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# The Arts in Utopian Literature: their Functions and Forms.

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# INTRODUCTION

This thesis originates from the desire to investigate the role of the arts in some utopian novels pertaining to different epochs of Western history. When I started to think about the functions and forms of the arts in utopia I admit I had some preconceptions; I believed that art in utopia had to be merely moral and didactic. I was also persuaded that in a utopian society the arts, being manifest signs of inequality, should have no importance. What follows proves I was wrong, at least partially.

The role of the arts in utopia is not a subject that can be easily situated in the utopian thematic scenery. Yet the arts are fundamental as they deal with society, with its customs and traditions. I asked myself about the influence of the aesthetic research, beauty and the arts in a genre, that of utopian novels, which is the political literary genre par excellence.

The utopian society is by its very nature committed to order and production and the question regarding the role of the arts in it raised almost spontaneously. I wanted to investigate whether or not the utopian society is an aesthetic society, what are the arts involved in the rendering of the aesthetic project, what are the functions, if they exist, of the arts in utopia.

I soon discovered, as one might expect, that in utopia there is neither place for famous artists nor for important works of art; utopian writers, being committed with perfection and beauty, perhaps thought that the perfect work of art cannot exist. This is also partially true as the concept of beauty in utopia, being extended to every aspect of human life, results in a new and wider definition of the word *art* as I shall discuss in this theses.

If on the one hand it is hardly possible to appreciate masterpieces or meet great artistic personalities, on the other hand a few exceptions exist. Yet the arts are everything but unimportant; they partake in questioning the inner nature of utopia.

Utopia's goal is certainly not to abolish all works of art or to dismantle human creativity. However, its purpose is to secure the use of art to the advantage of all the inhabitants of utopia. As a result the creation and fruition of the arts in utopia is a collective experience.

The whole community benefits from the aesthetic domain of art; beauty in utopia moves from the private sphere of the house to the public sphere of the streets and the buildings, where everybody can benefit from its presence, thus the arts in utopia are subordinated to the well-being of the community.

Beauty is part of the utopian project being the authentic demonstration of the peacefulness of society. Especially as regards the utopian novels based on a declared socialist ideology, the arts contribute to the rendering of an "aesthetics for the masses".[1]

The utopian writers write, by definition, from dissatisfaction with contemporary economic and social conditions and the core reason of their discontent is the unfair distribution of wealth. They are deeply persuaded that it is possible to put an end to the evils of present day society and, believing in the perfectibility of human nature, they are also convinced that there is always room for enhancement. What I suggest here is that the arts not only exist in the utopian dream, but also that while working within different levels, they actively contribute to the creation of the utopian project.

This being said, there are various and significant differences as regards the types of art employed, the degree in which they are present and the purpose they fulfill. The applied arts and the fine arts are present in different degrees and mirror the authors' engagement in the social and artistic movements of their time.

This study promptly and duly opens with Thomas More's *Utopia*, the writer who coined the neologism of utopia. In chapter one I discuss Thomas More's interest in music within the frame of his *eu-topian* society.

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[1] Paola Spinozzi, "Art and Aesthetics in Utopia: William Morris's Response to the Challenge of the "Art to People" in (ed.) Fàtima Vieira and Marinela Freitas, *Utopia Matters, Theory, Politics, Literature and the Arts*, Porto: Univesidade do Porto, 2005, p. 230.

Music is considered the highest art and utopians are exquisite musicians. However, More considers the creative process dangerous as it deals with imagination while disconnecting the individual from his duties. In *Utopia* a few artists are considered, yet they are mainly engaged in the decoration of the public areas and buildings.

Chapter two describes a women's paradise as seen from the eyes of a man. Charles Brockden Brown is considered the first professional man of letters in the United States; *Alcuin: a dialogue* (1798) is his first published work. The book, a feminist utopian novel written by a man, of course deals with feminist issues (marriage and the nature versus culture debate) as well as education, work and politics. The general atmosphere of harmony that characterizes "the paradise of women" as depicted by Alcuin can be mirrored in the architecture of this ideal city. The description of the architecture is evocative of The Greek Revival Style. In this chapter I discuss the above statements linked to architecture as well as the utopians' impossibility to detach issues of beauty from utility.

Chapter three and four aim at reflecting on two mayor utopian novels belonging to the last two decades of the nineteenth century; Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000-1887* published in Boston in 1888 and William Morris's *News from Nowhere,* first published in serial form in the English socialist review *Commonweal* in 1890.

Within Bellamy's disturbing vision of a world run by the Industrial Army I explore the presence and importance of the arts. In Bellamy's imagined utopia men and women live their lives separately and the economic progress is the main engine of social growth. Bellamy is fascinated with technology and art within the novel is mainly subordinated to it. He invents a futuristic music device that permits a democratic access to music for all; through a complex system of cable connections people can hear from their own houses a variety of distinct music programs. Music is clearly the principal and most

appreciated among the arts. Yet some artists exist, as well as schools where people are trained to become musicians and artists.

In Bellamy's utopia artists are required to satisfy first and foremost the public taste (as their artistic life depends on public approval) to the detriment of their own skills. My discussion confirms the idea that in the Boston of the future, the creation of potboilers is more than a concrete possibility. This unemotional and static approach towards the process of art making stands in deep contrast with William Morris's view of the importance of the arts in the lives of people as well as his creation of the figure of the artist craftsman. Morris wrote his masterpiece in response to *Looking Backward* and the reason for his discontent is based upon a intrinsically different way of perceiving the world.

In chapter four, I argue that Morris's socialist aestheticism evokes an art made by the people and for the people. In *News from Nowhere* Morris abolishes the bourgeois concept of art; in his work art ceases to be detached from life and rises to another level; art is present in every single aspect of human activity. Morris suggests a new notion of Art, which he defines as "popular". He constantly compares what he defines as "popular art" to the degeneration of the arts in Victorian society. As Vita Fortunati argues, the word "popular" indicates three new aspects of art; first it deals with the abolition of differences between major and minor arts (and as a consequence the abolition of the figure of the artist as a "genius" which stands in profound opposition with the artist-artisan who interprets the community wishes). Second, the making of art is not a privileged activity as everyone can be an artist, the "art of work pleasure" is the main art in *News From Nowhere*. Finally, art is popular as everyone can benefit from it. Art is a popular privilege as it is now completely detached from "individualist" art.[2] Morris's imagined society is non competitive as there are no differences among people, yet astonishingly the arts flourish despite the complete

[2] Vita Fortunati, "Utopia e Romance in *News From Nowhere* di W. Morris", in Vita Fortunati, *La letteratura utopica ingese. Morfologia e grammatica di un genere letterario*, Ravenna: Longo, 1979, p. 145.

absence of social conflicts. Morris believes in the importance to alternate work with rest, yet he values rest and considers it a pivotal moment for the contemplation of the accomplished artistic oeuvre. As discussed in the chapter, Morris's genuine faith in people's artistic abilities and potentials is extraordinary. Yet we are left with the doubt of whether such a socialist culture could really produce a society crowded with people that we would nowadays call "geniuses" or if instead such an artsy society could just belong to the genius of Morris's inventiveness.

The fifth Chapter is dedicated to Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In this chapter both her fiction and her non-fiction works are considered. In addition to reflecting upon her life-long effort, shared with other material feminists, to reform architecture, I engage in an analysis of the place of the arts within the political frame of her writing. Gilman, being a fervent advocate of the equality among the sexes, in her non-fiction work denounces the repercussions upon art of a solely masculine expression. In her utopian imagined world she further develops the above assumption and envisions an all female society, *Herland* (1915), where women sing to their children as "great artists" do. The longing for art in people is strictly related to the aesthetic atmosphere that surrounds almost every aspect of human life. This aesthetic drive is also significantly important in "A Woman's Utopia" (1907), a unfinished utopian novel where "the city mothers" have the duty to embellish and reform the architecture of the past.

The sixth chapter discusses *Walden Two* (1948) written by behavioural psychologist B.F. Skinner. The arts within the book are significantly important as they pursue a pedagogical function. The chapter discusses the link between applied behavioral modification and the flourishing of arts in the lives of people.

In Chapter seven "The arts in the critical utopia" four novels are grouped together; Ursula K. le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The*

*Dispossessed: An ambiguous Utopia* (1974), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976).

Tom Moylan, in his book of 1986, *Demand the Impossible* suggests the concept of critical utopia. The word "critical" is referred to both the utopian world and to reality. The writers of critical utopias explore the limitations of their present-day society as well as the limitations of the utopian societies they envision.

The first three novels belong to the science fiction realm, and precisely to feminist science fiction. I ventured to include these science fiction novels in my analysis mainly for two reasons. In the first place it has been argued that from a distant look science fiction deals mainly with the future, but from a closer look it deals more with the present than with the future, and this is the linking point to the utopian genre.[3] Besides, as Fredric Jameson points out, the science fiction narrative gives only the impression of describing the future as in practice its chronicles serve to describe and interpret the historical period in which the author is writing. Jameson compares this function with the utopian function and declares that the two forms are very similar.[4] Both the genres share an essential nature, they want to denounce present day society and present a better future. The second reason relies mainly in the contents of the three science fiction novels that I chose; *The Left Hand of Darkness* deals with an androgynous population and feminist scholars have for the above reason deemed it as utopian. Besides, the societies described in the novel are sometimes utopian. The protagonist, Genly Ai is sent to the "future world" of the Gethenians to arrange an open trade in goods, knowledge, and technologies but also in art and philosophies. What I have observed, however, is an astonishing detachment of the arts from any discourse upon beauty and the aesthetics.

Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* also displays a utopian drive, albeit "ambiguous" as its subtitle reminds us. Within the novel, the *possessed* world of Urras and the *dispossessed* world of Anarres are continuously

[3] Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, London: Methuen, 1986, p. 42.

[4] Fredric Jameson, "Progress Versus Utopia; or, Can We Imagine the Future?", *Science Fiction Studies*, 27 (July 1982), p. 153.

compared thanks to the protagonist's encounters with different architectures, objects and cultural happenings. My argument is that music and theater undermine the stability of utopia by introducing censorship among an almost *perfect* world; therefore, the imperfections of her ambiguous utopia are unveiled.

In Anarres, Le Guin's imagined anarchist utopia, people have almost no material possessions yet they refuse to waste them for both ethical and aesthetic reasons. However, despite Le Guin's equation of possession with alienation I suggest that Anaress remains a planet possessed by scarcity.

*The Female Man* (1975) written almost seven years before it was finally published depicts four different worlds inhabited by four women that communicate with each other in contrasting times and places. A small yet revealing portion of this novel deals with utopia, an all female world called Whileaway; here a famous public statue reminds people of the importance of feminism. In this chapter I argue that in addition to the strictly feminist and political essence of the oeuvre, Russ managed to convey a perfectly aesthetic utopia, where female virtues are combined with artistic drive. It is of great concern that mothering, the most important activity in Whileaway, is also the time devoted to the arts, to music and to literature. I suggest that the arts in Russ's utopia contribute to the enhancing of Whileaway as a symbol of equality and perfection thus merging her imaginative power with political engagement.

Marge Piercy published *Woman on the Edge of Time* in 1976. This outstanding novel of feminist literature is usually regarded as a classic in race and gender studies.

In this chapter I suggest a reading of the novel based on the interconnection between the arts (poems, artwork, holograms, music) and gender related issues. Through the adventures and misadventures of the protagonist Connie Ramos, a chicano woman imprisoned in a mental hospital, Piercy tells us about her idealized world. Her utopia works by constant references to the

*real* world, and the arts serve the purpose of enhancing every aspect of utopia.
In Mattapoisett the arts are dynamic, new, technological, ecological, and deeply aesthetic. I also suggest that feminist goals in the novel, as for example the separation from love or childrearing and issues of possession are achieved through the employment of aesthetic means.

In Chapter eight I discuss Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975). I explore the relationship existing between the artists and society as well as their responsibilities towards the ecotopian community.
Amid the ecological frame of the novel the arts represent a crucial factor for social advancement; detached from any monetary issues they nevertheless partake in the utopian plan. Interestingly enough, this ecological utopia is crowded with artists that find distasteful to be labeled as such.
Architecture is the most *ecological* among the arts, houses and buildings are designed by people (architects do not exist) usually following natural models.
Yet there is no difference between amateur and professionals, extreme faith in human abilities is mirrored also in other forms of art as music, which is largely discussed in the chapter.

The final chapter deals with Doris Lessing's *The Marriages between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980).
Here I investigate the relationship between the artist and the work of art.
Lusik, who is both a singer and the chronicler, narrates the story of the beautiful queen of Zone Three and her forced marriage to the king of Zone Four. He presents and interprets for the reader a large number of paintings and songs pertaining to the utopian land inhabited by the queen and the dystopian worlds of the other Zones. It is only thanks to the paintings and songs that Lusik describes that the Zones can exist; in this chapter I discuss his artistic responsibility and the power of art to shape consciousness. In Doris Lessing's imagined world, people understand their present time

through the reading of the paintings and songs of their tradition.

The teller and the tale coincide only at the end, along the narration the paintings are subject to critiques, to different readings. I suggest that without the paintings there would be no beauty and most importantly no fable.

# THOMAS MORE, *UTOPIA* (1516)

Thomas More's purpose in writing *Utopia* was quite clearly to open people's eyes to the social and political vices of the world around them, as criticism has generally recognized. As a matter of fact he wanted to condemn corruption, mistreatment of the poor, wars.

There are mainly two schools of thought concerning its content and purpose. One view is that *Utopia* is predominantly a Catholic treatise, the other view is that it is a political manifesto in which all references to religion should be ignored.[5] Both views, as it frequently happens, are true only to some extent. Paul Turner argues that Catholics and communists have both claimed it as their exclusive property, for the above reason one side has reduced it to a moral allegory, the other to a political manifesto. As Chambers argues not many books have been more misunderstood than *Utopia.* It has given the English language the word "utopian" that means something visionary and unpractical, but the exceptional thing about *Utopia* is that it foreshadows social and political reforms which have been occasionally carried into practice or which are considered as extremely "practical politics". "Utopia is depicted as a sternly righteous and puritanical State, where few of us would feel quite happy; yet we go on using the word "Utopia" to signify an easygoing paradise, whose only fault is that it is to happy an ideal to be realized."[6]

In this chapter I shall discuss *Utopia* by taking into consideration issues related to art and to aesthetic pleasure. But before doing this a few general considerations must be made.

As it is widely known the term utopia comes from the Greek *ou-topos*, meaning "no place", and *eu-topos*, meaning "good place". The debate concerning the origin of this word is still controversial.[7] Due to this

[5] Paul Turner, "Introduction" to *Utopia*, Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1965, p. xi.

[6] R. W. Chambers, *Thomas More*, London: The Bedford Historical Series, 1938, p. 125.

[7] According to Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor "the essentially contested nature of the concept of utopia and the chequered history of utopian thought can be traced back to the

ambiguity the word utopia is used both to refer to a place that does not exist and to a good place.

*Utopia* first appeared in its Latin version in 1516. The English translation did not appear until 1556, but by then its main arguments were widely known and had been widely debated. The imaginary island presented by Thomas More is divided into fifty-four independent city-states joined together through a representative council. The utopian family is the main social unit. Households are maintained at a certain size thanks to the constant redistribution of adults. Language, laws, traditions and customs are identical in every city. Houses are similar in appearance and there is a total lack of privacy. There is no allowance for individuality in architecture or civic planning. Cities are built following the lines laid down by Utopus 1760 years before. Everyone is equal, people have the same rights and the same duties. No one has more than others. The State is responsible for a fair distribution of resources and for health care.

In book one More describes the circumstances surrounding his trip to Flanders where he meets Raphael Hythloday. More visited Flanders as an ambassador of Heny VIII. In this first part the conversations between More, Peter Giles and Hythloday are reported. The three men discuss a wide range of civil, religious and philosophical issues. Book Two is the continuation of the conversation during which Hythloday explains the details of Utopia in full. In *Utopia*, everything is under the authority of the state however people are not required to work more than six hours a day. The ground of their economy is to give each person as much free time from physical hard work as the needs of the community will allow. By doing this every person is free to educate his mind, which they regard as the secret of a happy life.

Free time is dedicated to the study of the arts, literature, music and science.

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paradox at the heart of the pun which More coined: is the good place (eutopia) by definition *no* place (utopia)? Differently put, is utopia necessarily unrealizable because of its ideal nature? According to the answer given, utopianism signifies either the birth or the death of political optimism." In Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia: A Study in Theory and Practice*, London: Hutchinson, 1982, p. 15.

Children, whether boys or girls, are encouraged to receive a wide-ranging education. This would include a study of literature, the classics, the arts, politics, science and mathematics. Specialized courses are accessible to all, so that everyone has at least mastered one practical skill.

There are no great works of art and no great artists in this oeuvre, however, both the city and its inhabitants' lives are deeply aesthetic. Art is totally detached from issues of possession and social status. The utopians do not feel the need to express their artistic drives, namely they are not even allowed to do so.

The pursuit of pleasure has a pivotal importance for the general structure of Utopia.

> They inquire, likewise, into the nature of virtue and pleasure. But their chief dispute is concerning the happiness of a man, and wherein it consists - whether in some one thing or in a great many. They seem, indeed, more inclinable to that opinion that places, if not the whole, yet the chief part, of a man's happiness in pleasure [...] They define virtue thus - that it is a living according to Nature, and think that we are made by God for that end; they believe that a man then follows the dictates of Nature when he pursues or avoids things according to the direction of reason. They say that the first dictate of reason is the kindling in us a love and reverence for the Divine Majesty, to whom we owe both all that we have and, all that we can ever hope for. In the next place, reason directs us to keep our minds as free from passion and as cheerful as we can, and that we should consider ourselves as bound by the ties of good-nature and humanity to use our utmost endeavours to help forward the happiness of all other persons; for there never was any man such a morose and severe pursuer of virtue, such an enemy to pleasure, that though he set hard rules for men to undergo, much pain, many watchings, and other rigors, yet did not at the same time advise them to do all they could in order to relieve and ease the miserable, and who did not represent gentleness and

good-nature as amiable dispositions.[8]

As Lewis Mumford points out, "behind it all, however, is a vital idea: namely, that our attempts to live the good life are constantly perverted by our efforts to gain a living; and that by juggling gains and advantages, by striving after power and riches and distinction, we miss the opportunity to live as whole men. People become the nursemaids of their furniture, their property, their titles, their position; and so they lose the direct satisfaction that furniture or property would give."[9] Although Mumford reasons that the utopians' main purpose was to develop all those human potentials that every man has, in his critique there is no reference to the relationship between the utopians and art.

Thomas More depicts a refined society where the concept of aesthetic pleasure is ever present. The utopians live happy lives and are very good musicians. Music is considered the highest form of art and vocal music is even more respected and encouraged. More suggests that the utopian world is an aesthetic world. Art does not manifest itself in great artistic personalities but it originates from a deep common urge to build a collective spirit. Unfortunately, this image of art as something spread all over the space and shared by people does not leave any space to individuality.
As previously mentioned there are no great pieces of art in *Utopia* and there are no artists. The reason of this absence could be partially explained remembering that the artistic process is seen by the utopians as something dangerous. It involves skills that cannot be entirely learned and necessitates emotional drives that are in contrast with a society based on rational roots. Despite this, the utopian world is deeply aesthetic. Platonism in More's *Utopia* is likely to be the cause of More's choice not to consider art as the foundation of society and culture in his utopia.[10]

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[8] Thomas More, *Utopia, or, The Happy Republic: A Philosophical Romance in Two Books*, Gilbert Burnet, Translated by, Glasgow: R. Foulis; Edinburgh: Hamilton and Balfour, 1743, p. 75, all following quotations from the novel will be cited from this edition.
[9] Lewis Mumford, *The Story of Utopias,* New York: Boni and Liveright: 1922, p. 78.
[10] Paola Spinozzi, "Art and Aesthetics in Utopia: William Morris's Response to the Challenge of the "Art to the People", in Fátima Vieira, Marinela Freitas (eds.), *Utopia*

Paola Spinozzi claims that the utopians' high life standards and morality are attributed to attitudes and traditions in which artistic inclinations are not at all relevant. Despite this the utopians are very good musicians.

Karl Kautsy by analyzing the relationship between Thomas More's life and his work dwells upon his relation to art. In human things, Kautsky argues, he was more than a humanist and he was fascinated by art and devoted to music.[11]

Karl Kautsky argues that plastic arts also received his attention. In this respect Kautsky analyzes More's relation with Hans Holbein. The painter came to England in 1526 with a letter of recommendation from Erasmus to More who welcomed him with open arms. More gave hospitality to Holbein in his house for a long time, in return for which Holbein decorated it with his paintings and portrayed More and his family.

In Thomas More's present society people valued gold both as a precious metal used in jewelry and decoration and as something beautiful and tasteful. The utopians, on the contrary, deplore gold.[12]

> They eat and drink out of vessels of earth or glass, which make an agreeable appearance, though formed of brittle materials; while they make their

*Matters, Theory, Politics, Literature and the Arts,* Editora da Universidade do Porto, 2005.

[11] Karl Kautsky, *Thomas More and His Utopia with a Historical Introduction,* New York, Russel & Russel, 1959, p. 102.

[12] In 1527 Hans Holbein created the *Portrait of Sir Thomas More* (oil and tempera on oak). Today the painting resides in New York, hosted by the Frick Collection. I shall argue that the above painting could in fact be compared with More's *Utopia.*

While More describes people's disdain for materialism (people use gold to make humble things such as chamber pots), in the painting More wears fine robes (he is dressed as a great counselor) and a heavy gold chain of Tudor livery that has a strong decorative effect. It is made of "S" shaped links. As written in the Frick Collection and Frick Art reference Library web site "the chain belonged to the King and symbolized working in his service: it stands for the French expression *souvent me souviens:* think of me often. More had mixed feelings about such finery: one biographer writes, 'He made much of his dislike of the gold chains of office… but he did let people know that he had to wear them.' Photographs made with X-rays, revealing layers of paint under the surface, show that Holbein originally painted More with fancier sleeves but re-painted them; perhaps, More instructed him to remove this showy detail."

> chamber-pots and close-stools of gold and silver, and that not only in their public halls but in their private houses. Of the same metals they likewise make chains and fetters for their slaves, to some of
>
> which, as a badge of infamy, they hang an earring of gold, and make others wear a chain or a coronet of the same metal; and thus they take care by all possible means to render gold and silver of no esteem; and from hence it is that while other nations part with their gold and silver as unwillingly as if one tore out their bowels, those of Utopia would look on their giving in all they possess of those metals (when there were any use for them) but as the parting with a trifle, or as we would esteem the loss of a penny! They find pearls on their coasts, and diamonds and carbuncles on their rocks; they do not look after them, but, if they find them by chance, they polish them, and with them they adorn their children, who are delighted with them, and glory in them during their childhood. (p. 78)

For the utopians, iron is worth much more since it is more useful than gold. Gold is cherished and valued mostly because of its scarcity, yet the utopians are not fascinated by mere appearances or by notions concerning supply and demand. The utopians give children golden jewelry instead of toys. They believe that gold is something that could affect only a child, it is only children who can be delighted by its superficial shine and once they become adults they would abolish it from their lives.

The utopians show no consideration for gold and their contempt is mirrored in their use of golden chamber pots.

The utopians also associate gold with slavery, they transfer anything made of gold to the slaves and prisoners of their society. By doing this, slaves can be seen and recognized from far away. They take care by all possible means to render gold and silver of no esteem. Because gold is so scorned, no one wants to steal it, and if the country of *Utopia* needs money for international negotiations, it just melts down the chamber pots for extra funds.

Creative power is considered potentially dangerous in *Utopia* as it detaches people from reality. This premise further explains why the arts occupy a marginal place in utopia, but when the arts are committed to the celebration of the city they do not receive minor attention, they increase in social rank. Among other things, if we look at the description of gardens we are able to answer the question of whether the utopian world is an aesthetic world or not.

> They cultivate their gardens with great care, so that they have both vines, fruits, herbs, and flowers in them; and all is so well ordered and so finely kept that I never saw gardens anywhere that were both so fruitful and so beautiful as theirs. And this humour of ordering their gardens so well is not only kept up by the pleasure they find in it, but also by an emulation between the inhabitants of the several streets, who vie with each other. And there is, indeed, nothing belonging to the whole town that is both more useful and more pleasant. So that he who founded the town seems to have taken care of nothing more than of their gardens; for they say the whole scheme of the town was designed at first by Utopus, but he left all that belonged to the ornament and improvement of it to be added by those that should come after him, that being too much for one man to bring to perfection. (p. 60)

Except for gardening and agriculture, that are common to everyone, every man has some peculiar occupation to which he applies himself, such as the manufacture of wool, of linen, masonry, blacksmith's work, or carpenter's work, since there is no sort of occupation that is in great esteem among them.

However, creativity cannot be found in any of their activities or jobs; the creative process is absent also from the art of gardening.

The same could be argued with reference to architecture. Creativity in architecture is totally absent, buildings look exactly the same, and with every house having a door to the street and a back door to the garden. The

buildings are of good quality but are so similar that a whole side of a street looks like one house.

Parallel to the pleasure given by the contemplation of the inner beauty of the island there is another kind of pleasure that "arises neither from our receiving what the body requires, nor its being relieved when overcharged, and yet, by a secret unseen virtue, affects the senses, raises the passions, and strikes the mind with generous impressions - this is, the pleasure that arises from music." (p. 89)

It is important to point out, in fact, that except for literature, music is the only art that is somehow accepted and promoted in Utopia. The utopians are all good musicians and seem to value music more than everything else, music seems in fact to beat their time.

> After they have been for some time in this posture, they all stand up, upon a sign given by the priest, and sing hymns to the honour of God, some musical instruments playing all the while. These are quite of another form than those used among us; but, as many of them are much sweeter than ours, so others are made use of by us. Yet in one thing they very much exceed us: all their music, both vocal and instrumental, is adapted to imitate and express the passions, and is so happily suited to every occasion, that, whether the subject of the hymn be cheerful, or formed to soothe or trouble the mind, or to express grief or remorse, the music takes the impression of whatever is represented, affects and kindles the passions, and works the sentiments deep into the hearts of the hearers. (p. 64)

However, music is not the sole art that interprets the utopian dream; literature is also deemed as important. More describes the utopians as enlightened people, who nonetheless refuse to waste their time:

> They are not to abuse that interval to luxury and idleness, but must employ it in some proper exercise, according to their various inclinations, which is, for the most part, reading. It is ordinary to

> have public lectures every morning before daybreak, at which none are obliged to appear but those who are marked out for literature; yet a great many, both men and women, of all ranks, go to hear lectures of one sort or other, according to their inclinations: but if others that are not made for contemplation, choose rather to employ themselves at that time in their trades, as many of them do, they are not hindered, but are rather commended, as men that take care to serve their country. After supper they spend an hour in some diversion, in summer in their gardens, and in winter in the halls where they eat, where they entertain each other either with music or discourse. (p. 89)

In *Utopia* distinctions between law and morality, between good citizen and good man have disappeared. In *Utopia* there are no crime, poverty, war, injustice or any other problems that afflicted Europe during More's historical time period.

Art understood as figurative art is totally missing, however, the liberal arts that have historically been associated with unequal societies are here deeply and strictly controlled and used as an instrument to serve the purposes of utopia.

As Keith Watson argued, "(Thomas More) had a strong belief in man's ability to achieve and to rise above adversity; to become involved in the arts, literature, music and philosophy, as well as to be aware of scientific developments."[13] I believe this is partially mirrored in his masterpiece where the general atmosphere could definitely be defined as aesthetic. People live surrounded by beautiful gardens and live their lives in harmony with nature listening and playing music and studying as much as possible.

The great aim of *Utopia* was to point out the evil of certain conditions of life and to suggest remedies by placing a perfectly different state before people's minds.

[13] Keith Watson, "Sir Thomas More", *Prospects: the quarterly review of comparative education* (Paris, UNESCO: International Bureau of Education), vol. XXIV, no. 1/2, 1994, p. 185.

But, as the utopians declare that “the felicity of men” consists in pleasure I believe that besides the political underpinning, the oeuvre shows a profound respect for the importance of aesthetic pleasure, which is mostly related to the architecture of the city and to music.

# CHARLES BROCKDEN BROWN, *ALCUIN* (1798)

Charles Brockden Brown is an American writer born in Philadelphia in 1771. He is usually regarded as the first professional American writer as he attempted to earn a living with his writings. He studied to be a lawyer but he soon abandoned his legal career to devote himself to writing. He was an extremely prolific writer and he wrote copiously in many genres; he wrote novels, essays, fiction, articles in periodicals and pamphlets. He created three major magazines and published popular political pamphlets. His work was deeply radical for his time, especially his view upon the rights and roles of women: for this reason he has been regarded as a "feminist".

In this chapter I shall discuss *Alcuin*, his dialogue on women's rights. Although it is considered a minor work, the utopian dialogue *Alcuin* (1798), has been widely studied in the attempt to investigate Brown's feminism. As Rosella Mamoli Zorzi wrote in the introduction to the Italian version, Brown followed the canons of utopia and the scheme created by Thomas More. He divided the book into two parts, comparing his present-day society with an imaginary and ideal one.[14]

It has been argued that Alcuin is no literary masterpiece. Brown's prose is often "clumsy" and overly ornate and his characters are not properly developed.[15] Besides, the debate between Alcuin and Mrs. Carter remains eventually unfinished.

*Alcuin* is a dialogue between Alcuin, a poor and enthusiastic schoolmaster, and Mrs. Carter, a widow and a literary woman. In her apartment they discuss the status of women in Brown's present-day society as well as the inalienable rights argument for emancipating women. The dialogue begins with Alcuin defending the role of women in society and Mrs. Carter arguing

[14] Charles Brockden Brown, *Alcuin o il paradiso delle donne (1798 - 1815)*, Napoli: Guida Editori, 1985.

[15] William L. Hedges, "Charles Brockden Brown and the Culture of Contradictions". *Early American Literature 9,* Fall 1974, pp. 107 - 142.

that women receive poor education and are denied access to significant professions. Mrs. Carter observes that women are precluded from participating entirely as citizens in everyday life. Alcuin observes that if on the one hand he cannot sympathize with women's interests in business or in politics, on the other hand he argues that women are the superior sex in other respects.

In a subsequent conversation one week later, Alcuin describes a utopian society, "the paradise of women", where men and women are treated equally and receive identical educations and therefore have the same possibilities in life. Alcuin describes "the paradise of women" as a republican utopia, where the inhabitants, both male and female, dress in the same way and share all recreational, literary, artistic and cognitive activities. Besides, this society has embraced Jeffersonian agrarianism, deeming it the most ennobling way of life.[16] In *Alcuin*'s visionary paradise both men and women share in the labor and the fruits of the harvest. Furthermore, in this utopian society marriage is not contemplated. Mrs. Carter replies to Alcuin by defending the institution of marriage, but at the same time recognizes that the marriage laws are inadequate and unfair for women and that under the circumstances divorce can serve a useful purpose.

