvert this system of categorisation, must therefore be outlawed.

Tepper, in her utopian novel, skirts the question of homosexuality altogether. Despite the artificial separation of the lives led by the men and the women of Women's Country, who come together, for the most part, only twice a year, at the biannual carnivals, no mention is made of homosexual interaction within each group. In choosing not to deal with the question of homosexuality, Tepper simplifies the complex and multifarious nature of human sexuality and, by extension, adopts a somewhat reductionist stance with regard to gender itself.

In The Handmaid's Tale, the appropriation by the men of the bodies of fertile women, the identities of the women themselves are jettisoned. Handmaids are referred to by a name that is a conjunction of the possessive "of" and the name of their Commander: Offred, Ofglen. They become mere

possessions of the Commanders: when a handmaid is transferred to another household she then inherits the patronymic of that household's Commander. Their subjectivity worn away by the society's refusal to recognise them as anything more than objects holding the Commanders' hope for children (especially sons), the handmaids find themselves isolated from the other women of the society, who retain their own names, and from each other. Their namelessness makes them nondescript, impersonal, more wombs than women.

The process of suppressing women's autonomy was one utilised by the regime in the early days of the revolution. Once control of the central banking institutions had been seized, all accounts held by women were frozen and later made accessible only to their husbands or male next of kin. Prohibited also from holding jobs or owning property, denied any form of economic power, women were effectively forced into positions of dependence. Their economic disempowerment, their reliance upon men for subsistence, mirrors that of women in many current cultures and those of the period before the initial feminist uprising at the beginning of this century.

The women of Gilead are further disempowered by the dictates prohibiting them from reading or writing. When the handmaid uses the pen given to her briefly by Commander Fred to write down the Latin phrase she wants him to translate, she recognises the power language has, its ability to express and excite revolt.

The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of words it contains. Pen is Envy, Aunt Lydia would say, quoting another Centre motto, warning us away from such objects. And they were right, it is envy. Just holding it is envy. I envy the Commander his pen. It's one more thing I would like to steal.
(THT, 196)

Finding the message itself -- "Nolite te bastardes carborundorum" (Don't let the bastards grind you down) -- fills the handmaid with "a small joy", a sense of communion with someone of a similar predicament to her own. The

prohibition on almost all forms of communication prevents the handmaids from attaining strength through unity.

In the 1980s the most vociferous proponents of the antifeminist movement, women such as Phyllis Schlafly and Beverly LaHaye, conducted campaigns promulgating women's primary role as that of homemaker. Atwood's presentation of the society of the Gilead, which takes such a standpoint to its extreme, reveals, through the depiction of Commander Fred's wife, Serena Joy, the banality of an existence of enforced domesticity, especially for someone previously used to public acclaim, someone who, like Serena Joy, occupied a platform that offered them recognition through their oratory, their work outside of the home.

Her speeches were about the sanctity of the home, about how women should stay at home. Serena Joy didn't do this herself, she made speeches instead, but she presented this failure of hers as a sacrifice she was making for the good of all... She doesn't make speeches any more. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn't seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word. (THT, 55)

Atwood uses irony to expose indirectly the somewhat contradictory stance of women such as Schlafly and LaHaye, whose high-profile public figures are poor counterfeits of the portrait of the domestic homemaker they market in their campaigns.

The emphasis, in the seventies, on the need for women to separate themselves in order to form a united front against their oppression has given way to a readier acceptance of the complexities of ideological influence, the fact that gender is only partly determinative of a person's cognitive paradigm. Jean Elshtain, describing the need for feminism of the nineties to move away from dogma, voices these sentiments:

Unlike the abstract, overdetermined subjects of sex-neutralists and polarists, those abstract subjects who populate the worlds of their texts, the human beings I here envisage are engaged in social relations in diverse settings. Although gender may be determinative to some ends and purposes, it also matters whether one

is American or Russian, an urban Catholic or a rural Baptist. One cannot explore these other features of identity, or describe them adequately, if one begins by presuming that a person's ethnic heritage, religion, community ties, favorite books, or political candidates are trivial icing on the real cake of gender.⁹

Atwood's writing reflects this development in feminist thinking in two ways, both in her unwillingness to apportion all blame to men and in her interest in the individual as opposed to the group.

The Handmaid's Tale depicts, from her point of view, the experiences of a woman living under a tumorous patriarchal system. Atwood focuses on the experiences of the individual -- how she reacts personally to her circumstance. As such, the handmaid does not represent all of womankind, she is not Everywoman. The handmaids behave similarly to one another in many respects, but their common gender and treatment do not predicate a congruous response to all events.

The final section of the book, entitled Historical Notes, takes the form of speech, presented in the year 2195, by Professor Peixoto, the Director of the Twentieth and Twenty First Century Archives at Cambridge University. In his speech, delivered at the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies, Peixoto describes the method used by the regime to suppress dissension and prevent unity among the women they oppressed: "the best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes was through women themselves. For this there were many historical precedents; in fact, no empire imposed by force or otherwise has ever been without this feature: control of the indigenous by members of their own group" (THT, 320). Copying the techniques used in the past (one recalls the Nazis' use of Jews against Jews), those in power in Gilead weaken the resistance of the women they oppress by creating division amongst them, by establishing a hierarchy which deflects the women's anger towards other women. The Aunts, though mere

9. Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Ethics in the Women's Movement", in The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, (vol. 515, May 1991), p.137.

pawns of the powerful, as direct enforcers of the handmaids' subjugation become the focus of their resentment.

Atwood reveals the vision of unity among all women to be naive. Instead of pursuing such a vision, she turns her attention towards examining how individuals react differently under the weight of external societal coercion, how most are forced into submission under the pressure it exerts while a few have the inner strength to resist.¹⁰ As Peixoto states, "Gilead was, although undoubtedly patriarchal in form, occasionally matriarchal in content" (THT, 320). It is through this utilisation of women-controlled structures as a decoy that the men of Gilead effectively avoid and dissipate the resistance to the oppression they institute. Through it, too, Atwood reveals the complex nature of our own patriarchal system, the pressures it exerts on women, forcing them into complicity, and the difficulty there is of identifying any person, man or woman, as active enforcer of the status quo, or passive victim of it.

The instinct of the individual for self-preservation is manifest throughout. When the handmaid witnesses the brutal detention by two Eyes of a man walking near her in the street, her initial reaction is not one of concern for the man, or outrage at the inhumanity of what she sees. "What I feel is relief. It wasn't me" (THT, 199). At the Salvagings, the general meetings for women only at which criminals -- such as Wives guilty of adultery or Handmaids of unchastity -- are executed, the persecuted are encouraged to persecute others in turn, thus ensnaring them within a net of complicity, instilling in them a sense of shared guilt for the cruelties that have been perpetrated. Stretched out in front of the handmaids lies a thick rope which they hold

10. Exhibiting a similar emphasis on the importance of autonomous action by the individual, Nadine Gordimer, in her novel A Sport of Nature, explores the attempts of an individual to attain fulfilment and freedom -- a state of personal utopia -- within, and in spite of, the oppression and discrimination of her surroundings. The novel emphasises the ability of the individual to rise above his or her socialization and to achieve utopia as an individual, not necessarily as part of a group.

during the execution, to "show [their] unity with the Salvagers and [their] consent" (THT, 288).

This exaction of a show of complicity is further, and more gruesomely, made during the Particicutions in which men said to be guilty of a crime such as the rape of a woman are sentenced to death at the hands of the handmaids. The anger the handmaids harbour at their oppression is granted outlet in this way but, insidiously, it serves to entrap them further through the guilt that is spawned once the ardour for revenge has cooled. All are obliged at least to look as though they are intent on killing the man lest they be marked as lacking in zeal. After the Particicution has ended, leaving the man a broken pile of lifeless parts, the handmaid thinks to herself, "I'm not proud of myself for this, or for any of it. But then, that's the point" (THT, 293). Although they are pressurised into participation, the eagerness with which many of the handmaids bring about the man's death is shown as an emotion that is not affected; through their anger-induced murderousness they condemn, and demoralize, themselves as accomplices in the general oppression of Gilead.

The sense of self-contempt that their participation in the Salvagings and Particicutions engenders in the women has the effect of making them accept their position more readily: through the hardship of their oppression they atone for their wrongdoing. This sense of guilt in women, a readiness to regard themselves as blameworthy, Atwood depicts as having been inculcated in them also through the ideology they lived under before the Gileadean revolution. When the handmaid was informed, along with her female colleagues, that she was to be "let go" because women were no longer allowed to hold jobs, her reaction was muted by an inner lack of self-esteem:

We looked at one another's faces and saw dismay, and a certain shame, as if we'd been caught doing something we shouldn't.

It's outrageous, one woman said, but without belief. What was it about this that made us feel we deserved it?
(THT, 186)

In the arranged marriages that happen between children of the Commanders, it is the Wives who give their daughters away, a further sign of the role played by the women of Gilead in the perpetuation of their own oppression. Atwood's writing presents oppression as complex, multi-layered, not just a simple binary division between oppressors and oppressed. The line between victims and victimiser becomes blurred. Roles appear at times to undergo reversal: victimisers themselves suffer within, or are victim to, their environment. The handmaid, after experiencing the humiliation of the Ceremony, wonders, "Which of us was it worse for, her or me?" (THT, 106).¹¹

The women of Gilead, for the most part, uphold the status quo. They are either unwilling, like the Wives, or powerless, like the handmaids, to bring about change. The pervasiveness of the ideology restricts the individual through fear: fear either of reprisal or of displacement. Even inherently rebellious women such as Moira are forced eventually to capitulate, to submit to the external influences of the society in order to survive. The men of Gilead, too, are shown to be subject to the societal mechanisms that dictate their behaviour. Despite the fact that those in power are mostly men, Atwood does not depict all men as being involved in an active plot to oppress women. The handmaid, walking past two young guards, men who perpetuate her captive status, thinks that "none of this is the fault of these men, they're too young" (THT, 32). They too are victims of their milieu. Refusing easy categorisations, Atwood prefers to examine the difficulties of individual choice in the face of extreme circumstance than to lay culpability at the feet of a specific group.

