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Inclusion and Exclusion in Some Feminist Utopian Fictions

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INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN SOME FEMINIST UTOPIAN FICTIONS

KAREN F. STEIN

"By definition, utopia hinges on [contradiction and] paradox: it is a vision of a better world, but one that does not exist" (Stein, *Utopianism* 409).¹ Utopian fictions (like their counterparts in society, intentional communities) seek to create places of harmony and well-being. Peter Ruppert asserts

Utopias set out to challenge existing social values, to undermine existing norms, to transform existing social beliefs. They engage us in a dialogue between social fact and utopian dream. What initiates this dialogue is the recognition of contradictions and disparities: the non-coincidence between social reality and utopian possibility, the incongruity between "what is" and "what might be" or "what ought to be," the discrepancy between history and utopia (5).

According to Robert C. Elliott "Utopia necessarily wears a Janus-face. The portrayal of an ideal commonwealth has a double function: it establishes a standard, a goal; and by virtue of its existence alone it casts a critical light on society as presently constituted" (22).

Both the idea of utopia and the fictions that portray it are replete with paradoxes. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), the text that coined the term for this fictional genre, builds upon the contradictions inherent in its very name which may mean both eutopia (the good place) and outopia (no place). And, of course, one person's good place may be another's dystopia (bad place). Gary Saul Morson writes that utopias set up oppositions of "fact and fiction, wakefulness and dream, sane and insane, history and poetry, practical and visionary" (quoted in Lewes 74). To these oppositions,

¹ Darko Suvin offers a definition: utopia is the verbal construction of particular quasi— human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis (132).

Darby Lewes notes that women's utopias add the contrast between public and private (Lewes 74).

Elliott points out that the literary genre of utopia is closely related to satire:

Satire and utopia are not really separable, the one a critique of the real world in the name of something better, the other a hopeful construction of the world that might be. The hope feeds the criticism, the criticism the hope. Writers of utopia have always known this: the one unanswerable argument for the utopian vision is a hard satirical look at the way things are today (24).

Elliott explains that the idea of utopia grew out of the Saturnalia, ancient Roman festivals that symbolized a return to the mythic Golden Age "the time when all men were equal and the good things of life were held in common" (10). These festivals overturned the usual order for "the theme of the Saturnalia is reversal – reversal of values, social roles, of social norms" (11). Thus, from its beginnings, the utopia enacts paradoxes and reversals of the status quo and of the expected standards of behavior.

Lincoln Allison defines what he terms "the utopian paradox": "if you want to effect a radical improvement in institutions you cannot do so without first improving people, but nor can you improve people without first transforming institutions. An important rider adds that therefore it is often the case that attempting improvement will make things worse."

Another paradox of utopia is that it is typically also a "uchronia," a place outside of time. It may resist history, or, in fact, any form of change. In Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1998) the founding fathers of the all-black town of Ruby seek to build a safe community where women are usefully occupied in home-making and protected from attack. Yet over time the community stagnates. New ideas are discouraged, the comfortable and secure homes become entrapping, and many of the women and the young people grow restless and disaffected. Patricia Best, the community's self-appointed chronicler, discovers that the lighter-skinned residents face a subtle discrimination, and their story is expunged from the annual pageant celebrating Ruby's founding. The nearby Convent where a group of abused and homeless women finds comradeship and healing together becomes an enticing lure for many of Ruby's citizens who come to buy the hot peppers grown in its garden, and to find companionship, herbal cures, or illicit sexual encounters. To the leading men of the town the Convent's free-wheeling women represent a threat of change and disorder. Soon a group of men from Ruby attack it; however, the Convent women appear to find their own (supernatural) forms of paradise at the book's conclusion.

Morrison's novel points to another aspect of utopias, the importance of place and of boundaries. Ruppert notes

ever since More described his island Utopia, boundaries, walls, trenches, moats, and a variety of other spatial and temporal barriers have been indispensable features on subsequent maps of utopia. The function of these barriers is, of course, to protect what is inside from outside influence and contamination (27).

Thus, outsiders cannot enter, but the insiders are insular and isolated. These boundaries

like almost everything else about utopia, [are] twofold: seen from the inside, they function to keep disorder and chaos out; seen from the outside, they function to keep docile and unknowing inhabitants within and can be read as an unambiguous sign of utopia's desire to escape the uncertainties and contingencies of time and history (Ruppert 27).

Morrison explains that she wrote *Paradise* to explore "why Paradise necessitates exclusion" (Reames 21). She continues: "the isolation, the separateness, is always a part of any utopia. . . . But, in addition to that, it's based on the notion of exclusivity. All paradises, all utopias are designed by who is not there, by the people who are not allowed in" (Reames 21).

