Articulating the Elsewhere: Utopia in Contemporary Feminist Dystopias

Thesis submitted for a Ph.D. degree from the Department of English Studies, University of Strathclyde.

Ildney de Fátima Souza Cavalcanti

August 1999

Declaration of Author's Rights

Abstract

By examining the relationships between literary texts and theories, feminism and utopianism, this thesis reads some contemporary feminist critical dystopias. It is situated within a developing interest, in the field of utopian studies, both in the literary dystopian subgenre and in its radical potential for social critique. I argue that these fictions offer a privileged cultural space for paradoxical manifestations of feminist utopianisms, aiming to highlight the utopian strategies manifested in them. The first part of the study critically revises Ernst Bloch's utopianist thought, shows the possible alignments between his work and a feminist reading perspective, and elaborates on a way of reading which brings together Bloch's utopianism, narrative semiotics (theorized by Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva), and feminist formulations of utopian "elsewheres". The second part contains close readings of feminist dystopias which succeed in uncovering manifestations of utopian "elsewheres": the representation of utopian space/time in Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* and Doris Lessing's *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five*; the reconfiguration of the quest pattern in Suzy Mckee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World, Motherlines*, and *The Furies*; and the (a-)linguistic utopianisms in Lisa Tuttle's "The Cure", Suzette Elgin's *Native Tongue* and *The Judas Rose*, and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The juxtaposition of such utopian patterns is demonstrated in Margaret Elphinstone's *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight*. My analyses also consider feminist theoretical work on cultural constructions of spatiality, sexual/political separatism, reversal of sexually-polarized power relations, and (meta)linguistic issues. Although this study examines texts written from 1974 to 1994, the bibliography includes fictions published between 1967 and 1998, covering three decades of feminist dystopias. This acts to contextualize this writing within a wider frame, and offers further evidence that the dystopian genre constitutes a major form of expression of contemporary women's utopian desires and hopes.

Resumo

Ao examinar as relações entre textos e teorias literárias, feminismo e utopianismo, esta tese lê as distopias críticas feministas contemporâneas. Ela situa-se num interesse crescente, no campo de estudos da utopia, tanto no subgênero da distopia quanto no seu potencial radical para crítica social. Eu argumento que estas ficções oferecem um espaço cultural privilegiado para manifestações de formas paradoxais de utopianismos feministas, e tenho por objetivo realçar as estratégias utópicas nelas figuradas. A primeira parte do estudo revisa criticamente o pensamento utopianista de Ernst Bloch, aponta possíveis alinhamentos entre este corpus teórico e uma perspectiva político-feminista de leitura, e elabora um instrumental de leitura através da combinação do utopianismo de Bloch, da semiótica da narrativa (teorizada por Roland Barthes e Julia Kristeva), e de formulações feministas acerca de um "outro lugar" utópico. A segunda parte contem leituras de distopias feministas que sucedem em apontar as manifestações de tais espaços utópicos: a representação do espaço/tempo utópico em *Body of Glass* de Marge Piercy e em *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* de Doris Lessing; a reconfiguração da estrutura narrativa da busca em *Walk to the End of the World*, *Motherlines*, e *The Furies*, de Suzy Charnas; e os utopianismos (a-)linguísticos em "The Cure", de Lisa Tuttle, *Native Tongue* e *The Judas Rose*, de Suzette Elgin, e *The Handmaid's Tale*, de Margaret Atwood. A justaposição dos modelos utópicos observados é demonstrada em *The Incomer* e *A Sparrow's Flight*, de Margaret Elphinstone. As minhas análises também consideram o pensamento teórico feminista a respeito de construções culturais de espacialidade, separatismo político-sexual, inversão de estruturas de poder polarizadas sexualmente, e questões (meta)linguísticas. Apesar de o presente estudo examinar textos publicados entre 1974 e 1994, a bibliografia inclui narrativas publicadas entre 1967 e 1998, cobrindo três décadas de distopias feministas. Isto objetiva contextualizar essa produção escrita de forma mais ampla, e oferece evidência de que esse subgênero literário constitui, para autoras contemporâneas, uma importante forma de expressão de desejos e esperanças utópicos.

Acknowledgements

Como poderia falar-lhes eu duma ilha desconhecida, se não a conheço. (José Saramago, "O Conto da Ilha Desconhecida")

Chapter One

Introduction: A Descent into Contemporary Women's Dystopias

PART I - ERNST BLOCH'S UTOPIANISM, FEMINISM, AND WOMEN'S DYSTOPIAS

Chapter Two

Utopia Revisited: Ernst Bloch and the Principle of Hope

Chapter Three

Ernst Bloch, Feminist Utopianism, and the Feminist Dystopia

PART II - JOURNEYING THROUGH DYSTOPIA

Chapter Four

Exploring the Utopian Space/time: Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*

Chapter Five

In Search of Utopia: Suzy McKee Charnas's Holdfast Series and the Feminist Quest

Chapter Six

Utopias of/f Language: Lisa Tuttle's "The Cure", Suzette H. Elgin's *Native Tongue* and *The Judas Rose* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale.*

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: Leaving Dystopia

Chapter One

Introduction: A Descent into Contemporary Women's Dystopias

> [T]here's no other way of reaching the Paradise where you wish to go. Therefore you will go to the very end of Hell before taking the road to Limbo from the far side, and only then will you be able to proceed towards the goal to which you aspire. (Manastabal, the guide, Monique Wittig's *Across the Acheron*)[1]
>
> Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate. (Inscription above the gate of Hell, Dante's *Inferno*)[2]

I. Introduction

Published roughly seven centuries apart, the texts from which the fragments above were taken map their contemporary realities by means of an allegory of hell. Monique Wittig's revision of Dante's *Inferno* significantly substitutes patriarchy for the orders represented by the state and the church in the medieval text. Another major difference is the presence of hope in Wittig's text, manifested in the promise of a paradise to be reached, of a "goal to aspire to", where none existed in the former. These revisionary elements (which incorporate negative critique and positive projection) and the speculative mode of Wittig's text allow us to place *Across the Acheron* as representative of the fictions I will examine in this study: the feminist critical dystopias.

The feminist dystopias portray patriarchal "hells" of oppression, discrimination, and violence against women, thus mapping our contemporary social environment. Their nature is very ambiguous. On one level, these fictions offer an antidote to the banalization of misogyny, which still constitutes a pervasive evil in our society at the turn of the century and the millennium.[3] In other words, they bring patriarchal values and attitudes which in most cases pass unnoticed (because they have undergone a process of banalization) into full view. The questioning of patriarchal values and attitudes is brought into effect by the exaggeration of the power unbalance between the sexes, an exaggeration which indicates the literary closeness

---

[1] London: Peter Owen, 1987: 29, translation of *Virgile, Non* (1985).
[2] Canto III.9. Among the many English translations of this line, the one that has become a cultural marker is "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here." In my 1993 edition, C.H. Sisson has opted for "No room for hope, when you enter this place."
[3] I borrowed this notion of the "banality of evil" from the philosopher Hannah Arendt. Cf. her 1963 *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.

between dystopias and satire. Another common factor is the critical principle motivating both.[4] There is, however, a problematic edge to a reading of the feminist dystopian texts as a feminist critique of patriarchy. For, from an opposite angle, they could indeed be read as 'anti-feminist' to the extent that they re-stage women's experience of oppression in an androcentric society. In this perspective, the feminist dystopias risk promoting the banalization of misogyny I mentioned above. This was perhaps the major reason underlying feminist readers' early resistance to the genre.[5] The past tense is used advisedly here, as there is now evidence of change in their initial negative response.

Such contrasting possibilities underlie my fascination with the genre, and indeed partially triggered the present project. Being a subject who defines herself as a feminist and a literary critic, I found in the ambiguous affective responses provoked by the feminist dystopias a thread worth pursuing further. These fictions positioned me, on one hand, as a reader between the polarized experiences of profound pain and disgust caused by the presentation of the male-centred, sadistic orders contained in them, and of a form of pleasure whose cause was not so easily pinpointed on the other. Indeed, I have found in Patrocinio Schweikart's elaborations on the bifurcated response of female (feminist) readers to canonical male texts an analogy to my own process of reading the feminist dystopia. Clearly drawing from the work of Fredric Jameson, she explains that

> *certain* (not all) male texts merit a dual hermeneutic: a negative hermeneutic that discloses their complicity with patriarchal ideology, and a positive hermeneutic that recuperates the utopian moment - the authentic kernel - from which they draw a significant portion of their emotional power. (1986: 535)[6]

It is not my purpose to discuss the problematic and obscure notion of a textual "authentic kernel". I find Schweikart's argument important because it rests on a dual response from female (feminist) readers, and it aptly describes my own reaction to the feminist dystopia. The fact that the process she describes applies to readings of *male-authored* texts makes the reading process of the feminist dystopias even more complicated, to the extent that their "complicity with patriarchal ideology" is so overtly exposed.[7] Besides adding to their textual

---

[4] Concerning the formal relations between utopian literature and satire, see chapters one and two of Robert Elliott's *The Shape of Utopia* (1970). Mark Hillegas's study dealing specifically with *dystopias* explores their satirical edge (1967).

[5] I will address this issue again in the context of a discussion of feminist readers' response to Suzy McKee Charnas's fictions in Chapter Five below, p. 102.

[6] "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading", in Warhol & Herndl eds. 1991: 525-550. I wish to thank Margaret Elphinstone for referring me back to this important essay.

[7] That the images of female victimization and male brutality rendered in the feminist dystopias can implicate women readers in arguably pleasurable masochistic voyeurism is a point that exceeds my approach as female feminist reader. I consider myself to be part of an interpretive community who are aware of the politics of

sophistication (as in most feminist fictions this complicity tends to be obscured), this complicity must be accounted for in the reading process. Now with regard to the positive hermeneutic, the narrative pleasures which engaged me seemed to originate in what was actually pictured in the texts as instances of women's resistance to the oppressive orders, as well as in an elusive and textually obscure element, a narrative 'blank space' anticipatory of social possibilities which are radically other. Both fictional elements can be defined as utopian because they encode women's dissatisfaction with the status quo and their search for an alternative space, a good otherness. In addition to this, the existence of the feminist dystopias in itself contradicts any hopelessness to the extent that the texts manifest social acts of liberation which are both generated by and directed against a male-centred culture.

In *Across the Acheron*, Wittig, the author/protagonist, hears from her guide that she will have to reach "the very end of Hell" as the only possible way of getting to "the Paradise where [she] wish[es] to go".[8] Although less allegorical than Wittig's, most of the women's narratives mentioned here make use of the metaphor of "Hell" in their description of the terror and cruelty which characterize the male-dominated dystopic spaces they portray. And even when the analogy is not overt, in the dystopias the patriarchal orders are depicted as infernal machines.[9] I want to propose an exploratory journey through contemporary women's "Hells" in search for glimpses of their "Paradises".

II. On Feminism, Feminist Criticism, and Revisionary Writing

This exploration implies the activity of reading and interpreting literary works from a perspective best characterized as critical and informed by feminism. A brief discussion of issues relating to feminism and feminist literary criticism will help clarify my approach. Feminism has become an umbrella term which encompasses a diversity of trends. Although these may sometimes represent contradictory and conflicting views, which became more visible with the upsurge of many voices claiming differences among feminists in the 1980's and 1990's, feminists do share some fundamental assumptions. One such shared view is the political preoccupation with social life, a pragmatic concern which characterizes the movement.

---

reading (and its liberatory aims) and concerned with the end of women's oppression by men.
[8] Cf. the epigraph above.
[9] In the context of a discussion of the dystopian critical principle, Bryan Alexander (1998) comments on "the infernal" as a conceptual category in Benjamin's, Adornos's and Jameson's analysis of modernity. The novelty introduced by the feminist dystopias is that the rhetoric of "the infernal machine" informs the critique of patriarchy.

In feminist literary studies, the pioneer works *A Room of One's Own* (1929) by Virginia Woolf and *The Second Sex* (1949) by Simone de Beauvoir - landmark studies in twentieth-century feminist thought - never lose sight of the relations between textual and social practices. And although feminist literary criticism and critical practice has undergone much development, sophistication and change since the publication of Woolf's and de Beauvoir's analyses, its focus is still centred on the intersections between sexual, textual and political currents, as summarized by Robyn Warhol and Diane Herndl:

> Feminist critics generally agree that the oppression of women is a fact of life, that gender leaves its traces in literary texts and on literary history, and that feminist literary criticism plays a worthwhile part in the struggle to end oppression in the world outside of texts. (1991: x)

And reinforced by Gerardine Meaney:

> The nature of [the] links [of feminist scholarship] with feminist activism endows feminist criticism with a vitality which itself gives to feminist criticism and women's studies the only kind of cohesion acceptable to it. Beneath the intellectual diversity there is a common, though not a single, political purpose. The community of feminist scholarship is not achieved under the sign of denial of difference, but through the activation of difference into political and intellectual energy. (1993 : 2)

Such connection to the 'real world' brought about by feminism has caused a new impulse in literary studies. (Cf. the metaphors employed by Meaney: "vitality", "energy".)

This study is situated at the crossroads between the historical oppression of women, the feminist literary dystopias, and the political agenda of feminist literary criticism. The importance of writing as a deliberate instrument in the feminist struggle to overturn a patriarchal history and order is irrefutable.[10] To the extent that the writing of the feminist dystopias is motivated by the authors' feminist desire for an elsewhere, the texts are in themselves "acts of hope" (following Isabel Allende's use of the phrase),[11] as I remarked above. The stories I will analyze deliberately narrativize this history, and open up spaces for

---

[10] Hélène Cixous has perhaps most famously put the case in "The Laugh of the Medusa": "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies - for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement." (1975, in Marks and de Courtivron eds. 1980: 245).

[11] Allende explains: "I feel that writing is an act of hope, a sort of communion with our fellow [wo]men. The writer of good will carries a lamp to illuminate the dark corners. Only that, nothing more - a tiny beam of light to show some hidden aspect of reality, to help decipher and understand it and thus to initiate, if possible, a change in the conscience of some readers" ("Writing as an Act of Hope", in Zinsser ed. 1989: 39- 63, pp. 48-49). Most of the women authors of the dystopian works discussed in more detail below have, in one form or another, expressed their feminist-political concerns: cf. Atwood, quoted by Philips 1986, and in conversation with Emma Tennant 1987; Charnas, in interview with Cavalcanti 1998; Elgin 1987, in *Women's Studies* 14: 175-181; Elphinstone, interviewed by Babinec 1995; and Piercy 1989 "Active in Time and History", in Zinsser

active transformation. We will see below that, at times, these spaces are symbolized in the dystopian fictions by acts of narration, which double the women authors' own subjective positions, while offering a commentary about self-reflexivity and hope. By reading, and writing about, these texts, I intend to reinforce their liberatory aims. After all, it is through the readers that literature 'acts' upon the world.

Most markedly starting with the feminist wave of the 1960's and 1970's, an upsurge of literary works by women authors who reveal an awareness of the power politics inherent in the act of writing has paralleled the feminist activism, theory, and literary criticism. This awareness was strongly voiced by poet and critic Adrienne Rich, who advocated, in a statement which has resonated since its articulation in the early 1970's, a revisionist attitude towards literature. She views "writing as re-vision", and defines it as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" in the effort to create something new, and as "an act of survival" (1971: 167).[12] In this passage, her concern with tradition and the canon is apparent, an aspect she expands in the same essay: "We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us" (167-68). Even though the last passage describes a crucial contradiction so far unresolved by feminist literature and criticism, it still retains its original force, which seems to lie precisely in the tension it displays.

The feminist rewriting/revision of the canon has embraced several literary text-types, which have included the canonical utopias, of which Plato's *The Republic* (c. 370 BC) and Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) are often quoted as representative works.[13] Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) illustrates a feminist revision of the genre in its eutopian[14] mode with the portrayal of a "good place" for women. This text not only offers a critique of its contemporary patriarchal society, but it also exposes the pseudo-universality of previous literary utopias. Feminist dystopian narratives also constitute a profoundly critical and revisionary mode in writing, and this is doubly so. They revision a male-centred literary tradition, as in Wittig's revision of the previous male-authored text, which partially inscribes their feminism. In addition to this feminist revision, *dystopias* as a literary genre emerged in response to the literary eutopias (and in the context of the so-called crisis of modernity which questioned the tenets of utopian thought). Therefore, besides critiquing contemporary society

---

ed. 1989: 89-123.
[12] "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", in Rich 1993: 166-177.
[13] *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405) by Christine de Pizan has generally been neglected by literary criticism and histories of utopian writing.
[14] Terms which are relevant for my purposes and which are specific to the field of utopian studies are explained

and revisioning a male-authored, and male-centred, literary tradition, the feminist dystopian fictions which will be considered here also problematize earlier feminist versions of the women's "good place", like Gilman's. Further discussion of the critical dystopian revisionism of the traditional literary utopia is contained in section III below.

Utopias, fantasy, and science fiction are some of the popular genres which have been revisited by women authors more recently (Cranny-Francis 1990). Generic terminology inevitably generates confusion, as it is structurally impossible to establish clear-cut distinctions between the contemporary feminist fictions. Some of the feminist dystopias mentioned below have been grouped together under categories as diverse as utopian fiction, speculative fiction, science fiction, feminist fabulation, and the fantastic (Armitt 1991 and 1996, Bammer 1991, Barr 1987 and 1993, Bartkowski 1989, Lefanu 1988, Wolmark 1994). The diversity in terminology and the generic overlappings are due to the fact that, as widely acknowledged by now, the types of narratives incorporated under the labels above have become diffuse. With the continued influence of poststructuralist and postmodernist thought, the 1990's have witnessed a critical move in theories of speculative fictions towards 'wider' categories (Barr 1993; Armitt 1991; Armitt 1996).[15] Another element that complicates categorization is the merging of utopian and dystopian tendencies in contemporary speculative fictions, which I will discuss in more detail in section III below. While literary critics have correctly stressed the blurring of generic boundaries and I am aware of the structural limitations inherent in any generic mappings, this study is premised on the assumption that the fictions examined here can be grouped together as "feminist critical dystopias". I believe it is possible to do so without falling into a reductionist attitude concerning genre.

III. The Feminist Critical Dystopia

Bringing the women's narratives together under the category of feminist critical dystopias implies the idea of a distinct genre. In spite of the rejection of such a notion in contemporary criticism, I tend to agree with Helen Carr that genre is "a framework that is always there to some degree" (1989: 6). In fact, a 'sense of genre' as such is perceptible even in the writings of the 'anti-genre' critics I mentioned above: they cover certain cultural forms

---

in the glossary at the end of this thesis.

[15] Marleen Barr coined the expression "feminist fabulation" "as an umbrella term that includes science fiction, fantasy, utopian literature, and mainstream literature (written by both women and men) that critiques patriarchal fictions." (1993: 12); and Lucie Armitt offers a critique of Todorov's definition of the fantastic as a genre. For her, rather than a genre, the fantastic in literature "is more usefully seen as an impulse, or an interrogative drive" (1996: 33).

whose terrain can be mapped out, or circumscribed, in generic terms. Genre concerns cultural codes and relationships, and crosses the cultural activities of writing, publishing, marketing, and reading literature. It can be viewed as an unwritten contract uniting writers and readers, which has to do with certain (at times overtly stated) associations and readership expectations. All this is mediated by marketing practices within a capitalist context. I approach genre in a dynamic way, as a set of cultural relationships which involve the repetition and/or the redrawing of conventions of the writing, marketing and reception of literature, and hope to avoid rigid notions and boundaries. Thus, the definition of the feminist critical dystopia that follows is to be understood as provisional and contingent.[16]

To start with the first element of the term, the fictions I have chosen to study are *feminist*. Here I do not mean that the novels are markedly feminist in any structural or aesthetic way. Feminist literary criticism has evolved past the belief in an inherently feminist aesthetic. Following Rita Felski, I believe that grouping of women's narratives together has to do with "the recent cultural phenomenon of women's explicit self-identification as an oppressed group, which is in turn articulated in literary texts in the exploration of gender-specific concerns centered around the problem of female identity" (1989: 1). Bearing in mind the extent to which gender oppression crucially functions as the source of conflict in the feminist dystopias, it can be argued that this articulation finds in the genre one of its most striking cultural manifestations. It would be misleading, though, to assume that all feminist dystopias articulate and express gender oppression to a similar degree. For instance, while Suzy Mckee Charnas's, Suzette Elgin's and Margaret Atwood's dystopias construct fictional worlds where women's subordination to men is thoroughly pervasive, Marge Piercy's, Doris Lessing's, Lisa Tuttle's, and Margaret Elphinstone's stories render a less homogeneous, more nuanced picture of gender imbalance. Although their speculations about gender and power vary in intensity and approach, they all deal with this issue, a factor which marks in the

---

[16] The diversity of the feminist dystopias listed in my bibliography pulls against any conclusive boundary demarcations. Although, for my purposes, they are placed under the umbrella of feminist critical dystopias, these fictions are in most cases a hybrid mode in writing, and some could as easily be claimed as, for instance, modern fairy tales (e.g. Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains* and *The Passion of New Eve*); thrillers (e.g. Anna Kavan's *Ice*, Emma Tennant's *The Last of the Country House Murders*, and Elizabeth Wilson's *The Lost Time Café*); science fiction (e.g. Doris Lessing's *Canopus in Argos* series and Janice Galloway's "A Continuing Experiment"; heroic sagas (e.g. Suzy McKee Charnas's *Holdfast* series and Elisabeth Vonarburgh's *The Silent City* and *The Maerlande Chronicles*); or romance (e.g. Anne McCaffrey's *The Ship Who Sang* and Caroline Forbes's "The Needle on Full"). Raffaella Baccolini finds in some of these generic intersections themselves the locus of opposition as well as the opening for utopian elements in feminist dystopias, by examining the encounters between the latter and the epistolary novel, the diary, and the historical novel. Cf. "Gender and genre in the Feminist Critical Dystopias of Katherine Burdekin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler" forthcoming in Marleen Barr ed. *Future Females, The Next Generation: New Voices and Velocities in Feminist Science Fiction Criticism*.

feminist dystopias the connections with our own contemporary androcentric culture, giving them, to use Suzy McKee Charnas's words, a "foothold in reality".[17]

To the extent that they offer a critique of patriarchy, feminist dystopias are an intrinsically *critical* genre. In addition to this meaning of the term, I also use it in relation to the notion of a "critical utopianism", developed by Tom Moylan, which I will discuss in more detail here as it crucially informs my own definition of the feminist dystopias. Moylan is among the critics who have dealt with the merging of positive and negative elements in utopias and dystopias.[18] In his important *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (1986), he stresses the revival of a utopian impulse in literature in the late 1960's and the 70's, after the prevalence of the literary dystopias in the first half of the twentieth century. Writing in the 1960's, George Kateb and Mark Hillegas had already observed a revival in literary utopianism, which Moylan examines in detail. He relates this new wave of utopianism to the re-emergence of an oppositional culture "deeply infused with the politics of autonomy, democratic socialism, ecology, and especially feminism" (1986: 11), and points out a new direction in utopian writing:

> The new novels negated the negation of utopia by the forces of twentieth-century history: the subversive imaging of utopian society and the radical negativity of dystopian perception is preserved; while the systematizing boredom of the traditional utopia and the cooptation of utopia by modern structures is destroyed. Thus, utopian writing in the 70's was saved by its own destruction and transformation into the "critical utopia". (1986: 10)

He finds in the works of Russ, Le Guin, Piercy[19] and Delany examples of the "critical utopia", a renewed mode in utopian writing which challenges, reverses and deconstructs the simplistic binary opposition between literary eutopias and dystopias. According to Moylan, the innovations introduced with this new wave of utopian narratives occur at the iconic level (presentation of the alternative society), the discrete level (presentation of the protagonist) and at the level of generic form (textual self-awareness). Among these innovative elements, the latter appears to be most instrumental in informing the "critical utopias" with an "awareness

---

[17] Interview with Cavalcanti 1998: 15.

[18] Critical works along similar lines include Baggesen 1987, Penley 1986 (in Kuhn ed. 1990), and Wolmark 1994. Baggesen expresses discontent with the simplistic opposition between the utopian and the dystopian modes in writing, and suggests a distinction between "utopian" and "dystopian" pessimism. Penley coined the term "critical dystopia" to define a futuristic narrative mode which "locates the origins of future catastrophe in decisions about technology, warfare and social behaviour that are being made today" and which requires more complex responses from readers when faced with issues such as the exploration of subjectivities beyond the human/machine dichotomy (1990: 116). Wolmark's work contextualizes the merging of utopian and dystopian elements from a perspective that is more informed by feminism and the contradictory subjective positions available in a postmodern world.

[19] Chapter 6 of Moylan's *Demand the Impossible* examines Piercy's *Woman On the Edge of Time* (1976).

of the limitations of the utopian tradition, so that these texts reject utopia as blueprint while preserving its dream" (1986: 10).

Moylan's theoretical formulations have profoundly influenced studies on literary utopianisms. Although the usage of the term "critical" in relation to literary utopias may appear redundant at first (after all, all utopias result from a critique of our present conditions), in Moylan's conception it also implies the element of textual self-criticism. For my own purposes here, I have appropriated his previous theorization in my formulation of the feminist critical dystopia, with "critical" referring to three factors: the negative critique of patriarchy brought into effect by the dystopian principle; the textual self-awareness not only in generic terms with regard to a previous utopian literary tradition (in its feminist and non-feminist manifestations), but also concerning its own constructions of utopian "elsewheres"; and "in the nuclear sense of the *critical mass* required to make the necessary explosive reaction" (Moylan 1986: 10). The last factor is understood in this thesis in the sense that the feminist dystopias are in themselves highly critical cultural forms of expression (for the two reasons pointed out above), which in turn may have a crucial effect in the formation or consolidation of a specifically critico-feminist public readership.[20]

With regard to the last term, *dystopia* is understood here as a subgenre of literary utopianism (Sargent 1994). In this context, I follow Anne Cranny-Francis's definition of the *dystopias* as literary works featuring "the textual representation of a society apparently worse than the writer's/reader's own" (1990: 125);[21] and find her use of "apparently" relevant, insofar as it hints at the ultimately impossible task of deciding whether any society portrayed in fiction is worse than our own. Despite the impossibility of devising the parameters which enable any conclusive judgements, one can reasonably argue that the narratives referred to as feminist dystopias here render pictures of imaginary spaces which most contemporary readers would describe as "bad places" for women[22] because they are characterized by the suppression of female desire and by the institution of gender-inflected oppressive orders.

I stated above that, in terms of narrative technique, the feminist dystopias paint an exaggerated picture of the existing power relations between the sexes. Seen through different lenses, it can be argued that in the process of constructing their fictional worlds, these texts

---

[20] Baccolini's forthcoming essay (mentioned in note 16 above) also elaborates on the notion of the critical dystopia, but she does so from a perspective that emphasizes the blending of different genre conventions as adding to its critical dimension. My approach differs from hers in that I favour a combination of factors.

[21] Similarly, Tom Moylan defines the dystopia as "the narrative that images a society worse than the existing one" (1986: 9).

[22] I borrowed this term from Elisabeth Mahoney (1994), who usefully coined the expression "bad place narratives" in her study of the feminist dystopias.

effect what Fredric Jameson has termed "world-reduction", i.e. an "attenuation in which the sheer teeming multiplicity of what exists, of what we call reality, is deliberately thinned and weeded out through an operation of radical abstraction and simplification" (1975: 223). This "world-reduction" is observed in terms of the feminist dystopian focus on gender power relations, the main catalyst of narrative conflict. Such an "excision of empirical reality", to use Jameson's apt metaphor, is accompanied by an inverse technique: the compression, or condensation, of forms of gender-polarized oppression belonging to different histories and geographies into certain fictional space-times. My argument is that these particular imaginative strategies, more easily achieved in speculative fictional modes, amount to a feminist political stance and a radical critique of empirical power relations.

Although the scope of this study is limited to texts written from 1974 to 1994, covering two decades of feminist dystopias, this mode of writing by women authors can be traced back, of course, to a much earlier date. As a distinct genre, the literary dystopia appeared at the turn of the twentieth century (Hillegas 1967, Aldridge 1983, Kumar 1987)[23] and acquired a feminist twist in texts like Charlotte Haldane's *Man's World* (1927) and Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937).[24] The late 1960's witnessed the publication of much dystopian writing by women prior to the speculative literature which accompanied second-wave feminism and which became more visible from the 1970's. Anna Kavan's *Ice* and Kate Wilhelm's "Baby You Were Great" were first published in 1967, while Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains*, Suzette Haden Elgin's "For the Sake of Grace", Pamela Kettle's *The Day of the Women*, Doris Lessing's *The Four-Gated City*, Marya Mannes *They*, Anne McCaffrey's *The Ship Who Sang* (based on a 1961 short story), and Alice Sheldon's "The Snows are Melted, the Snows are Gone" all came to print in 1969. In very different ways, these texts portray future "bad places" for women and reveal, to varying degrees, a consciousness perhaps better defined as proto-feminist when seen in relation to the women's dystopias of the 70's, 80's and 90's, among which are the texts I have chosen to analyze: Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*, Doris Lessing's *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five*, Suzy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World*, *Motherlines* and *The*

---

[23] Alexandra Aldridge's "Origins of Dystopia: *When the Sleeper Wakes* and *We*", in Erlich and Dunn eds. 1983: 63-84. Considering the influence of H.G. Wells's works on the dystopian tradition to come, including Zamyatin's *We* (1924), Mark Hillegas refers to E.M. Forster's "The Machine Stops" (1909) as "the first full-scale emergence of the twentieth-century anti-utopia" not only because it is rich in the themes and imagery earlier used by Wells, but also because it attacks the former's vision of utopia (1967: 82). Concerning the record of English usage of the term "dystopia", see Köester 1983, who found evidence of its use by Baptist Noel Turner in 1782. In literary criticism, the term appears in the 1940's (cf. Doxiadis 1966).

[24] See Elizabeth Russell's "The Loss of the Feminine Principle" (in Armitt ed. 1991: 15-28) for a discussion of both feminist dystopias. Important bibliographical sources for dystopian fictions are Clarke 1978 and Sargent

Furies, Lisa Tuttle's "The Cure", Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* and *The Judas Rose*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Margaret Elphinstone's *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight*.

IV. A Myth and a Figure

I will continue to draw the contours of the feminist critical dystopia by speculating on the genre in relation to a Greek myth and a figure of speech. The myth is that of Pandora, whose name means "the all-gifted", because this mortal woman was endowed with beauty and other qualities by the god/esses who participated in her creation under the orders of Zeus. The story, as it reaches us, can be traced to Hesiod's texts,[25] which tell us of that god's vengeful action against Prometheus in sending this woman as gift to Epimetheus (and to all mortals). Pandora carried a box, or a jar, containing all the ills of the world, which were spread, as she opened the box, thus causing the downfall of the race of mortal men: "Only Hope remained there in an unbreakable home within under the rim of the great jar, and did not fly out at the door" (*Works and Days*: 9). The anti-feminist content of this myth was observed by Robert Graves, according to whom Hesiod probably adapted earlier versions of other 'casket stories' (of the Earth-goddess Rhea and of the princess Phyllis, for instance) to suit his misogynistic purpose.[26] However positive or enigmatic the earlier meanings of the tale, those are lost, and the Hesiodic version which blames a woman for the fall of men was, not surprisingly, the one to acquire cultural currency and to be passed on, as evidenced nowadays by the negative connotations implicit in the colloquial use of the expression "Pandora's box".

Simplified in Hesiod's version, the story of Pandora bears a mythical excess. Feminists have, of course, appropriated the powerful imagery contained in it, creating a positive counter-myth. As an illustration, the definitions under *Pandora* in Kramarae and Treichler's *A Feminist Dictionary* (interestingly published by the Pandora Press, whose very naming signals the shift in meaning effected by feminism) indicate women's revisionary myth-making by means of the restoration of the earlier, positive symbolism of the Earth-goddess, as well as the emphasis on the invaluable action of making information available and on the importance of introducing disruption in (thus causing the destruction of) a male-centred order (1985: 319). The revision of the myth also took fictional shape. In *Always Coming Home*,

---

1988; specifically for women's dystopian fictions, see Relf 1991a and Mahoney 1994.

[25] *Works and Days* and *Theogony*, in *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*. Cf. pp. 5-9, 121-125.

[26] The content of Rhea's casket has positive connotations, and that of Phyllis's remains unknown. Cf. Robert Graves's *The Greek Myths*, 1955: 148-149, 711, 714.

Ursula Le Guin shows an angrily ironic Pandora/narrator who is aware of narrative, and of history, and of her own subject position inextricably tied to both:

> All I did was open the box Prometheus left with me. I knew what would come out of it! I know about the Greeks bearing gifts! I know about war and plague and famine and holocaust, indeed I do. Am I not a daughter of the people who enslaved and extirpated the peoples of three continents? Am I not a sister of Adolf Hitler and Anne Frank? Am I not a citizen of the State that fought the first nuclear war? Have I not eaten, drunk, and breathed poison all my life, like the maggot that lives and breeds in shit? Do you take me for innocent, my fellow maggot, colluding Reader? I knew what was in that box my brother-in-law left here. (1986: 147-148)

Alongside these feminist appropriations, I find in the image of Pandora and her box/jar an analogy for the feminist dystopia. In Hesiod's version, the opening of Pandora's box allegorizes the passage from a prelapsarian utopia to the beginnings of history. The ills in the box symbolize history itself. By opening the Pandora's box of the contemporary women's dystopian narratives, ills are also put in circulation. This is so in the sense that the fictions enable the knowledge of the ills of a patriarchal history in which we, like the Pandora/narrator and implied reader in the passage above, find ourselves implicated. In the feminist dystopias I will examine, one perceives, accompanying the destructive intent concerning the patriarchal order of history as we know it, the hope manifested in the sites of resistance and the belief in an alternative pattern or arrangement. Hope, it must be remembered, is the remaining content of Pandora's box. This study aims to cast light on the utopian critique and desire at work in the contemporary dystopias, which, like Pandora's box/jar, offer the knowledge of evil but also keep the promise of a good otherness in suspension.

Besides the Pandora myth, the dystopian genre in its utopian orientation can also be thought of in relation to the rhetorical figure of catachresis. Catachresis is the figure of rhetoric which involves unusual, far-fetched metaphors. As a literary trope, it is "basic to the figures of rhetoric, since so many of them depend on deviations from 'normal' (non-poetic) usage" (Wales 1989: 57). Catachresis concerns a relation between a thing and a sign which is marked by concealed resemblances and analogies. Whereas synecdoche and metonymy follow the order of, respectively, principal and conspicuous (notable) circumstances linking names and things, catachresis is founded upon oblique relations, implying 'hidden' meanings and 'deviations' from normal usage. This figure has, from the etymological roots of the term, the connotations of 'misuse' or 'abuse' (Wales 1989). Although catachresis underlies the origins

and development of all language in a fundamental way (Foucault 1966, De Man 1978),[27] I want to hold that the feminist dystopias strongly recall this essential figure in the ontology of language.

After properly acknowledging the catachrestic nature of all language,[28] it is possible to maintain that some modes of language like literature, and, within its realm, certain specific literary forms and tropes, are more closely akin to this figure than others. Like all speculative narrative modes, the feminist dystopias are in a more 'deviant' relationship with their referents when compared with realistic (mimetic) literary forms. Without simplifying the problematics of referentiality implicit even in the most literal linguistic utterances or the most mimetic literary texts, it can be argued that, in the case of the feminist dystopias, the relationship between language and referents can only be defined in terms of non-continuity and 'deviation'. This is so to the extent that these fictions portray narrative "novums" which can be of spatio-temporal, social, sexual, technological and/or linguistic nature, as will become clear below.[29] In other words, the stories I have chosen to analyse are *overtly* catachrestic because they depict fictional realities which are, to different degrees, discontinuous with the contemporary 'real' (although such realities are drawn in relation to, and as a critique of, the world as we know it).

Another way of relating the figure of catachresis to the feminist dystopias has to do with the suspension these fictions build around the desired/able utopian object. As will be shown in the readings below, this object remains silent, ineffable, in such a way that the paradox of the "good place"/"no place" carried by the term *utopia* can be maintained. It is as if the fictional texts are composed in relation to a central absence, which is that of the utopian object. In his interesting speculations regarding another absent figure in writing, beauty as an empty object of comparison, Roland Barthes calls our attention to that "rhetorical figure which fills [the] blank in the object of comparison whose existence is altogether transferred to the language of the object to which it is compared: catachresis" (1970: 34). (Barthes is referring to the process by which beauty is rendered in language: because beauty is an 'absent figure', it exists in literature by means of indirect reference to an object of comparison, or, in other words, by means of catachresis.) Elsewhere Barthes raises a similar argument, without directly mentioning the figure of catachresis, but following the very same reasoning, when

---

[27] Michel Foucault gives an account of the development of language along the lines of three fundamental figures: synecdoche, metonymy, and catachresis (1966: 111-114). According to him language is catachrestic since literal meanings are not inherent in linguistic signs. Cf. also Paul de Man's "The Epistemology of Metaphor" in Sacks ed. 1978: 11-28.

[28] De Man aptly states that "[t]he use and abuse of language cannot be separated from each other" (1978: 19).

discussing one's failure in speaking of what one loves.[30] The point I want to stress is that utopia in the contemporary feminist dystopia resides in the realm of the ineffable, invisible, and silent, that 'space' around which the whole narrative revolves. In this sense the stories appear as extended figures of catachresis hiding utopia in their folds.[31]

V. Utopia in Dystopia

I have defined the feminist critical dystopia in relation to its contents, form and function. Feminist critical dystopias are narratives that portray, in most cases in an exaggerated way, women's oppression under patriarchy, thus provoking a cognitive response and satirical attitude with regard to our gender-polarized social environment. Recalling the myth of Pandora's box, the feminist dystopias cause the exposure of social evils and raise historical consciousness. In terms of form, the feminist dystopias are imaginative works, a subgenre of utopian literature in general, consisting of extrapolations into future worlds in which the power imbalance between the sexes reaches an extreme. Further understanding of the subgenre is made possible by looking at the feminist dystopias alongside the rhetorical figure of catachresis. Regarding their function, it was stated that these fictions offer a critique of contemporary patriarchal society by foregrounding gender oppression. In so doing, they work as an antidote to the banalization of mysogyny that characterizes our society. Accompanying the negativity of this critique, I have observed a utopian impulse, both in the form of the women characters' resistance to dystopic orders and states, and of the projection of alternative possibilities. Part of that resistance, I mentioned, lies in the very act of writing itself and the assertion of a utopian subjectivity which the text embodies. (It was also stressed that, in spite of their similarities with the feminist eutopian literary modes, the dystopia has important distinguishing traits.) The search for possible feminist utopia(s) in the dystopian fictions is a continuing element in the present undertaking. Therefore, it becomes crucial to consider what is meant by "utopia" in this context.

"Utopia" is a charged term whose history dates back to its coinage as the title of Thomas More's book about an ideal commonwealth, at the dawn of our modernity. A lengthy analysis of its semantic developments, starting in 1516 with More's composition and reaching our times, exceeds the scope of this study.[32] Ruth Levitas's is, to my knowledge, the best

---

[29] The term is borrowed from Darko Suvin (1979), and will be discussed below.
[30] Cf. "One Always Fails in Speaking of What One Loves" 1980, in Barthes 1984: 296-305.
[31] Elliott hints at the ineffability of the "good place" in his *The Shape of Utopia*: "except at the most primitive level, we lack a language and conventions for depicting man in a happy state" (1970: 120).
[32] Major studies on utopia and utopianism are Bloch 1959, Manuel & Manuel 1979, and Kumar 1987.

attempt to clarify the meanings of the term and to reconceptualize it. In *The Concept of Utopia* (1990), she sketches that diachronic history, stresses the advantages and limitations of different theorizations of utopia in terms of the interrelated categories of content, form and function,[33] and proposes, in addition to this tripartite model, a broad analytical definition of utopia as "the desire for a better way of being" (198). I wish to expand Levitas's definition, in order to incorporate the feminist slant of the texts I will be examining, in terms of addressing *women's* expression of desire for a different (better) way of being. My readings aim to locate the narrative encodings of such feminist utopian desire.

The distinction between defining dystopia in *formal terms* (i.e., as *narrative*) and utopia in *conceptual terms* (i.e., as *the expression of desire*) is crucial for my analysis. Fredric Jameson has elaborated on a distinction between dystopias and utopias as *texts*: "the dystopia is generally a narrative, which happens to a specific subject or character, whereas the Utopian text is mostly non-narrative and [...] somehow without a subject-position" (1994: 55-56). Whereas Jameson in this specific formulation is clearly referring to the classical utopian text, my argument is premised upon a distinction between the dystopia as narrative (which is on a par with Jameson's definition of the term), and utopia as the critical expression of desire which serves an anticipatory function and is manifested in the dystopic narrative. I am deliberately moving away from a notion of utopia as a literary genre, towards utopia manifested as a writing mode. In this thesis, utopia is the expression of desire manifested by means of writing and located in the workings of dystopian narrative.

One of the difficulties we encounter, as critics analyzing manifestations of utopianism, is that the notion of "utopia" has a tendency to slide into model configurations and preset goals or, the framing and/or death of desire. As Angelika Bammer so well explained in the context of a discussion about the revival of the utopian impulse by the progressive politics of the left, to which second-wave feminism directly relates,

> [t]he difficulty [...] is to sustain the concept of utopia as process. In the face of external and internal challenges to legitimate both its ends and its means, it is all too easy for even the most progressive movement to foreclose process and construct an image of utopia as historical telos. (1991: 48)

The same difficulty holds true for literary utopianism, especially in the eutopian mode. By presenting the picture of the desired/able society, the narratives tend to crystallize around a telos. And so what was intended initially to be a utopia shows its dystopic contours, because the static state is of course a dystopia. The upsurge of dystopian literature, as well as a body

---

[33] I followed these categories in the definition of the feminist critical dystopia above.

of anti-utopian theory, which has characterized our century, actually are responses to this phenomenon.

This tension between the dream of a better life and the social realization of such dream is conveyed by the term *utopia* itself as it was brilliantly and complexly coined by Thomas More: the "good place" (*eu-topos*) is, at the same time, the "no place" (*ou-topos*) signalled by the Greek etymological roots of *utopia*. In terms of artistic (re)presentations of utopia, this tension raises two issues which are crucial for my approach. First, the literary symbolic figuration of ideals precludes plot to the extent that narrative becomes impossible. In other words, it is difficult to present a picture of utopia as dynamic. (Cf. Jameson's remark above concerning the nature of the utopian text as mostly "non-narrative".)[34] Thus the importance of my emphasis, in the definition above, on *dystopia* as a dynamic narrative form, whose dynamism can be located precisely in its attempt to articulate utopia. Secondly, I argue that the structural impossibility to present the utopian "good place" directly relates to the figure of catachresis: the feminist dystopias enact the struggle of language to represent what is unrepresentable. In relation to the utopian object, the feminist critical dystopia is a 'narrative deviation' motivated by the desire to express its very object. This approach enables us to avoid the foreclosure of process and sustain the idea of utopia in a dynamic way.

In face of such a danger of foreclosure, contemporary theorizations (for instance, Moylan's "critical utopianism", Levitas's proposal of broad analytical definition introducing the element of desire, and Sargisson's feminist-oriented approach to utopianism)[35] have sought ways to ensure a renewed undertanding of utopia as process, rather than blueprint configurations. I want to construct an understanding of utopia that originates, not only in such renewed modes of utopianism, but also in the philosophical speculations that anticipate them all: the work produced by Ernst Bloch in the field of utopianism. From his writings I draw the visions of utopia which centrally inform the present readings: as critical principle, as a paradoxical figure of hope and desire, and as an anticipatory consciousness of a good otherness perceptible in cultural items. Not only does Bloch's work open up the possibility of articulating utopia in a non-teleological way, but it also suggests paradigms for textual analyses which I have updated and used in the readings below. An appropriation of Bloch's

---

[34] In the words of Peter Brooks, narrative "in general has precious little use for the simple, calm, and happy" (1984: 155).

[35] Lucy Sargisson advocates a utopianism of process, and does so from a feminist perspective: "the new (approach to) utopianism does not desire perfection but dynamism and unending process", and favours "the more difficult and slippery, openended vision which contemporary feminism utopianism represents" (1996: 230). However, Sargisson's approach, not unlike Bloch's, overlooks the differences between (and specificities of) different cultural expressions of utopianism, which occasionally results in problematic readings.

enormous philosophical system has, of course, to come to terms with difficulties of different orders. Among the ideological ones, Bloch's (teleological) Marxism and conservative outlook concerning issues of gender relations posed major hindrances. Nevertheless, it will become clear as we proceed with the study that these difficulties do not pose insurmountable barriers. Bloch's utopianism is flexible enough to be refunctioned from a feminist perspective situated near the end of a century and on the verge of a new millennium, a temporality which brings the imperative need to revise our utopianisms.

VI. Entering the Dystopian Space

Dystopias have been neglected both in their specificity as a literary genre and as a critical principle (Sargent 1994; Alexander 1998).[36] The present work aims to help map out the contemporary feminist critical dystopias, thus contributing to the study of their generic ground, and to show ways in which these narratives, carriers of a critical principle informed by a radical utopian function, cast light on contemporary feminisms. Secondary to this major aim is the refunctioning of Ernst Bloch's writings on utopianism from the perspective of feminist criticism and narrative studies. This combination will provide the theoretical tools that will allow the examination of the feminist dystopian novels. The chapters that follow are divided in two blocks: Part I, **Ernst Bloch's Utopianism, Feminism, and Women's Dystopias**, prepares the way for the readings of the feminist dystopias in Part II. Chapter Two gives an overview of Bloch's elaborations on utopianism, stressing those points in the conceptual framework elaborated by the philosopher that will be relevant for my purposes, among which are the elements enabling the alignment of his writings about utopia with poststructuralist theorizings. Chapter Three is more specific in its feminist revisionary orientation. It offers a critique of Bloch's gender-biased utopianism, discusses earlier feminist appropriations of his theories, and finds in his speculations an approach to utopia as a process which is crucial for the understanding of contemporary feminist utopianism. This chapter also offers an exploration of the interesting possibilities which emerge through the combination of Bloch's conceptualization of utopianism, poststructuralist theories of narrativity represented

---

[36] An overview of book-length studies specifically focusing on dystopian writing evidences this. An interest in the topic in the sixties produced Chad Walsh's *From Utopia to Nightmare* (1962), George Kateb's *Utopia and Its Enemies* (1963), and Mark Hillegas' *The Future as Nightmare* (1967). These were followed, after a three-decade interval, by Keith Booker's 1994 companion volumes *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature* and *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* and David Sisk's *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias* (1997). These texts survey different forms of dystopian texts (novelistic, filmic, philosophical) and are mostly male-centred.

by the work of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva, and feminist utopian thought expressed by means of different formulations of the notion of an elsewhere.

Part II, **Journeying through Dystopia**, contains readings of women's dystopian writings. The manifestations of feminist transgressions of the (male) dystopic orders observed in the fictions will be discussed in relation to the notions of a feminist elsewhere, to be expanded in Chapter Three. In their radical configurations, the feminist utopias are manifested by means of narrative elements of three types, whose main configurations are spatio-temporal, related to the quest object, or linguistic. Although these utopian configurations are interrelated, each chapter will examine one of them more closely. Chapter Four will look at the representation of utopian space/time in Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*. Chapter Five will focus on Suzy Mckee Charnas's series of novels centred upon the character of Alldera Holdfast in order to explore the relation between the feminist reconfiguration of the quest pattern and the critical dystopian mode. And Chapter Six will show that some contemporary feminist utopias are constructed in relation to language, a pervasive theme uniting the texts by Lisa Tuttle, Suzette Haden Elgin, and Margaret Atwood.

Finally, Chapter Seven, **Leaving Dystopia**, will consider the texts together. Margaret Elphinstone's novels *The Incomer* (1987) and *A Sparrow's Flight* (1989) will serve as stepping stones for my concluding remarks regarding the feminist critical fictions, as her texts feature the overlapping of the utopian elements examined in the previous chapters. A middle section of Chapter Seven will discuss the liberating possibilities, as well as the limitations, of the articulations of the utopian "elsewheres" observed in the feminist dystopian writings in the light of the political project of feminism. The last section elaborates further on my construction of utopia as semiosis, i.e. as a semiotic process, which is enabled by the juxtaposition of the theories and fictions explored in Parts I and II.

PART I - ERNST BLOCH'S UTOPIANISM, FEMINISM, AND WOMEN'S DYSTOPIAS

Chapter Two

Utopia Revisited: Ernst Bloch and the Principle of Hope

> A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. (Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism")[1]

I. Introduction

"One is never on firm ground when reading Bloch", states Jack Zipes in his notes to a collection of essays (and one interview) by the German Marxist thinker.[2] I chose his words to open this chapter advisedly because they signal the nature of the terrain one is bound to explore when reading Ernst Bloch's works. What follows in Chapters Two and Three is an attempt to provide a partial exploration of this terrain: an interpretation of Bloch's reflections on utopian hope and cultural forms, specifically literature, which will be crucial for my readings of the feminist dystopias. I also aim to point out the intersections existing between these reflections, recent critical practice (feminist and non-feminist), and theories of the narrative, moving from a consideration of Bloch's theorization of utopianism towards an instrumental look at his conceptual framework, and bearing in mind my aim to "re-function" them from a perspective informed by feminism.

In this chapter, the section entitled **The Utopian Function** will focus upon Bloch's view of utopia as manifested in cultural forms by providing a discussion of the basic premises and concepts developed mainly in *The Principle of Hope* (1959)[3] and in the writings collected in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays* (1988).[4] Works by Bloch published elsewhere will, of course, help to illuminate the discussion, which will develop into other sections approaching his theorization, influenced by psychoanalysis, of an "anticipatory

---

[1] One of Bloch's favourite quotations, it appears in *The Principle of Hope* (1959: 479), in *A Philosophy of the Future* (1963: 96), and in a 1964 interview entitled "Something's Missing: A Discussion Between Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing", in Bloch 1988: 1-17.

[2] Jack Zipes's 1988 "Introduction: Toward a Realization of Anticipatory Illumination," in Bloch 1988: xi-xliii, p. ix.

[3] *The Principle of Hope* was written in the U.S. between 1938 and 1947, and revised twice (1953 and 1959). In 1954/55 the first two volumes appeared. The 1986 English translation was based on the 1959 revised and authorized edition of the German original *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* published by Suhrkamp Verlag. Cf. Plaice et al. 1985 "Translators' Preface and Introduction" and the author's "Introduction", in Bloch 1959: xvii, xxv, xxvi, 11.

[4] Different English translations of seven essays originally published in *The Principle of Hope* (1959) appear in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* (1988), a collection of 16 texts originally published between 1918 and 1972. Quotations from them are taken from the 1986 translation of *The Principle of Hope*, unless otherwise stated.

consciousness"; the restoration of utopian hope as a critical principle; the essential role played by a utopian subjectivity in this critique; and the Marxist framework which both inspires and limits Bloch's system. **Bloch and/in Cultural Criticism**, as the name suggests, will illustrate Bloch's (and Bloch-inspired) cultural criticisms. Finally, the last section will focus on the intersection between Bloch's philosophy and poststructuralist and postmodernist theories, paying particular attention to the possibility, opened up by Bloch, of a utopian deconstructive practice.

II. The Utopian Function

Ernst Bloch's writings do not present a rigidly set aesthetic system (Jameson 1971, Zipes 1988), and readers cannot count on signposting indicating a 'safe' and logical course or direction within his texts. Nevertheless, some recurrent themes and patterns relating to his views of utopian hope can be devised, which are deeply infused with considerations about politics and aesthetics. Those which specifically regard cultural forms of expression will be explored in this section, and will be accompanied by a discussion of their implications for textual readings.[5]

Despite being aware of the depreciation of the term utopia and its association with idealistic and impractical schemes, Bloch persistently pursued his belief that utopian hope urged the world towards revolution and change. In general terms his effort may be described as a quest for (and restoration of) utopian hope, of which the major result was the monumental *The Principle of Hope*. In this publication, his concepts are presented, his search for utopian elements and moments in culture and history is undertaken, and the formative influences upon his thought are revealed. The latter include the German tradition (especially the idealism of Kant and Hegel), classical oriental and Western philosophies, chiliastic thinkers and hermetic figures of the Middle Ages, and, most markedly, the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels. Besides these, and permeating Bloch's writings throughout, are quotations from and allusions to the Bible and Goethe's *Faust*, "the central spiritual and poetic legacies" inherited by *The Principle of Hope* (Plaice et al. 1985: xvii). A 'negative' (though not less important) debt is also owed to the philosophy of Heidegger and to Freudian psychoanalysis.[6] This list of

---

[5] Jack Zipes's "Introduction" to Bloch 1988, Fredric Jameson's "Ernst Bloch and the Future" (in Jameson 1971: 116-159), and Vincent Geoghegan's *Ernst Bloch* (1996) provide excellent introductions to Bloch's thought for English readers and greatly contributed to the discussion in this chapter.
[6] Analyses of Bloch's dialogue with Freud are found in Jameson 1971 and Kellner & O'Hara 1976; and with Heidegger, in Norris 1983 and Zipes 1988. For more detailed discussions of the thinkers, movements and works influential in Bloch's formulations, see Hudson 1982 and Geoghegan 1996.

influences at work in the bulk of Bloch's writings is by no means exhaustive, as they also encompass marginal elements to the Western classical tradition: for instance, the millenarian Christians, Eastern religions and philosophies, and popular cultural manifestations like fairy tales and colportage,[7] which Bloch termed "incidental materials".

The thread running through Bloch's revision of such an eclectic cultural repertoire is his re-conceptualization of utopia by means of the principle of hope, a principle oriented towards future change. Theodor Adorno describes Bloch as "the one mainly responsible for restoring honor to the word 'utopia'" (Bloch & Adorno 1964: 1). This was indeed Bloch's lifetime project. Revising the orthodox Marxist stand concerning utopianism, Bloch defends the centrality of utopia for politics and philosophy, and sets out to restore its positive meaning:

> hope is not taken *only as emotion,* as the opposite of fear (because fear too can of course anticipate), but *more essentially as a directing act of a cognitive kind* [...]. The imagination and the thoughts of future intention described in this way are utopian, this again not in a narrow sense of the word which only defines what is bad (emotively reckless picturing, playful form of an abstract kind), but rather in fact in the newly tenable sense of the forward dream, of anticipation in general. And so the category of the Utopian, beside the usual, justifiably pejorative sense, possesses the other, in no way necessarily abstract or unworldly sense, much more centrally turned towards the world: of overtaking the natural course of events. (1959: 12)[8]

In Bloch's view, contrary to its pejorative connotation, utopia is essential for futurity and world improvement, and thus, for politics. More on the cognitive function of hope below.

Cultural forms (especially literature and the arts) occupy a central space in Bloch's enterprise. They are utopian in the sense that they transcend the dominant ideology and contain *Vor-Schein,* "an anticipatory illumination of that which has not yet become" (Zipes 1988, in Bloch 1988: xx).[9] Developed by Bloch from a synthesis of Kantian and Hegelian notions of illusion and appearance,[10] this anticipatory consciousness is manifested in the aesthetic sphere by means of aesthetic configurations of ideals, or, in Bloch's words, of "a humanely perfect world" (1959: 173). Substituting "l'art pour l'espoir" for "l'art pour art",

---

[7] Colportage refers to "the cheap materials sold by the colporteur or travelling bookseller of the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries" (Zipes, in Bloch 1988: xxxvii). Plaice et al. remind us that "Bloch is using the term to mean the genre of popular literature comprising adventure story, picaresque tale and thriller" (in Bloch 1959: 352). Pulp fiction seems to be its contemporary equivalent in English.

[8] Italics in the quotations are either Bloch's or the translators' (usually in parentheses), unless otherwise stated.

[9] This term was translated as "pre-appearance" (Plaice et al. 1985), "ontological anticipation" (Jameson 1971), "anticipatory illusion" and "anticipatory illumination" (Zipes 1979, and 1988 [in Bloch 1988]), and "anticipatory consciousness" (Bammer 1991). I will favour the latter, which provides a functional synthesis of two concepts (*Vor-Schein* and the Not-Yet-Conscious, to be discussed below). From this point onwards, I will use "anticipatory consciousness", whereas different translations of *Vor-Schein* in quotations will be followed by the German equivalent in brackets.

[10] For an account of Bloch's reutilization of these concepts see Zipes 1988, in Bloch 1988: xxxiv-vi.

and thus placing (leftist revolutionary) optimistic militancy where there was bourgeois contemplation, Bloch believes that aesthetic anticipatory consciousness points the way towards a better world that is becoming real:

> What habitual or unblunted sense can hardly still see is illuminated here, in individual processes as well as social and natural ones. This pre-appearance [Vor-Schein] becomes attainable precisely because art drives its material to an end, in characters, situations, plots, landscapes, and brings them to a stated resolution in suffering, happiness and meaning. (1959: 214-15)

Cultural expressions become (through their elements, images and latent meanings) charged with the anticipation of future possibilities. They function as a sort of material frame for the anticipatory consciousness, i.e., they are formal entities whose anticipatory quality permits a vision of possible utopian perfection. Cultural and artistic forms "communicate a rich otherness which is both attractive and rooted in real possibilities in the world" (Geoghegan 1996: 37), and can serve society by providing paradigms for change. The problematics of this utilitarian view of art will be discussed below.

Bloch illustrates the manifestations of the anticipatory consciousness by drawing from diverse cultural and artistic media. Focusing on the verbal arts, his readings of the fairy tale, for instance, suggest that the anticipatory consciousness is conveyed by the glimpse of a utopian Golden Age, the "view of paradise", given in their happy endings. The hero's agency in his/her quest aiming "to reach the place where life has become good" (1959: 353) is interpreted by Bloch in terms of the politics implicit in the genre. According to him, in the fairy tale the "power of the giants is painted as one with a hole in it" (1959: 355), whereby "power" means that represented by dominant ideology, and the "hole" symbolizes the possibility of utopian resistance. Moreover, the fairy tale is read by Bloch in terms of generic anticipation, as it contains elements (like the configuration of a fictional elsewhere as a "good place" and the theme of the voyage to foreign (is)lands) which would be developed later into traits of the literary utopias. This very brief discussion of Bloch's analysis of the formal structure (the "characters", "situations", "plots", "landscapes", "a stated resolution")[11] of the fairy tales is by no means illustrative of the richness of Bloch's ways of reading. For the purposes of this study, his analyses focusing less on the teleology of a "happy ending" and more on utopianism as latency (manifested in open works, for instance) are more appropriate.[12]

---

[11] Cf. quotation above.
[12] See my discussion of Bloch's reading of the *Künstlerroman*, starting on p. 36 of section VII below.

As noted by Norman Finkelstein (1989), a relevant distinction in Bloch's thought is that between anticipatory consciousness and ideology. The former consists of a cultural surplus, whereas the latter, following the Marxist notion of dominant ideology, refers to the false consciousness of a society. Cultural forms are seen as carriers of an ideological surplus - the anticipatory consciousness of utopia - that accounts for their reaching beyond the ideology of their own time. The surplus, thus, "distinguishes culture from mere ideology" (1972: 35)[13] and explains why cultural expressions can be continually appreciated at different epochs in history:

> The surplus [...] is much more like something that has a continual impact, is valid and utopian: *ideological surplus arises according to the utopian function in the formation of mere ideology and above this ideology.* Thus, great art or great philosophy is not only its time manifested in images and ideas, but it is also *the journey of its time and the concerns of its time if it is anything at all,* manifested in images and ideas. From this vantage point, it is new for its time. From the vantage point of all times, it is that which is not yet fulfilled. It is from this element of utopia alone, which ultimately must be prepared in advance by the phenomenon of genius, that the continual impact of the surplus is derived and goes beyond the particular ideology of an epoch. (1972: 38)

As the term suggests, the surplus indicates an excess ("that which is not yet fulfilled") reaching beyond the ideological contingencies surrounding (and enabling) certain cultural formations. This surplus is then the realm of the anticipatory consciousness, which is motivated by the dream of a better life, the dream of utopia. Bloch identifies a utopian function in the ideological creations, manifested in the (artistic, philosophical, scientific) cultural expressions, which motivates and produces the cultural surplus. This surplus accounts for this heritage being more than the palpable form of pure ideology. Utopia and ideology thus remain dialectically bound to each other in Bloch's philosophy.

This theoretical move does contain a sweeping oversimplification, which derives primarily from Bloch's dichotomous view of ideology and utopia. Contemporary readers will certainly find theoretical naivety in his argument that one has just to 'clean' cultural works of their ideological 'dirt' to have a view of 'pure' utopia, or, to use Bloch's terms, of the "ideologically unobstructed view of the content of human hope" (1959: 158). On the other hand, this move has two relevant implications: a. ideology *and* utopia are contained simultaneously in cultural forms; and b. the cultural surplus is both ideological and utopian. Concerning the first point, Bloch seems to be positioned at the intersection between the classic

---

[13] "Ideas as Transformed Material in Human Minds, or Problems of an Ideological Superstructure (Cultural Heritage)" in Bloch 1988: 18-71.

theoretical model of the ideology versus utopia dichotomy and the less rigid contemporary accounts of the interweaving of these concepts. The first is illustrated by the work of Karl Mannheim (1929). (The difficulty in application of the dichotomous model was recognized by Mannheim himself and brilliantly explained by Ruth Levitas [1990].) While reflecting this dichotomy, Bloch's assessment of the functions of both utopia and ideology anticipates a more fluid and organic relation between the two concepts, which is so well synthesized by Fredric Jameson.[14] This enables us, from the perspective of the late twentieth-century, to see the links between Bloch's notion of a cultural surplus and meaning (or the signified). For it is in the arena of meanings that the utopian (*and* ideological) strivings for "continued impact" and "validity" take place, and where the politics of interpretation is situated.

III. Anticipatory Consciousness

In the Introduction to *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch's aim is stated in very clear terms:

> a particularly extensive attempt is made [...] to bring philosophy to hope, as to a place in the world which is as inhabited as the best civilized land and as unexplored as the Antarctic. [...] Longing, expectation, hope therefore need their hermeneutics, the dawning of the In-Front-of-Us demands its specific concept, the Novum demands its concept of the Front. (1959: 6)[15]

Bloch points out that the categories of an "anticipatory consciousness" and of "hope" were excluded from psychoanalytical and philosophical discourses for a long time. His task of providing a hermeneutics of hope and utopia begins, then, with a reaction to and reutilization of Freudian psychoanalysis and of previous philosophy. To this effect, Bloch constructs a critique of both, which I will address below. Forming the core of Bloch's critique is a positive move, or step, by means of which he tries to locate and 'rescue' utopian elements. Even his (negative) deconstructions of discourses involve, in most cases, a positive "restoration" of what can be salvaged from previous thought, or the proposal of an alternative supplement. Bloch's critique of psychoanalysis provides an illustration, as the starting point for a more encompassing theory of human drives, and for the theorization of an anticipatory consciousness.

---

[14] In *The Political Unconscious* Jameson argues that "the effectively ideological is also, at the same time, necessarily Utopian" (1981: 286).

[15] One of the difficulties in reading Bloch's texts lies in the neologisms he creates. Here, "In-Front-of-Us" refers to the future, and the "Novum", to that which is totally new and has never existed before. Geoghegan further explains that "Ultimum" and "Totum" are used "to encompass the utopian moment of fulfilment"; and "Front" as "the site at which present and future meet" (1996: 4, 36).

The category of the Not-Yet-Conscious, formulated as early as 1907,[16] is indebted to, and symmetrically supplements, the psychoanalytical unconscious:

> The unconscious of psychoanalysis is [...] *never a Not-Yet-Conscious*, an element of progressions; it consists rather of regressions. Accordingly, even the process of making this unconscious conscious only clarifies What Has Been; i.e. *there is nothing new in the Freudian unconscious*. (1959: 56)

For Bloch, as well as for Freud, an unconscious portion of material that is capable of consciousness lies beneath human consciousness. Nevertheless, Bloch reminds us that this category in Freudian thought relates to the No-Longer-Conscious, i.e., to "an old [consciousness] with old content that has merely sunk below the threshold and may cross it again by a more or less straightforward process of being remembered" (1959: 115).[17] Because it is constituted by the contents of the repressed, the Freudian unconscious surfaces mostly in night-dreams. Similarly to the psychoanalytical No-Longer-Conscious, the category of the Not-Yet-Conscious is difficult and resistant. Contrary to it, however, the Not-Yet-Conscious belongs to an anticipatory consciousness that is revealed in the daydream.

> The Not-Yet-Conscious is [thus] solely the preconscious of what is to come, the psychological birthplace of the New. And it keeps itself preconscious above all because in fact there is within it a content of consciousness which has not yet become wholly manifest, and is still dawning from the future. (1959: 116)

In terms of direction Bloch's category of the Not-Yet-Conscious is projected forwards, while the psychoanalytical unconscious is turned backwards. Bloch's criticism of psychoanalysis stems from this categorical contrast between the psychoanalytical No-Longer-Conscious and his own Not-Yet-Conscious. For Bloch, the gap observed in the former relates to a historical block concerning the future and can be explained in terms of the historical context in which psychoanalysis developed.

Against the psychoanalytical interest in the nocturnal dream and 'neglect' of the daydream,[18] Bloch develops a theory of the latter which emphasizes its links with consciousness, its capability of being shaped into cultural forms, its anticipatory content, and hence its centrality for the way we change and construct the world. Originating in the Not-Yet-Conscious, that which "has never been conscious and has never existed in the past" (1959: 77), daydreams are crucial for an understanding of that category. And cultural forms provide

---

[16] Cf. Plaice et al. 1985: xx.

[17] Bloch means the "after pressure", which "constitute[s] the vast bulk of unconscious contents." See E. Grosz's "Repression" in Wright ed. 1992: 382.

[18] Bloch finds limitations in Freud's speculations concerning daydreams, which are valued as stepping-stones to nocturnal dreams or to subliminal cultural activities. Bloch positions himself against such an approach to art as providing the illusory solution to subjective sexual drives, which he qualifies as bourgeois-conformist.

one of the means through which the Not-Yet-Conscious discloses itself. Art thus viewed becomes "the major repository of the images, archetypes and symbols of the Not-Yet-Conscious" (Plaice et al. 1985: xxix).

Bloch's critique of Freudian theory goes beyond the psychoanalytical concepts per se towards an examination of the historical context in which Freudian psychoanalysis was generated and the political implications of its discourse and practice. Besides an 'indifference' concerning the future, Bloch stresses still another aspect 'ignored' by psychoanalysis. He argues that, in its emphasis on sexual libido, psychoanalytical thought overlooks socio-historical conditions, which leads to a class-based limitation and, ultimately, to adjustment and conformism to bourgeois values.[19] Of course, Bloch's critique of psychoanalysis appears to be too harsh. It does not address, for instance, the fact that psychoanalysis à la Freud is also concerned with human beings' happiness, has a social role to play and, therefore, a future orientation.[20] Bloch's construction of his own "utopian psychology", to borrow Wayne Hudson's term (1982), is less in contrast with the Freudian model than it appears to be. Indeed, the similarities between the Blochian and the Freudian models have been noted by commentators (Kellner & O'Hara 1976). It is not wholly ironic then that Bloch's sharp critique of psychoanalysis enables the systematization of his own premises. This debt was implicitly acknowledged by Bloch himself, as evidenced by the space dedicated to the revision of psychoanalytical thought in the argumentation of the principle of hope.[21]

A constitutive "not" permeates the Blochian concept of the Not-Yet (Kellner and O'Hara 1976). Springing from a fundamental lack of fullness and completeness, this "not" has psychological and non-psychological factors. In its psychological orientation, it is represented by the Not-Yet-Conscious discussed above. Its non-psychological dimension, by the Not-Yet-Become: "Just as a Not-Yet-Conscious, which has never been conscious before, dawns in the human soul, so a Not-Yet-Become dawns in the world: at the head of the world process and world-whole is this front and the vast, still so little understood category of the Novum" (1959: 623-4). David Gross explains that the Not-Yet may be understood as the future in the present. The Not-Yet-Become is the future which exists as latency in the world, while the Not-Yet-Conscious refers to what we experience as mental states:

> The first refers to all that is immanent in matter, the latencies existing at every instant of time yet to come to fruition. The second refers to half-conscious intimations - to longings, feelings, dreams, and only barely-sensed glimmers of

---

[19] Cf., for instance, Bloch 1959: 52
[20] *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) is the key text on these issues.
[21] Cf. Volume One (Part Two) of *The Principle of Hope*, Chapters 12-15.

wholeness - which tell us that the world and we ourselves are destined to be more than what we are. (1988: 193)

Meant by Bloch to be understood in a relational way, these categories are complementary in the sense that the Not-Yet-Become in the world can be manifested psychologically in the Not-Yet-Conscious. It was stated above that the "not" in the compound relates to a fundamental lack, which induces our hunger, longings, drives, desires and hope. To the latter, a pivotal concept in Bloch's system, the discussion will now turn.