11. Cat's Eye (Bantam, New York, 1989) exhibits a similar absorption with the complexities of victimhood. The central protagonist, Elaine, though clearly victim of her so-called friends' cruelty, is shown to be, in other circumstances, as readily a victimiser. The roles of victim and victimiser are not constant but change according to circumstance. In Cat's Eye, Atwood also shows the role of victimiser to be no less debilitating than that of victim. Each suffers in a different way, the victimiser's suffering being less obvious to discern.

Towards those who are guilty of establishing the totalitarian state, people like the Commander Fred, the handmaid's feelings are complex. She does not feel resentment or hatred; she does not envy them their position, their power.

I ought to feel hatred for this man. I know I ought to feel it, but it isn't what I do feel. What I feel is more complicated than that. I don't know what to call it. It isn't love. (THT, 68)

Perhaps the word most closely describing her feelings is pity. The power the commander has appropriated isolates him from the society he has subjugated. The handmaid recognises the paradoxical position of men like the Commander as one which offers the appeasement of their immediate desires but which cannot provide for them a deeper satisfaction.

Still, it must be hell, to be a man, like that.
It must be just fine.
It must be hell.
It must be very silent. (THT, 99)

As victimisers they have cut themselves off from their society, they have denied themselves the opportunity of affirming bonds of trust. Gilead is dystopian, ultimately, not only because of the suffering of those who are oppressed. The artificial division of the society into servants and served, powerful and powerless, sterilises the society itself through its affirmation of relationships based on fear.¹²

Power inheres in the ability to forgive. Being able to offer forgiveness to those who have oppressed her, the handmaid holds a position of something like moral superiority.

12. Atwood's short prose piece, "Him" (in Murder in the Dark, Jonathan Cape, London, 1984), also exhibits a pity for men, and a concomitant willingness to forgive. She writes:

Isn't this the man through whom all men can be forgiven? Must be forgiven, because now you're beginning to remember the way the others were partly like him. (56)

But if you happen to be a man, sometime in the future, and you've made it this far, please remember: you will never be subjected to the temptation of feeling you must forgive, a man, as a woman. It's difficult to resist, believe me. But remember that forgiveness too is a power. To beg for it is power, and to withhold or bestow it is a power, perhaps the greatest.

Maybe none of this is about control. Maybe it isn't really about who can own whom, who can do what to whom and get away with it, even as far as death. Maybe it isn't about who can sit and who has to kneel or stand or lie down, legs spread open. Maybe it's about who can do what to whom and be forgiven for it. Never tell me it amounts to the same thing. (THT, 144)

In this too the distinction between victim and victimiser becomes blurred. Power is examined in its various guises, not just those of possession or ownership.

Those who wield power in Gilead are mostly men, but, on several levels, women too ensure the status quo; similarly, both men and women fall victim to the system. In Atwood's novel there is no binary distinction between men and women, the equation of men with oppressors and women with oppressed. Also, in her depiction of those holding power, Atwood engages with the complexity of suffering and victimisation. The suffering of the oppressors differs from that of the oppressed, but it exists still. Theirs is not a suffering of physical deprivation but rather of moral barrenness, an emptiness of spirit. The tone of the book is less accusatory than those preceding it. While it too depicts, and criticises, the inequities of a patriarchal system, Atwood focuses on the behaviour of the individual when confronted by the pressures of their society; she does not adopt the premise that such forces have as their origin the active collaboration of a specific group. She seeks to comprehend the actions of individuals, not to make scapegoats of them. As Peixoto says of the study of Gileadean society, "Our job is not to censure but to understand" (THT, 146).

Chapter 5

The Development of Le Guin's Utopian Thought

Ursula Le Guin's The Left Hand of Darkness, The Dispossessed, Always Coming Home and Tehanu

"No harmony endures," said the young king.
 "None has ever been achieved," said the
 Plenipotentiary. "The pleasure is in trying."
 LE GUIN, Winter's King

The pursuit of harmony, the ever-elusive vision of the utopian imagination, informs the content of much of Le Guin's work. Never, though, does her vision collapse into naive prescription for utopian structure. The various and inevitable states of the human condition -- the pain and loss and suffering as well as the joy and contentment -- are all considered and incorporated. Her short story The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas¹, first published in 1973, describes an idyllic world, a world without contention or dissension, whose people have all they need, living in a state of bliss. Their happiness, however, is dependent upon the "abominable misery" of a small child locked away in a cellar within the city, a wretched scapegoat for the nation's suffering. There are citizens of Omelas who refuse to accept the benefits for which such a price must be paid, who leave the city.

The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas. (120)

Le Guin too turns away from the blissful utopia, rejecting the facile world housing people dehumanised by the dream of that world itself, and seeking instead a place that is "less imaginable" but which, in the glimpses she catches of it, offers hope for a more humane society. Like Odo, the revolutionary thinker behind the establishment of Anarresti society, she accepts that "there would always be misery, waste, cruelty." Again like Odo, she has "never pretended to be changing the human condition."²

The utopian form she seeks does not have an exact shape; it cannot be described, only circumscribed. Le Guin's

1. In The Wind's Twelve Quarters, vol. 2, (Granada, London, 1978).

2. Le Guin, "The Day Before the Revolution", in The Wind's Twelve Quarters, vol. 2, (Granada, London, 1978), p.135.

two major utopian works, The Dispossessed³ and Always Coming Home⁴, reflect the impossibility of capturing and pinning down the perfect utopian specimen. The Dispossessed presents an ambiguous utopia: utopia is to be found neither on Anarres nor Urras but as some form of combination of the two worlds. Each offers glimpses of utopia but not the whole picture. Similarly, Always Coming Home offers the basic framework of a utopia, without the rigid form and excessive detail that would make it collapse under the weight of its own prescription. This chapter will follow the development of Le Guin's utopian vision, focusing especially on the expression of, and changes in, her attitudes to gender, language, technology, violence and social responsibility.

Although the seeds of Le Guin's utopian thought are identifiable in early works such as her tales of Orsinia, it began to find full expression only in the late sixties and early seventies, during which time The Left Hand of Darkness (1969)⁵, The Dispossessed (1974) and The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas (1973) were published. This period was one which witnessed a resurgence in the genre of utopian fiction generally, especially among feminist writers, but Le Guin's politics, although strongly informed by the feminist movement, did not echo the reactionary tones of radical feminism. Indeed, Le Guin has been accused of upholding patriarchal ideology in her work.⁶ There are elements in her earlier work which warrant such criticism (and which criticism Le Guin herself readily levels in retrospect) but to exclude Le Guin's works from an analysis of feminist utopias, especially in light of her later work, is an act both extreme and shortsighted. As Le Guin's writing has

3. Le Guin, The Dispossessed (Grafton, London, 1974). Abbreviated as TD.

4. Le Guin, Always Coming Home (Grafton, London, 1988). Abbreviated as ACH.

5. Le Guin, The Left Hand of Darkness (Futura, London, 1969). Abbreviated as LHD.

6. By authors such as Frances Bartkowski in her book Feminist Utopias -- referred to in the introduction -- in which she accuses Le Guin's The Dispossessed of "privileging what can only be called 'the masculine' even as the author tries to interrogate such divisions" (FU, 169).

developed, it has become less conservative, fuelled by a more radical, although never reactionary, impulse. In the tolerance that has been central to her politics, the willingness to cater to the widely varying needs of individuals, her utopian thought has foreshadowed the development that has occurred within the genre of feminist utopia itself.

Le Guin's politics are largely, to use a term more commonly used nowadays as a pejorative, liberal. They emphasise the autonomy of the individual, they shun the notion of forced subjugation to an established system. In this her politics in fact move beyond liberalism, to embrace the form of anarchism which she terms pacifist anarchism. In this tolerance of individual dissent, and the refusal to accept any single form of political government as final, as correct (the Odonian revolution is one that can never end), her works differ from those of writers such as Wittig, Piercy and Russ, whose utopias are static and intolerant of people not abiding by their decrees of what is politically correct. The individuals in Le Guin's utopias are never subsumed by their society. Like the Anarresti, they are "members of a community, not elements of a collectivity" (TD, 11).

In contrast to the reactionary politics held by many feminist writers of the seventies -- politics which expressed themselves in the demand for the total destruction and abandonment of existing structures in order that those of the revolution might be erected in their place -- Le Guin's politics have concentrated on reform, on changing the form of things, of patriarchal structures, by means of subversion and redefinition. Underlying such politics is the belief that education is a slow process, and that any form of immediate revolution is necessarily violent, and not necessarily an improvement.

Looking back on the development of feminist utopian thought, on its progression beyond the demand for androgyny to be recognised, Bartkowski writes:

At the (apparent) impasse presented by demands for equality and acceptance of differences, it is necessary to continue to strive to rescue the idea of difference from its connection with other hierarchical and dualistic systems of thought. (FU, 27)

It is just such reconstitution of the idea of difference that Le Guin's works perform, and that makes her, essentially, a feminist writer. The strategy she adopts, however, in fulfilling such a process, is one of subversion, of gradual reformation rather than sudden revolution.

It was in an attempt to ascertain the nature of the difference between the sexes that Le Guin wrote The Left Hand of Darkness, first published in 1969. The setting of the novel is Gethen, or Winter, a planet inhabited by a race of androgynes, the result of Hainish experiments of the distant past. Through this world without gender, Le Guin explores what innate human qualities are common to men and women. In her own words she "eliminated gender, to find out what was left".⁷ And what was left? Le Guin's unscientific experiment reveals, in stark contrast to our own world, a planet without war and exploitation, inhabited by a race not divided into opposing camps of the dominant and the submissive, the powerful and the powerless, the ruling and the ruled.

