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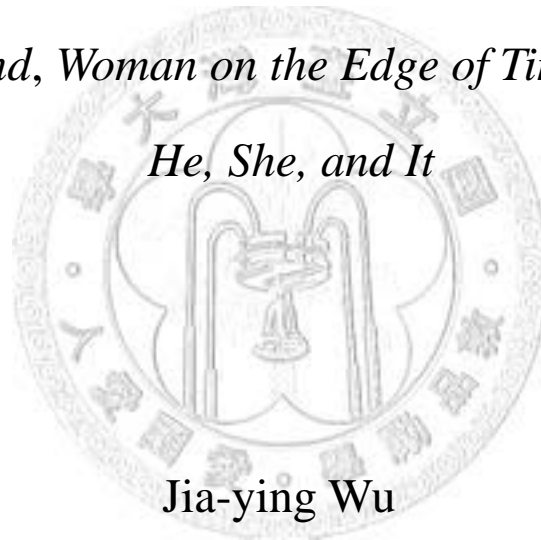
National Taiwan University

Master Thesis

Motherhood in Feminist Science Fiction:

*Herland, Woman on the Edge of Time, and*

*He, She, and It*



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碩士論文

女性主義科幻小說中的母性：

論《她鄉》，《時間邊緣的女人》和《他, 她, 和它》



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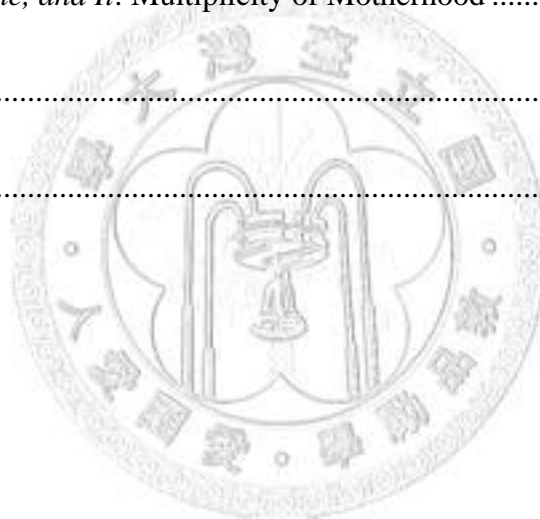
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## Abstract

Feminist science fiction is the genre in which feminist discourse and technological discourse intersect. This thesis focuses on an issue in this intersection: motherhood, intending to analyze how motherhood is represented in different ages and influenced by social values as well as technological practice. I choose three works for my analysis: *Herland*, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and *He, She, and It*. I consider Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* as a precursor of feminist science fiction and in which a utopian society constituted of women alone is depicted. This society, while supportive of mothers, presents a unitary conception of motherhood with their strict employment of eugenics. Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* depicts the time travel of a Chicano mother. With the antithesis of time frames, Piercy is able to criticize patriarchal ideologies of the contemporary society as well as imagine a better future, enabled by the adoption of artificial reproduction technologies, for mothers. *He, She, and It*, another work by Piercy, questions the identity of being human as well as conception of "natural motherhood." With the metaphor of cyborg, Piercy not only challenges the demarcation of gender identities but also points out that motherhood, as a practice, differs according to personal choices as well as social values. Her conception of motherhood in this text, although failing to incorporate biological males in the practice of motherhood, defies the stereotypical ideal of mothers as nurturers and child-rearers in patriarchy.

Keywords: Motherhood, feminist science fiction, reproduction technologies, *Herland*, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, *He, She, and It*.

## 摘要

女性主義科幻小說通過女性主義論述以及科技論述所產生的文本較之傳統科幻小說更專注於女性議題，本論文便是以三個女性主義科幻小說文本：《她鄉》、《時間邊緣的女人》、以及《他、她、和它》討論女性主義論述和科技論述同時關心的議題—「母性」。《她鄉》作為女性科幻小說的前驅，以「母性」為基本原則構建了一個只有女性的理想社會，但這女性互助互愛的社會一方面挑戰了父權社會對女性的控制與刻板印象，另一方面卻也是壓迫性的、缺乏個人意志的社會，在此文本中，優生學也被用於控制各種動植物以及人類的種類。《時間邊緣的女人》承繼了《她鄉》對理想社會的描寫，但這理想社會鼓勵個人發表自我意見並且勇於溝通以調和紛爭，而此理想社會起源於採用人工生育而棄絕生理性的繁衍行為。《他、她、和它》則採用了九零年代電腦叛客和人機複合體的元素，不僅挑戰了人類自我定義的界線，更試圖證明，所謂「母性」並非是一種單一的、生理性的本能，而是受到各種社會價值和科技應用的影響，在不同的社會架構之下會擁有不同的面貌，因而鼓勵女性依照個人的意願，突破父權社會的框架，建立真正自由平等的理想社會。

關鍵詞：女性科幻小說、母性、《她鄉》、《時間邊緣的女人》、《他、她、和它》

## Acknowledgments

As a child growing up with the company of Japanese animations featuring gigantic robots, time as well as space travel, and cyborg figures, I am always deeply fascinated with science fictional texts. However, it is the encounter with feminist science fiction texts that makes me realize that other than providing entertainment or reading pleasure, science fiction could be thought-provocative as well. Thus completing this thesis is like a dream realized for me. For this project I would like to express deep gratitude to Professor Chang Hui-chuan, without whose constant instruction and encouragement it would be difficult to accomplish this work. I would also like to thank Professor Liu Yu-hsiu and Professor Li Hsin-ying for their valuable suggestions. I would like to thank Professor Lin Ying-chin, who kindly alleviates my financial problems and offers me the opportunity to join the study group in which inspiring conversations between brilliant youngsters often occur. I would like to thank my parents who grant me my life and give me supportive brothers. I would like to thank Pi-chuan, Ming-ling, Nicole, and other friends who tolerate my grumbling when I felt over-pressured. I would like to thank my dear Jedi, but for whom this life, this world, would be overwhelmed by blinding darkness still.

## Introduction

### Feminist Science Fiction

As woman and science fiction occupy a marginal place either in literary or in social structures, the emergence of feminist science fiction is not surprising. Feminist science fiction is considered a “twice marginalized field” by Marleen S. Barr since it is a subgenre of science fiction, which is excluded from canonical literatures (2). Since science fiction texts often appear to be male power fantasies, feminist science fiction texts present “revisionary” female power fantasies, which “range beyond patriarchal reality”(Barr 3). In other words, just as Barr remarks, feminist science fiction not only depicts “artificial handicaps,” the ideologies used by patriarchal society to manipulate women’s behavior, but also “enlarges patriarchal myths in order to facilitate scrutinizing these myths”(4). It could be said that feminist science fiction as a genre explores various feminist issues and depicts imaginary social structures other than patriarchy. Those imaginary worlds depicted in feminist science fiction not only reveal the patriarchal ideologies hidden in the real society but also provide liberal environments for women to resist such ideologies and to construct their subjectivity. As Raffaella Baccolini observes, these writers interrogate universalistic assumptions of gendered identities, tackling issues such as “the representations of women and their bodies, reproduction and sexuality, and language and its relation to identity”(16). Writers of this genre continually depict societies where gender norms of contemporary society are obsolete. Furthermore, these societies are founded upon principles of egalitarianism and cooperation instead of capitalism and masculinist competitiveness. But these societies, rather than presented as historically inevitable or securely static, are often threatened either by external forces or by other alternative futures that seek to replace or accommodate the oppositional forces contained in these utopian communities. The resistance of ideological closure results in fragmented texts

which also resist narrative closure. Thus the narrative structure is often circular, switching among multiple narrators or time frames. Such an emphasis upon indeterminacy, multiplicity, and alternative power structures all manifest the critical stance of feminist science fiction and its aim to encourage the reader to reform.

In late 1960s and early 1970s, feminist science fiction tended to be utopian, producing what Tom Moylan termed as “critical utopia,” which pursues better worlds for women, such as Anarres in Ursula LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed*, the community of hill women in Sally Gearhart’s *The Wanderground*, Mattapoissett in Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and Whileaway in Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (30). As Nan Bowman Albinski comments, in this period, the resurgence of feminism in science fiction brings about texts that present better societies and question gender norms in contemporary society (7). Texts of this period interrogate canonical utopias and the sociopolitical reality they depict. Canonical utopian texts are static, whose internal literary structures attempt to establish a normative statement as historical inevitability. In other words, what they proffer is the mimetic description of an ideal society in totality, namely, a teleological blueprint for the future. Nevertheless, feminist science fiction in this period produces a utopian impulse which furthers “the processes of ideological critique, consciousness-raising, and social dreaming/planning that necessarily inform the practice of those who are politically committed to producing a social reality better than, and beyond, the one that currently oppresses and destroys humanity and nature” (Moylan 82). As these texts often stress the conflict between the original world and the utopian imagination, the process of reformation becomes the main plot. Thus, as Moylan remarks, these new texts “deflect utopian’s own drift into ideological containment to keep its processes of critique and change alive and healthy”(84).

These texts, as Russ records, depict societies or communities that share several



characteristics: they are mostly communal, classless, sexually permissive, and with ecological consciousness in contrast to the patriarchal, heterosexual society (72). These societies, instead of being totalizing, are liberal and without strong governments. In other words, they are anarchic in the sense that cooperation, rather than competition, is the principle of such societies (Sargent 4). For example, the hill women in Gearhart's story live in small groups and there is no hierarchy in their community. They are psychically connected to each other as well as to the natural world. This emotional attachment to nature characterizes writings in this period. In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, for example, the harmonious relationship with nature is constantly emphasized in Mattapoissett. Another example is the hill women, who could even communicate with as well as through the forest. Technologies are either deployed discreetly, as in Mattapoissett, or considered the epitome of masculine aggressiveness, as in *The Wanderground*. Sexual permissiveness is another characteristic. Heterosexuality and monogamy no longer dominate these societies, where all forms of sexuality are acceptable. In *The Dispossessed*, the marriage institution is even obsolete. Most people have multiple lovers simultaneously and they are encouraged to establish bisexual rather than heterosexual relationships. Few people adhere to monogamy, forming nuclear families and setting up the boundary between the private and the public and, thus, separating themselves from the rest of the community as the boundary. It is apparent that these texts stress an alternative set of values other than those in the contemporary industrial society. The social structure is represented as web-like rather than the alienated nuclear family system. Without racism, sexism, and class discrimination, the members are equal in status and respected. Human communication is valued as every one is free to voice out his or her opinion. Decision making is done not by few people but by all members of the community. Thus these texts could be deemed as "reactive," revealing the

insufficiency in reality for women (Russ 81). They are utopian in terms of feminist concerns since the worlds they present not only reflect what women in reality desire but also provide goals that readers in reality could struggle for.

Nevertheless, in 1980s, as Peter Fitting comments, “this utopian moment seems to have ended” and there appeared a bunch of female writers who produced texts that proffered “depressing images of a brutal reestablishment of capitalist patriarchy”(142). “The shift from utopia to dystopia” generates texts in which the future world no longer provides women freedom (Fitting 143). The dystopian future, as Albinski observes, is characterized by “militarism, patriarchal hierarchy, and the repression and exclusion of women in an aggressive, materialistic society”(7). For example, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, sexuality and fertility are regulated by the state, which means that the traditional values of nuclear families are reestablished, and heterosexuality triumphs over homosexuality. The protagonist Offred, a handmaid, serves as a walking womb, whose role is to bear children for the master of the house. In the rigid state of Gilead, she has no right over her own body. As a result, women are again alienated in the domestic sphere, serving as mothers and nurturers. Another example is that, in LeGuin's *Always Coming Home*, the Condor community “demonstrates a retreat from an earlier feminist utopianism”(Fitting 152). The patriarchal, militaristic Condor people are portrayed in contrast to the liberal, pastoral Kesh people. The protagonist North Owl (who later records her story in the name of Stone Telling) enters Condor society to live with her father, intending to pursue an exciting, romantic life. She is disappointed as she finds that what waits for her is domestic alienation and loss of autonomy, like other women of Condor society. She is silenced, enslaved in her marriage and domestic life. Nevertheless, both protagonists of these two tales do not resign to their fate but struggle for freedom. Offred reacts and flees from the state; North Owl also returns to her mother's people, Kesh, and in this community she could

say what she wants to say and write down her life story. Thus, such pessimistic depictions of women's life, for Fitting, are "intended ideally to push the reader to action"(142). The nightmarish description of women's life is to warn the reader that dreaming a better future alone could not transform the reality and to emphasize the urgent need for present action to determine the future.

Baccolini also holds a positive view toward dystopian works of this period. For her, dystopian texts of this period in fact open "a space of contestation and opposition for those groups (women and other 'eccentric' subjects whose subject position hegemonic discourse does not contemplate) for whom subjectivity has yet to be attained"(18). At the level of form, these texts still retain utopian hope in two aspects. Firstly, the open, ambiguous endings of these novels represent the failure of those totalitarian, dystopian societies to silence the individual. Although they suffer repression in those rigid societies, the protagonists are still capable of leaving their own accounts in various ways. Secondly, the blending of different generic conventions in these texts also makes them sites of resistance. For example, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood resorts to the conventions of the diary and the epistolary novel to record Offred's life. As women in the Gilead regime are not allowed to read and to write, Offred composes her personal history with imaginary letters and audio tapes. Within her mind, her constant reminiscence of the past and her lost family signifies "struggle against the obliteration of individuality the regime enforces"(Baccolini 22). Although it is not clearly stated whether Offred escaped Gilead successfully, her audio tapes are rediscovered in the future, probably a utopian one, and her story is published in a conference. Such a tendency to borrow convention from other genres, for Baccolini, "represents resistance to hegemonic ideology and renovates the resisting nature of science fiction and makes the new science fiction genre also *multi-oppositional*"(18). With the open ending and the blurring of genres,

these dystopian narratives preserve utopian hope for women to construct their subjectivity and to retrieve their language as well as power.

Furthermore, in 1990s, feminist science fiction was infused with the elements of cyberpunk as well as cyborg writing under the influence of postmodernism, discussing human-machine interface and provisional human subjects. According to Jenny Wolmark, “cyberpunk explores the interface between human and machine in order to focus on the general question of what it means to be human; feminist science fiction has also explored that interface, but in order to challenge those universal and essentialist metaphors about ‘humanity’ which avoid confronting existing and unequal power relations”(110-11). In this way, both cyberpunk fiction and feminist science fiction are confrontational as to the existing definitions of gender as well as identity. A powerful metaphor utilized by both cyberpunk fiction and feminist science fiction is that of cyborg, which signifies the erosion of boundaries that has been differentiating men and woman, human and non-human, as well as self and other. For example, Marge Piercy’s *He, She, and It*, with the metaphor of the cyborg, portrays “the increasingly fluid borders between reality and simulation”(Wolmark 127). The gradual dissolution of boundaries results in uncertainty about identity. In Piercy’s text, the central question is whether the cyborg, Yod, could be defined as human. Although Yod defines himself as a human being, he is still constantly recognized as a machine rather than a person. This conflict in defining human identity, for Wolmark, is “a strategy that enables the question to be raised of the way in which the subjects is constituted in culture”(128). In other words, what Yod represents is not only a cyborg/impure identity but also the impossibility to construct a coherent, unproblematic human identity. As Yod signifies the difficulty to draw a line between what is human and what is not, the definition of gender identity is also interrogated. As Wolmark remarks, Yod “occupies a contradictory position in the narrative, and

Piercy uses his developing consciousness to question the way in which social and sexual relations are shaped by conventions and definitions that are thought of as fixed and natural”(132). Although Yod’s physique is constructed as a male one by his maker Avram, he is programmed and socialized by two women, Malkah and Shira. Thus Yod transgresses the boundary of gender as his relationship with Shira is distinct from what is typical in the heterosexual society and his awareness of the self constantly conflicts with Avram’s command. Such subversion of traditional sexual and social relations, for Wolmark, is one of the main themes of the cyborg texts, which “contain a critique of the masculine hegemony of cybernetic systems which examines their impact on gender and identity, and asks whether those systems are capable of sustaining other sets of relations and meanings”(138).

In fact, no matter utopian or dystopian, feminist science fiction is characterized by resistance against enclosure and self-reflexivity. As Wolmark asserts, the fragmented narrative form, in conjunction with multiple protagonists, disrupts “the familiar discursive practices of science fiction in a playful and witty way” and enables the author to experiment with alternative composition of subjectivity and relation between self and other (21). Highlighting female desire and interpolating conventions from other genres, feminist science fiction blurs the boundaries between genres and challenges the generic convention which subordinates women’s desire to dominant ideologies. Wolmark argues that feminist science fiction, with exploration of the future, suggests that “the construction of subjectivity and identity is a process, and as such is always incomplete”(22). Thus feminist science fiction not only resists genre hierarchy but also the notion of a unified, integrated subject. In this way, feminist science fiction provides “a space in which subjectivity and experience, gender and identity, can be re-imagined in opposition to, and in recognition of, the dominant gendered discourses”(Wolmark 23). In other words, the space feminist science fiction

creates not only enables the subversion of totalizing subjects but also allows the subversive representation of gender identity. Likewise, Baccolini also asserts that feminist science fiction, as it positions critically, proposes to “negate static ideals, preserve radical action, and create a space in which opposition can be articulated and received”(17). What feminist science fiction proposes are myriad ruptures of male-dominated culture and power structure: alternative construction of subjectivity and gender identities, various possibilities of sexual relations and family structures, and communities without hierarchy. Feminist science fiction writers come to recognize that an ideal utopia is fraught with the danger of developing into a totalizing social structure that co-opts the impulse that motivates reformation. To evade this impasse, their works stress the importance of revolutionary process and seek to initiate in their readers the consciousness to resist dominant ideologies actively.

#### Feminist Discourse on Motherhood

Motherhood has always been an important part of women's life as human biology decrees that only women bear children. Moreover, the practice of motherhood has extended beyond physiological phenomena and is encoded with social meaning. It becomes a standard to evaluate a woman. A good mother is a good woman and a good woman is a woman who could bear a lot of healthy children. Women are expected to be mothers and, more importantly, expected to desire to be mothers, which psychologists term as the maternal instinct. Therefore, motherhood turns out to be an important issue for feminist discourse. Feminist theorists tackle the issue of maternity mainly from three perspectives: Nancy Chodorow explores the psychic experience of mothers of modern age, Adrienne Rich and Ann Dally approaches this issue from social and historical aspect, and Anne Balsamo focuses on how reproduction technologies affect the maternal body.

