

“A CONDITION OF POTENTIALITY”: AMERICAN WOMEN’S  
UTOPIAN AND SCIENCE FICTION,  
1920-1960

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

AUGUST 2009

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## DEDICATION

To the women who wrote these texts. To my mom, who told me I am doing what she would have done had her life circumstances been different. Most importantly, to my hopes, Sophia and Dominick.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to numerous individuals and organizations for this work. My committee – Kenneth Roemer, Stacy Alaimo, and Desiree Henderson – is a beautiful, balanced, organism. Kenneth Roemer inspired my interest in the project with his phenomenal teaching and vast knowledge, and he guided me academically, professionally, and personally along the way. He is the type of scholar, and type of person, I strive to be. Stacy Alaimo, too, is a scholar who sets the bar high for me. I read her *Undomesticated Ground* on the plane to a conference before this project, and the more I read, the more I sat up in my seat, nodded my head, mumbled praises. It remains my most marked up book. All of those little marginal exclamation points and frantic circles and asterisks fueled my thinking for this project, and *Material Feminisms* and conversation with Stacy guided it and refined it. Thanks, too, to her co-author, Susan Hekman. Desiree Henderson's research expertise enabled this project. I sat in on a class of hers as I was beginning this dissertation and soaked up the research guidance she gave her students. She opened my eyes to numerous databases and research strategies that were crucial to this project. In addition, she helped me sculpt my writing and express the argument clearly.

Many other scholars, mentors, and peers also helped me with this project. Lyman Tower Sargent generously shared his own unpublished bibliographies and helped weed through pages of lost race titles from Serendipity Books. Peter Howard at Serendipity Books in Berkeley kindly shared those titles from a collection he had just purchased.

Rebecca Jewett at Ohio State University's Charvat Collection and Rebekah Kim at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender Historical Society were generous in answering my research questions and guiding my research. Lucy Sargisson was kind enough to answer numerous emails from me and was enthusiastic in her support of the project. Her scholarly work has been an important buttress to this project. Margaret Lowry offered personal, realistic advice and support through this project. Jonathan Wilson read and re-read portions of the project before it was this project. Kevin Gustafson's leadership of the Dissertation Writing Group at the University of Texas at Arlington was crucial to my messy shaping of the project, and the members of the writing group were, too. In addition, Dave Wallace read and re-read chapters, making excellent critiques. Corby Baxter also read and offered time management suggestions that helped me finish my writing. Also, Eric Frierson and Ginger Dickens helped in profound ways with all of my formatting questions (not a small task).

My family has been an important support during this craziness. I owe more than just the completion of this project to Wes Arnold, who picked up and moved to Texas with me, so I could begin my Ph.D. work. We brought Dominick, our five-month-old son, whose "I love you, Mommy" has been more enabling than I will ever be able to articulate to him. And, Sophia, who was born in this last weeks of my last Ph.D. course, helped prepare me for the dissertation process by keeping me up all night and waking me up early every morning. Her little fingers probably typed a good deal of this project as she sat on my lap at 5 a.m. My parents, Terry and Debbie Barclay, infused a love of learning in me. I am fully convinced that my desire to be a scholar is rooted in the many times I sat with my father in his Thermo-Dynamics class, the books my mother suggested

for me as a child, and the free saltines from the University Center at Oklahoma State University. J.W. and Georgia Polk have spent a lot of time in prayer for me. Jeremy and Amy Barclay have offered comic relief and music. In addition, many other of my friends, family, peers, and mentors have shaped my thinking and provided a respite when I needed it. Thank you.

Finally, this project builds upon the important bibliographies of Daphne Patai and Carol Kessler. Their research and writing inspired and enabled this project and so many others. They have shaped the way we think about women authors in utopian studies. This dissertation simply would not have been possible without the work they have done for women authors in the field and for scholars. My greatest hope for this project is that it facilitates other studies in even a portion of the way that theirs has facilitated mine.

June 9, 2009

ABSTRACT

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The 1920-1960 period of women-authored United States utopian and science fiction deserves a reassessment. This study focuses on utopian texts and science fiction texts with strong utopian emphasis and recovers 41 women-authored utopian and science fiction texts from the period, almost doubling the number of titles in existing bibliographies. In so doing, the dissertation asserts, first, that the recovered texts mean that the 1920- 60 period is rich in women-authored utopian and science fiction; second, that many of these texts address issues that feminist theorists did not articulate until the

1970s; third, this means that we must reassess the ways in which we think of the period, utopian and science fiction, and feminist theory; and fourth, the issues these texts address are especially apparent through a material feminist frame. This reassessment disrupts the notions that critical and ambiguous feminist utopian and science fiction texts began changing their respective fields in the 1970s, showing that many women-authored works did so in earlier decades. Because of this, material feminism – which seeks to highlight the connections among science, culture, nature, and bodies – is a particularly suitable theoretical framework for a study of women’s utopian and science fiction. Chapter two outlines emergent material feminism and its call for a deconstruction of remaining boundaries between natures and bodies. Chapter Three focuses on how women authors of utopian and science fiction in the 1920-1960 era empower “otherness” and subvert utopian and science fiction tropes of alien/other by representing females as aliens, hybrids, mutants, and sexual others. This works to destabilize norms and complicate sexual dichotomies. The argument of empowered others is extended in chapter four by contending that Ayn Rand’s heroine Dagny Taggart is an androgynous “other” that continues to disrupt feminist readings. She is complicated, problematic, messy, and she is also one of the most influential female characters of the twentieth century. For these reasons alone, she is a feminist figure worth studying. Chapter five focuses on those texts that question the ways in which technoscience and nature intersect, often warning against scientific hubris or against an all-out distrust of science. Chapter 6 emphasizes process and exploration in *The Unpredictable Adventure* and *The Green Kingdom*, texts that prefigure feminist utopian and science fictions of the 1960s and 70s. The ways in



which these texts disrupt what has been currently argued about the period in both fields of literature is an important case for the dynamism of the 1920-1960 period.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In Rachel Maddux's 1957 utopian novel *The Green Kingdom*, the female protagonist Erma Herrick is the sole survivor of an expedition that discovers the paradoxically dangerous paradise Green Kingdom. She has lost her husband, her lover, her enemy, her friend, and two of the small community's children. She has survived all of these deaths, a brutal rape, infertility, and servitude in the Green Kingdom but chooses to stay in the land that has taken so much from her. She chooses to stay because it has matured her and helped shape her identity. After losing her lover and as the only inhabitant of the land, Erma discovers that she is pregnant. Her pregnancy comes after more than a decade of infertility, which created in her such a strong desire for a child that she was driven to the brink of insanity. She returns home from her lover's death, her choice to remain in the land, and the realization that she is pregnant, and begins to think about her connection with the Green Kingdom:

So Erma sat, quietly waiting for the hot tea for which her tiredness hungered. And if the river cannot pity and the earth cannot know compassion, she could perhaps do without these things. For had she not, after all, been singularly blessed to have known that the land of her heart's desire does exist, that it had accepted her as she had chosen it, that it had

given her love so that she might give it new life? Was she not, the Green Kingdom itself, privileged to be a component of death's most formidable enemy: a condition of potentiality? (557)

This scene exemplifies the power of feminist desire manifested in utopian and science fictions. Because they offer alternatives to the authors' contemporary world, many female utopian and science fiction authors are those women who are pregnant with a condition of potentiality grounded in their unfulfilled desires.

It is for this reason that the convergences of feminisms, science fictions, and utopianism is a poignant space to study women's desires and how those desires and alternatives are part of an American feminist process. My research uses contemporary feminist theories about women's places/spaces and bodies to chart feminist discourse in American women-authored utopian texts from 1920-1960 in order to show how these often overlooked political/social texts are sites of a continuous feminist process, leading to the emerging theory of "material feminism" which continues the engagements with space and body alternatives in new ways (Alaimo and Hekman). Carol F. Kessler, the leading bibliographer in this era of women's utopian fiction, has determined it is a lull, but the almost doubling of texts in this period and the frame of "material feminism" necessitates more work in this rich period of women's utopian and science fiction – or "speculative fiction." My argument, then, is four-prong: first, the recovered texts in my bibliography mean that the 1920- 60 period is rich in women-authored utopian and science fiction; second, many of these texts address issues that feminist theorists did not articulate until the 1970s; third, this means that we must reassess the ways in which we

think of the period, utopian and science fiction, and feminist theory; and fourth, the issues these texts address are especially apparent through a material feminist frame.

This introduction will delineate the ways in which women-authored utopian literature is fertile ground for feminist theory.<sup>1</sup> While I show how utopian and science fiction literature are generally considered fields of social and political critique, I focus specifically on the American women-authored texts for this exploration of feminist issues. This is not to say that a similar argument could not be made for British women-authored texts or that some male-authored texts also took part in a dialogue on feminist issues. This study, though, focuses specifically on American women-authored texts, though the feminist theories to which they contribute may not be American in origin.<sup>2</sup> In this introduction; I also outline Ellen Peel's definition of "feminist" to contextualize the issues of the study; I define material feminisms and show how it is the latest in the feminist process; and I show specifically why this 1920-60 period is important.

### **1.1 Utopian and Science Fiction Definitions**

Desire and potentiality can be studied in utopian fiction because it is what motivates utopian thinking. In *Utopian Audiences: How Readers Locate Nowhere*, Kenneth Roemer defines a literary utopia as "a fairly detailed narrative description of an imaginary culture – a fiction that invites readers to experience vicariously an alternative reality that critiques theirs by opening cognitive and affective spaces that encourage readers to perceive the realities and potentialities of their culture in new ways" (65). In *America as Utopia*, he insists, "To know America, we must have knowledge of America as utopia" (14). To understand women's roles in utopian visions is to understand women's ideological outlook in America. Similarly, Lyman Tower Sargent defines

utopianism as “social dreaming” (“Three Faces” 3). Also, in defining utopia as “the expression of the desire for a better way of living,” Ruth Levitas explains that the most important contribution of utopian thinking is its reflection of the real culture’s faults and “the desires which those conditions generate and yet leave unfulfilled. For that is the space which utopia occupies” (8). In this process of “social dreaming,” it is that “space which utopia occupies,” those “cognitive and affective spaces,” that I am interested in, specifically how women’s utopian texts and women’s proposals of alternatives in their fiction chart desire. Women’s utopian texts chart the unfulfilled desires of their circumstances, the desperation inherent in their utopian dreams, the disillusionment of static utopian expressions, and feminist and utopian processes. These texts, then, are indicators of what is felt to be lacking in the author’s historical moment and what they hope will improve, and thus they help us to better understand history, the present, and possibilities for the future.

Just as importantly, dystopian literature shows an author’s fears and serves as a warning of what must be changed in order to avoid a “worse than” outcome. Roemer explains, “When the author creates an imaginary alternative that is much worse than the present, we have the negative image of utopia – ‘dystopia’: the depiction of a bad time and place [...]” (*America* 3). Many 1960s and 70s feminist texts in this genre, for instance, are dystopian, or at least ambiguous. The range of utopian literatures is more than just good and bad, and even these two distinctions are complicated. Roemer continues, “This division assumes that it is always possible to discover an author’s intent and that the intent is consistently optimistic or pessimistic” (*America* 7). *Good* and *bad* are subjective, and whether or not we consider a text utopian or dystopian requires that

we apply the “better than” or “worse than” frame that is difficult to do because of the importance of the subjectivity and the historical situation of a text. Many subtler tones of optimism and pessimism are often united in the same text, making few purely one or the other, as Roemer asserts (*America* 7-8). In this dissertation, I will use *utopian* to discuss most of the texts, unless they are distinctly and overwhelmingly *dystopian*. I will also apply terms that identify the subtleties of the text when it is necessary.

I am partial to definitions of utopian literature that are hopeful and understand the potentiality of writing alternative worlds and those that recognize the importance of charting the situated histories of the authors. In addition, I find many of the dystopian texts hopeful, as well, in the sense that by serving as warnings, they imply that change is possible. In this sense many, not all, are hopeful. It is the notion that utopian fictions reflect some of the desires of any given historical moment and the notion that these fictions create new worlds, both real and imagined, that unifies the diverse group of texts in this study.

Science fiction texts pose the question “what could be,” focusing on the potentials of science, both positive and negative (Roemer *America* 6-7). Many of the women-authored science fiction texts in this study act as warnings about unfettered trust in and use of science. In Chapter Three, I show the ways in which women writers in the field were denigrated for their focus on the social consequences of science, but that is precisely what makes these texts important forerunners to later feminist texts and theories – their deconstruction of such dualisms as science-nature and science-culture. It is important to note here that I only address science fiction texts that are utopian texts, as well. It is simply necessary to point out that science fiction serves a different, though often

overlapping, purpose from utopian fiction. Frances Bartkowski notes, “During this period, from 1900-1950, the genres of utopian and science fiction are no longer so easily separable, leading later to the more inclusive term, speculative fiction” (8). This is an important term to note, though I will rarely use the word *speculative fiction* because I sometimes separate science fiction from utopian fiction.

## **1.2 Feminist Approaches**

Defining *feminist* in this study is important to setting the boundaries for the texts I am examining. While I address utopias that leading bibliographer Carol Kessler and others accept as feminist, I also review female-authored texts that forecast and begin feminist debates that others may not consider to be feminist. In fact, some of the works that I see as important parts of the feminist debate are not feminist to Kessler, and some that Kessler views as feminist, I do not see as substantially contributing to an ongoing feminist discourse.<sup>3</sup> I utilize the open definition of feminism that Peel presents in *Politics, Persuasion, and Pragmatism*. She determines four feminist beliefs, and if one is met, then the text is feminist, implying a spectrum of feminisms that I believe works well for a study that will encompass a number of texts that would not be commonly recognized as feminist by contemporary readers. The beliefs Peel asserts are advocacy of female power, respect for female focus and critique of dominant male focus, awareness of patriarchy, and the possibility for successfully resisting patriarchy. While Peel’s definition will be a gage for “feminist” in this study, I focus on issues and debates within numerous feminisms, emphasizing Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman’s newly coined “material feminisms,” in order to address the ongoing questions that these texts tackled in



the 1920-1960 period. These feminisms are defined as they are applied, while chapter two presents a theoretical introduction to material feminism, specifically.

Women writing utopian and science fiction alternative worlds both draw from and enable feminist theoretical and political discourse. More than just a literature of estrangement, utopian literature is a literature of change. It causes readers to question, it is an act of authors questioning, and it calls for a real-world, material change of some sort. Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerten write that women writers of early twentieth century pulps “indicate the influence of early twentieth-century feminism” in the representation of alternative gender roles, widened spheres of women’s influence, and gender equality (9). In calling for feminist political action, these authors sought estrangement from what the reader would consider the norm and sought real-world changes. Some of the “realism of postwar science fiction,” for instance, had the advantage of “realistic exploration of women’s lives, as well as critical analysis of the effects of gender differences [...]” (Donawerth and Kolmerten 9).

Donawerth and Kolmerten also cite not only continuity in pre- and post-mid-twentieth –century women’s utopian and science fiction writing, but also reference the continuity as politically active, as seeking to critique and change material conditions for women. For instance, they identify Naomi Mitchison’s writing from the 1920s through the 60s and her involvement in the feminist birth control movement. In 1929, they show, Mitchison writes about birth control in ways that were radical then and radical still in the 1960s when she continued to write about them:

[Women will have no need for contraception] when women have sufficient control over their external environment to ensure that their work

will be compatible with having babies, or when the whole business of having babies becomes a real job in itself, carrying with it social respect and economic independence, ... [or] when women have sufficient control of their internal environment to ensure that their bodies will not suffer during pregnancy or parturition, and also perhaps ...when they can at their own will be fertile or not fertile. (Caldecott 23-24)

Early twentieth-century women's utopian writing, as Mitchison exemplifies here, both burgeons into the feminist utopian traditions of the 60s and the feminist theories of the 60s and beyond and is politically active, taking women's material conditions into account. Such politically concrete, material understandings of feminism differ from the vein that feminism has followed in the postmodern period, culminating in Judith Butler's assessments of an almost complete cultural understanding of the body, of gender. She writes that gender is not stable, rather, "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (179). So, it is performative, not preexisting. It is established in the performance, so political voices/groups based on the "I" that is performed.

Several of the women-authored utopias during this time period approach the subject of embodiment and disembodiment in ways that suggest the later feminist argument about female bodies. The question of how the female body impacts gender relations, politics, and more has been a question throughout the nineteenth-century suffrage movement and still today. In the 1920-60 period, the rise of birth control, the World Wars, and women in the workforce, among many other factors, forced a consideration of the female body – its difference from and similarity to the male body. In

some of the utopian texts from this period, the authors suggest that souls are souls, despite the gendered bodies in which they reside. In others, particularly in the character of Dagny Taggart in Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* discussed in Chapter Three, the sexual, athletic, working body is part of female identity. The fact that the issue was being approached, questioned, tested is a contribution to feminist discourse in the period.

### **1.3 Writing as Creation**

The intersection of writing and creation is key to my understanding of utopian literature and my assertion that it is important to feminist discourse. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf asserts the potency of women writing in reflecting and creating women's lives. She writes, "[...] if she has a room to herself, [...] then I think that something of great importance has happened" (1025). Having a place and space of one's own is important in imagining new places and spaces. Roemer points out the importance of the notion of room in Ursula Le Guin's *Always Coming Home*, for instance (Roemer "Utopian Text as Native Living Room"). In it, archaeologist Pandora writes that she just wants "some room, some time. Time to look forward, surely; time to look back; and room, room enough to look around" (148). Because Pandora is an archaeologist of the future, of things that have not yet occurred, that room and time she desires is important to both reflection *and* creation.

Hélène Cixous also writes about the importance of women's writing to creation and change. In her 1975 "The Laugh of the Medusa," Cixous asserts that literature has been a place that has exiled women and that such exile is especially damaging because "writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of

social and cultural structures” (2043). The act of women writing, then, is important to change, and giving the women authors of the 1920-60 period credit for their writing – much of which is largely unread – not only changes the way we may see the field and time period, but also shows how they engaged with issues most feminists attribute to later decades.

Like Woolf and Cixous, Fredric Jameson and Peter Turchi show the importance of the act of writing to creating new worlds. Jameson’s cognitive mapping shapes the way that contemporary fictional utopias have been studied by many utopian academics. He uses Kevin Lynch’s idea of cognitive mapping from *The Image of the City* – the notion that individuals create cognitive maps of cityscapes based on how they imagine they are situated within that particular city – and Louis Althusser’s notion of ideologies as “the imaginary representation of the subjects relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence” (qtd. in Jameson 353), to define cognitive mapping in social thought. Jameson’s definition of “cognitive mapping” is that “[T]he mental map of city space...can be extrapolated to that mental map of the social and global totality we all carry around in our heads in variously garbled forms” (353). Jameson argues that cognitive mapping, in this sense, is essential to utopian thought because in order to think specifically about a better future, one must know exactly where he or she stands in the present (353).

Peter Turchi’s equation of writing to mapping complements Jameson’s idea of cognitive mapping. In *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer*, Turchi asserts that writing combines two intermingled acts – exploration and presentation (11). Turchi asserts writers create, “[...] we are defining, delineating, the world that is coming

into being” (14). Authors create worlds relationally, based on their position, as do cartographers and utopian dreamers. The way many women authors of utopian literature see the world around them and the way they envision alternatives to it naturally embody feminist questions and bring alternative worlds into being.

Utilizing the definitions I have highlighted here, utopian literature, in my own working definition of it, is *a social and political-focused literature that is a hopeful expression of the author’s desire for something lacking in her historical situation and her belief in and participation in the process of improvement*. My definition, as many others, could leave the line between science fiction and utopian literature permeable (many of the texts in this study were published in science fiction magazines, for instance).

Permeable as it may be, it is important to delineate a boundary here. Roemer uses the terms *prescriptive* and *normative* in his definition of *utopia* to distinguish between science fiction and utopian texts. He notes that the utopias usually encompass science, as well as other components of a culture; whereas, science fiction centralizes on the science of the text (*America* 6). He also suggests that authorial intent has a role in the distinction. Roemer writes that science fiction writers pose scientific possibilities in “*what-could-be* settings,” while “Utopists create alternative cultures as didactic frameworks: *What-ought-to-be* (eutopia) and *what-ought-not-to-be* (dystopias) [...]” (*America* 6-7). As he notes, though, this is a fine line. In women-authored utopian texts, science is an important factor in the social and political of women’s lives. Alternatives to reproduction and sexuality, mechanization, as well as space exploration (or earthly exploration of unknown worlds), disembodiment, and time travel not only reflect the rapid scientific advances from 1920 to 1960, but also allow questions of woman as other, materiality of woman’s

body, science and nature, and process and exploration to impact social and political alternatives in these texts. Several of these texts in this study are short stories that were published in science fiction magazines. The conventions and expectations of the science fiction field shape these texts. As I discuss the texts, I will show how the science fiction field enables these feminist discourses *and* how the women writers often had to subvert those conventions in many ways. In delineating between utopian texts and science fiction texts for this study, I am focusing on texts that question gendered social and political assumptions and that propose alternatives to those systems.

Many of the texts that I include are texts from Daphne Patai's and Carol Kessler's bibliographies of women-authored utopian texts, some of which are also considered science fiction. Kessler built her bibliography on the groundwork that Patai laid, and in the spirit of feminist process, I will continue to build on their invaluable studies. Also, a significant number of texts are those that Lyman Tower Sargent has shared with me from his ongoing unpublished bibliography of utopian fiction. In addition to these, I have included texts from the bibliographies of various books and articles studying feminist utopian or science fiction and a collection of lost race fiction.<sup>4</sup> Though many of these texts utilize science and technology and many come from science fiction magazines, I include them as utopian texts because the science and technology enable larger social and political questions.

#### **1.4 Utopianism as a Site of Feminist Alternative – Place/Space and Body**

A healthy corpus of theoretical and critical approaches to feminist utopias exists, and for good reason. Because utopian literature and feminisms critique social and political situations and express alternatives, desire for a changed space and a new

geography resonates in both feminisms and utopianism. Feminist Susan Griffin writes her dream for women as a place where:

We are no longer pleading for the right to speak: we have spoken; space has changed; we are living in a matrix of our own sounds; our words resonate, by our echoes we chart a new geography; we recognize this new landscape as our birthplace, where we invented names for ourselves; here language does not contradict what we know; by what we hear we are moved again and again to speak. (qtd. in Rose).

Place and space in this sense are important to utopian studies in that utopia itself is a nowhere that is certainly filled with concrete places and located in an imaginary space. Cityscapes, architecture, environment and more are certainly part of utopian dreaming. In addition, utopias react to specific historical moments – to real places and real spaces that the utopian dreamer sees as somehow lacking what he or she desires. Thinking of place – which is essentially the concrete – and space – which is the non-concrete – as different, but entangled notions is important in understanding the complexity of women's utopian desires and reflect resistance to male-authored placement of women.

Environmental critic Lawrence Buell defines place as “bounded and marked” and defines space as more “abstract, whether literal or metaphorical,” noting that “spatial practices – cartography, territorial definition, and land apportionment, for instance – inevitably express the values and agendas of those in charge of them [...]” (145, 147). Spatial practices, again, reflect discourse and create it.

Place and space, then, are often paradoxical. They are multi-dimensional, varied, and both historical and “not yet.” Feminist geographer Gillian Rose defines paradoxical

space as a sort of postmodern, non-dualized space – a feminist space that allows for a complex relationship of same and other, where women occupy both margins and center (140-41). These paradoxical spaces are spaces that women both own and are constricted to...spaces that display their power and their powerlessness simultaneously. In emerging material feminisms, for instance, women's spaces in nature and culture, in biology and cultural constructs, in civilization and out of it, are paradoxical spaces. Exploring place and space in these texts interrogates the relationship of the place/space paradox in women's utopian visions, complicating notions of utopian ideals of place and space and of how we define feminism, and consequently, how we study feminist utopias. Place/space will be used in this way throughout this study, including the place/space of the female body.

The place/space of the female body is central to feminist studies, and utopian literature often offers alternatives to gendered bodies to illuminate bodily issues. Different strains and phases of feminisms are defined through their notions of the female body, particularly the question of essentialism and cultural construction – the sex/gender question. The pendulum of sex/gender has swung and steadied some since the 1960s and 70s, but the earlier years of feminism set the pendulum in motion. Debates over sex/gender in women's places/spaces that began during the women's suffrage movement continued throughout the 1920s, 30s, 40s, and 50s in a variety of ways. Nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century women's movements often utilized the notion of sex difference to further their cause. That women's bodies and minds were different from men's was often a given, and this "truth" fueled arguments about women's education, suffrage, sexuality and more. A large phase of the suffrage movement, for instance,



argued that women should be political advocates for their natural interests – children’s welfare and domestic welfare. Women’s education, portions of the women’s movement argued, would make women better mothers. The 19<sup>th</sup> amendment enabled more diversity among women. Women were no longer fighting for a common issue but had new political subjectivity. Many feminists and historians see this as the end of the women’s movement, but Nancy F. Cott asserts that the 1920s birthed the modern feminist movement, fracturing the notion of “woman” (4).

In addition, the labor changes of the twenties, including collectivism, socialism, and professionalization of women’s labor dealt largely with how a woman’s body was used, how it was different from a man’s and what was biological (should women only work with children and women?) and what was cultural (the first generation of college graduates were proving, for instance, that women could be educated *and* fertile), as well as the spaces that were assigned to women and the spaces that they could hope for. In addition, Margaret Sanger and other activists opened the door for legal birth control for American women in the 1920s, which allowed women new reproductive freedom that impacted notions of a woman’s body and space in profound ways in the 1920s and the decades beyond.

Women’s body and place/space questions continued to be framed in the 1930s in terms of production and reproduction. American attitudes about women in the work force changed during the Depression, and ideology and practice conflicted. Historian Nancy Woloch, for instance, writes, “Ideologically, the depression gave new currency to the dogma that woman’s place was at home [...] (440). Women were expected to step out of declining wage-earning positions to allow male “breadwinners” to earn a living for

their families. Woloch continues, “But public animosity to married women wage earners was counteracted in practice by family need. During the depression the proportion of married women in the work force rose” (441). So, questions of the placement of a woman’s body in the work force is both a question of cultural understandings of gender and a question of real and imagined women. This debate about women in the workforce went through a number of changes. The government made a call for womanpower during World War II, for instance, and also called for women to return home after the war. Woloch notes, “By the end of 1946, 2 million women had left the labor force and another million were laid off” (467). With the mainstreaming of contraceptives during the Depression, as well as all of these changes in work force, women’s bodies and spaces were highly contested issues at the foreground of women-authored utopian texts, early parts of the processes that were full-blown by the feminist movements of the 1960s and 70s.

The concrete place and ideological space connection between feminism and utopianism is in their determining what is lacking in the concrete place and ideological space they are in and creating alternative place and space to resist their situations. Women-authored utopian texts often propose alternatives to and subjective improvements upon issues of women’s work and workspaces and issues of women’s reproduction and sexuality, for instance. Likewise, many feminists also focus on such issues. Although historically, some prominent utopian fictions have suggested static alternatives through didactic dialogues – often simple movements from a flawed “A” to an improved utopian “B” – contemporary women’s utopian fictions recognizably embrace process over product. Many nineteenth and early twentieth-century women’s utopian texts, then, may

be barely discernable as either feminist or utopian by contemporary standards; however, they are precursors to contemporary feminist utopian texts and theories. In seeking alternatives to women's lives in the historical moments in which they were written, in continuing the debates that are highlighted in feminisms of the 1960s and 70s, and in setting precedence for the questioning non-endings, these earlier texts take part in a feminist process. It is because of this shared interest in place/space and process of improvement, that women-authored utopian texts are an especially poignant place to show how feminist desire has developed from through early twentieth-century utopian expressions into the twenty-first century.

Critics making the connection between feminism and utopianism have been integral to this study, and I extend lines of reasoning that have developed through the scholarship in the field of women's utopian and science fiction. Studying this connection has both inspired me to and enabled me to revisit and re-envision the 1920-1960 period of women-authored utopian texts as engaging feminist issues in terms of the questioning and open-endings that many of the predecessors to this study have asserted is key/characteristic in feminist utopias. While I believe all of the texts in this period approach feminist issues in some way, several are decidedly non-feminist or offer little statement about gendered issues beyond female authorship (which is to me, whether intended or not, an act of feminism because of the female focus and female agency inherent in it).<sup>5</sup> Utilizing foundational arguments in feminism and utopianism, I assert that 1920-60 texts do some of the work generally attributed to later feminist utopian texts.

Three works that influence this study most directly by showing the fusion between utopianism and feminism as conducive to inquiry and process are Lucy

Sargisson's, Ellen Peel's, and Tatiana Teslenko's. In *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (1996), Sargisson asserts the dialogue that utopianism itself has with feminism. Feminism, she suggests, has impacted the ways in which we must think about utopianism, forming what she defines as "new utopianism," which "journeys into uncharted and unfamiliar territory, and creates spaces in which visions of the good can be imagined," in which we must "let go of the stability and certainty of the search for conclusion in favour [sic] of an approach that is resistant to closure" (5). Like Rosi Braidotti, Sargisson embraces process. Like Donna Haraway, she embraces the multi-dimensionality of being, moving away from dualistic divides and toward complexities.

In her text *Politics, Persuasion, and Pragmatism: A Rhetoric of Feminist Utopian Fiction* (2002), Ellen Peel also embraces process in feminist utopianism. She notes the importance, in fact, of process in contemporary feminist utopianism, choosing to study the field *because* it is a field of process. Peel focuses on the ways in which an intended reader's correspondence to an actual reader, what she calls "matching," lead to the success of the feminist argument in a feminist utopian fiction. She writes, "I belong to the group that claims utopias need not supply a blueprint for change; they can speak to us emotionally or metaphorically, inspiring us, even if we need to find our own means to reach the ends they portray" (xviii). This is the point of utopianism that seeks to question, and a strategy that can be applied to all women's utopias.

Tatiana Teslenko has such questioning and other feminist issues in mind in her text *Feminist Utopian Novels of the 1970s* (2003). She writes that 1970s feminist utopias offer a space that provides "the feminist community with a conceptual space to articulate the politics of change, to validate the personal as political, and to express

feminists' self-defense in their retaliating symbolic violence against patriarchy" (xi). Teslenko, like other feminist utopian theorists leading up to her, looks at a short time span of literature to show how the questioning and the complexity and process of 1970s feminist utopias exemplify both utopianism and feminism. She writes, "[...] If utopian thought can change the shape and scope of our consciousness, then what used to be the unthinkable can be thought of, desired, and articulated. In the absence of blueprints, the future is opened" (5). Though she explicitly references Braidotti later in the text, this statement reflects the kind of nomadic identity, the process of becoming women, that Braidotti argues, bringing the hearty relation between utopianism and feminism full circle. So, the importance of women's utopian texts is not solely in the specific alternatives that any given author wrote, but in the part that fiction plays in the development of, process of, feminisms. Even Sally Kitch, opponent of utopianism in feminism, acknowledges in *Higher Ground: From Utopianism to Realism in American Feminist Thought and Theory*, that feminism can not be stagnant, that is must be pliable. Her contention with utopianism is in her dated definition of it as perfection seeking.

Sargisson, Peel, and Teslenko are the most recent and explicitly drawn on for this study, but a number of other writers focusing on the link between feminism and utopianism have shaped my thinking in important ways. Delores Hayden's *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (1981), while only dealing with feminist utopian constructs of space in part, is an impetus for this study. In it, she argues the importance of material feminism's impact in both the women's movement and in utopian movements by focusing on the economy of women's work and spatial redesign for women.<sup>6</sup> Hayden

writes, “It requires a spatial imagination to understand that urban regions designed for inequality cannot be changed by new roles in the lives of individuals. The material feminist legacy can stimulate that spatial imagination by providing feminist visions of other ways to live [...]” (28). She explores the ways in which places are designed in feminist essays, but also how space was designed in real communal kitchens and intentional communities organized by women. Material feminism’s mark is on utopian fictions, as well, in ways that range from basic desires of mechanized housework to environmental issues.

The earliest bibliography of women’s utopian literature that I refer to in this study is Daphne Patai’s “British and American Utopias by Women (1836-1979): An Annotated Bibliography Part I” in *Alternative Futures* (1984). In *Daring to Dream: Utopian Fictions by United States Women Before 1950* (1995), Carol Farley Kessler expanded on Patai’s bibliography, forming the most comprehensive published bibliography and study of women-authored utopian texts available. My study will draw immensely from Patai and Kessler’s extensive bibliographies, as well as from Kessler’s findings on women’s utopian literature. Kessler distills the large body of nineteenth and early twentieth-century work by women writers and categorizes it for the reader. She argues that women’s utopias differ from men’s utopias, writing, “Women more than men imagine utopias where the intangible features of human existence receive more prominent consideration,” providing economic, political, and technological policies as “means to the social end of fully developed human capacity in all people,” noting that women also focus these issues in “family, sexuality, and marriage” more than men (xvii). She also divides the themes of women’s utopias into three categories: those written in the period

1836-1920 that she argues are often set in the U.S. and focus on relationships between men and women as the basis of most societal problems; those written between 1921-1960 that she asserts are sparse and show a disappointment that women's suffrage did not solve women's problems, so she says they focus on change in value systems; and those written after 1970 when women's utopian texts becomes a radically alternative space for feminism and in which marriage is by no means the central issue. Kessler annotated bibliography is a work that many of the women I cite here are indebted to.

Darby Lewes, for one, utilizes Kessler's work in *Dream Revisionaries: Gender and Genre in Women's Utopian Fiction, 1870-1920* (1995). Lewes notes that she expands on Kessler and others by keeping the time focus tight for the sake of depth as she looks at both English and American utopian fictions by women and asserts, "women used the [utopian] genre to respond to texts by men, to address specific tensions within the feminist movement, and to confront forces determining and shaping larger political and social climates" (34). In addition, one of the points she acknowledges that opens the field for my study is that many contemporary feminist utopias harken back to particular nineteenth-century texts in some way. In fact, as Gary Saul Morson claims in *Boundaries of Genre: Dostoevsky's Diary of a Writer and the Traditions of Literary Utopia* (1981), utopian fiction in general is a genre of texts that are in dialogue with other utopian texts and with the political and social current in which they were written, making it a prime space for the study of feminist process.

Likewise, feminist theorists are in dialogue in a continuous feminist discourse, which the authors of this study contribute to. Many of the authors seek to deconstruct gender binaries, predating contemporary feminist theories' deconstruction of historically

static notions of gender. Judith Butler's assertion in *Gender Trouble* that gender is culturally constructed is imperative to understanding the process of feminism in diverse feminist utopian fictions ranging over more than two centuries. But, Butler and other prominent theorists had predecessors.

One of the pivotal second-wave feminist publications is Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). In her "Introduction" to the tenth anniversary edition of the text, Friedan speaks to the incongruity of what women were and desired and what they felt they were consigned to. She writes, "There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique" (11). The feminine mystique is the ambiguous dissatisfaction with allotted feminine roles. She writes that individual women carried this problem alone: "The problem laid buried, unspoken for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States" (Friedan 15). Some women, though, *did* speak/write that desire, in the decades leading up to the 1960s. Some of the women voicing it did so under male pseudonyms, some did in the stages of questioning that preceded some of the more solid statements of the 1960s, but the yearning was not simply buried and unspoken. American women utopian authors addressed the cultural politics of body and space in a variety of ways – disembodiment, diverse material bodies and sexual orientations, alternative modes of reproduction, and more. They offered alternatives, questioned the premises of convention, and were vital contributors to the feminist process of the twentieth century. Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Annette Kolodny, Monique Wittig, Adrienne Rich, and Julie Kristeva most



notably continued that process in diverse ways and invited continuation of the process in contemporary feminisms. This study seeks to recognize women voicing feminist questions in the post-suffrage years leading up to these recognized feminist voices.

Moved by the strength and number of feminist utopian texts reflective of the feminisms of the 1960s and 70s, many contemporary feminists recognize the alternative visions that utopian texts embody as fertile ground for feminist imaginings. For instance, as early as 1976 Adrienne Rich writes, “To seek visions, to dream dreams, is essential, and it is also essential to try new ways of living, to make room for serious experimentation, to respect the effort even where it fails” (282). In addition, in her 1989 *Feminist Utopias*, Frances Bartowski asserts plainly, “Utopian thinking is crucial to feminism [...]” (12). Specifically applicable to this study, Bartowski continues, “Feminist utopian fictions “shed light” [...] “on historical moments in which they were produced permitting us to chart [...] feminist theories and fictional practices” (24). While Bartowski connects feminist desires in feminist utopian fictions, her focus is on later twentieth-century (primarily 70s) feminist utopian fiction. She studies Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915), but leaves the fertile 1920-1960 post-suffrage era open for study. Bartowski writes, “These feminist utopian fictions [largely from the 60s and 70s] tell us as much about what is possible to wish as they do about what it is necessary to hope. They are tales of disabling and enabling conditions of desire” (4). The process of desire materializing into questioning is the importance of feminist utopian fictions, then. She continues, “Through remodeling that which is not, we watch the ‘not-yet’ taking shape, what could be, might be, even what some say ought to be” (Bartowski 4).

Bartowski calls for a recognition of the historical process of feminist questioning (6).

This study seeks to achieve that.

It is the shared questioning and seeking in utopianism and feminisms that needs to be explored, then. In *At the Heart of Freedom: Feminism, Sex, and Equality* (1998), feminist Drucilla Cornell questions political systems and the actual improvement of women's lives, for instance, arguing for the possibility of a "reconciliation between freedom and equality" (xii). Cornell's questioning, demanding, and hope for possibility in the concrete ways in which women's lives need improvement intersects beautifully with many women-authored utopian fictions that do the same. In addition, feminist Rosi Braidotti, claims that the starting point for her work, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, is the question that she thinks is on the agenda of modern and future society: Not who we are, but what we want to become (2). She asserts that women's identities are in process and that women's identities are based in their bodies and their environment, usually the differing sites of corporeal and material feminisms respectively.<sup>7</sup> So, the aim of her book, according to Braidotti, is to explore the need and provide illustrations of new alternative configurations/figurations of identity (2). Such figurations have been and continue to be presented in women's utopian fictions, making the study of such texts not only a study of what we want to become, but what, and how, we have become as feminists. So, the importance of women's utopian texts is not solely in the specific alternatives that any given author writes, but in the part that fiction plays in the development of, process of, feminisms.

Braidotti builds on Donna Haraway's earlier text "Cyborg Manifesto," in which Haraway contends that women are both social constructs and biological beings and

should take both pleasure in and responsibility for those factors. Braidotti notes that her text is “an effort to contribute to social-feminist culture and theory in a postmodernist, non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end” (150). Blurring, questioning, proposing, breaking down are all feminist actions that are especially well represented in American women-authored utopian texts in which even such “basic” notions as fixed genders or two genders is questioned. What happens, for instance, to notions of women’s places/spaces and women’s bodies when fictional actors are disembodied or not solely male and/or female?

### **1.5 Scope of Study**

American women-authored utopias written from 1920 to 1960 are a particularly fertile ground to study, not only for the political and cultural events impacting women during this time (the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the New Woman of the 1920s, Depression-era gendered ideologies work, women in the workforce during WWII, the large-scale call for them to return home after the war, and connecting first wave feminisms to second and third wave feminisms), but also because it is a period often disregarded by scholars studying women’s utopias.<sup>8</sup> For instance, Kessler, the leading scholar and bibliographer of women’s utopias claims, “After 1920, women’s writing of utopias declined until 1960. Although the passage of Amendment 19 apparently *lulled* women into thinking that all needs could now be met, history has shown suffrage to be a more limited achievement than predicted for improving women’s position in society [...]” (xxv; my emphasis). Kessler claims that 35 utopian texts were authored by American women during these years, though in my collaborative research I have found 76 texts through various

published and unpublished scholarly bibliographies. This means that women's utopian writing did not decline as Kessler claims, but actually increased.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps women were not lulled.

In addition, Kessler claims of the 35 utopias she found during this 1920-60 period, only eight are feminist. Determining what is *feminist* during this time period can be even more problematic than defining it in contemporary literature because feminist beliefs have inherently shifted throughout the process of feminist inquiry. Additionally, because Kessler does not explicitly define *feminist*, her claims are open to revision. And, with my addition of at least 41 texts, Kessler's argument needs to be revisited.

Because Kessler is one of the primary scholars focusing on American women's utopian texts and has compiled the most extensive bibliography to date, her evaluation of the 1920-60 time period as a static period for women's utopias has shaped the scholarship of the field. Many scholars breeze through this period, if they address it all, citing Kessler's statements about its lack of potency. It is a largely ignored era of study in the field of women's utopias, despite the fact that it begins with the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment and leads into the "second wave" feminist movement and the most prolific period of feminist utopian writing. Also, in *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*, Justine Larbalestier argues that the years 1926-1973 in science fiction are "absolutely crucial to the formation of contemporary feminist science fiction, and yet very little critical work has been undertaken on the period" (2). The 1920-60 period, can offer scholars a more thorough understanding of the connection between early twentieth-century and the 60s and 70s twentieth-century women's movements and feminisms.

Given contemporary feminisms' focus on process and questioning, exploring the development of feminist desire concerning women's bodies and women's spaces through the study of American women's utopian texts in a disregarded period is an important undertaking. Most studies of women's utopian texts focus either on nineteenth-century texts or on later (70s and 80s) twentieth-century texts, not only separating the centuries but leaving gaps in the centuries they study, choosing a handful of texts to explore. For instance, Ayn Rand's *Anthem* and *Atlas Shrugged* are the most recognizable and most studied female-authored utopian texts during this time period, and science fiction authors such as Judith Merril and C.L. Moore who wrote utopian and dystopian texts are notable, well-studied writers during this time period in the science fiction genre.<sup>10</sup> This study works to show a feminist process continuing throughout the early twentieth century and to study not only desires that inspired their articulation and the historical moments they reflected, but also the hopes for alternatives that stimulated process and movement.

In chapters three through six, I take a close look at texts that take part in the process of feminist discourse most complexly. This means that the texts I look at may contend with one another in specific ways, but I see the engagement with the issues as contributing to the feminist discourse. First, though, in Chapter Two, "An Extraordinarily Volatile Site': Material Feminism," I lay the theoretical framework for the dissertation. Material feminism is an emergent feminism, so I outlined how it builds upon postmodern feminisms by valuing cultural constructions while also reconstituting the body in feminist theory. I use several short texts to give concrete examples of the theory in action, and I assert why material feminism is essential to this study. In Chapter Three, "Empowering 'Otherness': Subversive Aliens, Mutant Babies, and Cross-dressing

Authors,” I explore how othered narrators and protagonists are used to sanction sexual and gendered “others.” In Chapter Four, “‘Oddly, Challengingly Feminine’: A Feminist Reading of Dagny Taggart,” I extend the argument of empowered “others” to Ayn Rand’s character Dagny Taggart, who has often been excluded from or demonized by feminist critics. I assert that while she is a complicated, problematic character, she is one deserving of attention. In Chapter Five, “‘Inhabitable Narratives’: Convergences of Technoscience and Nature,” I study several texts that show an interconnectedness among nature, technoscience, and religion, deconstructing dualisms that feed into scientific and governmental power structures. These texts critique scientific hubris that imagines science in masculinist terms and that imagines science as separate from nature and culture. In Chapter Six, “‘I Have No Destination [...] But I Shall Travel [...]’ ‘Exploration, Inscription, and Process,’” I assert that these texts forecast material feminism by focusing on the protagonists’ exploration and process of becoming women. The final chapter takes a clear look at the texts from this period, posits some reasons the era has gone largely unstudied, and asserts the importance of material feminism to the study. Though I will focus on different texts in each chapter to show how the variety of 1920-1960 texts deal with these issues, the nature of study certainly means that several of the issues are dealt with in the texts. A text that deals with reproduction, for instance, may have implications in several chapters. The fluidity of this study is, in fact, the point of the study. The process of feminist discourse and material feminism’s connection between what are commonly considered divergent elements of feminisms are imperative to this study.

That Rachel Maddux chooses to end *The Green Kingdom*, one of the latest texts of this period preceding the 1960s, with an expectant Erma in a condition of potentiality is telling. The new life that she will birth in the Green Kingdom represents open endedness in Erma's life, as well as an extension beyond the text. In the last moment that the reader is with Erma, she rises to take a kettle from the hearth. Maddux writes, "It was a simple, deliberate movement, the one most characteristic of her: of answering, a movement of response" (557). She has forged an identity that is rooted in deliberate movement and response. It is also a movement that calls for response, and Friedan seems to do so six years later, when she writes that the image of self that women are forming goes beyond any one woman's life" and "is the crisis of women growing up – a turning point from an immaturity that has been called femininity to full human identity" (79). I have no doubt that there are numerous important women-authored utopian texts in the 1920-60 period that are waiting to be revisited, and I see this study both as a movement of response to women authors and critics who have redefined the field of utopian fiction and as a condition of potentiality inviting continuation of the process.

## CHAPTER 2

### “AN EXTRAORDINARILY VOLATILE SITE”: MATERIAL FEMINISM

#### 2.1 Material Feminism

The important contributions to feminist discourse revealed in the texts in this study are highlighted particularly because I am reading them through the framework of “material feminism,” which emphasizes subtleties of body and place/space in ways that other types of feminism may not. Before I begin articulating how the texts in the 1920-60 era articulate feminist issues decades before feminist theorists of the 1970s did, I will define material feminism and show how it differs from other feminisms, particularly feminisms focused on the linguistic and cultural. Then, I will outline why material feminism is particularly appropriate for the texts in this period.

Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman conceptualized the term *material feminism* and define material feminists as those who “explore the interaction of culture, history, discourse, technology, biology, and the ‘environment,’ without privileging any one of these elements” (9). This is a particularly suitable definition for a study of women’s utopian texts because of the intersection of these elements – elements addressed simultaneously in many of the primary texts in this study. In other words, material feminism seeks to break down the material/discursive dichotomy that remains in



postmodern feminisms, to address the materiality of the body and nature, in addition to discourses about them, while extending the work of postmodern feminists (Alaimo and Hekman 6). Material feminism addresses the importance of materiality – of the body, of nature, of sciences about these – and the ways that materiality and language interact. Women authors of utopias from 1920-60 were overwhelmingly concerned with material conditions – reproduction, the workplace, the home, the environment, sexual relationships. They addressed these issues with questions about how biology interacts with culture, how science and technology interact with nature and the environment, how human bodies matter or do not matter in alternative worlds, and how human bodies interact with the environment.

## **2.2 Unfastening “Woman”: The Influence of Linguistics and Culture in Feminisms**

Feminisms with a discursive turn – those “fueled by rigid commitments to social constructionism and the determination to rout out all vestiges of essentialism” – are important to feminist theory (Alaimo *Material Feminisms* 237). Alaimo writes, “the predominant trend in the last few decades of feminist theory has been to diminish the significance of materiality” and cites Elizabeth A. Wilson who asserts that social constructionists put “the body at the center of [feminist theory] is curiously abiological – its social, cultural, experiential, or psychological construction having been posited against or beyond any putative biological claims” (*Material Feminisms* 237; Wilson 15). The imagined essentialist connection between woman and nature has been historically problematic for women. The mind has been associated with man, and the body has been associated with woman. For this reason, many feminists began shifting their focus to removing women from associations with their bodies and natures. Simone de Beauvoir

argued that women need to distance themselves from nature, and Luce Irigaray argued that women need to transform the idea of nature.

The social constructionist turn has been highly influential because it offers an unfixed notion of gender and sex that in many ways benefits feminist assertions. If we can assert that woman is just as much reason as man (and proof of this is removal from “nature”), then other questions arise. Judith Butler – the theorist most attributed to the social constructionist understanding of feminist theory – asserts some important points. In her 1999 “Preface” to her highly influential 1990 *Gender Trouble*, she notes the importance of Gayle Rubin’s “extraordinary work on gender, sexuality, and kinship,” Esther Newton’s “groundbreaking work on drag,” and Monique Wittig’s “brilliant theoretical and fictional writings” to her theory (x). Butler writes:

Gender Trouble sought to refuse the notion that lesbian practice instantiates feminist theory, and set up a more troubled relation between the two terms. Lesbianism in the text does not represent a return to what is most important about being a woman; it does not consecrate femininity or signal a gynocentric world. Lesbianism is not the erotic consummation of a set of political beliefs [...]. Instead, the text asks, how do non-normative sexual practices call into question the stability of gender as a category of analysis? How do certain sexual practices compel the question: what is a woman, what is a man? If gender is no longer to be understood as consolidated through normative sexuality, then is there a crisis of gender that is specific to queer contexts? (x-xi).

