IT IS A WOMAN'S WORLD:

GENDER POLITICS OF GYNOTOPIAN NOVELS

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IT IS A WOMAN'S WORLD: GENDER POLITICS OF GYNOTOPIAN NOVELS

KADINLARIN DÜNYASI: GYNOTOPYA ROMANLARINDA TOPLUMSAL CİNSİYET POLİTİKALARI

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ÖZET
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KADINLARIN DÜNYASI:
GYNOTOPIA ROMANLARINDA TOPLUMSAL KİMLİK POLİTİKALARI

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Bu çalışmada Charlotte Perkins Gilman'ın *Herland* (1915), Joanna Russ'ın *The Female Man* (1975) ve Doris Lessing'in *The Cleft* (2007) romanları seçilmiş ve toplumsal cinsiyet ilişkileri açısından incelenmiştir. Çalışmada değinilmiş olan araştırma sorularının bazıları "Bu edebiyat türünde toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri; nasıl yansıtılmıştır? Kadınlara ve erkeklere ne tür yetkiler verilmiştir? 21. yüzyılla karşılaştırıldığında toplumsal cinsiyet sorunları açısından ne tür değişiklikler vardır? Bu romanlar yazıldıkları dönemin ve günümüzün toplumsal cinsiyet sorunları hakkında neler söylemektedir?" şeklinde olmuştur.

Bu tezin ilk bölümünde romanlara ilişkin önbilgi verilmiştir. Ütopya, distopya, feminist ütopya ile distopya ve gynotopia romanları hakkında örnekler verilerek açıklama yapılmıştır. Ardından gynotopia romanlarında görülen toplumsal cinsiyet ve feminizm temaları, önemli düşünürlere, görüşlere ve dönemlere değinilerek açıklanmıştır.

Birbirini takip eden bölümlerde, seçilmiş olan romanlar, yazarın eser içindeki varlığı, anlatı öğeleri ve çeşitleri, toplulukların sosyalleşmeleri, politik yapılar, eğitim, üreme, aile yapıları ve toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin temsili açısından incelenmiştir. Sonuç bölümünde de romanların karşılaştırmalı çözümlemesi gynotopia roman türünün geneline bakılarak ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: gynotopya, feminist ütopya, toplumsal cinsiyet temsili.

ABSTRACT
MASTER THESIS

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In this study, three examples of gynotopian literature from modern novel, *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Female Man* (1975) by Joanna Russ and *The* Cleft (2007) by Doris Lessing, are examined in terms of gender relations. Some of the research questions in this thesis are "In what way the gender roles are represented in gynotopian literature? What kind of power is given to women and men? In comparison to the 21st century, what has changed in terms of gender issues? What do these novels say in terms of gender problems of their time and current gender problems?"

In the first chapter of this thesis, the theoretical background behind the novels is presented. Definitions of utopian, dystopian, feminist utopian and dystopian, and gynotopian literature are exemplified and examined. After this literary background, the aspects of gender studies and feminist movements that are seen in gynotopian novels are also specified with reference to prominent thinkers of relevant ideas and periods.

In successive sections, the chosen novels are studied in terms of the writer's influence on the work, autobiographical nuances, narrative perspectives and varieties, socialization within their communities, political structures, education, reproduction, family structures and representation of gender roles. In the end, a comparative analysis of the novels is given with reference to the genre of gynotopia in general.

Keywords: gynotopia, feminist utopia, representation of gender.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY STUDY GYNOTOPIA?

This study is concerned with gynotopian literature in general and three novels in particular: *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Female Man* (1975) by Joanna Russ and *The Cleft* (2007) by Doris Lessing. Gynotopian literature encapsulates narratives in which the societies are female only and shows utopian as well as dystopian characteristics.

The novels in this study are chosen because they are spaced apart in significant points in the 20th century. *Herland* dates back to the beginning of the century when the Darwinist ideas were still vibrant in intellectual and social platforms. The fact that Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a self-proclaimed feminist activist played a major role in choosing *Herland*. The second novel, *The Female Man*, is written (1970) and published (1975) at the height of Second Wave Feminism in the United States. Therefore, it is charged with an abundance of radical energies that prove to be useful in exploring gender problems. As Gilman, Russ also identified herself as a feminist. The third novel in this study is *The Cleft* by Doris Lessing which aims to portray a creation myth taking place in a remote past; however, it may actually be indicating the status of gender relations of the 21st century.

There are some common points that bring these three novels together thematically. First and foremost, all three novels portray a community of only females who are self-sufficient, community-driven and competent. However, the peaceful and harmonious state of female communities' lives is shattered when they get into contact with male communities or individuals. This disruption brings in the issue of gender common to the three novels.