IV. Utopian Hope

In *The Principle of Hope* Bloch examines the gradual mechanisms effecting the elimination of emotion in classical philosophy, especially in the works of rationalist and objective thinkers (e.g. Descartes and Spinoza). He also points out the 'survival' of an emotionalized subject in the philosophies of Kierkegaard and Hegel. This emotionalized subjectivity plays a crucial role in Bloch's hope-orientated philosophy. In it, hope is linked to the class of "expectant emotions" (anxiety, fear, hope, belief), i.e.,

> those whose drive-intention is long-term, whose drive-object does not yet lie ready, not just in respective individual attainability, but also in the already available world, and therefore still occurs in the doubt about exit or entrance. (1959: 74)

Expectant emotions stand in contrast to "filled emotions" (like envy and admiration, for instance), "those whose drive-intention is short-term, whose drive-object lies ready", and differ from the latter because they possess a "*greater anticipatory character* in their intention, their substance, and their object" (1959: 74). The category of the Not-Yet belongs to the realm of such "expectant emotions", which imply a real future (as opposed to the future whose contents are already known) and remain open to a horizon of what is still to come. According to Bloch, hope is a fundamental expectant emotion because it relates to the basic psychological condition of lack of fulfilment inherent in the human subject.

Here at least three points are worth comment. First, while offering an understanding of two contrastive emotional modes of the self, this taxonomy of emotions paradoxically classifies these modes into a rational system. Actually, previous taxonomies are revised and criticized by Bloch for not fully covering this area "so rich in elisions" (1959: 74), but the philosopher's awareness is not self-reflexive: he never addresses the limitations of the dichotomy he proposes. A rational classification of emotions, however, is not completely at odds with his system. Secondly, Bloch's argumentation that hope is *the* most important

expectant emotion (overlooking the relevance of fear, for instance) is not wholly convincing. This seems to be one of the instances in which Bloch's optimism limits the scope of his philosophy and criticism. In a more sympathetic response to mine, Jameson explains the privileging of hope among other expectant emotions in terms of structural archetypal configurations:

> From the point of view of temporality, the experience of hope consists in a coming to consciousness of that relationship to the as yet inexistent implicit in all these [expectant] emotions, and may therefore stand as their structural archetype and at the same time as their most concrete affective manifestation. (1971: 127)

Finally, Bloch's notion that hope informs the human psyche in such an essential way contradicts his own view of human subjectivity as process. It adds a note of static logic to a system which openly aims to subvert exactly this characteristic in philosophical thought.

Bloch attempts to find a balance between emotion and rationalism, as he believes that an intellectual contact with emotion is indispensable for self-knowledge. Therefore, hope becomes "*docta spes*", "known hope", "comprehended hope", "educated hope", or "rationally informed hope". It has a psychological origin in human hunger and longing, hence its emotional quality. But it also has a rational side. According to Bloch, the rational aspect inherent in hope allows the Not-Yet-Conscious to surface in consciousness. If it is to be differentiated from escapism and contemplation and to relate to the utopian function, hope must be a combination of emotion and reason:

> Only when reason starts to speak, does hope [...] begin to blossom again. The Not-Yet-Conscious itself must become *conscious* in its act, *known* in its content, as the process of dawning on the one hand, as what is dawning on the other. And so the point is reached where hope itself, this authentic expectant emotion in the forward dream, no longer just appears as a merely self-based mental feeling [...] but in a *conscious-known* way as *utopian function*. (1959: 144)[22]

The dialectical relation implicit in the concept of "*docta spes*" provides a key to the understanding of Bloch's view of utopia as a critical, cognitive principle, and enables a reading of his philosophy against the facile optimism claimed by some reviewers to characterize his system (Tanner 1986, Wieseltier 1986).

A question that inevitably rises in a discussion of utopian hope concerns its object, the contents of the utopian dream. For Bloch, these contents cannot be described or defined, and he insists that it is always impossible to be explicit concerning the utopian object, or the configuration of the utopian "good place". It is determined by history and social

circumstances: "utopias have their timetable," states Bloch in stressing the point that utopias are tied to the historical context in which they are produced (1959: 479). Nevertheless, what is hoped for constantly changes and evades categorization. This 'paradox' offers a key insight for the reconfiguration of utopianism from the perspective of postmodernity.

While the depiction of the object of hope (or the configuration of what is desired in the utopian dream) is lacking in any final or definitive sense in his philosophy, terms used by Bloch to refer to the moment of utopian fulfilment abound: the Totum, the Novum, Homeland, the Utopian Humanum in the world, the One Thing Needful, the Thing For Us, the One-Thing-Intended, the Unum Necessarium, the human-adequate There. Such terminological excess may be understood, to a certain extent, as a compensation for the lacking definition. Some hints concerning the utopian goal do surface, albeit vaguely, in Bloch's texts, as the configuration of utopia surfaces as the dialectical interaction between objective and subjective factors, or, as the "humanization of nature" and "naturalization of man [sic]" proposed by Marxist philosophy. This is Bloch's 'privileged' utopia, under which all other utopian hopes and dreams are subsumed, and represents his teleological vision. Nevertheless, it is the non-teleological element also present in his theorization of utopian hope which suits feminist utopianisms and my own readings of the feminist dystopias.

For Bloch, the element of longing unites utopian dreams: "The content changes, but an invariant of the direction is there, psychologically expressed so to speak as longing, completely without consideration at all for the content" (1964: 5). This was extracted from the interview advisedly entitled "Something's Missing" (Brecht's phrase quoted by Bloch, and one of the latter's favourite leitmotifs),[23] for it closes with a discussion inspired by that title. It summarizes Bloch's idea of utopia, that "something missing" which cannot be cast into a picture, but which, paradoxical as it seems, is portrayed by him "as in the process of being (*seiend*)" (Bloch 1964: 15). This aspect remains central for contemporary readings of Bloch's utopianism as open-ended process, rather than blueprint, and resists simplistic approaches to his works as being teleologically oriented towards pre-determined goals. Particularly relevant for the present thesis, this aspect will be developed below.[24]

---

[22] Cf. also the quotation on p. 22 above.
[23] It also appears in *The Principle of Hope* (1959: 29, 309) and *Heritage of Our Times* (1962: 232).
[24] Cf. p. 33.

V. Utopian Subjectivity

In the introductory chapter I drew attention to the utopian potential embodied in the feminist critical dystopias, because they are in themselves acts of hope and the products of a utopian imagination. Therefore, also relevant for my own readings are Bloch's views regarding the processes of cultural production and reception. For Bloch, both processes imply a creative, utopian subjectivity. In a passage focusing on poetic production, which can be taken as illustrative of cultural creations and artistic practices in general, Bloch considers the relevance of a subjective position: "The subjective factor of the poetical is [...] the midwife of the artistic anticipatory illumination [Vor-Schein]" (1935: 160).[25] By using the significant image of the "midwife", another recurrent motif in his works,[26] Bloch implies that human subjectivity is the mediation necessary for the "birth" of artistic production, which is the carrier of anticipatory consciousness.

In fact, though, the "midwife" imagery is problematic and mystifying, since birth is an inevitable process, only assisted by the midwife. The feminist subjects who author the feminist dystopias would almost certainly claim their own cultural agency and positionality in a more assertive tone (and rightly so), than is suggested in the image used by Bloch. However, there is one sense in which the metaphor of the midwife can be read in a slightly more positive way. I am referring to an approach to narrative production, and cultural production in general, as a socially symbolic act informed by, and meditating on, a political unconscious.[27] Thus perceived, the fictions are more than individual aesthetic acts, reflecting and shaping the utopian the desires and hopes of a community. (This approach partially eclipses the role of the creative individual, being on a par with the 'midwife' metaphor.) My own feminist readings will take the 'collectivity factor' into account, without mystifying the role of the author.

The role of an active subjectivity in terms of cultural reception is also an issue in Bloch's writings. Jameson describes such utopian hermeneutics:

> For Bloch the world is an immense storehouse of figures, and the task of the philosopher or critic becomes a hermeneutic one to the degree that he is called upon to pierce this "incognito of every lived instant,"[28] and to decipher the dimly vibrating meaning beneath the fables and the works, the experiences and the

---

[25] "Marxism and Poetry", in Bloch 1988: 156-162. Reprinted in Eagleton & Milne eds. 1996 *Marxist Literary Theory - A Reader.* 84-90.
[26] In *The Principle of Hope* Bloch refers to revolutions as "the midwives of the future society with which the current one is pregnant." In this context "midwife" may be read as the mediation needed for a process to occur. In the second passage he mentions "the midwife's art", meaning the ability to bring something to light (1959: 247 and 532).
[27] I am drawing upon Fredric Jameson's elaborations in *The Political Unconscious* (1981).
[28] Translated and quoted directly from *Das Prinzip Hoffnung.*

objects, which surrounding us seem to solicit our attention in some peculiarly personal fashion. (1971: 145)

By positioning the philosopher/critic before the world's "storehouse of figures" (that repository of "fables", "works", "experiences" and "objects"), Jameson indirectly suggests that Bloch's view of the subjective factor in cultural *production* is, to some extent, mystified. (A point I hinted at above in my discussion of Bloch's use of the image of the midwife.) This passage also evidences Bloch's pioneering approach in the field of utopianism, as Bloch's own "storehouse of figures" actually includes a vast range of cultural and artistic practices, everyday experiences and dreams, and historical movements. Thus, he radically reconfigures utopianism as a disciplinary field to the extent that he opens up new possibilities for the investigation of diverse forms of manifestation of utopian hope.[29]

Shifting our focus back to the issue of a utopian subjectivity implicit in Bloch's theorical elaborations, Jack Zipes looks at our role as readers/critics:

> In general, Bloch's anticipatory illumination [Vor-Schein] compels us to focus on works of art in relation to human productive activity that is bound up with the way we define ourselves and the world. It also demands that we become detective-critics in our appreciation and evaluation of such works. It is up to us to determine what the anticipatory illumination [Vor-Shein] of a work is, and in doing this we make a contribution to the cultural heritage. That is, the quality of our cultural heritage and its meaning are determined by our ability to estimate what is valuable and utopian in works of art from all periods. (1988 in Bloch 1988: xxxvi)

Similarly to Jameson, Zipes stresses the puzzle-solving characteristic ("deciphering", "detecting") of the act of reading and interpreting cultural production. Both critics comment on the centrality of a hermeneutical, interpretative subject in Bloch's theory of utopia.[30] An approach that takes subjective reading positions is particularly relevant for the way of reading I favour since it can be aligned with a feminist hermeneutics which politicizes the reading process and evaluates cultural works in terms of their feminist-utopian potentialities. One of the drawbacks implicit in the reception model à la Bloch, however, is that it implies a high degree of prescriptiveness (which is neither possible nor desirable for feminist ways of reading), a point that will be further explored below in the assessment of Bloch's Marxism.

---

[29] One consequence of his approach, which has been the source of much negative criticism, is that, by encompassing a wide range of cultural phenomena, Bloch's system becomes too general and overlooks the specificities of the different media discussed.

[30] In what can only be referred to as a misreading of Bloch's proposal of a "hermeneutics of hope" (which in itself presupposes an interpretative subject/community), Caryl Flinn states that his approach "fails to consider the role subjectivity and agency play in the formation of utopian thought" (Flinn 1992: 102-103).

VI. The Influence of Marxism

In order to form a clearer picture of the Blochian conceptual system, one must try to understand his utopianism in the light of his Marxism, for it is this political orientation that both inspires and restricts his formulations. Marxist concepts and terminology centrally inform Bloch's writings, most of which are directed towards the classless society as a "concrete utopia", i.e. as a utopia that can be created: "the very power and truth of Marxism consists in the fact that it has driven the cloud in our dreams further forward, but has not extinguished the pillar of fire in those dreams, rather strengthened it with concreteness" (1959: 146). This passage strikingly evidences a tension existing between Marxist "concrete" materialism versus utopia as dream. This tension between the dream of a better life and the social realization of such dream, which fascinates Bloch leading him to revise orthodox Marxist thought and to formulate a dichotomy between abstract and concrete utopias,[31] ultimately relates to the paradox contained in the term *utopia* itself.[32] Indeed, such a tension is found at the core of all utopian thought and exposes the gap between the present "bad place" and the future "good place".

The influence of Marxism is perceptible throughout Bloch's works. Besides the path towards the realizable utopia of a classless society as a historical goal, which forms his major (teleological) belief, there are many instances where Marxist concepts and terminology are dealt with more creatively by Bloch. I am referring to his revisions of the Marxist conceptual framework in the creation of his own conceptual categories. It has been observed, for instance, that cultural or ideological surplus (*Überschuss*) is one such Marxist-inspired term coined by Bloch: it "inevitably calls to mind Marx's notion of surplus value" (Finkelstein 1989: 56). As a whole, Bloch's unorthodox interpretations of Marxist thought earned him the label of revisionist in times when the use of this term implied betrayal.

In the first half of the century Bloch's contributions to Marxism included the identification of two Marxist streams, which he named warm and cold Marxisms; a profound analysis of bourgeois society, whose decadence he witnessed and helped register; and (unlike orthodox Marxist critics) a concern with poetry and with the artistic and literary avant-gardes. But, as far as Marxist thought is concerned, perhaps it is true to claim with Adorno[33] that Bloch's major contribution was the restoration of the concept of utopia, a term which had been undervalued due to its frequent pejorative association with the sort of abstract

---

[31] I will return to this dichotomy in section IV of Chapter Three below.
[32] Cf. my discussion in Chapter One, p. 16.
[33] Cf. p. 22 above.

utopianizing rejected by Marxist intellectuals. The revival of utopianist thought among Marxist intellectuals in the second half of the century is to a great extent owing to Bloch's pioneering position.

Bloch's thought can be situated at the cross-roads of Marxism's promise of change (towards concrete utopia) and a belief in utopia as a critical, processual and transformative principle. To a certain degree, however, Marxism "is inadequate to serve his positive purposes" (Tanner 1986: 923), as indicated by Bloch's constant revisions of Marxist theory. Indeed, his Marxist politics may be seen to account for his prescriptive attitude to artistic and cultural practices. His views concerning the theatre provide an example. In "The Theatre, Regarded as Paradigmatic Institution, And the Decision in It",[34] Bloch elaborates on the notion that the stage may serve as a state of anticipation, of rehearsal of a model to be re-enacted in society: "the attitudes and events should be thoroughly worked out, thoroughly experimented with in a play-like way, to see whether they are of use for changing the world or not" (1959: 415). Bloch extrapolates, from Brecht's concept of estrangement, a view of the theatre as paradigmatic and exemplary.

In the analysis of the literary utopias a similar view prevails. This is noticeable, first of all, in the fact that the literary utopias and utopian historical movements are discussed in the same chapter of *The Principle of Hope*.[35] Literary utopias are measured negatively (as abstract utopianizing) against the socially concrete-anticipatory quality of Marxist philosophy:

> The abstract utopias[36] had devoted nine tenths of their space to a portrayal of the State of the future and only one tenth to the critical, often merely negative consideration of the present. This kept the goal colourful and vivid of course, but the path towards it, in so far as it could lie in given circumstances, remained hidden. (1959: 620)

Bloch sees the 'missing' path linking the contemporary real to the literary configuration of utopia as a generic "weakness" (cf. p. 579). A major flaw in his own way of reading is thus revealed in the sense his approach confines the utopian literary imagination. Bloch's one-sided, instrumental tone was noted by Zipes, who mentioned that, for the philosopher, "it was up to socialist art and by implication a socialist society to see to it that the 'auroral feature' of the [artistic] wish-landscape takes hold in reality" (1988, in Bloch 1988: xxxix).

---

[34] Chapter 30 of *The Principle of Hope*, Volume One, pp. 412-31.
[35] See Chapter 36, "Freedom and Order, Survey of Social Utopias", pp. 471-624.
[36] Bloch is referring to literary utopias as abstract utopias. For a discussion of the abstract/concrete utopia dichotomy, see Chapter Three (p. 56) and the glossary.

It would be fair to say that Bloch could perceive the politics of aesthetics only within the limits of his Marxist aims. And so, blinded by Marxist light, he failed - to some extent - to provide a self-reflexive criticism regarding such Marxist-oriented aesthetics. "To some extent" because, as stated above, Bloch's unorthodox attitudes allowed a revision of certain Marxist critical practices. Besides, disruptions perceptible in his own discourse, among which are the in/famous contradictions and paradoxes, implicitly indicate the undermining of "finished" or "closed" modes of thinking and writing. As far as Marxist criticism is concerned, it is as if he could detect the interweaving of aesthetics and politics, but not the ideology at work behind precisely the politicized aesthetics he defended. Thus, Bloch's dialectical thought lacks self-reflexive quality with regard to his own practice.

Despite the strong political bias and the resulting misreadings of cultural forms (e.g. literary genres) or simplifications of contemporary discourses, Bloch's writings offer an engaging and sophisticated formulation of utopianism. Much of the conceptual framework he built - the centrality of utopia for political thought and theory, the idea of an anticipatory consciousness, the key role played by artistic and cultural manifestations in the process of shaping utopian ideals, the dialectical relations implicit in the concept of "*docta spes*", the proposal of a utopian hermeneutics, to mention some of his contributions discussed above - still offers stimulating insights and opens up ways to theorize contemporary utopianisms even almost a century after he first touched the issue. My attempt to help restore Bloch's position as a major twentieth-century thinker appears as an addition to a growing trend of Bloch-inspired cultural commentaries, some of which will be discussed in the next section.

VII. Bloch and/in Cultural Criticism

This part moves towards a more practical arena after the theoretical discussion of Bloch's utopianism of the previous sections. The "criticism" of the title refers both to Bloch's own practice, as well as other critics' utililization of his concepts.[37] I will discuss Bloch's approach to cultural forms by looking in more depth at two analytical texts which are representative of his criticism and provide interesting starting points for my own readings of the feminist dystopias. Other issues I will address are Bloch's eclecticism concerning his choices of cultural materials to be the objects of his commentaries; and the trajectory of his reception, paying particular attention to Bloch's influence upon literary theorizations of

---

[37] There is, it should be remembered, a linguistic constraint to this. My commentary will be limited to Bloch's works translated into English and to Bloch-inspired criticism produced in English. An excellent bibliography of Bloch's texts available both in German and in English translations can be found in Bloch 1988: 293-295.

speculative fictions, an area that directly relates - and provides the foundation - to the present study.

Fine examples of Bloch's literary criticism are found in the pair of complementary articles entitled "A Philosophical View of the Detective Novel" and "A Philosophical View of the Novel of the Artist",[38] first published in 1960 and 1961, respectively. These genre-oriented articles have previously received critical attention in the work of Fredric Jameson, who refers to them deservedly as "the great essay-diptych" and "one of Bloch's masterpieces" (1971: 131). In these articles the symmetrically opposite movements underlying the psychoanalytical quest for a No-Longer-Conscious and the 'supplementary' quest for the Not-Yet-Conscious are demonstrated in terms of generic narrative strategies. In the first essay, Bloch defines the detective novel as "a hunt for sufficient evidence in narrative form" (1960: 246). According to him, the narrative form itself reveals an Oedipal search for hidden, un-narrated, pre-narrative events which is equivalent, in philosophical and metaphysical terms, to an investigation of origins: "Before the first word of the first chapter something happened..." (249). And the uncovering of this event takes the form of a "narrative picture puzzle" in three stages: suspense, act of discovering, and the fact to be discovered itself. The Oedipal search underlying the conventions of the genre is interpreted by Bloch as a reflection of the journey in search for the repressed contents of the unconscious, according to the Freudian paradigm.

Bloch views the two genres as foils:

> Whereas the detective novel requires a process of collecting evidence, penetrating backward to a past crime, the novel of the artist requires recognition of and interest in the creative person who brings out something new instead of something past. (1961: 167)

Thus, in contrast to the backward movement towards the omitted beginning of the detective novel, the *Künstlerroman*, in turn, constitutes a future-oriented narrative directed towards an omitted ending. The Not-Yet-Conscious in this narrative genre is represented by the unfinished work of art existing as latency and potentiality within the novel, and 'manifested' as the artist's/protagonist's project. By means of this mise-en-abîme, the *Künstlerroman* brings to light the

---

[38] In Bloch 1988: 245-264 and 265-277. Reprinted in Bloch 1998: 209-227 and 227-238. The original German title of the second essay refers to the *Künstlerroman*. It concerns "imaginary heroes and works" (1961: 266), narratives ranging from the archetypal myth of Prometheus, to stories appearing in the context of early capitalism (E.T.A. Hoffmann's), finally reaching the modernist texts. Because Bloch is by no means referring solely to the avant-garde "novel of the artist" (the term preferred by the translator), and actually explains he has a wider concept of "artist" in mind ("now, that is a word, that has been used for Bohemians and pop singers as well as for Hölderlin", p. 263), I decided to keep the original German term, rather than that used in the English translation.

artistic processes in a movement forward, in an until now not-yet so that the artistic process could find its *entire self-portrait:* that is, the portrayal of the desire to articulate, to form the face itself of that which has never before been heard. *(1961: 275)*

So, the *Künstlerroman* contains anticipation in its very form by carrying a potential work within its main narrative frame. Discussing the same article, Jameson describes the anticipatory consciousness generated by the metafictionality of the *Künstlerroman* as follows:

> [the] emptiness of the work within a work, this blank canvas at the center, is the very locus of the not-yet-existent itself; and it is precisely this essentially fragmentary and aesthetically unsatisfying structure of the novel of the artist which gives it its ontological value as a form and figure of the movement of the future incomplete before us. (1971: 132)

Besides the utopian function effected by the strategy described above, still another sort of anticipatory factor, linked to the former, is described by Bloch in relation to the formal techniques of the *Künstlerroman*: the quality of being projected towards the future in its open-endedness. As stated by Bloch, "no story that is a good story about production places a period behind this element of the harbinger" (1961: 277).[39] As for the metaphysics of this genre, Bloch stresses the relation which exists between the characteristics of the *Künstlerroman* and the human beings' archetypal journey towards envisioned utopia.

Besides pointing out, in these two articles, the metaphysical quest and the anticipatory consciousness in both the detective novel and the *Künstlerroman*, Bloch traces their generic history, as well as the mythical archetypes underlying them. He also explores the genres in the light of Marxist materialist undercurrents. In the case of the detective novel, the act of discovery is interpreted as analogous to that of the unveiling of dominant ideology. Not surprisingly, he sees in Marxism a radical potential for illuminating history through its "detective ideology". A cultural surplus is perceptible in the suggestion of the existence of a lost (utopian) situation to be uncovered (by historical materialist analysis). For Bloch, the search for such utopian scenery is analogous to the narrative detection strategies of this genre. Concerning the *Künstlerroman*, Bloch finds that the process of artistic production it portrays has important implications for Marxism: in this genre, the producing factor, a central notion in materialist dialectics, is not neglected in favor of the product. It is the very process of production which constitutes, Bloch reminds us, the developed theme of the *Künstlerroman*. The anticipatory factor inherent in the process of production, a central generic convention, carries the utopian surplus in terms of potentiality and latency.

---

[39] "Harbinger" refers to the quotation from Goethe Bloch is commenting on in this passage: "the early

In addition to being exemplary of Bloch's approach to literary texts, the relevance of these articles for the purposes of the present study lies in their genre-orientation, their focus on narrative strategies, and, more specifically concerning the second essay, its consideration of the 'manifestation' of the Not-Yet by means of what Jameson termed a "blank canvas at the center" (cf. quotation above) 'manifested' in the genre. As we proceed, it will become clear that these aspects directly relate to the way of reading the feminist critical dystopias I want to propose. I will now briefly examine Bloch's influence on cultural criticism produced in English.

As far as cultural activities and forms are concerned, Bloch's interdisciplinary disposition is reflected in a tendency to embrace a whole variety of phenomena in his writings, ranging from music to architecture, from literature to film, from religion to political speculation, in ways typical of encyclopaedic minds.[40] His practice problematizes distinctions between 'popular culture' and 'great art': Bloch is as attentive to the country fair and circus as to the theatre as an institution. Regarding literary criticism, an attraction to genres and forms that break conventions lead Bloch to comment on fairy tale and colportage, as well as the classical canonical works. Indeed, his works are concerned with bringing to light genres usually ignored by traditional criticism. About the detective novel, for instance, he states: "it is seldom praised and often read, even by those who despise it - what do we have here? There must be something to this case after all" (1965: 245). (This questioning resulted in the genre analysis discussed above.) Bloch's interdisciplinary mind and implicit questioning of the traditional canon can be viewed as partially responsible for his present importance and popularity in the scenario of utopian and cultural studies.[41] Indeed, as already mentioned above, his search for an utopian anticipatory consciousness in varied cultural forms certainly renders him largely responsible for a major reconfiguration regarding the object(s) of this field of investigation.

Besides the anticipatory quality of Bloch's (approach to) cultural utopianism, another decisive factor in his increasing popularity within the English-speaking context was the

---

harbingers of that which we shall be capable of achieving" (1961: 277).

[40] Such eclecticism partially derived from an education which included studies in philosophy, German literature, experimental psychology, physics, music, and Jewish mysticism. To date, there exists no book-length biography of Bloch in English. Biographical details can be found in Hudson 1982 (cf. "Bloch's Life and Writings": 4-19), Geoghegan 1996 (cf. "Life": 9-27), Gross 1972 ("Ernst Bloch: The Dialectics of Hope", in Howard & Klare eds. 1972: 107-130. Cf. "II. Life and Work": 111-15), Kellner & O'Hara 1976, Plaice et al. 1985, and Zipes 1988 (in Bloch 1988). Drew's 1985 "Introduction: From the Other Side: Reflections on the Bloch Centenary" gives an account of key facts in the philosopher's life which are reflected in his works (in Bloch 1974: xi-xlviii).

[41] In his "Introduction" to a collection of papers on Cultural Studies, Simon During observes the fact that the binary opposition between 'popular' and 'élite' culture "has historically been more fluid than cultural historians have believed" (During ed. 1993: 1-25, p. 22). Actually, Bloch's eclectic approach confirms During's point.

publication of translations of his texts from 1985 onwards, in what seems to be a belated response to his thought. From the mid-1980's key works relating to aesthetics and cultural criticism were translated into English for the first time, including *The Principle of Hope* (1959/1986), the writings collected in *Essays on the Philosophy of Music* (1974/1985) and in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* (1918-72/1988), *Heritage of our Times* (1935, rev. 1962/1991), and *Literary Essays* (1913-65/1998).[42] Before the 1980's, the translation and publication of his works was limited to fewer and shorter pieces, and Bloch's appearance in criticism in English happened mainly through the mediation of critics. Fredric Jameson lists the following reasons for the "Bloch-deafness"[43] of the English-speaking world: the all-embracing character of his system and its novelty in terms of philosophical language and perspectives; the lack of ultimate terminology and the almost religious adherence implied by his writings; and the anticipatory quality of these writings themselves (1971: 158-9). These, in turn, may have contributed to the delay in English translations. The facts remain that Bloch did not receive "the acclaim accorded to the Frankfurt School in the English-speaking world in the sixties and seventies," in spite of the views he shared with other German intellectuals (Plaice et al. 1985: xxvi); and that the impact of his thought in the English-speaking world was delayed.

In the specific areas of aesthetics and literary studies, at least two Bloch-inspired trends can be delineated, both showing a critical-Marxist orientation: a theoretical one, formed by introductions to, and explanations of, Bloch's system which originated in Fredric Jameson's writings;[44] and a more practical trend which involves the instrumentalization of Bloch's premises in readings of speculative narratives. Both date back to the 1970's. As my interest directly relates to the latter, I shall deal with it in more detail by mentioning some of the ways in which literary critics have creatively made use of Bloch's system.

The speculative-literary trend of Bloch-inspired criticism in English has been developed by scholars who favour a radical and overtly political type of approach. Among the critics whose works directly refer to Bloch, Jack Zipes, Darko Suvin and Tom Moylan deserve

---

[42] Dates given in parentheses refer to original publication followed by the publication of the English translation. *Heritage* was first published in 1935. It was revised and enlarged for the 1962 edition which was translated into English. Not all texts collected in *Literary Essays* are dated. Therefore, the years 1913-65 may not be precise.
[43] Term used by Michael Tanner (1986) to describe his own response to Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*.
[44] Published in 1971, Jameson's *Marxism and Form* includes a chapter discussing Ernst Bloch's version of a Marxist hermeneutics ("Ernst Bloch and the Future") and contextualizes it in terms of dialectical criticism. In this work Jameson "introduced [North-]American criticism to Bloch" (Finkelstein 1989: 64). *Aesthetics and Politics* (Adorno et al. 1977) features the translation of Bloch's "Discussing Expressionism" (1938). Later, in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) Jameson proposes a model for a positive Marxist hermeneutics based on the notion of a "political unconscious" whose argumentation owes a partial debt to Bloch's utopianism.

attention here. In 1979, Zipes and Suvin published key works in the area of fantastic fiction: Zipes explores, criticizes and applies Bloch's premises in readings of folk and fairy tales in his *Breaking the Magic Spell*, whereas Suvin's project, that of elaborating on a poetics of science fiction, involves the adaptation of Bloch's concept of the "novum" into that of a "narrative novum" as a defining generic trait.[45] According to Suvin, "SF is distinguished [from other fictions] by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional 'novum' (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic" (1979: 63). This "narrative novum" manifests itself by means of either the locus (time and/or space dislocation) or the dramatis personae (or both), which differ from that portrayed in naturalistic fiction, thus causing estrangement. Cognition, in turn, accounts for the distinction between SF and other non-realistic fictional genres whose conventions include metaphysical elements (like the gothic tales, for instance). Hence Suvin's definition of the SF genre - which encompasses the literary utopias - as a narrative of estrangement and cognition. Suvin himself acknowledges the structural limits implicit in any attempts to define a literary genre. But his contribution to the delineation of a poetics of SF remains a major attempt. Finally, in the 1980's Tom Moylan's definition of the "critical utopia" - a generic development in the history of the literary utopia Moylan associates with the utopianist political movements of the 1960's and 70's - also strongly relies on Bloch's utopianism.[46] What these three critics share, besides an acknowledged debt to Bloch in terms of updating and critically re-utilizing his premises, is a concern with the potentially subversive quality of speculative literature and a socio-political perspective in their readings. The establishment of scholarly science-fiction criticism in the 1970's also seems to have accounted for the growth of Bloch's popularity. His interest in the literary utopia combined with his future-oriented system provide the obvious link. Feminist studies of literary utopianism and speculative fictions is another radical branch in literary criticism where the influence of Bloch can be traced. This will be discussed in Chapter Three below.

[45] Suvin explains that estrangement in science fiction may function as a "creative approach, an organon (as Bloch said of utopia) for exploring the novum" (1979: ix). Although Suvin's conceptualization of a "narrative novum" ultimately differs from Bloch's own theorization of the utopian Novum, the two concepts are linked, since the cognitive estrangement effected by the "narrative novum" (in Suvin's sense) enables a creative exploration of the novum (in Bloch's sense).

[46] Cf. Moylan's discussion of Bloch's utopianism in *Demand* (1986: 20-26). His interest has been continued: cf. his "Utopia and Postmodernity: Six Theses", in Randolf ed. 1992: 3-14; and a recent compilation, with Jamie O. Daniel, of articles which respond to Bloch's works: *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch* (1997). Moylan's conceptualization of the "critical utopia" was dicussed in Chapter One above, p. 8.

VIII. Towards Poststructuralist Utopianism(s)

Here I will deal with a point of convergence between Bloch's utopianism and postmodernist and poststructuralist theories. The fact that such alignment is possible has been previously noticed by commentators, who have contextualized Bloch's philosophy in terms of the late twentieth-century critical debate. I will briefly refer to this debate. Actually, this possibility constitutes in itself a central factor in the continuous impact of Bloch's system among contemporary critics, for it offers us materials for discussions of key themes informing the recent paradigmatic shift in theories which characterize poststructuralism and postmodernism.[47] The discussion that follows will be limited to an overview of the issues regarding the possibilities for a utopian hermeneutics, or a utopian deconstruction, opened up by his texts.[48] This is intended as a link with the next chapter, in which Bloch's utopianism will be re-assessed from the perspectives of contemporary theories of the narrative and of feminist utopianisms, aiming to combine these practices and to devise a way of reading the feminist dystopias.

A major point of convergence between Bloch's approach and contemporary philosophy of language lies in the relationship of texts and meanings. Bloch was familiar with the writings of Wittgenstein,[49] and his understanding of the process of semiosis, imbued, of course, with his ideas on utopianism, showed a degree of sophistication. For him, "the word points differently from the start when it aims very far. It is taut, has a premonition which has nowhere yet become solid and enterable" (1959: 807), or, using his own terminology, poetic language is charged with the not-yet and, therefore, with future possibilities. Bloch's hermeneutics resists ascribing final meanings to texts, as the non-static relation between signifier and signified is of paramount importance in the construction of a utopian function turned towards that which is not-yet and latent (another one of Bloch's favourite terms). It is in the open sign[50] that the utopian function is once hinted at: "that not yet clear element which not only signifies its own matter, but also at the same time another matter within it. When this

---

[47] Some of the questions addressed by Bloch with relevance to contemporary theories include a critique of 'finished' ways of theorizing subjectivity and a claim for more fluid theories of the subject; a relativist distrust of definitive truths; and a concern with style in writing accompanied by an awareness of the uses of (philosophical) language. (An excellent analysis of Bloch's elaborate style is made by Klaus Berghahn in his 1989 "A View Through the Red Window: Ernst Bloch's *Spuren*", reprinted in Moylan & Daniel eds. 1997: 202-214.)

[48] Fredric Jameson explores such possibilities in "The Dialectic of Utopia and Ideology", in Jameson 1981: 281-299. Cf. also Christopher Norris's 1988 "Utopian Deconstruction: Ernst Bloch, Paul de Man and the Politics of Music", *Paragraph* 11: 24-57.

[49] Cf. Bloch 1962.

[50] The term *sign* is not adopted by Bloch. It was used here because it provides a synthesis of the various terms Bloch did use when speculating about representation and meaning. These include word, symbol, allegory, and

element appears in literary language, the words can certainly be sensuous and immediate, but they echo as in a great hall" (1959:174). This function seems to be located precisely in the arena of signification: for the 'Blochian sign' presents itself as an ideologically-charged and fixed form, but it also provokes "reverberations" through anticipatory consciousness.

I said above that the overlap between Bloch's model and deconstruction has stirred the interest of critics. Norman Finkelstein, for instance, has remarked that

> a utopian function characterized by plenitude and ascension cannot be regarded as distinct from a deconstruction known for a constant deferral of meaning and loss of ground. Revelations of the utopian moment in ideologically deformed cultural productions always involve a double reading of loss and gain, a simultaneity of effects, since for Bloch "Marxism is the weapon that first gives the imagination a guilty conscience and also the same weapon that heals the affected imagination" [162]. And as for deconstruction, if revelations of verbal groundlessness require violent demonstrations of the instability of signification, then they likewise involve virtual celebrations of the utopian potential of textuality as usually summed up in the notion of free play. (1989: 59)[51]

Finkelstein also states that Bloch's militant optimism accounts for his project differing from the poststructuralist and postmodernist ones, a view shared by other commentators. Fredric Jameson emphasizes Bloch's belief in utopia against the lack of "any ultimate sense of the direction or meaning" of Derrida's hermeneutics (1971: 121). In a similar fashion, Wayne Hudson suggests that Bloch's work "contains elements for a positive deconstruction of Western metaphysics against Derrida, based on the insight that the meaning which is never completely present has positive rather than negative connotations" (1982: 216). Thus, what makes the 'Blochian sign' different from the 'poststructuralist and postmodernist sign' (in its absolute relativism) is that whereas the former leads to individual and collective 'translation' of the sign into positive meaning (directed towards political action), the latter leads to endless displacement of meaning, and, ultimately, to political passivity. As correctly pointed out by Zipes, Bloch's writings stand in opposition to theorizing that leads to abstinence from action:

> For Bloch, interpreting and understanding meaning formed part of the uncontrollable relation between political struggle and the deep impulses and wishes embedded in and generated by works of art and intellectual projects such as Marxism. Reading and interpreting were political acts of detection, pointing toward resolution while demonstrating how this resolution is related to the ultimate mystery that is still in need of illumination. (1988, in Bloch 1988: xl)

cypher.
[51] Page number in brackets refers to Bloch 1988.

Here again it seems that Bloch's Marxism is the source of his optimistic belief in historical change and of his utopian vision. These two elements are not in contrast with a feminist politics of reading, as will be discussed below.

Bloch's works can be read themselves as carriers of the type of anticipatory consciousness he tried to formulate:

> I am talking about an anticipatory illumination [Vor-Schein] that could never be realized in an ideology of the status quo but, rather, has been connected to it like an explosive, as though it could always engender the most stimulating surplus beyond the ideology. (1972: 41)

This passage could very well be used to describe the way Bloch's texts themselves function. As pointed out in this section, there are textual "explosions" constantly disrupting any attempts from the reader to categorize his discourse, be it either into a fixed ideology or into final interpretations. Hence its anticipatory quality.

Finally, Bloch's speculations in the realm of aesthetics and culture deliberately do not attempt to present us with a method to be tested and/or applied. This does not mean, however, that nothing can be extracted from them, that they are "unreadable",[52] or that they have had no impact, as shown in my commentary in this chapter. The absence of rigid categories in Bloch's philosophy and criticism can be viewed positively insofar as the escape from rigid ideologies might be found valuable. Indeed, the impact of Bloch's utopian critique in current philosophical/critical trends gives evidence that his formulations cannot and must not be reduced to facile optimism on one side, or total "unreadability" on the other.

The panoramic view offered above explored the ways in which Bloch's criticism has suggested a model for a utopian hermeneutics, inspired literary studies (especially in the area of fantastic fiction), and provided the grounds for a dialogue with poststructuralism and postmodernism. Or, in the words of Caryl Flinn, "[Bloch's] work had sufficient 'cultural surplus' to reemerge later in poststructuralism" (1992: 99). Ernst Bloch produced invigorating analyses that still stand the test of time, as I have tried to show above by examining his writings from the perspective of contemporary criticism and critical practice. The next chapter will focus upon the (im)possible relations between Bloch's premises and feminism(s) and on the ways in which Bloch's thought may provide a useful paradigm for my reading of the literary dystopias.

---

[52] Term used by Tanner (1986: 923) and Wieseltier (1986: 44) in their reviews of *The Principle of Hope*.

Chapter Three

Ernst Bloch, Feminist Utopianism, and the Feminist Dystopia

> The glance at what is unincorporated [...] remains a
> good remedy against the poverty of encompassing.
> (Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*)

I. Introduction

Despite the myriad reasons we may have nowadays to be suspicious of words like
"hope" and "utopia", twentieth-century philosophy, criticism and politics show signs that
evidence a survival (and at points a strong revival) of utopianism. This revivalism is especially
noticeable in the philosophical writings of Ernst Bloch (discussed in Chapter Two above), as
well as in the radical revisionism of all spheres of experience proposed by the feminist
movement. A central utopian principle functions as the nodal point here. It does not seem
accidental that the term "feminism" itself was coined by a utopianist social reformer.[1] After
all, the movement carries hopes for that which is, in Bloch's terms, Not-Yet. But in spite of
the fundamental utopian orientation that brings the thought of the German philosopher and the
feminist movement together, there seems to have been little assessment of Bloch's work from a
feminist perspective so far; hence my undertaking with this chapter.[2] Having chosen to
propose readings of feminist texts vis-à-vis Bloch's utopianism, I will first analyze Bloch's
texts as part of a necessary feminist act of "re-vision", in Adrienne Rich's term.[3] Secondly, I
will provide illustrations of previous Bloch-inspired feminist criticism of literary utopianism.
Finally, still another possible convergence between Bloch's approaches to cultural works and
a feminist practice of reading will be suggested, a convergence which is also informed by
studies of the semiotics of narrative.

Parts II and III of this chapter respond to the challenge expressed in a critic's
assertion that "Bloch himself had little to say about feminism, and feminists, in turn, have had
little to say about Bloch" (Bammer 1991: 169). Based on the first part of the statement, my
initial aim will be to map out what Bloch did say, or imply, concerning the women's political
movement and gender issues. I will examine more closely two essays contained in *Heritage of*

---

[1] The term, whose first recorded use in English dates back to the 1890's, is derived from the French *féminisme*,
coined by the utopian socialist Charles Fourier (1772-1837). Cf. Ted Honderich ed. 1995: 270.
[2] Recent publications revisiting Bloch's thought include V. Geoghegan 1996 and Moylan & Daniel eds. 1997.
These, however, do not interrogate his system from a gender-based perspective.
[3] A discussion of feminist revisionary writing is part of my introductory chapter. Cf. section II, p. 3.

Our Times (1962), as well as parts of *The Principle of Hope* (1959). Although little was actually 'said' about feminism as a political movement, issues concerning women and gender were indeed explicitly discussed by Bloch. Moreover, much on sexual politics can be read between the lines in his texts. In section II, some tensions between Bloch and feminism will be identified. His conservatism is perceptible in a resistance to full acknowledgement of the relevance of the feminist political movement (despite his recognition of its utopian quality), and in the equation of women with utopia, which surfaces throughout his writings. I will argue that his problematic 'feminism' does not interfere, at least on the conceptual and functional levels, with a feminist approach in reading, after a certain "re-functioning" of his premises is carried out. The word is used advisedly here, as the practice of "re-functioning" is much valued by Bloch himself. His use of the term means the "elucidation, critical acquisition, functional change" of inherited cultural materials (1959:9). (The similarity between Bloch's notion of "re-functioning" and Adrienne Rich's "re-vision" is striking.)[4]

Actually, Bloch's utopianism has remained a source of inspiration for feminist assessments of women's cultural production, as will become clear in section III, where I will examine its impact on feminist criticism of the literary utopias written in the context of second wave feminism. By looking at Bloch-inspired readings of the feminist utopias, I intend to stress the ways in which feminist critical discourse has incorporated, made use of, or been influenced by Bloch's utopianism, especially in the light of the major contribution he made by conceptualizing an open-ended form of utopianism. For this, I will focus on the works of two critics: Bartkowski (1989) and Bammer (1991).

In the second half of the chapter, I will suggest that Bloch's utopianism provides a useful paradigm for the readings of the contemporary feminist dystopias. While section IV proposes to recontextualize Bloch's writings in more general terms by stressing the crucial moves necessary for the appropriation of his premises for my purposes, the following sections will provide more specific insights: section V will propose a possible alignment between studies in narrative semiotics (I am referring to works by poststructuralist theoreticians Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva) and Bloch's utopianism; and section VI will deal specifically with the feminist utopianism articulated in the conceptualizations of an elsewhere. The juxtaposition of Bloch's 're-functioned' utopianism, semiotic theories of the narrative,

---

[4] He sees the process at work in certain artistic practices and techniques (montage in Expressionist art, for instance), and in his own reutilization of a cultural heritage. It is very likely that Bloch himself would welcome the "re-functioning" of his own theories, since it was his habit to revise his own writings, as well as his political views. On Adrienne Rich's and feminist revision, see Chapter One, p. 5.

and the feminist articulation of a utopian elsewhere will guide the textual readings contained in the chapters of part II.

II. Bloch and Feminism

The portion of Bloch's writing explicitly dedicated to feminism, or the women's movement, is very limited indeed. (I am referring to works that have been translated into English so far.) Hence my decision to widen the perspective in order to account for Bloch's portrayal of gender in more general terms. In this light, women can be said to surface in at least three ways in Bloch's writings: as a gap, or blind spot, identified by the philosopher, in bourgeois thought and knowledge; as the subjects of a historical movement (when the women's movement is addressed); and as a utopianized essence (i.e., as Woman, with a capital "W"). While the first critical instance indicates an early, potential syntony with feminist thought, the other two are revealing of gender-biased conservatism.

Two essays contained in *Heritage of Our Times* illustrate Bloch's identification of women as gap, or absence, in the dominant bourgeois system of thought. As worded by Bloch himself, the theme of *Heritage* is a critique of the "bourgeoisie in decay",[5] and the whole volume functions as a chronicle of this fragmentation. The texts I want to emphasize, "Many Chambers in the World-house" and "Topical Crosswiseness: Fear of 'Chaos'",[6] will be treated together here due to their shared aim: to construct a critique of the exclusionary practices of bourgeois society (which are, in turn, both shaped by and reflected in its philosophy) and to reclaim pluralism. They display a tentative "catalogue of what has been omitted, of those contents which have no place in the male, bourgeois, ecclesiastical conceptual system" (1928: 355). Bloch correctly points out that the "abstract rationalism" and "habitual sense of life" which characterize the bourgeois frame of reference have worked to repress some existential contents listed in the earlier essay as: women, the body, sensual happiness, pregnancy, and death. In the discussion about women, he identifies a fundamental difference and excess that leads him to a rejection of the stereotyped social roles available in the 1920's: "Not the chaste maid, not the donna graziosa, not the sister of reform with equal rights, not the chorus girl, not the female comrade elucidates the indefinite aspect of woman, hardly that which is already given to her herself" (1928: 352). I take "the indefinite aspect of woman" in the quotation above to mean that which is not yet defined and remains outside (as an excess to) the social

---

[5] "Preface to the 1935 Edition", in Bloch 1962: 4.
[6] The texts which compose *Heritage* were written in the 1920's and 1930's. These two essays were originally written in 1928 and 1932, respectively. In Bloch 1962: 352-359 and 360-365.

structures criticized by Bloch. From a feminist perspective, this analysis can be read both positively and negatively, as will become clear as we proceed.

The 1932 essay has a more specific agenda, namely to expose a taboo involving matter, which is termed by Bloch as a "fear of chaos". He relates this attitude to old-established bourgeois values, and shows its origins in age-old mythologies working in service of a basis of reaction which is both patriarchal and ecclesiastical in nature. The realm of matter, or "chaos", appears as that which has to be repressed and restrained. Its manifestations include "the always disorderly woman" (1932: 362), as well as the realm of the "below" in both its religious and material connotations: via the association of the mythical serpent with the fallen woman's flesh, and of matter with the process of material production and the working classes.

In these analyses, woman is cited twice in association with the "chaotic" realm of matter repressed by the dominant value system. Though hardly a new correlation, in this context it is double-edged. On one hand, it significantly indicates Bloch's awareness of the restrained quality of women's libidinal economy as he hoped to expose the ideological quality of such restraint. At this point, Bloch appears to be potentially very finely attuned to feminist claims against oppressive patriarchal structures. On the other hand, his critique presents a risk in the sense that it is constructed upon the reactionary conflation of woman and lack (or disruptive excess), or woman and the body.

The essays suggest that cultural pluralism will surface in the end, and that the socially repressed contents "have to emerge again to the same extent as the system is exploded in revolutionary terms" (1928: 355). Bloch argues that pluralism is fundamental to the dialectically open system of thought based on the "rationalism of contingency" (rather than "abstract rationalism") he defends. The philosophical way out of the rigid conceptual structures being critiqued is contained in Bloch's proposal of such a renewed mode of rationalism, but the concrete social processes and human agency necessary to achieve transformation are left in obscurity. This exposes the 'not-so-contingent' quality of his own rationalism.

Bloch's inclusion of women in his repertoire of what is repressed by the bourgeois frame of reference occurs incidentally, lacks historical specificity, and overlooks the important issue of women's historical agency. Virginia Woolf's claims in a text published in the same period sound strikingly concrete in contrast.[7] In his defence, it should be stressed that Bloch

---

[7] Cf. *A Room of One's Own* (1929).

was at least *aware* of the issue of repressed content (and of its gender, class, and race implications), and made this awareness public with his writing. Besides, bringing the ('absence' of the) sensual, material body into theoretical evidence can and must be read positively. We should bear in mind that some of the issues that are taken for granted now (especially after so much sophisticated materialist feminist theorizing), were simply ignored in the first decades of the twentieth century, and Bloch's contribution in bringing them to light should not to be dismissed or obfuscated by his misjudgements.

It is in *The Principle of Hope* that women appear as historical agents. Part IV of the second volume deals with a series of group utopias, among which is the "struggle for the new woman, programme of the women's movement." Bloch refers, of course, to the first wave of the movement,[8] and his analysis is flawed by historical imprecisions and distortions.[9] In general terms, he qualifies the women's movement as "outmoded", "replaced" and "postponed". Bloch blames the small impact of the struggle upon its assimilation by the capitalist class system, hence being "outmoded". In his opinion, feminism "has pushed open bourgeois doors that were already open" (1959: 595), or in other words, it enabled the surfacing of women as a new force of production which was, in turn, necessary to and immediately incorporated by the pre-existing capitalist structures. Besides, the movement is "replaced", "because a struggle against the sexual barrier becomes pathetic without a struggle against the class barrier" (1959: 595). Finally, feminism is defined as "postponed" because woman "emerges as a problem again even beyond economic and social liberation" (1959: 596). In other words, even after the advent of classless society, the utopian possibilities for woman remain to be explored and released.

In response to Bloch's claims that the women's movement was at once "outmoded", "replaced" and "postponed", from a feminist perspective one could argue that the first charge ignores the immense impact of the movement even working from within a bourgeois capitalist context. Some of the victories of first wave feminism (women's right to vote and to have access to tertiary education, for instance) are certainly not to be disdained. Secondly, instead of "replacing" the category of sex by that of class, it is now obvious that the sexual factor in feminist politics and criticism was refined and extended in order to incorporate debates about

---

[8] Although Bloch lived long enough to witness the upsurge of second-wave feminism (he died in 1977), he seems to have remained silent about it.
[9] Bloch states, for instance, that "The Soviet Union faces no question of women's rights any more, because it has solved the question of workers' rights"; and an example of "specifically female attitudes" is taken from Gorki's portrayal of the mother in his realistic text. Cf. pp. 595, 596.

class (as well as other axes of difference: race, age, sexual orientation, etc.).[10] One trend in feminist thought even argues that, in terms of historical patterns of oppression, sex and class are conflated.[11] Finally, with regard to the "postponement" charge, it prioritizes class over sex. By stressing the priority of the class revolution over the feminist one, Bloch falls in the same trap as most (male) Marxist commentators, whose "sex-blindness" was to be pointed out by Marxist feminists writing in the context of the second wave of the movement.[12]

Whereas the feminist utopianism represented by the women's movement appears distorted (either contaminated by bourgeois tendencies or consisting of a vague dream which needs to be 'corrected' by the utopia of a classless society as shown above), and thus receives a constrained treatment and partial sympathy from Bloch, woman *as* utopia is a recurrent motif in his discussions of utopianism. Here we get to my third point, that concerning the presence of women as utopianized essence (as Woman), as the embodiment of utopia itself. I shall continue to explore *The Principle of Hope* in order to expand this point.

Eroticized utopian desire usually surfaces as something in the possession of the heterosexual male, with women being framed as objects of this desire, as evidenced by the visual imagery created by Bloch himself, or chosen by him to be discussed. Ranging from the fleeting images of daydreams with which he opens many of the sections of *The Principle of Hope*[13] to the lengthier discussions of myths and the arts, the pattern is repeated. Even the most superficial look at the cultural themes he chooses to explore in his examples of utopian anticipation and content evidences Bloch's centring of the desiring economy around the male subject. The two myths of Helen, the portrait of Pamina in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, woman as expectant landscape in painting, whatever the medium utilized, the syntax is mostly the same: a male subject is erotically compelled by the utopian dream or image of perfect femininity.

---

[10] This development in feminist methods has been described as "the engendering of differences" (Gubar 1998).

[11] The work of Monique Wittig can be cited as an example of this radical reconfiguration of the categories of sex and class. Aiming to expose the historical and ideological constructedness of patterns of oppression, she claims that sex constitutes a class. See her *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (1992).

[12] An excellent assessment of this critique is Maggie Humm's "Marxist-Feminist Criticism" (in *Feminist Criticism* 1986: 72-88), from which I borrowed the qualification "sex-blind". A more recent feminist critique of Marxism is Luce Irigaray's in *I Love to You - Sketch for a Felicity Within History* (1996). The absence of gender as a significant variable in Bloch's political analyses is briefly discussed by Geoghegan 1996: 114-115.

[13] One instance can be found in "Little Daydreams", where Bloch sets the theme of the whole work and stresses the pervasiveness of utopian longings in everyday life. One of the images presented is that of a woman's coveting a commodity good which has been eroticized and displayed in a shop window, while a man passing by looks at the woman: "and so both of them have a share of the wishful land" (1959: 33). This woman's desire thus appears to be "framed" on two levels: by consumer culture (her desire is shaped around a commodity by capitalist culture), as well as by Bloch's text (which places her as the object of male desire).

A chapter integrating Bloch's elaborations on the concept of anticipatory consciousness is dedicated to the myth of the Egyptian and Trojan Helens. His aim is to stress the threat posed by a dream when it becomes "brighter than its realization" (1959: 181). Bloch explains that this happens when the idol poses itself as real, and its fulfilment acts as a phantom, a phenomenon contained in one version of the Greek myth of Helen of Troy. In this version two Helens are depicted: the 'real' Helen is entrusted to Egyptian kings and kept in safety, while a phantom Helen is fashioned by the gods and sent to Troy to provoke strife. The Troy Helen is the one who has a phantasmatic existence, who is surrounded by a halo of utopian glamour; whereas the Egyptian Helen, the corporeal entity, is diminished and eclipsed by her utopianized double. For Bloch such occurrence is threatening to the fulfilment of concrete utopia, for it appears "as reification of the goal-dream, or at least as the continuation of this goal-dream which has become like reality" (1959: 186). Although his effort is clearly meant to raise our awareness of the dangers inherent in this phenomenon, his argument backfires. This is so because of the way in which Bloch himself reifies and idolizes women in his texts. Like the Troy Helen, their presence is phantasmatic, they embody utopian glamour as objects to be desired and, ultimately, obfuscate real women. Paradoxically, Bloch is claiming that Menelaus should not lose sight of the 'real' Helen, while his own texts are populated by phantasmatic women who surface as someone else's "utopian ground",[14] but devoid of utopias of their own. Thus Bloch becomes in theory what Menelaus became in myth: enchanted by a utopianized phantom.

In brief, his texts suppress the female utopian space Bloch himself had pointed out as a repressed factor. Whereas the earlier Bloch criticizes the fact that women represent a gap in the bourgeois frame of reference (knowledge, philosophy and experience), his later writings usually deny their positionality as subjects of utopian desire and hope by representing them as the embodiment of utopia. Finally, in the role of protagonists of a political movement, women are (at least temporarily) displaced. (The small space given to the utopia of the women's movement in *The Principle of Hope* is 'engulfed' by the suppression of women's utopian subjectivity which characterizes the text as a whole.) Therefore, it can be affirmed that, in terms of content, Bloch's utopianism is mostly dystopic for women. However, in conceptual and functional terms, his system of thought has continually attracted feminists, as will be evidenced in section III below.

---

[14] As illustrated by his discussions of female nudes in painting. Cf. Bloch 1959: 797-799.

III. Feminism and Bloch

This section aims to assess the impact of Bloch's utopianism on recent feminist thought. This could be carried out by following the route leading from Bloch's reconfiguration of utopianism, via his influence on the new Left movement of the 1960's, and finally reaching the second wave of feminism. For my purposes here, however, the scope will be limited to a view of Bloch's impact on a very specific form of literary criticism. I will focus on two critical works which present Bloch-inspired readings of the corpus of feminist literary utopias produced in the context of second wave feminism: Frances Bartkowski's *Feminist Utopias* (1989) and Angelika Bammer's *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970's* (1991).[15]

Beside the fact that both writers strongly base their literary analyses on Bloch's utopianism, Bartkowski and Bammer share other points in common, namely the identification of a literary corpus marked by genre and gender, the historical contextualization of this corpus in terms of the revival of utopianism which characterized the new women's movement, their belonging to a trend in feminist literary criticism delineated in response to the emergence of a great number of feminist literary utopias starting from the late 1960's, and finally their cross-cultural approach.[16]

Despite the similarities, a closer look at the works of these critics reveals some differences in approach. Although her text is heavily influenced by Blochian vocabulary, Bartkowski shows very limited concern with the conceptual subtleties, and the result is a superficial use of the philosopher's system centred upon the basic concepts of hope and the Not-Yet. For Bartkowski, feminist utopian fictions are versions - or visions - of the Not-Yet: "Feminist fictions are the 'places' where women speak the desires that frame the anticipatory consciousness of utopia made concrete, bringing the not-yet into the here and now" (1989: 162).

By limiting her considerations about utopian hope mostly to the level of the fictional content (the descriptions of the configuration of the feminist utopias), Bartkowski, albeit working with an alternative canon, can be aligned with previous descriptive studies in the area

---

[15] I have chosen to discuss Bartkowski's and Bammer's studies because their approach to Bloch's utopianism is extensive. However, they are by no means the only studies on feminist utopianism to allude to his theorization of utopia. Cf., for instance, Sarah W. Goodwin's "Feminism and Utopian Discourse in *Pride and Prejudice, Villette*, and 'Babette's Feast'" (in Jones & Goodwin eds. 1990: 1-20), Jan Relf's *Rehearsing the Future: Utopia and Dystopia in Women's Writing, 1960-1990* (1991a) and Lucy Sargisson's *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (1996).

[16] Both authors compare/contrast works written in different countries/languages. Bartkowski discusses texts by North-American, French and Canadian authors, while Bammer focuses on works produced in East and West

of literary utopianism[17] in repeating Bloch's approach in his own treatment of literary utopianism.[18] In Bloch's study this content-based approach led to a dismissive treatment of the genre, especially in its post-Marxist manifestations. Labelling the novels abstract utopias (i.e. dreams unconnected with the concrete utopia offered by Marxism only), Bloch views the pre-Marxist manifestations of literary utopianism as anticipations of the designing of the future which will be "concretely corrected in the work of Marx" (1959: 481). For him, the genre lost justification and was outdated by Marxist theory.[19] Although Bartkowski in no way treats her subject matter lightly or dismissively, her readings consist primarily of a list of content descriptions. Besides, her approach generates an awkward accommodation of the dystopia as a subgenre: "While eight of these novels [...] have been chosen primarily for their utopian strategies, that is to say, the what-if of hope, two of them [...] specifically aim to ask the what-if of despair, the underside and antinomy of hope, the dystopian" (1989: 4). Or:

> Each of the utopian novels studied here offers a model of how history and the
> future might be shaped if women were the subjects, that is, speakers of these
> histories; the two dystopian fictions represent the deformation of possible
> histories and futures when women are silenced. (1989: 161)

Bartkowski's neat separation of utopias (meaning eutopias) and dystopias does not allow much space for an engagement with the issues of the blurred boundaries between the subgenres, as well as the ambiguities and self-criticism contained in the novels. Implicitly, it is suggested that "utopian strategies" are limited to the subgenre of literary eutopias.[20]

Like Bartkowski, Bammer reads feminist fictions as "partial" and "partisan" visions of the dreams of a better life in terms of less oppression for women.[21] Unlike the former,

Germany, France and the U.S..

[17] For an account of this critical practice, see "Ideal Commonwealths: The Emerging Tradition" (in Levitas 1990: 9-34).

[18] Bloch's readings of literary utopias are found mainly in Chapter 36 ("Freedom and Order, Survey of Social Utopias") of *The Principle of Hope*, Volume Two.

[19] One of the issues that has intrigued me most when considering Bloch's cultural criticisms is the fact that, apart from random insights on structural elements of literary utopias, his approach is primarily function- and content-based. I will always wonder why Bloch was able to produce such excellent pieces exploring the formal elements of other literary genres (like the detective novel and the *Künstlerroman*), but has left nothing as refined as those on the literary utopias.

[20] Bartkowski's own argumentation reveals some contradictions. On one hand, it is her opinion that "a promissory rhetoric of hope" was rendered naive by the reactionary politics of the 1980's, which caused the feminist utopian writing to become dystopian, or less hopeful. In the same chapter, however, she correctly identifies a thread of "dystopian hope and resistance" in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1989: 133, 145). The notion of a "rhetoric of hope", which seems to be consistent with the traces of hope identified in the protagonist's discourse, is not expanded, though. This is precisely where more flexible, ambiguous boundaries between eutopia and dystopia as subgenres play a crucial role, as has been suggested by previous work on literary utopianism. Cf. the discussion on p. 8.

[21] The terms are indeed used by both (Bartkowski 1989: 166; Bammer 1991: 4). The recognition of the partiality of women's utopias can be contrasted with Bloch's earlier definition of the women's movement discussed above. For Bloch, partiality signalled weakness, whereas for contemporary feminist critics it is the only possible

however, Bammer's approach reveals a more careful reutilization of Bloch's conceptual framework. Aware of the structural death of utopia, of the always-existing dystopic dangers hovering in the horizon of traditional utopias, Bammer prefers to focus on a "utopian impulse" perceptible in the works of those who have been historically disempowered on grounds of gender, class, and race: "The work of women writers [...] is often centrally informed by what the philosopher Ernst Bloch has called an 'anticipatory consciousness': a consciousness of possibilities that have not yet been - but could eventually be - realized" (1991: 3). Stating that novels are informed by a utopian impulse, or by an "anticipatory consciousness", sounds undoubtedly more reasonable than the claims made by Bartkowski, where the use of words like "frame" and "model", for instance, reveals a way of reading oriented towards 'utopian' blueprints. The highly dystopic social configurations depicted in the fictions I want to focus on renders Bartkowski's approach inappropriate. In my opinion, utopian undertones are interwoven with the dystopic structures in a processual relationship that is precluded by Bartkowski's dichotomous model. Bammer's work, on the other hand, offers a functional potential for readings of the feminist dystopias. It shows an engagement with utopianism as process, which she defines thus:

> Experimental rather than prescriptive, speculative rather than predictive, this new utopianism proposed a politics of change cast in the subjunctive instead of the imperative mode. It was a politics that dared to leave questions open, a politics of the "what if..." (1991: 51)

She reminds us of Bloch's crucial role in the process of "reclaiming and redefining the utopian towards as yet open ends" (1991: 51).

Another aspect of Bammer's work worth considering here is the importance assigned to textual form. In her analysis, the formal factor surfaces not only in the sense that she is dealing with a group of texts that belong to a genre traditionally and extensively treated in utopian studies (i.e., the literary utopias), but also in the argument that some textual structures contribute to the manifestation of the utopian potential of the texts. The examples she gives include open-endedness, communal narrative point of view, and the subversion of novelistic unity by the juxtaposition of different genres. Thus, for Bammer, function, content, and form (in its macro and micro configurations) interweave to enhance the utopian impulse of a text. As will be made clear below, the way of reading I want to propose favours a similar combination of variables.

---

way to theorize utopianism. Concerning the issue of partiality in contemporary feminism utopianisms, see also Willemsen's 1997 "Feminism and Utopias: An Introduction" in van Lenning et al. eds. 1997: 1-9.

While commentators have tended to emphasize the symbolic, even the "epic", (as opposed to the functional) nature of the system of thought developed by Bloch (Geoghegan 1996: 3), the critics I discussed above, on the other hand, have shown by means of their practices that this is not necessarily so. Indeed, Bammer herself suggests that "Bloch's work offers much that could be of use to feminists" (1991: 169). My proposal in the last sections of this chapter aims to contribute still another way of bringing Bloch's and feminist utopianisms together.

IV. Envisaging Utopia / Reading the Feminist Dystopia

Bloch himself makes no specific mentions of the literary dystopia, let alone the *feminist* dystopia. Perhaps due to his optimism, the philosopher overlooked this literary genre. Besides, women's cultural production was largely ignored by him. However, the distance between Bloch's theories and practices regarding utopia and the feminist dystopias is only apparent, as I hope to demonstrate. As stated in the introduction, the presence of a strong utopian charge in this subgenre has led me to undertake a quest for utopia in dystopia, for the utopian traces and spaces found within the fictional realm of dystopia. In order to do this, I will rely strongly and creatively on Bloch's analyses of utopianism. Strongly because his basic premises concerning utopianism (discussed in Chapter Two), as well as his insights in the analyses of different manifestations of an anticipatory consciousness in cultural forms, will orient the readings. Creatively because at some points the conceptual tools he offered will be recycled, extended or updated.

My proposal involves a "re-functioning" of Bloch's utopianism. It is primarily an extension of his work because I seek to contribute to the construction of a "hermeneutics of hope", a task that Bloch both proposed and started to undertake with the beautiful, huge project of *The Principle of Hope*.[22] My contribution will be centred upon women's literary utopianism, and upon the ways that enable the identification of what Bartkowski termed a "rhetoric of hope".[23] I am specially interested in narrative strategies that relate to (or help to create) utopian spaces in writing when reading from a gender-informed perspective. Actually, the notion of a "hermeneutics" (as opposed to a "rhetoric") of hope offers some operational advantages. Both terms have had a long history in relation to textual practices, but I will favour the idea of a "hermeneutics", which derives from the Greek term for "interpretation", because it foregrounds the presence and the role of the reader to a larger scale. (While

---

[22] Cf. Bloch's "Introduction" to *The Principle of Hope* (1959: 6).

"rhetoric" is more suggestive of formal techniques, thus implying some intrinsically utopian content attached to certain forms.) Besides, the term "hermeneutics" has been used in a very particular way in recent studies on narratology following Barthes's conceptualization of a "hermeneutic code" in *S/Z* (1970). This will be further discussed under V below.

I will be refunctioning Bloch's original work to the extent that this project will set out to: a. centralize its focus upon women as producers of cultural forms, subjects of their own desire, and creators of their own utopias; b. reconsider the function, content and form of utopia; and c. recuperate, systematize and update some of Bloch's insights and analytical moves scattered throughout his criticisms of several artistic and cultural forms. As shown in section I above, Bloch's utopianism is extremely sexist: utopian desire is prerogative of the male subject, while women are positioned as objects of (male) utopian desire. By showing their gaps and sexist bias, I hope to have contextualized Bloch's writings within an androcentric critical and philosophical tradition. Following earlier commentators (discussed in section III above) in their belief that his conceptual framework is not intrinsically antagonistic to women-centred practices of writing and reading, emphasis will be shifted away from Bloch's analyses of male cultural production. This will be so not only to the extent that the feminist dystopias I will focus on were written by women, but also in the sense that these texts portray female subjects as characters in search of their own utopias, struggling from within dystopic patriarchal social environments. Besides, these fictions overtly address a female audience (without dismissing a male one, of course), and thus play a crucial role in the construction of a feminist utopian consciousness, both at the individual and collective levels, and in the formation of a female feminist public sphere.

Regarding the function, content and form of utopia, this tripartite model of aspects to be considered when thinking about utopianisms is derived from the work of Ruth Levitas, who argues for a non-static approach to each of these factors. Briefly put, content refers to the "portrayal of the good society"; "form", to how this vision is expressed (as in the case of utopia being defined as a literary genre, for instance); and "function", to the instrumentality of utopia, or "what utopia is for" (1990: 4-5). For my purposes, while Bloch's basic premise that "the essential function of utopia is a critique of what is present" (1964: 12) will be kept (as it is attuned with the critical aims of feminist utopianism), some of his considerations concerning the utopian content are problematic and inappropriate for the way of reading I want to favour.

---

[23] See note 20 above.

The central issue here is that, although fundamental to his Marxist positioning, the dichotomy between abstract and concrete utopianism, linked to the contents of the utopian dreams, ultimately leads to the confinement of the (in this case, literary) utopian imagination (Levitas 1990, 1997).[24] This is the point where Bloch's system and my own practice of reading diverge dramatically, and where I fully agree with Levitas (1997) when she states that the distinction proposed by Bloch implies teleological closure and is epistemologically untenable. Unlike Bloch's, my proposal has to do with the interpretation of utopian images (as opposed to an evaluation of their actual role in the transformation of empirical reality). Hence the emphasis placed on the 'hermeneutical factor' in the discussion above. Consequently, it precludes the abstract/concrete dichotomy when understood as mutually exclusive categories. One advantage of moving away from such a rigid dichotomy is that it rids the process of reading utopian literature of the didacticism which surrounds much of its criticism. Central to Bloch's utopianism, the abstract/concrete dichotomy is, in the last analysis, linked to the categories of desire and hope and therefore is crucial to utopian thought in general. The way of reading I want to propose will recycle this conceptual pair, which will be considered in a more fluid and interactional relation. This will become clear in section VI below, in the discussion of feminist theorizations of a utopian elsewhere.

As to the question of utopia as form, Bloch's all-inclusiveness in terms of the artistic and cultural practices surveyed has produced polarized reactions. Some commentators praise him for having opened up endless possibilities for the discussion of culturally diverse manifestations of utopianism. Others, not without reason, sharply criticize his lack of technical expertise in dealing with different forms of cultural expression. I am sympathetic to both. My own approach is located in the field of literary utopianism, which has, of course, traditionally been incorporated by utopian studies.[25] I will deal specifically with the feminist dystopia and will consider, in my analysis, the specificities of the structures of the form, that is, the formal qualities that contribute to the generation of a utopian impulse within the subgenre in question. I have chosen to favour a very limited field in the hope of avoiding the technical imprecisions in dealing with my object of study. My choice obviously also has to do with my preferences and previous training.