In asking these important questions, Butler builds on past feminist theorists. Simone de Beauvoir's assertion, for instance, that the relationship between the sexes is not natural and that "One is not born, but becomes a woman," is one of the earliest arguments for culture's impact on gender and sex (249). Gayle Rubin extends de Beauvoir's argument by asserting that the question of heterosexual as the norm and homosexual as the other is a question of sex and gender. Butler considers these and also uses Monique Wittig's argument that a heterosexual dichotomy exists in the feminist movement and that sexual practice does not constitute womanhood.

Butler deconstructs sex and gender even further, reconsidering "the status of 'women' as the subject of feminism and the sex/gender distinction" (xxx). She considers that the idea of woman as subject must be called into question because it is a culturally formed idea, so any feminism using "woman" as subject must consider that "woman" in the matrices of class, race, sexuality, and nationality creates the point of identity. To Butler, gender is not stable, rather, "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (178). It is performative, which means:

[...] the identity categories often presumed to be foundational to feminist politics, that is, deemed necessary in order to mobilize feminism as an identity politics, simultaneously work to limit and constrain in advance the very cultural possibilities that feminism is supposed to open up. (187)

The notion that gender is culturally constructed has had profound impact on feminist theory through its critique of fixed gender that is defined through sexual practice. Her assertion that "the univocity of sex, the internal coherence of gender, and

the binary framework for both sex and gender are [...] regulatory fictions that consolidate and naturalize the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression” destabilizes the assumed norms of feminist theory and enables an opening up of “the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized” (44, viii).

This opening up of feminist theory is the strength of this postmodern cultural constructionist approach – its most important contribution. Alaimo and Hekman applaud postmodern feminism as “enormously productive for feminism,” citing that its strength “is to reveal that since its inception, Western thought has been structured by a series of gendered dichotomies” (1,2). The deconstruction of dualisms altogether rather than a movement from one pole to the next has changed the face of feminism in positive ways, unfixing how we think of “woman” and instead realizing the multifaceted nature of “women” who cannot be fastened in a dichotomous understanding of gender.

### **2.3 Material Feminism’s Extension of Cultural Constructionists**

Material feminism’s return to materiality builds upon postmodern feminisms’ focus on the linguistic. Postmodern feminists have contributed to feminism by asserting that culture and language impact women’s bodies, creating women in many ways. This is an assertion that was made against modernism’s notion that biology determined reality – that “woman” is determined by her body and placed in an inferior position by the very laws of nature. Material feminism does not seek to reassert such frameworks of subordination, but instead seeks to show that the material world and the linguistic and cultural constructions that frame how we see the material world all work together to

“make” reality. In their conception of material feminism, Alaimo and Hekman focus specifically on the human body and the natural world. They write:

Materiality, particularly that of bodies and natures, has long been an extraordinarily volatile site for feminist theory – so volatile, in fact, that the guiding rule of procedure for most contemporary feminisms requires that one distance oneself as much as possible from the tainted realm of materiality by taking refuge within culture, discourse, and language. (1)

Realigning feminism with the materiality of the body and nature opens up new vistas of interpretation for texts that deal explicitly with material issues.

Rosi Braidotti mounts a material feminist argument when she asserts that embodied subjectivities carry the weight of political positioning. She uses the terms *enfleshed* or *embodied materialism* to talk about how looking at material boundaries is important in identity. She defends a sexual difference approach to cultural criticism and finds Judith Butler’s concepts of sexual difference and psychoanalysis contradictory in many ways. Braidotti writes that though our identities are not dualistic, they are material. The components of our identities are founded in our bodies, though our bodies are defined in a multitude of ways – sexual orientation(s), race(s), disabilities, and more. Braidotti asserts, “I want to re-assert my bodily brand of materialism and remain the end proud to be flesh!” (257). While Butler’s insights into how gendered identity is constructed have made important contributions to the material/cultural discourse in feminism, her leaning toward the discursive and cultural incites some feminist backlash. Alaimo and Hekman, for instance, cite the criticism Butler has received for her “‘loss’ of the material” and assert that “this retreat from materiality has had serious consequences

for feminist theory and practice” and that feminisms must take into account that “women *have* bodies” [...]” (3-4).

Along with reconstituting the body, material feminism seeks to complicate simplistic polarization of bodies and natures. Specifically, material feminism enables convergences of women’s bodies and the natural world, a connection avoided by many postmodern feminists because of the modernist women-nature equation that has historically limited women. Bodies and natures are particularly important in utopian fictions and in feminist theory. Both are political sites. Environmental critic Lawrence Buell’s definition of place as the concrete and space as the ideological is an important notion in reading women-authored utopian texts in terms of where bodies are placed in nature or how culture is positioned in and against the natural world. The intersection of the two is a particularly rich site for material feminist readings, an integration of corporeal and eco-feminisms.

Also, in Braidotti’s terms, bodies and environments are important in terms of what we want to “become” – defined as the process of our changing identity matrices. She asserts that ideologies are based in bodies and environments, and she ties in situated knowledges (Donna Haraway’s term), asserting the importance of knowing where are physical bodies are and in what physical environment. Early to mid-century women had concrete reasons to question how bodies and natures related in terms of birth control, the labor market, immigration, and more. Likewise, place and space in utopian literature is particularly important because of the nowhere element of utopias, they are dislocated in space but address real issues, seek concrete and ideological changes in a real world.<sup>1</sup>

Materiality is key to the importance of the women-authored texts from the 1920-60 as shaping feminist theory and politics. Not only do material, lived conditions incite utopian and feminist writings, but also materiality is a contested space in feminism. With “material feminism,” though, the importance of materiality – particularly of the human body and the natural world, as Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman frame them – is being addressed in new ways. Gendered bodies and the natural world are important to feminist theory, and with that, feminist theory can be transformed more readily into feminist political action – a goal of early twentieth century women utopian authors. The politics of bodies and of the natural world are important in material feminism. Not surprisingly, they are also important in women’s utopian and science fiction literature in the mid-century. In an era in which gendered political rights, legalized birth control, women in and out of the labor market, communist discourses, and race and gender relations were all hot topics, women’s political writing often centered on the body. Many of the texts in this study acknowledge the politicization of the body.

Women’s literature that highlights the material is sometimes disregarded or denigrated as essentialist, but it is just such topics that utopian women’s literature frequently addresses. So, assessments by Carol Kessler and others that the mid-century period of women’s utopian literature is largely a “lull” in feminist theory makes sense when one considers that the definitions of *feminist* may presuppose a material-shy postmodern feminist frame. The inattention to this period leaves it ripe for new study. Justine Larbalestier writes that in science fiction, this early and mid-century period “is absolutely crucial to the formation of contemporary science fiction, and yet very little critical work has been undertaken on that period” (2). Not only does this study cover

texts not covered in Kessler, but also the material feminist reassessment of those already known texts offers an insight into how the material was important to these women and how they engaged with discourses of materiality.

#### **2.4 “Altered Perception”: Feminist Theory in Utopian and Science Fiction**

Part of why material feminism is so important to the recovery work of the women writers during the 20-60s is that it is a feminism that enables political activism because of its concern with material conditions – environmental impact on bodies, scientific inquiry and its influence on women’s lives, for instance. Such political activism is a focus in utopian writing. Material conditions are what incite utopian writing, which is a genre of desires, of ways to improve the world. Utopias, more than reflective of any given set of cultural ills, are also generative. They have the power to change culture. Roemer writes:

They are supposed to teach us alternative ways of seeing our ‘present’ reality and this altered perception can generate altered attitudes about how we evaluate our present and what we desire (or don’t desire) for the future. The altered views may even lead to action designed to achieve those desires” (Roemer Lecture).

Additionally, in *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson writes, “The fundamental dynamic of any utopian politics [...] will therefore always lie in the dialectic of identity and difference, to the degree to which such a politics aims at imagining, and sometimes even at realizing, a system radically different from this one” (xii). Frances Bartowski writes, “Utopian thinking is crucial to feminism [...]” (12). Tatiana Teslenko and Lucy Sargisson both assert that utopianism a good genre for feminism because of the



deconstruction of binaries and the futures made possible. Utopian writing, then, is ripe for a material feminist frame.

Science fiction is also important in terms of political theory and, therefore, amenable to material feminism. Donna Haraway writes, “science fiction *is* political theory” (Haraway *How Like a Leaf* 120). It offers alternatives and questions assumptions, especially gendered/sexed assumptions. Lester Del Rey defines science fiction as “an attempt to deal rationally with alternate possibilities in a manner which will be entertaining” (5). Justine Larbalestier writes that by offering alternatives to polarized sexual difference – through additions of other genders and other such strategies – science fiction texts “offer the possibility of being something other than a proper man or woman, and thus they problematize a notion of true sex [...]” (13). Patricia Melzer asserts that science fiction tropes are “especially open to feminist appropriation” and “identification with the alien/other” (7,8). The alternatives and questioning that utopian and science fiction offer are energized with the material feminist frame because, as Alaimo and Hekman write, “Material feminism opens up new ethical and political vistas, as well. Redefining the human and nonhuman has ethical implications: discourses have material consequences that require ethical responses,” and “Practices are, by nature, embodied, situated actions” (7). Science fiction and utopian literature *is* in fact a political discourse, and framing a literature bound to the material with a feminist perspective that takes that into account enables a powerful reading of these texts.

Women writing these alternative worlds both draw from and enable feminist theoretical and political discourse. More than just a literature of estrangement, utopian literature is a literature of change. It causes readers to question, it is an act of authors

questioning, and it calls for a real-world, material change of some sort. Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerten write that women writers of early twentieth century pulps “indicate the influence of early twentieth-century feminism” in the alternative gender roles, widened spheres of women’s influence, and gender equality (9). In calling from feminist political action, these authors sought estrangement from what the reader would consider the norm and sought real-world changes. Some of the “realism of postwar science fiction,” for instance, had the advantage of “realistic exploration of women’s lives, as well as critical analysis of the effects of gender differences [...]” (Donawerth and Kolmerten 9).

Donawerth and Kolmerten also cite not only continuity in pre and post mid-twentieth –century women’s utopian and science fiction writing, but also cite the continuity as politically active, as seeking to critique and change material conditions for women. For instance, they cite Naomi Mitchison’s writing from the 1920s through the 60s and her involvement in the feminist birth control movement. Throughout the 1920s-60s, Mitchison wrote about birth control in ways that were radical. She writes:

[Women will have no need for contraception] when women have sufficient control over their external environment to ensure that their work will be compatible with having babies, or when the whole business of having babies becomes a real job in itself, carrying with it social respect and economic independence, ... [or] when women have sufficient control of their internal environment to ensure that their bodies will not suffer during pregnancy or parturition, and also perhaps ...when they can at their own will be fertile or not fertile. (Caldecott 23-24)

Early twentieth-century women's utopian writing, as Mitchison exemplifies here, both burgeons into the feminist utopian traditions of the 60s and the feminist theories of the 60s and beyond and is politically active, taking female material conditions into account.

It is the *engagement* with the idea of material that I argue is important, not a consensus among the authors or contemporary feminists on the topic. Some of these women authors question women's inferior social roles by writing texts of disembodiment, removal from the physical body into bi-gendered spirits. Others write about the agency of nature, concept contemporary eco-feminists and other material feminists argue that changes the relationship between women and nature. Others write texts that assert the fluidity of the spirit, that reincarnations may land us in either male or female bodies, but that our spirits remain the same. Still others argue that women's social roles are not inferior at all – that mothering, for instance, is the hope of the world. In these ways and others, women writing during this period are part of the formation of feminist theories that are recognized as taking shape in the 60s and 70s. The women writers of this period explore and debate the issues central to feminist theory still.

## **2.5 Atavists and Mutant Babies: Material Feminism and (Re)Productive Politics**

This section demonstrates the value of material feminism in highlighting the sophistication of some of the early to mid century utopian and science fiction texts in this study. Production and reproduction are distinctly tied to the materiality of the human body and of the natural world (in terms of how human bodies and the natural world are utilized in the production of goods and in terms of how female bodies and nature are related in reproduction, for instance). Are female bodies used to reproduce the “goods” of future generations? I will use Miriam Allen DeFord's 1952 “Throwback” and Alice

Eleanor Jones' 1955 "Created He Them" to demonstrate how material feminism helps articulate material interconnections. These short stories are particularly interesting short science fiction pieces in terms of how they navigate the questions of women's production and reproduction, engaging in discourses about government control of bodies and nature in terms of what the female body is supposedly "naturally" intended to do. They also engage with a discourse about scientific hubris that results in nuclear war, warnings about over trust in technology as more powerful than nature, and a criticism about simplistic "solutions" to women's (re)production. For instance, Jones envisions a world in which the protagonist is not given permission to reproduce and is forced to terminate her pregnancy and considered insane for deliberately trying to have a baby – considered a "lowly" function for a woman as smart as the protagonist. The women writing utopian and dystopian fiction during this era engaged in conversations about material conditions as a way to fuel interrogation into women's lives, and in so doing, began to question issues related to the natural world, gendered bodies, and politics, predating second and third wave feminist texts and theory.

Material feminism emphasizes how the interconnections among culture, bodies, and the natural world are political, as well. While postmodern feminism focuses on the political implications of linguistics, material feminism also takes into account the body and the natural world in a way that postmodern feminism does not. Alaimo and Hekman write:

This retreat from materiality has had serious consequences for feminist theory and practice. Defining materiality, the body, and nature as products of discourse has skewed discussions of these topics. Ironically, although

there has been a tremendous outpouring of scholarship on “the body” in the last twenty years, nearly all of the work in this area has been confined to the analysis of discourses *about* the body. While no one would deny the ongoing importance of discursive critique and rearticulation for feminist scholarship and feminist politics, the discursive realm is nearly always constituted as to foreclose attention to lived, material bodies and evolving corporeal practices. (3)

Lived bodies and the natural world are in fact two highly important sites in women’s lives and political action. United States women often choose their political alliances based on the topics of women’s rights to their own bodies and environmental concerns, for example. In past decades, women have been drawn to political action because of their concerns as mothers. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 5, the women of the Congress of American Women protested nuclear testing because of the environmental concerns for their children. They also took political action to end war during the Vietnam era because of their connection with Vietnamese mothers, both sides feeling as though they had no say in whether or not they wanted to send their sons to war. They went as far as to travel to Vietnam to meet with women there. In addition to these examples, Giovanna Di Chiro writes about women that are drawn into political action because of environmental conditions that sicken their children.

In these cases, and in many cases, the concerns the women have are not only discursive, they are also material, as are many of the issues addressed in the texts I study in this dissertation. Material feminism’s emphasis on the rich connections among bodies, natures, sciences, politics, and more is best suited to framing such texts. Because

“science fiction is feminist theory,” the materiality of the body and the natural world are central to how societies and individuals form and view “civilization” and how power is constructed (Haraway *How Like a Leaf* 120). Taking part in political rhetoric of the time, many women writing utopian and science fictions during the first half of the twentieth century were interested in how bodies were politicized, how they were used. To some, for instance, Marxist feminism was a way to achieve equality. Gillian Rose asserts that interconnections among production and reproduction and power exist:

The social relations of production and reproduction are understood to occur in different spaces and to be structured through them, but relations of both class and gender intersect in those spaces. Reproduction is not explained with reference only to patriarchy, nor production to capitalism; nor is gender confined to the home and class to the workplace, for ‘the construction of gender identity actually occurs in the workplace as well as at home and in the community’ (qtd in Mackenzie and Rose, “Industrial Change” 157).

Dolores Hayden also writes about the importance of the connection between gender and labor, citing what she calls the first feminists as “material feminists,” who “dared to define a ‘grand domestic revolution’ in women’s material conditions” by demanding “economic remuneration for women’s unpaid household labor” and “proposed a complete transformation of the spatial design and material culture of American homes, neighborhoods, and cities” (1).<sup>2</sup> Hayden gives these material feminists the range of 1865-1929, but I extend the material concerns of these feminists into later decades, as the national debate over communism, women in the labor force, redesigns of

homes and neighborhoods, and other production issues concerning women continued to grow in force as issues

## **2.6 Applying Material Feminism: Framing “Throwback” and “Created He Them”**

Issues of production and (re)production are particularly poignant in Miriam Allen DeFord’s “Throwback” and Alice Eleanor Jones’ “Created He Them,” both science fiction pieces published in the 1950s. (Re)production is an especially volatile site for women, especially during early and mid-twentieth century, a time in which women were struggling with issues of birth control, working outside the home, and other issues of what is “natural.” Alaimo writes:

A remarkably diverse range of women’s writings insist that it is crucial for feminism to contend with the nature that has been waged against women.

The struggle for birth control in the 1920s, Marxist-feminism of the 1930s, and contemporary battles against racism and heterosexism all grapple with the shifting but nonetheless politically potent meanings of nature.

*(Undomesticated 1-2)*

The sites of arguments of “natural” uses of the female body, then, are particularly well emphasized with material feminism because of the interconnections and complexities of bodies and the natural world (i.e., “natural” uses of the female body in these cases) that material feminism emphasizes. A postmodern feminism may emphasize the ways in which the culture of the 1950s U.S. created uses for the bodies, but material feminism also notes that the female characters have bodies and desires separate from what has been culturally constructed.

Miriam Allen DeFord's "Throwback" and Alice Eleanor Jones' "Created He Them" both engage in a discourse about women's (re)production in the 1950s. While a huge push for women to return home had occurred post war a few years earlier and the 50s brought about the idealization of motherhood, DeFord and Jones complicate motherhood in these two tales by both showing some kind of biological pull to mothering and by showing that state-enforcement of women's (re)production is dangerous – however it is enforced. These complications and concerns are perceptive critiques of natural and cultural understandings of gender roles, and governmental involvement in these.

Alice Eleanor Jones' "Created He Them" (1955) is concerned with the material lives of women and warns of the effects of war (and misused science) on the social system and women in particular. In the text, the protagonist Anne is an unhappy wife in a state-sanctioned marriage. She and her husband are one of the few genetic combinations that still produce "normal" children after a nuclear apocalypse and because of that are essentially breeders for the state. They have children that are taken to be raised by the government once they are weaned.

While it seems that Anne enjoys the babies, at least in some indirect way if not in a "maternal" way, her husband is annoyed by them. Anne keeps them in the basement while he is home so that he does not lose his temper with them or with her. More than actually seeming to want to reproduce, though, she is forced to do so by the circumstances, noting that even if she left her husband, she'd be paired with another man by the state.



Beyond just showing how Anne is forced to (re)produce, though, Jones also shows the devastation of those women who are incapable of reproducing. The women whose bodies have been mutated or rendered infertile by the scientific hubris, by the use of nuclear weapons, are just as controlled by the government as Anne is. Not only does the government give more money for more “normal” children, but also, Anne displays the children in a carnival of “normality” for the neighborhood women in order to gain goods. She takes the children out for a walk – a seemingly normal part of her daily activity – and the neighborhood women flock to them, asking to hold them or to touch their hair, relaying their stories of their lost “abnormal” children. Whether the children are lost because the government takes them to dispose of them or because they are so deformed they cannot survive is unclear, but Jones clearly forms female characters that have a biological draw to mothering. So, in a type of state of emergency, Jones shows that the women are the ones who carry the brunt of government control. Their bodies are regulated in a personal way, down to their reproductive organs.

Miriam Allen DeFord’s “Throwback” (1952) is a dystopian warning of the institutionalization of female reproduction. In the tale, Katharine, a renowned artist, is pregnant, having deliberately skipped her mandatory contraceptive injection. She considers herself a freak of nature, a throwback, because she loves a man, John, monogamously and wants to have a baby with him. This short story, though, cannot simply be read as a backlash to women in the labor market. DeFord makes the point that any government control of women’s (re)production – whether they are told to stay at home and bear children or told to contribute in the labor market and not bear children – is

dangerous. Jones complicates what is “natural” and questions some of the government propaganda and social movements in the 1950s after World War II.

1952 is a poignant time for such a tale. Women had just been asked to return home from the wartime work they had done. Despite this, more women were working outside the home than ever before in American history.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the availability of contraceptives was at an all-time high. Likewise, the contention between communism and democracy was on the rise in America, and woman’s place in such systems was important. Communist leanings were considered effeminate. As Michael S. Kimmel notes, “No wonder Senator Joseph McCarthy so easily linked homosexuality and communism – both represented gender failure” (155). Additionally, women’s anti-war and anti-nuclear proliferation groups such as the Congress of American Women were scrutinized by the House Un-American Activities Committee and the U.S. Department of Justice (Swerdlow 308). I delve deeper into these connections between gender and Cold War debates in Chapter 5.

Katherine and John’s responses within the government control complicate gendered dualisms by questioning the gender-communist paradigm that links women to a desire to work outside the home and women to communism or other non-democratic societies. The text deconstructs such dualisms, asserting that an alternative to the U.S. standard of women at home does not necessarily mean regulating women’s work outside the home and keeping them from reproduction. Such a pole is as limiting for women as the stay-at-home mother model.

The issue is about allowing women more complicated choices than two highly regulated poles determined by outside forces. The text ends with Katharine telling John

that she is pregnant and sharing the plans she has worked out – for John and she to go to Patagonia – believing she has paved a way for them to have the baby without anyone finding out and to escape the system. John has conspired with the totalitarian government to have Katharine committed to rid her of such desires and to have a forced abortion so she can continue her important artistic work. To him and to the government, her desire to reproduce instead of work in her field is a sign of mental stress. More importantly, even Katharine questions her own sanity and normality. She wonders if her desire to have a baby is the desire of a crazy woman. John’s complicity with government control of Katharine’s body is complex in a story like this in which DeFord uses the issue that would have been more shocking to her contemporary readers – a forced abortion and keeping women from what is deemed “natural” – to criticize the government exercise in asking women to exit the labor market.

The dystopian tale uses elements of women’s choices – contraception and career – to show that from a woman’s perspective the issue is less about whether it is work or family that is culturally enforced and instead makes the statement that it is *choice* that women desire. DeFord’s use of a fictional state regulating that women must apply for reproduction is a critique of the culture in the U.S. government call for women into the workforce during World War II and the cultural call for women to return home from the workforce afterward. Nancy Woloch writes, “By 1942, the War Department was inviting women into defense plants, urging women to enter government offices, and pressuring employers to use ‘the vast resource of womanpower’” (460). Additionally, she writes,

Since the end of the war, advice literature had urged women to assume feminine roles and to remember that veterans expected “admiration, or at

least submissiveness”; the postwar campaign to keep women home was soon as strong and well organized as if it had been run by the Office of War Information. (472)

The directives from a government or from a culture about what a woman should do productively and reproductively are the issue in the “Throwback.” The underlying idea of government control of a woman’s body that is so shocking in “Throwback” with a forced abortion is a critique of a dualistic understanding of women’s choices and a critique of government and societal pressure for women to forgo their desires for the state – both real-world issues in the U.S. at the time DeFord wrote the piece.

Both “Created He Them” and “Throwback” contend with government control of female bodies in terms of (re)production. The contention could be read as anti-Marxist because of the focus on production, or more convincingly, could be read as a warning against easy A to B answers for women. Capitalism may not offer the proper solutions for women’s bodies and how they are used, but Jones and DeFord seem to suggest that an oversimplified acceptance of a different system of governance may also have its pitfalls. It is the use of the female body as a producer or reproducer that is the problem – the gendered power structure inherent in forcing women into places or spaces in relation to the type of production expected of them. Gillian Rose writes, “feminist geography focuses on the oscillation between the differences in women’s production and the similarity in their reproduction” (118). The power structures that determine women’s uses also determine their daily routines. Place is important in this way. Rose writes:

For feminists, the everyday routines traced by women are never unimportant, because the seemingly banal and trivial events of the

everyday are bound into the power structures which limit and confine women. The limits on women's everyday activities are structured by what society expects women to be and therefore to do. The everyday is the arena through which patriarchy is (re)created – and contested. In the words of Teresa de Lauretis, feminism 'remains very much a politics of everyday life. The edge is there the sense of struggle, the weight of oppression and contradiction'" (17).

Gilman, Jones, and De Ford are aware of the meaning of place and space in such structures of power, and they emphasize the point in their critiques of gendered production and reproduction.

Contentions with women's prescribed production are a brake on some utopian and feminist ideologies of the time. Utopian authors and women authors promoting feminism have often been associated with leftist leanings, often voicing an affinity for Communism, Communitarianism, and/or Socialism. Nancy Woloch writes that in the 1930s, Communist party membership doubled and gained force. By 1933, "one out of every six members was a woman and by the end of the decade, more than one out of three" (448). She continues, "For some women on the left, communism seemed to exert the same appeal that feminism had a generation earlier" (449), and, in fact, many of the most influential feminist political activists were first and foremost Communist party members whose feminism was an outgrowth of that.

Material feminism enables a deconstruction of the polar understanding of the uses of women's bodies in terms of motherhood. Jones and de Ford insist that viewing women's "place" as either in the home or in the workforce is too simple, that the two are

intertwined and both are modes of production, complicating “either/or” understandings of women’s lives. With the use of material feminism, we can emphasize that complication, see the interconnections of the discursive and the material in defining women. Women’s roles in the 1950s are often characterized as extremely domestic, and they were to some degree, but the decade is a highly important one that is often oversimplified. Woloch notes “the decade had a split character; or rather, it had an overt agenda, the return to domesticity, and a hidden one, a massive movement into the labor market” (493). The domestic ideology that begat what Betty Friedan called the “feminine mystique” in 1963 was certainly heavily culturally embedded in the 1950s. Despite the domestic ideology, though, “by 1950, married women made up over half the female work force” (Woloch 500), and 27.8 percent of the labor force was female (from 24.6 percent in 1940, and growing to 32.3 percent by 1960) (Woloch 587). Jones and de Ford highlight such real-world complications of the split between production and reproduction.

## **2.7 The Potential of Taking Matter Seriously**

The most fruitful offering of material feminism is its breaking down of false barriers, its crossing of categories. DeFord’s piece in this chapter may not have been considered feminist with another feminist theoretical emphasis, but the use of materiality empowers the female body in a way that many postmodern feminists have been taught to shy from. Material feminism enables and encourages convergences of different types of scholarship and different approaches to the texts in this study. Using a lens of material feminism does not feel like a theoretical frame for these texts as much as it feels like an unframing, a new vision, a 3-D approach, perhaps. Alaimo and Hekman write, “attending to materiality erases the commonsensical boundaries between human and

nature, body and environment, mind and matter” (17). Erasing these boundaries enables a multitude of interconnections and readings.

In addition to the texts that I highlight in this chapter, numerous other women-authored utopian texts written during this time period take part in and contribute to the gender and materiality discourse and are worthy of study. These include texts focused on spiritualization and socialization of some sort, such as Louise Dardenelle’s 1943 *World Without Raiment, A Fantasy*, Mary Therese McCarthy’s 1949 *The Oasis*, Gaile Churchill McElhiney’s 1945 *Into the Dawn*, Lillith Lorraine’s 1929 *The Brain of the Planet*, and Geraldine Wyatt’s 1940 *Dawn of Peace*. Other texts take part in a discourse of race and colonization that material feminism highlights beautifully. These texts include Margaret St. Clair’s “Brightness Falls from the Air” (1951), which critiques the racial and ethnic inequalities of colonialism through a sympathetic male earthling who falls in love with one of the colonized aliens. Mildred Clingerman’s “Mr. Sakrison’s Halt” also centers on race by illustrating a real multi-racial utopia located in a place that is invisible to most people.

Elizabeth Grosz, in her contribution to *Material Feminisms*, writes about the importance of seeing the body as changeable, altering, and intertwined with culture and politics. She writes:

If we are our biologies, then we need a complex and subtle account of that biology if it is to be able to more adequately explain the rich variability of social, cultural, and political life. How does biology, the bodily existence of individuals (whether human or nonhuman), provide the conditions for culture and for history, those terms to which it is traditionally opposed?

What are the virtualities, the potentialities, within biological existence that enable cultural, social, and historical forces to work with and actively transform that existence? How does biology—the structure and organization of living systems—facilitate and make possible cultural existence and social change? (24)

The excitement inherent in such questions, the possibilities that such questioning opens up is boundless. Such questions that take into account the fullness of sex, gender, culture, and politics allow broad, sophisticated readings of the utopian and science fiction texts in this study. The work of these women authors who write about “not yet” and “what ifs” deserves such intersecting questioning. Alaimo and Hekman write in their introduction to *Material Feminisms*, “In short, taking matter seriously entails nothing less than a thorough rethinking of the fundamental categories of Western culture. In the process these categories may become nearly unrecognizable” (17). It is with just such a claim that I move into the rest of the chapters in this study.



### CHAPTER 3

#### ALIENS, MUTANT BABIES, AND CROSS-DRESSING AUTHORS

The notion that women are often portrayed as alien and other to the normative male is key in much feminist theory. Women writers of utopian fiction – especially utopian fiction published as science fiction – often utilize such portrayals to disrupt conventions and contribute to a process of feminist discourse, particularly discourses embracing diversity and “becoming” in Luci Braidotti’s term. The movement from recognizing the male norm that displaces females, eventually moves to an acceptance of otherness as a site of power, most notably in Braidotti’s and Donna Haraway’s work. The texts in this chapter contribute to an ongoing feminist discourse – particularly discourses shared by Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, Donna Haraway, Luci Irigaray, Gayle Rubin, Judith Butler, and Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman – by using utopian and science fiction tropes of alien/other to destabilize norms well before many feminists assume these issues were being debated. The texts in this chapter were largely published as science fiction, a field amenable to texts including aliens. In addition to the aliens representative of gendered bodies, aliens are also representative of racial/ethnic “others”; however, in this chapter the focus will remain primarily on the complication of sexual dichotomies by representing females as aliens, hybrids, mutants, and sexual

others. By using narrative strategies that complicate alien-ness/otherness, deconstruct gendered binaries, and address the nature/culture question made famous by later feminist theorists, they express feminist theories decades before feminist theorists did. Female authorship, lesbian authorship, and male-female collaborated authorship, as well as “cross-dressing” protagonists complicate gender dichotomies in these texts (Donawerth). In addition, these authors use characters to give the alien/other voice enabling outside critique of gender conventions to destabilize the notion of “natural” sex roles, to show the absurdities of gender and sexual norming and to show alien/other as embodying hope.

Of the women-authored texts recovered from 1920-1960, several contribute in some way to the discourse of alien/otherness in feminism. Leslie F. Stone’s “The Conquest of Gola,” and Gertrude Short’s *A Visitor from Venus* (1949) position aliens as observers of Earthlings in order to give an outside critique of gender relations and unhinge the idea that gender conventions are “natural.” Judith Merrill and Cyril M. Kornbluth’s *Outpost Mars* (1951) and Judith Merrill’s “That Only a Mother” (1955) posit hybrids and mutants as others embodying hope/hopelessness. Edythe Eyde’s “New Year’s Revolution: (A Satire)” (1948) reverses the sexual “otherness” of homosexuality through an unlikable narrator to deconstruct heterosexual norms and complicate gender. I have chosen these texts to make my argument because they empower the “others” in rich ways, either directly addressing and complicating gender otherness or advocating some sort of hope in otherness (or hope lost at the destruction of otherness). These texts are also different from the material otherness dealt with in Chapter One’s focus on materiality. This chapter is acutely pointed to gendered otherness and the notion of

otherness as hope. These texts provide the most complex, diverse support for my argument that feminist discourses were taken up during this period of writing.

The idea that woman has been historically labeled “other” to a male “norm” is a driving notion in early second wave feminism, important to the discourse of feminism. French feminist Simone de Beauvoir’s 1949 *The Second Sex* precedes what is referred to as the second wave of feminism, yet it is a landmark text in contemporary feminist thinking. She argues that the male norm delineates woman as other in order to continually proclaim its own normalcy: “Once the subject seeks to assert himself, the Other, who limits and denies him, is nonetheless a necessity to him: he attains himself only through that reality which he is not, which is something other than himself” (300). This is literally applicable in mid-century science fiction in which women are often depicted as the alien other by male authors. The utopian and dystopian texts published in science fiction magazines were influenced by such tropes. In *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction*, Robin Roberts asserts, “More than any other genres, science fiction is obsessed with the figure of Woman: not only as potential sexual partner but, more interestingly, as alien, as ruler, and as mother” (3). De Beauvoir goes on to show how this otherness of woman encapsulates more than just her own sexual difference from man. She embodies all otherness, particularly Nature:

Man seeks in woman the Other as Nature and as his fellow being. But we know what ambivalent feelings Nature inspires in man. He exploits her, but she crushes him, he is born of her and dies in her; she is the source of his being and the realm that he subjugates to his will;[...] Woman sums up

nature as Mother, Wife, and Idea; these forms now mingle and now conflict, and each of them wears a double visage. (303)

The equation of woman and nature as paradoxically sources of male power and “things” to be conquered and colonized is concreted in much male-authored mid-century science fiction, in which male explorers come to dominate matriarchies and other similar tropes. As seen later in this chapter, depictions of women as matriarchal rulers in mid-century male science fiction (hereafter SF) do not serve egalitarian purposes. The women authors who take up such tropes, though, disrupt them and empower the other in ways that articulate theories that such feminist theorists as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and Elizabeth Grosz discuss decades later.

The notion of woman as other has been approached by feminists in different ways. This union of the otherness of woman and nature to the male norm is also a point of contention in feminist theory, with de Beauvoir, for instance, arguing that women need to distance themselves from nature and Luce Irigaray, for instance, arguing that women need to transform the idea of nature. Irigaray seeks to annihilate the difference and to transform it through mimicry – a purposeful appropriation of the role. While the notion of otherness in the sense of female bodies as alien is applicable here, use of otherness in different material terms (particularly racial and ethnic alienness) and the woman/nature relationship presented by De Beauvoir will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Haraway, Braidotti, and Grosz have asserted the power of otherness, of being and becoming different. Feminist theory has transformed from recognizing male norming and the otherness of woman to privileging the other (deconstructing the norm). Donna Haraway constructs numerous symbols of otherness, most famously the cyborg – “ a

creature in a post-gender world” [...] “resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity” [...] “oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence” (586). In *A Manifesto for Cyborgs*, Haraway argues for “*pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries,” and such deconstruction also means a reconstitution of the notion of “other” altogether (586). With no boundaries of “us” and “them” or “norm” and “other,” multiplicity and partiality are powerful constructs.

Braidotti, too, asserts the power of “otherness” in terms of embracing processes of “becoming.” She asserts that her purpose in *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* is to deal with the deficiencies in defining identities and differences in a world where there is no normative center (3). She claims that the starting point for her work is the question that she thinks is on the agenda of modern and future society: Not who we are, but what *we want to become* (2; my emphasis). She utilizes both Gilles Deleuze’s and Luce Irigaray’s philosophies on difference to argue her points. Braidotti writes, “[...] one of the features of our present historical condition is the shifting grounds on which periphery and center confront each other, with a new level of complexity which defies dualistic or oppositional thinking” (14). She determines, “Becoming is a question of undoing the structures of domination by careful, patient revisitations, re-adjustments, micro-changes” (116). Braidotti sees gender, ethnicity, and other embodiments of identity as important but also rhizomatic, intertwined, and ever-transforming. The woman, the other, and the monster are all in constant redefinition and are empowered through their diversity and multiplicity.

Most recently, Elizabeth Grosz argues that Darwinian evolutionary theories can enrich feminist theory. Charles Darwin’s work is often denigrated by feminists as

biologically deterministic. Grosz, though, emphasizes Darwin's theories of

*"indetermination"* and asserts the richness those theories can offer feminisms (25):

It is perhaps time that feminist theorists begin to address with some rigor and depth the usefulness and value of his work in rendering our conceptions of social, cultural, political, and sexual life more complex, more open to questions of materiality and biological organization, more nuanced in terms of understanding both the internal and external constraints on behavior as well as the impetus to new and creative activities. (24)

Grosz asserts Darwin's potential contributions to understanding the interrelatedness of the social and biological and to unveiling complexities in these. Explaining Darwin's principles of "individual variation, the heritability of the characteristics of individual variation that lead to the proliferation of species and individuals, and natural selection," Grosz writes, "When put into dynamic interaction, these three processes provide an explanation of the dynamism, growth, and transformability of living systems, the impulse toward a future that is unknown in, and uncontained by, the present and its history" (30). These understandings of transforming, evolving, mutating identities and futures renders the notion of the other powerful. In Darwin's terms monstrosities – mutations of a life form – may be the future of the life form, the possibility for its future adaptability. Many of the women writing utopian and science fiction during the decades in the 1920s-1960s empower the others in their texts – others appropriated from male-authored texts – demonstrate such empowerment of "others" similarly. Some of the others in the texts in this chapter embody new possibilities for the future and the value of adaptability,

realizing the “dynamism, growth, and transformability” and the “impulse toward a future” that Grosz’s interprets in Darwin, the same “dynamism” and “impulse toward a future” with which female utopian authors and feminists are concerned (30).

Similarly, Fredric Jameson notes the importance of utopian literature’s questioning of the norm, thinking past boundaries. He argues that the primary goal of utopian fiction is to create constructive disruptions, questions about our ability to imagine alternatives. He writes, “Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment [...]” (*Archaeologies* xiii). By imagining alternative realities and deconstructing norms, these authors do that.

### **3.1 “We don’t want swooning dames”: Women Others in Science Fiction**

Women in utopian and dystopian science fiction during the mid-century were often referred to as the invasion by the male-dominated science fiction community, and it was invasion because utopian and science fiction are particularly fertile for feminist imaginations. The SF tropes were, as Patricia Melzer asserts, “especially open to feminist appropriation” and “identification with the alien/other” (7,8). Likewise, Sarah Lefanu writes, “[SF] makes possible, and encourages (despite its colonization by male writers), the inscription of women as subjects free from the constraints of mundane fiction; and it also offers the possibility of interrogating that very inscription, questioning the basis of gendered subjectivity” (Lefanu 9). Melzer emphasizes the rich potential of science fiction, drawing on Donna Haraway’s assertion that “science fiction is political theory” (*How Like a Leaf* 120). Women simply writing in the fields of utopian and dystopian science fiction – fields that themselves have blurred boundaries – was a

feminist act, and the characterizations and empowered embodiments of otherness that they wrote about, contribute even further to feminist theory.

Hélène Cixous builds de Beauvoir's notion of woman as other to argue that women have been excluded from literature and to assert the importance of women writing. In "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975), she claims that women writing will change the future first by returning women to their bodies – which men have had the power of writing about – thereby becoming individuals. Second, women's writing will change the future by giving women voice and so changing the political and social landscape, a particularly applicable notion in the political/social writing of utopian literature (2043-44). Cixous refers to woman as both the *other* and the *repressed*, inciting the power of the repressed who breaks her chains, writing that such power is "explosive" (2049).

Some science fiction scholars have recently asserted that science fiction women authors during the 1920s through 1960s contributed to discourses about politics and gender in important, largely neglected ways. Such assertions are applicable to the utopian fiction in this study, some of which was published in science fiction magazines. Both Brian Attebery and Justine Larbalestier look at women-authored SF during these years to show the conflict between men and women in the field – both textually and extra textually. Foretelling Cixous, solely writing in the field produced women characters more complex than those usually found in male texts, and further, the women authors often subverted SF tropes to disrupt assumptions about gender. Robin Roberts argues that women SF authors of the 70s and 80s utilized the woman as other/alien/monster motif of male-authored SF to transform the field. Often the only women in male-



authored SF texts were aliens, Roberts asserts, and contemporary women authors took hold of that female alien but changed her fate – from destruction of the alien to destruction of gendered norms. Women authors did this much earlier than the 70s and 80s. In “The Women History Doesn’t See: Recovering Midcentury Women’s SF as a Literature of Social Critique,” Lisa Yaszsek argues that while women’s mid-century SF writing may all not have been explicitly feminist, they “provide a powerful demonstration of how mid-century women’s literary practices both anticipated and extended the politics of their activist counterparts” (34). While Yaszsek asserts that these women used accepted notions of gender – their strength as mothers, for example – in their anti-war and racial activism in these texts, I assert that the texts also take part in discourses that disrupt those accepted notions of gender.

Not only were the women writers in the genre questioning gender conventions textually, but also extra-textually. Lisa Yaszsek asserts that Alice Eleanor Jones’ “Created He Them” (1955) was an example of a 1940s-50s trend in women-authored science fiction:

Rather than exploring the impact of new sciences and technologies on entire societies or civilizations, it invited readers to think more specifically about how science and technology might impact women and their families in the private space of the home. Because this fiction seemed to focus exclusively on traditionally feminine concerns including emotional reactions and interpersonal relations (rather than objective reasoning and outward-bound exploration), it was quickly – and somewhat unkindly – labeled “diaper” or “housewife heroine” SF. (“From Ladies” 77)

Because some of the utopian texts discussed in this study were published in science fiction magazines and spoke in/to/about science fiction tropes, the conventions and assumptions about women-authored and women-centered science fiction is relevant in important ways. To a largely male science fiction readership, science fiction focusing more on the impact of science than science itself, and more notably on women's domestic lives, was an "other" within the genre. Whereas most SF critics view the mid-century as a difficult, though fertile time for women authors, Eric Leif Davin asserts in *Partners in Wonder: Women and the Birth of Science Fiction* that the field was less hostile than imagined, though he cites more expansively from sources who contend with him than those that support his assertion. These two views are not necessarily contentious but are varied by degrees – Attebery and Larbalestier assert women's importance to SF *despite* the constraints placed on them, and Davin argues SF welcomed alternatives *and* at times constrained women. While "partners" may not be the appropriate word for the relationship between men and women in SF, it is clear that women certainly did write in the SF genre, though often under male pseudonyms or gender neutral initials or names, and they did appropriate alien-ness to change the field and create feminist theory, foretelling feminist utopias and science fiction of the 1960s and beyond.

Regardless of the degree of gender conflict, it is clear from female authors' recounts that some difficulty existed for women in SF and that far fewer women than men wrote in the field. The field of science fiction during the 1920s through the 1960s was a male-dominated field in several ways. Many women wrote within it, especially during the 1950s, but before that, women were treated as the others. In *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*, Justine Larbalestier argues that the years 1926-1973 in science

fiction are “absolutely crucial to the formation of contemporary feminist science fiction, and yet very little critical work has been undertaken on the period” (2). Larbalestier points out the otherness of women within the science fiction field – citing women author’s texts, women authors recounts about publisher rejection, letters, and fan letters in science fiction – in asserting their important contributions to the field and to the process of feminist discourse. Her archival work within the period uncovers large amounts of sexism within the field.

Larbalestier communicated with Judith Merrill – arguably *the* most influential of the SF women writers during these decades – and other women writers to research *Battle of the Sexes*, and these letters show that use of pseudonyms and/or male protagonists was a sticky thing for women writers. Merrill explains that she was repeatedly told by science fiction magazine editors – particularly John Campbell, editor of *Astounding [Stories]* and someone with whom she bonded with immediately in person – that she should write from a woman’s point of view. She explains how this struck her as absurd:

[...] It was a story with a male protagonist. And yes, the request pissed me off. I felt everything I wrote was a woman’s point of view, but the only stuff I had (and to this day, have) not been able to sell were my attempts to write the woman’s point of view as perceived by the publishing world; i.e. romances, confessions, slick magazine stories! (qtd. in Larbalestier 177)

The male editors often wanted her to write from a woman’s perspective as *they* saw “woman,” then she would be criticized for writing from a woman’s perspective or writing a “diaper” – the phrase used to describe SF stories that fans deemed too “domestic,” like

Judith Merrill's "That Only a Mother" later in this chapter. Marion Zimmer Bradley, another major female writer in science fiction during this time, also explained the paradox of women writing in the field. She writes, "[...] I realized that if I were going to write for anyone's edification other than my own, I would have to write about men; I would have to write novels with heroes rather than heroines. This was simply the rules of the game, the economic factors of life in the market" (qtd. in Larbalestier 177).

Larbalestier also includes several fan letters that Isaac Asimov wrote as a late teen to magazines like *Astounding Stories*. In one, Asimov applauds Donald G. Turnbull's 1938 letter in a previous issue in which Turnbull writes:

In the last six or seven publications females have been dragged into the narratives and as a result the stories have become those of love which have no place in science-fiction. Those who read this magazine do so for the science in it or for the good wholesome free-from-women stories, which stretch their imaginations.

A woman's place is not in anything scientific. Of course the odd female now and then invents something useful in the way that every now and then amongst the millions of black crow a white one is found.

I believe, and I think many others are with me, that sentimentality and sex should be disregarded in scientific stories. Yours for more science and less females. (Turnbull qtd. in Larbalestier 118)

To this, Asimov responds in part, "Three rousing cheers for Donald G. Turnbull of Toronto for his valiant attack on those favoring mush. When we want science fiction, we don't want swooning dames, and that goes double" (qtd. in Larbalestier 119).

Asimov became a major writer and leader in the field, though his misogyny only changed from written to acted out, according to Davin. Davin – who, remember, argues that the SF field was not especially hostile to women writers – writes that though Asimov “eventually established a great reputation as a liberal in gender relations” (a reputation I have yet to run across in my research), Asimov “was notorious for his roving hands, which roamed freely over the bodies of women he encountered at science fiction conventions” (4). Davin cites *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* long-time editor Edward L. Ferman’s tale of his first meeting with Asimov in the late 1960s. When Ferman introduced his date to Asimov, Ferman said, “instead of shaking my date’s hand, [Asimov] shook her left breast” (qtd. in Davin 4). Davin also cites that SF magazine editor Cele Goldsmith’s tale of Asimov chasing her around her desk (4). While these are extreme accounts of the sexual harassment of a major player in SF, it is clear through Larbalestier’s interviews with women authors that (slightly) more subtle discrimination was also in place.

Even as late as 1989, the “invasion” of women writers into SF was still lamented by Charles Platt. Larbalestier calls attention to Platt’s “The Rape of Science Fiction,” in which he writes that women are largely to blame for SF’s softening:

A new “soft” science fiction emerged, largely written by women: Joan Vinge, Vonda McIntyre, Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Kate Wilhelm, Carol Emshwiller. Their concern for human values was admirable, but they eroded science fiction’s one great strength that had distinguished it from all other fantastic literature: its implicit claim that events described *could actually come true*.

Of course, if you had a whimsical, muddled view of the world – if you didn't know anything about science, and didn't care – soft science fiction could seem perfectly plausible.[...] [Readers] preferred mythic fables about dreamsnakes and snow queens. (Platt 46)

The dreamsnakes and snow queens that Platt refers to are titles of the two famous novels by Vonda McIntyre and Joan Vinge, respectively. Hard science, as Platt asserts, is considered scientifically sound and is usually attributed to men. Soft science is considered “fantasy” and is usually attributed to women and blamed for changing the field negatively. Women's use of science has often certainly been used to show the inequality of subordinated groups, especially of women's lives, and/or the ways that science could impact those lives. Such an extension of science beyond the lab and into the human realm is part of the reason that utopian/SF by women enables real change in the world. That Platt's commentary comes in 1989, well after feminist SF had been established, is telling about the degree of contention women have met in the SF field.

### **3.2 “A patchwork of misguided nature”: The Subversion of Gendered Tropes**

Despite the gender contentions in the field, female authors of utopian and dystopian literature that was printed in science fiction magazines chose a forum that is especially open to reconfigurations of gender.<sup>1</sup> In *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought*, Patricia Melzer points out that the “‘unnatural’ female bodies and (often technologically enhanced or genetically engineered)” and the “‘unfeminine’ things” that SF female characters do help “reimagine gender relations most radically” (1). SF texts, then, “often involve theoretical investigations as well as theory production through complex interactions of reader, writer, and text” (Melzer 10). Larbalestier claims

that the ideal norms of gender are used to gage characters as either “real man” and “real woman,” or as “others,” so, science fiction is a genre that enables more alternative suggestions and questioning of gender conventions than other types of fiction because of the heavy use of science “what ifs,” as well as the use of such gender norms (43).

Because science fiction is not tied to reality as much as many other genres are, authors can imagine alternatives that other fictions could not. Larbalestier writes, “The process of imagining a world in which women are the dominant sex immediately exposes many of the processes that normally operate to keep women subordinate; it renders these processes of power visible” (8). In Leslie F. Stone’s “The Conquest of Gola” (1931), for instance, Stone uses parody and satire to show the absurdity of male science fiction tropes and their reflection of reality, fears, and desires, and writes in a field hostile to her to disrupt and change the conventions of the field. In so doing, she helped lay the groundwork for later feminist utopian fiction and SF.