Chodorow articulates how gender norms are internalized in children through maternal care in modern nuclear families. Psychoanalytic theories indefatigably assert maternal influence on the formation of individual subjectivity. The mother, for children, is the first love object, which must be renounced if the subject is to enter the social system and to develop as an individual. This perspective, while advocating the importance of the mother, also reinforces the patriarchal ideology that women alone should shoulder the responsibility of caring for children. In *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Chodorow criticizes the heterosexual, nuclear family system in which mothers alone take the responsibility of child-care. The maternal care of sons and daughters constitutes an asymmetrical sexual relation in the male-dominant society. In their family life, children are trained and socialized to their sexual roles. Although both sons and daughters would often choose the mother as the primary love object and would experience symbiosis with the mother during pre-Oedipal period, gender difference triggers dissimilar paths of personality development. As the boy grows up, he surrenders to his father's authority in the competition for his mother to avoid punishment. As a result, he identifies with his father to become the one who gives punishment and is masculine and superior. On the other hand, "a girl develops important oedipal attachments to her mother as well as to her father"(Chodorow 127). Although she might turn to her father, thus constituting heterosexual orientation in terms of love and authority, she does not abandon her pre-Oedipal attachments to her mother. Girls, according to Chodorow, "have normally remained externally and internally in relationships with their Pre-Oedipal mother and have been preoccupied with issues of separation, identification without merging mitigation of dependency, freedom from ambivalence"(140). A daughter, thus, is never fully separate from her mother and shares her mother's desire of mothering and caring for children. The result is that in

such families, “women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother”(Chodorow 7). In this way, the parenting arrangement of nuclear family system successfully reproduces gender roles and inculcates mothering roles in the daughter.

On the other hand, Rich in *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* analyzes the domestication of the mother and children as a life style as well as a social myth created by the social and economical situation in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. Rich points out that motherhood, instead of a natural situation, could be a practice enforced on women through patriarchy, which defines ideal mothers and ideal motherhood. According to Rich, the home defined as a purely private place is “a creation of the Industrial Revolution, an ideal invested with the power of something God-given, and its power as an idea remains unexpunged today”(49). After the industrial era, the line between public sphere and private sphere is set clear. Men work outside their home, while women stay home taking care of children. Thus, motherhood, in a modern nuclear family, becomes the main responsibility, or function, of women, who alone shoulder the responsibility of raising children, socializing them to expected gender roles. Moreover, after the two world wars ended, the jobs that were once held by women in the war time had to be open for the men who returned from the battle field. The image of a warm home with the mother caring for children not only comforts soldiers but also has its own economic values. This ideal emphasizes maternal love as essential to children and the deprivation of it equates great loss for children’s physical as well as psychological development. As time goes by, this ideal becomes firmer and “the image of the mother in the home, however unrealistic, has haunted and reproached the lives of wage-earning mothers”(Rich 52). The ideal motherhood that carries images of warm,



domestic, and sacrificing mothers thus is a fantasy constructed out of patriarchal ideologies that deny women independence. Furthermore, patriarchy dictates what kind of women could bear children, for what social system these children are born, and how these children are born and reared. Women are expected to mother children only in the hetero-sexual marital system. Single mothers and homosexual mothers suffer discrimination and have to struggle if they desire to have their own children. Under such situation, both mothers and children are alienated from the public sphere, playing familial roles and relying on men.

Dally, judging from historical and sociological evidences, also argues against the idealization of motherhood, which she deems as a result of the transformation of social as well as economic structure of modern era. Dally in *Inventing Motherhood: The Consequences of an Ideal* discusses the development of the conception of childhood and motherhood as a particular phenomenon in the modern era. Dally points out that the family structure shifts fundamentally from the kinship system in Middle Ages to the nuclear family of the industrial era. Before the industrial revolution and urbanization, societal ties are not limited to the family but expanded to “the wider group, village, community, as kin with ancestors, living relatives or future generations”(Dally 52). Economic adversity, lack of food provisions, and primitive medical treatment all explain the rise of the kin system, which aims at survival. As a result, children are treated as small adults, assuming responsibility and work quite early. Because of high mortality rates, the emotional ties between children and parents are not so close as they are in the modern family. Mothers do not stay with their children all day long but have to help field jobs or share economic burden. Moreover, low life expectancy shortens the period of marriage to less than twenty years<sup>1</sup>. Remarriage and combination of families are not uncommon. The society in this age is

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<sup>1</sup> The average time a marriage lasts, according to Dally, is about “twelve to seventeen years”(53).

composed of such kind of “open, unemotional, authoritarian and materialistic” family (Dally 53). It is not until the industrial era that the family structure gradually changes to the private and closed nuclear family, which shapes the domestic sphere and differentiates itself from the public sphere. This shift in family structure directly brings about the idealization of maternity, which changes life of women in the modern era. Designating the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century as “the age of idealization of motherhood,” Dally asserts that the emphasis on mother love as well as mother-infant relationship serves as an excuse for the government not to invest in the social care of children (92). In the war time, women are drafted to jobs and obtain some extent of economic independence. As the war ends, men return and they need the jobs and their wives to attend to children and home again. Thus idealization of mothers, including advocating the importance of family, the conception of home as a warm site for repose against the busy public world, and the caring mother who spends all her time with her children, takes place after the war ended. Moreover, unlike the virtually ignorant attitude toward infants in the medieval ages, almost “every mother’s manual and magazine article of this period assumed that the baby in question was wanted, loved, and had two loving and relatively well-off parents”(Dally 102). Children are no longer deemed as adults-to-be but precious gems of parents and every mother is expected to love her infants naturally.

It is apparent that the locale of modern motherhood, the nuclear family system, is identified as the source of mother’s suffering. The alienation of women and children from the public sphere is deemed as a way to render women passive and take away women’s right of choice and independence. According to Chodorow, “women’s mothering reinforces and perpetuates women’s relative powerlessness”(31). As mothers are excluded from the power structure of public sphere and as they reproduce

the maternal desire in their daughters, their subordinated position remains. For Rich, in the patriarchal family, the mother is not only “domesticated and confined within strictly defined limits” but “remains an object of mistrust, suspicion, misogyny in both overt and insidious forms”(126). Such alienation of mothers could result in maternal violence. Mothers, under conditions such as lack of economic or emotional support, might commit acts of violence toward their children. For Dally, maternity in the nuclear family system could impose great problems on both mothers and children as the children have no others but their mothers to depend on and the mothers are cut off from the outside world, thus gradually losing self-confidence and unable to return to it<sup>2</sup> (202). The domestication of mothers and children in the nuclear family, therefore, signifies a mother-children relationship full of difficulty and anxiety rather than intimacy or warmth. To change this situation, it is necessary to revise existent parenting arrangements for in this way children are allowed to “be dependent on people of both genders and establish an individuated sense of self in relation to both”(Chodorow 218). Rich likewise asserts that “until men are ready to share the responsibilities of full-time, universal child-care as a social priority, their sons and ours will be without any coherent vision of what nonpatriarchal manhood might be”(211). Evidently for these critics the reformation of family structure helps to reform the gender inequality of patriarchy.

Besides the nuclear family system, women suffers passivity in the scientific field as well. Balsamo in *Technologies of the Gendered Body* discusses the relationship between modern technologies and body politics, especially how the ideology hidden in the development, invention, and application of technologies shapes our perception and assumption of gender norms. Balsamo articulates the social consequences of

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<sup>2</sup> Doris Lessing’s “To Room Nineteen,” to an extent, illustrates Dally’s theory. Her protagonist Susan, after being alienated from the society for too long, could not face her husband’s infidelity and return to her professional career.

technologies, revealing that instead of the proclaimed objectivity, the technological discourse influences gender norms and is in turn influenced by such norms. Gender is a product of social as well as cultural practice, rather than a natural given. The material body, especially the female body, is encoded within the social structure. Science, as well as technologies, rather than liberating the material body from such inscription, enhances it through the process of observation and definition. For example, as the female body, instead of being a neutral object for analysis, is associated with nature, sexuality, and reproductive capacity, the womb also “continues to signify female gender in a way that reinforces an essentialist identity for the female body as the maternal body”(Balsamo 9). Balsamo thus criticizes that science is in fact permeated with gender biases, taking the female body as the primary object of analyses. The discourse of science, like the discourse of politics, is pervaded with power relations and gender ideologies. Gender ideologies also contribute to the demarcation of culture and nature as man, representative of culture, assumes his role to be the conqueror of nature. In setting up this hierarchy, the gendered body, with its interaction with technologies, attests to “ideology-in-progress, where new technologies invested with cultural significance in ways that augment dominant cultural narratives”(Balsamo 10). The ideology of gender norms directs the practices and research of technologies, whereas the application of the new technologies in turn shapes and enhances the ideology behind social norms.

Balsamo further analyzes the relationship between the technologies obstetrics use, such as imaging technologies and reproduction technologies, and the female body. The technologies deployed by obstetrics, mostly taking the fetus as the primary patient, insinuate the tendency to objectify as well as fragment the female body to be the container of the fetus. The pregnant body is thus de-naturalized, periodically

investigated, and subjected to medical authority. As Balsamo argues, “protection of the fetus is often offered as a commonsensical and, hence, ideological rationale for intervention into a woman’s pregnancy, either through the actual application of invasive technologies or through the exercise of technologies of social monitoring and surveillance”(89). Pregnancy becomes a unique phenomenon which simultaneously attests to the unruliness of and the social control over the female body. The womb, especially the fetus, triggers the desire of observation as well as control. As a result, visualization technologies, commonly deployed to observe the fetus, “leads some obstetricians to claim that the fetus is actually the primary obstetrics patient”(Balsamo 90). The fetus, as well as the womb, is dissected from the female body, rendering the female body to be the maternal body, where values lie in its physiological health and potential for pregnancy. Furthermore, the appearance of new reproduction technologies, such as in vitro fertilization, sex-choice technology, and genetic engineering, as well as issues related to such technologies, like surrogate motherhood and cloning, furthers the rationalization of reproduction, which renders pregnancy as a mechanical process. The process of human reproduction is divided into separate stages of reproduction technologies: egg production, fertilization, implantation, feeding, and laboring. Just as Dally criticizes, in the modern medical system, labor is made “a highly technological process and many mothers experience the ‘factory belt’ system” and the clinical and scientific atmosphere in such a system is dehumanizing (39). In the modern society, pregnancy is no longer a mere biological, thus natural, act but a technical production that depends on subjugation and fragmentation of the female body.

Likewise, Rich associates child-birth with women’s role of “passive suffering” in human society (129). In the course of pregnancy, women are subjected to the authority of obstetricians, who not only help them survive child-birth but also direct

the whole process with medical technologies like forceps and anesthetics. The vivid image Rich describes of a woman in labor in a modern hospital, “sheeted, supine, drugged, her wrists strapped down and her legs in stirrups,” demonstrates how medical inventions, established with masculinist values, take the will of mothers for granted and have their body in control in the disguise of help (171). Thus pregnancy and delivery are no longer biological acts but social practices within which women’s body is inscribed since “the value of a woman’s life would appear to be contingent on her being pregnant or newly delivered”(Rich 169). To be a good enough woman, one could not refuse one’s duty of bearing children, no matter psychologically or physically, and must give birth to children, who are legitimate, healthy, and most of the time preferably male. Motherhood, in this way, is taken as an institution in which patriarchy has control over women’s lives.

Motherhood, for feminist discourse, thus is considered as a site where women suffer suppression and powerlessness under patriarchy and needs reformation. These thinkers support economic as well as physical autonomy of women, thus pursuing the mother’s right of option and the control over her own body. For them, truly preferable motherhood would emerge once the institution of motherhood enforced upon women by patriarchy is abolished. Thus, they call for revision of family structure as well as gender relations. Unsurprisingly, the ideal situation would be that “women would choose not only whether, when, and where to bear children, and the circumstances of labor, but also between biological and artificial reproduction”(Rich 174-75). Women have to obtain the right to choose freely. She can choose at will the style of pregnancy, labor, and life as a mother, if genuine sexual autonomy is to be achieved. In feminist science fiction, such critical thinking articulates the portrayal of communities in which women are no longer domesticated, child-care is often shared by both sexes,

and technologies are employed to enhance women's power.

### The Structure of the Thesis

In feminist science fiction there are rich and various representations of motherly figures and motherhood. To name a few, Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *Herland* describes a woman-only country where women mother female children through self-will rather than being forced into motherhood. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, female bodies are exploited as walking wombs, subdued to non-ceasing pregnancy when they are fertile and dirty jobs when they are sterile. In Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve*, there is a Great Mother who castrates the male protagonist and tries to make him bear his own children, a state not unlike Julia Kristeva's pre-symbolic symbiosis. In Ursula LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*, the protagonist Shevek's mother leaves him in his father's care and pursues her own career. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, another novel by LeGuin, the androgynous Gethenians are fathers and mothers at the same time. In these works, the authors delineate maternal problems women encounter in reality and imagine various worlds where women could or try to live and have their children live freely.

Undeniably, motherhood is a major issue in both feminist discourse and feminist science fiction. Many issues that concern feminist thinkers are represented in feminist science fiction, such as the revision of the nuclear family structure, the mother-children relationship, and consequences of reproduction technologies. Invariably, these themes trigger the utopian imagination of feminist science fiction: an egalitarian community where nuclear families are either eliminated or revised and mothers as well as their children are not alienated and silenced. With these alternative social structures feminist science fiction writers are capable to imagine new

mother-children relationships that are distinct from the one controlled by patriarchy. Furthermore, technologies, especially reproduction technologies, are no longer taken as tools to manipulate women's body. Instead, in these imaginative societies, reproduction technologies bring the liberation of women from the biological destiny of maternity. This thesis attempts to tackle the issue of motherhood in feminist science fiction, focusing on three specific texts: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and *He, She, and It*, another novel by Piercy. These three texts represent the genre in various stages and offer various representations of maternal presence as well as conceptions about free motherhood. They, like other feminist science fiction narratives, touch two aspects of motherhood: pregnancy, including reproduction technology and medical regulations on expectant mothers; and the rearing of children, such as socialization of children and mother-children relationship. These texts also examine the nuclear family system, the locus of modern motherhood, and difficulties single, lesbian, or non-white mothers encounter. In their analyses, they expose motherhood as an institution imposed on women by patriarchy and explore the possibilities of free motherhood within their imaginary worlds.

Chapter one focuses on *Herland*, a pioneering work written in 1915, which presents a society founded upon the principle of maternity. The society is consisted exclusively of white, middle-class women who are either mothers or daughters for men have long disappeared due to a natural calamity. Ridded of masculinist restraints, *Herland* prospers. The society is depicted as an extended family, for the boundary between public sphere and private sphere no longer exists and the members are no longer enslaved to motherhood like women in the industrial era since motherhood is deemed as a professional affair. The result is that the members are as strong, agile as men, and still retain feminist traits such as carefulness, sensitiveness, and delicacy.



Such a mode of separatist societies flourishes in later feminist science fiction, such as *The Female Man* and *The Wanderground*, in which women form cooperative and nurturing communities to fight against patriarchy. However, *Herland* is criticized as repressive, though lauded as revolutionary<sup>3</sup>. The society of Herland is like a disciplined army without any dissenting views as every member embraces the belief of motherhood. The members are allowed to choose profession freely and according to their talents. But in the aspect of motherhood, there seems no choice: they all love to be mothers. In this way, Herland could be repressive as dissidents are either assimilated, like Van and Jeff, or expelled, like Terry. There is no space for opposition. Although Gilman precedes contemporary feminist thinkers, her text presents various issues that still concern contemporary feminist discourse. The women who do not conform to patriarchal gender norms reflect Chodorow's argument of the reproduction of gender roles in the nuclear family. As the nuclear family as well as patriarchy is abolished, women could achieve autonomy and enjoy motherhood. Furthermore, the communal motherhood presented in Gilman's text also corresponds to Dally's proposal of social resources. In this alternative social structure, mothers and children are not isolated and dependent upon men, but play a major role in the society.

Chapter two analyzes *Woman on the Edge of Time*, which portrays the story of a destitute Chicano mother, Connie, who encounters a utopian community, Mattapoissett, in the future where nuclear families no longer exist and a technical breeder, rather than women, bears children. Connie's predicaments in the reality is that she fails to be a qualified mother, a concept that resembles what Rich and Dally terms as ideal

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Jennifer Hudak analyzes the relationship between racism and gender in *Herland*. She argues that "scientific discourses, specifically the discourses of evolution and eugenics, enabled Gilman to deconstruct and de-essentialize gender; at the same time, however, they allowed her to fix gender in a rigid network that also strictly classified people according to race and class"(456). For Hudak, the parthenogenesis of members of Herland not only signifies resistance against masculine aggression but also the gesture of purification of the whole race.

motherhood. Instead of providing Connie help, the society deprives her of her daughter and incarcerates her in a mental hospital. The contrast between Connie's reality and her visit to Mattapoissett constitutes critique of the patriarchal society: the ineffectualness of social welfare system, social workers, and medical system.

Comparatively, Mattapoissett is a preferable future to the reality, for in this community reproduction technology successfully liberates women from the biological destiny of pregnancy and leads to the revision of the idea of motherhood, which is shared by both sexes. Apparently, the concept that motherhood is not the mother's duty alone corresponds to Dally's advocacy of father's participation in rearing children.

Furthermore, Mattapoissett, unlike Herland, is a community tolerant of dissonance.

There is still war going on and often argument when deciding public affairs. This work also invites comparison with other utopian fiction such as Ursula K. LeGuin's works since they are alike motivated by the utopian drive of 1970s.

The third chapter features another work by Piercy, *He, She, and It*, written in an age when the utopian imagination is gradually replaced with dystopian imagination. In this work Piercy contrasts the repressive, patriarchal multinational corporations with marginal, egalitarian enclaves. This opposition actually symbolizes the contrast between patriarchal culture and a more nurturing, equal one. The enclave Tikva produces unconventional mothers such as Malkah, Riva, and Shira, all of whom bring up their children in their non-patriarchal family. Furthermore, they symbolize resistance against patriarchal ideologies, first against Avram, who creates the cyborg Yod according to his masculinist notion, then against corporations which intend to invade and subdue Tikva. Their success in fighting back the aggression, although based upon the sacrifice of Yod, to some extent represents the possibility to form a new, free, and healthy mode of motherhood that is distinct from the traditional one. In this text, technologies play an important role in the presentation of human as well as

gender identity. On the one hand, as Balsamo claims, technologies, especially image technologies, often objectify the female body (9). In the multi Y-S, most pregnant women choose to alter genetically the fetuses and operatively remove the fetuses around eight months. These fetuses, as well as their parents, are considered by the patriarchal Y-S as mere property rather than human beings. On the other hand, technologies, once controlled by women, could also be utilized to resist patriarchal oppression. For instance, Riva advocates artificial reproduction technologies as well, but she chooses these technologies to relieve herself of inconveniences of pregnancy and to carry out her duty in fighting against the multis.