The dialogue ends with Mrs. Carter asserting that in order for marriage to survive as an institution it must be founded on the free and mutual consent of the willing. Alcuin wrongly assumes Mrs. Carter will approve the utopian's customs. To Alcuin's astonishment Mrs. Carter dislikes the utopia, mainly because she disagrees in abolishing marriage, she would rather reform it instead of abolishing it. She believes in the holiness of marriage but she is convinced it has to be reformed. She claims that marriage renders the female a slave to the male and that it deprives women of their legal and social identity. In Mrs. Carter's exemplary marriage, both wife and husband would control their own property. They could even live in separate houses in order to maintain their freedom. Marriage as understood by *Alcuin* does not exist in the paradise of women. He disapproves of it as it

[16] Anita M. Vickers, "Pray, Madam, are you a federalist?": Women's Rights and the Republican Utopia of *Alcuin*" in *American Studies,* 39:3, Fall 1998, pp. 89 - 104.

renders women slave to the man. Wives are submitted to the will of their husbands and impoverished. “Whatever she previously possesses, belongs absolutely to the man”. (p. 71)

In *Alcuin*, Brown argues that marriage should be a friendship signified by a contract into which husband and wife enter as equals; Wollstonecraft asserted a similar point in her earlier book.

*Alcuin* was clearly influenced by Mary Wollstonecfraft (1759 - 1797) and by William Godwin (1756 - 1836). Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1791 and published it in 1792; her masterpiece is considered the feminist declaration of independence.

In the historical period in which she was writing the general idea was that the best way for a woman to acquire knowledge was from following her father’s and brother’s suggestions.

Completely detaching herself from those ideas she thought that virtue depends on knowledge. As Mary Wollstonecraft thought that the most important duty for a woman was the one towards her children, she argued that women must be educated in order to become good mothers. She thought of education as a social imperative. William Godwin’s own views on the role of women were even more radical than those of his wife Mary Wollstonecraft. He contended that any institution that restricted or repressed individual freedom, whether it be religious, social, or political, should be eliminated.

The first part of the dialogue between Alcuin and Mrs. Carter serves to reveal Brown’s present social situation. Within this regard, the situation of women is defined, and the relationship between women and art is introduced. Women have historically been associated with nature, and the dialogue does not seem to represent an exception considering the time in which Brown was writing. The passage below describes a cliché, i.e. women’s natural inclination to “the art of the needle” and to music, that is to say the only womanly occupations they are allowed to perform.

> Your industry delights in the graceful and minute: it enlarges the empire of the senses, and improves the flexibility of the fibres. The art of the needle, by the lustre of its hues and the delicacy of its touches, is able to mimic all the forms of nature, and portray all the images of fancy: and the needle but prepares the hand for doing wonders on the harp; for conjuring up the "piano" to melt, and the "forte" to astound us. [17]

Things in the "paradise of women" are evidently different. Both men and women are allowed to receive the same education and thus are potentially allowed to choose a job that could fit in with their interests. Alcuin's utopian guide is lacking in personality, and he is clearly poorly characterized, but he nevertheless serves to conduct Alcuin through utopia:

> I need not tell how by the aid of this benevolent conductor, I passed through halls whose pendent lustres exhibited sometimes a group of musicians and dancers, sometimes assemblies where state affairs were the theme of sonorous rhetoric, where the claims of ancient patriots and heroes to the veneration of posterity were examined, and the sources of memorable revolutions scrutinized, or which listened to the rehearsals of annalist or poet, or surveyed the labours of the chemist, or inspected the performances of the mechanical inventor. Need I expatiate on the felicity of that plan, which blended the umbrage of poplars with the murmur of fountains, enhanced by the gracefulness of architecture. (p. 48)

This passage refers to "the paradise of women" a region which is distant but can be quickly reached. It is not clear how; the author remains quite vague to this end.

Alcuin sees musicians and dancers, groups of people listening to poetry and drama. As it has been suggested, Brown's paradise is that of the intellectual, as the main utopians activities deal with conversation, music, study and

[17] Charles Brockden Brown, *Alcuin: a dialogue,* New York: Grossman Publishers, 1971, p. 27. All following quotations from the novel will be cited from this edition.

meditation.[18]

From Brown's writing, a general feeling of harmony, grace and beauty emerges. Architecture is also described as graceful. In the following passage Brown is slightly more precise in describing the utopian buildings:

> Methought I could trace in their buildings the knowledge of Greek and Roman models: but who can tell that the same images and combinations may not occur to minds distant and unacquainted with each other, but which have been subject to the same enlightened discipline? (p. 45).

Architects' primary concern was to build a pleasant environment, to create a refined and charming atmosphere. We might assume that architecture was also deeply functional, but this is never specified in the novel. It is interesting to observe that Brown's description of architecture is reminiscent of the Greek Revival Style (often called America's first national style). It is worth remembering that in Philadelphia, the architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe designed the first major Greek Revival building in the United States, the Bank of Pennsylvania. It was built 1798 - 1801 and symbolizes the Greek Revival. The bank was made of white marble and had Greek Ionic porticos on both the front and rear. The bank functioned until the financial panic of 1857. The Bank building then functioned as a prison throughout the Civil War and was finally demolished in 1867.

Since the birth of the Greek Revival Style is contemporaneous with the publication of *Alcuin* we might assume that Brown was quite fascinated with this new architectural style.

People in "the paradise of women" seem incapable of detaching beauty from utility. They wear identical dresses and share the same taste. This is clearly one of the most disturbing aspects of the paradise. Furthermore, people are not allowed to express either tastes and preferences. Alcuin talks to his guide to utopia, he struggles to understand people's ways of life in the

[18] Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, *Utopia e Letteratura nell'800 Americano*, Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1979, p. 28.

"paradise". This is the answer he receives from his guide:

> Why should it be inexplicable? For what end do we dress? Is it for the sake of ornament? Is it in compliance with our perceptions of the beautiful? These perceptions cannot be supposed to be the same in all. But since the standard of beauty whatever it be, must be one and the same: since our notions on this head are considerably affected by custom and example, and since all have nearly the same opportunities and materials of judgement, if beauty only were regarded, the differences among us would be trivial. Differences, perhaps, there would be. The garb of one being would, in some degree, however small, vary from that of another. But what causes there are that should make all women agree in their preference of one dress, and all men in that of other, is utterly incomprehensible; no less than that the difference resulting from this choice should be essential and conspicuous. But ornament obtains no regard from us but in subservience to utility. We find it hard to distinguish between the useful and beautiful. (p. 52)

People living in "the paradise of women" do not know that utility and beauty might not coincide. They find it even stranger to sacrifice the former for the latter as they believe beauty to be evanescent and inconstant.

In Alcuin what is useful to one must be equally so to another. And this, of course, to the detriment of personal choices.

The role of beauty is thus ambivalent within Brown's *Alcuin*. The utopian world is an aesthetic world but at the same time utopians deplore beauty.

Besides, if on the one hand we are told that architecture in "the paradise of women" is beautiful, on the other hand we do not know if it is also functional. In the majority of utopias here discussed architecture is functional, *Alcuin* represents a case study in this regard.

The place of art in this utopia is definitely not a matter of primary concern for the author. In fact as previously mentioned, his "feminism" is the primary concern. It is nevertheless important to observe how a marginal discourse could grow to the surface and participate to the general well being

of an imaginary society where gender roles no longer exist and where women are regarded as equals to men. No longer considered as inferior human beings women manage to live together with men, without being excluded from social life. In *Alcuin* women have an androgynous outlook, nothing they wear could reveal their sex.

Both men and women can perform in theater, activity which seems to be of common interest among utopians. They are familiar with theater and Alcuin contends that:

> The tenor of the drama seemed to be followed as implicitly as if custom had enacted no laws upon this subject. Their voices were mingled in the chorusses: I admired the order in which the spectators were arranged. Women were, to a certain degree, associated with women, and men with men; but it seemed as if magnificence and symmetry had been consulted, rather than a scrupulous decorum. […]
> Was science or poetry, or art, the topic of discussion? The two sexes mingled their inquiries and opinions. (p. 49)

From this passage we gather that in this pacific and aesthetic society, both men and woman are used to talk about art and poetry.

I shall argue that from Brown's perspective, in order to obtain an advanced society, where the two sexes can coexist without being hostile to each other, a certain degree of culture must be pursued. Brown does not enter into details, telling the reader the topic of the conversations about art and poetry, we are just told that people living in the paradise of women dedicate most of their time to discussing the arts.

# EDWARD BELLAMY, *LOOKING BACKWARD 2000 - 1887* (1888)

*Looking Backward 2000 - 1887* was published in Boston in 1888.
The protagonist is Julian West, a rich Bostonian man that suffers from insomnia and that one day, on 10th September 2000, wakes up 113 years, three months and 11 days later in an America transformed by socialism.
This classic expedient allows Bellamy the opportunity to illustrate a completely reformed society. Julian West's guides are: Dr. Leete, his wife and their daughter Edith. Dr. Leete has the assignment to present the organization and the achievements of the new society. This description is mingled with romantic intervals between Julian West and Edith. Furthermore, by the end of the novel, they will be engaged and it accidentally comes to light that Edith Leete is the great-granddaughter of Edith Barlett, Julian West's wife-to-be in the Boston of 1887.

The novel envisions a nonviolent transition to a socialist society where industry is organized to perfection. Bellamy's utopia is founded on principle of economic equality, which has the virtue of being both morally right and a logical way to organize society. Consequently, Bellamy's claim is that economic fairness is efficient and moral.
Edward Bellamy reconsidered the causes of uncertainty and malaise of his time. His primary task was to depict a ordered world as opposed to the disorganization and confusion of his present. The Boston in which he lived at the end of the nineteenth century has become in his oeuvre a *real* eu-topia. His ideal resulted in the creation of a futuristic city run by "the industrial army"[19], where people must obey to many rules and where every little aspect of life is controlled. Bellamy's utopia is a place where nobody

[19] The Industrial Army is one of the most important elements in Bellamy's utopia. He dedicates three chapters to its description. The period of service in the Industrial Army is 24 years, and only two groups of people are not contemplated in it, women and members of the "liberal professions" that is teachers, doctors, writers and artists.

would ever wish to live, it does in fact resemble a giant mall. Socialism in *Looking Backward* assumes the features of statalism and centralization.

Life is organized in all its aspects even if a certain degree of freedom is still given. Men and women are compulsory educated until they are twenty-one, as education is fundamental to happiness, then they are demanded to work three years as common workers at jobs no one will volunteer for, but after that it is for the person to choose, in line with his natural taste, whether he will devote his life to an art or a profession or if he would prefer to become a farmer or a mechanic. People can work until they are forty-five, at which age they are retired. A person that decides to dedicate his life to art will be guided to cultivate his talent.

It is nevertheless important to point out that both men and women are educated yet Bellamy believes in the notion of "separate but equal". There is separation but not equality. Women have a world of their own because of their different ambitions. Bellamy considers women to be inferior to men and thus he invents a separate Industrial Army just for them. In the Boston of the future women are still viewed mainly as goddess and their unique privilege is that of choosing the best man with whom to produce children.

In the future there are schools of technology, of medicine, of art and of music. Bellamy focuses mainly on the technological progress that should result in a democratic access to music. Furthermore, as Rosella Mamoli Zorzi argues, in *Looking Backward 2000 - 1887* as in the majority of American utopias of the 19th century, faith in technology is as widespread as faith in education.[20] In Bellamy's oeuvre however, the role of education is more important for those who choose professions after finishing their term as "common workers". Professions are equivalent to the industrial army, yet people are compulsory demanded to choose a profession before the age of thirty. Along with this description, Bellamy makes a long and

[20] Rosella Mamoli Zorzi, "La tradizione dell'utopia americana" in Pietro Latini ed., *L'amalgama: fertilizzazioni tra Italia e Stati Uniti d'America nella costruzione della città*, Roma: INU Edizioni, vol. 1, 2005, pp. 132 - 138.

comprehensive analysis of nineteenth-century education, using mainly economic arguments.

Music is an art upon which everybody is trained. As Goldbach argues, Bellamy was looking for a democratic access to music for all.[21] People sing as a matter of course in the training of the voice. Some learn to play instruments for their own pleasure but professional music is congenial to everybody as it is perfect. Excellent singers and musicians are employed in the musical service that works thanks to an array of detailed mechanisms. Edith is the alter ego of the protagonist beloved of his past, and she is one of his guides to utopia. She explains to Julian West how they applied the idea of labor-saving by cooperation into their musical service as into everything else. The city is filled up with music rooms, built to satisfy the requirements of every different variety of music. People pay a small amount of money every month in order to support the halls which are connected by telephone with all the houses of Boston. People house-wire is connected to the hall by simply pressing a button. The time schedule of the programs is so well organized that people can enjoy the choice between instrumental and vocal and between different sorts of genres. All the bedrooms have a telephone plug used by people to require music on demand. Thanks to a clock combination a person could even dispose to be awakened at any hour by the music. Bellamy continuously compares the Boston of the past with his dreamed one. He supports his martial view of music by enhancing it as a symbol of equality among human beings:

> I am sure I never could imagine how those among you who depended at all on music managed to endure the old-fashioned system for providing it, replied Edith. Music really worth hearing must have been, I suppose, wholly out of the reach of the masses, and attainable by the most favored only occasionally, at great trouble, prodigious expense,

[21] Karl Traugott Goldbach, "Utopian Music: Music History of the Future in Novels by Bellamy, Callenbach and Huxley" in Fátima Vieira, Marinela Freitas (ed.), *Utopia Matters, Theory, Politics, Literature and the Arts,* Porto: Editora da Universidade do Porto, 2005.

> and then for brief periods, arbitrarily fixed by somebody else, and in connection with all sorts of undesirable circumstances.[22]

Bellamy abolishes money but invents credit cards. At the beginning of the year, every citizen receives a percentage of the annual product of the nation in a credit card with which the person can go to the public storehouses which are everywhere in the community. This agreement precludes business transactions between people. Any money left unspent is returned to the "general surplus". Inheritance of private property is not prohibited but has vanished as a practice because people would only find additional possessions troublesome.

The objects, not being salable, are of no value to people except for their actual use or the pleasure of their splendor.

> In your day, if a man had a house crammed full with gold and silver plate, rare china, expensive furniture, and such things, he was considered rich, for these things represented money, and could at any time be turned into it. Nowadays a man whom the legacies of a hundred relatives, simultaneously dying, should place in a similar position, would be considered very unlucky. The articles, not being salable, would be of no value to him except for their actual use or the enjoyment of their beauty. On the other hand, his income remaining the same, he would have to deplete his credit to hire houses to store the goods in, and still further to pay for the service of those who took care of them. You may be very sure that such a man would lose no time in scattering among his friends possessions which only made him the poorer, and that none of those friends would accept more of them than they could easily spare room for and time to attend to. You see, then, that to prohibit the inheritance of personal property with a view to prevent great accumulations would be a superfluous precaution for the nation. The individual citizen can be trusted to see that he is not overburdened. So careful is he in this respect, that the relatives usually waive claim to most of the effects of deceased

[22] Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000 - 1887*, New York: Modern Library, 1943, p. 90. All following quotations from the novel will be cited from this edition.

> friends, reserving only particular objects. The nation takes charge of the resigned chattels, and turns such as are of value into the common stock once more. (p. 93)

Thanks to his guide to utopia Julian West develops a new understanding of values. The new economic arrangements envisioned by Bellamy have the merit to eliminate poverty and class distinctions in order to create equality for everyone. But this equality is both fair and static. Hansot refers to a "static perfection" and argues that this utopia is not attractive to the reader who thinks in terms of change and development.[23]

As already mentioned the old and the new Boston are often compared within the novel. As it will soon be revealed art, in the form of a painting, participates to this end: the difference between "the age of individualism" and Boston in the twentieth century could be explained, according to Dr. Leete, by considering people's reaction to a normal weather condition as rain. Dr. Leete argued that in the nineteenth century, when it rained, the people of Boston put up three hundred thousand umbrellas over as many heads, while in the twentieth century they put up one umbrella over all the heads. The private umbrella is a fitting figure to illustrate the old way when everybody lived for themselves and their family. In the Boston of the future there still was a nineteenth century painting in the National Gallery representing a crowd of people in the rain, each one holding his umbrella over himself and his wife, and giving his neighbors the drippings. Dr. Leete believed the artist wanted to make a satire of his time.

This painting is highly symbolic and Dr. Leete's interpretation of it is quite interesting. He in fact assumed that the artist of the painting used his ability to denounce in a ironic way the "age of individualism". Yet Dr. Leete was clearly influenced by the art of the past as he considered it both didactic and ironic.

[23] Elisabeth Hansot, *Prediction and Progress, Two Modes of Utopian Thought,* Cambridge (Mass.) & London: M.I.T. Press, 1974, p. 138.

I shall suggests that the painting here under discussion could reasonably be *The Umbrellas* (1881 - 6) by Pierre-Auguste Renoir. Unfortunately we do not know whether Edward Bellamy effectively saw *The Umbrellas* or not, but the subjects of the two works of art seem to match perfectly.

As Dr. Leete interpreted the above famous painting of the past, people in the new Boston are the sole and unique judges of art. Every artist has the same chance to achieve appreciation from the public, whose opinion is deemed incontrovertible. People vote upon the adoption of paintings for the public buildings and upon statues. The people's vote will determine the artist's remission from other tasks and his devotion to his work:

> On copies of his work disposed of, he also derives the same advantage as the author on sales of his books. In all these lines of original genius the plan pursued is the same, - to offer a free field to aspirants, and as soon as exceptional talent is recognized to release it from all trammels and let it have free course. The remission of other service in these cases is not intended as a gift or reward, but as the means of obtaining more and higher service. Of course there are various literary art, and scientific institutes to which membership comes to the famous and is greatly prized. The highest of all honors in the nation, higher than the presidency, which calls merely for good sense and devotion to duty, is the red ribbon awarded by the vote of the people to the great authors, artists, engineers, physicians, and inventors of the generation. Not over a certain number wear it at any one time, though every bright young fellow in the country loses innumerable nights' sleep dreaming of it. I even did myself. (p. 132)

The "red ribbon" prize is accorded to the artists of great merit and Bellamy considers the prize "the highest of all honors". Nothing is added to this assumption and we fail to understand how someone would fight to become an artist.

As a matter of fact people's involvement in the arts would nevertheless appear to be just another aspect of Bellamy's social ideal. For the ideal Boston of the year 2000 Bellamy invents endless details, and art seems to lose its "artistic" and aesthetic connotation to be at the service of a State Communism, where national centralization has rose to its highest rank.

Bellamy describes a democratic access to music; by doing this he fulfills his desire to describe a society where art is accessible to everybody. Yet, the language of *Looking Backward* is clearly music which functions as the universal language of art. Fairness in artistic competition is the norm, but Bellamy fails to explain why artists should want to secure themselves such prestige. The sole explanation given is that such prestige is fair as the same possibilities are given to all the artists. Again, the reader's impression is that fairness in artistic competition is, once more, economic equality revealed in a different form. In Bellamy's ideal state there is no future, beside utopians seem to live in an eternal present that will never evolve.

Bellamy's utopia is mainly static and Hansot interprets this unchanging utopia by arguing that "human nature is static in Bellamy's future society because the one ideal it expresses is derived from the inadequacies of the past - a past that no longer exists to the extent that it no longer has meaning for the inhabitants of utopia."[24]

Moreover, economic equality oversimplifies a society that despite its potentials, is condemned not to progress. Bellamy's utopia fears change in all its aspects, consequently artists are not motivated as their unique aspiration depends upon public approval. The risk is, as Morgan argues, quite obvious; artists are pushed to please the public taste and consequently they ignore what they consider to be their best oeuvres. Furthermore, the quality of a work of art is determined also by the artists' capacity to support themselves, consequently the production of "potboilers" is a concrete possibility in Bellamy's utopia.[25] Aesthetic competence and awareness seem thus of secondary importance. Bellamy arranges in his novel a structure of

[24] Elisabeth Hansot, *Prediction and Progress, Two Modes of Utopian Thought,* Cambridge (Mass.) & London: M.I.T. Press, 1974, p. 134.
[25] Arthur E. Morgan, *Edward Bellamy,* Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1974, p. 356.

artistic creation that permits nothing more than the creation of unaesthetic art capable of satisfying the needs of an artistically uneducated mass of people.

Yet, as I am going to illustrate in the next chapter, Bellamy's vision contrasts deeply with Morris's suggestion that popular art is a crucial factor for human happiness and fulfillment. If on the one hand Edward Bellamy suggests that art has to be linked to profit, on the other hand William Morris thinks that art cannot grow under a commercial system.

# WILLIAM MORRIS, *NEWS FROM NOWHERE* (1891)

William Morris is regarded by scholars as a pioneer of modern art and design. He dedicated his entire life to the search for useful and creative work that led at last to his political engagement as a socialist. He set up a firm with his artist friends specialized in stained glass, furniture and household decorations. When in 1875 he joined the Liberal Party he began lecturing on art and on the state of society. As Tod and Wheeler pointed out, Morris in his lectures argued that "the general quality of art and manufacture reflected work conditions, and that good-quality products, that is, products with some love and care and art in them, could be made only by workers who were happy and fulfilled by what they did."[26]

Morris's ideas as regards politics and the arts can be found in his *News from Nowhere* (1891). This utopian novel was first serialized for the socialist review *Commonweal* in 1890 and it is widely considered as the novel of his maturity. It is a utopian novel written as a contribution to a discussion on the socialist future, principally as a response to *Looking Backward* written by the American writer Edward Bellamy.

William Morris was a revolutionary socialist, he was deeply dissatisfied with life in London and very critical towards the industrial society. *News from Nowhere* depicts a socialist society set in London in 2003. The protagonist of the book, William Guest, tired and discontented after having attended a Socialist League meeting, falls asleep and dreams of visiting the London of the future. His guide to utopia is an old man named Hammond. London is changed; it is clean, pleasant and logically organized. It is totally different from the London of his own days, where pollution and social injustice were the norm. The utopian city of London is inhabited by collaborative citizens. People's obsession with money and power is replaced by a tendency to cherish life in all its aspects; human dignity is not linked with social ambition but with the constructive use of free time in healthy

[26] Ian Tod and Michael Wheeler, *Utopia*, New York: Harmony Books, 1978.

and artistic activities. Creativity and beauty are treasured as essential for the health and prosperity of humanity. *News from Nowhere* effectively synthesizes Morris's views upon life and its social, political, economical and architectural organization. In Morris's utopia the arts are part of people's everyday lives and as Vita Fortunati has argued, in nowhere art substantiates life.[27]

The language Morris used for his chronicle was clear and simple, the images extremely realistic and cleverly used to reveal his intentions. Morris's goal was to reach a large public; he managed to do so and the novel was extremely successful. He wanted people to be amazed and astonished by the beauty of the ideal London of the future. He chose London as utopian city of the future as he wanted to show his contemporaries that socialism could be established even in their country.

The lifestyle of people living in Nowhere is reminiscent of the New Harmony community theorized by Robert Owen. Communism is the basis of a community inhabited by productive and happy citizens who live in harmony with nature, in medieval villages surrounded by gardens. Private property does not exist and communities are tied by kinship relationships. Nature helps people to lead harmonious lives and manual work is synonymous with artistic creativity. Gold no longer has economic value and a redistribution of wealth has eliminated poverty.

I shall argue that Morris's utopia corresponds to an aesthetic world. In "Art under Plutocracy" Morris writes:

> And first I must ask you to extend the word art beyond those matters which are consciously works of art, to take in not only painting and sculpture, and architecture, but the shapes and colours of all household goods, may, even the arrangement of the fields for tillage and pasture, the management of towns and for our highways of all kinds; in a word, to extend it to the aspect of all the external of our life. For I must ask you to believe that everyone of

[27] Vita Fortunati, *La letteratura utopica inglese: morfologia e grammatica di un genere letterario*, Ravenna: Longo, 1979, p. 144.

> the things that goes to make up the surroundings among which we like must be either beautiful or ugly.[28]

More than other utopias, *News from Nowhere* proves that if art in the utopian project is not essential, it is nevertheless of great significance. Morris was particularly concerned with aesthetics; in his work the arts did not belong to a separate sphere of society, on the contrary the artist was an active member of society and his work was highly valued. Morris succeeded in connecting ideology with art as well as aesthetics with ethics. He believed in humanity and in the capability of the human race to continuously ameliorate itself and flourish and improve.

His entire work evolved around the assumption that artistic creativity was the key for humanity to advance.

Despite creativity is an ever-present factor of enhancement, existing primarily in everyday work, Morris's utopia is definitely static as there is no change and no possibility of progress. Nowhere stability depends upon the fact that it is outside of time.

The Gothic style was from Morris's point of view an aesthetic and moral class that had nothing to do with the Victorian social values linked mostly to profit and to the capital. As Vita Fortunati argues,[29] in the novel the utopian drive is combined with a nostalgia of the past; *News from Nowhere* is set in the year 2003 but has some similarities with the Garden of Eden and with Arcadia. She argues that the reader perceives the fear and anxiety of the narrator William Guest who is constantly frightened by the possibility that the utopian socialist society he discovers might disappear. Vita Fortunati writes that, "la risposta di Morris al problema del tempo e della morte è estetica: soltanto l'arte e le creazioni artistiche possono sconfiggere il tempo

[28] William Morris, "Art under Plutocracy", in *The Collected Works of William Morris,* ed. by William Morris, London: Longmans and Green, 1912, vol. XXII, p. 164.

[29] Vita Fortunati, "La mentalità utopica" in Vita Fortunati, Raymond Trousson, Adriana Corrado eds., *Dall'utopia all'utopismo. Percorsi tematici*, Napoli: CUEN, 2003, p. 95.

e la corruzione del corpo."[30]

London, as imagined by Morris does not have any building dirty with chimneys smoke or polluted streets. The city is small and lives in harmony with the countryside. Because of its Gothic architecture, it is reminiscent of one of those ancient medieval cities that Morris loved. London is small and white and with no suburbs; it reminds us of a garden city. Thanks to the Great Social Revolution, that took place in the mid-nineties, people start to re-enter and live in those areas that the Industrial Revolution had profoundly deteriorated. In *News from Nowhere*, the present time is reminiscent of the past; "modernity" and "history" seem to cooperate harmoniously in the new city of London.

In *News from Nowhere* Morris argues that when humanity will be freed from the fear of the future the totality of people's work will be automatically perceived as beautiful. Every single object will be turned into a work of art. The description of a pipe is representative of this new tendency:

> She disappeared again, and came back with a big-bowled pipe in her hand, carved out of some hard wood very elaborately, and mounted in gold sprinkled with little gems. It was, in short, as pretty and gay a toy as I had ever seen; something like the best kind of Japanese work, but better.[31]

Clothes in *News from Nowhere* are also part of the general artistic drive felt by the community. Generally in utopias clothes are mostly white to indicate purity and reduced to their extreme simplicity; a lack of decoration is the norm as well as a lack of sophistication, clean lines are most - liked. *News from Nowhere* represents a separate case within this regard. Clothes are as refined as things. They are simple for the most part, but decorated with gold and silver.

[30] Ibid, p. 95.
[31] William Morris, *News from Nowhere, or, An epoch of rest: being some chapters from a utopian romance,* ed., James Redmond, London and New York: Routledge, 1970, p. 33. All following quotations from the novel will be cited from this edition.

Clothes do not reveal social status as everyone is equal however, surprisingly enough, they are not manufactured to pursue a goal. Working clothes are as comfortable as evening clothes, elegance seems to be the only rule.

Nowhere's inhabitants own magnificent dresses and they wear them not for ostentation, yet they wear only beautiful clothes as they all share the same taste for beauty.

William Guest is surprised by the gleam of gold and silk embroidery on some workmen's clothes. In *News from Nowhere* the first dress we come across is a working day dress, a refined dress with a "damascened steel beautifully wrought". William Guest observes:

> his dress was not like any modern work-a-day clothes he had ever seen but it would have served very well as a costume for a picture of fourteenth century life: it was of dark blue cloth, simple enough, but of fine web, and without a stain on it. He had a brown leather belt round his waist, and I noticed that its clasp was of damascened steel beautifully wrought. In short, he seemed to be like some specially manly and refined young gentleman, playing waterman for a spree, and I concluded that this was the case. (p. 5)

During his journey William Guest encounters also another men dressed with a light green coat with a golden spray embroidered on the breast, and with a belt of "filigree silver-work". He also meets a beautiful cottage dweller, dressed with a gown of silk, and with bracelets of great value on her wrists.

The totality of the citizens can afford to dress beautifully. Their clothes are both comfortable and fine, they have beautiful and strong bodies and they like to cover them beautifully. William Guest thinks it is a normal consequence of the state of things of the new society: "people who were so fond of architecture generally, would not be backward in ornamenting themselves; all the more as the shape of their raiment, apart from its color, was both beautiful and reasonable - veiling the form, without either

muffling or caricaturing it". (p. 119)

William Morris considered architecture as one of the most long-lasting celebrations of communal values and aspirations. Houses in *News from Nowhere* have undergone an aesthetic as well as functional transformation. Houses and buildings became an expression of happiness and joy.

As a comparison to the state of things during his time, Morris depicted a city where each building was different from others. Morris believed that a house had to talk about the personality of people living in it. The relationship between a person and its house is not merely practical but belongs also to the sphere of emotions.

In *News from Nowhere* the "great clearing of houses" took place in 1955, the new houses were decentralized. Some houses were built on the road, some others amongst the fields were characterized by pleasing streets leading down to them, and each house was surrounded by a garden.[32] Houses were solid and pretty in design, but their appearance was quite simple, like countryside houses. Some houses were made of red brick but more of timber and plaster, "which were by the necessity of their construction so like medieval houses of the same materials that I [William Guest] fairly felt as if I were alive in the fourteenth century; a sensation helped out by the costume of the people that we met or passed, in whose dress there was nothing "modern" (p. 19).

It becomes more and more obvious throughout the novel that Morris encourages a rebirth of medieval architecture and art; he is driven by a nostalgia for the past. Hammond says:

> Like the medievals, we like everything trim and clean, and orderly and bright; as people always do when they have any sense of architectural power. (p. 62)

[32] Gardens in *News From Nowhere* are visible signs of perfection; they represent the link between men and nature and are as such significant for the creation of the utopian project. For further discussion on the role of gardens in Morris's utopia see Eleonora Sasso, "William Morris e la visione del giardino come dominio estetico", Andrea Mariani ed., *Riscritture dell'Eden: il giardino nell'immaginazione letteraria dell'occidente*. 3, Venezia: ME, 2006.

William Guest is fascinated by the grace and beauty of the new architecture that reflects upon him a feeling of astonishment.
The Bridge of the Thames is also a representative example of the new architecture.

> Then the bridge! I had perhaps dreamed of such a bridge, but never seen such an one out of an illuminated manuscript; for not even the Ponte Vecchio at Florence came anywhere near it. It was of stone arches, splendidly solid, and as graceful as they were strong; high enough also to let ordinary river traffic through easily. Over the parapet showed quaint and fanciful little buildings, which I [William Guest] supposed to be booths or shops, beset with painted and gilded vanes and spirelets. The stone was a little weathered, but showed no marks of the grimy sootiness which I was used to on every London building more than a year old. In short, to me a wonder of a bridge. (p. 6)

Architecture was for the most part a modern copy of the architecture of the past as Shillingford Bridge which was newly built, but evocative of its old lines. An important old building built before the middle of the twentieth century that was still appreciated, "in a queer fantastic style not over beautiful" (p. 37) was the National Gallery, inside there were still mostly pictures. After the National Gallery, wherever there was a place where pictures were kept as curiosities permanently it was called a National Gallery, Nowhere is crowded with them. The British Museum was not demolished either. The inside of Westminster Abbey preserved its beauty after the "great clearance" (p. 26) but the outside was "cleaned".