This exclusion/ inclusion is another of the many paradoxes of utopia. Who gets to stay in utopia and who is left out or exiled? The list of the excluded is long. In the first utopia, the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are exiled for disobedience to a rule the importance of which they probably don't fully understand. Plato's *Republic* banishes poets from his ideal society, because they threaten the hegemony of the rulers. Poetry "encourages habits of thought and feeling contrary to those the Republic deems desirable," and thus subverts the order of the Republic (Philmus 64).

The parable-like short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" by Ursula K. LeGuin illustrates the exclusionary nature of utopia. The narrative postulates a seemingly perfect society that is predicated on the exclusion of one unfortunate scapegoat, a child who must suffer severe deprivation and maltreatment in order for the utopia to thrive. The residents are aware of the child's misery, and, in response to its degradation, some of them leave.

A recent novel, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) carries exclusion to an extreme. The trickster-scientist Crake proposes to create a worldwide utopia whose inhabitants are an improvement over the present world's imperfect people. To that end he recombines genes to engineer a

race of humanoids who lack many of the traits and emotions he perceives as dangerous flaws of humanity such as jealousy, greed, possessiveness, and symbol-making. He explains that these negative traits of the "primate brain" are rendering earth uninhabitable because they lead to wars, overpopulation, and overuse of natural resources. He hopes that because his "Paradise models" lack these problematic features they will be content to live in unchanging harmony with the earth and its creatures (and each other). However, in order to eliminate the "primate brain," Crake produces and disseminates a lethal hemorrhagic virus that obliterates almost all people. Thus, his intended global utopia has no room for humans on planet earth.

A somewhat less drastic exclusion is the removal of men from same-sex utopias by women writers. Dana R. Shugar lists twenty-five such fictions written in English between 1881 and 1988, thirteen of them written or re-issued during a time of feminist activism, from 1975 to 1980. An outlier, Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall*, was written in 1762 and reissued in 1986. (Shugar 210). This paper will examine exclusion and inclusion in five feminist utopian fictions popular in the U.S. in the late 1970s and 1980s: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (published serially in the journal *The Forerunner* in 1915 and first printed in book form in 1979), Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (1979), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), Suzy McKee Charnas's *Motherlines* (1978), and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). These books appeared (or, in Gilman's case reappeared) and gained a wide readership in tandem with the second wave of feminism, a time of social critique and political activism. Utopian fictions frequently arise at such moments in response to what is perceived as their opposites, dystopian political conditions. Therefore, I shall read these novels in conjunction with the then-current feminist critiques of American society. Issues that are particularly salient in these works include relationships among women, family, motherhood, reproduction and childcare, and (implicitly or explicitly) the problems with male-female relationships.

For North American feminists during both the first wave of the women's rights movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and the second wave of activism from the mid-1960s through the 1990s, the dystopian political conditions against which they wrote were the patriarchal organization of society and women's second-class status. As Thomas Moylan explains

the critical utopian text can be a valuable part of the opposition to the prevailing system: the text is not important for its practical blueprints of actual alternative society, but rather as it provides pre-conceptual images

that are generated out of opposition to what is. The unresolved problems in the text, the tensions and absences in the text, become an important part of the oppositional ideology (Moylan 163).

Of course, the absence of men in these fictions is part of that feminist oppositional ideology, the critique of a patriarchal system that distorted heterosexual relationships and oppressed both women and men. Because men are absent, child-bearing and child-rearing must assume new forms as authors invent new social structures that will replace the patriarchal nuclear family and new forms of behavior that will allow women to develop to their full potential.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935)

Gilman lived during a time of "great intellectual speculation and creativity in American thought" (Lane 10). She edited a journal, *The Forerunner*, wrote and lectured prolifically on the economic and political status of women during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the period (then called the woman's rights movement) now known as the first wave of the feminist movement, when women were seeking the rights to own property, to vote, and to be their own persons rather than the property of their husbands. Gilman wrote three utopian/dystopian narratives which exemplify in fiction the feminist (or, as she termed it, humanist) / socialist theories expressed in her non-fictional works, chiefly *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* and *The Home: Its Work and Influence*. The subtitle of *Women and Economics* points to Gilman's argument that women's economic dependence on men exaggerates the differences between the sexes, causing women to become more conventionally "feminine" and men to stress their "masculine" traits. *The Home* describes many of the issues that Adrienne Rich will later take up in her discussion of motherhood. According to Gilman, because women take on a variety of household jobs (cooking, sewing, cleaning, nursing, childcare, and so forth) without special training, they are exhausted, and their energies are fragmented. In the privacy of their homes women carry out alone functions that are better done on a larger scale by trained specialists. To solve this problem she advocates housing built with private small apartments, communal kitchens and dining rooms, and childcare centers. In these places specialists who are gifted in certain skills and trained for their professional roles will perform more efficiently many of the duties now undertaken by the overburdened housewives. Summarizing the tenets put

forward in *The Home*, Ann J. Lane terms it a "witty and wicked book" (264).