When choosing this topic, several questions come to mind: In what way the gender roles are represented in gynotopian literature? What kind of power is given to women? How do the male communities threaten this power? What measures do the women take to resist the threats? To what extent do the women have freedom? What are the messages the writers are trying to convey, if any? Are these messages consistent with the convictions of the authors? In general, what do these novels say in terms of gender problems then and gender problems now?

The relation of utopian dystopian literature with gynotopian narratives will be briefly discussed in addressing these questions. The question of gender will then be taken up in relation to the text under study. Certain perspectives of feminism (humanist feminism, ecofeminism, radical feminism, separatist feminism and gynocentric feminism) that can be clearly observed in gynotopian literature will also be brought into discussion in so far as they shed light on the particular texts under scrutiny.

CHAPTER I

UNRAVELING GYNOTOPIA

A. The Utopian Novel

As a literary term, "utopia" was coined by Thomas More in his book *A Fruitful and Pleasant Work of the Best State of a Public Weal, and of the New Isle Called Utopia*, shortly *Utopia*, published in Latin in 1516. Two of the various aspects of utopias are exemplified in the word's playful nature; it is both a "good place" and a "no place". From this term, thus, it can be deduced that utopia is a positive conjuring of a spatial phenomenon which is not existent in the world that we know of.

There have been many definitions of utopia since More's period. One of the most prominent thinkers in utopian genre is Lyman Tower Sargent. He defines utopia "as social dreaming – the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live" (3). The dystopian part of this social, and political, dreaming is also further defined in his article "Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited" as a society that is intended to be viewed as worse than the one in the author's reality. Furthermore, he defines critical utopia as the depiction of a society that seems better than a given contemporary society but with challenging problems and the narrative takes a critical look at the utopian genre (9).

While Sargent uses the term utopia as a general and encompassing umbrella term, he posits two directions it can take. Positive utopia (eutopia) is considered to be better than the current society whereas negative utopia (dystopia) represents a society worse than the existing one. However, the difference is not as straightforward as it looks at a first glance. Utopia is unreachable and it becomes problematic even while

one is dreaming it since realizing the dream will require enforcing it through totalitarian and autocratic regimes. Utopias based on the dream of ideal societies are by definition societies strictly organized according to the prioritization of collective utilitarian objectives that are often at odds with individual aspirations.

Generally, utopias reflect the desire for a better world with certain suggestions and configurations. In order to do that, they call forth social, political and economic theories into action. According to Roland Schaer, the first utopias had similar qualities: "abundance, unity, ease […], security," and immortality (8). Furthermore in mythical islands, such as the Isles of the Blest, the Fortunate Isles, Elysium, or the Elysian Fields (8), it is possible to find utopian elements of ease and eternal bliss. But these visions are closer to the Arcadian imagination which rests on the state of nature with its natural, spontaneous connotations of equality, rather than the utopian that organizes a community around strict social rules of regulation.

The ideas of Karl Mannheim can be utilised to support that all utopias are political. He contends that ideology and utopia are intermingled terms; "[b]oth concepts contain the imperative that every idea must be tested by its congruence with reality" (87). What Mannheim defines as wishful thinking is closer to utopian mentality observed in utopian novels. "When the imagination finds no satisfaction in existing reality, it seeks refuge in wishfully constructed places and periods" (184) – finding no satisfaction in their present realities, utopian writers seek to construct new and unobtainable places as social and political criticism of the period in which they live. While doing so they either create or refrain from creating an entirely new, but theoretically identical, *status quo* in order to formulate their new worlds – an action which is directly correlated with ideology at large. So claims Mannheim, utopian thought cannot be free of ideology.

As for Fredric Jameson, “the utopian space” is “an aberrant by-product” of real social space and, therefore, adverse to the normal flow of historical processes:

> that utopian space is an imaginary enclave within real social space, in other words, that the very possibility of Utopian space is itself a result of spatial and social differentiation. But it is an aberrant by-product, and its possibility is dependent on the momentary formation of a kind of eddy or self-contained backwater within the general differentiation process and its seemingly irreversible forward momentum. (15)

Darko Suvin agrees with Jameson when he defines utopia as “the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where socio-political institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis” (49).

All these definitions imply that the utopian ideal cannot escape being contaminated by dystopian elements, or that utopian dreams are constitutive of dystopian nightmares.