Stone’s “The Conquest of Gola,” published in the science fiction magazine *Wonder Stories*, uses both a woman narrator and protagonists and woman as alien to subvert gender conventions and to show their absurdity. What makes the text especially interesting, though, is that because the story is told from a Golan’s perspective, we see the invasion of male earthlings and their description as aliens. As Brian Attebery asserts in “The Conquest of Gernsback: Leslie F. Stone and the Subversion of Science Fiction Tropes,” men are the others in this extraordinary subversion of four popular science fiction tropes: “the alien invasion, the planetary romance, the race of telepaths, and the gender-reversed society” (53).

Lane's subversion of these tropes parody and disrupt the alien-ness and passivity of women in many male-authored science fiction texts.<sup>2</sup> "Conquest" opens with "Hola, my daughters (sighed the matriarch)," making it clear that this is a first-person female narration but leaving the relationship to the reader uncertain (1278). The narrator is of an older generation and is recounting the tale of the Detaxal (the third planet from the sun) and its invasion of Gola. As the tale develops, the reader learns that Gola is a lush planet and that Golans are peaceful and technologically advanced far beyond the Detaxals. Attebery asserts, "This opening sequence is important in laying the groundwork for what is to follow, especially in inviting sympathy for an understanding of the Golan natives – before their adversaries are introduced" (54). A technologically advanced race would have credibility, and as a literary convention, first person narrators often invite sympathy, despite their differences from the reader.

The alien invasion convention is usually set on earth with a human protagonist defending the planet from aliens. Stone subverts this convention with the matriarchal Golan first person narration of the male Detaxal/earthling invader as the alien other. When the narrator and her mother Geble, the ruler of Gola, learn that two Detaxal ships are hovering over the capital city Tola, they "dispatch [their] physical beings" via the "matter transmitter" to Tola. Geble begins "scanning the brains" of the invaders from a distance and telepaths to her daughter, "Barbarians!" (1280). The Golans conclude that the aliens are "nothing more than the despicable males of the species," and are appalled at the awkwardness and ugliness of their bodies (1280). The narrator says, "Their bodies were like a patch work of a misguided nature," noting:



Never before have I seen such a poorly organized body, so unlike our own highly developed organisms. [...] these poor Detaxalans had to carry theirs about in physical being all the time so that always was the surface of their bodies entirely marred.

Yet that was not the only part of their ugliness, and proof of the lowliness of their origin [...]. (1281)

Several references note the ugliness of the men carrying their organs outside of their bodies. This treatment of the male earthling body as foreign, ill organized, and proof of their inferiority parodies medical rhetoric about female bodies that Evelyn Fox Keller and Donna Haraway, among others, write about. In so doing, Lane's writing of the male body as the other disrupts the SF convention of alien women finding human male bodies alluring. In shifting the otherness from the female to the male body, Stone makes a strong statement about the absurdity of male alienation of women.

Similarly, the Golan women defy SF conventions for female alien bodies. Golan women are not the conventional slender, bikini-clad alien beauties of many other utopian and science fiction stories. They are round with short, muscular rubbery limbs. They can smell, hear, eat and touch with all parts of their bodies and have golden coats. They can also call forth organs at will, then put them away as necessary – an almost explicit reference to sexual organs.

The fourth trope that Attebery suggests “Conquest” subverts is the trope of race of telepaths. These evolved “others” were common in SF as the enemy to be defeated by old fashioned brute force. In “Conquest, “though, the women Golans are telepathic, and

it is the men's demise. When the Golan and earthling men revolt, the Golan women simply telepathically force them into submission. The narrator explains, "[The Detaxalans] were strong of will and they defied us, fought us, mind against mind, but of course it was useless. Their minds were not suited to the test they put themselves to [...]" (1287). This debunks the importance of physical strength and grants success to the other because of her "abnormal" qualities.

In this parody of male attitudes toward women played out in a sex-role reversal, the women's refusal to accept the Detaxalan men as a threat and their inability to see the intelligence of their own men leads to the deaths of thousands of Golans. The female Golan dismissal of the Detaxalan men and their own men critiques the universal dismissal of women. When the Detaxalans get back on their ship, the women laugh about them, noting that the Detaxalan men had such a "low grade of intelligence" that "there was no need of looking below the surface" (1283). Sure that the ships could not have been made by the unintelligent men, Geble says, "I don't question it but that their mothers built the ships for them as playthings, even as we give toys to our 'little ones,' you know" (1283). When a young, pretty Golan male consort asserts that maybe the Golan men are the stronger sex on their planet and built the ships themselves, one of the women responds, "Impossible!" (1283). Geble "laughed at the little chap's expression," and says, "Suiki is a profound thinker," drawing him near to her and hugging him in a condescendingly (1283). Suiki is in fact the only Golan to voice the correct opinion, but the Golan women are blind to his ability to think on the level of such political and social matters, and find the impossibility of his statement proof of his inferiority. Such parody

of a scene found in male-authored SF shows such blindness as absurd, so by extension, it argues that women are often simplified similarly.

The gender-reversed society trope often goes along with the planetary romance. Usually, a matriarchal society does not realize what it was missing until a muscular, lycra-clad male space explorer displays real manhood. In the trope, the women give power over to the male because it sets them back to the natural order of things. In “The Conquest of Gola,” the Golans are resistant and in control, refusing the changes that men offer, then try to force. “Conquest” ends with the narrator explaining, “Perhaps they will attempt it again, but we are always in readiness for them now, and our men – well they are still the same ineffectual weaklings, my daughters...” (1287). Far from setting male-female relationships to a state of patriarchal “normalcy,” Lane uses the trope to show the inadequacy of patriarchy and shows how the attempt to force it on the Golans completely ends any possibility of near future peace, and so disrupts assumptions about gender and gender relationships.

Despite some of the hopelessness of establishing gender relations, Stone treats the males in the text more favorably than male authors treat female characters. Stone grants the Detaxalans some sort of awareness when they realize they have insulted the Golan queen, Geble, by asking to speak to the ruler. The Detaxalan spokesman explains to Geble that they want to establish trade and tourism on Gola, saying, “Come now, allow us to discuss this with your ruler – king or whatever you call him. Women are all right in their place, but it takes the men to see the profit of a thing like this – er – you are a woman aren’t you?” (1284). When he sees how angry he has made Geble, he backpaddles:

“Sorry,” he said, “if I insulted you – I didn’t intend that, but I believed that man holds the same place here as he does on Detaxal and Damin, but I suppose it is just as possible for woman to be the ruling [word missing in my copy] of a world as man is elsewhere.” (1284)

Geble leaves at this, and her unattractive assistant Yabo scolds the young men for their silly behavior and tells them to return to their mothers and consorts. She threatens, “I have a good mind to take you home with me for a couple of days and I’d put you in your places quick enough. The idea of men acting like you are!” (1284). The men laugh “heathenish” at that and threaten destruction (1284). They tell the Golans that they have given them a chance to accept the “terms without force” but since the Golans have refused, they tell them, “we will have to take you forcibly” (1284). While the humor of “Conquest of Gola” is clear and adequately displays the absurdity of assumptions about women, an undercurrent of bitterness also exists. A threat of force in this way is certainly likened to rape, and in fact, the Detaxalans succeed in their first attack.

They give a deadline in time measurements that the Golans do not understand, and when it passes, they destroy millions of Golans living in the capital city, razing the entire city except the palace, which the narrator has protected with a defensive shield. While the body of the city was razed, the control center and ruling power of it remained. As the Detaxan ships were preparing to destroy the next Golan city, Geble uses a power beam to freeze the ships and the men inside them, bringing them to the ground. Geble handpicks what she considers the finest specimens of the frightened men and orders the rest destroyed. The unruly survivors are autopsied, and the others are kept as concubines.

These concubines eventually incite the Golan men and rebel with the help of other Detaxalan ships sent to colonize Gola. The Golan women combine their telepathic powers to stop the men, and after a long struggle they succeed. They disintegrate all of the Detaxalan men, and the narrator ends with a comment about the possibility of future attacks

Oh yes, more came from their planet to discover what had happened to their ships and their men, but we of Gola no longer hesitated and they no sooner appeared beneath the mists than they too were annihilated until at last Detaxal gave up the thoughts of conquering our cloud-laden world. Perhaps in the future they will attempt it again, but we are always in readiness for them now, and our men – well they are still the same ineffectual weaklings, my daughters .... (1287)

Despite the capability the Golan women saw in the Detaxalan invaders, they refuse to fear their own men or to fear another attack. In this way, “The Conquest of Gola” can be read as a sad commentary on the possibility for a change in gender relations in the real world Stone wrote in. On the other hand, the reader has seen the desire and rebellion of the men and the concluding ellipses indicate possibility for a gender revolution in some way.

Further Golan male discontent is expressed through the narration and is reflective of male narration of female characters. The Golan men become envious of the Detaxalan play things, according to the narrator: “Shut in, as they are, unable to grasp the profundities of our science and thought, the gentle, fun-loving males were always glad for a new diversion, and this new method developed by the Detaxalans had intrigued

them” (1283). These lines and the focus that Stone allows on the male Golans makes this text more than just a parody or a call for a role reversal. By focusing on the male discontent and the female condescension and giving the men desires that the reader can recognize as reasonable, Stone makes a serious statement about the real situation of women – not just about representations of women in science fiction.

Stone also subverts the planetary romance trope, in which a male lands on a planet of females or inferiors, a woman falls in love with him because of his true masculinity, and he becomes king. In “Conquest of Gola,” the male Detaxalans who have not been autopsied, are kept as servants, if not concubines. The narrator awakens to the revolt as her concubine, John, is holding her down. The two share a meaningful glance – the kind of glance that usually precedes a kiss in the trope. The narrator feels a new emotion and momentarily enjoys the arms of “a strong man,” but this quickly changes when John sees her thoughts and his glance turns tender, pitying, presumably for the impending destruction of her planet. The narrator is angered by the pity she sees in John’s glance and quickly disgusted with him. This tease on the trope is a humorous way of subverting it and important in showing the absurdity of such trite “defeats” of the woman/alien/other. This text is complex in the way it deals with gender and woman, alien, and other through parody, agency, and its elliptical ending, making it perhaps an ambiguous utopia. Stone parodies other texts through the subversion of tropes, and through that parody she participates in the science fiction genre while mocking it.

Gertrude Short’s *A Visitor from Venus* (1949) also posits woman as alien in powerful ways. It does so first, with an Earth woman witnessing a dialogue between two Venutian aliens, one of which has visited Earth, and second, with the Venutian alien

narration of Earth women as alien. The outside perspective on women's lives makes it clear that social constructs are not "natural" or divinely handed down and so are open to revision. Also, breaking down social situations and looking at them from an objective position, explicating them in new ways, makes them seem absurd.

In *A Visitor from Venus*, Short writes female aliens from Venus to describe the oppressed situation of earthly women, whom the Venusians call Eve. Protagonist Roberta Renfrow is a wartime pilot who, lost and out of gas, is forced to land her plane on a mountain top landing strip. She discovers a cabin with supplies of food, reading material in different languages, maps with airfields marked, and a visual and audio transmitter in which she sees a conversation between two Venutian women. Veh, the Venutian who has come to investigate Earth, reports to Venus about war and gender relations on Earth. She explains that on Earth, there is a creature "man," which in "all languages [...] means the same, and that is 'the boss'" and that the "secondary creature is 'woe-man'" (Short 223). She comments on how Eve/woman suppresses her own power, how she hides her intellect, how she pretends to be happy in the home, and allows herself to be merited on physical beauty. When Zua, Veh's correspondent, questions if Eve will be able to get out of the slavery she is in, Veh answers:

"If Eve will work at this as hard as she does in other directions.

Governments will improve when Eve shares in policies, helping to shape them to protect her sons [from war]. Some Eves made wise rulers through their inherited powers. None has been elected to fill a chief executive office."

"Will Adam grant Eve such opportunity to assume responsibility?"

“No, Adam will not. Eve will just awaken to her right and take these things in charge. Once Earthites believed in the divine right of kings to rule. They still believe in the divine right of Adam. They have yet to acknowledge the divine right of Eve. Their philosophy ‘It’s a man’s world’ is obsolete.” (231)

Veh feels that Earth is on the verge of an awakening in which women and others who are subordinated will be recognized for their strength and that the awakening will happen. Veh says, “Quietly it will come, like water under sand,” when a consciousness of equality seeps into politics and all else (239).

In *A Visitor from Venus*, the strength that women will realize is their strength as mothers – a discourse of maternal politics extending from the fight for suffrage and one that is often read as dated in contemporary feminist discourse. In the process of feminist discourse, though, the idea of power through motherhood not only extends from the pre-1920s woman’s movement, but also precedes the varied discourses on motherhood in later feminist texts like Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, in addition to the fictions like Suzy McKee Charnas’ 1978 *Motherlines* and Sally Miller Gearhart’s 1979 *Wanderground* which depict societies of mothers. In *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, Dee Garrison writes that such extension of motherhood to the public realm was key to political movements, particularly the pacifist movements of the Cold War era. Garrison writes, “The mothers-with-children protest was the first large-scale public mobilization in the postwar era to make national security policy a widely contested issue” (202). Veh feels that the awakening will happen when women move from the narrow roles they have been assigned – as homemakers and



mothers – and take part in ending the war and establishing politics of equality. The move from these roles, though, is an expansion of the roles. Veh states, “[Eve’s] thinking is closer to the welfare of the child and home, the smallest unit of government, and the most intimate in all lands. As the mother, it has been her child and her home. Now she is beginning to think in terms of the world-wide homes, and the children in them” (233). Though this notion is part of a women’s movement discourse that began before 1920 as the suffrage movement asserted that women needed the vote as the representatives of home and children and one that is often shunned in contemporary feminist discourses, it is one that is important to feminist discourse and the changes it has undergone through asking questions of itself about the “essential” nature of woman and what her strengths are.

Even the notion of expanded motherhood is complexly presented in the text, though. It is clear that Short is not advocating women in the home, but is taking up the rhetoric that oppresses women in order to argue for women’s full equality in the world, using the assertions of her suffragist predecessors. This assertion is made more poignant with the brief entrance of a man at the end of the text. When the communication ends, Roberta is still not fully convinced that the conversation between the Venutians is real, thinks it may be “a strange play” and hears footsteps outside the door (242). It is a man. Short starkly presents the equality that the Venusians have and can see emerging on Earth to the reality of gender relations. The brusque man has come to help the pilot, but grumbles, “Never can understand why women want to be cavortin’ round above the clouds in men’s clothes. Seems as how ye’r place is at home with the children. Don’t hold with flyin’! Nothin’ in the Bible about airyplanes” (243). This encounter serves as

a deep contrast to what Roberta has just listened to about gender relations and the ability of women to expand their mothering to help heal the Earth.

Use of the female alien interaction with human earthlings is a powerful tool of estrangement for the reader. Giving female aliens voice enables the reader to associate with the alien in the critique of gendered social systems and to question the “naturalness” of such systems. Questioning the construction of gender in such a way deconstructs gender dichotomies and broadens the possibility of gendered/genderless futures, predating – and enabling – second wave feminists’ discourses on the topic.

### **3.3 “If our children should be mutants”: The Alien Hybrid “Other” and Gender Complication**

Difference and otherness is also complicated in Judith Merrill and Cyril M. Kornbluth’s *Outpost Mars* (1951), through authorship, setting, and characters and in Judith Merrill’s “That Only a Mother” (1948) primarily through characters. Both of these texts are highly influenced by the Cold War and fear of atomic warfare, both imagining a radiation polluted, war-torn Earth that necessitates new understandings of survival. The performance of gender becomes even more complicated in *Outpost Mars*, as the duo’s protagonist Dr. Tony Hellman – already a likeable character who is fairly acclimated to a feminine viewpoint – comes to appreciate difference as an evolution. The authorship of the text is also complicated; it is a male-female collaboration. The setting of the fiction is also convoluted – a cooperative colony on Mars that is paradoxical in its sameness and otherness with both Earth and the other colonies. Characters, too, confuse boundaries of same and other by ultimately showing a hybrid human-alien species as the most suitable or adaptable in the text. The text uses Tony’s perspective as a doctor and a leader in the

Mars cooperative community to give voice to the otherness of several alienated others, including a telepathic woman, the cooperative community, alien hybrids, and an alien hybrid baby to disrupt polarities of same and other and move from static to “becoming” in Braidotti’s term.

Judith Merrill and Cyril M. Kornbluth collaborate as a female-male team under the pseudonym Cyril Judd for *Outpost Mars*, blurring gender boundaries further. Through authorship and through the empowerment of alien/human hybrid mutants, the text proposes gender deconstructions in ways that precede postmodern feminisms. In *Better to Have Loved: The Life of Judith Merrill*, Merrill writes that the collaboration began when she began writing based on an idea that her fellow SF author husband gave her. Once she became pregnant, the writing project was stalled as she “became totally submerged in biology and couldn’t do anything” (102). Friend and SF writer Cyril Kornbluth read the draft during a stay with Merrill and family and asked to have a chance at it. He wrote for three days in which he changed the draft a good deal, but “not in such a way that [Merrill] felt violated” (102). Their collaboration continued with Merrill and Kornbluth mailing the text back and forth to one another, rewriting one another’s portions, and adding on. It was published in three installments in *Galaxy Science Fiction* before it was eventually published in book form.

Set in a cooperative community on Mars, the colony is same and other in complex ways, breaking down the boundaries of same and other. The text opens with Polly Kandro in labor – an in-your-face setting of woman’s experience immediately impacting the reader. The focus, though, is on Jim Kandro as he worries about his wife, allowing a male reader some kind of familiarity. The reader soon finds that the humans survive on

Mars with the help of the drug OxEn, an oxygen enzyme that helps humans breathe on Mars. Some humans have “Marsworthy” lungs, but others previously had to wear oxygen masks constantly (10). Polly’s baby – still too young for OxEn – is fitted with an oxygen mask as soon as he is born.

The colony – Sun Lake City Colony – is different, too, even among the other colonies on Mars. “The Lab” is its primary source of profit and is a decontamination facility for the radioactive elements found on Mars and in high demand on Earth. The radioactivity on Mars – “nothing you couldn’t live with” – is preferable to Earth’s pollution to those who have migrated to the colony (12). Tony is infused with hope as he walks across the Martian terrain early in the text, thinking as he looks at The Lab:

The clean lines of the new building against that sparkling expanse constituted at once a challenge and a reassurance – this is what man can do; here is everything he needs to do it with. *If we can...a second chance for man, if we can learn how to use it...* (13)

The reader later learns that the Earth has been polluted, depleted of its natural resources, and torn by war to such a degree that radioactivity on Mars is preferable. In fact, the Kandro’s were infertile on Earth but produced a child who could thrive on Mars.

Explicitly connecting environment, culture, biology, and human life, the text predates emerging material feminist discourses. Tony has come to Mars because of the dire situation on Earth and his disgust with what humans have done to the planet and the consequences they have reaped. On Earth, too few natural resources and land to grow food exist for the out of control population, and Tony knows that such shortages escalate

the violence that already exists, with shortage and violence feeding into one another in a viscous circle. He wonders “How long before it blew up, and not figuratively speaking either? (89). He considers the war and domination through weaponry that prevails on Earth:

The Panamerican World Federation, first with most, refused to tolerate the production of mass-destruction weapons anywhere else in the world.

Long calloused to foreign mutterings, the Western colossus would at irregular intervals fire off a guided missile on the advice of one of its swarm of intelligence agents. (89)

He believes the domination will result in complete destruction. The dominated countries who are always trying to rebel against the Panamerican World Federation will someday succeed in their attempts, and “it would mean nothing less than the end of the world in fire and plague as the rocket trails laced continents together and the bombers rained botulism [sic], radiocobalt and flasks of tritium with bikinis in their cores” (89). Tony knows why people continue to migrate to Mars: “The damned, poverty-ridden, swarming Earth! Short of food, short of soil, short of water, short of metals – short of everything except vicious, universal resentments and aggressions bred by other shortages” (89). Mars, then, is a paradoxical haven from Earth despite its radioactivity and the inability of most humans to breathe its air, a place “better than” but not without its own problems.

Sun Lake City Colony is considerably better than the other colonies on Mars, as well, and is an “other” in their midst. The cooperative nature of the community sets it apart from other colonies, which are largely reminiscent of wild west towns catering to and profiting from vices. The Lab, too, sets the colony apart and is a catalyst for a

deliberate alienation of the colony by a powerful trillionaire who wants the use of the lab, and Tony's expertise at decontamination, for illicit drug purposes. The driving plot of *Outpost Mars* centers on unraveling a mystery of missing marcaine – a Martian element manufactured into legal medical drugs, as well as illegal drugs. The trillionaire Brenner manufactures the highly addictive marcaine for export to Earth, selling it to addicts for much higher prices than the medical uses pay. When a large quantity of Brenner's marcaine is stolen, the authorities trace a trail to Sun Lake City, and the colony is given three weeks to find the culprit or be sealed off from incoming and outgoing Earth shipments for six months while a government search of the community takes place. Such isolation from shipments would destroy Sun Lake City.

Hybrid aliens, including the Kandro baby – Sunny, named after the colony – are the most explicit embodiments of paradoxical difference in the text. The “aliens” are telepathic “evolutions” of humans, specially suited to life on Mars. They are “dwarfs” who are children of the human colonists. Tony explains the aliens to Polly and Jim Kandro and others why the hybrid babies are not born on Earth:

It's because of what the geneticists call a lethal gene. [...] On Earth, when Polly's lethal gene and Jim's lethal gene matched, it was fatal to their offspring. They never came to term; the gene produced a foetus which couldn't survive the womb on Earth. I don't know what factors are involved in that failure – cosmic rays, the gravity or what. But on Mars the foetus comes to term and is – a mutant. (255)

The mutation means they thrive on Mars as natives. Tony explains that the alien hybrids “don’t just *accept* Mars air like an Earthman with Marsworthy lungs. They can’t *stand* Earth air. And they need a daily ration of marcane to grow and live” (255).

Tony discovers all of this when he and Anna go in search of abducted Sunny and find that the mutants have stolen him in order to help him survive. Telepathic Anna, always in conflict with her “gift” of telepathy, is the only one able to communicate with the telepathic mutants. She learns that the mutants are a large community of mostly first generation mutants – children of some of the earliest homesteaders on Mars whose parents had been unable to survive on the planet. The children of these homesteaders were left alone, mutants thriving in Martian conditions, and formed a community. The oxygen that Tony was giving Sunny was killing him, and without Marcaine, he couldn’t survive either. The mutants have also admitted stealing Brenner’s marcaine for their survival.

Even with the mystery of the stolen Marcaine solved and Sunny’s health settled, the implications of humans living in the midst of and producing mutants that were unlike them frightens Anna, who herself has always felt like an other. A relationship has developed between Anna and Tony during the plot, and Tony asks Anna to marry him. Anna does not agree to marriage, explaining her fear:

“I’m afraid of our children, afraid of this planet! I was never afraid before. I was hurt and bewildered when I knew too much about people, but – Tony, don’t you *see*? To have a baby like Polly’s to have it grow up a stranger, and alien creature, to have it leave me and go to its – its *own* people....” (266)

Tony addresses Anna's fear of what she produces and what it means to her as a mother. He sees the mutation as "the hope of all the race," explaining "They look different. They even think differently, and nobody knows more about that than you. But they're as human as we are. Maybe more so" (267). Tony feels the possibility inherent in the mutants:

"Ansie, if our children should be mutants, we'd not only have to face it, accept it without fear – we'd have to be glad. Mutants are the children of Mars, natural human children of Mars. We don't know yet whether we can live her; but we *know they can.*" (267)

The paradox of their future children being both mutants and "natural human children of Mars" disrupts patterns of same and other usually written into such texts. The alien as other trope and the telepathic destruction trope mentioned in relation to "Conquest of Gola" earlier in this chapter are both subverted to complicate polar distinctions of same and other, making a case for breaking down gendered otherness. The hope inherent in such deconstruction is given voice through Tony's hope for the human race. Speaking about the mutants, he says:

"They're gentle. They're honest and decent and rational. They trust each other, not because of blind loves and precedents, as we do, but because they know each other as Earth humans never can. If blind hates and precedents end life on Earth, Ansie, we can go on at Sun Lake. And we can go on that much better for knowing that even our failure, if we fail, won't be the end." (267).



The “mutant”/“natural” human children of Mars are the only ones suited for survival. The text moves the issue of otherness beyond giving mutants voice – they don’t have voice in the way readers are accustomed to. They are telepathic. They have a new voice, and their hybridity enables a future.

While the hope in hybridity and the destabilization of same and other speaks to the gendered discourse of same and other in feminist theory, the text is not without complications. It does not necessarily read as a feminist text. The primary protagonist is male. The telepathic Anna who established contact with the mutants that enable the hope of Sunny, of the community, and of the human race, is wary of her gift of telepathy. It has always been a burden to her because she gained more insight into people’s evil desires or despair than she wished to. It due largely to Tony’s validation of her gift that she learns to embrace it. With the hope that Tony imbues her with, Anna asks Tony to marry her, an acceptance of the future Tony has explained. In addition, even in the midst of mutants and a cooperative colony on Mars, heterosexual marriage is treated as the norm – marriage is a precursor to reproduction for Anna, and brothels exist in other colonies. Despite some complications, though, and in fact reveling in such complications, are issues of otherness dealt with in ways that contemporary feminist discourse deals with them.

Like *Outpost Mars*, Judith Merrill’s “That Only a Mother” is a text that focuses on “alien” children that are harbingers of the future, though in the vein of dystopia. Set in the midst of war, presumably World War III, radiation poisoning has contaminated births, and those pregnancies that go full term often result in mutated children. The narrator Maggie’s husband, Hank, works around uranium, designing weapons, and has been away

through the duration of the pregnancy and well after the baby's birth. Though Maggie's pregnancy seems to be going smoothly, she is anxious but dismisses it as her psychologist does as her being "the unstable type" (90). She recounts the news of increased numbers of infanticides by men in a letter to her husband, but when she sees her baby, she is enamored and her mind put to ease. The baby girl, Henrietta, turns out to be genius – she is talking at a four-year-old level before she has teeth and singing by the time she is seven months old. Conversations between Maggie and Henrietta reveal an intimate, loving relationship between the two.

Hank returns home to see the baby for the first time, and mother and daughter eagerly wait to welcome him. Maggie wakes Henrietta to introduce her to Hank and asks her to crawl for him:

For a moment young Henrietta lay and eyed her parents dubiously.

"Crawl?" she asked.

"That's the idea. Your Daddy is new around here, you know. He wants to see you show off."

"Then put me on my tummy."

"Oh, of course." Margaret obligingly rolled the baby over.

"What's the matter?" Hank's voice was still casual, but an undercurrent in it began to charge the air of the room. "I thought they turned over first."

"This baby," Margaret would not notice the tension, "This baby does things when she wants to." (94)

Henrietta crawls like a “potato-sack racer,” putting Hank at ease for a moment. He says to her, “The way you wriggle [...] anyone might think you were a worm, using your tummy to crawl on, instead of your hands and feet” (95), before he realizes that she is limbless. Through love or insanity, Maggie has not noticed her daughter’s physical mutation and is equally blind to Hank’s discord. The text ends with the line, “*Oh God, dear God* – his head shook and his muscles contracted, in a bitter spasm of hysteria. His fingers tightened on his child – *Oh God, she didn’t know...*” (95). With the several references throughout the short story to infanticide and the low conviction rate of offenders, the reader is left to assume that the text closes with Hank murdering Henrietta.

What *Outpost Mars* and “That Only a Mother” have in common is the birthing of “others,” and while “That Only a Mother” may be a much more dystopian text, there is a sense of possibility of the “other” in each of the texts. It is clear that Henrietta is beyond normal, and the reader may assume that her eerie genius may be attributable to radiation poisoning. In addition, the love that Maggie has for Henrietta is heartening, despite the warnings that readers get as Maggie writes to Hank that the doctors kept Henrietta in an incubator and were hesitant to bring her to Maggie.

The short story is epistolary in portions, so much of the information the reader gleans is through Maggie’s rose-colored glasses and is one-sided. Hank’s letters are not included, so, for instance, in one letter, the reader simply realizes that Hank has voiced concerns about something the doctors have told him, but Maggie responds, “Well the nurse was wrong if she told you that. She’s an idiot anyhow. It’s a girl. It’s easier to tell with babies than with cats, and I know. How about Henrietta?” (92). Whether Hank’s concern about what the doctors told him was related to the sex of the baby or something

else is ambiguous. By the end of the story, when the reader discovers along with Hank that Henrietta is limbless, details like those in this letter take on new meaning and leave the reader with even more questions.

The mutations are certainly man-made, as well as man-destroyed. It can be assumed that Henrietta's mutations are a direct result of Hank's work with radiation. The nuclear war has radiated the environment to such a degree that the reader gets the sense that mutations are the norm rather than the exception. A letter that Maggie gets from her mother and the newspaper articles that Maggie reads indicate that the mutations are widespread. One article in the medical news states that a geneticist insists that by the fifth month of pregnancy, doctors can determine if the mutation is severe, though "Minor mutations [...] displacements in facial features, or changes in brain structure could not be detected" or "[...] normal embryos with atrophied limbs that did not develop beyond the seventh or eighth month," but that "the *worst* cases could be predicted and prevented" (89-90). The reader is left to wonder what is worst case, if changes in brain structure and limbless bodies are not.

Whatever Henrietta's mutations, Judith Merrill's short story literally gives voice to the "other"/mutant before her father murders her. Judging from the medical news, Henrietta's mutations were not worst case, yet Hank finds them disturbing enough to murder his then nine-month-old daughter. Henrietta, though limited physically, seems to embody intellectual possibility. Hank cares only that she is physically deformed, that she is a product of the radiation caused by the ongoing nuclear war. Not only is his murder of Henrietta a murder of the "other," but it will destroy Maggie, as well, whether it sends her into insanity or despair. It is clear that the only hope she has is tangled up in her love

of Henrietta. The short story serves as a warning about scientific hubris (covered in more detail in a later chapter) and gives voice to the other – a product of man’s wars – then kills the other.

### **3.4 “A not-woman, a not-man”: The Sexual “Other” and Gender Complication**

In “New Year’s Revolution: (A Satire),” (1948), Edythe Eyde, under the name Lisa Ben (an anagram for lesbian), reverses the other, making homosexual, specifically lesbians, the norm and heterosexuals the other, but she makes an abusive male heterosexual the protagonist, limiting or denying altogether reader identification with the protagonist, and reversing the situation so that the protagonist is positioned as the other when he awakens in a world in which homosexuality is the norm. “A New Year’s Revolution” came out in *Vice Versa: America’s Gayest Magazine*, considered the first gay and lesbian magazine. Eyde would type copies of the magazine on carbon paper and hand deliver them to local gay and lesbian bars, and it is believed that only twelve copies of the issue containing “A New Year’s Revolution” remain. The narrative choice and the norm/other reversal in this text work to destabilize the heterosexual norm, taking part in a feminist discourse normally granted to later authors.

The notion of heterosexual as the norm and homosexual as the other is a question of sex and gender according to Gayle Rubin in “Traffic in Women” (1975). She builds on Simone de Beauvoir’s assertion that the relationship between the sexes is not natural. De Beauvoir writes:

One is not born, but becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society: it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature,

intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine.

(249)

De Beauvoir is one of the early feminists to assert culture's impact on gender, writing, "Gender is a socially imposed division of the sexes" – an important notion in feminist theory (249). This notion has had profound impact on feminist discourse, forging a distinction between culture and nature that has been interpreted and bridged in numerous ways. In terms of homosexuality, though, it has served to question the notion that there is a "natural" sexual relationship between men and women.

One of the most prominent theorists in feminist theory who most recently takes up the sex/gender issue is Judith Butler. Her *Gender Trouble* (1999) is a pivotal text in feminist theory, inciting both support and critique. In her prologue to a subsequent edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler asserts:

*Gender Trouble* sought to uncover the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions. The text also sought to undermine any and all efforts to wield a discourse of truth to delegitimize minority gendered and sexual practices. (viii)

In her notion of how heterosexuality normalizes itself by abnormalizing homosexuality, Butler makes an argument that extends the otherness of male norming to heterosexuality. She writes that gender policing is used to define heterosexuality by putting boundaries are norm to define oneself against "other"

Rubin asserted earlier that argument to the notion that our sexuality is embodied in the type of gender we perform. She writes:

Gender is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that sexual desire be directed toward the other sex. The sexual division of labor is implicated in both aspects of suppression of the homosexual component of human sexuality, and by corollary, the oppression of homosexuals, is therefore a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women.... (782)

So the strict gendered conventions that delineate what is male and what is female polarize male and female into socially constructed opposites, which Rubin interrogates.

Monique Wittig also questions feminism's treatment of homosexuality and explores the biological and cultural entanglement of sexuality. In "One is Not Born a Woman" (1981), she asserts that lesbians have been left out of the feminist movement because of the heterosexual dichotomy that the movement suggests. She argues for a complication of the dichotomy because both "woman" and "man" are made impossible sites for lesbians. Wittig writes, "Thus a lesbian has to be something else, a not-woman, a not-man, a product of society, not a product of nature, for there is no nature in society" (547). In "New Year's Revolution," Eyde also questions conventions of sexual orientation by flipping what is considered "norm" and by "cross-dressing" as an unlikeable male protagonist, and by using satire to show the absurdity of violence toward those of a different sexual orientation.

In a chapter of *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction* entitled "Cross-Dressing as a Male Narrator," Jane Donawerth explains the use of women authors using male narrators and protagonists. She claims it is so pervasive in science fiction that it constitutes a convention and serves several purposes in women's science

fiction and asserts that the use of male narrators in women-authored fiction may be “a rebellious act” (111). She cites Joanna Russ’ chapter of *Images of Women in Fiction* entitled “What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can’t Write” in which Russ argues that American fiction myths have no place for real women and that even women authors cannot write their way out of the myths. To Russ, this is why women use male narrators, so that they can perform other-than-woman acts. She writes:

A woman writer may [...] stick to male myths with male protagonists, but in so doing she falsifies herself and much of her own experience [...] She is an artist creating a world in which persons of her kind cannot be artists, a consciousness central to itself creating a world in which women have no consciousness, a successful person creating a world in which persons like herself cannot be successes. She is a Self trying to pretend that she is a different Self, one for whom her own self is Other. (10)

Russ argues that science fiction can escape the myths and forge new ones, but I assert the use of a male protagonist not only makes publications easier for these women, but also subverts notion of male/female in order to disrupt accepted notions of these. For my argument, we can view it as a type of androgyny. In science fiction during the 1920-60s, women often choose to write male protagonists and narrators. Donawerth stresses that this is a way for a woman author to cross-dress as a male narrator and refuse “her cultural role as a woman” and so is a “rebellious act” (111). This act of rebellion benefits women authors and allows them to utilize the male narrators (and I extend this to protagonists in the same way that Donawerth connects Russ’ study of protagonists to narrators in her study) in three particular ways, according to Donawerth:



[...] cross-dressing as the male narrator, submerging their female identities as authors in the male identities of their narrators, but punishing the male narrators or converting them to feminist viewpoints; piecing together multiple narrators, male, female, and alien; and constructing transvestite and androgynous narrators who expose these authors' own struggles with double genders. (112)

The complexity of a female author writing a male protagonist in a homosexual text complicates gender further. The female author cross-dressing as a male narrator or protagonist is what I will consider here.

Donawerth continues her point about cross-dressing as subversion by showing three uses for the subversion: "the male narrator converted to a woman's point of view; the male narrator as a dumb man (a parody of masculine authority); and the male narrator as forced to undergo feminine suffering" (115). As Donawerth points out, the first use – male converted to woman's point of view – can be seen in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* with Van converting to Herland ways. It is the second and third uses of the cross-dressing subversion – dumb man/masculine parody and narrator/protagonist suffering as a female – that apply to "New Year's Revolution."

Donawerth describes the dumb man/masculine parody as an overperformance of the typical male narrator, invoking and distilling Butler, writing, "As Judith Butler points out [...], political opposition to gender is often offered in parody, through hyperbole, dissonance, internal confusion, and a proliferation of heterosexual gender performances, each slightly different" (119). The use for such parody, according to Donawerth, is to shun reader-protagonist identification and rather, reinforce a sense of superiority over the

extremely discriminatory protagonist and making the narrator/protagonist's blindness to his own discrimination and to indicators of alternative possibilities both a site of humor and horror that the reader can see (119). The reader then recognizes the need to move from thinking in ways that are like the sexist/racist male protagonist and narrator and may change his or her viewpoints accordingly (Donawerth 124).

Likewise, the third use of the male narrator by female authors is the reversal of feminine suffering to the male narrator/protagonist. Donawerth writes that because of the alternatives the science fiction genre enables, it is a field especially adept at such reversals (127). It is the "how would you like it" approach not only to forcing male readers to imagine female perspectives but also to allow female readers a sense of punishing the male narrator/protagonist for his wrongs. The dumb male and punishment go hand in hand in this case. If the dumb male cannot see the error of his ways, then he suffers some sort of punishment (*Herland's* Terry is an example of this).

The uses of dumb male/masculine parody and male experiencing female suffering allow a meaningful reading of "New Year's Revolution." The text is certainly more complex than just a female author cross-dressing as a male protagonist because the text also addresses issues of heterosexuality and homosexuality, but Eyde's use of a male protagonist as a subversion and as a narrative strategy helps blur gender in similar ways. The text opens with Harry Runk drunk at a New Year's celebration at an unfamiliar bar – Rabney's Rendezvous. He slowly realizes that he is at a "Queer joint" as he watches the girls dance together and curses himself that of all the places he could have gone, this is where he wandered in(2). He growls, "I'll show 'em what real dancing's like" (2). He sets his eyes on a blonde, and when she refuses him, he begins to manhandle her onto the

floor before her brunette date intervenes. Harry is certainly not a protagonist that most readers like to identify with. He is drunk, violent, and uncomprehending. His assumption that if he shows women real dancing with a man, they will be pleased by his masculinity and turn from lesbianism is, like *Herland's* Terry, an overperformance of masculinity and is a subversion to the male planetary romance and gender-reversed society tropes discussed in earlier in this chapter.

The shun and the giggling girls around Harry enrage him to such a degree that he follows the couple out when they leave and attacks the brunette:

Harry was crafty. He waited until they passed the dark alleyway adjacent to the Rendezvous before he attacked. Shoving the blonde girl aside, he grabbed her companion before either were aware of his presence, and swung his big fist again and again into her unprotected face. One swift kick in the direction of the blonde as she came to her lady love's assistance was the last thing that Harry Runk's hazy brain remembered – that, and grabbing at a green chiffon scarf around the blonde girl's slender, white throat. (3)

Far from being ashamed of the violence he has inflicted, Harry awakens “immensely pleased with himself” and leaves in a street car, thinking, “Idiotic women [...] The authorities oughtta close a place like that and put the patrons in the booby hatch where they belong” (3). He thinks he'll write a letter to the mayor to clear up the incident and falls asleep on the streetcar, a type of policing of gender that Butler asserts.

The humor of the story takes place when Harry awakens to find that he has missed his stop at Normal Street, and the conductor is a woman tells him that she doesn't

know Normal Street, that they are in “Fruitvale Heights district” (4). Harry thinks, “The war was over. Why didn’t these women stick to home? Women were only good for one thing anyhow... “(4). Harry gets off of the streetcar to have something to eat and wait until morning to find his way home. He notices, among other things, that the neighborhood theater is playing the movies, “When Girl Meets Girl” and “Joan’s Other Wife,” and a horror show for those 21 and over entitled “Beasts of Prey” about a man trying to come between two women (5-6).

When it is ever-so-slowly dawning on him that he is in a different place, he accosts a crossdressed redheaded man that he mistakes for a woman, grabbing her arm to escort her safely home. She says, “Shame on you! You go right along or I’ll call a policewoman!” (7). Shortly after, Harry ducks a rock thrown at his head, so he goes into the nearest café. When he asks a woman there to dance, she rebuffs him:

“What kind of a girl do you think I am? I don’t dance with men!” Then she looked at him a bit more kindly. “I’m not quite so narrow minded as my friends here, though. I can understand your inclinations although I don’t approve of them. I think there are a few places on the other side of town which still permit – uh –” she wrinkled her delicate nose in obvious distaste, “dancing with the opposite sex. But it just isn’t done here.” (8)

Harry is enraged: “Trying to be funny, eh?” snarled Harry. “You –”, an angry epithet rose to his lips. “I’ll teach you to get gay with me!” (8). At this, another patron calls him an “unspeakable outrage of nature” and knocks him to the floor. Female officers arrive to arrest Harry, and when all of the patrons realize what is going on, they begin yelling that he is a “queer,” and that they should take him out and shoot him (9). Confused, Harry

thinks, “He hadn’t done anything wrong, [...] just asked a pretty girl for a dance” (9). He is astonished to hear the bits of conversation about him that the officers carry on as they take him to the station. One says, “Well, they can’t help it if they’re born like that. They just never grew up emotionally. Intensive treatments from the Psychiatric Department have worked wonders with some of them.....” (9).

Though Harry is shaken in “New Year’s Revolution,” he does not convert or repent of his behavior in any way. He revels in it. The purpose he serves in the text, though, is to show the “real conditions of existence” for lesbian women in order to voice a desire for better. Harry is detestable, but he does not receive violence equal to his own. And, his complete inability to comprehend the lesson of the reversed world is both humorous and devastatingly frightening. The end of the text is open ended. Will the familiar scarred face and malevolent smile of the taxi driver convince him that he has been in the wrong? Will she do him harm?

When the police car wrecks, he escapes and hails a taxi. The driver is a “butchy” woman with “a peculiar scar extending from her left eye down to the corner of her mouth,” giving her “a somewhat mischievous, even malevolent, expression” (10). Scared of her, Harry decides it’s better to ride with her than to “remain in hostile territory,” and he falls asleep in the cab (10). He awakens in a jail cell, and the police tell him they found him passed out behind Rabney’s Rendezvous with a green scarf around his neck. He leaves the station, feeling that he must have had a terrible nightmare. When he hails a taxi, “a girl driver with tousled blonde curls tumbling down over one eye and a long, white scar on her cheek” smiles at him “malevolently” and asks “Taxi, mister?” (11).

The implication seems to be that she has been a victim of violence. Perhaps she is the girl he attacked. Perhaps she has been scarred/marked by some other event.

The use of Harry as an uncomprehending protagonist is key to the satire in “New Year’s Revolution” and key to the reader’s refusal to identify with him. Eyde disrupts gender conventions and idea of right and wrong in the text, predicting later postmodern feminist texts and theories that would do the same thing decades later. Such disruptions not only question the “nature” of heterosexuality and the male policing of it but also the question of sex and gender, much like Marge Piercy’s 1975 *Woman on the Edge of Time* and many others did in later decades.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The texts in this chapter utilize the alien and the other to complicate dualisms and empower alternative voices. They work together in a number of ways to do this, some serving multiple functions. In addition, some go about it by envisioning hopeful alternatives; others do it by warning against dualisms and “othering.” “New Year’s Revolution” and “That Only a Mother” are warnings about marginalizing “others,” while “Conquest of Gola,” and *Outpost Mars* enable the other to embody hope. Both “The Conquest of Gola,” and Gertrude Short’s *A Visitor from Venus* critique gender relations with alien points of view, un-anchoring ideas of “natural” gender attributes and positions. That notion of the alien/other is complicated further in “New Year’s Revolution: (A Satire),” with a critique of the concept of homosexual “otherness” by reversing the other. The authors of these texts used the fields of science fiction and utopian fiction – fields especially amenable to imagined alternatives – to confuse alien-ness/otherness through unconventional narrative styles, to deconstruct gendered binaries, and to address the

nature/culture question made famous by later feminist theorists. In so doing, they changed the fields of utopian and science fiction decades before feminist texts were given credit for doing so, and they contribute to feminist theory.

Such reconfigurations forecast material feminism, which revels in complexities and interconnections. Rosi Braidotti, for instance, imagines processes of becoming, asserting there is no normative center but just ongoing change (3). The texts in this chapter align with her claim that “becoming is a question of undoing the structures of domination by careful, patient revisitations, re-adjustments, micro-changes” (116). Like Donna Haraway, Braidotti sees multiplicity as empowering. Elizabeth Grosz, too, asserts the importance of biological indeterminacy, a notion that is especially helpful in thinking about the complexities of the texts in this chapter in terms of how some of the characters literally become something else, such as in *Outpost Mars*.

While women writing in the field of science fiction during the period of 1920-1960 were often considered others, the field still remained a fruitful site for feminist imaginations, as did utopian texts that sought alternatives. Patricia Melzer asserts that science fiction is, “especially open to feminist appropriation” and “identification with the alien/other” and Donna Haraway claims that “science fiction is political theory” (Melzer 7,8; *How Like a Leaf* 120). Such realizations of the rich potential within women’s science fiction support my claim that these texts are worthy of more study. The imagined alternatives and unconventional protagonists give voice to “others,” empowering them in ways that disrupted tropes at the time and articulated gender and sexual theories attributed to later authors and theorists. The most in/famous use of an unconventional protagonist who utilizes “otherness” to disrupt gender conventions and other dualities –

Dagny Taggart of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* – is the subject of the next chapter, in which I extend this argument of “otherness” as useful to feminist discourse in more detail.



## CHAPTER 4

### “ODDLY, CHALLENGINGLY FEMININE”: DAGNY TAGGART

Ayn Rand's heroine of *Atlas Shrugged*, Dagny Taggart, is a complicated character. She truly values her body in its complex connectedness with all other aspects of her life and explicitly, eloquently states that connection for her lover Hank Reardon and others. Sexuality is important to her as a demonstration of her character, a strong statement for a female character of this era. For this study, the androgyny that Dagny embodies is an important contribution to the development of a feminist dialogue in mid-century women-authored utopian literature (a literature of which Rand seemed hesitant to consider herself a part).<sup>1</sup> The ways that Rand addresses the material body – sexual relationships and labor – as well as androgynous otherness through Dagny complicates sex/gender roles, contributing to feminist discourse both by creating a strong female character and by eliciting both male and female responses on the nature of sex and gender, among a variety of other topics.

It is fitting to place a chapter on Dagny Taggart after chapters on materiality and otherness in feminist theory. Dagny is certainly a character who is enfolded, whose body is integrated with her mind and spirit and who utilizes her body to its fullest range and capacity through sexuality and work. She is also an “other” – both in the novel as an

“Atlas” who shoulders the world for others and as an outsider to feminist circles.<sup>2</sup> Strong as Dagny and other of Ayn Rand’s female characters may be, Rand is often ignored and harshly denigrated by feminists both because of her strident capitalist views, for her objectivist philosophy that is firmly rooted in the material, and for her characters’ sexual encounters, which are outgrowths of that materiality. Rand writes romanticized versions of *laissez faire* capitalism that celebrate the dollar, and her subtly or explicitly violent sex scenes and lack of any feel-good sisterhood among female characters often jettisons her out of feminist sympathies. Despite often justified feminist disdain for her, Rand has written some of the strongest, most successful female characters in American literature. Dagny Taggart’s strength and sexuality precedes Joanna Russ’ futuristic assassin Jael in *The Female Man*, for instance. And, Rand’s disruption of gender conventions with the character of Dagny precedes Ursula Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*, in which characters assume sex circumstantially.<sup>3</sup> She is problematic, as are many of the richest female characters in literature – Bronte’s mad woman in the attic; Piercy’s abusive drug-using Connie; Lessing’s Al-Ith, who falls in love with the man who rapes her (not unlike Rand’s Dominique Franco) – that are complicated and ambiguous. Dagny’s androgyny, along with her penchant for concrete action and solutions, elicits seemingly paradoxical descriptions from fellow characters who describe her as “hideous” (149), the image of an ideal woman (519), and “oddly, challengingly feminine” (100).