Each of Gilman's fictional utopias / dystopias consists largely of dialog between a visitor and a resident of utopia. Each has a male narrator

for dramatic and satirical reasons [and to] . . . expose contemporary myths and errors as her narrators express the values and views of patriarchy and are proven wrong by their utopian experiences and acquaintances. . . .The male narrators' mistaken notions are popped like so many balloons by the superior wisdom of utopia (Doskow 27).

Gilman's first utopian narrative, *Moving the Mountain* (1911), describes a socialist utopia of both women and men that developed over a thirty-year period almost without a struggle when "women woke up" to the issues and to their own power to initiate social change. Once awake, they set in place in the U.S. the institutions that re-shape civil society and become models for other countries to follow. Like many utopian fictions, the novel is thinly plotted. The narrative unfolds as John Robertson recounts conversations with his family about the changes that have transformed the country during the thirty years while he was lost in Tibet. His sister, Nellie Robertson, a college president, is married but (unusual in that time period) keeps her birth name. In line with Gilman's thesis in *Women and Economics* that economic dependence leads women to overemphasize their femininity, John, the unreconstructed traditional man, expects more typically feminine behavior from his sister. He is surprised to observe that Nellie's independence allows her to be "brisk, firm assured . . . somehow like – almost a man. . . . Not mannish; but she takes things so easily—as if she owned them" (42). John's skepticism about the social transformations provides the book's slight dramatic tension as he hears about the new arrangements for childcare and the solutions to poverty and crime. When he learns that women convinced men to give up such traditionally masculine practices as smoking, heavy drinking, and hunting he asks Nellie if "you women are trying to make men over to suit yourselves?" (93). She replies "Yes. Why not? Didn't you make women to suit yourselves for several thousand years?" (93). John insists that there must be some men who resist these changes. And, yes, there have been. These are the people who are excluded from the new society. Nellie explains "we dealt very thoroughly with them. . . . Hopeless degenerates were promptly and mercifully removed. . . . Perverts were incapacitated for parentage and placed where they could do no harm. . . . Many proved curable, and were cured" (98). These few euphemistic sentences are all Nellie reveals about the fate of these undesirables. How did the utopia deal with the

"degenerates" and "perverts?" We later learn from another informant: "We killed many hopeless degenerates, insane, idiots and real perverts, after trying our best powers of cure" (136). This, of course, raises a serious ethical issue we will encounter repeatedly in utopias: who is excluded and why? What happens to those who do not conform to the standards and behavioral expectations of the utopian society? How do women living in a single-sex society get rid of the men? Violence and war are surprisingly frequent in the utopias discussed here, although they are usually the background context and not central to the plot.²

Gilman removed men entirely from her second utopia, *Herland*, the most novel-like of the three narratives. Perhaps she realized that this would allow her to show new possibilities for women in a way that she could not in *Moving the Mountain* where Nellie Robertson, the college president, is never shown at work, but appears only as one of her brother's informants. Nevertheless, the story of *Herland* unfolds through the perspective of a male visitor (in contrast to the four novels by the other writers whose focalizing characters are women). Thus, the story becomes one of contrasting gendered expectations as the men from the U.S. engage with the women of a secluded single-sex utopia.

Three male explorers—the narrator Vandyck (Van) and his friends Jeff and Terry—set the plot in motion by arriving at the isolated country now occupied entirely by women. Marveling at the beautifully appointed countryside, the well-maintained forests, and the conveniently laid out towns, the explorers are certain that there must be men to accomplish such results, but they are wrong.

Here again, the independent women confound the three explorers' expectations of "femininity." The Herlanders have short hair, and are dressed

² Single sex utopias frequently explain their origins as reactions to male violence, either against women or among themselves. In *Houston, Houston, Do You Read* by James Tiptree, Jr. (a pseudonym of Alice Sheldon) the women of the future reluctantly kill the three remaining twentieth-century men, because "we simply have no facilities for people with your emotional problems," i.e. masculine traits such as violence and sexual aggressiveness (147). Their assumption appears to be that these negative traits are genetically inherent, not amenable to change through education or socialization in the future women-based society. Sometimes, as in *The Female Man*, there are actually battles between the sexes. However, the violence is usually external to the main action, and, as Joanna Russ explains, its "emotional consequences" are explored, and it is never "presented as adventure or sport" as is frequently the case in science fiction or crime fiction (Russ Recent 76).

comfortably in simple clothing that permits them to move freely, in sharp contrast to the crinolined, corseted American and British women of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, the first women our explorers meet are foresters, climbing trees, and evading capture by the intruders. The women of Herland react to the explorers differently than the men are used to: "They don't seem to notice our being men . . . They treat us . . . just as they do one another. It's as if our being men was a minor incident" (174). When the men give the women jewelry the recipients place the trinkets in museums.