B. The Dystopian Novel

The paradox that utopian thought is constitutive of dystopian is often overlooked in the blanket definition of dystopian which considers it the direct opposite of utopian. In dystopian and utopian novels it is possible to observe a totalitarian regime. The writer conjures up a regime which she or he condones is better than the one she or he experiences, and in order to exercise that regime, a rule with an iron fist is needed. In most utopias everything is structured for the individual

by a committee of individuals, which is generally referred to as the state. The citizens of the society cannot stray away from the distribution of workload, properties, etc. This functionalist and totalitarian regime is bound to create a dystopian mirror. In most utopian novels this dystopian mirror is also evident in the narrative. This is also a vicious circle; something goes wrong in the utopia, which transforms it into a dystopia.

According to Tom Moylan, as expressed in his work *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*, dystopian literature is the consequence of a dark vision for which the twentieth century is responsible.

> A hundred years of exploitation, repression, state violence, war, genocide, disease, famine, ecocide, depression, debt, and the steady depletion of humanity through the buying and selling of everyday life provided more than enough fertile ground for this fictive underside of the utopian imagination. (xi)

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1931), George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), Doris Lessing's *The Marriages between Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and Ursula K. Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985) can be listed as examples of the dystopian novel tradition that are inspired by this dark vision.

C. The Feminist Utopian and Dystopian Novels

A typical definition of feminist utopias is given by Sally Miller Gearhart, who maintains that "[a] feminist utopian novel is one which contrasts the present with an envisioned idealized society, offers a comprehensive critique of present values, sees men or male institutions as a major cause of present social ills, and presents women not only as at least the equals of men but also as the sole arbiters of their reproductive functions" (296).

This definition, however, has been subjected to criticism because it leaves out the dystopian aspect of feminist utopias, such as biological determinism, the instrumentalization of the use of the term patriarchy and the pitfalls of androgyny.

Reproductive rights are among the most significant features of feminist utopias and dystopias. The reason behind this theme is that women are marginalized for their reproductive functions. Some people put them on pedestals, glorifying them and at the same time making them dependent and fragile. On the other hand, they are also abused for their reproductive abilities because this valuable trait is not endowed to men. Radical feminists, such as Shulamith Firestone, argue that in order for women to break free from their patriarchal chains, a new form of reproduction should be formulated and reproductive tasks should be taken away from the women's body. It should be the responsibility of a non-human entity. Marxist feminism also takes this issue into consideration. Women do the labour of childbearing and childrearing, on top of housework and professional life, if any. This "unpaid" labour of women, according to Marxist feminism, should not go unrecognized. Thus, reproduction becomes a great issue of feminist utopian and dystopian revisionary works of literature.

There is also the other side of the coin when reproduction is in the monopoly of women, men are unnecessary accessories to reproduction. This frees women from patriarchal oppression but deprives them of the society of man imposing its own political exclusionist ideology such as political lesbianism and separatist feminism favoured by gynotopian narratives.

D. The Gynotopian novel

Gynotopia, as distinct from utopia and dystopia, is still a relatively underrated term whose comprehensive definition is lacking. One definition is that it is a non-existent society which consists of only female citizens. A "gyn"otopia only refers to the sex of its citizens; therefore, it can be a positive utopia, dystopia or critical utopia. Therefore, the idea behind this definition may be described as trans-generic.

Another important point is the issue of family. In *A History of the Family*, Claude Lévi-Strauss stresses his opinions of the family then and now.

> No society, or humanity itself, could exist if women did not give birth to children, if they did not enjoy a man's protection during their pregnancy and if they did not feed and raise their offspring. However, it would be a mistake to seek to reduce the family to this natural foundation. The family appears in very different guises in all human societies. But none of the forms it takes can be wholly explained by the twin instincts of procreation and maternity, by the emotional links that bind man and wife, father and children, or by any combination of their factors. (4)

In gynotopian literature this concept of a nurturing and natural nuclear family is criticized because the concept of family, as Chodorow mentions, subdues women into households and unpaid labour (31).

According to Adrienne Rich, as reflected in her book *Of Woman Born*, nuclear family is at the centre of patriarchy with its concepts of handing down private property (60). She further supports her ideas with that of Frederick Engels who also "identified father-right and the end of the matrilineal clan with the beginnings of private ownership and slavery" (110).

Under the heading of reproduction can be mentioned the questions raised by women who view medical intervention such as "in vitro fertilization, artificial insemination by husband or donor, surrogacy, gametic intrafalloppian transfer, amniocentesis, chorionic villus sampling, foetal ultrasonography, percutaneous umbilical blood sampling and foetal biopsy" (22) as either unnecessary or misogynist. Thus, the argument is that technology does not work for the benefit of the mother or the baby; rather it works for the benefit of the father and the state. That is why many gynotopian novels try out different reproductive models in order to eliminate men. In those novels, babies are happier, they don't cry or need to be comforted because they are not around men, and they are taken care of and loved by women only.