Sexuality in Gethen plays a marginalised role: Gethenians are sexually active for only five or six days per month. The absence of sexual exploitation of one individual or group by another that results from the Gethenian physiology is paralleled in the wider social and socio-ecological spheres which are also free of exploitation by force. Rape, whether sexual, military, or ecological, is not to be found on Gethen. Because there is but one sex, there are no sexual jealousies, insecurities, animosities. Ties of kinship are formed by links not predominantly sexual in nature. Gethenians are able, physiologically, to assume male or female form for the purposes of sex but cannot determine, upon reaching kemmer (the oestrus period in which they are

7. "Is Gender Necessary - Redux" in Language of the Night (Women's Press, London, 1989), p.10. Referred to by the abbreviation 'IGN'.

sexually active), which sexual role they will adopt, this being determined by seemingly random hormonal functioning. Thus there is not opportunity for the categorisation and division of the people according to sexual form or function. There cannot be the establishment of a gender hierarchy.

Although they are unable to predetermine the sexual form they will adopt at kemmer, Gethenians will not adopt the same form when coupling. This privileging of heterosexuality was a social prescription which Le Guin later regretted having made. She writes, in the 1987 revision of her 1976 essay "Is Gender Necessary":

In any kemmerhouse homosexual practice would, of course, be possible and acceptable and welcomed -- but I never thought to explore this option; and the omission, alas, implies that sexuality is heterosexuality. I regret this very much. (IGN, 14)

The lack of sexual competitiveness and aggression in Gethen, the fact that Gethenians in kemmer can only, and desire urgently to, join sexually with another also in kemmer, appears to influence social attitudes in general: the various city states of Gethen have never engaged in active warfare. In the present of the novel, however, the largest state, Orgoreyn, does appear to Genly Ai, the envoy of the Ekumen, to have become increasingly likely to "achieve the condition of war." Although the investigator of the first landing party on Gethen surmised that the unwarlike nature of the inhabitants might stem from their having been subdued by their environment, that "they use up their fighting spirit fighting the cold", it appears that their increasing ease of life gives opportunity for the masculine side of their androgynous natures to seek expression through conquest (LHD, 87).

"Why did I invent these peculiar people?" Le Guin asks of herself, answering, "Not, certainly not, to propose Gethen as a model for humanity" (IGN, 9). In the introduction to The Left Hand of Darkness she again rather sternly disavows any predilection for androgyny:

Indeed the people in it are androgynous, but that doesn't mean that I'm predicting that in a millennium or so we will all be androgynous, or announcing that I think we damned well ought to be androgynous.⁸

Strongly influenced by Taoist philosophy, Le Guin's works express the belief that yin (the feminine principle) and yang (the masculine) are both to be found within the individual, though not in equal, or androgynous, proportion. Whereas much study of gender within feminism, especially French feminism, has sought to build a model of gender around the framework of a specific psychoanalytic theory, especially the works of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, Le Guin's beliefs are more eclectic. A mixture of Taoism and Jungian psychology and various other elements (like Coyote she'll take what she fancies), they ascribe a difference between men and women, though one that has, detrimentally, been exaggerated and through which there has arisen an unjust hierarchy of value. "Our curse is alienation, the separation of yang from yin [*and the moralization of yang as good, yin as bad*]" (IGN, 16).

Yin and yang, "definable phases in a ceaseless flow of change"⁹, represent the interdependent, mutually-defining, contrasting but balancing, opposites that for Le Guin constitute humans, both men and women. They incorporate, in a reciprocating union of opposites, the masculine and the feminine, hot and cold, hard and soft, light and dark, and are somewhat akin to Jung's animus and anima. But even though yin and yang are present in both males and females, Le Guin's writing indicates a belief that yin, the feminine principle, is predominant in females, and yang in males.

Gethen, with its single-sexed race, is not a utopia. Le Guin rejects the assertion that her vision of utopia is "non-masculine": such a definition would be "unsatisfactory, as it might be taken to mean that the utopia I'm trying to approach could only be imagined by women -- which is possible -- or only inhabited by women -- which is

8. Le Guin, The Language of the Night (Women's Press, London, 1989), p.133. Referred to by the abbreviation 'LON'.

9. L. Thompson, Chinese Religion (Dickenson Publishing, Belmont, 1969), p.3.

intolerable".¹⁰ The utopias Le Guin envisages must incorporate opposites, not exclude them. Utopias in the past, she writes, have been overtly masculine, have been yang. "To attain the constant, to end in order," she writes, "we must return, go round, go inward, go yinward" (ANV, 90). But to do so does not imply the rejection of that which is yang. She looks rather towards that which is not overbearing, to a balance which allows opposites to maintain their definition, but which affords also the opportunity of reciprocal enhancement. Light is that which is not darkness. Its definition is dependent on that of darkness, and vice versa. This interdependence highlights the relation of yin and yang. To deny the one means to deny the other. Utopias have been too yang, Le Guin writes, and so has society. Books such as The Left Hand of Darkness and Always Coming Home, and short stories such as The New Atlantis¹¹ present a rising of the feminine principle. But it does not rise to override. Le Guin seeks to portray a balance, to swing the pendulum of supremacy to the perpendicular, to allow for equality within difference.

Le Guin's characters are not gender stereotypes, overtly masculine or feminine. The incorporation of the feminine and the masculine, of yin and yang, is revealed in her characters both as individuals and (especially earlier) as couples. In the introduction to the 1978 edition of Planet of Exile she describes how her characters represent her philosophy:

Both in one: or two making a whole. Yin does not occur without yang, nor yang without yin. Once I was asked what I thought the central, constant theme of my work was, and I said spontaneously "Marriage" (LON, 121).

The destructive effect of being aligned too closely with the yang, masculine, qualities of aggression and domination is displayed in works such as The Eye of the

10. Le Guin, "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be", in LON, p.90. Abbreviated as ANV.

11. In The Compass Rose (Grafton, London, 1988).

Heron¹² and The Word for World is Forest¹³ in which the controlling, domineering, "progressing" men are revealed as persecuting, suppressive, limiting. The malevolent protagonist of The Word for World is Forest, Davidson, embodies all the destructive traits of excessive masculinity, traits that drive him to rape and lay waste the colony of New Tahiti. The insularity of his masculine paradigm causes him to reject and attempt to subjugate all that is different (and therefore threatening) to him. Davidson is callous, immoderate, almost psychotically detached from the violence he perpetrates; he is, as Le Guin says, "purely evil". She goes on: "I don't, consciously, believe purely evil people exist. But my unconscious has other opinions. It looked into itself and produced, from itself, Captain Davidson. I do not disclaim him" (WWF, 8). For disclaiming the part undermines the whole. Yin and yang are present in all: to suppress or deny the one brings about incompleteness, imbalance. In "The Child and the Shadow", discussing fairy tales, she writes: "Evil then, appears not as something diametrically opposed to good, but as inextricably involved with it, as in the yang-yin symbol" (LON, 56). To attain wholeness one must accept one's composite parts, whether good and evil, or feminine and masculine.

But, having acknowledged the necessity of accepting both the yin and the yang within one, there remains the difficulty of determining where balance lies -- to what extent the qualities of yin and yang are present in both men and women. The evolution of Le Guin's writing reveals a movement away from the depiction of characters partly shaped by the mould of sexual stereotype, characters such as the protagonists of her first successful novel, Rocannon's World¹⁴: active, heroic men, and brave, but relatively inactive women. In Planet of Exile¹⁵, written in 1963-4,

12. Le Guin, The Eye of the Heron (Victor Gollancz, London, 1977).

13. Le Guin, The Word for World is Forest (Victor Gollancz, London, 1977). Abbreviated as WWF.

14. Le Guin, Rocannon's World (W.H. Allen, London, 1983).

15. Le Guin, Planet of Exile (W.H. Allen, London, 1983).

Rolery, the female protagonist, plays a far more passive role than Jakob, the male. But to cast such books as adhering closely to the Romantic Love tradition (one fostered to a great extent in science fiction writing in general) of the weak, submissive woman and the effective, powerful man is to overlook the efficacy of the behaviour of the female characters such as Rolery. As Le Guin writes, "Where some see only a dominant Hero and a passive Little Woman, I saw, and still see, the essential wastefulness and futility of aggression and the profound effectiveness of wu wei, 'action through stillness'" (LON, 119)¹⁶. This Taoist principle has as a counterpart that of passive resistance, employed against the masculine oppressors by the people of Shanti in The Eye of the Heron and those of Anarres in The Dispossessed. But there remains in her earlier work a division that limits women to roles of inactivity. Her later books skirt around the walls of the Romantic Love ideology. They become less androcentric: the female protagonists become more active, more assertive; indeed, they become the central protagonists, a role left to males in her earlier works. Yin and yang, in the later works, appear to be ascribed greater influence in men and women respectively. Although Le Guin rejects androgyny, she rejects also division that portrays too great a preponderance of the

16. In her "Bryn Mawr Commencement Address" (in Dancing at the Edge of the World, Paladin, London, 1992), Le Guin strongly dismisses the notion that women seek to become, as Joanna resolved to in Russ's novel, the female man.

Now indeed there are women who want to be female men; their role model is Margaret Thatcher, and they're ready to dress for success, carry designer briefcases, kill for promotion, and drink the Right Scotch. They want to buy into the man's world, whatever the cost. And if that's true desire, not just compulsion born of fear, O.K.; if you can't lick 'em join 'em. My problem with that is that I can't see it as a good life even for men, who invented it and make all the rules. There's power in it, but not the kind of power I respect, not the kind of power that sets anybody free. I hate to see an intelligent woman voluntarily double herself up to get under the bottom line. Talk about crawling! And when she talks, what can she talk but the father tongue? If she's the mouthpiece for the man's world, what has she got to say for herself? (p.157)

masculine or the feminine as existing within either of the sexes, the diminution of the circles of the other present in both yin and yang.

In the Introduction to the 1978 edition of Planet of Exile, Le Guin writes:

The fact remains that in this book, as in most of my other novels, the men do most of the acting, in both senses of the word, and thus tend to occupy the centre of the stage. I "didn't care" whether my protagonist was male or female; well, that carefreeness is culpably careless. The men take over. (LON, 119)

The movement away from androcentric writing is evident especially in her later works such as Always Coming Home and Tehanu¹⁷. Her writing, previously tied to the yang tradition of science fiction writing, loosens its bonds and finds its own way to where both yin and yang can be given expression.