These three texts illustrate how feminist science fiction tackles the issue of motherhood and maternity. What the writers pursue is that, in Carol Pearson's and Katherine Pope's words, "the mother is not dependent on a father, but is a free, independent person"(269). Furthermore, although the mother-children relationship is quite intimate, children are not deemed as owned by parents but independent persons. Although the ideal societies are quite different in each text, it is evident that they attempt to portray the emancipation of modern mothers from the domestication of nuclear family system and to depict the future as capable of being transformed through deliberate efforts.

## Chapter One

### *Herland: A Motherland*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* is one of the first utopian texts that center on feminist concerns of gender and identity<sup>1</sup>. The women-only society, separated from the outer world by an earthquake, which also killed most of the men, two thousand years ago, is visited by three male explorers, Terry, Van, and Jeff, each of whom represents a different attitude toward women and this peculiar society. Terry, the main supporter of the exploration, represents typical masculinity that seeks to conquer and objectify women. Van, characterized by scientific objectivity and artistic sensitivity at the same time, narrates the story from the perspective of sociological observation and admiration. Jeff, with his naïve idealization of women, happily succumbs to the society developed by women. As *Herland* is written in 1915, its linear literary structure unquestionably resembles traditional utopian texts, as Christ Ferns comments (176). And yet, the conflict between patriarchal ideologies represented by the male visitors and the alternative feminist thoughts embodied in the Herland society constitutes "dialogical feminist utopianism" asserted by Laura E. Donaldson (374). It might be said that *Herland* anticipates later feminist science fiction for it offers a model of a women-only society, which explores various feminist issues, such as gender equality, family system, and social structure. Among these feminist issues, motherhood is the central one of *Herland* as it is the fundamental principle of the alternative society. However, I would like to suggest that, as Herlanders could construct a nurturing society based on the principle of motherhood, they are, at the same time, bounded to this profession wholeheartedly. Thus what *Herland* embodies is an ambivalent narrative that, although depicting a better social structure than the

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<sup>1</sup> *Herland* is often characterized as a text of feminist utopia instead of feminist science fiction. Nevertheless, as this utopian society employs eugenics extensively in shaping its environment, I would consider it, at least, as a precursor of feminist science fiction and include this text in my analysis.

contemporary one, still leaves the conflict between maternity and patriarchy unresolved. The reversal of gender roles in *Herland*, to some extent, reiterates the heterosexual social structure that Gilman seeks to reform in her narrative. Undeniably, motherhood in Herland society is represented as a practice not founded upon personal choice as well as multiplicity, but upon uniformity. Indeed, as Ann J. Lane in her introduction to *Herland* observes, “Gilman seems to assume that the desire for motherhood, though not the ability to be a good mother, is inherent in the female condition”(xiii). Indeed, it seems that, for Gilman, the possibility that a woman might not want to be a mother does not exist. Furthermore, what Herland embodies is a universalized conception of motherhood. Surely Herland is a utopian society where everyone is taken care of. But its members hardly ever question their own practice of motherhood or challenge the priority of motherhood. However, this controversial stance, perhaps influenced by traditional utopias, still sheds light upon constituting better societies for women as those shaped in later feminist utopias. As a feminist text, *Herland* still occupies a revolutionary place that not only rebels against patriarchal oppression that domesticates women but also inspires various texts that focus on themes of motherhood and femininity, such as *The Wanderground*, *The Female Man*, and *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

### Feminist Utopianism

A utopian text often involves two societies, the hometown of the traveler and the ideal society that the traveler introduces to the reader. The contrast between these two societies not only offers a fantasy for the reader to escape the imperfect present but also engages the reader to think critically about his/her own society and even to reform. Utopia is a unique genre which sees the interplay of political theory, fictional fantasy, and historical possibility. Conflict arises as utopian texts, by depicting utopia

as absolute perfection, diminishes the revolutionary power they seek to exert on the reader. A utopian text is fundamentally torn between the revolutionary tendency to create a better world than the reality and the tendency to draw a blueprint for a perfect world. The former impulse signifies emancipation and freedom, while the later insinuates static boredom which, in some way, is not unequal to repression. This conflict exists in feminist utopias as well. As Angelika Bammer comments, there are conflicting impulses “to enable change by disrupting given orders and to create peace and calm by establishing order” in feminist utopian texts (15). The revolutionary power is clearly in conflict with the tendency to retain order. The conflict between the momentum of reforming reality and the impulse of constructing a perfect society results in the tension between “the impulse to create predictive utopias and a process-oriented belief in the emancipatory but unpredictable, outcome of unregulated utopian impulses”(Bammer 48). Such opposition between static imagination and the reformative drive in utopian narratives, for Donaldson, pinpoints the difference between masculinist utopianism, which “relies upon the inculcation of apriori principles to accomplish its goal of absolute perfection” and feminist utopianism, which “creates truth *between* people collectively searching”(374). Describing masculinist utopianism as “monologic,” Donaldson criticizes “the diseased stasis of masculinist utopianism, whose eternal and unchanging nature prevents even the most private subversion of its highly-wrought structure”(375). Traditional utopian texts are static, whose internal literary structures attempt to establish a normative statement as historical inevitability. Male utopia is the mimetic description of an ideal society in totality, namely, a teleological blueprint for the future. In contrast to monological masculinist utopianism, dialogical feminist utopianism affirms “kinesis, process, and dialogue”(Donaldson 378). Questioning patriarchal ideologies, feminist utopianism discards the conception of utopia as a finite, unchangeable truth. Instead, it “not only

offers women's experience as a profound challenge to patriarchal conceptions of gender and genre, but also shatters traditional utopian structure"(Donaldson 378).

The conjecture toward the future, thus, divides into two streams, the telos or the process. Thus a new utopian trend, although still providing a goal to dream for, shifts its emphasis to being experimental and speculative, proposing "a politics of change cast in the subjunctive instead of the imperative mode" in feminist utopian works (Bammer 51). This new utopianism, stresses utopia as an open-ended, continuing, and indeterminate process, although aiming at a better-off world. Feminist utopian imagination, according to Jean Pfaelzer, produces texts that stimulate "a cognitive revision of historical process in the mind of the reader"(193). In the same vein, Ellen Peel praises feminist utopia for its great potential to "disturb" readers as they "may be encouraged to give more critical scrutiny to personal or societal relationships in their own world"(41). Instead of representing the future as historical inevitability, these texts take the future as undetermined, myriad possibilities and urge the reader to participate in creating alternative possible worlds. They thus mark the transition from totalized representation to a democratizing action. By emphasizing utopia as process, feminist utopian texts are potentially capable of blurring "the distinction between fictional fact and historical possibility"(Bammer 16). This "radical utopianism" allows authors to state "the need to change things radically" and the impetus to design "an alternative future" within the structures of patriarchy (Bammer 54). This new utopianism, thus, attempts to incite the reader to reform and act in the reality by the momentum proffered in their representation of perfect worlds. Here utopianism and feminism intersect as both "envisioned a transformation of patriarchal culture so all-encompassing that not only the political, economic, and ideological structures, but the structures of human identity, relationships, and language—of consciousness itself—would be fundamentally reorganized"(Bammer 53-54). Like utopianism,

feminism articulates itself as “simultaneously situated in the (historical) Now and the (utopian) Not-Yet”(Bammer 57). Proposing women’s culture as well as feminist consciousness, feminist movements explore gender differences and tend to see the future as a possibility, to enable the change of the political present. Thus, utopia for feminists no longer functions merely as a literary form but exemplifies political significance. Writing utopia, thus, breeds “the deconstruction of the ways in which woman within patriarchy had been written”(Bammer 61). The combination of feminism and utopianism, proposing to rethink the definition of gender identity, inevitably questions the established orders in the given political structure. By writing the possibility of women’s future, feminist utopian texts potentially presents the possibility of transforming the present.

*Herland* could be seen as a work that manifests the tense relationship between masculine utopianism and feminine utopianism. Surely Gilman presents her feminist agenda and counters patriarchal ideologies throughout the text. As Ferns remarks, the isolation of Gilman’s all-female society is almost “a precise mirror-inversion of the male utopian fantasy of masculine appropriation of the womb” and the “womb-like environment” Gilman imagines excludes the male forever (177). Moreover, the visitors’ response toward *Herland* differs from that of typical utopian visitors, whose passivity and unquestionable acceptance of utopian didacticism are anticipated, thus resulting in monological narratives which preach the utopian blueprint. The interaction between the male visitors and Herlanders underscores the fact that gender is the crucial issue of this society and that gender difference, instead of a biological fact, is in fact culturally constructed. Thus *Herland* is a dialogic narrative, which dialectically presents two sets of values and “encourages what most utopian fictions seek to suppress: an active critical participation on the part of the reader”(Ferns 179). In this dialogue “not only do the visitors undergo a painful process of learning to



acknowledge the virtues of utopia, the utopians themselves reveal an unusual degree of openness to change”(Ferns 182). The three men each mark a different attitude toward gender and femininity: Terry the conventional chauvinist, Jeff the romanticist, and Van the objective observer. Not all of them are convinced of the supremacy of Herland values and Terry despises them all the way. The schematized characterization of the visitors, for Ferns, represents not only typical masculine attitudes toward women but also “radically different possible interactions between the values of utopia and those of the outside world”(183). In fact the male visitors are a threat to the order and security of Herland (and Terry indeed disrupts the order), although Van and Jeff in the end accept the values wholeheartedly. However, instead of eliminating potential threats, Herlanders instruct these visitors and this interaction certainly represents the confrontation of two sets of values: the patriarchal ones and Herland ones.

Taking traditional utopian texts as masculine, Donaldson likewise contends that Gilman’s witty utopia “introduces the dialogic text of *Herland* to the monologic book of hisland, and in the act of their meeting, helps to neutralize the patriarchal script”(375). Masculine utopianism, as present in traditional utopias, produces texts which stress given social ideology and static perfection, denying possibilities of revolution as well as transformation. In contrast to such texts, Gilman’s novel, equipped with “an anti-canonic spirit which recognizes the arbitrariness and conventionality of all normative patterns, questions generic conventions as well as authoritative ideologies (Donaldson 377). Feminist utopianism embodied in Gilman’s novel, with the imagery of web and emphasis on human relations, questions gender and genre conventions, thus producing dialogical texts which affirm the definition of utopia as a revolutionary process rather than static perfection. The inversion of gender roles in Herland, for Donaldson, illustrates that “the classical oppositions of master/slave and male/female do not connote peaceful coexistence, but rather, a

violent hierarchy in which the first term always forcefully subjugates the second”(379). Therefore, Herland, with its web-like social structure, “mounts a profound assault upon patriarchy’s stratified social and semantic patterns”(Donaldson 380). What Herland presents thus is an alternative social structure and this new structure is designed to arouse the reader’s critique of patriarchy.

Libby Falk Jones similarly defines *Herland* as “a thesis about the real world, rather than an internal action”(117). Other than being merely a literary text, the narrative intends to influence the reader’s attitude toward social conventions. Rather than proposing the elimination of men, the women-only society of Herland tackles with possibilities of women’s development as human beings once they are ridded of patriarchal yokes. However, Herland is similar to most traditional utopias in presenting a largely static society since “the excitement, the dramatic tension, of Herland lies not inside the fictional work but outside, as the gradually revealed strength, harmony, intelligence, and resourcefulness of the Herlanders stimulate us to create a twentieth-century society which releases these qualities in real women”(Jones 118). Thus, rather than advocating war against men, this narrative proposes war against patriarchal ideologies, such as male reason represented by Van, aggressiveness embodied by Terry, and naïve idealization from Jeff. The conflicts between the gender-free Herland and patriarchal values represented by the male visitors aim to incite the reader to question the familiar social structure and gender norms through the unfamiliar society of Herland.

### The Maternal Society

*Herland* symbolizes women’s survival and independence. According to Jill Rudd, the whole country is situated in “a hidden spot of our own contemporary world,” thus highlighting the historical feasibility of Herland (470). As the male characters travel

in the society, its customs and social structure are disclosed to the reader. The society of Herland, as Rudd remarks, emphasizes on “clean, simple living and straight talking,” reflecting “the desire for openness” that underpins Gilman’s vision of a better world (467). Unlike women in the male-dominated society, the women the explorers encounter are athletic, efficient, and energetic. They are diligent workers and manufacturers. In Herland, every woman is mother and daughter at the same time. But the possessiveness of mother-daughter bondage that is often a characteristic of male-centric society is eliminated: the responsibility of educating children is entrusted to those gifted and everyone has her own private living space. Thus Herland is a community capable to “foster genuine independence and confidence in each person while also inculcating in automatic assumption that everyone will both desire privacy and individual integrity and expect it in others”(Rudd 473). In Herland, everyone could exert her talents to the full instead of being domesticated and exhausted by the maternal responsibility. The gynocentric community, for Carol Farley Kessler, reveals “a world of possibilities and potentials available to women as a sex”(69). As men disappeared in Herland, the nuclear family system of traditional society was also replaced with the whole community of women where women have full control over their body as well as life, thus capable of disengaging themselves from “sex parasitism”(Kessler 70). Herland women are not typical housewives that the male visitors are used to. Thus the utopian Herland for the male visitors represents “a liminal state, one of ambiguity and transition”(Kessler 71). In Herland, “the tradition of men as guardians and protectors had quite died out. These stalwart virgins had no men to fear and therefore no need of protection”(Gilman 57). In a way, the women are freed from sexual characterization they are often subjugated to in patriarchy. The male visitors thus have to confront the absence of sexual roles which are present in their society and this confrontation allows them as well as the reader to re-consider the

gender norms of patriarchy. In the first encounter with the three girls of Herland, the three male visitors could not understand the culture of Herland and take the girls as games or barbarians, signifying the de-humanizing attitude toward women.

Interestingly, the hunters are hunted, confined and educated with Herland's history. In Kessler's words, this imprisonment is "a variation of the so-called therapeutic confinement of a neurasthenic woman" and symbolizes the reversal of gender-roles (72). Before the male visitors could describe and analyze Herland as an object of scientific quest, they are explored and observed by Herlanders first.

Dorothy Berkson argues that Gilman's utopia, with its fundamental principle of motherhood, replaces the traditional society with the egalitarian community, which intends to "change or maternalize men so they will voluntarily give up the selfish and hierarchical values that rule the dominant culture"(100). Therefore, the trip to Herland could be deemed as the rite of passage of the three travelers. Only when they are re-educated and capable of accepting the maternal culture of Herland could the patriarchal culture be changed. Although the re-education of Terry fails and he is exiled, the other two men, with their partners, maintain the possibility to create a truly androgynous culture where both men and women are treated equally. Berkson advocates the radical potential of Herland since the community Gilman creates suggests that "the suppressed should become the dominant, the marginal should move to the center"(102). Berkson remarks that "the society of Herland is an imaginative version of the female wild zone completely cut off and removed from the dominant culture; there is nothing but woman's culture in Herland"(107). As a wild zone, women in Herland get rid of patriarchal culture and develop their own. In this culture, the separation of public and private spheres in traditional industrial society is abolished and "the sentimentalized home, which Gilman saw as a prison from which children and women must flee, is blithely eliminated"(Lane xiv). There is no more

nuclear family, thus there are no more patriarchs, but the whole community is a big family where everyone is sister, mother, and daughter simultaneously. The hierarchical social structure is discarded and what remains is “circular and weblike” connective relationship (Berkson 104). Moreover, Gilman also attacks the logo-centrism of science. As Donaldson remarks, “the confinement of first-person narration to the boundaries of one’s own perspective reduces the objectivity of the scientific imagination to ‘i-centricity,’ whose emphasis on interpretive consciousness not only erodes masculine authority, but also imbues Van with the individualism and immanence formerly ascribe to the feminine”(381). However, it is such difficulty for absolute objectivity that allows the male intruders the possibility of transformation, which symbolizes the dialectics between two sets of values: masculine ones and feminine ones.

Gilman offers Herland a historical origin rather than a mythical creation. In contrast to an omnipotent Father who creates Adam and Eve, Herland is given birth by a mother, who bears only daughters. As Somel proudly claims, “We are all mothers—all of us—but there are no fathers”(45). After an earthquake and a war kill off all the men of the country, the history of Herland begins with a mother, as

one of these young women bore a child. Of course they all thought there must be a man somewhere, but none was found. Then they decided it must be a direct gift from the gods, and placed the proud mother in the Temple of Maaia— their Goddess of Motherhood—under strict watch. And there, as years passed, this wonder-woman bore child after child, five of them—all girls. (56)

This historical fact not only explains the origin of Herland society, it also insinuates how the society works. Procreation is no longer deemed as a personal affair but one that deserves public attention and support. Furthermore, this change of reproductive method in fact brings forth a different social structure:

There you have the start of Herland! One family, all descended from one

mother! She lived to a hundred years old; lived to see her hundred and twenty-five great-granddaughters born; lived as Queen-Priestess-Mother of them all; and died with a nobler pride and a fuller joy than perhaps any human soul has ever known—she alone had founded a new race! (57)

As Jane Donawerth comments, *Herland* proposes an alternative path of evolution to Charles Darwin's theory, which rests on biological competition, as Gilman's gynocentric society takes its origin from this historical first woman and walks upon a different path of history (20). The members become more rational and agile than their male visitors, thus demonstrating that "the sex roles that the men in the novel (and Darwin) assumed are biologically determined are, in fact, gender roles culturally induced and therefore changeable"(Donawerth 20). *Herland* thus demonstrates how the principles of nurturing and cooperation refute the principle of competition, which prevails over patriarchy. By presenting *Herland* as desirable, Gilman proposes a vision in which men, by accepting feminine values, could attain a utopian society and competition is no longer "a major motivating force for human industry and progress"(Donawerth 21). Indeed *Herland* is a land of mothers, and of their children. Moreover, motherhood rules this society not only as a moral code but also as a spiritual religion as the historical first mother turns out to be the mother goddess as well. It could be said that the principle of motherhood governs the society, which runs by relation and nurturance:

in each step of the rich experience of living, they found the instance they were studying widen out into contact with an endless range of common interests. The things they learned were related, from the first; related to one another, and to the national prosperity. (100)

Since the society of *Herland* is founded on the fundamental principle of motherhood, the development of technology is also directed toward nurturance and protection. As Van observes, "they developed all this close inter-service in the interests of their children. To do the best work they had to specialize, of course; the

children needed spinners and weavers, farers and gardeners, carpenters and masons, as well as mothers”(Gilman 68). Herland demonstrates that scientific inquiry as well as application is subjected to social values as “Herlanders develop science in the context of their limited space and in relation to the value they place on motherhood and children”(Donawerth 28). For example, the eugenics applied by Herlanders observes the feminine values of nurturing, creating the whole community as a garden-land where harmful species, including those women unfit for mothering, are bred out and thus no one would be hurt. Like Donawerth, Bernice L. Hausman also contends that Gilman revises Darwinian conception of evolutionism by offering “an evolutionary paradigm that suggested that all aspects of human condition—including the biological constitution—were open to change”(492). Therefore, instead of stark opposition between nature and culture, Hausman argues that Gilman revises “scientific theories that advocated the ‘natural’ subjugation of women to men” and restores “the body as the material link between nature and culture”(493). As sexual selection justifies the patriarchal domestication of women, Gilman’s revised version of natural selection, parthenogenesis, produces a desirable society which demonstrates the superiority of women to men. It is the reproductive practice of Herland that challenges modern heterosexual social structure. Reproduction and motherhood in Herland are no longer motivated biologically but spiritually. Procreation for Herlanders becomes a sacred task, not only for the survival of the country, but more importantly for the improvement of the whole race. Herlanders, to achieve the end of improvement, have total control over their own bodies; by their mysterious ability of mental conception, they attain birth control. This practice demonstrates that the exclusion of hetero-sexual social structure and patriarchal culture could bring forth a better people.