To discount Rand, to avoid her, in a study of the formation of and evolution of feminist studies because she and her female characters complicate sex and gender is, to say the least, shortsighted. Rand has been and continues to be a force to be reckoned with, like Dagny. Her books continue to sell well, well within the best-seller numbers,

and her influence on business leaders is strong, in part because her celebration of excellence is a siren song, appealing to those who are high achievers and have ever felt held back by “underachievers,” incompetents, or bureaucrats. Algis Valiunis writes for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Twenty-two million copies of Rand’s books have been sold; in 2002 alone, sales of her behemoth 1957 novel *Atlas Shrugged*, reached 140,000 copies” (Valiunis 59). Valiunis also asserts that Hilary Clinton is one of the many political and executive leaders that claims to have been influenced by Rand, and a 1991 Library of Congress survey that finds that *Atlas Shrugged* is the second most influential book “in America today” after the Bible (Valiunis 59). In an episode of the 2007 series *Mad Men*, set in a 1960s New York advertising company, agency owner Bertram Cooper references *Atlas Shrugged*, saying “that’s the one,” recommending the book, and describing the executive and himself as “productive and reasonable men, and in the end, completely self-interested,” qualities he sees as strengths, presumably based on his affinity for the book (“The Hobo Code”). In addition, Arthur O. Lewis writes that some of the appeal of *Atlas Shrugged* is in its conversion narratives of the strong being influenced “through the efforts of a superleader,” John Galt (Lewis 139). For instance, among other national leaders influenced by *Atlas Shrugged*, Former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan took Rand’s objectivism to heart as one of her inner circle (sardonically entitled “The Collective”) early in his career.

Both Rand and Dagny, as influential as they are, deserve a more thorough investigation, a new frame of material feminism that focuses not on a retrograde modernist view of body and mind but on a complex process investigating the alteration and movement of the female body and its interconnectedness with discourse and mind.

The guarded maintenance of the body-discourse paradox in feminism should be re-examined, despite the complexity and dangers of disassembling the dichotomous stronghold in feminist theory. Whether or not Rand is feminist may not be the question to ask. Dagny is a character that *embodies* androgynous otherness, as it is described in chapter two, in a powerful way, paradoxically both adopting a conventionally “masculine” work ethic and philosophy and centralizing the female body as important to her identity.

#### **4.1 “An act of scorn”: Ignoring Rand**

Many feminists have an uneasy relationship with Rand and her characters because of the nature of Rand’s sex scenes, and dialogue about gender, as well as Rand’s view of feminism and women in general. In this section, I will address – and defend – Rand’s literary gender relations, specifically sexual encounters, and Rand’s own views of feminism and gender. I assert that there are more alliances between Rand and feminisms than she has often been given credit for, or that Rand herself was willing to admit, and that material feminism makes such alliances clearer by exposing Rand’s boundary deconstructions.

The quintessential scene in Ayn Rand’s writing that seemingly establishes Rand as a non-, even anti-, feminist, is Dominique Francon’s “rape” in *The Fountainhead*. My focus in this chapter is on *Atlas Shrugged* and how Dagny Taggart contributes importantly to feminist discourses of the sexual and laboring female body, of power, and of gender relations, but in an argument about gender and sexuality in Rand’s works, I cannot ignore the rape scene. Ayn Rand complicates the issues of female sexuality and gender performance in ways that anticipate later pro-sex feminisms and queer theories.

Rand's progressive gender representation, though, has not always sat well with feminists. Susan Brownmiller, for instance, dubs Rand "a traitor to her own sex," stating that "she is an example of the ways in which a strong, male-directed woman accommodates herself to what she considers to be superior male thought," which places an important gendered discourse on the radar (64-65).<sup>4</sup>

In the infamous scene, *The Fountainhead* hero Howard Roark sneaks into Dominique Franco's window and kisses her roughly. She is unsure if she is responding in terror or ecstasy, but she fights him "like an animal," biting his hand until it bleeds (216). When he throws her on the bed, she feels hatred and "helpless terror" before she feels "the sudden pain" shoot through her and screams (217). After he leaves without a word, Dominique thinks:

It was an act that could be performed in tenderness, as a seal of love, or in contempt, as a symbol of humiliation and conquest. It could be the act of a lover or the act of a soldier violating an enemy woman. He did it as an act of scorn. Not as love, but as defilement. And this made her lie still and submit. One gesture of tenderness from him – and she would have remained cold, untouched by the thing done to her body. But the act of a master taking shameful, contemptuous possession of her was the kind of rapture she had wanted. (217)

That she "would have remained cold" if Roark had asked for consent and that it was the "rapture she had wanted" certainly seem to contradict the scene a few pages later in which Dominiuqe sums up the scene as a rape and in identifying it as such, "[t]hrough the fierce sense of humiliation, the words gave her the same kind of pleasure she had felt in

his arms. ...She wanted to scream it to the hearing of all” (233). Dominique’s pleasure and desire for the sex act as it was – one that she qualifies as rape – dangerously mottles the line that women activists and feminists have fought to clearly delineate between rape and women’s desire. Such seemingly (at the least) antiquated and (at the most) male-dominated pornographic and criminal use of female body is disturbing to say the least, to feminist ideologies. The contradiction Dominique voices seems to lend validity to the notion that women want sex in such ways, despite what they say. Dominique’s complexity – her blurring of cultural constructs and her own desire – is disconcerting, disturbing, rattling to such a degree that an initial feminist repulsion at and expulsion of Rand altogether is understandable.

In responses to several fan letters, Rand clearly delineates that the Dominique-Howard sex scene is not rape, despite Dominique’s qualification of it as such. She explicitly states that taking a woman who does not want to be taken is criminal and immoral. Wendy McElroy highlights that in a June 5, 1946 letter of response to reader Waldo Coleman, Rand writes that Coleman “misunderstood” the Dominique “rape” scene, thinking “the lesson to be derived from [the scene] is that a man should force himself on a woman and that she would like him for that” (*Letters* 282). Instead, Rand insists:

But the fact is that Roark did not actually rape Dominique; she had asked for it, and he knew that she wanted it. A man who would force himself on a woman against her wishes would be committing a dreadful crime... The lesson in the Roark-Dominique romance is one of spiritual strength and self-confidence, not of physical violence. (*Letters* 282)

Rand responds on March 13, 1965, to reader Paul Smith, similarly:

It was not an actual rape, but a symbolic action which Dominique all but invited... Needless to say, an actual rape of an unwilling victim would be a vicious action and a violation of a woman's rights; in moral meaning, it would be the exact opposite of the scene in *The Fountainhead*. (*Letters* 631)

Rand repeatedly asserted that she did not write the scene to be read as a rape, despite what Dominique says. Though, the fact that the scene is so ambiguous as to elicit such questions from readers is disturbing in and of itself.

To better understand Dominique's response and Rand's choice in the scene (and in sex scenes in *Atlas Shrugged*), though, one must have a grasp of Rand's idea of individualism and of gender relations. Rand sees the sex act ideologically and materially – anatomically even. Nathaniel Branden – part of Rand's inner circle and Rand's long-time lover – writes that Rand's philosophy of sex and love in heterosexual gender relations presupposes a strong woman that will only allow a man who is her equal to “conquer” her, citing Rand's enthusiasm for “the legend of Brunhilde, a warrior woman able to defeat any man in combat, who swore she would give herself only to the man who could prevail against her” (224-25). Branden asserts that Kira (of *We the Living*), Dominique Francon, and Dagny Taggart desire men who are able to “conquer” them intellectually, and he explains that “by ‘conquer,’ Rand meant ‘inspire them to sexual/romantic surrender’” (225). Rand, he writes, felt that anatomy made “surrender” and “conquer” applicable terms in sexual relationships because of the invasive nature of male entry and the receptivity of female “surrender.” Branden writes:

Happy, even aggressive receptivity is still a different experience from male thrusting. In the context in which Rand used it, “surrender” was emphatically not a negative word but a positive one. It was associated with admiration and trust. (225)

While such an understanding of male and female sexual anatomy could be read through the Freudian-Lacanian lens of male phallus and female “lacking,” this does not seem to be what Rand means. Her female characters’ receptivity, Dagny’s in particular, do not seem to imply a lacking, but rather an acting out of female desire that does not discount the material bodies involved in the act.<sup>5</sup> While this does not discount Dominique’s own qualification of the sexual experience as “rape,” she also expresses her desire for it, exemplifying the problem of simplistic dismissal of Rand on such issues.

Some corporeal and material feminists have noted feminist reductive treatment of the heterosexual sex act, and their critiques are not only complexly amenable to Rand’s philosophies, but also provide insights into her literary sex scenes. The diversity of sexual desire among feminists uproots any simplistic understanding of what constitutes “feminist” sex. The anti-pornography work of 1970s feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon has been dubbed by contemporary feminists as an advocacy of “vanilla sex” that is just as repressive as the patriarchal sex it argues against.<sup>6</sup> Carla Freccero contends that a feminist focus on sexual practices artificially pits “vanillas and sadomasochists” against one another in a good girl/bad girl paradox and is a misuse of the revolutionary potential of feminism (319). She invokes Cora Kaplan’s work to support her point that sexual practices may not be the best site of feminist strategizing. Kaplan writes:



[...] [I]t is not surprising that [feminists] have too often accepted the paradigm that insists that desire is a regressive force in women's lives, and have called for a sublimation of women's sexual pleasure to meet a passionless and rational ideal. [...] As long as the idea survives that a reformed libidinal economy for women is the precondition for a successful feminist politics, women can always be seen as unready for emancipation. (33-34)

Giving reason precedence over passion was key to Margaret Fuller's work, according to Kaplan, but continuing that hierarchy regresses feminist successes. Considering a transformation of passion to reason as a "precondition for a successful feminist politics" is problematic because of the subjective nature of desire (Kaplan 33-34). In fact, one of Freccero's "voices" in her article articulates transgressive sexual desire in a way that complicates "vanilla" feminist notions of female sexuality by describing pleasurable fantasies involving abuse and rape.<sup>7</sup> The point is that corseting sexual desire is contentious to a politic that seeks liberation for its subjects.

It is clear that sexual desire is complicated. Lynne Segal sees the "biological narrative" of male initiatory activity and female passive receptivity as ideological more than biological (107). The body is inscribed with cultural ideologies that shape the way that medical writers frame the functions of anatomy and biology. Even feminists have reacted to the notion of vaginal receptivity to some degree, according to Segal, who cites "feminist-inspired research" that denigrates penetrative sex as unorgasmic for the majority of women. This notion of receptivity and non-desire for penetrative sex was taken up by feminists, and as Segal states, "Before long the coercive message of much

feminist sex-advice literature was that wise women, in touch with their ‘authentic’ needs, would avoid penetrative sex,” a notion that Segal asserts “not only ignores the unruliness of desire but reflects, more than transcends, the repudiation of ‘femininity’ in our misogynist culture” (108).

So, Rand is not alone in her understanding of the anatomical receptivity of female sexuality, but she is ahead of her time in her understanding of the complexity of sexual desire and its ideological underpinnings. Here, Rand is more aligned with corporeal and material feminists, like Segal who argues, “Sexual experiences are so tied in with the most keenly felt but peculiarly inexpressible hopes and deprivations, promising either the confirmation of, or threats to, our identities [...]” (108). Dagny clearly is aware of her desire. She laughs at Hank’s assessment of his depravity after their first sexual encounter and asserts that physical desire is linked to individual character. Dagny says, “I want you, Hank. I’m much more of an animal than you think. I wanted you from the first moment I saw you – and the only thing I’m ashamed of is that I did not know it,” and follows it with full expression of her unreserved desire for Hank “in her bed” with no other requirements on his time or self (239). This understanding of her own desire is followed by her saying she views their sexual relationship as achievement because she sees him as a pinnacle of work ethic and creatorship. Her sexual desire is something he has earned through his character.

In addition to the complexity of Rand’s view of the heterosexual sex act, a difficulty with Rand’s sex scenes is that the compliance of the sexual scenes is rarely explicit in Rand. Both parties want the act, but they do not communicate it verbally. Wendy McElroy writes, “In every one of Rand’s sex scenes, a clear indication of consent

is present either in the revealed thoughts of the characters or in their behavior,” though, “the woman’s consent is often implicit, not explicit, and it is briefly given” (161).

McElroy contrasts such brief, often subtle or internal (available to the reader through the omniscient narrator) consent with the explicit, drawn out roughness of such scenes, and suggests that perhaps the imbalance of these is the reason that the scenes often set off alarms for feminists. In fact, Dagny, at the start of her first sexual encounter with Reardon, thinks, “Yes, Hank, yes – [...] Now, like this, without words or questions... because we want it...” (235). The internal narrative consent is all the reader gets in a scene like this, but it is clear.

Almost as disturbing to feminists is Rand’s outright distaste for the women’s movement of the 1960s and 70s. Barbara Gruizzuti Harrison notes the opposition to it that Rand explicated in her newsletter *The Objectivist*. Harrison writes:

[Rand] declares herself to be unalterably opposed to the “grotesque phenomenon” of Women’s Liberation, and to the monstrous regiment of “sloppy, bedraggled, unfocused females” who are undertaking “to surpass the futile sordidness of a class war by instituting a sex war.” (qtd in Harrison 68-69)

Rand’s fierce individualism is both hauntingly calling to women who have been culturally trained to care for others before themselves and sweepingly dismissive of the efforts of a social and political agenda, like the women’s movement, that functions on the premise of collective disenfranchisement. Joan Kennedy Taylor asserts that Rand’s individualism is in line with feminism and that Rand’s “novels will continue to nourish young women and lead many of them toward feminism” because “the young woman with

individualist impulses needs, above all, to find believable and inspiring examples of what is possible for women to make of their lives” (247).

Rand’s writing and life, in fact, have been influential to many women (and men). Author Camille Paglia compares Rand to Simone de Beauvoir in several ways and ultimately questions women’s rejection of Rand. Paglia says in an interview, “One would think that women’s studies, if it really obeyed its mission, would make her part of the agenda [...] someone who preaches individualism and independence as Ayn Rand does” (79). Also, Mimi Reisel Gladstein has highlighted Billy Jean King’s comments about Rand in an interview with *Playboy Magazine* (yes, *Playboy*). King says that *Atlas Shrugged* was concretely influential to her career:

“The book really turned me around, because at the time, I was going through a bad period in tennis and thinking about quitting. [...] I realized then that people were beginning to use my strength as a weakness – that they were using me as a pawn to help their own ends and if I wasn’t careful, I’d end up losing myself. So, like Dagny Taggart, I had to learn how to be selfish, although selfish has the wrong connotation. As I see it, being selfish is really doing your own thing. Now I know that if I can make myself happy, I can make other people happy – and if that’s being selfish, so be it. That’s what I am.” (King 1976 qtd in Gladstein)

Such embrace of individualism is key to much of feminism’s development, key to the multiple feminist agendas that have sought equal social, political, and legal treatment for women.

Such demands for equality, for identification of women as individuals, is also amenable to Rand's Objectivist philosophy, which is grounded in material reality. In *Introduction to Objectivist Epistemology*, for instance, Rand asserts that cognition is based on perception of the material then abstracted to a degree, a philosophy amenable to contemporary feminisms. Rand writes that recognition of objects is followed by recognition of individual objects, which is followed by a recognition of "relationships among [them] by grasping the similarities and differences of their identities" (Rand *Introduction to Objectivist* 6). In identifying similarities and differences, we conceptualize both a distinct identity for each and a collective identity. Rand uses the example of stones – we recognize there are two stones and that they are both stones but that they are both distinct and different from one another. This, she says, is identification of units and

[...] is not an arbitrary creation of consciousness: it is a method of identification or classification according to the attributes which a consciousness observes in reality. This method permits any number of classifications and cross-classifications [...] but the criterion of classification is not invented, it is perceived in reality. (6-7)

The relationship between the concrete materiality of the individual and the abstraction to the collective, the unit, are important concepts to feminisms. This complicated conceptualization of same and different simultaneously aligns with feminist arguments for both collective and individual women, a complicated concept that reacts against the homogenous "woman" of modernism while also seeking a collective social and political agenda grounded in both the material and ideological, the individual and the collective.

## 4.2 “[T]o hold her head as he did”: Dagny and Her Work

Rand’s focus on individualism and the material in Objectivism have seemingly been at odds with feminists and utopianists whose focus is the collective and the cultural, but the shift toward materiality in feminism invites a new interrogation of Rand’s work, particularly of Dagny Taggart. Dagny’s joy in her performance potential (athletically, intellectually, sexually) is the driving force of her life. She enjoys her body and its uses, in the labor market and beyond, and feels it as one in the same with her spirit and mind, refusing to devalue her body as religion and culture demand. She considers the concourse of the Taggart Terminal a cathedral and the statue of her grandfather Nat Taggart as representative of the word *exalted*. The statue of Nat Taggart shows “he held his head as if he faced a challenge and found joy in his capacity to meet it,” and “all that Dagny wanted of life was contained in the desire to hold her head as he did” (63). In fact, she was nine when she determined to run Taggart Rail, standing on the tracks with the rails “brilliant in the sun, and the black ties [...] like the rungs of a ladder which she had to climb” (54). She feels called to work, to achieve in the labor market, in the face of cultural pressure for her to choose otherwise. She only thought once that her gender may be an issue in her desire to lead the Taggart family business: “She was fifteen when it occurred to her for the first time that women did not run railroads and that people might object. To hell with that, she thought – and never worried about it again” (54). Worrying about it again or not, her father leaves controlling stock of the rail to her brother James, though she has been running it and though her father acknowledges her ability with it (55).

Despite all of this complication, Dagny's commitment to her work outweighs all else. She loves the railroad more than any of the men in her life – Francisco d'Anconia, Hank Reardon, or even John Galt. She consistently reiterates to Hank, and others, that her attraction to him is contingent on his own work ethic and success and his acknowledgement and respect for hers. To her, a man who would ask her to give up the railroad would be the kind of man she would not want. In fact, when Francisco and Galt tell her that they are inciting the intellectual strike and ask her to let the railroad go, she cannot, even as she believes they may be right.

This ambition and desire to progress are key to Dagny's identity, and her concept of work is aligned with the movement and process-orientation of feminists, especially utopian feminist, of the 1970s and beyond. Tatiana Teslenko and Lucy Sargisson both stress that what Sargisson coins as "new utopianism," impacted by feminist ideologies of the 1970s, focuses on process and avoidance of the static (Sargisson 5). Movement is important, both Sargisson and Teslenko assert, because ideas, bodies, desires are changing/changeable, which resounds in material feminism's view of indeterminacy. Though Dagny certainly values product, her ideology, along with the other intellectual powerhouses in the text, is constructed in human progress.

During a time away from the railroad, Dagny stays in a cabin that she repairs. She plants flowers in order "to see one spreading slowly over the ground and the other climbing up the tree trunks, to see them grow, to see progression and movement" (561). The rebuilding and repairing of the cabin begin naturally for her, and she finds the same joy that she finds in the railroad: "[...] She had not noticed how she began it or why; she had started without conscious intention, but she saw it growing under her hands, pulling

her forward, giving her a healing sense of peace” (561). Dagny begins to realize that she enjoys this work, too, and that she finds satisfaction even in such domestic work:

Then she understood that what she needed was the motion to a purpose, no matter how small or in what form, the sense of an activity going step by step to some chosen end across a span of time.[...] the work of building a path was a living sum, so that no day was left to die behind her, but each day contained all those that preceded it, each day acquired its immortality on every succeeding tomorrow. (561)

Despite the affinity between this notion of movement and the same notions in current material feminisms, Dagny also imagines “physical nature” and man pitted against one another, physical nature as a circle and man’s work as a straight line continually heading toward a goal. Despite the notion of a linear journey toward a goal, she clearly finds that she enjoys the act of work, the movement of it. She wants to work toward a goal, but the pleasure is not in just attaining the goal. There is important alignment, though, with the process and nomadism of feminists like Luci Braidotti, Lucy Sargisson, and Tatiana Teslenko in the ideologies of work in *Atlas Shrugged* that makes the text utopian throughout, not just in the scenes limited to Galt’s Gulch.

That same purposeful motion defines how Dagny sees the material world and the pleasures it offers as intricately tied to the soul and the mind, part of human identity. When she first rides on the John Galt Railroad, which she has built to save Taggart Railroad, she feels an immense sense of pleasure at the physical elements of the wind, the speed, and the earth flying by. These elements are part of the ecstasy of her achievement,



of her hard work, body, and intellect working together to achieve something. She questions in the midst of her sheer pleasure:

These things and the capacity from which they came – was this the pursuit men regarded as evil? Was this what they called an ignoble concern with the physical world? Was this the state of being enslaved by matter? Was this the surrender of man’s spirit to his body? [...] The words for it, and for this journey, and for her feeling, and for the whole of man’s earth, were: It’s so simple and so right! (226)

It is the movement and progress that Dagny finds she is incapable of leaving. It is the reason she cannot give up the railroad for Francisco or for Galt, though they argue that she is working in a hamster wheel for the looters. The urge to work and try to save the railroad is inherent in her nature. She tells Francisco, “If Taggart Transcontinental is to perish with the looters, then so am I. [...] I thought I could live without it. I can’t” (584), and she declares that she still believes that the only sin is to do things badly, which is why “so long as there’s a railroad left to run, [she’ll] run it” (584). Her notion of right and wrong are derived solely from her own understanding of the world, a large part of what makes Dagny such a complex and interesting character. She experiences the world first hand and does not rely on others’ interpretations of it to gain understanding. Her senses, her pleasures, are her guides.

### **4.3 “Such confident, dangerous power”: Dagny’s Bodily Materiality**

Dagny’s power lies in part in the way she carries and utilizes her body and sees it as an essential part of her. The text covers several instances in Dagny’s girlhood that show a strength and confidence in her body, mind, and spirit as they work together that

differ from others. She stands out as an other because of the shocking confidence and power she holds. In one instance particularly, Dagny's mother decides to give her a formal debut ball, hoping that such an event will make Dagny more womanly, more interested in romance, and more emotional. Dagny is surprisingly interested, hoping for adventure of some sort. The night of the event, Dagny's beauty stuns her mother, though it does not surprise Dagny. When Mrs. Taggart asks "gently, reproachfully," "Dagny [...] do you see how beautiful you can be when you want to?" Dagny responds, "Yes, [...] without any astonishment" (100-01).

When Dagny enters the ball, Mrs. Taggart's fascination with her daughter continues as she watches the bold way in which Dagny surveys the room:

This was not a child, not a girl, but a woman of such confident, dangerous power that Mrs. Taggart stared at her with shocked admiration. In an age of casual, cynical, indifferent routine, among people who held themselves as if they were not flesh, but metal – Dagny's bearing seemed almost indecent, because this was the way a woman would have faced a ballroom centuries ago, when the act of displaying one's half-naked body for the admiration of men was an act of daring, when it had meaning, and but one meaning, acknowledged by all as a high adventure. And this – thought Mrs. Taggart, smiling – was the girl she had believed to be devoid of sexual capacity. She felt an immense relief, and a touch of amusement at the thought that a discovery of this kind should make her feel relieved.

(101)

This scene exemplifies the complexity of the text in terms of how others view sexuality, how Dagny carries her body and views sexuality, where the power lies, and more. Her mother gives the debut ball because she fears that Dagny will never take interest in men; Dagny is so intellectually driven and interested in her own affairs, that she stands out from the norm of what is expected from women. By taking part in the ball, she not only shows that she is a sexual being but, through the honesty and power of her presence, does so to an almost indecent degree. The power of her sexuality is not what others expect of a woman, but the confident power Dagny possesses is more than just sexual, more than just her body, though sexuality and bodily power are immensely important elements of who she is.

It is also at the ball, though, that Dagny learns a hard lesson that shapes her life perspective. She is excited about the ball because she believes it will be an adventure, some of the fire of life. She is expectant. After the ball, though, Dagny explains her disappointment to her mother. She asks her mother if other people see the world in reverse from her. She is amazed that people seemed to hope to *gain* excitement and romance from the flowers and the lights at the event, as opposed to their innate excitement and romance *reflecting* in the flowers and lights. She says lifelessly to her mother, ““There wasn’t a person there who enjoyed it [...] or who thought or felt anything at all. They moved about and they said the same dull things they say anywhere. I suppose they thought the lights would make them brilliant” (101). Her mother responds that the people are “not supposed to be intellectual at a ball” but “gay” (102). Dagny wonders if gay equates with stupid, and when her mother asks if she enjoyed the young men at the ball, Dagny replies, “What men? There wasn’t a man there I couldn’t squash

ten of” (102). This pivotal scene is Dagny’s first realization that her own vigor cannot be transferred. That others are content with mediocrity, a lesson she relearns throughout the novel.

Dagny’s interest in her childhood friend, Francisco, in fact, is grounded in his excellence, in the competition he is for her. In a pivotal scene before they begin a sexual relationship and not long after the ball, Dagny and Francisco are playing tennis. He always wins, but during this game, Dagny determines she will win:

She did not know at what moment she decided that she would win, this time. When she became aware of it, it was no longer a decision or a wish, but a quiet fury rising within her.[...] She felt an arrogant pleasure in seeing the skill of his movements, because *this* was the thing which she would beat, so that his every expert gesture became her victory, and the brilliant competence of his body became the triumph of hers. (102)

She does win, as he laughs, trying to make her work harder. She is acutely aware of her body and his during the game. With each movement, she feels pleasurable pain that she is sure is the last move she is able to make. But she is able to continue, realizing a resilience in her body that equals her spirit. He notices it, too, and a sexual energy ending the scene leads to a sexual encounter fueled by their competition, understanding of each other’s excellence, and respect for one another’s work.

This attraction and first sexual encounter with Francisco pave the way for subsequent loves in Dagny’s life. Francisco comes to watch her at the way station of the railroad that evening, and like the tennis match, watching her work at something she is good at reads like foreplay. She enjoys the rapidity of her own movements, her own

fluency with her work, and is aware of his eyes on her, feeling the nakedness of her own arms as she picks up a paper that drops. The movement makes “her heart stop causelessly in the kind of gasp one feels in moments of anticipation” (104). With few words spoken, and Francisco’s eyes on her, the room is charged by the time Dagny’s shift is over. He suggests they walk home, and when they come to a clearing, they both know simultaneously that they will make love. When Francisco touches her, it is “as if he were learning a proprietor’s intimacy with her body, a shocking intimacy that needed no consent from her, no permission” (105). Despite this and her desire to escape she pulls him to her. And, she chooses to forgo the uselessness of fear because “he would do what he wished, [...] the decision was his, [...] he left nothing possible to her except the thing she wanted most – to submit” (105). She too feels ownership of his body and submits because she chooses to submit. It is her decision, and it is based in the excellence he embodies.

Ayn Rand’s entire notion of sexual attraction is based in character, in a larger sort of individualism. In one scene in *Atlas Shrugged*, Francisco tells Reardon, “Tell me what a man finds sexually attractive and I will tell you his entire philosophy of life” (453). Such a man, according to Francisco, needs a heroine, not “to gain his value,” but “to express it” because “There is no conflict between the standards of his mind and the desires of his body” (453). And, in her journal, Rand writes the following about sexual relationships:

The reason why people consider sexual desire insulting to a woman is, in the deepest sense, the fact that to most people sex is an evil, low, degrading aspect of man’s life. [...] On such a premise, sexual desire *is*

insulting to the woman who is the object of it. [...] The twisted element of truth here is that sex has to have a high spiritual base and source, and that without this it is an evil perversion. [Most people] do not suspect the *essential*, unbreakable tie between sex and spirit – which is the tie between body and soul. (608-09)

She continues, “it is a great compliment to a woman if a man wants her. It is an expression of his highest values, not of his contempt” (609).

This is the philosophy that Dagny expresses to Hank after their first sexual encounter. Dagny finds joy in Hank’s desire for her in part because she knows his desire for her may be trumping his efforts to contain it. He wants her to the point of surrender. As he kisses her roughly, she tears her mouth from his:

[...] she was laughing soundlessly, in triumph, as if saying: Hank Reardon – the austere, unapproachable Hank Reardon of the monklike office, the business conferences, the harsh bargains – do you remember them now? – I’m thinking of it, for the pleasure of knowing that I’ve brought you to this. (236)

Then, when he trembles, she thinks, “this is the kind of cry she had wanted to tear from him – this surrender through the shreds of his tortured resistance” (236). She then thinks “that the triumph was his, that her laughter was her tribute to him, that her defiance was submission, the purpose of all of her violent strength was only to make his victory greater – [...]” (236). Reardon despises his sexual impulse and is repulsed by the sexual drive she evokes in him. And, despite that, she has the power to evoke it in him. When they

both silently hail the sexual tension between them, it is not a tender salute; rather, it reads with an almost-pornographic violence. When he grabs her,

It was like an act of hatred, like the cutting blow of a lash encircling her body: she felt his arms around her, she felt her legs pulled forward against him and her chest bent back under the pressure of his, his mouth on hers.[...] He was not smiling, his face was tight, it was the face of an enemy, he jerked her head and caught her mouth again, as if he were inflicting a wound. (235-36)

She, too, acts in violence herself and is pleased that she has brought him to such uncontrollable sexual desire. She sees him as the victor, and her reward is the sexual service she can give him:

Whatever I am, she thought, whatever pride of person I may hold, the pride of my courage, of my work, of my mind and my freedom – that is what I offer you for the pleasure of your body, that is what I want you to use in your service – and that you want it to serve you is the greatest reward I can have. (236)

Dagny awakens, her body bruised, to hear the rant of Reardon's disgust for her as he calls her a bitch whose talent in bed he desires more than the rest of her greatness. He tells her, "What I feel for you is contempt. [...] I wanted you as one wants a whore – for the same reason and purpose. [...] You're as vile an animal as I am. [...] Today, I would give my life not to let it be otherwise, not to have you be anything but the bitch you are" (238). And, after Hank denounces both Dagny and himself for their desire for one

another, Dagny laughs at him again. Standing deliberately naked in front of him, she says:

“You think that this is a threat to your achievement, but it is not to mine. I will sit at my desk, and work, and when the things around me get hard to bear, I will think that for my reward I will be in your bed that night. Did you call it depravity? I am much more depraved than you are: you hold it as your guilt, and I – as my pride.” (239-40)

It is only Dagny’s respect for Hank, in his commitment to work and the character displayed in it that draws her sexually to him. And, for that, she feels no guilt. Even before their sexual encounter, his inner dialogue during their meetings is at least once about his desire “to reduce [her] to a body,” something that she simply will not allow him to do (193).

By taking full pleasure and control over her body, and perhaps his, Dagny disrupts even Hank’s notions of sex/gender. She complicates the virgin/whore dichotomy in such a way that even feminists find hard to unravel. Despite his uncertainty of who he is and how his sexual desire fits into his life, she knows who she is and embraces her sexuality. She says, “I want you, Hank. I’m much more of an animal than you think” (239). It is in her response to this that I see part of the potential to assert the text’s participation in a feminist discourse, foretelling characters of later women’s texts. She is unlike woman characters from countless earlier books that do not know what to do with their sexuality, who feel their desires to be separate, evil, detriments to their achievements as women. Dagny’s pride is not from her relation to cultural standards of



what she should be, but she is instead guided by an internal compass that no one can disturb, not even the men she loves.

For this and other reasons, Dagny, particularly, embodies my point that many of the primary texts in this study are either ignored or discarded from feminist study because of the presence they give the body. Dagny's body cannot be argued away. Dagny is complicated and messy to deal with from a feminist perspective, so some feminists have not wrestled with her. She defies the polarities. She both controls and submits. It is Dagny's deconstruction of these paradoxes that makes her not only more real in many ways than other female characters, but also makes her a character that lays the groundwork for later feminist characters.

#### **4.4 “To Hell With That” or “Who Does She Think She Is?": Dagny's Androgyny**

The combination of a highly powerful female character both in sexual terms and in the labor market complicate Dagny, making her a character who is an androgynous other. She claims masculinity in several places, tearing down preconceptions of “masculine” and “feminine” in ways that some later feminists tried to do. Despite the importance of her body – her female body – to her identity, she often presents herself and refers to herself as masculine in her work. Her mother sees the young Dagny as “a figure hurrying in and out of the apartment, a slim figure in a leather jacket, with a raised collar, a short skirt and long show-girl legs,” and cannot reconcile this quintessentially Dagny image to her own version of femininity (100). Despite her mother's incapacity for understanding the complexity of Dagny, she recognizes the conundrum that Dagny embodies, seeing the way Dagny moves: “She walked, cutting across a room, with a

masculine, straight-line abruptness, but she had a peculiar grace of motion that was swift, tense and oddly, challengingly feminine” (100). Dagny is a gender disruption.

At the same time, other male characters describe her as what a woman was meant to be. When Hank Reardon sees her for the first time, not yet knowing that she is Dagny Taggart, he thinks to himself that she represents womanhood in a true way: “Had he asked himself a moment earlier whether he carried in his mind an image of what he wanted a woman to look like, he would have answered that he did not; yet, seeing her, he knew that this was the image and that it had been for years” (519). This tension between conventional sex/gender and the disruptions of those conventions is part of the ongoing feminist discourse. What Rand developed and questioned in *Atlas Shrugged* contributes to the feminist process through her assertion of the mind/body/spirit connection simultaneous to her complicated portrayal of Dagny Taggart’s sex/ gender. While her sexuality – that of a female heterosexual – is important to her identity, her “masculinity” in the workplace is also integral to her identity.

Others refer to Dagny as though she is sexless, an anomaly, and an other because of her “masculine” pursuits. James’ lover, Betty – with whom he has a passionless relationship in which they both have sex because they assume they are supposed to – is disgusted with Dagny. She says, “I think your sister is awful. I think it’s disgusting – a woman acting like a grease-monkey and posing around like a big executive. It’s so unfeminine. Who does she think she is, anyway?” (73). The fact that Dagny is not even considered masculine – just unfeminine – is interesting. To Betty and others, Dagny hovers in a gender netherworld.

Judith Halberstam's work on female masculinity offers insights into the complexity of Dagny's gendered boundary transgression. Halberstam interrogates the ways in which masculinity is manifested and performed by women, claiming, "far from being an imitation of maleness, female masculinity actually affords us a glimpse of how masculinity is constructed as masculinity" (1). Taking on masculine characteristics, in other words, reveals the frameworks of masculinity – the elements that define masculinity. If female masculinity parts the curtain on how "masculinity is constructed," then Dagny reveals how both masculinity *and* femininity are constructed, thus disassembling both. Such gender deconstruction anticipates postmodern and material feminists and queer theorists.

Halberstam's work on female masculinity, though, does not fully suit an interpretation of Dagny here. Halberstam contends with the notion of androgyny as a balanced male-female. My argument about Dagny's androgyny may be more in line with Rebecca Bell-Metereau's work on androgyny in films. Halberstam writes that for Bell-Metereau, "androgyny is seen as the apex of gender flexibility" (Halberstam 215). Bell-Metereau writes, "The androgynous figure gives audience a sense of hidden possibilities, of the potential for change and renewal" (237). Likewise, Marjorie Garber writes about androgyny as a "third" and "a space of possibility" (11). Halberstam finds Belle-Metereau's assessment leading in the right direction for female masculinities but limiting in terms offering only a "balanced binary" of masculinity and femininity, an argument not fully helpful to her discussion of the spectrum of masculine performance, a limitation voiced by other feminists, as well (15).<sup>8</sup> *Female Masculinities* is devoted to the spectrum of masculinities assumed by women, so androgyny "always returns us to this humanist

vision of the balanced binary in which maleness and femaleness are in complete accord,” which is a problem for “the image of the blatant butch” who “upsets such a balance and offers no hope of temperate gendering [...]” (215). And, though Halberstam separates female masculinity from lesbianism, citing that she seeks to extend beyond the lesbian-masculine duo that Martha Vicinus explores, she also concedes that the discussion of heterosexual androgyny is outside the scope of *Female Masculinity*. She writes, “The masculine heterosexual woman need not be viewed as a lesbian in denial; she may merely be a woman who rejects the strictures of femininity” (59).

Dagny’s androgyny is not one with hints of lesbianism, but one which embodies conventional masculinity and femininity to their fullest. I use the term *androgyny*, though aware that the dualism it connotes to some feminists, because it is the one most aligned with my argument. Dagny is not a holistic balance of masculinity and femininity, but the fluidity of her movement along the spectrum of the gender binary of masculine and feminine stretches the definitions, warping notions of conventional masculinity and femininity. However, she is not masculine in the way in which Halberstam writes about female masculinity. Considering Dagny as inhabiting “a space of possibility” is more suitable to this study (Garber 11).

The assumption that Dagny is “disgusting” because of her conventionally masculine traits and interests is a notion that Rand contests throughout the text. Later in the novel, a friend of James Taggart’s comments to him about his sister, saying that Dagny is “a symptom of the illness of our century. A decadent product of the machine age” (133). He continues,

“Machines have destroyed man’s humanity, [...] robbed him of the natural arts, [...] turned him into an insensitive robot. There’s an example of it – a woman who runs a railroad, instead of practicing the beautiful craft of the handloom and bearing children.” (133)

Dagny’s character and her stark contrast in her ability compared to the character who makes this statement and others that agree with him, denies such essentializing of sex. Dagny is certainly sexual in many ways, but she, too, takes up the brand that others give her and declares her masculinity on occasion, taking the power from her naysayers and turning it on them.

Dagny conducts herself as and at times refers to herself as masculine. In doing this, she defies those around her who hold the belief that there are boundaries in which women must stay and that to stray from those boundaries unsexes them. Dagny lets others know that a threat of the unfeminine is not enough to stop her. In fact, she embraces the masculinity in herself. When Cheryl, James’ new bride whom he has convinced that Dagny is parasitic, sees Dagny for the first time, she confronts her. Cheryl tells Dagny that she will not be polite because they are relatives and that she will protect James from Dagny’s harm. When she says to Dagny, “I’ll put you in your place. *I’m Mrs. Taggart. I’m the woman in this family now,*” Dagny responds, “That’s quite all right. *I’m the man*” (367-68).

Despite such a declaration, others refer to her as what a woman should be. On one hand, the men are attracted to her strength and competence, and on the other, they see her femininity as what a woman is meant to be. For instance, one of the first scenes of Hank Reardon’s attraction for Dagny is when he sees her at his anniversary party.

Because Hank normally sees Dagny in business suits, her formal dress seems especially revealing to him, “because it was astonishing to discover that the lines of her shoulder were fragile and beautiful” (131). It is the gender disturbance that is part of Hank’s attraction. He is drawn to the gendered complexity of her.

Later in the novel once the relationship between Hank Reardon and Dagny has begun, Hank remembers the first time he saw her. She is the one thing for which he compromises his principles, agreeing to hand over power of Reardon Metal to the government in order to save Dagny the dishonor of being outed as his mistress. He still does not understand Dagny fully, does not comprehend that she is unlike other women and does not feel her affair with him – or others’ knowledge of it – is dishonor. He remembers that before meeting Dagny, he disliked businesswomen and felt the railroads were too important to be played with, “no business for a woman”; “he expected a spoiled heiress who used her name and sex as substitute for ability, some eyebrow-plucked, overgroomed female, like the lady executives of department stores” (519). When he sees a woman in a gray suit standing over some construction work being done, he is impressed by her “arrogantly pure self-confidence,” looking “as if this were her place, her moment and her world,” and her body an instrument for her use (519).

But he was not looking at her as at a woman. [...] he was held [...] by the delight of the unexpected and undiscovered, he was held by the astonishment of realizing how seldom he came upon a sight he truly liked, liked in complete acceptance and for its own sake, he was looking up at her with a faint smile, as he would have looked at a stature or a landscape,

and what he felt was the sheer pleasure of the sight, the purest esthetic pleasure he had ever experienced. (519-20)

When he finds out the woman is Dagny, still not having met her, his desire takes shape. To see the confidence of the woman's stature and to know her as Dagny Taggart astounds Hank. It is only in remembering this moment before he signs the certificate granting the government ownership of his company that Hank realizes the body/mind/spirit connection that Dagny has long professed to him. He understands that the scene of his first attraction for her was not simply to her body, an attraction for which he has always felt guilt and repugnance. His attraction to Dagny was from the beginning an attraction to "the woman who ran a railroad" (521). He thinks, "That desire, which I damned as obscene, did not come from the sight of her body, but from the knowledge that the lovely form I saw did express the spirit I was seeing [...]" (521).

Dagny's complexity is in part because her spirit, intellect, and drive – integral parts of her identity – are conventionally classified as masculine. Her complication is in others' inability to categorize her by the standards they know, a problem that Rand also faces among feminists. She both evades conventional masculinity and femininity and embodies each of these to their highest degree, resulting in a deconstruction of gender. Hers is not necessarily an androgyny that is a balance of gender, but it is one that forces the reader to question the strictures of pluralistic gender constructions. Her gender transgression is transcendence. If she can navigate in and out of the conventions, then what use are the boundaries?

#### 4.5 Crashing Into Galt's Gulch and Forcing Her Way Into Feminism

Feminists cannot ignore Dagny. Just as she tore her way through the mirage protecting Galt's Gulch, she passes over boundaries many feminists try to maintain. That Dagny's violent intrusion into Galt's Gulch is uninvited may even provide equilibrium to the assumed "rape" scene and the rough sex scenes in this and other Rand texts. Of all of the places in *Atlas Shrugged*, Galt's Gulch is the mecca of individual strength, of Rand's philosophy. And, it is into this chasm that Dagny forces herself. When she decides to descend the plane she is following one of her individualist cohorts with into a valley, following another that seems to have wrecked, she thinks she must descend. "The savage thing she feels is almost enjoyment" (639). This sort of ultimate desired entry (Galt and others have been working to get Dagny to come to Galt's Gulch) that is forced is reminiscent of the sexual scenes in the text, and this scene in particular, as well as the sex scenes, is indicative of Dagny's power, of her otherness to all communities, of her androgyny.

Rand's work, particularly in this focus on Dagny Taggart, is a rich site of study for feminists seeking to challenge not only others' understandings of gender and sex, but also their own. The fact that Rand's work can invite readings that seem to advocate rape is disturbing, but I am reminded of many other female authors who could be read similarly – Gloria Naylor's *Bailey's Café* is full of female characters who invite and relive their own victimization, and other works in American literature certainly do so, as well. What Rand offers, though, in a strong, ambitious, sexually powerful and desirous woman who prospers and is an example, a broken mold. Barbara Branden writes of Dagny's example:



Dagny is the apotheosis of the Ayn Rand female ideal. She is a beautiful woman of prodigious intellect who runs a major transcontinental railroad. She is free of inner conflict, serene in her basic relationship to existence, passionately ambitious and creative. She is the woman though to be impossible in the conventional view of life – the woman engineer dealing with the material world of metal rails and freight cars and diesel engines, who is simultaneously, consummately feminine. (29)

Her power is unquestionable. Even in the sex scenes in which she gives up power, it is by choice. And, Mimi Reisel Gladstein, one of the first female advocates of reading feminist philosophy in Dagny Taggart, writes that Dagny is an “affirmative role model” (54) and that “She behaves according to her code of ethics and is not punished by God or society. She is that rarity in American fiction – a heroine who not only survives, but prevails” (54). Complications notwithstanding, feminists can utilize the character of Dagny Taggart and the philosophies of Ayn Rand, particularly in terms of deconstructing gender norms and use of the material body, to more fully understand the feminist movement reflected in American literature during the mid-century.

## CHAPTER 5

### “INHABITABLE NARRATIVES”: TECHNOSCIENCE AND NATURE

The texts in this chapter all interrogate the ways in which science, technology, and nature intersect – at times these texts do so to warn against scientific hubris and at times they do so to warn against an all-out distrust of science. Some of the characters in these texts are others – mutants or Frankenstein-like creations – but these texts differ from those discussed in chapter 2 in that the overall tone of the stories in this chapter is not solely about the possibilities that such hybrids offer but rather about the after-effects of nuclear apocalypse or the pitting of what is deemed to be “natural” against technoscience. In the texts that address religion, the religious advocates see religion as a protector of what is “natural” (versus what is technological or scientific).<sup>1</sup> Likewise, some of these texts are similar in the mutant/other theme to some of the texts discussed in chapter 3, but the focus in the texts from this chapter is not on the use of the male/female and sexual bodies as much as it is about the regulation of science.

Carol Emshwiller’s 1959 “Day at the Beach,” Sophie Wenzel Ellis’ 1930 “Creatures of the Light,” Margaret St. Clair’s 1951 “Age of Prophecy,” and Leigh Brackett’s 1955 *The Long Tomorrow* show worlds in which altered bodies and/or places/spaces advocate a complication of technoscience and nature in ways that foretell

the later feminist writings of such theorists as Evelyn Fox Keller, Donna Haraway, and Gillian Rose, among others. Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerten write that the feminist science fiction and utopian texts of the 1960s and 1970s “advanced feminist critiques of much of Western culture, rather than limited criticisms of particular social or domestic practices” and “offered [...] anarchic governments, revised sciences, and a debate on the use of violence to achieve change” (11). The dystopian/science fiction texts highlighted in this chapter are critiques of government, sciences, and violence that reflected the concerns the authors had with these issues and laid the groundwork for these later feminist texts to imagine such utopias and science fictions.<sup>2</sup> “Day at the Beach” and “Creatures of the Light,” use unfavorably altered bodies and estranged – though familiar – places to warn of the possible ill spaces science and technology can occupy/create when not mediated with forethought. “Age of Prophecy” and *The Long Tomorrow* set their tales in post-nuclear war settings in which – in “Age of Prophecy” – bodies are mutated and in which the American city has been destroyed both physically and ideologically.

At least a dozen of the texts from the 1920-60 period have similar themes. I chose the four in this chapter because of their richness and complexity and their focus on bodies and natures, though several others would have also worked well in this chapter, including Judith Merrill’s 1950 *Shadow on the Hearth*, C.L. Moore’s 1957 *Doomsday Morning*, Ayn Rand’s 1938 *Anthem*, and Rena Vale’s 1952 *The Red Court* and her 1952 “The Shining City.” All of these are also dystopian, but each – with perhaps the exception of Vale’s works – ends with a movement towards hope. Though, “Day at the Beach,” “Creatures of the Light,” “Age of Prophecy,” and *The Long Tomorrow* handle

the themes of techno-science and nature with a particular sophistication that exemplifies later feminist approaches to these issues.

The boundary breaking between science/nature, same/other found in this chapter's texts is a theme attributed feminists of the 1960s and later. Donna Haraway's famous cyborg – a happy complication of science and nature – is particularly helpful in this chapter. She writes, "We are both social concepts and biological," and should take "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction" (150) and denies the notion that there is a "natural" genesis that science could have altered. To Haraway, techno-science is imperative to female – to human – identity. Evelyn Fox Keller traces a history of scientific thought that viewed nature as God's lockbox and male scientists as the keyholders. Gillian Rose writes that "paradoxical space" – a sort of postmodern, non-dualized space – is a feminist space that allows for a complex relationship of same and other (140-41). The texts in this chapter deconstruct the same dichotomies that contemporary feminists – particularly material feminists – deconstruct, but they did so decades earlier.

In this chapter, only "Day at the Beach" has a prominent female protagonist, and this lack of women in these dystopian tales of battles of techno-science and nature is telling. This displacement is part of what is being critiqued in that the tales serve as imagined futures of women's displacement that reflect real histories of such displacement, especially from techno-science. In chapter three, I wrote about the general exclusion – at least attempted exclusion – of women from the sciences and science fiction and their subversion of the science fiction community. The four texts in this chapter are not as explicitly gender-driven, but their dystopian warnings about the directions their

contemporary conditions are heading are grounded in a patriarchal scientific hubris that not only views males as the norm of science studies, but also that views males as the authorities of technology and science, the distributors of it. Such warnings and critiques are also critiques of the exclusion of “marginal” populations, including women, from technology and science.

These warnings are also inherent in the concrete places in which the tales are set, places that reflect ideological spaces, as Buell points out.<sup>3</sup> “Day at the Beach,” “Age of Prophecy,” and *The Long Tomorrow* are set in post-nuclear worlds in which the cities are destroyed. Beyond destroyed, they are considered evil and/or dangerous. Each of the tales then addresses the natural world in different ways. In “Day at the Beach,” the sea is the one unchanged/unchanging element in the apocalyptic world, though it is not an easy good-bad dichotomy. It is at the sea that the protagonist couple has to murder a man. In “Age of Prophecy,” the protagonist moves from a rural, where he innocently honed his “natural” gift of clairvoyance, to a metropolitan one, where he begins a cult following and used his power to try to kill all mutants and scientists. The complication arises when he finds out that his “natural” gifts are mutations and learns his true identity. In *The Long Tomorrow*, the protagonist is consumed by the techno-science and city scenes that are forbidden him in a New Mennonite rural village. He journeys for the first two-thirds of the novel in search of a fabled city of scientific discourse. He finds it, discovering that it is not a city, but far more remote, entombed in the wild, free American west. It cannot fulfill his desires either, so he escapes, only to be forced to return. The complication here is in the realization that neither place/space is fully what he wants, nor are they

dichotomous. A complicated relationship exists between the rural villages/forbiddance of science and the wild natural west/science as God.