A common feature of gynotopias is a separatist society in which there are no men. A world view that is feminist, as opposed to masculinist, is employed in the fields of science, agriculture, industry and other facets of everyday life. The societies are unavoidably matriarchal – committees of women or individual women are governing the countries and even if men are sometimes allowed to infiltrate, they are not allowed access to the judicial or legislative systems of the country. A brief survey

of some gynotopias will be helpful to underscore some shared aspects of gynotopias before I turn to a detailed analysis of *Herland, The Female Man* and *The Cleft*.

Sarah Robinson Scott's *A Description of Millennium Hall,* written in 1762, was the first real gynotopia ever written. It explicates a pastoral country in which celibate women reside. These women have escaped from the corrupted world in order to spend their days studying and praying. This gynotopia is highly Christian in its themes.

Herland (1915) and *With Her in Ourland* (1916), both written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, are two of the earliest gynotopias. Herland is a remote society, free of men, war and any sort of conflict. There the women reproduce by parthenogenesis and the babies are always girls. In *Herland*, Herland is visited by three men that represent three different perspectives of misogyny and patriarchy. While exploring Herland and learning about Herlanders, all of them get married and one of the man wants to take his wife to his own country. Willing to learn about what his world is all about, the woman accepts the offer. This work lays bare the construction of gender roles and how to define and change them. In the sequel *With Her in Ourland*, the observations of the wife in the United States can be observed.

Written by John Wyndham, *Consider Her Ways* (1956) is the story of a woman who wakes up in the future, in a society where everyone is female who do not know what "man" means. The novel explicates that a virus killed all the men, leaving only the women to reproduce without them.

Joanna Russ has become one of the most celebrated writers of this tradition. Her short story "When It Changed", written in 1969, depicts a planet where a plague eliminates all the men and the women learn to combine eggs to produce the y-chromosome. When astronauts from the Earth arrive at this gynotopian planet, they

verbally attack and insult its citizens. *The Female Man* was written in 1970 as a continuation of this short story. It has four perspectives and, thus, four parallel worlds. They cross over to the other parallel worlds and challenge the relevant gender roles. One of the parallel worlds is similar to the 1970s on Earth; the other has major historical discrepancies. Third parallel world is a female-only utopian society in the future and the last world is a dystopian world where women and men engaged in a physical battle against each other.

Alice Sheldon, asserting the pseudonym "James Tiptree, Jr.", wrote "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" (1976) which received many awards from literary circles. In the story there are astronauts who are lost in space. While trying to reach NASA, they stumble upon a frequency in which all the voices are female voices. Furthermore, these females are offering them help. At first they reject this offer of help; however, little by little they learn that long ago a plague had wiped out humanity, leaving only a couple of thousand people behind who are all female citizens. Women started to reproduce by cloning. In the absence of men, they experience no wars; however, their technology is not quite advanced either (which is, in my opinion, a misogynist point on the writer's part).

Ammonite (1992) by Nicola Griffith is another gynotopia that expands the normative understanding of gender in a given society. The story depicts a female anthropologist who does research on an endemic disease which kills all men who contract it. Similar to most gynotopias, heterosexuality is not compulsory at this locality as well. Actually, most citizens are lesbians.

The Gate to Women's Country, written by Sherri S. Tepper in 1988, portrays an all-female society living in cities fortified by stone walls. Men live in garrisons on the other side of the walls. On certain times of the year there are festivals in which

women and men come together in private rooms and reproduce. The girls are kept in "Women's Country" whereas the boys are given to "Men's Country" to grow up to be soldiers in the garrison. When the boys are fifteen years of age, they have an option to choose in which side to live. There are also people who are banished or who wouldn't prefer to live in either side, and these people live outside the walls of both cities like vagabonds. This series of dynamic interactions compel the standards of gender roles and provides a new perspective.

In Doris Lessing's *The Cleft,* written in 2007, there is a society of women living a carefree and simple life all by themselves by the sea. These women reproduce asexually and they only give birth to female children. One day, however, a male child is born and the women, faced with this biologically different creature, cannot comprehend its difference and name it "monster". They leave these male babies on a faraway rock for the eagles to eat, but eagles carry the male babies to a valley where they can grow, with the help of other animals, and found a society themselves. Their interaction is also full of exploration, fear, anxiety and biological discovery.

What this very brief survey shows is that, it is impossible for a gynotopia to continue being an all-female society. Intrusion and intervention from patriarchy are inevitable. This inevitability creates the major tensions and conflicts of the gynotopian narrative.