The Herlanders are quite interested in motherhood, and in the possibilities of adding new genetic material to their society, but they appear to have no interest in personal experiences of sexuality, either among themselves or with the men.

By virtue of their superb educational system the women here are athletic, self-confident, intelligent, even-tempered, wise, and independent. They greatly value sisterhood and public service. After subduing the male intruders the women keep them under guard while they educate them about Herland and learn from the men about the world beyond Herland, which they imagine must be even more wonderful due to the presence of two sexes. This allows Gilman much opportunity for satire, as the men reveal the real situation in their country, the U.S.

According to the history of Herland, the men met a violent end 2000 years before the novel begins. It appears that the men themselves incited the violence. Most of the men were away fighting in a war when a volcanic eruption caused a landslide that sealed off access to their hilltop country. As for those men who had remained at home, slaves "rose in revolt, killed their remaining masters even to the youngest boy . . . intending to take possession of the country with the remaining young women and girls" (194). To save themselves the young women "slew their brutal conquerors" (194). None of the boys born to pregnant women after this tragedy survived.

The loss of men seemed to doom them to extinction. In order to assure the continuation of their societies, separatist utopias must imagine unique methods of single-sex reproduction. Eventually one of the Herland women miraculously gave birth parthenogenetically to five girls in succession and all the women of Herland are her direct descendants. As the explorers discuss parthenogenesis their instructors ask them to explain what "virgin" means, as in "virgin birth." Zava asks if the term applies also to the male who has not mated (187). (Other words the Herlanders do not understand include competition and poverty.) Reproduction is triggered by a young woman's mystically intense longing to bear a child. But they have wisely

decided to limit population growth so as not to exhaust their country's resources. Thus women are restricted to one child each, except that certain particularly excellent mothers are permitted a second child.

Motherhood is a prominent value, spoken of with reverence and awe by the Herlanders. The children are nurtured and cared for by those who are specially skilled and trained to do so. But Gilman does not show us any of the young children or their living and schooling arrangements so it remains unclear whether they live with other children in dormitories, with their mothers in apartments, or in some other type of dwelling. Similarly we see little to demonstrate how the superb education actually occurs.

It must be difficult to tell the genetically identical women apart from each other, especially since they are all so healthy, athletic, and self-confident. Yet, despite their genetic likeness the explorers find more variation than seems possible. The Herlanders attribute this variation partly to "careful education, which followed each slight tendency to differ, and partly to the law of mutation" (212).

As in Gilman's treatise *Home*, women specialize in what they are best fitted and trained for. We meet foresters and teachers, but never see the other workers, the cooks, engineers, gardeners, automobile technicians, plant and animal breeders, carpenters, dress-makers, weavers, and so on. When Terry argues that women can't work together without quarreling, Jeff "dragged in the hymenoptera," using the analogy to prove that, like ants and bees, women are "natural co-operators" (204). Critic Graham J. Murphy also drags in the hymenoptera, arguing that Herland and other single-sex societies are like hives or anthills. He argues that the men who visit are made to serve as drones for purposes of reproduction.

One person's utopia is another's dystopia. Of the three explorers Van and Jeff are the most receptive and accepting of Herland and its women. Although Van leaves at the end of this novel, he returns with his Herland wife, Ellador, at the end of the sequel, *With Her in Ourland*. Jeff is sentimental and romantic, and he also marries a Herlander whom he "worships" (250). Terry, on the other hand, is more macho and expects more subservience from women. His relationship with Alima, his wife, is stormier. Terry chafes at the restrictions on cohabitation placed on them, and attempts to rape Alima. In consequence he is exiled.

Always wise and rational, the women of Herland are unwilling to admit men without further investigation of the social organizations men have produced in the world outside of their isolated single-sex homeland. Van leaves with his wife Ellador to escort the exiled Terry home, and to travel through "Manland" to show Ellador the world beyond the boundaries of her utopian enclave.

Gilman called herself a humanist rather than a feminist. Her aim in *Herland* was to depict a society where women could flourish and attain their potential as fully developed humans rather than as limited beings constrained by their dependence on men and their relegation to the burdensome obligations of the private home. This desire to explore the possible range of women's potential as humans remains a driving impulse beyond single-sex utopias.