Meals are chief and aesthetic moments in utopia's everyday life. In the majority of utopias here considered people are vegetarian, as to display a profound connection with the earth.
Usually meals are consumed in communal kitchens or restaurants. In *News from Nowhere* the peacefulness and the cooperation of the citizens are merged with the beauty of the objects.

When invited for an ordinary dinner, William Guest notes that everything is cooked and served elegantly, at the same time everything is simple and excellent:

> The glass, crockery, and plate were very beautiful to my eyes, used to the study of medieval art; but a nineteenth - century club-haunter would, I daresay, have found them rough and lacking in finish; the crockery being lead-glazed pot-ware, though beautifully ornamented; the only porcelain being here and there a piece of old oriental ware. The glass, again, though elegant and quaint, and very varied in form, was somewhat bubbled and hornier in texture than the commercial articles of the nineteenth century. The furniture and general fittings of the ball were much of a piece with the table-gear, beautiful in form and highly ornamented, but without the commercial "finish" of the joiners and cabinet-makers of our time. Withal, there was a total absence of what the nineteenth century calls "comfort" - that is, stuffy inconvenience. (p. 86)

William Guest understands that the loss of competitiveness among people has not stopped the production of the community. The production of what used to be called art, but which has not the same name in Nowhere, becomes a necessary part of the labor of every man. In *News from Nowhere* the people's goal is to make their own work every day more pleasurable; Morris believes this attitude capable of raising the standard of excellence. Things that could be treated as works of art are a great number, and art gives an occupation to a multitude of people; art in Nowhere is inexhaustible and ever-present. Art is popular and it is "made by the people and for the people [...] It is communitarian, because aesthetic creation and enjoyment are shared by all, but is also individual, since it allows for the development of one's specific creative inclinations."[33]

[33] Paola Spinozzi, "Art and Aesthetics in Utopia: William Morris's Response to the Challenge of the "Art to the People" in Fátima Vieira, Marinela Freitas (ed.), *Utopia Matters, Theory, Politics, Literature and the Arts,* Porto: Editora da Universidade do Porto, 2005, p. 233.

Art in Nowhere was considered as "work-pleasure", and it rose almost spontaneously after the abolition of the squalor and from an instinct amongst people as they were not subjugated to work: "a craving for beauty seemed to awaken in men's minds, and they began rudely and awkwardly to ornament the wares which they made; and when they had once set to work at that, it soon began to grow". (p. 115) People became conscious of that pleasure, and cultivated it, and started to become happy. William Guest is finally able to appreciate art and to abandon for a few moments his anxiety.

> The evening passed all too quickly for me; since that day, for the first time in my life, I was having my fill of the pleasure of the eyes without any of that sense of incongruity, that dread of approaching ruin, which had always beset me hitherto when I had been amongst the beautiful works of art of the past, mingled with the lovely nature of the present; both of them, in fact, the result of the long centuries of tradition, which had compelled men to produce the art, and compelled nature to run into the mould of the ages. Here I could enjoy everything without an afterthought of the injustice and miserable toil which made my leisure; the ignorance and dullness of life which went to make my keen appreciation of history; the tyranny and the struggle full of fear and mishap which went to make my romance. The only weight I had upon my heart was a vague fear as it drew toward bed-time concerning the place wherein I should wake on the morrow: but I choked that down, and went to bed happy, and in a very few moments was in a dreamless sleep. (p. 120)

In "The aims of art"[34] (1886) Morris explained that people live under the influence of two dominating moods, the "mood of energy" and "the mood of idleness", the first one being connected with hope and happiness. He wrote:

> When the mood of energy is upon me, I must be doing something, or I become mopish and unhappy; when the mood of idleness is on me, I find it hard indeed if I cannot rest and let my mind wander over

[34] William Morris, "The aims of art" in *Hopes and Fears for Art and Signs of Change,* Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994.

> the various pictures, pleasant or terrible, which my own experience or my communing with the thoughts of other men, dead or alive, have fashioned in it; and if circumstances will not allow me to cultivate this mood of idleness, I find I must at the best pass through a period of pain till I can manage to stimulate my mood of energy to take its place and make me happy again. And if I have no means wherewith to rouse up that mood of energy to do its duty in making me happy, and I have to toil while the idle mood is upon me, then am I unhappy indeed, and almost wish myself dead, though I do not know what that means. [...] Well, I believe that all men's lives are compounded of these two moods in various proportions, and that this explains why they have always, with more or less of toil, cherished and practiced art.[35]

He believed that the primary purpose of a work of art was always to please the senses of the person who was watching it. The "restraining of restlessness" and the increasing of happiness in men were the primary aims of art. Art is the expression of the society amongst which it exists; this is the reason why, in order to live in a society where the arts flourish, men have to make work happy and rest fruitful. As Paola Spinozzi argues: "rest, far from being a state of indolence and inertia, is a form of re-creative inactivity which Morris deems necessary to the contemplation and enjoyment of the fulfilled artistic act."[36]

Under these conditions, Morris insists, art will never perish. He based his theory upon the premise that slavery laid between art and people. Art must be linked to work and everybody should have access to it; this will lead to new splendors and beauties of visible art.

Morris was quite dissatisfied with the state of the arts at his time, he believed there was too much talk about the arts and not enough practice of it. He deeply discussed his ideas in his non fictional work. In *News from Nowhere* the same principles are nevertheless expressed.

[35] Ibid, p. 81 - 82.

[36] Paola Spinozzi, "Art and Aesthetics in Utopia: William Morris's Response to the Challenge of the "Art to the People" in Fátima Vieira, Marinela Freitas (ed.), *Utopia Matters, Theory, Politics, Literature and the Arts,* Porto: Editora da Universidade do Porto, 2005.

While traveling on the upper Thames, William Guest confronts himself with Elen; the new architecture works as pretext to a long discussion upon the differences among the two époques:

> "we have plenty of record of the so-called arts of the time before Equality of Life; and there are not wanting people who say that the state of that society was not the cause of all that ugliness; that they were ugly in their life because they liked to be, and could have had beautiful things about them if they had chosen; just as a man or body of men now may, if they please, make things more or less beautiful - Stop! I know what you are going to say".
> "Do you?" said I, smiling, yet with a beating heart.
>
> "Yes," she said; "you are answering me, teaching me, in some way or another, although you have not spoken the words aloud. You were going to say that in times of inequality it was an essential condition of the life of these rich men that they should not themselves make what they wanted for the adornment of their lives, but should force those to make them whom they forced to live pinched and sordid lives; and that as a necessary consequence the sordidness and pinching, the ugly barrenness of those ruined lives, were worked up into the adornment of the lives of the rich, and art died out amongst men? Was that what you would say, my friend?" (p. 166)

Morris projection of a utopian city is radically different from the city of Boston as depicted by Edward Bellamy in *Looking Backward 2000 - 1898* (1886).

It has been argued that William Morris wrote his *News from Nowhere* in response to *Looking Backward*. Among other critics, Vita Fortunati[37], discussed some substantial differences among London and Boston. The biggest difference was linked with technology. As Redmond says, "Morris abhorred Bellamy's scheme because it seemed to threaten the extinction of art as anything more than an amusing way of filling time, and the extinction

[37] Vita Fortunati, "Le città utopiche: Londra" in Vita Fortunati, Raymond Trousson, Adriana Corrado ed., *Dall'utopia all'utopismo. Percorsi tematici*, Napoli: CUEN, 2003.

of genuine individuality; the people were to be sacrificed to the machines."[38] Morris considered Bellamy's utopia a bureaucrat's paradise; furthermore, from Raymond Trousson's point of view, *Looking Backward* displays some typically American values as the rejection of social parasitism, the search for profit and an efficient technique of production and distribution. [39] This is the model that provoked a reaction in William Morris. He judged *Looking Backward* a "cockney paradise"[40], diametrically different from his own system committed to condemn profit, centralism and industrialization.

[38] William Morris, *News from Nowhere, or, An epoch of rest: being some chapters from a utopian romance,* James Redmond ed., London and New York: Routldge, 1970, intoduction, p. xxxvii.
[39] Raymond Trousson, "America", in, Vita Fortunati, Raymond Trousson, Adriana Corrado eds., *Dall'utopia all'utopismo. Percorsi tematici*, Napoli: CUEN, 2003, p. 284.
[40] William Morris, *Works: The Collected Works of William Morris,* ed. and introd. May Morris, 24 vols., London, 1910 - 15, vol. xxi, p. 28.

# CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN, *HERLAND* (1915)

The narrative of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, both the fictional and the non-fictional is pervaded by the presence of the city seen as a woman's land of possibilities. Within this discourse, issues about art can be introduced.

Her massive production is constantly hanging between two worlds, the political and the literary. I shall take into account her utopian work, *Herland* (1915) and "A Woman's Utopia" (1907), as well as her non fictional work, *The Man-Made World, or* Our *Androcentric Culture* (1911) and *Women and Economics* (1898).

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a material feminist. This aspect of her biography is revealing in order to explore her relationship with architecture and art. "Through art, Gilman believed, we know the past, govern the present, and influence the future."[41] Together with architects and urban planners material feminists suggested a total transformation of the spatial design of American cities, neighborhoods and homes. What was remarkable about material feminists was not their concern in the technological and architectural question, but their opinion that these economic and spatial changes should evolve under women's jurisdiction. In her writings, Gilman deeply investigates issues about the home, projecting and envisioning apartment houses with kinder gardens on the roof and no kitchens. The collection of her writings, pamphlet, articles, poetry, short stories, novels, is highly political. It is quite astonishing how she managed to merge her political enthusiasm with a refined style, never forgetting the immense effect of beauty and art on the life of people. Besides, her biography tells us that by the age of sixteen (as she grew up in poverty) she was beginning to obtain economic independence by selling watercolors and advertising cards. From time to time she gave private lessons or taught art classes. As Ann J. Lane argues, she showed "early signs of talent and interest in art. [...]

[41] Gough, Val and Jill Rudd eds., *A Very Different Story: Studies on the Fiction of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998.

Charlotte's interest in art and her successful efforts at selling cards and watercolors do not constitute a commitment to an artistic career but suggest it was a possibility she considered at this time."[42]

She married her first husband Charles Walter Stetson in 1884; Charles was a Rhode Island artist who, as Ann J. Lane tells us was not willing to do what was essential to make money from his artistic talents and in the mean time he refused her the possibility to work.[43] After marring him she gave birth to her daughter and fell into a depression and suffered from a nervous breakdown. She recovered in Pesadena, a city with the reputation of being an artistic and cultural enclave. Here she was offered to complete the interior decorations on the new Pesadena Opera House, "a project she carried out with great flair and pleasure."[44]

As I shall underline in the analysis of both her utopian and non-fiction work, and as it emerges from her biography, Gilman was deeply concerned with artistic and esthetic issues in particular.

As a first step she denounces, on her critical works, as in *Women and Economics*, or in *The Man-made Word* the women's condition of her present day, the role women play in society and in culture. As a second step in her utopian work she applies those ameliorations she believes to be basic and fundamental in order to improve society.

In 1909 Gilman serialized a book in *The Forerunner, A Monthly Magazine.*[45] which she published in 1911 under the title *The Man-made World, or Our Androcentric Culture*.[46]

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[42] Ann J. Lane, *To Herland and Beyond : the Life and Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman,* New York: Pantheon Books, 1990, p. 63.
[43] Ibid. p. 101.
[44] Ibid. p. 143.
[45] From 1909 to 1916 Gilman single-handedly wrote and edited her own magazine, "with no capital except a mental one". She wrote: essays, poems, critical articles, editorials, serialized novels, and book reviews. As Jill Rudd argues, *The Forerunner* is indicative of the energy and conviction she not only expended herself but expected of others. Jill Rudd "Charlotte Perkins Gilman: *Herland*" in David Seed ed., *A Companion to Science Fiction,* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
[46] Charlotte Perkins Giman, *The Man-made World: or, Our Androcentric Culture*, New York: Charlton, 1911.

Gilman reasons that this book was a study of “excessive maleness” an analysis of what happens when one sex predominates over the other. She devotes an entire chapter to the discussion of issues of gender with relation to the production and consumption of art.

In chapter 4, “Men And Art”, she denounces that there are no great women artists. She asks herself what are the facts as to the relation of men and women to art. And what, in particular, has been the effect upon art of a solely masculine expression.

She contends that the greatest artists are men, and that women instead of creating go on consuming.

In chapter 4, “Men And Art” she writes:

> Applied art in all its forms is a human function, common to every one to some degree, either in production or appreciation, or both. “Pure art”, as an ideal, is also human; and the single-hearted devotion of the true artist to this ideal is one of the highest forms of the social sacrifice. Of all the thousand ways by which humanity is specialized for inter-service, none is more exquisite than this; the evolution of the social Eye, or Ear, or Voice, the development of those whose work is wholly for others, and to whom the appreciation of others is as the bread of life. This we should have in a properly developed community; the pleasure of applied art in the making and using of everything we have; and then the high joy of the Great Artist, and the noble work thereof, spread far and wide.

Gilman reasons that men have developed architecture, sculpture, painting, music and the drama, while women are still relegated in their primitive environment “making flowers of wax, and hair, and worsted; doing mottoes of perforated cardboard, making crazy quilts and mats and "tidies"--as if they lived in a long past age, or belonged to a lower race”.

To interpret Gilman’s words means admitting that she blames “our androcentric culture” for having put down the standard in aesthetic culture. Yet she argues that men have weakened and reduced the output while

keeping down the general level of taste. She maintains that "the true artist" goes beyond his or her sex, consequently, if this is not the case, the art suffers. Yet neither the masculine nor the feminine could have any place in art as art must be human.

Gilman however was aware of the enormous power of literature to shape consciousness. In chapter V, "Masculine Literature" (collected in *The Man-made World: or, Our Androcentric Culture* in 1911), she made clear her faith in the capacity of the novel to change human consciousness: "Literature is the most powerful and necessary of the arts, and fiction is its broadest form.... The art which gives humanity consciousness is the most vital art" (*The Man-made World: or, Our Androcentric Culture*, p. 93).

In *Women and Economics*[47] she analyses the economic factors that have contributed to the downgrading of women to a second category of humanity. The book focuses upon mainly three subjects; the family, the marriage and the home. *Women and Economics* is extremely provocative and original considering the time in which it was written. It is also ambitious as it aims at combining economic concepts with notions belonging to the sphere of anthropology and psychology. She makes a profound analysis and a deep social critic that lay the foundation for her utopian books and tales. She analyzes meticulously the subordinate relation of women to men and suggests possible alternatives. She starts by comparing the human being with other species existing in nature. From her point of view, what makes human beings different from all other species is that in nature the female does not depend on the male. She writes:

> We are the only animal species in which the female depends on the male for food, the only animal species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation. With us an entire sex lives in a relation of economic dependence upon the other sex, and the

[47] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics, A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: First University of California Press Paperback, 1998.

> economic relation is combined with the sex relation. (*Women and Economics*, p. 5)

She coins the term "sexuo-economic relationship" specifically to refer to women's subordination. She denounces that a woman gets her living by getting a husband and that a husband gets his wife by getting a living. Beside she says:

> Pictorial art, music, the drama, society, everything, tells her that she is she, and that all depends on whom she marries. (*Women and Economics*, p. 33)

Again, as in *Our Androcentric Culture*, she criticizes the masculinist realm of the arts in her present day society. She argues that all working conditions being equal, men get payed while women don't. Although specialization and organization are the basis of human progress they have been prohibited to women almost completely. She suggests that the traditionally feminine work inside the house must be moved to the city. She writes:

> As cooking becomes disassociated from the home, we shall gradually cease to attach emotions to it; and we shall learn to judge it impersonally upon a scientific and artistic basis. (*Women and Economics*, p. 88)

If on one hand she denounces what she perceives as unfair in her non-fictional work, in her utopian work she imagines a solution to those problems she has raised before. *Herland* (1915) is a perfect example of this. Except for the heaven-sent massacre of the entire male population at the beginning of *Herland* and the following female repopulation via parthenogenesis, from this utopia, serious suggestions for different ways of living are revealed. Art is an ever-present human activity conveyed by painting, dance, music, poetry, child-rearing strategies, clothes and by religion.

*Herland*[48] is Gilman's most popular utopia, although *Moving the Mountain*

[48] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*, Usa: Pantheon Books, 1979. All quotations from the

was published in 1911. Her-Land represents the city as a milieu that is for women both inaccessible and potentially welcoming. Anna Scacchi argues that *Herland* succeeds in criticizing the doctrine of separate sphere and in suggesting a utopian vision of a "city of women", where the urban space is in harmonic relation with the domestic space. [49]

It depicts an egalitarian society inhabited by wise, independent and athletic women where an environmental disaster killed the men and secluded women high in the mountains; to compensate for the lack of men in *Herland* women give birth though parthenogenesis.

The story could be easily summarized; three male friends join an expedition during which they discover *Herland;* initially they are convinced that such a advanced society requires men, whom they think must be hiding. Surprisingly enough for them, all the people that the three male explorers will meet will be women.

Women run a society with splendid architecture of buildings and landscape. Gilman extends the ideal of efficient and collective kitchens, laundries and child care centers in order to remove women's traditional tasks from the home. The very first impression the visitors of *Herland* have is associated with art; the voice of the "herlanders" is musical.

> They were girls, of course, no boys could ever have shown that sparkling beauty, and yet none of us was certain at first.
> We saw short hair, hatless, loose, and shining; a suit of some light firm stuff, the closest of tunics and knee breeches, met by trim gaiters. As bright and smooth as parrots and as unaware of danger, they swung there before us, wholly at ease, staring as we stared, till first one, and then all of them burst into peals of delighted laughter.
> *Then there was a torrent of soft talk tossed back and forth; no savage sing-song, but clear musical fluent speech.* (p. 15) (emphasis mine)

novel will be cited from this edition.

[49] Anna Scacchi, "Oltre le mura domestiche: La Donna, La Casa e la Città nell'opera di Charlotte Perkins Gilman" in C. Giorcelli, C. Cattarulla, A. Scacchi, a cura di, *Città reali e immaginarie del continente americano*, Roma: Edizioni associate, 1998, p. 195.

The sociologist Vandyck Jennings, is the narrator of the story. He recounts the whole story from memory, having lost his notes. He tells the story because:

> the rest of the world needs to know about that country [...] I haven't said where it was for fear some self-appointed missionaries, or traders, or land-greedy expansionist, will take it upon themselves to push in. They will not be wanted, I can tell them that, and will fare worse than we did if they do find it. (p. 1)

Finally he will look at women "not as females, but as people". His friends are: Terry O. Nicholson, a rich and arrogant "macho" who finds it almost impossible to live in a place where men are not superior to women, and Jeff Margrave, the man who accepts *Herland* without asking himself too many questions. As Jill Rudd argues interestingly enough, Van - the narrator - describes Jeff as "born to be a poet" (p. 2) but he is actually a doctor, "thus combining the supposed objectivity of a scientist with the more aesthetic appreciation (arguably equally supposed) of an artist."[50]
The three men are captured and educated. They are treated well; in the end they are introduced to three young girls and they respectively form a couple.

Music and dance are part of *Herland*, music seems to have a therapeutic effect on the life of people, it is played on many occasions and it coexists with other activities.

> There were no spectacular acrobatics, such as only the young can perform, but for all-around development they had a most excellent system. A good deal of music went with it, with posture dancing and, sometimes, gravely beautiful processional performances. (p. 32)

Gilman's utopia is highly practical and aesthetically pleasant. *Herland* is

[50] Jill Rudd "Charlotte Perkins Gilman: *Herland*" in David Seed ed., *A Companion to Science Fiction,* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

described as a garden world.

> Here was evidently a people highly skilled, efficient, caring for their country as a florist cares for his costliest orchids […] Everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness, and the pleasantest sense of home over it all. As we neared the center of the town the houses stood thicker, ran together as it were, grew into rambling places grouped among parks and open squares, something as college buildings stand in their quiet greens. (p. 18)

Each person is considered in his or her individuality, this attitude is mirrored in *Herland*'s houses, private spaces with two rooms; one destined to entertain friends and a private one.

Clothes in utopias are significant elements, specifically, the act of changing them when reaching utopia has been deeply investigated by scholars. In *Herland* clothes are simple but artistic in a way, as the quotation below shows.

> We had become well used to the clothes. They were quite as comfortable as our own -- in some ways more so -- and undeniably better looking. As to pockets, they left nothing to be desired. That second garment was fairly quilted with pockets. They were most ingeniously arranged, so as to be convenient to the hand and not inconvenient to the body, and were so placed as at once to strengthen the garment and add decorative lines of stitching. In this, as in so many other points we had now to observe, there was shown the action of a practical intelligence, coupled with *fine artistic feeling, and, apparently, untrammeled by any injurious influences.* (p. 75) (emphasis mine).

In Gilman's utopia the mother is the connecting point from present-day to future. In *Herland,* among others feminist utopias, the private world of mother-child confined in the home is transformed into a community of mothers and children, in a socialized world. It is a world where human social values have been accomplished by women in the interest of

everybody.

Collective motherhood in *Herland* is viewed as an art and a calling requiring both great skill and talent. Child-rearing is, in *Herland*'s culture, deeply studied and practiced, the more the Herlanders love their children the less they are willing to trust unskilled hands, even their own. Education is their "highest art" (p. 82).

Gilman eliminates the possessiveness that she sees in the mother-child relation by teaching the child that he is nothing more than "one of many", although she does not question the assumption of maternal love.

> There you have it. You see, they were Mothers, not in our sense of helpless involuntary fecundity, forced to fill and overfill the land, every land, and then see their children suffer, sin, and die, fighting horribly with one another; 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. (p. 68)

As Huckle argues, "the controlling force in Gilman's paradise is mothering [...] the mothering function is idealized and serves as a building and guiding principle."[51] She idealizes both the maternal impulse and the potential of mothering and education to transform society.

The songs the Herlanders sing to their children are also representative of the artistic atmosphere of the entire utopia. Their child-motive were "the exquisite work of great artists; not only simple and unfailing in appeal to the child-mind, but *true*, true to the living world about them." (p. 103)

In contrast with the state of things in her present day society - as we saw in her nonfictional work - in the imagined world depicted by Gilman female artists are deeply valued.

A visitor to *Herland*, Jeff, is happily surprised when he notices that

[51] Patricia Huckle, "Women in Utopia" E.D. Sullivan ed., T*he Utopian Vision: Seven Essays on the Quincentennial of Sir Thomas Moore,* San Diego, Calif.: San Diego State University Press, 1983, p. 118.

Herlanders exhibit a sort of interest in him. At home he never was popular and the only women that ever showed an interest in him were: "The less practical, perhaps; the girls who were artists of some sort, ethicists, teachers -- that kind." (p. 86)

Jeff looks at women artists as "less practical" underestimating artists as such.

In *Herland* religion is drastically different from the one existing in Gilman's present day.

Religion in *Herland* gives to the searching mind a rational basis in life, it gives to people the feeling of being loved and understood.

> It gave clear, simple, rational directions as to how we should live -- and why. And for ritual it gave first those triumphant group demonstrations, when *with a union of all the arts, the revivifying combination of great multitudes moved rhythmically with march and dance, song and music, among their own noblest products and the open beauty of their groves and hills*. Second, it gave these numerous little centers of wisdom where the least wise could go to the most wise and be helped. (p. 115) (emphasis mine)

Virtually every moment in *Herland*'s life is balanced with art. I shall suggest that this is an expedient to spread Gilman's ideas in a more efficient way. The charming, the delicate and the artistic atmosphere work together in order to prepare the ground for a radical revolution. Finally I shall also point out that a pleasant atmosphere has the merit to induce the longing for art in people, the narrator in fact argues:

> It was as if I had come to some new place and people, with a desire to eat at all hours, and no other interests in particular; and as if my hosts, instead of merely saying, "You shall not eat", had presently aroused in me a lively desire for music, for pictures, for games, for exercise, for playing in the water, for running some ingenious machine; and, in the

> multitude of my satisfactions, I forgot the one point which was not satisfied, and got along very well until mealtime. (p. 130)

Gilman believes that the most important fact about men and women is the common humanity they share and not the differences that separate them, all her work is dedicated to serve this ideal, yet, as I shall see also while discussing “A Woman's Utopia” she manages to combine human evolution with aesthetic evolution.

# "A WOMAN'S UTOPIA" (1907)

The 1907 "A Woman's Utopia" is an unfinished novel and represents Gilman's very first attempt to write utopian fiction.
Gilman defines it "a practical utopia"; critics have not adequately analyzed this oeuvre, however, the majority of Gilman scholars have underlined its importance. It comprehends a short introduction and just five chapters. In the introduction Gilman tells the reader what she thinks is the meaning of utopia:

> We are beginning to see that Utopian dreams are to life what an architect's plans are to a house - we may build it - if we can. Of course if he has planned wrongly - if the thing won't stand, or does not suit our purpose, then we lay it aside and choose another. But it is perfectly practical to make plans before you build; much more so than to build without a plan.[52]

Gilman believes humanity to be in need of utopia, and she suggests that there is a road to it, and that the road must start here and now. She also denounces that the numerous utopias of the past have been written by men in fact she writes: "Never a voice from a woman to say how she would like the world. The main stream of life, the Mother, has been silent." [53] (p. 135)

The plot of "A Woman's Utopia" can be easily told: the narration is set in New York only 20 years in the future with respect to the time she was writing.
Narrator Morgan G. Street defies his much loved cousin Hope Cartwright and the club she runs - the R. G. U. [Argue] club - to improve the United

[52] "A Woman's Utopia", in C. F. Kessler ed., *Daring to Dream: Utopian Fiction by United States Women Before 1950*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995, p. 134. All following quotations from the novel will be cited from this edition.
[53] It is reasonable to assume that Gilman never read Mary Griffith's *Three Hundred Years Hence* (1836), widely considered as the first utopia ever written by a woman in the United States.

States under various aspects. While the narrator travels for twenty years the women running the R. G. U. club instead of just talking about reforms will have to demonstrate that his donation of twenty million dollars could help them in realizing their reforms.

As Hope tells Morgan:

> Then if I can show you that the average woman to-day is interested in the improvement of the whole world, her own country, and especially her own city; that she takes a large part in business and politics, art and science, all industry and trade; that she has become stronger, more beautiful and dresses with wise good taste and personal distinction; that she is now organized and united in splendid co-ordination in every city, throughout the country and internationally as well; and is hand in hand with men in the highest progress, you will admit the change? (p. 155).

He will admit the change; Gilman describes Morgan returning to New York on May 1927 and finding a completely renovated city. As Kessler has argued, Hope gradually converts him from masculinism to feminism.[54]

The women of the R. G. U. club managed to improve society under various aspects (physical, social, cultural, architectural). The city Gilman imagines is pollution-free and very technological. Great importance is given to the education of children and to work. Women who are not at work are commiserated and are regarded as incompetent. As Hope says:

> There are very few women now who are not at work - and such are very properly pitied as incapable or despised as unwilling or both. (p. 164)

One of the first things that Morgan discovers is that religion has become the "science of conduct" (p. 146) i.e. the study of ethics. The study of ethics has lead to "medical ethics" as well as to an "artistic conscience" among people.

[54] Carol Farley Kessler, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress Toward Utopia with Selected Writings*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995, p. 49.

This new religion helps people to nourish their drives through the counseling of some "religious teachers". They contend that God is inside every person and that he fights to build a collectivity from a non-homogenous collection of individuals. The most important ethical issue being that of elevating women from slaves to the men to the higher category of human beings. Such advancements, Gilman insists, have improved men and children together with women thus overcoming the era of egoism in favor of "socioism".

The "city mothers" are a group of women extremely active in studying and making reforms; they are in charge of thinking the city from a new perspective, both from an architectural point of view and from a social one.

> They rose and rose, a vast, swift, peaceful revolution; town after town was captured by these enthusiastic city mothers, and things began to be done. Honesty, efficiency, cleanness, health, beauty, order, peace, economy - these were their purposes: and they accomplished them. (p. 158)

They study Domestic Economy as well as Child Culture and Architecture; they use a technique to ameliorate and embellish the city following both an aesthetic and a functional goal. They give five years time to the house owners to modify their habitations according to the new taste. In case this would not happen, the city mothers take it upon themselves to pay the houses to their owners, but at the same time, they have the right to destroy and rebuild the houses following the new taste. The walls are pleasantly colored and decorated. "The absence of coal enabled us to have painted cities gay as flowers". (p. 164)
As a result of the work done by the City Mothers, urban areas of New York are totally different from their past;

> […] it was as if the hard, dark, closepacked kernel of New York had burst like popcorn, and become a far more beautiful and wholesome thing, ten times its

former size. (p. 160)

Beauty and order are two factors that cannot be separated in Gilman's imagined city. Electric and ventilation heating, children garden on the roofs for children's play and tree-lined street are different yet compatible elements of a wider project; together they create an aesthetically pleasant city that nevertheless is founded on ecological and technological principles. In fact the entire city has been reshaped, never forgetting the importance of the aesthetic for people's inner fulfillment and joy.

Hope insists that these reforms have been possible as a result of the decentralization of business. She further shows Morgan some reforms by taking him to visit a typical worker family. This visit serves to further expand on her view upon a better architecture capable to match the needs of both men and women. The Whiteberg family lives in a kitchen-free apartment of four rooms that is part of a bigger block. The upper floor contains residences while public dining rooms are hosted on the roof and on the first ground. The shops are housed on the second floor whereas kindergarten and recreation areas are on the rooftop. Recreation activities include some artistic happenings as well as dancing and reading.
Music and dance are deeply valued in "A Woman's Utopia" as a matter of fact not only Gilman provides some physical spaces for people to practice the arts, but also describes women's artistic enhancement - they are described as playing the piano on various occasions - as a result of the revolution that took place. In addition to music and dance, Gilman talks about theater and we get to know that in her utopia going to the theater is almost free. This is significant of Gilman's belief that art has to be enjoyed by everybody regardless of their social status.

However, the most appreciated art within this unfinished novel is architecture as it helps the feminist cause by creating buildings capable of matching women's need: the houses with no kitchens and the famous kindergartens on the roofs. Furthermore architecture while displaying the

perfection of the utopian city does not forget the importance of beauty for the lives of people. “The city mothers” insist in educating people to the new taste, which is in turn mirrored in the elegantly colored new houses.

“A Woman’s Utopia” is the experimental ground for a perfectly structured work as *Herland*. Although numerous problems that critics have underlined (her work is marred by racism and elitism and she lacks economic competences, etc…), it still remains a wonderful pattern of utopian literature.

# B.F. SKINNER, *WALDEN TWO* (1948)

*Walden Two* was first published in 1948 and reissued with an introduction in 1976. It is considered both a psychology book and a utopian novel. It has been defined as the clearest expression of the utopian concept in modern term.[55]

The title is a reference to Henry David Thoreau's *Walden.*

B.F. Skinner's Utopia reminds Thoreau's *Walden*, yet Skinner's *Walden Two* is not a place of loneliness but a community. In the beginning, Skinner wanted to title his oeuvre: *The Sun is but a Morning Star*, which is a even clearer reference to Thoreau's *Walden.*[56] However the two novels are extremely different: Thoreau's *Walden* promotes individuality, while *Walden Two* promotes community values.