### **5.1 Gendered Science: Masculinity, Femininity, and New Empiricism**

Women's concerns with science are complicated. Jane Donawerth aptly assesses the connection between the conditions in science for women and the science fiction genre ("Utopian Science"). Feminists in science studies in the 1970s, like many feminists, asserted that culture impacts science and that empirical data is tainted by cultural constructions. Feminist science critics such as Sandra Harding, Evelyn Fox Keller, Sharon Traweek, Helen Longino, Lorraine Code, and Lynne Hankinson Nelson argue for a new empiricism that, like material feminism, seeks to understand the importance of *both* cultural constructs *and* empirical evidence in sciences. In addition, in her *The Science Question in Feminism* and "Women as Subjects of History" in *Sciences from Below: Feminisms, Postcolonialities, and Modernities*, Sandra Harding addresses the ways in which feminist science studies has not only created debates within scientific fields, but also within the feminist science studies community.

Some utopian and science fiction women authors of the 1920-60 period engage in this complicated discourse – sometimes offering warnings about scientific hubris claiming to outdo nature (the women arguing as a premise that nature is agentic...a modern eco-feminist argument) or to offer better alternatives. They also engage with it as a positive equalizer to the interpreted gender hierarchies of religious and superstitious beliefs (such as the "natural" state of reproduction being altered to allow women reproductive options). While the engagements with technoscience are not uniform

among these women writers, many seek to at least question notions of science as the secret decoder ring to “Nature” or an unbiased revealer of “Truth.”

Many of these women authors were denigrated for addressing the social aspects of science.<sup>4</sup> These women interrogated such issues decades before Evelyn Fox Keller’s 1985 groundbreaking assertion in *Reflections on Gender and Science* that:

What needs to be understood is how [scientific] conscious commitments (commitments we can all share) are fueled and elaborated and sometimes also subverted, by the more parochial social, political, and emotional commitments (conscious or not) of particular individuals and groups.

(Keller, *Reflections* 11)

Keller’s probe into how “extra-scientific” elements impact the types of questions scientists ask and the ways in which empirical evidence is interpreted was a paradigm shift for science studies.<sup>5</sup> Keller’s rethinking of science not as a monolithic big-T Truth, but instead a composite of empirical evidence and biased interpretation forced a rethinking of gender and science. She writes, “What we know or claim to know about the natural world comes to us in our own constructions – constructions that are inevitably shaped by our own cultural and linguistic frames,” and those frames are gendered (*Essays* 3). While Kuhn acknowledges the way that science changes our perceptions, to him “‘science’ remained a distinctive endeavor; its internal dynamics, even if neither autonomous nor impervious, still conceptually distinguishable from social (‘extrascientific’) factors” (Keller 1). To Keller, the social is not extrascientific but indistinguishable from science.

Sciences, according to Keller, have historically understood what is conventionally masculine to be the norm for what is human. Keller writes<sup>6</sup>:

From this perspective, gender and gender norms come to be seen as silent organizers of the mental and discursive maps of the social and natural worlds we simultaneously inhabit and construct – even of those worlds that women never enter. This I call the symbolic work of gender; it remains silent precisely to the extent that norms associated with masculine culture are taken as universal. (*Secrets* 16-17)

The assumption of masculine as universal is also reflected in the gender divide in science jobs. Sandra Harding points out Margaret Rossiter's study of women in fields of science in which she determines the following about cultural understandings about women and about science:

[...] they were seen as doing only a narrow range of 'womanly' activities, a stereotype that linked them to soft, delicate, emotional, noncompetitive, and nurturing kinds of feelings and behavior. At the same time, the stereotype of "science" was seen as rhetorically as almost the opposite: tough, rigorous, rational, impersonal, masculine, competitive, and unemotional. (Rossiter xv)

Rossiter also shows that though women in the science field began to rise in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, they were hindered by the cultural constructs of gender and science, often given a limited range of scientific occupations. The women authors in this chapter question the masculine tendency of science, forcing the focus onto the social aspects of



science. Their questioning serves as warnings about an unfettered trust in science, emphasizing the detrimental possibilities of *after* science.

The battle between the material and the cultural in science studies is an important one in feminism (and other politically motivated ideologies) and in science studies. A contribution of feminist science studies is to accentuate the cultural biases of science. Science is not pure and factual but is culturally tainted, is politically motivated. Cultural and political impetus generates scientific inquiry and interpretation. Likewise, science creates “knowledge” and has cultural and political impact. Supporters of traditional empiricism argue that the results of science are hard and fast, unchanging, regardless of cultural interrogation or interpretation. Many 1970s feminists argued that sciences are always tainted, emphasizing cultural construction over materiality. The material feminist stance is, of course, a mediation of these. The material world exists, but we interpret it through biased lenses. Even the questions we ask of science are biased – are a frame of cultural understandings. Sandra Harding asserts that this approach to science has “implications at least as revolutionary for modern Western cultural self-images as feminist critiques in the humanities and social sciences have had” (*The Science Question* 10). This potential is not without complications, though. The balance between material and cultural interpretations of science is not one that is easily decided, and the dispute remains even among feminists.

The charge of feminist science studies, then, is to alter the way we think of science, deconstructing the notion of it as a revealer of truth, and reconstructing it as something as open to cultural biases as any other discipline. This understanding does not render null and void the notion of material reality in science, but seeks a self-reflexive

consideration of the ways in which we propose scientific inquiries and the ways in which we interpret them. Anne Balsamo asserts:

[...] [T]he ultimate pedagogical aim of feminist technoscience studies is not to turn women away from science by detailing the many ways women have been ill-treated in the histories of these institutions, but rather to illuminate for students (women and men) the process whereby science, technology and medicine accrue cultural authority so that they may be better equipped not only to recognize abuses of this authority in their lives, but also to intervene in the ongoing reproduction of the misuse of such authority in the future. (186)

This “new empiricism” in feminist science studies seeks to understand the reality of culture *and* the material in science and is a reevaluation of the empirical evidence with an understanding of the ways in which culture impacts it. It is aligned with material feminisms in that it moves from the postmodern dualization of social construction and materiality into an understanding of the importance of both of these in science studies. This feminist empiricism moves from earlier “feminist critiques of science focused on the androcentrism of science – the masculine constructions, perspectives, and epistemologies that structure scientific practice” and “attempts to retain an empirical, material element without abandoning social construction” (Alaimo and Hekman 5). Material feminism and new empiricism are both outgrowths of the same movement from the postmodern emphasis on the cultural to the contemporary emphasis on the ways in which culture and material work to create meaning.

While feminist science studies' assertion of a new empiricism is relevant to all sciences – engineering, social sciences, biological sciences, physics, etc. – the focus in this chapter's texts is primarily nuclear sciences. Three of the four presume a post-nuclear devastation and act as dystopian/science fiction warnings about use of nuclear weapons and an overtrust in technoscience. "Creatures of the Light" does not discuss nuclear sciences explicitly, but even its notion of a life force drawn from the sun that can be turned into a "death ray" seems to speak to a nuclear science. The focus in it is on the *creation* of life and the questions of science and nature. The warnings of the other three focus on the ways in which technoscience is sparse once everything is destroyed – as in "Day at the Beach" – or the ways in which technoscience is distrusted, outlawed, and considered sinful after nuclear devastation – as in "Age of Prophecy" and *The Long Tomorrow*. Feminist science studies certainly focus on all of the sciences – social and physical sciences. In considering science, nature, and religion in these texts, I will consider a general distrust of and warning against the hubris of technosciences in the texts, but each focuses largely on nuclear sciences as epitomizing the potential problems of science.

The questioning or the warning that the texts in this chapter offer not only foretells 1970s feminist science studies critiques of masculinist modes of thinking in science, but goes further, aligning more with new empiricism and material feminism than with initial feminist arguments about the social construction of science. While these texts seem to presume a masculinization of science, they also offer complex readings of science. None of them polarizes sciences. Their purposes, in fact, are to question technosciences – the intricate relationship it has with culture, "nature," and religion. But,

like contemporary feminist science critics, they question it because they value it and seek to improve it.

Despite their move beyond, their complication of, a mere masculinization of science, one must look at the reasons feminists of the 1970s needed to show how and why science is masculinized. Sciences before the 1970s rarely considered the possibility that scientific interrogation or modes of interpretation are politically motivated and socially constructed. Again, while this does not negate the empirical evidence, the materiality, of science, it is certainly important to note the ways in which knowledge is created/interpreted.

Ideas of masculinity in the 1950s post-war United States may have leant to a masculinization of science in the era. The G.I. Bill meant more men were in college in the fifties, and those men came from the military. In addition, the Cold War and nuclear proliferation in the wake of Nagasaki and Hiroshima created a climate of militarized science, which by default in the era, meant masculinized science. Nuclear science became – and remains – a science largely populated with men. Michael S. Kimmel writes that American masculinity was in crisis after World War II. What would now be labeled as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, along with a sense of purposelessness and a reconfiguration of manhood in the face of a changing womanhood, created a sense of uncertainty for men, according to Kimmel. In this uncertainty, Kimmel writes:

If the suburban breadwinner father didn't exactly know who he was, he could at least figure out who he wasn't. In the 1950s American men strained against two negative poles – the overconformist, a faceless, selfless nonentity, and the unpredictable, unreliable nonconformist. (155)

Responsibility to family, especially finding masculine identity in fathering, was a “normalcy” men often sought and found in the corporate workplace and the suburbs, “the new arena for proving one’s manhood” (155). Historian William Chafe describes this clawing at normalcy as an “effort to reinforce traditional norms” in an “almost frantic” way (qtd. in Kimmel 155).

This consumerist “normalcy” was especially pertinent with some of the popular male markers they were meant to emulate and those they were meant to avoid. Kimmel points out that Ayn Rand’s popular works *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), along with her other fiction and nonfiction, celebrate a highly individualistic, almost brutal, patently capitalist version of masculinity. *The Fountainhead’s* Howard Roark, discussed earlier in the chapter “‘Oddly, Challengingly Feminine’: A Feminist Reading of Dagny Taggart,” is a self-made man, a “professionalized artisan” who alone can “redeem his manhood” (Kimmel 157). Hank Reardon and John Galt, Dagny Taggart’s two love interests in *Atlas Shrugged*, embody the same sort of masculinity – one dedicated to the dollar but unwilling to participate in a sheep mentality in earning it. They are men who make their own way, bouncing off of both polar trappings of masculinity as Kimmel explains them. They are certainly not conformist, nor are they non-conformist in a way that balks responsibility, avoiding the emasculating effects of either of those poles.<sup>7</sup>

Just as individualistic capitalists were positive markers of masculinity, communism was a negative marker because of the link between communism and homosexuality. Senator Joseph McCarthy linked the two as “half men,” and Senator Kenneth Wherry asserted, “You can’t hardly separate homosexuals from subversives”

(Kimmel 156). Additionally, the supposed link between effeminacy and communism was certainly spurred on by such women's (even maternalist) pacifist groups as the Congress of American Women (1946-50) and Women Strike for Peace (founded in the 1960s) that were open to women of all political stances and subjected to severe scrutiny by the House Un-American Activities Committee and the U.S. Department of Justice. Amy Swerdlow writes, "As the cold war escalated, friendship with the Soviet Union and outlawry of the atom bomb became the central focus of CAW," and "[a]s Communist women filled in or took over CAW leadership roles, the Congress of American Women focused its energy and considerable vigor on protesting every escalation of the cold war" (308). One of CAW's prominent later members, Ethel Barol Taylor, notes that atomic testing and members' concerns for children was a primary motivator. She recalls in an interview:

"We started because of children, because the scientists and doctors said that the strontium 90 and iodine 131 from the atomic tests would poison our children's milk and cause cancer. When we first organized we sent out a call throughout the streets with leaflets saying, 'Take your children off milk.' We sent our children's baby teeth to a lab in St. Louis to determine if strontium 90 was present. We were concerned about an epidemic, like polio before vaccines, except that polio is viral and these were manmade epidemics." (433)<sup>8</sup>

The publicity of such organizations and the link between pacifism/Communism and women was certainly at play in notions of masculinity in the 1940s and 50s. Also, the links between the creation, use, and proliferation of militarized nuclear sciences with

masculinity and pacifism and communism with femininity creates an interesting gendered understanding of some of the themes of the texts in this chapter.<sup>9</sup>

Donna J. Haraway asserts the same sort of connectivity decades later. In her 2008 “Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms,” Haraway writes, “No longer able to sustain the fictions of being either subjects or objects, all the partners in the potent conversations that constitute nature must find a new ground for making meanings together” (158). She interrogates the ways in which we can do that by asking the following:

Is there a common context for discussion of what counts as nature in techno-science? What kind of topic is the “human” place in “nature” by the late twentieth-century in worlds shaped by techno-science? How might inhabitable narratives about science and nature be told, without denying the ravages of the dedication of techno-science to militarized and systematically unjust relations of knowledge and power, while refusing to replicate the apocalyptic stories of Good and Evil played out on the stages of Nature and Science? (167-68).

Haraway determines that a way of communicating, in the sense of truly integrating with the other worlds of nature, is to “know that you [humans] are not the only subjects” (181). Several of the women writing mid-century about the subject of the convergences of nature, technology, science, and culture advocate the same – exploratory intercourse with the realization that subjects are changed by the intercourse. While some texts are also anchored in their time – Ellis’ “Creatures of the Light” seems to advocate eugenics –

they also offer a respect for science and nature that warns against hubris, appropriation, or blind trust in the “goodness” of either.

## **5.2 Feral Boys and Artificial Adams: Debunking Masculine Scientific Hubris**

Carol Emshwiller’s “Day at the Beach” (1959) is dystopian science fiction that shows mutated bodies – in the example of a feral son – and altered places to serve as a warning about the possible horrific consequences of unmediated scientific hubris. While this text is applicable to any of the sections in this chapter, it is most relevant as a social warning of the consequences – and absurdity – of political and social decisions that end in war. Nuclear war is presumably the cause of the destitution in which the characters are living. Emshwiller’s short story features Myra, her husband Ben, and their son, whom they simply call Littleboy, perhaps a comment on the survival rate of children in the post-nuclear war that serves as the story’s setting. Myra and Ben are both altered from the nuclear war, both “absolutely hairless” (274). Myra’s once long, black hair is now gone, and she has “neither eyebrows nor lashes nor even a faint, transparent down along her cheeks” (274). Their three-year-old son, Littleboy, is a feral, presumably because of radiation mutations. With his thick, black hair “growing low over his forehead and extending down the back of his neck so far that she always wondered if it ended where hair used to end before, or whether it grew too far down,” and “he is strong-looking and has wide, blunt features and a wary stare (277). He only grunts at his parents and frequently bites Myra to the point of taking chunks out of her skin. Early in the short story, he bites Myra while she nuzzles him. He leaves “a shallow, half-inch piece” out of her collarbone, and she yells in pain to Ben, “He bit me. A real piece out even, and look, he has it in his mouth still” (277). As Littleboy chews a chunk of her flesh, Myra, not



surprisingly, questions his development. Such morbid mingling of “normal” life and post-nuclear survival strikes a balance between familiarity – disciplining a toddler – and estrangement – a child so mutated by radiation that he frequently bites chunks out of his parents’ flesh.

The same strange mix of a day at the beach and the preparations they have to make – as well as the murder that takes place there – form a dystopian tale that is poignant in its warning. When Ben agrees they can go to the beach, he says, “You wear the wrench in your belt and I’ll wear the hammer, and we’ll risk taking the car” (278). Myra gathers a picnic to take with them, “a precious can of tuna fish and hard, home-made biscuits baked the evening before when the electricity had come on for a while, and shriveled, worm-eaten apples, picked from neighboring trees and hoarded all winter in another house that had a cellar” (278). Ben “[measures] out gas from his cache of cans, ten miles’ worth to put in the car and ten miles’ worth in a can to carry along and hide someplace for the trip back” (278).

The *mélange* of a trip to the beach, the world the reader discovers along the way, and the ever-existing natural world serve as the critique and warning of the text. For instance, Myra recalls how busy it used to be on the way to the beach – “bumper to bumper” (279). They pass no other running cars on the way there, only an indeterminately gendered hairless cyclist. When trying to talk Myra out of going to the beach, Ben tells her that it won’t be like it used to be, to which she responds, “Oh, the sea’s the same. That’s one thing sure,” and she’s right (275). When they arrive, Emshwiller writes,

Then, at last, there was the sea, and it *was* exactly as it had always been,

huge and sparkling and making a sound like...no, *drowning out* the noises of wars. Like the black sky with stars, or the cold and stolid moon, it dwarfed even what had happened. (279)

Like Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the tone of the sea – like the stars and moon – outweighing the senselessness of war and post-war life familiarizes the reader enough in the unfamiliar setting to make the warning of the text more poignant and its possibility more plausible. The tale is a “let's not let it get to this point” narrative, a dystopian warning to slow down and take a second glance at the pride of “creation” of weapons of destruction.

The complicated interconnection among life, death, and secrets in relation to the atomic bomb that Evelyn Fox Keller describes highlights the hubris that Emshwiller exposes in “Day at the Beach” decades earlier. Keller asserts that the secrecy of the creation of the atomic and hydrogen bombs and the birthing rhetoric surrounding them is woven meaningfully into their destructive power – a kind of “womb envy.” The experience at the beach is proof of the level of destruction and “degeneration” scientific hubris and unmitigated military power has brought. That three of the feminist texts from this chapter on nature and science deal with nuclear destruction exemplifies the degree to which it was a gendered concern in the 1950s, particularly. In fact, “Day at the Beach” addresses the ways in which capabilities can outpace ethical judgment and force society back to a sort of “primitivism,” for lack of a better word.

The boardwalks at the beach are gone, and they are, it seems, the only people there. They hide the car and the gas, and as Littleboy runs naked in the surf, Myra and Ben consider sex and its consequences. They kiss at one point, “a longer kiss than they

had meant,” and just that sexual contact makes Myra think about the consequences: “I don’t even know a doctor since Press Smith was killed by those robbing kids and I’d be scared” (280). As Ben is in the act of trying to convince her, she sees someone coming down the beach; three men, one with a pistol, demanding the gas Myra and Ben had come with. When Ben refuses, the oldest of the three threatens to let the younger two “play a bit with your little one and you might not like it” (281). When the men begin running after Littleboy, Ben kills the armed man, then launches out after the younger ones, eventually scaring them away. Myra and Ben have to search for Littleboy, who is scared by the commotion. When they find him, their day at the beach turns chipper. They have another “splash” in the ocean and pack up as Littleboy “[circles] the body by the blanket, touching it sometimes until Ben [slaps] him for it” (283-84). With all of this, Myra leans against Ben on the drive home and says, “We did have a good day after all [...] I feel renewed,” wondering “if it really *was* Saturday” (284).

The same sort of hubris in the secrecy/creation/destruction triad is evident in Sophie Wenzel Ellis’ 1930 “Creatures of the Light.” The text is the least progressive of the four texts in this chapter, advocating science as an enhancer of nature (through eugenics). Protagonist John Northwood is a handsome scientist who is approached by Emil Mundson, an electrical scientist who solicits Northwood’s agreement to become part of one of his experiments. With an evil “Adam” following them, Northwood agrees to be the human progenitor for Mundson’s human woman and travels with him to the Antarctic garden that Mundson has created by harnessing the power of the sun. The created Adam tries to kill everyone but himself and Athalia, the real human who is

intended for Northwood. Adam has rejected the created Eve who is intended for Northwood to mingle “real” vital life into the created line of humans.

The sun’s “Life Ray” is responsible for the polar Eden, and its restorative qualities are key in the creation of the beings abiding there, but they miss a certain vitality that humans have, making them uncannily horrific. They are described as uncannily perfect, to the point of producing shudders in Northwood. They are fertilized and “birthed” in a lab, free of human touch. It also seems, they lack the vitality and spirit that would serve as a conscience. Both Adam and Eve think of the “Dark Age” humans as worms and feel superior to them, willing to kill them. Despite this hurdle, both Adam and Even are in love with humans. The same power that can be positively used for the Life Ray can also be used for a Death Ray. Adam, evolved beyond Mundson’s intelligence and able to see into another dimension, has developed the Death Ray and plans on destroying the human race.

Mundson’s hubris is in seeking to overthrow or speed up “mother nature.” Mundson believes that knowing the electrical and chemical processes of the body will allow humans to work with Nature, to speed of her evolutionary work. He writes, “We need not wait another fifty thousand years to be god-like creatures. Perhaps even now we may be standing at the beginning of the splendid bridge that will take us to that state of perfected evolution when we shall be Creatures who have reached the Light” (173-74). The notion that perfection is the end goal, that there is an end to the process, is out of line with contemporary feminist theories, and certainly so is the notion of perfection.

The creatures that Mundson has scientifically birthed are soulless and prone to evil, or at least without conscience. They are not human, despite their human make up.

When Northwood first sees Adam staring at him in a bar, the beautiful man chills him, and “Trying to analyze the queer repugnance that he felt for this handsome, boldly staring fellow, Northwood decided, ‘He’s like a newly-made wax figure endowed with life’” (170). Mundson critiques Nature’s imperfect, “bumbling ways” and seeks to alter them by concentrating the sun’s “life rays” and increasing the speed with which humans develop, making twenty generations within five years (191). He proudly shows Northwood the jars of gestating babies, explaining:

“Here is one baby who’ll never be kissed,” he said. “He’ll be nourished chemically, and, at the end of the week, will no longer be a baby<sup>10</sup>. If you are patient, you can actually see the processes of development taking place under the Life Ray, for babies develop very fast.” (192)

The emphasis on the lack of human contact and love that the baby will receive is chilling – both to the reader and to Northwood. The notion of a baby as a scientific experiment or product is eerie. Northwood is sickened, in fact. He responds, “Lord! This is awful. No childhood; no mother to mold his mind! No parents to watch over him, to give him their tender care!” (192). Northwood serves as the warning voice to Mundson’s scientific hubris, to his fascination with perfection and god-like beings.

The point of Mundson’s “Eden” is to speed up what he believes is the natural process of evolution, to take the power away from nature. In an article he publishes about his nebulous work, he writes:

Man always has been, always will be a creature of the light. He is forever reaching for some future point of perfected evolution which, even when his most remote ancestor was a fish creature composed of a few cells, was

the guiding power that brought him up from the first stinking sea and caused him to create gods in his own image. In this yearning for perfection which sets man apart from all other life, which made him man even in the rudimentary stages of his development. He was man when he wallowed in the slime of the new world and yearned for the air above. He will still be man when he has evolved into that glorious creature of the future whose body is deathless and whose mind rules the universe. (173)

This passage invokes two themes important to the discussion of this text. First, the frightening theme of reaching for perfection with the expectation of an immortal, omnipotent power with which to rule the universe is addressed. The warning in this text is against such techoscientific overreaching and the hubris behind it. Second, the idea of movement, of a process of becoming – minus the notion of perfection – is important. It is a driving theme in the works of today’s contemporary material feminist theorists such as Braidotti who asserts that the real question of society is identifying who we want to become (2). That idea of becoming is also important in utopian theory, as I note in the introduction and will expand on in the final chapter.

The tale, then, is one of science and nature, questioning the ethics of taking all of the liberties technoscience affords us. It serves as a warning for the hubris of mid-century science that was so enthralled with itself it often focused only on the positive possibilities science suggested. Like the warnings of the “diapers” discussed in chapter two, Ellis’ short story is a focus on the possible negatives of scientific advancement, questioning the ethics of tampering with “nature.” All of this serves as a warning about the ethical uses of science and the responsibility of humankind to mitigate scientific

capabilities, as well as a comment on Nature and science. Also, Anne Balsamo writes, “[...] the power promised by science and technology is life transforming power: the power to explain, to describe, to create, and to modify the material world. In short, the power of science and technology is the power to make the world” and notes that this is reason that science studies need to address for science students the “abuses of this authority” and “intervene in the ongoing reproduction of the misuse of such authority in the future” (186).

Evelyn Fox Keller uses the example of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to describe the connectivity of life and death. Keller asserts that tales of male creation of life often produce monstrous offspring in the process of uncovering the “secrets of life.” Ellis’ entire text, in fact, is in dialogue with *Frankenstein*, alluding to it in setting – the icy Antarctic in which *Frankenstein* ends – as well as the ethics and hubris of man seeking to create, to outdo nature. Keller writes:

Inevitably, however, that life form is monstrous – itself unable to procreate, only to kill. A life form that becomes an agent of death. The most famous story of this genre is of course *Frankenstein* – written, as it happened, by a woman. [...] *Frankenstein* is a story first and foremost about the consequences of male ambitions to co-opt the procreative function, and “implicit critique” simultaneously of the plot and the birth that are conceived without women. [...]. (49)

Keller’s analysis applies to “Creatures of the Light,” as well. In it, Ellis writes a dystopian science fiction that provokes an interrogation of the ethics of scientific undertakings that adapt nature. While women are present in Ellis’ story, as both an Eve

and an anti-Eve (though even this is more complicated than a polarization because of what has been historically interpreted as the biblical Eve's deliberate culpability in disobedience and the downfall of humankind), the major plot points rely on the male characters. And, it is Mundson and Adam's hubris that is the downfall here (though love of a woman is still an impetus for that downfall).

It is the notion of perfection and meddling with nature's processes that Ellis warns against in this piece. This is akin to the work of current feminist utopian theorists Luci Sargisson and Tatiana Teslenko, among others, who also warn against the stagnancy of perfection-seeking. After the world is destroyed and Athalia and Northwood are together in the Antarctic, freezing to death, Northwood says to her, "I love you because you are not perfect. I hate perfection!" (201). To this, Athalia responds, "Yes. Perfection is the only hopeless state, John. That is why Adam wanted to destroy, so that he might build again" (201).

The idea of constant striving for, constant process and change, with change as the goal, not perfection, is an idea with which feminist utopian and science fiction authors of the 1970s changed the face of those genres. Teslenko writes that 1970s feminist utopian fiction offers a space to effect change in the present by envisioning a future without blueprints but with the full potential of possible futures, relying on ambiguities and multiplicities (xi). Sargisson, too, asserts that goal-oriented notions of utopian perfection are outdated and cannot encompass women's contemporary utopian fiction and science fiction of the 1970s and beyond. She writes, "[...] The new utopianism represents the manifestation of a conscious and necessary desire to resist the closure that is evoked by approaches to utopia as perfect, and that this has far-reaching implications" (226). Ellis'



1930 short story disrupts the idea of utopia as perfection-seeking four decades before feminist authors were given credit for doing so. Her warning against the scientific hubris of altering nature and of seeking an end to the process, though grounded in the early twentieth century fascination with eugenics, is progressive in its process orientation, helping build the frameworks of later feminist and utopian theories.

So, the idea of perfection as a goal is out of line with the notion of process, and Mundson's search for perfection by speeding up nature's processes is the problem. Mundson's work is utterly destroyed by itself in the end, and Mundson sees his fault, but leans on the success of his coupling of Athalia and Northwood, a type of eugenics. Upon rescuing Athalia and Northwood, Mundson says:

"I've flown over the entire valley. We're the only survivors – thank God!"

"And so at last you confess that is not well to tamper with human life?" Northwood, warmed with hot brandy, was his old self again.

"Oh, I have not altogether wasted my efforts. I went to elaborate pains to bring together a perfect man and a perfect woman of what Adam called our Black Age." He smiled at them whimsically.

"And who can say to what extent you have thus furthered natural evolution?" Northwood slipped his arms around Athalia. "Our children might be more than geniuses, Doctor!"

Dr. Mundson nodded his huge, shaggy head gravely.

"The true instinct of a Creature of the Light," he declared. (202)

The short story ends with this, serving as a warning about the hubris of too much tampering with nature, but ending on a tone that seems to advocate eugenics. Ellis sees the explicit use of technoscience as a means of “perfecting” or dehumanizing humans as destructive, but she promotes a sort of channeling of nature through human breeding, essentially.

As different as the settings for “Day at the Beach” and “Creatures of the Light” are – one set in a human-created nuclear hell and one set in a human-created attempt at Eden – they both advocate pulling back on the reigns of science. Both are far more reserved in their trust of science than the two texts in the next section of this chapter, and both find a consistency, a constancy, to nature that should be respected. While such an understanding of nature is dated – contemporary feminists are much more apt to see nature as a changing subject – their notions of a balance, an intersection, between science and nature foretells later feminist authors and theorists.

### **5.3 “Right or Wrong the Fruit Was Eaten”: Complications**

Margaret St. Clair’s 1951 “Age of Prophecy” and Leigh Brackett’s 1955 *The Long Tomorrow* move from warning against the god-like alteration of nature to writing dystopian worlds in which “nature” and science are severely polarized, warning that such polarization is as – if not more – dangerous than unmediated scientific hubris. The texts are dystopias that critique uncritical trust in either science or “nature” (aligning religion to “what is natural” in complex ways in both), much like the work of current feminists Elizabeth Grosz, Evelyn Fox Keller and Donna Haraway. Both texts are set in post-nuclear worlds in which science is distrusted because of the destruction it has caused. St. Clair writes a world that is full of anti-science cults, and in *The Long Tomorrow*, most of

the remaining population is New Mennonite, remaining as self-sufficient and technology free as possible. In fact, in both, those who are considered scientists/science users, are stoned to death in the name of the new religions that have sprouted up.

In both texts, there is critique of anti-techno-science religion, each showing splintered religious cults (much like Cormac McCarthy's 2006 *The Road*) as an effect of the nuclear disasters, and a complex relationship of bodies and cities. In each, the author assumes a failure of Christianity and other organized religions in the face of real destruction. This in itself serves as a critique of religion. While science remains in each of these tales, religion falters. Each of the texts also interrogates the place/space of the body – in one case mutated bodies, and in both cases, murdered bodies – and its relationship to “metropolis”/evil. This is a concept interrogated by Elizabeth Grosz in her 1995 *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, in which she contends that the understanding of bodies and cities as either causal or equal is flawed. She, instead, asserts that while bodies do have a complex cause-effect relationship and are perhaps isomorphic, they are neither polar/static in their causal relationships or mimetic in their equality. She writes:

What I am suggesting is a model of the relations between bodies and cities that sees them, not as megalithic total entities, but as assemblages or collections of parts, capable of crossing thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or micro-groupings. [...] [T]heir interrelations involve a fundamentally disunified series of systems, a series of disparate flows, energies, events, or entities,

bringing together or drawing apart their more or less temporary alignments. (385)

Her understanding of cities and bodies as *mélanges* that interrelate to one another is directly in line with St. Clair and Brackett in their deconstruction of polarized notions of evil cities/mutated bodies and “natural” non-cities/ “natural” bodies. Through such deconstructions, they assert an interconnectedness that foretells material feminism.

St. Clair’s short story is set in a gloomy, chaotic world destroyed by nuclear war in which techno-science is believed by most to be an unnatural evil. Mutants and scientists are believed to be unnatural and worthy of death. The plot of St. Clair’s story centers on an attempt to kill the mutants and scientists at an academy. People remain in destroyed cities, “where the bodies of millions rotted unburied, and even the disease germs had mutated [...]” (37). Mutants are commonplace, though they are considered evil by most of the religious cults that have sprouted up. The protagonist Benjamin is clairvoyant, and his grandfather Tobit selfishly grooms him to be a prophet in the city so that he may be powerful and wealthy. Benjamin gains a following in the city, and though he truly believes his convictions about the evil of science and mutants, Tobit only spouts such rhetoric to appear religious.

Tobit’s hunger for power is evident as soon as the two arrive in the city and are listening to other prophets. Benjamin sees that one of the most successful prophets, who is levitating, is doing so with the help of a machine, and he tells Tobit. Tobit exposes the false prophet to the crowd and orchestrates their stoning of him. He shouts that he is a secret scientist and yells, “Kill him” (31). When he has been stoned to death, Benjamin is in awe of the crowd’s fury and his grandfather’s goading, sorry for what his

clairvoyance brought about. Tobit snaps, “Oh, don’t be silly, [...]. He was a scientist; he deserved to die.” (31). Tobit then speaks to the now sickened crowd, telling them they have done the right thing in stoning the other prophet and rallies them to be followers of the true prophet – Benjamin.

Despite his initial reluctance to accept such violence, within a few months, Benjamin leads an attack against an academy of science that houses the few remaining scientists.<sup>11</sup> He lays out his design to the other cult leaders, hoping that they will support his attack. He argues:

“Science is wrong.

“If we know anything in the world today, we know that. Who knows what those scientists in Pasadena are doing, shut up in their laboratories?” [...]. “They may be breeding new strains of disease germs to kill the rest of us. I’ve heard that they have the most horrible mutants in their laboratories helping them. We must not let people like that live.” (34)

Benjamin’s religious conviction that the evil of science has brought the destruction of Earth and that the only way to salvation is through its total destruction is shared by his hordes of followers. He has no difficulty finding a small army to attack with him, rallying them with, “It is a sin to let mutants live” and telling them that if the scientists “sincerely repent” some may be spared their lives (35). Fighting with stones, though, the cult army is easily defeated by the scientists’ advanced weaponry.<sup>12</sup>

Benjamin is captured and discovers later that his grandfather stun gunned him and turned him over to the scientists, allowing himself to be taken as well, in an effort to make Benjamin believe he was trying to save him. When the scientists tell Benjamin the

truth and also inform him that his grandfather was a famous scientist at the academy and that his clairvoyance is a mutation, his belief system is shattered. In shock, he simply walks out of the academy, and the lead scientist lets him go, ending the short story saying, “His world has just broken into pieces. The heavens are falling on his head. [...] He’s intelligent. Some day soon, it may be tomorrow or the next day or the next, he’ll come back to join us. [...] He’ll be back” (43).

St. Clair’s pitting of science and religion in this short story serves as a dystopian warning against an either-or polarization of the two. While the other short stories from the first half of this chapter focused on warning against the hubris of science, advocating moderation in a trust in science, St. Clair’s piece more clearly advocates the rationality of science over the irrationality of religious mutations. This is a theme that can be found in more recent feminist dystopian literature, including Margaret Atwood’s 1986 *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

Leigh Brackett’s 1955 *The Long Tomorrow* similarly shows fervently non-science religious systems in a post-nuclear apocalyptic world. Most people live in small villages because they think of cities and the techno-science of such metropolitan settings as the unnatural evils that ruined the world. No science or technology is used and no cities exist.<sup>13</sup> If a village begins pushing the limits of becoming too big, zealots attack its population. The main character, Len Colter, is a New Mennonite. After “The Destruction” and the end of cities (which had been the targeted and obliterated by the bombs), “men found that in the changed world [the Mennonites and the Amish] were best fitted to survive,” and “the Mennonites had swiftly multiplied into the millions they now counted” (6).

Early on in the book, the fervency of the anti-science beliefs is exemplified by an extreme preacher who yells that past generations “lusted after everything strange, and new, and unnatural” and that God “cleansed” them – “they were burned with the fires of their own making, yeah, and the proud towers vanished in the blazing of the wrath of God! And with the fire and famine and thirst and fear they were driven from their cities [...] (17, 18). The preacher works the mob into a frothing frenzy and asks them if there is evil among them. A trader thought to have connections to the fabled science haven, Bartorstown, is cast forward, and the crowd stones him to death in a violent scene. Another trader, Hostetter, saves Len from the scene. Len is sickened, and this is the beginning of his realization that it is not as simple as a polarization of an evil science and a good religion. His thirst to know more about a fabled city of science increases after this point, and he soon runs away from home in search of it.

Hostetter again saves Len from a violent scene years later and tells him he is a resident of Bartorstown and agrees to take him there. Hostetter explains that Bartorstown was founded by “specialists, working on this hush-hush project for the government” (130). After the war, when “things began to get nasty, they brought in a lot of other men and their families, scientists, teachers, people who weren’t very popular on the outside any more. [...]” (130). Though there were other “secret installations,” “Bartorstown is the only one that wasn’t discovered or betrayed, or didn’t have to be abandoned” (130).

Bartorstown is in the American west, and the landscape and lack of population offer the protection that has enabled the town to survive. In the new landscape, Len initially longs for the green of Ohio, but eventually likes “the whole new world” (138). The openness of the prairies and ranges seem indicative to Len of what Bartorstown is to

him – different from the cultivated, farmed, regulated East. He notices, “Beyond the sand hills was the prairie, and on the prairie were the great wild herds of cattle and the roving horse bands that made the living of these hunters and traders,” which Hostetter explains are the “descendants of the pre-war range stock, turned loose in the great upheaval that followed the abandonment of the cities [...]” (139). He continues:

“Their range runs clear down to the Mexican border,” [...] “and there isn’t a fence on it now. The dry-farmers all quit long ago. For generations there hasn’t been a single plow to scratch up the plains, and the grass is coming back even in the worst of the man-made deserts, like the good Lord meant it to be.” He took a deep breath, looking all around the horizon. “There’s something about it, isn’t there, Len?” (139)

Len responds, “It’s just so big and empty I keep feeling like I’m going to fall in” (139).

The vastness and renewal of the West is analogous to a new Eden in Brackett’s tale. Nature and science are seemingly aligned, and fearful religions have pitted themselves against these two in some way. Though the religious factions say they are opposed to cities and science, their communities are clustered in the Eastern United States. The expansive majesty of the West – where Bartorstown is located – is also different from the villages, perhaps symbolic of a notion of the difference of the reality and the beliefs about science. In his 2008 *Future West: Utopia and Apocalypse in Frontier Science Fiction*, William H. Katerberg writes that the West in *The Long Tomorrow* can be read as “technological and entrepreneurial promise” and can also be read as “pitting the pastoral and progressive against each other” (168). Instead of the either-or, reading it as *both* a



pastoral versus progressive and a West full of technological promise is what makes the text a complication of themes that seeks to question rather to answer.

Len learns that Bartorstown is powered by Uranium – the element of The Destruction – and learns that Bartorstown original purpose was to disable atomic warfare. The government founded the secret town to work on a project to “control the interaction of nuclear particles right on their own level, so that no process either of fission or fusion could take place wherever that protecting force-field was in operation” (173). Because the knowledge of the atomic bomb could not be undone and because neither side the war would agree to disarm, the defense was the only hope the government saw.

The truth of Bartorstown source of power and function enrages Len, in whom it has been ingrained that Uranium is evil. He cannot help but associate it with “evil and night and terror and death” (168):

A voice screamed in Len’s ears, the voice of the preaching man, standing on the edge of his wagon with the sparks flying past him on the night wind – *They have loosed the sacred fire which only I, the Lord Jehovah, should dare to touch – and God said – Let them be cleansed of their sin –* (168)

Len reacts violently to the men who try to defend the use of Uranium in Bartorstown, and they explain to him that once knowledge is achieved – good or bad – it cannot be unachieved. The best thing to do, they argue is to learn to control it and use it properly. Though the scientists representing Bartorstown are certainly drawn as flawed – the city and project is far from utopian – their view of technosciences is relatively realistic and the approach that *The Long Tomorrow* seems to advocate.

Len eventually comes to believe in their project. In a conversation with one of the leaders, Sherman, he sees the potential. Sherman says:

“Someday atomic power will come back no matter what anybody does to stop it.”

“A thing once known always comes back.”

“And the cities will come back too.”

“In time, inevitably.”

“And it will all happen over again, the cities and the bomb, unless you find that way to stop it.”

“Unless men have changed a lot by tomorrow, yes.”

“Then,” said Len, still frowning, still somber, “then I guess you’re trying to do what ought to be done. I guess it might be right.” (176)

When “no bolt of lightning came to strike him dead” for the statement, Len begins to alter his belief system, realizing the complexity of issues of science, human nature, good, and evil (176). He begins to mature and think critically both about the New Mennonite way of life and the life in Bartorstown, realizing that human knowledge and the urge to progress (represented here as techoscientific inquiry) will not halt. Only then, can he see the positive reasons to continue the Bartorstown project, the anticipation of how to properly handle technoscientific ethical dilemmas.

Despite the freedom of thought and questioning that Len believed Bartorstown offered him, it is clear when they arrive that there are restrictions in the city of science, as well. Several of the residents are discontented and would leave if given the choice. Len is warned that for the safety of Bartorstown, if they try to leave, they will be shot. And,

not long after their arrival, a drunken community member comes in to stare at Len, saying, "I just wanted to see a man who wanted to come here when he didn't have to" (157). Later, Len learns that what he thought was a private conversation about what drew him to Bartorstown has been broadcast for the whole community as a sort of propaganda.

Len becomes interested in Joan, a Bartorstown girl who wants to get out, and eventually escapes with her, despite the danger of being shot. Amity likens Bartorstown to a cult of fanatics with Clementine, the mega computer working on the atomic project, as their God. The likeness between Bartorstown's "protection" of its citizens by the regulation of their lives and the New Mennonite "protection" of its citizens by the same becomes clear. When a disgruntled scientist tries to destroy the machine after Len learns that there may be no solution, he decides to leave with Joan.

Hostettler swears to return Len and Joan to Bartorstown, and his pursuit of the two is a maturing for Len. In a confrontation with Hostettler, Len thinks:

I know now what lies across the land, the slow and heavy weight. They call it faith, but it is not faith. It is fear. The people have clapped a shelter over their heads, a necessity of ignorance, a passion of retreat, and they have called it God, and worshipped it. [...] And it will betray its worshippers, leaving them defenseless in the face of a tomorrow that will surely come. It may be a slow coming, and a long one, but come it will, and all their desperation will not stop it. Nothing will stop it. (221).

Len realizes that the same faith that fuels the New Mennonites fuels Bartorstown and that it is just as futile in the face of change and human nature. Control is unfathomable. He realizes, "Time goes on without any of us. Only a belief, a state of mind, endures, and

even that changes constantly, but underneath there are two main kinds – the one that says, Here you must stop knowing, and the other which says, Learn” (221). Though Len does not fully ascribe to the fanaticism of Bartorstown, he sees it as the lesser of two evils – as a way to work out of knowledge than to work out of ignorance and thinks, “Right or wrong, the fruit was eaten, and there can’t ever be a going back” (221). Joan sobs severely at the prospect of returning to Bartorstown and says, “It’s a hideous world [...]. I hate it” to which Hostetter responds, “No, [...] not hideous, just imperfect. But that’s nothing new” (223). And, they begin their return to Bartorstown.

#### **5.4 “[A]ll his conceptions would change”: A Conclusion**

While Carol Emshwiller’s 1959 “Day at the Beach,” Sophie Wenzel Ellis’ 1930 “Creatures of the Light,” Margaret St. Clair’s 1951 “Age of Prophecy,” and Leigh Brackett’s 1955 *The Long Tomorrow* most clearly complicate techno-science and nature, other mid-century female authors of utopian and science fictions also question too-simple polarizations of these, as well. One of them, Sarah N. Cleghorn, writes an imagined future – a utopia – in which humans integrate exploratory science and agentic nature and in so doing produce a better world. She writes in her 1924 “Utopia Interpreted”:

[...] such facts of Science as we all know familiarly, in the way that we know that the Earth is round, make up the framework inside of which we do all the rest of our thinking. Inside that frame we plan, work, and live. All our conceptions of individual life have to fit into what we have learned, in a large way, about the world we live in. But of course it’s while those conceptions are new that they affect us most dynamically. It is then that our imaginations are most under their power. It is then that we

are most interested in them and aware of them. The time, accordingly, to expect any great social change must always be a time when large scientific discoveries have lately become popularized, and mankind at large has begun to realize them imaginatively. It would be at such a time, naturally, that the framework of man's thinking, having enlarged and changed its shape, all his conceptions would change too to fit the new frame; -- and particularly his conceptions of his own relations with his neighbors; for these are the most important things he thinks about. (217)

Cleghorn's understanding of the social impact of scientific discovery and of the notion of a *paradigm shift* are similar to Evelyn Fox Keller's understanding of the interpretations of science and similar to Donna Haraway's assertions that humans are social and biologically formed. Cleghorn, Emshwiller, Ellis, St. Clair, and Brackett all not only lay groundwork for later feminist studies in science and nature, they also predict those. Going further than just preparing for later feminist arguments, they are actually similar to those later arguments in multiple ways. The questioning of how we understand science, the impenetrable link between science and the social world, notions of bodies and landscapes/cities, and place/space infusions of meaning all drive feminist theory forward from 1924 well into the works of Haraway, Keller, and Rose in the 1980s and beyond. That driving force -- that movement -- is a foundational belief that the next chapter explores -- the movement of identity, the importance of place/space to gender, and the process of becoming.

## CHAPTER 6

### “I HAVE NO DESTINATION [...]”: EXPLORATION AND PROCESS

In her 1935 *The Unpredictable Adventure: A Comedy of Woman's Independence*, Claire Myers Spotswood Owens writes an allegorical tale of a young woman, Tellectina, exploring her identity. She plans to leave her home of Smug Harbor because she literally cannot breathe its air and needs to find a different climate. She tells her Aunt Sophistica, an explorer, about her plans. Sophistica tries to warn her of the dangers of the journey, though she relishes the fact that her niece is destined to break from an unthinking life. Tellectina responds, “But I’m going, I have no destination as yet, but I shall travel ‘everywhither’ until I discover a place I like” (72). Sophistica tells Tellectina about the dangers of the land that is “wild, unknown, and dangerous” where she may be “attacked by cannibals, lost in the desert, drowned, frozen on the mountain tops, devoured by wild animals or, even worse, by loneliness and —” (72). Tellectina’s eyes shine as she responds, “Oh, is there really a place as thrilling as that?” (72). Erma, the protagonist of Rachel Maddux’s 1957 *The Green Kingdom* also thrives in such uncertainty. Both characters also write their experiences, charting their desires and questions throughout their journeys. Forecasting later process-oriented feminist utopian and science fictions,

Tellectina and Erma both embark on journeys of discovery in their process of becoming women, and both are greatly impacted by the places of their nomadry.

### **6.1 Place/Space and the Inscription of Meaning**

The movement of exploration, the questioning, is essential to the protagonists' processes of becoming and how they both inscribe meaning and have meaning inscribed upon them by the places through which they journey. Movement, from, through, to, beyond place and space – place as concrete and space as ideological – allows deconstruction and reconstruction of sexual, gender, individual and environmental ideologies in these two texts. *The Unpredictable Adventure* deconstructs and questions convention, finding humor in life's removals from power, by exploring and searching. *The Green Kingdom* takes it a step further, deconstructing, reconstructing, and reinhabiting places and spaces as a sort of Eden retold. The exploration, inhabitation, and process of situating in and against places reflects the ideological movement in these texts. Desire and longing are both satisfied and renewed in the places that the characters in these two texts inhabit; in the search of satisfying ideological appetites for better, both Tellectina and Erma are in constant motion.

Place and space are complexly integrated, especially in relation to the notions of the “no place” and “better than” of utopianism. Lawrence Buell writes, “Up to a point, world history is a history of space becoming place. In the beginning, earth was space without form. Then through inhabitation places were created. But modern history has also reversed this process” (63-64). This idea that space – essentially the natural that has not been inscribed by humans – is a *tabula rasa* before being inscribed with humanity's individual meanings – is problematic. Buell invokes William Cronon to show that it is

also “crucial for us to recognize and honor nonhuman nature as a world we did not create, a world with its own independent, non human reasons for being as it is” (Cronon 87). In *The Unpredictable Adventure* and in *The Green Kingdom*, the inscription is mutual. Place writes onto the women as much as they write onto it – if not more. Tellectina and Erma’s movements across the places, settlements in them, nomadry, and process, are as place-bound as a “monogamous relationship to just one place,” as much infused with feeling as if they had always been settled there (Plumwood 233).

The desire of utopian dreaming is closely tied to the notion of dreaming of other places, representative of ideological spaces. This is why dreams of places can be as inscribed with meaning as much as, or more so than, places we have actually been. Buell writes that one also becomes attached to places by the power of imagining alone:

The places that haunt one’s dreams and to some extent define one’s character can range from versions of actual places to the utterly fictitious – Alaska’s wild north slope, Robin Crusoe’s “desert island,” the “little house on the prairie” of Laura Ingalls Wilder’s children’s books, the promised land of the ancient Israelites imagined from Egyptian or Babylonian captivity, the Hopi *Tuwanasavi* or origin-place to which the people are called to return. But the fact that the imaginer hasn’t been there and maybe never will hardly lessens the intensity of such storied or imaged places to induce longing and loyalty [...]. (72-73)

In this way, Tellectina and Erma mentally dwell in Nithking and the Green Kingdom respectively. The “no place” of utopia is just such an imagined place, birthed out of desire for better. As I asserted in my introduction, utopian texts propose alternatives, and



although historically many utopian fictions have offered static alternatives – often simple movements from a flawed “A” to an improved utopian “B” – contemporary women’s utopian fictions recognizably embrace process over product. Scholars such as Bulent Somay, Tom Moylan, Lucy Sargisson, and Tatiana Teslenko note that these ambiguous and critical utopias were spawned from the social and political movements of the 1960s and 70s; however, I continue to argue they began earlier. Moylan explains that these ambiguous, open-ended, critical utopias “reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream” (10). Such novels, according to Moylan:

[...] dwell on the conflict between the ordinary world and the utopian society opposed to it so that the process of social change is more directly articulated. Finally, the novels focus on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives. (10-11)

Moylan and others note that such utopias *The Unpredictable Adventure* and *The Green Kingdom* (written in the 1940s) particularly, along with eight other titles from this period, set precedence for the questioning non-endings, these earlier texts take part in a feminist process.<sup>1</sup> It is because of this shared interest in place/space and process of improvement, that women-authored utopian texts are an especially poignant place to show how feminist desire has developed through early twentieth-century utopian expressions into the twenty-first century.