But what are Gilman's views of men and masculinity? Although Terry represents one type of traditional, macho male, Gilman contrasts him with two gentler, more respectful men. Van explains that Terry appears normal as "a man among men," but looks quite different as "a man among women" in Herland. Gilman's theories explain that patriarchal social arrangements have trained Terry (like all men in patriarchal societies) to over- accentuate his masculine traits. Although in the sequel, *With Her in Ourland*, Ellador lays out a devastating critique of patriarchal institutions, she does not paint men in general as hostile or brutal, only as misguided, ignorant, even stupid. She hopes that the women of Herland will be able to teach them and thereby transform the world beyond their utopia. This portrayal of men contrasts with the men depicted in the other single-sex utopian fictions under consideration here. *With Her in Ourland* reverses the "visitor to utopia" genre by having the utopian Ellador from Herland visit "Ourland." In a kind of Socratic dialog Ellador very rationally, kindly, and with flashes of humor demonstrates the deficiencies of the patriarchal world. She analyzes religion, economics, immigration, the values and practice of democracy, and families. She explains how the patriarchal family is not "a pattern of all that is good and lovely [but instead a] . . . primitive social group, interfering with the development of later groups" (330). Noting that people wish to "preserve the sanctity of marriage" she asks "have they tried benzoate?" (341). She declares that there is "much mischief [because of] . . . too much father. . . . The dominance of him! . . . The egoism of him!" (334). She tells Van that "human misery is a joke—because you don't have to have it!" (330). When it comes to her analysis of economics, she points to the "bloodsuckers! . . . oil-suckers and coal-suckers . . . this splendid young country is crawling with them" (335-36). And the women, compelled to be "home-bound" and dependent on men, are forced to become "men-suckers" (336). She concludes "I would die childless rather than to bear a child in this world of yours" (381). So they return to Herland, where in time "a son was born to us" (387). What could his life as a lone male child in a country of women be like? Unfortunately Gilman did not write a sequel to answer this question.

Many of the issues Gilman addresses in her fiction and non-fiction remain problematic today. In the decade of second-wave feminism considered here scholars develop theories to analyze similar issues, activists carry out political campaigns to address them, and novelists formulate critiques in dystopias and single-sex utopias.

Second-wave Feminism

Second-wave feminism arose in conjunction with the Civil Rights Movement as women perceived themselves to be locked into subservient domestic roles and excluded from career opportunities and from policy-making positions. As depicted powerfully in the film *The Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter* the women who had previously been recruited to work in defense industries during World War II were now urged to remain at home to raise children and nurture their families. The tensions of the ensuing Cold War period spawned a mood of conservatism. It was a time when women faced limited life choices, and a version of "the cult of true womanhood" that extolled the value of domesticity held sway (see Cott and Welter). "The Good Wife's Guide"—purportedly an article in a magazine called *Housekeeping Monthly* from 13 May 1955—which circulated widely on the internet sums up exaggeratedly the expectations for wifely behavior. The article advises the woman who aspires to be a good wife to cook, clean, manage the children and the household, "never complain," and "remember he is the master of the house." While the article is almost certainly written much later as a parody, it does indicate the prevailing domestic ideology and the separate roles for women and men. Similar publications such as Helen Andelin's *Fascinating Womanhood* (1963) exhorted women to remain at home and yield to their husbands--for of course the men's jobs were more important than women's housekeeping (Snopes.com). Women's primary role was intended to be the home-maker, the nurturer, and the provider of childcare.

In response to the constraints women experienced, Betty Friedan conducted interviews with many women suffering from what she termed "the problem that has no name," and analyzed a growing malaise among them in her book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). The book pointed out women's dissatisfaction with their limited roles and inferior social and economic status. For the feminists of the second wave, equality, workplace parity, sexuality, and reproductive rights are key foci.

Motherhood and its discontents are also important aspects of the second wave feminist agenda. Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1977) speaks of the problems

women face when they are the only parent responsible for the care of the home and the children. Dorothy Dinnerstein's *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (1976) argues from psychoanalytic theories of child development that misogyny, aggressiveness, and other human failings arise from the fact that only women are the primary caretakers of young children. She urges men to become more nurturing and to participate in rearing their children. More radically, Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1971) points to child-bearing and childcare as the source of women's second-class status, and urges the separation of sexuality and reproduction. Firestone wrote:

Just as the end goal of socialist revolution was not only the elimination of the economic class privilege but of the economic class distinction itself . . . so the end goal of feminist revolution must be . . . not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally (Firestone quoted in Fox).

At this time women's organizations such as NOW (National Organization of Women) began to advocate for affordable and reliable day care for children so that women could work outside the home. To redress the gendered imbalances and to alleviate the constraints under which women suffered, utopian fictions of this time often dismantle the nuclear patriarchal family and imagine worlds without men.