*Walden Two* is founded on the principles of behavior analysis and behavioral engineering, that implies scientific technology applied to human conduct; Skinner was himself a behavioral psychologist.

Skinner did not want his novel to be a model for a real community; his aim was rather to show that experimentation was the road to follow to improve society.

As we can deduce from his introduction to his novel, he believes that in order for society to improve and in order to achieve social justice for all, science and technology of behavior are necessary:

> Either we do nothing and allow a miserable and probably catastrophic future to overtake us, or we use our knowledge about human behavior to create a social environment in which we shall live productive and creative lives and do so without jeopardizing the chances that those who follow us will be able to do

[55] E.D. Sullivan, *The Utopian Vision: Seven Essays on the Quincentennial of Sir Thomas More,* San Diego, Calif.: San Diego State University Press, 1983, p. 31.

[56] The final sentence of Thoreau's *Walden* is: "There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star."

> the same. Something like a Walden Two would not be a bad start.[57]

Scholars have reacted to Skinner's novel in deeply different terms; some have labeled his work as dystopian, as it involves mind and behavior control.[58] Others disapproved the practice of applying to human beings practiced learned in laboratories through the study of rats. However, the majority of critics situated his novel in the utopian genre. *Walden Two* also had some enthusiast admirers that ventured to create communities based on this book.[59]

The novel follows the tradition of Thomas More's *Utopia* by being almost completely a dialogue. Professor Frazier shows the prodigies of his society to the visitors to utopia. The visitors are: Burris, a Psychology Professor (whose name evokes Skinner's first name, Burrhus), Castle, a Philosophy Professor who will pose counter-arguments, and two American couples that show varying degrees of suspicion or enthusiasm for both the behaviorally engineered society and for America; one of which will eventually live in Walden Two while the other will prefer the "real" world. Frazier is the founder of Walden Two, as well as the guide through Utopia. Together with five more men he is a "governing planner".

*Walden Two* embraces a community of 1,000 inhabitants where jealousy does not exist nor does competitiveness, consumerism, fashion or traditional families (children are reared communally) and where everybody work. In this community the aim of work is not to earn money but to produce goods for the community.

Art is highly valued, more valued than work:

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[57] B.F. Skinner, *Walden Two,* New York: Macmillan Paperbacks Edition 1972, p. xvi. All following quotations will be cited from this edition.

[58] For a discussion upon Skinner's supposed dystopian drive see: Joseph Wood Krutch, "Danger: Utopia Ahead" in *Saturday Review*, 20 August 1966, pp. 17 - 18.

[59] Twin Oaks (Virginia, USA) established in 1967 is the most long-lasting and famous of such communities. It is made up of around 85 adult members and 15 children. Their community is self-supporting and reflects values of cooperation, nonviolence, equality and ecology.

> there's nothing wrong with hard work and we aren't concerned to avoid it. We simply avoid uncreative and uninteresting work […] Our energies can then be turned toward art, science, play, the exercise of skills, the satisfaction of curiosities, the conquest of nature, the conquest of man-the conquest of men himself, but never of other men. (p. 76)

Skinner values art because the final goal of his Utopian world is happiness of both the individual and the community.

Skinner, through Frazier, compares the state of art of his time with the one in Walden Two:

> I merely wanted to bring up an aspect of Walden Two that you mustn't neglect in evaluating us. I mean our patronage of the arts. This is not a great age in either art or music. But why not? Why shouldn't our civilization produce art as abundantly as it produces science and technology? Obviously because the right conditions are lacking. That's where Walden Two comes in. Here, the right conditions can be achieved. (p. 88)

From Skinner's point of view these conditions could be easily summarized. In Walden Two artists do not struggle for remunerative positions and there is no great competitiveness for the public's consent; such achievements, Frazier believes, are ascribed to cultural engineering. Walden Two is in fact a model community that shares principles of behavior modification.

People are happy, inventive, artistic and productive. Everyone can be an artist, as artistic impulse originates from a positive environment.

Art flourishes in Walden Two; early in the narration Burris gets involved in some artistic activities, his attention is captured by "extraordinarily good paintings", he reports that "they were surprisingly vigorous and fresh." (p. 27). The production of art is the reason for people's happiness. The artistic productivity consists mainly of painting but music is present as well (the music mentioned is for the most part classical, Bach's B-Minor Mass is mentioned and also some concerts with violin and piano accompaniment). Frazier reveals that the artistic productivity of the members is aimed at

encouraging a Golden Age of art, music and literature. As we can notice from the description of rooms, art is ever present:

> Some were furnished for music, with pianos, phonographs, and shelves of music and records. Others appeared to be group studios. Various works of art in progress stood about, but the rooms were serving now for informal meetings. (p. 41)

Skinner raises various questions in this work, among other things, he reflects upon the necessity of building and living in big cities. He suggests that smaller cities represent a better environment for the lives of people. He argues that smaller cities encourage interpersonal relationships among human beings and promote respect and love, yet he does not talk about architecture.

Children are society's most important resources. In *Walden Two* the Behavioral Engineering substitutes the family both as an economic unity and as social and cognitive support as well, furthermore, Skinner believes that artistic interest has to be encouraged in children from an early age.

He points out that in a perfect society, as the one represented in *Walden Two*, people's spare time is not dedicated to vices (drinking, gambling, etc..) but it is spent in the pursuit of artistic satisfaction. Community's planners require just a small number of working hours per person as each member of *Walden Two* is required to accumulate 1200 labor credits a year. The difficulty and the attractiveness of the job are the factors that determine the number of credits per hour's work. Freedom of choice is maintained as well as happiness, as all kinds of jobs are made equally attractive either by their nature or their payment.

*Walden Two*, by aiming at establishing a Golden Age of Art succeeds in creating the perfect ground for artistic creativity.

# The Arts in the Critical Utopia

Tom Moylan, in his book of 1986, *Demand the Impossible*[60], suggests the influential concept of 'critical utopia'. Beginning in the late 60s and early 70s a succession of new utopian novels emerged from the ferment of the oppositional culture in the United States. Moylan's compelling analysis shows this phase of utopian publishing revival as a transformation that involves both the destruction of utopian writing and its maintenance.

But what is a critical utopia? And to what extend is a critical utopia different from a classical utopia?

Tom Moylan argues that "critical" is used "in the Enlightenment sense of *crtitique* - that is expression of oppositional thought, unveiling, debunking, of both the genre itself and the historical situation."[61]

The writers of critical utopias highlight the route to social change that leads to utopia, yet they openly display their aspiration to discuss the utopian society itself. Tom Moylan argues that there are two main differences between critical utopia and traditional utopia. The critical utopias have the merit to analyze, explore and reveal the limitations of present-day society, but also those of the utopian society, which is everything but untouched by inaccuracies as well as moral and social problems.

Critical utopias differ from other utopias also with respect to the characters' behavior; as a matter of fact the inhabitants of utopia no longer follow the orders obediently yet they actively participate in the creation of utopia. As Vita Fortunati observes, this new concept of utopia, which is open and problematic inevitably leads to a lucid revision of the utopian paradigm whose rules appear to be constrictive and limiting.[62]

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[60] Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, London: Methuen, 1986, p. 41.

[61] Ibid., p. 10.

[62] Vita Fortunati, Iolanda Ramos, "Utopia Re-Interpreted: An Interview with Vita Fortunati", *Spaces of Utopia: An Electronic Journal*, nr.2, Summer 2006, p. 5.

Women writers have embraced the concept of critical utopia, making it their own; in this chapter I shall discuss four critical utopias written by women that are also representative of the revival of the utopian genre that began after the social turmoil of the 1960s.

Unlike the novels of modern utopist as Bellamy and Morris these feminist and critical utopias present substantial differences; first and foremost these novels share an awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition. Therefore, it is not surprising that individuality becomes a primary value.

As Khanna argues, instead of the faceless uniformity of traditional utopian citizens, the reader meets distinctive people who disagree with each other.[63] Furthermore, she adds that feminist utopian novels deal very much with art issues as opposed to the anti-art attitude of most male utopias. So I asked myself why feminist utopian writers, as opposed to their male counterparts, seem to share a higher fascination with the arts.

I shall argue that feminist worlds are usually more dynamic than male ones, and the liveliness of their utopias is mirrored in an intensification of creativity in the lives of utopian citizens.

Except for *The Left Hand of Darkness* which represents an exception, the remaining novels here presented, describe aesthetic worlds concerned with artistic qualities.

Furthermore, as it will also be thoroughly discussed, these novels share a fascination with the arts that is often associated to a deep interest in technology as well as in ecology.

[63] Lee Cullen Khanna, "Women's Worlds: New Directions in Utopian Fiction" in *Alternative Futures: The Journal of Utopian Studies,* Volume 4, spring / summer, 1981, p. 49.

# URSULA K. LE GUIN, *THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS* (1969)

*The artist deals with what cannot be said in words.*
*The artist whose medium is fiction does this in words.*
*The novelist says in words what cannot be said in words.*
*Ursula K. Le Guin*

It is usually agreed that the first science fiction novel was written by Mary Shelley, the daughter of the feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and the wife of the English romantic poet Shelley. Mary Shelley wrote Frankenstein in 1818 at the age of nineteen. However, the field has since been dominated by male writers who have made the land of science fiction almost exclusively male. Women's science fiction, or feminist science fiction is more recent than the genre as a whole. It is commonly regarded as a genre born in the 1960s.[64] Some of the aspects of feminist science fiction writing mirror many features of the second-wave feminism. Ursula K. Le Guin's 1969 novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness* is one of the first major works of feminist science fiction and one of the acknowledged classics of female science fiction. It received the most prestigious awards given to science fiction writing. A Hugo Award in 1969 and a Nebula Award in 1970. This novel is part of the Hainish cycle.

*The Left Hand of Darkness* belongs clearly to the science fiction realm, but has often been considered as utopian by feminist scholars. The reason for its "ambiguous collocation" resides mainly upon its themes and aims.

The subject of art in this science fiction novel seems to be a non-subject at first as there are no figures of great artists or works of art. However, if we consider the novel in its entirety we discover an artistic drive that permeates the entire work. Music characterizes most of the activities of Le Guin's imagined word.

[64] Adam Robert, *Science Fiction,* London and New York: Routledge: 2000.

The novel is made from a "heterogeneous group of narrative modes artfully superposed and intertwined, thereby constituting a virtual anthology of narrative strands of different kinds"[65]: the travel narrative, the imitation of myth, the political novel, plain science fiction, Orwellian dystopia and finally also a love story.

Donald F. Theall argues that "in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, interestingly enough, the stranger - who is also the main narrator - is a professional cultural analyst and cultural communicator, whose concern with a thorough account of the culture provides the novel with the characteristic features of an anthropological report [...] in this respect Le Guin employs the techniques of ambivalence, for her field-worker, her "mobile" from the Ekumen to the Gethenians, realizes that the "truth" of the humane sciences is founded in imagination as well as fact."[66] The novel starts with these words:

> I'll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my homeworld that Truth is a matter of imagination. The soundest fact may fail or prevail in the style of its telling; like that singular organic jewel of our seas, which grows brighter as one woman wears it, and worn by another, dulls and goes to dust.[67]

Le Guin presents us the protagonist who could in fact be regarded as a fictional ethnographer. He meticulously reports his adventures together with the customs of the places he visits. He also reports sound - tape collections, legends, descriptions of the architecture.

Genly Ai, the protagonist, has an anthropological attitude which helps him to observe and understand a different culture, he is an objective observer. Ai is determined to arrange an open trade with the world he visits "not only in

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[65] Frederic Jameson, "World Reduction in Le Guin: The Emergence of Utopian Narrative", *Science Fiction Studies,* Volume 2, Part 3, November 1975.

[66] Donald F. Theall, "The Art of Social-Science Fiction: The Ambiguous Utopian Dialectics of Ursula K. Le Guin", in *Science Fiction Studies* 7, Volume 2, Part 3, November 1975, pp. 256 - 264.

[67] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness,* New York: Ace Books, 2003. All following quotations from the novel will be cited from this edition.

goods...but in knowledge, technologies, ideas, philosophies, *art*, medicine, science, theory ..." (p. 138) (emphasis mine).

Themes in *The Left Hand of Darkness* are numerous, elaborate and interwoven. However, the plot of Le Guin's novel can be easily summarized: the novel takes place in the year 4870 and deals with Genly Ai, an envoy from the Ekumen who has come by himself to a planet called Winter or Gethen in the language of its inhabitants. The planet Gethen has two countries, Karhide and Orgoreyen. Karhide is an anarchist monarchy governed by a mad king. Orgoreyen is characterized by its bureaucratization. This planet gives hospitality to various contrasting societies, none of which is simply utopian or dystopian. Ai's mission is to convince the planet Winter to join the Ekumen League of Words, a peaceful interplanetary organization. Ai visits first the nation of Karhide, where he is befriended by the Prime Minister Estraven. Karhide's king is psychotic and oversuspicious. He exiles Estraven and declines Genly Ai's mission. The story of Ai's mission becomes submerged in the story of his relationship with Estraven. Most of the second part of the novel is committed to a journey across the icy world of Winter, as Estraven helps Ai to escape from a prison in Orgoreyn to return to Karhide. Estraven is the most open-minded and the one willing to share the ideas of the Ekumen.

As the name suggests, Winter is a very cold planet, always covered in snow and ice. People living in it are out of the ordinary, they are androgynous, they are neither female nor male. Just once a month they have gender identities or sexual urges, in this period of time they enter "Kemmer", a state of estrus.

There has never been a war on Winter; Le Guin suggests that this is because the planet is freed from gender roles, and thus there is no androcentric culture and no violence. During his expedition the envoy must learn some arcane rules of politics and diplomacy in order to survive. Ai's fate changes rapidly, in relation to what political faction is in power at the time in the country he is residing in. Genly Ai's adventures in this imaginary and hostile planet are used by Le Guin to investigate what life would be without

all dualities, as winter versus summer or male versus female.

If on the one hand, as previously mentioned, the plot is not too elaborate, on the other hand the process that involves the narration of the story is definitely complex and occasionally confusing. Le Guin's writing is circular and has various levels; the narration is mixed with tales, legends, diaries, records and it continuously shifts back and forth in narrative time.

Critics have investigated mainly two basic assumptions; the first is the climatic premise. Everything from the style of the buildings to religion displays the restrictions of the cold weather. The second premise concerns androgyny and has clearly strong feminist implications. The Gethenians have fluctuating sexual dominance, that is, most of the time they are neuter, having no sexual desire. When they enter the monthly fertile period called *Kemmer:*

> The sexual impulse is tremendously strong [...] controlling the entire personality, subjecting all other drives to its imperative. When the individual finds a partner in kemmer, hormonal secretion is further stimulated [...] until in one partner either a male of female hormonal dominance is established [...]
> Normal individuals have no predisposition to either sexual role in kemmer; they do not know whether they will be the male or the female, and have no choice in the matter [...] kemmer ends fairly abruptly, and if conception has not taken place, the individual returns to the latent phase and the cycle begins anew. If the individual was in the female role and was impregnated, hormonal activity of course continues, and for the gestation period the individual remains female [...] With the cessation of lactation the female becomes once more a perfect androgyne. No physiological habit is established, and the mother of several children may be the father of several more. (p. 82)

A society based on such a premise surely raises some provocative possibilities:

> Consider: Anyone can turn his hand to anything. This sounds very simple, but its psychological effects are incalculable. The fact that everyone between seventeen and thirty-five or so is liable to be... "tied down to childbearing" implies that no one is quite so thoroughly "tied down" here as women, elsewhere, are likely to be - psychologically or physically. Burden and privilege are shared out pretty equally; everybody has the same risk to run or choice to make. Therefore nobody here is quite so free as a free male anywhere else.
> Consider: ... There is no myth of Oedipus on Winter.
> Consider: There is no unconsenting sex, no rape...
> Consider: There is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive.

Genly Ai is very curious about the inhabitants of Winter, and thus he investigates their customs. He instructs them about his universe and in turns learns about Winter. The Gethenians look quite different from him. They are neither hairy nor winged. They are small, plump. Genly Ai is tall, thin, black and male.

As Beverly Friend argues, Le Guin's main trust is not at the Gethenians and their bisexuality, but at Genly Ai's reaction to them. He is not the destructive, irrational representative of masculine narrowness who destroys and fears what he cannot understand. [68]

For Genly Ai, it is always difficult to understand life on Winter; this is mainly due to its inhabitants. It has been argued that Genly Ai is the Alien in this situation.[69] The Gethenians consider him a "pervert" as he is always "in kemmer" i.e. he is always capable of sexual activity. Ai struggles to relate to the Gethenians, he is constantly trying to encode them in those categories that are so essential to him and so irrelevant to the people he encounters.

If we consider the first question we ask about a new-born baby, then we realize that the entire model of socio-sexual interaction that pervades the

[68] Beverly Friend "Virgin Territory: the Bonds and Boundaries of Women in Science Fiction" in Thomas D. Clareson ed., *Many Futures, Many Worlds: Theme and Form in Science Fiction,* Ohio: The Kent State University Press: 1977, p. 159.
[69] Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin, *Science Fiction: History, Science, Vision*, New York: Oxford University Press: 1977, p. 227.

culture of the earth-man Genly Ai, is nonexistent in Gethen, as its inhabitants do not see themselves as men or women, they have no sexual stereotypes in their lives. Androgyny is used by Le Guin to make her readers observe that people depend on sexual stereotyping for much of their identities.

David Seed argues that the ambisexuals Gethenians reflect a Taoist drive in Le Guin's writing. We know that Le Guin was deeply influenced by the believes of Taoist philosophy; "instead of a struggle, light and dark should be reconciled; each needs the other to exist... the light and dark, light-in-dark, male and female, male - in - female, is given flesh in the ambisexuals Gethenians, and coming to understand this Taoist interdependence of male and female is perhaps the greatest epiphany of Ai [...][70]

On Winter people are respected and appreciated as human beings. Ai considers it an appalling experience but struggles to use his language to define Gethenians. According to him, the social implications of their physical condition lead to a society where neither aggressiveness nor war could ever be conceivable. George E. Slusser observes that Ai must learn that differences must be recognized and accepted before any common ground could be achieved.[71] Critics have largely discussed the meaning of Ai's Name. As Slusser argued, Ai represents an "I", "an ego who accomplishes his being only when he enters into the most personal of relationships with Estraven."[72]

Some critics have seen in Ai's name an "eye" an observer that turns into an actor, but Ai sounds to the Gethenians like "a cry of pain." In order to accomplish his mission, Ai needs to understand the world he sees in Gethen. Myths, rituals and stories represent a valid help within this regard; besides, I shall argue that art in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is present also in the form of myth telling.

Feminist critics have ignored the implications of myth in the novel, but the

[70] David Seed ed., *A Companion to Science Fiction,* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 412.
[71] George Edgar Slusser, *The Farthest Shores of Ursula K. Le Guin*, San Bernardino: Borgo Press: 1976, p. 27.
[72] Ibid. p. 28.

subversive potential of ritual and art has been nevertheless taken into consideration by some scholars.[73]

Jane Ellen Harrison in her *Ancient art and ritual* (a book which is, in her own words, written with the purpose to demonstrate that "primitive art grew out of ritual" argues that "art is in fact but a later and more sublimated, more detached form of ritual".[74] Anna Valdine Clemens demonstrates the link existing between Greco-Roman mythology and rituals and myths as portrayed in *The Left Hand of Darkness.* Clemens is in fact persuaded of Le Guin's mythic orientation and her "conception of art as serving a ritualistic function, as "a kind of guide" for others seeking "a great vision" within an ordinary life."[75]

At the very beginning of the novel Genly Ai attends a parade, this is the first ritual presented by Le Guin, it is a unhurried and chaotic event:

> a vast ornate procession that moves to the music of metal horns and hollow blocks of bone and wood and the dry, pure lilting of electric flutes. The various banners of the great Domains tangle in a rain-beaten confusion of color with the yellow pennants that bedeck the way, and the various musics of each group clash and interweave in many rhythms echoing in the deep stone street. (p. 2)

Music as well is a recurring form of art in the novel. The music that accompanies the parade is described as "discordant", with each band playing its own music. There is no unity in music, but a noise of different sounds an rhythms. "Karhide is not a nation", explains Estraven, "but a family quarrel". The king of Karhide is mad, and to confirm his insanity, the musicians play him the royal music, which is a discordant explosion of sounds produced by the gossiwor, that would drive any person crazy. The

[73] See, for example, Frederic Jameson, "World Reduction in Le Guin: The Emergence of Utopian Narrative", *Science Fiction Studies,* Volume 2, Part 3, November 1975, pp. 221 - 230. Also see, Jeanne Murray Walker, "Myth, Exchange and History in The Left Hand of Darkness", *Science Fiction Studies*, Volume 6, Part 2, July 1979, pp. 180 - 189.

[74] Jane Ellen Harrison, *Ancient Art and Ritual,* Cambridge: The University Press, 1913, p. 225.

[75] Anna Valdine Clemens, "Art, Myth and Ritual in Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*", *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Volume 17, Number 4, Winter 1986, 423 - 436.

gossiwor produces “a preposterous disconsolate bellow ... if this is the Royal Music no wonder the kings of Karhide are all mad”. (p. 3)

This parade involves elements of both modern and ancient remnants. Together with electric flutes there are “metal horns” and “hollow blocks of bone and wood”. Anna Valdine Clemens observes that “despite its vestiges of ancient sacrificial ritual (...) the Ehrenrang parade is much more like any of our political ceremonies” but above all it is “simply a display of collective consciousness.”[76] As I have argued before, Le Guin’s narration embraces fictional evidences; chapter two, for instance, is taken from “a sound tape collection of North Karhidish “hearth - tales”. Again the importance of music is stressed.

Chapter five “The Domestication of Hunch”, instead, concerns the description of the cities and lifestyles in Karhide. In the nation of Karhide, houses are made with wood and are built following a “rural” style, trying not to contaminate nature with man made buildings. When Ai visits this nation and spends a few days with the locals, he reports that:

> Time was unorganized except for the communal work, field labor, gardening, wood cutting maintenance, for which transients such as myself were called on by whatever group most needed a hand ... In the evenings there might be gathering in the hearthroom of one or another of the low, tree-surrounded houses; there was conversation, and beer, and there might be music, the vigorous music of Karhide, melodically simple but rhythmically complex, always played extempore. (p. 59)

Karhidians are accustomed to music and dance, one night two “indwellers” danced and Ai reports that “their dancing was slow, precise, controlled; it fascinated eye and mind”. But this chapter is crowded with details regarding the theme and role of music in Karhide. It is considered as the most important among the arts. Musicians are treasured and their social function is highly cherished.

[76] Ibid. p. 426.

The second city that Ai visits is Mishnory in Orgoreyn. What is interesting about this city is its architecture, which is radically different from the one previously described. The role of art in this novel is mainly social, as it is used for practical purposes. Architecture in the novel confirms this assumption; cities are built in accordance with the climate. When Ai visits Mishnory he is pleasantly surprised. Mishnory is clean, large, light. "Great buildings of yellowish-white stone dominated it, simple stately blocks all built to a pattern [...] everything was simple, grandly conceived, and orderly". (p. 115) Even the king seems not to appreciate opulence and luxury. His castle is only partially furnished but he does have some precious objects as "an ancient radio of carved wood inlaid with silver and bone, a noble piece of workmanship". (p. 29)
He does not even dress himself in a "king-like" fashion, he only wears a big ring that is the symbol of his status.

Going on with the narration we encounter the report of a personal diary. Chapter 11 is narrated by Estraven. The writing is fragmentary as it consists precisely in a diary. Estraven is familiar with the inside politics of Orgoreyn, being an expert politician he makes a detailed analysis of the situation and of the rulers of Orgoreyn. Ai and Estraven's mission is aimed at bringing peace to the planet Gethen. Alliance with the Ekumen, the League of the Planets, represents the solution. Estraven's lucid analysis helps us understand that Orgoreyn is a very repressive police state. The secret police control the entire communication. They control what people know and consequently what people think. There is a committee that purposes to suppress those plays regarded as obscene, "trivial, vulgar and blasphemous". Orgoreyen is a dystopia, where people's mind is under constant surveillance. The artistic drive is discouraged and any form of art undergoes several restrictions.
If all forms of art have to be mainly voted to the accomplishment of practical purposes, the Gethenians' appearance does not represent an

exception in this field. Ornaments, for example, lose their decorative function. Jewels are not used as ornaments in Winter; instead, they are used as symbols. A person's social role is mirrored in his ornaments: Estraven wears a "broad bright silver chain", King Argaven XV wears a gold finger ring which is his only ornament and sign of office.

Gethenians value rubies and jewels much as "Terrans" do. Genly Ai came to Winter with a "pocketful of gems to pay (his) way". The preciousness and value of gems seems to be the link between the real world and the imagined one.

Clothes as well have nothing artistic in their features, they are nevertheless well-made but very heavy. Ai chooses an outfit which is standard in Winter: a white knitfur shirt, gray breeches, the long tabard-like overtunic, *hieb*, of bluegreen leather, new cap, new gloves tucked at the proper angle under the loose belt of the hieb, new boots [...] (p. 28)

The choice of clothes brings us to a further consideration; in *The Left Hand of Darkness* masculinity and femininity are evidently presented as social constructions, even if the novel is not deliberately feminist, it deals with one of the central principles of feminist thought, namely the social construction of gender. In Winter gender inequality and concepts of masculinity and femininity are unknown.

In her essay "Is gender necessary?"[77] Le Guin describes her motivations for writing *The Left Hand of Darkness:*

> Along about 1967 […] I began to want to define and understand the meaning of sexuality and the meaning of gender, in my life and in our society […] It was that same need, I think, that had lead Beauvoir to write "The Second Sex", and Friedan to write "The Feminine Mystique," and that was, at the

[77] Ursula K. Le Guin "Is gender necessary?" in Susan Wood ed., *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction,* New York: Putnam, 1979, p.161 - 169.

> same time, leading Kate Millett and others to write their books, and to create the new feminism. But I was not a theoretician, a political thinker or activist, or a sociologist. I was and am a fiction writer. The way I did my thinking was to write a novel. That novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness,* is the record of my consciousness, the process of my thinking.

She also said that the book is "about betrayal and fidelity. That is why one of its two dominant sets of symbols is an extended metaphor of winter, of ice, snow, cold: the winter journey."[78]

As Naomi Jacobs points out, even if we are used to associate women's utopias with warm places, "with surprising frequency" a contrasting setting appears. She argues that the terrain of ice is particularly important in works by women as it is related "to women's sense that the world of generation - of sexuality and reproduction - can be entangling, a hindrance to intellectual or emotional growth."[79] Ice is by definition unfruitful and sterile, but it could also be a fertile place for female imagination.

Fredric Jameson, among other critics, gives a different interpretation; he understands the coldness of the planet Winter in terms of a "symbolic affirmation of the autonomy of the organism, and a fantasy realization of some virtually total disengagement of the body from its environment or eco - system."[80] He argues that Gethen embodies Le Guin's effort to imagine an innovative landscape in which "our being - in - the - world" is made exceptionally simple.

To conclude I shall argue that the role of art in *The Left Hand of Darkness* is multifaceted and interwoven. I have taken into consideration issues of architecture, myth, music, ornaments, but what emerges with respect to the nature of art in the novel, in my opinion, is the total and genuine detachment

[78] Ibid. p. 168.
[79] Naomi Jacobs, "The frozen landscape in women's utopian and science fiction" in Jane L. Donawelth and Carol A. Kolmerten ed., *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994, p. 190.
[80] Frederic Jameson, "World Reduction in Le Guin: The Emergence of Utopian Narrative", *Science Fiction Studies,* Volume 2, Part 3, November 1975, pp. 221 - 230.

of art from beauty. Gethenians live with no aesthetic values, although they have a long and fascinating history that is revealed by Le Guin through the narration of myths and tales.

Art, within this novel, becomes mainly an instrument of communication, useful to express one's experiences and beliefs; it does not even belong to any particular class of society. It is important for society in its whole.

# *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* (1974)

*The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* was first published in 1974. Winner of the Hugo and Nebula awards it was very well received by both critics and public.[81] Definitely the most read novel by Le Guin, nowadays it continues to be printed and read. Together with *The Left Hand of Darkness* it is part of the Hainish Cyrcle, a collection of six novels set in the same universe but that do not represent a coherent history.[82]

In this chapter I shall argue that its title refers to both possession, understood as ownership and dispossession understood as deprivation. Le Guin's choice as regards the title has clear political echoes. Scholars have labeled it as an anarchist novel; Urbanowicz among others has argued that *The Dispossessed* reveals "the author's broad and sympathetic understanding of anarchist theory, with emphasis on the idea that the personal and political growth of the individual must be not only compatible with but also complementary to each other."[83] Its subtitle, "An Ambiguous Utopia" warns the reader under many aspects and its ambiguity is constantly demonstrated. Thus the political underpinning of the novel is a factor that cannot be ignored. Within discourses of possession and dispossession I shall investigate the functions of the arts in creating consensus as well as in helping the building of utopia. I will first start by arguing that the arts contribute to the education of children - being this a common feature of all critical utopias - but I will mainly consider the role of music and the theater; thanks to the treatment of such arts in the novel Le Guin manages to further expand her view upon politics and the nature of human beings. Furthermore, the protagonist of the novel in the *possessed* world of Urras and the

[81] Tom Moylan argues that it was well received when published in 1974 because it "crystallized some of the major ideas and practices of the movements of the 1960s as well as revived utopian narrative itself". In *Demand the Impossible, Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, New York; London: Methuen, 1986, p. 119.

[82] *Rocannon's World* (1966), *Planet of Exile* (1966), *City of Illusions* (1967), *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), *The Dispossessed* (1974), *The Telling* (2000).

[83] Victor Urbanowicz, "Personal and Political in *The Dispossessed*", *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, July 1978, p. 115.

*dispossessed* world of Anarres experiences the dualism of possession and dispossession that characterizes the two planets; he does it merely through his encounters with objects, architectures, cultural and aesthetic happenings. He is very critical towards how the objects are designed as well as towards the aesthetics of architecture. I shall finally argue that Le Guin's utopia sustains the value of difference, as her novel is written from various political perspectives and because the utopian viewpoint is admittedly ambiguous.

A brief analysis of the novel's structure is essential before entering the details of this analysis; the novel is set on two contrasting planets, Anarres and Urras. They are moons of each other yet there is almost no communication between them, the only contact between the two planets consists in the spaceships that bring certain essentials (metals, fossil fuels, machine parts and high technology pieces) from Urras to Anarres in return for taking gold to Urras. These two worlds are put side by side within the broader context of an interstellar community of planets.