CHAPTER II

THE HIS-STORY OF *HERLAND*

From another country. Probably men. Evidently highly civilized. Doubtless possessed of much valuable knowledge. May be dangerous. Catch them if possible; tame and train them if necessary. This may be a chance to re-establish a bi-sexual state for our people. (89)

a. The Writer and the Work

It is important to mention Charlotte Perkins Gilman's career before starting an analysis of her novel *Herland* because her ideas on women can be observed in her novel. Born in 1860 in Connecticut, she avidly participated in social reform campaigns. She was a feminist and a sociologist influenced by many academics that occupied the minds of men at that time; the most important being Charles Darwin. Her life was full of "independence, determination and hard work" (xi) personally and professionally. According to the introduction of her novel *Herland*, Gilman's foremost non-fictional works are "*Women and Economics* (1898), *Concerning Children* (1900), *The Home: Its Work and Influence* (1903), *Human Work* (1904), and *The Man-Made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture* (1911)" (xvi). After writing such critical works, she started to publish her own magazine *The Forerunner* in 1909 (xvi) in which *Herland* had been published periodically before being published as a novel in 1915. Her most important fictional works, apart from *Herland*, are "*What Diantha Did* (1910), *The Crux* (1911), and *Moving the Mountain* (1911), *Mag-Marjorie* (1912), *Won Over* (1913), *Benigna Machiavelli* (1914), and *With Her with Ourland* (1916)" (xvi).

According to Lyman Tower Sargent, *Herland* stood as an important model

for feminist utopias; however, even though it was serialized in 1915, it wasn't published until 1979. Written in 1915, *Herland* is a gynotopian novel that depicts a society of women living secluded without men. In the novel three men, Vandyck Jennings, Terry O. Nicholson and Jeff Margrave go on an expedition to an uncharted territory about which they have heard rumours of women living together in the absence of men. After petty speculation and disbelief, they proceed to their destination of discovery. They are instantly caught and imprisoned by strong and agile women of this strange land. There they lead a comfortable life in which they learn the culture of Herlanders. This learning process becomes the "cognitive estrangement" (as coined by Darko Suvin in his work *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*) for both parties in that both are amazed at what they are hearing about strange lands and unravelling the world as they experience it. The three different men represent three different notions of femininity; accordingly they make three different marriages. Terry's misogynistic manners lead to the end of his marriage and he is consequently banished from Herland. Having to escort Terry home, Vandyck takes Ellador to his country as well – an occasion that signals the sequel *With Her in Ourland* (1916).

b. Narrative Perspective

The narrative of Herland is performed by Vandyck; therefore, represents a male point of view. This means Herland is rendered through "male" naming and depiction. The procedure of naming starts when the guide calls the land "Woman country" (7). "Herland" is a name the men give to the country after saying it is a form of "Feminisia". "Ladyland" (12) is also another name proposed by Terry, who

is the misogynistic character of the novel. Vandyck, the narrator, states that their tour guide makes a mystical remark by saying "No place for men – dangerous. Some had gone to see – none had come back" (7). So the mysterious Herland stands for the three curious men as something to conquer. Sargent argues that the fact that Gilman chooses to describe her matriarchal society through the perspective of male adventurers is an effective satire (52) as it exposes the shortcomings of the male mind to understand a female society.

As expressed in the first sentence of the novel ("This is written from memory" [3]), the reader places her trust in the memory of the narrator, who is soon to be recognized as a male adventurer. Memory is a tricky subject in that it may subconsciously choose what it wishes to remember. It is further expressed that the men had "mapped" the abode of women but lost the map together with Vandyck's notes. This heightens the unreachability of the narrative which is there to undermine the male perspective.

In the first paragraph of the novel, the male perspective of language and domination can be clearly seen in that men are the mappers of the new world in front of them. Their attitude to the new geography is one of exasperation. The dystopian mirror of Herland's utopia can be observed in the men's situation.

> "I'm sick of it!" [Terry] protested. "Sick of the whole thing. Here we are cooped up as helpless as a bunch of three-year-old orphans, and being taught what they think is necessary – whether we like it or not. Confound their old-maid impudence!" (35).

Although the three men are in a considerably good condition in Herland, they cannot overcome their feelings of frustration. They are allowed to explore the new geography and yet they feel imprisoned. That is because they are diverted of their

power to conquer and command which is their expectation from exploration. Terry is the man who feels the pressure of this failure of masculinity the worst: “as the weeks ran into months, he grew more and more irritable” (35). His contempt for the ways of Herland can be observed in all of his spoken discourses.

c. Intertextuality

There are numerous allusions to literary and mythological narratives in the novel. First and foremost in the social commentary Gilman provides through the discourse of the venturing men and Herlanders can be correlated to how Hythloday comments on the misgivings of his own society in More’s *Utopia*. Through Hythloday, More conveys his own commentary on England, and Gilman does so for the United States. Another important allusion is to that of Plato’s *Republic*, in which the education of the guardians (the future adults of the state) is of utmost importance. Similarly, in *Herland* education of the children and the children themselves are at the centre of the being of Herlanders.