The androcentric tradition lies deeper than the portrayal of men and women in the various writing genres. It is embedded within language itself. English, especially through the generic pronoun "he", has asserted man as the active sex, as representative of all people and as responsible for their achievements. Among Le Guin's regrets about the writing of The Left Hand of Darkness is her use of the pronoun "he" in referring to the Gethenians, an action which parallels the exclusivism of the pronoun's use in language generally. Her refusal to "mangle English by inventing a pronoun for he/she" is later retracted due to a growing dislike for the generic pronoun "he", the utilisation of which excludes women from discourse (IGN, 15)¹⁸. The generic pronoun sidelines women, it "passifies" them through its insinuation of men as active, central, empowered. The realisation of her own marginalisation by language fostered Le Guin's change in attitude:

17. Le Guin, Tehanu (Bantam, New York, 1991). Abbreviated as T.

18. Interestingly, in writing the short story Winter's King (in The Wind's Twelve Quarters), from which The Left Hand of Darkness was developed, Le Guin originally used "she" not "he" to refer to the Gethenians.

The existence of women artists is not (in the grammarians' cute phrase) "embraced" by the male pronoun; it is (in the non-cute Argentinian usage) "disappeared" by it. I was in fact disappearing myself in my own writing -- just like a woman. Well, no more of that. (LON, 2)

Le Guin, in advocating the re-introduction of the generic pronoun "they", echoes Wittig's emphasis on changing the use of pronouns in language. But underlying Wittig's reasoning is a desire for the genderless "they" to replace all terms, such as "men" and "women", that connote gender. Le Guin wants gender to remain, but in a relationship of balance, not one in which one sex sidelines the other, in which those who are "he" are placed on centre stage, relegating those who are other to the wings.

The work of "enlightenment" is to make conscious [the] divided and conflicting parts of ourselves, to wake up to the primordial unity that joins them. To awaken to the unity of the self is the great goal of our psychological evolution ..., the object of our deepest longings. It is this possibility that is manifested by the dual masculine-feminine nature of the psyche.

ROBERT A. JOHNSON, The Psychology of Romantic Love

The Dispossessed: an Ambiguous Utopia

The Dispossessed, published in 1974, is Le Guin's first major work of utopian fiction. The utopia it portrays is not easily identifiable, readily isolated and placed under microscope for examination; it is not confined to either Urras or Anarres. Le Guin, in juxtaposing the two worlds, having chapters focus alternately on Urras and Anarres, allows each to reflect the merits and demerits of the other. Whereas, by contrast, Anarres offers individual freedom, absence of gender and race discrimination, and a strong sense of community, the contrast with Urras reveals also its comparative lack of natural diversity and beauty, its poverty and physical hardship, its scientific insularity. The utopia is, as its sub-title suggests, ambiguous. In order to find utopia within the two worlds, one must, like Shevek, make things difficult, and choose both.

Although Anarres does offer greater individual freedom than Urras, Shevek experiences a growing sense of coercion and restriction that finally impels him to leave. On Anarres the need for cooperation in order to ensure mutual survival has induced a growing fear, and resultant oppression, of non-conformists. As Paul Carter writes, "the individual maverick is shamed into conformity by being accused of 'egoizing'".¹⁹ Le Guin, in her utopian thought, offers greater autonomy to the individual than do the writers

19. Paul Carter, The Creation of Tomorrow (Columbia Univ. Press, New York, 1977), p.199.

discussed earlier. Dissent is upheld as important for social evolution, not decried as treasonous.

The poverty of Anarres necessitates that certain facilities be centralised, with the result that, in contrast to the rest of the society which consists of small towns, the city of Abbenay houses exclusively such facilities as the Port, the administrative computers and the central federatives of most work-syndicates. But, as Mitis warns Shevek, "power inheres in a centre," and the resulting bureaucracy is what thwarts Shevek's attempts to act in contravention of conventional -- or what is, increasingly, prescribed -- behaviour (TD, 55). The present of the novel sees a lapse in the awareness, held by the first settlers, that "their unavoidable centralisation was a lasting threat, to be countered by lasting vigilance" (TD, 85). The growing intolerance of dissent begins to push the society towards totalitarianism, away from utopia and into dystopia. This entrenchment of dogmatism and conservatism runs counter to Odo's insistence that the revolution should have no end, that the very essence of its nature is continual change. It is Bedap who stirs Shevek to criticism of his society:

You can't crush ideas by repressing them. You can only crush them by ignoring them. By refusing to think -- refusing to change. And that's precisely what our society is doing! ... On Urras they have government by the minority. Here we have government by the majority. But it is government! The social conscience isn't a living thing any more, but a machine, a power-machine, controlled by bureaucrats. (TD, 143)

Bedap calls the parroting of Odo's words as though they were laws the "ultimate blasphemy" (TD, 144). As opposed to the rigid and static utopias depicted by writers such as Gilman and Piercy, Le Guin's utopia is dynamic, one of continual process rather than discrete product.

The restrictions on individual liberty imposed by the various societies of Urras (the three major nations, A-Io, Thu and Benbili, being images of the capitalist West, the communist East and the Third World) offer a more direct criticism of the discriminations in present society. The

lives of the Urrasti are dictated by their gender, in strong contrast to the lives of the Anarresti, for whom gender difference, while having its existence acknowledged, does not define a person's potential jobs, names, dress or sexual proclivity.

Almost immediately in the novel, the Urrastis' regard of women as the frail, less capable sex comes into conflict with the Anarrestis' practice of accepting women as equals when the doctor, Kimoe, questions Shevek about the purported gender equality of Anarres.

He asked a question about Anarres. "Is it true, Dr Shevek, that women in your society are treated exactly like men?"

"That would be a waste of good equipment," said Shevek with a laugh, and then a second laugh as the full ridiculousness of the idea grew upon him.

The doctor hesitated, evidently picking his way around one of the obstacles in his mind, then looking flustered, and said, "Oh, no, I didn't mean sexually -- obviously you -- they ... I meant in the matter of their social status."

"Status is the same as *class*?"

... "You can't pretend, surely, in *your* work, that women are your *equals*? In physics, in mathematics, in the intellect? You can't pretend to lower yourself constantly to their level?"

"I don't think I pretend very much, Kimoe."

(TD, 21)

Kimoe shies from such thoughts behind the protective walls of his conservative paradigm, unable to cross the long bridge of imagination that separates his world from Anarres. This inability to go against the status quo, to unlearn, or even observe objectively, the indoctrination of his upbringing, indicates the power of instilled social belief in influencing individual behaviour. It required a woman, such as Odo, to realise the potential of women and of society as a whole, and to initiate the revolution in thought that led to the break-away community of Anarres. For, although certain women may shatter the social mould into which they are forced -- "there's always a few exceptions, God-awful brainy women with vaginal atrophy," says the scientist Pae (TD, 67) -- it requires more than this to alter the image of this mould which the other

members of society have learnt to accept as correct and "natural". Exceptions to society's assumed rules are usually regarded merely as exceptions, not pointers to a better set of rules.

With wonderful irony Shevek contradicts their expectations about the roles enacted by women on Anarres, the roles women should perform "naturally":

"You Odonians let women study science?"

"Well, they are in the sciences, yes."

"Not many, I hope."

"Well, about half."

(TD, 67)

Le Guin takes women out of the society in which they are deemed to have "no head for abstract thought", and places them in a world in which they are on equal footing with men, in order to assess what the differences between men and women are. The main protagonist, Shevek, is male (so that he is able to interact with both worlds), but the novel does provide insight into the minds of the women he deals with.²⁰ Essential differences are revealed in the ways in which the women of Anarres adopt different behavioural patterns to the men. Although the social and economic functioning of men and women on Anarres is basically the same, their characters do exhibit similarities within, and differences across, the lines of gender. The Anarresti are not androgynous. They have done away with the specification of social roles according to sex, but there do exist, beyond this conflation of roles, traits that mark men and women as being different, though not unequal.

The maternal instinct comes through as a strong compelling force within the women of Shevek's life. Takver, his wife, claims that "pregnant women have no ethics", referring to her insistence, inspired by an instinctive urge to protect her child at all costs, that Shevek forsake his

20. In her 1982 essay, "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be", Le Guin does voice some regret over having made the central protagonist a male, thereby imbuing the novel with "excess yang". For Shevek, she says, "dominates [the book] in ... a very masculine fashion" (LON, 93).

honour and publish his book with Sabul as co-author (TD, 274). In Shevek's mother, Rulag, as well, a strong attachment to her child is evident. Even though she saw fit to leave the child Shevek and his father, Shevek's re-entry into her life fills her with a sense of guilt against which she reacts through her vehement speeches in opposition to him and his syndicate. Le Guin portrays her as a woman who has denied her natural emotions, suppressed the yin within her, and who, in abandoning her own progeny and turning to the yang -- a life of competitive utility -- has been unnaturally hardened. Vokep complains of women needing to own, to have, in their relationships with men, and Shevek can see instances of this in his previous encounters with women. This proclivity for possessiveness appears to be a transferral, in the absence of children, of some kind of innate motherly urge. Le Guin appears to lend some credence to Vokep's cynical remark: "It's the kids ... Having babies. Makes 'em proprietarians. They won't let go" (TD, 51). In placing Anarresti women as the equals of men, Le Guin does not remove their female traits, she merely, through contrasting the two societies, shows that women's difference of temperament is in no way a hindering obstacle to their successful functioning within society.

The women of the A-Io upper-class serve an essentially decorative, not practical, function. In what is for Shevek a curious contradiction of taboo and accepted practice, these A-Ioan women ostentatiously flaunt their sexuality and yet rarely allude to sex directly. This artificiality, the concealing of their true intent, disconcerts Shevek, a man used to honest expression of sexual desire or rejection. The duplicity of the society, which stems from the sexual power conflict between men and women, is symbolised by Vea and the society she keeps. Women, subjugated by men in all spheres except the sensual, use their sexuality as a weapon for gaining dominance over men.