There are 13 chapters, the first and the last chapters deal with both Anarres and Urras, while the remaining chapters deal with either Urras or Anarres. The novel begins with the protagonist Shevek, a "galactically famous scientist" leaving his home planet Anarres to go to Urras. His life in Urras continues every other chapter (3, 5, 7, 9, 11). Moving from past to present Le Guin starts to narrate Shevek's life till he decides to go to Urras (Chapters 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12). Chapter 1 narrates the events which come after chapter 12. Thus if the reader wanted to follow the logical sequential order, then he or she should read the novel in this order: 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13. Each alternating chapter adds up additional details to the complete story. Therefore the reader moves back and forth between Anarres and Urras as well as between past and present. In *The Dispossessed* the separation is both spatial and temporal; the communities of Anarres and Urras are located on different planets and represent the future and the past respectively. The structure of the novel thus allows for an endless dialectic

between conflicting values. The structure of the novel is circular as it ends where it began.

The protagonist Shevek is a brilliant scientist researching and working to develop a "General Temporal Theory." His theory deals with the nature of time and simultaneity. He is from Anarres, the planet that was founded by Odo - a female prophet - created by a revolutionary wing of Urras' population (the Odonians) that seceded from Urras and colonized Anarres a century and a half in the past. The colony is, at the beginning of the story, over 150 years old. Anarres is Le Guin's ambiguous utopia, a place where private property has been eradicated and class divisions do not apply to the society. Shevek believes that joint exchange between the two cultures is not only possible but also necessary. He sees his scientific discoveries on temporal theory as something that should be shared for the benefit of all people, not just his own. So he leaves the world he was raised on to reach one that has always been visible, yet also totally out of reach.

The two planets presented in the novel are divided by a wall; "Like all walls it was ambiguous, two faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you where on."[84] Mark Tunick argues that *The Dispossessed* is a rich and critical examination of the anarchist ideal of breaking down walls to the advantage of freedom.

*The Dispossessed* looks into the relationships between walls, possession/dispossession, freedom, communication and community. Anarres has but one boundary wall, and little privacy, in contrast to Urras, with its "massive walls of stone and glass," prisons, private possessions, and possessiveness.[85] One of the central themes within the novel is thus the

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[84] Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed, The Magnificent New Epic of an Ambiguous Utopia*, New York: Avon, 1975, p. 1. Hereafter all references will be quoted from this edition.

The full title of the book has varied throughout the years. There are six editions of the novel. In addition to the edition I used for this chapter that has on its cover a subtitle: "The Magnificent New Epic of an Ambiguous Utopia", the 1974 Gollancz edition and the 2003 Perennial edition list the title of the book as *The Dispossessed: A Novel*. The 1991 and 1999 Gollancz editions read simply *The Dispossessed*. The others publications read *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia* on their title pages.

[85] Mark Tunick, "The Need for Walls: Privacy, Community, and Freedom in *The Dispossessed*" in Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman (edited by), *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin's The Dispossessed*, Lanham: Lexington books, 2005, p. 130.

breaking down of walls, of those boundaries that separate and segregate people.

Shevek's dream then is that of overcoming the wall by reuniting his fellow people with the planet Urras, the fertile green world covered with cultivations that provide a large variety of produce. His means of expression for doing so is the "Principle of Simultaneity" whose theories will allow immediate exchange of ideas among all populated worlds.

The major driving force of the book is the comparison between the different political views of the anarchist world of Anarres and the capitalist aggressive and competitive world of Urras.

Urras consists of various nations, the most important one being A-Io (the USA or perhaps some Western European power) and its rival Thu (the USSR). Urras however is not an honest copy of the Earth. In Urras possession is everyone's aspiration so the inequalities of capitalism are presented. However, Le Guin also shows the many advantages of such a world, especially as concern the arts. It is described as a stunning beautiful place, house to abounding historical architecture and immense tracts of land where nature governs. Shevek himself is to some extent attracted by the aesthetic and cultural aspects of Urras.

As in the tradition of utopian novels, the community of Anarres attempts to preserve its utopian way of life by organizing life in all its aspects; from town planning to food distribution to childbearing and childrearing practices as well as language reforms. However, life on Anarres is harsh and dry; people live in a community with no animals and occasional periods of famine. A gigantic amount of manual labor is essential for Anarres to be able to feed itself. In Anarres people eat together in public canteens, education is universal and health care is public and highly developed. Children are educated together and live together in a common hall of residence; names of the newborn babies are randomly chosen by a computer. There are no weapons and technology (ships, dirigibles, solar and wind devices to produce clean energy) is highly advanced.

The arts are integrated in the lives of people; literature, poetry, music and storytelling are the most popular forms of art. Concerts and theatrical performances are unanimously deemed as the most appreciated among the arts; however Anarresti relationship towards the arts cannot be easily categorized as censorship and public approval are factors that determine an artist's place in society. In the utopia of Anarres the arts serve the purpose of educating people, there is no distinction between the arts and the crafts as it was for William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1891). As written in the novel, in Anarres:

> Learning centers taught all the skills that prepare for the practice of art: training in singing, metrics, dance, the use of brush, chisel, knife, lathe, and so on. It was all pragmatic: the children learned to see, speak, hear, move, handle. No distinction was drawn between the arts and the crafts; art was not considered as having a place in life, but as being a basic technique of life, like speech. Thus architecture had developed, early and freely, a consistent style, pure and plain, subtle in proportion. Painting and sculpture served largely as elements of architecture and town planning. As for the arts of words, poetry and storytelling tended to be ephemeral, to be linked with song and dancing; only the theater stood wholly alone, and only the theater was ever called "the Art" - a thing complete in itself. (p.127)

It has been argued, that Ursula K. Le Guin might have read Herbert Read's *Education Through Art*.[86] We have no direct evidence of this, but the resemblance between Read's ideas and the above passage is not to be dismissed.[87] In his masterpiece Read attempts to demonstrate why education should be synonymous with art. And he manages to do so by identifying aesthetic values with life values. He was also convinced that his present day community needed art more than it was prepared to admit.

[86] Herbert Read, *Education Through Art*, London: Faber and Faber, 1949.
[87] Victor Urbanowicz, "Personal and Political in *The Dispossessed*", *Science Fiction Studies* Vol. 5, No. 2, July 1978, p. 115.

Shevek himself discovers the importance of art in his life. At the age of 21 Shevek is in the city of Abbenay, Anarres. He is recovering from an illness and has thus the occasion of getting to know some artistic life. His attention is primarily taken by the concerts:

> He went with groups of cheerful young people to athletic fields, craft centers, swimming pools, festivals, museums, theaters, concerts. The concerts: they were a revelation, a shock of joy. He had never gone to a concert here in Abbenay, partly because he thought of music as something you do rather than something you hear. As a child he had always sung, or played one instrument or another, in local choirs and ensembles; he had enjoyed it very much, but had not had much talent. And that was all he knew of music. (p. 126)However it was not until his second year in Abbenay that he discovered his Art:
> […] the art that is made out of time. Somebody took him along to a concert at the Syndicate of Music. He went back the next night. He went to every concert, with his new acquaintances if possible, without if need be. The music was a more urgent need, a deeper satisfaction, than the companionship. (p. 127)

In addition to being Shevek's favorite art, music represents an example of censorship in Anarres, thus corroborating Le Guin's constant critical view upon both "planets" namely upon both the capitalist and the anarchist way of life.

As Douglas Spencer points out the utopia of Anarres must not be understood as an alternative to the capitalist way of living, a possible and realistic design for a future society. Instead he sees it as a bigger fictional design that criticizes and studies the supposed binary opposition of possession and dispossession. He writes "Both Urrasti capitalism, where objects are the source of human identity and sociability, and Anarresti anarchism, where objects alienate and their absence allows for identity and sociability, represent polar positions; Le Guin brings the two worlds, and by

implication the two positions, into a proximity that starts to undermine the stability of both."[88]

I shall argue then that music undermines the stability of utopia. Music is in the novel the most discussed among the arts; a character named Salas - not a main character but still well characterized - is a musicians and he serves the purpose of showing the side-effects of an anarchist way of conceiving the production and consumption of the arts. He comes from the ambiguous utopia of Anarres and he is a composer. Salas and Shevek want to learn from each other respectively and will eventually become friends. Salas knows little math but is an eager and intelligent listener, so Shevek manages to explain some physics to him. In turn Shevek is willing to listen to anything Salas tells him about musical theory. But some of what Salas tells him he finds extremely troubling; he discovers that Salas had never had a posting in music or in anything but unskilled labor. Salas is very competent as he spent around eight years at the "Music Syndicate conservatory". He was offered to teach but he refused as he considers himself a "composer" and not a "performer". He tells Sheveck that the Music Syndicate does not like his compositions. Salas smiling and wrinkling his expressive face tells Sheveck:

> "You see, I don't write the way I was trained to write at the conservatory. I write dysfunctional music". He smiled more sweetly than ever. "They want chorales. I hate chorales. They want wide-harmony pieces like Sessur wrote. I hate Sessur's music. I'm writing a piece of chamber music. Thought I might call it The Simultaneity Principle. Five instruments each playing an independent cyclic theme; no melodic causality; the forward process entirely in the relationship of the parts. It makes a

[88] Douglas Spencer, "The Alien Comes Home" in Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman eds., *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin's The Dispossessed*, Lanham: Lexington books, 2005, p. 96. Among other things Spencer recognizes some similarities between Le Guin's treatment of objects and the utopian architectural and design plans of radical design circles like Utopie in France and the Superstudio in Italy. As he argued these groups developed Utopian architectural and design projects "in which alienation could be transcended through a reshaping of the material world." These groups of the 1960s and 1970s in turn used science fiction pictures and photos in their publication to advertize their utopian and futuristic nature.

> lovely harmony. But they don't hear it. They won't hear it. They can't." (p. 141)

Shevek is unable to understand how the Music Syndacate can justify this kind of censorship. He is shocked, as he believes that music is a cooperative and social art and as such it should be understood and praised. He insists that writing music is one of the most ethical and most noble jobs an individual can undertake. Furthermore he believes that the nature of any art, and of music in particular is sharing; "the artist shares, it's the essence of his act" he argues. The "syndics" are clearly scared by the power of music to express one's individuality. They justify their denial as Bedap[89] (a close friend of Sheveck) cynically says:

> "They can Justify it because music isn't useful. Canal digging is important, you know; music's mere decoration. The circle has come right back around to the most vile kind of profiteering utilitarianism. The complexity, the vitality, the freedom of invention and initiative that was the center of the Odonian ideal, we've thrown it all away. We've gone right back to barbarism. If it's new, run away from it; if you cant eat it, throw it away!" (p. 142)

With these words Bedap insinuates the suspecion in the reader as well as in Sheveck that he is, in fact, a revolutionary. The ambiguity lies in the fact that he feels that he is such as a result of his upbringing and education as an Odonian as well as an Anarresti. At the same time he feels that he cannot fight against his society, he cannot rebel because his society, properly conceived, is itself revolutionary.

[89] As Jennifer Rogers argues, Bedap plays two important roles within the narration. First he provides Shevek with a friendship that is also a connection to the past and to their shared childhood, and secondly he forces Shevek to acknowledge that Anarresti society is "falling far short of its goals". Furthermore, through Bedap (who will eventually be his lover only once), Shevek meets a number of unconventional individuals, all possessing an "independence of mind" that he very much appreciates. Jennifer Rogers, "Fulfillment as a Function of Time, or the Ambiguous Process of Utopia" in Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman (edited by), *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin's The Dispossessed*, Lanham: Lexington books, 2005.

Bedap is a teacher as well as a rebel and a homosexual and he has the merit of accelerating the plot versus its subsequent phase. However, as Tom Moylan points out, he remains only a supporting character and is further devaluated later as a gay man who regrets his choice of not parenting.[90] After having introduced Shevek to the musician Salas, Bedap further introduces him to the playwright Tirin, a man who suffers from the terrible effects on the lives of people caused by censorship, he is in fact committed to the Asylum because he once wrote a satiric drama. Theater in Anarres is considered "the Art," a "thing complete in itself."

> There were many regional and traveling troupes of actors and dancers, repertory companies, very often with playwright attached. They performed tragedies, semi-improvised comedies, mimes. They were as welcome as rain in the lonely desert towns, they were the glory of the year wherever they came. Rising out of and embodying the isolation and communality of the Anarresti spirit, the drama had attained extraordinary power and brilliance. (p. 168)

Shevek however does not care for Anarresti theater so much as he cares for music, yet he portrays Tirin as "a born artist. Not a craftsman - a creator. An inventor-destroyer, the kind who's got to turn everything upside down and inside out. A satirist, a man who praises through rage" (p. 263). The play that caused him so many problems is considered as witty by Shevek. It is about an Urrasti who hides himself in a hydroponics tank on the Moon freighter, and breathes through a straw, and eats the plant roots. He attempts to buy, sell, and possess things just as he would have at home, and he finally gets himself smuggled onto Anarres. His play is misinterpreted by his inflexible fellow Anarresti as anti-Odonian. As a result, he receives a public warning.

For his creativity as well as for his critical reflection Tirin becomes paranoid and is forced into therapy. Beside, we are also told that he was ruined as a person. As all he could do thereafter was to write the same play over and

[90] Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible, Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, London: Methuen, 1986, p. 111.

over again, we might conclude that critical thought is clearly not welcome on Anarres.

Shevek says that:

> We force a man outside the sphere of our approval, and then condemn him for it. We've made laws, laws of conventional behavior, built walls all around ourselves, and we can't see them, because they're part of our thinking. Tir never did that. I knew him since we were ten years old. He never did it, he never could build walls. He was a natural rebel. He was a natural Odonian - a real one! He was a free man, and the rest of us, his brothers, drove him insane in punishment for his first free act". (p. 265)

The oppression that Anarresti ideals set on people is clearly too heavy for many to bear, and sometimes it ruins them. Failing to conform to Odonian orthodoxy caused Tirin's disgrace.

As shown by the treatment of the musician Salas and the actor Tirin, far from idealizing and elevating the syndicalism of Anarres, Le Guin is cautious to show its imperfections as well as its merits. Anarres is thus only partially more *eutopian* than Urras as their anarchism has become a mechanical tradition "an internalized preaching" static and hampered by the powers of convention and consensus. With respect to its anarchism I agree with Stow when he argues that "far from presenting a simple depiction of the promise and problems of anarchism as a political theory, the novel offers us instead a method for critical reflection."[91]

In addition to showing the imperfections of her admittedly ambiguous utopia, Le Guin insists on comparing it with an even worst dystopian alternative, thus suggesting the lesser of two evils. Yet the main differences between the planets as expressed by Shevek do not leave any room to interpretation:

> Anarres is all dust and dry hills. All meager, all dry.

[91] Simon Stow, "Worlds Apart: Ursula K. Le Guin and the Possibility of Method" in Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman eds., *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin's The Dispossessed*, Lanham: Lexington books, 2005, p. 43.

> And the people aren't beautiful. They have big hands and feet, like me and the waiter there. But not big bellies. They get very dirty, and take baths together, nobody here does that. The towns are very small and dull, they are dreary. No palaces. Life is dull, and hard work. You can't always have what you want, or even what you need, because there isn't enough. You Urrasti have enough. Enough air, enough rain, grass, oceans, food, music, buildings, factories, machines, books, clothes, history. You are rich, you own. We are poor, we lack. You have, we do not have. Everything is beautiful, here. Only not the faces. On Anarres nothing is beautiful, nothing but the faces. The other faces, the men and women. We have nothing but that, nothing but each other. *Here you see the jewels, there you see the eyes. And in the eyes you see the splendor, the splendor 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!" (p. 184, emphasis mine)

Anarresti people have very few material possessions (Odonian thought maintains that "excess is excrement") since everything is public and generally available. Throughout the novel Shevek often perceives and condemns the immense waste of the Urrasti. He observes that their exaggerated ornaments are nothing but the symbol of the inner poverty of their souls thus stressing the differences with Anarresti attitude towards possession.

However, questions about aesthetics and possession are not as neatly categorized as it would seem. In the following episode of the ring - which is set in Abbenay, Anarres - Le Guin introduces another element to displease the previous *logical* comparison:

> "It's a necklace," the child said with awe. People in the small towns wore a good deal of jewelry. In sophisticated Abbenay there was more sense of the tension between the principle of non ownership and the impulse to self-adornment, and there a ring or

> pin was the limit of good taste. *But elsewhere the deep connection between the aesthetic and the acquisitive was simply not worried about*; people bedecked themselves unabashedly. Most districts had a professional jeweler who did his work for love and fame, as well as the craft shops, where you could make to suit your own taste with the modest materials offered - copper, silver, beads, spinels, and the garnets and yellow diamonds of South rising. Sadik had not seen many bright, delicate things, but she knew necklaces, and so identified it. (p. 260, emphasis mine.)

This passage suggests that in Anarres people refuse to waste their scarce material possessions for both ethical and aesthetic reasons, yet their attitude is neither innate nor superior. The passage also unveils a not so hidden hypothesis; namely, the desire to possess things is a natural consequence of aesthetic stimulation.

In contrast to this Shevek observes that the Urrasti have taste, but their taste often seems to be in contradiction with a desire to display "conspicuous expense". As he observes, in Urras "the natural, aesthetic origin of the desire to own things was concealed and perverted by economic and competitive compulsions, which in turn told on the quality of the things: all they achieved was a kind of mechanical lavishness. Here, instead, was grace, achieved through restraint". (p. 117).

What is noticeable about Shevek's view is certainly the fact that he considers the desire to possess to be *natural*. I agree with Spencer when he points out that Shevek's assertion is in conflict with Le Guin's equation of possession with alienation. Certainly this attitude towards possession is at odds with the Marxian nature of the novel, but given the fact that it is placed within the discourse of utopia and science-fiction and on a distant planet, "it enables a reframing of Utopian approaches to objects and aesthetics."[92]

In the utopia of Anarres people do not choose to avoid consumerism, they just live in a planet where there is no escape from the scarcity that

[92] Douglas Spencer, "The Alien Comes Home" in Laurence Davis and Peter Stillman eds., *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin's The Dispossessed*, Lanham: Lexington books, 2005, p. 105.

characterizes their earth. As a matter of fact, if on the on the one hand Le Guin suggests that the Urrasti are possessed by luxury, on the other hand the Anarresti are clearly possessed by scarcity. Within this regard, Le Guin breaks with the tradition of William Morris and Charles Brockden Brown who looked at a golden past where there was no alienation involved in possession; in Anarres there is no chance to choose how to relate to ownership as shortage of both nature and culture is embedded in their life.

## JOANNA RUSS, *THE FEMALE MAN* (1975)

Joanna Russ completed *The Female Man* in 1971.[93] She had to struggle to find a publisher because the world of publishing, especially the one concerned with science fiction was historically male dominated and thus unwilling to publish an admittedly feminist book.[94] Furthermore, it encountered additional troubles because of its narrative structure that is extremely innovative and experimental. Russ managed to have it printed only four years after, in 1975.

The text does not follow the typical dictums of utopia, it belongs more to the science fiction literary tradition, but, given that a considerable part of the work is dedicated to the depiction of a utopian world, the one of Whileaway, this book has often been referred to as a work of feminist utopian fiction. There are multiple visitors to utopia and the plot is built upon the interwoven narration of the lives of four women coming from different times and spaces. The narrative structure is post-modern and proceeds with a nonlinear technique which could disturb and challenge the reader. Considering its fragmentary structure it is almost impossible to investigate the role of the arts within the plot, as a linear plot is nonexistent; therefore, I will proceed by separately considering each character as well as the world she lives in.

The book is divided into nine parts; each part has several chapters of varying length. There are four main characters, Jeannine, Joanna, Janet and Jael. The novel takes place in four different worlds; each world is populated

[93] Joanna Russ, *The Female Man*, London: Women's Press Classic, 2002. All following quotations from the novel will be cited from this edition.
[94] Tom Moylan, *Demand The Impossible*: *Science Fiction and The Utopian Imagination*, London: Methuen, 1986, p. 57.

by one of the four versions of the same genotype. This implies that they are biologically identical and that the differences in their lives have to be inscribed only to the social environment in which they live. The four "J" travel from one universe to the other without an apparent reason. Jeaninne Dadier lives in 1969, in an America that has never recovered from the Great Depression. Joanna lives in the same year but in an America that is the same as the one contemporary to Russ, she personifies from the beginning the monstrous hybrid of the Female Man. Janet Evason lives in an all female utopian future, a place called Whileaway. Jael lives in a dystopian future where Womanlanders are at war with Manlanders. These four characters are a clone, and so they are genetically identical. The four worlds represent four different alternatives to the male dominated world in which Russ was living. This book works also through a constant comparison between characters (the four "J" interact with each other in different times and places). This technique serves both to show alternatives and solutions and to denounce gender based behaviors and habits. The postmodernist narrative structure is also a metaphor of the multiplicity of the women's voice.

The novel begins with Janet introducing herself to the reader in first person and this choice breaks with the traditional narrative technique of utopian novels, in which a guide is in charge of presenting the reader to utopia. Although it constitutes only a small portion of the book, the utopian society of Whileaway plays a very important role in the novel. Beside, as the presence of the arts in this feminist utopia is highly valued, I shall mainly focus upon this section of the book. I shall argue that creativity is seen as essential for the well being of the community, furthermore the arts are valued in relation with their enhancing potential; at the same time, the arts are not detached from economic issues. As a matter of fact in the all female utopia of Whileaway women work as farmers, as scientists and as artists too.

Janet Evason is the inhabitant of the aesthetic world of Whileaway. She is a Safety and Peace officer and she has killed four times and is married to Vittoria. Whileaway is a parallel universe where men disappeared centuries ago because of an epidemic. This natural catastrophe is reminiscent of the natural catastrophe that killed all men in *Herland*[95], a book that has clearly influenced the writing of *The Female Man*[96]. A brief explanation of this statement is essential before continuing with the analysis of Russ's utopian Whileaway. As discussed in the dedicated chapter, Gilman focused her analysis on the figure of the woman as protagonist of the utopian world as well as an active agent of social improvement. *Herland* describes an all female utopian world in which women procreate by parthenogenesis, exactly as it happens for the inhabitants of Whileaway in Russ's novel. In *Herland*, female qualities have generated a pacifist society, ecologically friendly and based on the rearing of daughters and built upon aesthetic issues. In this utopia women do not suffer any patriarchal oppression and their physical appearance is not synonymous with financial security. Among other themes what really links *Herland* with *The Female Man* is the importance given to the rearing of children. The aesthetic process involved with maternity exemplifies one of the highest similarities among the novels. Whileawayans live in non biological families or tribes which are constituted by twenty or thirty members. When a daughter reaches the age of 22 she decides whether to live in the family of her first mother or in the one of her second mother. If families become bigger than 30 members then a woman of the family starts a brand new one.

Women become mothers by parthenogenesis at the age of thirty. As Janet Evason tells us:

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[95] Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*, London: The women's press, 2001.

[96] Amid other critics, Tom Moylan investigates similarities and differences among the early feminist-socialist utopia of *Herland* and *The Female Man*. In, Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, London: Methuen, 1986, p. 66.

> I bore my child at thirty; we all do. It's a vacation. Almost five years. The baby rooms are full of people reading, painting, singing, as much as they can, to the children, with the children, over the children …. Like the ancient Chinese custom of the three-years' mourning, an hiatus at just the right time. There has been no leisure at all before and there will be so little after - anything I do, you understand, I mean really do - I must ground thoroughly in those five years. One works with feverish haste … At sixty I will get a sedentary job and some time for myself again. (p. 159)

As for other feminist utopias, mothering represents an aesthetic happening. (See for example the chapter on *Herland* and that on *Woman on The Edge of Time.*)

If on the one hand Russ tells us that women in Whileaway are extraordinarily productive, on the other hand during the years dedicated to mothering, women use the arts to provide for their daughters education and enjoyment. Russ suggests that women paint during this time of their life because they are in a particular psychological mood which leads them to express their artistic drive. Women live "the time of leisure" and the arts help them to manifest their serenity.

Yet, within issues about maternity, the arts serve the purpose of creating an aesthetic and pleasant atmosphere around the daughters. Mothers must be free to attend to the child's "finer spiritual needs" (p. 50) and this of course can be possible only with the contribution of the arts understood as painting, dancing and the reading and production of literature. When the little daughter reaches the age of six she is obliged to leave the family to join the regional school where she receives a heavily practical education as how to run machines as well as law, mechanics and practical medicine.

Art cannot be taught in Whileaway, as a matter of fact daughters, after the separation from their mothers continue by themselves and not in school, to dance, to sing and to paint (which correspond exactly to what their mothers

did when they where together.)

From teens to seventeenth they wander alone in bands. The daughters achieve Three-Quarters Dignity when they reach the age of seventeen and they are sent to work where they are needed, and at the age of twenty-two they achieve Full Dignity. At this age they can marry and start a new family, or they can join an existing one, besides at this age they see their learning certified. When they reach the age of sixty they perform sedentary but highly intellectual jobs. Russ tells us that in Whileaway there is always work to do, and that people are always busy and not keen on losing time with children. Some children express the desire to travel, and mothers allow the daughters to do so. Some others spend their puberty tormenting actors and musicians, showing an early interest in the arts which in Whileaway are in charge of a double function; they are both regarded as a recreational tool and, when performed by professional artists, the arts are considered fundamental for the development of the economy.

The majority of people in Whileaway perform some kind of recreational art, but artists and musicians are highly valued for their contribution to the well - being of the utopian society.

As already considered, motherhood is, in Whileaway, the time of leisure. Mature people could definitely be compared to mothers within this regard. Old age is as treasured as motherhood. Old women are anything but useless, on the contrary they represent culture and knowledge and for these reasons they are deeply appreciated. This stands in deep contrast with the masculinist projection of womanliness in Russ's contemporary society where beauty and social importance were equated with youth. Aging is so cherished in Whileaway that "if one is lucky, one's hair turns white early". (p. 52). People of Whileaway dream of old age because:

> For in old age the Whileawayan woman - no longer as strong and elastic as the young - has learned to

> join with calculating machines in the state they say can't be described but is most like a sneeze that never comes off. It is the old who can spend their days mapping, drawing, thinking, writing, collating, composing. In the libraries old hands come out from under the induction helmets and give you the reproductions of the books you want; old feet twinkle below the computer shelves, hanging down like Humpy Dumpty's; old ladies chuckle eerily while composing The Blasphemous Cantata (a great favorite of Ysaye's) or mad-moon city-scapes which turn out to be do-able after all. (p. 75)

As Russ tells us, in this feminist utopia old women compose songs and indulge themselves in the visual and literary arts. They are indispensable for the well functioning of the community system. They work in libraries (again the importance of culture is stressed) and they use computers. Jobs are divided by age and are performed thanks to the support of the induction helmet that permits the control of machinery by direct connection with the human brain. Sophisticated technology, including biological engineering and space travel, is the norm. Technology, far from being a dehumanizing experience contributes to crate a pastoral atmosphere in the eu-topian world of Whileaway. Technology is part of everyday Whileawayans' lives. It is considered essential and it is neither overestimated nor underestimated as it is harmonically merged with nature. Whileaway has the merit to combine a highly cybernetic technology with a libertarian pastoral social system. In Whileaway:

> But there is too, under it all, the incredible explosive energy, the gaiety of high intelligence, the obliquities of wit, the cast of mind that makes industrial areas into gardens and ha-has, that supports wells of wilderness where nobody ever lives for long, that strews across a planet sceneries, mountains, glider preserves, culs-de-sac, comic nude statuary, artistic lists of tautologies and circular mathematical proofs (over which aficionados are moved to tears), and the best graffiti in this or any

other world. (p. 54)

"High intelligence" is, from Russ's perspective indiscernible from creativity, which is in turn subordinated to the creation of an aesthetic city that must display highly technological tools and that is immensely proud of its graffiti.

Whileawayans are hard workers, yet they find some time for celebrations. They celebrate mainly dancing and the art of ballet is highly studied. Among other things they celebrate the full moon, the winter and the summer solstice, the flowering of trees, marriages, divorces, but above all they celebrate great ideas and "the contemplation of a work of art". (p. 103)

In Whileaway we can also find the description of a very important form of public art, a statue[97] that becomes in the narration a symbol of the female essence:

> There is an unpolished, white, marble statue of God on Rabbit Island, all alone in a field of weeds and snow. She is seated, naked to the waist, an outsized female figure as awful as Zeus, her dead eyes staring into nothing. At first She is majestic; then I notice that Her cheekbones are too broad, Her eyes set at different levels, that Her whole figure is a jumble of badly-matching planes, a mass of inhuman contradictions. There is a distinct resemblance to Dunyasha Bernadetteson[98], known as The Playful Philosopher (A.C. 344 - 426), though God is older than Bernadetteson and it's possible that Dunyasha's genetic surgeon modeled her after God instead of the other way round. Persons who look at the statue longer than I did have reported that one cannot pin It down at all, that She is a constantly changing contradiction, that She becomes in turn gentle,

[97] It has to be pointed out that in utopian literature, as opposed to mainstream literature, the art of sculpture is not widespread at all. For a discussion on the subject of sculpture and its relationship with American literature see: Andrea Mariani, *Il sorriso del fauno. La scultura classica in Hawthorne, Melville e James*, Chieti: Marino Solfanelli Editore, 1992.

[98] Russ invents and creates the name and the character of the venerated Whileawayan philosopher, Dunyasha Bernadetteson. Russ tells us little about her life, yet we know that A.C. stands for After Catastrophe but we are not told which catastrophe she is referring to.

> terrifying, hateful, loving, "stupid" (or "dead") and finally indescribable. (p. 103)

The effects of this public work of art, as I will soon reveal, have been associated to the feminist discourse upon identity. As previously mentioned the novel constantly moves through voices and characters, yet the question of identity is symbolically analyzed and discussed behind the lines of the narration. In fact there are multiple visitors to utopia as well as multiple narrators. At times it is very difficult, almost impossible to discern who is talking. Joanna and Jeannine guide Janet, but they are also guided by Janet when they visit Whileaway. Jael also guides Joanna, Jeannine and Janet to her dystopian future where Manland and Womanland are at war. Finally Jeannine guides Jael to America. As Susan Ayres argues, "these narrative shifts not only displace the reader, but on another level they raise the question of the identity of the subjective self. Identity, like the statue on Whileaway *is a constantly changing contradiction.*"[99]

Even if of all forms of art, public art is the most static and stable, this statue is a "constantly changing contradiction". As Mitchell argues "public art is supposed to occupy a pacified, utopian space, a site held in common by free and equal citizens whose debates, freed of commercial motives, private interests, or violent coercion, will form public opinion."[100] If we follow Mitchell's suggestion, then, the statue of Whileaway must have a pivotal importance in the shaping of consciousness.

To outline Whileaway essence I shall borrow Tom Moylan words; he writes: "in general, Whileaway is a woman's place that thrives on the pleasure principle in a post-scarcity, non phallocratic, non-capitalist, ecologically sensitive, anarcho-communist society. Hard work, tidiness, privacy, community, freedom, creativity, and a love of nature emerge as the primary values in a society that is purposely shapeless, without the linear

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[99] Susan Ayres, "The "Straight Mind" in Russ's *The Female Man*", *Science Fiction Studies* Vol 22, march 1995, p. 2, italics in original.