As children do not belong to their birth mothers, they are cared for not by them,

either. Instead of taking this as an act of bereaving, Herlanders believe it is for the baby's sake to be taken care of in good hands. According to Lane, "the mothering and educating of the children, carried out by trained specialists who are not necessarily mothers but who always are women, is crucial to the creation of a new people with a new consciousness"(xiii). As Somel explains to Van,

it is her baby still—it is with her—she has not lost it. But she is not the only one to care for it. There are others whom she knows to be wiser. She knows it because she has studied as they did, practiced as they did, and honors their real superiority. For the child's sake, she is glad to have for it this highest care. (83)

For Val Gough, *Herland* reveals "a fictional negotiation of female nurturance, and her public belief in the potential transformation of heterosexual social structures"(196).

The all-women society turns out to be a feminist space for lesbian ideal of motherhood as well as for social critique of patriarchal segregation of women. The collective motherhood proposed in *Herland* for Gough enables "Gilman to extrapolate the utopian potentials of what she saw as innate female traits of nurturance and to imagine female identity untainted by internalized hetero-patriarchal values"(198).

Herlanders work as a race which, without competition, proves superior to and more efficient than patriarchy. This society acknowledges the fusion of "spiritual ideal of mother-love and notions of collectivized and professionalized child care" and thus refutes the patriarchal assumption that child care is an instinct to every woman

(Gough 199). Infants are cared by their own birth mother after birth, but

after the baby-year the mother was not so constantly in attendance, unless, indeed, her work was among the little ones. She was never far off, however, and her attitude toward the co-mothers, whose proud child-service was direct and continuous, was lovely to see. (103)

They advocate professional mothering, thus proposing alternative approaches to child-rearing and reproductive arrangements. As Van keenly observes,

the Herland child was born not only into a world carefully prepared, full



of the most fascinating materials and opportunities to learn, but into the society of plentiful numbers of teachers, teachers born and trained, whose business it was to accompany the children along that, to us, impossible thing—the royal road to learning. (107)

Rather than the hysterical or sentimental mothers of modern society, the new motherhood Herlanders observe leads them to become more rational than the male visitors. Therefore, the history of Herland provides an imaginary path of “social change which challenges the conservative ideological assumption that the social status quo is natural and inevitable”(Gough 205).

### Homogeneity and Ambiguity

Unquestionably, *Herland* inspires various works that focuses on exploration of alternative conception of femininity as well as motherhood, such as Gearhart’s *The Wanderground*, LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed*, and Russ’s *The Female Man*, to name a few. According to Lane, “many of the ideas in these books are reminiscent of notions expressed in *Herland*: class equality; some kind of communal child-rearing; absence of sex privilege by sex; freedom from fear of male violence; elimination of sex-linked work; the mother-child relationship and the idealized home as models for social institutions; and the use of persuasion and consensus to maintain social order”(xx).

*Herland* serves as a model society that offers revolutionary ideas to construct alternative social structures. For example, the non-hierarchical community of *Herland* echoes the anarchic community of hill women, LeGuin’s *Annares* society that is based on communism, and Russ’s *Whileaway* that affirms women’s freedom from men’s sexual exploitation. Whether these communities are exclusively constituted of women or not, they all share with *Herland* the attempt to eschew patriarchal domestication of women, to challenge the status quo of gender hierarchy, and to re-organize the practice of motherhood. These communities, like *Herland*, demonstrate that the social

order imposed by patriarchal hierarchy on women is changeable and that non-hierarchical social structure could help shape peaceful communities where women enjoy motherhood. Home, in these imaginary communities, means a place for rest for both women and men rather than a place for women to work. Like Gilman who advocates professional mothering and refutes motherhood as a biological instinct, in later works motherhood is not a personal affair but a communal one that is supported by the whole community. Moreover, women could choose their professional careers and participate in the public sphere.

What differs between *Herland* and the later texts, however, is that the society Gilman depicts is characterized by homogeneity although she presents a dialogue between patriarchal values and feminist issues. In later texts conflicts are more or less represented. The hill women have to discuss and reconcile their disagreements about whether or not they should continue their negotiation with men (Gearhart 126). In *The Female Man* Russ presents two antithetic futures: Janet's utopian Whileaway and Jael's dystopian world. LeGuin's Anarres is neither a satisfying community as Shvek's under pressure and could not have his work published. *Herland* indeed attempts to fight against patriarchal orders. Nevertheless, it eventually falls back to the static boredom commonly observed in traditional utopias. Herlanders live in harmony, but this harmony is based upon a tight control over the environment and their wholehearted devotion to motherhood. In *Herland* women take full control over the natural environment, rationally and pragmatically manipulating the plants and animals for their own use:

By the most prolonged and careful selection and exclusion they had developed a race of cats that did not sing! That's a fact. The most poor dumb brutes could do was to make a kind of squeak when they were hungry or wanted the door open, and, of course, to purr, and make the various mother-noises to their kittens. Moreover, they had ceased to kill

birds. They were rigorously bred to destroy mice and moles and all such enemies of the food supply; but the birds were numerous and safe. (49)

Thus the community of Herland is somewhat ambiguous: on the one hand it is harmonious and its members think of themselves as an entire unit; on the other hand, the freedom the women earn is based on careful control of resources. It could be insinuated that the paradise for mothers could also be the prison simultaneously. As every variable is meticulously controlled in Herlanders' life, accidents are not anticipated or permitted. And it is apparent that every animal, every plant, and every person that hinders or does not help the society to pursue its goal to create better people is excluded or eliminated by prohibition of producing progenies. Indeed, the society is a unitary one that hardly tolerates dissonances.

The whole country of Herland is situated on a high plateau and constantly referred to as a garden-land. For Donawerth, describing the country as a garden-land signifies the harmonious relationship between humans and nature as Herland is a place where humans are "in partnership with nature"(28). The womb-like country, cut off from the rest of the world, becomes a benevolent nursery for Herlanders. However, the terrain of Herland, as Christopher P. Wilson points out, is a flat land which reflects the uneventfulness of the narration, in which "female agility counterpoints and defeats the knowledge, temptations, and advances of masculine exploit"(271). The male explorers expect adventure and opportunities to realize their hero fantasy, which implies "the imperial and sexual designs underwriting conventional narrative development"(Wilson 283). They anticipate a savage society, where they would bring enlightenment and civilization. However, since they enter Herland, they are continuously frustrated. They try to seduce the Herlanders with ornaments but fail; their exploration is ended with capture and confinement; their plan to escape again fails. The plane by which the male visitors penetrate Herland is sewed up in cloth

since the machine is a symbol of colonialism and prefigures the masculine aggressive act of Terry. The land, as an artificially created garden where everything is carefully guided, watched for, and expected, not only defeats those men's desire to conquer but also bores them as Terry complains about the lack of adventure and thrill in Herlanders' children tales. The frustrated adventure of the male intruders suggests that Herland is place without danger and excitement. Everything, animal or human being, is well-programmed and under control. Wilson points out that "Herlanders exhibit a subordinated sense of the personal"(286). There is no nuclear family system in Herland since the inhabitants come from the same mother. In other words, the whole country is a family and the boundary between public sphere and private sphere does not exist. For example the children in Herland do not have any surname and they are cared of not always by their biological mothers but by women who are good at such matters. As the character Somel declares, there is no need for everyone to know a child's birth mother (Gilman 75). And the visitors' wives could not understand what it means to have "homes of our own"(Gilman 96). For Herlanders the home is the country; the domestic sphere and the public one are integrated. There is no individual matter in Herland. Just as Van observes, Herlanders always think in first person plural and "it was so hard to get her to be personal"(Gilman 126) . The society based on the concept of motherhood is a country, where adventurers are educated like powerless infants and species are under selection. Although Wilson's comment is overtly masculinist, his observation points out the weakness of utopian imagination in this text. As a place devoid of anything personal, Herland could be perceived as a personified community of ant-hills or bee-hives, where the will of drones succumbs to the queen's will, in Herland the principle of motherhood.

Herland, with the appearance of parthenogenesis and the core thought of motherhood, is devoid of personal and sexual desire. The direct consequence is that

“Herlanders do not depend upon men economically nor do they need them for procreation”(Hausman 496). Biological evolution thus leads to social evolution, which also motivates physiological changes since, having to rely on themselves to survive, Herlanders are stronger, darker, more athletic and thus more boyish than women living under patriarchy. Nevertheless, the male narrators are not repelled from the all-women society at first for the women do not reject returning to bi-sexual world since in this way they could recover the complexity of genetics. But this does not indicate that Gilman enjoys the idea of the return to the demarcation of sex roles of patriarchal society. Herland is a society where “eugenicist ideology surfaces in relation to maternal fitness rather than racial difference, although the suggestion of an Aryan race reminds the reader of the linkage of eugenics to ideals concerning race purity”(Hausman 499). To improve their race as a whole, in Herland those unfit to mother are persuaded not to leave their progenies and even if they do their children would be carefully educated. Ironically enough, through this biologically motivated society, Hausman argues that Gilman endeavors to “prove that what men think is a biologically ordained pattern of behavior was, in fact, a convention specifically related to their society and the bio-historical organization of human culture”(500-01). In other words, Hausman, like Donawerth, denies the absolute objectivity of science and takes science as a narrative whose interpretation is influenced by as well as dependent on specific historical as well as social contexts. It could be said that Herland offers a paradigm that liberates women from the sexed identity defined in patriarchy. The ability of parthenogenesis allows Herlanders full control of their body, thus giving them the power for autonomy. Unfortunately, with the desire to return to the bi-sexual society, “Gilman was not able to see institutionalized heterosexuality as a force that kept women dependent on men”(Hausman 503). The utopian society Gilman maps out is essentially heterosexual and white. The subversive potential of

Herland society is offset as Gilman insists on the purity of maternity and sex.

Ferns also recognizes that the separatist society of Herland insinuates “a still further diminished sense of agency”(201). With Herlanders’ proclaimed openness to change and the desire to return to bi-sexual society, the model of Herland is clearly not the solution to the dominant social structure. For Ferns, Gilman’s idealization of femininity as well maternity to some extent reproduces the value system of patriarchy and the matriarchal society seems to be the mirror inversion of patriarchal society. Surely Gilman endorses feminist values as positive alternatives to the abuses of patriarchal system, but Gilman’s conception of femininity, which amounts to “fetishization of the virtues of motherhood,” “the sacred duties of child care,” and “purity and virtue of the utopian women,” reflects the very definition of women by the male-dominated society (186). As the women of Herland live happily for two thousand years without men, their life does not differ much from those who are deemed as perfect mothers in the dominant culture. Ferns notes that in Herland sexuality is replaced with maternity as the disappearance of men also results in “the absence of desire” (187). Although the marriage managements of the three pairs are unconventional and Terry’s aggressive rape is condemned, Ferns argues that this indicates that sexual desire is sacrificed for motherhood, “reproducing the blurring of the distinction between wife and mother”(189). The members of Herland, although strong and athletic, “continue to manifest the virtues of purity, goodness, and maternal kindness to children which constitute the ideal of femininity in the patriarchal society of her own era”(199). In this way, dominant ideology is reproduced in this utopian society. It could be said that femininity in Herland is re-valued rather than re-defined. Nevertheless, it is such revaluation that highlights the contrast between Herlanders and its visitors. The opposition of two sets of values invokes the possibilities of change in two sides at the same time. On the one hand, as it is possible to assimilate

men to Herland values, it is also possible to transform the patriarchal society. On the other hand, as Herlanders prepare to return to the bi-sexual world, they have to face those men who are unable to educate like Terry as well as the possibility that their values might not prevail.

Kessler also notices the unified community as characterized by “a troublesome, dystopian flatness” since it is composed of a homogenous race and culture (74). What remains most ambiguous would be the core of Herland culture: “deification of motherhood, practice of a common motherhood, and consequent orientation toward their children’s future”(75). As the women seem to break physical limitation and could undergo parthenogenesis with mental determination, their spirit is still occupied with motherhood, and the desire for which is not unlike advocating for maternal instincts. Moreover, the persuasion of those unfit for mothering to give up giving birth is suspicious of ignoring personal choice since the standard of unfit mothers is unspecified and the reproduction policy in Herland is always decided for the benefit of the whole country. Although everyone has her own private space and the nuclear family system no longer exists, the aspect of motherhood leaves almost no space for individual will. Besides human beings, they breed out plants and animals according to their purpose to gather and store food. It could even be said that the whole community of Herland is like a well-controlled machine or factory of birth.

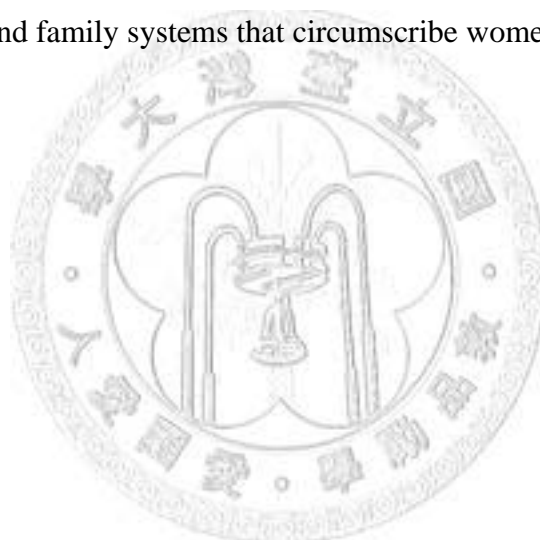
Alys Eve Weinbaum argues that the feminist motherhood in Herland, rather than advocating lesbian maternity, as Gough does, is closely linked with American colonizing movement at Gilman’s time. The women of Herland share the same origin; they come from the same first mother, and thus as a race their purity is retained and their kinship equates nationality. Weinbaum argues that Gilman advocates eugenics and “racial and national belonging ought to intersect in the reproduction of citizens”(275). In this way, Herland serves as a stark contrast to “the crowding

multitudes who pollute the United States as they populate it,” since in Herland human beings are programmatically perfected and “genetically refined”(Weinbaum 282). Thus, Herlanders are deemed as a race by which Gilman highlights the importance of purity as well as genealogy. Women, through the process of reproduction, shape a better/purer nation. Truly, women are free from domestic chores and shoulder the more responsibility of building a better society. And yet, women’s role of reproduction is emphasized at the same time. The concept of motherhood, which constitutes the main principle of the society, religion, as well as language of Herland, turns out to be congruent with racism and colonialism. In *Herland*, the reversal of sex roles also connects the feminine civilization with colonialism. Truly the male intruders represent the masculine desire of conquest and invasion. And it is unsurprising that in their first encounter with Herlanders, the male narrator describes the women as “defeminized, animalized, and exoticized,” associating them with savages (Weinbaum 288). But the colonizers turns out to be captives and have to be re-educated since according to Herlander’s standards it is these invaders that are uncivilized savages. This inversion highlights Gilman’s problematic arguments of gender roles since in Herland the power relations, although reversed, persists and “the mission of keeping insurgents down is women’s”(Weinbaum 291). Apparently, these women, although challenging patriarchal values, do not question their own unitary values of motherhood.

Therefore, it is easy to see that what Gilman proposes is a paradoxical job. On one hand she promotes motherhood as the sole origin, religion, and even purpose of Herland, advocating the image of caring, nurturing, and loving mother. Just as Gough points out, “although she did not reinforce the stereotype of mothers as natural nurturers, she did reinforce traditional sexual division of labor”(Gough 201). On the other hand, she seeks to confront the patriarchal social values that leaves children in



the care of mothers alone and denies women any help. As Gilman endeavors to exalt motherhood as a sacred vocation, she redefines conventional motherhood and its conventional location, home. Both the practice of motherhood and family system are extended to the extent that “the race is viewed as the family and the whole of Herland viewed as its home”(Gough 203). The exaltation, therefore, is also ambivalent as, while questioning patriarchal ideologies that confine mothers, Herlanders do not question their own way of mothering. Nevertheless, as a pioneer narrative, *Herland* does set up a model for later explorations of alternative conceptions of motherhood. Gilman, presenting her motHerland, unquestionably initiates the trend to interrogate extant social values and family systems that circumscribe women’s autonomy.



## Chapter Two

### *Woman on the Edge of Time: Mothers in Futures and the Present*

As Jean Pfaelzer notes, authors of feminist science fiction in 1970s often “fragment their texts with multiple protagonist; multiple narrators; interpolated time frames; and frequent shifts among dreams, awakenings, and drug-induced states of consciousness”(194). While Gilman focuses on depicting a utopian world in *Herland*, Piercy presents alternative time frames in *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Written in 1976, Piercy’s text shifts between the present and the future as the protagonist Connie Ramos time travels. As M. Keith Booker points out, this work “presents Piercy’s contemporary America as a society that is already a dystopia for marginal members of society..., then contrasts this dystopian America with an ideal 22<sup>nd</sup>-century utopia based on tolerance, nurturing, communality, ecological responsibility, and the complete effacement of conventional gender differences”(339). In the present time, Connie is a destitute Chicano, a single mother whose daughter was handed over for adoption. She lives on welfare and is recorded as violence-prone as she once abuses her daughter and attacks her niece’s pimp. She is punished, imprisoned in a mental asylum, and subjugated to be a subject of mental experiments. In a word, she is marginalized because of her race, gender, mental state, and poverty. However, it is this powerless woman that has the ability to travel through time even though she is physically caged. With her guide Luciente and her mental ability, Connie visits Mattapoissett, a utopian community in 2137, which is almost the reverse of Connie’s present. In Mattapoissett, there is no longer gender hierarchy, no private property and no racism. Madness is not viewed as dangerous and despised but merely as a symptom that requires people to take a rest. As Connie moves between the present and the future, a sharp contrast between a patriarchal society that marginalizes women and a liberal community that allows everyone to speak up one’s voice is presented. As

Angelika Bammer observes, such a shift allows Piercy to “represent a utopian/dystopian antithesis”(95). As Connie’s present is represented as a patriarchal hierarchy that silences and oppresses Connie, the future Mattapoissett is clearly a preferable place that offers equality, opportunity, and freedom for Connie. This contrast, for Susan Kress, is conceived as one between exterior and interior time. According to Kress, “exterior time, present time, is State time, system time, and even—male time,” while Connie has her own time, an individual, interior, and female one that allows her the ability of time travel (119-20). The interior time grants Connie the opportunity to counter the outer society, which constantly seeks to control her, depriving her individuality and dignity, in the present time. The future, the inner time, restores Connie’s individuality and eventually endows her power to fight for posterity.