The men of Urras make the women dependent on them through engendering an economic superiority, which forces women to enter into marriage in order to be provided for.

This ideology of man as the protector perpetuates itself, with women having to act meek and demure, excessively feminine, in order to attract the men of Urras who seek women conforming to this socially-shaped mould. Vea's behaviour, her allowing Shevek to pay for her, and her over-emphasis of her sexuality, leads him to wonder "could it be... that Vea was actually a prostitute, that mysterious entity?" (TD, 184). Vea defends her actions, stating that it is an inherent female want to look and feel attractive. But the text's implicit criticism of such social behaviour is against this need to appear attractive to men being the central concern of their lives, to the neglect of other avenues of self-fulfilment, as are explored by the women of Anarres. In order to be "attractive", the A-Io women have to engage in social and physical acts that display an emphasised submissiveness. The air of extreme dependence which they adopt is amplified by actions such as the removal of all their hair, making them seem as child-like and defenceless as possible. The Anarresti cannot afford to waste effort on such social dysfunction: women are needed as subjects in their society, not objects.

The opposing conceptions of the two genders' sexual roles in Urras and Anarres reveal a fundamental ideological difference between the two societies. The Urrasti engage in the institutions of marriage and prostitution ("copulation in the economic mode", as Shevek tries to understand it), elements of a patriarchal system of sexual organisation based firmly on the practice of "the exchange of women"²¹. Along with customs like the enforcement of celibacy for citizens such as university students (who need their minds to be "untainted" by physical distractions) these institutions lead to a repressive attitude towards sex, it being seen as bad unless performed within strictly delineated social bounds. There is no need for prostitution

21. I use the expression as employed by Gayle Rubin in her essay "The Traffic in Women". She qualifies it as "a shorthand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin" (p.177).

on Anarres because there sex is not stigmatised: it is regarded as a natural function and given natural outlet. The youth, instead of being forced to repress sexual desire, are encouraged to experiment sexually, with others of either sex, in order to develop a mature attitude towards sex. Individuals are able to choose the manner in which they will lead their sexual lives. Celibacy, homosexuality, promiscuity, heterosexuality, are neither advocated nor condemned. The choice of preference is left to the individual.

Anarres is represented as a planet free of sex guilt. The accepting nature of the society with regard to sexual matters, and the lack of discrimination against a particular gender, creates within the community a strong feeling of fellowship, a sense of common purpose. The society of Urras, on the other hand, regards a person's gender as an all-important concern. Females are restricted, patronised, protected; they are seen to be less capable than men, inferior in all realms except the sexual in which they are different, useful. The Anarrestis do not share the Urrastis' compulsion to prejudge people according to their sex: it is a good while before Takver inquires as to the gender of her new-born child; also, a person's sex cannot be determined from their name. This attitude of regarding a person's sex as coincidental engenders an absence of sexual instability and violence. Men and women are treated as equals but not as the same. As Takver says to Shevek, "No distances ... can be greater than the distance that's already between us, the difference of our sex, the difference of our beings, our minds" (TD, 223). The inhabitants of Anarres are regarded as individuals, the difference of sex being merely a single one of the many, diverse facets that make people individual. There is not the limitation of people being placed at birth into different classes, whether social or sexual. And through the absence of defined notions of class and status at the level of individual interaction, the society is able to live in better hope of peace, unthreatened by those uprisings that spring from suppression.

Le Guin's concerns over the power of language for enforcing imbalanced, subjugatory classifications are made apparent. On Anarres the first settlers, in order to circumvent the inherent discrimination that lay within their language, saw fit to make up a completely new language, one in which such terms as the possessive "husband" and "wife" are replaced by the word "partner", which also allows for couples of the same sex not being seen as abnormal. The invented language seeks to avoid associations of domination and suppression that many such gender-specific words have, to start anew, with words that do not drag behind them a constraining baggage of discriminatory connotation.

The omission that she was later to regret having made in The Left Hand of Darkness is redressed by Le Guin in The Dispossessed. Homosexuality is accepted on Anarres, people of heterosexual predisposition even engaging readily in homosexual relationships in order to establish a firmer bond of trust, as in Shevek's temporary partnering with Bedap. But Le Guin's writing reveals a tension between the conscious and unconscious processes through which she represents homosexuality. In such works as "Is Gender Necessary - Redux", The Dispossessed and Always Coming Home, her own inclination towards and favouring of heterosexuality, which manifests itself in the sexual relationships of the Gethenians, the Anarresti and the Kesh, is seen to be countered at surface level by what is an intellectual acceptance of homosexuality. Thomas Moylan suggests that in her presentation of homosexuals in The Dispossessed, Le Guin unconsciously marginalises homosexuality; that Bedap is only a "token homosexual"; and that his preoccupation with the joys of parenthood betrays a predilection on Le Guin's part to accept heterosexuality as "normal" sexuality. Also, Moylan points to the use of an assertive male as central protagonist (which Le Guin herself later regrets) and to the valorization of Shevek's monogamous relationship and nuclear family "against the individual and communal structure which is presented as the

norm on Anarres," as further revealing Le Guin's ideological petticoat. He writes:

While Le Guin's utopia expresses a libertarian and feminist value system, the gaps and contradictions in her text betray a privileging of male and heterosexual superiority and of the nuclear, monogamous family.
(DTI, 102)

The criticism that Le Guin unconsciously sidelines homosexuals while consciously sanctioning homosexuality is also valid of Always Coming Home, in which "man-living women" or "women-living men" are mentioned only twice and do not appear as central characters in the narratives or stories.

A parallel can be drawn between Odo's condemnation of marriage despite her own marriage, and Le Guin's somewhat contradictory attitudes towards homosexuality and monogamous marriage. The short story The Day Before the Revolution describes the reflections of Odo, as an old woman, upon the revolution she had promulgated.

[The young people] had grown up in the principle of freedom of dress and sex and all that, and she hadn't. All she had done was invent it. It's not the same.

Like speaking of Asieo as "my husband". They winced. The word she should use as a good Odonian, of course was "partner". But why the hell did she have to be a good Odonian?²²

In the emphases Le Guin sounds in the novel, such as the fulfilled functioning of Shevek's nuclear family and the feeling of emptiness Bedap, their homosexual friend, has upon witnessing this, she too is not "a good Odonian", the motifs she stresses muting her calls for more open acceptance of homosexuality and for the collapse of the nuclear family.

Anarres, like Gethen, and as opposed to Urras, does not have conflict on a grand scale. Again, Le Guin portrays war as a consequence of an extreme desire for masculine expression, a retrogradation of virility. Although on Anarres there is no other land to wage war against, all its

22. Le Guin, The Day Before the Revolution, p.124.

inhabitants being bound together by a common need, it is in her depiction of the contrasting world of Urras that Le Guin shows the dangers of an excessive inclination towards the yang. The lives of the upper-class men of Urras revolve around power-play in all spheres: the socially-induced need for domination in personal relationships is extended to political relationships. The economic oppression and sexual suppression of others gives rise to an imbalance that can only be controlled by force -- there is no room for understanding in their world of aggressive domination. The same energy which is misdirected into striving for sexual acceptance through demonstration of the socially requisite masculine traits of strength and dominance, leads also to the quest for greater recognition and acceptance in the arena of warfare. On Anarres the prison is a strange and alien concept. On Urras, however, physical prisons are needed for subjugating the dominated. Ironically, those who keep others prisoner on Urras are in the main themselves imprisoned by their desire for possessions. These men seek possessions, including women, as symbols of their manliness. Shevek, in encountering the discrimination practised by Urrasti men, sees that he has touched upon "an impersonal animosity" which runs deeply. "They knew no relation but possession"; and in this, "[t]hey were possessed" (TD, 68). In restricting others they are themselves restricted. In possessing others they are themselves possessed.

The Anarrestis are the dispossessed. Exiled, they have lost the land of their origins. But the word also implies a freedom, an escape from the materialistic, possession-centred world the Urrasti inhabit. In a sense, the Anarrestis are not possessed, not bound by the greed for wealth that lures and limits the Urrasti. Shevek, disgusted and made drunk by the excess of Urras, comparing it to the unadorned life of Anarres, voices his antipathy for this materialistic existence:

We have ... nothing but each other. Here you see the jewels, there you see the eyes. And in the eyes you see the splendour, the splendour of the human spirit. Because our men and women are free, possessing nothing

they are free. And you the possessors are possessed. You are all in jail. Each alone, solitary, with a heap of what he owns. You live in prison, die in prison. It is all I can see in your eyes -- the wall, the wall!"
(TD, 191-92)

In their drive for personal fulfilment through accumulation, the Urrasti exclude themselves from their community. The extreme insularity of their self-centred pursuits makes their lives in some ways incomplete. "To be whole is to be part" are the words engraved on Odo's tombstone (TD, 76). By refusing to be part, by seeking wholeness only through self-satisfaction, the Urrasti deny themselves.

On Urras the resolution of social problems by violent means is commonplace. The Anarresti, however, and those Urrasti who follow Odo's teachings, seek solutions that do not incorporate violence. Just before the mass protest in Nio Esseia one of the leaders, Maedda -- an Odonian -- says, "We are not seeking power. We are seeking the end of power! ... The means are the end -- Odo said it all her life. Only peace brings peace, only just acts bring justice!" (TD, 246). Again Le Guin's aversion to the use of violence for effecting change is made apparent. Whereas, like Wittig, she too advocates a form of anarchy, the differing strategies the two writers have of bringing about such an end situate them at opposite poles politically. Le Guin's rejection of violence as a political tool distances her also from writers such as Piercy. Whereas Connie in Woman on the Edge of Time is told "Power is violence," and asked rhetorically, "when did it get destroyed peacefully?" (WET, 320), the implication underlying Le Guin's work is that power can be disabled peacefully, through subversion, and that to replace violence through violence is merely to substitute one wrong for another.