**Suzy McKee Charnas, *Walk to the End of the World* (1974)
and *Motherlines* (1978)**

Motherlines depicts a group of nomadic Plains women who live in a harsh environment. They disrupt the stereotypes of femininity as they tame and ride horses, form allies and enemies, raid each other's camps to steal horses, love and hate each other, fight, fuss, and feud. Charnas's previous book, *Walk to the End of the World* introduces the Holdfast society from which the women have escaped. The Holdfast is strictly hierarchical: older men dominate the younger; food and other resources are scarce. Holdfast men are brutal and macho. They enslave women to perform the difficult labor of the society and to breed children. The children are kept in "kit pits" where only the toughest survive until they are old enough to be trained by men for their lives of hard work and subservience.

Charnas introduced a woman, Alldera, into the novel when she thought: "there has got to be a woman in here someplace or things are going to look awfully lopsided" (Charnas *A Woman Appeared* 103).

While she wrote more of the novel Charnas began to read feminist theorists—especially Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1971), and Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (1970)—and to participate in consciousness-raising groups. As Charnas tuned in to feminist ideas she reshaped her novel. Alldera's story began to emerge and the plot changed. "The book ended up being about sexism carried to a logical extreme, and it suggests . . . the inherent destructiveness of any society in which one portion of the population enslaves and dehumanizes another" (*A Woman Appeared* 104). Charnas explains that excluding males from her next book gave her room to create women characters with the full range of human behaviors, rather than the restricted roles assigned to women in patriarchal societies:

With the spectrum of human behavior in my story no longer split into male roles (everything active, intelligent, brave and muscular) and female roles (everything passive, intuitive, shrinking and soft), my emerging women had natural access to the entire range of human behavior. They acted new roles appropriate to social relationships among a society of equals, which allowed them to behave simply as human beings—tenderly, aggressively, nurturingly, intellectually, intuitively, whatever suited a given individual in a given situation (*A Woman Appeared* 106 – 107).

Alldera survives her life as a slave in the patriarchal Holdfast society and escapes to find two groups of women, the free fems and the Riding Women, who have likewise escaped. The fems worry that they will not be able to have offspring and try to make themselves fertile through herbal douches. The Riding Women have been genetically engineered by male experimenters so that they can have children through the addition of a special fluid. Now that they have left the world of men, they obtain the required fluid by mating—usually successfully—with the male horses they raise (much to the horror of the fems, who call the Riding Women mares). These women have the full complement of genetic material, so their children are genetically identical to them and do not contain horse genes. Thus, the "motherlines" are the generations of children born of the original mothers.

They welcome Alldera, who is pregnant through rape by a Holdfast man, because she can add a new, genetically different, line. They place her in a semi-conscious state and nurse her while she is in a half-sleep. A group of co-mothers lactate and raise her infant daughter until she is ready to enter the "childpack," and they believe that after being suitably trained she will be able to mate with the horses as they do.

Child-rearing in this group is markedly different from the careful nurturance given the girls of the other utopias discussed here. The children in the childpack generally run wild. When the girls start to menstruate they are ousted from the pack and take their place among the women who clean them and educate them in the ways of their tribe. The two groups of free women each feel superior to the other. The fems hope to return to the Holdfast, overcome the men and free any remaining women. The Riding Women have prevented the fems from carrying out their plan because they realize that the fems have few martial skills and because they do not want men to know about their existence outside the Holdfast. But Alldera acts as an intermediary who helps the two groups to intermingle and grow to respect each other. The fems learn to ride horses and become more skilled in the martial games the Riding Women play. Thus, in her next novel, *The Furies* (1994) the fems sneak off and, aided by freed female slaves and a few Riding Women who have tracked them, defeat the Holdfast men.

Sally Miller Gearhart, *The Wanderground* (1979)

This book, a series of linked short stories with various protagonists, recounts the tales of the hill women who escape a brutal heterosexual society and live in enclaves outside of the cities. The men are so dangerous and brutally oppressive that nature herself comes to the rescue; the men become impotent and all machines stop working outside of the cities. Here again the women reproduce parthenogenetically through a kind of mystical ecstasy, as in *Herland*. Children are instructed in skills such as mind-melding (connecting telepathically with other women and with animals) and wind riding (flying). The "remember rooms" contain virtual representations of women's lives in the cities before they escaped.

There are two groups of men who remain in the cities: the majority of brutal, macho, patriarchal men, and a small group of "gentles," men who repudiate heterosexuality and brutality and who cooperate secretly with the hill women. Nevertheless, many of the hill women remain distrustful of the gentles, and believe that "men and women cannot yet, may not ever, love one another without violence; they are no longer of the same species" (115).

Peter Fitting argues that "the absence of men [in single-sex utopias] functions not as a call for a world without men, but as a metaphor for the elimination of male [patriarchal] values" (For Men Only 102). Thus he claims that stories lacking positive male characters carry that message more forcefully. He believes that male readers may identify with the

"gentles" in Gearhart's book, and fail to appreciate the necessity of reading "beyond gender" (104).