This chapter intends to analyze how Piercy presents two different sets of conception about motherhood. As a mother, Connie’s experiences within the two time frames illustrate women’s predicament in the reality as well as the necessity to reform. Being female, poor, and non-white, Connie in her present is alienated from and by the social hierarchy. She has no control over her own life and, thus, no dignity, no power. Her individual will is constantly suppressed and neglected. Instead of making choice for her own life, choices are made for her. For example, she is committed to the mental hospital by her niece’s pimp after she fights him to protect her niece. She once speaks about her powerlessness to Luciente, “all my life I been pushed around by my father, by my brother Luis, by schools, by bosses, by cops, by doctors and lawyers and caseworkers and pimps and landlords. By everybody who could push”(90-91). Connie’s counterpart in the present time is her social worker Mrs. Polcari, a white woman with a decent job, family, and young look:

Mrs. Polcari was slim, with short brown hair smooth as a polished wooden bowl to her cheeks. Today she wore silver earrings with little

green stones that might be jade. Large hazel eyes with long sweeping lashes looked out surprised from gold wire-rimmed glasses...Her large ripe mouth opened to a glitter regular white teeth when she, very occasionally, smiled. Girlish, modish, like one of those college girls she used to see when she had worked for Professor Silvester. (26-27)

Unlike Connie, Mrs. Polcari is a woman who fits in with the social standard as a woman. It is no wonder Connie feels herself “second-class goods”(27). She is further alienated in the mental hospital where patients suffer inhuman treatments and are subjected to experiments against their will. In an interview, Connie finds that no one cares about what she says: “When what she said didn’t fit their fixed ideas, they went on as if it did. Resistance, they called that, when you didn’t agree, but this bunch didn’t seem that interested in whether she had a good therapeutic attitude. What were they listening for, inasmuch as they listened at all? How that Dr. Redding stared at her, not like she’d look at a person, but they way she might look at a tree, a painting, a tiger in the zoo”(84). The doctors in the hospital do not treat patients as individuals but ignore and objectify them. It is impossible for Connie to express herself under the suppression of these medical authorities as her voice goes unheard.

The future Mattapoissett, on the contrary, is a place where every individual voice matters. At the first sight of Mattapoissett, Connie is surprised to see a pastoral village:

“She 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. No skyscrapers, no spaceports, no traffic jam in the sky.”(60)

In this country, although not overtly high-technological, people are free from house chores and could pursue their own interest with the help of technology. And every one is valued for his individuality. For example, when talking about the concept of beauty,

Luciente says, “Jackrabbit is thin beautiful. Bee is big beautiful. Dawn is small beautiful. Tilia is creamy orange beautiful”(89). There is no longer a single standard in determining who is beautiful or not as each is appreciated for “per”<sup>1</sup> uniqueness. Furthermore, as everyone could seek self-fulfillment, the gender differences that are so conspicuous in Connie’s present are limited to minimal. Thus Connie mistakes Luciente for a man at first. In Connie’s eyes, “Luciente spoke, she moved with that air of brisk unself-conscious authority Connie associated with men. Luciente sat down, taking up more space than women ever did. She squatted, she sprawled, she strolled, never thinking about how her body was displayed”(59). Madness is neither treated with punitively as Jackrabbit describes his experience of being mad, “I went mad with fear. In the madhouse I met Bolivar and he was good for me in learning to say that initial ‘I want, I want.’ I have played a lot as a child with paints and with holies and I felt...most alive then. I had to do that in the center of my life”(115). In this future society, madness is treated through rest, mutual help, and venting. It becomes a source of creation and finding one’s self instead of imprisonment.

Piercy, with the contrast between the present and Mattapoissett, criticizes patriarchy and, I would hasten to point out, explores alternative social structures as well as conception of motherhood. Magali Cornier Michael indicates that “Piercy’s superimposition of temporally disconnected worlds or realities has two consequences, both of which propel forward the novel’s feminist aims: it highlights a thorough challenge to Western thought and values, and it opens up a space for the creation of a restructured world devoid of human oppression”(113). The representation of Mattapoissett serves to disrupt and even to restructure the social order in which Connie is situated. By presenting Connie as an important person in shaping the future, Piercy

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<sup>1</sup> “Per” is the pronoun as well as the possessive case that Piercy coins in this text to replace “he,” “his,” “she,” and “her.” This usage of pronoun that disregards individual’s gender in a way signifies that the language as well as the society of Mattapoissett is devoid of sexism.

confronts the value system of Connie's reality, and challenges the societal structure that places her in the bottom. Likewise, Donna Fancourt also contends that "these altered states, which include dreams, trances, meditations, and hallucinations, are intrinsically related to the text's vision of feminist utopianism as rooted in crating a new spiritual and political consciousness"(94-95). Fancourt takes Connie's mental trip toward the future not as empty escapes from the stark reality but as a kind of utopian dreaming that enables her "to imagine a life different from her own, providing her not only with the desire, but also the drive and perseverance, necessary for political change"(106). It is Connie's experience in the future that encourages her and the reader to re-think the status quo, to imagine what is possible to be, and to act. Connie eventually convinces herself that she is not what patriarchy judges her to be but what she could be if the society changes. And to bring forth the possibility of the future she chooses to act, to change the reality. It could be said that Connie's perception of herself as well as that of the outer society gradually alters. Through this change of perception Piercy enables the reader to question what is often taken granted: the given social order, particularly women's roles as mother. This chapter intends to investigate how Piercy utilizes the various time frames in this text to envision and restructure the concept of maternity as well as the organization of reproduction practice.

### A Mother in the Present

Discussing the rise of the nuclear family, Edward Shorter notes that "maternal love created a sentimental nest within which the modern family would ensconce itself, and it removed many women from involvement with community life"(227-28). In the modern times, home is deemed the place which provides security, rest, and solace from the hardship of external society. More importantly, the comforts a home is supposed to provide come from the mother, whose love and compassion soothe other

members of the family. Thus, a mother is often expected to remain at home, caring for children and her husband emotionally as well as physically rather than participate in the public life or pursue individual talents. She is not expected to be economically independent since her husband is supposed to take care of her and children. This is how a nuclear family runs basically. However, problems arise when a woman could not find a man to depend on. She becomes vulnerable since in the public sphere there is no place for her. Things would be worse if she has children to support. Alienated, helpless, and dependent, a single mother can not meet the standards of motherhood. In Elaine Tuttle Hansen's words, it is easy to discern the discrepancy between "theoretical and ideological constructions—feminist or not feminist—and experience, between the institution of motherhood and the fraught myths of the mother, on the one hand, and the 'practice' of mothering as lived in disparate cultural, socioeconomic, and psychic circumstances, on the other"(21).

Connie is one of such vulnerable mothers. As Hansen observes, "taught by her ethnic and class background to be a good woman—a passive, submissive, complicitous victim—Connie is brutalized and abandoned by a series of men and institutions who are allegedly her protectors: her father, brother, lovers, husbands, professors, doctors; her family, the welfare state, the hospitals she is imprisoned in"(23). When Connie grieves for her lost lover Cloud, she neglects her daughter Angelina and, in a fit of frustration, she hits her. Thus, she is labeled as an unfit mother and loses Angelina. A social worker criticizes that "as a mother, your actions are disgraceful and uncontrolled"(52). Connie thus is punished, as Michael points out, "for being a bad mother, for not living up to the romanticized ideal of motherhood—an ideal that has no link to the material situations of many women"(117). Nevertheless, it seems that although the society demands her full care of her daughter, the welfare system fails to pay heed to her economic predicaments.

She could not even afford a new pair of shoes for Angelina:

Then she came staggering off the couch and saw that Angie, in kicking the table, in kicking the wall—every blow the blow of a hammer on her aching head—had kicked a hole in her lousy cheap shoes. Those were the only shoes Angie had, and where in hell was Connie going to get her another pair? Angie couldn't go out without shoes. There rose before Connie the long maze of conversations with her caseworker, of explanations, of pleas and forms in triplicate and quadruplicate, and trips down to the welfare office to wait all day first outside in the cold and then inside in line, forever and ever for a lousy cheap pair of shoes to replace the lousy cheap pair Angie had just destroyed. (54)

This incident clearly demonstrates the failure of the social welfare system. As Alice Adams indicates, “although Connie feels responsible for her action, the scene leaves little doubt that both Connie and Angelina are victims of the omnipresent hostility toward the poor and women of color”(273). Connie's momentary violence, instead of signifying personal lack of control, suggests that it is impossible for mothers to survive, let alone to thrive, without depending on men in a patriarchal society.

The society Connie lives in not only deprives her of opportunities to support her family independently, but also violates her body with reproduction technologies. In describing her experience of giving birth, Adrienne Rich points out that the hospital is an embodiment of patriarchal hierarchy:

We were, above all, in the hands of male medical technology. The hierarchal atmosphere of the hospital, the definition of childbirth as a medical emergency, the fragmentation of body from mind, were the environment in which we gave birth, with or without analgesia. The only female presences were nurses, whose training and schedules precluded much female tenderness....The experience of lying half-awake in a barred crib, in a labor room with other women moaning in a drugged condition, where 'no one comes' except to do a pelvic examination or give an injection, is a classic experience of alienated childbirth. The loneliness, the sense of abandonment, of being imprisoned, powerless, and depersonalized is the chief collective memory of women who have given birth in American hospitals. (176).



Modern medical technology thus is described as dehumanizing and repressive for the female body. The gynecological technology, established with masculine value, takes the will of mothers for granted and takes control of their body in the disguise of help. In Connie's present, medical technology holds the same attitude toward women, objectifying the female body and ignoring the patients' will. Connie's womb is taken out without her consent: "She, too, was spayed. They had taken out her womb at Metropolitan when she had come in bleeding after that abortion and the beating from Eddie. Unnecessarily they had done a complete hysterectomy because the residents wanted practice. She need never again fear a swollen belly; and never again hope for a child"(37). On the contrary, her sister is given sugar pills instead of contraceptive drugs:

Like my sister Inez, she lives in New Mexico. Her husband drinks, she has seven kids. After he sixth, she went to the clinic for the pill. You know—No, you can't! It's so hard for a woman like her—a real Catholic, not lapsed like me, under his thumb too and him filling her with babies one right after the other—so hard for her to say. Basta ya! And go for the pill. See, she thought she went to a doctor. But he had his scientist cap on and he was experimenting. She thought it was good she got the pill free. But they gave her a sugar pill instead. This doctor, he didn't say what he was doing. So she got heavy again with the seventh child. It was born with something wrong. She's tired and worn out with making babies. You know you have too many and the babies aren't so strong anymore. They're dear to you but a little something wrong. So this one, Richard, he was born dim in the head. Now they have all that worry and money troubles. They're supposed to give him pills and send him to a special school, but it costs. All because Inez thought she had a doctor, but she got a scientist. (268-69)

As Billie Maciunas points out, "the women in Connie's world are subject to the abusive technology connected with reproductive policies that deny them the achievement of the ideal of motherhood"(252). Connie and her sister, thus, are exploited for the convenience of those who are supposed to help them. Just as Anna M.

Martinson remarks, “male technicians (doctors) utilize technology for their own gain, regardless of the ramifications for the women involved”(54).

What Connie and her sister encounter corresponds to Renate Duelli Klein’s observation about reproduction technologies, which, in the control of male scientists, might subjugate women’s autonomy instead of bringing freedom:

Thus some women are forced to have children—and others are forced to remain childless. Legal and respected is whatever the group in power declares to be ‘right’ for a specific group of people at a specific time....When women refuse to obey, when we take those control in our own hands—as for example with menstrual extraction to forego the problem of a pregnancy, or women-controlled self-insemination, or feminist pregnancy counseling and radical midwifery—such action is often called ‘dangerous,’ ‘immoral,’ ‘irresponsible.’”(68-69)

New reproductive technologies, in a society like Connie’s, can only precipitate women’s predicaments as men define what kind of reproduction is proper. As Jalna Hanmer contends, “reproductive technologies offer the possibility to extend the shaping of the ‘fit mother’ to include the ‘fit reproducer’”(102). The female body, especially the maternal one, is constantly put under surveillance.

The depiction of Connie’s powerlessness against the social structure—the social workers and the medical authorities—“exposes and inherently challenges the workings of power relations structured within a male-centered binary logic that privileges men, white Europeans/Americans, the rich, the young and healthy”(Michael 115). It exposes motherhood as an artificial role and ideal imposed on women rather than inherent instincts. Such an ideal could oppress a mother and render her helpless. As Hansen argues, Piercy, by delineation of Connie’s experience in the repressive patriarchy, comprehends “a versatile, fluid, unsettled relation of maternity and femaleness or femininity and resist any fixing of the mother or motherhood as a complete human identity, a transcendent or full of atemporal,

ahistorical essence”(38). Maternity, thus, is no longer construed as essential for female subjectivity. Connie’s experience as a mother, or “an unfit mother,” in her time renders the social concept of a good mother problematic and requests reshaping or restructuring the concept of motherhood. By presenting the social ideal of motherhood as unreasonable, Piercy implicitly advocates the necessity of imagining an alternative for the present society: Mattapoissett.

### Mothers in the Future

As Hansen contends, in *Woman on the Edge of Time* there is a close link between “the maternal self and the experience of time travel”(25). Connie’s contacts with Luciente are constantly triggered by her recall of Angelina. For example, at one time when Connie could not stand the pain of remembering Angelina she calls out for Luciente:

She could not stand remembering! She had felt disgusted by Luciente and Bee, but she did not care. She had to get out of here. She had to turn off her memory. She tried to open her mind, to invite. For a long, long time nothing stirred. Nothing but time sticking to her like cold grease. Then at last she felt something. At once she begged, “Luciente, let me visit!”  
(105)

Furthermore, “if Connie remembers the reality of her disabled mothering or the injustices of motherhood as an institution in real time, the like is broken”(Hansen 26). Apparently the stark predicaments of a mother Connie faces actuates the imagination of Mattapoissett, a place of utopian motherhood where a powerless mother like Connie could be relieved of the romanticized ideal of maternity.

Mattapoissett is a community free from sexism and the concept of “father.” Ironically, such progress benefits from the use of reproduction technology, which contributes to Connie’s oppression in the present. In Mattapoissett, biological reproduction is discarded; children are born by a machine brooder and genetically

engineered. According to Luciente, the forfeit of biological reproduction contributes to the reform of patriarchy and facilitates equal distribution of childcare among all members of community:

It was part of women's long revolution. When we were breaking all the old hierarchies. Finally there was that one thing we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in return for no more power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth. Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we'd never be equal. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender. So we all became mothers. Every Child has three. To break the nuclear bonding (97)

The reproduction practice proposed here echoes Shulamith Firestone's attack on biological reproduction:

The end goal of feminist revolution must be...not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally....The reproduction of the species by one sex for the benefit of both would be replaced by...artificial reproduction: children would be born to both sexes equally, or independently of either, however one chooses to look at it; the dependence of the child on the mother (and vice versa would give way to a greatly shortened dependence on a small group of others in general, and any remaining inferiority to adults in physical strength would be compensated for culturally. The division of labor would be ended by the elimination of labor altogether (cybernation). The tyranny of the biological family would be broken. (11)

As artificial reproduction replaces biological reproduction and biological family is eliminated, women are liberated from the domestication that is so common in patriarchy and are empowered to regain autonomy.<sup>2</sup> Discernibly, the future Mattapoissett is a community based upon reformation of motherhood, which not only eliminates women's oppression but also offers men the privilege of maternity. Just as Maciunas remarks, "mothering (caring work), then, must be incorporated as a human

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<sup>2</sup> Lucy Sargission also makes similar remarks about the relationship between Piercy and Firestone. Piercy's text, for Sargission, "can be read as a fictional exploration and extension of Firestone's theory"(165).

experience and located at the center of culture, rather than remaining at the margins of culture as ‘women’s work,’ undervalued and/or sentimentalized”(253).

The contradictory outcome of reproductive technologies in the two time frames suggests, as Kathy Rudy indicates, that “technology itself is innocuous and can be used toward either positive or negative ends”(23). Then what matters is not whether these technologies should be developed but that these technologies should be controlled in women’s hands or deployed for feminist causes. While in Connie’s present gynecological medicine is used to exploit and dissect the maternal body, in the future new technologies liberate the maternal body and helps to shape a maternal community where “babies would not be bought and sold as products, women who chose not to raise children would be accepted in society, an society would value women outside of their roles as reproducers”(Rudy 31). In Mattapoissett, the maternal body is no longer threatened and fragmented by patriarchy.

As biological production is discarded, so are the structure of nuclear family and the concept of patriarchy. There is no longer the role of father in Mattapoissett as maternity ceases to be a biological trait and becomes a social role both genders share. As Dorothy Berkson notes, in Mattapoissett “the dyadic bond between female/mother and child is replaced by a system of multiple mothers of sex”(112). Men are not excluded but maternalized in Mattapoissett. It is even possible for men to breast-feed through changing hormones:

He had breasts. Not large ones. Small breasts, like a flat-chested woman temporarily swollen with milk. Then with his red beard, his face of a sunburnt forty-five-year-old man, stern-visaged, long-nosed, thin-lipped, he began to nurse. The baby stopped wailing and begun to suck greedily. An expression of serene enjoyment spread over Barbarossa’s intellectual schoolmaster’s face. (126)

Men and women alike mother children as reproduction is severed from the female body. What prevails is the spirit of motherhood: “to nurture, to provide love and

emotional support and guidance during childhood, and to ultimately free the child from dependence,” in Barbara Drake’s definition (113). Children, under such arrangements, identify with maternal values, such as nurturance, tolerance and egalitarianism. According to Michael, Piercy’s *Mattapoissett* suggests that “it is possible to do away with the Western notion of motherhood by simply disrupting the metaphysical equation of mother and female and the opposition between father and mother”(122). The whole concept of motherhood is thus transformed into the process of reproduction.