Finally, my claim for Bloch's "functionality" will become more apparent when the recuperation, systematization and updating of his analyses are effected in the practice of

---

[24] Cf. *The Concept of Utopia* (1990) and "Educated Hope: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia" (1997, in Owen and Moylan eds. 1997: 65-79).
[25] Lyman T. Sargent's "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" (1994) maps out this terrain.

reading. The main aim is to point out that much of Bloch's approach to utopianism can be "refunctioned" from the perspective of literary studies. This will be accomplished in two ways: first by stressing the possible links between his theorizations and part of an increasing body of knowledge currently known by the umbrella terms of narrative semiotics (or narratology, as favoured by some); secondly by actually borrowing some of the ways used by Bloch in his readings of cultural forms and literary genres and adapting them for my own readings of the feminist literary dystopias. The first step will involve a more theoretical discussion, in the following sections, of the convergence between Bloch's premises and a gender-informed semiotic approach to narrative. The second, which will become clear as we proceed with the textual readings themselves (in the chapters contained in part II), is more specific. I will be arguing that certain formal strategies which Bloch associates with the anticipatory consciousness observed in different cultural forms can be read vis-à-vis the contemporary feminist dystopias I have chosen to focus on.

V. Refunctioning Bloch's Utopianism I: Continuities with a Semiotics of Narrative

Most of Bloch's writings on utopianism were produced in the first half of the century, during the period when the necessity of the discipline of semiotics (or semiology)[26] was affirmed by Charles Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussurre. Broadly defined as a theory of signs, sign systems, and meanings, the field of semiotics has shown greater theoretical development and has consolidated into a discipline mainly from the 1960's. My concern in this section is to relate Bloch's utopianism to the field of literary semiotics, in the hope that the readings of the literary texts that follow in part II will not be reduced to exercises in feminist ideology. Accompanying my approach to literary texts as carriers of a feminist utopian/ideological message is a need to heed the specificities of literary texts as a semiotic practice. I find in the combination of Bloch's works and those by semioticians of the narrative some elements which allow for the construction of a "semiotics of utopia", which, in turn, will serve as a general working frame for my readings.

In a remark concerning the relationship of representation and utopia, a philosopher and semiotician has stated that:

---

[26] Katie Wales explains that the two terms "are virtually synonymous; [semiology], following Saussure, favoured especially in France; [semiotics], following Peirce, favoured especially in [North-]America" (1989 : 416). Umberto Eco also mentions the two terms as equivalents (1976: 1).

> every representation conceals and harbors, through its frontiers, frames, borders, edges, and limits, a utopia, that is, a utopian drive, a desire for an elsewhere that nevertheless would be realized here and now: a representation within which, around which, desires, wishes, hopes, and expectations are longing for blissful achievement. (Marin 1993: 419)

While I believe in the truth of the assertion, and the present project moves towards providing evidence for its truth, it leaves one wondering, concerning the process of representation, exactly where such a utopian drive (Bloch has termed it the "utopian function" or the "anticipatory consciousness" of utopia) is located, or how it works. To this effect, my questions could be worded as follows: How are utopian spaces, or utopian drives, located in narrative? How does a semiotics of utopia work? And in what ways can it be informed by feminism? My aim in this section is to try and provide tentative answers to these questions.

Three Blochian premises discussed in the previous chapter will underlie the discussion that follows. The first concerns the impossibility of defining the utopian object (perceptible in Bloch's refusal to define the content of utopia); the second is the notion that a utopian function is inherent in cultural forms and literature (reiterated in Louis Marin's words above) and manifested by means of anticipatory consciousness of the Not-Yet; and the third relates to what Bloch terms the utopian surplus, which, closely linked to the utopian function, is associated with the continuous production of meaning.

Aligning the premises above to some of the concepts developed by Barthes and Kristeva[27] may provide a fruitful way to proceed. Both critics conceive literary texts as a semiotic practice and locate desire at the origin of narrative (Barthes 1970; Kristeva 1980). In an explanation that could apply to her own conceptualization of literature, Kristeva argues that

> for Barthes, "desire" seems to signify the recognition of a heterogeneous element in relation to the symbolic - the space of a material contradiction where the "other" is another *topos* of the subject, an other *practice* of the sexes. (1971: 117, her emphases)[28]

This heterogeneous element engendered by a desiring economy in writing, which Barthes terms "negativity", and Kristeva herself, the "semiotic" (as opposed to the paternal symbolic), is formulated in a "negative", or "supplementary", relationship to meaning understood in its symbolic function of language (Barthes 1970; Kristeva 1971 and 1975).[29]

---

[27] I am aware that these thinkers have produced very distinct and changeable bodies of knowledge. They are brought together in this section on the assumption that their theories of semiotic practices can be partially juxtaposed and provide interesting ways to bridge Bloch's system and literary narratives.

[28] Taken from Kristeva's review of Barthes's work in "How Does One Speak to Literature?" (1971), in *Desire in Language* (1980: 92-123).

[29] See Kristeva 1971 and "From One Identity to an Other" (1975), also in *Desire in Language* (1980: 124-147).

Of particular interest in such theoretical formulations is their proximity to Bloch's premises. What surfaces in the quotation above as an "other *topos*" (the term rings a bell) of subjectivity, an "other *practice* of the sexes", appears to be, in my view, very close to the notion of an anticipatory consciousness manifested in the utopian cultural surplus theorized by Bloch. According to Kristeva, this otherness unsettles the paternal symbolic order (the thetic function of language).[30] This reminds us of Bloch's remark concerning the function of utopia in terms of a critique of the present order, and of the metaphor of the "spark" which is repeatedly used by him to refer to the presence of utopian impulses in everyday life and cultural forms. The "spark" for Bloch is certainly charged with revolutionary connotations, which are also perceptible in Barthes's and Kristeva's writings. The difference (which is not a divergence) between both approaches seems to be that in Blochian terms, the (utopian) otherness communicated by literature is oriented towards revolution in the Marxist sense, that is, in the form of a transformation of the real, empirical world, whereas Barthes and Kristeva are mainly dealing with revolution in (for Kristeva, poetic) language and the shattering of the symbolic order. Whereas the semioticians try to build a theory of desire in dialectical relationship with the repressive norm (the semiotic and the symbolic, in Kristeva's words), in Blochian terms a similar relationship is treated in terms of utopia versus ideology. But ultimately the two projects interweave, especially when they are viewed in the light of developments in Marxist theory which have tended towards an approach to history as an absent cause, whose only access occurs via symbolic structures.[31]

Another aspect to be considered is that psychoanalysis plays a crucial role in both systems: Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis allows for Kristeva's conceptualization of the interplay between language as symbolic function and the repressed instinctual drives, which cause dissonance and heterogeneity (its semiotic "otherness"); while, according to Bloch, the workings of the utopian function also originate in unconscious drives. One crucial difference between Blochian and Kristevan appropriations of psychoanalytical discourse lies in their temporal orientation. Kristeva's definition of the "semiotic" in language refers to a "*distinctiveness* admitting of an uncertain and indeterminate articulation because it does not

---

[30] The "thetic" phase is a necessary step in the process of production of meaning, summed up by Toril Moi thus: "The semiotic continuum must be split if signification is to be produced. This splitting (*coupure*) of the semiotic *chora* is the thetic phase (from thesis), enabling the subject to attribute differences and thus signification to what was the ceaseless heterogeneity of the *chora*." Cf. Moi's "Introduction" to *The Kristeva Reader* (1986: 13).
[31] See especially *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), where Jameson proposes that "history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise". History is posed by him as "an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and [...] our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious" (1981: 35).

yet refer [...] or no longer refers [...] to a signified object for a thetic consciousness" (1975: 133, her emphasis). As already discussed in the previous chapter, the portion of Bloch's theorization of utopianism which tries to account for psychic processes privileges the futurity implied by the Not-Yet-Conscious, rather than an anterior (repressed) consciousness.[32] Nevertheless, in spite of Bloch's one-sided, future-oriented tendency, he did identify a form of utopian consciousness which was past-oriented (as, for instance, in his analysis of the detective novels).

Thirdly, a comparison can be drawn concerning the task of the reader/critic in the works of Barthes and Kristeva on one hand and Bloch's on the other. Barthes views literature as a discourse in which "the certainties of language" are disturbed (1966: 70), the univocity of a transcendental signified shattered. Similarly, Kristeva emphasizes the work of literary language against a transcendental signified. Her interest lies in that "otherness" in language which prevents the reduction of a text to one meaning. She describes her analytical procedure in terms of a "search within the signifying phenomenon for the crisis or the unsettling process of meaning" (1975: 125). Both perform a search for that which disturbs and unsettles, that is, for a "negativity" underlying the symbolic structures of literary language. In her review of Barthes's works, Kristeva reminds us that this "negativity" implies a "positivity" in the sense that a restoration of meaning is carried out by the reader/critic:

> The operating negativity of writing is grasped, in criticism, by *One Affirmation*. It is ultimately blocked by *one* meaning clearly revealing the critic's writing as being entirely triggered, sustained, and determined by the discourse of the other. (1971: 108, her emphases)

For Barthes, "to write is *already* to organize the world, it is *already* to think" (1966: 51). Because critics rearticulate literary writing by producing more writing they re-present writing and produce thought and meaning. I want to argue that these procedures of detecting a (disturbing, unsettling) "negativity" followed by the "positive" move of assigning a meaning to a text parallels "negative" and "positive" moves of Bloch's own hermeneutic procedure, discussed above. At that point I mentioned that contemporary critics find in Bloch the model for a "utopian deconstruction", that is, a possible combination of the "negative" mode of thinking implied by the deconstructive task with "positive" utopian thinking.[33] The semiotic

---

[32] Cf. p. 26.
[33] See Chapter Two, Section VIII. Also relevant in this context is the Bloch-inspired project for a Marxist hermeneutics proposed by Fredric Jameson: "[Marxist analysis] can no longer be content with its demystifying vocation to unmask and to demonstrate the ways in which a cultural artifact fulfills a specific ideological mission [...]. It must not cease to practice this essentially negative hermeneutic function [...] but must also seek, through and beyond this demonstration of the instrumental function of a given cultural object, to project its simultaneously Utopian power as the symbolic affirmation of a specific historical and class form of collective

projects of Barthes and Kristeva and Bloch's approach to utopianism are compatible in the sense that they open up the space for the critic to "risk" the production of one (for Bloch, utopian) meaning.

It is the political dimension of such utopian-redemptive hermeneutical mode that, in my opinion, feminism cannot do without. Bloch's "deconstructive utopianism" allows for the appropriation of his thought by a feminist way of reading that intends to go beyond the pure negativity of a deconstructive practice centred upon an ever-floating (and therefore subjectless and apolitical) signified, and to move towards the affirmation of utopian unity and solidarity. For contemporary feminisms, it must be stressed again and again, such utopian impulse towards the building up of a collectivity can only be manifested in partial, provisional terms.

Having provided an overall view of the convergence between Bloch's conceptualization of a utopian anticipatory consciousness in cultural forms, and more recent semiotic formulations of an "otherness" in literary language triggered by the workings of desire, I will now explore in more detail the narrative manifestation of such utopian "otherness". Brilliantly coined, the word "utopia" carries in itself its own contradiction. It refers to a "good" place which is at the same time the "no" place, and thus it expresses a paradox. In semiotic terms, it could be said that utopia is a (representational) "fullness" which carries and exposes its embedded "emptiness" (a deferral in content and signification), for the sign represents its "non-representability". Although Bloch never raised the issue in semiotic terms, his writings show insight into this matter when he discusses the paradox of utopia and the impossibility of defining its object. Besides, it is precisely the philosopher's theoretical elaboration on this paradox that allows for his views of utopia as devoid of programmatic content, as an always changeable and processual *topos*.[34] It could even be argued that, in his speculations on literary genres, Bloch clearly anticipates some ideas that would be developed later by semioticians of culture and literature. I am referring particularly to the essays on the detective novel and the *Künstlerroman* written in the early 1960's and discussed in the previous chapter. I will return to them briefly, and revisit some of the passages quoted above, in order to point out some of the elements initially identified as utopian by Bloch, which were to be raised later from within a semiotic approach to narrative and its desiring economy.[35]

---

unity" (1981: 291).
[34] My discussions of the paradox inherent in the term utopia itself (and in literary representations of utopia), and of Bloch's elaboration on the utopian paradox offered initial hints to this point, which is of crucial importance for this thesis. Cf. Chapter One, p. 16; and Chapter Two, p. 33.
[35] See Chapter Two, Section VII above.

Concerning the anticipatory consciousness in these literary genres, Bloch detects motivational narrative elements around enigmas. His reading of the detective novel makes us heed the archetypal Oedipal structure[36] (given shape by the unmasking process contained in the search for "an un-narrated factor", an event *ante-rem*) underlying the narrative's 'backward' movement.[37] Bloch also shows that, in opposite fashion, the *Künstlerroman* is conventionally structured in the "movement forward" towards the Not-Yet. The genre is, thus, for him, more 'authentically' utopian than the detective novel. In the *Künstlerroman*, says Bloch, "the artistic process could find its entire self-portrait", i.e., the genre portrays "the desire to articulate". This is discussed by Jameson in terms of the "emptiness of the work within a work, this blank canvas at the center", which is "the very locus of the not-yet-existent itself". Such a representational gap is seen by Bloch in connection to a utopian Not-Yet. It is mainly in the recognition of the utopian dimension of an absent factor/object whose 'presence' motivates narrative's "desire to articulate" that I locate the thread that leads in the direction of Barthes's elaborations on narrative semiotics.[38]

In *S/Z*, a threshold text which moves away from rigid formalisms and provides a reading of Balzac's "Sarrasine", Barthes identifies five major codes under which that story's textual units and signifiers can be grouped. Of great relevance for my purposes is the hermeneutical code.[39] Integrating such a code are

> all the units whose function it is to articulate in various ways a question, its response, and the variety of chance events which can either formulate the question or delay its answer; or even constitute an *enigma* and lead to its solution. (1970: 17, my emphasis)

A few pages later, a similar formulation is found:

> the various (formal) terms by which an *enigma* can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed (these terms will not always occur, they will often be repeated; they will not appear in any fixed order). (1970: 19, my emphasis)

---

[36] Barthes briefly mentions the human "invention" of both Oedipus and narrative in the final lines of his "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" (1966, in Barthes 1977: 79-124). He further elaborates on the topic in later writings.

[37] Peter Brooks names this strange temporal logic of narrative the "anticipation of retrospection" (1984: 23).

[38] The quotations contained in this paragraph are repeated from Chapter Two, Section VII. References were given then.

[39] The other major codes are as follows: the seme (connotative signifiers of a single thematic grouping); the symbolic (relative to symbolic structures); the proairetic (code of actions and sequences of events); and the cultural code (references to science or to any other cultural body of knowledge). See Barthes 1970, Chapter XI, "The Five Codes", pp. 18-20. It must be added that Barthes's "code" model is by no means rigid, allowing for analytical "blanks" which mark "the escape of the text" (p. 20).

The key issue is, of course, the *formalized enigma* posed by Barthes as a narrative element. This, I want to argue, appears to be strikingly similar to the paradox surrounding utopia as a signifier which articulates its own absence. Both Bloch's and Barthes's ways of reading discussed above converge towards the solving of a puzzle that is the *enigma* around which narrative acquires its form and consolidates itself. Similarly to Bloch's remarks concerning the detective novel, Barthes's reading of "Sarrasine" also points to the enigma of narrative discourse in relation to the figure of Oedipus (1970: 62).[40] This narrative enigma is held by both thinkers to be motivational because it generates plot thus enabling narrative initiation and progress.

While both thinkers discuss the final disclosure of the enigma of narrative, they also show an awareness of non-disclosure as a possibility (which Bloch views as a more radically utopian aesthetic expression). Bloch locates it, to quote Jameson's term, in the "blank canvas" which remains as latent utopian possibility in the *Künstlerroman*, as well as in other fragmentary aesthetic forms. Barthes explores the suspension of narrative disclosure in at least two ways in *S/Z*: by referring to the concepts of "hermeneutic jamming" and the "pensive text".[41] The former relates to the declaration, in discourse, that the enigma it has posed is unresolved; and the latter, which interestingly names the closing chapter of *S/Z*, refers to "suspension" as meaning's "last closure". For him, the "pensive text" is an attempt to

> "let it be understood" that it does not say everything; this *allusion* is coded by pensiveness, which is a sign of nothing but itself: as though, having filled the text but obsessively fearing that it is not *incontestably* filled, the discourse insisted in supplementing it with an *et cetera* of plenitudes (1970: 216-17, his emphases)

A discourse that poses its own enigma as unresolved, a "pensive text" that keeps an ultimate meaning in suspension: these formulations can be understood, in my view, as evocative of the functioning of utopia as a signifier of its own paradox which I discussed above. Taking my cue from Barthes's writings, without losing sight of Bloch's, I intend to define utopian discourse in terms of a "supplement of plenitudes". First because it exists in excess of what is posed as a textual signifier, and secondly because it carries the hopes of perfection and fullness (both expressed by the notion of plenitude). Hence, my task as a reader can be formulated as a search for unresolved enigmas (the signifiers of "hermeneutic jammings") and

---

[40] In Chapter One of his *Reading for the Plot* (1984), by providing a reading of a detective story as an "allegory of plot", Peter Brooks theorizes a more fundamental relationship between Oedipus and discourse than is the case with Bloch and Barthes in the texts under discussion above. Another landmark text to approach this relationship is Teresa De Lauretis's "Desire in Narrative" (in her 1984 *Alice Doesn't*: 103-157), which looks at the implications of narrative Oedipal structuration for the feminist subject.

[41] Barthes's interest in narrative "blanks" also surfaces, in *S/Z*, in his discussions of the figure of catachresis,

textual encodings of "pensiveness", which I see as more sophisticated elaborations of the textual omissions and elisions identified by Bloch as performing a utopian function. In the present study, the feminist utopia is understood as a fiction practice marked by the desire to articulate a good otherness which is, in turn, problematized as consisting in an *ou-topos*, a non-place. The "hermeneutics of utopia" I wish to propose involves looking for certain textual strategies which enable the contradictory condition of utopia to be asserted. I find in the feminist dystopias a privileged site for this search.

VI. Refunctioning Bloch's Utopianism II: The Perspective of a Feminist Hermeneutics

The novels I have selected for analysis depict, at least as their initial scenery, highly oppressive sexual economies. In the opening chapter I mentioned that one of the conventions of the feminist dystopia is the stylization, even the exaggeration, of the asymmetric power relations between the sexes. I locate the utopian drive motivating these narratives in the opposition to these dystopic structures for women. However, the utopian potentiality of the feminist dystopias has been overlooked by feminist readers.[42]

Earlier readings in the context of second-wave feminism showed a negative reaction to this genre. The prevailing attitude was one of rejection of the feminist dystopias, as female readers favoured narratives featuring eutopian, rather than dystopian, societies. This can be explained in terms of the formation of a feminist readership who, being aware of an oppressively sexist history and social environment, looked for novels depicting better societies for women and celebrating 'womanhood' (found, of course, in the feminist eutopian fictions), perhaps as a form of compensation.[43] I want to argue, however, that it is precisely *because* feminist dystopias focus on extremist masculine economies that they appear to be important from the perspective of a feminist reading position. First, the fictional dystopic regimes in terms of gender displayed in the novels are analogous to, even if an exaggeration of, the social structures we women experience in our everyday lives. Thus the 'alternative worlds' rendered

---

and, in connection to the hermeneutic code, of the notion of "delay" (Cf. pp. 34, 59, 75).

[42] This utopian impulse has, at times, been noticed but not explored. In a pioneering study about the feminist dystopia, Sarah Lefanu observes: "there is a hidden utopian streak in these dystopian novels by women. They contain an element of hopefulness that rests on a belief in the power and efficacy of women's speech" (1988: 75). Lefanu's remark hints at a key issue for my reading: the question of narrative self-reflexivity in the construction of its utopianism. And in what is, to my knowledge, the most extensive study of the feminist dystopias produced so far, Elisabeth Mahoney does mention a "utopic impulse at the end of the narrative" (1994: 23). However, both commentators leave the remarks at that, whereas this study, in contrast, aims to point out that such "utopian streaks", or "utopic impulses", inform the feminist dystopia in a more fundamental way.

[43] A contextualized discussion of feminist critics' early response to the genre appears in Chapter Five, in my

in these novels look uncannily familiar to women readers. (In a 1986 interview where she talks about *The Handmaid's Tale*, Margaret Atwood remarks that "[t]here's nothing in the book that hasn't already happened or isn't happening elsewhere".) Secondly, in trying to resist the rigid patriarchal structures of the dystopias, the female characters offer possibilities for the female readers' identification, and, consequently, for the construction of feminist identities and subject positions. Another generic trait of crucial importance is the dialectical interaction between dystopic patriarchal structures and feminist (utopian) desire and hope. The latter are generated by, but work towards the disruption of, the dystopic male orders, aiming to reach another *topos* of female subjectivity, a women's "good place" based on another relationship with the other and a different economy between the sexes.[44] In my view the feminist dystopias are textual spaces where feminist utopianism - understood as a processual, transformational impulse - is very strongly encoded. My aim in this section is to inform the construction of a semiotics of utopia started in the previous section with feminist theorizations of utopianism. In so doing, I intend to set the parameters that will allow the observation, in the chapters below, of *how* the feminist utopian desiring economy is encoded in narrative.

The concept of an elsewhere of discourse and representation presents one means by which a utopian space for feminism has been theorized. Particularly useful for the present study, this conceptual space has acquired different meanings for different theorists. In Julia Kristeva's work (1974),[45] the elsewhere is presented as a space in which women would neither identify with the symbolic order (the law of the father), nor be inspired by that which this order represses, and victimized as a consequence. The Kristevan elsewhere would be a space in which women could identify with that which has been repressed by the symbolic contract without being cast as victim. For Kristeva this positioning is desirable, but not historically available, though it may be glimpsed through the semiotic irruptions in poetic language. The major drawback implied by this way of theorizing the notion of an elsewhere is that it appears to operate a conflation between women and the semiotic excess (which opposes and disrupts the symbolic contract), and thus risks imprisoning women in the place they have historically occupied. The danger here is to equate the feminine with the "semiotic" (which, in turn, bears a strong relationship with the unconscious), and thus to imply that the symbolic order of language is intrinsically oppressive and hegemonic.[46] Actually, in the possible conflation of

reading of Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World*. Cf. p. 102.
[44] Cf. discussion on p. 58 above.
[45] "About Chinese Women" in *The Kristeva Reader*, Toril Moi ed. 1986: 139-158.
[46] This critique has been repeatedly raised by commentators of Kristeva's work. See, for instance, Moi's "Introduction" to *The Kristeva Reader* (1986: 1-22), Felski 1989, Braidotti 1991.

woman and the non-place of language, Kristeva's theorizing is not far from the equation of woman with utopia which I criticized earlier in the discussion of Bloch's works.[47] I pointed out though, in the previous section, that the semiotic excess in literary language (and the elsewhere glimpsed through it) can indeed be thought of in terms of a utopian function, and this allows a positive reading of the Kristevan elsewhere, a point I will return to below.

Hélène Cixous's "Sorties" (1975)[48] explores the idea of an elsewhere as the women's space which is truly and radically "other", as opposed to women's historical alterity dictated by the logic of phallogocentrism. Although this train of thought poses a similar contradiction to the one mentioned above, Cixous's argument touches an issue that is crucial for my own argument, namely, the centrality of women's writing in the process of searching for a utopian elsewhere:

> - There has to be somewhere else, I tell myself. And everyone knows that to go somewhere else there are routes, signs, "maps" - for an exploration, a trip. - That's what books are. Everyone knows that a place exists which is not economically or politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where *it* writes itself, where *it* dreams, where *it* invents new worlds. (1975: 72, her emphases)

For Cixous, this elsewhere exists in writing as the space "where desire makes fiction exist" (1975: 97). She is referring to women's writing (*l'écriture féminine*) in contrast to a phallocentric literary tradition which narcissistically repeats itself. While the idea of a radical historical alterity (of a truly female economy which evades codification), like Kristeva's notion of the semiotic, poses an insurmountable barrier for feminist debates and theories, Cixous exposes a relationship between desire for an elsewhere and writing, a factor which offers a way to theorize the utopian desire for a radically "other" space as the element which motivates fiction ("makes it exist"). Cixous's and Kristeva's "elsewheres" can be approximated, to the extent that, for both thinkers, such utopian space surfaces in writing: poetic language and *l'écriture féminine*. There is another convergence in the sense that they 'refer' to radical historical alterities, therefore being on a par with the Blochian concept of the utopian Not-Yet, that which is totally new. This element in their theorizations can, and must, be appropriated for a feminist reading.

The feminist philosopher and critic Luce Irigaray speaks from a different perspective. For her, the women's elsewhere consists in a liminal space defined more in terms of strategic movement than fixed positionality: "one foot in the system, the other outside" in Rosi

---

[47] Cf. Section II of Chapter Three, p. 49.

66

Braidotti's words (1991: 172). This doubled position, "[a] playful crossing, and an unsettling one which would allow woman to rediscover the place of her 'self-affection'" (Irigaray 1975: 77),[49] is implicit in the game of mimesis, understood by Irigaray as the playful re-enactment of 'womanhood' which is "capable of bringing new nourishment to its operation" (1975: 76). It may bring about the reversal of the existing (phallic) order, as it is "capable of furnishing a critical perspective on our crisis-ridden culture, and also, a point of departure for a radically new analysis of this culture" (Braidotti 1991: 172). In a different way from the notion of women's elsewhere à la Kristeva, or à la Cixous, Irigaray's elaboration of such space works from within pre-existing social and conceptual structures, and involves simultaneously re-enacting and defying them.

Another feminist critic who has conceptualized the possibilities of women's elsewhere is Teresa de Lauretis. Like Irigaray's, her view of an elsewhere is defined in relation to liminality (thus implying a doubled, contradictory position for the female subject) and envisioned from within existing structures and institutions:

> I think of it [the elsewhere] as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparati. And it is there that the terms of a different construction of gender can be posed - terms that do have effect and take hold at the level of subjectivity and self-representation: in the micro-political practices of daily life and daily resistances that afford both agency and sources of power or empowering investments; and in the cultural productions of women, feminists, which inscribe that *movement in and out of ideology, that crossing back and forth of the boundaries* - and of the limits - of sexual difference(s). (1987: 25, my emphases)

There is great sense of immediacy in De Lauretis's and Irigaray's visions. Their elsewhere is, to some extent, the here and now of a dystopic and androcentric social environment. They talk about possible and critical instances, strategic movements, liminal positionalities. Their theories are nonetheless utopian because they aim at the dismantling of phallocentric structures (Irigaray's) and a re-construction of gender (De Lauretis's). The contradictory positioning they propose for the female feminist subject has been well accepted in contemporary feminist theory (Braidotti 1991, Funck 1998).

Informed by the theoretical elaborations above, the construction of the semiotics of utopia I want to propose with the present readings of contemporary feminist critical dystopias will rely centrally on these two interrelated ideas of a utopian elsewhere: a. a radical "other" space in writing and representation where desire is located, that is, the elsewhere that

---

[48] In Cixous and Clément's *The Newly Born Woman* (1975: 63-132).

motivates narrative; and b. a liminal space which, being located both within and without the existing structures, allows for women's critical perspective and transformative actions. While in the first instance the utopic horizon evades theorization (like Bloch's concept of the "Novum" - that which is absolutely new -, Cixous's "female economy", or Kristeva's "semiotic"), the second enables the formulation of notions of utopian partiality and process, both crucial for contemporary feminist debates of utopianism. I view these narrative "elsewheres" as inextricably linked, in constant flux and complementary relationship, and will refer to them separately for analytical purposes.

My readings of the feminist dystopias in the following chapters aim to show that these two conceptions of a feminist utopian elsewhere coexist. As the locus of desire and of an absolute historical ("good") otherness, the elsewhere is linked to the narrative enigma which enables the repeated postponement (thus, the suspension) of the articulation of the contents of *the* feminist utopia. I will argue that this elsewhere manifests the utopian paradox in the women's dystopias. (In Barthian terms it could be said that it refers to the enigma of narrative which remain undisclosed, to the pensive text.) The narrative movement I identify in relation to the second strategy is that from utopia to topia to utopia, and so forth, whereby the fulfilment of women's utopian dream into something concrete in the fictional space (a topia) is accompanied by self-critique, which in turn generates still another utopia.

I find a parallel between the Blochian abstract/concrete dichotomy and these two feminist "elsewheres": while the first strategy retains an element of nameless (abstract) desire, the second implies the political (concrete) hope which corresponds to the notion of *docta spes*, educated hope. We will remember that I refunctioned the (originally exclusionary) Blochian concepts into a fluid pair of categories.[50] Now I want to suggest a renewed perspective on these complementary categories by showing the possible alignment between them and the feminist "elsewheres". This will enable a reading approach to the feminist critical dystopias which locates their utopianism at the always shifting intersections between desire and hope.

It will become clear as we proceed with the analyses that I will be moving dynamically between two treatments: literature as a self-referential and metalinguistic system and as a practice that has a feminist utopian function and effect. I aim to point out the narrative procedures I associate with a feminist anticipatory consciousness (the elision of the utopian object, the constant surfacing of feminist critical utopian oppositional strategies), and

---

[49] "The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Feminine" in *This Sex Which is Not One* 1977: 68-85.
[50] Cf. discussion on p. 56 above.

to contextualize these procedures in terms of their functions and effects from the perspective of feminist politics. Thus, I hope to find a balance between formal and ideological approaches.

PART II – JOURNEYING THROUGH DYSTOPIA

Chapter Four

Exploring the Utopian Space/time: Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*

> Utopia is nowhere because as soon as we get there it
> ceases to be Utopia. (Ursula Le Guin, in conversation
> with Suzie Mackenzie)[1]

I. Introduction

In Book VII of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), we 'hear' the voice of God,
through his Son, at the moment when the universe to be inhabited by Adam and Eve is created,
announcing: "Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds;/ This be thy just circumference, O world."
Holding "golden compasses, prepared/ In God's eternal store", he circumscribes our universe
and proclaims its precise boundaries.[2] The question of boundaries, a recurring motif in
Paradise Lost, and their representations in Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1991)[3] will be the
central theme of this chapter. In this novel, the envisioning of a dystopian future society is
counterbalanced by the surfacing of hope from utopian undercurrents. I will explore some
paradoxical utopian possibilities opened up by this text by focusing on the ways in which such
utopian underlying elements are manifested. In particular I intend to describe the textual
representations of utopian space/time by mapping the ways in which Piercy imagines the
confines, ambiguous borders and margins, and ways in/out in *Body of Glass*. *Paradise Lost*
will feature in the discussion as a representative text of Western myth and literary tradition,
against which Piercy's novel has been written and will be read, for thematic elements of the
former constantly emerge and are challenged by the latter.

In the futuristic world portrayed in *Body of Glass*, the main three-fold spatial
organization is the following: in the borders of the domed confines of the multinational
corporate fortresses, which 'protect' their workers, stands secondly the Glop, the slum
where most of the population live exposed to starvation, pollution, violence and disease. In the
margins are the freetowns, sanctuaries which have their autonomy constantly threatened by
the multis. The frequent tensions between the multis and the freetowns form the main narrative
line of *Body of Glass*, and an obvious utopian trace is found in the resistance of the latter in
order to maintain a relative autonomy and to evade the totalitarian control of the former.

---

[1] In "The Truth is Out There" (*The Guardian*, November 30 1996).
[2] Book VII, lines 224-231, p. 304 of the *Complete English Poems, Of Education, Areopagitica*.
[3] Marge Piercy *Body of Glass* (London: Penguin, 1992). Quotations and page numbers will refer to this edition,
and the title will be abbreviated to BG.

However, such a map of the 21st century features other spatio-temporal dimensions, like the 'empty' spaces in between, which have turned into desert, for instance. And one such other space is a gap, an *ou/eu-topos*, a paradoxical space "off the map" (BG: 568) which is secondary to the main narrative structure and hardly mentioned at all. The relationship of this discrete utopian 'blank space' to the other settings and to the main narrative frame will be touched on. Crucial to this study are the gender implications, as well as the implications for feminism, behind the discursive strategies employed by Piercy, particularly through the 'depiction' of a fictional space/time that is both marked by gender and only hinted at. I will argue that in such narrative space metafictional qualities double themselves, silence 'speaks', and the paradox of utopia is inscribed.

Central issues to the analysis of space/time in *Body of Glass* will include the dual imagery of contained (defined) as opposed to open space (undefined), as well as the representation of temporality associated with each different spatial dimension. The questions I will try to answer can be formulated as follows: Which spatial configurations in *Body of Glass* open up utopian possibilities? How do these relate to the representation of temporality (especially in terms of the suspension of the present, or the death of history, usually associated with traditional utopian writing, and of alternatives to such a static generic model)? And, more importantly, what do these space/time configurations have to contribute in the sense of producing references and meanings within the discursive boundaries of feminism? In relation to the third question, the analysis of *Body of Glass* will only initiate my discussion concerning ways of representing contemporary utopianisms which are markedly feminist. This will be expanded with the readings contained in the two following chapters and further elaborated in the conclusion.

This chapter is further divided into three sections. First I will consider the relevance of spatio-temporal issues in relation to contemporary critical practices, and, most important to my purposes here, to feminism and the feminist dystopia. In Part III I will provide a close reading of the representations of spatio-temporal relations in *Body of Glass*. The order in which I will discuss the different spatio-temporal configurations follows the shift in emphasis on each of them occurring in the novel itself. I will develop the argument that Piercy's dystopian novel features the revival (and problematization) of utopia by means of the narrative construction of significant geographies. The feminist "elsewheres" that help to construct the novel's utopianism will be discussed in relation to such geographies. In conclusion, I will argue that Piercy's novel may be viewed as a feminist critical dystopia which allows a 'shadowy' glimpse at a feminist anticipatory consciousness. I shall also contextualize *Body of*

Glass in terms of the similarities of its spatio-temporal utopianism to that manifested in other dystopias published by women authors since the 1970's. A parallel between Piercy's novel and Doris Lessing's *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* will illustrate this discussion.

II. Dystopia as a "Topos"

Besides being literally and conceptually around us in the physical sense, space-time has become a central issue in critical and literary studies, feminist theories and, most expectedly, science fiction criticism. Spatial and temporal metaphors are to be found everywhere as cultural studies has moved towards the mapping out of centres, margins, borders, zones, an activity which, in turn, has acquired increasing political significance. For cultural theorist Homi Bhabha, for instance, to be located in the 'beyond' is "to inhabit an intervening space, as any dictionary will tell you. But to dwell 'in the beyond' is also [...] to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; *to touch the future on its hither side*" (1994: 7, his emphasis). For him, this "intervening" space becomes the spatio-temporal dimension where "intervention" in our 'here' and 'now', i.e. in history, and anticipation of the future are made possible.

Concerned with political intervention in the shaping of a better future, feminist discourses have, despite their diversity in forms and purposes, been marked by a pervasive sense of locality in space/time. This is evidenced in a brief overview of some of those discourses. In the first half of the century, Virginia Woolf gives shape to a spatial utopianism by claiming women's material need of "a room of one's own"; and Simone de Beauvoir maps the construction of our location as cultural others. The second wave of feminism brought more theorizing in spatio-temporal terms. The Ardeners, for instance, analyze the opposition between dominant/male versus muted/female cultural groups, and relate women's cultural spatiality to a "wild zone" outside the dominant order of language and culture. Hélène Cixous proposes an exploration of the "dark continent" of women's sexuality. And Julia Kristeva identifies three dimensions of "women's times" in relation to feminist practices.[4] While some

---

[4] Virginia Woolf's claim is stated in *A Room of One's Own* (1929); Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) consists of a comprehensive (biological, historical, psychoanalytical, mythical, and literary) analysis of women's cultural otherness. The other theorists' works are more recent: Edwin and Shirley Ardener have published their anthropological studies concerning "muted groups" and the "wild zone" since the 1970's (cf. the introductions and articles collected in *Perceiving Women* 1975 and *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society* 1978); an enlightening account of their theories is offered by Elaine Showalter in her "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness" (1981, in Showalter ed. 1985: 243-270); Hélène Cixous's "Sorties: Out and Out:

imaginings of sites of an alternative consciousness for the female/feminist subject are described in relation to interior/defined spaces (Woolf), others are best associated with wild/undefined spatiality (the Ardeners, Cixous). This dichotomy will be observed in the analysis below. But of particular relevance for the present discussion is the theorization of a feminist utopian elsewhere, both as an intervening space of possible political action (to use Bhabha's metaphor), and as a space of radical alterity. Theoretical developments in the area of feminist geography will also parallel the discussion of the figurations of feminist "elsewheres" in Piercy's novel.[5]

With regard to literary genres, science fiction writing has been the cultural practice *par excellence* of speculations about the issues of alienness and space-time, with its narrative conventions of estrangement in the portrayal of the *locus*, understood in terms of spatial and/or temporal dislocation, or of the *dramatis personae* - or both (Suvin 1979). Such conventions make of the genre a privileged domain where radical cultural possibilities can be explored. Moreover, dystopia is a "topos", i.e. a place, from its very etymological roots. The term carries spatial and oppositional connotations. Coined in contrast to (e)utopia (meaning the "good place"), it has to do with the notion of an "an imaginary *place* or condition in which everything is as bad as possible."[6] These words are imbued with spatial connotations via the Greek "topos" used by Thomas More to name the imaginary island of Utopia. So, spatial connotations have fundamentally informed the genre. Indeed, from the same root derived the term *topos*, meaning a theme or motif in a literary composition, employed to designate a rhetorical or literary formula. In the case of the literary dystopias, these connotations converge to the extent that the dystopias constitute a generic literary *topos* which is characterized by the depiction of a "bad place" in a predominantly narrative mode.

Observing the generic developments in speculative narratives, one follows the transition from the description of a spatial novum towards a temporal one. And finally to a merging of both,[7] since it has become inconceivable, in our century, to separate spatial

---

Attacks / Ways Out / Forays" (1975) and Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time" (1981) have become anthological pieces in feminist theory and are found in *The Newly Born Woman* (1975: 63-132) and *The Kristeva Reader* (1986: 187-213), as well as several anthologies of feminist writings.

[5] For a survey of the groundbreaking publications in the area of geography and gender see Gillian Rose's introduction to *Feminism and Geography* (1993). Rose discusses the male domination of the discipline of geography and the consequences of such domination (e.g. the marginalization of feminism by mainstream geography), and reviews spatial "images" (or metaphors), articulated by feminists: Adrienne Rich's 'politics of location'; the idea of an elsewhere following Teresa de Lauretis; as well as other feminists' articulations of what Rose terms "paradoxical space" (pp. 138-41). More on "paradoxical space" on p. 91 below.

[6] *The Oxford English Dictionary*. My emphasis.

[7] See Bloch (1959), Suvin (1979) and Moylan (1986) for explorations of the conventions of the "topos" in literary utopias as space and time.

categories from temporal ones, an understanding relating to the progress and impact of scientific theories on the nature of space/time (especially Albert Einstein's groundbreaking work). Despite the connection of space with time, cultural theorists have consistently stressed that our era's concern with space is greater than with time. Retracing the "history of space" in Western experience, Michel Foucault, for instance, remarks that "it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space", but goes on to remark that our present anxiety "has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time" (1984: 22-23). And specifically regarding science fiction as a genre, Fredric Jameson proposes that its distinctiveness "has less to do with time [...] than with space" (1987: 58).[8] For the purpose of my reading of Marge Piercy's dystopia the categories of space and time will, of course, be explored in a relational way. But it will become clear as we proceed with the analysis that the fictional figuration of the category of space is indeed more accentuated, with spatial markers and descriptions being more prominent than the temporal ones.

There are at least two ways of thinking about the feminist dystopias as a "topos". One is by looking at the narratives as cultural practices located at a given space-time. This seems to be what Elisabeth Mahoney has in mind when she refers to the genre as "the 'dark continent' of speculative fiction" (1994: 136), thus signalling that the literary dystopias as a cultural items remain largely unexplored.[9] Although the present study responds to this and other similar claims and aims to contribute to this exploration, my aim in this chapter has more to do with the second way of thinking about the dystopian "topos", as I intend to observe the spatio-temporal dimensions portrayed in fiction, i.e., the geographies constructed in/by narrative.

Feminist critics have consistently pointed out the possibilities offered by speculative fiction - a genre centrally characterized by estrangement techniques - as a cultural form which

---

[8] Emphasizing the same issue, Lucie Armitt observes: "no single popular mode offers a more sustained treatment of the relationship between fantasy, pleasure and concepts of the spatial than that of science fiction" (1996: 60).

[9] An examination of this cultural cartography would possibly involve, among other issues, an interrogation of the marketing practices, reception and circulation of the feminist dystopias. In fact, a great number of these fictions are out of print and/or not available at university libraries, factors which in themselves indicate the marginalization of women's cultural production in general and of this genre in particular. The following short account concerning the reception of *Body of Glass* evidences some nuances of this marginalization. When Piercy, "an outsider", was awarded the 1993 Arthur C. Clarke prize for the novel, there was reason "for the considerable disquiet in British science fiction circles" (James 1994: 217). The author herself explains the following concerning the same fact: "when my novel *He, She, and It* won the Arthur C. Clarke award for the best work of science fiction published in the United Kingdom, my [North-]American publisher would not sticker the books for fear winning this prize would actually hurt sales. You don't want it shelved among science fiction, she said. Indeed, of all my novels, this one - one of the most ambitious and complex - received the fewest reviews in the feminist press, because of its genre". Cf. Piercy's "Marleen Barr's Lost and Found", a foreword to Barr 1993: xix-xi, p. x.

enables the questioning of deeply rooted androcentric assumptions.[10] Specifically concerning the feminist dystopias, it has been argued that the genre offers a privileged space from which to challenge cultural gender constructs (Mahoney 1994; Booker 1994c), a point with which I fully agree but which may require further clarification as the challenge posed by these fictions is not immediate, or straightforward. As discussed in Chapter One above, the feminist critical dystopia re-stages women's experience under patriarchy, and thus poses the danger of re-affirmation of an oppressive order. Indeed, the culturally familiar imagery of a woman trapped, or caught up, in a space-time defined according to androcentric parameters is pervasive in the genre. And while some feminist dystopias challenge the confining structures by critically rendering them visible but offering no possibilities in terms of alternative spatio-temporalities, others engage with the restoration of the utopian space-time, thus representing the visionary facet of feminism.[11] This is the case, of course, with Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*, to which I will now turn.

III. Utopia as an "Ou-topos"

Body of Glass, Piercy's third speculative novel,[12] was first published in the USA as He, She and It (1991), a title which foregrounds both its genre-[13] and its gender-consciousness. The forty-nine Shira and Malkah chapters that form the novel alternate loosely (sixteen are of the second type), and the point of view and narrative focus change according to this dual organization. In the Shira chapters, the tale of the 21st century is told: basically, the reader follows the development of a plot which opens on the day Shira is denied the custody of her son by Yakamura-Stichen (Y-S), the multinational corporation she works for. This very

[10] Inaugurating this critical tradition is Joanna Russ's "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write" (1972), in Susan Cornillon ed. 1972: 3-20. Critical introductions to collections of women's speculative fictions would later repeat the same argument. Cf. Jen Green and Sarah Lefanu's editorial commentaries in the 1985 *Despatches*, Pamela Sargent's introductions to the *Women of Wonder* series (1974, 1976, 1995), and Joanna Russ's own "Introduction" to Williams and Jones ed. 1995 *The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy by Women*.

[11] 'Dystopic' (or closed) feminist dystopias vary in relation to the form of confinement experienced by the female protagonists. I have identified roughly six types: the feminist dystopias of a medico-technological fix, like Josephine Saxton's "Big Operation in Altair Three" (1985) and Caroline Forbes's "Transplant" (1980); the spectacle-technological fix of Kate Wilhelm's "Baby You Were Great" (1967) and Alice Sheldon's "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" (1973); the bureaucratic and/or militarized state machine seen at work in Pearlie McNeill's "The Awakening" (1985) and Raccoona Sheldon's "Morality Meat" (1985); stories of imminent cataclysm, as Anna Kavan's *Ice* (1967); texts of 'mythical entrapment', like C.J. Cherryh's "Cassandra" (1978); and dystopias of the full co-option of women by the male-dominant system, such as Lisa Tuttle's "Wives"(1979).

[12] It was preceded by *Dance the Eagle to Sleep* (1970) and *Woman On the Edge of Time* (1976).

[13] Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* contributed to the formation of a dystopian literary tradition in the first half of the twentieth century. The grammatical stress of the title *He, She and It* evokes Zamyatin's work. Actually, the original Russian title of Zamyatin's dystopia is *My*. Nevertheless, its first publication in the English translation as *We* happened in 1924, almost three decades before the 1952 first Russian language publication (Clute &

first plot event already indicates that the struggle which ensues is marked by issues of gender and power. From that point on, Shira's story turns out to be one of opposition and resistance against the control of the multinational corporation of Y-S located in what used to be the USA, now called Norika. The corporation enclaves materialize the most dystopic spatio-temporality of the novel in terms of the confinement and control of human beings. The whole world presented to us in 2059 is dominated by multinational enclaves, which house a 'privileged' minority. Around and outside their fortresses, most of the population strive to live in a vast megalopolis, the Glop. The settings of the domed corporate fortress and its decrepit surroundings occupied by the Glop very much resemble the dual iconic imagery (neat and artificially contrived centre versus bleak underground margin) by now familiar in science fiction narratives.[14] As will become clear below, *Body of Glass* deconstructs this binary model by presenting multi-faceted spatio-temporalities.

The corporate enclave of Y-S, with its power structure and total control over the life of the population, epitomizes the world reality in the early twenty-first century:

> There were twenty-three great multis that divided the world among them, enclaves on every continent and on space platforms. Among them they wielded power and enforced the corporate peace: raids, assassinations, skirmishes, but no wars since the Two Week War in 2017. (BG: 3)

Allusions to the claustrophobia of life on a space platform (BG: 21) and to the ironically named "Paradise Park", "the enclave within the enclave" built for the children of management (BG: 18), double the spatial configuration of the corporation enclave itself, with its domed structure and monitored entrances. And the fixity of an artificially-maintained climate within the dome - it is always Spring - produces a sense of timelessness and functions as a metaphor for the death of the linear time of history, while, at the same time hinting at the corporation's all-pervasive control over people. "Every aspect of life" is dictated by the corporation (BG: 326), including the congealed hierarchic divisions of classes and workers, fashion and appearance, conception and reproduction technologies, sexuality, religious practices. Actually, the corporations encapsulate in fiction the phenomenon of 'utopia-become-commodity'.

The ironic allusion to the Edenic garden in relation to the corporation deserves a closer look, as it can be read as late twentieth-century revision of *Paradise Lost*. First, the issue of power in the world of the corporation parallels the power of God the Father in

---

Nicholls 1993). So, the title of the English translation has remained relevant.

[14] The origins of this type of imagery can be traced in archetypal images of paradise and hell. In modern speculative fictions, it appears in texts like H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895). The centre/margin visual imagery I am suggesting has anthological screen representations in films like *Metropolis* (Germany 1927, dir. Fritz Lang), and, in the 1980's, *Blade Runner* (US 1982, dir. Ridley Scott).

Milton's text: both dictate the law and control inclusion and expulsion in/from the enclave/paradise. Secondly, the enclosed corporation space (with its hierarchical orders) parodies the multifold and pervasive references to boundaries and contained spaces in *Paradise Lost*, where Paradise, heaven and hell are equally bounded, walled and gated. And regarding the representation of time, "eternal Spring"[15] reigns in the garden of Eden, where timelessness implies a lack of plot. An interesting footnote by the editor concerning the name of *Satan* explains that it means "'adversary', or 'one who plots against another' in Hebrew."[16] Satan is, then, the literal antagonist and the plot initiator of this creation myth. Were it not for him, there would be no conflict, i.e., no story and no temporality. By repeatedly and ironically alluding to the Edenic garden of the judeo-christian myth while depicting the world of the multis, *Body of Glass* deconstructs this myth and its literary rewriting by Milton and exposes the dystopic character of the utopian garden. Moreover, Piercy significantly places Shira in the role of plot initiator: she is the one who actually causes the dystopian narrative's temporality to start as she challenges the corporation law.[17]

The portrayal of the corporation's static framing generates further effects at both the intertextual and the intratextual levels. Intertextually, it calls forth the generic conventions of literary utopias from the Renaissance texts to the twentieth-century totalitarian-state dystopias. The spatio-temporal insulation of the former and the all-pervasive control of the latter are suggested by this setting. Ernst Bloch's remarks on the spatio-temporal insulation of the classical utopias are especially relevant at this point:

> The novels of an ideal state very often saw all contradictions resolved by their prescriptions, health has become paralysed in them as it were. No fresh questions, no different countries appear in the margin any more, the island, although a future one itself, is largely insulated against the future. (1959: 478)

As shown above, this notion of a spatio-temporal insulation fits the depiction of the world of corporations in *Body of Glass*, where interior/defined spaces connote confinement, lack of freedom and of alternatives. By ironically locating "Paradise Park" within the limits of the dystopic corporation, the text mocks the usual association between mythical paradise and the representation of setting in the traditional utopia, while exposing the co-option of utopia by late capitalism.

---

[15] Cf. Book IV, line 268. See also the reference to the "fenceless world" and to the end of "the spring / Perpetual" after Adam and Eve's fall in Book XX.

[16] See note 82: 152.

[17] To the extent that Shira initiates story conflict adding a temporal dimension to the narrative, her role resembles that of Pandora in the feminist rewriting of this myth, discussed in Section IV of Chapter One above.

At the intratextual level, the carefully described corporation setting functions as an antagonistic space in relation both to the narrative discrete other space and to the two additional and more ambiguous main settings of the novel: the fragile freetown of Tikva and the chaotic Glop, to which I will now turn. Located outside the domed boundaries of the multis, the Glop areas occupy vast stretches of land in all the continents and concentrate most of the world's population. A "crowded violent festering warren" (BG: 8), the fetid slum of the Glop shown in *Body of Glass* stands in opposition to the corporation of Y-S in more ways than the description of the visual imagery of its setting. Instances of this contrast are the dark covering worn by people in order to ensure anonymity and thus to guarantee survival (versus the identity control of the multis), its anarchist politics (against the tight corporation control), and the racial hybridity of the population (which contrasts to the uniformity valued and enforced by the Y-S).

Besides the oppositional characteristics, however, there are ties uniting the Glop and the world of the corporations. These are suggested, for instance, by the setting itself: the imagery of the domes that partially enclose the Glop reiterates the corporation protective covering. The confinement of the fortress is repeated in a less ambiguous way in the picture of the Glop, the space of "hell" (BG: 41) whose territories are "depths" (BG: 40). Such description echoes the "hollow deep / Of hell" in the first Book of *Paradise Lost* (lines 314-15: 158), and the vertical imagery height/depth is reproduced in the novel. In addition to similarities in the setting, populational and commercial links exist between the Y-S corporation and the Glop. The class structure of the former absorbs part of the Glop inhabitants as low-skilled day workers, who then move within both spaces. In this sense the geographical configurations of these spaces overlap. Another symbiotic relationship between both spaces is observed in the fact that the Glop people are the consumers of the capitalist trash produced by the multis.

Another parallel that can be traced here is that forms of resistance emerge from both spaces: Shira, a former corporation worker, leaves the enclave and becomes an antagonist to its system, and resistance forces arise from the "depths" of the Glop in the form of the political organization of a new gang, the Coyotes. I mentioned above that Shira plays a crucial function in *Body of Glass* as the initiator of conflict, mirroring the role of Satan in the creation myth. A similar oppositional force is embodied in a character called Lazarus, the leader of the Glop revolutionary group. As stressed elsewhere, the name symbolizes a hope of "social and cultural revival", thus signalling the potential for cultural rebirth identified with the Glop (Booker 1994c: 344). At this point in her narrative, Piercy's revision draws its material from

the New Testament,[18] rather than from the Old Testament creation myth rewritten by Milton (whose imagery centrally informs the novel). Nevertheless, a parallel can be constructed between Lazarus in *Body of Glass* and Satan in *Paradise Lost*, as both have been to the underworld/hell and function as antagonists to established orders, i.e. to the corporations and God. The fact that the Glop is not all chaos, because resistance in the form of rebel organizations is started and political alliances made there,[19] accounts for the utopian possibilities of such otherwise hellish place.

The freetowns constitute another major spatial configuration in the novel. In terms of geographical location, they "flourished on [the] unclaimed margin" (BG: 48), in the vulnerable and dangerous terrains along the shore, an unwanted space due to the constantly rising sea-level. Their geographical vulnerability mirrors the constant military threats to their survival and relative independence from the multinational corporations. Tikva, "a fragile modern ghetto" (BG: 24), occupies one such space and struggles to keep its relative autonomy by selling technologies to several different multis. This is where most of the action happens, and the home Shira returns to after losing contact with her son. Back in Tikva she engages in a new job which relates to the freetown's defence mechanisms while plotting the abduction of her son. Described as "what was left in the world of freedom and choice" (BG: 484), Shira's hometown of Tikva is associated with a sanctuary, specially through the descriptions of Malkah's household (a microcosm for the town). "[A]n oasis of green in the desert the world has become" (BG:24), it is compared to "paradise itself" (BG: 59), as in the following passage:

> The yellow rose still twined on the wall, the courtyard was still planted with peach and plum trees, grapevines and cosmos and tulips, squash and tomato vines, a garden of almost Eden. (BG: 50)

Nevertheless, the depiction of Tikva as a utopian feminist h(e)aven is undermined by a subtext which reveals ambiguities under the surface of the town's democratic politics and combination of respect for nature and exploration of new technologies. On the one hand, the "libertarian socialism with a strong admixture of anarcho-feminism, reconstructionist Judaism [...] and greeners" (BG: 548) that inform Tikva's politics may sound imaginably attractive, at least on its surface. On the other hand, however, dystopic undertones can be perceived in this space, as suggested by Piercy's subtle insertion of the word "almost" in the description of the garden quoted above. If it is true that "walking under a wrap was different from being under a

---

[18]Cf. John 11. 1-44.
[19] A crucial political encounter happens in the Glop, bringing together characters representing the oppositional

[corporation] dome", as the former is "more permeable" (BG: 48), on the other hand the "wrap" does echo the "dome". Not only do both display controlling mechanisms which work like protective 'floodgates', but these spaces also stage actions and attitudes which parallel one another. These include, for instance, Avram's, the Tikva scientist, belief that "he has an absolute right to control Yod" (Neverow 1994: 28) and obsession with the construction of a line of cyborgs, of which Yod is the tenth attempt. These very much resemble the corporation's overall control and plan to obtain the technology to serialize Yod. Also suggestive of the dystopic traits of Tikva are the freetown's commercial ties with the multis (which echoes the Glop/multi link). Besides, "Paradise Park" - the children's playground mentioned above - constitutes too strong a reference and resonates with irony. When readers encounter the Edenic garden alluded to a second time (in the description of Malkah's home), they are no longer innocent (like the children in the corporation park), but have grown suspicious instead. The allusion to paradise reveals instances of genre- and gender-awareness, and can be understood in two complementary levels. First in relation to the links between utopia and gardens derived from creation myths, especially from the Jewish tradition, which Piercy recontextualizes in *Body of Glass*, and the recurrence of such motif in classical literary utopias.[20] Secondly, in relation to the feminist suspicion and critique of the canonical texts of Western civilization (the Bible and *Paradise Lost*) and, more specifically, of utopian discourses.

At this point I would like to juxtapose my reading with those of two other critics of Piercy's speculative novels. In analysing the utopian future space of Mattapoisett in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Tom Moylan states that, in line with the authors who revived literary utopianism in the 1970's, Marge Piercy

> is aware of the limitations of the genre itself: its tendency to reduce alternative visions to closed and boring perfect systems that negate the utopian impulse that generated them; as well as its cooptation by the marketing and socialization mechanisms of contemporary industrial societies. (1986: 151)

For Moylan, and I agree with him here, Piercy's novel suggests that problems continue to exist in utopian discourses/spaces. And although this critic is referring to a previous novel, the same statement could be made concerning Tikva in *Body of Glass*. It seems to be precisely

---

spaces of the Glop, Tikva, and the women's land. Cf. Chapter Thirty-Five: Living with the Undead.
[20] See my discussion on page 78 above. John Hunt's "Gardens in Utopia: Utopia in the Garden" explores what he calls "the utopian dimension of gardens" (in Baker-Smith and Barfoot eds. 1987: 114-138, p. 119). Of special interest are his readings of the frequent appearance of gardens in literary utopias and dystopias, and his discussion of the characteristic "*timelessness* within time", and the "illusion at least of *perpetual spring*", evoked by gardens and utopias (pp. 119, 121, my emphases).

this awareness - I call it a suspicion - that accounts for Piercy's imagining settings which are both utopian and dystopian at the same time. What Moylan seems to have underestimated in his analysis of *Woman on the Edge of Time* is the full impact of the feminist critique informing Piercy's writing.[21]

Unlike Moylan, and locating herself very much on the grounds of feminist criticism, Janet Lucas sharply criticizes *Body of Glass* for its failure to create "a different world entirely free of sexually dichotomous limitations."[22] She provides her readers with a list of textual evidence (most selected from the Tikva context) to support her argument that "Piercy has continued to write the sexism into her narrative at times when she apparently thinks she has eradicated its presence." A major flaw in Lucas's reading lies in the fact that she seems to be too sure about Piercy's thought, never raising the hypothesis that the author may be in fact problematizing utopian discourse (which would be in line with Moylan's argument concerning *Woman*, as well as with my own in the present reading). This renders her reading unnecessarily reductive. In my view, the same textual evidence raised by Lucas could be employed to sustain the point I have been trying to make: that Piercy does *not* mean to cast an unproblematic picture of utopia in *Body of Glass*.

What I tried to point out by looking at the way Marge Piercy has portrayed the corporations, the Glop and Tikva amounts to the description of ambiguous spatio-temporal dimensions where utopian and dystopian characteristics merge. Not only does *Body of Glass* feature three main narrative spaces (there are others, as will be stressed below), thus breaking the conventional centre/margin, self/other dichotomies, but it also presents the readers with, to use Minnie Pratt's apt image,[23] a "world of overlapping circles" (if not of "just circumferences"), or shifting ground in terms of utopian/dystopian elements. This is mainly achieved by means of spatio-temporal configurations which are reiterated and constantly evoke each other, sometimes in an ironic way, thus shattering clear-cut distinctions between the spaces and defeating the hope that any of those spaces can achieve a state of purity and perfection. Nevertheless, in spite of the ambiguity of the space-time dimensions described above, the more markedly utopian possibilities in the novel can be seen to lie in the marginal terrains occupied by the Glop and Tikva, as opposed to the closed and oppressive corporation system.

---

[21] Although Moylan does refer to Piercy's feminism, he does so in a diffuse way by listing it amid the other radical political axes informing her vision. Cf. pp. 123, 124, 127, 134, 137, 139, 146.

[22] In "Nuancing the Cyborg: A Feminist Deconstruction of *He, She and It*" (1995). Page numbers are not given in the electronic journal consulted.

[23] Minnie Bruce Pratt, quoted in Gillian Rose 1993: 158.

Besides the three-fold spatial plan consisting of corporate enclaves, the Glop, and the freetowns described above, the rest of the map of the globe depicted in *Body of Glass* is occupied by the in-between spaces of the desert (to which we will return), and the sea, whose level is constantly rising as a result of the rising temperature of the planet. And occupying still another dimension of space/time is cyberspace, the universe of computer networks, artificial intelligence and virtual reality, where part of the conflicted actions and upheavals take place. Also in cyberspace, another space-time of narrative exists in the Malkah chapters, which tell an embedded story running in parallel to the main narrative frame.

This narrative level consists primarily of Malkah's 'telling' a story - the narration is carried out by her plugging into the cyberspace of the Net - about a Jewish enclave in 16th/17th century Prague. The 'receiver' (listener does not really apply) of Malkah's story is Yod, the cyborg she helped to programme. Besides providing another spatio-temporal dimension and serving as one of the novel's metafictional elements, this narration within the narration functions as foil to the main story in a number of ways, the most obvious one being the analogy between the golem constructed by the rabbi Judah Lowel to help protect the Jewish ghetto and the cyborg Yod, constructed by scientists Avram and Malkah to perform a similar function in the Tikva enclave.

The analogy between the cyborg and the golem which structures the plot has been considered sentimental due to the cyborg's self-destructive (self-sacrificial?) last battle to protect Tikva (Clute & Nicholls 1993). My reading, however, proposes that it should be viewed as still another instance of narrative generic self-consciousness, for the medieval Jewish tales of the golem relate to the history of the science fiction genre insofar as they constitute proto-science fiction stories about the maker and the made.[24] Moreover, Piercy is revisiting our century's dystopian tradition, as Karel Čapek's R.U.R. (1920), an early literary dystopia, also draws on the robot/golem analogy. In *Body of Glass*, this analogy also serves to interrogate reductive definitions of science fiction, which, by focusing on the "cognitive" aspect (Yod is the result of scientific investigation, and thus 'fits' here), exclude narratives which deal with metaphysical elements (presented in the golem tales).[25] Besides, posing differently 'assembled' creatures (the golem, the cyborg, and Nili, a character I will discuss below) replicates the novel's intra- and intertextual narrative complexity. Genre history also

---

[24] It seems interesting to observe that in their *Encyclopedia* Clute and Nicholls (1993) take the Golem tales into account as proto-science fiction, but fail to recognize Piercy's revision of the genre via the same tales. Although Keith Booker treats science fiction and Jewish mysticism as "two ostensibly very different genres", he correctly points out that "Piercy is able to effect a dialogic interaction between the two" (1994c: 347).
[25] See Chapter 2 "SF and the Genological Jungle" in Suvin 1979 for the distinction deconstructed by Piercy.

surfaces in the direct allusions, as well as plot similarities, to *Frankenstein* (both via Shelley's 1818 text and the 1931 film version starring Boris Karloff). And still concerning Piercy's awareness of generic history, it has been argued that *Body of Glass* features the re-vision, from a feminist perspective, of the cyberpunk texts in the mode of William Gibson (Booker: 1994c), whose influence upon her work is acknowledged in the afterword to the novel.[26] Indeed, it could be argued that cyberspace rendered in *Body of Glass* is characterized by a politico-feminist ethos that radically distinguishes it from the corporate-ubiquitous, nihilist cyber-universe of texts like William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984).

I stated above that Malkah's storytelling is in itself another instance of narrative self-reflexivity. It reminds us of Marge Piercy's own storytelling and of the power and ideologies at struggle in the reception and (re)production of narratives. Her re-vision of a patriarchal Jewish tale accomplishes the double critical move that has been associated with feminist discourse: the very act of questioning 'official' history implies its reinstatement. In the following passages, family memory via an oral tradition, rather than the official records, is favoured by Malkah:

> My family tradition says [the Maharal] was eighty-one; the books report various birth dates and thus a medley of ages up to ninety-odd. I'll accept the family's memory. (BG: 30)

> The subject of this most unusual interview [between Judah and the emperor] granted a Jew was a secret; the histories are silent. [...] But the family has its stories, doesn't it always? (BG: 31)

Both excerpts are about choosing versions of a narrative that will be passed on. The political implications of the act are foregrounded here, as family tradition is either favoured or fills gaps. (The novelistic text as a whole endorses Malkah's revision to the extent that twenty-first century 'official' histories and geographies are interrogated). Besides, fragments such as these serve the double function of destabilising and undermining (Malkah's own; at another level, Piercy's; ultimately all) discourse as it exposes its own constructedness, while hinting at its constructivist nature. It is also Malkah who states: "I cannot always distinguish between myth and reality, because myth forms reality and we act out of what we think we are" (BG: 34), hence the relevance of stories; and refers to herself elsewhere as the creator of "fictions and monsters" (BG: 34). The plural forms - "the books", "histories", "stories", "fictions" - favoured by Malkah echo the multi-layered narrative structure of *Body of Glass* itself. The shifting of narrative levels between the Shira and the Malkah chapters and the disruptions

---

[26] "I enjoy William Gibson very much, and I have freely borrowed from his inventions and those of other

resulting from the self-reflexivity of Malkah's storytelling parallel the slidings in spatio-temporal configurations in the novel, to which I will return.

My interest will now shift to the exploration of a discrete spatio-temporal dimension featuring in the in-between terrains that form the inhospitable, dystopic planet the Earth has become in *Body of Glass*. I stated above that, apart from the spatio-temporal configurations already discussed, the rest of the landscape has turned into desertic regions. It is to this area that I will now move in order to investigate the utopian possibilities of the desert, a space which has been revisited by the feminist imagination in contemporary speculative narratives.[27]

In extremely subtle ways, Piercy introduces a fictional version of women's 'other space', a literary equivalent to their cultural "wild zone", or to the "dark continent" of a radically different sexual economy. In *Body of Glass*, the area called the Black Zone is secondary to the main narrative spaces and hardly mapped out at all. Nevertheless, the similarity of that spatial dimension to these metaphors of undefined space is striking, as initially suggested by its naming. For "[Black zone] was one of the common names for the interdicted zone, because on contemporary maps it was a uniform black, with no features shown at all" (BG: 417). Like the "wild zone" theorized by the Ardeners, this space is marked by genre and remains unheeded by the dominant culture (represented in the novel by the male-centred world of the corporations).[28] And on a par with the women's other space discussed by Cixous, which evades categorizations and theorizations,[29] the Black zone remains strangely and paradoxically 'absent in its presence'. I will explore this space below, hoping to demonstrate that it strongly encapsulates one form of narrative anticipatory consciousness in Piercy's novel.

---

cyberpunk writers" (BG: 583-84).

[27] Cf., for instance, the female protagonist's escape into the desert to give birth to her child, who is to become a resistance leader in the dystopic future of *The Terminator* (US 1984, dir. J. Cameron). Cris Newport's "The Courage of Sisters" (1984) features a similar end: Kira, the protagonist, flees into the desert in search of "the Barrens", a women's community, where she will give birth to her girl child. See also the fantastic flight into the desertic canyon/gap at the end of *Thelma and Louise* (US 1991, dir. Riddley Scott); the narrative quest pattern away from the urban environment and into the North-American desert in Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977); and a female hero battling for survival in a dystopic desert in the futuristic teen fantasy *Tank Girl* (US 1995, dir. Rachel Talalay).

[28] Women's unheeded survival from the perspective of the male-centred dystopic environment is a key theme in the feminist dystopias, occurring, for instance, in Josephine Saxton's "Gordon's Women" (1976), Suzy McKee Charnas's *Motherlines* (1978), Pamela Sargent's "Fears" (1984, in Sargent ed. 1995: 141-151), and Caroline Forbes's "Night Life" (1985, in *The Needle on Full*: 155-167).

[29] In "Sorties", Hélène Cixous states that "*[t]he 'Dark Continent' is neither dark nor unexplorable*", and that one way of undertaking this exploration is through a feminine practice of writing. The problematics behind those apparently simple moves are raised by Cixous herself when she concedes that such practice is "never able to be *theorized*, enclosed, coded"; and that "it has been impossible (and it is still very difficult) to think or even imagine an 'elsewhere'" as the space of a feminine economy (1975: 68, 92, 83, her emphases).

At the beginning of *Body of Glass*, when the new map of the globe is described, readers are told that "[a] large chunk of the Middle East was represented on maps as a uniform black, for it was uninhabitable and interdicted to all. A pestilent radioactive desert" (BG: 14). As the story progresses, not much is said concerning this space where life is supposedly non-existent due to the high radiation levels that spread after the last great nuclear war. Until the appearance of a secondary character who comes to Tikva as a visitor, the interdicted and poisonous space of the Black Zone had been for us readers, and according to the 'official' narrative, an empty spot: "a black patch on the maps" (BG: 267), "wastelands" (BG: 267), "truly no-man's-land" (BG: 268). Through Nili, however, we get to know that this space is quite literally, as well as metaphorically, "no-man's-land", for a community of women flourished in the desert, amid the ruins, out of the nothing suggested by Nili's name:[30]

> We live in the hills - inside them, that is. 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. (BG: 267)

The passage above illustrates one of the very few instances in which this land is described. (Although the description is minimal, it renders a romanticized and problematic picture of the women's land.) Since Nili's dialogues are kept to a minimum, and since the story is not told from her perspective, the amount of information given is scarce, and requires from the reader a gradual collection of bits and pieces.

Textual fragments concerning the women's space surface through the breaches of the main narrative frame of *Body of Glass*. Such technique is interesting in terms of intra- and intertextual relations, and of the associations between fragmentation and marginality characteristic of recent feminist theory. Not only do the ruptures effected by fragmentary writing destabilize the novel itself (causing a similar result to the disruptions provoked by Malkah's storytelling), but they also challenge the ordering and closure of traditional narrative. Its anti-hierarchical movement shatters, for instance, the neat mapping of *Paradise Lost*, which draws "just circumferences" for heaven, the world, hell and where even chaos occupies a well defined space.

French post-structuralist thought comes in handy in our understanding of fragmentary writing. Maurice Blanchot calls it "the writing of the disaster", and relates this narrative mode

---

[30] Nili suggests "nil", or "nihil", in my opinion. Further examination of the symbolic signification of Nili's name is made by Vara Neverow, who points out it is an acronym of a Hebrew phrase (meaning "the glory of

to the erosion of utopia - here understood as a totalizing concept - and to the combat against the One (Blanchot 1980). The anti-hierarchical statement posed by fragmentation in writing has also been explored by French feminisms. Drawing on post-Freudian psychoanalysis French feminists have carried out a critique of the collusion of language and phallocentrism. Exemplary of this way of theorizing is Hélène Cixous's associations between women's writing and a non-phallocentric mode in discourse, and Julia Kristeva's elaborations on the semiotic disposition in poetic language which disrupts its thetic function. One valid criticism directed against this theoretical trend is that it risks too easily conflating innovative forms with (feminist) subversive meanings.[31] One way of avoiding hasty conclusions is by observing whether other textual elements support the associations between certain forms and gender-informed meanings.