That both Tellectina and Erma write in and of their new places, and are written on by the new places, infuses a deeper meaning in terms of utopian literature. Utopian literature in my definition is *a social and political-focused literature that is a hopeful*

*expression of the author's desire for something lacking in her historical situation and her belief in and participation in the process of improvement.* So, the authors, and the characters, must be situated in their time, must clearly understand their position in the world, in order to imagine where they want to be. And, writing and place, as I assert in my introduction, is also important to feminist literature. Helene Cixous asserts that literature has been a place that has exiled women and that such exile is especially damaging because “writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (2043). So, the intersection of feminist and utopian literatures in these two texts means that the inscription *of* place and *in* place is particularly important.

Beyond just predicting later feminist texts, *The Unpredictable Adventure* and *The Green Kingdom* are actually *as* ambiguous and *as* focused on process as the feminists utopian and science fiction texts of the 1970s are hailed as being. Tatiana Teslenko and Lucy Sargisson both assert the importance of the feminist texts of the 1970s and 1980s as texts that changed the fields of utopian and science fiction and that gave feminist theory a soil in which to flourish. Teslenko asserts that the point of ambiguous feminist utopias is to question, to avoid “mapping” the “correct” alternative worlds. To create change in the present by portraying a vision of the future, feminist utopias must avoid blueprints of social dreaming, which abort full potential of future. They should, instead, deconstruct patriarchal language and use ambiguities and multiplicities (xi). Teslenko's argument is in part that the feminist utopias of the 1970s are embedded in that decade because of the

feminist theories emerging. This is an argument that I am reworking, offering textual examples of such theories in play, in process, decades earlier.

Sargisson's notion of new utopianism and argument about how feminism has changed the field of utopianism is particularly well aligned to material feminism. She writes that feminist utopianism tends to bridge dualisms such as spirit/body and mind/body and the new approach with utopianism and feminism is "transgressive utopianism; it transgresses, negates, and creates new conceptual spaces from which to reapproach the world in a non-dualistic way that is not driven by the desires to possess" (168). This is a foundational assertion of material feminism – that a transgression of false boundaries is necessary to fully appreciate richness and complexity.<sup>2</sup> Sargisson defines *new utopianism* as "emerging from contemporary feminist theory and fiction" and asserts that "it forces the field of political theory into new ground: utopian thought journeys into uncharted and unfamiliar territory and creates spaces in which visions of good can be imagined" (5). Sargisson's new utopianism is based in the changes that feminist utopias of the 1970s brought to the field of utopian literature – changes from what some thought of as perfection-seeking to process-oriented, multifaceted, and open-ended, "resistant to closure" (5). I argue that such ideas of promise in process and exploration began earlier than the 1970s, opening new spaces for the widespread process themes in utopian, science fiction, and feminist thought in the 1970s. Sargisson writes, "Utopian thinking, then, creates new conceptual spaces – outopias – in which they can be imagined in different ways of conceptualizing the past, present, and future" (59). This is a notion of utopianism particularly aligned to material feminism because of the concept of creating new space.

This process that Teslenko, Sargisson, Moylan and others scholars note as markers of feminist utopias of the 1970s is akin to the notions of nomadry and becoming as Rosi Braidotti writes about them. She asserts that because change is part of modern life, she seeks “to explore the need and to provide illustrations for new figurations, for alternative representations and social locations for the kind of hybrid mix we are in the process of becoming,” and she defines *figuration* as “a politically informed map that outlines our own situated perspective [...]” and continues, “A figuration is a living map, a transformative account of the self – it is no metaphor. Being nomadic, homeless, and exile, a refugee, a Bosnian rape-in-war victim, and itinerant migrant, and illegal immigrant, is not metaphor” (2, 3). So, like Jameson’s notion of *cognitive mapping* as a need to see where one is situated in the real world in order to determine where one wants to go, Braidotti argues that the complexity of who and where we are is essential to movement and change. Braidotti, though, places greater emphasis on the alternatives, the matrices of identities and how we negotiate our place/space to fit the reality of our own complex, changing identities. She writes, “many traditional points of reference and age-old habits are being recomposed, albeit in contradictory ways” (3). We change the places and spaces we inhabit. Braidotti calls all of this transformation a *quest*. She writes:

This quest for alternative figurations expresses creativity in representing the kind of nomadic subjects we have already become and the social and symbolic locations we inhabit. In a more theoretical vein, the quest for figurations attempts to recombine the propositional content and the forms of thinking so as to attune them both to nomadic complexities. It thus also challenges the separation of reason from the imagination. (3)

This quest for changing old mental maps to fit the reality of complex, changing lives is what the characters' in this chapter do. They leave comfort and stasis, in which they feel either unknown or only partially known, to journey into complex identity searches. In the two novels, the female protagonists embark on travels that bring them immense pain, experience, and pleasure, and the places and spaces they leave, travel through, inhabit, both change them and are changed by them. I base my argument in large part on the notion that *becoming* woman, rather than *being* woman, is important in these texts and the theories aligned with them because becoming is not static (Braidotti 2).

## **6.2 “That Sounds Paradoxical Enough to be True”: Exploration as Rebellion**

Tellectina Christian, the protagonist of Owens' allegorical tale of a woman's journey to individuality in *The Unpredictable Adventure: A Comedy of Woman's Independence*, becomes an explorer and a writer as part of her process of becoming. She goes through steps of understanding the many ways in which her society inscribes upon women in attempts to constrict them. Then, she realizes that she knows better, that she finds Smug Harbor stifling. This rebellion against the constrictions of her society is what compels Tellectina to explore, to see a way out of inscription, to learn to inscribe meaning herself.

The texts first pages critique the ways in which women are inscribed, forming a groundwork of what Tellectina will later rebel against through her exploration for a place free of such inscriptions. The text begins with Tellectina as a child. Her parents are discussing her Aunt Sophistica, whom Mary Christian calls a “terrible influence” because of the illicit books she has written and her unmarried (though not unloved) status. When

Tellectina questions what she hears her parents talking about, she asks, “[...] if a grown-up woman’s not an old maid and not married either, then what do you call her?” to which Mrs. Christian mutters, “A disgraceful hussy” (3). Immediately upon her Aunt Sophistica’s arrival, Tellectina asks her the same question – what is a woman who cannot be categorized. Sophistica says, “[...] I’d call her a damned intelligent woman! [...] To say nothing of natural and courageous and honest and glorious and a dozen other fine things besides! But do you realize, wise infant, that you touch upon the most ludicrous theme in all human history?” (5). She explains:

“A thousand years from now, when civilization begins to dawn on this benighted planet, the world will wake up and rock with laughter at the outmoded purity myth. It is a primitive superstition which should have become extinct with the dodo or the dinosaur. It is absurdity on the grand scale, imbecility defying all human logic, injustice beyond human credence. For has not six inches of – of vacuity altered the entire course of human lives, wrecked homes, and swayed the destiny of empires? Ah, yes, women still hold the power of the world in the hollow of their little –”

Laughter prevented her, however, from completing the sentence (6).

Sophistica’s interactions with and juxtaposition to her brother John Christian and his wife Mary foreshadow the movement that Tellectina will make away the fog of Smug Harbor. Tellectina is likened to Sophistica, and Sophistica certainly does not fit in what she calls the ubiquitous choking air of Smug Harbor (in the land of Err).

The names of characters, places, and activities in *The Unpredictable Adventure* are allegorical and often anagrams. Miriam Kalman Harris, who wrote the afterword for

the 1992 republication of the book includes a glossary of words, and the understanding of these adds significantly to the meaning of the text. For instance, Tellectina is *intellect* (with a few letters added). Of course, some of the significant words are not anagrams. Tellectina, for instance, is from the always-foggy, rosy-hazed Smug Harbor in the Land of Err, which Mr. and Mrs. Christian, allusions to the allegorical *Pilgrim's Progress*, refer to as "God's own Country" repeatedly (15). She spends her journey in the forbidden Nithking (Thinking). By the end of the text, Tellectina is, like Sophistica, addicted to a drug Cianite Vitrgrew (creative writing), the understanding of which is imperative to an understanding of the text. Where it makes a difference in the meaning, I will include the word that is being anagrammed in parentheses after the first mention.

Sophistica mentors Tellectina, teaching her through books and letters what it is to be a free woman, and this relationship is important in Tellectina's growth and eventual journey. At the end of their first visit, Sophistica tells Mr. Christian that Tellectina will run away some day. She warns:

"But, John, you may not be able to prevent it. To be a Tellectina is at once a blessing and a curse. I predict wonderful and terrible adventures for this quite little dreamer." She sighed heavily. "Ah, well, if I can't save her now, I must at least be on hand a few years from now, when she starts out alone to explore Nithking, the Forbidden Country." (15)

When Sophistica returns three years later, she comes specifically to give Tellectina a birthday gift – a book titled *Greek Myths for Young People* – and to guide her in the journey she knows Tellectina will undertake. She tells her that though she knows the pain she will endure; she doesn't fear for her and tells her not to "revile life too much for

having created a Land of Err. Otherwise there would be no Forbidden Country [...] and your adventure would end before it began. For without fools there is no comedy [...]" (18).

Additionally, in the letter enclosed with the book, Sophistica gives Tellectina advice – “a set of rules to guide the young”:

[...] if you turn the other cheek, life will smite it twice as hard as she did the right cheek; that the meek do not inherit the earth, but a hell on earth; that life is your adversary, and a grand cantankerous old woman she is, too; that if you ask little of the old girl you receive even less, therefore demand much; and that the two cardinal sins are: to hurt others deliberately (though hurting is inevitable) and to fail to enjoy life as much as possible. (27)

The advice to “demand much” is akin to Tom Moylan’s utopian mantra “demand the impossible,” a phrase he borrowed from French political graffiti during the Vietnam war. It is a phrase that is imbued with a hope that change is possible, that movement is possible. It’s the realization that life does not have to be as it is, that perhaps life needs to change instead of her, that eventually leads Tellectina to explore Nithking.

Tellectina is also intrigued by Sophistica’s language, her storytelling, and hints of danger and excitement. When she asks if Sophistica is truly an adventuress as the others say she is, Sophistica tells her about the dangers and beauty of Nithking, a land where, “the jungles are so vast that thousands of lost explorers wander in them for a lifetime; its sacred rivers [...] the most treacherous and turbulent in the world” (19). She continues



that though it is more dangerous than anything known to humankind, people continue to go:

“Because the lust for adventure is in their blood, because they can’t tolerate confinement, and curiosity consumes them like a fever; because excitement is the breath of life to them and they like to use their wits to save their lives; because in Nithking the adventures are unsurpassed by any other country on the face of the earth, the scope and grandeur of the views staggering, and the beauty almost unbearable. The very scent of its flowers makes one delirious, and the seas are fragrant with amorous perfume. In Nithking explores reach heights that are absolutely intoxicating [...]” (19-20)

Later that day, Tellectina has a foretaste of the adventure and freedom to come. She runs in the wind of an oncoming storm, against the admonishments of her father, and feels overpowering joy. “And then, possessed by some fearfully sweet power, she felt the walls enclosing her personal identity crumbling away, her very self dissolving into the elements, her individuality being drawn up into the vast unknown” (23). When she almost loses herself in ecstasy, she suddenly fears that something is wrong with her, to be so joyful for something as basic as a coming storm. This is a poignant moment for Tellectina, a calling to something she does not recognize, a becoming who she will be. Several other such moments exist for her – the discovery of passion when a boy kisses her, and in a repentant prayer she sees streaks of lightning spell “HOW DO I KNOW THERE IS A GOD?” in the sky and the discovery of the drug Cianite Vitgrew (creative writing) (39,42).

Because of her distractedness and questioning, her father sends her to Rote Hill, a health resort, where she finds her “natural sister” Femina, falls in love with scholarship, begins to question sexuality, and gains the determination to leave home to explore Nithking. The figure of Femina represents the sexual, heterosocial sides of Tellectina. It is Femina that finds boyfriends there and is approached by a lesbian friend. Femina and Tellectina are constantly at odds; the men who find Femina interesting are completely disinterested when Tellectina begins speaking. As Femina emerges, Tellectina becomes more and more intellectual, both questioning and learning in what she describes as the carnival of scholarship.

It is her newfound power and liberty in scholarship and in her questioning of the cultural beliefs (for example, why are women expected to be chaste and men not?) that makes the air of Smug Harbor choke her. She knows she must leave and is determined to do so, despite her parents’ pleading. She tells them, “[...] I can’t breathe in the atmosphere of Smug Harbor, [...]. I must go away to some other climate, to a higher altitude. I’ve been here all summer now and I’ve steadily felt worse. If I don’t go I shall suffocate” (68). She continues, “Oh, it’s a horrible place! How can people live in this continual fog from the Dead Sea! They mold, mildew, and decay, and don’t even know it! And Halfish is the language of half-wits! I hate it, hate it! I’m going away, somewhere, anywhere!” (68-69). With this, she goes to her aunt and tells her of her plans, and gains her blessing. Sophistica advises:

“Do not be careful. Be wise and rush in where fools fear to tread. Heed no voice except your own – not even mine” [...] “[...] let your desire be your guide: deny yourself nothing. Throw yourself into this expedition

with a whole heart – half measures are for puny people. Abandon yourself recklessly to the passion of living, for it is the grand passion [...]. (73-74)<sup>3</sup>

The notion of following desires resonates Ruth Levitas' assertion that the most important contribution of utopian thinking is its reflection of the real culture's faults and "the desires which those conditions generate and yet leave unfulfilled" (8). Desire is a way of knowing what one lacks in order to know what one needs in a better world. Additionally, after telling Tellectina that the suffering she will go through will give her an outstanding sense of humor, Sophistica tells her how to approach life:

"Demand everything from life and you shall receive much; ask nothing and you shall receive even less. When life stabs you in the back – as she assuredly will – laugh in her face; wrestle with the old bitch, fight to the finish, show her she has chosen a worthy opponent. And after she defeats you (and she defeats us all) she may, woman-like, reward you with a kiss or an unexpected favor; or, of course, she may stab you in a new place – be prepared for either. But never take her blows lying down: give blow for blow. Not of course that you can ever touch her: she's an agile old tart; but it keeps your manhood up, so to speak!" (75)

Sophistica essentially tells Tellectina to demand the impossible, like Moylan's definition of utopia, to continue despite the odds of failure, to maintain hopefulness. This understanding of reaching better worlds, better ways of living is in line with contemporary notions of utopia. With this advice, a fearlessness that concerns her aunt

(who knows life will teach her to fear), and the determination never to return, Tellectina “blindly but hopefully [...] struck out across country [...].”

Tellectina fights through the half-grown forest guarding the borders of Err, and emerges into the Desert of Dotbu (Doubt) in the Land of Nithking. There she is attacked by a band of political outcasts and questioned roughly about the nature of life –

“What right has any man to rule over any other man? Should not every human being have the same freedom, the laborer, the servant, the Negro, and even the woman?” [...] “Why shouldn’t wealth be distributed more evenly? Have you no social consciousness? Can’t you see that the whole world is reeking with injustice, suffering, and crime?” (79)

The Desert of Dotbu is a meandering in such questions, in uncertainties. She soon realizes that it is okay to be uncertain, that it shouldn’t keep her from seeking a goal. Questioning is part of that journey. She is consistently pulled forward by a mirage, a utopia of full equality and few social or legal bonds, that she believes must be real because she sees it. After wandering at length through the Desert of Dotbu, leading the pack of questioners, she receives a letter from her aunt, encouraging her to seek out a guide who will help her out of the desert.

This important chapter on wandering through the Desert of Dotbu, wavering in doubt, is important to the Owens’ construction of material place as representative of ideological space. It alludes to the biblical tale of the Hebrews wandering, angrily questioning, through the desert the exodus from Egypt, and it is in the desert that Tellectina realizes that though her destination is utopia (what she sees as Certitude) she needs something to more immediately address her material needs. She maintains a vision

of the ideal, but searches for concrete solutions to her hunger and thirst. She seeks out real answers.

This is an important shift in the tale, to a notion of utopia as ideal but perhaps unrealistic. This search is what defines the texts as a critical utopia – one that is hopeful but doubtful – or an ambiguous utopia – one in which the new “land” may or may not leave the traveler in a better state. In both of these, it is the search for better that becomes the utopia. The process of becoming, changing what one desires – as Adrienne Rich writes in *Of Woman Born*, “To seek visions, to dream dreams, is essential, and it is also essential to try new ways of living, to make room for serious experimentation, to respect the effort even where it fails” (282). *The Unpredictable Adventure*, then, predates other important 1970s and later feminist utopian and science fiction that changed the face of the genres, texts that highlight the importance of exploration and feature female protagonists. *The Unpredictable Adventure* lays the groundwork of questioning, traveling, process that Joanna Russ’ *The Female Man*, Doris Lessing’s *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*; Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*; and Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Always Coming Home* and “Those Who Walk Away from Omelas,” and *The Dispossessed* later do.

One of the hallmarks of feminist utopias of the 1970s and later is the female protagonists’ critique of her present world and her questioning of other systems – one or more that she discovers along her exploration process. Through this process of questioning, not only are the places/spaces they encounter often ambiguous improvements, but they also realize their original locations are more ambiguous than they previously believed – either better or worse than they originally thought. For instance,

Lessing's Al-Ith in *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five* leaves Zone Three to follow the dictate of the Providers to marry the leader of Zone Four. She is not happy with the forced removal from Zone Three's matriarchy and peace – a place she does not yet see as flawed, though the land is in the midst of a plague of infertility. As she slowly discovers the benefits of Zone Four – their desire for better, the passion for more – she realizes that Zone Three is not as flawless as she believed. She realizes, in fact, that her belief that it was flawless, ideal, is one of its flaws. In one scene in particular, it dawns on Al-Ith that her complacency, the complacency of all of the inhabitants in Zone Three, is a flaw that shakes her. Zone Four's citizens must be deterred from looking up, imagining a better place. They are punished for looking up toward Zone Three by being forced to wear heavy metal helmets to keep their vision down. Despite this, the inhabitants of Zone Four consistently disobey, and Al-Ith realizes she has never looked up at the Zone beyond her. She gazes at it during one of her trips between Zone Three and Four, “gazing, wondering, allowing her eyes to be drawn into those long, blue, deceiving distances ...” (59). She is saddened that in all of her happiness in Zone Three, she never looked for more:

And never standing for long pauses in her busy life to rest her eyes in the blue reaches of the Zone which was as much higher than Zone Three as this one was to Zone Four...This idea shook her, shook her as strongly as a conception did—*should*, if it were a properly designed and orchestrated conception—here was some very strong and urgent need, that she should be attending to, reaching out towards.... (59)

For, Al-Ith, part of the exploration involved in the text – an ambiguous utopia – is a reassessment of her own world, a new set of eyes with which to look at it. The process of nomadry, of becoming, so essentially changes her that she is more disturbed by the stagnancy of the “better” Zone Three than she is by the warring and sexual inequality in Zone Four.

The changes that the protagonist goes through are importantly tied to the change of places in ambiguous utopias. Place works as a representation of ideological space shifts. In other words, the utopia is in the process, the nomadry, the movement, the exploration – not in finding a better, stagnant B to the flawed A. This is the case with Owens’ Tellectina, as well. Even as she leaves Smug Harbor, her aunt Sophistica tells her she will return, though Tellectina is appalled at the idea, certain she never will. As she makes her way out of Smug Harbor and into the Desert of Dotbu, she only begins to question the doctrines of Smug Harbor, shallowly wandering in circles with only notions of what she does not like about her homeland. At one point she even decides to raze the city, but she is too confused to find her way to the city, instead merely leading the band of outcasts in circles, attacking mirages – an apt metaphor. As the novel progresses, she begins to realize that the necessary changes to make are to herself and that positive things do exist in Smug Harbor.

Tellectina’s uncertainty in the desert is an important part of her process of becoming, an important step to her accepting ambiguity, though her ultimate goal is Mt. Certitude. Braidotti writes, “[...] reasoned cartographies are the starting point for the production of adequate accounts of the realities involved. The ultimate aim is the quest for resistance, but also creative and qualitative theoretical leaps across the uncertainties”

(Braidotti 265). She calls for “nomadic subjectivity,” which is necessary to change (Braidotti 265). This is aligned with Jameson’s cognitive mapping as imperative to utopianism. The present historical moment must be mapped, criticized, and its faults determined in order for movement into future, better spaces to be possible. Adrienne Rich writes, “Theories of female power and female ascendancy must reckon fully with the ambiguities of our being, and with the continuum of our consciousness, the potentialities for both creative and destructive energy in each of us” (Rich *Of Woman* 283). It is this realization, the continuum, the potentialities, the creative and destructive that Tellectina must grapple with and which is the point of the text.

Essentially, Tellectina reckons with the societal standards under which she has been raised. She is set in her opposition to the inequalities under which she has been raised, but throughout her travels, she encounters different groups of people and individuals from whom she learns and is able to refine her understanding of what she desires. She is able to, as Frye puts it, see what she has learned in *Err* as ritualistic, deconstructing the importance of all of the standards she has learned. Frye writes:

The procedure of constructing a utopia produces two literary qualities which are typical, almost invariable, in the genre. 1) the behavior of society is described *ritually*: ritual is “a significant social act, and the utopia-writer is concerned only with the typical actions which are significant of those social elements he is stressing. [...] 2) “rituals are apparently irrational acts which become rational when their significance is explained. [...] The utopian romance does not present society as governed



by reason; it presents it as governed by ritual habit, or prescribed social behavior, which is explained rationally. (26-27)

One of the scenes that does this particularly well in *The Unpredictable Adventure* is one in which Tellectina leaves the Desert of Dobtu and enters a jungle where she finds a tribe of Amazons who are descendents of political outcasts. They have distorted their original beliefs, but Tellectina is able to discover that their rituals are based in worthy ideals.

### 6.2.1 “She-self” and Feminist Exploration: *Femina* and *Tellectina*

Tellectina’s personas – the intellectual Tellectina and the feminine/sexual *Femina* – along with the Amazonian community is a construction of what Rosi Braidotti terms a “she-self,” an individual woman’s realization that she is part of a collective politic. It is clear from the text that Owens’ purpose in writing is to explore the movement of realization for Tellectina that she is a multiplicity in process – that she is thinking woman, sexual woman, individual woman, and collective woman. This is not to say that Owens is setting up a monolithic *Woman* in the sense that Irigaray disputes it. Instead, she is splintering a monolithic notion, at the same time she is splintering a dualistic notion of *either* intellectual *or* sexual woman. Tellectina’s embodiment of her intellect and sexuality and her unity of difference and of political and social objectivity are integral to the theme of female subjectivity in the novel. Tellectina seeks to deconstruct cultural beliefs about gender for herself and for other women.

This seeking of subjectivity, exploration of the multiplicity of herself and her relation to the gendered collective is especially well emphasized through the framework of Braidotti’s work on nomadic subjects and becoming woman. Braidotti writes, “[...] the female feminist subject, to whom I will refer to as: “she-self” or “I, woman,” is to be

redefined through the collective quest for a political reexamination of sexuality as a social and symbolic system” (*Nomadic Subjects*, 199). The process of rethinking self and social connections, Braidotti asserts, is key to gaining female subjectivity. She writes:

*Working through* is a nomadic notion that has already given proof of both its strengths and its limitations. Working through the networks of discursive definitions of “woman” is useful not only in what it produces as a process of deconstruction of female subjectivity but also as a *process*, which allows for the constitution and the legitimation of a gendered female feminist community.

In other words, the “she-self” fastens upon the presence of the female embodied self, the woman, but it does so only as long as other women sustain [...] the project of redefining female subjectivity. It is a sort of ontological leap forward by which a politically enforced collective subject, the “we women” of the women’s movement, can empower the subjective becoming of each one of us “I, woman.” (200)

This reflexivity – the fluidity and necessity of the individual “I, woman” to the collective “we women” is essential to Tellectina’s own “working through” of her gendered identity. Tellectina converts to the Amazonian religion worshipping Frewo (Freewoman) and transforms it, develops it. Her fastening onto the embodiments of other females is both enlightening to her and forces her to articulate and refine her beliefs.

Despite this, when Tellectina begins building a new place with the Amazons, their presence drops off as she works through her relationship with both her lover Ray and Femina. Her relationships with both Ray and Femina eventually help her refine the

articulation of her needs more specifically to include a reverence for the body, the sexual, that she had not previously credited. She realizes her desire for something beyond just an intellectual life, just an intellectual partnership. This occurs first when Femina gives birth, a moment in which Tellectina is stunned at the processes of the body, saying to Femina, “And so the processes of nature go on quite well without the help or hindrance from the mind and will of the individual. It makes a Tellectina feel humble and insignificant for the first time in her life!” (119). This moment of insignificance is imperative to Tellectina’s development as an “I, woman” and as a “She woman.” To understand both the limitations of intellect and the grandeur of the nature of the body is enlightening to her. The second occurrence of reverence for the corporeal life is her discovery of Ray’s homosexuality and her realization that “people can’t marry with their minds alone, [...] – it’s doomed to failure” (125). Before these occurrences, Tellectina had valued mind over material, but these are pivotal points for her in understanding the fullness of what she is as a woman.

Just such discoveries of identity and nomadry are open-ended, marking the text as a progressive statement of the importance of matter and mind, best emphasized through material feminism. Braidotti defines feminism as “not a dogmatic countertruth, but the willful choice of non-closure as an intellectual and ethical style,” and Tellectina’s searching is exemplary of this definition (*Nomadic Subjects* 201). Braidotti continues,

If we take as our starting point sexual difference as the positive affirmation of my facticity as a woman, working through the layers of complexity of the signifier I, woman, we end up opening a window onto a new genderized bond among different women. [...]

By genderized collective subjectivity I mean a symbolic dimension proper to women in the recognition of the nonreducibility of the feminine to the masculine and yet, at the same time, of the indestructible unity of the human as an embodied self structurally linked to the other. It is the complex intersecting of never-ending levels of differing of self from other and self from self. (*Nomadic Subjects* 204)

Tellectina's process of becoming woman, exploration of her gendered identity hinges on her ability to relate to Femina and the other women –as well as the men, especially the complicated homosexual Ray – she meets in her nomadry.

Not that Tellectina and Femina live peacefully after this. Tellectina finds that the battles continue, though a new respect has arisen. In a relationship later in the book, she and Femina are both in love with a man for different reasons, and the intellectual side and feminine side of Tellectina seem to be constantly at battle. In *Cape Coverture* (Protective Shelter, which the editor explains is the protection marriage offers women), Tellectina meets Elam Domitann (Male Domination). Elam has no respect for women as equal to men, but he is fascinated with Tellectina's wit and her progressive ideas, along with her beauty. They argue good heartedly over gender issues. In one conversation, for instance, they debate how good things are for women, as far as Elam sees it. Elam begins:

“In your very commendable eagerness to do women justice, Miss Tellectina Christian, you seem to forget that since the beginning of the human race the majority of women have been supported and protected and loved and even worshipped by some men. Men often sacrificed career, home, even life, for them.”

“And you seem to forget, mister, that since the beginning of the race the majority of women have been kept in a forced state of arrested development by men. You treated her as either a drudge or a toy for your pleasure. At best you treated her as a child.”

“There are worse things than being treated as a child, my dear.”

“And better things. [...]” (164)

The debate ends with Elam and Tellectina laughing when Elam, who is quite a bit older than the twenty-three-year-old Tellectina, pats her hand condescendingly and comments on her youth and beauty, saying, “And you’re so adorable when you pout, and your eyes are like stars when you get angry, and the dimples play hide-and-seek about your pink petal-like lips while they’re making such serious sonorous statements” (167). This lighthearted debating and their clearly opposing ideas on gender issues create a mood of contentious playfulness early in their love affair, but that mood later turns darker.

One of the first indications to Tellectina that the relationship has difficulties is when Elam meets Femina for the first time – months after he and Tellectina have been having intellectual debates (though no outright love making). When Femina emerges from the woods, flowers in her hair and on her clothing, as Tellectina and Elam are on a walk, Elam is mesmerized. He forgets Tellectina, and she walks far behind Elam and Femina. The intellectual debates have not fully called Elam forth to pursue Tellectina, but within a few moments of meeting Femina, he is announcing love for her (Femina), saying, “Do you know, Femina, that you are like a flower yourself – a very delicate slender flower with a very radiant face – and that I love all beautiful things?” (170). His

“love” has not been inspired by Tellectina’s intellect, and even Femina calls forth only a love of a beautiful object.

Despite this, it is not long before both Tellectina and Femina are “happier than they had ever been before in their entire lives,” though they are weakened by the tropical disease walking pectoralitis (love sickness). It is not until Elam has to leave to go seek out funding for his scientific research that the effects of the disease become serious. When saying goodbye, Femina bares her left breast to Elam, who places his hand on it. At Femina’s scream, Tellectina opens her eyes to a “sight which struck her dumb with horror” (174). In his departing touch, Elam had wrenched Femina’s heart from her breast, and it was “suspended before Tellectina’s very eyes – dripping with blood – bloody threads depending from it – bloody cords connecting it with her body” (174). The strength and cruelty of Elam’s power to withdraw her heart from her body, and the converse weakness that power elicits from Femina and Tellectina concerns Tellectina. Femina is happy to discover this deep love for Elam. Tellectina is confused. She argues with Femina:

*“So this is love! This pain, this agony, this wrenching out of one’s heart! No, no, no, I won’t allow any other human being to torture you so, Femina; to have the power of life and death over you or me! Come away, we’ll leave this man at once.”*

Femina smiled pityingly on Tellectina. “And have my heart torn out again? Oh, no.”

“But love, oh, it’s a disease – it’s a fever you can’t control! It’s a trap – you can’t stay and you can’t go—either way it’s agony. It’s not fair! It’s not fair! And I had always thought that love meant happiness!” (176-77).

The free love partnership between Elam and Tellectina (and Femina) eventually becomes a marriage. Tellectina loses her teaching position at the local college and her home because of the surrounding community’s distaste for the free love union between she and Elam. Because of this, despite her belief that marriage was evil to women, Elam convinces her to marry him. This love – both intellectual and sexual – is a learning experience for Tellectina, something that after their love affair, a two-year tumultuous marriage, Elam’s death in a war, and the severe pain and suicidal thoughts that his death brings, Tellectina declares, “I may have learned more in those two years of marriage to [Elam], however, than I would have in exploring Nithking proper” (222). She leaves Cape Coverture, suffering the after effects of heart-wrenching love but “more keenly alive than she had ever been before in her entire life [...], and in leaving Cape Coverture, “she [feels] a tremendous thrill at the prospect of the exciting adventure which now lay before her” (222).

The marriage to Elam is an important piece of Tellectina’s process of becoming a woman. He is not a man to necessarily respect her progressive notions for themselves, but out of love of her, he often went along with them. Their marriage, though, struggled between the erratic passion of deep love and the disgust of disagreement in life views. Her understanding of love and marriage in this way is not only essential to her development of the “I, woman” – her integration of Tellectina and Femina – but also essential to her connection to the collective “we, women” through a clear, concrete

understanding of what love makes a woman want to give up and a clear, concrete understanding of marriage as a real thing, not just an abstract theory. What Tellectina before so casually derided – love and marriage – becomes something different. Her realization of why women love and marry is important to her growth. To understand what she will give up her ideals for, or at least compromise them for, connects her not only with Femina, who loves more easily and tends more to traditional love than she, but also connects her to women as a collective.

This development, this new understanding, is key to Tellectina's process of becoming and to her subjectivity. Braidotti writes about the importance of thinking in new ways: "[...] feminist theory in the nomadic mode I am defending is the critique of power in/as discourse and the active endeavor to create other ways of thinking: it is the engagement in the process to learn to think differently" (*Nomadic Subjects*, 196).

Tellectina's new way of thinking is an understanding of desire, of her own willingness to bend in her ideologies, through which she gains greater understanding of herself as an individual and of the gendered power structures. Braidotti writes, "Feminism as critical thought is therefore a self-reflexive mode of analysis, aimed at articulating the critique of power in discourse with the affirmation of an alternative vision of the female feminist subject," and to Tellectina this critical thought deepens her understanding of her own complicity in power structures. Braidotti continues:

I see as the central aim of this project the articulation of questions of individual gendered identity with issues related to political subjectivity.

The interaction of identity with subjectivity also spells out the categorical distinction between dimensions of experience that are marked by desire –



and therefore the unconscious – and others that are rather subjected to willful self-regulation. I have argued previously that although both levels are the site of political agency, there is not one dominant form of political action that can encompass them both. The key to feminist nomadic politics is situatedness, accountability, and localized or partial perspectives. (196)

The importance of situated being, of localized perspectives, is what Tellectina learns from being in love and through being married to a dominating man she loves. Thinking outside of gender relations – thinking abstractly before she first falls in love – is not a true situatedness, perhaps. For Tellectina, being in the structures of intimate gender relationships is key to her fully understanding the structures. And, she must fully understand the structures, or at least see them in this manner, in order push through them. This is not to say that only through marriage or only through heterosexual love can a woman understand gendered power structures. This is to say that to Tellectina, a concreting of her abstracted ideas about her own heterosexual love relationships is important to her process of becoming.

This notion of situatedness as important to political action and social change relates to utopian fiction as, again, both Braidotti and Fredric Jameson lay it out in the concepts of *figurations* and *cognitive mapping*, respectively. In order to gain subjectivity, one must locate oneself in place/space. Jameson's assertion that cognitive mapping – placing oneself realistically in one's own political, historical moment – is essential to utopian thought because in order to think specifically about a better future, one must know exactly where he or she stands in the present (353). Braidotti defines

*figurations* as “materialist mappings of situated, or embedded and embodied, positions” (*Metamorphoses* 2). The individual realization and the collective realization of women’s place/space in her society, then, is essential to Tellectina’s movement, understanding of which direction to head. She learns more and more what she wants as a political and social improvement by learning more and more what she does not want, by learning more and more about the power structures of gender.

As Ruth Levitas explains, the most important contribution of utopian thinking is its reflection of the real culture’s faults and “*the desires which those conditions generate and yet leave unfulfilled. For that is the space which utopia occupies*” (8; my emphasis). Because women’s utopian texts chart the unfulfilled desires of their circumstances and the feminist and utopian processes, Tellectina’s process of understanding multiple, even conflicting desires – the desire for Elam, the desire for subjectivity, the desire for Certitude – helps her better understand her present and possibilities for the future. It is why she leaves Cape Coverture with a sense of excitement and clearer vision.

### 6.2.2 *The Folly of Certitude*

That excitement and clearer vision lead Tellectina through more adventures, more disillusionments, before she eventually reaches her goal – the highest mountain in the world from which she can view the rest of the world. She has always referred to this highest goal as Mt. Certitude, but she learns that it is not that at all, but rather is called Ghaulot (To Laugh). It is in this realization that the text clearly advocates process over product as the approach to a better world, an emphasis in Braidotti’s and other material feminists’ works and the hallmark of feminist utopian and science fiction of material feminism. Tellectina announces to herself,

“Is this not the best, the loftiest view of the world? To see the whole world clearly but with compassion for its strivings and humor for its ridiculousness? [...] The extreme complication of human living necessitates its being viewed from more angles than one – if it is to be seen as it really is.” (399-400)

With this, Tellectina realizes that she has been seeing life’s meaning not solely from the top of what she thought was Mt. Certitude but all along her journey. The only thing she can be certain of is that she will always be uncertain, that life is ever-changing and shifting out of one’s grasp, that the best thing one can do is to laugh. She wonders to herself:

“And at this moment, which I thought would be the supreme moment of my life, I do not feel ecstasy as I had secretly hoped I might – but only a tremendous relief and an appalling fatigue. [...] Yes, a full score of twenty years it required for me to make this journey from Casuistry to Certitude – from Smug Harbor to Mt. Ghoulot. At Manu Mission [her formal emancipation from slavery], it was suddenly revealed to me that I was forever freed from the compulsion to believe as other men believed (it was indeed ‘the formal liberation of a slave’); I had however, no slightest conception of what I myself did believe. But now I have attained a positive philosophy: my ideas on all important subjects are clearly defined – surely there are no more problems for me to settle. I know that I know and nothing under heaven can change my convictions on certain subjects, at least. What a deep, thorough satisfaction Certitude gives one!” (401)

Her concept of Certitude has shifted from seeking out answers to seeking out questions, that the only certainty is uncertainty. Tellectina realizes that she has been unknowingly seeking out perfection and now realizes “that no human being ever finds it” (402). And, Femina refuses to live in the heights of the mountain with Tellectina, who begins her addiction with Cianite Vitrgrew (Creative Writing) before an avalanche knocks her off the mountain. The fall, eventually lands her back in the land of Err when, lonely for any human contact, she boards a carriage going anywhere... it goes to Err.

Tellectina’s return to Err is ambiguous, not quite triumphant, but not a return to her previous life. She has changed, so all else has to her. In a conversation with Sophistica, she explains that she is disappointed in the desires of her emotions and her body, that the need to have company and comfort usurps her need for independence to some degree. But, she finds the notion of independence for women to be a comedy “because she can’t be independent of the established order; she can’t be independent of men either emotionally or intellectually” (434). Sophistica explains that men, too, are this way. The failure to maintain pure independence is a human trait, for “what man is free of his desire for love and sex and companionship? What man is free of his need for creature comforts? [...] You ask the impossible” (435). The two determine that independence is a negotiation. Tellectina states that the secret of life is passion:

“Yes, to do everything in life with wholehearted intensity – whether it’s loving or hating; whether it’s the pursuit of a rainbow or the peeling of a potato – that is the way to live richly. Thus we bring upon ourselves great disappointments, griefs, and joys, but never do we bring upon our heads the real tragedies of life. For the real tragedies are not heartbreak, sorrow,

and disillusionment, but emptiness, denial, frustration, repression and suppression, dullness and monotony. [...] I am ripe and rich and full. I've scorned half measures and plunged into life with a whole heart, and I'm glad – glad!" (443)

This ripeness gives way to creative writing, a high that Tellectina is addicted to. At the novel's end, she has a caller downstairs who wants her hand in marriage. She puts away the Cianite Vitgrew and puts on "her most feminine and seductive underwear" (456).

Despite the process of self discovery that Tellectina has gone through, the ending of the text is ambiguous. It is difficult to determine if she is better off. The reader feels that she may end up marrying (as Sophistica has several times), but that her love for creative writing and her process of self discovery will never end. And, since the ongoing discovery and the passion, as Tellectina states it, are the things that make a good life, one feels that she will be better, continue to be better. This ending is echoed in Doris Lessing's *Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*, again, at the end of the novel when Al-Ith is alone, perhaps compromised to that aloneness, but is better in some sense. Ben Ata, Al-Ith's husband for a season, says to Al-Ith's sister, "[...] content is not the highest good" (239). The stagnancy that the text opened with, that the marriages had been arranged to solve, had opened into process. Lessing writes,

There was a continuous movement now, from Zone Five to Zone Four. And from Zone Four to Zone Three – and from us, up the pass. There was a lightness, a freshness, and an enquiry and a remaking and an inspiration where there had been only stagnation. And closed frontiers.

For this is how we all see it now.

The movement is not all one way – not by any means. (244-45)

The movement is the better life, the improvement on stagnancy, even if stagnancy offers contentment. The impetus to explore, to progress, if ignored, would equal stagnancy. In Owens' *The Unpredictable Adventure: A Comedy of Woman's Independence*, as in later feminist utopian and science fiction texts like Lessing's, the rebellion against stagnancy and complacency, the realization of individual desires, is the process of becoming a woman. The meaning of life is in the fluidity in these texts. The ever-changing subject and movement of place and space is essential to improvement, and it is constant. According to Ellen Peel, ambiguous feminist utopias “engage readers in making judgments instead of accepting some monolithic belief” (xix). They move past the idea of perfection into something “more possible and vital: and ongoing, intricate, vibrant process of rethinking what feminism might entail, a process akin to philosophical pragmatism” (xix). She continues, “These ‘ambiguous utopias’ endorse feminism not only by constructing utopian societies but also more interestingly by questioning them” (xix). It's the process of questioning – exploration and potentiality – that is most important in the texts in this chapter.

### **6.3 “A Movement Forward of Her Body”: The Green Kingdom**

While the ambiguity and the process of becoming in *The Unpredictable Adventure* is set in Nithking, a kingdom of both beauty and ugliness where the places are representative (it is an allegory) of the spaces in explicitly ways, the movement in *The Green Kingdom* is into a place that is lush and productive, though some characters cannot survive in it. This adds to both its ambiguity and the notion of process – the change is expected of the characters. They both inscribe on the kingdom and must adapt to its

inscription, though only one woman is able to become, to adapt. The scene I open this dissertation with, in which Erma, the main female protagonist in *The Green Kingdom*, realizes she is pregnant, “in a condition of potentiality,” is representative of the theme of this novel, a theme of accepting the motion and change of life (557).

The desire for places that “haunt one’s dreams and to some extent define one’s character” is already inscribed with meaning (Buell 72-73). Before the characters get to the Green Kingdom, they have an idea of what it means to them. In addition, the characters in *The Green Kingdom* are writing their experience in a Record. Erma, and to some degree Justin, are the only characters that recognize the inscribing process of the kingdom on them. As I have mentioned previously, Peter Turchi asserts that writers “[...] are defining, delineating, the world that is coming into being” (14). The Green Kingdom inscribes, too. Characters are impacted by the place, a place that calls for the ability to become, to loosen old bonds on identities and allow reworkings. By the end of the tale, Erma and the kingdom have negotiated a “world that is coming into being” and Erma has become something that the kingdom has made her (Turchi 14).

The desire for the Green Kingdom was handed down to Justin, the main male protagonist, by his grandfather, who had been there and had drawn Justin a map before his death. No one believed Justin’s grandfather, except him. He dreamed of the Green Kingdom as a child, and as a composer, expected his opus magnum to be a piece of music about the Green Kingdom. His desire to see the Green Kingdom intensifies as the story opens because of the pain of his reality. His wife is insane after having lost their sons in the war. She frequently has vivid flashbacks of the times when her boys were alive and acts out the moment to which she flashes. Early in the text, she imagines she is

in labor with one of their sons. Their four sons have died in the war, and Edith's coping mechanism is to imagine their births instead of their deaths. She relives the births and feels the pain of labor instead of the pain of their deaths:

Yet it was not their births but their deaths which mattered, he knew that. Their deaths had come in rapid succession just as Edith had approached her forty-fifth year, and somewhere in the time of disorder and uncertainty and shock she had transferred the violence of their deaths to that of their births. It was an imagined violence, of course, for even now he knew very little of the actual conditions under which, individually, they had died.

(19)

Even this, the pain of his reality that creates in Justin a sense of desire for more, a longing for better, is steeped in potentiality. That his wife imagines the pain of childbirth – a pain of potential – rather than the pain of her son's deaths lays the groundwork for the notion of potentiality in the text, bookending well the final scene of Erma's (Justin's second love) pregnancy in the Green Kingdom. And, Edith's floating in time, movement through time in search of better than her reality, keeps Justin in process, in movement. He often waits for her flashbacks, in repose to respond to whatever time she wakes into. He thinks that "he [does] not want her to be living in the dull and disorganized wreckage of the present," and so, "His whole body and his mind were tensed into active, waiting, suspended reception" to meet her in the time she emerges (21).

The main female character, Erma, also accounts for time, for time's potentiality. She does so in writing, keeping a daily record for her husband Arthur's dream project, a "People's Library, [...] The Human Records" (24). Arthur and his partner Joe run a



printing press and print bound copies of other people's lives, their stories – either truth or lies. Erma believes in his project to such a degree that she gives him her savings for a baby in order that he may achieve his dream. She doesn't tell him that accumulating a savings by making cuts in the daily budget – “margarine instead of butter” [...] “putting off going to the dentist [...]” – and that to her, a savings has meant a baby because he is always concerned about not having enough money, always focused on his dream of the People's Library.

The characters all meet when Justin goes on tour, conducting his symphonies. Edith has died, and Justin has survived a suicide attempt. He takes Edith's body out on a boat and expects to die in the ocean with her lifeless body. A letter from Erma stating how meaningful his music has been to her throughout her life and a book explaining Arthur's People's Library project, eventually lands him in her town and ignites a friendship among the characters. He tells them of the Green Kingdom, and later, Erma writes to Justin, “Last night I dreamed of your green Kingdom or rather, this morning, for I awoke with the dream still upon me. I cannot remember ever having dreamed in color before” (94). Justin visits the other characters often, and as they all meet disappointments in their lives, they decide to make a short trip in search of it, following the map that Justin's grandfather drew of it.

All of the inscriptions – Justin's map and compositions, letters from Erma to Justin, and especially Arthur's People's Library or Records – are important to understanding the inscriptions of and onto place in the Green Kingdom. Justin feels as though he is finished composing, yet his best work, as he later assesses it, is inspired by the Green Kingdom. The hope that Erma offers Justin in her letter to him is the

beginning of an intimate friendship and love relationship. Arthur's People's Library is his life's work, what he explains as a way of inscribing meaning onto life, inscribing truth. In the Green Kingdom, he later realizes that a man cannot know his own truth, or at least does not narrate it in a record. According to Arthur by the time he leaves the kingdom, the truly important events in one's life are interpreted by others – one's failings, one's triumphs. But, for the majority of the novel, he tries violently to inscribe meaning onto life through his demand that all of the inhabitants of the Green Kingdom continue to keep records of their lives. His forceful need for control eventually undoes him and the others.

The party sets out to discover the Green Kingdom, following the rough map that Justin's grandfather bequeathed to him. When they reach the mountain that houses the Green Kingdom, a mountain that splits every ten years then closes again, they are in awe of the place's actuality. Justin goes in first, though he tells them later, he does not remember going in, just being in. Though:

Erma could remember. She could remember going after Justin impulsively, going headlong, just as she had jerked the two dollars out of Joe's hand that day in Drury and jumped on the train after him, the day that Edith died. It was the same movement. It was the same need. She remembered it always as a movement forward of her body. (160)

Their reactions vary, but Maddux's narration of the Green Kingdom is powerful, whether negative or positive for each character. She writes,

How can it be said *in words* what they saw spread out before them?

How is it possible? Imagine that you have been starved—not just hungry but *starved* – for many weeks. [...] You are kneeling before a bakery window. With your bony fingers you are clawing at the glass which stands between you and a windowful of bread. [...] I say to you: There is no glass in the window. Reach in.

That is what the Green Kingdom looks like. (162)

Ruth Levitas' definition of utopian literature as a "desire for a better way of being and living" is applicable here (7). That hunger, which Lyman Tower Sargent speaks of as a desire to feed others even if we are well fed, is utopian desire. That hunger satisfied is the process of utopian discovery, of continual questioning, of nomadry, of what Sargisson calls "new utopianism" – open ended and without blue prints.

Once inside, the characters' responses vary greatly and foretell their future in the Green Kingdom. They know they are sealed in for a decade. Justin, not remembering entering, weeps openly at the sight of the lush paradise. Erma, too, cries. Joe and Arthur are practical – in search of wood and food. Gwendolyn, Joe's girlfriend, is panicked, then shocked, then full of hatred for the others. The tunnel-visioned focus that Arthur has given to his writing project leaves him desolate before long. He refuses and ignores Erma's desire for a baby, and she has to "[pin her] hopes on the morrow" repeatedly (207). She writes in her record, which the characters still keep up for Arthur, about Justin's compositions that he continues in the Green Kingdom:

Oh, it would be wonderful to be like Justin Magnus, to have a place always waiting where you could put your fervor and your torment, to get a concerto instead of hysterics, a lament instead of nausea. To have with

you always an expandable vessel that would hold any amount and, holding it, come alive on its own.