[100] W. J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*: *essays on verbal and visual representation,* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995, p. 383.

order imposed by a central government or male abstraction."[101]

Whileaway is even more eu-topian if compared to the land inhabited by Jael [102] which is clearly dystopian and surprisingly attentive to art related issues; before discovering the arts in this other world a few considerations must be made: Jael lives in a dystopian future where Womanlanders are at war with Manlanders. She is a cyborg and she embodies the belief that change is possible, she manages to change her body and empower it with weapons. Symbolically she represents the unifying factor of the four J and thus the active agent versus the development of a better world. She is the one who actually fights, in a physical and practical way, for women's revolution and she is the one who brings the four J together. As Nicola Nixon points out, Jael is an allegorical figuration of feminist struggle, the active, ruthless and productive rage which eventually allows the utopic Whileaway to come into existence.[103] In Jael's dystopian world men and women have been fighting for over forty years in what seems to be an endless war between the sexes. Humans and machines are at war; technology in this future has very bad potentialities. Some men are obliged to undertake plastic surgery at birth and their body is surgically altered in order to obtain the semblances of a woman. Women for their part, use technology to build cyborg machines. Jael herself owns one of these robots whose name is Davy. He is both her personal lover and her housekeeper, he has neither opinions nor concerns. This reproduces in an ironic way those patriarchal love relationships that Russ wants to denounce. In fact women treat their "men" as slaves and objects. As Susana S. Martins argues: "The engineering of "females" in Jael's world is a metaphor for the violence done to women and their

[101] Tom Moylan, *Demand The Impossible*: *Science Fiction and The Utopian Imagination*, London: Methuen, 1986, p. 71.

[102] The name Jael has biblical reminiscences: the tale of Jael is narrated within the Book of Judges, in The Song of Deborah. Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, is the heroine who killed Sisera, one of her people's worst enemy. She invited him into her tent, she offered him a cover, a drink and a place to sleep. Sisera asked Jael to stand at the door and deny his presence to any who may inquire. He was sure that a woman would have never dare to disobey him. While Sisera was sleeping, Jael took a tent stake and hammer and killed Sisera by pounding the stake through his temple into the ground. By doing this she freed her people from this terrible and perfidious enemy.

[103] Nicola Nixon, "Cyberpunk: radical or reactionary?" In *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol 19, 1992, p. 222.

interpellation as feminine objects in Joanna's and Jeannine's worlds."[104]

Manland is a land populated by real men but also by the changed, which are real men who have been surgically changed into women and the half-changed who are biologically male but female in appearance. Jael's world represents the maniacal effort to maintain gender divisions both socially and privately. Manland is a masculinist dystopia where men are homophobic and misogynistic. It is at this point that the arts become important in Russ's narration of Jael's world. In Manland "art, they say, has had a Renaissance among the Manlander rich" (p.173). "The four J" examine the paintings on a Manlander's wall and again we are told that "the paintings are pretty good. We're having a kind of Renaissance lately" (p. 179). But after this statement the same man asks Jael "how's art among the ladies". The answer is a discomforted "so-so". The atrocity of Manlander's world, compared to Whileaway, the utopian city of happiness and delight, is stunning, yet they are experiencing a renaissance of the arts. In such a dystopian world there must be a price to pay to reach such a renaissance, even if just for the "rich" ones. The price is clearly mirrored in every aspects of their everyday lives. The good fortune of the arts yet requires a disastrous background.

Opposing themselves to Manlanders, Womenlanders declare that "among the ladies" art is not prospering. The reader knows this is only partially true, as later in the narration Russ tells us that sometimes Jael goes into one of her cities and have "little sprees in the local museums" and she spends some time looking at pictures (p. 192).

She has enormous importance in the novel, she is a cyborg, she has no fingers but claws and her teeth are "a sham over metal" (p. 181). She is the most politically active of the four characters as she is the one who brings them together and who fights for women's liberation.

Her technological transformation into a cyborg shows that women have in themselves the possibility to change and to empower themselves. Her militant and belligerent attitude does not stop her from being involved in the

[104] Susana S. Martins, "Revising the Future in *The Female Man"*, *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol.32, 2005, p. 41

arts, however the arts are not as central in her life as they are for Whileawayans. In fact she is an androgynous character and she challenges gender roles by mocking the male attitude towards women. She is extremely subversive and represents the belief that the social construction of femininity could and should be overcome.

Jeannine Dadier stands in profound opposition to Jael. She is a woman from the earth, from America as it was in 1969, but where the Second World War never happened and the Great Depression never ended. Hitler died in 1936 and Japan is still an empire and the USSR a federation. She is 29 years old and she works as a librarian.

She embodies the stereotype of the sweet and submissive woman, a woman whose first wish is to get married to a rich man. Jeannine is representative of what Betty Friedan called the "feminine mystique" and thus shows Russ' interest in liberal feminism as well.[105]

Betty Friedan wrote *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. In her work she analyses those issues that affected women's lives after World War II. She talks about the limited career scenario and the enforced domesticity for women. As Maggie Humm points out the "mystique" was Friedan's term for the 'problem with no name' that is to say the psychic agony experienced by those women who could not have a public career and were imprisoned in their houses.[106] In *The Feminine Mystique* Friedan advocates the possibility for women to enter those professions that were historically male dominated. She was also convinced that a woman's presence deficiency in the home would have made husbands and children into better people. In *The Feminine Mystique* she insists that women shouldn't be obliged to choose family over career in order to be considered moral. In Jeannine's very sad world there are no references to the arts and Jeannine seems too much concerned with her own unexciting life to get involved in the arts.

The last character I am about to consider is Joanna, an English professor.

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[105] Heather J. Hicks, "Automating Feminism: The Case of Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*" *Journal of Postmodern Culture*, Vol IX, Number 3, May, 1999, (online journal).

[106] Maggie Humm, *Feminism a Reader*, Harvester: Wheatsheaf, 1992, p. 182.

She is evidently Joanna Russ' alter ego; she is the writer who becomes a character. She personifies from the beginning the monstrous hybrid of the Female Man. She describes her turning into the female man with these words: "I sat in a cocktail party in mid-Manhattan. I had just changed into a man, me, Joanna. I mean a female man, of course; my body and soul were exactly the same" (p. 5).

By saying that she turned into a man she does not mean that she became a weird monster, on the contrary she clearly implies that she gained consciousness and that she became not a man but a human being. She points out that her body and soul were exactly the same, yet she was still herself, still a woman, but with a consciousness that she associated to the state of being a man. Later in the narration she adds: "I'll tell you how I turned into a man. First I had to turn into a woman" (p. 133). Here Russ recalls *The Second Sex* (1949), in which Simone de Beauvoir argued that "one is not born a woman; one becomes one". When she realizes she is a woman then she also realizes that the time has come to change her life and thus she turns into a man. She argues that turning into a man was easier than turning into a woman, and she adds "I think it had something to do with the knowledge you suffer when you are an outsider" (p. 137). To become a female man is to become a complete human being, someone who has his/her own uniqueness and who is not regarded in terms of lack. Joanna strongly disagrees with the mainstream view upon femininity of people of her age. In fact she is fascinated by Whileaway and she is very keen on technology in general. She sees in the utopia of Whileaway a road to salvation. She does have a job but her work, as the one performed by women of her time, is not synonymous with freedom or success. As other women do, she knows that she works just because the world needs female work force as well. The society she lives in is still strictly patriarchal. In fact she is seen by her work colleagues as a sex object. The worlds inhabited by Jeannine and Joanna are very much like the one in which Joanna Russ was writing, and thus represent the attempt to denounce the gender discrimination of her time.

As it usually happens, utopian writing works as blueprint for real life, the very last few pages of Russ' work represent all the political issues that were raised in between the lines among the book. Joanna says goodbye to the other characters and concludes that all of them are free now. She says:

> Go, little book, trot through Texas and Vermont and Alaska and Maryland and Washington and Florida and Canada and England and France; bob a curtsey at the shrines of Friedan, Millet, Greer, Firestone and all the rest; behave yourself in people's living rooms, neither looking ostentatious on the coffee table nor failing to persuade due to the dullness of your style". "Do not scream when you are ignored, for that will alarm people, and do not fume when you are heisted by persons who will not pay, rather rejoice that you have become so popular. Live merrily, little daughter-book. (p. 213)

Combining imaginative power with political commitment, Russ considered her novel as a revolutionary child, offered to the world to fight in order to make people aware of women's battles and dreams. Whileaway in *The Female Man* is Russ's genuine dream of a better place. It is remarkable that in such a feminist and political book as *The Female Man,* within the passages about her dreamed utopia, art is second to nothing, it covers "the whole range of human feelings". In "Daydream Literature and Science Fiction", Russ makes a distinction between real dreams and daydreams: "real dreams are not at all like daydreams; they are witty, poetic, poignant, forceful, sometimes painfully vivid, often extremely clear, and they cover the whole range of human feeling. Just like art."[107]

[107] Joanna Russ, *The Country You Have Never Seen: Essays and Reviews,* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007, p. 202.

# MARGE PIERCY, *WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME* (1976)

Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), is a best - selling utopian novel widely considered a classic of feminist literature.

I shall argue that *Woman on the Edge of Time* is by all means a provocative political book, although it describes a deeply aesthetic society where the arts are promoted and creativity is encouraged also through the use of advanced technology. Art or the creative process in this novel, has been defined as "clearly important."[108]

The woman who is "on the edge of time" is Connie Ramos, the protagonist. She is a 37 years old Chicana who lives in New York. She represents everything that is "different", she is Chicana, poor, has no job and is considered mentally ill. She is a mother but she has no children. Doctors removed her uterus and took her daughter Angelina away and placed her in a foster home. The narration is set in a mental hospital called Bellevue[109] where she is segregated because she is declared insane. In here, doctors oblige her to take lots of tranquilizers.

It is unclear whether it is because of the drugs she is taking, but during her life in hospital she is constantly losing and gaining consciousness. This aspect is very indicative of the parallel between fiction and reality, and also of the 1970s feminists' struggle for women to acquire consciousness. Whenever Connie closes her eyes she is able to travel into the future. For the people living in 2137 she is not mentally ill, instead she is regarded as clever and sensitive. Luciente, her guide to utopia, tells her that she is "what we call a catcher, a receptive."[110] Thanks to her mind these people will show her their deeply advanced and aesthetic world. This future is Mattapoisett, a

[108] Lee Cullen Khanna, "Truth and Art in Women's Words: Doris Lessing's *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*" in Marleen Barr and Nicholas D. Smith eds., *Women and Utopia: Critical Interpretations*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1983.

[109] The name chose by Marge Piercy is reminiscent of the "Bellevue Hospital Center" most often referred to as simply "Bellevue". It was founded on March 31, 1736, in New York, and is considered the oldest psychiatric and public hospital in the United States.

[110] Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time,* New York: Ballantine Books, 1997, p. 37. All following quotations from the novel will be cited from this edition.

technological and ecological utopian future where gender differences do not exist. At the end of the novel Connie poisons her doctors and for this reason she will be condemned to spend the rest of her life in a hospital. The book ends with a reproduction of Connie's medical papers from various mental institutions. This technique serves both to denounce the deceptive power of the medical institution but also to engage the reader with a tangible piece of Connie's life. The reader is thus obliged to question himself about where the line between fiction and reality lies. This finale leaves open the possibility that both Mattapoisett and Connie's present are simply projections of Connie's fantasies. It also leaves open the possibility that doctors were right in diagnosing her as a dangerous and mentally ill patient.

The rhythm of the narration is homogeneous, pleasant and neat. In *Woman on the Edge of Time* Piercy adopts only one narrative voice to underline how everything in our world is deeply gendered, beyond everything, our language.

In Mattapoisett as Luciente tells Connie, "we've reformed pronouns" (p. 38). The choice of reforming the pronouns is linked to the wish of dis-gender the language. In fact the word "person" is used to refer to people as subjects, and "per" is used to refer to objects and verbs. This technique however quickly becomes tolerable to the reader.[111]

There is only one traveler to Utopia, as in the tradition of utopian novels. Marge Piercy's use of time travel is reminiscent of Edward Ballamy's Julian West, the adventurer of *Looking Backward*. In *Woman on the Edge of Time* the reader moves constantly through the dystopian present in which Connie is living to the utopian future that she visits when she falls asleep or when she loses consciousness because of the medicines that doctors require her to take. Only once Connie visits by mistake a dystopian future.

Thus the utopian world is described through the eyes of a woman who is discriminated under various aspects, her race, her poverty and her sex.

[111] One example of this language technique is "Person must not do what person cannot do" (p. 92). This motto summarizes the belief in personal freedom and social responsibility which is typical of the inhabitants of Mattapoisett. In another passage Luciente tells Connie: "To be a chef is like mothering: you must volunteer (…) but Bee is a chef and at the next feast, *person* will make the menu and direct" (p. 159), emphasis mine.

The first chapter opens with a description of her life before the internment. The squalor and degradation of her neighborhood, where drugs and prostitution are the norm, open up the door to utopia. A utopia that is not only necessary for Connie but also a magnificent projection of an almost "perfect" world. The very first person that Connie meets is Luciente whose name means shining, brilliant, full of light (p. 33). She will be her closest friend, her alter-ego and she will guide her through utopia.

The art of designing and constructing buildings in Mattapoisett is one of the first aspects that strikes Connie's attention. She gets to know that these people live in villages of roughly six hundreds people.

Connie saw :

> [...] a river, little no-account buildings, strange structures like long-legged birds with sails that turned in the wind, a few large terracotta and yellow buildings and one blue dome, irregular buildings, none bigger than a supermarket of her day, an ordinary supermarket in any shopping plaza. The bird objects were the tallest things around and they were scarcely higher than some of the pine trees she could see. A few lumpy free-form structures overrun with green vines. [...]
> Most buildings were small and randomly scattered among trees and shrubbery and gardens, put together of scavenged old wood, old bricks and stones and cement blocks. Many were wildly decorated and overgrown with vines. (p. 63)

In Mattapoisett people do not live in big cities but in brightly colored villages. There is no noise pollution and buildings are small and surrounded by trees and gardens, people prefer to use bicycles even if public transportation is available.

Architecture is thought to designate a degree of private space to each person, everyone has his own space to "meditate, think, *compose songs,* sleep, study". (p. 67, emphasis mine).

Economy in Mattapoisett is engaged with environmental, technological and cultural issues.

As Luciente explains:

> We have high production! [...] Mouth - of - Mattapoisett exports protein in flounder, herring, alewives, turtles, geese, ducks, our own blue cheese. We manufacture goose-down jackets, comforters and pillows. We're the plant-breeding center for this whole sector in squash, cucumbers, beans, and corn. We build jizers, diving equipment, and the best nets this side of Orleans, on the Cape. *On top we export beautiful poems, artwork, holies, rituals* [...] (p. 119, emphasis mine)

The above quote suggests that art (poems, artworks, holograms) is a leading factor in their economy.

In Mattapoisett, Piercy imagines a more ecologically friendly future in contrast to the pollution, the waste and the progressive loss of touch with nature that people experienced in her contemporary society. In Mattapoisett people live in harmony with both nature and machines. This community relies on wind and solar power for energy as well as water mills. Every region tries to be as self sufficient as possible in "plant proteins" (p. 65). As Luciente explains to Connie;

> Our technology did not develop in a straight line from yours […] we have limited resources. We plan cooperatively. We can afford to waste … nothing. You might say our - you'd say religion? - ideas make us see ourselves as partners with water, air, birds, fish, trees. (p. 117)

This passage mirrors a path in ecofeminism,[112] which is the wish to create empathy between human beings, animals, and nature. The term ecofeminism embodies the varied range of women's efforts to save the

[112] "The term *ecofeminisme* was coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 to represent women's potential for bringing about an ecological revolution to ensure human survival on the planet". Carolyn Merchant, "Ecofeminism and Feminist Theory" in Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, edited by, *Reweaving the world, The Emergence of Ecofeminism*, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990, p. 100.

planet and to imagine a solution to solve the environmental crisis that our planet is experiencing. It has been argued that Piercy's novel could be defined as an ecofeminist utopian work, since she is able to combine technology and ecology in her narration.[113] Ecofeminist themes as the recycling of waste, the use of advanced and ecologically friendly technologies in order to improve the quality of human life are extremely present in the utopian future of Mattapoisett. Marge Piercy, "tries to put a human face back on technology and reminds us that it is we who design technology."[114]

Technology not only has "a human face", it also displays aesthetic functions within the structure of the city, in fact:

> [...] the solar heat collectors and the intakes for rain - water cisterns studded the surface like sculpture, some of them decorated with carved marks, others scalloped, inlaid with shell and glass mosaics. (p. 138)

As previously mentioned, the division of spaces helps people to nourish their artistic drives. A person can fulfill his own deepest needs and desires only if he is let free to spend some time in complete isolation, even if villages are crowded with public places. They also have few museums and they take Connie to one of them to let her understand both them and their history better. The "fooder", for example, is a canteen where people eat together, if they like. In the "fooder" there are some extremely sophisticated dishwashers that do the entire job.

The "fooder" echoes Dolores Hayden model of public kitchen and community dining club. As she argues, material feminists reasoned that "the entire physical environment of cities and towns must be redesigned to reflect equality for women."[115]

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[113] Anna M. Martinson, "Ecofeminist perspectives on technology in the science fiction of Marge Piercy", *Extrapolation*. Kent: Spring 2003. Vol. 44, Iss. 1., pp. 50 - 68.
[114] Ibid, p. 58.
[115] Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981, p. 8.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman together with other "material feminists"[116] also dedicated her time to project alternative houses without kitchens. She viewed private kitchens as the symbol of female oppression, and for this reason she suggested that food had to be cooked by people together in communal kitchens. She was convinced that by moving the traditionally feminine works from the private space of the house to common places, those women connotations that deprived them from their economical and social power would disappear. Marge Piercy shares exactly the same point of view as Gilman. In Mattapoisett people are still biologically female or male, but the tasks they perform are not gendered.

Marge Piercy's description of her imagined feminist space involves a type of architecture that is technologically and aesthetically deeply advanced. The notion that urban evolution would in fact parallel human evolution is a linking point that Piercy shares with the material feminists.

The "fooder" is a soundproofed warm place and has panels that could come out to get the breeze from the river. Panels are painted with designs in a "wild variety of styles and levels of competence, ranging from sophisticated abstracts, landscapes, and portraits" (p. 70). When Connie asks where the art came from, Luciente seems surprised and explains that "all the arts fall out in a forty/sixty ratio in the population - doesn't seem to matter whether you're talking about dancing or composing or sculpting. Same curve" (p. 70).

They change the panels all the time, they discuss and change panels depending on what people want to see. Change is deeply respected and accepted. Art is dynamic and it also involves a dynamic process.

A very important factor in the construction of society in Mattapoisett is

[116] The term "Material Feminists" was coined by Dolores Hayden to describe those women who where convinced that their oppression was caused by the slavery of the domestic work they were obliged to perform without being paid. Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: a History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities*, Cambridge: MIT press, 1981.

linked to reproductive technology. Motherhood is a deeply relevant subject in the novel; along with its political implications, Piercy describes the entire procedure of gestating children outside the womb empathizing the aesthetic atmosphere that surrounds it. Reproductive technology is highly developed. In the utopian future imagined by Piercy, Connie's attention is posed on the childbearing and child-rearing of children. She gets to know that children have three mothers and that in this future childbearing is performed by machines, moreover, childrearing is both a female and a male duty as men can lactate as well. Piercy clearly wants to separate genes and culture. By giving birth outside the human body children are not influenced by their biological parents, nor are they destined to carry their parents' background. Racial discriminations are also eradicated by stopping biological heredity; people from the future "want there to be no chance of racism again" (p. 97). In this future children are born "without pain, multicoloured like a litter of puppies without the stigmata of race and sex" (p. 99).

In the birthing chambers children gestate in an artificial placenta and ova and sperm are chosen randomly in order to avoid genetic selection that could unveil racism. The responsibility of rearing children is not considered a compulsory duty for everyone; in fact, only those people who have a genuine desire to raise children actually do it.

The embryos grow in the "brooder" outside a woman's womb. It is described as a brilliant and colorful machine. The space around the brooder resembles more "a big aquarium" than a science laboratory. "The floor (is) carpeted in a blue print and music (is) playing ... a tank (is) painted over with eels and water lilies" (p. 95).

The brooder is described as a strange device with tanks and machines, with something like a big heart that beats in it. Bee, who is the man in charge of controlling the apparatus has a tattoo whose colors and drawings were finer than any Connie had ever seen in her life. The sense of a highly aesthetic atmosphere involved with childbirth is given both by the brooder and his controller.

The aesthetic description of the entire childbearing procedure serves, in my opinion, to soften and embellish her radical view upon maternity. Piercy was in fact a radical feminist, and as such she was against biological motherhood and in favor of social motherhood. *Woman on the Edge of Time* seems to narrate in prose what Firestone argued politically.

In *The Dialectic of Sex*[117] Shulamith Firestone maintained that patriarchy is the consequence of the biological differences between men and women.

Both Firestone and Piercy believed that abolition of gender and sexual inequalities would result if, and only if, an androgynous society would emerge and replace the one characterized by sex distinctions.

From Firestone's point of view, technology in itself could have the potential to help women in their struggle. This faith in technology is a factor that strongly links Firestone with Piercy; as a matter of fact women in Mattapoisett are liberated thanks to technology. Firestone envisions a solution to the different roles men and women play in reproduction by begetting children ex - uterus. She believes technology has the potential to free women from being child bearing machines. As Tong argues, Firestone believed that when technology will be able to perfect "artificial" ways for people to reproduce, the need for the biological family will disappear and, with it, the need to impose genital heterosexuality as a means of ensuring human reproduction."[118]

Piercy strongly agrees with Firestone's point of view. Connie Ramos is thus the leading factor of the differences between a world in which biological reproduction is the norm and a world in which children are born outside the womb. Connie is condemned to live the saddest of all lives mainly because she met a man and got pregnant. Being pregnant immediately pushed her from being a human being to being a mother, with all the implications this state implies. She loves her daughter and throughout the text there are references to the fact that she misses her, however, she is destined not to see her again because she is considered unfit to look after her. She symbolically

[117] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, London: Cape, 1971.

[118] Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: a Comprehensive Introduction*, Boulder and San Francisco: Westview Press 1989, p. 74.

represents what is worst about being a mother. The way she is treated and how she lives her life mirrors the aggressiveness of a world ruled by patriarchal assumptions.

In Mattapoisett, as Luciente explains, what happened to Connie could never happen again:

> 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 become mothers. Every child has three. To break the nuclear bonding. (p. 99)

In Mattapoisett women are equal to men but in order to reach this goal they had to renounce their unique privilege, becoming a mother. The fact that birth occurs outside the body separates biology and reproduction. People of Mattapoisett understood that the price to pay in order to live in a better world, where racial and sexual differences no longer exist, was to give up the link between biology, the body and reproduction, and base their lives on technology. Far from being a violent process, Piercy describes it as an aesthetic experience. Although family is not traditional in composition at all, parenting is a primary duty and children's education is one of the main social values.

Children are educated in a "house of children". The detailed description of the school shows a well-defined "function of art" in this feminist utopia; art has a deep didactic function in this area. "A good strong holi is a powerful tool of learning" (p. 289) says Luciente. Connie and Luciente go into a room full of books and art supplies. In a dark room they encounter a girl listening to a Bach sonata for unaccompanied flute. In another room the walls were mosaics of old bottles.

> Everywhere children went about their play and their business with adults, with older and younger children, with dogs, with rabbits, children with what Luciente told her were powerful microscopes, spectroscopes, molecular scanners, gene readers, computer terminals, light pencils, lightweight sound and light holi cameras and transmitters that created an image so real she could not believe till she passed her hand through that the elephant in the center of the room was only a three-dimensional image. (p. 124)

Most of what children need to learn they learn by doing. Their educational system has been defined as holistic because people from Mattapoisett believe that imagination and reason can work together precisely as body and mind enrich each other.[119] To reinforce the sense of connection they are actively engaged in the arts. Holograms (called "holi" in the novel) are both a form of art and an instrument to increase children's knowledge of the world.

Holography is, in Mattapoisett, one of the most appreciated arts. The word holography comes from the Greek *hólos*, "whole" + grafē, "writing, drawing".

The technique of holography involves a procedure that consents to the light scattered from an object to be remembered by a device capable of remembering the image. The vision changes depending on the orientation of the viewing system, the image appears three-dimensional and thus the viewer gets the impression of the object as if it was there. The procedure that involves the recording of the light and the following reproduction when the object is no more there, is similar to the technique of sound recording as the sound can later be reproduced. The hologram is almost a perfect reproduction of the reality that the artist chooses to reproduce, in fact it can be observed from varying distances and from different perspectives. I shall

[119] Lee Cullen Khanna, "Frontiers of Imagination: Feminist Worlds", Women's Studies International Forum Volume 7, number 2 (1984), p. 100.

argue that for the above reason, holography could be regarded also as a technologically advanced art that needs the care and sensitivity of the artist.

In Mattapoisett people are used to discuss the arts, and holograms serve this purpose. They believe that a powerful image can say more than words ever could. They display a great respect for beauty but they combine this aspect with the belief that art must also display a social and didactic function. Below I report a discussion about this art among some inhabitants of the village:

> "In their recent holi, the image of struggle was a male and a female embracing and fighting at once, which resolved into an image of two androgynes. Yet the force that destroyed so many races of beings, human and animal, was only in its source sexist. Its manifestation was profit oriented greed."
> "Luciente crits[120] justly", Barbarossa said. "In truth, I didn't think of it. But it seems to me the holi should have related the greed and waste to the political and economic systems."
> The old person with the glittery black eyes, Sojourner, shook her head.
> "Every piece of art can't contain everything everybody would like to say! I've seen this mistake for sixty years." (p. 194)[121]

From the above quote, we can deduce that they have different ideas about both the meaning and the social function of a work of art. They use paintings and holograms to discuss gender roles of the past, politics and the meaning of art in general terms.

[120] In the text the informal word "crits" is short for "criticizes".

[121] As we can see from this quote, Marge Piercy's choice regarding the names of her characters mirrors her political view: in 1851 in Akron Ohio, a women's right convention was held. Sojourner Truth, a former slave, challenged the popular doctrine of women's supposed physical inferiority.
"Nobody ever helps me into carriages or over puddles, or gives me the best place - and ain't I a woman? ... Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted and gathered into barns, and no men could head me - and ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? In Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism,* New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971, p. 191.

Jackrabbit is a nineteen years old artist who mainly works in graphic arts. He is a dear friend of Luciente. He does sculptures in light and "shapes that reshaped themselves into other shapes" (p. 244). Connie feels sometimes nervous looking at Jackrabbit's art with him, the artist, as she is afraid she wouldn't seem appreciative and clever enough to understand his art.

Jackrabbit has to go "on defense" and he wants to get defending out of his way before he starts mothering. Connie reasons that Jackrabbit is a very good artist, and as a consequence he should live just of his art, she cannot understand his desire to work, as all the others do, as a farmer and eventually as a soldier and mother. Connie wrongly assumes that the society of Mattapoisett does not value art and artists that much.

Luciente explains to her that the great majority of them are interested in some art, and sometimes more than one. She tells her:

> Connie, we think art *is* production. We think making a painting is as real as growing a peach or making diving gear. No more real, no less, real. It's useful and good on different level, but it's production. If that's the work I want to do, I don't have to pass a test or find a patron. But I still have family duties, political duties, social duties, like every other lug. How not? (p. 246)

Aside holography, they also own and produce some luxury items. These luxuries pass through the libraries of each community:

> beautiful new objects get added and some things wear out or get damaged. Costumes, jewellery, vases, paintings, sculpture - some is always on loan to our village. And always passing on. [...] We pass along the pleasure. (p. 162)

Jackrabbit also has a Michelangelo "hung where (he) could see it every day".

People living in Mattapoisett enjoy many cultures and many arts. Some of them love Beethoven, especially the "Quartet in B Flat. The Grosse Fugue" (p. 164).

Music is part of utopia, and part of Piercy's aesthetic world; it serves also as a comparison between the real and the imagined world.

If in Mattapoisett music is sophisticated and pleasant, in Connie's hospital there is no music but "Muzak" (p. 175) that comes over the PA system. As previously mentioned, the hospital's name is Bellevue. This institution is reminiscent of the panopticon prison designed by the social reformer Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century. The penitentiary designed by Bentham envisaged a building in which its prisoners would be under constant inspection. Indeed, he was convinced that by being susceptible to observation, even when one is not actually being watched, was a fundamental step in order to treat criminals. Foucault compares the Bentham penitentiary with modern society.[122] He warns that visibility is misleading. In fact, it is through visibility that modern society controls systems of power and knowledge. He suggests that our everyday life is a carceral continuum, characterised by the witting or unwitting surveillance of some humans to others. It follows that Bellevue hospital in the book, is a metaphor for society. Relationships between human beings are not equal, social classes together with race and gender differences are factors that determine a person's place in society.

The name "Bellevue" is French for "wonderful view"; it is doubtless very ironic considering the way in which patients are constantly spied upon. Yet the absence of any form of art is impressive. Patients are constantly dehumanized. Doctors conduct experiments over people's bodies careless of the consequences that their actions could provoke. They surgically implant devices into the human brain of patients in order to control and cure the brain. Connie at the beginning of the novel is in isolation, after a while doctors will move her to the mixed ward where the most terrible treatments are accomplished.[123] They do not care about Connie, when Dr. Redding talks

[122] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London: Penguin, 1991.

[123] Piercy's social denouncement of the institution of mental hospitals is evocative of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, a novel written in 1962 that condemns the control that mental institutions have over people's minds and bodies. In this novel Big Nurse alone embodies the totalitarian power over patients that her institution wields. In Piercy's novel there is more than one person in charge of demonstrating the power of the medical institution. Piercy's driving forces of oppression are represented by a group of both

to her, she "stared at her, not like she'd look at a person, but the way she might look at a tree, a painting, a tiger in the zoo" (p. 85). Connie is constantly objectified, this time she is compared to a painting, meaning that those doctors that treat her so badly are incapable of enjoying and understanding art.

Her life at Bellevue is thus a real nightmare, it could be compared by association to chapter XV in the novel. Here Piercy describes an alternative to the utopia of Mattapoisett; a dreadful, bare future in which sexism and capitalism have thrived. Piercy's depiction of the future of Mattapoisett is even more eu-topian if compared to the dystopian future that Connie visits by mistake. If technology has been able to free women from Mattapoisett and to build an ecologically friendly atmosphere, this dystopian future shows that a inappropriate use of technology could lead to a catastrophe. In this otherworld Connie meets Gildina 547-921-45-822-KBJ, whose body "seemed a cartoon of femininity" (p. 265). Technology in this future has led people to live in a society run by money. Only rich people can afford to eat fresh food, poor people suffer from lack of protein and die very young. Women have plastic surgery as a way of adapting themselves to the female stereotypes of the time. Rich people become cyborgs thanks to transplants of organs taken from the poor people. Air conditioning is essential to life, as the air is not breathable. "Multis own everybody". This is a technocratic horror, authoritarian and super - machista world where poor people are just walking organ banks and the rich ones live up to two hundred years.
Gildina lives in a room surrounded by mirrors, as to stress the importance of appearance in her time. She looks like a cartoon, she has a tiny waist and enormous breasts, a flat stomach, oversized hips and ridiculously small feet; she habitually undergoes plastic surgery and implantation to maintain her bodily cartoon appearance.

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men and women doctors who work together and who consider human beings as laboratory animals.

The dehumanization she is urged to perform to her body reminds me of the life and work of Orlan.[124]

Orlan's deep deconstruction of the body through plastic surgery leads to important theoretical questions. Which is more substantive, the body or the soul? is the self "substantially invested" in the body or is the body's substance "superficial" to the self?