Now shifting our focus back to the issue of fragmentation within the narrative spaces of *Body of Glass*, the textual refusal to offer a unified and whole "topos" strongly appears to be an anti-hierarchical statement better understood in relation to ideologies of gender. The inscription of gender in the textual space of the women's community is clear, as it constitutes a women's land in the sense that no man actually lives there. The elimination of the phallus has become a narrative convention in women's speculative writing, as it enables the 'imaging' and 'representation' of an alternative space in terms of sexual economy. Piercy's technique of fragmented and minimalist description enables the 'figuration' of the alternative economy. (The literal lack of the penis does not necessary imply a non-phallocentric order, as will become clear in Chapter Five below.) Besides, the imagery used to describe the women's land also evokes femaleness. Perhaps the most obvious example is the caves in the hills which house the women. Although the women's land constitutes a textual space of lesbianism, it is not so in the separatist way observed in most women-only literary utopias, for the women plan to open up to the world. Indeed, Nili's liminal position (marked by her trips to the other narrative spaces and her fluid sexual identity) signals the community's non-separatism.

Nili is the mediator linking the women's land, the Glop and Tikva, a liaison that is echoed by textual metaphors. The Glop revolutionary leader's name Lazarus has connotations that can be extended to the rising of the women's community: the biblical Lazarus was resurrected from the dead just as Nili's society emerged from the ashes of nuclear war. And the parallels with Tikva can be traced in the central line of women Malkah/Riva/Shira, which reiterates the all women's lines of the land of the desert; and in the Jewish cultural roots of

Israel will not fail"), which also names a Jewish underground intelligence group (1994: 23).
[31] This issue will be raised again in Chapter Six below. Cf. p. 145.

both communities. Furthermore, Nili's land, Tikva and the Glop are united in common aims articulated by characters from them all: to survive and to oppose the multis (BG: 416, 417, 418). Indeed, such shared objective results in political alliances, and, eventually in a victory over the Y-S corporation.[32] To the extent that *Body of Glass* shows the convergence of inhabitants from different geographies who engage in political resistance and action, it renders one version of the *feminist elsewhere* (in its most politically immediate and contradictory aspect) discussed above.

Body of Glass provides us with an "alternative history" to the "alternative history": the existence of the women's community surfaces as an alternative to the main settings of the novel, which is in turn also 'alternative' when seen in relation to the contemporary 'real'. Although this community remains to a great extent unknown territory, the beginnings of forms of political intervention gradually surface through the negotiation of technologies, the awareness and rejection of collusion with the world of the multis, the exploration of possibilities and future alternatives by means of connections with the other marginal spaces. Returning to the passage quoted from Bhabha above, the "intervening space 'beyond'" gains a fictional representation in *Body of Glass* through the depiction of the marginal spaces, where signs of historical action and intervention already exist. The novel encodes political hope by showing the formation of alternative networks for communication and interaction among the women's space, Tikva and the Glop. These networks challenge the corporation power while opening up collective and cultural possibilities. When Nili meets the Glop's revolutionary leader for the first time, she states: "I can offer you nothing yet except my interest" (BG: 417). The futurity in Nili's statement, revealed by the "yet", can be aligned with Bloch's Not-Yet-Conscious and with Jameson's notion of the "political unconscious" manifested in narrative texts. It indicates a narrative movement towards the future which is not yet and which bears wider political implications.

Regarding the elsewhere in its most radical connotation, the women's community in *Body of Glass* epitomizes this utopia and its dual connotations as the "no-place" (*ou-topos*) and the "good-place" (*eu-topos*). It is through the imaging of this spatio-temporal configuration that Piercy constructs a narrative enigma and touches the paradox of utopia, or the contradiction implicit in the act of "casting utopia into a picture" (Bloch & Adorno 1964:

---

[32] In her reading of *Body of Glass* vis-à-vis Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto", Joan Haran correctly observes that the strategic political alliance involving Tikva, the Glop, Riva and Nili pictured in the novel parallels Haraway's metaphor of cyborg identity as "the coalitions of interest groups" (1996: 12).

11).[33] Precisely the same paradox inherent in the representation of utopia was hinted at by Le Guin, who remarks, in the statement I chose to open this chapter with, that "Utopia is nowhere because as soon as we get there it ceases to be Utopia". Those views are linked by the interplay between desire and its object: once the object of utopian wish is grasped (or rendered into representation), the utopian impulse itself ceases to exist.

I will examine the representation of utopia as paradox in Piercy's narrative in the light of recent feminist theorizing of utopian space as a radical alterity, or as an elsewhere. Teresa de Lauretis identifies as a problem faced by feminists the fact that the available theories or cultural productions are built on master narratives of gender "bound by the heterosexual contract; narratives which persistently tend to reproduce themselves" even in feminist discourses themselves (1987: 25). Read in this context, *Body of Glass* still remains to a certain extent linked to what feminist critics term the "sex-gender system". In my opinion, Piercy's introduction of a possible utopia beyond the margins of the main narrative map of the novel further reveals the author's suspicion concerning the inscription of that system in her own creation. If my argument holds, the opening of this utopian space is in line with a critical instance which "continues to be as vital a part of feminism as is the ongoing effort to create *new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective - a view from 'elsewhere'"* (De Lauretis 1987: 25, my emphasis). For while the depiction of the three main futuristic spaces in *Body of Glass* is highly critical, especially in its attempts to rewrite cultural narratives (the biblical creation myth and its epic rewriting by Milton, as well as the utopian literary tradition), the most radical textual possibilities are opened up by the spatio-temporality of the women's land, which appears to inscribe one such new space of discourse as to allow a view from elsewhere.

In order to weave this narrative space, the strategies employed by Piercy deconstruct and reconstruct the traditional literary utopias and dystopias in important ways. Unlike the narrative conventions of the genre, instead of readers being introduced into the women's community through the eyes of a visitor, it is Nili who comes as an explorer to the 'outside'.[34] And the reverse situation occurs in a condition that stresses the paradox mentioned above even more. By the very end of Malkah's section in the novel, she travels to this promising (promised?) land and her crossing over water reiterates early literary trips to utopian islands, like Thomas More's *Utopia* and Thomas Campanella's *City of the Sun*. However, instead of

---

[33] "Something's Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing", in Bloch 1988: 1-17.

[34]Such inversion also occurs in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, where at first Luciente - a dweller of futuristic

the description of the land, as the generic conventions make us expect, Malkah's point of view provides us with only "shadows" and "shapes" (BG: 568) due to her dim sight. In fact, one of the reasons that takes Malkah to the women's land, in addition to scientific exchange and religious pilgrimage, is her failing eyesight. The 'opaque' description provided by Malkah's point of view further hides, rather than reveals, the women's land, consisting of a very brief account of no more than a few paragraphs near the end of the novel.

Significantly, the boat that takes the women "off the map" has the painting of "an eye on the prow" (BG: 568), and therefore foregrounds the act of seeing while also highlighting Malkah's physical disability and foreshadowing the success in her operation. Some points deserve attention here: first, the imagery of the eye is also suggestive of another twentieth-century dystopia, George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four. The eyes that "follow you about when you move" and the caption "Big brother is watching you" are immediately brought to mind in what turns out to be another allusion to the genre's history (Orwell 1949: 7).[35] The second point also relates to intertextuality: the negated gaze in Body of Glass stands in sharp contrast to the Miltonic obsession with the theme in Paradise Lost. This epic poem was written when the author was blind, a fact which is foregrounded especially in the opening lines of Book III, when the poetic persona invokes celestial light:

> So much the rather thou, celestial Light,
> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate; there plant eyes; all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight. (lines 51-55)

The biographical event of Milton's blindness may account for the huge amount of seeing that goes on in that text,[36] and is evocative of associations between the poetic persona and other blind bards and mythical prophets and oracles. The sharp contrast between Paradise Lost and Body of Glass that can be drawn here refers to the question of authority: while the Miltonic persona invests himself with the gift of the word and the power derived from it so that he "may see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight", Piercy's character undergoes a journey to acquire vision but does not render the spectacle of her sight textually visible. Finally, the

---

Mattapoisett and Connie's alter-ego - visits the dystopic present.

[35] See Umberto Eco's 1984 "Orwell, or Concerning Visionary Power" for a brief discussion of the structures of seeing, in relation to the idea of the panopticon, in Nineteen Eighty-Four (in Eco 1994: 81-88).

[36] The variations of the theme of sight in Paradise Lost follow a rigid vertical order, of which God's continual watch on Earth constitutes the topmost instance of the gaze/power/knowledge hierarchical relations in the poem. God is the all-seeing, unseen entity throughout the entire poem; other syntaxes of the gaze include the angels' watch upon Eden (one of the angels is Zophiel - the "spy of God" [cf. editor's note to Book VI, line 535]), Satan's gaze upon Adam and Eve, Eve as object of the gaze, Eve's transgressive gaze and desire for the fruit, Eve's eyes opened by the fruit, Adam's lascivious eyes on Eve, the visions seen by Adam after the fall.

third point I want to stress relates to the structure of the gaze which has predominated in representations such as those mentioned in the examples above. Instead of the masculinist point of view that appropriates/colonizes what is seen, Piercy usurps and deconstructs the traditional visual imagery by breaking the power of the gaze thus structured. Instead of a male observer rendering a vision of utopia, this is rather a female subject's quest to acquire her own vision, who 'reads' the "eye on the prow" positively as "a good omen" (BG: 568).

Also relevant in this context is the ambiguous "I see everything clearly. Very clearly," (BG: 576) articulated by Malkah in the last time her voice is heard in the novel. If at the level of plot development this passage assures readers that Malkah's operation has been successful (a clear inversion of the plot in *Oedipus Rex*, and another rewriting of classical plots), from the point of view of a feminist critique it may be taken as a hint of increased political understanding and awareness. The "contents" of what she sees, however, are not described, and the effects generated by this ellipsis in representation are several. First, it brings consistency to Piercy's text, for it highlights the paradox implicit in the act of casting a utopian space into representation, while helping maintain the dialectics of desire/absence as well as the radical utopian wish for something beyond. Secondly, it questions the objectifying masculinist gaze discussed above, for the reader is denied the fulfilment of what Laura Mulvey calls "visual pleasure".[37] Besides choosing a literary genre which inherently destroys visual pleasure (for dystopias as visual spectacle can hardly be defined as pleasant), Piercy also accomplishes this destruction at the end of *Body of Glass* by breaking the conventions of utopian narrative when the women's utopia is not rendered visible. Her text thus negates the traditional aesthetic representation of utopian spaces. The effect achieved is that of a new syntax of desire, for its object is paradoxically and simultaneously both present and absent.

The crossing to the women's land at the end of *Body of Glass* takes Malkah (and the readers) to the margins of the margins of the narrative map, to a space beyond representation, to its radical elsewhere. The concept of "paradoxical space" has been used by Gillian Rose in *Feminism and Geography* to designate "a space imagined in order to articulate a troubled relation to the hegemonic discourses of masculinism" (1993: 159). She identifies, in a critical and mobile trend in feminism, a tendency to resort to the strategic articulation of a "paradoxical space" in face of the dilemma of being both within and without the order of the Same, or, to use de Lauretis's terms, of having a "doubled vision". The representation of a

---

[37] Cf. Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" 1975, in Warhol & Herndl eds. 1991: 432-442, especially pp. 433-434. For another major discussion of the phallic element in the scopic drive at work in dominant culture (cinematic practices), see Teresa de Lauretis 1985 "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory", in Kemp

"paradoxical space" in feminist critical discourses and the representation of utopia as paradox are combined in *Body of Glass*. Piercy's strategy of hiding rather than revealing, of posing gaps and silences rather than language becomes her means of representing the unrepresentable, and of rendering a paradoxical "ou-topos", a "no-place". (Nili's place is also paradoxical in the sense that its utopia deconstructs the binary opposition between closed, or demarcated, versus undefined spaces: it remains unmapped, located in the Black Zone, but the women's housing in hillside caves is evocative of enclosed security.) Thus *Body of Glass* keeps the promise and hope of utopia without confining it a totalizing discourse.

The move towards a space beyond what is representable parallels Ernst Bloch's notion of an ideological *surplus* that, reaching beyond dominant ideologies, relates to the utopian function at work in aesthetic forms (1959). In terms of metafictional qualities, the opening up of what I call a utopian blank allows the text to "talk" about itself at a level that reaches further than its self-awareness concerning genre history. At this point in *Body of Glass* form and content become indistinguishable, and the text reveals its own representational and ideological limits. And by approaching its own limits, it becomes a novel about what cannot be said. The feminist semiotics of utopia I want to propose suggests that this ellipsis be viewed in terms of the excess of signification that elides the signifier and that works as a reminder of the ideological inscription - and therefore of the limits - in the representations rendered by feminist discourse itself, as well as of its profoundly utopian orientation.

IV. Conclusion: The Feminist Dystopia and the Problematization of the "Eu-topos"

All-women utopian spaces have been frequently envisaged by feminist authors who have appropriated the narrative conventions of the traditional literary utopias to question gender constructs.[38] Although these texts can be quite revolutionary in their historical contexts, they inevitably risk creating a feminist version of closure and totalitarianism. In other words, they risk not being sufficiently (self-)critical. In "Troubles in Women's Country", a chapter about this trend in feminist science fiction, Jenny Wolmark, touching the same issue, argues that "the utopian optimism of the separatist communities depicted in the

---

& Squires eds. 1997: 27-36.

[38] Charlotte P. Gilman's *Herland* (1915) constitutes an early example of a self-consciously feminist, all-female literary utopia. Alice Sheldon's "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" (1976), Suzy Mckee Charnas's *Motherlines* (1978), Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979), Elisabeth Vonarburgh's *The Silent City* (1981), Katherine Forrest's *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* (1984), Caroline Forbes's "London Fields" (1985), and Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (1986) illustrate recent portrayals of all-women utopias.

novels is, in the end, insufficient to sustain a radical critique of patriarchy" (1993: 86). As I showed above, in *Body of Glass*, the utopian space created within a dystopian frame evades the one-sidedness and simplistic utopianism of the more eutopian texts. (It only seems a bit odd that Wolmark criticizes this novel for its diminished focus upon the utopian possibilities of the feminine, i.e., upon Nili's cyborg identity rather than upon Yod, the male cyborg.)[39]

Regarding feminist fictions in which dystopic settings predominate, it can be argued that the dream of a radical utopian space and the characters' move towards, or anticipation of, this version of an elsewhere of narrative discourse can be observed with a certain recurrence in feminist dystopias published since the 1970's. Besides the narratives which will be examined in the following chapters, a sample includes Alice Sheldon's [James Tiptree Jr.'s] "The Women Men Don't See" (1973), Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) and *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980), Cris Newport's "The Courage of Sisters" (1984), and Frances Gapper's "Atlantis 2045: No Love Between Planets" (1985).[40] Whereas all these stories feature the female protagonists' escape to an elsewhere outside a dominant dystopic order and beyond the textual space of representation (the "other" space is not shown as it is located, in most cases, beyond the narrative ending), it could be argued that Piercy's novel, together with Lessing's texts mentioned above, go a step further in the representation of their utopian spatio-temporality. By means of the strategies analyzed in Section III above, *Body of Glass* presents the readers with an 'other' space that is both within and without representation, and so does *Marriages*.[41] I shall briefly compare these texts below.

Despite and beyond their striking differences (*Body of Glass* lies on the 'techno', post-capitalistic side of women's dystopian writing, while *Marriages* portrays a fairy-tale

---

[39] Comparing/contrasting the ways Yod and Nili challenge fixed cultural notions of human identity, Wolmark states that "despite the fact that the utopian possibilities of the text lie firmly with the feminine [with the definition of Nili as cyborg], the implications for women of a cyborg identity are not, in the end, fully explored. Despite the narrative refusal to endorse Yod's cyborg version of masculinity, the question of identity is framed too often in terms of the masculine because of the insistent focus on Yod's sense of self, rather than, say, that of Nili" (1993: 134). I want to take issue with Wolmark regarding the (lack of) exploration of Nili's subjectivity, which she views as a limitation in the novel. This seems to indicate a certain incoherence in her own argument. In the chapter significantly entitled "Troubles in Women's Country" (mentioned above), Wolmark develops a critique of novels about women-only communities in the sense that "they are depicted as patriarchy's other" (1993: 86). In the case of Piercy's *Body of Glass*, however, Wolmark seems to have overlooked the hypothesis that Piercy's omission may be read as a deliberate strategy to avoid precisely such entrapment into otherness.
[40] Alice Sheldon's "The Women Men Don't See" (in *Warm Worlds and Otherwise* 1975: 131-164); Frances Gapper's "Atlantis 2045: No Love Between Planets" (in Green & Lefanu eds. 1985: 129-135); Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (London: Flamingo, 1995) and *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* (London: Flamingo, 1994). Newport's text was mentioned above. In the discussion of *Marriages* below, page numbers will refer to this edition and be preceded by "M".
[41] In fact, Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* also features the textual emergence of a problematized utopian elsewhere. I chose to discuss *Marriages*, rather than *Memoirs*, due to its more markedly feminist tone,

world of kingdoms, queens and kings), Marge Piercy's and Doris Lessing's novels are extremely similar in their problematization of the utopian "good place". Like the geography of the futuristic world rendered in *Body of Glass*, there are three main territories in *Marriages*, each occupied by one of the Zones of the title. Also similarly to Piercy's text, each Zone is very clearly demarcated both spatially and culturally, and occupy different scales in the utopic/dystopic spectrum. And a rough parallelism can be traced between the anarchic and marginal Zone Five and the Glop; the male-centred, dystopic Zone Four, where King Ben Ata rules, and the multis, as oppression is clearly gender-marked in both spaces; and the gentler, and apparently eutopian, matriarchy of Zone Three, the land of Queen Al· Ith, and Tikva. The fact that the positions of liminality in the two texts belong mainly to women characters who initiate bonds and catalyze change is not less significant.

The most striking feature uniting these two texts lies, in my view, in the narrative movement they construct towards a "good place", which is at the same time a textual "no place". Having an equivalent function to the women's space in *Body of Glass* in terms of its radical utopian potentiality is Zone Two in *Marriages*. The enigmatic 'presence' of Zone Two, like Piercy's gradual display of the women's land, is constructed by means of narrative fragments scattered throughout the novel, whose main plot line also involves the three other zones. One notices that Zone Two does not appear even in the novel title, and readers are introduced to this area as Al· Ith (re)discovers it: "No one had ever mentioned Zone Two!" (M: 104), and yet it was 'strangely familiar' to her. (A similar pattern as that in *Body of Glass*: as Shira revises her previous knowledge concerning the "Black Zone", we, readers, get to know about it.) First we experience Zone Two 'visually' from a distance, as Al· Ith and her sister Murti· observe the other zone from a tower in Zone Three, but the description is problematized: "Murti· *could see nothing* but *a gap* in the mountains with *a haze* in it." (M: 103, my emphases). And when Al· Ith finally visits the place, her bodily senses are inappropriate to experience the radically different surroundings and her language insufficient to codify and describe that experience:

> 'I am not *able* to see. But I do see more and more ... there are beings like flames, like fire, like light ... It is as if wind had become fire, or flames ... the blue is only the matrix of the real light [...] and if I shut my eyes -' and she shut her eyes - 'I can see images, pictures, reflections ... they are not like us, to them we are just ... they pity us and help us, but we are just ...'
> So she babbled. (M: 281, emphasis in the original)

---

as well as its stronger concern with spatio-temporal configurations.

Whatever this space is, it eventually attracts the inhabitants of the 'lower' zones and represents a positive alterity able to "feed, strengthen, nourish, endure..." (M: 281), words which could actually define the women's space in *Body of Glass*.[42] At the end of *Marriages*, Al· Ith disappears into Zone Two. Indeed, in her depiction of Zone Two, Lessing has constructed a radically other space-time which is even more cryptic than Piercy's women's land, whose minimalist description suddenly grows too rich in comparison and even acquires a certain smugness.[43]

The narrative sophistication of these two texts in terms of their problematization of the feminist utopian space-time especially allows us to qualify them as critical dystopias. And, suspicious as we may be of a tendency to draw linear accounts of literary history, thus creating still another fiction, I feel very much tempted to underline the changes in relation to the depiction of a radical utopian elsewhere in the feminist dystopias. Initially hinted at by a flight from the text itself (i.e., as the destination of the female protagonist's trip beyond the narrative ending observed in texts like Sheldon's "The Women Men Don't See"), the women's "good place" has been gradually incorporated and problematized *in* and *by* meta-narrative. Nili's land and Zone Two represent the unknown countries appearing on the margin and disrupt the "insulation against the future" Bloch associates with the traditional utopian novels.[44] In this sense, Piercy's and Lessing's texts pose the promise and desire for a not-yet from a feminist perspective without falling prey to the foreclosure which characterizes the utopian imagination in its tendency to delineate models and blueprints. The narrative "gap" in the representation of these spaces can be read as a metaphor for a feminist "political unconscious", a narrative space where the feminist politics of the text reveals both its ideological limits and its full utopian dimension. The following chapter will continue to look at the textual inscriptions of this form of anticipatory consciousness, but will shift the focus towards the quest pattern towards utopia.

---

[42] A reading of *Marriages* in the context of Doris Lessing's space fiction series *Canopus in Argos: Archives*, will of course engender a different response to Zone Two, as it then appears as one of the spatial dimensions belonging the three galactic empires envisioned in the quintet of novels. But even when this is the case, apart from all the other space-time dimensions, Zone Two stands alone in that it remains ineffable.

[43] As, for instance, in Malkah's remark that Nili's people are "the strongest women in the world" (BG: 566).

[44] See quotation on p. 78 above.

Chapter Five

In Search of Utopia: Suzy McKee Charnas's Holdfast Series and the Feminist Quest

> Without utopianism, feminism will grind to a halt.
> (Lucy Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*)

I. Introduction

This chapter proposes to offer a close reading of Suzy McKee Charnas's Holdfast series, which comprises so far the following novels: *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) and its sequels *Motherlines* (1978) and, much later, *The Furies* (1994).[1] Centred upon the tale of Alldera Holdfaster, the texts follow her path from an initial state of slavery in the dystopic patriarchal space of the Holdfast (*Walk*) towards escape into what turns out to be a version of a women's-only "wild zone", a sort of refuge or "retreat"[2] (*Motherlines*), and finally back to the initial setting for the establishment of a 'new' order in which former women slaves become the Holdfast masters (*The Furies*). As hinted by this over-simplified summary, the series takes in the thematic and formal conventions of the quest narrative as found in Greek epic writing and medieval romance, both of which tell of the legendary expedition or adventure of a hero to achieve some purpose or obtain something. These forms have helped shape narrative fictions in general, and the novel genre specifically.

Quest-texts in Western culture are traditionally informed by a masculine economy: the hero is usually male, the object searched for (the prize to be won) being, in most cases, symbolized as woman herself.[3] Initiating from a 'male-type' quest which conforms to this model and echoes the Oedipal plot, the focus of the series gradually shifts towards a woman

---

[1] *Walk to the End of the World & Motherlines* (London: The Women's Press, 1995) and *The Furies* (London: The Women's Press, 1995). References will be made to these editions, and the titles abbreviated to WEW, M and F.

[2] Jan Relf's term (1991a, 1991b), further discussed in section III below.

[3] For a discussion of the role of women as the mythical hero's "other portion", see chapter III, part 4 in Campbell (1949). A gender-based critique of plot patterns/myths in the Western literary canon is Joanna Russ's "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write" (Cornillon ed. 1972: 3-20). This witty text from the early days of feminist criticism surveys recurrent literary plots and concludes that "our literary myths are for heroes, not heroines" (p.7). In "The Mythical Subject" Teresa de Lauretis examines the relation between myth, narrative, and the Oedipal plot in terms of sexual difference: "to say that narrative is the production of Oedipus is to say that each reader - male or female - is constrained and defined within the two positions of a sexual difference thus conceived: male-hero-human, on the side of the subject; and female-obstacle-boundary-space, on the other" (1984: 121). The concept of an Oedipal narrative trajectory has also been used in film theory. Susan Hayward gives us a brief account of this convention and its recurrence in mainstream cinema: "the female is a stationary site (that is, a passive object) to which the male hero travels and upon which he acts" (1996: 255). I mentioned Bloch's and Barthes's theorization of narrative Oedipal structure on p. 62 above.

character, Alldera. The difficulties in conceiving an adventure story centred upon a female protagonist have been discussed by Charnas herself: "I was writing an adventure story, and I knew from all my reading that adventure means male. Women are included only as prizes or so that they can be tamed and taught their proper place." She reiterates the problematics raised by Russ concerning heroine portrayal: "I knew why [Alldera] was there, but not what she was supposed to do" (1981: 103).[4]

Besides revising the conventional quest narrative in terms of gender, as will be shown, the series also draws on and revises a tradition of literary utopian writing. The science-fictional element is immediately perceived from the generic self-referentiality of the title of the first novel, i.e., its syntactic and semantic parallelism with Jules Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864). Besides, the opening paragraph of *Walk* projects the reader into a future of utopian/dystopian visions. Although the quest motif recurs in science fiction,[5] this is not usually so in conventional literary utopias, where plot development is secondary to the idea of perfection and stasis[6] and where the traveller to the utopian space is not usually invested with the questor's attributes and qualities. Charnas's series combines the genres mentioned above in the construction of a feminist critical dystopia, which foregrounds "the political quest of the protagonist" (Moylan 1986: 45)[7] and her search for a feminist elsewhere.

Being motivated by an original "lack" or "insufficiency" (Propp 1928), quest patterns are inherently utopian. This chapter aims to highlight this utopian trace and to identify ways in which, to use Bloch's term, the "figures of hope" of the series and some issues central to feminism overlap thematically. I intend to argue that the novels allegorize current theoretical and political debates within feminism.[8] My reading also hopes to contribute to the process of constructing a feminist semiotics of utopia by pointing to the ways in which the anticipatory consciousness (which surfaces, I claim, as a historical product of feminism) *is* both thematically and structurally inscribed, and problematized, in Charnas's texts.

---

[4] "A Woman Appeared", in Barr ed. 1981: 103-108.

[5] For a discussion of the dialogue between science fiction and epic and romance forms, see chapters 3 and 5 in Patrick Parrinder's *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching* (1980). The literary topos of travel as quest in science fiction is also discussed by Darko Suvin (1996).

[6] Darko Suvin (1979) and Tom Moylan (1986) examine traditional literary utopianism - to which they oppose a new wave - in terms of its "static", "blueprint" qualities.

[7] The quote is from Moylan's definition of the "critical utopia" discussed in Chapter One above, p. 8.

[8] I am aware of the breadth and variety of (sometimes contradictory) issues debated within feminisms' discursive space in the past three decades, and of the impossibility of covering this terrain. Therefore, I have chosen to limit my scope to three central issues foregrounded by the novels themselves and specified in the paragraphs below. Regarding the specific political context of mid-seventies North-American feminism which informed the first two novels of the series, see chapter 3, "Of Unmen and Women", in Frances Bartkowski's *Feminist Utopias* (1989).

In "The Laugh of the Medusa", discussing the "tasks" of women's writing, Hélène Cixous states that "as there are no grounds for establishing a discourse, but rather an arid millennial ground to break, what I say has at least two sides and two aims: to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project" (1975: 245).[9] Starting from the agenda set up by Cixous, I want to argue that Charnas's dystopic *Walk* accomplishes the first move: the de(con)struction of a patriarchal order. *Motherlines* and *The Furies*, on the other hand, can best be aligned with the second move: that of "foreseeing the unforeseeable" because they explore in fiction two different feminist 'utopias': the dreams of a separatist utopia and of a utopia of sex-role reversal, respectively.[10]

The analysis will follow the textual sequence by examining the scenarios that correspond to the three novels, originally published separately. Thus section II will focus on *Walk*, dealing specifically with the de(con)struction of a patriarchal order. Centred on *Motherlines*, whose setting is the all-female country of the Riding Women, section III will deal with separatism as one of the political strategies favoured by second wave feminism. The next section will provide a reading of *The Furies*. This reversal utopia will be looked at in terms of the political experiment it provides, as the 'new' order established by the former women slaves in the Holdfast gives a picture of a society in which women have become masters. Sections III and IV will approach the novels as fictional utopian configurations of feminist speculations about alternative social models. Besides following the chronological order of publication of the texts, this organization also stresses the increasing degree of sophistication in feminist fictions and theories from the early days of the second wave to the feminism(s) of difference of the 1990's.

II. Escaping from Dystopia: Walk to the End of the World

> "They [the women] have no will, no character, and no souls; they are only a reflection of men." (The Knight, in Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*)

> Where is she?
> Activity/Passivity
> Sun/Moon
> Culture/Nature

---

[9] In Marks & de Courtivron eds. (1980: 245-264). The text features in a section entitled "Utopias".
[10] In the last analysis, the two moves proposed by Cixous (destroying/foreseeing) cannot be distinguished from each other. I am treating them as consecutive stages for reasons of clarity, and of textual imagery suggestiveness.

> Day/Night [...]
> Man
> Woman (Hélène Cixous, "Sorties")[11]

Women as mirror reflection of men: the textual fragments above point to a similar issue, despite their diverse contexts. The former is part of a comment on the status of women in the dystopic Nazi culture rendered in the early feminist dystopia *Swastika Night* (1937). The list of binary oppositions, as widely known by now, opens Cixous' "Sorties" (1975),[12] a key text of contemporary feminism. If readers were asked to characterize the relationships between the sexes in *Walk to the End of the World*, the exercise would result in a similar list. Besides the closeness in their dates of publication, what brings Charnas's and Cixous's texts together (and sets them apart from Burdekin's) is that both consist of "attacks" - as the title of Cixous's article itself invites me to name their common aim - on the dual, hierarchical oppositions upon which phallocentric and logocentric structures rest. These "attacks" have characterized second-wave feminism and poststructuralism.

One of the assumptions in this section is that, despite the divergences existing between second-wave feminist and mainstream poststructuralisms,[13] they share some theoretical concerns. Among these, is the fact that feminist and poststructuralist theories have crossed the line separating 'nature' from 'culture', and have thus problematized "the notions of subjectivity and knowledge which occupied that frontier territory" (Braidotti 1991: 130). Thus, the 'naturalness' of gender hierarchies came under scrutiny.[14] The purpose of this section is to provide a reading of *Walk* as a representation of a feminist critique and de(con)struction of the (male) Order of the Same, a crucial item in the feminist agenda, and one which coincides with poststructuralist thought. My argument is that the first novel of the series metaphorizes one of the tasks assigned to women's writing by Cixous: "to break up a millennial ground".

---

[11] "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks / Ways Out / Forays", in Cixous & Clément 1975: 63-132.

[12] A brief history of sexually-marked duality in philosophical thought is offered by Monique Wittig's 1990 "Homo Sum" (in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* 1992: 46-58). From a feminist perspective, she reconsiders "the first table of opposites which history has handed down to us" (49-50), presented in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and stresses the continuities of the system of dual thought in philosophy.

[13] Accounts of these divergences point to a fear that poststructuralism "leads to a theory without addressees, to a self without center ... Is not a feminist theory that allies itself with poststructuralism in danger of losing its very reason for being?" (Di Stefano and Benhabib, quoted in Humm 1994: 144). Other cautionary notes concerning an alliance between feminism and poststructuralism stress the latter's distance from material culture and lack of a more accurate gender-based analysis. Good accounts of the convergence/divergence between the two trends are found in Braidotti 1991 and chapter 6 in Humm 1994.

[14] A major feminist critique of the nature/culture dichotomy is, of course, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Her central argument is against the essentialist naturalization of woman by myth: "It is not nature that defines woman; it is she who defines herself by dealing with nature on her own account in her emotional life" (1949: 69; see also section 1 in "Myths"). Speaking from outside feminist discourse, Roland Barthes shares

In its opening lines, making use of one of the conventions of initiating dystopian literature, i.e., the fictional given that there has been a disaster causing drastic natural and social transformation,[15] Charnas sets the post-apocalyptic, dystopic scene of *Walk*: "The predicted cataclysm, the Wasting, has come and - it seems - gone: pollution, exhaustion and inevitable wars among swollen, impoverished populations have devastated the world, leaving it to the wild weeds. Who has survived?" White men and "fems" have. The latter are now reduced to the status of "unmen", and described as "the natural inferiors", "lesser beings" (WEW: 58). ("Unman" or "fem", instead of "woman", would feature at the bottom of my imaginary readers' list.) This undoubtedly foregrounds the inferior, relational position occupied by women in the reconstructed society of the Holdfast, where the maintenance of law and order is effected by male domination over male youths and women, the latter being the only "unmen" who remain (the others - non-whites and animals - having been exterminated).

The depiction of the Holdfast society has much in common with the social configurations in other feminist and non-feminist dystopias. With the latter it shares the mechanisms of exaggerated social control for the maintenance of the status quo characteristic of strongly hierarchical societies, as the word Holdfast itself suggests: the space was named after "the anchoring tendril by which seaweed clings to the rocks *against the pull of the current*" (WEW: 4, my emphasis). Other connotations of the word must not be forgotten. Holdfast also means, in its dictionary definition, a "firm or secure grasp".[16] Moreover, it symbolizes "the monster of the status quo", or "the keeper of the past", in its several mythological impersonations (Campbell 1949: 337). Such meanings evoke the rigid social mechanisms at work in that space, which include an enforced conditioning, censorship and the manipulative retelling of history. Social control reaches the point of determining which (drug-induced) dreams are "proper" by the "Canon of Dreaming Images" (WEW: 47, 77), in what appears to be a reference to the construction of desire in our own context of late capitalism.

More specifically echoing other feminist dystopian texts, thus marking the gender inflection of the novel, is the "reduction of women" in *Walk* and their scapegoating by means

---

with de Beauvoir the task of working out the principle of myth: "it transforms history into nature" (1957: 129).

[15] Post-holocaust, post-nuclear, and disaster narratives are terms currently used to refer to the genre, within utopian writing, featuring the fictional premise of disaster (Clute & Nicholls 1993; Brewer 1987; Wolmark 1994). Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) already features this generic device. A small sample of feminist (post-)disaster fictions includes: Judith Merril's *Shadow on the Hearth* (1951), Alice Sheldon's "The Snows are Melted, the Snows are Gone" (1969) and "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" (1976), Doris Lessing's *The Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), Kate Wilhelm's "The Scream" (1974) and *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1974), Pearlie McNeill's "The Awakening" (1985), Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (1986), Sheri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1989), Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass* (1991), and L. A. Hall's "In the Green Shade of a Bee-Loud Glade" (1993).

[16] Cf. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.

of a sexual politics of women's oppression materialized via spatial confinement, their use as permanent slave labour force and reproductive machines, denial of access to linguistic expression, ritualistic executions and sexual abuse. Many historical notes are sounded by those forms of violence inflicted upon women. Concerning intertextual links, similar elements are already found in Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937)[17] and will also feature in later texts like Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). The higher degree of graphic violence portrayed by Charnas and the centrality of gender in her text distinguish *Walk* from its generic precursor.

The sexist system of binary oppositions attacked by Cixous assumes an extreme form in the portrayal of the relationship between the sexes in Charnas's novel. "They had no souls, only inner cores of animating darkness shaped from the void beyond the stars" (WEW: 57): the male opinion about the "fems" in the Holdfast echoes some piece of derogatory, misogynistic discourse whose occurrence in our philosophical tradition was not infrequent. (The similarity with the Burdekin quotation above is striking.) Men, on the other hand, are "bastions of order, clear-thinking and will" (WEW: 10). In the name of reason and order, and in order to maintain the patriarchal Holdfast system, older men rule over women and the young by means of a militaristic governmental machine aptly described by Frances Bartkowski as "a white, male gerontocracy" (1989: 84): "Everything the board does - or fails to do - is calculated to ensure that nothing happens to shake its control" (WEW: 192). While the punishment of young male rebels is, if not always more subtle, at least less bloody, the violence committed against women in the novel reaches peaks of misogynistic sadism in the performances of "formal fem-hunts" and "witch-burning": public spectacles in which the killing of women serves exemplary and ceremonial purposes (WEW: 170 and 113). These elements echo our past history, as similar atrocities have been committed in the name of religious, racial or sexual supremacy.[18]

Discussing the distinctions between mainstream and feminist poststructuralist theoreticians, Rosi Braidotti discusses their basic difference in approach insofar as gender is concerned. The gender-blindness of mainstream poststructuralism is exposed in the following critique of "rational violence":

---

[17] Burdekin published *Swastika Night* under the pseudonym of Murray Constantine. The expression "the reduction of women" appears in this novel, after the act which institutionalizes the lower status of women. This metaphor is used by Sarah Lefanu to title her chapter on feminist dystopias (1988: 71-75).

[18] The historical resonance of Charnas's and Burdekin's novels leads us to reconsider forms of oppression that have gone beyond gender, like the extremist racial separatism between Aryans and Jews which marked our century. Written during the rise of Nazism in Germany, *Swastika Night* extrapolates from history by envisioning Europe under the Nazi rule. Gender (as well as race) is foregrounded in that homosexual (and homosocial)

> While inscribing themselves in a more general movement of critique of rational violence, women have added a specific gender inflection, stressing the masculinity of [the violent philosophical exercise of reason]. Violence is a constant of power determined in function of three variables: the monetary, the military, and the masculine. All violence is sexed, that is to say, it reflects a power-system dominated by male subjects; this is also reflected on the discursive level. According to this view, violence is the protective enclosure of rationality, which can only impose itself by processes of exclusion and denial. Violent reason. Reasonable violence. (1991: 279)

I want to argue that violence in *Walk* is analogous to the violent exercise of reason theorized by Braidotti. Gendered violence in the novel, in which the "processes of exclusion and denial" of the cultural other can amount to murder, may be seen to work as a feminist indictment of the collusion between reason and violence operating in the contemporary real and reflected/construed by the discourses of philosophy, history and the media, for example.

One of the issues to be raised at this point (which may account for feminists' initial disregard of *Walk*, and concentration on *Motherlines*)[19] can be articulated as questions: if the novel reproduces the binary hierarchical oppositions so useful to the maintenance of the patriarchal system, symbolized in the Holdfast, to what extent does it "break the ground"? Is the text not operating as a reinstatement of masculine hegemony rather than effecting its destruction? A clue for a possible answer is the disintegration of the Holdfast society portrayed in the novel, which culminates with civil war shaking its basis. This supports my reading that destruction of the old hierarchical order is being effected. Also supporting this view is the presence of the male-dissidents and of Alldera, the protagonists of *Walk*. Concerning the three male antagonists to the system, Captain Kelmz, an older junior officer who declined the "dignity" of seniority, is described as "standing out of order" (WEW: 20). Servan D Layo and Eykar Beck "fail" their initiation test from boyhood into junior status (thus failing their social conditioning) and become "borderline cases" (WEW: 77) unable to be

---

society, where women are reduced to a caste below the hierarchical all-male Nazi/non-Nazi dichotomy.

[19] Lefanu explains the lower popularity of *Walk* among feminists: "This is undoubtedly because [...] it is *Motherlines* that centralises women. There are, indeed, no men in it." And further: "*Walk* does present certain problems to the reader. [...] It is, I think, a very feminist book, but its concentration on male characters and its depiction of a society in which women are slaves are, understandably, offputting to readers who are fed up to the teeth with women as slaves and want something rather more inspiring" (1988:147-8). I agree that *Walk* is "a very feminist book", and want to add that, while the assertion that it does not centralize *women* is to some extent tenable, it does centralize gender issues: the power relations between the sexes and the emergence of a woman's voice. If, due to a given historical context (that of the images-of-women criticism), *Walk* was temporarily ignored, feminist critics have been revisiting this text recently (e.g. Bartkowski 1989, Cranny-Francis 1990, Relf 1991a, Sargisson 1996). This indicates a change in feminist readings and suggests that *Walk* was ahead of its time. The publication of *The Furies* will undoubtedly instigate renewed interest in the earlier novels.

assimilated by the male-centred Holdfast society. Their presence evidences fissures in the Holdfast structure.

In the character of Eykar lies "the potentiality for mythical action" (WEW: 86): he is the one who knows his father's name in a society where the blood ties are not recognized, the division between the Holdfast men being that of seniors and juniors. The point of keeping secret the individual identities of fathers and sons is to avoid the "fated enmity" between them: "to know your father's identity would be to feel, however far off , the chill wind of death" (WEW: 24). Eykar is the central figure in the re-enactment of the Oedipal plot. Stated early in the novel, his aim is "to find [his] father" (WEW: 23), whom he kills, fulfilling the patricidal mythical role. However, in Charnas's feminist revision of the myth, this is Oedipus with a difference for Eykar refuses his role as successor and precipitates the collapse of the power-structure which had been intended to become another version of the Holdfast in his father's plan to build a "new, better and truly rational society" (WEW: 188).[20]

Outsider among outcasts, fem among male dissidents, Alldera has been described as "a kind of absent heroine" (Lefanu 1988: 147). She is chosen to join the men's journey due to her special skills as a messenger and a runner, which set her apart from most of the other fems: "She had been speed-trained, which was illegal and added to her value. Speed-training was confined to men who specialized in racing competitively for their companies. In any case, no fem should be able to outrun Rovers"[21] (WEW: 67). Planned by the Matris, older fems who connive with the male rule by enforcing the other fems' subordination,[22] her mission is to journey away from the fems' enforced confinement in the Bayo towards the Wild (the space outside the Holdfast borders) and back again with some message from the free fems. Free fems are believed to be runaways who have escaped from the Holdfast. It is also believed that they will return and help the resistance movement started by young rebel fems. Nevertheless, neither the Matris nor Alldera herself have confidence in the existence of the free fems, her (fake) mission consisting of a scheme devised by the Matris to persuade the young fems to give up political resistance, which endangers the lives of all fems.

---

[20] I will return to Charnas's rewriting the Oedipal pattern in section IV below.

[21] Rovers are automatons, "nearly soulless" men who fail the Holdfast ritual of initiation. They are programmed to watch and punish the fems and kept under the trainers' skilful control. Compared with "the mechanical men of Ancient legend" (WEW: 53), they provide an interesting parallel to Yod, the cyborg of Piercy's *Body of Glass*.

[22] The presence of (usually older) women who have been co-opted by a male-dominant culture recurs in feminist dystopias: Kate Wilhelm's "The Funeral" (1972), Lisa Tuttle's "Wives" (1979) and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). These women (teachers, wives, aunts) are indeed one of the most sinister character types in the genre. Although they have access to power, they exercise authority in precisely the same terms as the male oppressors do, helping to keep the sexually-polarized power structure intact.

It should be noted, however, that Alldera is not acting out of mere dishonesty, or collusion with the Matris. It is her idea that "if any young fems could grow bold enough to dare a concerted and determined break into the Wild under the mistaken impression that they would find allies there, then they themselves might of necessity turn into free fems" (WEW: 149). Alldera is then to a great extent moved by her own beliefs in emancipatory strategies which reveal a longing for change. Whereas the Matris have been co-opted by the Holdfast patriarchal system, Alldera's position implies a subtle form of feminist resistance: "There was a difference between lying and bending her neck for the privilege of continuing to lie and bend her neck, and going through the same motions so that some other fems might not have to do either any more" (WEW: 150). It is clear in this passage that Alldera's mimicry of "Holdfast femininity" is a political strategy of resistance, for she plays 'womanhood' as a role. Presented in several instances, this evidences the liberating aspect of masquerade[23] and functions as the textual inscription of Alldera's doubleness and alternative wishes. While this masquerade signals Charnas's non-essentialist portrayal of women, one should also notice that, for the author, "non-essentialist" does not signify "disembodied". As discussed above, the mechanisms of repression act concretely upon the fems' bodies. Besides, Alldera's enterprise very literally depends on her bodily skills.

Alldera and the three male protagonists may be seen as representatives of a counter-cultural movement resisting the militaristic Holdfast. Her status as fem (unman, slave), the timidity of her political action, and the secondariness of her position as traveller in someone else's quest seem to justify the epithet bestowed by Lefanu. But the actual presence of "the absent heroine" gradually grows perceptible. Two factors support this: the first relates to the formal aspect of the novel, and the second has to do with Alldera's finding her own voice. *Walk* is structured into six parts. Between the prologue and the epilogue ("Destination") there are four sections, each named after a different protagonist and told from his or her point of view. The order is linked to the characters' importance in each narrative stage: from Captain Kelmz to Servan D Layo, then shifting to Eykar Beck, and finally ending with Alldera's section. While the object of Eykar's quest is stated early in the text (p. 20), Alldera's first appearance happens at about one third of the novel (p. 67). Besides, readers only get to know about her own quest in the section narrated from her point of view (in the last third of the text). After a start involving male protagonists only, "inevitably and almost effortlessly, the

---

[23] Now current in feminist critical discourse, popularized by the work of, among others, Judith Butler (1990), the term derives from Joan Riviere's "Womanliness as a masquerade" (1929). It refers to women's use of the social mask of womanliness in order "both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals

last pages of *Walk* grew to be Alldera's. At that point, the story had become her story" (Charnas 1981: 104).

This shift points to the emergence of a woman character in the novel, metaphorizing what could be termed the "becoming woman" of the text. I am borrowing the expression from Rosi Braidotti's critique of mainstream poststructuralism, and investing it with a different meaning.[24] For the purpose of this analysis, I have redefined the term positively. "Becoming a woman" is understood here as the formulation of female feminist identitities and subjectivities which are embodied, aware of history, and engaged in the political task of seeking forms of agency alternative to the ones imposed by phallocratic order. I associate the emergence of this historical subject of feminism with the surfacing, in Charnas's novel, of Alldera, who gradually becomes a central character and the agent of her own feminist political quest by the end of *Walk*.

The issue of language, a central theme in *Walk* and in other speculative writings by women, is relevant in this context.[25] Only a few Holdfast fems have been trained into speech. When linguistic competence is permitted to fems, they are allowed a very restricted use of language. The speech patterns enforced on them include, for instance, the use of the third person instead of the first when referring to themselves ("this fem" instead of "I") as a means to enforce their subservience. Fems who have command of speaking skills must hide their linguistic competence strategically, as is the case with Alldera. In 'her' section of the novel, Alldera finally pronounces the "magical pronoun", "the equalizing name for the self" (WEW: 166). In this occasion she fully realizes the power of speech:

> This was her first experience of speech as self-expression with any degree of complexity, eliciting responses of similar quality. It gave her an extraordinary feeling of power, of reality.
> That was the danger. (WEW: 172)

Significantly, as Alldera gradually takes over the narrative focus and becomes the agent of her own quest, she also becomes the enunciator of her own identity. This implies, of course, an active reorganization of that world according to her perspective.

---

expected if she was found to possess it" (Riviere 1929, quoted in Wright ed. 1992: 243).

[24] Reviewing the thought of postmodernist thinkers, Braidotti observes that "the 'becoming woman of...' is a force which appropriates women's bodies, an exchange among the master-thinkers of the feminine body: it perpetuates an ancestral habit of domination as the trait of the masculine discourse on women. It is still a misogynistic mode of thought" (1991: 123). The "becoming a woman of" *male* mainstream poststructuralism (represented, in Braidotti's analysis, by Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari) is thus a form of philosophical violence, by which means real individual women disappear. "Woman" acquires signification as a mode of textual practice, being metaphorized to its limit in the context of French poststructuralism.

[25] Chapter Six below examines utopianisms constructed in relation to language in the feminist dystopias.

The emergence of a female subject amidst the disintegration and imminent fall of an established order at the end of *Walk* finds parallels in history and philosophy. The fact that Alldera enters the scene precisely at the point in which the male contract represented in the novel by Eykar and his father falls apart raises some complications. One must bear in mind, for instance, that the start of Alldera's own political quest depended on male dissidence and on Eykar's sympathy. Besides, the special physical training which enables Alldera to be picked out for the journey involved a former masters' "interesting requirements" for his femhold (WEW: 67). The pattern of her quest is thus highly imbricated with the masculine order (symbolized by the male characters and their motivations) she sets out to oppose. This is, in my view, allegorical of the emergence of the feminist utopian subjectivity which responds to an oppressive and decaying patriarchal order and its philosophy.

According to Rosi Braidotti, we have come to the historical crossroads where the "becoming woman" routes of feminist and of (male) mainstream poststructuralisms diverge:

> This desire for a new neutrality and multiplicity is certainly not gratuitous: at the precise historical moment when women start to speak in their own name, and to articulate their particular relation to discourse and theoretical production, it is no accident that male thinkers appropriate their language and begin to women-speak, to speak 'as' women themselves. (1991: 122)

She argues for the need to theorize a form of "becoming woman" subjects which moves beyond the vague generalizations of mainstream poststructuralist philosophy. Asserting that "women have been poststructuralists since the beginning of time" does not suffice either (Braidotti 1991: 122).

At this point, Alldera's quest may provide some clues concerning ways out of this impasse. At the end of *Walk*, this character, whose subjectivity is marked by her experience in the dystopic Holdfast, sets off on a journey that is at once personal and political, individual and collective in its implications, and definitely feminist. In the epilogue, entitled "Destination" (which functions symbolically as a crossroads and is marked, from its very title, by an anticipatory quality), in the last dialogue with Eykar, Alldera articulates the following words: "It's just as well that our ways part here. My hope lies in speed, and you can barely hobble" (WEW: 214). Hope and speed, expectation and agility: more than a clumsy farewell between master/man and slave/fem, this exchange evokes the radically different political paths implied by a male-dominated nihilistic philosophical trend which revels in fragmentation and death of the subject on one side (represented by Eykar Beck's frailty amidst a crumbling Holdfast), and the forward-moving utopian impulse which underlies the feminist quest for reformulated identities and alternative ways of being (symbolized by Alldera's setting off on a

new journey). Fleeing from a disintegrating order, Alldera departs on her walk to the end of the narrative space (the novel ends with her preparations to cross the Holdfast borders), that is, at the same time, the walk to the beginning of *Motherlines*, the focus of the next section.

III. A Separatist Utopia: *Motherlines*

> Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes, and it is that zone we must try to remember *today*. (Catherine Clément, "The Guilty One")[26]

Clément is referring to the metaphorical "zone", or the space outside, in the margins of a repressive culture. To such space belong the ones who do not fit into the Order of the Same - the cultural anomalies or the cultural others. Feminist speculative fictions provide a fertile ground for the explorations of the feminist "wild zone", and one such fictional space was discussed in the previous chapter when I looked at Piercy's protagonist's trip at the end of the novel, a journey which very much resembles Alldera's. Some theoretical configurations of the female/feminist "wild zone" were also raised in the context of that discussion.

In the closing pages of *Walk* and in the beginning of *Motherlines*, we follow Alldera crossing the Holdfast boundaries into "the Wild".[27] Her transgressive mobility is symbolic of those who occupy peripheral spaces, and the prospect of the exploration of the unknown continent ahead evokes a utopic horizon after Alldera's earlier experience as a slave in the dystopic Holdfast. The transition between the novels/fictional spaces is charged with forward impulses and anticipation of the future unconscious, which Bloch termed the Not-Yet. Another marker of anticipation lies in Alldera's pregnancy during her crossing; in this context, the child itself signifies the embodiment of the future, or, using Cixous's phrase, "the possibles' body" (1975: 90).[28] Furthermore, the utopian move of "foreseeing the unforeseeable" is

---

[26] In Cixous & Clément 1975: 1-59.

[27] Although "the Wild" was intended by Charnas as a "'buffer zone' between the Holdfast and the Grasslands" (Cavalcanti 1998: 8), this space is the only reference to what exists beyond the borders. It functions as a repository of men's fears and of imaginary dangers, as well as the destination of the fugitive women. By escaping into "the Wild" fems reach the all-female territory depicted in *Motherlines*. Men who try a similar path are eliminated by the riding women. This confirms the gender connotations of the spaces beyond the Holdfast, which I consider to be a fictionalized version of the "wild zone" of theory.

[28] A pregnant woman's (or one in the maternal role rescuing a child) attempted escape out of a dystopic zone has been a recurring image in contemporary women's dystopias: e.g. Joanna Russ's *The Two of Them* (1978), Elizabeth Lynn's "Jubilee's Story" (1978), Cris Newport's "The Courage of Sisters" (1984) and Pearlie McNeill's "The Awakening" (1985). It has also been recurrent in film: e.g. *The Terminator* (US 1984), *Aliens* (US 1986), and the film version of *The Handmaid's Tale* (US/Germany 1990). In popular culture, this image raises complications for feminist readings, as it reinforces the traditional maternal role, 'softening'

accomplished in *Motherlines*, which turns out to be a novel about that which is impossible (and thus utopian) in our historical time/place, that is, an autonomous all-female society.

My aim in this section is to look at Charnas's second novel of the Alldera series in the light of the feminist issues around separatism.[29] Radical separatism is here understood metaphorically as the political prescription and/or choice to reject the heterosexual contract and remain outside the masculine economy (and the binary sexual identities it implies). It has been advocated as a usable model in terms of radical political action by some feminist theorists, among whom Monique Wittig[30] seems to have had greater impact, while being discarded by others (Irigaray 1977 and 1996, Butler 1990, Braidotti 1991). I want to point out some of the intersections existing between *Motherlines*, a novel which turned out to be "not just conceptually separatist but literally so" (Charnas, in Cavalcanti 1998: 9), and the claims for and against separatism within feminist theoretical discourse.

Motherlines is what Fredric Jameson has termed "an open-air meadow text" (1987: 58), but one with a feminist twist. It depicts an all-female pastoral world very much in the fashion of other separatist utopias in which women live in harmony and 'free' from the masculine economy characteristic of the phallocentric order. The absence of the phallus is symbolized by the absence of male characters, in a syntax which initially conflates the male organ with the symbolic significance of the phallus as power, and which will be rendered as a naive feminist utopia. For its portrayal of a society liberated from the rigid constraints of a dystopic phallocratic order, this novel has been associated with eutopias (rather than dystopias). To this extent, it stands in contrast with the other fictions I have chosen to study. As will be shown, however, its conflicts and ambiguities reveal the all-female territory to be no easy blueprint and assure the position of *Motherlines* as part of the wave of utopianism which has produced highly ambiguous texts.

---

representations of strong or violent women (*The Terminator*, *Aliens*) or simply romanticizing 'femininity' and motherhood (*The Handmaid's Tale*). In contrast, in most of the feminist fictions I have examined, the image is invested with a form of anticipatory quality which transcends clichéd representations. More on this below.

[29] In very general terms, it could be argued that feminism has always been inherently separatist for being a political movement specifically concerned with women's issues, in which sense the expression "feminist separatism" is somehow redundant. In more specific ways the term has different meanings, varying from the radical lesbian separatism of Adrienne Rich and Monique Wittig, to the "strategic" and "more 'conceptual'" separatism denoting a theoretical and epistemological mode peculiar to female feminist subjects and their approaches and methodologies (Braidotti: 1991). (This thesis illustrates, of course, such 'conceptual' separatism.) The debate about separatism accompanied the neo-feminist wave of the 1960's and 70's, and it seems to be no coincidence that *Motherlines* was first published in 1978, when separatist ideas were very much 'in the air'. This historical intersection helps to explain the higher popularity of this novel in comparison to *Walk* (see note 19 above). An update of the debate is the forum "Separatism Re-viewed", consisting of an introduction followed by two essays, in *Signs* 19 (2) 1994: 435-479.

[30] Cf. especially the writings collected in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (1992).

Monique Wittig is perhaps the feminist critic who has argued most strongly the case for radical separatism since the 1980's. Defending her theoretical position as a materialist lesbianism, this critic owes much to the Marxist concepts of class struggle and material oppression. She is, however, very aware of the limitations of Marxism (especially concerning gender), fiercely criticizing Marxist ideology and praxis. In "One Is Not Born a Woman" (1981),[31] for instance, Wittig points out, from a feminist perspective, Marxism's blind spots.[32] In the same essay, and specially relevant for the present discussion, she states the need to destroy the categories of sex (woman and man), which, being still used in scientific and theoretical discourses, are responsible for the perpetuation of the material oppression of women as individuals and as a "class".[33] For Wittig, women remain tied to the "heterosexual contract", the ubiquitous, unstated social contract prevailing in all cultures. As an alternative to and as a means of reformulating this historical model, Wittig proposes a third alternative to the categories of sex, the lesbian position:

> Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation [...], a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual. (1981: 20, Wittig's emphasis)

The assertion that "lesbians are not women", which has stunned her readers, has premised Wittig's political writings since the 1970's.[34] It underlies the radical proposal of a new category (or a third sex) outside the dualism of the heterosexual contract, which survives within culture as "a core of nature", as ironically stated in "The Straight Mind". (This phrase in itself sums up the disciplines, theories, ideas and attitudes operational in the naturalization of the heterosexual contract.)

> [A]lthough it has been accepted in recent years that there is no such thing as nature, that everything is culture, there remains within that culture a core of nature which resists examination, a relationship excluded from the social in the analysis - a relationship whose characteristic is ineluctability in culture, as well as in nature, and which is the heterosexual relationship. (1980: 27)

---

[31] In Wittig 1992: 9-20.

[32] Positive and negative assessments of Marxism can be found in many of Wittig's writings. "Homo Sum" (1990, in Wittig 1992: 46-58) provides a lengthier analysis, in which the discussion of the reductive character of Marxism is counterbalanced by the recognition of its relevance in terms of historicizing dialectics.

[33] Against the essentialist idea of "woman" and clearly drawing on materialist theories, Wittig theorizes women as a "class" formed by "women fighting for women" (cf. the preface to Wittig 1992: xvii).

[34] Before its publication in 1980, "The Straight Mind", which ends with the famous statement, was presented at the M.L.A. conference in 1978 (Cf. Louise Turcotte's foreword to Wittig 1992: xii). Note the coincidence of date with the year of publication of *Motherlines*.

For Wittig, "woman" signifies only within the heterosexual contract, thus the call to abandon its dialectical trap. In Turcotte's words, the radical position proposed by Wittig "sees lesbianism as necessarily political and considers it outside the whole heterosexual political regime" (1992: x).[35] This movement towards an "outside", i.e. a social space beyond an oppressive regime for women, is portrayed in the transition from *Walk* to *Motherlines*, hence my juxtaposition of Wittig's theory and Charnas's novel, to which I will now return.

In *Motherlines* Alldera proceeds with her quest and meets two groups of women in the Wild: the riding women, nomadic tribes of Amazons who have never been to the Holdfast; and the free fems, women who, like Alldera herself, have fled the Holdfast territory. Descendants of the women survivors of the initial disaster, who developed a parthenogenetic form of reproduction enabling the formation of all-female families or lines (the motherlines of the title), the former group constantly patrol their borders rescuing fugitive fems, forbidding others to return, and killing any man who eventually tries to enter that space. The other group, the supposedly mythical Holdfast escapees, lead their lives in a gypsy style, based on agricultural activity and the exchange of goods with the riding women. Unable to reproduce parthenogenetically, the free fems face the prognostic of imminent extinction.

The two groups display distinct cultural identities. The riding women's social organization has abolished power hierarchies: "Where there are no masters, no one can be a slave", states Nenisi, one of them (M:248). Political decisions are taken in open councils, and the autonomy of each individual and of the motherlines, respected. Their most cherished values are freedom, a sense of connectedness, and a female version of pantheistic paganism (as opposed to monotheism): "We celebrate the pattern of movement and growth itself and our place in it, which is to affirm the pattern and renew it and preserve it" (M: 386). These elements, arguably typical of a feminine economy,[36] are observed in other feminist utopias.[37] *Motherlines* differs from earlier separatist texts in the mode of *Herland* in its self-awareness that the women's territory constitutes no blueprint of perfection. Through Alldera's point of view, readers are introduced to the women's culture. Her ambivalent feelings towards it,

---

[35] An in-depth analysis of the implications for feminism of Wittig's project is outside the scope of this study. An interesting evaluation, and one to which I am indebted, is made by Braidotti (1991: 245-247).

[36] "Arguably" because, for feminist theoreticians, a feminine economy must remain undefinable, "absolutely other" (Cixous 1975: 71). Along similar lines, Kristeva states: "In 'woman' I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies" ("Woman Can Never Be Defined" 1974, in Marks and de Courtivron eds. 1980: 137). Representing a female economy is, thus, both a challenge which feminist authors of speculative fictions have to take on and a paradox comparable to the one inherent in the representation of utopia. I will return to this issue below.

[37] E.g. Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979) and Katherine Forrest's *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* (1984).

"sweet and sour at the same time" (M: 294), function as a constant reminder that this space is no eutopia: "She had wanted the women to be perfect, and they were not" (M: ibid.). Among the 'imperfections', "the raw, ugly underside of things" (M: 293), are the cruel slaughter of horses for food, warfare and raids among the tribes. It is perhaps the women's inability to fully accept Alldera into their culture, in spite of their initial warmth and nurturing towards escapees, that provokes her strongest feelings of exclusion and mirror her experience in the phallocratic Holdfast. She is not allowed, for instance, to take part in important social rituals like the inter-tribal raidings or the Gathers (the collective festive encounter when matings take place). Unbridgeable cultural rifts had previously resulted in the creation of a separate camp for the fems, where Alldera seeks refuge after realizing she will always be "a stranger" (M: 297) among the riding women.

Originating from a society with a different power structure and inheritors of a masculinist value system, the free fems have been unable to fully reject the Holdfast masculine economy, reproducing its hierarchical model instead. It is again through Alldera's point of view that a critical assessment of the free women's society is made. The teacamp "sometimes seemed just like a big [Holdfast] femhold" (M: 314; cf. also 321), with the repetition of practices of corruption, violent punishment, and the master/slave dichotomy. "I just want to see the free fems break out of the old order, not make it all over again here," stresses Alldera voicing her dissatisfaction (M: 343). In terms of plot development, the repetition of the Holdfast masculine economy in the free fems' encampment (like the insulation and exclusionary policies of the riding women described above) provokes Alldera's reiterated criticism and ultimately her dissent. On the symbolic level both instances hint at the 'presence' of the phallus in the all-women territory.

Depicting a female libinal economy represents an impossibility, stresses Cixous. To this effect, she writes that

> men and women are caught up in a web of age-old cultural determinations that are almost unanalyzable in their complexity. One can no more speak of "woman" than of "man" without being trapped within an ideological theater where the proliferation of representations, images, reflections, myths, identifications, transform, deform, constantly change everyone's Imaginary and invalidate in advance any conceptualization. (1975: 83)

The surfacing, in Charnas's depiction of an all-female territory, of a masculine economy confirms Cixous's theorizing of the unavoidable "ideological trap" in attempts to reconceptualize "woman" and "man". My reading of *Motherlines* shows that the utopia of a woman's land becomes dystopic with the re-enactment of a masculine economy in both

communities of women. This repetition shows on a symbolic level that the all-female space has been structurally *defined* by the phallus. In my view, this relates to the paradox of utopia described in previous chapters, i.e. the "good place" is also the "no place", as the depiction of utopia appears as its negation. However, the utopian feminism that underlies Charnas's text prevents it from "grinding to a halt",[38] from the stasis of traditional utopian literature. (The danger of stasis is actually suggested metaphorically by the fact that both groups are generative dead ends, thus presenting no viable option.) And so the quest continues, with Alldera in the role of a necessary catalyst of change via the negotiation of differences.

Among the cultural differences between the riding women and the free fems, the expression of sexuality emerges as one of the main points of divergence. The polygamous lesbianism favoured by the riding women sharply contrasts with the Holdfast-like possessive, monogamous 'circumstantial lesbianism' of the free fems. Actually, deriving pleasure from heterosexual relationships is considered by fems to be deviant, and desire for sexual intercourse with men is repressed. But some of the fems betray a preference for male partners (this will be accentuated in *The Furies*), a fact held to be unacceptable and degrading by the riding women.

Beyond the different libidinal economies driving the two groups, mating and reproduction present another major cultural barrier. As mentioned above, the free fems must live with the prospect of impending extinction, unless a return to the Holdfast happens allowing mating with men. However, they are forbidden to attempt a return. The riding women's ancestors, on the other hand, had devised a way of making use of stallions' sperm in order to set off parthenogenetic reproduction. In ritualistic, carnivalesque ceremonies, women and horses mate, guaranteeing the continuation of the motherlines. Although not facing the free fems' drastic prognostic of imminent extinction, the riding women's community has been dwindling gradually, for they do not possess the technology to start new motherlines.

In the passage that follows, Alldera's reaction to the riding women's breeding epitomizes the fundamental difference between the two groups:

> She tried, but she could not make sense of what Nenisi said. This horse mating was like a river that Nenisi and the others had just crossed on an inexorable journey that they were making away from her, into a mysterious and incomprehensible distance. And not the first river; there had been others, now she recognized them: the childpack, the Motherlines, love without bonds, the brutal killing of horses, warfare as a game, the leaving of the dead for the horrible Sharu whom women hunted but also fed... She began to be afraid that all the time she had thought she was catching up with the women, they had been leaving

---

[38] See the epigraph to the chapter.

her farther and farther behind, that she would never be able to reach them. (M: 296)

Many other instances of distinctions and frictions between the two groups appear throughout *Motherlines*.[39]

A brief look at the way sections are structured in the novel will cast light on Alldera's role as mediator and initiator of change in what is initially a static social configuration formed by the two groups. Like *Walk*, *Motherlines* features a prologue and an epilogue, and the middle sections are organized as follows: "The Women", "Free Fems", "Fedeka's Camp", and "Kindred". As the titles suggest, the two first sections concentrate upon Alldera's experiences living with each separate group. "Fedeka's Camp" is about Alldera's retreat to be cured by the healer, after severe punishment. Closely relating to the quest narrative pattern, the time spent in isolation serves the purpose of energy restoration and preparation for a return into action. Finally, in "Kindred" the cultural encounter between the two groups occurs, initiated by Alldera. By the end of the novel, the earlier "friction" (M: 396) between the communities has been superseded by negotiation and change: "if things were not exactly out of place, they were at least in a new alignment, moved by some deep, slow, powerful shift of events, long in the making and still only dimly perceptible" (M:430). Two signifiers of the "new alignment" are Alldera's child, a hybrid being (born of a fem, brought up as a riding woman) who, invested with the signified of the "possibles' body", embodies the hope that a new motherline might be initiated;[40] and Alldera herself, the "all-daring" (Relf 1991a), dressed "in a femmish smock and Marish pants" (M: 367), who has started the movement which not only dissolved the barriers between fems and riding women, but will also reconfigure the borders of the women's territory. The epilogue prepares the reader for another crossing, which is, like that at the end of *Walk*, both territorial and textual.

Before proceeding to discuss this spatial transgression by the free fems in *The Furies*, let us consider some convergences and divergences between Charnas's *Motherlines* and Wittig's theory of the lesbian society and separatism. One issue that can be raised initially refers to a similarity in the metaphors employed by both authors. In order to discuss this, I

---

[39] Cf. the portrayal of Alldera's condition as an outsider living in the company of the riding women in "The Women" (pp. 287, 291, 294, 296, 297), and the descriptions of the interactions between free fems and riding women in "Kindred" (pp. 377, 379, 380, 384, 395-396).

[40] In feminist dystopias, the anticipatory potential embodied by children is manifested in two ways: the child, or children, may represent a synthesis of two divergent populations, as is the case in *Motherlines*, Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains* (1969) and Doris Lessing's *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980); or symbolize the emergence of a totally new, specially endowed species or mutational development, as in Doris Lessing's *The Four Gated City* (1969), Lisa Tuttle's "The Cure" (1984) and Elisabeth Vonarburgh *The Maerlande Chronicles* (1992).

shall draw briefly on the work of Paul Ricoeur (1978).[41] He has contributed three ways of conceiving a semantics of metaphor which will enlighten my argument. The first is the pictorial dimension involved in metaphorizing, made obvious by the expression "figures of speech", i.e., the metaphorical process relies on a semantic innovation achieved by creating a picture. Charnas and Wittig construct very similar images in their texts. A recurrent figure of speech in Wittig's writings, which obviously relates to her preference for theories of materialism, is the analogy between women as class and serfdom: "I see now that [women] can tear themselves away from the heterosexual order only by *running away one by one*"; and also: "Lesbians are *runaways, fugitive slaves*" (1989: 34 and 45, my emphases). This image is reiterated by the use of the word "escape" in the longer excerpt quoted above, and, later in the same text, by comparing women to "[North-]American runaway slaves".[42]

This description is similar to Charnas's portrayal of women. First, fems are defined as slaves in the Holdfast order depicted in *Walk*.[43] They were reduced to a "permanent fem labor force", functioning a slave working class, "closely controlled" under "the hegemony of their masters" (WEW: 52 and 59). Like slave classes in slavery-based economies of the past centuries, the Holdfast fems are denied citizenship. They hold no legal rights, and are trained, traded, owned, physically abused and tortured, and patrolled by the [white male] masters, the Matris and the Rovers. (The latter two are the Holdfast equivalents to slave-drivers.) Like black slaves' historical experience, the fems start an organized community at the margins of a dystopic, oppressive order by "running away one by one" into the Wild: the free fems' camp of *Motherlines*.[44] Finally, the collective revolutionary action resulting from the fems organization again parallels the historical experience of black slaves, for the solidarity spaces of escapees were sites of subversive action. These analogies suggest a conflation of sex and class which parallels Wittig's theorization.