With the dissipation of nuclear family system, the bondage between parents and children also changes. Like the women in *Herland*, people in *Mattapoissett* have no family name. As Jackrabbit explains to Connie, people choose their own names when they grow up:

When I came to naming, I took my own name. Never mind what that was. But when Luciente brought me down to earth after my highflying, I became Jackrabbit. You see. For my long legs and my big hunger and my big penis and my jumps through the grass of our common life. When Luciente and Bee have quite reformed me, I will change my name again, to Cat in the Sun. (69)

As Annegret J. Wiemer comments, “naming in *Mattapoissett* mirrors individual growth and personal choice”(167). By owing the power to change names, individuals are able to determine and control their life. Unlike Connie, whose various names signify fragmented identities—determined by the society, people in this future could determine who they are. Furthermore, the disappearance of surnames implies the extinguishment of father’s authority and the extension of nuclear family to communal kinship. The boundary between the private sphere and the public one is thus breached as people no longer identify with patriarchal lineage but relate to each other within the community. Children are also taught the values of interdependence rather than those of patriarchal hierarchy:

We educate the sense, the imagination, the social being, the muscles, the nervous system, the intuition, the sense of beauty—as well as memory and intellect...People here in our bony skulls...how easy to feel isolate.

We want to root that forebrain back into a net of connecting. (132)

Along with the sense of connection, however, children are encouraged to develop their own individuality rather than dependence upon their mothers. When a child comes to age, he or she enters a ritual called “naming,” during which the child would try to survive alone for a period of time in the wilderness and choose a new name<sup>3</sup>.

After the child gets back, the child and the mothers would be separate for about three months so that the mothers-children dependence would be broken. When Connie expresses her astonishment, Luciente says, “but your young remained economically dependent long after they were ready to work. We set our children free”(109).

Mothers in Mattapoissett care for their children but do not indulge or over-protect them. To these mothers, it would be transgression if children are not offered opportunities to be fully developed individuals and responsible for themselves.

Although most critics find Mattapoissett a satisfying community, Adams contends that “in its reproductive program it preserves the patriarchal fear and distrust of the mother”(275). For Adams, what Connie represents is the sacrificing biological mother, who willingly erases herself to bring about artificial motherhood. Adams contrasts Connie with mothers in Mattapoissett: “Connie, embodying the disadvantages of exclusive biological motherhood, contrasts starkly with the comothers. The ‘artificial’ mothers exceed the ‘nature.’ They are as loving as Connie, but they are better able to provide physical, intellectual, and emotional sustenance for their children”(277). Thus,

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<sup>3</sup> This self-naming, as well as the disappearance of the family name, could be deemed as a measure to counter patriarchal authority, or “the name of the father.” Jacques Lacan asserts that “it is in *the name of the father* that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of law”(67). Dylan Evans articulates Lacanian concept of the name of the father as referring to “the prohibitive role of the FATHER as the one who lays down the incest taboo in the Oedipus complex”(119). The family name, as well as the paternal right of naming, symbolizes the father’s absolute power of domination in the private domain and in the constitution of a subject. In Mattapoissett, as the concept of fatherhood is abolished, there is no need for the family name.

Piercy's use of artificial womb, for Adams, is "a gesture of patriarchal affirmation, approving men's inability to accept women's bodies and their reproductive capabilities, and placing the burden on women to validate men as 'mothers'"(278). Nevertheless, I would like to point out that what Mattapoissett eradicates is the concept of biological motherhood instead of the biological mother and what it proposes is artificial reproduction rather than artificial motherhood. If Connie looks inferior in her mothering ability, it is not due to her being a biological mother but due to her being in a malevolent patriarchal hierarchy. She can not mother in her present for she is not allowed to. Mattapoissett, on the contrary, provides a space for universal motherhood, which rejects biological essentialism as an inherent trait of motherhood. If Mattapoissett suggests anything, it is that maternal characteristics are not sexually differentiated but shared by both sexes.

#### Controversy and Diversity

Unlike *Herland*, in *Woman on the Edge of Time* Piercy presents a society that is based on communication and openness to conflicting opinions. Although Herland is a society working by the rules of consensus, the strict organization by which the members survived and the rigorous control they have over the environment render the society a totalitarian one. Mattapoissett, on the other hand, stresses harmonious relationship among its members and not a society that suppresses disagreements. Mattapoissett encourages people to argue, to speak out their discontentment, and to reach understanding during the process of contention. The most prominent example is the relationship among Luciente, Jackrabbit, and Bolivar. As the nuclear family system is obsolete along with patriarchy and monogamy, Mattapoissett is a sexually permissive community, where homosexuality and promiscuity are not punished. As Kerstin W. Shands argues, Mattapoissett is a bisexual society, which could be viewed



as “a transgression of the heterosexual paradigm” of patriarchy, which institutionalizes the division of labor and gender norms (79). Luciente, Jackrabbit, and Bolivar form a stable family, in which Jackrabbit is the lover of Luciente and Bolivar at the same time. Tensions arise as Luciente and Bolivar compete for Jackrabbit’s attention and around Bolivar’s “holi,” a media of art in Mattapoissett, Luciente and Bolivar have an argument. As Luciente criticizes Bolivar’s work for its lack of political correctness, Bolivar argues that Luciente applies political axioms too rigidly to appreciate the artistic value of his work. To solve the tension, there is a “warming” meeting held in the community. In the process the difference of Luciente and Bolivar is fully explored and identified, the former equipped with political consciousness while the latter is artistically insightful. It is notable that their antagonism is to be resolved through communication. In *Warming* a character Sojourner says to both, “Luciente leans far in the direction of one value and Bolivar in the other. Yet instead of looking at each other with pleasure and thinking how much richer is the world in which every one is not like me, each judges the other. How silly. You could enrich each other’s understanding through Jackrabbit, who is drawn both ways—as to everything that moves!”(204). These words suggest that in Mattapoissett each individual’s uniqueness is valued and preserved rather than eradicated even if it engenders hostility. Tom Moylan asserts that in the warming process Piercy “opts for a dialectical unity of the two positions, avoiding the extremes of political hack and individualistic indulgence”(159).

Mattapoissett, thus, embodies the value of diversity. People born in the community are genetically mixed as Bee explains to Connie:

At grandcil—grand council—decisions were made forty years back to breed a high proportion of darker-skinned people and to mix the genes well through the population. At the same time, we decided to hold on to separate cultural identities. But we broke the bond between genes and

culture, broke it forever, we want there to be no chance of racism again. But we don't want the melting pot where everybody ends up with thin gruel. We want diversity, for strangeness breeds richness. "(95-96).

Most policies are open to discussion for all the members of the community rather than decided in a totalitarian way. For example, there is a controversy between Shapers and Mixers, the former "want to intervene genetically" and "to breed for selected traits," while the latter choose not to utilize genetic technology so actively (219). In addition, Mattapoissett is not secure as a community like Herland is and faces threat and war. People have to fight for the preservation of the community for "the enemy is few but determined. Once they ran this whole world, they had power as no one, even the Roman emperors, and riches drained from everywhere"(261). The war thus is between patriarchal exploitation and feminist egalitarianism. Furthermore, the war not only exists in 2137, but extends through time. As Barbarossa explains, Mattapoissett is only a possible future for "at certain cruxes of history...forces are in conflict. Technology is imbalanced. Too few have too much power. Alternate futures are equally or almost equally probable...and that affects the...shape of time"(189). Instead of being historically inevitable, Mattapoissett exists as a possibility and the members "must fight to come to exist, to remain in existence, to be the future that happens"(190).

Another alternative future presents a totalitarian New York in which women as well as children are deemed as mere commodities. Gildina, the woman Connie meets in this future and a worse version of Dolly, is shut up in a room and under constant surveillance. She has undergone cosmetic surgery to satisfy masculine desire. In Connie's eyes, Gildina's body

seemed a cartoon of femininity, with a tiny waist, enormous sharp breasts that stuck out like the brassieres Connie herself had worn in the fifties—but the woman was not wearing a brassiere. Her stomach was flat but her hips and buttocks were oversized and audaciously curved. She looked as if she could hardly walk for the extravagance of her breasts and

buttock, her thighs that collided as she shuffled a few steps. (281-82)

Corporate bodies, the multis, control the future and all humans, machines, and cyborgs are their properties, ready to be sold or bought. In an extremely capitalistic future like Gildina's, women are put in prostitution. Marriage, as well as reproduction, exists in the form of contract. Hierarchy exists as the rich could live longer than two hundred years, while the poor live less than fifty and serve as live organ banks. Drugs and medicine serve as psychedelic t to kill the time. Everyone has brain implants that monitor movements, talks, and places. Gildina, like Connie in her present, is deprived of individual will and freedom. Her voice, like Connie, goes unheard and she is casually dismissed after Connie is discovered in her room. Definitely, Gildina's future is the opposite of Mattapoissett.

Connie's experiences in the future are not simply escape. On the contrary, these experiences provide her the courage to fight against her predicaments in the present as well as to fight for the existence of the future. *Woman on the Edge of Time* in fact marks "the transition from a teleological view of the future to a deconstructionist view of the future"(Pfaelzer 193). The future is hinged upon the choice made in the present and is, thus, unstable. As Moylan points out, Piercy sheds light upon "the necessity for violent struggle to achieve the social revolution given the overwhelming power of the phallogocratic/capitalist/bureaucratic structure both in its ideological manipulation and its raw violence"(125). Connie recognizes she is in war, a war that decides not only her life but also the whole future. So she uses the bottle of poison she has stolen from her brother's greenhouse to poison the doctors that have been experimenting with patients' brain. She persuades herself that what she has done is right, "I murdered them dead. Because they are the violence-prone. Theirs is the money and the power, theirs the poisons that slow the mind and dull the heart. Theirs are the powers of life and death. I killed them. Because it is war"(370). It is easy to associate the goal of

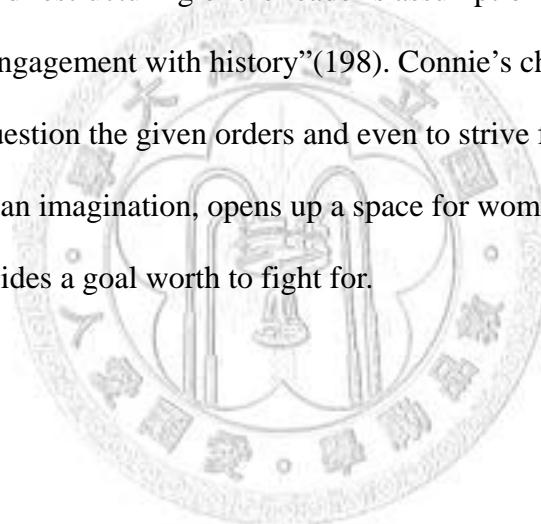
these experiments—to control the unsociable behaviors of these patients—with the brain implants that leave Gildina no privacy for herself. Both are patriarchal means to erase individuality, to suppress dissenting voices, to violate people's body in the name of protection, and to take away motherhood from women's hands. To prevent Gildina's future, Connie is enlisted to fight. Only by changing the present reality will the future be shaped and chosen. She, the powerless, must challenge the powerful to bring to birth a better future. Nadia Khouri observes that “it is this totalizing vision of cultural continuity, of the openness of history, of the survival of the group beyond the individual, of the individual's essential role in the life of the group, of the victory of life over death which turned *Woman on the Edge of Time* into an optimistic tragedy”(58-59). Connie, in committing murder, does not regain her freedom nor does she reform the social structure. But she does regain her individual will and succeed in revealing patriarchy's oppression of women as well as the hopeful future, which might exist due to Connie's efforts.

As Christ Ferns indicates, Mattapoissett is “actively engaged not only in a continuing military struggle with what remains of the old order, but also in taking decisions that affect both the future and the past”(210). Whether Mattapoissett will come into existence depends on whether Connie could fight back the scientists who seek to control Connie's mind. The controversies and the uncertainty Mattapoissett, for Shands, indicate that “it suffices to point to the process toward harmony, equality, balance, between humans and nature, union without unity: a process that entails struggle and effort”(82). What Piercy aims in her text is the resistance against patriarchal ideologies that seek to contain rebelling voices like Connie's as well as the utopian enclosure that all too often co-opts the resistance in feminist science fiction. What really matters is the ceaseless struggle toward a better place and some day the dichotomous culture of patriarchy could be wholly abolished as Luciente hopes:

Someday the gross repair will be done. The oceans will be balanced, the rivers flow clean, the wetlands and the forest flourish. There'll be no more enemies. No Them and Us. We can quarrel joyously with each other about important matters of idea and art. The vestiges of old ways will fade. I can't know the time—any more than you can ultimately know us. We can only now what we can truly imagine. Finally what we see comes from ourselves. (322)

In Mattapoisett people are still fighting, although they have attained some achievements as Ferns describes it, “there is freedom, but not freedom from responsibility; security, but only as a result of unceasing struggle”(208).

The struggle constantly represented in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, for Pfaelzer, provides “the profound restructuring of the reader’s assumptions about contemporary reality and political engagement with history”(198). Connie’s choice to fight might incite the reader to question the given orders and even to strive for the utopian future. Piercy, with her utopian imagination, opens up a space for women to dream about free motherhood and provides a goal worth to fight for.



## Chapter Three

### *He, She, and It: Multiplicity of Motherhood*

While feminist utopian writers are enthusiastic in depicting worlds where mothers could give birth to their children and rear them up without patriarchal oppression, in later works feminist science writers seem to break away from their predecessors on the matter of maternity. Jane Donawerth, in her discussion of feminist dystopia of the 1990s, analyzes fifteen feminist science fiction texts and records a turn from the utopian drive of 1960s and 1970s. Feminist science fiction in the 1980s no longer embraces the utopian vision of pastoral, egalitarian communities. Instead, these futures present post-apocalyptic urban societies with repressive governments and cold machine. As Donawerth observes, “the near future gritty realism and city settings of mid-century science fiction are resurrected and combined with the high tech settings of recent cyberpunk”(50). Furthermore, in these dystopian futures, families no longer “provide sanctuary from the breakdown of society,” while the mother, instead of being idealized in earlier feminist utopias, “is dead, lost, or hostile”(51). Susan Kornfield also contends that “recent works predominantly suppress or demonize mothers, and at times completely transform or displace maternal function”(65). The hail of motherhood in feminist utopian fiction seems to vanish in feminist cyberpunk fiction<sup>1</sup> in which “utopian optimism has been replaced by

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<sup>1</sup> Feminist cyberpunk fiction is a subgenre of feminist science fiction. June Deery asserts cyberpunk is “a recent strain of science fiction that gives central play to cyborgian technologies” and a cyberpunk text typically depicts “future high-tech developments in information exchange and multinational capitalism with some of the nihilistic exuberance of punk rock”(88). A feminist cyberpunk narrative, therefore, explores feminist issues in such futuristic high-tech societies where human-machine interface as well as information technologies influences human identity. Jenny Wolmark also acknowledges the subversive possibility cyberpunk offers feminist science fiction and comments, “despite the male ethos of cyberpunk and its largely uncritical celebration of the mysteries of the human-machine interface, its active engagement with technology and its oppositional qualities are of considerable relevance to writers of feminist SF”(5). Nevertheless, Wolmark also proposes a subtle division between cyberpunk texts and cyborg texts. Although both cyberpunk and cyborg texts explore the influence of technology upon society and the breakdown of the boundaries between human and machine, cyberpunk texts focus on “the electronically constituted virtual reality of cyberspace,” where human consciousness is often merged with artificial intelligence or other people’s minds regardless of physical boundary

dystopias and a return to the father for access to power”(Kornfield 71). Mothers are again silenced and trivialized in these dystopian futures. Kornfield attributes this re-silencing to “the fear of maternal power conditioned by the power women wield as mothers” for mothers, once endowed with independence and power, are suspicious of being unreliable (71). Kornfield concludes that, only with some exceptions, “women’s science fiction has returned to narrative structures of two hundred years ago, where the daughter’s struggle to find her freedom is set against or driven by an absent, suppressed, or antagonistic mother”(72). It seems that, although feminist science fiction strives to deconstruct gender conventions and to construct feminine identity, the maternal question is still left unsolved and eschewed.

However, as Donawerth contends, the writers who create indifferent and cruel mother “seem to react against the essentialism of a utopian vision of idealized mothers, and use their dystopian explorations to achieve a fuller understanding of the complexities and variations that social construction of gender implies”(52). For Donawerth, feminist dystopian narratives of 1990s do not necessarily hinder the exploration of maternity as Kornfield argues. Instead, Donawerth takes these dystopias are ambiguous ones “that do not end in the triumph of the repressive state and tragedy for the protagonist”(62). Marge Piercy’s *He, She, and It*, published in 1991, is one of these works. Situated in a post-apocalyptic future, the whole world is devastated with war and pollution. The result is that the world geography is divided by four kinds of organizations: hierarchical, aggressive, late-capitalistic multis that occupy the wealthiest districts; free towns that resist multis’ domination by their resources of high-technology; poor Glops that consist of most population of the world;

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(Wolmark118). On the other hand, writers of cyborg texts “utilize the metaphor of cyborg rather than that of cyberspace to examine the relationships of power that are concealed within and disguised by cybernetic systems”(Wolmark 125). Wolmark thus categorizes *He, She, and It* as a cyborg text but I retain the term of feminist cyberpunk fiction as the influence of cyberpunk upon this text is still observable.

and finally the Black Zone, which is originally the Middle East district and destroyed in a nuclear war. The protagonist Shira, reared up in a free town Tikva, in the beginning of the text loses both her son and her job in a multi Yakamura-Steichen and returns to her hometown. After she returns, she accepts a job to socialize an illegal cyborg Yod<sup>2</sup>, intending to make him pass as human. Later on both Shira and the whole town face the aggression of the multi Y-S and fight for their own survival. During the process, Shira transforms from a conventional mother, as conditioned by patriarchal hierarchy, to a mother who achieves autonomy and subjectivity. And it is this chapter's intention to explore the transformation of conception of motherhood in the highly technological future and the interaction between the metaphor of cyborg and gender politics.