Joanna Russ *The Female Man* (1975)

Russ's novel utilizes time travel as it relates the interactions among four women who represent possible alternate selves; they are genetically identical but shaped differently by their cultures. Jeannine, a librarian living in a version of the 1960s when the Depression continues and World War II never happened, struggles with the demands of femininity and feels pressured to marry. Joanna is the self in the novel's present who travels backward and forward in time, and becomes the female man. Two visitors arrive from two different time periods of the future Whileaway. Janet Evason's Whileaway is a peaceful single-sex agrarian society that uses highly advanced technology for difficult work. Jael is an assassin who comes from an earlier and bleaker future in Whileaway.

The women express their sexuality in different forms. Jeannine engages in heterosexual sex, but without much pleasure. Women of Janet's time have many lovers, and reproduce by means of merging ova. Their sexual taboos proscribe inter-generational sex. In Jael's time men and women are separated into different societies. In one scene Jael engages in graphically described love-making with Davy (who may be a lobotomized young man or an android) who performs sexual and household services for her.

Janet explains that a plague wiped out men in Whileaway. Jael takes credit for the "plague" and explains that in fact women killed the men in a 40-year struggle, a war between the segregated societies of Manland and Womanland, thus making Janet's peaceful country possible. Jael seeks the help of the other three in setting up bases to prepare for her war. Janet refuses; the other two accept.

Meanwhile, Joanna becomes the eponymous "female man:"

To resolve contrariedades, unite them in your own person. . . . Well, I turned into a man. . . . If we are all Mankind, it follows that I too am a Man and not at all a Woman, for honestly now, whoever heard of Java Woman and existential Woman and the values of Western Woman? (138 – 140).

Let's review some of the issues raised by single sex societies. Does eliminating men from these communities suggest that men and women cannot coexist successfully, as the women in *Wanderground* fear? Is it ethical to exclude men when feminists are asking for equality and advocating for their wider inclusion in the public sphere? Does eliminating

men simply reverse roles, making men the shunned "other" and thus change one undesirable situation for another? Does the need to imagine new forms of single-sex reproduction push these utopias into the genre of science fiction and thereby render them less valued as literature, less believable, or less possible to achieve? Must utopian visions always be exclusionary?

In contrast to these single-sex fictions Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* works to be inclusive, admitting men, but changing them in the process.

Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976)

One of the ironies of single-sex societies is that feminists—who argued for their inclusion in the rights, privileges and responsibilities of society—would find it necessary to exclude men from their utopias in order to achieve the freedom they sought. Of the group of feminist utopian fictions discussed in this paper only Gilman's *Moving the Mountain* and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), admit men to the utopian community. But in both of these utopias it is necessary "to make men over" as more sensitive and nurturing people so that they fit into the communal society.

This novel also (like *The Female Man*) features time travel as Consuela (Connie) Ramos, a Chicana woman living in New York City, travels to two vastly different possible futures, the utopian communal Mattapoissett and a hostile future world. Connie's life reveals the hardships of a poor woman of color in a patriarchal classist society. Her successive husbands and lovers have died from disease, been imprisoned, or been victims of random street killing. She ekes out a living from menial jobs and welfare. Her young daughter is taken from her by social workers. When she strikes her niece's abusive pimp he has her committed to a mental hospital where she becomes a subject of an experiment to control inmates' emotions and behavior through brain implants. Luciente, a native of the utopian future Mattapoissett, makes contact with Connie in an urgent attempt to enlist her in the fight to insure that her future will take place.³ Because Luciente is "well muscled for a woman," Connie assumes she is a "dyke." Indeed, Luciente is bisexual, as are many of the inhabitants of her utopian world. "Luciente spoke, she moved with that air of brisk

³ Some readers argue that Connie's time-travels are really hallucinations. I accept the novel's version that time-travel occurs. I suspect readers would be more amenable to the idea of time-travel if Connie were not institutionalized

unselfconscious authority Connie associated with men. Luciente sat down, taking up more space than women ever did. She squatted, she sprawled, she strolled, never thinking about how her body was displayed" (61). Mattapoissett is an inclusionary society, but it does maintain the death penalty for repeat killers, as the citizens do not want to have to squander resources on policing and imprisoning people. Their society is peaceful, and Mattapoissett encourages its members to solve conflicts through mediation. Yet they are involved in a war with hostile enemies, and they know that another type of future may preclude their existence.