The second point raised by Ricoeur is inspired by classical studies of metaphor, and stresses "the insight into likeness" implicit in the metaphorical process, where a paradox is maintained: "'remoteness' is preserved within 'proximity'". He explains: "To see *the like* is to see the same in spite of, and through, the different" (1978: 146). In this sense, both Wittig and

---

[41] "The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling" (Sacks ed. 1978: 141- 157).
[42] See de Beauvoir for an analysis of men's appropriation of other men (slaves) and of women, and of the exploitation of both as labour force (1949: 80-81 and 102-103).
[43] Happening previous to the main narrative time span, the enslavement of women is described in the Prologue (WEW: 3-5). There are links between black slaves and women as class: the latter replaced the labour which "could be forced from the lazy, savage Dirties" before the Wasting (WEW: 58). ("Dirties", or non-whites were exterminated.) Class is therefore constituted out of race and sex categories.
[44] Cf. the Wittig quotation above. In Brazil, such communities of runaway slaves, the *quilombos*, existed from the 16th to the 19th century. Their utopian dimension is discussed by Coelho (1980: 84).

Charnas envision a similarity, in spite of the differences, between the experiences of women and that of escaped slaves. The images both writers create restructure semantic fields by means of the sex/class/race conflation. This suits Wittig's materialist, anti-essentialist feminism as it enables women to be viewed as a historical group constructed and oppressed as a "class", rather than determined by biology. To a similar effect is Charnas's use of the metaphor in the novels, where descriptions of enslaved women heighten the dramatic effect.

Thirdly, the point in which Charnas's and Wittig's figural modes differ, Ricoeur draws our attention to the "suspension" (*epoché*) of "ordinary reference" accomplished by metaphorical representation in poetic language.[45] Whereas Wittig's use of figural language in her discursive prose (theory/logos) tends to be more referential, Charnas's fictional portrayal (literature/pathos) performs a "suspension" of the referential function. In other words, when Wittig says that "only by running away from their class can women achieve a new social contract, even if they have to do it like the fugitive serfs, one by one", she is summoning the social bodies of real women to assume the lesbian position in the material reality surrounding us, and, by doing so, transform it. The referential function of language seems to be more fully activated, as evidenced by Wittig's reiterated concern with history and material reality.[46] As expected, Charnas makes different use of metaphor. The image of escaped fems and of an all-female community, like all metaphors in fictions, is in a state of "suspension", or, using Jakobson's terminology, leads to a "split reference". It at once refers and does not refer to real women escaping from patriarchal oppression. My position is that *Motherlines* offers an extended metaphor. It provides a parable of a women's economy, of what this economy would look like, rather than a summons for real, historical women to form an alternative society, which is not the role of fiction anyway. In brief, Charnas's and Wittig's texts belong to different genres. Each is part of a distinct writing practice with very specific audiences, marketing, conventions and expectations. As such, they certainly require different reading frameworks.

---

[45] Ricoeur draws upon and extends Roman Jakobson's work regarding referential as opposed to poetic language. For Jakobson, "in referential language the connection between *signans* and *signatum* is overwhelmingly based on their codified contiguity," whereas poetic function directs language towards itself. Thus, poetic language inherently exposes the rift between language and reality. Concerning fiction, Jakobson remarks: "'Verseless composition' [...]presents more entangled problems for poetics, as does any transitional linguistic area. In this case the transition is between strictly poetic and strictly referential language" (1958, in Jakobson 1987: 87 and 89). My aim is not to question the absolute concepts of "strictly poetic" and "strictly referential language" (or pure aestheticism and pure reification), but rather to emphasize the transitional quality of fictional discourse, which perfectly fits Ricoeur's further utilization of Jakobson's notion of "split reference" (implicit in the idea of "suspension of ordinary reference"), relevant for the distinction I want to stress between Charnas's and Wittig's uses of metaphor.

[46] Wittig's final sentences in this essay confirms her concern: "If ultimately we are denied a new social order, which therefore *can exist only in words*, I will find it in myself" (1989: 45, my emphasis).

Despite the innovations in feminist writing, especially in the upsurge of the experimental *écriture féminine* with which Wittig's earlier works have been associated,[47] the radical lesbian position is defended in texts which come closer to the less figurative, discursive form of theoretical demonstration and political argumentation. (It is intriguing that the utopian community depicted Wittig's *The Guérrillères* is not separatist) Therefore, the lesbian position of her more theoretical writings are better understood, I argue, as a political manifesto and a call for action.

Both Charnas and Wittig envision lesbian utopias as alternatives to dystopic sexist conditions. While *Motherlines* offers a fictional all-female haven after the women's experience in the dystopic Holdfast society, Wittig proposes their escape from the dystopic heterosexual contract towards the lesbian society. In the writings of both, women's utopia remains 'outside' an existing order: in a fictionalized utopian all-women's community (Charnas) and in the theoretical space of the lesbian society (Wittig). But here the major similarities stop. Whereas Charnas' gives us in novel-length a full picture of the all-female space, with all its ambiguities, conflicts and limitations which, as I showed above, makes the boundaries between eutopia and dystopia seem rather unstable, Wittig deconstructs the historical sexual categories of male and female, and tries to supplant them with a third category, the lesbian position whose specificities are never dealt with. The project remains vague and, despite Wittig's historico-materialist concern, frustratingly ahistorical. She does not even consider, as it would be expected, the historical experience of real slaves following their escape, nor what happened to their marginal society. This remains a major flaw in her theorizing.

In a critique of Wittig's writings concerning the lesbian utopia, Braidotti finds "this position as dangerous as any utopia can be: it perpetuates the dream of an easy escape from psychic life, merrily confusing the register of wilful choice with that of unconscious desires" (1991: 246). It is with this idea of "an easy escape" from reality that I would like bring my comparison to an end. Braidotti's remark seems to be correct to the extent that the position defended by Wittig in her theoretical texts lacks historical contextualization,[48] and thus deserves the attribute of 'utopian' in its pejorative connotation of escapism. Wittig's further contributions to feminist theorizing (among which are the problematization of the heterosexual contract and an insistence on the relevance of language in the material oppression of women)

---

[47] Although Wittig overtly opposes *écriture féminine*, her earlier, more literary *The Guérrillères* (1969) and *The Lesbian Body* (1973) have often been quoted as examples of this mode (Braidotti 1991, Humm 1994). In the dystopic *Across the Acheron* (1985) the more experimental and poetical vein surfaces again.

[48] Diana Fuss comments on Wittig's "tendency to homogenize lesbians into a single harmonious group and to erase the real material and ideological differences" between them (1989: 43).

appear to be based on more solid theoretical ground than her call for women to "escape" from the confines of sexist society and into an-other sexual category constituted by women, who must then discard exactly the gender category that brings them together in the first place.

Besides Braidotti, Luce Irigaray has also provided a critique of separatism as a political alternative for feminism, albeit not directly of Wittig's version of it. She identifies, among feminist groups, one that refuses mixed-sex culture and defends a between-women sociality "whose objective is the development of a homo-sexual sentiment without the creation of objective mediations useful for all women and for relations between women and men" (1996: 3). She criticizes this trend, which I associate with Wittig's lesbian separatism, for its extremely partial and limited intentions ("[it] does not serve the cause of the female gender but merely that of a minority of women" [1996: 3]), as well as for being a form of "homo-sexuality" basically similar to that already existing within the male-dominant power structure:

> There is no need to present women with the glowing promises of a new dawn for relations limited to within their own gender! That new dawn is not really imminent, as the doctrinaires of homosexuality are well aware. Yet, being closer to the tendencies of our tradition concerning relations between women and men, they actually do far less to upset existing institutions and dogmas than would a real change in the respective status of the female and male genders. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that they might enjoy the actual support, either openly or indirectly, of authorities that at the same time refuse to bring in laws appropriate to female identity. Haven't these powers been structured, consciously or not, by homo-sexuality for centuries? (1996: 5)

The philosopher makes clear that, instead of bringing about a radical reformulating of social organizations, the formation of such single-sex groupings leads to a parallel culture which does not 'disturb', or "upset", existing systems. The notion of "an easy escape", discussed in the context of Braidotti's critique of separatism, is echoed in this fragment by the sarcastic "glowing promises of a new dawn". Irigaray's rejection of a separatist instance is part of her feminist political project oriented from *within*, rather than *without*, history and based on interventionist action via "the creation of objective mediations" (1996: 3). (When Irigaray does defend separatism, she does so with the cautionary note that this move must be undertaken as a temporary and necessary stage, as "tactical strikes".)[49] It is totally expected, thus, that one of the items in her agenda is the defence of gendered, different rights for the sexes.[50]

If we agree with the critique of radical political separatism, which regards it as a escapist strategy, or as one that keeps the system intact, what to say then, of its fictional

---

[49] Cf. *This Sex Which is Not One* (1977: 32-33).

counterpart, the feminist separatist utopia? In other words, is *Motherlines* escapist, and thus "dangerous as any utopia can be"?[51] Following the fictional thread offered by Charnas in search for answers, I would argue that, in metaphorizing separatism in *Motherlines*, the author presents a more sophisticated picture of this issue than Wittig's theoretical argumentations, most of which were published at least a decade later than the novel.

Feminist literary utopias have usually been critiqued in ways which are very similar to the reaction concerning the claims for real-life feminist separatism. This type of critique tends to overlook generic specificities and thus treat literary utopianism and political utopianist discourses as if they were equivalent practices and had similar, programmatic functions.[52] I want to argue that utopian literature should not be read in the light of the same criteria used to evaluate utopianist theory and political discourse and that literary utopias cannot be considered "escapist" in the same sense as other modes of writing are liable to. If we do so, we risk ignoring the liberating aspect and the autonomy of literary works, reducing literature to a purely ideological role, and constraining the literary imagination.

However, even if *Motherlines* is submitted to the 'escapism test', the novel undoubtedly turns out to be not escapist. As was already pointed out, *Motherlines* offers us a conflictual picture of a separatist society. The conflict is represented mainly by the rendering of two clashing communities. Besides, the prospect of self-destruction faced by the two groups of women can further illustrate a non-simplistic approach to separatism. The idea underlying this image is, in my view, that of political ineffectiveness and, ultimately, self-annihilation. This metaphor serves to question and problematize the isolated all-female culture, rather than enforce an escapist dream. In order to illustrate this point one step further, I would like to mention the territorial isolation enforced upon the *free* fems by the riding women, which means that one faction is, at least geographically, controlled by the other. The free fems' plan to return to the Holdfast involves "slip[ping] past the Mares' patrols" (M: 305), who are there not less to prevent the free fems' return than to block men's entrance. Before Alldera's intervention as mediator, this fact makes the plan sound "absurd", for "Marish patrols had never once let a man come as far as the Grasslands; surely they were capable of preventing fifty fems from returning to the Holdfast" (M: 306). Is this not an extremely ironic detail that mirrors the fems' confinement in the Bayo in *Walk*, from which they had to run away as slaves? And does this not embarrassingly suggest the reversal of Wittig's image: that of *free*

---

[50] Irigaray's concern with civil law and sexed rights is perceptible throughout *I Love To You* (1996).
[51] See the Braidotti quotation on p. 116 above.
[52] This way of reading is widespread. Cf., for instance, Wolmark 1994 and Sargisson 1996.

fems, former slaves, trying to escape one by one from the women's territory? Finally, referring back to the first novel of the series, the horrors committed in the (male) "homo-sexual" society of the Holdfast function as a note of awareness concerning the dangers of an-other Order of the Same. I pointed out in my reading that similar actions occur in the all-female territory of the Grasslands. This textual mirroring increases the ambiguity of the women's utopia, and reminds us of the complexities faced by women and men when it comes to conceptualizing and representing gender identity. This issue emerged above in the context of a discussion concerning the impossibility of theorizing a female-economy given the "ideological theater" in which we are all trapped.[53]

Summing up the ideas above, my reading of *Motherlines* suggests that: a. the shortcomings of separatism as a political strategy are perceptible in this novel; and b. *Motherlines* finds echoes in other trends in contemporary feminist thought and action represented, for instance, by the ideas of Braidotti and Irigaray discussed above, which have questioned separatism as a model to be of use by feminism. The first point was stressed in my analysis of Alldera's negative experiences while living in the company of the riding women and of the free fems consecutively. Both spaces were shown to reproduce the masculine economy Alldera is trying to escape. I also showed that, when read vis-à-vis Wittig's claim for separatism, *Motherlines* draws a much richer picture of an all-female society and thus permits a fuller exploration of the subtleties of the issue. Rather than positing a positive alternative social model, the women's space turns out to be static, insulated, confining and self-destructive. Thus, eutopia becomes dystopia, and the wishful space-time is displaced from the all-female Grasslands towards still another utopian projection. Alldera's agency functions as a catalyst for change, with the initiation of an interactional movement between the two groups of women and the preparation for the transgression of the strict borderlines towards another utopia. In my view *Motherlines* can be read along the lines of a critique of the feminist utopia of separatism, an approach sometimes ignored by feminist readers.

In her innovative study of the feminist separatist literary utopias, Jan Relf develops the concept of "women in retreat":

> a space within which women can defend, affirm and nurture each other, and gather strength to counteract the oppressive nature of material, patriarchal reality. It thus has the potential to function as a regenerative space in which women can advance in retreat, temporarily drawing back in order the better to leap forward with renewed vigor. (Relf 1991b: 143)[54]

---

[53] Cf. quotation on p. 111 above.
[54] Relf's point can be illuminated by Irigaray's partial acceptance of feminist separatism discussed above. It is interesting to compare this quotation with the following remarks by the French philosopher on women's

This notion is particularly useful for my reading, first because it allows for a dynamism which I identify in *Motherlines* after Alldera's political interference, in which the "retreat" in question refers to a necessary time of preparation for something to come. This position is portrayed twice in *Motherlines*: Alldera's isolation at Fedeka's camp mirrors, in a small scale, the women's retreat in the whole text. In terms of narrative parallelism, the women's retreat is mirrored in the narrative form in the sense that the whole novelistic text represents an interval between two other novels. *Motherlines* gives a picture of women in retreat, and at the same time it functions as a sort of ellipsis in the main narrative frame which starts with *Walk* and continues with *The Furies*. (Similarly, Alldera's retreat in Fedeka's camp functions as a parenthetical chapter in the structural organization of *Motherlines*). The narrative fabric is woven in a way so as to reinforce the continuum between content and form. And secondly because retreats imply a return. Passages into states of suspension are part of mythical quest patterns, allegorizing "a life-centering, life-renewing act" and being pictured as transit into another sphere and back (Campbell 1949: 92). Alldera's retreat (twice) fits this model, being thus anticipatory of the future. Her story will also involve a return, as we will see below. The interval represented by *Motherlines* in the series functions as a preparation for the counter-cultural move to be accomplished by the women in *The Furies*, to which I will now turn.

IV. A Utopia of Sex-role Reversal: *The Furies*

> When "*The* Repressed" of their culture and their society come back, it is an explosive return, which is *absolutely* shattering, staggering, overturning, with a force never let loose before, on the scale of the most tremendous repressions: for at the end of the Age of the Phallus, women will have been either wiped out or heated to the highest, most violent white-hot fire. (Hélène Cixous, "Sorties")

> Naturally a female dominance would make the race no happier, nor bring it a whit nearer to humanity. The privilege would merely be reversed, and possibly it would be more oppressive and more cruel. (Katharine Burdekin, *Proud Man*)

temporary renunciation of the heterosexual contract: "For women to undertake tactical strikes, to keep themselves apart from men long enough to learn to defend their desire [...], to discover the love of other women while sheltered from men's imperious choices that put them in the position of rival commodities, to forge for themselves a social status that compels recognition, to earn their living in order to escape from the condition of prostitute... these are certainly indispensable stages in the escape from their proletarization on the exchange market" (1977: 33). Both critics describe all-female spaces in terms of self-empowering, temporary tactics.

The Furies is about the return of the culturally repressed and the overturning of an order: the free fems' return to the Holdfast, led by Alldera, to free the enslaved fems, their conquest of the men, and establishment of a 'new' order with women at the top of the social hierarchy. Whereas *Walk* portrays the destruction of an order and *Motherlines* relates to exile and preparation, *The Furies* deals with the construction of a 'new' social arrangement in the Holdfast. The sex-role reversal accomplished by overthrowing male domination reinstates violence, committed by the women become masters. The novel can be read as an experimental space in which the existing imbalance between the sexes is reversed. It indicates the failure of this model: the utopia of reversal becomes dystopic in the same terms as the Holdfast system of male-domination. This text will be analysed in relation to: a. the concern, in feminist literary criticism, with Oedipal narrative trajectories; and b. the feminist utopia constructed upon the reversal of existing power relations between the sexes.

The positionality of the female characters concerning their own desire is a key element in feminist narrative theories. The connections between narrative and Oedipal models and between narrative and desire are central to de Lauretis's considerations about narrativity.[55] Revisiting Oedipus by looking at the way the trajectory of the mythical hero paradigmatically informs a certain dominant mythical-textual-critical mechanics, she shows "how this view of myth and narrative rests on a specific assumption about sex difference" (1984: 113).[56] It hardly needs to be added that she is referring to the hierarchical binarisms upon which sexual difference is construed. My reading of *Walk* showed Charnas's partial deconstruction of these structures. I also showed that, while not offering a model of utopian perfection, the all-female space of *Motherlines* enables the preparation for a necessary return and therefore the continuation of the quest. In this section, I will look at the confrontation of the sexes in *The Furies*, and the relations between this confrontation and the Oedipal model.

The conflicts experienced by the women (of whom there are three major groups in *The Furies*: the free fems, the riding women, and the newly freed; acting, in Alldera's quest, like Propp's "helpers"),[57] both among themselves and in face of the former male masters, can be read as an allegory of a major tension in feminism: between the need to determine a common ground on which to base a political agenda and the pull against universalization coming from

---

[55] See "Desire in Narrative" in de Lauretis's *Alice Doesn't* (1984: 103-157), to which I am most indebted in this section. Her use of the term 'narrativity' (as opposed to narrative structure) reveals a semiotic concern with the redefinition of the object of narrative theory. Semiotics offers "a dynamic, processual view of signification as a work(ing) of the codes" (105). Narrative work and effects, rather than its structures, become the object of study.
[56] See also note 3 above.
[57] Cf. Vladímir Propp on character functions in his analysis of the folk tale (1928: 87-91).

specific groups and/or individual women. The common ground is the utopian aspiration to end women's oppression. Here is where point 'b', concerning the feminist rejection of existing power relations between the sexes and the utopian projection of a reversal, becomes relevant. *The Furies* will be read vis-à-vis contemporary feminist theorizing of the issue as voiced by Irigaray (1977), Cixous (1975) and Braidotti (1991). The cross-fertilization between this political quest/ion and Oedipal narrative patterns treated under 'a' will also be touched on.

The conclusion of the chapter (section V) will once again approach the quest motif in the series, taking all three novels into account, with a discussion of the strategies employed to revise its main narrative pattern (which turns out to be Oedipal and anti-Oedipal at once), and to maintain the utopian dimension of the quest. My central concern then will be Charnas's creative exploration of crucial feminist issues and the ways her fiction can be read as an allegory which, among other things, helps illuminate and widen the feminist theoretical debate. Against the reductivism of a reading practice solely concerned with feminist ideology, I will try to explore both the historical importance of the series in terms of its feminist orientation and the aesthetic/formal workings of narrativity.

I will now briefly comment on sex-role reversal utopias in order to contextualize *The Furies*. Like the separatist utopias, they form a distinct group of fictions - a thematic subgenre - within the category of literary utopias and have had a long history in culture.[58] They use estrangement (or defamiliarization) via the depiction of a social arrangement in which the power relations between the sexes have been turned upside-down. Unlike the feminist separatist texts, sex-role reversal utopias are not always motivated by feminist ideology. Indeed, as Daphne Patai's interesting study on the subgenre shows, some of these texts are rather anti-feminist in effect. She identifies two types of sex-role reversal utopias. The satires, which, "based simply upon the notion that a society in which women dominate is a self-evident absurdity", are usually anti-feminist in ideology and likely to produce reactionary effects by ridiculing women in power.[59] The nonsatirical ones, on the other hand, show "a serious

---

[58] Aristophanes's utopian satire *Assemblywomen* (circa 390 BC) introduces the sex-role reversal theme, which already "had old roots in myths and comic fantasies." The innovative aspect of the play lies in his development of the theme "in light of actual contemporary discussions [...] about the wisdom of women's traditional exclusion from participation in male (executive) culture, and about the virtues and potential civic value of women" (cf. Henderson's comments in *Three Plays by Aristophanes*, 1996: 144). Sex-role reversal in *Assemblywomen* is partial, relating specifically to the power to run the polis. Other class and/or sex-differentiated activities remain unchanged (weaving and food-catering, for instance, are still women's duties). This asymmetrical re-accommodation of sex roles enables contradictions to be elided, guaranteeing the play's utopian note.
[59] Whether this is the case in *Assemblywomen* it is still open to debate. The anti-feminist satirical texts mentioned by Patai are all male-authored, and she very easily equates satire with an anti-feminist agenda, ignoring satirical sex-role reversal texts written from a feminist perspective (e.g. Gerd Brantenberg's 1977 *Egalia's Daughters* and Esmé Dodderidge's 1979 *The New Gulliver*).

concern with *undesirable* social arrangements," being referred to as dystopias (1982: 58, my emphasis).[60] *The Furies* belongs to the type of "serious" dystopian texts which problematize feminist ideology. In other words, it is a feminist critical dystopia.

The emergence, in Patai's textual analysis, of the categories of desirability (and undesirability) has a familiar ring. As it will be remembered, I have favoured a definition "utopia" as the expression of women's desire for a better place. The interplay between desirability and undesirability will be central for this section, and the main questions I will be addressing in relation to the novel are: a. what is desirable/undesirable? and b. desirable/undesirable for whom? They will inform the reading that follows, which is overtly inflected by psychoanalytical narrative theories. I intend to show that the object of women's utopian desire (in Patai's inflection of the term) and desire as the motivational element in narrative (in Barthes's and de Lauretis' sense) cross and inform each other in *The Furies*, as in the series as a whole.

That the novel engages itself in 'tormenting' Oedipus with the revision of the myth and of the plot pattern is signalled from its very title. The furies, or erinnyes, are part of a female mythical family formed by gorgons (the Medusa being the most 'prominent' gorgon in psychoanalytical discourse and feminist criticism),[61] and the sirens. Such mythical characters, as suggested by their names,[62] are female personifications of anger, violence and destruction whose presence in classical mythology can be accounted for as an excess, or surplus, partially revealing the contradictions and complexities myth works to suppress.[63] In contemporary popular culture, the furies re-emerge, for instance, in the female avenger of rape (perpetrated or attempted, literal or symbolic), recurrent in both 'naturalistic' and speculative narratives.[64] A lot more could be said concerning the different representations of the rape-avenger in

---

[60] Patai closely examines reversal utopias written at the turn of the century: Annie Denton Cridge's *Man's Rights* (1870), Jesse Wilson's *When Women Reign* (1909) and Vivian Cory's *Martha Brown, M.P., A Girl of Tomorrow* (1935). Recent examples of this thematic subgenre include the utopian satires by Brantenberg and Dodderidge (see footnote 59 above); "serious" anti-feminist texts like Pamela Kettle's *The Day of the Women* and the movie *Planet Earth* (1974); and highly ambiguous feminist critical dystopias like Sheri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988) and Elisabeth Vonarburgh's *The Maerlande Chronicles* (1992).

[61] Cf. Freud's "Medusa's Head" (1940 [1922], in Freud 1955: 273-274), and the revision by psychoanalytical feminist criticism of Freud's theories of sexuality: Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" and Creed's "Medusa's Head: The *Vagina Dentata* and Freudian Theory" (in Creed 1993: 105-121).

[62] The "angry ones", the "grim ones", and "those who bind with a cord" (Graves 1955).

[63] Cf. Barthes on the suppression of elements in mythical discourse: "in general myth prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat, and ready for a signification, such as caricatures, pastiches, symbols, etc." (1957: 127). In my understanding, the figures in question are a reminder of the "fat" which resists suppression by mythical discourse.

[64] E.g. the protagonists of *I Spit on Your Grave* (U.S. 1978), *Thelma and Louise* (U.S. 1991), *The Handmaid's Tale* (U.S. 1990, the revenge plot features in the film adaptation only, not in the novel). In feminist speculative fictions, the theme appears, for instance, in Caroline Forbes's "Snake" (1980), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Margaret Elphinstone's *The Incomer* (1987), and Suzy M. Charnas's "Boobs" (1989).

cultural texts, but that lies outside the scope of the present study,[65] which will be focused upon the depiction of the avenging furies by Charnas.

The furies inspire Charnas's novel at several levels. (Although they surface in different mythologies, I will discuss the Greek versions of the myth.) First, their role in avenging offence against the mother, in the Oedipus and Orestes stories, for instance, gives them the gender specificity echoed in Charnas's text, where the free fems want to avenge the crimes perpetrated against their mothers/ancestors. Next, instead of conforming to the stereotype of the deathly beauty, who allures and seduces in order to kill (like the sirens), the furies do not entice their victims. Their role is destructive without encompassing the pleasures of initial seduction games. So is that of Charnas's female characters. Another analogy is the existence of three furies (Alecto, Tisiphone and Megaera), symbolic of the triple-goddess Hecate, a numerical pattern repeated in the novel by the portrayal of three major groups of women, who, despite their different motivations, perform similar vengeful acts against men.

This description of the furies will draw the comparison even further:

> Erinnyes are crones, with snakes for hair, dog's heads, coal-black bodies, bat's wings, and blood-shot eyes. In their heads they carry brass-studded scourges, and their victims die in torment. It is unwise to mention them by name in conversation; hence they are usually styled the Eumenides, which means 'The Kindly Ones.' (Graves 1955: 122)

The image of the crones (elder, mischievous women) is also that of the free fems who invade the Holdfast. Indeed, the characters' advanced age is repeatedly mentioned in the text.[66] The hybrid animal/human body finds textual parallels in the bonding between women and horses; to the scourges Charnas's characters add whips, lances, hatchets, arrows and knives; and the taboo forbidding "mentioning them by name" is maintained.[67] Finally, and crucially for my argument, some versions of the myth tell us that the furies hounded Oedipus until his death (Graves 1955: 376). This is re-enacted and revised in the women's assault of the Holdfast and killing of men.

In classical mythical narrative, the furies' desire is hampered by their homologation in Athenian culture as a result of their pacification.[68] A major contrast in Charnas's feminist

---

[65] Works in this field are Chapter 9 in Creed 1993, about the woman avenger in horror films in connection to the stereotype of the monstrous-feminine; Jacinda Read's 1997 examination of the female avenger in 'naturalistic' films; and Lalitha Gopalan's 1997 study of the emergence of the type in contemporary Indian cinema.

[66] Cf. F: 21, 37, 56, 62, 244. Their major concern with aging relates to loss of fertility and physical vigour and to their reduced chances of surviving the hardships of the crossing back and fighting in battle.

[67] The men are not allowed to refer to them by name, and the enigmatic Setteo uses the expression "the Blessed". This character will be discussed below.

[68] Cf. chapters 114 and 115 in Graves 1955.

revisionary mythmaking is that the female characters' desire is asserted (not suppressed or co-opted). Taking the series as a whole, readers follow what was initially some fems' dreams and myths of revolting and conquering the Holdfast and the spark of Alldera's own quest (*Walk*) turning into the idea of a comeback planned during the Grasslands years (*Motherlines*). Finally, the plan is actualized by means of their return and action (*The Furies*). "I want my homeland back" (F: 37), states Alldera the leader in one of the clearest statements of her desire. She also voices the wishes of the free fems', which do not differ from her own:

> They want to come home, take what revenge they can, bring freedom to the friends and lovers and daughters they left behind, if any still alive, and to any children there may be. So they follow me where they want me to lead them, as if we had never quarreled. (F: 54)

To the same effect is the following passage: "they were committed in reality to what had been only a childish game of 'what if'" (F: 24). The conditional quality of the free fems' previous forward dreaming of a return to the Holdfast has the same motivation as that of the utopian dreamers in general, as Bloch has described it. The critical utopian "what if" opens up the potentiality towards the Not-Yet which can be realized. Bloch proposes the following distinction between wishing and wanting: "In wishing there is not yet any element of work or activity, whereas all wanting is wanting to do". The former has a more passive quality. Fed by wishing, wanting implies "necessarily active progress towards [a] goal" (1959: 46-47). Readers of the series follow this gradual transformation very clearly: the wishful image of the fems' desire, formed earlier in the series, becomes a "wanting" by the end of *Motherlines* and culminates with action in *The Furies*.

The reversal of the power hierarchy between the sexes in the Holdfast is signalled in the text in several ways. Most obvious is, of course, the central plot of the fems' victories over the Holdfast men as they cross the land and expand their army by training the "newly freed" (former slave fems liberated by the invaders). Parallel to this major antagonism, a subtext reinforces the lowered status of men (at times complicating the oversimplified biologistic division of the sexes, as we will see below). For instance, both the Holdfast territory and its male inhabitants seem "small" according to the fems' renewed perception at their return. As they enter and contemplate the homeland ahead, Alldera is pictured "above a canyon", both literally and metaphorically "looking down on the Holdfast":

> She had not remembered the Holdfast as quite so narrow, with margins so poignantly ragged. It seemed cozily small after the endless reaches of the Grasslands, jewel-like with the ripe coloring of late summer. How could such a compact tract of country ever have contained as much death and terror and desperate loving as the Free Fems carried in their combined memories? (F: 31-2)

Another episode with a similar effect of enhancing the Holdfast 'smallness' is the gathering of fems around a miniaturized version of the Holdfast in order to discuss their invasion strategies. They map the territory on the floor and walk on and around it discussing their tactics. Besides reinforcing the lilliputian proportion of the Holdfast in comparison to the 'giant' fems moving on its surface, this also reasserts the fems' power by means of the creation of their own collective representation of geographic space. [69]

Other symbolic markers of the lowered status of the male sex are observed in the first encounters between free fems and men as the former enter the Holdfast territory. The first man they meet is a decaying corpse found on a hill. The following description of their finding has Christian sacrificial connotations:

> The contorted corpse was clumsily fixed to a tree with woven fiber cords. Exposed for days to the weather, it was shrunken to ropy meat and dull, exposed bone. Its outspread arms were pinioned, and its head was held upright by a twist of its long hair knotted to a branch above. One foot was pegged to the tree trunk by a wooden stake driven through below the instep. The other leg dangled above the ground like a haunch of horsemeat hung over a fire to smoke. The whole distorted figure was too tall for a child, too narrow in the hips to be a fem. (F: 42)

Despite the parodic element in this image (the man's death was not actually a sacrificial death,[70] nor will his crucifixion bring men's salvation), it inevitably evokes sacrificial scapegoating, foreshadowing the ritualistic killing of men. The scene that follows this strange finding is not less strong: to Alldera's surprise, many of the fems take turns in thrashing the corpse in a spectacle of sadism and uncontrol. The destruction of this dead male body again foreshadows the violence to be perpetrated on male bodies in expiation for former crimes against the women. The contrast between the enraged fems' agency and the powerlessness of that body (symbolized in this scene by the passivity of death) will be echoed many times.

The male organ, symbol and avatar of masculine power since classical antiquity through to Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalysis,[71] is described as a "shrivel of

---

[69] As a cultural expression, mapping relates to self-empowerment and the construction of one's identity. Maps previously appeared twice in the series: in *Walk*, in Maggomas's charts of the Holdfast territory (W: 192); and in the riding women's ceremony of initiation of *Motherlines*, which involves the drawing of maps of the Grasslands on the floor. This is how "women gave a child the plains" symbolically as she leaves the childpack and acquires status as an individual in their social order (M: 395). The mapping of the Holdfast by the free fems is foreshadowed by both instances, having similar self-empowering connotations.

[70] Later it will be made clear that this corpse was only placed there after the man's death, the whole contrivance being a ritualistic offering made by a 'madman', based on his confused and fragmented ideas of past mythology.

[71] It has been argued that Lacanian psychoanalysis has displaced the sexual biological ties of the Freudian model by centralizing the phallus "as a linguistic, not a bodily marker", thus instating its role as the privileged signifier of the logos and of desire. Elisabeth Grosz examines implications for feminism of this psychoanalytical

blackened flesh at the corpse's groin" (F: 42) in the first encounter of the free fems with the male other. In the second, the image of male impotence reappears in the intriguing character of Setteo, the fool,[72] who contrived the 'sacrificial' scene discussed above. He is the first man to be taken prisoner. It is Fedeka, who, by touching Setteo's exposed body, notices his castration: "He's gelded. He's some man's bondboy, fake fem and no man" (F: 45). Daya, who claims his capture, is then ashamed: Setteo is "one of those boys whom powerful Senior men used to have mutilated to make soft but acceptable mates, effeminate but not actually female" (F: 46).[73]

This passage raises a series of interesting points which I will discuss now. Starting with the penis/phallus association, this passage confirms the conflation of the terms to the extent that Setteo's physical lack signifies powerlessness, i.e., his castration implies the lack of the phallus.[74] The inversion of the power relation between the sexes is thus conveyed by means of a gender-bender and of visual imagery. Setteo's clothes ("a kind of ragged skirt") and body ("his nipples small and flat like a little girl's") set a contrast with "the harsh manspeech" which identifies him as "undoubtedly a male" (F: 44). Usually a generic defamiliarization-enhancing device in satirical sex-role reversal stories,[75] cross-dressing is re-employed by Charnas in a non-satirical context to heighten the dramatic effect.

Certain narrative subtleties in this instance of gender subversion lead us beyond the one-to-one reversal schematized in the two columns below, which reproduce the binarism attacked in Cixous's "Sorties"[76] (except, of course, for the reversal of the man/woman duality):

---

concept both in its Freudian and Lacanian perspectives. "Lacan's re-reading of the notion has helped to vindicate psychoanalysis against the charges of biologism and naturalism so commonly levelled at it by feminists" (e.g. Irigaray 1973 and 1975). However, she proceeds, his reading is also unsatisfactory for feminists: "Lacan acknowledges that the phallus is a signifier, not an organ; to confuse them is to conflate a Real function with a Symbolic one. Yet it is on the basis of this conflation that women are construed as castrated", and "feminists cannot afford to ignore the *a priori* privileging of the masculine within this account, nor can they too readily accept Lacan's claim that the phallus is a signifier like any other" (Grosz in Wright ed. 1992: 321-322). In Charnas' series, firstly the biologistic and symbolic meanings are obviously conflated, and then questioned.
[72] Setteo is Charnas's version of the 'wise fool' peopling the Western literary tradition. Despite the fems' certainty of his madness, Setteo "knew himself to be saner than any of them" (F: 237).
[73] The castration of young men by their seniors is introduced in *Walk*, pp. 79-80. The theme of the effeminizing of men for sexual exploitation by a male élite also appears in Pamela Sargent's feminist dystopia "Fears" (1984).
[74] Although Setteo still possesses the biological organ, he has been deprived of sexual and reproductive potency.
[75] Cf., for instance, Aristophanes's *Assemblywomen* in which the women wear men's clothes in their scheme to usurp the assemblymen's political power. (As women's roles were played by male actors in ancient Greece, a double gender-bender would happen on the stage at this point: male actors impersonating female characters impersonating male characters). When Praxagora, the revolutionary leader, informs her husband about the women's victory to participate in the demos and govern the polis, both are, for different reasons, cross-dressed.
[76] Cf. the epigraph to section II, p. 98.

phallus	lack
(represented by the arms)	(represented by Setteo's castration)
male power	female powerlessness
agency	passivity
desiring subject	object of desire
Daya (woman)	**Setteo (man)**

Besides the obvious twist accomplished by positioning female characters in possession of power and as subjects of desire, I want to argue that at least in one sense Setteo and Daya occupy similar, rather than opposing, positions. Prior to being captured, Setteo's role was that of a senior's "bondboy", in a similar sexual objectification as Daya's, a "pet fem" in her Holdfast days. The fact that, among all free women, it is Daya who arrests Setteo complicates matters in the sense that, on the symbolic level, they have similar roles in spite of the simplistic surface oppositions between the two sexes.

Moreover, Setteo's embodiment of "something other" - neither male nor female - in terms of gender provides further evidence that a more problematic picture of sex and gender is being presented than the one of mere reversal of a binary model:

> With his scrotum emptied and withered Setteo was not, strictly speaking, a male [...] On the other hand, no one could truly mistake him for one of the Blessed, either. Other states, between the extremes, must exist. He was curious to discover [...] what those states must be. (F: 114)

The presence of this character provokes what has been termed "gender trouble",[77] i.e., the subversion of gender identity which undermines the essentialist binary opposition between the sexes. I want to argue that Setteo provides one of the clues to the destabilization of the binary model reproduced by the central sex role-reversal plot in *The Furies*. His will to discover "other states, between the extremes" of the male/female polarity reinforces gender complications, constituting one of the keys to the deconstruction of binarisms at work as a subtext in the novel. These narrative subtleties seem to be allegorical of the feminist poststructuralist deconstruction of rigid binary models, revealing ever shifting subject positions and gender identities which are liable to construction and reconstruction.

Another interesting encounter of the fems with individual males is that between Alldera and her old Holdfast master. Eykar Beck, suitably introduced by the emasculated Setteo, has his "hair now shot with gray", and "creased and lined" features. "His shoulders were stooped", and he was "battered". Crippled due to an injured leg, "the man who had never

---

[77] The expression is used by Butler (1990) who suggests that gender identity is performatively constituted, rather than essentially fixed. In order to subvert the sex-gender system and expose the fictional quality of its supposedly naturalistic necessity, Butler resorts to instances of "gender trouble", performances of gender identity situated beyond the binary limits imposed by dominant ideologies.

turned his gaze away from anything was half-blind" (F: 152-154). The lameness and blindness in his description allude to the classical Oedipal plot, and stress the disadvantageous position of Eykar/Oedipus in relation to the avenging fems/furies. The reversed hierarchy reiterates the other encounters discussed above, being paradigmatic of the new relations between all fems and all men in the Holdfast.

The central subversion at work in the novel is the sex-role reversal that keeps the binary model but dislocates hegemonic power to the female sex in a symmetrical inversion of the previous power structure. The description of the runaway fems' cave drawings representing the fems' history of persecution serves the purposes, in *The Furies*, of heightening the dramatic effect of the fems' revenge and refreshing the readers' memory. (Of course it also has the strategic function of 'filling a gap' for those who have not read the first novel.)[78] Eykar Beck reads in such drawings his own fate and the other men's:

> He saw spirals, carefully traced shapes of spread fingered hands, counting series of lines in groups of fives - counting days in hiding?
>   Then came crude stick figures shown running, or walking bent under heavy loads, or wrapped in each other's arms, or transfixed by barbed slashes, or straining upward to escape the stylized flames that surrounded them. Other figures pursued them, entrapped them, tormented them - squat monsters with rough-drawn, pendulous male genitals, wide mouths full of pointed teeth, and whips in their fists. [...]
>   This too was a map, of sorts: a map of the fems' rage and pain, generations in the making; just as Alldera had said. He read his own kind's future there, and his heart quailed. (F: 323)

This passage offers an interesting metafictional clue. The drawings consist of the fems' representation of women's oppression. In the same fashion, but on a different level, *Walk* is in itself a highly stylized version of real-life women's oppression. So, we are presented with a representation within a representation. The mention of the drawings as "crude stick figures", something not refined or drawn in very simple lines, causes a retrospective look back at *Walk* as an oversimplified representation of the conflict between the sexes, involving the victimization of fems under the persecution of men *en bloc*, and to contrast this with the more elaborate portrayal rendered in *The Furies*.[79]

---

[78] To a similar effect is Daya's storytelling. Cf. F: 23-31.
[79] For Charnas "*Walk* was and is a sort of barometer of a certain moment and level and tone of feminism among middle-class, white, thirtyish feminists - like me, in other words - that is now long gone" (Cavalcanti 1998: 7). Of course, the author's sexual politics has followed the developments of feminist thought. Written over a decade later, *The Furies* is clearly attuned with the multi-faceted feminisms of the 1990's, and Charnas's look back at *Walk* is informed by a renewed historical perspective. The drawings may function as an allegorical representation of the univocity of the North-American feminism of the 1970's, which is no longer either possible or desirable.

The binary oppositional framework inaugurated by the fems in *The Furies* brings about the symmetrical inversion of the syntax of sadism portrayed in *Walk*, summed up in the passage quoted above. A sadistic note is perceptible, for instance, after Alldera's first blow in battle against the enemy: "She ached to turn back and beat him to death where he lay - the master, pulled down at last. The thought was so exciting she thought it might stop her heart" (F: 91). Campbell's remark that "[t]he hero of yesterday becomes the tyrant of tomorrow, unless [s]he crucifies [herself] today" (1949: 353) seems to hold true. Actually, Alldera's role as a tyrant had already been hinted at in *Motherlines*, when she was named Alldera Holdfaster.[80] This is reinforced in *The Furies* as suggested by narrative parallelisms[81] and by the protagonist's own actions and awareness. She exercises power cruelly and oppressively over the Holdfast men, which causes her to reflect on own behaviour critically: "You know, sometimes I think I have the makings of a terrible tyrant" (F: 299).

The atrocities against men include enslavement, spatial confinement, linguistic restrictions, physical torture, exemplary punishment, killing (as penalty, for sacrificial offering, or for pure pleasure), and cannibalism. Concerning cannibalism, the symbolism of the act has a self-giving aspect via the incorporation of the qualities of a powerful Other. In my view, in *The Furies* the ritual reveals (and reinforces) an Oedipal mechanics, for it signifies the fems' becoming the male enemy, the archetypal father, whose bone marrow they drink.[82] On a philosophical level, the exclusion and debasement of women effected by phallogocentrism has been denounced as "an act of metaphysical cannibalism" (Braidotti 1991: 214). This metaphor suitably applies to *Walk* and, by inverting the sexes, to *The Furies*. In both texts the exclusionary and violent acts are invested with metaphysical significance.

This 'phallicization' of the fems and 'dephallicization' of the men in *The Furies* can be read as allegorical of the feminist philosophical debate concerning women's access to power. Several thinkers have debated this issue, and what follows is a brief overview of the question of women's relation to power in the works of Irigaray, Cixous and Braidotti.[83] In an interview concerning the structure of her 1974 *Speculum de l'Autre Femme* (which is in itself, not unlike Charnas's novels, a textual power play with mirrors), Irigaray states the following:

---

[80] See p. 100 above for the connotations of the term "Holdfast".
[81] In "A terrace in 'Troi", for instance, Alldera revisits Raff Maggomas's tower, positioning herself in what used to be that tyrant's quarters in *Walk*. Her "terror of the height" (the high floor "groaned ominously under her feet", the building being in ruins), and her thoughts ("Come all this way, to fall?") suggest an identification between Alldera and Maggomas, echoing his earlier fall from power, and anticipating her own fate (W: 51).
[82] Ritualistic cannibalism is described in Book One (F: 65). In Book Two, Setteo interestingly muses: "you are what you eat" (F: 115). Intersexual cannibalism in *Walk* is devoid of self-empowering symbolism mainly because the women are believed to lack a self. The sole aim of cannibalism in the earlier novel is nourishment.
[83] See also Wittig's 1990 "Homo Sum" in Wittig 1992: 46-58. Cf. especially pp. 55-6.

> For what is important is to disconcert the staging of representation according to *exclusively* "masculine" parameters, that is, according to a phallocratic order. It is not a matter of toppling that order so as to replace it - that amounts to the same thing in the end - but of disrupting and modifying it, starting from an "outside" that is exempt, in part, from phallocratic law. (1975: 68, her emphasis)

Some of the implications of "toppling the order so as to replace it", a movement I identified in the analysis of *The Furies*, are discussed by the feminist philosopher in the same interview. One is that "a change in the distribution of power, leaving intact the power structure itself" is not desirable because it leads to the resubjection of women to a phallocratic order. The type of power reversal which keeps the order intact "plays on a certain naiveté that suggests one need only be a woman in order to remain outside phallic power" (1975: 81).[84]

Cixous shares a similar concern when she asserts: "It is not a question of appropriating [men's] instruments, their concepts, their places for oneself or of wishing oneself in their position of mastery" (1975: 96). According to her, the end of the "Age of the Phallus" must be marked by a radical transformation against men's grammar and away from the dominant masculine economy. Along the lines of the "outside" suggested by Irigaray as a possible site for radical transformation, Cixous elaborates on the notion of a feminine economy as the site of women's *jouissance*, an elsewhere of feminist discourse. This concept replaces the psychoanalytical notion of the phallus as the signifier of female desire. I will return to this idea below.

Braidotti has added her own claim to the ones above. Looking at radical feminist philosophies of sexual difference, she reaffirms the rejection of a mechanics which repeats the One/Other dialectics founded upon One's self-legitimation via the exclusion of an Other:

> [the] infernal logic of domination by symbolic disqualification - the triumph of the One over the Other - cannot be remedied by a straight reversal of the balance of power that would counter the game of self-affirmation and the space of projection of the One in favour of the Other. This reversal would in fact leave the dialectical opposition intact: one must tackle the very structures of the framework, not its propositional contents, in order to overcome the power relations that sustain it. (1991: 213-214)

Invalidating the master/slave dualism is, for Braidotti (and following Irigaray and Cixous before her) a crucial point in the feminist agenda. To sum up the three thinkers' position, the establishment of another authoritarian order with women on top of the hierarchical structure

---

[84] Indeed, my reading of *Motherlines* in the previous section points to Charnas's awareness of the truth that inspires Irigaray's assertion, since the emergence of a masculine economy in the all-female territory questions this naive assumption.

and men as the inferior term is not desirable for feminism in so far as this repeats an already existing unsatisfactory model.

I will return to the specific question of narrative desire in *The Furies* in order to stress the novel's alignment with the theories above. It was already stated that the syntax of desire at work in this text's surface inverts the subject/man-object/woman grammar of the male economy, while problematically keeping its structure intact.[85] In this sense, the narrative follows the Oedipal mechanism. Nevertheless, the presence of a subversive subtext shaking the newly-founded social structure complicates the issue of desire, and gradually acquires crucial importance. I showed above that *The Furies* undermines a simplistic binary logic: Setteo defies rigid sex-gender roles by being both (and neither) male and (nor) female; and the Alldera/Eykar subplot does not fit the one-way syntax of desire typical of a masculine economy. Complicating the issue further is the men's reaction to their enforced captivity. Unlike the overall passivity which characterized women's behaviour in the old Holdfast order, male slaves respond to servitude with further aggression. One instance is the impalement of three newly freed fems by enraged men as retaliation of violence committed against their own sex.[86] This generates still another upsurge of violence from the fems as reprisal and punishment. At stake here is the issue of agency, for the episode signals the non-passivity of the male slaves. In sharp contrast to *Walk*, both sexes are depicted in *The Furies* as simultaneously castrating and castrated, being positioned at once as subjects and objects in relation to each other, which again problematizes the active/passive sexual binarism.

The narrative acquires a more and more dystopic tone in proportion to the transformation of desirability into undesirability. Alldera's dissatisfaction with the 'new' order gradually becomes noticeable:

> And she understood well the longing for something fresh, innocent and hopeful to arise from the welter of bloody struggle in which they had all been living; something around which all of [the fems'] own differences could be centered and resolved. (F: 243)[87]

The issue is given further stress by Eykar's interpellation in a chapter very suitably entitled "The Oracle": "Haven't you come back to be something else than our own creation?

---

[85] In spite of the problematics inherent in the sex-role reversal narrative plots, they can, nevertheless, still be the source of interesting feminist readings. By means of the defamiliarization they effect, this type of plot challenges the essentialist naturalization of woman as well as the phallocentric notion of women's passivity.

[86] This is rendered in the chapter entitled "Christs" (F: 183-191). Readers 'see' the scene through Setteo, a fact which constructs links with the Christ-like figure of the beginning of the novel.

[87] An interesting contrast can be drawn by also looking at some of Alldera's earlier statements: "We are not men but Free Fems, come home to take what's ours. We have beaten you, and we will break you, and we will own you" (F: 97); or "We are your masters, the only kind of masters the Holdfast will ever see again" (F: 100).

Something new, something of your own not crippled by those old times?" (F: 268). Eykar, it is remembered, had previously contributed to the partial fall of the patriarchal Holdfast structure by killing his father but refusing to replace him. He facilitated Alldera's escape into the Wild, and witnessed the free fems' arrival with hope (F: 144). Therefore, his role may be taken to symbolize an antagonism to the re-enactment of the Oedipal plot, his function as speaker of truths sounding less like a programmatic statement (after all Eykar does not offer any plans for action) than like another narrative foil to Alldera's trajectory.

I want to sum up the discussion so far by asserting that the narrative movement in *The Furies* is both Oedipal and anti-Oedipal. Or, to quote de Lauretis, it is "Oedipal with a vengeance" (1984: 157), for it simultaneously reinstates the Oedipal trajectory and deconstructs it. The dissatisfaction inspired by the non-resolution of the major narrative problem is the textual vengeance at work in Charnas' novel: "The problem is men and fems, masters and slaves. Of course it's still there" (F: 373), states Alldera in the epilogue. By this I mean that, as my analysis has shown, in rewriting Oedipal plot her text simultaneously repeats and subverts it. And to return to the question whether Alldera is a tyrant, the most suitable answer seems to be that she has been one, and has repented. Nevertheless, her and the other fems' quest has not reached an end. In terms of the utopian vision of a feminist elsewhere based on radically different economy between the sexes, the text poses it as an unsolved problem, an enigma.

One final question I want to address is the feminist tension between collectivity and individuality. A good starting point for the discussion is Braidotti's account of Jacques Derrida's view of feminism: "So feminists are supposedly seeking nothing other than a new phallic order centred on the primacy of the woman-subject, a new law, a new proto-totalitarian order. An-other phallic referent that leaves the system untouched" (1991: 105). This quote also implicitly explains the reasons for Derrida's anti-feminism. The aim of a deconstructionist practice is precisely to "deconstruct" phallogocentric discourses, whereas, according to Derrida, feminism would be posing a new master narrative, thus founding a new version of phallogocentrism. This account is crucial for the present discussion, for a careful reading of *The Furies* will expose tensions and fractions in and among the women's communities. It becomes clear, in Charnas's text, that the instances in which differences between individual women (and groups of women) surface function *against* the pull towards totalitarianism, homogeneity and universalism, claimed by Derrida to endanger feminism.

Replacing the dual sexual differentiation *en bloc* at work in *Walk, Motherlines* offers a more complicated picture of women, both individually and in groups. In *The Furies*, this

picture is complicated even further. Major ideological clashes among the three groups of women vary in function and in effect. The presence of the riding women in the Holdfast territory, for instance, offers us the point of view of a surprised observer (of fems' and men's ways), a recurrent character type in utopian literature. Although these women propose to keep their interference to a minimum[88] by trying to be politically tactful, they ultimately interfere in the fems' affairs. For example, they instigate an 'illegal' mating without the other fems' consent and arrange for a pregnant fem to escape to the Grasslands in the hope that she will give birth to a child there, a fact which provokes outraged reaction and a confrontation between cultures.[89]

Among the instances of difference within a particular group of women, the most obvious textual evidence is the formation of a dissident group under the leadership of Daya to overthrow Alldera's command. The dissidents' plan culminates in a failed attempt to assassinate her, described in a chapter ironically entitled "Necessity". The episode provokes Alldera's retreat for healing, in the company of Eykar and other fems, in the Endpath, a place whose function is turned upside down (from being a place of death in *Walk* to a place of healing in *The Furies*).[90] The differences among the women cannot, however, be reduced or itemised. It is mainly through Sheel's, a riding woman's, point of view that readers are offered some hints of this immeasurability: "[free fems] seemed to have absorbed power and weight from the earth of their homeland and to have become more alien than ever" (F: 110); or still: "[Holdfast fems] were like contrary winds blowing in every direction" (F:126).

These illustrations should suffice as textual evidence of the fragmentation and differentiation of women's motivations which is, in my opinion, allegorical of the feminisms of difference of the 1990's. The violence of the exclusions *of* women and *by* women in the novel may well provide a metaphor for some of the exclusions inherent in feminist discourse, or ultimately structurally inherent in any discourse. In the last decade, heightened self-awareness in feminism was brought about by the (sometimes enraged) emergence of diverse, even contradictory, discourses and tendencies. These have substituted multiplicity for the monolithic orientation of earlier second-wave feminism. Contrary to Derrida's thoughts, the driving impulses of the movement seem to be characterized presently by a struggle against

---

[88] This is usually the case, for obvious reasons, in literary utopias of the "static" type. The visitor's/observer's agency appears as a trait of critical utopias.

[89] Another major ideological confrontation between groups of women is that between free fems and bond fems. During the invasion of the Holdfast, some of the slaves resist siding with the invaders: the coopted Matris and their followers refuse to collaborate with the free fems. The deaths of three fems result from this conflict.

[90] This retreat mirrors, of course, the previous ones in the series, and has a similar anticipatory quality. See the discussion at the end of section III, on p. 120 above.

being instituted as just another phallocratic order in disguise. I have shown in my analysis that these impulses are at work both in Charnas's text and in the works of the feminist theoreticians discussed in this section.

I will return briefly to Braidotti's theories before reaching the conclusion of the chapter. Her thoughts concerning individuality versus community provide an interesting theoretical insight. Braidotti formulates this feminist tension as an instance of what she terms a "collective singularity". The paradox reveals the tension between the two terms. A "collective singularity" is the way found by Braidotti to account for the simultaneous pulls towards collectivity and individuality characteristic of contemporary feminism. It is supposed to work as a hypothesis operating on two levels. Theoretically, this hypothesis may provide "a basis for analysing the process of specification and problematization of women in discourse, the validity of which depends on the light it can shed on the mechanisms of power"; and politically, "this collective singularity constitutes a provisional platform supporting women's real and multiple struggles" (1991: 132). Although applied to 'real-life' politics, this notion *illuminates my reading* of Charnas's fiction. I want to argue that a similar tension pervades *The Furies*. Initially, at an early stage of the invasion of the Holdfast, Alldera voices the strong sense of community uniting the free fems: "So [the free fems] follow me where they want me to lead them, *as if* we had never quarrelled" (F: 54, my emphasis). Later, in a moment of crisis and fragmentation of interests, Alldera remarks that "we can't afford quarrels among ourselves" (F: 248). Finally the novel 'closes' with a change in the distribution of power. Instead of the one-fem leadership, a council consisting of representatives from different factions is established, which Alldera is invited to join in. The institution of a council is in itself metaphorical of such "collective singularity", and provides an interesting alternative to the earlier law according to which Alldera had the final word. Furthermore, the council manifests another subversion of the Oedipal narrative model to the extent that, being collectivity-oriented, it 'dilutes' the traditional protagonist's agency and displaces Oedipus as monomyth.[91] The women's coalition (represented by the council rule) denotes a unifying element at work at the end of the novel which is based on gender identity and politics. It

---

[91] The idea of collective protagonists has repeatedly inspired feminist utopian fictions. Most notable for their formal innovations are Wittig's *The Guérrillères* (1969) and Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979). In the former, a third person plural narration is rendered: the protagonists are referred to by the pronoun "they" (which partially loses the gender impact in the English translation) throughout. Since no individual identities are ever portrayed, community overrides singularity. The latter is formed by a series of interrelated stories with different protagonists/narrators, united by the cause of keeping and protecting the all-female territory of the title.

compensates for the pull of women's individuality and fragmentation, some instances of which I examined above.[92]

My reading shows that contemporary feminisms tend to reject the repetition of the existing power structure between the sexes. Irigaray suggests disrupting the phallocratic law. Cixous proposes substituting a (utopian) feminine libidinal economy for the masculine one, while Braidotti, perhaps more aware than Cixous of the dangers of utopian thinking, hypothesizes an ever-provisional "collective singularity" as a useful political model for feminism. Regarding "narrativity", de Lauretis has argued for a mode of storytelling working both with and against Oedipus, which she has described as "Oedipus with a vengeance".

The Furies remarkably brings all these together. The return of the fems to the Holdfast can be understood in the light of Irigaray's claim to dismantle the phallocratic model, whereas the women's repetition of such an undesirable system stresses the difficulty of starting something anew when one is inserted in a pre-existing social configuration and has to operate from within its limits.[93] Charnas's metaphor of the furies further exposes the intricacies of the women's plight and reveals an awareness that her characters, not unlike flesh and blood feminists, act on a pre-set ideological stage. After all, the mythical furies' agency is in itself already a response to Oedipus's prior action. So is her characters', Charnas reminds us. Embodying the avengers, they perform a vengeance at the level of plot content. The text tells the story of the women's vengeance and of the re-enactment (followed by the interruption) of Oedipus. It tells of the women's retaliation for violence and sadism by the same token, but it also breaks this textual-mechanics with the gradual surfacing of increased dissatisfaction, desire for change, and the postponement of utopia.

On another level, *The Furies* extrapolates its own content and perpetrates a formal vengeance by means of its open-endedness. Appropriately entitled "A Traveler", the final part of the novel anticipates still another story to be told, another journey to be started, which enables the utopian dimension of the women's quest to be kept. This leaves the utopia of a radical feminist elsewhere alive. Finally, Charnas has accomplished no small task by melding form and content together whilst leaving her readers expectant of more storytelling. I would

---

[92] Further textual allusions to the women's singularities and differences are voiced throughout *The Furies*: Daya refers to all women as "So many different people, so many interests and desires"; Alldera thinks about the "differences" and "dissonance" between them, the survivors of the old Holdfast being "like living fragments of a dream all the Free had shared" (F: 240, 243, and 293). This oxymoronic statement aptly conveys the tension between collectivity and singularity.

[93] The same undesirable masculine economy 'infects' the all-female, apparently 'free', space of *Motherlines*. In this context, the full relevance of two words voiced by Irigaray can be measured. She defends modifying the dominant order by "starting from an 'outside' that is exempt, *in part*, from phallocratic law" (cf. p. 131 above, my emphasis). The suggestion, echoed in *Motherlines* and *The Furies*, is that there is no such a thing as a value-

call such expectation a reader's desire *for* narrative, generated by the desire at work *in* her narrative. This is, for me, her great achievement.

V. Conclusion: On the Possibility of Sequels

> Nothing suits her, she has no place else to go, but she can't seem to accept herself and the life around her. It's a sickness I have no medicine for. (Fedeka, the healer, *Motherlines*)

I have chosen to end my reading of Charnas's Holdfast series with Fedeka's words about Alldera because they epitomize dissatisfaction and longing, feelings that I associate, both thematically and formally, with the whole sequence of novels, with the utopian movement, and with the feminist quest. Inspired by Cixous's visionary statement concerning the tasks of women's writing, "to break up, to destroy; and to foresee the unforeseeable, to project,"[94] my analysis showed that the extremely misogynist machine portrayed in *Walk to the End of the World* functions as a dystopian narrative space where points of resistance and political hope are started and feminist utopias envisaged. *Motherlines* and *The Furies*, in turn, "foresee the unforeseeable" by projecting two feminist utopias: an autonomous all-female society situated 'outside' the phallocratic order of the Holdfast; and a utopia of sex-role reversal. I also argued that the alternative societies presented in the two later novels provide no unproblematic pictures of eutopias. Conflicts emerge in them which blur distinctions between eutopia ("good place") and dystopia ("bad place"). The effect achieved by Charnas's sophisticated textual mirror game, specially by means of narrative parallelisms (oppressive sexual politics, exclusionary practices, territorial disputes, border transgressions, slavery and violence), is the projection upon readers of the characters' feelings of dissatisfaction and longing, "a sickness" Charnas herself offers "no medicine for".

I want to discuss briefly this feeling of dissatisfaction, which finds correlations in utopian thought and in feminist theory, and the semiotics of utopia and narrative. It appears to be very close to the expectant feelings central to Bloch's writings about utopianism.[95] Besides, Alldera's unfinished quest (and, consequently, her dissatisfaction) fits what the German philosopher has described as "the still unattained aspect in the realizing element". He identifies "a deficit in *the act of realization*", a deficit which is responsible for dissolving the traditional

---

free, neutral space outside existing ideologies from which to start oppositional action.
[94] Cf. p. 98 above.

connection of the act of concretion of a utopian goal with a finished idea. This aspect of human action is anchored on Bloch's notion of the Not-Yet: "*in the realizing element itself there is something that has not yet realized itself*" (1959: 193, 190, 193). This idea crucially underlies his philosophy of utopia as never-ending process, which is marked by a correcting element when utopia is 'realized' (or becomes a "topia"). My reading of the series shows precisely this lack of congruence between the women's achievements and (what had been) the utopian goal-images motivating their actions. This generates a suspension in what Propp (1928) called, discussing terminal functions, a conclusive "liquidation of misfortune".

Also relevant in this context is Bloch's concern with an 'aesthetic of fragmentation' and its utopian potentials. Cultural forms privileged by Bloch in his writings include expressionist paintings (characterized by the technique of montage), the open-ended novel of the artist, artistic fragments and unfinished works of art.[96] They illustrate the philosopher's association of lack of closure with the utopian function, which allows formal parallels with Charnas's series, in itself of a series of 'unfinished' novels, each sequel being a "fragment", or mosaic, in a larger picture. On the issue of artistic fragments, Bloch interestingly discusses a characteristic "exploding crack", a "hollow space" which marks the central "un-finish-ability" of certain cultural works. According to him, fragments denote a utopian mode in the sense that they shatter the myth of "roundness" and "enclosedness" and open up a horizon of interpretative possibilities. Following Bloch, I suggest that each novel of the series can be seen as a "belated fragment" of a larger work, separated by the utopian "hollow spaces" in-between stories.[97]

Of course there are sequels and sequels. Aesthetic elaboration, a critical take on utopianism, and radical feminist perspective distinguish Charnas's series from the wave of literary and filmic sequels produced and marketed each year. Whereas the latter tend to 'rewind' the narrative to a kind of zero degree with the resolution of a conflict at the end of each episode so that the same story can be told time and time again for easy consumption,[98]

---

[95] Cf. the discussion of Bloch's elaborations on hope as an expectant emotion on p. 28 above.

[96] For Bloch's considerations about montage see the essays collected in part three of *Heritage of Our Times* (1962); about the "novel of the artist", "A Philosophical View of the Novel of the Artist" (1965, in Bloch 1988: 265-277); about fragments and/or unfinished works of art, *The Principle of Hope* (1959: 217-222). From the latter I quote the following: "all great art shows the pleasant and homogeneous aspects of its work-based coherence broken, broken up, leafed open by its own iconoclasm, wherever immanence is not driven to closedness of form and content, wherever it still poses *fragment-like*" (219).

[97] Terms appearing in quotation marks in this paragraph are taken from Bloch 1959: 217-222.

[98] There is a utopian element in such cultural narratives to the extent that they satisfy readers'/viewers' hopes of a good/happy end, and their utopian longing for a sense of collectivity or shared goal. But these wishful longings are usually fulfilled by means of the affirmation of simplistic (usually white, male, heterosexual, middle-class, capitalistic) construction of a perfect consensus concerning the common good, well-being and happiness. This can be a dangerous utopia as it provides an easy escape from our present dystopic reality

each novel of the Holdfast series is told from a different perspective, avoiding closure and consolatory endings each time. The anticipatory spaces in-between novels provide important shifts so that each tale of the quest can be seen to offer a renewed glance at a particular feminist utopian vision. An analogy with painting may illuminate the point I am trying to make. The series can perhaps be compared to thematic sets of impressionist works (like Monet's cathedrals or his water-lilies, for instance) which portray the artist's impressions of the same object in different canvases, from different angles, in different lights, at different points in time. Similarly, Charnas's Holdfast novels seem to concentrate on one subject matter - the search for a feminist utopia, for an alternative economy of desire which does not objectify women as the signifier of a male desire - which is explored in each novel from a different perspective and chronology. The possibilities are endless.

Still concerning the issue of serialization, a sixteen-year silence separates *Motherlines* from *The Furies*. The interval generated critical speculations that a third novel would not be composed:

> *Walk* and *Motherlines* are essentially interrogative: of character, of order, of unity. [...] The object of their interest is dissolution, rather than resolution. And it is this, I think, that precludes a third book, a book that will 'round off' or 'complete' the trilogy, as in traditional SF romance it would do. (Lefanu 1988: 149)[99]

Although my reading is in complete agreement with the first two statements, the rest of the discussion follows a path contrary to mine. The terms emphasized by Sarah Lefanu herself lead us back in contrast to Bloch's discussion of fragmentation and open-endedness. They also reveal, in that feminist sf critic's discourse, a tendency towards closure and teleological views, which is certainly at odds with contemporary feminisms. Although Lefanu's discourse precludes teleology on its surface, it implies that a third novel could only follow a teleological movement.[100] It seems that it is Lefanu's argument itself that excludes ways of thinking of literary sequels which subvert the conventions of "traditional SF romance". Anyway, the silence was broken with the publication of *The Furies*, which works against the "rounding off" of narrative and the offer of a "eutopian synthesis" (Relf 1991a). Indeed, another novel of the Holdfast series is being currently composed.[101]

---

through entertainment, and, in the last analysis, works in terms of maintaining the status quo. An excellent reading of popular sf film following this line is in Susan Sontag's "The Imagination of Disaster" in *Against Interpretation* (1966: 209-225).

[99] Jan Relf (1991a) also predicted the interruption of the series after *Motherlines*.

[100] Relf's position is similar in that she could only envision the (unlikely) third novel in terms of a final "eutopian synthesis" in relation to the previous two: thesis and antithesis (Relf 1991a: 53).

[101] *The Conqueror's Child* was actually published in the U.S. as I was finalizing the present study. The fourth

To read the novels in parallel with recent feminist theorizations of alternative socio-sexual models (the radical separatism of Wittig, speculations concerning role-reversal, the hypothesizing of a "collective singularity" in order to mediate contradictory pulls within the movement) has reasserted fiction's potential to continually join in and inspire theoretical debate. Due to its closer link with politics as well as its radical extrapolative possibilities, utopian fiction certainly occupies a privileged space in this debate without bearing the burden of having to offer a programmatic route for action. This is precisely where the liberating aspect of literature lies.

My analysis showed that Charnas's Holdfast series is engaged in a revisionary move which is part of the feminist project aimed at the deconstruction of a phallocratic order. It also showed that the construction of an alternative order via the realization of feminist wishful images (be it inspired by sexual separatism or by the reversal of sex-roles) very much depends on - is structurally defined by and therefore cannot escape from - the pre-set ideological stage this alternative order aims to replace, since "the resistant is dependent for its identity on the othering of that domination [which is always presumed to be dominant]" (Cubitt 1997: 299). Or, in the words of a feminist philosopher whose thought has centrally inspired this reading:

> What is the "Other"? If it is truly the "other", there is nothing to say; it cannot be theorized. The "other" escapes me. It is elsewhere, outside: absolutely other. It doesn't settle down. But in History, of course, what is called "other" is an alterity that does settle down, that falls into the dialectical circle. (Cixous 1975: 71)

Charnas's utopian works function as reminders of the danger of "a fall into the dialectical circle". As discussed at length in this chapter, the assertion of female desire in the texts studied openly re-enacts the hierarchical binary model of self/other it seeks to destabilize. In this sense, the two feminist utopias projected in *Motherlines* and *The Furies* repeat the dystopic past culture portrayed in *Walk*. However, and here is where I locate its potentially radical utopianism, the series also anticipates a culture to come by means of narrative devices which were shown to work against the reaffirmation of the dual order, in the direction of what I would call the 'postponement' of utopia. I argue that the novels express a constantly present utopia in their attempts to portray a "feminine economy", which, paradoxically (as Bloch had predicted of all utopias) cannot be defined. Concerning the utopian quality perceptible in Cixous's idea of a "feminine economy", Judith Still has stated the following: "The feminine economy is, I would claim, a necessary utopic horizon or moment of radical destructuring

---

novel is still not available for a U.K. readership.

140

which should accompany the more everyday and patient labour of feminist struggle".[102] The feelings of longing, dissatisfaction and hope experienced by characters (and readers) at the end of each text are markers of the desire for a feminist utopian elsewhere, which remains in suspension as the narrative unsolved enigma; whereas the characters' agency for the attainment of each political goal encode the other form of the utopian elsewhere, being allegorical of our everyday feminist hopes and struggles.

Finally, in terms of a feminist semiotics, Charnas's novels provided the ground for the exploration of the contradiction implied in the process of becoming a woman subject, of asserting a woman's identity. They centralize the often pronounced issue of the feminist subject's impossible positioning as the owner of her own desire. This impossibility lies in the fact that, in order to express her desire, the feminist subject engages in a signifying practice which a priori depends upon her positioning as the phallic signifier of the desire of the (male) other. As de Lauretis remarks, "it is the signifier who plays and wins before Alice [the female subject] does, even when she's aware of it" (1984: 186). My reading of the novels demonstrated the truth of this statement by focusing on the re-enactment of Oedipal narrative logic staged by the novels. It also demonstrated that each text simultaneously deconstructs this logic by resisting its confinement and by keeping the utopian wishful dream of the articulation of a symbolic space free from the shadow of Oedipus. To this effect, thematic and formal questions interrelate. The protagonist's unfulfilled quest for utopia, which I read vis-à-vis the feminist quest articulated from within a poststructuralist context, and the textual form chosen by Charnas (three open-ended novels) seem to be interwoven and to reflect a concern with lack of closure and with the dismantling of Oedipal narrative. With her continuous storytelling, Charnas, this contemporary Scheherazade, tells different stories, which are also retellings of the same story. In them, we female feminist subjects walk the ambiguous path which involves the re-enacting of a violent order, but also the assertion of our deepest utopian longings: in each story is the inspiration for continuing our political quest and, in this, the measure of our own survival.