A little talent is the cruelest possession in the world. And in me it seems there is to be no creation of any kind, not even the creation I felt myself perfectly suited for. For me there is no balm for this bruise. There is no rest for the tiredness. There is no place to put this awful weight. To be pregnant forever of this need to bear that never gets born. (219)

Erma's desire to bear a child has turned to an unbearable longing for her, with no outlet besides the artistry of the breads she bakes for the other inhabitants of the Green Kingdom.

Gwen sinks deeper into depression and anger, and Erma's unfulfilled longing for a baby is sharpened by Gwen's easy, unwanted fertility. In fact, though Gwen is disgusted and terrified at the idea of being pregnant in the Green Kingdom, with no hospitals and no desire for a child, she soon realizes the power of her role as the pregnant one among the group. Arthur notes, "It was fascinating to see her weight out this new idea," which places Gwen in "a kind of princess role" (222). He continues, "She has the whip hand over us all now, even though she hasn't begun to swing it seriously yet. It is revolting [...]" (222).

Arthur's anger at Gwen, disappointment at the loss of his writing project – something he views as a loss of inscribing life with meaning, essentially – eventually lead him to drug addiction and violence. He becomes darker and more unlike himself, unlike the man that Erma knows. The breaking point after months of estrangement is when he rapes Erma. He comes to her when she is asleep, and she welcomes him:

But suddenly in fear she opened her mouth to cry out and the fear became terror and the scream was frozen in her. For she did not know this man. Even the skin of his back was alien to her finger tips, and her hands recoiled from the touch of it as, in denial of their long history together, without tenderness, without caress, with no love and nothing, nothing familiar, nothing belonging to their so infinitely varied ritual, he thrust himself upon her in measured, in human brutality, thrust upon thrust. She tried to get away, but he pinned her shoulders in pain and submission.

[...] It was as though she were dead. A dead woman. [...] (235-36)

She imagines his phallus as a fist, as hatred incarnate “trying to violate the very earth,” a telling statement now that Erma has associated herself in some way with the earth, has created an earthen cave, womb-like space of her own. The rape comes immediately before Joe casually mentions Erma’s sterility, something she has not yet considered. She feels the hope she has for a few days every month begin to fade.

This inscription of power, of anger, onto Erma’s body is mirrored later in his stabbing of her and her animal companion. Arthur’s addiction to the pain medication that Joe is developing for Gwen’s birth runs rampant and harms Erma even further.

Throughout her time in the Green Kingdom, Erma has developed a companionship with one of the native animals – a feathermane that resembles a miniature horse. It is her constant companion, and her care and love is poured out onto the creature. In a frenzied desire to steal what is left of the pain medication, Arthur slits the feathermane’s throat. The animal was running down the path near him and jostled some of the last of the liquid drug, so “[...] he slashed. Now he was on top. He cut the feathermane across the throat,

and, when he saw the blood, he laughed and slashed again” (255). In his drug-induced violence, though, he had also knifed Erma who was with the featherman. These violent events – the rape and the stabbing – are intimate inscriptions onto Erma’s body, inscriptions that mirror his almost violent insistence that everyone keep a record of his or her lives. The intimacy of demanding the inner stories of the other Green Kingdom inhabitants and of the rape are likened to that of the knife attack. David Grossman refers to stabbing as the most intimate form of violence on another, and here, the similarity to the rape is explicit (137).

Justin happens upon them, and a complicated desire for Erma arises in him, given the violence of the scene. He has finished the second section of his symphony; the section is called “The Time of Innocence,” and he has been amazed since its completion how unlike it is what he expected. He has had a foreboding when he thought he would have a renewal, something more fitting for a section he entitled such. But, he recalls Erma telling him – after her rape, which he does not know about – that innocence never dies; it is always murdered (Maddux 219). As he comes across her body in the path, he realizes this is what his forebodings had been. “The dread was no longer unknown” (256). He realizes the foreboding and tension has also been his unrecognized love for her:

Many were the visions he had had of her, seen, throttled, buried, sublimated, and called music. Long had the tortures of his insomnia been cast into that odor of her jacket in the night, cast into the mountain of work by day. Now the blood of the mutilated featherman, flowing on the tortured grass, had set him free. The music and the wakefulness, the sweat

– they ran free in a might river called Erma, called by his beloved’s name, and the tension, the mounting, uncensored crescendo of tension burned in the flowing, freedom-making blood of violence and became desire. (256-57)

This is mirrored by the love the feathermane has for her as he lays – presumed by Justin to be dead – in the path where Justin found Erma. He has been rendered blind and immobile and longs for Erma. Maddux narrates the feathermane’s thoughts, “Oh, where was she for whom, in the darkness, he hungered? Where was she for whom he had forsaken his own kind, his herd?” (258). This is the last of the Green Kingdom inhabitants’ narration before the beginning of the third section of the book, following the same titles as Justin’s parts of his symphony. So, the conclusion to the “Time of Innocence” is a violent one, leading into the next, “Time of History.”

### *6.3.1 Dirt Womb: Macabre Creations*

“Time of History” is a section of “trans-corporeality” showing the interconnection between nature and humans. Stacy Alaimo’s defines “trans-corporeality” as “the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from ‘nature’ or ‘environment’” (238). While Alaimo shows that trans-corporeality has ethical and political resonance by applying the theory to toxic bodies, the approach of trans-corporeality – “[...] a theoretical site [...] where corporeal theories and environmental theories meet and mingle in productive ways” – “necessitates rich, complex modes of analysis that travel through the entangled territories of material and discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual” in ways that opens up new meanings in texts that

address such interconnectedness. Analyzing *The Green Kingdom* with the frame of trans-corporeal theory allows a complex reading and opens up interesting lines of questioning.

The emphasis on the intermingling of Erma's body and the Green Kingdom is imperative to the text's notion of utopia. It is a mutual acceptance. Erma does not apply a set of expectations to the land, nor does the land offer a static social order which Erma can carry out into the world. I will later address this departure from the utopian tradition of conversion and evangelizing. Subjectivity – both the kingdom's and Erma's – is essential to the utopian dream the text puts forth.

The trans-corporeality becomes explicitly apparent as Erma recovers from Arthur's attack. At the same time (almost as soon as Erma regains consciousness), Gwen has her baby, and Erma discovers the feathermane has barely survived Arthur's attack. Maddux draws a clear connection between the birth of the boy and the nursing of the feathermane in a cave Erma builds for him. Erma digs the cave, which becomes a womb-like shrine, her own artistic creation and outlet. However, Maddux does not humanize the feathermane in a way that writes him as Erma's surrogate child. Instead, the treatment is as a fellow creature that she loves. So, she allows the others to think he is dead in order to keep him safe. The cave becomes a shrine when she discovers a root that looks like "the belly of a woman, rounded, full, and voluptuous" (303). She works to unearth it more and more every day, and discovers the belly is "supported by massive thighs" (305). The cave becomes a shrine, a piece of art to Erma. Maddux writes, "Once the walls of the cave had been only dirt to her, an enemy in fact, to be pushed back, an impediment to safety. Now, beneath her hands, they had come alive, bringing her a joy



she had never experienced” (305). All the while, here she houses her wounded, blind, loving featherman.

This engagement with the kingdom, literally digging out a cave that will nurture her beloved companion, is a complicated interaction between the kingdom and Erma. A simplistic reading could assume that the Green Kingdom is simply maternal. However, it would be problematic to describe it in that way. The kingdom means the end for most of the characters. In the end, only Erma survives. It is only she who has a symbiotic relationship with the kingdom – digging it, making it her art, allowing it to develop her, exploring it, living with it rather than cultivating it, and speaking to it. She inscribes upon the kingdom, and it inscribes upon her. It is not a space of her own, but a space where she can be her own. The Green Kingdom is an “undomesticated space,” “untamed” in a way that stresses its “sovereignty” and “agency” (Alaimo *Undomesticated* 16).

In a conversation later, Justin explains desire to Erma, not knowing of the desire she has buried, is nurturing/festering, inside the land of the Green Kingdom. Certain of himself (something he later recalls as particularly naive of himself), he tells Erma:

“Desire [...] is always in the process of being fulfilled in some manner.[...] All that is necessary is life. If you live, your desires will be accomplished in some way; and, while you live, desire is always being accomplished. The hungers of the heart are always fed, if only upon themselves.” (330)

Given the festering nature of Erma's desires, what she later calls a "hidden, wound-licking process of secret consolation," "the cave of [...] dark despair" (529, 552), his comments about desire being the ends, the satisfaction, ring absurd. Justin continues:

"You must see how it is not the longed-for but the longing that is the powerful force, the real creation. It is not the thing desired but desiring that truly grows. Desire is never constant, never still, never static. Never can it be nothing; and always it is moving." (331)

He later, upon discovery of her shrine, realizes his folly in saying this to Erma. He realizes her longing is not a pretty one, not one to drive, but as she says it, to gnaw. The cave is the scene of important events in the text – Justin, Erma's love, gets sick and confused, is frightened; the other two men die and are buried there; the featherman dies and is buried there; Gwen, her enemy – the only other woman and her antithesis in that she *can* bear children and is a *terrible* mother – seeks gain from Emeralds; Erma mourns, is transformed, and brings to light what she finds here. The featherman is the only male allowed in the shrine, "in a room of lush, gravid female unrest" (340).

Soon after the womb-like structure's creation and Erma's deification of the maternal goddess she unearths, the importance of ritual and place is suggested. Justin has found Erma waiting for an annual flower opening, a fertility ritual she had created, and now she has promised to bring the goddess of her own making some of the pollen. As she collects the pollen, she has "an inkling then of what had happened to her hope, of how it had been translated to ritual: Light becomes darkness; desire made superstition" but she "put the hint of knowledge away from her into another place. Her place was a narrow equilibrium, essential to her life" (320). She is unable to allow herself full

reflexivity at this time. She is weakened by her desire for a child, and Justin longs for her, longs for a closeness to her that he cannot achieve when she is removed from herself. He confronts her, tells her how much he loves her, and she is weakened. He tries to recall her to her strength, saying, "Girl, do you not know there is enough strength in your hands to strangle a man? Why should you cringe from any creature?" (325). Her ritual later sickens him, when he discovers it.

Place, too, is emphasized. Not only is place important in terms of the womb-like shrine, her dug earth sanctuary, but Justin's discovery of it, and her dream of the release of it is, as well. Maddux writes:

How often do we walk alone the pathways of desire and, by the very repetition of the act, believe some fraction of its history to have been shared. How easily do spatial landmarks serve to map the mind's geography, transforming coincidental longings into memory's events.

*Here in this place*, beloved, the lover says, *I long for you*. (316)

Erma imagines being with Justin, apart from the others, apart from the domestication that anchors them, for they are the caretakers of the others. Justin says they should become nomads. He sees the toll that caring for the others takes on Erma and warns her of it. He says to her:

"But make no mistake [...] of thinking that a nomad existence is the same as death. Nomads are different from settlers. No doubt they are less clean. Certainly, they are less comfortable. Their records are inadequate and their music does not seem to grow. But no one ever said that they were less alive than the settlers. That is what you must remember, Erma.

With all your work, you have not made life; you've made comfort. And, if it destroys you, the price of comfort is too high. I would give all my comfort and I would deprive the others of theirs gladly to hear you laugh out loud, just once again, to see you lie down on the ground and look about you aimlessly, with pleasure." (329-30)

The nomadic existence he offers as an alternative is one that they later choose, and the understanding of it that Justin has is complicated. Their later nomadry works as a re-figuration of their identities and the notion of place.

Despite this anthem to Erma, Justin is disturbed by her melancholy, by the secret he knows is eating her, and he seeks to uncover her secret, the one thing that brings her joy, biting though it may be. He follows her to determine what her secret is, and sees her enter the cave. After she leaves, he enters, moved by his desire to know and uncaring of her desire for privacy. Justin's is the first full view of the cave/womb that the reader gets, and its artistry is both awe-inspiring and sickening to Justin. He has already determined that whatever the secret to her melancholy is, it is his enemy. He finds that his enemy is her desire for creation, for a child. That desire has birthed the shrine that, Justin finds, is laden with carved figures of the Green Kingdom's animals, all pregnant. Maddux writes, "Now it could be seen that, in this living lushness, this surfeited abundance, the mossback was in labor and the bellies of all the animals were distended in unbearable crescendo" (340). All of the carvings were restless, "strained under tension, reaching from the wall" (340). Justin is both mesmerized, called toward the undulating figure of the thick-thighed goddess, and sickened. He vomits in the shrine and "that he had defiled her temple and jeopardized her solace did not occur to him at the time" (340).

This encounter with the dirt entombed, carved out goddess – whom Justin refers to as a divinity – leaves him with a knowledge akin to the biblical tale of Adam and Eve. Justin thinks, “Oh, to have back again [the] ignorance of yesterday, [...]. To be innocent of this knowledge—what would he not give?” (341). He wonders how he can face Erma. This serves as mixed allusion to the Christian creation tale of Adam and Eve’s removal from the garden, of their undesired knowledge of sin and of their inability to look upon God, or to be looked upon. He both fears and desires Erma, and laughs to himself at his own ignorance at having spoken so assuredly to Erma about desire. He thinks, “*He* had told *her* that desire was always accomplished somewhere. He had told *her* of the heart’s hungers. How she must have laughed at his innocence,” then realizes that, no, she “had not laughed” (341). Later, Justin even likens the feathermane to either a “monster or a Christ Child,” as he imagines Erma’s cave as a creation. He thinks:

Was not her cave a creation of her own? Very strange he had not seen it as a work of art before. It was without restraint, of course, profligate, overblown. Yet it was native to a land that was without restraint. In the strongest way he had always believed that new creation should not be interfered with, not be dictated. Was her cave, then, to her, the same as his symphony to him? Who was he to say to another, “What you have created is not good, is evil, will bring tragedy”? if this were a valid basis for destruction of art, would not most of the world’s art have been destroyed?  
(353-54)

The creation, artistry, of Erma’s desire is emphasized against the lackluster, twisted mothering of Gwen. She knows her power is in her fertility, to bear the only

natives of the Green Kingdom, and after she has her second child – Kathy – Joe carries the baby to her, and she says “It’s not good to me *after* it’s born” (355). Joe thinks he could forgive her her cruelty if she had just referred to the baby as *she* instead of *it*. Her character as a mother is a complicated antithesis to Erma’s desire and creation. Gwen is a vengeful, overpowering mother, abusive and needy. At one point, she locks Kathy into a corner until Kathy announces her love to her. Her demand for love, her lack of nourishment, and her ability to create life all serve as a complicated foil to Erma.

The cave also houses the deaths of Joe and the feathermane and the near-death and eventual departure of Arthur. Joe finds emeralds in the cave and has Arthur help him mine them there, doing it so that Gwen will want to stay in the Green Kingdom. He wants Kathy, his daughter, to grow up in the Kingdom, knows that it is the place for her, and feels that finding some profit there is the only way to keep Gwen from wanting to leave when the gap reopens at the tenth anniversary. As they mine there one day, the feathermane recognizes Arthur’s scent as the one who tried to kill him. His instinct is to flee, but blind, he doesn’t know how to get out. Instead he gores Arthur. Joe tries to save Arthur, and he is gored as he stabs the feathermane. Joe and the feathermane later have to be buried together, and Arthur has to be nursed back to health and has lost his voice.

All of this moves Erma out of the cave. She feels that the burden of her responsibility in the deaths of Joe and the feathermane are hers to carry, and some sort of contentment rises inside of her at the release of secrecy of the place. Her posture changes, even, as she carries herself straighter, trading the burden of the heavy secret for the acceptance of her role in the deaths. Maddux writes:

And so Erma Herrick was precipitated by the death of her friend – out of the realm of darkness and secrecy into the structures of open light. Thus did she embrace the time of her history and join herself with those who own themselves to be responsible for what they do and able to live with what they are.[...] In these people, this quality is not the accompaniment of sadness, nor is it at war with gaiety. Rather, it is like the air they breathe. (37)

The death of the featherman, of Joe, of her goddess, of the place her desire dug out is a shift for her. It proves to be an important marker in her process of becoming.

In fact, later in the text, she realizes that it was in the cave that she birthed her talent for artistic carving. As she and Justin are travelling later, she carves driftwood, becoming her art and her goddess all in one. Justin watches her and delights in the process of her artistry: “To Justin they were equally fascinating to watch, the carver and the carving, for when Erma would sit back from the carving to study it her own body would unconsciously borrow line from it” (528). And, in a pivotal moment, Justin admires the power and motion of a piece she has finished, a form she says she learned from carving the line of her goddess’ torso in the cave. She asks Justin what to call it, and he tells her it looks exactly like her, that it should be called *Erma*. She smiles, and when he asks what it was she thought to call it, she says, “Oh, a while ago, before you came, I thought what I would call it if I called it anything, and the only word that came was ... was *pride*” (529). This moment is a concrete demonstration of the ways in which she has inscribed the kingdom – carved it here – and been inscribed upon. She has learned from the place as much as she has shaped it, and she is now a reflection of the

goddess whose lines she learned in the womb/cave. While earlier she secretly carved the very land, the roots within it, she has now emerged, been nourished by the kingdom, is triumphant in the ways in which the “undomesticated space” has carved her. This joy and power in her carving also is a reversal of Arthur’s destructive inscriptions, a mining of who she is. This is a move beyond “carving [her] own spaces,” for Erma does not try to make the kingdom hers. Rather, she is in relationship with it, and it intensifies, refines her (Alaimo *Undomesticated* 21).

The Green Kingdom, is, as Justin states, a land of no restraint, and the act of becoming for all of the characters is the lack of restraint on their personalities. In the Green Kingdom, these characters become what they are, what they desire, but they become it fully, without cultural restraint. It is a place of becoming that is negative for some, positive for some. Justin composes his masterpiece here. Gwen degenerates into a bitter, power hungry, unloving woman to her fullest. Erma is consumed by her desire and that desire shapes her. Arthur and Joe are both pulled by their desires to become more of who they are – Arthur’s hopeful discontent becomes just festering discontent, and Joe’s hopeful, persistent love for Arthur and Gwen distorts his sense of right and wrong.

These different events in the womb structure –desire manifested as artistic creation, nurturing of the feathermane, greed to exploit Erma’s place for the treasure it holds, the poetic deaths of the feathermane and Joe, and Arthur’s loss of voice – all distinguish the cave as a place that is integral to the characters and to the Green Kingdom. This womb that Erma creates, thinking she is infertile and acting on her desire to produce, births moments of tremendous change for the inhabitants of the Green Kingdom and is Important to the tale of exploration, desire.



### *6.3.2 Place and Space: Nomadry and Inscription as Potential*

Erma and Justin become nomads when they alone remain in the Green Kingdom. The deaths of Tommy, Kathy, and Gwen, and Arthur's departure, all leave Justin and Erma alone in the Green Kingdom, strangely weighted with their grief and unburdened from caring for others. Tommy sets off to find his dad in the "World" by rafting the river and drowns. Arthur, too, heads to the river, a thing he loves and must explore. His fate is unknown – perhaps he finds a new place in the Green Kingdom, a way out of it, or perhaps he dies. It matters little which of these happens to him; the change of place and the deliberate freeing of Erma are the important things. Kathy is poisoned by a plant as she searches for more emeralds for Gwen, and Gwen, as Kathy holds on to life and is nursed by Erma, hangs herself naked in Justin's home. Somehow, these tragic events bring a peace, a new kind of joy to Justin first, then to Erma. Justin thinks:

Yet no man, wishing for himself a time surrounded and enfolded by tenderness and love, would deliberately seek to make it of such ingredients: a child slowly dying, a woman defeated in her basic beliefs. But of course he had not made it, he who felt now so often like a cello played upon. What had made it, this golden interval in his life? Whence came this sense of boundless time, of the moment's enjoyment spread in all directions? Where had it begun? (494)

In part, the joy comes from self-knowledge, from freed tension. Both Erma and Justin assess their actions in the Green Kingdom, and their history, even their regrets are simplified. Erma wonders why she did not kill Gwen to spare the children, knowing that both the children were driven to their deaths by either a need to escape Gwen or please

her. Erma responds to Justin's acknowledgement that they all waited with the hope that Gwen would change. She says, "But why did we allow ourselves that stupid hope? [...] Why couldn't I have had the courage to see long ago it was a matter of choosing? Why didn't I kill Gwen?" (496). When Justin, who Erma knows would not have had the capacity to kill Gwen as she did, tells her that she simply embraced civilization over the primitive, Erma exclaims to him, "I *am* primitive, I believe in life" (497).

When Kathy dies, Justin wants to leave their settlement and travel through the Green Kingdom. He comes to a full realization of this as he is milking one of their domesticated animals. He pours the milk out and says to the animal, "We don't need it. [...] We don't need milk any more. The child is dead" (509). He thinks to himself:

Let the grain rot in the storehouse. Let the moss grow smooth over the grinding stone. Let the gates of the corral yawn open and abandoned and the hens run foraging for themselves [...]. Let the hearth grow cold. And leave it. Leave it, gladly. For these are the comforts that come at high price and these are the comforts lovers do not need. What we need, Justin thought, Erma and I, what we need is to look on a landscape without history, without demands or memories. (509)

Justin's desire to abandon the settlement and to explore, to become nomadic in the Green Kingdom, is rooted in his grief, his love, and his awe of realization "that they had outlived all the demands on them" (510). So, they travel until Erma craves the comforts of the settlement, and they return to it, restore it, and change it, still nomadic to some degree, moving from house to house as they desire.<sup>4</sup>

The nomadry is not escapist, not a refusal of place or an inability to settle, but instead is an openness to change. The material feminist non-dualistic understanding of place and identity opens up an understanding of nomadry as not the opposite pole of settlement, domestication, but as a movement that is a re-occupation of places. It is a continual returning to places of meaning and mutual transformation of human subjects and the places that they surround themselves with, settle into. Nomadry is not homelessness, but transition. Braidotti asserts that we are nomadic subjects that also inhabit “social and symbolic locations” (*Metamorphoses* 3). Even the notion of nomadic as never-situating is ruptured in the true sense of nomadry as Braidotti understands it. Craig Childs, for instance, writes that the late B.C. and early A.D. Anasazi occupied settlements for a decade or two before moving on, following the patterns of nature (12-13). The Anasazi would return to sites, though. Braidotti’s term *figuration*, “a politically informed map that outlines our own situated perspective,” is important to understanding nomadry as it applies in feminist theory of becoming and in terms of *The Green Kingdom* (*Metamorphoses* 2). She asserts, “We live in permanent process of transition, hybridization and nomadization, and these in-between states and stages defy the established modes of theoritical representation” (*Metamorphoses* 2). That transition and hybridization applies even to our understandings of what nomadry means. In feminist theory, and in *The Green Kingdom*, the term is meant not as an “a-situatedness.” Instead, it is a complex situatedness in which both the nomadic subject and the places they inhabit are re-inscribed. That meaning-making is what defines Justin and Erma’s nomadry as process-oriented, figuration determining, instead of escapist.

Both Justin and Erma earn an appreciation for their love and for the land in their nomadry, and, likewise, in their return to the settlement, they earn a new appreciation for it. They move from one house to the other, depending on their needs and desires. At one point, they move to Justin's cabin to hear the sounds of sunset that he remembered and longed to hear again. They clear the overgrowth from the door, so they can enter, and they re-inhabit the cabin – a place where their love had blossomed and Justin wrote his symphony.<sup>5</sup> It is in the cabin that Justin dies suddenly one night, holding Erma's hand and "with the sound of unwritten music in his ears" (546). Justin's compositions and the journal writing that have continued in the Green Kingdom shift after Justin's death.

Erma is struck dumb by Justin's death until:

At last in a floundering and stupid way she stumbled out of the cabin, aimlessly hoping for direction, for help of some kind. In an awful weariness she leaned against a lacewood tree.

"Justin is dead," she said to the tree.

And it seemed to her that that was what she must do. She must tell the trees that Justin was dead. The trees must know. (548)

In this way, she inscribes onto the land again. Kent C. Ryden writes, "A book is a tree with an education, [...]; taken from the forest, chewed up, and flattened into paper, the tree, studentlike, gets imprinted with all kinds of information, [...]" (xvii). Erma here inscribes the tree like a book, leaving it intact to continue to write her story upon it, to continue to read it along with the rest of the landscape. Like her overwhelming desire inscribed with handmade chisels into the dirt and roots of the womb she created, she now inscribes her grief onto the trees.

She also continues to write the record after his death, and it serves as a more self-reflective, self-reflexive mode of writing than the guttural writing onto the trees. She thinks through her grief, writing:

I have turned to the Record at last for discipline in the hope of finding some help in this terrible confusion that stupefies me. I must come to some decision about the opening. [...] There are Justin's manuscripts, which I must take if I go out, and the Records. (550)

The literal writing of a Record meant for a human audience outside of the Green Kingdom forces her to articulate her grief differently than she does with the trees, with the land, with the animals. Erma continues, "There is no one, no one, to tell me what to do, and my own inner voices, upon which I used to rely so heavily, seem silenced, struck dumb. The animals would help me if they could" (550). Despite the different intended audience, neither the Records nor Justin's manuscripts make it out.

She heads for the opening, planning to leave, to take Arthur's dream of the Records and Justin's dream composition to the outside world. But, when the kingdom opens and she sees the outside world, she is reminded "how brown it was, how, in comparison with the Green Kingdom, it seemed to be burned, hard, alien, and dry," so she stood looking out, and "at last the clear inner voices spoke to her" (552). She chooses her desire over the dreams of Arthur and Justin. "At last she felt one single, clear desire" (552). She turns her back on the opening and begins to head toward home, leaving the cart and with the Records and Justin's symphony inside the Green Kingdom near the opening:

She wanted to move freely, easily, confidently, even to run, in a full embrace of this beautiful land.

For this was her home. Where you have lived for ten years in the riches and fullest experience of your life; where crumbles the cave of your dark despair, defeated; where stands the house that you have made yourself out of a wilderness; where lie the ashes of your beloved: there is your home.

In the green silence Erma paused and looked about at the rich and beautiful land. In her grief she had been blind to it, and now, by her choosing and her embrace, it sparkled once again in all its richness. [...]

(552)

It is in this moment of embracing the kingdom that Erma feels a quickening, realizes she is pregnant. In awe, she seeks forgiveness from the land for doubting her own fertility. She finds strength in the land, thinking, “There was the land about her, with all its riches of life, which she had loved and chosen, and learned to live with” (556).

Erma’s decision to remain and to leave the cart inside the kingdom could be critiqued as an invalidation of the better life in the Green Kingdom because it defines the utopian convention of the protagonist sharing the news of the utopia with the mainstream world; however, such lack of evangelizing is not uncommon in feminist utopian literature. In fact, the progenitor of the genre, Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*, questions the effectiveness of bringing news of alternatives to the new world. In *Utopia*, Raphael, the visitor who shares his experience in Utopia, shares it only in provoked conversation and states his disinclination to propose the alternative lifestyle to European kings. He states, “[...] we neglect the best examples [our forefathers] have left us; but if something better

is proposed, we seize the excuse of reverence for times past and cling to it desperately” (8-9), and later states, “[...] I suspect it will be a long time before we accept any of [the Utopians’] institutions which are better than ours” (30). He commends the Utopians’ willingness to learn, to continue to improve, and cites it as the primary reason they are a better society. So, the convention of a utopian protagonist’s responsibility to deliver news of the alternative world is not a necessity to the genre, though it may be a convention developed later. In fact, the writer’s telling of the alternative world is often delivery enough.

Though, even *if* evangelizing is a utopian tradition, it is a tradition that many feminist utopias break from. The very nature of new utopianism’s focus on process and questioning instead of blueprinting means that what the utopia entails for the traveler is not necessarily a product with which he or she can return to the mainstream world, but is instead a way of being. That way of being in feminist utopias is focused on individual identity and subjectivity. For Al-Ith in Lessing’s *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*, for instance, the conversion experience is one for herself, one that cannot be evangelized. Though others visit her, the utopian process is an opening of boundaries, not a replacement of A with B.

In fact, the agency of place and the process of identity would be problematic to proselytize. They are individual acts of discovery. This is a breaking away from old patterns, a birth *into* the Green Kingdom, even the very womb of its land. The Green Kingdom is not a social blueprint, an invention imbued with cultural values, that can be placed elsewhere. It is a place, meaningful on its own, that is neither escapist, nor a *tabula rasa*. It is agentic, a place of individual discovery and questioning. It is a place

that allows process self discovery. Erma's conversion is the point in which she realizes she has her first clear desire – to stay. Her thought, “There was the land about her, with all its riches of life, which she had loved and chosen, and learned to live with,” is an understanding of the kingdom as a place she chooses to exist with (556). It is not a transportable, salable notion in this context. Her communion with the place is not a product to evangelize.<sup>6</sup>

The potentiality of herself, of the land, creates in Erma a peaceful, hopeful, exuberance. She knows that “the life that she bore within her would have the chances, the gamble, the promise and potentialities that cherished, valued life asks everywhere” (557). And, she finds comfort and joy that she is in a land of fruitful potential and full of a growing life. Maddux writes,

So Erma sat, quietly waiting for the hot tea for which her tiredness hungered. And if the river cannot pity and the earth cannot know compassion, she could perhaps do without these things. For had she not, after all, been singularly blessed to have known that the land of her heart's desire does exist, that it had accepted her as she had chosen it, that it had given her love so that she might give it new life? Was she not, like the Green Kingdom itself, privileged to be a component of death's most formidable enemy: a condition of potentiality? (557)

Erma's negotiation with the land, her refusal to heap upon it human traits, and her ability to find beauty in the unpredictable power of potentiality is an acceptance of process over product. She desires a chance, movement, possibility. She knows it is not a given. As the only remaining member of a group of five adults and two children, she certainly



knows that. But, she is happy to have the chance, to continue to grow. As the tea kettle boils, Erma reaches for it. Maddux writes, “It was a simple, deliberate movement, the one most characteristic of her: a movement of answering, a movement of response” (557).

This responsiveness from Erma and the Epilogue to the text continue the movement, the process of potentiality. In the short epilogue, the reader learns that Arthur has made it out of the Green Kingdom and has found Max, one of Justin’s friends. Arthur tells him that Justin has written a new symphony. In excitement, Max thinks, “There is more, [...] More. In that place. There is a new one waiting. And it is mine to seek” (561). This movement beyond the final pages of the texts, the assumption that the Green Kingdom continues to draw others with the desire it incites makes the text ambiguous, process oriented.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

Doris Lessing’s 1980 *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five* concludes with an opening, a redefining. Lessing writes:

There was a continuous movement now, from Zone Five to Zone Four. And from Zone Four to Zone Three—and from us, up the pass. There was a lightness, a freshness, and an enquiry and a remaking and an inspiration where there had been only stagnation. And closed frontiers.

For this is how we all see it now.

The movement is not all one way—not by any means. (245)

That same opening, osmosis, is emphasized in the texts analyzed in this chapter. In *The Unpredictable Adventure* and *The Green Kingdom*, Owens and Maddux highlight process

and exploration over product, foretelling feminist utopian and science fictions of the 1960s and 70s. This study of the ways in which these texts both forecast and contribute to later fictions and theories through notions of exploration and process redefines the 1920s-1960s as a dynamic period in utopian and science fiction, contrary to past assertions.

The exploration and process these texts deal with not only anticipate later texts, but anticipate material feminism. These texts have not been given their due credit, in fact, because of the materiality they advocate. Engaging with the material risks the imbalance of essentialism, understanding biology as deterministic. Material feminism, though, engages with both the material and cultural and allows understandings of such connections as expressed in Alaimo's "trans-corporealities," opening sites of questioning and uncertainty. Alaimo and Hekman write:

Such uncertainty requires risk, to be sure, as the specter of essentialism continues to haunt feminism. We think the risks are worth taking, however, since the emerging body of thought we are calling "material feminism" promises, bold, provocative, and potent reconceptualizations of the material terrains of our shared worlds. (17)

That risk and reconceptualization is necessary to feminist identity, to identity in general. *The Unpredictable Adventure* and *The Green Kingdom* are truly explorations in that way – travel outside of mapped knowledges. Material feminism enables the reader to bask in the questions these texts pose.

Though the texts I mention in this chapter, including the endnotes, are the most rich for study in terms of process and exploration, eight others during this period also

emphasize these themes in some way – Leslie F. Stone’s 1929 “When the Sun Went Out,” Vassos’ 1930 *Ultimo*, Rand’s 1937 *Anthem*, Martha Marlowe Morris and Laura B. Speer’s 1938 *No Borderland*, Elizabeth Garver Jordan’s 1940 *First Port of Call*, Cyril M. Kornbluth and Judith Merrill’s 1952 *Outpost Mars*, Wolf’s 1953 “Homo Inferior,” and Leigh Brackett’s 1955 *The Long Tomorrow*. While a greater majority of the texts are not as easily definable as process-oriented, this number is enough to warrant a re-examination of the era, as I will establish further in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 7

### A (NON) CONCLUSION

The 1920-1960 period of women-authored utopian and science fiction deserves attention. Far from a lull in the fields, this era is fruitful and dynamic. My argument is that, first, the recovered texts in my bibliography mean that the 1920- 60 period is rich in women-authored utopian and science fiction; second, many of these texts address issues that feminist theorists did not articulate until the 1970s; third, this means that we must reassess the ways in which we think of the period, utopian and science fiction, and feminist theory; and fourth, the issues these texts address are especially apparent through a material feminist frame. As I assert in chapter two, the texts in this period, especially with the frame of emergent material feminism, promises an exciting re-evaluation of women's literature, science fiction, utopian fiction, and feminist theory. Understanding the ways in which many of these texts prefigure the feminist science fiction and utopian texts of the 1960s and 1970s redefines these fields of literature. Material feminism – which seeks to emphasize the connections among science, culture, nature, and bodies – is a particularly suitable theoretical framework for a study of women's utopian and science fiction because of the intersection of such elements in these fields of writing. Material feminism addresses the importance of materiality and women authors of utopian and

science fiction from 1920-60 were overwhelmingly concerned with material conditions, such as reproduction, labor, environment, sexual relationships, and sciences.

Emphasizing the importance of materiality of the body and nature enables rich readings of these texts, in large part because of the ways in which asserting the interconnectedness of materiality inherently deconstructs dualisms.

In Chapter Three, I argue that the women authors of utopian and science fiction in the 1920-1960 era empower “otherness” by deconstructing binaries. In so doing, they contend with the notion of a centralized “norm” and embrace diversity and “becoming,” forecasting such feminist theorist Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, and Donna Haraway, as well as later feminist utopian and science fiction authors. The subversion of utopian and science fiction tropes of alien/other destabilizes norms and complicates sexual dichotomies by representing females as aliens, hybrids, mutants, and sexual others. This is also done through interesting narrative constructions, including “cross-dressing” and through alien critique of Earth ways to challenge the notion of “natural” or “normal” gender and sexual constructions (Donawerth).

I extend the argument of empowered others in Chapter Four by contending that Ayn Rand’s heroine Dagny Taggart is an androgynous “other” that continues to disrupt feminist readings. She is complicated, problematic, messy, and she is also one of the most influential female characters of the twentieth century. For these reasons alone, she is worth studying. I argue, though, that she is a feminist figure. Rand addresses the material body – sexual relationships and labor – as well as androgynous otherness through Dagny and complicates sex/gender roles. In so doing, she takes part in a feminist

dialogue about materiality by creating a strong female character who is sexual and successful in the labor market.

In Chapter Five, I assert that some of the texts in the early and mid-century period of women's utopian and science fictions question the ways in which technoscience and nature intersect. Many of the texts I study in the chapter are warnings against scientific hubris and some are warnings against an all-out distrust of science. Carol Emshwiller's 1959 "Day at the Beach," Sophie Wenzel Ellis' 1930 "Creatures of the Light," Margaret St. Clair's 1951 "Age of Prophecy," and Leigh Brackett's 1955 *The Long Tomorrow* show the interconnectedness of technoscience and nature in ways that foretell the later feminist writings of such theorists and feminist science critics as Evelyn Fox Keller, Donna Haraway, and Sandra Harding, among others.

In Chapter 6, I argue that the authors of *The Unpredictable Adventure* and *The Green Kingdom*, emphasize process and exploration, prefiguring feminist utopian and science fictions of the 1960s and 70s. The ways in which these texts disrupt what has been currently argued about the period in both fields of literature is an important case for the dynamism of the period. They not only prefigure later feminist fictions, but they also forecast (and are best revealed by) material feminism, enabling "bold, provocative, and potent reconceptualizations" (Alaimo and Hekman 17).

## **7.1 An Honest Assessment**

This study has opened my eyes to the breadth and depth of texts that women during this period were writing in the fields of utopian and science fiction. The historical moments in which these socio-political texts were situated – from women's right to vote, through the Great Depression, changes in the distribution and use of birth control, World

War II, the Cold War, the call for women *to* the workforce and *out* of it, through the beginning of the activism of the 1960s – would be enough to warrant a re-reading with new feminist theoretical lenses, especially material feminism. But, the texts themselves, not just the socio-political desires they address, also warrant scholarly attention. Certainly not each individual text is aesthetically pleasing or ripe for theoretical framing, but many are. The ones I addressed in this study are only a handful of those that I would have liked to address. In fact, some in this study have become my own new personal favorites, and I am excited about the possibilities the era offers. For aesthetic, historical, and theoretical reasons, the texts in this period deserve a re-examination from the scholarly and reading community.

Like Dagny Taggart, this body of work simply cannot be ignored, despite (or rather *because* of) the incongruities, disruptions inherent in them. Not all are pleasant or rich reads. Some are downright boring. At least one of the texts – Berenice V. Dell’s 1925 *The Silent Voice* – is disturbingly racist and anti-feminist. But even these reflect a dialogue about women’s place in the world – figurations of gender – that cannot be ignored. And, because of the didacticism among texts in the utopian and science fiction fields, they both respond to and provoke response from other texts. Many more than I have been able to give detailed time to in this dissertation, though, are worthy of study, offering rich sites of inquiry about such issues as communism, disembodiment, the space program, and lay science. Like Dagny these texts defy definition and demand attention.

## **7.2 “The limbless body”: Figuring Reasons for Dismissal**

The general disregard of the 1920-1960s era in women’s utopian fiction and science fiction of the era may be due to a number of reasons. First, my recovery and

recompilation of the texts here could have impacted the understanding of the era.

Certainly, almost doubling the number of texts considered in the utopian genre makes a difference. It is important to note that though I discuss the texts in this study as utopian and science fiction, I do not address texts that are not utopian in some way. I simply consider it important to look at the conventions of both modes of literature. Research for this study in a digital age of research has been immensely helpful. Not only have I had the luxury of emailing such scholars as Lyman Tower Sargent and Lucy Sargisson, in addition to working closely with Kenneth Roemer and Stacy Alaimo, I have also been able to search databases and communicate regularly with archivists and booksellers via email. I cannot overemphasize the importance of such capabilities in a study like this, and I assume – hope heartily – that more and more texts will surface as more people study the period.

Also, because of the smaller cache of texts in previous studies of this period and the presumably material-shy definition of feminism (though she does not explicitly define feminism), Carol Kessler, the leading bibliographer, considered it a lull. Kessler's assertions that "after 1920, women's writing of utopias declined until 1960" and that "the passage of Amendment 19 apparently *lulled* women into thinking that all needs could now be met" must be reassessed given the larger store of recovered and compiled texts (xxv). In addition, Justine Larbalestier argues that the years 1926-1973 in science fiction are "absolutely crucial to the formation of contemporary feminist science fiction, and yet very little critical work has been undertaken on the period," citing sexism within the field as one of the many reasons (2). In addition, Kessler claims that only eight of the thirty five utopias she found during this 1920-60 period are feminist, though the emergence of



material feminism invites new study. While Kessler does not explicitly define the feminist definition she uses, it is seemingly a postmodern feminism that assumes a discursive-material dualism that material feminism disassembles. Because of her high regard and expertise in the field, most scholars focusing on women's utopia, defaulted to her assessment of the era. Likewise, Brian Attebery points out some of the subtle subversion that women authors utilize in the "diaper" science fictions, meaning that without a finely-tuned reading, the texts could be overlooked as non-feminist or anti-feminist.

Also, the emergence of material feminism is, in part, responsible for the reassessment of the period. The protagonist Maggie in Judith Merrill's 1948 "That Only a Mother" imagines her baby Henrietta as whole, despite her missing appendages. She is so taken with the child's genius – her ability to speak at a four-year-old level at only a few months old and her ability to sing by the time she is seven months old – that she dismisses the fact that Henrietta has no limbs. The reader can assume that the dismissal is probably one of two things. Perhaps it is an intentional overlooking of the complication, meant to protect the baby from its father, given the fact that patricide goes unpunished in a world of multitudes of nuclear-deformed babies. Perhaps it is self-protective, Maggie convincing herself that everything is "normal." The text seems an apt metaphor for imagining why the 1920-1960 era of women's utopian and science fiction has received little attention. It is easier to avoid a period of literature that may be problematic. But, avoiding it is not seeing it for what it is – not seeing its full, if different shape. And, just as Henrietta's genius may have offered a new type of potential, so does

this period of literature, but it must be dealt with in all of its complication, all of its difference, all of its materiality.

### **7.3 A New Paradigm: Material Feminism's Impact**

Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman write that the material turn in feminist theory is an emergent “paradigm for feminist thought” and that it is “a necessary and exhilarating move for contemporary feminism” (10). Material feminism is, in fact, one of the most important contributions to the re-valuation of the women-authored utopian and science fiction texts from 1920-1960. A feminist theoretical framework that revels in the complexity of the ways in which bodies and the natural world are addressed in conjunction with culture and science is imperative to fully articulating these texts. With the frame of material feminism that explores “the interaction of culture, history, discourse, technology, biology, and the “environment,” without privileging any one of these elements,” the richness of these texts and their contribution to feminist theory and the feminist utopian and science fiction of the 1960s and 70s becomes more evident (9).

By building on postmodern feminisms' focus on the linguistic, reconstituting the body, and opening up dialogues about the interconnectedness of the human body and the natural world, material feminism “promises bold, provocative, and potent reconceptualizations” of not only the “material terrains of our shared worlds,” but also of this era of women's writing (Alaimo and Hekman 17). Postmodern feminists have contributed to feminism by asserting that culture and language impact women's bodies by conceptualizing “woman.” The shying from the material – both bodies and the natural world – that resulted was a defensive move meant to combat essentialist equations of woman with nature and other such simplistic dualisms. In combating essentialism,

though, the linguistic-material dualism remained. This happened at the same time that women's studies became more popular in the 1970s. The emergence of material feminism allows, for the first time, a critical look at the texts from 1920-1960.

The material conditions that incite utopian writing must be studied because they lead to the ethical and political changes that utopian and science fiction seek to bring about. Utopian fiction offers what should be and science fiction offers "what could be," and those assessments refer in large part to material conditions (Roemer *America* 6-7). Alaimo and Hekman assert about the politics of, "Material feminism opens up new ethical and political vistas, as well. Redefining the human and nonhuman has ethical implications: discourses have material consequences that require ethical responses," and "Practices are, by nature, embodied, situated actions" (7). Understanding the material implications of these texts is imperative to understanding their worth.

Opening up these texts with a material feminism framework also enables an interrogation into their complications and the process of feminist theory and fiction. While such complications are challenging, they are fruitful. Rosi Braidotti's commitment to asserting the complexities, interconnections, and changes of life fit with the feminist utopian texts' assertion of process. Braidotti writes, "If the only constant at the dawn of the third millennium is change, then the challenge lies in thinking about processes, rather than concepts" (1). She explains the difficulty of that task: "[...] [I]t is far simpler to think about the concept A or B, or of B as non-A, rather than the process of what goes on in between A and B. Thinking through flows and interconnections remains a difficult challenge" (92).

The potential of such inquiry is clear, though. Frances Bartkowski draws a connection between some pre-1920 texts and later 1960s and 1970s texts in *Feminist Utopias*. Additionally, Jane L. Donawerth and Carol Kolmerten note that there is indication that “continuity [...] exists between feminism of the 1920s and the 1960s and 1970s” (11). Given Bartkowski’s assertion that feminist utopias “tell us as much about what it is possible to wish as they do about what it is necessary to hope” and that “they are tales of disabling and enabling conditions of desire,” giving attention to the texts during the largely unstudied 1920-1960 era is especially important, is an “archaeology of the future” (Bartkowski 4; Le Guin *Always* 3).

I consider this study an opening. While I culled a variety of sources, I by no means imagine that there are no other women-authored utopian and science fiction texts from 1920-1960 out there. There may well be. My hope is that this study will assert the importance of re-assessing this period and open up additional inquiry. Like Erma in Maddux’s *The Green Kingdom*, I think, “And there is more, [...]. More. In that place” (561). If there are not more texts, then there are more avenues of study, more complications to interrogate. Study of the era is an important step in feminist theory’s process of becoming. Emphasizing the material may be messy at times, but it is necessary. Braidotti writes about her book *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*:

It reads like a road-map, marking idiosyncratic itineraries and paradoxical twists and turns around a number of central ideas, hopes and yearnings [...]. It is a map that draws the trajectory of changes, transformations and becomings. [...] This is a book of explorations and risks, of convictions

and desires. For these are strange times and strange things are happening.

*(Metamorphoses 10)*

Those words seem a fitting way to end my study – a way of imagining a continuation and participation. My study is part of the process – an assertion that the 1920-1960 period of women’s speculative fiction is valuable, particularly *because* it is idiosyncratic, paradoxical, risky, and strange.

## Annotated Bibliography<sup>1</sup>

Bailey, Alice A[nn]. *The Immediate Plans*. New York: New York Unit of Service. 1937.

A non-fiction assertion that the spiritually and intellectually strong should unite to heal the world to protect from war and disaster. A universal spiritual oneness is the solution to the world's impending ills. Similar to her earlier publication, *The New Group of World Workers*.

---. *The New Group of World Workers*. New York: Author, 1932. Essay

calling for men and women who can transcend some of the material ills of the world, come together in a telepathic/spiritual community to help heal mankind.

Warns of destruction coming, if something isn't done to avoid it.

Barber, Elsie Marion Oakes. *Hunt for Heaven*. New York: Macmillan, 1950. A historical fiction romance about Pastor John Bliss's intentional community Kingdom of God in response to the Haymarket Riots. The community fails because of members' desire for profit, but outsider Dan (bent on ruining the good name of the community because he is paid by a businessman who wants the community's land) is converted to their kindness. In the end, though the community has ended, Rebecca (Bliss' daughter) and Dan fall in love.

Barnhouse, Perl T. *My Journeys with Astargo; a Tale of Past, Present and Future*.

Denver: Bell, 1952. Three entrepreneurial young men – two who are veterans and owners of a ranch – build a rocket and land on Perfecto. The planet is loosely

described and not without struggles, but one protagonist falls in love there and sees the planet as holding promise for Earth.

Ben, Lisa. "New Year's Revolution." *Vice Versa: America's Gayest Magazine* (Los Angeles) 1.8 (January 1948): 2-11. A role-reversal utopia in which a misogynist anti-gay male character who has physically attacked a lesbian couple ends up in a world in which gay is the norm and straight is considered odd. He is persecuted for his heterosexuality, and the end leaves the question as to whether it was a dream or not. Important in imagining alternatives, giving lesbian women visions of acceptance, and giving heterosexuals visions of an alternative life. Satire.

Borgese, Elizabeth Mann. "For Sale, Reasonable." *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* 17.1 (July 1959): 70-73. Written as a "want work" ad for a human who is trying to compete with machines. The writer of the ad notes the pros of using a human who can continue gathering knowledge, is more flexible, is less expensive, etc. Interesting in terms of body and technology.

Brackett, Leigh [Douglass]. *The Long Tomorrow*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1955.

Post-atomic era of anti-technology, anti-city. The young male protagonist, raised in a New Mennonite community as is almost everyone else after cities have been declared evil, desires a place of science and technology that he hears about. He sets out to find it, only to find that it, too, is riddled with problems. Ambiguous ending...escapes the technological city only to be forced to go back.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer. "The Climbing Wave." *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* 8.2 (no. 45) (February 1955): 3-55. This short story/novella follows a group of space explorers who are return to earth to find that the planet has moved

back to rural/simplified life and uses science only to help. They are not dependent on it, and consider it a tool for their discretion. They live without it in their daily lives. The captain of the ship has a difficult time accepting this.

Gender equality among the explorers, but a more conventional approach to gender in the simplified, supposedly more philosophically evolved Earth.