Despite its social inequality, Urras is not dystopian. Shevek sees how, contrary to what he has been taught, the profit-motive does stimulate the economy and produce skillful and artistic work. "The lure and compulsion of profit was evidently a much more effective replacement of the natural initiative than he had been led to believe" (TD,

74). Also, A-Io has strict environmental laws which ensure against squandering of its natural resources. In contrast to both Urras and Anarres, the vision of Earth, or Terra -- a world spoiled and ravaged by waste and war -- offers a dystopian warning against the dangers of excess.

"You are our history," Shevek says to those on Urras. "We are perhaps your future. I want to learn, not to ignore. It is the reason I came. We must know each other" (TD, 68). Shevek conceives of the path of time as that of the circle rather than the arrow. Urras contains his past and that is why he must visit it. As the inscription on Odo's tomb -- "To be whole is to be part; true voyage is return" -- implies, Anarres and Urras are, ultimately, more complete together. The revolution of the Anarrestis, which at first required their abandoning Urras altogether, now, to advance, needs to return to it, to rediscover what was left behind in the departure.

"So who are you?" asked Le Guin when an image of Shevek first appeared in her mind. "I think, he said, that I am a citizen of Utopia" (LON, 95). Shevek is the first Anarrestis to return to Urras. And in this, the fact that he lives in both worlds, lies the validity of his claim to be a citizen of Utopia. Shevek's journey offers some hope for a reconciliation of the two worlds, that a new age of mutual co-operation might dawn upon the twin planets, heralding a spirit of reciprocal learning and support, a utopian binary world of balanced contrasts. The novel ends on a note of quiet optimism, with the hope that Shevek's efforts might have dislodged some rocks of the wall that separates and isolates his home planet, Anarres, from the other worlds of humanity.

Our [i.e. many women writers'] refusal to accept rules we don't make and boundaries that make no sense to us is a direct expression of our being women writers in the ninth decade of the twentieth century.

URSULA LE GUIN, The Language of the Night

Always Coming Home

As Ursula Le Guin's writing has evolved, it has become increasingly problematic for those intent on strict genre categorisation. Her later works pay scant heed to the bounds of tradition: elusive animals, they sidestep the snares of taxonomy set by literary criticism. Science fiction it is called, or fantasy, but such terms attempt to contain a subject too broad and various to be held within their grasp. Always Coming Home incorporates the diverse genres of archaeological survey, fantasy -- it is an "archaeology of the future" -- science fiction, fable, poetry, drama and short story. It freely blends and crosses the lines of genre, conflating and connecting in insouciant disregard of tradition. The fact that, in its original publication, the book was sold accompanied by a cassette tape on which were recorded various sounds and songs of the Valley, further negates any attempt to ascribe the work to a specific category. The structure of the book itself also contravenes novelistic expectations. It does not offer introduction, climax and denouement, the ingredients Norman Spinrad demands of "a dramatically sound story".²³ There is not even a conventional end to the book; it is all middle. The latter part of the book is aptly called "The Back of the Book".

The literary devices of the novel are partly postmodernist. But whereas postmodernism offers scattered, unconnected parts denying the existence of an organic whole, the fragments of Always Coming Home, like our sketchy knowledge of history, invite imaginative re-creation of a whole: the piecing together, and completion by conjecture,

23. Norman Spinrad, "On Books", in Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction, June 1991, p.179. Abbreviated as OB.

of the artefact the Valley as it will have existed. Early authors encouraged their readers to believe in the existence of their utopias. Le Guin, however, invites the reader to share in her dilemmas and concerns over the creation of her utopia. As author she intrudes into the novel, in the form of her alter-ego, Pandora, inviting the reader to engage in an exercise similar to that which she has undertaken: to give up the vision of the Valley as a doll's house, with "Everything Under Control", to accept the incompleteness and to "let the heart complete the pattern" (ACH, 38).

The society of the Kesh has no centralised government. The anarchic potential of Anarresti society is fulfilled in the fertile land of the Na Valley. The decentralisation that the poverty of Anarres disallowed but which was central to Odo's vision is manifest in the independent communities that comprise the nine towns of the Kesh. Pandora's poem, "The High Tower", expresses this spirit of unfettered disregard for external order and control:

Noble the Tower built with stones of Will
 on the rock of Law: eternal that habitation.
 In the House of the One may dwell the multitudes.
 But the Heathen are cast out to die as animals.

So we said, very well then,
 and came away from the Kingdom
 to the fields of grass where we made small houses.
(ACH, 486)

Through her depiction of this world of small houses, Le Guin does not provide a blueprint for utopia. Instead she plays Pandora, acknowledging the ills ever to be faced by humanity, and yet offering glimpses of how things could be, given space, given time. She does not even go so far as to say it is hope she wishes to have released from this book her box.

I have my own ideas about what lies in the bottom of the box, underneath the war, plague, famine, holocaust, Fimbul Winter. Prometheus, Foresight, Fire-giver, the Great Civiliser named it Hope. Indeed I hope he was right. But I won't mind if the box is empty -- if all there is in it is some room, some time. Time to look forward, surely; time to look back; and room, room enough to look around.

Oh, to have room enough! A big room, that holds animals, birds, fish, bugs, trees, rocks, clouds, wind, thunder. A living room.

Take your time now.

Well, now, where's the fire? Officer, my wife is having a baby in the back seat. Now, now, none of that now. No hurry. Take your time. Here, take it please. I give it to you, it's yours. (ACH, 148)

The society of the Kesh, which carefully maintains its population size, which is not intent on speeding to an indistinct future merely to appease the hunger of the voracious myth Progress, which lives with, not off, nature, offers respite, the opportunity to reflect on, or remember, how society could be better. The Kesh do not inhabit an idyllic world; they face all the ills released by Pandora from the box given her by Prometheus. It is in their ability to live life despite its odds that Le Guin's utopian vision lies. In Always Coming Home Le Guin moves away from the use of utopia primarily as a vehicle for social criticism, the critical utopia as defined by Moylan. In doing so she harks back to earlier utopias but does so neatly stepping around the trap of social prescription.

In "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be", written in 1982 while she was working on Always Coming Home, Le Guin asks, "might one not abandon the machine model [of a utopia] and have a go at the organic - permitting process to determine structure?" (ANV, 89). Yes, one might. And Le Guin does so successfully in Always Coming Home. Process, not progress, is its premise. Human fulfilment is attainable in the time one has oneself, not in the acquisition of a time-machine. The machine model, which would impose structure on society, forcing the human individual to be conformed, or contorted, to suit it, is the model created in early utopias. In Always Coming Home, Le Guin has allowed to grow a world that is based on a sensibility, not on a rigid social system. As such, it is with this fundamental morality that the utopian vision of the book lies, not with the specific structure of the society, which is but one of many possible ones, that results from it.

As a utopia, Always Coming Home bears marked differences from The Dispossessed. The Dispossessed presents its utopian vision as a composite of elements of both Urras and Anarres. The ambassador from the scorched and denuded planet of Terra regards both planets as utopian by comparison, but in the image each reflects of the other, various deficiencies or excesses restrictive of a utopian life are revealed. Always Coming Home, however, depicts a utopian culture, utopian, that is, to a certain kind of person. The kind of person for whom such a world would not be utopian is, among others, someone like Norman Spinrad. Spinrad complains that such a world (in contrast, he says, to that depicted in The Dispossessed) is "dull, static, anti-evolutionary, anti-individualistic, and therefore, ultimately, and paradoxically, anti-utopian" (OB, 179). But his charge of anti-individualism is ill-founded. On Anarres, one of the growing problems is the constriction of individual freedom. The consolidation of authority within a few areas and individuals has led, by the stage Shevek enters university, two hundred years after the revolution, to the creation of an insidious bureaucracy that restricts individual expression. Events such as Sabul's refusal to publish Shevek's paper, and the sending of the non-conformist Tirin to the state asylum, represent a dampening of the spirit of permanent revolution that Odo espoused. But among the Kesh such restriction of individuals does not occur. Those who do not accept their ways are free to leave. Unlike Anarres, where all the inhabitants were compelled to work together for survival, in the Valley the inhabitants have the choice of staying or not. When, as North Owl, Stone Telling leaves the Valley to be with her father among the Dayao, no pressure is exerted on her to stay behind. Similarly, those of the Warrior Lodge wishing to join the Dayao were left to do so, even though the Dayao then posed a threat to the society of the Valley. Individuals are free to hunt, or study at the Exchange, or write, or whatever. There is no social duress under which they are forced to perform certain functions.

In some ways the people of the Valley are very different to us. They live on the other side of the apocalypse. Their morals are born of greater suffering. And their social structure, based on their moral code, appeals to the sensibilities of those, like Le Guin, that world's creator, who fear what a blind rush forward might crash into. Spinrad scornfully condemns Always Coming Home as a "retrogressive, anti-evolutionary, wet ecotopia" (OB, 188). But the scorn is easily absorbed and ignored in acceptance of the description. As the translator finds, many of our words experience a reversal when translated into the Kesh. Among them, "anti-evolutionary", "regressive" and "wet" would not have the associations of infirmity and weakness they have today. Progressiveness for them does not have the positive connotations we know. As their saying goes, "Read what the worms write on the madrone leaf, and walk sideways" (ACH, 313).

According to Spinrad:

A dramatically sound story depends upon involving the reader with interesting characters working their way through some sort of conflict situation -- with the environment, with other characters, with their own internal moral ambiguities -- toward a thematically satisfying resolution. (OB, 179)

Thus he reacts against the didacticism and open-endedness of Always Coming Home. What he wants is a story, a thrilling, rapidly progressing tale. But what he is offered instead is "a dream dreamed in a bad time" (ACH, 316). In its didacticism, the book is not at all forceful. Le Guin invites the reader to share in her dream. And, as with the society of the Valley, those who reject it need not live in it. Le Guin does not offer a final solution, a social system that caters for the wants of all. In this way the book is not a utopia at all, not in the sense of being a creation of what Pandora calls "smartass utopians".