---

[102] "Feminine Economy" in Wright ed. 1992: 90-92, p. 92.

Chapter Six

Utopias of/f Language: Lisa Tuttle's "The Cure", Suzette H. Elgin's *Native Tongue* and *The Judas Rose* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

> "[L]anguage is power, life, and the instrument of
> culture, the instrument of domination and liberation."
> (Angela Carter, "Notes from the Frontline")[1]

I. Introduction

Futuristic dystopias are stories about language. This is true, first, in the sense that ultimately all fictional works are narcissistic and metafictional, i.e., besides telling a 'surface' tale, they also tell the story of their own existence (their possibility and limitations) as cultural artefacts concretized via the specific medium of language. Secondly, because all speculative fictions are characterized by a special type of metafictionality, being 'more' metafictional than other (realistic, or mimetic) literary forms. They overtly expose their metafictional quality by having a distinct relationship with language itself and with their 'non-existent' referents.[2] Thirdly, this century's (male) canonical dystopias thematize issues related to language, which often functions as a source of conflict in the narrative. Linguistic control and the enforcement of strict linguistic normativity symbolically stand in for other forms of social (ideological, political, institutional) control.[3]

Contemporary feminist dystopias overtly thematize the linguistic construction of gender domination by telling stories about language as instrument of both (men's) domination and (women's) liberation.[4] The silencing of women by men has surfaced in a number of ways: strongly regulated forms of address and turn-taking; enforced use of formulaic or contrived

---

[1] In Michelene Wandor ed. *On Gender and Writing* 1983: 69-77.

[2] With specific reference to science-fiction, Darko Suvin borrows Bloch's concept of the "Novum" in order to define this metafictionality. (See the discussion on p. 40 above.) George McKay uses the term "doubled difference" for similar purposes (1994: 52). And Umberto Eco explores the idea of "self-voiding fiction", literary texts which "demonstrate their own impossibility" by explicitly signalling their fictionality, and also associates this mode with science-fiction (1994: 81, 106). Cf. also Branham 1983.

[3] Cf., for instance, the regulatory linguistic practices in Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924), George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1954). This thematic thread has triggered the interest of readers, among whom are Myra Barnes (1975, Chapter IX, "The Language of Thought Control": 140-170); Walter Meyers (1980, Chapter 12, "The Children of Sir Thomas More": 193-209); and David Sisk (1997). Sisk's book-length study on the topic has a specific chapter on "Language and the Feminist Dystopia" featuring discussions on Margaret Atwood's and Suzette Elgin's texts discussed here. Cf. pp. 107-135.

[4] Although, in most cases, the feminist dystopias thematize gender-polarized linguistic struggles by equating the male principle with domination and the female with liberation, this is not always the case.

speech (sometimes reaching the extreme circumstance in which the female protagonist has to communicate by following a script); prohibition of access to public speech, reading and/or writing, specially creative writing; denial of representation in political forums; or, more effectively, the cutting out of women's tongues.[5] All these expose the interweaving of linguistic manipulation and dominant patriarchal ideologies in the dystopic spaces, while at the same time giving the texts their feminist ideological hues, as these elements can be interpreted as (sometimes crude and straightforward) metaphors for the historical silencing of women.[6]

Besides featuring as an instrument enforcing a dystopic male order, language has a liberating potential in the feminist dystopias. I am referring to the utopian response to the imposed (male) norm, evidenced by the women characters' dissatisfaction with their status in relation to language. In a counter move to restrictive practices, they engage in a series of subversive actions of resistance that range from the strategic "masquerading" of their femininity by means of appropriate 'feminine' speech to camouflaged singing and message-networking, from the process of re-naming to storytelling and creative writing, from the reinvestment of a sign with a new meaning to the creation of a whole alternative system of meanings. In an extremist response, one of the utopian strategies observed in the texts consists in the character's radical escape from (verbal) language itself, a move which is paradoxically rendered by means of storytelling, i.e., of verbal language. Women's resistance is observed in these fictions in terms of the strategies they develop to evade a dystopic linguistic order by means of the construction of what I have termed utopias *of* and *off* language.

My main argument in this chapter is that in the feminist dystopias, dystopic and utopic dispositions (represented by male and female principles) confront each other, and that this confrontation is often enacted by means of linguistic struggle. I will investigate different, at times contradictory, facets of (a-)linguistic utopianisms in four narratives published in the 1980's: Lisa Tuttle's "The Cure" (1984), Suzette Elgin's *Native Tongue* (1984) and its sequel *The Judas Rose* (1987), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).[7] Before we

---

[5] Male linguistic control over women appears, in one or more of these forms, in the following fictions: Burdekin's *Swastika Night* (1937), Elgin's "For the Sake of Grace" (1969), Sheldon's "The Girl Who Was Plugged In" (1973), Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* (1974), Russ's *The Two of Them* (1978), Vonarburg's *The Silent City* (1981), Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988). One of the most violent pictures of the silencing of women is the parade of crippled, mutilated and *silent* women in the patriarchal hell portrayed in Wittig's *Across the Acheron* (1985: 79-83).
[6] This has been the object of much feminist critical thinking. Some notable examples are Virginia Woolf's "Women and Fiction" (1929, reprinted in Cameron 1990: 33-40) and *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Tillie Olsen's "Silences: When Writers Don't Write" (in Cornillon ed. 1972: 97-112), Joanna Russ's *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983). See also the other texts in the section on "Speech and Silence", in Cameron ed. 1990.
[7] "The Cure", in *A Spaceship Built of Stone and Other Stories* (London: The Women's Press, 1987: 123-134); *Native Tongue* (London: The Women's Press, 1985) and *The Judas Rose - Native Tongue II* (London: The

proceed to the analysis of each of the texts, I will explain the theoretical approach that will help to guide my readings.

Linguistic innovations in speculative feminist fictions have previously attracted the interest of commentators from the areas of linguistics and literary criticism. Speaking from within the realm of academic linguistics, Deborah Cameron discusses their role in terms of a critique of and discontent with language: "It is interesting to note that in feminist utopias [...] there is often some attempt at a modified language. A female utopia could not be content with what we have now" (1990: 13). And explaining the principles orienting the compilation of a feminist dictionary, Cheris Kramarae and Paula Treichler state that it

> draws words and definitions from such utopian works as Monique Wittig's and Sande Zeig's *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary* (1976), Sally Miller Gearhart's *Wanderground* and Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* (1984), thereby suggesting not only what is or has been but what might be. (1985: 4-5)[8]

From the perspective of feminist linguists, thus, the stories contribute to a critique of "what we have now", as well as projecting a utopian "what might be". In the feminist dystopias, the critique of the present is manifested in the stylization and exaggeration of "what we have now", and the women's move against the status quo is enacted as a utopian counterpart. Because they portray a misogynist society, they incorporate the linguistic struggles, rather than showing 'ready-made' (re)constructed language (as is usually the case in the eutopian modes), a factor which makes the subgenre specially relevant for feminist readers/readings.

The response from literary commentators has been less welcoming. And while they stress the important role played by linguistic innovation in contemporary feminist speculative writings, they also show a degree of frustration with what is actually achieved.[9] These critics do not find, in the fictional works, the 'women's language' they expect. Penny Florence shows disappointment with the fact that the narratives incorporate language thematically, but not structurally, being "formally and linguistically conventional" (1990: 81-2). Similarly, Lucie Armitt expresses the general frustration felt by readers and critics of feminist science fiction:

Women's Press, 1988); *The Handmaid's Tale* (Toronto: Seal, 1986). Page numbers will be accompanied by the stories' initials (C, NT, JR, and HT, respectively) and will refer to these editions. The order in which the stories will be discussed follows the chronology of their publication.

[8] The fact that *Native Tongue* provided materials for a feminist dictionary and a critical anthology (Cameron ed. 1990: 160-163) evidences its favourable reception in the context of feminist linguistics in the 1980's and early 1990's.

[9] See Cheris Kramarae "Present Problems with the Language of the Future", in *Women's Studies - An Interdisciplinary Journal* 14 (2) 1987: 183-186; Penny Florence "The Liberation of Utopia or Is Science Fiction the Ideal Contemporary Women's Form" in Linda Anderson ed. 1990: 64-83; Lucie Armitt "Your Word Is My Command: The Structures of Language and Power in Women's Science Fiction" in Armitt ed. 1991: 123-138; Sonya Andermahr "The Worlds of Lesbian/Feminist Science Fiction" in Gabriele Griffin ed. 1993: 106-125.

It is not enough merely to challenge surface manifestations (with revisions of words such as 'chairman', 'mastery', 'authoress' and so on, important though such revisions are), but we must also analyse and subvert the deep structural principles of language. (1991: 123)

Elgin's *Native Tongue*, which I will discuss in section III below, has been specially targeted by this type of criticism.[10]

The "not-formally-innovative-and-radical-enough" tendency is extremely problematic in that it reveals a highly prescriptivist way of looking at literary texts and relies on shaky assumptions concerning language, fictions, and ideologies of gender. In fact, these readings imply that for the novels to be effectively oppositional, they must be formally unconventional and subvert "the deep structural principles of language" (understood here in terms of syntax, as opposed to the "surface" lexical manifestations). The two underlying suggestions are, first, that avant-garde fictions are more revolutionary, as if a feminist oppositional element were inherent in the avant-garde or experimental forms; and, consequently, that effective feminist ideologies depend on unconventional narrative structures. Both assumptions are equally difficult to hold as they ultimately lead to the simplistic notion of linguistic and narrative structures as inherently patriarchal and oppressive (or of linguistic innovations and formally complex literary works being inherently feminist).[11]

I have chosen a way of approaching the feminist dystopia that deliberately avoids the trend described above. For this, I will borrow the concept of "verbal hygiene" from sociolinguistics. Developed by feminist linguist Deborah Cameron, the notion of "verbal hygiene" is theorized as a fundamental cultural trace and defined in relation to "practices [...] born of an urge to improve or 'clean up' language", a "general impulse to regulate language, control it, make it 'better'."[12] The concept is applicable to a vast range of linguistic practices. Although not all of these relate to gender power struggles, gender appears as one of the

---

[10] Florence argues that Láadan, the women's language created in that novel, "has no radical structural function" in the text (1990: 82). Andermahr, in turn, criticizes the novel for "fail[ing] adequately to address the relationship between language, ideology and political consciousness" (1993: 123). Armitt objects to it on the grounds that "the political implications of syntactic structures, which Elgin raises on a discursive level, are not concretised within the narrative form". She proceeds: "the deconstruction of language as content is important [...], but perhaps the deconstruction of language as form and structure is more significant" (1991: 135). Kramarae complains that "while the importance of the [women's] language structure and construction is made very clear in the novel, there are two few examples of the specific language" (1987: 185). My own reading below will indirectly respond to these claims.

[11] The untenability of these assumptions has been exposed by feminist critics. For excellent discussions of the problems underlying the direct equation of radical politics with avant-garde literary forms, see Chapter One in Rita Felski 1989 and Pamela Morris 1993: 126. From the perspective of linguistics, see the "Introduction: Why is Language a Feminist Issue" in Cameron ed. 1990: 1-28.

[12] In her *Verbal Hygiene* 1995: 1, 9. From now on, I shall refer to verbal hygiene without quotation marks.

terrains in which verbal hygiene tensions and contestations occur.[13] I will turn now to a more detailed description of the concept and of the advantages of using this paradigm in the present reading.

Verbal hygiene is basic to the use of language in the sense that human beings not only use language, but comment on the language they use, either in order to maintain certain habits or to transform them. It is a general phenomenon in our linguistic behaviour, Cameron argues, and ranges from the ordinary practices of everyday interactions to highly institutionalized forms, with an important critical component in its manifestations:

> Verbal hygiene comes into being whenever people reflect on language in a critical (in the sense of 'evaluative') way. The potential for it is latent in every communicative act, and the impulse behind it pervades our habits of thought and behaviour. (1995: 9)

This pervasive, critical attitude towards language followed by "the urge to improve" it are crucial factors, as they provide the link with the understanding of utopianism favoured in this study. This critical and transformative disposition parallels the basic orientation of the utopian subjectivity, discussed in Chapters Two and Three above.

Cameron's conceptualization of verbal hygiene responds to what has been referred to in linguistic theories as "prescriptivism", usually contextualized in a binary opposition to "descriptivism". She finds it appropriate to coin a new expression because, in its association with unscientific and ideological practices (as opposed to 'objective', 'value-free' description), linguistic prescriptivism has strongly negative connotations. Verbal hygiene, in turn, offers a more flexible perspective: "This impulse takes innumerable forms, not all of which are conservative, authoritarian or (arguably) deplorable" (1995: 9). Indeed, the concept partially results from Cameron's desire, informed by feminist and other critical theories, "to find an alternative way of theorising normative practices."[14] Major implications for my purposes are that this alternative concept allows an increased awareness of the politics underlying linguist practices, and a more nuanced outlook of the dystopic/utopic spectrum.

Making use of verbal hygiene as a starting point to talk about the feminist dystopias is not without problems, as the transfer of a category from one discipline into another (in this case, from sociolinguistics to literary studies) never occurs smoothly. While Cameron talks about verbal hygiene at work 'out there' in the real world, I will be dealing with its representation in narrative.[15] Although this may sound quite obvious, it raises some important

---

[13] Gender-related practices are discussed in Chapters Four and Five of Cameron's *Verbal Hygiene.*
[14] Personal communication.
[15] Although Cameron does refer to literary texts (Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Shaw's *Pygmalion*) in her

issues. Among these is the fact that verbal hygiene portrayed in literature is more removed and mediated when compared to the practices examined by Cameron. A related point which I shall address is that, at times, verbal hygiene acts portrayed in speculative fictions find no 'real life' equivalents, thus being better understood in symbolic, rather than allegorical, terms. Whatever the case, observing the literary manifestations of verbal hygiene offers insights into one of the intersections between linguistics and literature, and enables a consideration of the relationship between speculative fictions and their extra-textuality (i.e., the question of their referents and continuities with the real world 'out there').

Another issue I want to address refers to the belief, evoked by the "hygiene" metaphor, in a state of linguistic purity and cleanliness. This is represented in the dystopias by the regulatory practices, against which a heretic, or blasphemous, strand can be identified (which is in itself, of course, another manifestation of verbal hygiene, also liable to become dogma). Heresy and blasphemy appear to be particularly useful metaphors in this context, as they suggest an opinion contrary to orthodoxy, and profane (ritually *unclean*) utterances, respectively. They are both related to what can be expressed - and what must be repressed - by means of language, and can be linked to the figure of catachresis, the figural 'abuse' of language identified above as fundamental to the genre.[16] Moreover they are charged with utopianism to the extent that they imply a critique of an order, system or situation. Indeed, the utopianism of heretical (religious) movements has had a major role in shaping modern utopian thought (Mannheim 1929, Bloch 1959, Berrini 1997). As we will see, Atwood's and Elgin's texts draw heavily upon the metaphors of heresy and blasphemy in the constructions of feminist utopianisms.

In a discussion of verbal hygiene for women, Cameron mentions George Shaw's *Pygmalion* as exemplary of "one of the great verbal hygiene stories of modern English literature" (1995: 166). I want to suggest that the dystopias could be viewed as the verbal hygiene literary genre *par excellence*, due to the pervasiveness of their representations of verbal hygiene practices (and counter-practices). Within this generic ground, feminist dystopias are verbal hygiene stories in which the gender struggle is at its most perceptible. I will pursue the instances of verbal hygiene at work in the fictions by resorting to three topics

---

theorization of verbal hygiene, she does so, expectedly, in relation to sociolinguistic practices. Newspeak is mentioned in a discussion of Orwell's opinions about politically motivated (ab)uses of language: the relationship between linguistic manipulation and the totalitarian policing of thought (cf. pp. 69-72, and 148-155). *Pygmalion* appropriately opens a chapter about verbal hygiene for women. An excellent commentary on *Verbal Hygiene* from the point of view of sociolinguistics is James Milroy's review published in the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 1 (1) 1997: 127-134. It is followed by a dialogue including Cameron's and Milroy's replies on pp. 163-166.

mentioned by Cameron when discussing the politics of linguistic practices: identity, agency, and authority. Besides occupying a crucial space in contemporary feminist debates, these categories offer suitable entrances for such distinct narratives as Tuttle's, Elgin's, and Atwood's.

II. A Utopia off Language: "The Cure"

> "Who then [...] tells a finer tale than any of us? Silence does. And where does one read a deeper tale than upon the most perfectly printed page of the most precious book? Upon the blank page." (Isak Dinesen, "The Blank Page")[17]

In Lisa Tuttle's "The Cure" verbal hygiene surfaces in an extreme circumstance. The main impulse motivating the characters is not to "improve or 'clean up' language", but to perform a thorough act of verbal hygiene by moving away from verbal language itself.[18] Language features as a limiting, dystopic structure in this story, whose utopian elsewhere is located outside the linguistic realm, a state described as happy and unrestrained: a *utopia off language*.[19] I will address the issue of identity at stake in this short story by examining the depiction of the characters' transgression of expected linguistic behaviour (by rejecting verbal expression), and explore the implications of this form of 'a-linguistic utopianism' for feminist politics. I will also contextualize "The Cure" within a specific tradition of feminist narratives thematizing women's silence, showing that it reveals the feminist tension regarding the utopic and dystopic nature of language, and finally foreground the ineffability of the story's utopian space, a recurrent pattern in the texts studied so far.

Devastating diseases whose effects include the destruction of the victim's capacity for communication (manifested by loss of verbal interaction) feature in two dystopias by Octavia Butler: "Speech Sounds" and "The Evening and the Morning and the Night".[20] Their utopian dimension is manifested in the characters' effort to invent life-saving technologies, and to re-establish and re-invent communicational links in order to foster a renewed feeling of connectedness. In Tuttle's "The Cure" language itself becomes the disease outside which

---

[16] Cf. Chapter One, Section IV.
[17] In S. Gilbert & S. Gubar eds. 1985: 1391-1394.
[18] Cf. quotation on p. 145 above.
[19] With its flight *from* language, "The Cure" illustrates a symbolic figuration of verbal hygiene, as opposed to more specific, allegorical ones. See my commentary in section I, p. 147 above.
[20] In Butler's *Bloodchild and Other Stories* (1995: 87-108 and 33-68, respectively). The author provides interesting afterwords to both stories, and Michelle Green discusses them in "'There Goes the Neighborhood':

alternative inter-subjective links will be fostered. It is the story of two women drawn together by language, who have a stable relationship spanning years, and later find themselves in a state of crisis with the realization that they are perceiving reality in radically different ways. "You are in another world. A world beyond words" (C: 123), states the nameless first-person narrator, referring to the fact that her lover has deliberately chosen to move away from language, to "cure" herself from language as the ambiguous title suggests.

From a point in her present, located in a near future resembling our own present,[21] the narrator recollects the events leading to this decisive day in her life with her partner. She tells us about their first encounter and immediate empathy and friendship, their relationship as lovers, her lover's decision to have a baby, their taking a preventive medical treatment ("the cure"), the unexpected effect of this treatment upon the next generation of human beings (including her lover's boy child), her partner's gradual move into silence (and the narrator's frustrated attempts to obtain medical help), until we reach the climactic moment with which we are left at the end.[22] The story is structured in flash backs interspersed by passages in which the narrator's attention (and ours with hers) is brought back into the fictional present by her lover's 'disruptions', when the latter is viewed through a window or heard working. Towards the end, there is a moment of reunion and (final?) confrontation of worlds. Readers realize then that the narrator is about to undergo a major change herself.

I have identified three levels of meaning for "the cure". First, and most obviously, the title refers to a treatment taken by the women characters "to stimulate and strengthen the body's own defences against microscopic invaders". It works in the prevention of "all the diseases humanity had feared through the ages", and is welcomed as "a miracle, without side-effects" (C: 128). However, "the Cure" does have an unexpected side-effect: it causes the emergence of speechless children, "The Silent Generation" (C: 127), among whom is the narrator's lover's child.

The second possible meaning for "the cure" surfaces with the narrator's partner's understanding that language is itself a virus which has infiltrated among humans, infecting human genes and spreading by human interaction. The story suggests that people's awareness of language as disease triggers the 'second' cure, as happens to this character who realizes that language is "[a] highly successful, adaptable virus", and then triggers her own cure:

Octavia Butler's Demand for Diversity in Utopias", Donawerth and Kolmerten eds. 1994: 166-189.
[21] Some elements in this fictional future are continuous with our perceived reality in terms of the life styles, technology available, and social behaviour (e.g. heterosexuality is still compulsory and the main characters' homosexuality condemned).
[22] This description follows a roughly chronological order for the purpose of clarity (in the story the events are

> You saw it that way when you decided that you were *the crippled one*. When you recognised the cool, golden web of words as *a trap* and *an affliction*. When you used the Cure to turn your own defences against the very thing that made you your self. (C: 134, my emphases)

The passage above makes it clear that this now silent woman deliberately decides to 'cleanse' herself from language, the virus. A similar cure is the narrator's own, suggested in the last paragraphs of the story, as she chooses to follow her partner. This "cure" is left in suspension: "Perhaps I will wake in your arms and be with you at last, without any words between us, *well and happy*. Or perhaps there will be nothing, nothing between us at all" (C: 134, my emphasis). In very few occasions in my experience as a reader of stories had the blank space after the last period of the text had such power. Or the silence been more telling. Although more ambiguous, this ending can be compared to that in Christine Brooke-Rose's *Verbivore* (1990), as the end of the narrative coincides with the characters' entrance into a 'silent' order.[23] While Brooke-Rose's text suggests a *dystopia* off language, "The Cure" is evocative of a desired/able state of well-being. Finally, and relating to what was said above, a third interpretative possibility for "the cure" is engendered by the utopian connotations of the story title itself, which conveys the idea of a better state or condition than those of a bad present.

Now I will explore a bit further the web of language metaphors in "The Cure". Besides the centrality of (the loss of verbal) language for the plot, language-related symbolism is pervasive in the story. In the very first line, we learn that the narrator is a writer presently surrounded by the objects of her craft (books by other writers, her own writings, a typewriter): "I sit here, day by day, turning my life into language" (C: 123). (This line adds to the dramatic effect of the final lines quoted above, as the whole story appears to be a fragment of a diary.) As the narration proceeds, readers find out that her lover also used to be a writer before her transformation. Besides, the main characters' first encounter takes place in a library when they are both still students interested in linguistics. "Words brought us together in the first place" (C: 123), remarks the narrator in the first of a series of references to the crucial role of words to their relationship.[24]

---

not narrated sequentially and, at times, time references are non-existent).

[23] Brooke-Rose's *Verbivore* (1990) is a futuristic dystopia about collapsing communications networks at worldwide scale. It presents a post-modernist take on "wave-pollution" by words with an ominous, 'silent' ending evocative of the information breakdown caused by the phenomenon that titles the novel. John Varley's 1978 "The Persistence of Vision" pictures a very different utopia off language by depicting a community of deaf-mute blind people (in *In the Hall of the Martian Kings* 1978: 263-316).

[24] "Life without words was not life at all. Words were the basis and meaning of our friendship. Words brought us together and kept us close"; "We are composed of words as much as we are of flesh and blood and bone" (C: 124-125, 127).

Also from the beginning of the story, language is associated with confining, dystopic structures, as opposed to the freedom and happiness of the narrator's lover's 'outside' world, evocative of utopian plenitude. Against this silent idyllic background, glimpses of which are scattered throughout the text,[25] the narrator's anxiety grows more and more salient: "Never before had I felt so isolated and estranged" (C: 129). In her study-room, language infects the atmosphere: "the air [...] is murky with words" (C: 123); and writing becomes an "attempt to pin you [her lover] to the page" (C: 123). Language is charged with negative connotations, as expressed in passages like the following, in which the narrator attempts to reach her lover by means of speech:

> You back away from me, frowning, and I gaze at you *through the bars of words* until, finally, they falter and fail, and I fall with relief into silence.
> I'm shaking. I can't even look at you now. What was I saying, what was I trying to say? The words seemed to come out independent of my mind, and the only meaning in them was my desire *to touch you, to catch you, to draw you to me in a net of words*. (C: 132, my emphases)

The lexical choice in this excerpt[26] sums up the essential quality associated with verbal language in "The Cure": its oppressive, "colonising ability" (C: 134). Hence my argument that the utopian element (the good desired/able otherness) in the story is located *off* language. Not unusual in contemporary narratives, this form of utopianism raises intriguing issues for a feminist reading. I will first locate "The Cure" within a broader cultural context and then address the women's construction of the 'silent' alternative identity figured in the story.

This story belongs to a distinct feminist tradition which focuses on the representation of women's cultural silence. Not necessarily represented by speculative fictions, this tradition is characterized by an approach to language as an imperfect, oppressive, or superfluous instrument functioning as a barrier to interpersonal communication and exchange, as well as a hindrance to happiness. Contemporary culture is full of images of women experiencing moments of utopian fulfilment outwith verbal language. These are recurrent in filmic narrative and stage performances (e.g. *Nell*, *The Piano*, and *Children of a Lesser God*).[27] In literature,

---

[25] The scenes featuring the narrator's lover are either evocative of pastoral utopias or show a technology-free home utopia (cf. pp. 123, 125, 131). In indoor scenes centred upon her linguistic 'disability', the buildings themselves (a study, a doctor's surgery) become symbolic of the dystopic linguistic edifice, and she is always depicted gazing outside (cf. pp. 126, 132, 134).

[26] Cf. also the longer quotation from C: 134, on p.150 above.

[27] From the perspective of the women protagonists, who are afflicted by distinct linguistic handicaps, language surfaces as a barrier, rather than a mediation, for communication in these texts. In *Nell* (US 1994, dir. Michael Apted), the protagonist develops an idioglossia caused by contact with an aphasic mother and a twin sister who died as a child, the only human beings in her social universe up until her 'discovery' by 'civilization'. Mark Medoff's *Children of a Lesser God* (1980) is about a deaf woman's resistance to acquiring spoken language. Similarly to *Nell*, in *The Piano* functional, rather than organic, causes explain the protagonist's speech

one thinks of allegorical texts, like Isak Dinesen's "The Blank Page" (1957), as well as more recent futuristic fictions, where language is often experienced "as a block to communication, expression, pleasure" (Florence 1990: 73). Indeed, an easily identifiable trend in feminist speculative fictions explores the possibilities of non-verbal modes of communication and interaction,[28] and while "The Cure" clearly integrates this generic trend, it also appears to be close to the parable of "The Blank Page" in its formal elaborations and thematic exploration of the trope of the blank page.[29]

In a passage mentioned above, we saw that the silent protagonist "turn[ed] [her] own defences against the very thing that made [her her] self" (C: 134). This "thing" is language. Here the narrative hints at a point on which I will focus: the relationship between language and identity. By identity I understand an individual's sense of self and of belonging to (and helping shape) social groups representing gender, sexual preference, class, race, and other particular categories. Discussing the importance of the issue of identity in the process of verbal hygiene, Cameron explains that in earlier sociolinguistic accounts "it is implicitly assumed that the relevant categories and identities exist prior to language, and are simply 'marked' or 'reflected' when people come to use it". The interface with recent critical theories generates a shift in perspective: "The critical account suggests language is one of the things that *constitutes* my identity as a particular kind of subject" (1995: 15-16, emphasis in the original). Cameron takes her cue from feminist philosopher Judith Butler's theory of the performative character of gender identity, and brings it to bear on the realm of linguistic behaviour. The question posed by "The Cure" is: what form(s) of (alternative) identity does a female subject who moves away from language, understood as one of the elements which constructs her identity, offer? I will elaborate on tentative answers in the remaining paragraphs of this section.

---

impairment (Australia/New Zealand 1993, dir. Jane Campion). Significantly, in two of these texts the 'speechless' female character is antagonized by a man in a paternal/professorial role, allowing readings as rewritings of *Pygmalion*. The films specially highlight the utopian quality of the 'speechless' scenes. So did the stage performance of *Children* at the Old Fruitmarket in Glasgow, September 1998 (dir. Theodor-Cristian Popescu).

[28] For a brief discussion, see A. Wiemar's "Foreign L(anguish), Mother Tongue: Concepts of Language in Contemporary Feminist Science Fiction", *Women's Studies - An Interdisciplinary Journal* 14 (2) 1987: 170-171.

[29] Formal similarities are the narration made by a storyteller/writer who is also a character and who constructs us, readers, as 'second-degree' narratees; the experience of a woman character whose story remains a 'blank' in the narrated discourse; the interpretative possibilities offered by the textual gaps (the blank canvas in "The Blank Page" and the space of experience beyond verbal language in "The Cure"). I will return to the trope of the "mysterious promise of [the] blank page" below (Susan Gubar 1982 "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity" in Elaine Showalter ed. 1985: 292-313, p. 296).

"The Cure" elicits two responses, each with different implications for a feminist perspective and politics. The work of Julia Kristeva offers an interesting interpretative key to the short story. Her psychoanalytical theorization of a subject's entrance into the symbolic contract (enacted by an individual's separation from the maternal semiotic, pre-linguistic chora, as well as his/her acquisition of language and engagement with the Oedipal role) places women in the 'privileged' position of retaining a special relationship with the pre-Oedipal chora. According to this theory, a woman's subjectivity is more unstable due to her (bodily) proximity to the chora, whose irruptions endanger the stability of the law of the Father. The latter's main manifestation, it should be remembered, is linguistic. Kristeva conceptualizes the semiotic chora as that disposition in language which breaches the stability of monolithic signification systems, which, in turn, crucially support the symbolic contract. The semiotic irruptions/disruptions pose the 'danger' of heterogeneousness and are manifested in "poetic language".[30] Although Kristeva's theory has been the target of feminist critics who see in it a way of confining women to an unfavourable position in their relationship to systems of signification, it can still inspire utopian readings. In Chapter Three above, discussing Bloch's and Kristeva's appropriations of psychoanalysis, I mentioned their difference in terms of privileging a distinctive disposition in literary language (Bloch's "anticipatory consciousness", Kristeva's "semiotic") which may either refer to that which "does not yet refer", or to that which "no longer refers".[31] My responses to the "The Cure" can be aligned with each of these two dispositions, allowing the perception of drastically different forms of utopian consciousness: one regressive and nostalgic, the other anticipatory.

The retreat into the a-linguistic realm envisioned in "The Cure" provides an interesting metaphorical figuration of Kristeva's theory of women's special relationship with the semiotic chora, and uneasy relationship with the symbolic order of language. Many elements in the story support this reading, most obviously one character's very act of withdrawal into a wordless world, evocative of a child's pre-Oedipal relationship with her mother. To a similar effect are syntactic and metaphorical associations between this woman and animals (the latter naturally outside the linguistic contract).[32] Also relevant is the fact that

---

[30] This simplified version of Kristeva's theory of subject and identity formation will suffice at this point. Her theoretical elaborations on the topic can be found in "The Ethics of Linguistics" (1974) and "From One Identity to Another" (1975), both collected in *Desire in Language* (1980), and in "Women's Time" (1979), reprinted in *The Kristeva Reader* (1986). Leon S. Roudiez's and Toril Moi's introductions to these collections are illuminating. Cf. also my discussion of this theory vis-à-vis Bloch's utopianism, pp. 58 and 59.
[31] Cf. p. 59 above.
[32] The pronoun "you", appearing twice on the third line of the story's second paragraph, may also refer to a mare (C: 123); and this character's description includes an allusion to her "dog-brown, horse-brown eyes" (C: 125).

this woman character is the one who mothers a "silent" child, and her 'pre-linguistic' relationship with this child motivates her retreat. We follow the disintegration of her identity as a middle-class lesbian writer, lover, and mother of a child, into a subject position which is very literally outside the contract and the symbolic order. Significantly, the anxious first-person narration is disrupted by (semiotic?) glimpses of the other woman's silent happiness. As remarked above, the story culminates with the suggestion that the narrator will follow a similar impulse and trespass from a relatively stable identity into the wordless, meaningless space of female *jouissance*, or bliss,[33] a territory occupied by women, children, and animals. Being located outside language, the character's identity is transformed into a non-identity, to the extent that a retreat from language implies a retreat from subjectivity itself. In this perspective, the short story suggests that women's subjectivity is marked by difference in their relationship to the symbolic contract, to language and meaning, and, consequently, to power; and can only be 'asserted' outside that order. This feminist elsewhere is problematic though because of its simplistic equation of language (and the contract it represents) with dystopic structures and masculine values[34] and because of the political paralysis implicit in this form of compensatory utopian space.[35]

Another interpretative possibility is premised upon an understanding of the interplay between the "semiotic" and the "symbolic" in "The Cure" in its anticipatory quality. Thus envisioned, the story metaphorizes the search for renewed, radically transformed identities, a search which avoids approaching language as its central constitutive element. Total verbal hygiene metaphorically liberates the self from the constraints of an identity defined (and fixed) solely by language, while serving as a critique of the language-centredness which characterizes contemporary theorizations of identity. Significantly, three populations with distinct relationships to language coexist by the end of the story: those who retain speech, the 'pre-linguistic' "silent generation", and at least one 'post-linguistic' subject. This variety requires that other - so far non-existent - forms of human interface be shaped. In this sense, the story points towards renewed ways of (re)defining identity and of exploring other forms of interpersonal contacts. Instead of the escape from identity, the story thus understood portrays subjectivities in process of transformation. In terms of feminist politics, this response to "The

---

[33] If we favour Richard Miller's 1975 translation of the term used by Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973).
[34] Cf. p.145 in the introduction to this chapter for a critique of this equation.
[35] Actually, a Kristevan reading of this text along these lines could be interrogated on the ground that the "semiotic" is not literally 'silent', but 'agrammatical'. This argument can be countered if one views, as I am proposing, the character's silence as representative of an 'otherness' in relation to the social contract supported by language which destabilizes the 'presence' of language materialized in the first person narrative, thus generating textual ellisions and gaps.

Cure" not only proves to be more liberating (as it enables an approach to the textual silences as imbued with meaning, especially when this silence is seen as a form of resistance),[36] but it also opens up possibilities of envisioning realities that are not yet existent. In this sense, it is on a par with the theorization of a feminist elsewhere in its most radical potentiality.

Whatever the reading favoured, utopia in the story remains ineffable. The paradox of utopia surfaces in the trope of the blank page, the textual silence upon which the story is constructed. The whole text consists in a whirlpool of words revolving around a blank (utopian) centre, evocative of interpretative possibilities. Also, both ways of reading allow an understanding of the tension between the story's "semiotic" and its "symbolic" as a dramatization of the struggle within feminism between silence and speech, language as (dystopic) foreclosure and as (utopic) possibility. Similarly to Dinesen's "The Blank Page", in "The Cure" one woman's transgressive silence is framed by another woman's narration. (The problematization of the narration is crucial to this 'blank-centre effect'.) And perhaps the greatest irony that brings these texts together lies in the fact that the 'silent' story is actually *told*, i.e., language renders the silence possible. Thus, language itself is, in the last analysis, invested with a utopian function. This form of paradoxical silence is, in both texts, heavily charged with connotations of transgression and of utopia hungered for by the characters and by us, the ultimate narratees of the stories. In her analysis of "The Blank Page", Susan Gubar remarks that "the blank sheet may mean any number of alternative scripts for women" (1982: 305). It is the utopian promise of "alternative scripts" that Lisa Tuttle's short story also keeps in suspension.

III. The Utopia of a Women's Language: *Native Tongue* and *The Judas Rose*

> No one lives in this room
> without confronting the whiteness of the wall
> behind the poems, planks of books,
> photographs of dead heroines.
> Without contemplating last and late
> The true nature of poetry. The drive
> to connect. The dream of a common language.
> (Adrienne Rich, "Origins and History of
> Consciousness")[37]

---

[36] On silence as resistance, see Susan Gal 1995, who challenges the current notion that women's silence is a marker of passivity and powerlessness: "Silence [...] gains different meanings and has different effects within specific institutional and cultural contexts, and within different linguistic ideologies" (in Hall & Bucholtz 1995 eds: 169-182, p. 172).

[37] In *The Dream of a Common Language - Poems 1974-1977* (New York: Norton, 1978: 7).

Among the futuristic feminist dystopias I have chosen to examine, Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* (1984) and *The Judas Rose* (1987)[38] are the most 'science fictional'. This is mainly because their narrative novum, in Suvin's sense of the term,[39] is manifested by the projection of a highly technological twenty-third century planet Earth thriving with human-alien contacts and negotiations. They share with the others the portrayal of a dystopic male order, a feminist "bad place", against which the dream of a good otherness exists. Like "The Cure" and *The Handmaid's Tale*, the other texts examined in this chapter, Elgin's novels show a central concern with gender and verbal hygiene practices in their dystopic and utopic possibilities.

The dystopic future revealed in both novels relies heavily on linguistic restrictions and control. Language features as a key metaphor, having a crucial role in the two major plot lines uniting them. One relates to the monopoly of all negotiations with aliens held by the Lines, or families of linguists, whose specialized skills in alien languages guarantee their survival. Because the linguists' role as translators is essential for the inter-galactic trade, their existence is tolerated and a degree of public courtesy maintained in an otherwise prejudiced environment. The linguists, referred to by the non-linguists pejoratively as Lingoes, comprise thirteen families scattered throughout the planet and living in separate communal households as a defense measure. Each family is under the leadership of a male linguist, who rules, together with the other men of the Lines, over women and children, imposing inhuman learning and working hours to maximize production.[40] The novels present the tensions between the linguists and the government, the former willing to maintain their precarious hold on power while the latter attempt, at times by means of atrocious secret experiments involving the death of human babies and aliens, to develop the language acquisition technologies necessary to carry out negotiations without the mediation of the Lines.

Of greater importance for us in this context, the second major plot line concerns gender polarization and power struggles. The epigraph to first chapter of *Native Tongue*, which 'quotes' from a 1991 amendment to the U.S. Constitution, explains how women became deprived of autonomous citizenship, having lost the right to vote and been declared

---

[38] The Native Tongue Series includes a third feminist dystopia, *Earthsong - Native Tongue III*. Because its focus shifts away from the linguistic concerns I have been discussing, this sequel will not be considered in detail here.

[39] Cf. p. 40 above.

[40] Elgin seems to have drawn upon the historical experience of the Jewish people in the representation of the linguists. Indeed, some parallels can be traced, including historical persecution, discrimination, ghettoization, organization in patriarchal lines/tribes, and even the stereotyped belief about their relationship with money. However, in spite of the similarities, linguists and Jews are portrayed as non-identical in the futuristic world of the novels, as the former have a Christian faith and the latter still retain a separate identity. Cf. JR: 65. I wish to

legal minors.[41] Significantly, the subordination of half of the population is formalized by means of writing, i.e. the official document. When the narrative starts, in the Summer of 2205, institutionalized sexual stratification (the legal subjection of women by linguists and non-linguists alike) has existed for over two hundred years. Although sexual oppression is extended to all women, the women of the Lines bear a heavier burden. "Owing to the demand for linguist babies, these women are part linguisticians, doing invaluable government work, and part breeding machines" (Andermahr 1993: 123). Initially from the perspective of the women linguists under a U.S. Line, and then spreading to women outside the Lines, the novels show the development of an all-female resistance movement brought into effect by a radical act of verbal hygiene: the creation of a women's language.

In his *Aliens and Linguistics*, discussing restrictive linguistic practices in literary dystopias, Walter Meyers states that "the dystopian government has a second task [in addition to linguistic manipulation]: it must not only enslave words, but also prevent *the natural forces of language* from freeing them" (1980: 200, my emphasis). Underlying his remark is a notion of language as a natural entity subject to spontaneous changes, a view still pervasive in certain contexts (Cameron 1995). Centring upon women's intervention in language making, Elgin's novels foreground the role of politically motivated human (in this case, female) agency in linguistic change. Thus, they help to demystify certain assumptions about linguistic change, like the one expressed by Meyer. Again drawing upon Cameron's theorization of verbal hygiene, I will consider the issue of human agency in the meta-linguistic practices rendered in the novels, observing the extent and effectiveness of such practices. I will argue that verbal hygiene is a major concern in these two texts, and that the women's engagement in linguistic construction constitutes a powerful metaphor for the human agency, effort and organization essential for feminist language politics located in the 'real' world. My reading will cast some light upon cultural myths re-utilized by Elgin, namely the human dream of a common language; and, following the pattern initiated in previous chapters, will also touch the paradox of an 'absent' utopia as it surfaces in Elgin's novels.

The heterotopic sites of women's agency

Both Láadan novels feature all-female heterotopic spaces where the women engage in language-making. In *Native Tongue* the ironically named Barren Houses are one such space.

thank Deborah Cameron for suggesting the analogy.
[41] In the two novels, all chapters are introduced by epigraphs of pseudo-documentary type, taken from a number of written and spoken 'sources' (the discourse of the law, instructional materials, personal diaries, the media, public speeches, literary texts, scientific treatises and religious rituals). They also feature editorial prefaces, an appendix (in *Native Tongue*) and an epilogue (in *The Judas Rose*). A discussion of the structural function of

A creation of male linguists, they are separate residences for the women who no longer fulfil the much valued reproductive function.[42] Concerning the term, the head of the Chornyak Household (and of all the others), Thomas Blair Chornyak, explains:

> "if it was to do over again we wouldn't call the place Barren House. That seems cruel, and in the worst of taste, looking at it now. But when the place was first built, it was taken for granted that that was just a kind of working title, and that a new name would be chosen quickly - it just never happened, and I don't know why. It's a tradition now... and I'm certain that the women who *are* barren no longer make any connection between their condition and the name. It's just a name." (NT: 121, emphasis in the original)

In a highly self-reflexive text, Chornyak's final remark strikes a chord. "Barren House" is *not* "just a name". Ironically, precisely in this space, the women construct a compensatory haven for the 'barrenness' of life among men. Here they "keep their secrets", which include the evidence of (and of their resistance to) verbal hygiene practices: forbidden books and archives from the time before change and "the secret language files" (NT: 123-124).

In such space, women's creative linguistic action starts. "It is difficult to imagine a more triumphant assertion of agency than a proposal to invent a new language," affirms Cameron, referring to non-fictional artificial languages (1995: 18). *Native Tongue* renders a fictional version of such proposal. Although readers learn about the women's language project as we follow the dramatic events in the life of Nazareth Chornyak, starting with an early, arranged marriage and culminating with a premature 'retirement' to the Barren House, the women's project dates from generations back. It involves the construction of "a language [...] by women in order to express the perceptions of women" (JR: 182). Láadan, as this language is named, is grounded on the premise that the existing human languages are androcentric and inadequate for this purpose. Details about Láadan are scattered throughout the texts,[43] and while *Native Tongue* shows its secret development and the beginnings of its adoption among the women of the Lines, in *The Judas Rose* the language reaches the non-linguist women.

Of central importance to Láadan is the Encodings Project, which involves formulating and naming semantic concepts. An Encoding, with capital 'E' to distinguish it from ordinary lexical encodings, is

> the making of a name for a chunk of the world that so far as we know has never been chosen for naming before in any human language, and that has not just suddenly been made or found or dumped upon your culture. We mean naming a

---

these materials in terms of enhancing self-referentiality is found in Bray 1986.
[42] 'Barren Houses' are later replaced by 'Womanhouses', for *all* linguist women. Cf. NT, Chapter Twenty-Four.
[43] We learn, for instance, that Láadan is not 'English-centred' and its phonetic system comprises eighteen sounds (NT: 160). Concerning its morphology, there are two types of Encodings, major and minor (NT: 158); and "[t]he pronouns of the language are not marked for sexual gender"(JR: 214). More on the Encodings below.

chunk that has been around a long time but has never before impressed anyone as sufficiently important to *deserve* its own name. (NT: 22, emphasis in the original)

A prodigy in linguistic abilities, Nazareth Chornyak has been producing a number of Encodings since she was a child, hence unaware of their relevance for the linguist women's project. They are collected by the latter and codified into Láadan.

Although the novel partially mystifies the women's linguistic activity with the portrayal of an exceptionally gifted child, the Encodings succeed as a metaphor for one form of feminist linguistic resistance and intervention. Coining neologisms to express culturally 'absent' concepts is among the feminists' responses to a language which encodes male world views. It is a way of inscribing women's experiences and perceptions in language and culture, thus helping to shape what counts as reality.[44] Metonymic of the Láadan Project, Encodings are a fictionalized version of this phenomenon. And while the use of 'women-friendly' neologisms in feminist speculative fictions, specially in the eutopian mode,[45] has been recurrent, Elgin's texts differ importantly: rather than showing the 'finished' linguistic results, they render the process of language-making visible and foreground the human (in this case, female) factor underlying linguistic change.

The Judas Rose shows Láadan crossing the limits of the Barren Houses, reaching the non-linguist women and meeting male contestation. This begins with the strategic use of Láadan translations in the linguist women's "Devotionals", religious gatherings of Protestant orientation held in the Lines' households. Interested in Láadan, a non-linguist nurse starts these gatherings in hospital chapels with the approval and support of the linguist women. (More will be said about the women's response to the new language below.) Láadan then leaves its ghetto before attracting the attention of Catholic priests who see in its growing popularity among non-linguist women a way to boost religious faith. This triggers more layers of verbal hygiene practices, and the construction of a space of female resistance. The women's heterotopic site is, not surprisingly, the catholic Convent of St. Gertrude of the Lambs, since in that future society "[a] convent was one of the very few alternatives that a woman [...] had to a life of unrelenting silliness" (JR: 244-245). This space mirrors the Barren Houses of *Native Tongue* in a number of ways, the most obvious being that both are all-female spaces

---

[44] Mapping this strand of feminist linguistics is beyond the scope of this study. Theoretical discussions are found in Cameron's "Introduction: Why is Language a Feminist Issue?" (1990, cf. pp. 12-20) and Ehrlich & King 1994. A brief commentary is contained in Doyle (1995, cf. pp. 41-42). Collections containing the lexical items include Kramarae & Treichler (1985 [1992]), and Daly & Caputi (1987). A different take on feminist lexicography is Elgin's own compilation of *A First Dictionary of Láadan* (Huntsville, Arkansas: The Láadan Group, 1983), which is not available in UK libraries.

for the women outside the reproductive 'market'. Like the latter, it also allows the freedom from the male-dominant order necessary for the accomplishment of subversive verbal hygiene.

Actually, a double move of verbal hygiene is observed. First, the Catholic priests assemble a "holy task force" of nuns, under the leadership of Sister Miriam Rose, who are initially to infiltrate the gatherings and find out about the Láadan texts. In them, the fathers suspect, "there may be heresy" (JR: 182) of feminist religion. The nuns are instructed to "stamp out the heresy" and harness the women's religious feelings into "devotion to the Virgin Mary" (JR: 184). The fathers' strategic reaction aims to "stifle [the] heresy" by means of an act of verbal hygiene involving "a systematic modification of the language of the heretical texts" (JR: 214, 216). The strongly regulatory impulse is marked by the recurrent metaphor of a heresy that must be purified before the women's language can be appropriated.[46] Thus, the 'hygiene' metaphor is particularly apt for my reading: the nuns are expected to render the Láadan text "free of [...] the routine blemishes of feminism" (JR: 241); care must be taken to avoid "the chance of [their own] contamination" (JR: 220); and the whole process is referred to as "laundering your [the linguist women's] heresies" (JR: 351), whose expected result would be "the sanitized word" (JR: 348). Textual pollution ("heresy", "blemish" and "contamination") is to be replaced, in the ironic words of a linguist, by "squeaky-Catholic-clean" translations (JR: 348).

The fathers' hygienic impulse generates a contrary effect: instead of the action to curb Láadan, the sisters greatly contribute to its spreading by producing copies of the translations they were expected to "clean up". Sister Rose "was actually in charge of a secret rebellion inside the convents", "recruiting nuns - who recruited nuns, who recruited nuns - to make handwritten copies of [the] heresies and distribute them in secret from one end of the world to the other" (JR: 351). For years they work "to *preserve* the heresy" (JR: 337). And, in order to keep this subversive action under cover, they also produce poor revisions of Láadan to be regularly presented to their male superiors.

The two 'heterotopic islets' described above, the Barren Houses and the convent, represent to the women compensatory freedom from a male-dominated environment. In these all-female retreats, they appear as linguistic agents, able to resist male-control by engaging in the verbal hygiene practices of constructing an alternative language and assuring its

---

[45] E.g. Marge Piercy's *Woman On the Edge of Time* (1976) and Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979).
[46] The words "heresy" and "blasphemy" occur repeatedly in the text. Cf. JR: 182, 183, 208, 214, 216, 337, 343, 351.

expansion. Such marginal "utopian enclaves", to borrow Tom Moylan's term,[47] repeat a pattern already observed in the analyses of Piercy's, Charnas's and, in a much smaller scale, Tuttle's texts contained above. In Elgin's novels, the women's community is marked by linguistic activity. Textual clues hint at the utopian quality of these spaces, as, for instance, in the description of characters' feelings on occasion of their retirement to the Barren Houses. In her turn, Nazareth "realized that she was like someone who goes home at last after a lifetime of exile", and that she was experiencing "[a] kind of freedom" in contrast to the alienation of life in the main linguists' quarters or publicly as a translator (NT: 243). The place is also alluded to as "Paradise On Earth" in a discussion about symbolically renaming it from the perspective of women (JR: 119). I showed above that the convent presents the bracketed space of female heresy. Metaphors usually associated with utopia ("home", "paradise", "freedom", "heresy"), combine to shape the female retreats as the sites of active resistance. Uniting these threads is the women's dream of a common language, which I will discuss in more detail below.

The dream of a women's language revisited

The Láadan novels provide a radical feminist re-elaboration of the ancient myth of a common language. According to it, human beings once had a common language, which enabled transparent communication among all peoples. This language is now lost, but remains the object of much utopian dreaming, many cultural manifestations and concrete enterprises. Second-wave feminism has produced its counter-myth with the dream of a common language for women.[48] The dangers underlying this feminist appropriation have been pointed out in feminist postmodernist and poststructuralist theories, among which is the trend known as cyborg politics. In her famous cyborg manifesto, Donna Haraway is adamant in her critique: "The feminist dream of a common language, like all dreams for a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience, is a totalizing and imperialist one" (1985: 173).[49] In this perspective, Elgin's "heresy" can be aligned with the reactionary orthodoxy it aims to resist. Discussing the topic, Deborah Cameron offers a critique of what constitutes, in her opinion, Haraway's own orthodox position: "The dream of a common language is impossible;

[47] Cf. Moylan's "Global Economy, Local Texts: Utopian/Dystopian Tension in William Gibson's Cyberpunk Trilogy" (1995).
[48] This myth is examined by Michel Foucault (1966: 36-37, 117) and, in its cultural pervasiveness and European manifestations, by Umberto Eco (1993). The tradition within second wave feminism of the "the dream of a common language" is discussed by Deborah Cameron (1992). She identifies two 'versions' of the dream: one characterized by a return to lost origins, or to a lost paradise, especially noticeable in the works of French feminists; and the tendency in North-American radical feminisms which advocates the transformation of the language inherited by women. Elgin's texts are clearly aligned with the latter.
[49] "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century",

but if we are to have a politics of affinity in difference, the drive to connect is indispensable" (1992: 10). She is alluding to Adrienne Rich's poem advocating the feminist "dream of a common language", a major text of radical feminism.[50] While my reading of the novels is informed by the postmodernist suspicion of the dream of a common language, it also hopes to stress the importance of women's "drive to connect" made manifest in the metaphor of collaborative language construction.

Elgin's vision of linguistic communities is to some extent idealized in that it provides a simplistic picture of all women working for the common goal of the construction of a language that "will be *for* all women" (NT: 216, emphasis in the original), and of the smooth spreading of Láadan among them. Although they represent different cultural backgrounds, virtually no dissent exists among the women with regard to Láadan, which brings about closeness and provokes an almost magical reaction from linguist and non-linguist women alike.[51] Such a unifying fictional picture parallels that of the cultural phenomenon of "linguistic utopias", identified by Mary Pratt. She uses the term to describe the discursive representation of linguistic communities as too homogeneous and simplistic, obscuring difference, 'noise' and distortion (heterogeneity of any sort). Examining the discourse of linguistics, Pratt is critical of "a linguistics of community whose view of language is anchored in a normative vision of a unified and homogeneous social world" (1987: 64).[52] Thus considered, the novels are problematic for a feminist reading because, similarly to the phenomenon observed by Pratt, they obscure differences among women (and among men) revealing, as they construct their utopia of language, what Haraway would define as a "totalizing" face. Informed by recent feminist self-criticism, *Earthsong - Native Tongue III* (1994) revises the ironing out of difference in the first two novels.[53]

In spite of what was said above, the novels still offer interesting insights in terms of feminist utopianism. First, the emphasis placed on "the drive to connect" is crucial for feminist politics. So, if on one hand the novels 'fail' for not rendering differences among women, on the other they succeed in portraying women's groups (linguists, non-linguist lay

---

reprinted in Haraway 1991: 149-181.
[50] See excerpt opening this chapter section.
[51] Jo-Bethany, a non-linguist nurse in the Chornyak household, "loves the sound of it ... it eases [her], somehow". Láadan is "soothing", making "the tension inside her melt away" (JR: 123-124). Non-linguist women at the "Devotionals" soon get 'enchanted' by it. And, apparently, so do the Catholic nuns. Actually, women's actions to protect Láadan include extreme self-sacrifice and murder. Cf. NT: 131-135, 281-283.
[52] "Linguistic Utopias", in Nigel Fabb et al. eds. 1987: 48-66.
[53] Cf. p. 74: "They [the women of the Lines] had been so sure that women outside the Lines would welcome Láadan, would welcome a language constructed specifically to express the perceptions of women, once they knew it existed and had ways to learn it. They had been so certain that it would be the same blessing for other women that it had been for the linguist women. And they had been so wrong in those certainties."

women, Catholic nuns) establishing connections which, based on the experience of shared oppression, enable political activity in an androcentric culture. To borrow Cameron's phrase, "a politics of affinity" is clearly in the agenda here, and the dream of Láadan plays a key role in promoting this sense of a collective self, whose importance is foregrounded even in Haraway's sceptical elaboration of feminist postmodern selves.[54]

Secondly, the novels are relevant for feminist thought because they show women's linguistic agency at the crossroads of gender and power. Thus, they contribute to raise the readers' awareness of the role played by language in the construction of our sense of reality, of the non-neutrality of linguistic rules and conventions, and of the gender struggles at stake in them. Elgin's fictionalization of verbal hygiene also casts light on the extent and efficacy of this cultural phenomenon. The fictional reality of women's oppression has not changed as the main narrative span (comprising the two novels) comes to a close, which significantly indicates that the extent of women's agency, and of the transformative power of verbal hygiene, is limited.[55] Although, at one point, the text overtly draws a parallel between "language" and "magic" to the extent that both "make something 'appear'" (NT: 242), readers find no such "magic" when it comes to the transformation of the women's reality by means of their linguistic intervention. It can be argued that the narrative plot itself undoes any overstatement, or idealized visions, concerning the instrumental role of verbal hygiene in social change. In my view, Native Tongue and The Judas Rose appear to be more relevant for feminist thought because they present an allegory of women's engaging in the process of politically motivated linguistic activity, rather than by rendering a successful verbal hygiene story, which the novels clearly do not do.[56] The fact that the process, not the effect, of women's linguistic agency is emphasized in the novels has two important implications: it gives a more realistic picture of the intricacies of verbal hygiene practices and keeps the promise, contained in the Láadan Project, of a radical feminist elsewhere suspended.

---

[54] Community-related metaphors used by Haraway in her manifesto include: "affinity", "coalition", "a picture of possible unity", "women in the integrated circuit", "networking", "partial connection" (1985: 148, 155, 161, 165, 170, 181). The notion of "a politics of affinity" may indeed evoke nostalgia for an initial moment of second-wave feminism which relied heavily (and naïvely) on the metaphor of "sisterhood". On the other hand, the idea of a sense of community has increasingly regained currency in the feminisms of the 1990's, as one finds it voiced by thinkers who, like Haraway and Cameron, are informed by poststructuralist theorizing and therefore aware of the problematics implicit in the idea of "sisterhood". Cf., for instance, Rosi Braidotti's definition of the feminist subject (1991: 171) and Kate Soper's discussion of the gap existing between feminist theory and feminist politics, which "has always implied a banding together, a movement based on the solidarity and sisterhood of women" ("Feminism, Humanism, Postmodernism" 1990, in Kemp & Squires eds. 1997: 289, my emphasis).

[55] The 'editorial prefaces' of both novels, written at a time in the future of the novels' future, give evidence that "the situation of women is different" (JR: 8), but no clues about how the improvement happened or about the role of Láadan in it.

163

Thirdly, rather than a *literal* interpretation of the Láadan project as a representation of empirical women's search for "a perfectly true language, of perfectly faithful naming of experience", I want to propose that its meaning is *symbolic*. The literal interpretation leads us to the implausible picture a group of 'real' women getting together and actually working on a common language, an image which is untenable (as we have learned from feminist poststructuralist theorizings) and utopian in the derogative sense of the term. Symbolically, Láadan can be understood as a metaphor for a feminist elsewhere, for that good otherness representing the object of women's desire, which serves as a source of inspiration for transformative action and without which feminism loses its *raison d'être*. According to this view, the women's dream of Láadan as a common language remains in the utopian horizon of feminism not because it offers any sort of blueprint, but because it constitutes a manifestation of the Blochian "Not-yet", which is essential for all political projects. I will further this argument in the discussion about the textual 'absence' of Láadan below.

Láadan under cover, or the paradox of an 'absent' utopia of language

Despite its key role in narrative motivation, Láadan is seldom 'seen'. Significantly, the women's language is carefully hidden from the male characters, as well as from us, readers. This is, in my opinion, one of the more interesting aspects of the two novels, and also one which has greatly annoyed Elgin's feminist critics, who want to learn the narrative linguistic "secret" in order to understand its radical function and meaning.[57] I want to explore the textual 'absence' of Láadan and argue that this gap has a function and meaning in itself which closely relates to the construction of the narrative's utopia by presenting an emblem for the novels' anticipatory consciousness.

Commentators of fictional languages in narrative have stressed their usually brief appearances.[58] Regarding Elgin's novels, David Sisk observes that "Láadan is conspicuously absent", and qualifies the brief display of the women's language as "token appearances" (Sisk 1997: 162). It is indeed striking that, in over six hundred pages, the Láadan appearances should be limited to a few words and three full sentences.[59] Readers get to know *about* the women's language (some formal details, its origins, aims, and mythologies), but the access to

---

[56] More on the 'failure' of verbal hygiene in the literary dystopias below. Cf. p. 172.

[57] Cf. note 10 above.

[58] As opposed to the few literary texts actually written in the fictional language, an example of which is Russell Hoban's reformed, futuristic English of *Riddley Walker* (1980). Eco (1993: 3) and Sisk (1997: 161-2) remark on the brief figurations of fictional languages. Barnes (1971, Chapter Two) gives a very good account of the growth of linguistic 'realism' in fiction.

[59] Cf. NT: 267 and JR: 74, 134, 209, 301. *Native Tongue* features an appendix containing a sampler from Láadan vocabulary (pp. 302-304, reprinted in Cameron 1990: 161-163).

the language itself is extremely scarce. While the 'absence' of Láadan repeats a fictional convention, it also functions as a motivational element and as a carrier of utopian meaning.

The 'absence' of Láadan can be observed in its relation to the women's linguistic conspiracy. At her arrival in the Barren Houses, as Nazareth learns about the women's construction of an artificial language, she also learns about the need to hide it, quite literally, in the women's quarters: "[Nazareth] followed them, laughing again as [the linguist women] pulled the scraps of paper from the backs of drawers and the middles of recipe files and other assorted nooks and crannies" (NT: 244). (Láadan is also 'hidden' in the sense that it has been memorized by the linguist women.) Having an analogous function to those "nooks and crannies", physical spaces actually concealing the language files, is Langlish, another artificial language in which Láadan is wrapped up. "Langlish, with its endless growing list of phonemes and the constant changes in its syntax, all the nonsensical phenomena, was only a charade. A decoy to keep the men from discovering the real language" (NT: 160), "a dummy inside which Láadan could be hidden" (JR: 171). Displayed as the 'public version' of the women's project and tolerated by the men as a whim or hobby, Langlish offers the women the excuse for their meetings and the subject for the storytelling and mythologies passed on to little girls in preparation for their later knowledge of Láadan. Another contrivance with a similar hiding purpose is plotted by the sisters in *The Judas Rose*, who produce poor revisions of Láadan to serve as a protection for the translations they are actually copying and distributing.

It is significant that the spatial metaphors of "nooks and crannies", evocative of enclosed spaces and narrow openings (chinks, cracks, crevices) where Láadan is sheltered, have analogous manifestations of linguistic nature: a cover language and textual fragments. I suggested above that the women's language is better understood symbolically, as a metaphor for the radical 'vision' of a feminist elsewhere. I want to reinforce this idea by stressing the point that the elaborate metafictionality of the novels helps to construct their utopian meaning. On one level, *Native Tongue* and *The Judas Rose* are about layers of language covering the women's language, which is, in turn, symbolic of an alternative "good place" for women. On another, the novels themselves constitute a layer of language which, by 'covering' the utopian "good place", preserves it as "no place". Utopia thus 'surfaces' as the motor and enigma of feminist dystopian narrative, its desire machine.

Centred upon the narrative gap, this way of reading Elgin's texts relates the non-articulation of the women's "good place" to the radical notion of a feminist elsewhere as that which is, like Bloch's "Not-Yet", absolutely new, and therefore ineffable. Another way of understanding the feminist elsewhere is represented by the female subject's contradictory

position in face of a male-dominant order. Elgin herself is well aware of, and fascinated by this paradox in terms of women's relationship to language.[60] This is clearly reflected in her fictions, which offer interesting insights concerning the elsewhere in the sense of women being positioned within, while at the same time working against, a male-dominant order. Elgin's novels remind us that it is in the context of the very oppressive social structures, represented by the microcosms of a linguist Household and a Catholic convent, that women's subversive verbal hygiene comes into existence and acquires meaning. While the limited success of the women's linguistic enterprise appears to be disappointing, they enable a critical perspective concerning the phenomenon of verbal hygiene. Finally, the Láadan novels importantly offer an allegory for the female feminist subjects' need to "connect" and to shape language into an instrument of liberation, in constant process of (re-)construction.

IV. A Utopia of Language under "Reduced Circumstances": *The Handmaid's Tale*

> I reach towards you, my beautiful Paradise, from the very depths of Hell, although I know you only in flashes, and if words fail me you disappear like a haemorrhage in reverse. (Monique Wittig, *Across the Acheron*)

The Handmaid's Tale features a woman's outpouring of words in the form of a diary. This verbal profusion is comparable to that portrayed in another feminist dystopia also published in 1985, Monique Wittig's *Across the Acheron*, from which I selected the lines in the epigraph above. In both novels, the utopian "good place" is characterized by linguistic profusion. In Wittig's paradise, "the words fall in thousands, the air is laden with them" (1985: 108). The utopian "good place" in Margaret Atwood's novel is the space of narration, constructed out of storytelling itself. Both visions arise in opposition to women's reduced linguistic circumstances and enforced silence imposed by dystopic male orders, represented by the hell where men rule in Wittig's text and the militarized future theocracy in Atwood's.

Among the texts discussed so far, *The Handmaid's Tale* is the feminist dystopia that has attracted most critical and non-critical attention. Although Atwood's name is not immediately associated with speculative or science fiction writing,[61] she has produced several

---

[60] "[I]f it were actually true that existing human languages are inadequate to express the perceptions of women, then the only mechanism available to women for explaining this situation and for working with it was the very language that was inadequate! That fascinated me" (Elgin 1987: 177).
[61] Actually, Atwood receives entries in both Clute & Nicholls's generically authoritative *The Encyclopedia of*

texts which resort to the estrangement technique, an essential science-fictional trait, among which *The Handmaid's Tale* is the most prominent.[62] It has achieved huge commercial success, as well as winning Atwood literary prizes and wide recognition in sf scholarship.[63] It was (very poorly) adapted into a film released in 1990,[64] and in 1996-97 the novel was selected by the UK public one of "the greatest books of the century" in a nationwide search by a well-known book seller in association with Channel 4, which certainly boosted the sales of the novel.[65]

In this section, I will look at verbal hygiene practices in *The Handmaid's Tale* in relation to the issue of authority. Discussing questions of power and authority underlying linguistic conventions, Cameron remarks that

> the social function of the [linguistic] rule is not arbitrary. Like other superficially innocuous 'customs', 'conventions' and 'traditions' [...], rules of language use often contribute to a circle of exclusion and intimidation, as those who have mastered a particular practice use it in turn to intimidate others. (1995: 12)

It is desirable, she continues, that this non-arbitrariness be exposed and debated. Commentators have observed that language usually functions as one of the means to enforce social control in the totalitarian orders depicted in literary dystopias (Barnes 1974; Meyers 1980; Sisk 1997).[66] I believe that the genre provides an interesting ground for the discussion of the non-arbitrariness discussed by Cameron. In my reading of Atwood's novel, I will argue that not only does it expose forms of linguistic authority constructed upon a gender hierarchy which has an extremely clear social agenda (the maintenance of an order based on the suppression of women's voice and desire), but it also raises more subtle points concerning

---

Science Fiction (1993) and in John Clute's *Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia* (1995). But despite appearing in these landmark publications and continuously inspiring critical commentaries (from both within and outwith sf circles), her work still generates a certain uneasiness in sf circles. Cf., for instance, Clute's remark: "MA's attempts at the language of genre sf are not unembarassing" (in Clute & Nicholls 1993: 70).

[62] See, for instance, the short story "When It Happens" (1975, reprinted in Williams and Jones eds. 1995: 279-289) where the imminence of future social collapse is filtered through the mind of an old-aged woman. Atwood's early poetry has triggered specialized criticism for its science fictional qualities (Glicksohn 1974). More recently, an anticipatory glimpse at a bleak, "man-made", techno-capitalistic future is provided by the angrily ironic "Hardball", one of the non-fictional prose writings collected in *Good Bones* (1992: 93-96).

[63] *The Handmaid's Tale* was nominated for the Ritz-Paris Hemingway Prize in France, and shortlisted for the Booker Prize. It won the *Los Angeles Times* Prize, the Governor General's Award in Canada, and the first Arthur C. Clarke award for sf novels in 1986 (cf. Ketterer 1989).

[64] US/Germany 1990, dir. Volker Schlöndorff. Jonathan Bignell's "Lost Messages: *The Handmaid's Tale*, Novel and Film" (1993) offers a good critique of the adaptation.

[65] Together with other canonical dystopias (Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, and Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*), *The Handmaid's Tale* had previously featured in the New York Public Library's Books of the Century list. For a critical commentary on the UK ballot, see Germaine Greer's "Book of the Century?" (1997), in which relevant questions, including its market orientation, are raised.

[66] Barnes treats the issue in chapter IX, "The Language of Thought Control" of her study (pp. 140-170); Meyers also explores linguistic manipulation in the dystopias (cf. pp. 163-165, 193-209); Sisk considers not only the "conscious manipulation of language by oppressors intended to control thought", but also the "conscious use of

what Cameron terms "the pervasiveness and effectiveness of verbal hygiene" (1995: 14). By looking at the novel's sophisticated narrative techniques, I will explore the tensions between the dystopic quality of linguistic authority in its overlapping with patriarchal order and ideology, and the acts of resistance and subversion countering such authority. I will examine verbal hygiene struggles at different narrative levels, but before proceeding to the analysis, I will first briefly comment on the novel plot and structural organization.

Following "the reduction of women" convention observed in feminist dystopian writing,[67] *The Handmaid's Tale* depicts a futuristic space in which women's social roles have been thoroughly dominated and severely limited by a patriarchal order. It is represented by the Republic of Gilead, a theocratic Christian-fundamentalist state[68] established after a takeover by an extremist right-wing élite as a backlash against, among other things, the revolutionary feminist developments of the previous decades. Gilead, which is significantly located in what used to be New England,[69] comes into being "after the mid-eighties" (HT: 107), which corresponds, in our own historical time, to the period immediately after the date of publication of the novel. In this militaristic near-future state run by a male minority (the Commanders), women have been stratified into the castes of Wives, Aunts, Handmaids, Marthas, and Econowives. Marthas do the housework in upper-class households, and Econowives are "the women of the poorer men" (HT: 23). Dressing according to a rigidly assigned colour code publicly marks the class status of women.[70] And those who do not fit into this social grid (feminists, lesbians, rebels, professional women, and/or sterile women) are either forced into life-risking work at the Colonies, or sex work at Jezebel's (a 'secret' sleazy club).

Aunts and Wives have collaborated with the takeover, collude with male power, and help enforce the status quo. They used to belong to Christian-fundamentalist groups before the change, and there are suggestions in the novel (perceptible through the indirect depiction of

---

language by rebels as a means of resisting [...] control" (1997: 175).