Carlton, Mary Shaffer. *The Golden Phoenix*. New York: Vantage Press, 1958.

Set in 1960. First Person female narrator who, along with her son, is the first to contact an alien vessel that lands near their home. The aliens ask the mother and son to visit their home planet, Veda, and with the full consent of the U.S. government, they leave to find out more about the alien life. The planet is presented by the narrator as a salvation for Earth.

Case, Josephine Young. *At Midnight on the 31st of March*. Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin, 1938. Ambiguous. Something happens in the world, and a small town is isolated. They create a self-sufficient community. It is a utopia for some and a dystopia for others. Lives are rearranged based on a new set of priorities.

Cleghorn, Sarah N[orcliffe]. "Utopia Interpreted." *The Atlantic Monthly* 134 (1924):56-67, 216-24. Four interpretations set in the future, describing how the future present utopia came into existence. Cleghorn's interpretations are modern in their use of environment as an active agent, in their multicultural/global views, and in their gender non-biases, as well as science/art intermingling. Rich for study.

Clingerman, Mildred. "Mr Sakrison's Halt." *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. 56 (Jan 1956): 36-44. A young female narrates her memories of visiting family in the south. She recalls tells story of an older woman who rides the train regularly



to find her lost love whom she left at a mystical stop. The utopian stop, not one in a town that anyone knows of, is racially equal and park-like. In the end, the woman finds it again, though few believe the story.

Curtis, Betsy [Elizabeth M.]. "Tempress of Planet Delight." *Planet Stories* 5.12 (May 1953): 4-31. Dystopia. The male protagonist is an interplanetary Sears salesman. On Delight he discovers that there are essentially three types of beings...human(like) beings, zombie-like beings (who are just displaced people that are being punished for not filling out part of the enormous amount of paperwork on the planet), and ethereal beings. The protagonist falls in love with an ethereal being during the revolution that the ethereal beings are advocating. Interesting in terms of communist critique.

Dardenelle, Louise. *World Without Raiment, A Fantasy*. New York: Valiant, 1943.

A tale of a young girl who is kidnapped by a wealthy man who has taken a liking to her, escapes to a nudist colony. Because of environmental changes, the whole world is eventually nude. Equal sexual relationships. Disjointed and sensational. Utopian.

DeFord, Miriam Allen. "Throwback." *Startling Stories* 27.3 (October 1952): 65-72.

Dystopia set in 2952. No natural reproduction allowed, and the female protagonist has purposefully tried to get pregnant because she loves her long-time mate and wants a child without seeking permission. When he and the government find out she is pregnant, they conspire to force her to have an abortion and spend a short time in a mental ward. Interesting and rich in terms of gender fears.

DeForest, Eleanor. *Armageddon; A Tale of the Antichrist*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,

1938. Set in California for first half, then Palestine the second half. Twin Jewish sisters Isabel (good) and Jezebel (bad) are raised by their uncle, a rabbi who believes in Christ. Jezebel runs away to Hollywood and bears Ivan Sikorski's child (he has raped her). All the characters are coincidentally in Jerusalem at the same time in the last half of the novel. Sikorski is the antichrist who has Europe under his control and begins killing Jews. In the end, he and Jezebel and their son all die. The utopian ending is heaven on earth with Christ on his throne as in Revelations.

Dell, Berenice V. *The Silent Voice*. Boston: Four Seas, 1925. A highly racist, sexist novel set in 4000 A.D. in which a land run by women and non-Aryans is at war with the exiled Aryans. The Aryan nation eventually traps some of the non-Aryans in a state-sized stadium in Arizona. The novel advocates women staying at home as the way to heighten civilization. Supposedly Christian doctrines used to support the racist and sexist revisions.

Ellis, Sophie Wenzel "Creatures of the Light." *Astounding Stories of Super-Science* 1.2 (February 1930): 196-220. A handsome, intelligent scientist is approached by another scientist to take part in an experiment, bettering humans thousands of years beyond the present. He has used electricity and "Life Force" to create an Eden in the Antarctic where he speeds up life and makes healthier, stronger, six-sensed humans. One of his creations is bent on destroying the world. The whole of Eden is destroyed in the process of saving the world. Interesting in terms of science and nature, reproduction, and perfection as stagnancy.

Emshwiller, Carol. "Day at the Beach." *Fantasy and Science Fiction* 17.2 (Aug 1959). A family in a post-nuclear catastrophe United States sets out for a day at the beach. The juxtaposition of a familiar family outing with the abnormal surroundings and circumstances creates an uncanny portrait of post-destruction that acts as a warning against nuclear war. An interesting dystopia.

Ferber, Edna. "A Few Things Altered or Abolished." *The Nation* 126.3282 (May 30, 1928): 609-10. Critical utopia or anti-utopia. A one-page installment of a series on changing the world. Ferber's "wish list" of changes is random – marriage, work, no cars, but no real plan for any of it. She makes it clear she does not believe in the notion of dream worlds.

Gazella, Edith Virginia. *The Blessing of Azar, A Tale of Dreams and Truth*. Boston: Christopher, 1928. Part sentimental, part utopian, this text has a number of gothic elements, including several strong female characters. Set on a ship, then Europe, then in the U.S. Main female character owns the land (in the American west) where she and others build an intentional community. Female protagonist draws strength from the wide, untamed landscapes, and the men in her life are suppressed by it. Fairly progressive in terms of race and gender.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "Applepieville." *Independent*. 103 (25 Sept. 1920): 365, 393-95. An essay on how to improve the lives of rural women. It has cooperative development as a key point for shared work among women.

Irving, Minna. "The Moon Woman: A Tale of the Future." *Amazing Stories* 4.8 (November 1929): 746-54. Short sketch of a man (Bellamy-like) who tests his suspended animation serum on himself, is duped by his colleague and left

“suspended,” until he is rescued by a winged woman of the year 3014. Utopian romance.

Isham, Mary Keyt. “Moonward.” *Moonward and Other Orientations*. No Publication Information. 1-23. Short, fairly vague text about exploration to the moon. Earth is overcrowded and polluted, and the plot focuses on the effects of bodies in space. Little is said of the moon itself.

---. “Reductio ad Absurdum.” No Publication Information. *Moonward and Other Orientations*. 36-40. A critique of radical socialism, the narrator gives a first-person account of visiting a foreign city in which regulations had been lifted in the name of equality. The focus is entirely on traffic and the fact that allowing delinquents to drive has created chaos for responsible citizens.

Johnston, Marry Ann. *Sweet Rocket*. New York: Harper, 1920. Female protagonist abides with her love on a mystical, utopian property. The characters seek a oneness in the universe through disembodiment.

Jones, Alice Eleanor. “Created He Them.” *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* 8.6 (49) (June 1955): 29-37. Really powerful short story dystopia with a female protagonist. The setting is post nuclear war with an invasive, overarching central government, bad economy, children often born deformed, and bad environmental issues. Ann verges on hating her brutish husband, but they have a unique gene combination that allows them to have normal children. Healthy children and babies under three (before the government takes them to be raised in a facility) are such a rarity that the women in the neighborhood barter with Ann to hold her children.

---. "Life, Incorporated." *Fantastic Universe*. (April 1955): 59-74. An Earthling lands on a serene, telepathic utopian planet that values life and community. The earthling begins a black market for life tags – the only currency the planet uses – and his flooding the market with counterfeits creates a devaluation of life. He is asked to leave. The text deals with the issue of human fault ruining utopian society.

Jordan, Elizabeth Garver. *First Port of Call*. New York: D. Appleton-Century. UK ed. London: John Long, 1940. A young heiress, Maxine, is on a plane that crashes into the ocean, and she awakes with several of the other passengers on an island where all of their physical comforts are taken care of but they have to watch the events of their lives played out for all to see. A sense of peace pervades the island once the inhabitants become relaxed with the unknown of their situation, soon realizing this is the first "port" of death. Maxine chooses to work things out in the past – in her life – not in her death, so she is eventually revived. The ending finds her resuscitated after four hours of CPR. She begins loving others, sharing her money, and doing good. The working out in the after life is seen as a progression. This island is the first port, but others follow. It is a kind of purgatory but without the physical discomfort.

Joseph, Marie G[ertrude] Holmes. *Balance the Universe, or The Heavenly Abode*. New York: Hobson Book Press, 1946. A non-fiction plan for a better world. Much of it is focused on controlling natural resources, classifying workers, forcing birth control, and the like. It is scattered – some of the plans for improvement are vast, such as making the world under one government and killing all dangerous sea creatures; others are minute, such as moderation in drinking and building a

protective wall on all oceans so that people are not swept out to sea. Though presumably meant as a utopian proposal, to most contemporary readers, it is a frightening prospect in terms of how the environment is to be utilized solely to benefit humans.

Kayser, Martha Cabannē. *The Aerial Flight to the Realm of Peace*. St. Louis: Lincoln Press, 1922. Unknown narrator. Vague, disjointed description of a hot air balloon journey to another world that is a peaceful, Christian utopia.

[Kornbluth, Cyril M. and Judith Merrill]. *Outpost Mars*. By Cyril Judd [pseud.]. New York: Abelard Press, 1952. Set in a Mars cooperative colony in the midst of capitalist colonies, this story follows a male doctor. It opens with the birth of a baby on Mars – a baby that has mutated to breathe Mars air and communicate telepathically after many failed pregnancies for the couple on Earth. The baby is stolen by evolved elfish martians who are trying to save his life. The few references to Earth show it to be a depleted planet.

Loutrel, Anna Gregson. *A Constitution for the Brotherhood of Man: The United Communities Bill, and How It Came to be Written*. New York: Greenwich Book Publishers, 1957. Presented as a nonfiction historical account of the writing of a community's bill. Recounts mostly the author's family and their part in writing it. Meant as a way to save people from the Depression.

Loveseth, Margaret. *Man at the Crossroads*. San Jose, CA: The Rosicrucian Press, 1948. Utopia in which spiritual oneness and telepathy connect all humankind. Male protagonist/narrator and female mentor/guide. The narrator is called to inhabit an idyllic setting in the Eastern hemisphere and guide mankind to evolving

into more loving, peaceful beings. The tale presumes humans have multiple lives. This is a post-war novel seeking harmony and peace, a fairly common theme in post-war utopias.

Maddux, Rachel. *The Green Kingdom*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957. A group follows a map to find a utopian kingdom. They find it inside a mountain, and are enclosed in it – the kingdom only opening to the outside world once every decade. The members' endure psychological and physical struggles as they accept the Eden-like surroundings that offer both lush goodness and harshness. Some thrive; some deteriorate. Only one woman survives and chooses to stay in the Green Kingdom. One man escapes and shares the news about the kingdom, though he is not a convert himself. Rich ambiguous utopia.

Martin, Dorothea Knox. *Yucay: A Romance of Early Peru*. San Francisco, CA: Suttonhouse Publishers, 1941. The opening political setting in Peru is utopian, turning to dystopian when an evil brother takes over and begins torturing Peruvians. The Spanish are represented in a complex way...both as saviors from the barbarity of the dictator and as pillagers of Incan land and wealth. The narration is by Yucay, an Incan princess whose beauty is the cause of all of the bloodshed. Men fall in love with her over and over, and her beauty and grace are powerful instruments, though conventional for a woman. She finds escape in marrying a Spanish knight whom she ends up loving. Well written and interesting. Largely romance, but with interesting utopian/dystopian elements.

Martin, Prestonia Mann. *Prohibiting Poverty: Suggestions for a Method of Obtaining*

Economic Security. New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1932. A non-fiction plan for a communism that does not disregard religion. The author calls it National Livelihood Plan and argues that there is no need for poverty in the U.S. Argues that individual production of basic necessities is wasteful and that these could and should be provided communally. Also, work should be mandatory after school for both genders, freeing women from economic slavery that leads to reproductive slavery. Argues that creating a schism between working women and reproductive women is bad eugenics.

McCarthy, Mary Therese. *The Oasis*. New York: Random House, 1949. Anti-utopian text in which an intentional community begins its descent when it determines to use force to prevent a poor, non-community family to stop picking strawberries from the community's garden. The plot does not follow the community's demise, but anticipates it through the unraveling and hypocrisy that the use of violence means to the community.

McElhiney, Gaile Churchill. *Into the Dawn*. Los Angeles: Del Vorse, 1945. An interesting utopia presenting a post-death/separate consciousness in which the female protagonist pilot "dies" and then is reunited with her pilot lover to improve the world. Telepathy and spirituality are remedies to the world's ills.

Meek, Doris and Adrienne Jones. [Gregory Mason] (pseud.). *The Golden Archer*. A *Satirical Novel of 1975*. New York: Twayne, 1956. A family resides in their own anarchic utopia in the midst of a dystopian theocratic rule in U.S. Set in 1975, it has a plot about a murder. Absurdist style with potential for complex interpretation.



Merril, Judith. *Shadow on the Hearth*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1950. A

Westchester county housewife deals with the ramifications of an Atomic attack in NYC. Some of the text is eerily like 9/11. Except for a scene in the hospital, a few pages in the maid's home, and a few pages of the husband's stream of consciousness-like escape from Manhattan, the entire novel is set in the home of the protagonist. She cares for her two daughters – one of whom is fifteen and forced to become a woman (she takes over duties her mother can't mentally handle). Several men come to the rescue of the women, and the text ends with the eventual return of her husband, though the ending is dangling. She is constantly in search of her husband, wanting someone – a man – to help her, and being borderline victimized and eternally saved by men.

---. "That Only a Mother." *Astounding Science-Fiction*. (June 1948): 88-95. A part-epistolary first-person short story in which a mother worries about her baby, given the rise in physically altered babies due to nuclear contamination. She is relieved that her baby is advanced – speaking and singing before she is a year old. When the father returns, the reader learns that the baby is limbless. The text ends with the father possibly killing the baby. Dystopian warning against nuclear arms and scientific hubris.

Moore [Kuttner], C[atharine L]ucille]. *Doomsday Morning*. Garden City, NY:

Doubleday, 1957. A has-been male actor in a U.S. dictatorship is called upon to put on traveling plays in the rebel-controlled California of 2000. He does not know why, and he becomes a rebel himself and handles the defeat of the

centralized government by the end. Interesting in terms of use of bodies, resistance to domination, and environment.

---. "Greater Glories." *Astounding Stories*. (Sept 1935): 88-95. 111-29. The male protagonist is shipwrecked on an unmapped "island" that is inhabited by a race that has chosen to become a collective "Self" in order to achieve happiness – a task that would be impossible without sacrificing the individual to the collective. The being still has not determined how best to create a world and speculates. The protagonist becomes part of the collective for love, but his material body remains. Critical utopia.

---. "Greater Than Gods." 1939. *The Best of C.L. Moore*. Lester del Rey, ed. New York: Ballantine Books, 1975. 159-97. A comparison of two different futures – one ruled by men, and one ruled by women. Neither is acceptable. Though gender qualities are simplified, it is a text similar to later feminist texts in many ways. Dystopia

Morris, Martha Marlow and Laura B. Speer. *No Borderland, a Novel*. Dallas: Mathis, Van Nort & Co., 1938. Two male archaeologists are in trouble and led to a safe mountain-top city by an angelic woman. While in this "paradise," they learn that these inhabitants are descendants of Atlantis and that they have lived out the same love rivalry through many lifetimes. The text offers an interesting notion of individual and human process that includes multiple lives, variously gendered. Interesting notions of materiality, spirituality, and human ability to change.

Nielsen, Helga. *Deep in the Sky*. New York: Exposition Press, 1955. In this dystopia, a

male pilot lands on a post-monarchic, science/technology laden planet with a social system that punishes those who commit crimes and errors such as copying art, attempting murder, and marrying before regulated. Those who are imprisoned can choose to benefit society and pay off their “debt” by submitting to scientific experiments. The men on the planet are domineering and cold, and prostitution is allowed, but the women find the earthling more pleasing than their own men. The protagonist is sent forcibly back to earth because of a love rivalry.

[Norburn, Hope Robertson. *Lord Lollypop; A Timely Allegory*. New York: Exposition Press, 1952. Allegorical poem about the need for inner changes instead of outer changes to the world.

Norris, Kathleen [Thompson]. *Through a Glass Darkly*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957. Male protagonist first half, female second (though female protagonist is the focus even in the first half). Moves from “better” afterworld that is still not heaven, not the final world, back to dystopian current world in which female protagonist is born into poverty, circumstances work against her, she is pregnant and unwed until a man that has always loves her marries her. Feminist issues, if not outright feminist.

Owens, Claire Myers Spotswood. *The Unpredictable Adventure: A Comedy of Women's Independence*. 1935. New York: Doubleday. Reprint edited by Miriam Kalman Harris, Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1993. Tellectina is a free-thinking child who grows into a free-thinking teen, at the prodding of her aunt Sophistica. She questions God and tradition, and sets out to explore the untamed land of Nithking (Thinking), a land outside of her native Err. She explores the land, questions, and

eventually comes to her goal – Mt. Certitude – where she realizes it is not what she thought. Reality returns her to Earth a changed woman. The allegorical ambiguous utopia is a denial of tradition, religion, and marriage and an embrace of finding truth in oneself.

Palmer, Lucile. *Lovers in Mars*. Los Angeles, CA: Sargent House Publishers, 1954.

Dystopia. Young anti-marriage lovers from Earth volunteer for an experimental trip to Mars. There they discover a controlled civilization with multiple-person marriages and scientific breeding. They eventually escape back to the traditional love notions of Earth, taking over the bodies of an Earthly married couple.

Perkins, Violet Lilian and Archer Leslie Hood]. *The Melody from Mars*. By Lilian Leslie [pseud.]. New York: Authors' International Pub. Co., 1924. Vague depiction of interplanetary relationships based on musical communication. Also an exploration and colonization of a utopia inside the earth called the Electric City.

Pettersen, Rena Oldfield. *Venus*. Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1924. A Venutian mother and daughter land their spaceship on earth and spend time with a family. They are telepathic and use electricity for most of their innovations. The two women invest time and education into a woman, believing that she will set a new standard for Earth women. They share with her visions of past lives and educate her in all that she is meant to be. Despite all of the progressive ideas of women, the messianic figure is not the woman, but a son born to her.

[Pratt, Inga Marie Stephens]. and [Murray] Fletcher Pratt. "A Voice Across The Years." By I.M. Stephens [pseud.] and [Murray] Fletcher Pratt. *Amazing Stories Quarterly* 5.1 (Winter 1932): 2-73. Utopia with male narrator and all male characters. An

alien from an advanced planet lands in northern New York. He and the human narrator escape to space and explore inhabited planets. The alien's home planet is supposedly gender equal (though all pictures are of male aliens). Life is better there, so the narrator sends his memoir to earth.

Rand, Ayn. *Anthem*. London: Cassell, 1938. Rev. ed., Los Angeles: Pamphleteers, 1946.

A first-person narration of a male protagonist who is a member of a socialist state. No independence is allowed and the society is stunted and stagnant because of its strict, absurd adherence to equality. The protagonist escapes, discovers individuality, and plans to begin a new world in which each human is able to achieve his or her best. Hopeful dystopia (or critical utopia – one could read the extreme shift from community to individuality as ominous).

---. *Atlas Shrugged*. New York: Random House, 1957. Dagny Taggart

protagonist of a capitalistic/objectivist tale in which the thinkers of the world go on strike against the masses that ride their coat tails. Dagny is a strong female character who blends notions of body/spirit and pride in her body in ways open to feminist interpretation.

Roy, Lillian Elizabeth. *The Prince of Atlantis*. New York: Educational Press, 1929. A

protagonist in a dystopian Atlantis studies a past utopian Atlantis to discover why the civilization was lost. The utopia was one in which gender, spirituality, and nature were in balance. Human evil destroys this balance, and the earth is an agent of divinity to readjust. The protagonist discovers that the Atlanteans again face an imminent purging of evil much like the biblical account in Revelation.

They must find a new homeland. The implication is that the new Atlantis is America.

Short, Gertrude. *A Visitor from Venus*. New York: William Frederick Press, 1949. A wartime female pilot crashes and discovers a cabin with digital recordings of the last inhabitant – a Venutian woman sent to earth to study it. Venutians are intrigued with how the women of earth suppress their power and hide their intellect. They forecast that Earth will be better off when women take part in its policies, something they will have to do without men's warrant. Uses comparison of utopian Venus to show Earth's gender flaws.

Sterne, Emma Gelders. *Some Plant Olive Trees*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1937. A historical fiction about a French intentional community of racial equality that tries to make a free state of Alabama but meets with resistance and fails. The government does not give the settlement land. The end of the text leads to another attempt in a different location. Nature a force in it, as is "civilization." Progressive critical utopia.

Stone, Leslie F[rancis]. "The Conquest of Gola." *Wonder Stories* 2.11 (April 1931): 1278-87. Rpt. in *New Eves*. Ed. Janrae Frank, Jean Stine, and Forrest J. Ackerman (Stamford, CT: Longmeadow Press, 1994), 31-42. Told from the perspective of an alien, matriarchal planet invaded by the third planet from the sun, Detaxal. The women of Gola are at first simply annoyed with the ugly appearance, barbaric minds, and annoying demands for Gola to become part of a trade federation. When the Detaxals destroy one of the cities, though, the women kill all but 32, who they keep for slaves and for autopsies. The ones who remain begin a

- revolution with the subordinated males of Gola, and hordes of Detaxals again attack Gola. The women of Gola easily use their minds to overpower the Detaxals. The women win this second battle and others that follow, until the Detaxals learn that they are no match for the women of Gola.
- . "The Great Ones." *Astounding Science Fiction* (July 1937): 75-89. A hopeful dystopia in which eugenics favors body over mind, leading to a giant, violent, imbecilic race of humans who prey on a smaller, smarter tangent of the race. Civilization has disintegrated because of the lack innovation and intelligence, but the short story ends hopefully. The tale warns against stagnancy and homogeny.
- . "Letter of the Twenty-Fourth Century." *Amazing Stories* 4.9 (December 1929): 860-61. A fictional letter written from one friend to another in the twenty-fourth century. The author of the letter explains his discovery of twentieth-century writings about the future and awes over the sexist and racist fears, among other things. He wonders what the writers of the texts would think of the *real* twenty-fourth century with no nations, atomic energy, and universal education.
- . *When the Sun Went Out*. Science Fiction Series No. 4. New York: Stellar Publishing Co., 1929. Hopeful dystopia with gender equality. The sun goes out as part of a natural cycle, so people are forced to abide underground. Open ending with possible romance and desire for change.
- St. Clair, Margaret [Neeley]. "Age of Prophecy." *Future Science Fiction Combined with Science Fiction Stories* 1.6 (March 1951): 26-43. In a post-nuclear apocalypse, a young male with prophetic talents becomes a cult leader in a city and seeks to wipe out the remaining scientists who have caused the scourge. The protagonist

finds out he is a product of science and the grandson of a great scientist.

Ambiguous hopeful ending.

---. "Brightness Falls from the Air." Original publication date and place? *The Science Fiction Century*. New York: Tor, 1997. 161-65. A critique of inter-planetary colonialism in which a male protagonist falls in love with a native alien. He tries to help her people, but she dies before he can assist her. Dystopia with a strong critique of racial inequality.

---. *The Green Queen*. New York: Ace 1957. An ambiguous text in which a female is trained to act as a sort of messiah to the lower class to keep them from revolting. In the midst of this, she actually becomes messianic before losing faith in the end. An interesting read for feminist interpretation.

Sutton, Paralee Sweeten. *White City: A Novel*. Palo Alto, Calif.: Palopress, 1949. A female explorer and her childhood male friend discover a utopian community, a sort of Garden of Eden. Its inhabitants use telepathic communication and have no monetary system. Not exceptional except for the female explorer.

[Thompson, Harriet Alfarata Chapman]. *Idealia; A Utopia Dream; or Resthaven*.

Albany, N.Y.: Lyon, 1923. A female narrator visits a peaceful establishment and finds it is a sort of help house for those who cannot care for themselves. The home grows its own food and is communitarian. Women's roles are fairly conservative – women who choose to do so, clean the rooms of those who can't clean their own. Men do other work. Some dress reform for women. Utopia.

Vale, Rena M[arie]. *The Red Court: Last Seat of National Government of The United*



*States of America, The Story of the Revolution to Come*. Chicago, IL: Nelson Publishing Co., 1952. A fictional journal of a communist party administrative worker. This text begins with a protagonist (first person female) who is pro Communism at the beginning of a Communist revolution in the U.S. before her faith in the party disintegrates. She comes to see Democracy as the proper form of government and, in the end, gives her life to help the Democratic rebels (led by the man she loves who no longer trusts her). The journal follows the deterioration of the U.S., with civil liberties stripped, fraud wars declared to kill the courageous men, and a forced isolation of the elite communist court from their families.

Dystopia.

---. "The Shining City." *Science Fiction Quarterly* 1.5 (May 1952): 10-48. Follows a male protagonist leader, Thor, of one of the highly scienced U.S. cities. His son, Leonard, is a rebel leader, fighting for the rural, "primitives." Thor is loyal to the government instead of his son and his home (he is from a rural area) and reluctantly sides with those who want to use the land and the people for their "science." Leonard kills Thor in the end, as Thor comes to warn him that he has okayed the annihilation of the revolutionaries. Interesting in terms of eco-feminism.

Vassos, Ruth. *Ultimo: An Imaginative Narration of Life Under the Earth*. New York: Dutton, 1930. An inhabitant of the interior of the earth explains that humans were there because the Earth's surface is in an ice age. The narrator, presumably male in the text's illustrations, narrates the change leading to the move to the interior, then the boredom and oppression of being in the trapped. The narrator volunteers

to go on an expedition to another planet to determine if it is habitable. Hopeful dystopia.

Wolf, Mari. "Homo Inferior." *If Worlds of Science Fiction* 2.5 (November 1953): 43-76.

Set in the future, a human without telepathic qualities is considered an inferior anomaly and eventually seeks to find rumored others like him in the hills. He finds three women, one of which is his age, and he and she escape the stagnant utopia together in an antiquated rocket. They desire progress and change.

[Wright, Mary Maude Dunn]. *The Brain of the Planet*. By Lillith Lorraine [pseud.].

Science Fiction Series No. 5. New York: Stellar Publishing Co., 1929. This short text is about a male scientist who, after learning that telepathy is a reality, decides to create a machine to force people to be kind to one another and seek the common good. His thoughts are the ones that will rule the world toward evolution until they are so used to a better way of life out of habit, that he can destroy his machine and let man use their own minds. It works and a Golden Age is built in which there is a world-state, fewer working hours for all, and common good.

---. "The Celestial Visitor." By Lilith Lorraine [pseud.]. *Wonder Stories* 6.10 (March 1935): 1190-1207. The protagonist from an ideal world longs for struggle, is bored, so visits Earth. He is dressed in classic Greek attire, is mocked, goes through a trial on Earth, frees prisoners, and leaves with the judge's daughter.

---. "Into the 28<sup>th</sup> Century." By Lilith Lorraine [pseud.] *Science Wonder Quarterly* 1, no. 2: 250-67, 276. 1930. Male protagonist first person narration of being catapulted into the 28<sup>th</sup> century while sailing in the Gulf of Mexico. The 28<sup>th</sup> century is a

realized heaven with athletic and intelligent people, scientific progress allowing almost infinite life and health, and short work days. The people use “thought vibrations” to express themselves, and base their world in both biblical teaching (barely) and psycho-analysis. The post-Socialist government has utilized neurologists to perform surgeries to weed out criminal tendencies. This is a rectification of the socialist system in which the neurologists did “vocational operations” to make each person useful for the vocation he was assigned to. A revolution of the young usurping the old solved this. Gender equality is based on notion that woman has the power to extend “the scope of maternity and the four walls of her home to include the spiritual and intellectual guidance of [the] planet, the home of the human race” (257). Couples petition state if they want to have a child, and a conceived embryo is transplanted from the mother to an incubator.

Wyatt, Geraldine. *Dawn of Peace*. Independence, MO: Harald Publishing House, 1940.

Preface announces that the inspiration behind the text is a mix of archaeology and the Mormon religion...archaeology proving that Mormonism history in U.S. (Hebrews having lived here and Christ’s appearance here) is true. Materialism overcome by spiritual peace. The female protagonist, Dumah, is a poor orphan whom wealthy Ulan falls in love with and marries. He is arrogant about his wealth, but with her help and the help of his parents, discover spirituality. Wealth destroyed and peaceful spirituality and simplicity prevails. Good writing, and Dumah has a special connection to nature, gardening and using her plants (which she sees as agentic) for medicinal uses.

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## NOTES

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### Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> See Brian Attebery's *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction* for examples of male-authored utopias that deconstruct gender in equally important ways. Though many male authors were contributors to the process of feminist discourse, this study will focus on women authors in order to locate desire and hope (or fear) expressed through female authors' voices.

<sup>2</sup> French feminists are important contributors to what is considered second wave feminism, though the French school is certainly entangled with American-originated theories.

<sup>3</sup> Kessler asserts, for instance, that *World Without Raiment, A Fantasy* (1943) is one of the texts of this period for which "feminist values [can] be argued" (xxv). I contend with her assertion that this text – one portraying dime novel-like female victimization and eventual universal nudity – offers more to feminist discourse than the dozens of other books she categorizes as non-feminist.

<sup>4</sup> Peter B. Howard Stuart, owner of Serendipity Books in Berkeley, owns the Stuart Teitler's collection of lost race fiction. Lost race fiction focuses on exploration of or discovery of lost human races. Atlantean lost race fictions are not uncommon. Lost race fiction can overlap with utopian fiction.

<sup>5</sup> Berenice Dell's *The Silent Voice* (1925), for instance, proposes an alternative world for white Americans that critiques a world of women's rights and multiculturalism that Dell sees as a dystopia but that many readers today would view as a utopia. The text addresses issues of female and minority empowerment that other texts of the time period embrace, showing multiple perspectives on the historical moment.

<sup>6</sup> The material feminism that Hayden writes about is *not* necessarily synonymous with Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman's use of *material* feminism, as referred to later in this introduction. The movements and feminisms that Hayden discusses are more closely aligned with *materialist* feminisms. Hayden focuses her study on women who fought for "transformation of the spatial design and material culture of American homes, neighborhoods, and cities" (1). Alaimo and Hekman delineate the difference in these two feminisms in their introduction to *Material Feminisms*, writing, "It is important to distinguish what we are calling 'material feminism' – which is emerging primarily from corporeal feminism, environmental feminism, and science studies – from 'materialist' feminism, which emerges from, or is synonymous with, Marxist feminism" (18). Hayden's material feminism seems to lie somewhere between materialist feminism and emerging material feminism.

<sup>7</sup> Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman define material feminists as those who "explore the interaction of culture, history, discourse, technology, biology, and the 'environment,' without privileging any one of these elements" (9). This is a particularly suitable definition for a study of women's utopian texts because of the intersection of these elements.

<sup>8</sup> Carol Farley Kessler designates 1921-1960 as the weak period in the introduction of *Daring to Dream* (xxv), but in the annotated bibliography in the appendix, she dates the period 1920-1959 (270). To cover the entire range and avoid any confusion, my study will focus on the years 1920-1960.

<sup>9</sup> Kessler's list of 35 for this time period include a British-authored text, taking the number to 34. For the period of 1836-1920, Kessler claims that 104 women-authored utopian texts were published. This averages 1.2 per year and is, she claims, the most fertile period of her study. Using the 75 published works during the 40 year period of 1920-1960 averages out to 1.8 per year, meaning that far from being "lulled," women almost doubled the rate of utopian texts after suffrage was won.

<sup>10</sup> Brian Attebery's *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction* (2002) and Justine Larbalestier's *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction* (2002) are two recent studies that look specifically, as the titles suggest, at gender in science fiction texts and note the impact that Merrill and Moore, among other women, made in the science fiction field between 1920-1960.

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## Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> There is an interesting history of landscapes as female bodies in utopian literature that is not directly applicable to this study but important to note. In “Nudes from Nowhere: Pornography, Empire, and Utopia,” Darby Lewes writes about the connection between the female body and the landscape as places of conquest in the eighteenth-century English utopias *A Voyage to Lethe* and *A New Description of Merryland*.

<sup>2</sup> Hayden’s term material feminism is different from Alaimo and Hekman’s material feminism (see introduction).

<sup>3</sup> Nancy Woloch notes, “By the end of 1946, 2 million women had left the labor force and another million were laid off” (467).

## Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup> At least 32 of the texts from this study were either printed in SF magazines, or published as science fiction, including “Conquest,” *Outpost Mars*, and “That Only a Mother” from this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to note here, though, that several men wrote texts in this genre that promoted feminist issues. *Outpost Mars*, which will be discussed later in this chapter, is in fact authored by a male-female collaboration.

## Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup> Rand denied Kenneth Roemer permission to reprint “The Goal of My Writing” from *The Romantic Manifesto* in his book *America as Utopia*. The reason for the denial was not specifically cited, but it was stated that it was based on the requested material Roemer sent to Rand about the book – the context of the reprint and the text of any comments on her or her work in the rest of the book, among other copyright and reprint issues.

<sup>2</sup> In an MLA International Bibliography search for “Ayn Rand” and “Feminism,” only a handful of articles separate from *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* appear. *The Journal of Ayn Rand Studies* is not affiliated with the Ayn Rand Institute, and a search of “feminism” in the journal’s archives results in zero matches, as does a search of “women.” The one significant book that is dedicated to a feminist look at Ayn Rand’s work is Gladstein and Sciabarra’s 1999 *Feminist Interpretations of Ayn Rand*, which I utilize throughout this chapter.

<sup>3</sup> See Mona Fayad’s “Aliens, Androgynes, and Anthropology: Le Guin’s Critique of Representation in *The Left Hand of Darkness*,” for instance.

<sup>4</sup> Several influential women writers have worked on the premise that male thought is superior, whether cultural or biological. Charlotte Perkins Gilman seemed to express that idea in *Herland*, for instance, but viewed the “rational” male thought as something culture allowed for men. Elizabeth Stoddard wrote similarly in her journals and in her columns, often writing her frustration with the female mind in its trivialities. Despite such statements, both Gilman and Stoddard are generally considered fondly in the feminist community.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Grosz’s chapter “Psychoanalysis and Psychological Topographies” in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* offers some insights from a revised feminist psychoanalytical theory that could be useful here, though my focus is elsewhere for this study.

<sup>6</sup> See Laura Kipnis’ *Ecstasy Unlimited: On Sex, Capital, Gender, and Aesthetics* (1993); and Carol S. Vance’s collection *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* (1984), particularly Gayle Rubin’s “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality”; and Carla Freccero’s “Notes of a Post-Sex Wars Theorizer” (1990), which I invoke in this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> In her “Forward” to the article, Freccero writes, “I transcribed at least three voices in this paper: the first voice would prefer to speak about this topic in a group of women. The second voice is analytical and politically committed to comprehensive revolution, therefore somewhat impatient with the topic at hand. The third voice is that of a listener trying to paraphrase for the one who cannot speak within this text” (305).

<sup>8</sup> Gayle Rubin sees androgyny as an absence of gender, which is not the case with Dagny. Also, Mona Fayad sees androgyny as askew in its “patriarchal desire for wholeness” (70), and Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clement see it as a “fantasy of unity” (84). These are important concerns about the notion of androgyny, but my argument about Dagny means that her use of androgyny is a disruption, though



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arguably a first step in full disruption. Rand certainly envisions a male-female, heterosexual world in her writing.

## Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Fox Keller writes about the historical scientific coupling of nature and religion in terms of how nature was considered the lock box of God's secrets (57-59).

<sup>2</sup> Marge Piercy's 1976 *Woman on the Edge of Time*; Ursula K. Le Guin's 1974 *The Dispossessed* and her 1985 *Always Coming Home*; Doris Lessing's 1980 *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four, and Five*; and Joan Slonczewski's 2001 *Brain Plague* are later utopian and science fiction critiques of and alternatives to war and unmediated science.

<sup>3</sup> As I emphasized in the Introduction, environmental critic Lawrence Buell defines place as "bounded and marked" and defines space as more "abstract, whether literal or metaphorical," noting that "spatial practices – cartography, territorial definition, and land apportionment, for instance – inevitably express the values and agendas of those in charge of them [...]" (145, 147).

<sup>4</sup> See chapter 2, "Empowering 'Otherness': Aliens, Mutants, and 'Others' in Mid-century Women's Utopian/Dystopian Science Fiction" in this dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> Keller uses T.S. Kuhn's phrase *paradigm shift* to explain the change in thinking of the impact of gender is science.

<sup>6</sup> At the same time that science studies have historically universalized the masculine, they have also disembodied the masculine. What is material, what is corporeal has been associated with the female. This is, in part, why material feminism – by encouraging "fruitful conversations between the fields of corporeal feminism, environmental feminism, and feminist science studies" – is a rich framework of study for these texts that question "masculine" science (Alaimo and Hekman 16-17). In the second part of this chapter, I explore how Margaret St. Clair's 1951 "The Age of Prophecy" and Leigh Brackett's 1955 *The Long Tomorrow* show the intersections of the "natural" and techno-science in complex ways, advocating science but doing so with a dose of hesitancy and precaution. The religious cults in St. Clair and Brackett's texts presume to protect what is "natural," but both authors complicate a polarization of science and nature. These texts assert that the positioning of science, technology, culture, and nature as separate is a manufactured stance, that they are much more fluid and interconnected than such simplistic understandings.

<sup>7</sup> Kimmel notes that rodeos and *Playboy* magazine were other outlets that men used to define themselves. *Playboy* actually lauded itself as "a little diversion from the anxieties of the Atomic Age" in its first issue in 1953 (Heffner qtd. in Kimmel 167).

<sup>8</sup> This lay science forecasts many of the material and eco-feminist critics like Vera Conley, Karla Armbruster, Rachel Carson, Barbra Adams, and Stacy Alaimo that stress the connections among science, the natural world and human bodies.

<sup>9</sup> Defining men in such ways – even if by what they were not instead of what they were – also defined women by default, and not just in terms of communism and capitalism, pacifism and militarization. Men and women were also culturally pitted against one another in the workforce, in the home, and in mother-son relationships. When men returned home from World War II, women were urged to return home from the workforce that they had a few years earlier been urged to join. Along with this, came the malaise of the returning veterans and a resultant blaming of mothers. Kimmel notes that some analysts undertook vengeful attacks on mothers in the 1940s and 50s "for virtually every characterological flaw among American men," citing Philip Wyle's 1942 *Generation of Vipers*, David Levy's 1943 *Maternal Overprotection*, and Edward Strecker's 1946 *Their Mothers' Sons*. Kimmel writes, "Strecker, a consultant to the Surgeon General of the U.S. Army, attributed the unmanliness of those rejected by the military to their mothers' overprotectiveness," and Wylie described mothers as destructive angels who rule men by wiles and manipulation" (150-51). Wyle writes, "Mom is everywhere and everything and damned near everybody, and from her depends all the rest of the U.S. Disguised as good old mom, dear old mom, sweet old mom, your loving mom, and so on, she is the bride at every funeral and the corpse at every wedding. Men live for her and die for her, dote upon her and whisper her name as they pass away, and I believe she has now achieved, in the hierarchy of miscellaneous articles, a spot next to the Bible and the Flag, being reckoned part of both in a way" (Wylie 187-88). While some pundits blamed women, mothers specifically, for men's malaise, others suggested ways in which wives could soothe husbands by creating calm domestic environments (Kimmel 148).

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<sup>10</sup> Bernard Shaw's 1921 *Back to Methuselah* also includes rapid-growing babies.

<sup>11</sup> An ancient model of an academy in science in utopian literature is Francis Bacon's House of Solomon in *Atlantis*. Many others exist in utopian literature.

<sup>12</sup> This science versus "non-science" theme is not an uncommon theme in science fiction. Scenes such as advanced weaponry versus more base weaponry can be found in Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s 1959 *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, for example. Marge Piercy's 1976 *Woman on the Edge of Time* addresses the dangers of an unfettered use of science and proposes a thoughtful moderation of science instead.

war going on at the end of the novel is one in which both sides use technological weaponry, though the utopian technology is much smaller scale than that of the dystopian aggressors.

<sup>13</sup> The theme of worlds without science and cities can be found in earlier works, as well, though Brackett complicates these issues differently. Samuel Butler's 1872 *Erehwon* and William Morris' 1890 *News from Nowhere* are examples of earlier similarly themed utopian texts. In *News from Nowhere*, the society recoils from big cities and science.

## Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup> Leslie F. Stone's 1929 "When the Sun Went Out," Vassos' 1930 *Ultimo*, Rand's 1937 *Anthem*, Martha Marlowe Morris and Laura B. Speer's 1938 *No Borderland*, Elizabeth Garver Jordan's 1940 *First Port of Call*, Cyril M. Kornbluth and Judith Merrill's 1952 *Outpost Mars*, Wolf's 1953 "Homo Inferior," and Leigh Brackett's 1955 *The Long Tomorrow* also have protagonists who seek out more, want to explore as a process of improvement. *Outpost Mars* and *The Long Tomorrow* are discussed in previous chapters. In "When the Sun Went Out," Stone writes about a dying sun, resulting in a dying planet. An Ice Age is setting in, and humankind is concentrated in one city. Beyond the detrimental natural changes, humankind is also diminished mentally. The protagonist notes that over reliance on machinery – created by intelligent humans generations before – has retarded humankind. A devolution has occurred, leaving the human race static, with little innovation and intelligence with which to address the problem of the dying sun and impending Ice Age. The severely diminished population has decided to dig underground tunnels to escape the planet's surface. The text climaxes in the moment the sun dies. Despite the suicides that occur at that moment, the text is hopeful, ending with a budding romance between the protagonist (a scientist) and another scientist who plan to begin the process of improving life, either underground or on the earth's surface.

Similarly, in the short, illustrated *Ultimo*, humankind has been forced underground by an Ice Age. The protagonist, presumably male according to the pictures, narrates the change leading to the move to the interior, then the boredom and oppression of being trapped there. The narrator volunteers to go on an expedition to another planet to determine if it is habitable. He expresses, "It will be our inestimable privilege to begin again and fashion the pattern of our lives more to our liking. And above all, we can live close to that nature which must appear there in a far kinder guise, in far gentler habiliments from those in which she cloaks herself for us here. [...] I long for uncertainties, the hazards of that different life. So far has uncertainty, so far have hazard and risk been eliminated from our existence – life stinks in our nostrils like a dead thing... (Vassos). The agency of nature, the desire for uncertainty, and the literal movement from the static, dead life underground to the dangerous exploration of other planets makes the text one that would also fit into this study.

*Anthem* is a hopeful dystopia that moves from a static society that stifles progressive thinking, intelligence, and innovation to a place of possibilities. The opening society is meant to be a post-democracy, it seems. Men and women are forced to be equal to such a degree that the world "I" is unknown. The protagonist, Equality 7-2521, "re-invents" light and faces punishment for trying to stand out, trying to improve life beyond what the council believes it should be. He escapes through the Uncharted Forest to a home that is a remnant of the time before the revolution. With the books in its library, Equality 7-2521 feeds the fire of his desire for change and renames himself Prometheus. He plans to create a new society based on free thinking and individualism and to free those enslaved in the city. The literal movement through an Uncharted Forest is similar to both *The Unpredictable Adventure* and *The Green Kingdom* in that it is a charting of one's own, a process of discovery resulting in creation. The move in the text is away from what is static into a process of improvement.

In *No Borderland*, bodies are in process in complex ways, a type of ungendered disembodiment. The text is set in a mountaintop paradise that is a resettlement of Atlantis survivors. Explorers Brad and Sidney

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archeologists who (re)discover the paradise that they are from in another life. They are lead to safety by the ethereal Zacca, Sidney's soul mate. The land is one in which the material and spiritual await the next step of evolution, movement from to a better world when all of the earth is able to evolve spiritually simultaneously. Until that spiritual progression in unison, earth's inhabitants relive lives, have chances to correct behaviors, and take part in a process of becoming that entails multiple gendered material forms.

Elizabeth Garver Jordan's 1940 *First Port of Call* is a tale of a spiritual and material "stop" after the material life we know comes to an end. The working out in the afterlife is seen as a progression. This first stop, an island is the first port, but others follow. It is a kind of process, reminiscent of purgatory, but without the bad connotations. Travelers are comfortable and take part in a process of self discovery.

"Homo Inferior" also seeks movement over stasis. The text's protagonist is a man who is considered an atavism. Humans have evolved to telepathy, but the main character is an inferior anomaly who has to communicate with words. The society in which he lives is a good one in many ways, but the self-contentedness and stasis marks it as dystopian (or at least a critical utopia). The protagonist finds another woman like him who is living primitively in the forest, and he and she steal an antiquated rocket and leave the earth. Their desire for something different, dynamic – unlike the evolved humans who are so contented they have stopped space exploration, thinking that theirs is the best society – leads them to a process of change.

<sup>2</sup> Donna Haraway and Luci Braidotti, as well as others, famously argue for transgressive identities throughout their works. Most appropriate here are Haraway's "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" in which she asserts that we should take pleasure in our transgressions of identity boundaries and "The Promises of Monsters," in which she asserts the hopeful possibilities of boundary transgression as "changing maps of the world, for building new collectives out of what is not quite a plethora of human and unhuman actors" (110). Braidotti, too, writes, "Becoming is a question of undoing the structures of domination by careful, patient revisitations, re-adjustments, micro-changes" (*Metamorphoses* 116).

<sup>3</sup> In her 1985 *Always Coming Home*, Ursula K. Le Guin's archeologist of the future, Pandora, advises the reader similarly, asserting that despite the tragedy and destruction of life, there is hope that one should take the time to discover (148). Even the name of Le Guin's text is appropriate here, given that Tellectina's eventual journey leads her literally home and that she finds "home" in her questioning journey.

<sup>4</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* also has characters whose societies are nomadic and/or move from house to house, depending on need, event, time of year.

<sup>5</sup> They clear the house with a natural herbicide made from the hulls of clusternuts, one of their foods. Maddux writes, "For the first time they possessed something which, separated from their own hands, removed from them, could kill, could destroy" (542). Erma had eaten the nuts almost religiously in the years before, as she had tried to get pregnant, because Gwen loved them, so Erma equated them with fertility. This new knowledge of the natural herbicide leaves Justin and Erma uncomfortable, though. Justin states, "If you tamper with nature, you never know what forces you're letting loose," to which Erma responds, "I really don't want to tamper. I even dread having the knowledge of the clusternut pile, in a way" (541-42). Justin disagrees, seeing them as easier than "pulling and hacking" to clear their home from vines. There is no indication one way or the other whether or not Erma uses the herbicide once Justin is dead, though her hesitation to use even a natural agent to change the kingdom is meaningful, indicative of the agency she believes the kingdom has and her displeasure in changing it. Overall, Erma creates what Stacy Alaimo calls a "hybrid landscape," one in which "rather than representing the domestic as a colonizing force that tames and contains nature, nature often seems to have imploded into the domestic realm, [...]" (*Undomesticated* 40).

<sup>6</sup> The Epilogue shows that the word about the kingdom did get out and leads the reader to believe there will be more people coming to the land, or at least one. The reader finds out in the Epilogue that Arthur has made it out of the kingdom and, though not a convert, he is a proselytizer to some degree. He finds Justin's friend Max and tells him of Justin's finished symphony in the Green Kingdom, and Max thinks, "And there is more, [...]. More. In that place. There is a new [symphony] waiting. And it is mine to seek" (561).

### **Annotated Bibliography**

<sup>1</sup> I owe a hearty thanks to Alice E. Waters' for her article, "Hoping for the Best, Imagining the Worst: Dystopian Anxieties in Women's SF Pulp Stories of the 1930s." In her article, she brought three important

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texts to my attention as I was completing my dissertation: C.L. Moore's "Greater Glories" and "Greater Than Gods" and Leslie F. Stone's "The Great Ones." They are included in the annotated bibliography.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Bridgitte Barclay Arnold earned her M.A. from Southern Connecticut State University, where she studied twentieth-century women's writing. Her Ph.D. work in utopian fiction and feminist theory culminated in this project, which began as an attempt to create a bibliography of all American-authored utopian texts. Though such a project proved to be too big for a dissertation-length study, Arnold intends to continue in that vein. Her research and teaching interests include the intersections of sciences and literatures, socio-political issues in utopian and dystopian texts, and the recovery of women's texts. Past publications include "'It Began This Way': The Synonymy of Cartography and Writing as Utopian Cognitive Mapping in *Herland*" in *Utopian Studies* and "Louise Meriwether" in *Encyclopedia of African-American Women Writers*.