Herland can clearly be considered as a land of Amazonian nature. The capable women of Herland live without men in their remote land, and they don’t even need the help of men in terms of reproduction. The lack of male input in the reproductive paradigm sets women free in the sense that they don’t require men’s assistance in order to lead and enjoy the freedom of a space that they own.

There is a river that separates Herland from the rest of the world. This is but a mythological allusion to River Styx which separates the world from the Underworld, or the Hades. Thus, Herland is portrayed as a hell for masculine outlook. The river’s evasive nature as opposed to the sea can also be seen as a warning for the male

adventurer s who are about to conquer it. There are also swamps and tangles of wood along the way which further signify the river as a warning to the men.

The first section of the novel is named "A Not Unnatural Enterprise" which signifies the idea that it is natural for men to venture into the spaces of women in order to command, conquer and colonize. During their journey, men are referring to the women as "savages" reminding the reader of a convention in colonial literature. The men's colonial pursuit is initiated by Terry who says that they should go ahead and venture into Herland. "There was something attractive to a bunch of unattached young men in finding an undiscovered country of strictly Amazonian nature" (7). This attraction may come from the fact that the colonial enterprise was already an honoured tradition in the period when the novel was written. Terry states that the women might be fighting among themselves, and no order and organization would be found (10). He also guesses that the women would be clueless about technology and progress. Jeff, on the other hand, thinks that the women's land would be a land of peace and harmony. Vandyck mediates between these two opposing views by this more balanced approval. Terry, the embodiment of colonizing patriarchy, thinks that he could become the king of Herland.

Gilman is clearly influenced by the ideas of social Darwinism. The Darwinian survival and the celebration of the fittest connected to Gilman's racial politics in the novel. Furthermore, the women of Herland attribute their difference in character, despite originating from the same mother, and appearance to "law of mutation" (78). The debate of nature and nurture is prevalent throughout the novel. Another important point is that, Herlanders only allow the most virtuous and worthy women to become mothers – an aspect that supports Gilman's ideas on eugenics. All these point to the dystopian contamination of this land presented as a utopia.

d. The Ways of the World

Unlike many gynotopian novels, *Herland* does not have a separatist state. The women do not politically and critically separate themselves from the men. According to the history of their land, as given throughout the novel, most of the men died of natural causes. Nature itself left Herlanders stranded on the piece of land they possess. Vandyck reflects his view about Herland and its formation as a kind of "Maternal Pantheism" (61) in that what they hold dear is, more than a monotheistic divinity, nature and motherhood. Furthermore, it cannot be argued that the citizens of Herland believe in a monotheistic divinity either since there are references to "gods" as opposed to a "God". Thus, their religion is maternal and "their ethics, based on the full perception of evolution, showed the principle of growth and the beauty of wise culture" (103).

In Herland, there are no wars, no kings and no aristocracies. Instead there is an exclusionist genealogy of women. In the novel the women reproduce by parthenogenesis, the virgin birth, and this erases the risk of genes (races) being intermingled. In this respect, women are solely responsible for the creation of a pure, uninterrupted race of women. Education is designed so as to bring out the utmost potential women possess. One of the citizens of Herland says "each one of us has our exact line of descent all the way back to our dear First mother" and So, although Herland is not a society of class division, it is a collectivity based on racial nationals and eugenics. As Alys Eve Weinbaum states in her article "Writing Feminist Genealogy", this is the definition of "universal sisterhood" (285) which is profoundly at the centre of *Herland.*

Herland's main city is strictly organized, with flowers, trees and fountains everywhere. Vandyck, upon observing the city, makes a remark reminiscent of More's *Utopia*: "We'd better import some of these ladies and set 'em to parking the United States […] Mighty nice place they've got here" (20). The three men admire the landscape and architecture of the city. Vandyck also follows up with a criticism of twentieth century California. In Herland, as opposed to real world California, "everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness, and the pleasantest sense of home over it all!" (21).

According to the men, Herlanders did not feel nervousness, terror, uneasiness, curiosity, excitement. During their encounter, Van does not believe in the women's enterprise. He cannot imagine a community that can survive without men. Women would need men, if for nothing else, for the protection they need. In their first encounter with Herlanders, most of the men's assumptions shatter into nothing as they observe the opposite of what they had believed is present before their very eyes. The idea of men as guardians and protectors is not a rationale that these women have. There are "no men to fear" (59) in Herland; therefore, there is no need for protection.