[67] Cf. discussions in Chapter One, and on p.100 above. For a contextualization of Atwood's novel in terms of the dystopian genre, see David Ketterer 1989 and Amin Malak 1987. In Ketterer's analysis Atwood's vision loses some of its strength, as the feminist issues are dissolved in his discussion of the (specifically Canadian) historical thematics of survival. Malak, in turn, discusses generic conventions in the light of feminism. Neither of them contextualizes the novel in relation to the writing of *feminist* dystopias. For commentaries from this perspective, see Sarah Lefanu (1988, Chapter Seven), Peter Fitting (1990, in Jones and Goodwin eds. 1990: 141-158), Elisabeth Mahoney (1994), and Raffaella Baccolini (1999, in Barr 1999, forthcoming).

[68] The portrayal of the women's "bad place" as a patriarchal theocracy is repeated in Sheri Tepper's depiction of the Holylanders, a society in the margins of the Women's Country, in *The Gate* (1988, Chapters 20 and 23).

[69] Atwood discusses Gilead's location in excerpts quoted in Deborah Philips's review of the novel (1986: 14). The choice of dedicatees for the novel - Mary Webster, a Connecticut woman who survived her hanging after condemnation as witch, and Perry Miller, a North-American scholar who started Puritan Studies at Harvard (cf. Bergmann 1989, Ketterer 1989) - hints at the historical significance of this location.

[70] A similar classificatory system appears in Elisabeth Vonarburg's matriarchal dystopia *The Maerlande Chronicles* (1992). In the alternative world of Maerlande both men *and* women wear the colours green (pre-

Serena Joy, one of the Wives) of dissatisfaction with the new status quo. The Aunts patrol and indoctrinate other women into fitting the prescribed social slots. Their roles are more public when compared to the Wives', who hold domestic control over the Marthas and Handmaids: "The transgressions of women in the household [...] are supposed to be under the jurisdiction of the Wives alone" (HT: 151). In a society where the fertility rate has fallen dramatically, fertile women have become "a national resource" (HT: 61) and been assigned the role of Handmaids, following the biblical precedent of the old testament. They serve as surrogate mothers of the patriarchs' offspring, and there is absolutely no space in Gilead for, to borrow Angela Carter's term (1983), "the voluntary sterile", or for pleasure in sex:

> We [Handmaids] are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary: everything possible has been done to remove us from that category. There is supposed to be nothing entertaining about us, no room is to be permitted for the flowering of secret lusts; no special favours are to be wheedled, by them [Commanders] or us, there are to be no toeholds for love. We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices. (HT: 128)

The practice of utilizing women as breeders is an allusion to Genesis 30: 1-3, quoted as epigraph and repeated in the "reading" episode (HT: 84). The monthly (rape) "Ceremony" follows the scriptural "and she shall bear upon my knees" very literally, grotesquely requiring the presences of Wife, Handmaid (positioned between the Wife's legs and holding her hands), and Commander. It synthetizes the institutionalized subjection and objectification of women.

Regarding its temporality, Gilead is contrasted extratextually to our present society, which functions in the novel as its immediate past; and intratextually with Nunavit, situated in its future.[71] The latter may apparently stand for an eutopian alternative to Gilead, as the social status of women has improved in that future (e.g., women occupy academic positions). Nevertheless, Nunavit is no feminist utopia. More subtly conveyed when compared to the horrors perpetrated in Gilead, misogyny in Nunavit is to be read between the lines of Professor Pieixoto's speech about "The Handmaid's Tale", which comprises the other narrative layer. This structural juxtaposition of dystopic spaces led Patrick Murphy to coin the term "double dystopia" to qualify Atwood's text (1990: 36), a concept which appears to be convergent with my own perspective on most of the feminist dystopian texts examined in the present study.

---

adolescence), red (fertile individuals) or blue (sterile individuals).
[71] Gilead also offers satiric images of certain aspects of contemporary gender relations, in which sense it parallels (rather than contrasts) the world as we know it. In the introductory chapter I discussed the satirical critique of the contemporary real effected by the feminist critical dystopias. Cf. p. 1.

The Handmaid's Tale is composed of two distinct narrative blocks. The first part, consists in June's/Offred's[72] description, in diary form, of her experience as a Handmaid under the Gileadean regime. This is a transcription of recordings found by historians after the fall of that regime, and is divided into fifteen chapters alternating reconstructed renderings of the daily life and routine of a Handmaid and, in the "Night" chapters, her thoughts and recollections, dreams and nightmares. Her narration presupposes other dissidents and/or escapees from Gilead, the potential narratees to June's/Offred's story, to whom readers of the novel become 'shadow' or 'second-degree' narratees. The "Historical Notes" which form the second block contain the proceedings of a conference on Gileadean Studies. The time gap separating the two parts is of approximately two hundred years. The notes are formed mainly by Professor Darcy Pieixoto's, a Cambridge expert on Gileadean studies, paper on the manuscript forming the first block. Readers of the novel are again positioned as 'second-degree' narratees, shadowing the conference audience. While in the two blocks narration is constructed intradiegetically (i.e., the narratees 'exist' within the text), together they also form a third (extradiegetic)[73] level, to which we are the addressees. Using Susan Lanser's terminology, this distinction can be understood in terms of "public" and "private" levels of narration. By "public" narration Lanser means "simply narration (implicitly or explicitly) addressed to a narratee who is external (that is, heterodiegetic) to the textual world and who can be equated with a public readership", whereas private narration "is addressed to an

---

[72] In Gilead, Handmaids are given their Commander's name preceded by "of": Offred, Ofglen, Ofwarren. No mention is made in the novel of the protagonist's real name, except for suggestions that it could be June. In chapter one, Handmaids whisper their names: "Alma. Janine. Dolores. Moira. June" (HT: 4). As all the others are accounted for in the narration, except for June, one could reasonably assume it to be Offred's name. This is reinforced by its etymological roots and fertility symbolism (as something sacred to the Goddess Juno), as well as the metaphorical association of Offred's name with the moon:

> My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden. I tell myself it doesn't matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I'll come back to dig up, one day. I think of this name as buried. *This name has an aura around it, like an amulet, some charm that's survived from an unimaginably distant past. I lie in my single bed at night, with my eyes closed, and the name floats there behind my eyes, not quite within reach, shining in the dark.* (HT: 79-80, my emphases)

The June/Offred association has been previously observed (Bergmann 1989), but most commentators still refer to the protagonist as "Offred", or simply "the Handmaid". More recently, a critic used "June" as a means to position himself against Gileadean sexism (Andriano 1992), while another alternatively used both names (Staels 1995). I have chosen to refer to the protagonist as "June/Offred" to foreground the two facets of the character's identity: the 'intimate' June and the 'public' Offred. Besides, I wanted to preserve the connotative potentialities of both names, including those suggested by phonetic possibilities (/v/: Of Fred; /f/: off red). Surprisingly, in the film adaptation the protagonist is named "Kate".

[73] The term "extradiegetic", coined by Gérard Gennette in opposition to "intradiegetic" and "metadiegetic", has been used in narratology to refer to the outermost level of a narrative, usually marked by "author-narrators" inscribed in the text (Wales 1989). Nevertheless, in my use it also incorporates later theorizing in its consideration that an outermost narrative level need not necessarily be textually inscribed. Cf. Susan Lanser "Toward a Feminist Narratology" (1986, reprinted in Warhol & Herndl eds. 1991: 610-629).

explicitly designated narratee who exists only within the textual world" (1986: 620). In parallel to the concept of "public" narration, I will approach the whole novelistic text of *The Handmaid's Tale*, comprising "The Handmaid's Tale" and the "Historical Notes", as a third-level narrative addressed to us, 'real' readers. My interest in the exploration of the narrative embeddings in the novel relates to its multi-layered instances of verbal hygiene, as well as the political perspective engendered by such sophisticated narrative structure. This will become clear as we proceed with a closer examination of each narrative level separately.

Level One: "The Handmaid's Tale"

Critics have consistently stressed that "the brutal domination of women on *The Handmaid's Tale* is largely linguistic in nature" (Booker 1994b: 83).[74] My discussion of the issue will be focused on the verbal hygiene struggles: how this linguistic domination functions, and June's/Offred's transgressive reaction to it. "The Handmaid's Tale" (as distinct from *The Handmaid's Tale*) tells of a woman's survival in reduced circumstances, as suggested in the opening metaphor to this section, drawn from a recurrent motif which surfaces in the narrator's description of her newly-assigned room in the Commander's household:

> this could be a college guest room, for the less distinguished visitors; or a room in a rooming house, of former times, for ladies in reduced circumstances. That is what we are now. The circumstances have been reduced; for those of us who still have circumstances. (HT: 8. Cf. also 99, 104)

Such reduced circumstances are extended to the linguistic realm. In a household ritual in which the Commander reads from the Bible to an all-female audience, June/Offred muses: "He has something we don't have, he has the word". She proceeds: "How we squandered it, once" (HT: 84). This brief meditation expresses the essence of the linguistic economy in Gilead: men have (power over) "the word", women do not; it is singular, monolithic, biblical in the sense that it is originated by God, the father; as opposed to an earlier time when women had an anarchic relationship to it, as suggested by the second statement.

Women's linguistic circumstances are characterized by legally enforced scarcity: reading and writing were declared forbidden. Writing in tickets, shopping tokens and notice boards has been replaced by pictures; all books and magazines, banned. Even the Wives, who belong to a higher social strata, have been denied the right to read, write and speak publicly. June's/Offred's remarks about Serena Joy, the Commander's Wife whose earlier role as a high-profile singer and preacher made of her a key figure in the implementation of the new order, gives a full measure of a Wife's silence and the pathetic irony underlying this specific

---

[74] See also Hilde Staels 1995 and Elisabeth Mahoney 1996 ("Writing So To Speak: The Feminist Dystopia", in

case: "She doesn't make speeches anymore. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn't seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word" (HT: 44).

Scattered in the Handmaid's narration are passages which illuminate the gender-based power politics underlying verbal hygiene. Serena Joy's speechlessness, the Handmaids' enforced cliché exchanges (based on the scriptural texts), the lack of reading materials (in June's/Offred's environment, this is reduced to an embroidered cushion ironically displaying the word "Faith", and a hidden graffito scratched on her cupboard walls) are metaphors for the linguistic reduction of women in Gilead. Against this controlling apparatus, strategic ways of communicating are developed. I will examine this resistance in more detail.

I stated above that the fictional figuration of enforced uses of (simplified, reduced, and cliché) language as means of social control and manipulation appears as a pervasive trait in the literary dystopias. I have also remarked that the feminist dystopias expose the gender ideologies underlying such linguistic contestations. Now I will explore the idea that, if on the one hand the literary dystopias have conventionally provided a fictional space for the staging of authoritarian verbal hygiene (in its manipulative and politically conservative forms), on the other the genre also portrays its failure. In a discussion of "the language of thought control", Myra Barnes states that

> [the anti-utopia], in which language has been instrumental in producing a society that thinks according to plan, centers around a protagonist who attempts to break both the cultural and linguistic molds into which his life has been forced. But he does not succeed. (1971: 170)[75]

Barnes hints at the characters' resistance to a dystopic order by "attempting to break cultural and linguistic molds", but stresses their defeat by the system (which holds true for the texts she examines). The point I want to emphasize is that this resistance implies that (cultural and linguistic) impositions are never totally successful. In other words, in spite of its pervasiveness, the effectiveness of verbal hygiene is limited. The protagonists in Anthony Boucher's "Barrier" (1942) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949), to mention two dystopias centred upon forms of verbal hygiene aiming to promote stasis and prevent political dissent, manage to evade the restrictions imposed upon them. Actually, John Brent and Winston Smith keep diaries which breach the linguistic law. Similarly, in *Walk to the End of the World*, Alldera is able to communicate in the standard Holdfast English despite her

---

Sceats & Cunningham eds. 1996: 29-40).
[75] Although Barnes's text reveals lack of awareness of feminist contestations of the generic masculine, "he" in this excerpt is accurate: all the protagonists in the dystopias discussed in that section of her work are male.

previous training and public performance reflecting the linguistic behaviour expected from women in that society.[76]

Turning our attention back to Atwood's dystopia, what makes it distinct from Boucher's and Orwell's (which give us glimpses of their protagonists' diaries) is that "The Handmaid's Tale" in its entirety constitutes an act of resistance. Paradoxically, June's/Offred's narration (and here Atwood's choice of a first person narrator is crucial) frames the verbal hygiene imposed upon her in such a way as to enable her own authorial voice to be inscribed. This act of resistance reveals June's/Offred's careful and conscious use of language in countermoves against the verbal hygiene imposed upon women. This narration materializes a feminist utopia of language characterized by creativity and plurivocality, presented against the backdrop of the linguistic 'utopia' of static, monolithic meaning necessary for the existence of Gilead. Earlier commentators have exposed the facets of this resistance,[77] which I shall summarize in the following paragraphs. Analyzing the dominant discourses contained in "The Handmaid's Tale" (June's/Offred's own story and the discursive law of the theocracy), Hilde Staels is among these critics. She contrasts the "absolutely homogeneous, univocal signs" forced upon the inhabitants of the totalitarian state of Gilead and "the potential polysemy of discourse" which has been suppressed and breaks through the theocratic law in the Handmaid's narration (1995: 457). Although Staels has appropriately identified a major narrative tension, I strongly disagree with her point that "Gilead Newspeak makes all other modes of thought impossible" (1995: 457). Her argument can be countered by looking at June's/Offred's strategic uses of language, which encode alternative modes of thought and world-views.

June's/Offred's response is perceptible on two levels. Some linguistic transgressions are 'visible' as elements in the story plot, i.e. in its content. Illustrative of these are the Handmaids' stolen exchanges among themselves by means of whispering and lip-reading, their "amputated speech" (HT: 189). In the imposed quiet of the night in the Rachel and Leah Re-education Centre, for instance, they significantly exchange names. (Cf. note 70 above.) Besides signalling the transgression through speech, which in itself breaks the imposed silence, the act is also symbolic of self-affirmation in an institutional environment where the effacing of women's identity and individuality is the main aim.

---

[76] Cameron's discussion on the failure of authoritarian verbal hygiene in non-fictional totalitarian regimes (the former communist world) provides an interesting parallel to the point I am arguing here (1995: 150-155).

[77] Cf. Andriano 1992: 90; Booker 1994a: 168-169; Staels 1995; Hogsette 1997: 270.

Most of the transgressions in the handmaid's tale, however, are not 'seen', but expressed in her (spoken) reconstructed narration, i.e. in its form. In the mental operations which acquire narrative shape *post factum* the contrast between the rhetorical richness of the Handmaid's heresies and the barrenness of Gileadean dogma brings the ineffectiveness of the acts of verbal hygiene imposed upon her into full view. To combat the worship of monolithic meaning, for instance, June/Offred composes what she significantly terms "litanies", speculations exploring the polysemy of lexical items, as in the passage below:

> I sit in the chair and think about the word *chair*. It can also mean the leader of a meeting. It can also mean a mode of execution. It is the first syllable in *charity*. It is the French word for flesh. None of these facts has any connection with the others.
> These are the kinds of litanies I use, to compose myself. (HT: 104)

Besides probing the polysemic possibilities of the word "chair", the passage significantly puns on the verb "compose", which means both to "calm" oneself and to "construct in words".

In addition to lexical items, longer textual pieces also acquire various meanings. Such is the case of the dog Latin inscription June/Offred finds in her cupboard, scratched by a previous occupier: "*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*" (HT: 49). Unaware of its origins, she assigns a meaning for that form, which becomes a woman's desperate plea and a prayer before a rape "Ceremony" takes place: "I don't know what it means, but it sounds right, and it will have to do, because I don't know what else I can say to God. Not right now" (HT: 86). Besides functioning as a plot element (it reveals the Commander's previous 'affairs'), this inscription is a recurrent narrative motif, being explored in several possibilities of meaning: "Here, in this context, it's neither prayer nor command, but a sad graffito, scrawled once, abandoned" (HT: 174). When its origins as a jocular piece of schoolboy lore copied from the Commander's books are finally revealed (HT: 175), the sentence has become too imbued with semantic possibilities (liable even to be read as an extended metaphor, emblematic of the whole novel) for closure in its initially intended singular sense.

Another device against the fixation of meaning is June's/Offred's exposure of constructedness as an inevitable condition in narrative, thus allowing space for different perspectives, contestations, and interpretations to surface. And while a limited perspective is a necessity of first person narration, the persistent rendering of stories as incomplete, mosaic pieces seems to exceed the purely technical requirement:

> This is the story of what happened to Moira.

> Part of it I can fill in myself, part of it I heard from Alma, who heard it
> from Dolores, who heard it from Janine. Janine heard it from Aunt Lydia. (HT:
> 121)[78]

Against the fullness of the official versions of history produced in Gilead, June/Offred offers

plurality and gaps:

> When I get out of here, if I'm ever able to set this down, in any form,
> even in the form of one voice to another, it will be a reconstruction then too, at
> yet another remove. It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because
> what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there
> are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances; too many gestures, which
> could mean this or that, too many shapes which can never be fully described, too
> many flavours, in the air or on the tongue, half-colours, too many. (HT: 126)

Besides foregrounding the multiplicity of points of view and the inevitability of narrative

incompleteness, June's/Offred's storytelling still resorts to another device with a

deconstructive purpose: the presentation, in sequence, of different versions of the same event.

One example is the description of her surreptitious first encounter with Nick, the household

driver. Two stories are told, both rebuffed, followed by: "I'm not sure how it happened; not

exactly. All I can hope for is a reconstruction" (HT: 246).

Similarly to the instances above, the following excerpt conveys a view of storytelling

as processual. Besides, the issue of control at stake in narration is foregrounded:

> I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must
> believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better
> chance.
> If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there
> will be an ending, to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where
> I left off.
> It isn't a story I'm telling.
> It's also a story I'm telling, in my head, as I go along. (HT: 37)

Another appropriate metaphor for the language/power association is the game of Scrabble

between June/Offred and the Commander, in which sexual, political, and linguistic forms of

domination are dramatically interwoven and (literally and symbolically) seen at play.[79]

June/Offred authors (in the full sense of the term: she both produces and has control

over) her narrative, shaping it according to an alternative view of Gilead. By means of the

strategies discussed above, this individual "squanders" the Gileadean "word": she rejects the

---

[78] Cf. also the preamble to the narrative of Moira's escape from the Rachel and Leah Centre: "This is what she
says, whispers, more or less. I can't remember exactly, because I had no way of writing it down. I've filled it
out for her as much as I can: we didn't have much time so she just gave the outlines" (HT: 228).
[79] Cf. HT: 130-131, 145, 170-171. For an illuminating analysis of Atwood's use of the game of Scrabble as a
pervasive controlling metaphor see Joseph's Andriano's "*The Handmaid's Tale* as Scrabble Game" (1992).

form of linguistic normativity imposed upon her, which "contribute[s] to a circle of exclusion and intimidation"[80] of women, and critically restores linguistic freedom and creativity. Implicit in June's/Offred's response are the counterideologies of her perspective, her radical utopian orientation in opposition to Gilead's own conservative utopia. Despite the limited political impact of her narration (its self-liberating potential is unquestionable, but no evidence exists as to whether it ever reaches her contemporaries), June/Offred contests the linguistic tyranny of Gilead and inscribes, in this case, 'speaks' her own authority in, over and through language.

Conflicted authority is a central theme in "The Handmaid's Tale", and the analysis above showed that verbal hygiene practices and counter-practices stage such conflict. Verbal hygiene surfaces as a pervasive phenomenon in its dystopic form (to the extent that the linguistic law of Gilead operates comprehensively), whose limited power is observed in the narrator's utopian resistance. The section below will approach different guises of authority and verbal hygiene by focusing on another narrative layer.

Level Two: Historical Notes

The "Historical Notes", the epilogical material to the novel, have generated much critical attention.[81] They are formed by the proceedings of a conference held at the University of Denay, Nunavit, and include a transcript of an academic paper on Gilead. The latter functions as a pseudo-documentary framing enfolding the Handmaid's story (Murphy 1990). This narrative layer presents a set of linguistic practices which can be understood in relation to the concept of verbal hygiene. Dramatizing the issue of authority, linguistic control perceptible at this level parallels the silencing of women effected in Gilead, and allegorizes forms of appropriation of feminist discourse in a sexist environment. The object of study of recent feminist linguistics, this practice neutralizes to some extent the radical transformative potential of feminist linguistic interventions. In fictionalizing this phenomenon the novel may serve the purpose of raising readers' awareness of the intricate relations between radical and liberal discourses represented, respectively, by June's/Offred's confessional narration and the academic paper.

Theorizing verbal hygiene, Cameron takes into consideration the assumptions and world-views underlying different understandings of human communication. She explains that some hygienic impulses are grounded on what she terms the "fetish of communication", the notion that successful communication depends on language functioning according to a fixed

---

[80] Cf. quotation on p.167 above.
[81] For an excellent review, see Grace 1998.

code which guarantees the transfer of 'transparent' messages between people. In a paragraph that deserves to be quoted in full, she explains that linguistic forms which break the conventions necessary for 'good communication' (following the fixed code model) tend to generate anxiety and to trigger specific reactions from verbal hygienists:

> The social analogue of a 'breakdown in communication' is a breakdown in cultural and political consensus, the irruption into public discourse of irreconcilable differences and incommensurable values. Thus the anxiety that gets expressed as 'if we don't obey the rules we won't be able to communicate' might equally be defined just as an anxiety about moral relativism or social fragmentation. Just as 'we speak the same language' is a metaphor for sharing interests and values, so the idea that meaning is contested and relative is a metaphorical recognition of the inevitability of difference and conflict. There are forms of verbal hygiene for whose proponents this recognition holds no terrors [...]. But most forms of verbal hygiene are practised in order to ward off the threat, by making language a fixed and certain reference point. (1995: 25)

This relates to my reading of the "Notes" to the extent that, for Professor Pieixoto, the Handmaid's text is marked by difference. It arouses fear and threatens to disrupt a stable order, represented by the academic's liberal discourse. As we proceed with the analysis it will become clear that the Professor's hygienic practices are motivated by an impulse "to ward off the threat" of (sexual, political and linguistic) difference, and reveal an élitist and conservative outlook. Veiled in his academic prose is a vision of a linguistic utopia modelled according to patriarchal ideology, and therefore not so distant from Gilead's own.

As part of a satire of the historian's discourse and metacommentary on our own position as readers/critics, the "Notes" display institutionalized forms of verbal hygiene. In this part of the novel we learn that "The Handmaid's Tale" has been edited by expert historians. Forming the bulk of the notes, Pieixoto's paper comments on the manuscript, and allows a glimpse of the authority underlying the academic practices of editing and interpreting. In its very opening paragraph, Pieixoto puns on the words "char" and "chair". I showed above that "chair" appears in June's/Offred's composition of her self-empowering "litanies". Not only does Pieixoto ignore this previous appearance and meaning, but he also uses precisely the same word in a sexist joke. Readers have then, from the start, the signs of the effacement of the Handmaid's voice and of Pieixoto's textual appropriation, which I will explore in detail now.

The paper title, "Problems of Authentication in Reference to *The Handmaid's Tale*" (HT: 282), already signals the central concern of the "Notes". To authenticate means to give authority or validity to something, and the insertion of "problems" announces that the manuscript's authority and validity will be questioned. As exercised by co-editors James

Pieixoto and Knotly Wade, verbal hygiene functions formally and symbolically to deny the protagonist's authority, and instate their own. Originally a tape recording, the item is transcribed, annotated, given a title, and published. At this formal level, the professors effect a semiotic transfer materialized by means of a series of decisions and editorial moves. The transcription from spoken to written word involves the loss not only of the non-narrative material camouflaging the handmaid's account (in itself a framing of another sort), but also of the non-verbal aspects of human speech. Besides, an order is given to the recordings by the editors: "it was up to Professor Wade and myself to arrange the blocks of speech in the order in which they appeared to go" (HT: 284). And in addition to this, they face other "difficulties posed by accent, obscure referents, and archaisms", which lead to "some decision as to the nature of the material" (HT: 284). Prompted by 'scientific accuracy', Pieixoto addresses the "difficulties" and "decisions" involved in the editorial process, but the fact that these decisions are never value-free is not made evident. Nor are the inevitable loss of some meanings, and inscription of others, brought into effect by the whole procedure. An obvious example is Pieixoto's explanation of the intentional (and insidious) pun contained in the manuscript title (cf. HT: 283). This contributes to the emptying of subversive meaning of June's/Offred's story by attaching 'humorous' connotations to a (once) radical text, while functioning as a re-instatement of the Gileadean anti-feminist perspective.[82] A reversal in the intended meaning is being performed here. The practices described above are representative of the sort of editorial verbal hygiene that usually goes unnoticed. By rendering this satiric metafictional commentary, Atwood actually makes them visible. In so doing, not only does she highlight the palimpsestic quality of texts as they reach us (reinforcing one of the novelistic leitmotifs), but she also casts light on the sexual/textual politics of editorial verbal hygiene. Now I will focus on hygienic impulses operating more symbolically as genre valuation and authoritative interpretation.

Assigning validity to a linguistic item implies certain attitudes concerning its genre. Throughout history, we have witnessed verbal hygiene grounded on the valuation/devaluation of textual genres. For Pieixoto, the confessional mode of June's/Offred's (spoken) narration is a marker of difference and strangeness, as evidenced in his uneasy attitude in terms of accommodating it in the category of historical document:[83]

---

[82] Other instances of the Professor's 'humorous' asides are the pun on "chair" mentioned above, and his mention of the political resistance movement as "Underground Frailroad" (HT: 283).

[83] Within the space of two paragraphs, June's/Offred's text is referred to as "the *soi disant* manuscript", "our saga" and "this item" (HT: 282-3). Appended clauses also show his apprehension: "I hesitate to use the word *document*" (HT: 283, 'his' emphasis), or "this document - let me call it that for the sake of brevity" (HT: 285).

> What would we not give, now, for even twenty pages or so of printout from Waterford's private computer! However, we must be grateful for any crumbs the Goddess of History has designed to vouchsafe us. (HT: 292)

The issue of generic value underlies such dismissal of a woman's oral rendition of her desires and feelings under the Gileadean regime as "crumbs". 'Official documents' in the form of statistical, depersonalized data from the Commanders' computers would be far preferable to the actual record of human experience, marked by "a whiff of emotion" (HT: 285), which was actually found. Pieixoto's attitude also evidences the scholar's problematic relationship with items which are either not written, or more 'literary' than 'official'. This can be contextualized in terms of the novel's satirical outlook on the discourse of history and criticism, in itself part of a feminist critique of textual approaches based on deeply rooted patriarchal assumptions.

Authenticating a document also involves interpretative tendencies as we have learned from the power invested in interpretative communities, and from the fate of the dissidents of interpretation, at certain moments in history. I would like to draw attention to the fact that Pieixoto 'misreads' June/Offred: "[s]he is also 'off-read' or mis-read [...] by the academic historian who reconstructs her 'strange' manuscript" (Lacombe 1988: 7-8).[84] He completely bypasses her account of violence and horror in Gilead, as illustrated by his gross misrepresentation of the Particicution ceremony.[85] Besides, the plural interpretative possibilities posed by the Handmaid's account are sharply contrasted with the Professor's obsession with single referents and 'official' versions, evidenced in his attempt to trace the Handmaid's identity (later shifting his interest towards the Commander's). Finally, Pieixoto's repeated use of the inflated "we" of academic prose ("our saga", "our period", "our author") further signals the assimilation of the handmaid's narration.[86] His interpretative authority remains unchallenged by a sympathetic, if ghostly, audience, whose reactions are limited to "laughter", "applause", and "some groans".

The Professor's discourse imposes its own authority over June's/Offred's by means of the institutionalized verbal hygiene intrinsic in editorial practices. Paradoxically, the academic move which gives visibility to the Handmaid's text, at the same time partially eclipses it. The "Notes" offer a satire, constructed in terms of gender imbalance, on a discourse's failure to comprehend. Underlying Pieixoto's metalinguistic practices is an androcentric and conservative subtext whose assertion depends on the suppression of women's voices and

---

[84] Cf. also Staels 1995 and Hogsette 1997.
[85] "Scapegoats have been notoriously useful throughout history, and it must have been most gratifying for these Handmaids, so rigidly controlled at other times, to be able to tear a man apart with their bare hands every once in a while" (HT: 289). The Handmaid's account of the same ritual is on pp. 261-264.

experiences. Indeed, previous commentators have found similarities between Nunavit and Gilead: "The desire for univocal, transparent meaning ironically mirrors the authoritative word of Gilead" (Staels 1995: 465. Cf. also Murphy 1990, Bignell 1993, Grace 1998). I showed above that this desire motivates gender-biased verbal hygiene practices and hides anxiety in face of sexual, political, linguistic difference.

Another issue I want to address concerns an area of interest in feminist sociolinguistics: the neutralization and depoliticization of feminist meanings in a sexist environment. Studies carried out by Susan Ehrlich and Ruth King (1992, 1994)[87] focus on the social construction of meaning, specifically the mechanisms of appropriation of feminist meanings and linguistic innovations by the (sexist) dominant culture in which they are recontextualized. "Terms originally with very specific feminist-influenced meanings are subject to redefinition and, not accidentally, are redefined in terms of the perspective of a white male's experience" (1992: 170). Although their analysis focuses on the reception of lexical items within non-fictional contexts (society at large and the print media), some of the mechanisms they describe find striking parallels in Atwood's depiction of the scholar's discursive strategies. I showed that the Handmaid's text is, both on the whole and partially, misinterpreted (sometimes to the extent of reversal of the intended meaning). Some passages are subjected to omission, while others, rendered ludicrous. These are among strategies identified by Ehrlich and King as instrumental in the redefinition and depoliticization of the feminist linguistic interventions as they are assimilated in a wider cultural context. I have approached June's/Offred's narration as a feminist indictment of the Gileadean patriarchal dystopia.[88] In the "Historical Notes", her (once radical) account undergoes a similar process of trivialization, delegitimization and co-option by academic liberal discourse camouflaged in pseudo-neutrality and 'amoral' relativism.[89] (Pieixoto simply takes the issue of gender-based

---

[86] The pervasive use of "our" echoes the previous use of another possessive in "Offred".
[87] "Gender-based Language Reform and the Social Construction of Meaning" (1992), reprinted in Cameron ed. 1998: 164-179, and "Feminist Meanings and the (De)politization of the Lexicon" (1994).
[88] This character's feminism may require some qualification. June's/Offred's initial apolitical attitude sharply contrasts with her mother's (a feminist activist before the coup) and with the 'first' Ofglen's (a supporter of the resistance movement), which has been off-putting and problematic for feminist readings. (This, in itself, raises interesting questions concerning the novel's critique of facile understandings of feminism.) My claiming her narration as *feminist* is grounded on the character's developed awareness of her own passivity (cf. HT: 53, 234, 251), and of the form of extremist sexual politics which supports Gilead fundamentalism. These are made evident in her self-empowering and critical act of narration, which is constructed in opposition to Gilead's patriarchal dystopia and aimed at political interference.
[89] Cf. HT: 284: "If I may be permitted an editorial aside, allow me to say that in my opinion we must be cautious about passing moral judgement upon the Gileadeans. Surely, we have learned by now that such judgements are of necessity culture-specific. Also, Gileadean society was under a good deal of pressure, demographic and otherwise, and was subject to factors from which we ourselves are happily more free. Our job is not to censure but to understand. (Applause.)" Atwood's stereotyping Pieixoto's discourse is a deliberate stylistic choice. This

violence in Gilead for granted, avoiding a topic which would certainly disturb his own chauvinistic liberal utopia.) On a par with contemporary linguistic theories, the "Historical Notes" problematize the reception of radical discourse and raise readers' awareness concerning the ideological disputes (and the accompanying visions of utopia/dystopia) informing linguistic contestations.

Level Three: *The Handmaid's Tale*

In one of the "Night" passages, June/Offred speculates: "What I need is perspective. The illusion of depth, created by a frame, the arrangements of shapes on a flat surface. Perspective is necessary. Otherwise there are only two dimensions" (HT: 135). This excerpt evidences the Handmaid's highly analytical stance and offers a metafictional commentary on textual structure and reader response. One way of adding perspective to this reading is by considering the public narrative level of *The Handmaid's Tale*, or the 'third text', meaning the novel as a whole, finished literary piece. This, as explained above, is understood in the sense that the two narrative blocks ("The Handmaid's Tale" and the "Historical Notes") together with other prefatory materials finally yield a third. I want to explore the ways in which this 'outermost' layer of narration, or "the most hidden text" (Lanser 1986: 621), raises a set of implications which help to construct the readers' affective response by enabling an even sharper outlook concerning issues of verbal hygiene and gender politics. I will discuss Atwood's careful stylistic choices, and the narrative effects generated by such choices. My analysis will focus on the title of the novel, the order in which the narrative layers appear and the symbolic space dedicated to each, as well as the narrative point of view (and the construction of private and public narratees).[90]

The title of the finalized text, *The Handmaid's Tale*, foregrounds the centrality of June's/Offred's story. It inscribes a woman's authority of narration both intertextually and intratextually. The novel rewrites a male-centred narrative tradition grounded on the structural objectification of women: the Handmaid's position is shifted from that of the (grammatical) object of a biblical passage, quoted in the epigraph, into that of a subject. The title anticipates the fact that the *Handmaid's*, rather than the patriarch's, version will follow. Title and epigraph together also enhance the palimpsestic quality of the novel. Intratextually, the title brings the Handmaid's subjective position as a storyteller into evidence. As Hilde Staels aptly remarks: "[s]he is the grammatical subject and narrative agent of the tale, whereas Gilead reduced her position to that of (grammatical) object and patient" (1995: 459). It should be

---

will be discussed in the following section, which deals with the public level of narration.
[90] These aspects are, of course, interrelated. I approach them separately for clarity of argumentation.

remembered that we, readers, will only read the Professor's commentary about the title of the *manuscript* at the novel's end (when our own construction of the meaning of the title is well advanced). This generates interesting effects. The Professor's literary allusion to Chaucer provokes illuminating insights[91] in ways that the obscene pun on the word "tale" does not. Actually, the pun helps to build up readers' awareness of, and resistance to, the sexist subtext to the Professor's discourse. While the first narrative block positions the Handmaid as subject, the second objectifies her again. Thus, read retrospectively, the title of the novel functions almost like a 'second' feminist reappropriation of the tale to the extent that it 'restores' the Handmaid's central position, which was relegated to the margins in the "Historical Notes". This significantly indicates shifts in meanings and the possibility of (re)politicizing signs, both of which are crucial for feminist linguistic practices.

Regarding the order in which the narrative blocks appear and the space dedicated to each, "The Handmaid's Tale" comes first, and occupies almost the whole bulk of the novel; whereas the "Notes", covering less than five percent of that space, follow in the thirteen last pages. It seems almost redundant to state that the amount of space taken up by each is symbolic of which discourse Atwood is actually making visible. Indeed, the theme of (in)visibility surfaces throughout the Handmaid's story. Thinking about family photograph albums and who will feature in these reconstructed visual narratives, June/Offred muses: "From the point of view of future history, this kind, we'll be invisible" (HT 214). And later on, considering her own and Nick's objectification under Gilead: "We do have something in common: both of us are supposed to be invisible, both of us are functionaries" (HT: 218). By dedicating most of the textual space to June's/Offred's narration, Atwood puts this invisibility under a magnifying glass and inverts her "reduced circumstances", making her text more visible than the Professor's, which paradoxically contributes to its invisibility.

Except for an entry under the novel "Contents", no signpost of the existence of the framing is given before readers actually reach the "Historical Notes". The omission of an initial framing has been the object of critical interest, both due to its innovative aspect as a fictional strategy (Grace 1998), and to the retrospective textual re-evaluation this strategy enforces (Hogsette 1997, Grace 1998). In an illuminating analysis, Patrick Murphy has observed that this omission reinforces the continuous thematic uniting the first and the second narrative levels. He further explains that, by subjecting the readers to those conference

---

[91] Exploring this allusion, Grace remarks that "[t]he Chaucer reference doubly underscores the impossibility of Pieixoto's desire to arrive at a single, true version of the tale Offred recounts by likening her tale to fiction and by pointing up the problems inherent in editing the account" (1998: 487-488).

proceedings immediately after experiencing the powerful indeterminacy of the ending of the Handmaid's narration, Atwood makes an allegory of the frame: she "jerks the reader's attention towards outrage and a critique of the enervating, disarming element of contemporary literary and historical criticism" (1990: 34). This allegorical frame works in two directions: the "Notes" resonate with the echoes of Gilead (enforcing the thematic continuities) as well as those of our own history (reducing the dystopian distance between reality and fictional construct). Although specifically looking at the function of pseudo-documentary framing, Murphy slowly shifts his focus from the (micro)textual technique to its implications in the construction of sexual/textual politics, "Atwood's consistent feminist perspective" (1990: 36).

My interest will now be centred upon Atwood's use of narrative point of view, and the role it plays in the construction of such feminist perspective. I have noted above that in the two blocks comprising the novel readers are constructed as second-degree, or shadow, narratees to the intradiegetic ones. The Handmaid's account presupposes other dissidents or escapees to whom she is telling her tale - the "you" in her first person narration:

> But I keep on going with this sad and hungry and sordid, this limping and mutilated story, because after all I want you to hear it, as I will hear yours too if I ever get the chance, if I meet you or if you escape, in the future or in Heaven or in prison or underground, *some other place.* [...] By telling you anything at all I'm at least believing in you, I believe you're there, I believe you into being. Because I'm telling you this story I will your existence. I tell, therefore you are. (HT: 251, emphasis added)

The engaging element observed in passages like the one above is striking. First by directly addressing her narratees, the narrator prompts the 'readers' into sympathetic, interactive response ("I will hear yours too") and identification with the "you". The repetition of "believe", "tell" and "you" adds rhetorical strength to the excerpt and heightens the readers' affective response.[92] The passage also conveys the utopian desire for "some other place" where a better form of human interaction will be possible. The utopian impulse is marked, in the Handmaid's story, by a desire for a space where narrative can flow and linguistic exchange exist outwith the constraints of the dystopic space of Gilead. I will return to this point.

In sharp contrast to the Handmaid's, the clichéd academic discourse of the "Notes" generates a negative response from readers. As noted by Murphy, they are initially shocked ("jerked") by the triviality of the conference announcements given just before the Professor's speech. Lacking the rhetorical sophistication and emotional appeal of the Handmaid's

---

[92] Similarly, June/Offred addresses the "you" (intra- and extradiegetically) as the person a letter or a love song

personal account, the latter consists in a collection of gross misinterpretations, misogynistic asides and jokes, and instances of academic vanity and false modesty delivered to a passive audience. All this is rendered in stereotyped academic prose, punctuated by worn out expressions and the editorial "we", increasing the distance between Pieixoto and his audience and conveying an authoritarian and possessive attitude. Finally, Atwood's satirical parody on the academy is also reflected in the choice of proper names for the conference venue. "University of Denay, Nunavit" echoes "deny" and "none of it" (Bergmann 1989, Murphy 1990, Staels 1995). In brief, the "Historical Notes" cause readers to become critical, suspicious of "the clearer light of [the Professor's] own day" (HT: 293).[93]

Susan Lanser's notion of a public level of narration has proven useful for my reading of the novel insofar as it has enabled a more detailed exploration of the complex relations between author, narrators, and readers. Atwood's structural choices discussed above play a crucial role in shaping the individual reader's psychological response, and allow us to envision her socio-political and feminist perspective more clearly. Under the light of the 'third text', different dimensions of the verbal hygiene practices become perceptible. In previous sections, I showed verbal hygiene performed by the authoritarian regime of Gilead in order to enforce the social exclusion of women. This is contested by June's/Offred's own impulse to critically restore linguistic dynamism and creativity. On another narrative level, her text is subjected to more subtle forms of institutionalized verbal hygiene, represented by the academics' editorial intervention and authoritative speech. Functioning like another frame (and a political lens), the 'third text' reveals Margaret Atwood's profoundly critical attitude towards verbal hygiene as practised in the two dystopic male-centred orders of religious fundamentalist Gilead and liberal Nunavit.

The story plot in *The Handmaid's Tale* is one of gender-polarized, conflicted linguistic authority and dominance. It crosses (and is crossed by) the "plot of narration"[94] to the extent that, among themselves, the narrative embeddings also stage, or dramatize, verbal hygiene tensions. As a commentary on verbal hygiene, the novel clearly indicates the pervasiveness, as well as the intricate degrees of mediation, of this cultural phenomenon. As for its effectiveness, my reading of the novel suggests two points: verbal hygiene is not totally effective, as there always appears to be margin for contestation; and verbal hygiene struggles are contextual and political. There is no such a thing as a neutral space where linguistic

---

is written to, thus generating intimacy and confidence. Cf. HT: 37.
[93] For a lengthier discussion of the function of the epilogue in terms of reader's response, see Hogsette 1997.
[94] Susan Lanser's term, in contradistinction with the story plot (1986: 625).

interventions can float. The last point is particularly relevant because if, on the one hand, it means that the radical impact of those interventions are liable to be co-opted, on the other it indicates the possibility of an open arena for their re-appropriation and re-contextualization. Framed in the academic context, the radical impact of June's/Offred's uses of language (and the utopian vision it represents) is partially lost, though ironically it is precisely this environment that causes her narration to become 'public'. As I demonstrated above, the 'third text' makes the parody on the historian's discourse more prominent, and helps in the 'restoration' of the feminist meanings suppressed by that discourse.

In my closing remarks about the novel, I will return to June's/Offred's desire for "some other place" of narration which was mentioned above. I define this desire as *utopian* because it is critical of the present and directed towards future alternatives. As *feminist* because it is informed by gender, and critical of patriarchal oppression. Atwood's text reveals a critical attitude concerning the feminist linguistic utopia constructed by June/Offred by showing it as contextual, ideological, and liable to co-optation. This version of a feminist elsewhere is marked by the contradictions between a woman's assertion of her desire and the dystopic contingencies which generate and surround it. In addition to this form of critical utopianism, the novel gives another version of the feminist elsewhere, hinted at in the last words of the Handmaid's account: "And so I step up, into the darkness within; or else into light" (HT: 277). Although this end gives us no resolution, it evokes the space *of* and *off* narration: of narration because it is where June's/Offred's voice comes from; off narration because it is absent from the novelistic text.[95] Such a space, where a woman's storytelling is not only possible, but free from the male dystopic orders which constrain it, fully conveys the utopian paradox in the sense that the feminist "good" place is also the narrative "no" place.

V. Conclusion: Verbal Hygiene and the Feminist Dystopia

In his recent study about the role of language in the literary dystopias, David Sisk argues that "language is so crucial to the dystopia that we are justified in labeling it a generic structural element: without its inclusion, a fiction cannot be considered a dystopia" (1997: 174). His hypothesis is problematic because if we take "language" in its broad meaning as the essential element in the composition of all fictions, Sisk's point becomes too vague. And when

---

[95] But shown in the film adaptation, which includes a final scene presenting a post-Gilead pregnant 'Kate' waiting to be reunited with her lover and rescuer, Nick. This device frames the previous narrative and constructs it as a flashback, while providing closure. The utopian potential of the suspended ending is lost, replaced by this weakened, romanticized version of a "shallowly hopeful" ending, to borrow Bignell's apt description (1993: 80).

"language" is understood as a thematic structural element in the construction of narrative plot, which appears to be what Sisk has in mind, his argument sounds unconvincing, as a number of dystopian works in which this is simply not the case come to mind. My own understanding regarding this issue is that language *often*, rather than *always*, surfaces in the literary dystopias as a key element in the construction of narrative conflict. As I have suggested with the readings above, when this happens, the conceptualization of verbal hygiene offers an illuminating way to approach the linguistic tensions and conflicts. I opened this chapter with the statement that dystopias are stories about language, and would like to close it by stressing that the theme of language in this literary genre is actually the theme of metalanguage, i.e., of value-loaded struggle over language. Just as the dystopias are markedly metafictional, so too they are markedly metalinguistic.

Deborah Cameron's theorization of verbal hygiene has cast light on the pervasive cultural phenomenon relating to human beings' concern with language and engagement in metalinguistic practices. This chapter proposed that literary dystopias offer a privileged fictional space for the staging of this cultural phenomenon, and that, in the feminist dystopias examined above, the linguistic practices are inextricably linked to the construction and maintenance of gender domination, with language being depicted as an instrument of enforcement (at times, the very materialization) of a highly dystopic order. In an important essay entitled "Language, Gender, and Power", Susan Gal states that "it is important to remember that domination and power rarely go uncontested" (1995: 175).[96] The fictions studied above also focus on the liberating potential of language by showing women engaging in verbal hygiene practices which represent ways of resisting the male-dominant orders surrounding them. Their resistance in itself indicates that the effectiveness of verbal hygiene is represented in partial, limited terms. In a similar fashion, the women's (re)action, as portrayed in Elgin's and Atwood's texts, is never entirely successful, or free from co-optation and/or reaction in the form of further verbal hygiene. This led to our consideration of the narratives not only in terms of the *presence* but also of the *failure* of verbal hygiene.

Issues of female identity, agency and authority informed the analysis of the fictional representations of verbal hygiene. Although the protagonists' verbal hygiene enacted as escape from language in Lisa Tuttle's story may ultimately entail the dissolution of identity (and risks a fall into inchoateness), it interrogates the centrality of language in the constitution of female subjectivity. Elgin's Láadan novels are centred upon women's agency as language-makers and

---

[96] In Hall & Bucholtz eds. 1995: 169-182.

verbal hygienists, while offering no delusions concerning the extent of this agency. Atwood's text, in turn, displays hygienic impulses directed at the maintenance of authority (in extremist and liberal guises), and a woman's resistance through narration. Considered together, the narratives help to expose the gender politics underlying verbal hygiene and raise readers' awareness of the role of language as a key instrument in the construction of gender identities and relations.

The gender-polarized versions of verbal hygiene observed in the narratives reveal culturally embedded assumptions which tend towards maintaining or changing the status quo, as well as the visions of utopia underlying them. I have identified different manifestations of feminist "elsewheres" envisioned in relation to language. Elgin's and Atwood's novels similarly portray women working simultaneously within and against a male dystopic order, a contradictory position associated with the female feminist subject's elsewhere. And Tuttle's "The Cure" shows the feminist subject's contradictory relationship with language by ambiguously rendering a woman's a-linguistic utopia by means of language, i.e., of narrative. All three texts are marked by the presence of the other (more radical) version of the feminist utopian elsewhere, also related to the narrative "anticipatory consciousness" and its main motivation. Lisa Tuttle's suggests the possibility of constructing radically new identities which are less defined in and by language. Suzette Elgin's envision the space of feminist connectedness via language. Finally, Margaret Atwood's evokes the space of female creativity, where an individual freely expresses her desire in an act of narration.

As final remarks to this chapter I would like to return to its title, in which I refer to the textual construction of feminist utopias of/f language. I hope my analyses have succeeded in clarifying the distinction between the two fictional manifestations of feminist utopianism, indicated by the possibilities contained in the "of/off" dichotomy. My argument may be summarized as follows: while Tuttle's "The Cure" presents a feminist utopia "off" language, in the sense that it is literally a-linguistic and ineffable; Elgin's Láadan novels and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* render utopias "of" language because their feminist utopianisms are manifested by means of the construction of a women's language and of a woman's act of narration, respectively. There is, however, another way in which the of/off dichotomy can be perceived. This is so in the sense that the three narratives studied above consist, simultaneously, in utopias "of" and "off" language. First because the feminist utopianisms they construct is materialized by means of narrative, and therefore, of language. Secondly because, similarly to the paradox contained in the term "utopia" itself, the elusive figures of

the feminist "good place" 'portrayed' in these fictions exist in the "no place" of narrative which exceeds the possibility of being encoded in language.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion: Leaving Dystopia

I. Naomi's Journey

> She sensed perfection, and it tantalised her, driving her
> on to decipher this dead code that revolted all her
> instincts, in order to abstract the life that lay within.
> (Margaret Elphinstone, *A Sparrow's Flight*)

In the chapters that form part two of this thesis I offered readings of feminist
dystopias in search for their utopian elements, and here I shall sum up these readings in a
discussion of the patterns that I have associated with the feminist anticipatory consciousness
conveyed by the narratives. In order to do so I will bring two novels into the scene: Margaret
Elphinstone's *The Incomer* (1987) and *A Sparrow's Flight* (1989).[1] These feminist dystopias
provide an interesting ground on which to base my concluding remarks. I have chosen to do so
first because the imagistic and metaphorical 'materiality' of these fictions offers an
appropriate way to open up the space for the more abstract argumentation which will follow.
Secondly, and very relevantly, because Elphinstone's texts embody the juxtaposition of
different forms of utopian anticipatory consciousness examined above in relation to the other
feminist dystopias. This will become become clear as we proceed.

Both novels are about *a* future located many centuries after "the world was changed"
(I: 46, SF: 18). I emphasize the "a" because, as suggested by the subtitle of the second novel
("a novel of a future"), these narratives overtly indicate one future possibility among an
infinity. The "change" mentioned in the texts is marked by the textual novum of a radically
different environment: ecological disaster has caused major natural and social transformations.
These transformations include an adjustment to post-capitalist, post-technological village life;
the disappearance of cities, now reduced to ruins feared by the remaining population; and the
presence of contaminated portions of land which are gradually healing (e.g. "the empty lands"
of *A Sparrow's Flight*). With regard to a sexual novum, the future societies presented in the
two novels show some discontinuities with our contemporary real: institutionalized marriage is
non-existent, homosexuality is no longer seen as a deviation from a heterosexual norm,[2] and

---

[1] *The Incomer*, London: The Women's Press, 1987; *A Sparrow's Flight*, Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989. Quotations
will refer to these editions, and page numbers preceded by I or SF.

[2] While in *The Incomer* homosexuality is latent, Naomi's fellow traveller Thomas (the other protagonist) in *A*

the power structure between the sexes is in many ways reversed. Indeed, in the eco-feminist villages described in both texts, women occupy important positions as household heads and community leaders, maintaining "a spiritual connection with the land" (Babinec 1995). This suggests that women hold a privileged, or special, position in terms of ecological concerns. Also signaling the sexual novum is the fact that the birth of baby girls is much valued: "Boys were never spurned or neglected, but there was no denying that a daughter was an occasion for rejoicing, for it was upon daughters that the future depended" (I: 89).

In this thesis I have consistently emphasized the point that the feminist dystopias are about the present as much as they are about the future. Or, as Elphinstone herself says, "the other [future, fictional] world is often as much historical as it is fantastic" (1992: 47).[3] Something of history surfaces, for instance, in the use of place names to refer to geophaphical locations which are are recognizably Scottish.[4] Furthermore, gender issues are far from stabilized, and major gender conflicts which are only too familiar to contemporary people do persist in the fictional worlds created by Elphinstone, characterizing these worlds as *feminist dystopias* and adding to the historical force of their futuristic projections. Rape, for instance, "the utmost metaphor for the issue of power in sexual relations" (Funck 1998: 72), is a target of one of the novel's dystopian critique. Talking about *The Incomer*, Elphinstone touches the issue of unresolved gender relations: that future world is "*almost* free from male oppression but it's also got to relate to what we deal with, so in those terms it's a paradigm for contemporary reality."[5] Because the novels dramatize the tensions between women's desires and hopes and the "bad place" of history, they may be usefully addressed in terms of their utopian function and in relation to the feminist dystopian narratives examined in the previous chapters.

In *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* we follow traveller-musician Naomi, the protagonist who embodies, in my reading, the female feminist subject on her quest for utopia. Her trajectory structures the narrative spatio-temporality, as in both novels Naomi's journeys frame her temporary stay among foreign villagers (one Winter in *The Incomer*; ten days

---

Sparrow's Flight is a male homosexual. For a reading of a homoerotic lesbian subtext in *The Incomer*, see Lucie Armitt's "Space, Time and Female Genealogies: a Kristevan Reading of Feminist Science Fiction" in Sceats & Cunningham eds. 1996: 51-61.

[3] Margaret Elphinstone, "Contemporary Feminist Fantasy in the Scottish Literary Tradition" in Gonda ed. 1992: 45-59.

[4] A curious aspect in Elphinstone's speculative fictions is the interweaving of the fantastic and the realistic modes: "all my places are exact descriptions," she states (in personal communication). The combination of recognizable geographical locations (and their old historical names) with a future temporal dimension is one of the elements that bridges her fictions to our contemporary reality. This strategy generates uncanniness and a form of estrangement similar to that effected in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

[5] In interview with Babinec 1995: 58, her emphasis.

during the Spring in *A Sparrow's Flight*). In Chapter Four we saw that one of the ways in which feminist dystopias effect a utopian function is by paradoxically displacing and problematizing the utopian space-time, a strategy that is also observed in Elphinstone's novels. In parallel to the woman protagonists in Piercy's *Body of Glass* and Lessing's *Marriages*, Naomi is positioned liminally, experiencing, in the spaces she visits, utopian and dystopian situations; instances of these are Naomi's eco-feminist encounter with Mother Earth, and her estrangement and exclusion from the women's community during their gathering together as a consequence of a rape episode (both in the *The Incomer*, Chapters 23 and 28).

In the novels examined in Chapter Four the radical "good place" is displaced in relation to the narrative spatio-temporality, and problematized by means of a complication of the women characters' perceptions (vision impairment in Piercy, insufficiency of the senses in Lessing). Similarly, in both *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* the anticipation of a future utopia is rendered by means of the transitional locations and spatio-temporal dislocations with which the narratives start and close. The closing lines of *The Incomer*, which mirror the start of the narrative/journey, convey a positive expectancy: "The sky arched over her, blue as sapphire in the first heat of the sun, and the road stretched away ahead of her, limitless, weaving its way into the north, finding new ways and making connections, bringing together every village in the world" (I: 229). *A Sparrow's Flight* opens with the description of another (the same?) journey, this time posing the promise of Naomi's "coming home" to an island, significantly described as "a safe place" and "a sanctuary" (SF: 6, 3). The spatio-temporal symbolism of an island awaiting in the future clearly draws from the tradition in literary utopianism, but the text refuses to present Naomi's home/island, postponing her arrival at the destination with an interposed journey which functions as a narrative detour, and again displaces and problematizes the utopian space-time. In fact, at the end of the novel Naomi's liminal position (she is waiting for the right tide to make the crossing to the island) repeats the novel's opening, and sustains readers' expectation of a "good place" which is beyond narrative: on the last day of her journey, which is also literally a new beginning, the island is initially viewed ahead by Naomi as "a dark outline against a flame-coloured sky" gradually growing into sight as the sun rises "so that it leaped into sudden daylight, no longer a silhouette, but substantial as the earth on which she sat" (SF: 255, 256). The novel closes with the promise of the material ("substantial") island and Naomi getting ready to cross, a crossing into feminist utopian space-time, and out of narrative, which aligns itself not only with

Al· Ith's in *Marriages* and Malkah's in *Body of Glass*, but also with that of other female characters' in the feminist dystopias mentioned above.

In my analysis of Charnas' Holdfast series in Chapter Five, I elaborated on the relationship between dystopic narrative spaces, the feminist quest for utopia, and the formal issue of novelistic serialization. My argument was that the Holdfast novels stage feminist dystopias which function as starting points for the projections of feminist utopias, which, in turn, once they become a narrative topos (materialized by a sequel), inevitably show dystopic contours thus refusing to provide unproblematic pictures of feminist eutopias. I explained that this movement from projected utopia onto narrated dystopia and back to the projection of another utopia is crucial for the maintenance of the processual utopianism theorized by Bloch, and for the feminist self-critical perspective and utopian quest. This issue will be discussed further in the next section.

Interestingly, and in spite of major differences between the texts,[6] Elphinstone's novels share with Charnas's the interweaving of formal and thematic elements centred upon a female character's journey, which, as said above, is paradigmatic of the female feminist subject's quest. Like Charnas's stories about Alldera, the Naomi novels were initially intended as a longer series (so there is the possibility of future sequels)[7] and are structured around a female protagonist's travels and quest. Just as the narrative spaces in between novels are marked by Alldera's liminality, so is the narrative pattern in Elphinstone's novels. Ahead of both characters lies a horizon of possibilities, "the beginning of a quest" (SF: 22) with the symbolic note concerning "possible obstruction in the path ahead" (I: 2), and the temporary interactions with different communities which form the core of each of the novels. In their journeys, both Alldera and Naomi must face and suffer the effects of violence caused by sexual difference, oppressive sexual politics, gender-based exclusionary practices (at times the exclusion of women by women),[8] territorial defensiveness (and the violence triggered by border transgressions), elements which constantly remind us of our own dystopic history.

---

[6] The epic quality of Charnas's dystopian series, with the portrayal of wars and of the subsequent restructuring of entire socio-sexual systems, crucially distinguishes it from Elphinstone's, which is very much centred upon Naomi's journeys and the disruptions caused by herself as a foreign individual in the culturally different communities she visits.

[7] Elphinstone's original plan was of a "prose quartet", her fictional response to T.S. Elliot's "Four Quartets" and Beethoven's musical quartets. When asked whether she will resume the writing of the series, she prefers to leave this as an open possibility. (In personal communication.)

[8] Naomi represents the fact of difference between women, embodying the foreigner trying to communicate and overcome this difference in her associations with other women, as in this dialogue following her exclusion by the women's community in the village of Clachanpluck:

    'I am not a woman of Clachanpluck, but I am still a woman. I wish that you could see who I am.'

    'You think I haven't?'

    'Because you only see yourself in Clachanpluck. It's like looking in a mirror. What you don't see in me

Although Alldera's and Naomi's utopian dreams differ in nature and scope, their projected utopias are clearly marked by gender. While Alldera's quest has wider implications for the women surrounding and supporting her, Naomi's is more self-centred and involves the fulfilment of her own desire and the construction of an autonomous subjectivity. However, some of the choices both characters are obliged to make are strikingly similar, as, for instance, their option to leave their own children behind to be cared for by other people so that they can pursue their political/professional goals. (In *The Incomer*, Naomi's choice between motherhood and a career is paralleled by a character called Anna's similar dilemma. Cf. p. 73.) Both Charnas's and Elphinstone's texts leave this question in suspension. But perhaps what unites Alldera and Naomi's texts in a more fundamental way is the female protagonists' dissatisfaction with their surroundings, which marks their utopian subjectivity and makes of their journey a never-ending quest. Just like Alldera, Naomi is constantly longing for a new beginning: "You know I never stay. But I've come for a bit," she states as she approaches her home/island (SF: 5). Their unfinished quest is materialized formally by means of serialization, in a textual movement which pulsates between (dystopian) narrative and (utopian) anticipation.

Elphinstone's novels do not explore the form of linguistic utopianism I discussed in Chapter Six above, when I looked at the feminist dystopian fictions by Lisa Tuttle, Suzette Elgin and Margaret Atwood vis-à-vis the sociolinguistic concept of verbal hygiene in order to examine the constructions of gender domination and liberation resulting from metalinguistic struggles. Nevertheless, they show a high degree of self-awareness regarding issues of language. Firstly, like all speculative fictions, *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* overtly expose their metafictionality. This is inscribed in the very subtitle of the second novel which was mentioned above.[9] Furthermore, at times Elphinstone's texts emphasize the utopic and dystopic dispositions manifested in relation to language. The liberating aspects of language as deployed in narration and storytelling are stressed, for instance, in Thomas's and Naomi's 'talking cure' from past trauma and guilt in *A Sparrow's Flight* (see pp.228-229 and 236-238). This foregrounds the utopian elements of self-empowerment and survival contained in the confessional mode, which was discussed above when I looked at June's/Offred's personal accounts and located hope in the act of narration itself. Inversely, utopian fulfilment is also experienced outside language, as in the beautifully lyrical description of Naomi's communion with nature by penetrating the heart of the forest, in *The Incomer*:

---

is what is the same as yourself.' (I: 174)

[9] Cf. p.189.

A long descent, forgotten images returning. Rocked by the sea, down in the darkness *where there are no more words*. Only the music, *belonging to a place far beyond words*, at the very roots of consciousness. Rhythm of blood in her body, slow circling of the stars, music unheard through all the daylight years behind her. There was nothing left now, only the music, and all the music ever was the sound of the sea. Rhythm of water, rhythm of blood, the whole music of the world within her. The stars turned, and the sea swelled and retreated, and the long exile was over at last. (I: 208-209, my emphasis)

Located outside language, the natural state of well-being described above is similar to what I termed the "utopia off language" in my reading of Lisa Tuttle's "The Cure". But unlike Tuttle's, in Elphinstone's text this passage is followed by the protagonist's return to language and to a sense of renewed identity.

There is still another way in which utopianism is constructed in relation to language in Elphinstone's novels. In Chapter Six I showed that language may function as an instrument of liberation in the feminist dystopias when signs are reinvested with renewed meanings. This was discussed in relation to the strategies employed by June/Offred as a form of resistance against the linguistic dystopia imposed upon her in Gilead. Both *The Incomer* and *A Sparrow's Flight* foreground human agency and the role of a utopian subjectivity in deciphering the latent possibilities language encodes, that element which Bloch has termed the "surplus" in cultural expressions. One of the themes in *The Incomer* is the characters' struggle to extract meaning from books salvaged from the past. When the contents of the writings of the past are disclosed to George, a secondary character in *The Incomer*, he reacts by saying: "How does this dead person know what it is that we hold here in Clachanpluck?" (I: 59), 'reading' the old writings by an unknown author in reference to the villagers' respect for nature and overall ecological attitude. Like June/Offred, he as a reader is actually recycling the linguistic signs and their meanings. A similar mise-en-abîme is Naomi's readings of the "music of the past" (which involves, of course, a different language: the non-verbal code of the music writing). From one such reading I selected the epigraph to this section, which significantly hints at the "perfection" held by a cultural code and its resistance to fully disclose, or our inability to fully grasp, its latent utopia, a factor which "revolt[s] all her instincts". These metafictional clues allow us to envision the form of utopianism inherent in the ways in which human beings engage with (the reconstruction of) languages, codes and meanings, a practice which is ultimately emblematic of our own position as readers of the feminist dystopias, of literary texts, and of cultural forms in general, in trying to reach beyond ideologies in search for utopias: "It was a test, this journey, like learning the music of the past had been: struggling with something at the edge of her comprehension, feeling her imagination

stretched to its limits, and exulting in the possibilities" (SF: 41). Naomi's journey is paradigmatic not only of the other female protagonists' in the critical dystopias mentioned above, but also of our own journey as feminist reader subjects dreaming of an elsewhere.

II. Articulating the Feminist Elsewhere

> [Ernst] says slowly, "But surely you know that all places are bad, Irene."
> She says, "Then we will have to do something about all places."
> "That's a very, very big job." (Joanna Russ, *The Two of Them*)
>
> I have no picture of the city where the female subject lives. (Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't*)

My interrogation of the location of utopian spaces and drives in the feminist dystopian narratives and of the ways in which these spaces and drives can be (in)formed by feminism led me to the theoretical elaborations of a feminist elsewhere, which I showed, in Chapter Three above, to mean different things to different thinkers. While for Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva this conceptual space refers to a radical alterity beyond sex and history, Luce Irigaray and Teresa de Lauretis think about the women's elsewhere in a more immediate manner as the contradictory positionality of a female feminist subject located simultaneously within and against dominant androcentric culture and its apparatus of control. I then proposed a combination of these two supplementary stages into a utopian hermeneutical tool which proved invaluable for my readings of the feminist critical dystopia.

As one would expect, feminist speculative fictions have been previously thought of in relation to a utopian elsewhere. Jan Relf theorizes this elsewhere as the "eutopian other world represented in the fantasies of women writing utopia" (1991: 63), thus approaching the alternative world contained in the feminist eutopias as the image, or the object, of women's desire. Unlike Relf's, my own understanding of the elsewhere consciously avoids an explicit reference to the textual image of the feminist "good place", as this very easily slides into static configurations of ideals, being thus at odds with my own readings of the utopian potential of the feminist dystopias.[10] The notion of an elsewhere re-emerges in Elisabeth Mahoney's treatment of the feminist dystopias as a generic space "for thinking through issues of gender and identity" (1994: 10), by which she means both the marginal cultural space deliberately

---

[10] Relf's elaboration is very close to Frances Bartkowski's definition of the Not-Yet "framed" by the feminist (e)utopias critiqued in Chapter Three above. Cf. p.51.

and strategically occupied by these fictions and the subversive textual spaces they open up. Although I agree with the issue of cultural marginality, one could take issue with Mahoney to the extent that she appears to homogenize and oversimplify this marginality (e.g., texts like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* can only be considered marginal in very specific circumstances), but this is not my aim here. In parallel to her second use of the term, i.e., the *elsewhere* as a subversive textual space, I re-conceptualized this space in terms of its utopian potential by looking at the two feminist theoretical trends explored in Chapter Three (and summarized in the paragraph above) in dialectical interaction. This double move consolidated an approach to the feminist critical dystopias which enabled me not only to locate the textual utopian spaces (and thus to a way of understanding the workings of the anticipatory consciousness and its utopian function) differently inscribed in narrative, but also to innovative readings of feminist dystopian fictions as major sites for articulating feminist "elsewheres". Moreover, this way of reading allowed me to re-think contemporary feminist (meta-)utopianisms; to reconsider the contradictions between feminist desire and hope; and finally, to take both formal and utopian/ideological textual elements into account.

The excerpts drawn from a feminist critical dystopia and a feminist theoretical text which open this section synthesize the two visions of the elsewhere that informed the readings. While Joanna Russ's "trans-temp agents" travelling on diplomatic missions contemplate the fundamental badness of all places and the female protagonist expresses her wish to transform them despite the enormity of the task ahead, de Lauretis's statement, made with reference to the problematics of women and/in discourse, indicates the impossibility of even imagining what a radically transformed place would look like after Irene's "very, very big job" is accomplished.[11] My readings of the feminist dystopias indicated that, rather than effecting a paralysis, the intersection between those two different conceptions of feminist "elsewheres" can actually be productive and positive to the extent that it enhances a processual form of utopianism.

I showed that the feminist dystopias provide a view of the feminist elsewhere understood as women's contradictory position, in the sense that the female protagonists in these texts are located within, but engage in struggle against, the extremely rigid masculine economies surrounding them. The utopian function understood at this level was observed, revising Bloch in his analysis of fairy tales (1959, 1962), in the weak, little *woman's* active

---

[11] Chapter Four above showed that De Lauretis is echoed in more recent elaborations from other feminist forums. There, I mentioned Gillian Rose's, who, voicing her critical stance regarding the discipline of geography, speculates about women's paradoxical space: "I am not sure what this elsewhere would be like; but I

search for happiness in defiance of the giant.[12] (The metaphor of the giant is appropriate in this context, for, as commented above, gender hegemony is usually allegorized by means of exaggerated male power in the feminist dystopia.) Going beyond the portrayal of male brutality and female victimization, the feminist fictions I examined show women emerging as active social agents, organized in large or small collectives or acting individually, against masculine dystopic orders. We saw, for instance, that in Charnas's series, the gender struggles reach epic proportions and involve difficult negotiations among different groups of women, whereas the search for the feminist "good place" in texts like Tuttle's starts with two women in mutual support. In most cases, resistance, survival and the eventual partially successful transformation of an oppressive order are manifested by means of strategies and quests which are both personal and political, reminding us of one of feminism's fundamental premises. This is the case, for instance, with June's/Offred's act of narration in *The Handmaid's Tale*; Malkah's crossing to the women's land at the end of *Body of Glass*; and, in Elphinstone's texts, Naomi's precarious balance between the acceptance of the other women's cultural differences while keeping her own individuality and sense of self. These fictional women offer empowering examples of female subjectivities, thus providing an important link with the empirical world of feminist politics. They are likely to play a crucial role in the formation of feminist identities, helping to shape and providing inspiration for a feminist "counter-public sphere", a political body which can be mobilized by a sense of identity grounded on the "shared experience of gender-based oppression" (Felski 1989: 166). In this sense, this generic mode has more to offer in terms of role models for female feminist subjects than the feminist eutopias, which tend to be utopian in a compensatory way and to provoke lesser political response.

By articulating the elsewhere understood in this sense, the feminist dystopian narratives metaphorize everyday feminist struggles, providing inspiration for women's actions from within the "chinks of [the] world-machine", to quote from one of the most well-known feminist dystopias (Sheldon 1973: 78). Reading them can be comparable to viewing the chinks and cracks of a male-hegemonic culture with a magnifying glass, and unveiling gender-marked, multi-faceted utopian resistance and survival. The contingencies and sheer diversity which characterize the modes of resistance (ranging, for instance, from pacifist resistance in texts like Ursula Le Guin's *The Eye of the Heron* to armed terrorism in Marge Piercy's *Body*

---

am certain it would not be like here and now" (1993: 143).