When Connie enters an alternative future by mistake at one point, we realize how dangerous it may be. The world she visits is governed by corporations who police their subjects by mind control, drugs, and machine-like androids. Ordinary women are surgically enhanced to accentuate their sexuality, and contracted as sexual servants to higher ranking men. The "richies" live on space platforms and replace any ailing body parts with organs and parts harvested from the rank and file people living on the polluted earth below.

In contrast, the citizens of Mattapoissett have spent considerable effort in their inclusionary project of encouraging diversity, preventing sexism, ageism, classism, and racism, and allowing men to participate. Peter Fitting (like Lincoln Allison) argues

the imagining of an alternative future must address the question of how to collectively create the consciousness and identities of men and women for that society and not simply the larger social and economic structures, which would make such people possible (Mothers 170).

The people of this future have worked to create such consciousness. Jackrabbit explains to Connie: "we tried to learn from cultures that deal well with handling conflict, promoting cooperation, coming-of-age, growing a sense of community, getting sick, aging, going mad, dying" (119). As in *The Wanderground* and *Herland* young people are trained in meditation, and forms of mind control. They strive to be inclusive of older people and of ethnic and racial diversity. Each of the local communities chooses an ethnic flavor. Mattapoissett derives its culture from Wampanoag native Americans; a nearby village has an Ashkenazi Jewish "flavor," another is Harlem – Black. They "mix the genes well through the population. . . . But we broke the bond between genes and culture. . . . We want there to be no chance of racism again. But we don't want the melting pot. . . . We want diversity, for strangeness breeds richness" (96 – 97). Their educational system strives to imbue all community members with values of caring and nurturance. The elderly are seen as the best educators

for young people, and the aged are treated with reverence and respect. The novel presents many scenes from daily life, children working with adults as they learn and work together, festivals and feasts, and rituals surrounding death and dying. Connie wonders why they are still faced with problems of sickness and death. Luciente explains: "Some problems you *solve* only if you stop being human, become metal, plastic, robot computer," rather like the people in the dystopic future Connie visits (118, italics in original).

Most striking is their system of reproduction and childcare. They have broken the nuclear family as well. Groups of three people (including at least one man and one woman) who are not in intimate relationships with each other ("sweet friends") request to become co-mothers and to raise a child together. Men who wish to become parents take hormones that allow them to lactate, the computer selects a genetic code for the new infant, and babies are grown in a "brooder." Women have given up the privilege of birthing children, in order to share power equally.

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. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender. So we all became mothers. Every child has three. To break the nuclear bonding (98).

Piercy's divorce of sex and child-bearing here echoes the ideas of Shulamith Firestone.

In the utopian future Ms. Firestone envisioned, reproduction would be utterly divorced from sex: conception would be accomplished through artificial insemination, with gestation taking place outside the body in an artificial womb. While some critics found her proposals visionary, others deemed them quixotic at best (Fox, New York Times).

The language of Piercy's utopia has been re-shaped to remove sexism. There are no male or female pronouns; the single personal pronoun is "person," as in "person must not do what person cannot do." Luciente's child Dawn does not know the meaning of the word "daughter" (93). Luciente's communal society sounds rather like an Israeli kibbutz, a form of social organization that is on the wane.

Connie is increasingly frightened of the potential for loss of her identity through the hospital's experiments. In the face of such likely harm, she is empowered by her visits to Mattapoisett. Taking dramatic and

daring action to save herself and her fellow institutionalized inmates from the mind control experiments and to help make the utopian future more likely, she poisons the doctors who would render her passive and docile.

Conclusion

Joanna Russ notes the ways that these utopian fictions are critiques of the society in which they were written:

The stories' classlessness obviously comments on the insecurity, competitiveness, and poverty of a class society. Their relative peacefulness and lack of national war goes hand-in-hand with the acceptance of *some* violence – specifically that necessary for self-defense and the expression of anger, both of which are rare luxuries for women today. The utopias' sexual permissiveness and joyfulness is a poignant comment on the conditions of sexuality for women: unfriendly, coercive, simply absent, or at best reactive rather than initiating. . . . The emphasis on freedom in work in the public world reflects the restrictions that bar women from vast areas of work and experience (Recent 82).

Most of the issues treated in these utopian fictions—social, economic and political equality, reproductive rights and practices, sexual identities, violence, environmentalism and environmental justice—remain problematic. However, as feminism evolves, its theories have become more complex, taking into consideration issues of globalization, ecology, environmentalism, sexual preference and sexual mores, and others. Whereas feminism of the 1970s and 1980s often viewed "woman" and "man" as unitary categories, today there is greater concern for the subject positions of individual women and men as they are informed by class, race, age, education, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The impulse to write utopias seems to be correlated with a time of activism and optimism, seemingly lacking in the present climate of cynicism. If a feminist were to write contemporary utopian fiction, what might it look like? I look forward to reading more of these stories.

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