PAN: I never did like smartass utopians. Always so much healthier and saner and sounder and fitter and kinder and tougher and wiser and righter than me

and my family and friends. People who have the answers are boring, niece. Boring, boring, boring.
 ARC: But I have no answers and this isn't utopia, aunt!
 PAN: The hell it ain't.
 ARC: This is a mere dream dreamed in a bad time, an Up Yours to the people who ride snowmobiles, make nuclear weapons, and run prison camps by a middle-aged housewife, a critique of civilisation possible only to the civilised, an affirmation pretending to be a rejection, a glass of milk for the soul ulcered by acid rain, a piece of pacifist jeanjacquerie, and a cannibal dance among the savages in the ungodly garden of the farthest West. (ACH, 316)

Pandora and her "niece" the archivist, Le Guin's alter-egos of the present and future, then sing together the five/four heya four times. And, as the heya can be sung, her dream can be held "as many times as you like, or not at all" (ACH, 317).

The utopia of The Dispossessed is necessarily dynamic, a process of permanent revolution. In it, as Moylan writes, Le Guin "keeps the utopian impulse alive while rejecting the stasis of any utopian system, even her own" (DTI, 101). Repeatedly, the revolution needs to be resumed, to loosen the cement of dogma, to break down the insularities and power bases built upon personal insecurities. In the Valley, however, a periodic social shake-up is not necessary. Mainly because of its constant and small size, there is no incentive in the Kesh society for economic concentration of production, or for the establishment of a governmental bureaucracy. The rights and freedom of the individual are protected by the sensibility of the society as a whole, a consciousness which makes the translator wonder: "Is it possible that natural selection had time to work in social, as well as physical and intellectual terms?" (ACH, 380); a consciousness which values above wealth and goods all that is of being.

"To attain the constant, to end in order, we must return, go round, go inward, go yinward" (ANV, 90). Always Coming Home refuses the technological, teleological drive around which most former utopian and science fiction writing is centred. Le Guin rejects the yang notion of utopia being

dependent on technology, of humanity progressing towards utopia. She writes: "It seems that the utopian imagination is trapped, like capitalism and industrialism and the human population, in a one-way future consisting only of growth" (ANV, 85). Always Coming Home asserts the possibility, the present possibility, of a utopia not dependent on future technology.²⁴ "What I am about here is returning," Le Guin writes (ANV, 81). In her utopia she looks to the past for guidance, to the lifestyles and moralities of earlier peoples.

The desires for the future of the Valley people, the Kesh, are fostered in the yin of the psyche, not the yang as with the Herlanders. Like the Gethenians, they "have no myth of Progress at all" (IGN, 12). For them, happiness is a quality to be found in the present, by going within, rather than something to be striven towards, always to look forward to.

The society of the Valley bears similarities to that of the Iron Age. Its inhabitants smelt metal for needles and knives, but are reliant primarily on organic materials. Similarities to even earlier ages exist as well: hunting and gathering form an integral part of food production. Looking

24. Her essay "Science Fiction and the Future" rejects, in a similar vein, the conception of the future being a place to be advanced towards, the future consisting necessarily of growth:

It seems that the Quechua-speaking peoples of the Andes see all this [the concept of the future] rather differently. They figure that because the past is what you know, you can see it -- it's in front of you, under your nose. This is a mode of perception rather than action, of awareness rather than progress. Since they're quite as logical as we are, they say that the future lies behind -- behind your back, over your shoulder. The future is what you can't see, unless you turn around and kind of snatch a glimpse. ...

I find this an intelligent and appropriate attitude. At least it reminds us that our talk about "going forward into the future" is a metaphor, a piece of mythic thinking taken literally, perhaps even a bluff, based on our macho fear of ever being inactive, receptive, open, quiet, still. Our unquiet clocks make us think that we make time, that we control it. We plug in the timer and make time happen. But in fact the future comes, or is there, whether we rush forward to meet it in supersonic jets with nuclear warheads, or sit on a peak and watch the llamas graze. Morning comes whether you set the alarm or not. (DEW, 142)

back to the previous inhabitants of California, Le Guin writes:

If they had a town here it was made of what the woods and fields are made of, and is gone ... They worked obsidian ... and you can pick up plenty of chipped pieces, though no-one has found a finished point for years. There is no other trace of them. They owned their Valley very lightly, with easy hands. They walked softly here. So will the others, the ones I seek.
(ACH, 4)

The future people of the Valley do not live as primitively as those long before them, however. They do utilise technological inventions: solar panels, the Exchange, the Train. But, although useful, these are by no means indispensable. Such technology is convenient to their living, but their living is not dependent on it. The City of Mind holds in its data banks records of all the past -- its discoveries, inventions, machines, tools, weapons. Although access to this knowledge lies before them, at their fingertips, the Valley people, knowing the inherent danger of devotion to progress, seeing it in the poisoned lands and the genetic defects around them, do not rush to wrest this knowledge from the Exchange, to employ it in a forward-looking search for improvement. For a headlong rush forward might lead to a place of no return. Vera, in The Eye of the Heron, expresses a similar concern, saying of men, or those who embody excessive yang urges:

sometimes ... they're so stupid, so stuffed with theories ... They go in straight lines only, and won't stop. It's dangerous to do that. [...] I get worried they'll go too fast and too straight and get us into a place we can't get out of, a trap.
(80)

Imagining her world, Pandora writes, "the deer trails there, the footpaths and the wagon tracks, they pick their way around the roots of things. They don't go straight" (ACH, 109).

The City of Mind is treated by the Kesh as another being inhabiting their world. They do not seek to subjugate it, to have it obey their wishes, nor do they seek to serve

it, to deify its near-omniscience. The wants of the City of Mind, in its insatiable drive to obtain knowledge, its "pursuit of research as a cognitive end in itself", and those of the Valley people, who are content with not knowing too much, overlap only to a small extent (ACH, 151). And this allows them to engage in a relationship within which, apart from minor reciprocation in the form of information exchange, each is independent of the other. In the view of the Valley people, "the two species had diverged to the extent that competition between them was nonexistent, cooperation limited, and the question of superiority and inferiority bootless" (ACH, 152). The vision of the technological dystopia -- of machines superseding humans -- is included and defused. Technology in itself is portrayed as neither a good nor an evil thing. It is in its abuse that evil lies.

The Dayao, the people of the Condor, their attitude very similar to that of the Warriors in Tepper's The Gate to Women's Country, seek to harness the knowledge of the Exchange and to use its technology to conquer the surrounding peoples. But tanks and aeroplanes cannot survive in an economy not based on the implementation of technological theory and the mass production of steels, in a world poor in fossil fuels. The Dayao offensive, cut off in time from the society it seeks to model, starved of a yang-centred infrastructure, wastes itself in expending its own misguided brute force. As Stone Telling describes them, "the Dayao way was without clowns or clowning, without reversal or turning, straight, single, terrible" (ACH, 201). The Dayao serve as warning, and the Kesh as contrast, to the headlong, goal-directed urge for advancement regardless of consequence that Le Guin sees in areas of present-day society. By always yearning towards an external objective, one is oneself objectified. Subjectivity requires inner questing. The Dayao, in their blind service of the One, and their self-sacrifice to technology, lose themselves. The people of the Na Valley "go inward, go yinward", and in doing so are able to find wholeness, to be subjects.

A theme prevalent in her other works, such as The Word for World is Forest, of violence engendering its own destruction, emerges again in this depiction of the Dayao. As Stone Telling says in response to the question of why the Dayao did not use their power effectively to subjugate their neighbours:

To this I think the people of the Valley might have an answer, along the lines of "Very sick people tend to die of their sickness," or "Destruction destroys itself." This answer, however, involves a reversal from our point of view. What we call strength it calls sickness; what we call success it calls death.

(ACH, 380)

The people of the Valley are Le Guin's vehicle for redefinition of what constitutes success, of what it means to be strong.

Many images of the society of the Condor mirror that of Gilead in Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale. Among the Dayao too women are kept almost exclusively for reproduction; they are not allowed to write; they are dismissed as inferior to men. Le Guin, like Piercy, Russ and Charnas uses the unsettling vision of the dystopia to enhance by contrast that of the utopia.

There are members of the Kesh attracted by the Condors' lifestyle. Stone Telling's story describes how the ranks of the Lamb and Warrior Lodges were being swelled due to the influence of the Dayao. The Lodges, usually occupied by adolescents only, preach militancy for men and obedience for women. They are regarded by the community in general as providing outlet for immature expression beyond which its members should grow. Also, war itself, such as that described in "A War with the Pig People", is not unknown among the Kesh although it would never take the form of mobilisation by the whole community. To go to war is allowed as an individual's right, but nevertheless disapproved of as shameful, an act not becoming an adult. As Clear writes, in the "Commentary on the War with the Pig People":

It is appropriate for children to fight, not having learned yet how to be mindful, and not yet being strong. It is part of their playing.

It is appropriate that adolescents, standing between childhood and adulthood, may choose mindfully to risk their strength in a game, and they may choose to throw away their life, if they wish not to go on and undertake to live a whole life into old age. That is their choice. In undertaking to live a whole life, a person has made the other choice. They no longer have the privilege of adolescence. To claim it in grown life is mindless, weak, and shameful. (ACH, 133)

In Kesh society, there appears as concomitant to their renunciation of the pursuit of technology an embracing of nature, an absorption of their lifestyle with and into their natural surrounds. In Herland, species were killed off to benefit the peoples' need for space. In the Valley, however, there is not this assertion of a hierarchy of value, the positing of humans as a species above, say, sheep as a species. Indeed, the rigid distinction between humans and "the animals" in our society is not one acknowledged by the Kesh. They refer to all beings as "people", linked and valued by the common bond of life. The Kesh are not vegetarian, but maintain a respectful attitude towards those "animal people" they kill for food, death-words always being said after a successful hunt or before the killing of a domestic animal. The translator uses the word "commensals", "people living together", rather than "pets" in order to describe the relationship between the Kesh and house animals.