Jay Prosser asked the artist about the relationship between body and identity.[125] He asked her whether she experienced a feeling of internal transformation accompanying the external one. Orlan answered that her transformation was not only physical but psychological as well. She suggested that every time she changed her physical appearance she felt changed inside. To a change on her body corresponded a change on her personality.

Gildina 547-921-45-822-KBJ is obliged by society to live in a "plastic body" which is now completely detached from her soul. She is herself just a image, a cartoon image. She hardly ever leaves her apartment, she watches television all the time. She has no windows but a window-like device that displays five pictures;

> She presses a switch and the scene changed to a mountain with skiers and superfast snowbuggies skimming across the snow and hovercraft hanging in the brilliant air. Gildina flicked the switch again and

[124] Orlan is a female French artist. She is the only artist to use plastic surgery as her medium of choice. In 1993 she exhibited in a gallery in New York her latest work. She decided to show a post-structuralist modification of her body. She showed a movie of her surgical experience. Her main purpose was to demonstrate that the body is constructed and not natural. Since 1990, she has undergone a series of "performances" during which her face was drastically changed through the use of plastic surgery. Her intention was not to become "beautiful" but rather to suggest that: "the objective beauty (Venus, Diana, Psyche, Monna Lisa) is unattainable and the process horrifying". This contentious work, which is rooted in feminist and psychoanalytic theory is called *The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan*. Orlan defines her work as "Carnal Art", which she explains as "a self-portrait in the classical sense, yet realized through the technology of our time". For further discussion on her work see: Wilson Sarah, Onfray Michel, Allucquére Rosanne Stone, François Serge Parveen Adams, *ORLAN: Ceci est mon corps, ceci est mon logiciel*, Londres: Black Dog Publishing, 1996.

[125] Jay Prosser, *Second Skins. The body Narratives of transexuality*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

> a bunch of men dressed in Roman tunics began chasing a lot of women around and pulling their clothes off. She flicked again: hand-to-hand sword combat in medieval costumes, with bloody hands flying off. The last scene was a herd of zebras grazing, while some lions stalked, but something was wrong and it was very speeded up and jerky. “That one's broke”. She changed back to the lake. (p. 272)

Gildina never saw a real work of art, the only artist she knows is a leg painting “artiste”.

Coming back to utopia, when Connie returns to Mattapoisett she gets to know that every seven years people get a sabbatical year, during this year they are off work but they must be responsible for their families. Some of them decide to improve their knowledge on their subjects, others learn a language or decide to travel. The majority of them decide to dedicate their time to the arts, painting or writing a book.

People perform in spectacles and play music, flutes and guitars and string instruments Luciente herself plays drums. Funerals are also aesthetic happenings. During Jackrabbit’s funeral, his family and friends remember him by telling memories and playing music, Barbarossa remembers that:

> The holi Jackrabbit made that warmed me most was the one for green equinox, with all the speeded-up plant growth. For days after I kept remembering the little sprouts wriggling out of the seeds, the tulips unfolding, shutting, opening, shutting. It was funny and beautiful at once. Those images kept coming back when I was working and I'd smile. It gave me a good connected feeling. (p. 292)

At the end of every funeral the community choose a new child from the “brooder” to carry on the spirit that has gone.

There are a lot of festivals during the year and for the occasion people wear “a flimsy” for the evening, which is “made out of algae, natural dyes” (p. 158). A big part of the joy given by festivals consists in designing flimsies.

This does not happen for proper costumes that circulate. People can borrow costumes from the library.

They have around eighteen regular holidays, a time they dedicate to remember their heroes and to praise the history that leads to them. On July nineteenth for example, they celebrate the Seneca Equal Rights Convention [126] beginning women's movement. On this occasion they perform a spectacle and play music.

In this utopian society art and creativity are central values. Art is essentially dynamic. Marge Piercy focuses on the depiction of the artistic events that take place in Mattapoisett.

During these occasions people play and listen to music, dance, read and write poetry, wear elaborate costumes and enjoy holograms and above all they display a profound familiarity with aesthetic values. Creativity is a recurrent ability among the entire community; it is highly valued as it is perceived as important for personal self-expression. The aesthetic pleasure they get from the arts also has a deep recreative property. Art has a didactic function as well; holograms are used to teach children. There is a figure of a great artist that emerges from the novel, Jackrabbit, but he is not different from other people in his community. From Piercy's perspective the aim of art is to produce beauty, to provide pleasure, enjoyment or entertainment. However, she shows that art is also an instrument of communication, useful to express ones experiences and beliefs.

[126] As previously argued with regards to names (see Sojourner) Marge Piercy's novel is often referring to important feminist occurrences. On July 14, 1848 Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton called for a woman's Rights Convention to be held in Seneca Falls five days later. Notwithstanding such short notice three hundred people came to Seneca Falls and approved a Declaration of Sentiments. The declaration of sentiments declared that "all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights; that among this are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". The Seneca Falls Convention has since been heralded as the official beginning of the women's suffrage movement in the United States.

# ERNEST CALLENBACH, *ECOTOPIA* (1975)

*Ecotopia* is one of the first ecological utopias ever written. It was clearly born out of the political and economic turmoil of the 1970s. It both influenced the green movement and was influenced by it. *Ecotopia* is founded on ecological principles but at the same time it allows free love and marijuana.

As one can deduce from the name *Ecotopia*[127], this novel is a combination of ecology and utopia; the term ecotopia, which is nowadays widely used, comes from this novel.

Rejected by every single publisher in New York, originally it was self published by its author in 1975.[128] Nowadays the novel is instead a world wide appreciated cult novel that only in the first decade of its life sold more than 300,000 copies. The narration takes place 25 years into the future, in the year 1999; the narrator is an American visitor, Will Weston,[129] he is a reporter from the fictitious *New York Times Post* and he writes the novel in a diary form and sometimes he writes news reports in the form of articles. The plot adopts the traditional scheme of the narrator who is initially skeptical and who will be progressively converted to the ideals of the society he is observing. The narrator is sent (twenty years after the founding of Ecotopia) by his newspaper to write a description of the Republic of Ecotopia. He is the first journalist to be allowed in Ecotopia since it gained its independence. When Washington, Oregon and California seceded from

[127] Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia, The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston,* New York: Bantam Books, 1990. All following quotations from the novel will be cited from this edition.

[128] In 1974 Callenbach published a shorter version of *Ecotopia* "First Days in Ecotopia" in the American Review. In 1981 he published *Ecotopia Emerging* a prequel to his former novel where he explains how *Ecotopia* could have really come into existence.

[129] The name "Will Weston" is reminiscent of "William Guest" the utopian visitor created by William Morris. By naming his character over him, Callenbach wanted to draw a link between his oeuvre and what is generally considered the first utopian novel explicitly ecological; yet one of the main differences among the two characters is that, while William Guest (as the name suggests) will come back home, Will Weston will become an Ecotopian.

the United States they adopted the name of Ecotopia.
As the name suggests the main goal of this new society is to match the needs of humanity with the needs of the environment. There are absolutely no forms of pollution and this premise works as a framework for "minor" themes, as for example: the health-care system, the educational system, the city's architecture, alternative energy sources, work, race and gender discrimination and the arts. Callenbach uses the fear for environmental dangers to promote social change. Ecotopians managed to set up a sustainable economy, freed from pollution, industrialism and capitalism. The person in charge of ruling the nation is a female president whose name is Vera Allwen. She is also the leader of the Survivalist Party.

In Ecotopia people use bicycles for transportation (Ecotopians consider bicycles aesthetically beautiful because they represent the most efficient means of transportation) recycle almost everything and live communally. However, Ecotopia does not seem to be a real paradise, as a certain degree of race discrimination is still present; male aggression has not been eradicated and war games are commonly practiced in order to reduce the supposed "male aggressiveness" which is clearly a gender based assumption that discriminates women. This gender based assumption forgets that differences in behaviors among human beings are socially and not naturally based. In addition to this, while men try to compensate their "natural" aggressiveness, women waste their time celebrating into the forest. Ecotopians show a high degree of aggressiveness in the war games; thanks to these games, Callenbach thinks, men will never again experience the need for war. Race discrimination is also underpinning Callenbach's writing: in fact black people do not live in Ecotopia but in Soul City, which is significantly less green than Ecotopia. As Will Weston reports, the culture of Soul City is different from that of Ecotopia, yet astonishing Soul City "is a heavy exporter of music and musicians, novels and movies and poetry, both to the rest of Ecotopia and to Europe and Asia" (p. 108).

Callenbach sent every single chapter of his book to scientists, as he wanted to be reassured about the truthfulness of his solutions; by doing that he confirmed his will to write a blueprint for his ideal of a better future. This attitude is by all means common to utopian writers, but in his case it is even stronger as he sent his chapters to scientists for approval. His scientists friends replied that his idyllic high-speed public transportations, electronic vehicles as well as small cities crowded with gardens and solar and wind energies were undoubtedly possible even if not yet in use. Callenbach is a precursor of the efforts of our society in terms of renewable energies. In a historical period where climate change is putting our world at risk this book is still now very relevant. Callenbach's efforts to write a novel based on scientific evidences is reminiscent of Gilman's attitude, in fact in "A Woman's Utopia" she wrote that utopian dreams must be planned correctly, and that it is important to draw up the plans before building.
In this chapter, however, I will investigate mainly what role art plays in this "ecotopian" society, the relationship of artist to society and what are the responsibilities of artists to ecotopian population.

An important chapter of the novel is dedicated to the arts, it is titled "Ecotopian Music, Dance, Other Arts". As an incipit to my discussion I shall anticipate that in *Ecotopia* there are just a few professional artists, while amateur artists are the norm; yet there are a few Ecotopian artists who have gained international prestige in Paris and Tokyo. Ecotopian artistic creativity can be enjoyed mainly in *Ecotopia* and artists refuse to be considered as such. There is only one art that seems to be nonexistent even if known; the art of photography that is just briefly mentioned within the narration. Ecotopians think photography "has a dark-magic side, as a way of trying to freeze time - to cheat biology and defy change and death" (p. 80). This common assumption among Ecotopians seems too naive and thus inappropriate with regard to their main culture and believes; yet it can also be compared to Roland Barthes's view upon photography. Barthes argues that photography can be the object of three practices (or three emotions, or

three intentions) and he names these three *The Operator*, *The Spectator*, and *The Spectrum*. The Operator is the photographer, the Spectator is that who look at photographs, and the Spectrum is what is photographed or the referent. The word *spectrum* retains, in its root, a relation to "spectacle" and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead.[130]

When Will Weston interviews a young artist he refuses to give him his name and adds, "we have no art, we just do everything as well as we can" (p. 147) the interviewer reasons that:

> The effects of this attitude can be see not only in the high level of beauty attained by craft products - pottery, weaving, jewelry, and so on - but also in the quality of Ecotopian furniture, utensils, and house decorations.[131] Some of these last like a stunning feather mandala given to me by an Ecotopian friend, are not exactly art and not exactly anything else either. But they certainly add to the aesthetic enjoyment the Ecotopians provide for each other. (p. 146)

As in the whole country everyone either writes, sculpts, paints, dances, sings or "indulge [s] in some original artistic creativity" (p. 144) the role of the artist within the community is at the same time non influential and crucial. The status of "artist" is unrecognized by society and just a small number of artists gain recognition and income sufficient to sustain themselves through their work. There are no grants for artists, and "if they cannot make it with their art, young Ecotopian artists have only two alternatives: living in the minimum-guarantee level and continuing to strive for recognition, or taking a job and pursuing their art as a part-time activity" (p. 145). Artists, even if not economically sustained by the state, are crucial for the aesthetic that

[130] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1981, p. 9.

[131] As C. Paggetti argues, most of the artistic production listed by Weston follows the best tradition of William Morris's handicraft, yet no mention is made of the potentially subversive role of the artist. In *Histoire Transnationale de l'utopie littéraire et de l'utopisme*, Vita Fortunati et Raymond Trousson eds., avec la collaboration de Paola Spinozzi, Paris: Honorè Champion, 2008, p. 187.

surrounds every aspect of Ecotopian lives, yet the respect given to artists turns upon accomplishment. Imagination and creativity are highly valued mainly because they are convenient for society and surely not valued as private personal qualities.

Ecotopians appreciate the arts regardless of their economic value; namely Ecotopians do collect worldwide-recognized important art, but they mix it with works of art given to them by friends or which they have done themselves. Ecotopia is proud of its museums, which sometimes host some international traveling art exhibitions, however:

> Ecotopians spread their appreciation thin; they have a near provincial disregard for the very highest achievements, a kind of ultrademocratic shrinking of the scale of creative excellence. Apparently, if art is something everybody does, a Picasso or a van Gogh no longer seems quite special. (p. 145)

The same could be argued for architects, as a matter of fact there are no famous architects in Ecotopia, as people prefer to design by themselves their houses and buildings (which are usually made of wood); the narrator reports that:

> They build with rock, adobe, weathered boards - apparently almost anything that comes to hand, and they lack the aesthetic sense that would lead them to give such materials a coat of concealing paint. They would apparently rather cover a house with vines or bushes than paint it. (p. 10)

Will Weston initially struggles to appreciate and understand Ecotopian architecture as it is too different from what he is used to, but finally the more he will get involved in the Ecotopians' way of living, the more he appreciates its *natural* architecture. What he appreciates most is certainly that the whole street area is "sidewalk" (p. 13) and that potholes in the pavement are planted with flowers. One day walking in the street he came across a group of street musicians playing Bach, "with a harpsichord and a half dozen other instruments" (p. 13). Furthermore, as Will Weston reports,

"among all the arts, music seems the most important to Ecotopians" (p. 146).

As already mentioned people from Ecotopia do not leave the practice of arts to professionals; in fact there is almost no difference between amateurs and professionals in the arts. Music does not represent an exception within this regard as "every farm, factory, or extended family has some kind of musical group" (p. 146). Goldbach argues that the various Californian music scenes of the 60s and the early 70s influenced Callenbach.[132]

In Ecotopia there are numerous styles of new music being composed; "black bands play a music with roots in the jazz and blues we know from Chicago and New York" (p. 146) and the music from the Carribean. In Ecotopia there are also music bands with Spanish backgrounds that play with an "obvious" Latin American influence. There are some others music bands that use classical instrumentation as violins, flutes or clarinets, but there are also musicians who play electronic music. The differences in musical styles are mirrored in the instruments used. As Goldbach points out, at the rock festival in Woodstock, on the one hand, folk groups accompanied their vocals only with acoustic musical instruments, mainly guitars. On the other hand, rock bands like the *Who* made their music even louder thanks to towers loudspeaker. Goldbach notes that "although the scandal Dylan is reported to have provoked at the folk festival in Newport 1965 seems to be a legend [...], he was, indeed, attacked by folk fans, for instance at a concert on 17th May 1966 in Manchester (UK), where he was accused to be "Judas" [...]."[133]Goldbach adds that the above conflict can be found in Ecotopia as well, as we can see in the following quote:

> The burning musical issue in Ecotopia at present concerns electrification. At the time of Independence, rock music was entirely electronic, and groups carried around with them a whole truckload of heavy amplifiers. They soon came

[132] Karl Traugott Goldbach, "Utopian Music: Music History of the Future in Novels by Bellamy, Callenbach and Huxley", in Fátima Vieira, Marinela Freitas (ed.), *Utopia Matters, Theory, Politics, Literature and the Arts,* Porto: Editora da Universidade do Porto, 2005, p. 238.

[133] Ibid, p. 239.

> under attack from “folkies,” musicians who used only traditional instruments such as recorder, banjo, guitar, piano, and antique types such as the lute or oriental types such as the sitar. Folkies argued that music could not be a truly people's art, accessible to all, if it depended on high cost electronics; and they also maintained that music should not depend on the artificial aid of electricity. Their final argument was that amplified music was a biological offense because it damaged eardrums. The development of small, inexpensive amplifiers undermined their first point, and the last didn't seem to impress young Ecotopian musicians any more than it had our own. And so the debate goes on. (p.147)

There are also some popular songs in Ecotopia; Will Weston reports that these songs are nothing more than “romantic lamentations” and adds, “evidently the Ecotopian revolution, whatever else it may have accomplished, has not touched the basic miseries of the human conditions” (p. 146).

The world of publishing needs also to be taken briefly into consideration, as it is linked to a specific form of art that can hardly be found in utopia, that of comic books. In Ecotopia book publishing is considered important and thus functions perfectly. Ecotopians can choose a literary work, punch the number on a jukebox-like keyboard and have the book printed and bound automatically. Authors and artists have easy access to print because “Ecotopia early developed portable, fool-proof, easily repairable offset printing presses [...] the variety of materials printed in this way is staggering”. They print cookbooks, political and scientific papers and mostly comic books that have a wide development “being the chosen medium of some excellent artists.” (p. 121)

To conclude I shall argue that environmental hazards work in this novel as a fertile ground to promote social change and among this change envisioned by Callenbach the arts provide the measure of ecotopians quality of life.

Even if what Callenbach suggests is not very original at all and the community needs are more important than the individual needs, *Ecotopia,* as Heinz Tschachler argues, still occupies a point where the pastoral and utopian modes intersect.[134] I shall suggest that the pastoral atmosphere is encouraged by the aesthetic rendering of all the arts that are performed within *Ecotopia*, from architecture to music, passing through painting.

[134] Heinz Tschachler, "Despotic reason in Arcadia? Ernest Callenbach's Ecological Utopias" in *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3, Nov., 1984, p. 306.

# DORIS LESSING, *THE MARRIAGES BETWEEN ZONES THREE, FOUR, AND FIVE* (1980)

As discussed in the chapter titled "The Arts in the Critical Utopia", feminist utopian fiction looks at art within a well-defined perspective; Piercy for instance, paid much attention to creativity, as she understood creativity as a powerful mean of social advancement. Furthermore, individual self-expression, and the aesthetic pleasure given by the making and rating of art contributed to the building of utopia. If the attention to art is clearly noticeable in Piercy's work, in Doris Lessing it is even more enthralling. Doris Lessing finely investigates the functions of art in her science-fiction/ utopian series, *Canopus in Argos: Archives.* As Khanna points out[135], the relationship between art and truth, art and the well-being of the social order, and between the artist and his work all become crucial in Lessing's *The Marriages between Zones Three, Four and Five*".

*Canopus in Argos: Archives* is a sequence of five novels: *Shikasta* (1979), *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980), *The Sirian Experiments* (1980), *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* (1982), *The Sentimental Agents in the Volyen Empire* (1983).

Even though these five novels, being part of the same series, have many themes in common, every single book narrates a different tale. I shall mainly focus upon *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five.*

Some interesting points regarding the form of *The Marriages between Zones Three, Four, and Five* (1980) deal with the question of whether or not this novel can properly be regarded as a work of science fiction. In an interview[136] with Margarete von Schwarzkopf in response to a question

[135] Lee Cullen Khanna,Khanna, "Truth and Art in Women's Words: Doris Lessing's *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*" in Marleen Barr and Nicholas D. Smith eds., *Women and Utopia: Critical Interpretations*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1983.

[136] Margarete von Schwarzkopf, "Placing Their Fingers on the Wounds of Our Times" in Earl G. Ingersoll ed., *Doris Lessing Conversation,* Princeton, New Jersey: Ontario Review Press, 1994, p. 107.

regarding her new attitude towards science-fiction writing Doris Lessing argues:

> **Schwarzkopf**: In recent years you have actually written four science-fiction novels. Have you become an "SF writer"?
> **Lessing**: "I wouldn't classify these books as science fiction. They don't have much to do with "science," that is, scientific knowledge and technology. I leave that to my colleagues who really know something about technology.
> I am skeptical about science as it is practiced today, this shortsighted discipline concerned with tomorrow but not with the day after. No, my novels are fantasies, or utopias in the truest, most precise sense of the term, to be sure, rather less related to Orwell and Huxley than to Thomas More and Plato. They are fables, spun out of what is happening today."

I shall, under Lessing's suggestion, define this novel as utopian.

The relationship between the artist and the work of art is one of the main topics of *Canopus in Argos: Archives.* The second book, *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* however, is particularly interesting within this regard as the narrator is, in fact, a singer.

Music and songs represent the heart of the novel; the opening lines are quite revealing:

> Rumors are the begetters of gossip. Even more are they the begetters of song. We, the Chroniclers and song-makers of our Zone, aver that before the partners in this exemplary marriage were awake to what the new directives meant for both of them, the songs were with us, and were being amplified and developed from one end of Zone Three to the other. And of course this was so in Zone Four."[137]

From the very first lines, the novel brings the reader into the land of legend

[137] Doris Lessing, *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five* (as narrated by the chroniclers of zone three), London: Grafton Books, 1981. All following quotations from the novel will be cited from this edition.

and of myth. Interviewed by Minda Bikman[138] Lessing observes that: "There's never been a book that I enjoyed writing as much as that one. It was a piece of cake, very unlike most of my books, which are agony. I really loved it".

Narrated by the artist and chronicler Lusik, the book tells the story of Al•Ith the beautiful and affable Queen of the benign Zone Three and of her forced marriage to Ben Ata, the soldier King of the militarized, hostile and hierarchic Zone Four. Although Al•Ith does not want to marry Ben Ata - she considers him a savage - the marriage is imposed by "The Providers", mysterious and superior entities whose immense power is always respected and never challenged. These rulers of all the Zones order the marriage because the two Zones share the same tremendously life-threatening problem, the absolute sterility of both animals and people.

With the metaphor of marriage Lessing suggests that if the Zones do not begin to establish a contact between them the fertility rate would reach its lowest point and the world would disappear.

Zone Three is a pleasant and aesthetic utopia; people are elegant in appearance and manner and architecture is equally beautiful and functional. It is a Zone of feeling and intuition (traditionally "feminine" attributes)[139], it is a peace - loving community, where "a quarter are artisans, using gold, silver, iron, copper, brass, and many precious stones. A quarter are merchants, suppliers, traders, and tellers of stories, keepers of Memory, makers of pictures and statues, and travelling singers. None of (their) wealth goes into war. There are no weapons in (their) country" (p. 124). Men and women can be both biological and "mind fathers" or "mind mothers". It is a "magical matriarchy, sophisticated, sensual and intuitive."[140] Zone Four by contrast is misogynistic, poor and barbaric, as all its wealth goes into war; in this zone women are abused and kept obedient.

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[138] Minda Bikman, "A Talk with Doris Lessing" (1980) in Earl G. Ingersoll ed., *Doris Lessing: Conversations,* Princeton: Ontario Review Press, 1994, p. 57 - 63.
[139] Ruth Whittaker, *Doris Lessing*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988, p. 106.
[140] Lorna Sage, *Doris Lessing,* London and New York: Methuen, 1983*,* p. 80.

The premise of this marriage is, despite the differences among the Zones, to put an end to the desolation of a world without births.

Al•Ith and Ben Ata are symbols of their worlds. Katherine Fishburn observes that, as a symbol, their marriage is useful for society because it represents the linking point between two ways of life, "it is the conjunction of theses and antithesis: it is the dialectic of sex as described by Shulamith Firestone in her book of that name." [141]

As Fishburn argues, although Lessing's depiction of society is not exactly matching Firestone's she too establishes a discourse based on the division of sexes and the resulting obstacles this division implies.

Shulamith Firestone argues that all social problems originated in the biological differences between men and women; in order to understand why women are subordinated to men, one has to take into consideration those biological differences between the sexes. Reproduction, instead of production as the Marxists thought, is the main cause of inequalities.[142]

The different role men and women play in reproduction leads, from Firestone's point of view, to the very first division of labour in history. She argues that "unlike economic class, sex class sprang directly from a biological reality: men and women were created different, and not equally privileged."[143] Thus, because of different bodies men and women are expected to play different roles in the bearing and rearing of children. The economic revolution that Marx thought to be essential in order to abolish differences of class can be mirrored in Firestone's attempt to pursue a biological revolution. Since she thought that women's oppression derives from biological differences between men and women she argues that a reinterpretation of motherhood and childbearing in particular is essential in order to free women from their biological stigma.

Firestone argues that social distinction of gender is neither natural nor needed; in fact it threatens the well being of people and the planet. Fishburn,

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[141] Katherine Fishburn, *The Unexpected Universe of Doris Lessing, A Study in Narrative Technique*, Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1985, p. 88.
[142] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, London: Cape, 1971.
[143] Ibid, p. 8.

by using Firestone's theory to give her reading of *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* suggests that the Zones described by Lessing are threatened because they are scared of "the Other".

Korn further elaborates the theme of "the Other" by suggesting that "the meeting and mating of opposites, the alchemical marriage between Zones Three and Four, is not just a meeting between male and female. It is the conjunction of pastoral and military, of hierarchical and democratic." [144]

The goal of the marriage is the birth of Arusi; this birth will start an increased birthrate, and figuratively, as Fishburn argues, it "takes the form of intellectual growth and change, a change that can only occur when the zones interact with one another, a change that is *given birth* by conflict and communion." [145]

Mothering in Zone Three is a communal matter, it is not only a female duty as it shared by both male and female individuals. Besides, parenting is not linked to biology as we can see from the following quote where Al•Ith is talking with Ben Ata:

> 'I have five of my own. But I am the mother of many. More than fifty.'
> She could see that everything she said put greater distance between them.
> 'It is our custom, if a child is left an orphan, that I should become its mother.'
> 'Adopt it.'
> 'It is not one of our words. I become its mother.'
> [...]
> 'Then how are they your children?'
> 'They all have the same rights. And I spend the same time with each of them, as I am able.' (p. 46)

After the initial and obvious resistance, surprisingly enough, both the King and the Queen learn to love and respect each other. She teaches him to understand women and she also succeeds in teaching him the responsibilities involved in running a kingdom. However, Al•Ith changes

[144] Eric Korn, "Al•Ith in Wonderland": Review of the *Marriages between Zones Three, Four and Five*" in Eve Bertelsen ed., *Doris Lessing,* Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1985.
[145] Katherine Fishburn, *The Unexpected Universe of Doris Lessing, A Study in Narrative Technique*, Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1985, p. 91.

gradually and starts to experience feelings she is unfamiliar with; she becomes jealous and possessive.

As in the tradition of Utopia, the journey motif is crucial; Al•Ith changes in accordance to the zone she visits. She undergoes several journeys which are subordinated to personal and social changes.

Shortly after the birth of Arusi the Providers command that Al•Ith must return to her Zone Three and that Ben Ata must marry Vahshi, the savage queen of the uncivilized Zone Five. This Zone covers a wild region and is enemy of both Zone Three and Four; its inhabitants are barbaric in both appearance and behavior and terrorize the other Zones.

He feels miserable but has to obey and marry her. When the queen Al•Ith is commanded to return to her own realm, against her own wish, she feels her heart is broken as she has to abandon her husband and her child. Besides, when she returns to her Zone Three, she painfully notices that people do not recognize her anymore and that her sister Murti took her place and became the queen of Zone Three. Murti changes attitude towards her sister and exiles her to Zone Two, where she is told by invisible people that she can not stay there. Al•Ith seems alienated from everything; from her child who has been taken away from her and from her treasured Zone Three. Finally, Zone Four is led by Dabeeb, one of Al•Ith's closest friends, this Zone is populated by women capable of appreciating Al•Ith's qualities. The second part of the novel deals with Dabeeb, and her league of women, and with their decision to take Arusi to Zone Three, to see his mother. This choice is not commanded by the Providers, and as such, it is regarded as dangerous.

It has been argued that the novel seems paradoxical in many ways as Al•Ith, once a happy and fulfilled woman has to lose control of herself and experience a new aspect of her personality (becoming insecure and possessive) in order to strengthen herself, and her Zone has to experience displeasure to remain dynamic. Finally, "the reader's attachment to Al•Ith and Ben Ata must yield to the realization that it is the song itself, the tale of Al•Ith that matter most."[146]

[146] Lee Cullen Khanna, "Truth and Art in Women's Words: Doris Lessing's *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*" in Marleen Barr and Nicholas D. Smith eds., *Women*

The novel is written in the classical voice of the old storyteller; Doris Lessing, by telling the story of Al•Ith through the perspective of an artist, succeeds in drawing a link between the artist and the work of art in a very revealing way. If on the one hand the marriages are the premise to the salvation of the Zones, on the other hand the contribution of the musicians, painters and reporters is also of extreme importance. The unceasing efforts made by these artists to interpret the marriages serve to render the marriages' achievements immortal and famous.

Songs and art are immediately recognized as the main interests of Zone Three, the pleasant feminist utopia. Zone Three, is a traditional utopia under many aspects; people live in harmony with nature and connect with animals, which is a common path in feminist utopian fiction.

But art surrounds the entire novel, and it is not only used to reveal the aesthetic atmosphere of a feminist utopia, it has a deeper role, a role of unification, of culture but above all it is founded on the assumption of the subjectivity of the work of art.

Lusik is the artist/narrator; he narrates the adventures of the beautiful queen Al•Ith and the reader promptly sympathizes with her and with the profound humanity that arises from her thoughts and adventures. Aside from Al•Ith, the reader confronts himself with Lusik, who is constantly referring to paintings or songs that illustrate the same fable he is telling.

By doing that Lusik, the artist/narrator, continuously questions the veracity of the paintings and songs, he questions the meaning and the use of art. Art calls into questions the real description of events. Roberta Rubenstein[147] argues that "the Chronicler suggests the classical discrepancy between appearances and reality".

By comparing the incipit and the very last lines of the novel we might guess Lessing's speculations on the nature of art; at the beginning of the novel the songs of Zone Three are unknown to the other zones. Only at the end of the novel, when Al•Ith manages to undergo sufferance and torment in order to

*and Utopia: Critical Interpretations*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1983, p. 125.

[147] Roberta Rubenstein, "*The Marriages between Zones Three, Four, and Five*: Doris Lessing's Alchemical Allegory" in Claire Sprague and Virginia Tiger (edited by), *Critical Essays on Doris Lessing,* Boston: G.K. Hall, 1986, p. 61.

spring up again, art becomes available to everyone. The novel ends with these words:

> There was a continuous movement now, from Zone Five to Zone Four. And from Zone Four to Zone Three - and from us, up the pass. There was a lightness, a freshness, and an enquiry and a remaking and an inspiration where there had been only stagnation. And closed frontiers.
> For this is how we all see it now.
> The movement is not all one way - not by any means.
> For instance, our songs and tales are not only known in the watery realm 'down there' - just as theirs are to us - but are told and sung in the sandy camps and around the desert fires of Zone Five.

Lusik is both the chronicler who tells the story and the artist capable of interpreting art (both pictures and songs); within this frame he is the most important figure of the novel. Lusik accomplishes his job by displaying a huge sense of artistic responsibility. He describes to the reader what he understands as important differences among those paintings illustrating the fable of the love between the Queen and the King. Thanks to him, the artist/narrator of this fable, the reader reflects upon the reliability of his own understanding of the facts narrated.