[12] Or, using Barthes's terminology, this analytical instance involved looking at the proairetic code of narration, the code of actions and events. See footnote 39, p.62 above.

of Glass) prevent programmatic readings and responses to the genre. And while it is true that at times the feminist dystopias over-simplify gender polarizations in their "world-reduction" (e.g. by presenting an extremist dualizing picture of male/oppressors versus female/oppressed), on the other hand their strong reliance on gender has crucial effects and implications. First, and bearing in mind what I said in the introduction concerning the generic compression of forms of gender-polarized conflict belonging to different histories and geographies into the narrative dystopian space-times, this may indeed raise readers' awareness concerning the condition termed by Bloch as our "non-contemporaneity" (1962):[13] the contradictory co-existence, in a given time continuum, of multi-faceted cultural traits (elements of ancient societies, different forms of consciousness and ways of life) whose dialectical interaction may open up critical utopian arrears. Because they portray women as a group who suffer gender oppression to varying degrees, the feminist dystopias as a whole resist a uniform view of women in history while at the same time stressing the issue that gender-inflected oppression completely traverses our social reality.[14] Besides, the gender factor in these fictions reminds us that our empirical reality is light years away from the post-structuralist utopias of post-gender subjectivities, such as Donna Haraway's cyborg identity in its most radical potentiality, and of sexualities without gender and other queer utopias which conceive gender in negative terms (Haraway 1991, Martin 1994). Finally, a strong sense of gender imbalance also functions as a sharp critique of the complacency observed in certain 'feminist'[15] quarters, which ultimately leads, on the level of oppositional politics, to a paralysis in grassroots actions and movements, and, on the theoretical level of academic debate, to the deplorable present state of metacritical dissension "diagnosed" in an important recent article by Susan Gubar (1998).[16]

The examination of the feminist critical dystopias by Marge Piercy, Doris Lessing, Suzy McKee Charnas, Lisa Tuttle, Suzette Elgin, Margaret Atwood, and Margaret Elphinstone demonstrated that these contemporary fictions are also characterized by the 'presence' of an elsewhere in its radical conception, as that good otherness beyond history and

---

[13] Cf. especially pp. 97-148 of *Heritage of Our Times* (1962).

[14] Although I am referring to the dystopian genre as a whole, I should stress again that at times forms of gender oppression belonging to different histories and geographies are "compressed" into one novel.

[15] A couple of years ago I would have used, perhaps in a very crude manner, the term "post-feminist" in this context, meaning the unhappy convergence between feminist, poststructuralist and postmodernist philosophies of absolute relativism which led, ultimately, to political paralysis. In that sense, "post-feminist" actually meant "anti-feminist". Now the term has been redefined as the "coming of age" of feminism, "its maturity into a confident body of theory and politics, representing pluralism and difference and reflecting on its position in relation to other philosophical and political movements similarly demanding change" (Brooks 1997: 1). In which case my qualms regarding the term are ended, if not my wariness regarding its negative charge.

[16] Her essay is advisedly titled "What Ails Feminist Criticism?"

sex, which at the same time motivates the narratives and evades narrativization. Thus conceived, the elsewhere manifests the anticipatory consciousness in relation to the object of women's desire in its unnameability. It is, I argued, that element which sustains the fictions by its very retreat. I showed that, in different ways, the narratives complicate and refrain from disclosing a picture of the feminist "good place", or the contents of its final utopia, which remains in the spaces off-narration.

In several passages above, I touched on the relation between the absence of the moment of utopian fulfilment and issues of literary negativity (i.e., of language struggling to say the unsayable).[17] The paradox of utopia elaborated upon by Bloch was discussed in Chapter Two, and Chapter Three explored the possible alignment of this representational paradox with a semiotics of narrative. Fascinated by this literary (*ou*)topos, Bloch returns to it in his analysis of fairy tales, by looking at those stories in which wishes, usually numbering three, are 'wasted': "not even the fairytale finds it easy to say the wish of wishes in terms of content: the highest good is like a well of lasting contentment, but where the well springs up is hidden in the *inconspicuous*, at best in the *emblematic*" (1959: 1315, my emphases). My examination of the feminist critical dystopias aimed to show that this structural 'absence' is manifested by means of certain narrative strategies, and has major political implications. We will remember that, while in texts like Piercy's, Lessing's, and Elgin's the problematization of the women's radical elsewhere is built up around a fundamental *inconspicuousness* (i.e., it is that which cannot be perceived sensually or is literally hidden, or both), in other texts such inconspicuousness is achieved by means of narrative strategies of detour (e.g. Tuttle's "The Cure"), postponement (e.g. Charnas's unfinished/able series of novels), and the palimpsest (e.g. Atwood's). Section I above looked at Elphinstone's novels and demonstrated that these strategies may overlap. These features led us to a perception of utopia as a central absence, or receding point, in the feminist critical dystopias. In my opinion, this 'absent' factor itself enables a view of these fictions as *emblematic* of utopia as a specific semiotic process,[18] and of our failure to imagine utopia. With the recent reconceptualizations of utopianism from the perspectives of poststructuralism and postmodernism, it has become a question whether the inability to conceive and (re)present utopias is to be considered a failure at all.[19]

---

[17] I shall return to this in section IV below.

[18] Utopia thus understood is equivalent to a specific signifying practice and writing mode, which I will term the writing of utopia. I will expand this topic in the final section below.

[19] Fredric Jameson has given much attention to the issue of "our constitutional inability to imagine Utopia" in the last decades. Cf. Jameson 1975, 1982 (where this quote is from), 1998. The 1998 text comments on essays forming a special section of *Utopian Studies* 9 (2) dedicated to his works. In it, Jameson interrogates this 'failure' as such.

I argue for a positive reading of this 'failure' and base this argument in my proposal of a way of reading located at the convergence of two forms of narrative encodings of the utopian elsewhere. The dialectical interaction between the two "elsewheres" (the anticipatory consciousness manifested in the female characters' transformative agency and in the central absence of the final picture of the feminist utopia) enables us to rethink contemporary feminist utopianisms. This involves, in turn, a reconsideration of the contradictions between the female feminist subjects' desire, and hope in processual, productive terms. In order to expand this point, I will draw a parallel between the utopian strategies observed in the feminist dystopias and feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti's picture of a possible post-structuralist utopia imagined in relation to nomadic subjectivities:

> The utopia, or nonplace, that the poststructuralists pursue [...] is a nomadic path that functions according to different rules and designs. I will define this sort of post-human utopia as a political hope for a point of exit from phallogocentrism; it is the basis for nomadic consciousness. Nomadic thinking is the project that consists in expressing and naming different figurations for this kind of decentred subjectivity. (1994: 32-33)

My readings of the feminist critical dystopias identified in the female characters' struggles against the dystopic male orders surrounding them the measure of the "political hope" mentioned by Braidotti. This form of anticipatory consciousness is crossed, or to an extent contradicted, by the textual inscription of the lack (absence or displacement) of the object of women's desire. This undercutting provides a displaced view from an elsewhere understood as an other space, which immediately puts all the utopian visions, as well as the transformative actions carried out in the name of those visions, under critical scrutiny.[20] This seems to be what the poststructuralist utopia based on "nomadic thinking" is about: a mode of thinking and acting which is no longer located where thought and agency were originated, but elsewhere. The feminist fictions I have looked at are, then, beyond the utopian mode in the sense that they are meta-utopias, thus deserving to be referred to as critical dystopias in the full sense of the term.

This way of reading built upon a complementary relation between the two feminist visions of a utopian elsewhere offered one possible solution for a major contradiction in Bloch's utopianism (namely, his conceptualization of utopias based on the rigid dual model of

---

[20] A similar elaboration to mine is Tom Moylan's discussion, from the perspective of postmodernity, of the necessary erasure of the positive in utopian discourse: "the positive in utopian discourse must (*pace* Derrida) always be the positive *under erasure*: must be self-reflexively positive, pre-conceptually positive, provisionally positive, reluctantly positive, resistantly positive - must be positive uttered in such a way that it immediately starts to interrogate itself as soon as it is spoken" (1992, in Randolph ed. 1992: 10, his emphasis).

abstract and concrete utopias, which undermines the philosopher's own claims concerning the paradox of utopia). Approaching the feminist critical dystopias from this perspective enabled us to reconsider the 'contradictions' between desire and hope, abstract and concrete utopias for Bloch, in terms of dialectical interaction. I repeatedly stressed the fact that the feminist critical dystopias show women's transformative agency to dismantle hegemonic androcentric structures, thus encoding (concrete) political hope. It was also said that the female characters' actions vary in nature, having at times contradictory aims, and involve the difficult recognition of differences and the (not always possible) negotiation of those differences among them. So, the dystopias offer no final picture of the feminist "good place", of the object of female desire. Nevertheless, rather than paralysis, or an anaemic utopianism, this generates the circulation of more desire; thus freeing the fictions (and us) from stagnant modes of thinking and of hoping, and teaching "desire to desire, to desire better, to desire more, and above all, to desire in a different way."[21] This second movement is essential in terms of the recognition of the partiality and provisionality of any utopias and of the ideological limitations of contemporary feminisms.

At the intersection of the two "elsewheres" observed in the feminist critical dystopias, I locate the point from which these literary texts move towards that which is totally ideological in terms of feminist utopian desire educated into political hope and tranformative action; and from which, being at their most utopian, they fall into silence revealing the limitations of their feminist ideologies and epistemologies. These fictions expose their highly metafictional quality, and are simultaneouly invested with a radical political function, articulating the utopian promise of that which cannot be articulated - encoded in language and narrative - yet.

III. The Writing of Utopia

> Perhaps the ultimate motive for metaphor, or the writing and reading of figurative language, is the desire to be different, to be elsewhere. (Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon*)[22]

Bloom's remark appropriately sets the stage for my final comments on a semiotics of utopia in relation to the feminist critical dystopias, as it centralizes the protagonists of the story of reading and writing (writers, readers, literary texts) from the perspective of a

---

[21] Thompson 1976, quoted by Levitas 1999.

[22] Although Harold Bloom places semioticians and feminists among the "School of Resentment" (whom Bloom himself seems to resent), and would certainly find my way of reading deplorable, his speculations regarding the motives for reading and writing literary texts could not be more suitable to open this section.

motivating desire, a "desire to be elsewhere". According to the definition of utopia favoured in this study, this desire can be qualified as utopian. In Chapter Three above I quoted Louis Marin's broad formulation[23] concerning representations, desire and utopia, as a starting point for my own elaboration of the ways of reading which would enable a utopian hermeneutical approach to the feminist critical dystopia. This approach was built up from the combination of Ernst Bloch's main premises (the impossibility of defining the contents of utopia, the presence of a utopian function in cultural forms, and the notion of a cultural surplus which generates the continuous production of meaning) with the semiotic projects of Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva. I then showed that the semioticians' formulations of an "otherness" in literary language are not at odds with Bloch's conceptualization of the utopian anticipatory consciousness manifested in literary texts. This common basis allowed the creation of a way of reading for the utopian element encoded as a narrative enigma, or a non-place, which functions as its main motivation. The close readings presented above tested this way of reading, and opened up the possibility of a theorization of the feminist critical dystopias as emblematic of utopia understood as semiosis (as a specific signifying process or writing mode), which I shall briefly discuss now.

The dystopias examined above are a narrative practice that responds to our social environment in a way that is self-consciously critical and informed by feminism. I quoted Isabel Allende in the introduction to say that, to the extent that this writing is motivated by the authors' own desire for an elsewhere, it is in itself an act of hope.[24] As a specific signifying practice, the dystopian fictions are symbolic materializations of desire. In addition to this, they are centred upon the women characters' oscillation between the (problematic) affirmation of their own desire and the education of this desire into political hope, thus promoting the engendering of female feminist subjectivities. In an extremely self-reflexive way, they are twice the expression of female desire, as this writing practice involves desiring women portraying desiring women. This becomes even more perceptible in the instances where the female protagonists themselves are pictured engaging in semiotic practices, which is the case in most of the dystopian fictions examined above (e.g. storytelling in Piercy, map-making and drawing in Charnas, language-making in Elgin, music decoding in Elphinstone), but more obvious in the first person narratives of Tuttle and Atwood. This is one sense in which the feminist critical dystopias are emblematic of utopia as semiosis: because they are a specific

---

[23] Which is actually very similar to Bloom's. Cf. p.58 above.
[24] Cf. p. 4.

symbolic system, in itself motivated by and an expression of female feminist desire, which represents this very same desire.

There is still another sense in which the feminist critical dystopias offer a privileged domain for theorizing utopia as semiosis. In Chapter Three above I speculated about the morphology of the word utopia, in semiotic terms, as a representational "fullness" which carries in itself and exposes an embedded "emptiness": the word being the signifier of an 'absent' signified. I then expanded this idea by bringing together Bloch's and Barthes's elaborations on narrative enigmas, which enabled the understanding of the contradictory condition of utopian discourse and the formulation of a utopian hermeneutical approach. My readings of the feminist critical dystopias showed a parallel to what was said above regarding the term utopia. I propose that these narratives are emblematic of utopia as a signifying process to the extent that the feminist dystopian fictions I examined are textual signifiers pointing towards a signified that is deferred. I demonstrated that the feminist "good place" exists in the feminist dystopias as the "no place", as those spaces off-narrative, i.e. the unresolved narrative enigmas. Just as the "good place" (eu-topos) and the "no-place" (ou-topos) are contained and expressed by one sign,[25] so too the feminist dystopias are texts which dream with the good otherness while aware of the impossibility of their expressing it.

In Chapter One I insisted upon a distinction between an understanding of dystopia as a narrative topos, whereas utopia was defined as the expression of women's desire. And in Chapter Three I expanded the definition of the feminist dystopias as a fiction practice characterized by the attempt to articulate this utopian desire. They are a utopian discourse to the extent that the narrative workings are directed towards that supplement of plenitudes, which, I stressed, exists in excess to a textual signifier (i.e., it exceeds narrativization) and carries hopes of perfection and happiness. The readings of the feminist dystopias showed that the hidden, final feminist utopia both generates and motivates the dystopian narratives, which, as I hope to have demonstrated, can now be grasped as a utopian writing mode.

In the dystopian narrative machine the presence of the writing of utopia is equivalent, to borrow a metaphor from Roland Barthes, to "the rustle [which] is the noise of what is working well" (1975: 76).[26] If the rustle stops, plot stops flowing and narrativity stops. Therefore, this negativity in utopian writing (manifested in the feminist critical dystopia by the

---

[25] The fact that both meanings are juxtaposed in the very same prefix (i.e., the Greek *ou* and *eu* are synthesized in the *u*) further stresses the point that one signifier contains its own contradiction.
[26] "The Rustle of Language" (1975, in Barthes 1984: 76-79). Although the essay opens with the simile between the rustle of language and that of the machine, its last paragraph slides into natural metaphors, i.e. the rustle of nature. For an excellent commentary on this text, see Chapter 8 in Knight 1997.

figural evasion of the space of women's desire) is, in the last analysis, a positivity. First because it is the very condition of narrativity. This understanding of utopian writing relates to the issue of language struggling to say the unsayable,[27] whose major figural expression is catachresis. This leads us back to my introduction, where I proposed that this figure offers an appropriate way of thinking about the feminist critical dystopia; and to the epigraph to this thesis, taken from José Saramago's story about the search for the unknown island: "How could I speak to you about an unknown island if I do not know it."[28] (This character's remark, in itself an instance of catachresis, encapsulates the whole story.) Similarly to Elphinstone's *A Sparrow's Flight*, Saramago's short story keeps the promise of the dreamed island/utopia by taking readers into a narrative detour, or deviation, which is the working of catachresis. Secondly, such space of negativity in the writing of utopia is a positivity in that it opens up a supplementary relationship to meaning (the cultural surplus, for Bloch) driving readers to anticipate utopian meaning that is not yet there. Barthes terms this form of anticipation "the rustle of language":

> [J]ust as, when attributed to the machine, the rustle is only the noise of an absent noise, in the same way, shifted to language, it would be that meaning or - the same thing - that non-meaning which produces in the distance a meaning henceforth liberated from all the aggressions of which the sign, formed in the 'sad and fierce history of men,' is the Pandora box. (1975: 78)[29]

As textual signifiers, the feminist dystopias epitomize, perhaps more than any other literary genre, the inextricable relation between the sign and the 'sad and fierce history of men'. (We will remember that my introduction elaborated on the metaphor of Pandora box, which surfaces in this excerpt, in relation to the feminist dystopias.) My readings showed the functioning of this compromised fiction practice and the dream of liberated meaning it anticipates, i.e. the Blochian Not-Yet. This is encoded, I argued, in the articulation of the elsewhere, which is also the writing of utopia.

I will conclude this study by briefly commenting on the role of the reader, the other protagonist in the stage set by Bloom, with which this section opened. For Bloom (and I fully agree with him) the act of reading is motivated by the reader's subjective desire to be elsewhere. I explained above that the dystopian texts effect a radically different response when compared to literary eutopias. While the latter can trigger a consolationist response to the

---

[27] It is surprising that in a collection which was recently reissued about literature and the unsayable (Budick & Iser eds. 1987, 1996 reprint), only one essay approaches the theme of utopia. Cf. Hendrik Birus, whose essay examines literary theory, namely Adorno's aesthetics, rather than literary texts.

[28] My translation.

[29] Earlier in the same paragraph, Barthes affirms that "the rustle of language forms a utopia" (1975: 77), an

extent that it offers a compensatory bracket from the social evils surrounding us, the dystopian novum offers no such consolation. I also said that, from the perspective of a feminist reading position, this is crucial in terms of promoting affective identifications and raising readers' political awareness. (This issue was discussed in more detail in the context of my reading of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.) In other words, the reading position constructed by the feminist dystopias denies the satisfaction of desire and reinforces readers' initial position as desiring subjects.

I will return to the issue of readers' reaction to the deferral of the moment of utopian fulfillment, which is a recurrent pattern of the feminist critical dystopias. My readings stressed the major function served by this deferral insofar as it adds a self-critical and processual element to manifestations of utopianism. And earlier in this section I drew upon Barthes's speculations regarding "the rustle of language" in order to point out that this textual strategy opens up the space for the production of utopian meaning. Now I will focus on the role of the utopian subjectivity in this process, hoping to foreground the crucial role of the reader's desiring subjectivity and utopian imagination in engendering such utopian meaning. Elisabeth Vonarburg's *The Maerlande Chronicles* offers interesting ground for this discussion, as this feminist critical dystopia is as much about reading and deciphering as it is about alternative socio-sexual configurations and gender-inflected social oppression. Besides, the passages quoted below show the female protagonists engaging with interpretative practices involving a semiotic interplay between a textual "fullness" and "emptiness", which is central to the point I wish to make. Observe the happy coincidence that is Vonarburg's use of the motif of the cube/box as the text being deciphered, which, of course, reminds us of the analogy I constructed between the dystopias and Pandora's box:

> One day Mooreï had shown [Lisbeï] a black and white engraving, a cube seen in perspective. "Is it hollow or full?" Full, of course, since the purpose of drawing it from an angle was to create the illusion of a free-standing object. "Look carefully." She studied the engraving, puzzled. Was it full or empty? And suddenly, in an invisible but instantaneous transfer, the black and white surfaces changed perspective and the cube was hollow. After several tries, she understood: *a kind of deliberate mental twist* enabled you to see the hollow cube. She burst into delighted laughter. (1992: 121, my emphasis)

The 'cube passage' is reiterated much later in the narrative. In the second time, Lisbeï receives a gift in a box whose decorative pattern repeats that of the drawing of her childhood: "It was a square, wooden box inlaid with mother-of-pearl. It took Lisbeï a moment to realize the design

---

assertion that this longer quotation aims to explain.

was one of illusory cubes, alternately concave and convex. She smiled as she opened the box" (1992: 549). These passages can be considered as a metaphor for the role of the utopian subjectivity in approaching the feminist dystopias. This is so to the extent that a utopian hermeneutics depends on a "deliberate mental twist" from the part of the reader to see the text/cube/box in its full utopian meaning. This holds true for every individual act of reading, but acquires greater relevance in cases like the present one, in which reading becomes not only a public affair, but also a hopefully shared political stance, and a utopian statement in itself. What I learned during my own voyage throughout the fictional realms of the feminist dystopia was that if you look long enough and engage with the text in its full potentialities, you will see the picture of utopia forming.

Glossary of Terms

❖ **abstract / concrete utopia:** dichotomy conceptualized by Bloch (1959) to create the distinction between expressions of utopia as (abstract) wish-fulfilment, and the 'genuine' or 'authentic' (concrete) utopia, whose major manifestation is the dialectico-Marxist orientation towards the elimination of class. In Bloch's writings, abstract utopianizing is associated with uneducated desire; while the concrete utopia is better understood as educated hope (*docta spes*) and relates to the real historical possibilities and latencies he terms the Not-Yet-Become. Although this distinction is ultimately untenable (Levitas 1990), the dichotomy remains central for an understanding of Bloch's utopianism. Furthermore, it occupies a crucial position in the critique directed against 'abstract' utopianizing underlying oppositional politics, which are obviously turned away from such form of 'abstract' utopianizing and towards 'concrete' historical transformation.

❖ **anti-utopia:** this term has been widely used in reference to the literary dystopias (Kateb 1963, Hillegas 1966, Elliott 1970, Barnes 1971, Kumar 1987). Anti-utopia may also refer to a wider body of literary, philosophical and academic works which offers a critique of, or attacks, certain forms of utopianism and their accompanying utopian ends, e.g. perpetual peace, guaranteed abundance, conditioned virtue (Kateb [1963] analyzes this trend). Because the main argument of this thesis is that the feminist critical dystopias as a genre are *not* antagonistic to the utopian mode (much to the contrary, I argue that, rather than *anti-*, such feminist fictions are *for* utopia), anti-utopia is not an adequate term to be used with reference to the subgenre in this context. Making use of very confusing terminology, Elliott names the genre in speculative literature which accomplishes the 'redemption' of utopia in the 20th century "anti-anti-utopia" (1970). To avoid such twists, I always use the term *dystopias* in relation to the narrative genre, restricting the use of **anti-utopia** to a reaction *against* utopia (unless, of course, I am quoting from other critics' works).

❖ **critical dystopia:** my use of the term draws upon Tom Moylan's (1986) previous theorization of the **critical utopia**. In my formulation of the feminist critical dystopia, "critical" refers to three factors: the negative critique of, and opposition to, patriarchy brought into effect by the dystopian principle; the textual self-awareness not only in generic terms with regard to a previous utopian literary

tradition (in its feminist and non-feminist manifestations), but also concerning its own constructions of utopian "elsewheres"; and the fact that the feminist dystopias are in themselves highly critical cultural forms of expression (for the two reasons pointed out above), which in turn may have a crucial effect in the formation or consolidation of a specifically critico-feminist public readership. While Moylan stresses the merging of utopian and dystopian elements in the **critical utopias**, I find it necessary to make a specific claim for the term *critical dystopia* because of two factors: the predominance of a dystopic setting in the feminist fictions being examined (i.e., they portray fictional "bad places"); and the distinction I want to emphasize between **dystopia** as a narrative form which performs a utopian function, and **utopia** as the expression of women's desire which is both motivational of, and embodied in, the dystopian narrative.

❖ **critical utopia:** the term was coined by Tom Moylan (1986) to refer to a transformation observed in utopian writing in the late 1960's and 1970's. The critical utopias, he explains, "dialectically transform the utopian and dystopian precursors and [...] incorporate the self-reflexive strategies and tactics of postmodernism in the face of the movement into, and critique of, the emerging global economy" (1992, in Randolph ed. 1992: 6). The critical utopias, thus, represent the "coming-of-age" of utopian writing, deeply influenced by (and influential upon) the radical movements starting in the 1960's, which has emerged as a distinct form of cultural expression in the second half of the twentieth century. As explained above, my own elaboration on the feminist critical dystopias is developed in extension of this concept.

❖ **dystopia:** term used to refer to a subgenre of literary utopianism which portrays imaginary societies worse than the readers'. This definition requires qualifications. First, I should stress again that any allusions to worse, or better, societies are implicitly relativistic. These representations beg the question: worse for whom? Although there can never be decisive terms, this matter is partially settled by the fact that in this thesis the focus has been narrowed in terms of gender. In other words, I base my definition of the feminist dystopias on the idea of the suppression of female desire. This solves, to a great extent, the problem of perspective, since most female readers would certainly agree that the fictions mentioned here picture "bad places" for women. Secondly, I approach the literary dystopia as a predominantly narrative textual genre which is paradoxically marked by a utopian writing mode (which I term the writing of utopia), since it encodes a strong element of desire for an

alternative elsewhere of history, sex, and meaning. Terms which have been previously used to refer to the dystopian subgenre include the following: **anti-utopia** (see entry above), black utopia (Bloch 1959), negative utopia (Elliott 1970, Eco 1984, in Eco 1994), and **utopian satire** (Frye 1966). Commenting on this terminological variety, David Sisk quotes Alexandra Aldridge's witty compilation of "some bizarre appellations" used to define the modern dystopias, which include, for instance, "sour utopias in the apocalyptic mode" and "negative quasi-Utopias" (1997: 5).

❖ **eutopia:** subgenre of literary utopias in which the projected alternative society is better than the present one. Similarly to what was said above concerning the **dystopias**, the boundaries between the subgenres are not clear cut, and there are no definitive parameters to settle the distinction in any final way. In this thesis, eutopias are referred to as such because in their future worlds women are freer (in comparison with both the contemporary real and the fictional dystopian worlds) to express their own desire. Author of literary utopias Marge Piercy thinks about the eutopian/dystopian narrative spectrum in terms of predominance within texts: "Most of *Woman* [*on the Edge of Time*] is if only, and most of *He, She and It* [*Body of Glass*] is if this goes on" (1994: 1).

❖ **feminist utopia:** the expression is used in this thesis with three possible meanings, and the context in which it is used always clarifies the intended meaning. First, **feminist utopia** may refer to imaginative, literary projections of the women's "good place". In this case, what I have in mind is the conventional generic definition. The second meaning is more encompassing, and more prevalent in this study, than the first. **Feminist utopia** signifies any dreams, or (attempted) projections, of alternative female economies of desire which oppose the historical, male-centred one grounded upon the objectification of women and the negation of their positionality as subjects of desire (e.g., theorizations or artistic expressions of sexual-separatist or sexual role-reversal paradigms). Finally, it was said above that a major aim of this thesis is the search for **feminist utopias** in the dystopian fictions. In this sense, the expression means the manifestation in narrative of certain patterns of (self-)critical utopian resistance and transformation, which are approached as encodings of the feminist "elsewheres". In this light, the feminist utopia is a fiction practice, a writing mode,

which embodies women's feminist desires and political hopes and finds in the contemporary feminist critical dystopias a privileged form of expression.

❖ **heterotopia:** I have used the term following Michel Foucault's definition. He employs it differently in two contexts. Heterotopias may signify instances of symbolic 'disorder' in opposition to the fabulatory consolation offered by utopias. Thus viewed, heterotopias disturb language, "desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, [...] dissolve our myths" (1966: xviii). In a later text about social spaces, the philosopher uses the term to define the actual compensatory spaces, or counter-sites, found within cultures, which contest the culturally dominant spaces where we live. Heterotopias are again discussed alongside utopias, but with reference not to a disposition in language, but to real social spaces (rest homes, museums and libraries, for instance). In the later conception, heterotopias are distinct from utopias because, despite the fact that they are also devised in oppositional relation to empirical contemporary society, utopias are "sites with no real place", "unreal spaces" (1984: 24). In a nutshell, utopias are imaginative fabulations; while heterotopias are compensatory social spaces. I have employed the term in the intersection of the two meanings: both in the sense that the novels fictionalize the heterotopias of deviation in relation to dominant (male) dystopic socio-cultural spaces (e.g. the Barren Houses in Elgin's *Native Tongue*); and also meaning the disruptive disposition in narrative discourse, which dissolves language and the utopian visions constructed by utopian writing.

❖ **meta-utopia:** ironic, more self-conscious and self-questioning utopianism which emerges with the the political movements of the 1960's and 1970's, marking the shift in conception of utopianism away from the classical approach centred upon reason, which is what underlies the modernist teleological project. This meta-utopianism is characterized by open-ended, processual, provisional and contingent approaches and modes of thinking (Csicsery-Ronay 1997). The concept of the **meta-utopia** is aligned with that of the **critical utopia**, but the latter has been used mostly in reference to literary utopianism.

❖ **partial utopia:** the term was used pejoratively by Bloch (1959) to refer to utopian social dreaming of 'limited scope' which characterizes certain historical movements (e.g. feminism, the youth movement, Zionism). These were considered by him to be secondary to the full-scale, Marxist utopia of the classless society. From the perspective of contemporary theory and politics, and with the influence of

poststructuralist and postmodernist debates, the idea of a partial utopia appears to be *the only* possible way to theorize utopianism. Margaret Mead's claim that "one [wo]man's dream" is "another [wo]man's nightmare" aptly communicates both the impossibility and undesirability of theorizing utopianism in a monolithic way (1957: 958). In this sense, feminism must be, according to Bloch, viewed as a partial utopia. But this partiality is now invested with positivity: feminism is a partial movement both because it expresses the specific wishes of women, and because it contains and constructs, in turn, several other partial utopias within its discursive space.

❖ **post-modernist/post-structuralist utopianism:** understood in broad terms as formalized responses to the challenges posed to utopianism in the last decades in face of the radical paradigmatic shifts caused by the relativistic, self-critical ways of thinking about symbolic and epistemological structures, as well as of our historical condition of postmodernity. In a happily succinct statement, Ruth Levitas explains that "[t]hese shifts [in utopianism] involve a greater provisionality and reflexivity of utopia itself, together with a shift of emphasis from content to process" (1999: 5). The **meta-utopia** and the **critical utopia** discussed above, of course, belong here. And so do other utopian-theoretical configurations mentioned in this thesis, like the feminist nomadism defended by philosopher Rosi Braidotti; the cyborg identity theorized by Donna Haraway; and the utopia of a post-gender state advocated by queer theory.

❖ **static, blueprint, or classical utopia:** is used to mean the classical literary form of encoding utopian social dreaming, epitomized by Thomas More's *Utopia*, whose historical formation can be dated back to ancient myths and texts: Judeo-Christian and pagan mythologies, Greek and Roman art and philosophy. The genre is characterized by the systematic description of the ideal society, and, as Fredric Jameson reminds us, "is mostly nonnarrative" (1994: 56) thus lacking the dynamism of its generic successors.

❖ **utopia:** conventionally refers to the literary, filmic, political, philosophical or any other form of imaginary representation or argumentative creation of a social organization alternative to (and intended as better than) ours. My use of the term, however, initially follows Ruth Levitas (1990) by favouring an analytical definition: in this thesis, utopia means women's expression of their own desire for a different, better way of being. I argue that utopia thus understood serves critical and anticipatory

functions and finds in the feminist critical dystopias a privileged form of cultural expression. My approach deliberately moves away from a conceptualization of utopia in formal terms (i.e., as a literary genre), towards an understanding of the concept as a specific writing mode which encodes the expression of desire, as perceptible in the workings of feminist dystopian narrative. Thus approached, the writing of utopia is a semiosis, a specific signifying process involving authors, their texts (a fictional practice) and readers, motivated by the dream of a utopian elsewhere of history, of sex, of meaning. (When there is a need to refer specifically to the conventional meaning of utopia, the context makes this clear.)

❖ *Utopia*: Thomas More's humanist work describing an ideal commonwealth which named the genre. It was originally written in Latin, titled *De Optimo Reipublicae Statu deque Nova Insula Utopia Libellus Vere Aureus* (published in 1516), and first translated into English in 1551.

❖ **utopianism**: is understood as an umbrella term for social critique and social dreaming which have been elaborated formally. This includes literary, philosophical, and/or political bodies of writing, as well as any other verbal and non-verbal forms of cultural expression (e.g. public speeches, painting, photography).

❖ **utopian satire**: also refers to a mode in literary utopianism, in which the description of the imagined society is rendered in a more ambiguous form than in the **eutopias and dystopias**, and in which "satire overwhelms the other elements" (Sargent 1994). Although the dystopian fictions I deal with in this study portray "bad places" when seen from the perspective of feminist readings (being less ambiguous and thus falling into the category of dystopias), they keep a dialogic relation with satire. This is perceptible by means of their uses of exaggeration, sarcasm, irony and the grotesque (e.g. Angela Carter's novels). The relation between the subgenres is explained by the fact that the origins of the dystopian subgenre can be located in the satirical strand in the literary utopia (Kumar 1991). Northrop Frye even went so far as to refer to the literary subgenre of dystopias as themselves utopian satires (1965, in Manuel ed. 1965: 28-29).

Bibliography

I. Dystopian Fictions by Women: 1967-1998

The majority of fictions listed below are full-scale dystopias. However, the list also includes a small number of fictions best defined as women's eutopias, rather than dystopias, when these narratives also feature a women's dystopia as part of its settings (as a background, an alternative space-time, or a marginal society). Dates preceding the titles refer to year of first publication.

Acker, Kathy (1988) *Empire of the Senseless*. London: Picador.

Atwood, Margaret (1985) *The Handmaid's Tale*. Toronto: Seal Books, 1986.

_____ (1975) "When It Happens". In Susan Williams & Richard Jones eds. *The Penguin Book of Modern Fantasy by Women*. London: Penguin, 1996: 279-289.

Baines, Elizabeth (1983) *The Birth Machine*. London: The Women's Press.

Brooke-Rose, Christine (1990) *Verbivore*. Manchester: Carcanet.

Butler, Octavia (1987) "The Evening and the Morning and the Night". In *Bloodchild and Other Stories*. New York and London: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1995: 33-68.

_____ (1993) *The Parable of the Sower*. London: The Women's Press, 1995.

_____ (1983) "Speech Sounds". In *Bloodchild and Other Stories*: 87-108.

Cadigan, Pat (1984) "Another One Hits the Road". In *Patterns*. London: Grafton, 1991: 107-139.

Califia, Pat (1988) "The Hustler". In *Macho Sluts*. Boston, Mass.: Alyson Publications, 1988: 177-210.

Carter, Angela (1974) "The Executioner's Beautiful Daughter". In Harry Harrison & Brian Aldiss eds. *The Year's Best Science Fiction No. 8*. London: Sphere Books, 1976: 166-173.

_____ (1969) *Heroes and Villains*. London: Penguin, 1981.

_____ (1972) *The Infernal Desire Machines of Dr. Hoffman*. London: Penguin, 1982.

_____ (1977) *The Passion of New Eve*. London: Virago, 1995.

Charnas, Suzy McKee (1989) "Boobs". In Williams & Jones eds. 1996: 479-498.

The Holdfast Series (1974-1994):

_____ (1974/1978) *Walk to the End of the World & Motherlines*. London: The Women's Press, 1995.

_____ (1994) *The Furies*. London: The Women's Press, 1995.

Cherryh, C.J. (1978) "Cassandra". In Pamela Sargent ed. *Women of Wonder: The Contemporary Years. Science Fiction by Women from the 1970's to the 1990s*. San Diego, New York and London: Harvest/Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995: 21-28.

Elgin, Suzette Haden (1969) "For the Sake of Grace." In Donald Wollheim & Terry Carr eds. *World's Best Science Fiction 1970*. London: Gollancz, 1970: 113-136.

The Native Tongue Trilogy (1984-1994):

_____ (1984) *Native Tongue*. London: The Women's Press, 1985.

_____ (1987) *The Judas Rose - Native Tongue II*. London: The Women's Press, 1988.

_____ (1994) *Earthsong - Native Tongue III*. New York: Daw.

Elphinstone, Margaret (1987) *The Incomer*. London: The Women's Press.

_____ (1989) *A Sparrow's Flight - A Novel of a Future*. Edinburgh: Polygon.

Emshwiller, Carol (1980) "Abominable". In Sargent ed. 1995: 81-88.

Fairbairns, Zöe (1979) *Benefits*. London: Virago, 1988.

_____ (1985) "Relics". In Jen Green & Sarah Lefanu eds. *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind: An Anthology of Original Stories*. London: The Women's Press, 1985: 175-189. Also in Williams & Jones eds. 1996: 417- 431.

Ferris, Lucy (1997) *The Misconceiver*. London: Sceptre, 1998.

Forbes, Caroline (1985) "London Fields". In *The Needle on Full*. London: Onlywomen Press, 1985: 78-151.

_____ (1980) "The Needle on Full". In *Needle*: 9-37.

_____ (1985) "Night Life". In *Needle*: 155-167.

_____ (1980) "Snake". In *Needle*: 38-44.

_____ (1980) "Transplant". In *Needle*: 76-77.

Galloway, Janice (1987) "A Continuing Experiment." In Duncan Lunan ed. *Starfield: The Anthology of Science Fiction by Scottish Writers*. Kirkwall: Orkney Press 1989: 83-88.

Gapper, Frances (1985) "Atlantis 2045: No Love Between Planets". In Green and Lefanu eds. 1985: 129-135.

Gearhart, Sally Miller (1979) *The Wanderground*. London: The Women's Press, 1985.

Gentle, Mary (1984) "The Harvest of Wolves". In Sargent ed. 1995: 114-122.

Hall, Leslie (1993) "In the Green Shade of a Bee-Loud Glade". In Williams & Jones eds. 1996: 514- 524.

Hall, Sandy (1982) *The Godmothers*. London: The Women's Press, 1984.

Jerome, Hilary (1980) *A Woman's World 138-9 Chri Plus*. Wells, Somerset: Thorn.

Jones, Gwyneth (1985) "The Intersection". In Green & Lefanu eds. 1985: 35-47.

Kavan, Anna (1967) *Ice*. Lodon: Picador, 1973.

Kettle, Pamela (1969) *The Day of the Women*. London: Leslie Frewin.

Le Guin, Ursula (1986) *Always Coming Home*. London: Grafton, 1988.

_____ (1974) "The Day Before the Revolution". In Pamela Sargent ed. *More Women of Wonder - Science Fiction Novelettes by Women about Women*. London: Penguin, 1979: 249-264.

_____ (1978) *The Eye of the Heron.* In Virginia Kidd ed. *The Eye of the Heron and Other Stories.* London: Panther, 1984: 109-251.

_____ (1975) *The New Atlantis.* In Robert Silverberg ed. *The New Atlantis and Other Novellas of Science Fiction.* New York: Warner, 1976: 65-93.

Lessing, Doris (1979-1983) *The Canopus in Argos: Archives Series:*

_____ (1979) *Re: Colonised Planet 5 Shikasta.* London: Grafton, 1990.

_____ (1980) *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five (As Narrated by the Chroniclers of Zone Three)* London: Flamingo, 1994.

_____ (1981) *The Sirian Experiments - The Report by Ambien II, of the Five.* London: Granada, 1982.

_____ (1982) *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8.* London: Jonathan Cape.

_____ (1983) *Documents Relating to the Sentimental Agents in the Volyen Empire.* London: Jonathan Cape.

_____ (1969) *The Four-Gated City.* London: Granada, 1978.

_____ (1974) *The Memoirs of a Survivor.* London: Flamingo, 1995.

Livia, Anna (1988) *Bulldozer Rising.* London: Onlywomen Press.

Love, Rosaleen (1988) "The Invisible Woman." In *The Total Devotion Machine and Other Stories.* London: The Women's Press, 1989.

Lynn, Elizabeth A. (1978) "Jubilee's Story." In Kidd ed. 1984: 43-52.

Mannes, Marya (1969) *They.* London: Sphere, 1971.

McCaffrey, Anne (1969) *The Ship Who Sang.* London: Corgi, 1992.

McNeil, Pearlie (1985) "The Awakening". In Green & Lefanu eds. 1985: 150-163.

Newport, Cris (1984) "The Courage of Sisters". In Rita Arditti et al. eds. *Test-Tube Women: What Future for Motherhood?* London and Boston: Pandora Press, 1984: 449-56

Piercy, Marge (1991) *Body of Glass.* London: Penguin, 1992. [published in the U.S. as *He, She and It*]

_____ (1970) *Dance the Eagle to Sleep.* London: W.H. Allen, 1971.

_____ (1976) *Woman On the Edge of Time.* New York: Fawcett Crest, 1983.

Russ, Joanna (1975) *The Female Man.* London: The Women's Press, 1994.

_____ (1978) *The Two of Them.* London: The Women's Press, 1984.

Sargent, Pamela (1984) "Fears". In Sargent ed. 1995: 141-151.

Saxton, Josephine (1985) "Big Operation on Altair Three". In Green & Lefanu eds. 1985: 9-14.

_____ (1976) "Gordon's Women". In *The Travails of Jane Saint and Other Stories.* London: The Women's Press, 1986: 109-120.

_____ (1980) "The Pollyanna Enzyme". In *The Travails*: 181-194.

Sheldon, Alice [James Tiptree, Jr.] (1968) "Mama Come Home". In *Ten Thousand Light-years from Home.* London and Sydney: Pan, 1977: 44-65.

_____ (1973) "The Girl Who Was Plugged In". In *Warm Worlds and Otherwise*. New York: Ballantine, 1979: 79-121.

_____ (1969) "The Snows are Melted, The Snows are Gone". In *Ten Thousand Light-years*: 17-29.

_____ (1973) "The Women Men Don't See". In *Warm Worlds*: 131-164. Also in Harrison & Aldiss, eds., pp. 57-88.

Sheldon, Raccoona (1985) "Morality Meat". In Green & Lefanu eds. 1985: 209-234.

Tennant, Emma (1974) *The Last of the Country House Murders*. London: Faber, 1986.

Tepper, Sheri (1988) *The Gate to Women's Country*. London: Corgi, 1990.

Tuttle, Lisa (1984) "The Cure". In *A Spaceship Built of Stone and Other Stories*. London: The Women's Press, 1987: 123-134.

_____ (1979) "Wives". In *A Spaceship Built of Stone and Other Stories*: 25-34. Also in Williams & Jones eds. 1996: 355-364.

Vinge, Joan D. (1978) "Phoenix in the Ashes." In *Phoenix in the Ashes*. London & Sydney: Futura, 1986: 1-42.

Vonarburgh, Elisabeth (1992) *The Maerlande Chronicles*. Trans. Jane Brierley. Victoria: Beach Holme.

_____ (1981) *The Silent City*. Trans. Jane Brierley. London: The Women's Press, 1990.

Wilhelm, Kate (1967) "Baby, You Were Great". In Pamela Sargent ed. *Women of Wonder: Science-Fiction Stories by Women about Women*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974: 166-181. Also in Williams and Jones eds. 1996: 198-212.

_____ (1972) "The Funeral". In *The Infinity Box*. London: Arrow, 1979: 288-318. Also in Sargent ed. 1979: 171-199.

_____ (1973) "The Red Canary". In *The Infinity Box*: 113-133.

_____ (1974) "The Scream". In Harrison & Aldiss eds. 1976: 138-165.

_____ (1974) *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*. London: Arrow, 1977.

Wilson, Elizabeth (1993) *The Lost Time Café*. London: Virago.

Winterson, Jeanette (1998) "Disappearance I". In *The World and Other Places*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1998: 100-115.

Wittig, Monique (1985) *Across the Acheron*. Trans. David Le Vay. London: Peter Owen, 1987.

Yarbro, Chelsea Q. (1972) "False Dawn." In Sargent ed. 1974: 225-241.

_____ (1971) "Frog Pond." In *Cautionary Tales*. London: Granada, 1983: 26-37.

II. Other Works Consulted

Adorno, Theodor et al. (1977) *Aesthetics and Politics*. Several translators. London: Verso, 1986.

Alexander, Bryan (1998) "Jameson's Adorno and the Problem of Utopia." *Utopian Studies* 9 (2): 51-57.

Alighieri, Dante (*c.*1315) *The Divine Comedy.* Trans. C.H. Sisson. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Anderson, Linda ed. (1990) *Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction.* London: Edward Arnold.

Andriano, Joseph (1992) "*The Handmaid's Tale* as Scrabble Game". *Essays on Canadian Writing* 48: 89-96.

Ardener, Shirley ed. (1978) *Defining Females: The Nature of Women in Society.* London: Croom Helm.

_____ ed. (1975) *Perceiving Women.* London: Malaby.

Arendt, Hannah (1963) *Eichmann in Jerusalem - A Report on the Banality of Evil.* London: Faber and Faber.

Aristophanes (411-391? BC) *Three Plays by Aristophanes Staging Women.* Trans. and ed. Jeffrey Henderson. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Armitt, Lucie (1996) *Theorising the Fantastic.* London and New York: Routledge.

_____ (1991) *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction.* London and New York: Routledge.

Atwood, Margaret (1992) *Good Bones.* London: Virago.

Babinec, Lisa (1995) "'Between the Boundaries': An Interview with Margaret Elphinstone." *Edinburgh Review* 93 (Spring): 51-60.

Baggesen, Søren (1987) "Utopian and Dystopian Pessimism: Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest* and Tiptree's 'We Who Stole the Dream.'" *Science Fiction Studies* 14: 34-43.

Baker-Smith, Dominic & Barfoot, C.C. (1987) *Between Dream and Nature: Essays on Utopia and Dystopia.* Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Bammer, Angelika (1991) *Partial Visions - Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s.* New York and London: Routledge.

Barnes, Myra (1971) *Linguistics and Language in Science Fiction-Fantasy.* New York: Arno, 1975.

Barr, Marleen (1987) *Alien to Femininity - Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory.* Westport: Connecticut.

_____ ed. (1981) *Future Females: A Critical Anthology.* Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press.

_____ ed. (1999, forthcoming) *Future Females, The Next Generation: New Voices and Velocities in Feminist Science Fiction Criticism.* Boston: Rowman & Littlefield.

_____ (1993) *Lost in Space - Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond.* Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press.

Barthes, Roland (1966) *Criticism and Truth.* Trans. and ed. Katrine P. Keuneman. London: The Athlone Press, 1987.

_____ (1977) *Image-Music-Text.* London: Flamingo, 1982.

_____ (1957) *Mythologies*. Sel. and trans. Annette Lavers. Herts: Paladin: 1976.

_____ (1973) *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1997.

_____ (1984) *The Rustle of Language*. Trans. Richard Howel. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.

_____ (1970) *S/Z*. Trans. Richard Miller. London: Jonathan Cape, 1975.

Bartkowski, Frances (1989) *Feminist Utopias*. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press.

de Beauvoir, Simone (1949) *The Second Sex*. Transl. H. M. Parshley. London: Jonathan Cape, 1953.

Bergmann, Harriet (1989) "'Teaching Them to Read': A Fishing Expedition in *The Handmaid's Tale*." *College English* 51 (8): 847-854.

Berrini, Beatriz (1997) *Utopia, Utopias*. São Paulo: Educ.

Bhabha, Homi (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

Bignell, Jonathan (1993) "Lost Messages: *The Handmaid's Tale*, Novel and Film." *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 8 (1): 71-84.

Blanchot, Maurice (1980) *The Writing of the Disaster*. Trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986.

Bloch, Ernst (1974) *Essays on the Philosophy of Music*. Trans. Peter Palmer. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

_____ (1962) *Heritage of Our Times*. Trans. Neville & Stephen Plaice. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

_____ (1998) *Literary Essays*. Ed. Werner Hamacher & David Wellbery. Trans. Andrew Joron et al. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

_____ (1963) *A Philosophy of the Future*. Trans. John Cumming. New York: Herder and Herder, 1970.

_____ (1959) *The Principle of Hope - Volumes I, II and III*. Trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice & Paul Knight. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1995.

_____ (1988) *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*. Trans. Jack Zipes & Frank Mecklenburg. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 1993.

Bloom, Harold (1994) *The Western Canon*. New York and London: Harcourt Brace & Co.

Booker, M. Keith (1994a) *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*. Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press.

_____ (1994b) *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide*. Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press.

_____ (1994c) "Woman On the Edge of a Genre: The Feminist Dystopias of Marge Piercy". *Science Fiction Studies* 21 (3): 337-50.

Boucher, Anthony (1942) "Barrier". In Kingsley Amis & Robert Conquest eds. 1965 *Spectrum IV: A Science Fiction Anthology*. London: Victor Gollancz: 134-188.

Bradbury, Ray (1954) *Fahrenheit 451*. London: Corgi, 1967.

Braidotti, Rosi (1994) *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory.* New York: Columbia University Press.

_____ (1991) *Patterns of Dissonance: A Study of Women in Contemporary Philosophy.* Trans. Elizabeth Guild. Cambridge: Polity.

Branham, Robert (1983) "Fantasy and Ineffability: Fiction at the Limits of Language." *Extrapolation* 24 (1): 66-79.

Brantenberg, Gerd (1977) *The Daughters of Egalia.* Trans. Louis Mackay with G. Brantenberg. London and New York: Journeyman, 1985.

Bray, Mary Kay (1986) "The Naming of Things: Men and Women, Language and Reality in Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue.*" *Extrapolation* 27 (1): 49-61.

Brewer, Mária M. (1987) "Surviving fictions: Gender and Difference in Postmodern and Postnuclear Narrative." *Discourse* 9 (Spring-Summer): 37-52.

Brooks, Ann (1997) *Postfeminisms - Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms.* London and New York: Routledge.

Brooks, Peter (1984) *Reading For the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative.* Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Budick, Sanford & Iser, Wolfgang (1987) *Languages of the Unsayable - The Play of Negativity in Literature and Literary Theory.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Burdekin, Katharine [Murray Constantine] (1934) *Proud Man.* New York: The Feminist Press, 1993.

_____ (1937) *Swastika Night.* London: Gollancz, 1940.

Butler, Judith (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity.* New York and London: Routledge.

Cameron, Deborah ed. (1990) *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader.* London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

_____ ed. (1998) *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader.* London and New York: Routledge. [second, rev. ed.]

_____ (1992) "Why the Cyborg Doesn't Dream of a Common Language." Unpublished paper delivered at Glasgow University in May 1992.

_____ (1995) *Verbal Hygiene.* London and New York: Routledge.

Campanella, Thomas (1623) *City of the Sun.* In *Famous Utopias.* New York: Tudor, n.d.

Campbell, Joseph (1949) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* London: HarperCollins, 1993.

Čapek, Karel & Joseph (1920/1921) *R.U.R. & The Insect Play.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961.

Carr, Helen ed. (1989) *From My Guy to Sci-Fi: Genre and Women's Writing in the Postmodern World.* London: Pandora.

Cavalcanti, Ildney (1998) "The Profession of Science Fiction 52: 'A Literature of Unusual Ideas', Interview with Suzy McKee Charnas." *Foundation* 72 (Spring): 5-19.

Cixous, Hélène & Clément, Catherine (1975) *The Newly Born Woman.* Trans. Betsy Wing. London: Tauris, 1996.

Clarke, I. F. (1978) *Tale of the Future - From the Beginning to the Present Day*. London: The Library Association.

Clute, John & Nicholls, Peter eds. (1993) *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995. [updated ed.]

Clute, John (1995) *Science Fiction: The Illustrated Encyclopedia*. London and New York: Dorling Kindersley.

Coelho, Teixeira (1980) *O Que É Utopia*. São Paulo: Brasiliense.

Cornillon, Susan ed. (1972) *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*. Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1973. [rev. ed.]

Cranny-Francis, Anne (1990) *Feminist Fiction - Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Creed, Barbara (1993) *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Csicsery-Ronay, Istvan (1997) "Notes on Mutopia". *Postmodern Culture* 8 (1). [pmc@jefferson.village.virginia.edu]

Cubitt, Sean (1997) "Book review". *Screen* 38 (3): 296-301.

Daly, Mary & Caputi, Jane (1987) *Webster's First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*. London: The Women's Press, 1988.

Dinesen, Isak (1957) "The Blank Page". In Sandra Gilbert & Susan Gubar eds. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English*. New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985: 1391- 1394. [second, rev. ed. 1996]

Dodderidge, Esmé (1979) *The New Gulliver Or, The Adventures of Lemuel Gulliver Jr. in Capovolta*. London: The Women's Press, 1988.

Donawerth, Jane & Kolmerten, Carol eds. (1994) *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Doxiadis, Constantinos (1966) *Between Dystopia and Utopia*. London: Faber.

Doyle, Margaret (1995) *The A-Z of Non-Sexist Language*. London: The Women's Press.

During, Simon ed. (1993) *The Cultural Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.

Eagleton, Terry & Milne, Drew eds. (1996) *Marxist Literary Theory - A Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Eco, Umberto (1994) *Apocalypse Postponed*. London: Flamingo, 1995.

_____ (1993) *The Search for the Perfect Language*. Trans. James Fentress. Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995.

_____ (1994) *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press.

_____ (1976) *Tratado Geral de Semiótica*. Trans. Antonio Danesi e Gilson Souza. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1991.

Ehrlich, Susan & King, Ruth (1994) "Feminist Meanings and the (De)politization of the Lexicon." *Language in Society* 23: 59-76.

Elliott, George (1970) *The Shape of Utopia*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Erlich, Richard & Dunn, Thomas (1983) *Clockwork Worlds - Mechanized Environments in SF*. Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press.

Fabb, Nigel et al. eds. (1987) *The Linguistics of Writing: Arguments between Language and Literature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Felski, Rita (1989) *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change*. London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989.

Finkelstein, Norman (1989) "The Utopian Function and the Refunctioning of Marxism". Review essay on Ernst Bloch's *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays*. *Diacritics* 19 (2): 54-65.

Flinn, Caryl (1992) *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Forrest, Katherine (1984) *Daughters of a Coral Dawn*. Tallahasse, Florida: The Naiad Press.

Forster, E.M. (1909) "The Machine Stops." In *The New Collected Short Stories*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1985: 108-140.

Foucault, Michel (1984) "Of Other Spaces". *Diacritics* 16 (1): 22-27.

_____ (1966) *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Routledge, 1994.

Freud, Sigmund (1930) *Civilization and Its Discontents*. The Penguin Freud Library. Volume 12: *Civilization, Society and Religion*. London: Penguin, 1991.

_____ (1955) *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud - Vol. XVIII*. Trans. and ed. James Strachey. Toronto: The Hogarth Press, 1962.

Funck, Susana (1998) *Feminist Literary Utopias*. Florianópolis: Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina.

Fuss, Diana (1989) *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature & Difference*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.

Geoghegan, Vincent (1996) *Ernst Bloch*. London and New York: Routledge.

Gibson, William (1984) *Neuromancer*. London: Harper Collins, 1995.

Gilman, Charlotte (1915) *Herland*. London: The Women's Press, 1992.

Glicksohn, Susan (1974) "The Martian Point of View." *Extrapolation* 15 (2): 161-173.

Gonda, Caroline ed. (1992) *Tea and Leg-Irons*. London: Open Letters.

Gopalan, Lalitha (1997) "Avenging Women in Indian Cinema". *Screen* 38 (1): 42-59.

Grace, Dominick (1998) "*The Handmaid's Tale*: 'Historical Notes' and Documentary Subversion." *Science-Fiction Studies* 25: 481-494.

Graves, Robert (1955) *The Greek Myths*. London: Penguin, 1992. [rev. ed. 1960]

Greer, Germaine (1997) "Book of the Century?" *The Waterstones Magazine* (Winter/Spring): 2-9.

Griffin, Gabriele ed. (1993) *Outwrite: Lesbianism and Popular Culture*. London and Boulder, Colorado: Pluto Press.

Gross, David (1988) "Bloch's Philosophy of Hope". Book review on *The Principle of Hope*. *Telos* 75 (Spring): 189-198.

Gubar, Susan (1998) "What Ails Feminist Criticism?" *Critical Inquiry* 24 (Summer): 878-902.

Haldane, Charlotte (1926) *Man's World*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Hall, Kira & Bucholtz, Mary eds. (1995) *Gender Articulated: Language and the Socially Constructed Self*. New York and London: Routledge.

Haran, Joan (1996) "Re-Visioning Feminist Futures." Unpublished paper delivered at the *Envisioning Alternatives: The Literature of Science Fiction Conference*. University of Luton, September 1996.

Haraway, Donna (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books.

Hayward, Susan (1996) *Key Concepts in Cinema Studies*. London and New York: Routledge.

Hesiod (*c*. 800 BC) *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*. Trans. Hugh Evelyn-White. London and Cambridge: Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1914. [rep. 1970]

Hillegas, Mark (1967) *The Future as Nightmare: H.G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hoban, Russell (1980) *Riddley Walker*. London: Picador, 1982.

Hogsette, David (1997) "Margaret Atwood's Rhetorical Epilogue in *The Handmaid's Tale*: The Reader's Role in Empowering Offred's Speech Act." *Critique* 38 (4): 262-278.

Honderich, Ted ed. (1995) *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Howard, Dick & Klare, Karl E. eds. (1972) *The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism since Lenin*. New York and London: Basic Books.

Hudson, Wayne (1982) *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch*. London and Basingstoke: MacMillan.

Humm, Maggie (1986) *Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critics*. Brighton: The Harvester Press.

_____ (1994) *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Feminist Literary Criticism*. New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Huxley, Aldous (1932) *Brave New World*. London: Penguin, 1967.

Irigaray, Luce (1996) *I Love to You - Sketch for a Felicity Within History*. Trans. Alison Martin. New York and London: Routledge.

_____ (1977) *This Sex Which is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Jakobson, Roman (1987) *Language in Literature*. Ed. K. Pomorska & S. Rudy. Cambridge, Mass. and London: Belknap Press.

James, Edward (1994) *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford and New York.

Jameson, Fredric (1998) "Comments". *Utopian Studies* 9 (2): 74-77.

_____ (1971) *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton U.P., 1974.

_____ (1981) *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Routledge, 1993.

_____ (1982) "Progress Versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?" *Science Fiction Studies* 9 (2): 147-158.

_____ (1987) "Science Fiction as a Spatial Genre: Generic Discontinuities and the Problem of Figuration in Vonda McIntyre's *The Exile Waiting.*" *Science-Fiction Studies* 14: 44-59.

_____ (1994) *The Seeds of Time*. New York: Columbia University Press.

_____ (1975) "World-Reduction in Le Guin: The Emergence of Utopian Narrative." *Science Fiction-Studies* 2: 221-230

Jones, Libby F. & Goodwin, Sarah W. eds. (1990) *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press.

Kateb, George (1963) *Utopia and Its Enemies*. New York: Schocken, 1976.

Kellner, Douglas & O'Hara, Harry (1976) "Utopia and Marxism in Ernst Bloch." *New German Critique* 9 (Fall): 11-34.

Kemp, Sandra & Squires, Judith (1997) *Feminisms*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Ketterer, David (1989) "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: A Contextual Dystopia." *Science-Fiction Studies* 16: 209-217.

Knight, Diana (1997) *Barthes and Utopia: Space, Travel, Writing*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Köester, Patricia (1983) "*Dystopia*: An Eighteenth Century Appearance." *Notes & Queries* (February): 65-66.

Kramarae, Cheris & Treichler, Paula (1985) *Amazones, Bluestockings and Crones - A Feminist Dictionary*. London: Pandora, 1992.

Kristeva, Julia (1980) *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Ed. Leon Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, Leon Roudiez. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.

_____ (1986) *The Kristeva Reader*. Toril Moi ed. Several translators. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.

Kuhn, Annette ed. (1990) *Alien Zone: Cultural Theory and Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema*. London and New York: Verso.

Kumar, Krisham (1987) *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*. Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.

_____ (1991) *Utopianism*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.

Lacombe, Michele (1988) "The Writing on the Wall: Amputated Speech in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale.*" *Wascana Review* 21 (2): 3-20.

de Lauretis, Teresa (1984) *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. London and Basingstoke: MacMillan.

_____ (1987) *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*. London: MacMillan, 1989.

Lefanu, Sarah (1988) *Feminism and Science Fiction.* Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989.

van Lenning, A. et al. eds. (1997) *Feminist Utopias in a Postmodern Era.* Tilburg: Tilburg University Press.

Levitas, Ruth (1990) *The Concept of Utopia.* Hempstead: Philip Allan.

_____ (1999) "For Utopia". Keynote address given at the conference *Nowhere: A Place of Our Own - Exploring the Uses of Utopia.* University of Warwick, May 1999.

Lucas, Janet (1995) "Nuancing the Cyborg: A Feminist Deconstruction of *He, She and It*". *Aotearoa Electronic Journal.* [fmst@stonebow.otago.ac.nz]

Mackenzie, Suzie (1996) "The Truth is Out There". *The Guardian*, November 30: 39-40.

Mahoney, Elisabeth (1994) *Writing So To Speak: The Feminist Dystopia.* PhD Dissertation. University of Glasgow.

Malak, Amin (1987) "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Dystopian Tradition." *Canadian Literature* (Spring): 9-16.

Mannheim, Karl (1929) *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge.* Trans. Louis Wirth & Edward Shils. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954.

Manuel, Frank ed. (1965) *Utopias and Utopian Thought.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

_____ & Manuel, Fritzie (1979) *Utopian Thought in the Western World.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Marin, Louis (1993) "Frontiers of Utopia: Past and Present". *Critical Studies* 19 (Winter): 397-420.

Marks, Elaine & de Courtivron, Isabelle eds. (1980) *New French Feminisms: An Anthology.* New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981.

Martin, Biddy (1994) "Sexualities Without Gender and Other Queer Utopias." *Diacritics* 24 (2-3): 104-121.

McKay, George (1994) "It's not 'about' science, it's 'about' fiction and it's 'about' about". *Science Fiction Studies - The Review of Science Fiction* 60 (Spring): 51-57.

Mead, Margaret (1957) "Towards More Vivid Utopias". *Science* 126 (3280): 957-961.

Meaney, Gerardine (1993) *(Un)Like Subjects: Women, Theory, Fiction.* London & New York: Routledge.

Medoff, Mark (1980) *Children of a Lesser God.* Ambergate, Derbyshire: Amberlane Press, 1982. [first staging April, 1979]

Merril, Judith (1951) *Shadow On the Hearth.* London: Roberts & Vinter, 1966.

Meyers, Walter E. (1980) *Aliens and Linguists: Language Study and Science Fiction.* Athens: The University of Georgia Press.

Milroy, James (1997) "Book Review of *Verbal Hygiene.*" *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 1 (1): 127-134.

Milton, John (1626?-1671) *Complete Poems, Of Education, Aeropagitica.* London and Vermont: Everyman, 1995.

More, Sir Thomas (1516) *Utopia*. Trans. Peter K. Marshall. New York: Washington Square Press, 1971.

Morris, Pam (1993) *Literature and Feminism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

Moylan, Tom (1986) *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. New York and London: Methuen.

_____ (1995) "Global Economy, Local Texts: Utopian/Dystopian Tension in William Gibson's Cyberpunk Trilogy." *Minnesota Review* 43/44: 182-197.

_____ & Daniel, Jamie eds. (1997) *Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch*. London and New York: Verso.

Murphy, Patrick (1990) "Reducing the Dystopian Distance: Pseudo-Documentary Framing in Near-Future Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies* 17: 25-40.

Neverow, Vara (1994) "The Politics of Incorporation and Embodiment: *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *He, She and It* as Feminist Epistemologies of Resistance." *Utopian Studies* 5 (2): 16-35.

The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. Ed. Lesley Brown. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Norris, Chistopher (1983) "Marxist or Utopian? - The Philosophy of Ernst Bloch." *Literature and History* 9 (2): 240-245.

_____ (1988) "Utopian Deconstruction: Ernst Bloch, Paul de Man, and the Politics of Music." *Paragraph* 11 (1): 24-57.

Orwell, George (1949) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. London: Penguin, 1983.

The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) Prep. J. A. Simpson & E. S. C. Weiner. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989. [2nd ed.]

Parrinder, Patrick (1980) *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching*. London and New York: Methuen.

Patai, Daphne (1982) "When Women Rule: Defamiliarization in the Sex-Role Reversal Utopia." *Extrapolation* 23 (1): 56-69.

Philips, Deborah (1986) "Telling Tales". Book Review of *The Handmaid's Tale*. *Women's Review* 7: 14-15.

Piercy, Marge (1994) "Telling Stories About Stories". *Utopian Studies* 5 (2): 1-3.

de Pizan, Christine (1405) *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards. London: Picador, 1983.

Plato (*c.* 370 BC) *Republic*. Trans. Robin Waterfield. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Propp, Vladimir (1928) *Morphology of the Folk Tale*. Trans. L. Scott. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.

Randolph, Jeanne ed. (1992) *The City Within*. Bannf, Alberta: Bannf Centre for the Arts.

Read, Jacinda (1997) "Narratives of Transformation: Fashioning the Female 'Avenger'". Unpublished paper delivered at the *Screen Studies Conference*. Glasgow, June 1997.

Relf, Jan (1991a) *Rehearsing the Future - Utopia and Dystopia in Women's Writing, 1960-1990*. PhD Dissertation. University of Exeter.

_____ (1991b) "Women in Retreat: The Politics of Separatism in Women's Literary Utopias". *Utopian Studies* 2 (1&2): 131-146.

Rich, Adrienne (1993) *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose*. Sel. and ed. Barbara and Albert Gelpi. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc.

_____ (1978) *The Dream of a Common Language - Poems 1974-1977*. New York: Norton.

Rose, Gillian (1993) *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity.

Russ, Joanna (1983) *How to Suppress Women's Writing*. London: The Women's Press, 1994.

Sacks, Sheldon ed. (1978) *On Metaphor*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Saramago, José (1998) *O Conto da Ilha Desconhecida*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

Sargent, Lyman Tower (1988) *British and American Utopian Literature, 1516-1985: An Annotated, Chronological Bibliography*. New York and London: Garland.

_____ (1994) "The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited." *Utopian Studies* 5 (1): 1-37.

Sargent, Pamela (1986) *The Shore of Women*. London: Pan, 1988.

Sargisson, Lucy (1996) *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*. London and New York: Routledge.

Sceats, Sarah & Cunningham, Gail eds. (1996) *Image & Power: Women in Fiction in the Twentieth Century*. London and New York: Longman.

Shelley, Mary (1826) *The Last Man*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Sheldon, Alice [James Tiptree, Jr.] (1976) "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?". In *Star Songs of an Old Primate*. New York: Ballantine, 1978: 164-226.

Showalter, Elaine ed. (1985) *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*. London: Virago, 1993.

Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 19 (2) 1994: 435-479.

Sisk, David (1997) *Transformations of Language in Modern Dystopias*. Westport, Conn. and London: Greenwood Press.

Sontag, Susan (1966) *Against Interpretation*. London: Vintage, 1994.

Staels, Hilde (1995) "Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: Resistance Through Narrating." *English Studies* 5: 455-467.

Suvin, Darko (1979) *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980.

_____ (1996) "The Profession of Science Fiction, 49: Travels of a Shintoist Cybermarxist." Interviewed by Liao Chao-Yang and Tami Hager. *Foundation* 67 (Summer): 5-28.

Tanner, Michael (1986) "Prophet of the Unbecome." Book review: *The Principle of Hope*. *The Times Literary Supplement* (August 22): 923.

Tennant, Emma (1987) "Margaret Atwood in Conversation with Emma Tennant." *Women's Review* 21: 8-11.

Varley, John (1978) "The Persistence of Vision". In *In the Hall of the Martian Kings*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson: 263-316.

Verne, Jules (1864) *Journey to the Centre of the Earth.* London: Penguin, 1994.

Wales, Katie (1989) *A Dictionary of Stylistics.* London and New York: Longman, 1995.

Walsh, Chad (1962) *From Utopia to Nightmare.* London: Geoffrey Bles.

Wandor, Michelene (1983) *On Gender and Writing.* London: Pandora.

Warhol, Robyn & Herndl, Diane Price (1991) *Feminisms - An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism.* New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Wells, H.G. (1895/1896) *The Wheels of Chance & The Time Machine.* London: Everyman's, 1969.

Wieseltier, Leon (1986) "Under the Spell of Paradise." Book review: *The Principle of Hope. The New York Times Book Review* (November 23): 44.

Wilde, Oscar (1890) "The Soul of Man Under Socialism." In *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde.* London and Glasgow: Collins, 1966: 1079-1104.

Wittig, Monique (1969) *The Guérrillères.* Trans. David Le Vay. London: Picador, 1972.

_____ (1973) *The Lesbian Body.* Trans. David Le Vay. London: Peter Owen, 1975.

_____ (1992) *The Straight Mind and Other Essays.* New York and London: Harvest Wheatsheaf.

Wolmark, Jenny (1994) *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism.* New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Women's Studies - An Interdisciplinary Journal 14 (2) 1987. Special Issue: Feminism Faces the Fantastic. Eds. Marleen Barr & Patrick Murphy.

Woolf, Virginia (1929/1938) *A Room of One's Own & Three Guineas.* London: Vintage, 1996.

Wright, Elizabeth ed. (1992) *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary.* Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell.

Zamyatin, Yevgeny (1924) *We.* Trans. Mirra Ginsburg. New York: Bantam, 1972. [First Russian publication 1952.]

Zinsser, William ed. (1989) *Paths of Resistance: The Art and Craft of the Political Novel.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.

Zipes, Jack (1979) *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales.* London: Heinemann, 1979.

_____ (1988) "Ernst Bloch and the Obscenity of Hope: Introduction to the Special Section on Ernst Bloch". *New German Critique* 45: 3-8.

III. Films

Aliens (US 1986, dir. James Cameron)

Blade Runner (US 1982, dir. Riddley Scott)

The Handmaid's Tale (US/Germany 1990, dir. Volker Schlöndorff)

I Spit on Your Grave (also known as *Day of the Woman*, US 1974, dir. Meir Zarchi)

Metropolis (Germany 1927, Fritz Lang)

Nell (US 1994, dir. Michael Apted)

The Piano (Australia/New Zealand 1993, dir. Jane Campion)

Planet Earth (US 1974, dir. Marc Daniels, TV movie)

Tank Girl (US 1995, dir. Rachel Talalay)

The Terminator (US 1984, dir. James Cameron)

Thelma and Louise (US 1991, dir. Riddley Scott)