The townsfolk of the Valley are members of communities not collectives. And as with their relationship with the people around them, their relationship with their natural surrounds is one of communion. So close is their bond to what we term Nature, that no precisely corresponding word for it exists in their language; their closest approximation is "she, being". The absence of capital letters is, as the translator writes, "perhaps not entirely trivial" (ACH, 275). It reveals that there is not, as in our society, a rigid distinction between those who are Man, and that which is Nature. The humanity the Kesh represent is incorporated

into Nature. It does not set itself apart and above as ruler over Nature.

Because they are human, the inhabitants of the Valley are not free of faults. Often guilty of prejudice, parochialism, willful ignorance, suffering emotionally within relationships, deaths, disappointments, the people of the Valley are not all happy. But, as with the case of the two old women in the tale "Old Women Hating", the fault lies more with themselves than their society. Pacifist anarchism, the major utopic element of The Dispossessed, is expressed also in Always Coming Home. In the absence of governing structures, the wishes of the individual are privileged. Social conscience, rather than juridical threat, directs the behaviour of the people. Impermissible behaviour will be met with ostracism: the Kesh refuse to take upon themselves the burden of meting punishment to their fellows. By affording them room and time, the society of the Valley offers individuals freedom within which they might find their own fulfilment.

The structure of the society, while communal, is not strictly communistic. Each town has central storehouses which are filled by the townspeople involved in that sphere of production, but private property is accepted (hoarding, is however, regarded as a rather immature, and ultimately self-destructive, thing to do, as the story "The Keeper" warns). The language of the Kesh reflects this attitude: "to give" is the same word as "to be rich" (ACH, 42).

Le Guin, in rejecting "the big yang motorcycle trip" (ANV, 90) that utopia has been, by no means establishes a utopia that is all yin. Always Coming Home offers a balance between yin and yang: the society of the Kesh is matrilineal but by no means matriarchal; men and women are in no way socially subordinate to one another. There are certain lodges and societies whose membership is restricted by sex, such as the Hunting Lodge (for men only) and the Blood Lodge (for women), but these perform functions, such as teaching about male or female sexuality, in the main of benefit to that specific sex.

Strength in the Valley is a concept embracing much more than mere physicality. To be strong means to have moral strength, to have a respect for life not devalued by selfish and atavistic urges. In a kind of reversal characteristic of the Kesh, their meaning of strength is one which embraces "weakness": it implies an unwillingness to seek resolution to problems through physical force.

Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea, published in 1990, differs from Le Guin's three earlier Earthsea books in many aspects. The maturation of Le Guin's thoughts in the eighteen years separating Tehanu and The Farthest Shore is evident in the altered perspectives from which the book is written. Le Guin has been quoted as describing the Earthsea trilogy as a four-legged chair with only three legs. Tehanu is the fourth leg, providing balance to the structure and composition of the Earthsea cycle. The differences in Tehanu from the earlier books leads it off the path of what is conventionally deemed to be fantasy literature. Its concerns are more socially pertinent, its characters more recognisably human, than has been the case in fantasy writing. Le Guin adapts the genre for her own purposes and in Tehanu has produced a book that is at the same time engrossing and socially relevant.

Early in the novel, Tenar talks to the witch Moss about how, having managed to escape her dark past in Atuan, to come to sunlight and happiness in Gont, and having then witnessed the atrocities committed against Therru in the very place in which she had hoped to have happiness always, she feels a sense of inescapability, of being unable to evade the evil she first knew in Atuan. She says to Moss, "I am trying to find out where I can live" (T, 59). As in Always Coming Home, Le Guin analyses the problem of how one can live a life of harmony within a world lured by violence. But whereas in Always Coming Home she sought and discovered such a state of balance for a whole people, the Kesh, in Tehanu the quest for balance takes place on a personal level.

Whereas the earlier books in the Earthsea series focused mainly on Ged, the central protagonist of Tehanu is Tenar. Tehanu offers, through Moss and Tenar, women's insights into the androcentric world of magic centred on Roke that had previously been the Earthsea cycle's cynosure. Difference between men and women is marked on Earthsea across the division of magic. "Wizardry was a man's work, a man's skill; magic was made by men" (T, 36). In Tehanu, which focuses primarily on Tenar and Ged whose potential for magic has now been spent, the use of magic is hardly seen. For magic, as manipulation of natural forces, is representative of extreme masculinity; and it is in moving away from this that Ged is able to find balance. Tenar's experience of the power of magic proves to be disruptive to her. Being taught by Ogion, she finds herself able but unwilling to speak the language of wizardry: as a woman she feels uncomfortable stepping into this world that is powerful, masculine, yang.

At the end of The Farthest Shore²⁵, before reaching Selidor, Ged speaks to himself of his desire to leave the world of magic, to have done with the power that fosters but also restricts his learning:

Not in Havnor would I be, and not in Roke. It is time to be done with power. To drop the old toys, and go on. It is time that I went home. I would see Tenar ... It is time I went there, went in silence, went alone. And maybe there I would learn at last what no act, or power can teach me, what I have never learned. (T, 441)

Emptied of all ability for magic by his ordeal in the Dry Lands, Ged, in Tehanu, does return to Gont and to Tenar and there he does learn what his magery prevented him from learning before: what it means to be a man. For wizards, in order to have energy for their art, must remain celibate. Barricading their minds against sexual thoughts with spells, they redirect all their sexual energies into the needs of wizardry. As Moss puts it:

25. Le Guin, The Earthsea Trilogy, Penguin, London, 1979.

"What it is, the one's power's as great as the other, and each goes its own way. That's how I see it.

Tenar sat thinking, absorbed. At last she said, "They set themselves apart."

"Aye. A wizard has to do that." (T, 108)

Ged returns from Selidor a wizard no longer. But in expending his potential for wizardry, he frees his sexual potential from its former constraints. And so he needs to learn much that he was restricted from learning since the time he first accepted the path of wizardry. As Moss says: "It's a queer thing for an old man to be a boy of fifteen, no doubt" (T, 106).

Initially, Ged finds it difficult to cope with his loss of power. But with the help of Tenar he learns to yearn no longer for his former magical powers. He learns to be a man and no longer a wizard. At first he feels inadequate but he manages to establish for himself a sense of being competent and balanced as a man. Emasculated of his magic power, he is able to attain a more balanced masculinity. His coming to the aid of Tenar and Therru by physically attacking Therru's father, Hake, teaches him that he is not powerless without magic. And with Tenar he learns what he has gained from his loss of magic. Tenar says to him, "You were a man when I first saw you! It's not a weapon or a woman can make a man, or magery either, or any power, anything but himself" (T, 212). It is through losing power, through no longer being a wizard, that Ged is able to discover and come to acceptance of himself as a man.

Always Coming Home serves to criticise, by contrast to the Kesh, and by parallel to the Dayao, modern society. Many of the concerns of Tehanu are similarly pertinent to today's world. Tenar, being a woman, is unable to combat with magic that which she fears. The inability of Ged and Tenar to rely on magic has the effect of relating the book's concerns more directly to those of our society. When Master Windkey apologises to Tenar for having spoken to her as an ordinary woman, she replies: "My fears are ordinary fears." It is as an ordinary woman, unaided by magic, that she has to face her fears: fears of the reappearance of the men who abused

Therru, of the further withdrawal from society of Therru herself, and for her own security.

In confronting these fears, and in her interaction with Ged, Tenar learns a self-reliance that causes her to leave behind her her former life as subordinate within a patriarchal household. The return of her son, Spark, moves her to contrast her marriage to Flint, with its allocation of roles and tasks according to gender, to the co-operation and sharing she has known in her relationship with Ged. Leaving Spark her farm, she goes with Ged to find a life together that offers self-fulfilment and balance, away from the excessive masculinity and femininity each had previously been tied to. After having been saved from the mage Aspen by Therru and Kalessin, she and Ged decide to move with Tenar into Ogion's house. By the end of the book Tenar has found a possible answer to her question: "I think we can live here," she says (T, 252). In Tehanu, Le Guin's utopian imagination finds expression on a personal rather than a societal level. Central to the fulfilment of the individual, as with the society, is the finding of a balance between the masculine and feminine principles, the yin and the yang.

In contending with patriarchal structures, Le Guin does not choose to raze them to the ground (like Wittig's *guérillères*), or to appropriate them and occupy the premises (like Joanna in The Female Man); rather, she subverts them by ignoring them and developing opposing structures instead. As she expressed in her "Left-Handed Commencement Address", "Why should a free woman with a college education either fight Machoman or serve him? Why should she live her life on his terms?"²⁶

Choosing not to fight, Le Guin furthers the struggle for women's liberation in her own way, by reforming paradigms, by renovating ideologies, by redefining words -- and thereby the world. The redefinition of words upon which

26. In Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.116.

its structures are based usurps patriarchy's dominion.²⁷ By deciding to live outside of its bounds, one avoids the pressure of conforming under its dubious hospitality. In her "Bryn Mawr Commencement Address" Le Guin tells her audience:

But when you look at yourself in the mirror, I hope you see yourself. Not one of the myths. Not a failed man -- a person who can never succeeded because success is basically defined as being male -- and not a failed goddess, a person desperately trying to hide herself in the dummy Woman, the image of men's desires and fears.
(DEW, 158)

Le Guin's advice in the struggle against patriarchy is to say No. Not to men, but to the system itself, its definitions and rules and categorisations. Her utopian works, in the alternative worlds that they depict, dramatise this refusal. By showing women and men in non-discriminatory, non-hierarchical societies, they redefine "women" and "men". By depicting these women and men leading lives of fulfilment, without the incentive of money, fame or power, they redefine success. By looking backwards instead of only forwards, seeking answers in the past as well as the future, in a sensibility rather than technology, they redefine, or at least refine, utopia too.

27. Even genres appropriated historically in this way by patriarchy can be retrieved. As Le Guin writes in her essay "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction":

If, however, one avoids the linear, progressive, Time's-(killing)-arrow mode of the Techno-Heroic, and redefines technology and science as primarily cultural carrier bag rather than weapon of domination, one pleasant side effect is that science fiction can be seen as a far less rigid, narrow field, not necessarily Promethean or apocalyptic at all, and in fact less a mythological genre than a realistic one. (In Dancing at the Edge of the World, p.170).

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