The above passage epitomizes Lusik's attitude towards art:

> There is of course always - there has to be! - a difference between the way their artists and ours portray the various incidents in the tale of our queen and their king. There have never been lacking scholars only too willing to devote their lives to the analysis of this or that picture or ballad, and while this exercise does not seem to me useful, I must confess I have always been a student of the different emphasis given by the two realms. Scenes popular with us are indifferently received by them, and of course, the other way around as well. (p. 182)

Later in the novel, Dabeeb gives a message to Al•Ith and Ben Ata. The couple is enjoying the new born baby, but their happiness can not stop Dabeeb, who looks them straight into the eyes and referring to Al•Ith says "I beg for your forgiveness first - for what I am to tell you [...] my lady, you are to return to your own land" and then, referring to Ben Ata: "you are to marry the lady who rules that country to the east. You are to marry Zone Five my lord" (p. 229).

Al•Ith feels terrible, and starts alone her journey to Zone Three. In this case, the artist/narrator agrees with the way in which this scene was pictured; in fact he says:

> And yet, he *would* now marry someone else, and the child Arusi would be brought up part-orphaned [...] The Providers, surely, had erred [...] so Al•Ith as she steps her horse soberly towards the frontier. She had at least remembered the shield. She would not be able to enter her country without it. Why, she was so much an inhabitant of this Zone now, that she literally could not remember the Al•Ith of Zone Three. But she had to, she must try ... Through the dark nights goes Al•Ith, seeing the gleam of the canals beside her, the white shimmer of the peaks of Zone Three ahead. *Her horse is slow and careful under her. And all night the tears run down her face. So she is pictured. And so she was.* (p. 230, emphasis mine).

As Khanna argues, "at this moment art and life coincide perfectly."[148] In her much detailed article, Khanna detects and analyzes "artistic versus factual" scenes comparing and contrasting them. Khanna insists that in the narration art is superior to reality, meaning that the reader trusts more the pictures described then what the narrator says.[149] Among various examples she makes, I specially share her impression regarding a passage of the novel

[148] Lee Cullen Khanna, "Truth and Art in Women's Words: Doris Lessing's *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*" in Marleen Barr and Nicholas D. Smith eds., *Women and Utopia: Critical Interpretations*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1983, p. 128.

[149] Among other critics Whittaker gives a completely different interpretation as she argues that in the novel: "art falsifies, it is implied, and by drawing our attention to the fictionality of the paintings we are encouraged by the chronicler to believe in the written narrative, which gains veracity by comparison" in Ruth Whittaker, *Doris Lessing*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988, p. 105.

when Al•Ith is riding back to her Zone, with her much loved horse that seems on the point of death. The artist/narrator suggests a picture softening this fact, and the reader "can hardly avoid the impression that artistic renderings of Al•Ith's tale are, in some sense, truer than the actual events. The beloved horse, Yori, cannot die; Al•Ith will forever ride down into Zone Four. *Such is the power of art to immortalize and to transform suffering into joy."*[150]

Lusik, by accomplishing his double function, seems to understand and value his artistic responsibility. In "The Small Personal Voice"[151] Lessing presents her view upon the responsibility of the artist which seems to tally with Lusik's purposes and accomplishments.

In this essay Lessing describes her understanding of what it means to be a responsible artist faithful to the idea of social change.

Lusik is deeply committed with his role and he is aware that with his work he might change the future. He interprets the reality he sees, and that makes his role of fundamental importance; he says: "One of the motives for this chronicle is an attempt to revive in the hearts and memories of our people another idea of Al•Ith, to re-instate her in her proper place in our history" (p. 177).

From Fishburn's point of view, Lusik expresses Lessing's ideas that "as a writer he should speak for those who cannot speak for themselves."[152]

Lusik is the chronicler in charge of telling Al•Ith's adventures but he states that he is not only a chronicler of Zone Three as he "also share in Al•Ith's conditions of being ruler insofar as (he) can write of her, describe her. (He) is a woman with her, though (he is) man, as (he) writes of her femaleness" (p. 242).

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[150] Lee Cullen Khanna, "Truth and Art in Women's Words: Doris Lessing's *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*" in Marleen Barr and Nicholas D. Smith eds., *Women and Utopia: Critical Interpretations*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1983, p. 129. (emphasis mine)

[151] Doris Lessing, "The Small personal Voice", in Tom Maschler ed., *Declaration,* New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1958.

[152] Katherine Fishburn, *The Unexpected Universe of Doris Lessing, A Study in Narrative Technique*, Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1985, p. 99.

Fishburn observes that the above statement has mainly two meanings; on the one hand it indicates that Lusik participates in Al•Ith's activities by recording them, on the other hand it shows that as a narrator he controls his people as he defines reality for them.

Lusik seems to be both the creator of the story and one of its protagonists. He often reflects upon the creative process and finally his own tale appears to be merged with the general tale told by Lessing. Lusik adds:

> I see myself as a describer, only that; a writer-down of the events which pass [...] and so I record here only that when Al•Ith sat and dreamed of Zone Two, she was Zone Two, even if in the most faint and distant way, and her imaginings of its immaculate fire-norn beings brought her near them, and when she thought of us, the Chroniclers, she was us...and so now, in this footnote to Al•Ith's thoughts on that occasion I simply make my cause and rest it: Al•Ith am I, and I Al•Ith, and every one of us anywhere is what we think and imagine. (p. 244)

Khanna sees in Lusik's words the recognition that teller and tale coincide and that art can "in some sense, create life."[153]

Little by little Lusik begins to interpret songs and pictures more emotionally, giving his own personal view upon reality; for example while describing a passage in which Al•Ith is crying he says:

> In songs, in picture, and in story, this scene is known as 'Al•Ith's Tear'. It is popularly believed to have to do with the tender emotions of this pair when she told him she was pregnant, but the truth of the matter is as I tell it here [...]. (p. 96)

As previously mentioned, aside from embellishing reality, paintings reflect the differences between the Zones; that is to say, they interpret shared

[153] Lee Cullen Khanna "Change and Art in Women's Worlds: Doris Lessing's Canopus in Argos: Archieves, in Ruby Rohrlich and Elaine Hoffmann Baruch eds., *Women in Search of Utopia: Mavericks and Mythmakers*, New York: Schocken Books, 1984, pp. 275.

events differently. Furthermore, people feel the need of creating art capable of mirroring their own needs.

One last example within this regard is linked to the most popular scene in Zone Four, that of Al•Ith and Ben Ata parading before the armies. According to Zone Four and judging from the number and dimension of the pictures this was the most important event in the marriage.

> Ben Ata rode first. [...] Behind him, and half his size, on her black horse, is Al•Ith. Her horse's neck is arched under a tight rein. She is sitting sideways and is very pregnant. Sometimes the child is born and is held in front of her: a large child, dwarfing her. Her face is conventionalized, has the blunt solid look of their people. She is smiling, and holds out one hand palm upwards: in the palm is a small object meant to represent Zone Three - a mountain. (p. 183)

In Zone Three this scene has never been popular and for a long time it was not represented at all, but as Lusik tells us later in the narration, more adventurous artists did try to represent it. "Soon the early, cruder representations lost favor: some of them had even shown Al•Ith with bounds hands, or a chain around her neck. But most concentrated on the soldiers rather on Al•Ith, who was reduced to a pathetic doll-like figure on her horse" (p. 183). This scene focuses on the assumption that Al•Ith is secondary to Ben Ata; this vision relating to the queen's role in the marriage is definitely masculinist and as such unpleasant. In the end, however, the artists of both Zone Three and Zone Four begin to show the scene in a similar way suggesting a change in the two Zones;

> […] the pictures were of, above all, Al•Ith's gold dress - of her decorated and opulent dress, and her bound, trapped hair. She dwindles under the weight of stuff and jewellery. Her pregnancy is not ignored, but not made much either. Her face is only indicated. She rides between ranks of men in uniforms which

> are shown in the greatest detail. These pictures came to be known as 'Al•Ith's Dress'. (p. 184)

Lusik observes that these representations failed to come to terms with Al•Ith's feelings as she rode behind Ben Ata. From Lusik's point of view artists do not grasp Al•Ith's deep understanding of her role. Al•Ith is not offended; she understands both what it is required from her and Ben Ata's necessity to show himself as the leader. Finally Lusik reports his own vision of this scene and argues:

> I do not believe that any of our artists, or our ballad makers or songsters, have got anywhere near the truth of that scene. And in fact perhaps those Zone Four pictures that have the child already born and sometimes even on his own little horse riding in front of Ben Ata and Al•Ith have got nearest of it. (p. 185).

This contrasting use of art, depending on the Zone of origin, could be found in songs as well. As the narrator argues:

> Such Zone Four ballads, travelling upwards to us, found themselves transformed as they crossed the frontier. For one thing, there was no need of the inversions, the ambiguities, that are always bred by fear of an arbitrary authority. We may almost say that a certain type of ballad is impossible with us: the kind that has as its ground or base lamentation, the celebration of loss. In their Zone the riderless horse gave birth to songs of death and sorrow; in ours to songs about loving friendship. (p. 40)

Fishburne argues that: "the kinds of songs that are found in the two zones help to suggest the differences between them. These songs also suggest two conflicting uses of art: the state's use of art to protect the status quo and the rebels' to protest it." [154]

[154] Katherine Fishburn, *The Unexpected Universe of Doris Lessing, A Study in Narrative Technique*, Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1985, p. 96.

Surprisingly enough the songs of the feminist and utopian Zone Three are rather conservative, while the songs of Zone Four are original and revolutionary.

A children's counting game in Zone Four says:

> Great to Small
> High to Low
> Four into Three
> Cannot go
> (...)
> Three comes before Four.
> Our ways are peace and plenty.
> Their ways - War! (p. 11)

Unlike these popular lines of Zone Three, that have been defined as "conservative"[155] those of Zone Four express a revolutionary spirit; people living in Zone Four are not allowed to raise their head and look towards the clouds "cloud gathering, (they) call it" (p. 59), where Zone Three is. People do not look up at all "that *glory*" as it is considered weakening. Once every three months they disobey this rule and have parties with songs and try to imagine how life must be like in Zone Three.

Songs in Zone Four are revolutionary; despite the law against cloud gathering, as we can notice from the following song (remembered by Al•Ith) women's lyrics are revealing:

> How shall we reach where the light is,
> Come where delight is?
>
> High on the peaks light changes,
> Hope ranges.
>
> Clouds? - no,
> Snow...
>
> Rain here,
> Snow there:
>
> Freeze-fire white,
> Flake light.

[155] Ibid. p. 96.

How may we go there
Climb in the air there

Up, up, up from this flat land,
Into the high land

That is our way
That is our way ... (p.102)

These words are sung by the sweet voice of a woman, Al•Ith will always remember this song as it reminds her of Ben Ata. During the ritual ceremonies, women living in Zone Four take off the "punishment helmets" and look up at the mountains in secret. Their songs are extremely revolutionary especially from a gender's perspective; their songs are feminist as they celebrate female superiority while considering male attitude towards war as barbaric and fool.

Al•Ith believes in the power of art as a means to understand the world; she remembers the songs of the Zones she visits and "it seems to (her) we may find out what we want to know - or at any rate get some inkling, by listening to old songs. Stories" (p. 128).
In Zone Three they have all kinds of songs, in fact songs have various functions, they keep company to people and instruct them on their past. Along the narration Al•Ith sometimes points out that parts of songs are forgotten or changed; this symbolizes the lack of healthiness of the whole community. Lusik shares her point of view saying that " the general malaise, or stagnation (...) was well established among us, the Chroniclers, the makers of pictures, the songsters..." (p. 175).
Sometimes songs mirror the state of mind of the character acting, as in the following song where Al•Ith is singing to herself:

Sorrow, what is your name!
If I knew your name I could feed you -
Fill you, still you, and leave you!

Grief, if I knew your nature,
I would lead you to pasture.
What is the path I should lead you?
Which is the food I should feed you? (p. 150)

As we can see from this song, Al•Ith suffers tremendously; interestingly, she finds her way precisely through music. When she feels alone and she is sad she relies on the power of art, and on its consolatory function. Later in the novel Al•Ith mutters: "A song. What I want to find is - a song. There must be one. Songs and tales, yes, they tell. They talk. They sing. Instruct ..." (p. 244).

She tries to remember a song but every attempt is vain. Later on, Dabeeb goes to visit her and sings quietly to herself the same song Al•Ith previously tried to remember:

I shall ride my heart thundering across the plain,
Outdistance you all and leave myself behind -
Who am I on this high proud beast
Who knows where I should ride better than I do?

Oh, I do not like to look back at myself there,
Little among the stay-at-homes, the restabeds.
No, sting my self-contents to hunger
Till up I ride my heart to the high lands
Leaving myself behind.

Teach me to love my hunger,
Send me hard winds off the sands [...] (p. 278)

Al•Ith begs Dabeeb to sing her the entire song. Dabeeb is not a singer, but her singing helps Al•Ith to react to her afflictions. Even if the reader knows that Dabeeb is not a singer, the narrator presents her as such, strengthening her artistic function within the novel and implicitly claiming the supremacy of art. The song she sings comes from Zone Five but became popular when Ben Ata's bodyguard came back into the villages. Now they all sing it. Al•Ith reasons that "it should come from *there"* (p. 280).

Khanna sees in Al•Ith's words a sign of irony because she, and the singers

of Zone Three, "have so long assumed their own superiority"; those who reside in Zone Three think of themselves as superior to residents of Zone Four, Zone Four have similar feelings towards Zone Five and so on. This irony suggests that "art should know no boundaries nor hierarchy."[156]

These songs, together with the pictures previously discussed demonstrate that art in women's worlds is dynamic. The artist/narrator describes the marriages to the reader in terms of both realism and iconology. The reading of Lessing's fable is doubtless a delightful experience, however the narration requires an "active reader". As a matter of fact, Lusik asks the reader to interpret the scenes objectively, especially when these scenes are rendered into paintings or songs. The meaning of art seems, for the above reason, deeply linked with issues regarding truth and veracity. Furthermore, the feminist utopia of Zone Three is a significant example of the aesthetic atmosphere that characterizes feminist utopias. This aesthetic drive is nevertheless inadequate if statically conceived; differences and negotiations must be central in utopia. The role of conflict in social progress is expressed though art; paintings and most importantly songs have the power to smooth the way for change. Lessing also "shows us how the graphic, written, and oral art forms - taking these marriages as their subject matter - can lead to social change by helping people to expand their horizons and introducing them to the unknown."[157]

To conclude I shall argue that the role of art within the novel transcends the novel in itself and moves towards the realm of opera. *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five,* is a two acts opera by Philip Glass for orchestra with chorus and soloists.

Doris Lessing wrote herself the libretto which is based on her novel, translated into German by Saskia M. Wesnigk. This opera was commissioned by the State Government of Baden-Wüttemberg and the Cement Corporation of Heidelberg in Germany.

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[156] Lee Cullen Khanna "Truth and Art in Women's Words: Doris Lessing's *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*" in Marleen Barr and Nicholas D.Smith eds., *Women and Utopia: Critical Interpretations*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1983, p. 132.

[157] Katherine Fishburn, *The Unexpected Universe of Doris Lessing, A Study in Narrative Technique*, Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1985, p. 101.

The opera first premiered in Heidelberg, Germany on May 10th 1997, seventeen years after Lessing published her novel.

The opera is particularly committed with the novel; it presents the spectators the fights between men and women and the problem of sex and love in Zone Three, Zone Four, and Zone Five, different lands which embody differing cultures and customs. It is divided in two acts and has no overture and no conclusion, it lasted two hours and thirteen minutes. More than thirty actors and dancers performed on stage. The chorus and the symphonic orchestra managed greatly to render the harmonious atmosphere of the novel.

A new production, which nevertheless deserves to be remembered, was directed by Harry Silverstein with music conducted by Robert Kaminskas and a chorus of forty musicians at DePaul University's Merle Reskin Theater, Chicago (USA) on June 7th 2001.

These opera representations further confirm the link between art and literature as well as art and life.

# CONCLUSIONS

The novels here considered embrace a length of time that dates from 1516 to 1980.

The functions and forms of the arts within these novels have varied, of course, a great deal depending on the period of time in which they were written and on the author's commitment with cultural and political movements. In fact, as Baruch points out, utopias often reveal the times in which they were written more than the future.[158] In this final chapter I shall discuss the forms of art that occupy a significant place in utopia – music, architecture, painting – and their meaning. While doing so I shall discuss the speculation pervading this entire work, namely, the relation between aesthetics and the utopian project.

## *MUSIC.*

Over the centuries music has been the most suitable medium to interpret the utopian dream as well as being the most appreciated among all the arts.

From Thomas More onward utopian writers have displayed enthusiasm and curiosity towards both vocal and instrumental music. As one would expect classical music is often mentioned, yet also popular songs are authentic representation of the utopian ideals.

But why, one wonders, is music the most commonly practiced and demanded among all the arts in utopia?

Music is commonly regarded as the universal language for human beings and as such it inhabits the utopian world by right. But music can be an individualistic as well as a collective art at the same time, it can be pleasant or disturbing, poor or refined, and many other things. Theodor Adorno writes: "It is the prerequisite of every historical-materialistic method which

[158] Ruby Rohrlich and Elaine Hoffman Baruch, (Edited and with Introductions by), *Women in Search of Utopia: Mavericks and Mythmakers*, New York: Schocken Books, 1984, p. 204.

hopes to be more than a mere exercise in intellectual history that under no conditions is music to be understood as a 'spiritual' phenomenon, abstract and far-removed from actual social conditions, which can anticipate through its imagery any desire for social change independently from the empirical realization thereof."[159] From Adorno's point of view, both musical production and musical consumption are linked to present-day society, although he describes this relation as problematic. I believe that it is by virtue of music's socio-political underpinning that its presence in utopia is so large.

Adorno divides popular music from serious music.[160] He says that the fundamental characteristic of popular music is standardization. In his work he insists that classical or "serious" music is superior to other forms of music. He believes that popular music requires no efforts from the audience and as such he deems it as inferior. People are reassured by the familiarity of popular music and thus are deceived that everything goes for the better. The listener of popular music is distracted by the redundant and unchallenging rhythm; as a consequence, his role in the production within the economic system is preserved.

His counter-argument is that people should instead be conscious of their potentiality to change the world; "serious" music could instead help them to grow into open minded and judicious citizens.

I shall argue that in utopias the aspect of control over people's brain as discussed by Adorno could partially explain why popular music is a highly recurrent art in utopia. The musical automatism produced by popular music is a valid instrument to maintain the levels of consensus high.

Let me now take into account just the utopian writers that considered music within their narrative.

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[159] Theodor W. Adorno, "Zur gesellschaftichen Lage der Musik (1932) (On the Social Situation of Music), in Edward A. Lippman, ed., *Musical Aesthetics: a Historical Reader. The Twentieth Century*, Vol. III, Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1990, p. 224.

[160] Theodor W. Adorno, "On popular music" in *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, New York: Institute of Social research, 1941, IX, p. 17 - 49.

In Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) the artistic process is seen as dangerous as it involves irrational skills that could detach people from the order of reality. However, utopians are exquisite musicians. They have musical instruments that differ from the norm – but we are not told how or why they differ – and all their music "both vocal and instrumental, is adapted to imitate and express the passions […]" (p. 64). Music is thus a way to control what is uncontrollable by definition, the passions.

In Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000 - 1887* (1888) music becomes a symbol of equality among human beings. Bellamy describes a device – that reminds us of the radio – which is able to provide music in everybody's house.[161] Needless to say that "serious" music in the nineteenth century was totally out of reach of the masses and here lies the egalitarian and unifying power that Bellamy gives to music.

Charles Brockden Brown mentions music in *Alcuin* (1798), but he just touches on it. In "the paradise of women" musicians and dancers are introduced merely to support the "paradisiacal" atmosphere of utopia. Nothing more is added by C.B. Brown, but harmony and serenity are achieved *also* through music. The same could be argued for *Herland* (1915) as music and dance serve the purpose of showing the placid and melodious air breathed by the Herlanders. Yet, seen from a different light the popular songs that the Herlanders sing with the children and to the children could be regarded as one of the community's instruments of control. Songs celebrating motherhood or the joy of domesticity are standardized forms of music.[162] However standardized music might be, I shall argue that both in C.B. Brown and C.P. Gilman music serves merely as aesthetic tool, as little space is devoted to its description.

In Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948) music is important as the members of the utopian community aim at encouraging a Golden Age of art, music and

[161] It has to be remembered that Marconi invented the radio around 7 years after the publication of the book, so it is reasonable to think that Bellamy has been influenced by the numerous experiments that were taking place during his time.

[162] Theodore W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music,* (translated from the Germany by E. B. Ashton) New York: The Seabury Press, 1976, p. 25.

literature. Serious music is mentioned; classical music – Bach's B-Minor Mass – and concerts with violin and piano accompaniment are the result of behavioral engineering in the lives of people. However, as Baruch argues, Skinner says he wants music in his utopia but one wonders how "such a static society as Walden Two could ever achieve anything beyond mere technique."[163]

Moving now to feminist utopian fiction I shall argue that music in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) serves a ritualistic function. Metal horns and electric flutes produce tribal rhythms described as "discordant" as different bands play different music simultaneously. The king of Kahride is crazy and the royal music is a discordant explosion of sound that, as the protagonist observes, would drive any person to mental insanity. Music is thus capable of mirroring the community's codes; it participates in destroying all the individualities and contributes to the birth of a gigantic collectivity. Music is in the novel a clear symbol of state-control.

*The Dispossessed* (1974) further emphasizes the ability of music to interpret the community's nature. In Anarres, the anarchist utopia depicted by Le Guin, music being strictly controlled by the Music Syndicate undermines the stability of utopia. The concerts are both "a shock of joy" and – as the episode of the composer Salas proves – precluded to those who want to play "innovative" music, thus showing the side effects of an anarchist way of considering production and consumption of the arts. Salas wants to write *serious* music, i.e. a piece of chamber music. This kind of music (with no melodic causality, thus with what Adorno labeled as standardization) is not accepted as it necessitates skills that cannot be learned as well as intellectual effort. The chamber music Salas wants to play cannot be accepted as it challenges the intellect to go further. It comes as a consequence that real creativity is not possible in Le Guin's anarchist utopia.

[163] Ruby Rohrlich and Elaine Hoffman Baruch, eds., *Women in Search of Utopia: Mavericks and Mythmakers*, New York: Schocken Books, 1984, p. 206.

In Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) as well as in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) music is again part of the utopian project. In Piercy's utopia for example the majority of the population either writes, paints or composes songs and people's preference goes to Beethoven and Bach.

In *Ecotopia* (1975), Ernest Callenbach talks eloquently about music. We get to know that the ecotopian revolution did not succeed in eliminating popular songs that are considered as "miseries of the human conditions." However, as Goldbach's discussion upon electronic versus instrumental music has shown,[164] ecotopian music is considered people's art and as such it has to be accessible to all.

Furthermore, in Doris Lessing's *The Marriages between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980) music becomes central in the creation of utopia as the narrator is, in fact, a singer. Songs in Zone Three are different from those of Zone Four and Five, and the differences in songs mirror the differences of the Zones. The use of music within the novel demonstrates that art could be used both to preserve the existing social and political system and to fight against it.

*ARCHITECTURE*

For those writers who describe a reformed architecture in their oeuvres the main idea is that architectural evolution would parallel human evolution; therefore, it is not surprising that architecture is the second most appreciated art in utopia.

Being usually geometric it represents in utopia a visible sign of perfection and control. As I have largely discussed in this dissertation, architecture mirrors shared utopian values and aspirations but most importantly it

[164] Karl Traugott Goldbach, "Utopian Music: Music History of the Future in Novels by Bellamy, Callenbach and Huxley", in Fátima Vieira, Marinela Freitas (ed.), *Utopia Matters, Theory, Politics, Literature and the Arts,* Porto: Editora da Universidade do Porto, 2005.

celebrates the utopian aesthetics. It serves functional and practical purposes, however it mainly satisfies symbolic and artistic needs. The town becomes *especially* in utopia a metaphor for society; furthermore, utopian ideals that might not be visible take shape thanks to architecture. Not unexpectedly, architecture becomes emblematic of utopian fears and desires.

If we consider Thomas More's *Utopia* then we discover that cities are not distinguishable from each other and so are buildings, furthermore we are told that houses are well built but identical in every single detail. Therefore, given that Thomas More depicts a refined yet communal society the architectural design confirms that there is no space in his thought for individual creativity.

A diametrically opposed attitude towards architecture can be found in William Morris's *News from Nowhere.* His doctrine tells us that when people will be freed from the burden of the future all their work will contribute to the creation of an aesthetic world where every object will be a real work of art. In his aesthetic utopia each building differs from others. He refers to the "great clearing of houses" which took place in 1955, and contributed to the creation of new houses, medieval in appearance, but still capable of mirroring the personality of people living in them. Artistic creativity in Nowhere is essential in people's life and this further clarifies why they are so fond of architecture.

However, the majority of utopian writers here considered, depict the urban planning and the architecture of their imagined city in accordance to their personal taste, the fashion of their time and as it will soon be shown, with their political engagement. Among other things I have argued that Charles Brockden Brown's fascination with the Greek Revival Style is mirrored in the description of the buildings in "the paradise of women."

A different approach toward architectural issues is one of the linking factors among the utopian novels written from the 1970s onward; a pastoral yet futuristic architecture is clearly a representative sign of these novels. With respect to more ancient utopias these feminist and ecological utopias tend to

merge architecture with nature, trying to preserve the uncontaminated beauty of their landscapes. Creativity goes hand in hand with ecological engagement.

As related in *Woman on the Edge of Time,* houses are usually decorated, small and sophisticated at the same time. Villages are colored and surrounded by trees and gardens. The same happens in Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* where the architectural project reflects a synergy between man and nature.

Being inevitably linked to associative life, architecture in turn influences and is influenced by the needs of a reformed society. Feminist utopian novels for example display a kind of architecture that is able to mirror a society that is no longer based on the traditional family.

Town planning is definitely one of the most useful feminist utopian activities. Libraries, common kitchens, schools, statues are all designed by the people and for the people and contribute to create a rural yet extremely advanced community.

A precursor of this general trend is evidently Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Her description of the utopian architecture is accurate and elaborate. The apartment houses as well as the "beautiful blocks" of Gilman's imagination fully satisfy feminist desire –by creating kindergarten on the roofs as well as common kitchens to mention only two – with a look at the aesthetics. However modern in technology and design, her work is always inspired by beauty as I have argued in my discussion on "A Woman's Utopia" (1907) where the "City Mothers" managed to change and embellish the buildings and streets of New York in less than twenty years, as to stress Giman's urge for a rapid and collective action.

*PAINTING*

It is quite common in mainstream literature to find references to paintings. This of course does not happen in utopia, but why?

It has been argued that painting disrupts the purity and unity of nature into various dead images. E. Aubin suggests that in a perfect world people do not need images: "in utopia, painting, the art of illusion, if it exists at all, works for truth and is reduced to discourse."[165] As it emerges from this dissertation, paintings are not often mentioned in utopia but when they are, they carry a deep symbolical relevance. Besides, if it is true that there is no space for famous paintings in utopia, it is even truer that the art of painting is nevertheless widespread among utopians. It is not uncommon to find references to "schools of painting" in utopian novels. In *Walden Two* for example, people have plenty of free time that they dedicate to the arts, especially to the art of painting.

Sometimes in utopia paintings are used for didactic purposes. In *Looking Backward* for example, I discuss a painting[166] in the National Gallery of the future that is used by Dr. Leete – for didactic purposes – to talk about the "age of individualism."

However, it is with feminist utopian novels that the art of painting manifests itself with greater strength; in Joanna Russ's utopia, mothers paint with their daughters while Marge Piercy presents us with a society that use paintings and holograms to discuss gender roles "of the past." People from Mattapoisett think that art *is* production and that making a painting is "as real as growing a peach." Paintings and sculptures are on loan at their village and pass from hand to hand, as possession is not contemplated. However, Jackrabbit has a Michelangelo that he can admire every day. Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* shares many principles with Piercy's utopia; in his imagined world art is something that everybody does and has no commercial value. Ecotopians have an "ultrademocratic" understanding of the creative excellence that allows them to collect a Picasso and a painting given to them by friends with the same enthusiasm.

In Doris Lessing's *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*

[165] Edith Aubin, "Culture" in Vita Fortunati and Raymond Trousson eds., *Dictionary of Literary Utopias*, Paris: Champion, 2000, p. 148.

[166] I have argued that the fictitious painting described in the novel could reasonably be *The Umbrellas* (1881-6) by Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

paintings are used as a tool for speculations about the relationship between art and truth. Furthermore, Lessing's novel presents the reader with Lusik, the artist-narrator who has the power to build consciousness by giving the reader the means to see reality from different perspectives.

### *Aesthetics and the utopian project*

Throughout this dissertation a powerful idea has emerged, namely that beauty is the expression of the serenity of the utopian world and that, far from expressing the individual personal taste, it displays the inclination of the entire collectivity.

Despite the limitations upon personal freedom to the advantage of the collectivity, I have argued that the utopian world can still be defined as an aesthetic world as beauty is extended to all aspects of human life; it can be admired in the streets as well as in the buildings and in social and recreative life. It is my firm belief that there is an intimate connection that ties up the arts and utopia, and this connection lies in utopian interpretations of aesthetic pleasure.

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## ESTRATTO PER RIASSUNTO DELLA TESI DI DOTTORATO

Studente: Fiammetta Calzavara matricola: 955486

Dottorato: Studi Iberici ed Anglo-Americani

Ciclo: 23°

Titolo della tesi: The Arts in Utopian Literature: their Functions and Forms

Questa tesi studia il rapporto che intercorre tra le arti e il genere letterario dell'utopia. La domanda principale alla quale ho cercato di rispondere riguarda la natura delle arti in utopia. Quali sono le arti presenti in utopia? Quali funzioni svolgono le arti? Quali le finalità? E soprattutto, il mondo utopico è un mondo estetico? Quale ruolo svolgono le arti in una società efficiente, razionale, dedita all'uguaglianza? Per rispondere a queste e altre domande ho analizzato un corpus di opere utopiche che va dal 1516 al 1980. Da Tommaso Moro a Doris Lessing, passando per C.B. Brown, Edward Bellamy, William Morris, C.P. Gilman, B.F. Skinner, Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy e Ernest Callenbach. Nonostante esistano significanti eccezioni, lungi da occupare un posto marginale, le arti sono parte integrante del progetto utopico influenzandolo ed essendone a loro volta influenzate. L'arte e l'estetica in utopia abbandonano le mura private della casa per impossessarsi delle strade, degli edifici pubblici, delle città, e contribuiscono a ridefinire ed ampliare il concetto di arte, poiché la bellezza accompagna ogni momento dell'esperienza utopica.

This thesis studies the existing relationship between the arts and utopian literature. The main question I tried to answer deals with the nature of the arts in utopia. What are the arts involved in the rendering of the aesthetic project? What are their functions? Is the utopian society an aesthetic society? What is the role of the arts within an efficient and rational society that is by its very nature committed to equality? To answer these and other questions I considered a corpus of utopian works that dates from 1516 to 1980. From Thomas More to Doris Lessing, passing through C.B. Brown, Edward Bellamy, William Morris, C.P. Gilman, B.F. Skinner, Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy and Ernest Callenbach. Apart from significant exceptions, far from occupying a minor space, the arts actively contribute to the creation of the utopian project. I suggest that the arts by leaving the private space of the house and moving towards the public sphere - in the streets as well as in public buildings - where everybody can benefit from their view, contribute to a new and wider definition of the word art as beauty in utopia is preserved in every aspect of human life

Firma dello studente

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