#### Cyberpunk, Postmodernism, and Feminist Science fiction

According to Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, cyberpunk is definitely postmodern, characterized by simulation and fusion:

On the one hand, pure negation: of manners, history, philosophy, politics, body, will, affect, anything mediated by cultural memory; on the other, pure attitude; all is power, and “subculture,” and the grace of Hip negotiating the splatter of consciousness as it slams against the hard-tech future, the techno-future of artificial immanence, where all that was one nature is simulated and elaborated by technical means, a future world-construct that is as remote from the “lessons of history” as the present mix-up is from the pitiful science fiction fantasies of the past that tried to imagine us. (182)

With its portrayal of the interface with the computer matrix, cyberpunk inevitably challenges Cartesian split of mind and body, the boundary between high art and low art as well as that between the real and the imaginary, and the concept of human

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<sup>2</sup> Yod is a humanoid cyborg composed of mechanism and organic material. Although as a cyborg Yod transgresses the boundary between what is human and what is not, I choose the pronoun “he” rather than “it” as Yod determines himself as a male life form rather than an inorganic machine.



identity. The result is the emergence of fragmented, provisional subject that resists definition and enclosure. Characterized by hard technologies such as computer science, artificial intelligence, and robotic technologies, cyberpunk is traditionally considered as a masculine genre, populated with male characters who seem to have no sympathy for women. According to Veronica Hollinger, cyberpunk is “written for the most part by a small number of white middle-class men, many of whom, inexplicably, live in Texas”(207). Jenny Wolmark likewise remarks that “it is no surprise that cyberpunk is strongly inscribed with the masculine, since heroes of cyberpunk are drawn from the high-tech environment of hackers and rock music, and the rhetoric echoes that which is found in the narratives of detective and adventure fiction”(109). In the same vein, Karen Cadora comments that “cyberpunk s are almost invariably male—hyper-masculine ones at that—and, as a rule, they have little time for issues of sexual politics”(357). Flooded with violence and pornographic details, it seems indeed that there is hardly any room left for feminist ends.

However, various critics begin to see cyberpunk as a fit site to discuss feminist issues and here we have feminist cyberpunk fiction. For one, Joan Gordon claims that “feminist cyberpunk is covert feminist science fiction”(196). Gordon traces feminist cyberpunk’s ancestry back to James Tiptree’s “The Girl Who Was Plugged In” and advocates feminist cyberpunk as a pertinent genre to present female characters who are different from the traditional female role. Wolmark also recognizes that “feminist science fiction has had an undeniable impact on cyberpunk, both in its refusal to accept the generic limitations of this traditionally masculine genre, and in its concern to reframe the relationship between technology and social and sexual relations”(110). For Gordon, feminist cyberpunk offers feminism “a vision of the world which is both a logical extension of the 1980s and a radical departure from the essentially nostalgic view of feminist science fiction”(199). The earlier utopian pastoral communities that

mostly deny technologies, thus, for Gordon is escapist and unrealistic. On the other hand, feminist cyberpunk fiction, with its embrace of technologies, allows women to survive in the imperfect future if women learn to control it. Like Donawerth, Gordon advocates that it is no longer necessary for a woman to be a perfect mother goddess; being “an earth mother” is satisfactory enough (200). What feminist cyberpunk could offer feminist science fiction, thus, is a new position to oppose the unified definition of women as the cultural other. As Cadora comments, “women writers have begun to use cyberpunk for just that purpose, resisting the conservative politics of their masculinist predecessors, grappling with the realities of technology, and exploring new forms of the subject of feminism”(357). This alliance between cyberpunk and feminism brings about feminist cyberpunk fiction, which envisions “fragmented subjects who can, despite their multiple positionings, negotiate and succeed in a high-tech world”(Cadora 357). In feminist cyberpunk fiction, technologies no longer signify as masculine weapon but “a tool of both oppression and liberation”(Cadora 359). On the contrary, technologies become indispensable for survival and empowerment. Therefore, women in feminist cyberpunk could no longer discard technologies as their predecessors do in various feminist utopias.

### Cyborg, Monster, Woman, and the Other

In feminist cyberpunk fiction, the most powerful signifier is the cyborg, which, taking its stem in Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” signifies the transgression of the boundary between human and machine, challenges the concept of a unified subject, and rebels against patriarchal gender norms as well. Defining her cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction,” Haraway locates the cyborg at the postmodernist

position of existing simultaneously as and not as human/machine as well as real/unreal (149). Most important of all, the cyborg transgresses the line between gender demarcations, which is essential in the construction of patriarchal modern society. For Haraway, the cyborg “is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity”(150). Without a natural history, the cyborg resists categorization and a consistent, coherent identity that would earn it a firm standpoint in the patrilineal world. In other words, a cyborgian identity is always fluid, provisional, and always ready to change:

Cyborgs are not reverent; they do not re-member the cosmos. They are wary of holism, but needy for connection—they seem to have a natural feel for united front politics, but without the vanguard party. The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential. (Haraway 151)

Therefore, the cyborg is essentially feminist in its emphasis of connection and resistance against domination. Questioning the demarcation between natural and artificial, organic and non-organic, the cyborg inherently challenges the gender conventions, exposing them as social practices rather than naturally imbedded. It is no wonder that Haraway claims the political potentials for the cyborg as she remarks that “cyborg unities are monstrous and illegitimate; in our present political circumstances, we could hardly hope for more potent myths for resistance and recoupling”(154). It is a time to expand women’s “natural” identity and to re-conceptualize what is feminine for there is nothing truly organic as “sexual reproduction is one kind of reproductive strategy among many with costs and benefits as a function of the system environment”(Haraway 162). With the fusion of organic and non-organic, cyborg

figures manifest themselves in feminist science fiction as monstrous imageries, as extending and contesting the limit of human body as well as identity:

Our bodies, ourselves; bodies are maps of power and identity. Cyborgs are no exception. A cyborg body is not innocent; it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity and so generate antagonistic dualisms without end (or until the world ends); it takes irony for granted. One is too few, and two is only one possibility. Intense pleasure in skill, machine skill, ceases to be a sin, but as aspect of embodiment.  
(Haraway180)

With the enhanced/twisted physicality, the cyborg allows feminist science fiction writers to strip off the gender norms that seek to confine women and to establish a feminine identity that is characterized by myriad possibilities.

In *He, She, and It*, there are two cyborgs, Yod and Nili: the former constructed from biological as well as mechanical material by a male scientist Avram and socialized by female scientists Malkah and Shira; the latter a genetically engineered woman from Safed, a historically wiped-out district. These two cyborgs differ fundamentally as Yod is designed as a tool and, thus, lacks self-autonomy, while Nili, born a biological woman, could exert her self-will. Yod's construction narrative parallels Malkah's story of Golem and in both narratives, Yod and the Golem Joseph undergo the postmodern quest of the construction of human identity. By depicting Yod's interaction with other human entities, as Deery observes, Piercy "exploits the cyborg's denaturalizing of the human to ask what it means to be human, what it means to be a person, and how these notions relate to birth and reproduction"(92). Yod's existence clearly challenges the conception of humanity. On the one hand, the house computer obstinately terms him as "the machine." On the other hand, Shira, as well as other people, recognizes him as a life form, although not human-born as she finally concedes that "we are all cyborgs" and Yod is "just a purer form of what we're all tending toward"(150). Malkah deems Yod as "not a human person, but a person"(76).

And in a world where sterility is a common phenomenon, the ability of biological reproduction could not function as a priori in defining humanity. It is no longer possible to differentiate where humanity ends and where machine starts. The inability to mark off coherent definitions, for Wolmark, is “a strategy that enables the question to be raised of the way in which the subject is constituted in culture” as “the loss of a clear sense of boundaries leads to uncertainty about identity, and this has particular resonances where gender is concerned”(128). Like Haraway’s cyborg, Yod transgresses the boundary between man and woman. Although Yod is always perceived as a male and characterized by his superior physical power, his lack of autonomy still leaves him as powerless as a woman. His constructor, Avram, gives him a totally masculine body, and when Shira asks Avram what is the purpose, here is Avram’s response:

Avram looked slightly embarrassed. He did not look at Yod or at her but at the ceiling, his hand joining behind his back. “I felt the more closely he resembled a human being, the less likely he would be detected. It will be necessary for him to pass time with humans, and he must seem as much like them as possible. I frequently had to sacrifice efficiency to a convincing façade and behavior. I could see no reason to create him...mutilated.” (71)

What Avram represents here is the typical masculine attitude that is common in male scientists, who are enthusiastic about creating a new life form without feminine intervention. Thus, Yod resembles Frankenstein’s monster, a male distorted child born from a father without a mother. Indeed, when Gadi, Avram’s son, learns his father creates a cyborg, he exclaims “call me the Son of Frankenstein”(148). And Yod would have ended as the monster that later immerses himself in violence and killing, just like his nine predecessors, but for Malkah’s intervention. As Malkah comments, for Avram, masculinity represents perfection and purity. She explains to Shira that “Avram thought that was the ideal: pure reason, pure logic, pure violence” and to

counterbalance Avram's masculinist view, she give Yod "a gentler side, starting with emphasizing his love for knowledge and extending it to emotional and personal knowledge, a need for connection..."(142). In other words, Yod, unlike his violent elder brothers, is feminized through Malkah's programming and Shira's socializing. Indeed, Yod is constantly associated with women, especially in his relationship with Shira. For example, Yod's body, in Shira's description, is more feminine than masculine:

His lips were soft on hers. His tongue was a little smoother than a human tongue but moist. Everything was smoother, more regular, more nearly perfect. The skin of his back was not like the skin of other men she had been with, for always there were abrasions, pimples, scars, irregularities. His skin was sleek as a woman's but drier to the touch, without the pillow of subcutaneous fat that made it fun to hug Malkah, for instance. (168)

In fact, even his association with Frankenstein's monster validates his position as the cultural other as he strives to have his "impure" existence accepted in the community. Furthermore, Yod's relationship with Avram, who asserts full control over Yod's act and even possession, also reminds us about women's status in traditional patriarchy: the property owned by fathers or husbands. Thus, as Wolmark asserts, Yod "occupies the unexpected narrative position of alien and outsider, and is therefore denied access to structures of power" and this contradictory position allows Piercy to "question the way in which social and sexual relations are shaped by conventions and definitions that are thought of as fixed and natural"(132). Shira, as well as the reader, could not help but realize there is nothing truly natural in being a human or a woman; gender conventions, like human identity, are socially constructed, and, thus, could be reformed.

Another cyborg figure in *He, She, and It* is Nili, whose technologically enhanced as well as genetically engineered body echoes the deadly female warrior Jael in *The Female Man*. Indeed, like Jael, Nili also comes from a woman's land, where men have

erased their own existence as well as historical feud by a nuclear war. Born from the destruction is Safed, a joint community inhabited by Israeli and Palestinian women who survive and reconcile the ethnic conflict that induced the war. Safed is another version of Herland, whose members strive on without men's interruption. Nili introduces her homeland and her people's achievements as such:

I can walk in the raw without protection. I can tolerate levels of bombardment that would kill you. We are a joint community of the descendants of Israeli and Palestinian women who survived. We each keep our religion, observe each other's holidays and fast days. We have no men. We clone and engineer genes. After birth we undergo additional alteration. We have created ourselves to endure, to survive, to hold our land. Soon we will begin rebuilding Yerushalaim. (198)

What Nili represents is, thus, a radical cyborg who is not only unfaithful to her fathers, embracing their enemies as sisters, but prospers without being restrained by her fathers. However, like Herlanders, Safed inhabitants desire to break their isolation and send Nili out as their messenger and observer to see whether the outer world is ready for their return. It is easy to see Safed as a remote utopian society that is waiting to be reached and in the end of the narrative Malkah undertakes a pilgrimage toward the utopia, hoping for regeneration with its advanced technology. But the question remains unsolved: would the feminist values represented by Safed prevail in the outer world, or, would these feminist, strong, figures of Nili's sisters be treated as potential threats or as the object for desire?

I would like to suggest that Nili's cyborgian body, although could be seen as a site to contest feminine autonomy, is still susceptible to masculine desire. Many feminist critics have observed that female cyborgs, portrayed often with strong, athletic, and plump bodies, are in fact hyper-sexualized form of femininity rather than empowerment for women. Despina Kadoudaki, analyzing cotemporary cultural representations of cyborg women, argues that these cyborg figures fail to embody

hybrid sexuality that is so often praised and advocated in feminist discourses. Instead, Kakoudaki points out that “their exaggerated gender is what makes cyborgs matter and is the reason contemporary feminist discourses have appropriated and proliferated cyborg femininities” as “the popular representations of cyborgs are sentimental, existential, sexualized, and fetishized in alarming ways”(166). The destabilizing potential inherent in the fluid body of cyborg thus vanishes as the representation of cyborg bodies gradually falls to a rigid pattern: beautiful, powerful, sensual and sexually arousing. The female cyborg, then, instead of facilitating female autonomy, “arrives as an object/product that engages many fetishistic relations to technology, and to the unreal bodies of fantastic/fantasy women”(Kakoudaki 171). Furthermore, the representation of the close relation between female cyborgs and feminine sexuality reflects masculine anxiety toward feminine sexuality. Thus, these feminine cyborg bodies are most of the time co-opted or re-inscribed in patriarchal ideologies. They must become loyal servers for masculine desire or they must vanish. Therefore, cyborg women narratives are, as Janet Vertesi observes, companions of Pygmalion myth. Vertesi keenly observes that “in books, plays and movies alike, female cyborgs are always, by definition, beautiful and sexually desirable, whether in their graceful or erotic gaits, their husky voices, or their large breasts”(83). For Vertesi, female cyborgs, instead of signifying transgressing potentials, epitomize masculine sexual fantasy. Like Pygmalion, composers of science fiction continue to mold their cyborg women into their ideal of women: perfect sex objects and domesticated servants. Apparently, the social relations between genders are reproduced in these narratives.

Surely Nili is not presented as submissive to patriarchal ideologies, but her relationship with Gadi clearly reflects the patriarchal culture that inclines to objectify female bodies, even cyborgian ones. In presenting the female counterpart of Yod, Piercy give a detailed depiction of her physicality after she and Riva enters Malkah’s



house:

The other woman threw off her black coverall, letting it fall to the floor. Under it she was wearing very light fine body armor, which she also proceeded to strip off. Under that she wore shorts, laden with bulging pockets, and a short-sleeved safari shirt, both the color of sand, on a body that made Shira think of mascleoids she had seen in stimmies. Nili's hair was a metallic red—not the color of carrots or marmalade but the color of blood....Her skin was dark, of uncertain and probably mixed race. (188)

In the paragraph Nili's physical power is stressed and immediately associated with "stimmies," fictitious simulated illusions that grant the view physical sensations.

Although she is not depicted as exaggeratedly sexual, her peculiar body catches the attention of Gadi, who at first sight of her desires to make her a heroine of fictitious simulations. Gadi even secretly records her morning exercise and sends the tape to the multi he works for. The multi immediately shows interest in Nili and offers her an opportunity to become a star. What Gadi intends is to make Nili's cyborgian body a sexual object, thus circumscribing the rebellious potential contained in her.

Nevertheless, although Nili agrees to build a relationship with Gadi, she does so not because of attraction but out of necessity as she explains to Shira:

I must do it. We know that if we open up to the world, we're going to have to deal with men. I'm supposed to find out what they're like. He seems as good a choice as any. He's very curiously made and strange. Everything he does is out of my range of experience. Surely I'd learn a great deal about things completely foreign to us. (253)

Naturally enough, more concerned with her duty than being a sexual object, she declines Gadi's offer, exclaiming "I don't want to be a toy"(382). From this perspective, Nili is like Elladore of *Herland*, who marries Van and leaves her homeland with him. Both leave their utopian home to explore the unknown, to learn what is different from their own home. Although Gadi does not succeed in his intention to objectify Nili's body, what he represents is the patriarchal system that seeks to restrain women's autonomy. Nili's experience with Gadi demonstrates a

major problem that female cyborgs have to deal with once they desire to inhabit in the man's world: man's objectifying gaze.

### “Natural” Motherhood

If the metaphor of cyborg helps to transgress the boundary of human as well as gender identity, then how does it affect the conception of motherhood, an important facet of femininity? As the cyborg blurs what is organic and what is not, could it reproduce and raise offspring? As Kornfield points out, feminist theorists, as well as feminist science fiction writers, in 1970s and 1980s tend to attribute the source of gender oppression to social structures, cultural upbringing, and ideological conditioning to counter biases based on biological essentialism: “women are not born to be silenced, unempowered mothers and caregivers; they are raised that way”(67). This induces the gradual disappearance of maternal body in feminist science fiction as the maternal body, in Kornfield's words, “is decidedly gendered”(67). For Kornfield, the cyborg body is in opposition to the maternal one, even replacing it, in feminist cyberpunk fiction as the maternal body represents the natural history that is discarded by the cyborg. However, I would like to suggest that the disappearance of maternal body does not necessarily equate with the disappearance of maternity. As Lucie Armitt points out, Haraway refuses to “set up so-called ‘natural’ mothering as a superior option” and exposes “the artifice of such nature/culture binary polarities”(62). Although the cyborg body might not be capable of pregnancy, the experience of mothering is not denied to it. As Cadora asserts, “the blurrings of human-machine-animal and reality-fantasy means that there is no identity that is essentially or uniquely ‘human’”(370). In fact, there is neither an identity essentially “maternal” in Piercy's text. In *He, She, and It*, motherhood, instead of a unified idea, becomes personal practices which differ from individual to individual. Motherhood is

no longer a privilege limited to biological mothers alone as Yod and Nili have their own peculiar experiences of mothering children. Furthermore, even human mothers have diverse conceptions about motherhood as Riva and Shira have quite different ideals regarding pregnancy as well as rearing children.

In *He, She, and It*, Piercy offers motherhood as multi-faceted, different from person to person, instead of a unified idea. In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy advocates the severing of reproduction from mothering; the concept of mothering prevails in the future Mattapoissett as the women give up biological reproduction. In *He, She, and It*, utopian optimism does not prevail as the social structure of small family returns and takes the place of community-family system in *Herland* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*. In Shira's world, reproduction technologies prevail and few people choose biological reproduction as sterility becomes a common phenomenon. But this time these technologies do not necessarily serve to liberate women as they do in Mattapoissett. For Shira, who gets pregnant during working for Y-S, feels these technologies have become a tool of control for the multis and chooses biological reproduction:

Half the kids in this town are born from petri dishes or test tubes. At Y-S they used to say every baby has three parents nowadays—the mother, the father, and the doctor who does all the chemistry. And there Y-S is the fourth parent....I carried the baby nine months because I didn't want to give my child up to Y-S so early. I'm suspicious about the conditioning they use on preemies. It's standard practice there to induce labor in the eighth month to avoid stretch marks. (191-92)

On the other hand, her mother, Riva, chooses artificial reproduction not only because she is lesbian but because she “couldn't afford to hang around swollen up like a bilious elephant”(192). In Shira's world, thus, technologies are ambivalent; they could be used for oppression as well as liberation.