Jane Donawerth, in her article "Utopian Science: Contemporary Feminist Science Theory and Science Fiction by Women", underlines the technological advancements in Herland stating that female genetic scientists have transformed nature by breading crop-producing trees that are resistant to all kinds of diseases and cats that do not kill birds. "The feminist utopias […] make us see a history of women in science" (539) in that the Herlanders are accomplished in linguistics, hygiene, nutrition, psychology and education. Somel adds that women have "a good deal of knowledge of anatomy, physiology, nutrition […]. We have our botany and

chemistry, and […] our own history, with its accumulating psychology" (106). So women are not only self-sufficient in this society, but are also accomplished in all the branches of science and technology.

The ruthless advance of the men into the country and then harsh treatment of women are rendered by a rape metaphor. The third chapter is called "A Peculiar Imprisonment", in which men are imprisoned, not as one would expect in cells, but in beautifully furnished, warm rooms. To this situation, Terry reacts aggressively whereas Jeff has never felt better in his life. "We have been stripped and washed and put to bed like so many yearling babies – by these highly civilized women" (27) says Terry in one of the many instances in which he feels stripped off his masculinity and reduced into the status of a child. Furthermore, Terry also feels like a "neuter" because in his helplessness he doesn't feel like a man. Jeff, on the other hand, thinks that they are treated as guests. The two opposite poles of argument on the state of Herland continues between the men.

There are prisons in Herland; however, they are only reserved for men. Terry is one of the men who are confined there, for instance. He is also the man who cannot reconcile with Herlanders until he is banished. He cannot let go of his prejudices that worked perfectly well in his own country but don't make much sense in Herland. So, the real prison he inhabits is made up of his own prejudice and misconception. Upon Jeff's argument that imprisonment in women's country is better than what they would get in a men's country (30), Terry argues that he still believes there are men in Herland. His opinionated belief that no women can build a castle is responsible for this mistake.

Education is an important aspect of Herland, and it continues throughout the lives of all the citizens. After the men eat their first breakfast with their hosts, they

are immediately invited to learn the women's language, and the women are eager to learn the men's language as well. The women use children's schoolbooks in order to teach their language to the men, while they are eager to learn about the ways of the rest of world. One of the concepts they question is animal keeping and food supplies. In Herland, the women used to have sheep, llama and dogs; however, they disposed of them in order to have lands to feed their people in a highly utilitarian manner. In an effort to learn about how and why the people in the United States eat meat, Somel (one of the tutor-women) questions how people can drink the milk of the cow and still leave enough milk left for the calf. Here again a reverend connection to nature is observed in Herlanders. The women of Herland do not abuse the animals for what they possess. Vandyck states that "it took some time to make clear to those three sweet-faced women the process which robs the cow of her calf, and the calf of its true food; and the talk led us into a further discussion of the meat business. They heard it out, looking very white, and presently begged to be excused" (50). Furthermore, one of the ideas that the women insistently question is the reason why the North Americans bury their dead when there is not enough space to even feed the people of the country. Vandyck, the sociologist of the bunch, explicates how he answers the women's question but he doesn't seem to have been successful at convincing them.

> We told them of the belief in the resurrection of the body, and they asked if our God was not as well able to resurrect from ashes as from long corruption. We told them of how people thought it repugnant to have their loved ones burn, and they asked if it was less repugnant to have them decay. They were conveniently reasonable, these women. (57)

The education of children is one of the most important tasks in Herland. According to Vandyck, upon facing problems of education, the women solved them by continuously and unconsciously educating them (96), and this they accomplished by way of using games to teach them. The women think of the mind as "natural as the body, a thing that grows, a thing to use and to enjoy" (105).

The women's social activities include reading, playing games, knitting, aerobics and dancing. Their competitions are not real events for the men because they did not have any "fight" in them (34).

The citizens of Herland get descriptive names as they move on in their lives. Terry wonders why they don't have family names; however, what he is actually doing is looking for a replacement for the masculine paradigm of a name that signifies ownership of a person. Since the society of Herland is communal and "descended from a common source" (76), they are not in need of a family name that would emphasize belonging to one person or one family. Instead, Herland has one great family for which every citizen cares and works incessantly.

e. Family Unit

In the novel Gilman differentiates between sexuality, reproduction and motherhood. Their society is asexual, reproduction is obtained through voluntary parthenogenesis and motherhood is communal. In the novel parthenogenesis is also a metaphor for women's control of reproduction – something many women still not possess in many modern societies.