In *He, She, and It*, the practice of motherhood differs from place to place. The

multi Y-S is a corporate society with strict social hierarchy as well as gender codes, which govern the members' physical appearance and behavior. Y-S culture haunts even their bodies as their faces are surgically altered to conform to the codes: "blond hair, blue eyes with epicanthic folds, painted brows like Hokusai brush strokes, aquiline nose, dark golden complexion"(1-2). The members' social life, religion, and even marriage, which is a contract between two persons, is intertwined with their technical skills, which decide their social status. Furthermore, Y-S is a patriarchal society, where children as well as women as are deemed as men's properties. Shira's secretary Rosario is driven out of the enclave as she is divorced and could not offer technological gain for the multi:

As was customary even for low-level talent, he had taken a new wife, twenty years younger. Rosario was forty-two, and Y-S let her go. Shira had protested that she needed Rosario, but she had no power. Women over forty who were not techies or supervisors or professionals or execs were let go if they were not the temporary property of a male grud. Female gruds were supposed to have the same privileges and, if they had enough position, often took young husbands. (6)

Although this social arrangements seem equal enough for both sexes, the truth is it is often men, rather women, who get promotion. Women in Y-S are forced to obey social decorum and act conventionally. It is not surprising that Shira later discovers her work is not appreciated by Y-S and she is evaluated not by her professional skills but by her relation to Tikva. According to M. Keith Booker, although the corporate enclaves are domed and safe from environmental pollution as well as human crimes and material want, "it is the very orderliness of these enclaves—as opposed to the mess of the glop—that represents the real dystopia, because this orderliness is indicative of a rigid corporate structure that leaves no room either for individual freedom or for the possibility of eventual change"(345). What the multies represent is the late-capitalist patriarchal society that seeks to suppress women's personal will and voice. Like

Connie in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Shira is deprived of her child by the patriarchal society and, she also takes a trip of transformation afterward. Shira acts as a traditional mother in the beginning of the narrative. Riva described Shira as “pretty girl, got married, worked for a multi, had a baby” and could not see much herself in Shira (194). It is after Shira returns to Tikva and works with Yod that she begins to break away the Y-S conditioning and to fight the multi to retrieve her son. Joan Haran observes that as Shira “does not feel as compelled to assume conventional feminine roles in her interactions with the cyborg, she is able to explore her own desire and to experience the physical pleasures of sex in a way she has only associated previously with her first love affair”(95). In fact, with her identification with Yod, Shira does not renounce her identity as a mother, but redefines it in feminist terms. After Y-S awards her son’s custody to her husband, Shira feels distressed and blames herself for insisting on divorce. But her decision to divorce leads to her opportunity to become independent. Instead of conforming to the patriarchal values and accepting the loss of her son, she struggles to fight Y-S and gets her son back.

It is often noted that Yod’s sexual relationship with Shira is incestuous and that they, with Avram, form the Oedipal triangle. Yod’s self-destruction blow that takes Avram’s life with him seems to affirm this view. However, I would like to suggest that given Yod’s cyborg and feminized identity, he is not a typical male subject that occupies the male child that competes with his father for his mother’s affection. As Armitt points out, Yod is programmed to “fulfill desire in a manner entirely evading Freud’s belief in woman’s sexuality being driven by the castration complex”(59). In fact, although his physique is absolutely masculine, his developments as a subject resembles a woman who, paralleling Shira, seeks to protect, to nurture, as well as to break off the patriarchal shackles imposed on him by Avram. He is accepted by Shira’s son “not as a figure of authority but as a superior and all-capable

playfellow”(377). As Book discerns, “Yod is clearly a sort of male parody of those artificially-created ideal women who, from Galatea forward, have functioned as central images of the objectification of women in Western civilization”(348). But he resists Avram’s control and struggles for his freedom. His taking Avram’s life, instead of an act to usurp the power of patriarchal domination, is to achieve personal autonomy and prevention of slavery. From this perspective, he is like Connie, who murders scientists who are developing technologies that would help enslave women, as his message makes clear, “I die knowing I destroy the capacity to replicate me”(415). Like a mother, what Yod considers is the welfare of the progeny.

Shira, with her choice of biological reproduction, is never truly submissive to Y-S ideologies. For one thing, she keeps her Jewish belief although the official religion is Shintoism. And unlike her colleagues in Y-S, she chooses to carry her son with her body and refuses reproduction technologies. As Armitt observes, “for Shira biological birthing is the starting-point in the determination of the distinction between human and cyborg forms within the specific context of the feminine”(63). However, Shira does not deny the cyborg’s ability for motherhood as she recognizes Yod as a far better parent than her former husband and is even tempted to rebuild Yod after his destruction. Furthermore, she comes to recognize that she is not so different from the cyborg. After all, both she and Yod receive programming, hers social while Yod’s mechanical, that directs and influences what they feel and do. In her final conversation, she confesses to Yod, “my maternal programming makes me sacrifice anyone and anything to Ari”(410). So Shira discerns that motherhood, as well as gender, is culturally constructed and not necessarily inseparable from the “natural” body. Motherhood, thus, is a practice that could be embodied in various forms and performed not by women alone. In the end of the narrative she assumes independence and succeeds Malkah as the Base overseer of Tikva. And it is at this time that she

discovers what is left of Avram's data that would help rebuild Yod. However, sympathetic with the unempowered, enslaved cyborg Avram creates, she gives up the plan for "she could not manufacture a being to serve her, even in love"(428). And she finally decides to destroy all the records, respecting Yod's wish not to be replicated and realizing that the technologies used to create Yod are tools for enslavement and control. As Booker points out, "rather than seek fulfillment in an ideal man, Shira learns to find fulfillment in her own emotional and intellectual capabilities"(348). Not only does she free Yod from further enslavement, she also frees herself from patriarchal ideologies to depend on a love object.

In contrast to the patriarchal society, Shira's family is matrilineal, consisting of unconventional mothers, who, according to Booker, "avoid conventional stereotypes (both patriarchal and feminist) by contesting traditionally male areas of technology and warfare"(346). Malkah is both a professional in designing programs that protect the Base and a voracious lover who enjoys heterosexual love but remains emotionally as well as economically independent. In her seventies, she still enjoys flirtations in the cyberspace, sometimes pretending to be a man. Confident in herself, she speaks to Avram, "it's your eyes and your appetite that are falling, not my beauty"(244). Energetic and autonomous, she differs from the stereotypical, rigid women in the Y-S community. Malkah's lesbian daughter Riva is also an unconventional woman who leaves her daughter to her mother and devotes herself to liberating information. Unlike Shira, who is strongly attached to her family and to heterosexual love, Riva, identifying herself as a fighter rather than a mother, chooses to fight against the multis that seek to extend their control over the existent free towns. Termed by Booker as "an internationally-renowned Robin Hood-like data pirate," she appropriates information of technologies from the multis and distributes it to those who need it (346). It could be said that she equals what Wolmark defines as a cyberpunk hacker,

“the postmodern equivalent of the quintessential flaneur, strolling anonymously and heroically through the new physical and social spaces of the modern city streets”(114). She has no inclination toward domesticity and is always ready to go adventure. And she strolls in cyberspace as well as the material world, organizing alliances between the Freetown and the Glop gang coyotes. Occupying the oppositional position against the multis, she relies on her capacity to remain invisible and even pretends to be dead to deceive the multis. Indeed, as Barbara J. Morehouse suggests, “body image means nothing to Riva, and in fact her readiness to assume the role of characters from society’s margins allows her to remain unnoticed as she moves through the material world”(77). What Riva embodies is the resistance from the marginalized and the silenced. Riva, like Chava in Malkah’s parallel narrative, chooses her professional career over her children. Although Riva is not a good mother according to traditional values, it does not mean that she does not love her children. Her antagonistic relationship with Shira comes from their different values rather than personal enmity. Finally we have the Amazonian human cyborg Nili, who is a blood-relative of Shira. Described by Riva as “my darling and a very well made bomb,” Nili represents the mixed gender identities as well as a human-machine combination (189). According to Morehouse, Nili embodies “new possibilities for redefining and reoccupying the spaces constructed by patriarchy, for they now have the physical strength and socialization needed to move beyond entrenched notions of gendered relations and geographies”(78). However, the various technologies that enhance her body do not obliterate her ability as a mother. In contrast to Mattapoisett members, who are uniformly born by the technical brooder, she could get pregnant if she chooses to. Her community Safed, like Gilman’s Herland, is an all-women society in which the children “are raised by several mothers”(363). Although Piercy does not give detailed description about the maternal practice of this futuristic society, through Nili’s intense



emotional attachment to her daughter, it is still discernible that for these super-women, maternity is an important facet of their life.

Like *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy also describes the opposition from the marginalized. Tikva is a fragile community as it economically relies on the mults. Thus, its independence and position as a “Freetown” is in fact relative, although its members are ready to fight for its existence. It is easy to see that it is in the destitute, chaotic, dystopian Glop that a truly independent community is possible to organize. Morehouse criticizes Tikva as “a homogenous ethnic Jewish enclave and a prototypical geography of exclusion” and advocates the Glop as a district that allows exploration of alternative social structure:

On the surface, dystopias as the Glop provide an effective trope for highlighting the values of feminist social formations. Such dystopias not only provide dramatic tension, but also allow a stronger light to play over how feminist values might provide a viable alternative way of structuring society. Such devices should provide a means for creatively thinking about how feminist alternatives might effectively redress profound wrongs through more egalitarian ethnic, gender and racial integration. (85-86)

The gang Coyotes feeds its members with food made from algae themselves so that, as a member points out, they will not “be starved into submission”(306). As Tom Moylan points out, “the people of the Glop have moved significantly toward creating a viable counter-public sphere with political organizations resembling trade unions and organs of self-government beginning to develop”(265). The gang Coyotes thus striving toward building an autonomous community that will help their survival. Through its struggle against the mults, it is hopeful that the gang Coyotes could construct a more feminist, egalitarian community.

Conclusion: Where Will Men Live?

With Yod's self-sacrifice and alliance with the gang Coyotes, Tikva successfully defeats Y-S and is temporarily safe from further aggression. It seems a hopeful future is approaching as both in Glop and Tikva resistance is formed. Moreover, Piercy seems to offer Safed as a positive direction for future as Malkah comments:

Yod was a mistake. You're the right path, Nili. It's better to make people in partial machines than to create machines that feel and yet are still controlled like cleaning robots. The creation of a conscious being as any kind of tool—supposed to exist only to fill our needs—is a disaster. (412).

Indeed, in her journey to Safed, Malkah fills in quite easily and comfortably. She describes the life in the community as a myriad of possibilities when she meets her host Karmia:

She is only four years younger than I am, but she is far more vigorous. I don't know if she will be my friend, my lover, or only my support here, but already we talk about her returning to Tikva with me. Her mind excites and delights me. She is extraordinarily intelligent, and her life, too, has been a twisted rope of many colors. (420)

Safed, thus, signifies a utopian direction that favors feminist concerns and in *He, She, and It* many people, such as the Coyote gangs, endeavor to fight against the patriarchal multitudes and struggle toward this direction. Just as Moylan points out, "the social and aesthetic value of such a text therefore lies in the emphasis it places on the process of reaching toward Utopia and on the values and policies required for that process to move in a progressive direction" (272). While in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, members of Mattapoissett fight for its continuous survival, in *He, She, and It*, people are struggling for a better future.

However, men in *He, She, and It* do not seem to share this view toward the future. Unlike men in Mattapoissett, who share mothering and even enjoy breast-feeding, men in *He, She, and It*, seem to undergo little change from the stereotypical patriarchal ones: Shira's former husband Josh maintains his masculine detachment; Gadi never

forfeits his desire in objectifying women; Avram is the cold, controlling patriarch who would not acknowledge Yod's status as an individual. As Haran points out, "despite the text's investment in recuperating (hetero)sexual pleasure for women, it still seems at a loss to recuperate masculinity"(96). As the women succeed in perceiving alternative social structures as well as alternative conceptions of their gender identity, men in this text do not conceive the necessity to transform their perception about patriarchal hierarchy. As Haran contends, "women are left to do the work of transforming gender relations, as the attempt to reconceptualize heterosexuality as egalitarian is not complemented with a revisioning of gender or gendered power relations"(97). The road to Safed is, thus, perilous and shadowed by the preserving, unchanging masculinity that still dominates Shira's present. It seems that while Piercy in *Woman on the Edge of Time* proposes an androgynous Mattapoissett where both sexes enjoy equal status as well as motherhood, in *He, She, and It* she fails to incorporate men in her revision of motherhood. In a way, *He, She, and It* could be seen as regressive as most people live in poverty and lack public resources to support them, while in Mattapoissett, though people have no other choice but to discard biological pregnancy, members could live a secure life without lack. And yet, we have to note that while Mattapoissett is described as a utopian ideal where Connie could not physically participate, what we have of, *He, She, and It* is Shira's present, which leaves a lot of room for improvement. What Piercy portrays in *He, She, and It*, instead of a utopian society, is a dystopian world where human beings should endeavor to build an egalitarian society and to secure their own survival. Furthermore, motherhood as represented in this text could be perceived as social practices that, instead of having a "natural" paradigm, would differ according to various sets of values, which are socially influenced. In Shira's present, not all of these sets of social values are in favor of women's welfare, as those in multis are often patriarchal.

Nevertheless, Piercy still provides us with strong female characters who bravely counter these values and assert their own choice in mothering practice. Through these characters the hope of diverse but benevolent conceptions of motherhood is retained. In contrast to Mattapoissett, where motherhood as well as reproduction is considered a communal affair, in Shira's world motherhood apparently is represented as divergent practices that defy the unitary ideal of motherhood worshipped in societies like Herland.



## Conclusion

Motherhood continues to be a main theme of feminist science fiction, which exposes predicaments women face in the contemporary society and provides imaginary solutions to these predicaments. From utopian to dystopian imagination, feminist science fiction interrogates patriarchal gender norms and seeks to offer alternative social structures where women, especially mothers, are allowed to escape patriarchal confinement, achieve autonomy, and construct a sound mother-children relationship. The critique of patriarchy these texts offer against patriarchal ideologies corresponds to that of contemporary feminist thinkers. The egalitarian and communal societies envisioned by these texts is an attack on the social structure based upon capitalism, competition, and sexual division of labor. By depicting alternative social structures other than the patriarchal one, writers of feminist science fiction also portray alternative psychological development that would not reproduce internalization of sexual roles that Chodorow observes in our contemporary society. On the other hand, the abolishment of the boundary between public and private sphere also coheres with Rich's criticism of the domestication of women. And the communal motherhood that assists individual mothers adheres to Dally's appeal for social support to mothers.

Therefore, these societies could be taken as experimental solutions writers of feminist science fiction offers to disrupt patriarchal ideologies and to tackle those quandaries women in the contemporary society often encounter. Gilman's *Herland* could be seen as a literary experiment that claims once men disappear, women could stand on their own. Gilman's feminist separatism affirms that motherhood is a social practice that differs from one society to another, and that in a society without men, motherhood, instead of a burden on women, could be a gift. Depicting Mattapoissett as an androgynous society, Piercy advocates that motherhood as a patriarchal institution

would produce unhappy mothers. Furthermore, by depicting men who enjoy motherhood, Piercy denies motherhood as a biological instinct. *He, She, and It* further illustrates the contrast between a patriarchal culture and a non-competitive one and the necessity to reform. More importantly, these three texts illustrate the change of conception of motherhood as well as ideal social structures in feminist science fiction. Gilman's *Herland* is a unitary society that defines women as happy mothers as long as men's oppression is abolished. Although it is a society beneficial for mothers, women in *Herland* could not be anything other than mothers. *Mattapoissett* is a society that begins to acknowledge personal voices and conflicts. Although motherhood in *Mattapoissett* is a communal institution as everyone, without choice, is born from a machine breeder, members of this community are tolerant of others' differences and willing to communicate when conflicts emerge. Such respect for individual will is what is behind their practice of motherhood as mothers in *Mattapoissett*, male and female alike, allow their children to choose their own name and respect them as adults after they complete the rite of passage. In *He, She, and It*, the narrative does not depict a single utopian society but rather portrays multiple communities with various value systems. In this diverse world, motherhood is not a must for women and there is no best way for mothering. The way of mothering differs from place to place and even from person to person. From the unitary *Herland* to the multiple *He, She, and It*, it is apparent that feminist science fiction undergoes tremendous transformation.

Although the conceptions of motherhood are different in these three texts, they altogether exemplify the dialectic relationship between patriarchal ideologies and feminist values. In *Herland*, the different reactions of the three male visitors to *Herland* values illustrate that not all men would welcome these good strong mothers. Besides men like Jeff and Van, who embrace *Herland* values, there are men like Terry, who objectifies women and takes *Herlanders* as preys rather than autonomous

individuals. In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Connie's entirely different experiences in her present time and in Mattapoissett reinforce the contrast between a patriarchal society and a feminist one. To fight for Mattapoissett, Connie chooses to murder those male scientists who victimize the patients. In *He, She, and It*, the opposition between multis and non-oppressive communities, such as freetowns and the Glop, portrays the aggressiveness of patriarchy and the resistance against it. The opposition between patriarchal ideologies and feminist values demonstrates not only the necessity to reform patriarchy but also that, instead of a once and for all remedy, it takes incessant efforts to fight against patriarchal oppression and to struggle for women's freedom. Women in these three texts all endeavor to challenge patriarchal norms but their task is never finished. In *Herland*, Elladore leaves with Van to the outer, bi-sexual world. In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Connie is incarcerated for her whole life for the murder she commits. In *He, She, and It*, the multi Y-S is defeated but there are other multis that will annex Tikva and other communities once they have chance. Nevertheless, it does not mean that these three texts end pessimistically. On the contrary, these texts, with their open endings, reveal that the future is always hopeful as long as we do not submit to patriarchy.

These three texts also demonstrate the feminist attitude toward technologies. Unlike feminist utopian texts that take technologies as symbols of patriarchal oppression, these three texts embrace technologies. These texts, echoing Balsamo, seek to expose that technologies never transcend social values and are in fact ideology-ridden. Therefore, although technologies could be and often are employed in the reality to oppress and circumscribe women, it is also possible for the practice of technologies to be utilized according to feminist values and in favor of women's needs, as is shown in these texts. Herlanders have automobile machines, in Mattapoissett people utilize technologies to relieve people of daily chores, and in *He,*

*She, and It* women use technologies to enhance physical ability. Like motherhood, the application of technologies is also a social practice influenced by cultural norms. Thus, what is important is not to discard all technologies but to utilize them in favor of women. As Helen Merrick contends, “we should take seriously the stories about science told in feminist SF texts, which envisage social, cultural, and discursive formations that constitute new narratives of gender, feminism, and the sciences”(226). The interaction between technologies, science fiction, and feminism deserve further notice. We need to pay more attention to how technologies influence our notions of gender identity and how such influence is represented in feminist science fiction.





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