According to Bernice L. Hausman, argues in her article "Sex before Gender: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Evolutionary Paradigm of Utopia", that Gilman is

influenced by gynocentric evolutionism, and this point is further signified by the asexual nature of Herland. Darwinism states that sex meant genital heterosexuality (503) – which also corresponds to Adrienne Rich's idea of "compulsory heterosexuality". Thus, the asexual nature of Herland contributes to problematizing the sexuality of Western norms and the Western norms of sexuality.

In their journey in Herland, the men see children; therefore, they expect to see men. Upon being asked, by Terry, whether there are men or not, Somel answers "There are no men in this country. There has not been a man among us for two thousand years" (47). They start discussing the method by which the women reproduce, parthenogenesis, which is a method which can also be observed in some forms of insects. Vandyck states that back in the United States they referred to parthenogenesis as "the virgin birth". Their following conversation signifies the deep-seated gender stereotypes of the rest of the world.

> "Birth, we know, of course; but what is virgin?"
>
> Terry looked uncomfortable but Jeff met the question quite calmly.
>
> "Among mating animals, the term virgin is applied to the female who has not mated," he answered.
>
> "Oh, I see. And does it apply to the male also? Or is there a different term for him?"
>
> […]
>
> "No?" she said. "But one cannot mate without the other surely. Is not each then – virgin – before mating?" (48)

In the end, the men find it difficult to believe that in the absence of men for two thousand years, Herlanders manage to bear only girl babies, let alone bear any baby at all.

Motherhood can be considered as the most important aspect of life in Herland. It is explained in detail in the historical origins of Herland.

[…] and then a miracle happened – one of these young women [the few remaining women after the catastrophe] bore a child. Of course they all thought there must be a man somewhere, but none was found. Then they decided it must be a direct gift from the gods, and placed the proud mother in the Temple of Maaia – their Goddess of Motherhood – under strict watch. And there, as years passed, this wonder-woman bore child after child, five of them – all girls. (58)

The women are joyful of their ability to bear children without men. That is why motherhood is important to them. They are founding a nation on motherhood. In my opinion, Gilman chose to phrase the story in this way in order to emphasize the significance of motherhood and the disposability of fatherhood, in other words, patriarchy. Consequently, the women who can bear children are raised to the highest power of mother-love (59) and, eventually, a love of sisterhood in the company of women.

While founding their country, the council of the remaining women decide on the foundations of their society: "[w]ith our best endeavors this country will support about so many people, with the standard of peace, comfort, health, beauty, and progress we demand. Very well. That is all the people we will make" (69). This is the solution to the possible problem of overpopulation and it is stated that, thus, the mothers learned how to restrain themselves. They can voluntarily defer bearing children by thought. At this point, they ask about how the North Americans deal with overpopulation, a question that brings about the question of abortion. Vandyck informs them that "certain criminal types of women – perverts, or crazy, who had been known to commit infanticide" (71). Children are of utmost importance to

Herlanders and they cannot be expected to be pro-choice about their decisions on the unborn child. However, Vandyck's comment is clearly Gilman's satirical statement on the state of abortion in the United States.

As mothers, they were the "Conscious Makers of People" (69). Their idea of motherhood is very different from the concept of motherhood in which the mother is confined in the house to take care of her children. In Herland, women work and strive hard to create a nation of mothers and children. Not all women are allowed to be mothers, though. Only the best ones are endowed with this task. Furthermore, motherhood is not a personal task for Herlanders but a communal one. Everyone is mother to every child and every child is mothered by every woman in the country. The three men, upon contemplating this idea, ask further questions to Somel and feel sorry for the women who do not individually possess a child. Somel, earnestly, answers their questions.

> It is her baby still – it is with her – she has not lost it. But she is not the only one to care for it. There are others whom she knows to be wiser. She knows it because she has studied as they did, practiced as they did, and honors their real superiority. For the child's sake, she is glad to have for it this highest care. (84)

Asking every question they can think of, the men try to understand the Herlandian idea of motherhood. In the end, Vandyck sufficiently summarizes the concept of motherhood in Herland: "Here was Mother Earth, bearing fruit. All that they are was fruit of motherhood, from seed or egg to their product. By motherhood they were born and by motherhood they lived – life was, to them, just the long cycle of motherhood" (61).

Fatherhood is not an issue greatly discussed in *Herland*. Since they reproduce

via parthenogenesis, they do not need the men. Thus, they do not need the father and, consequently, they see that the absence of the father is not a problem at all, if anything it is an advantage. The women also back up their idea through nature. Among the animals in Herland, the women observed that father is not useful at all. Birds, cats, insects are some examples for this thesis. Therefore, they do not have a clue as to what a father is. In my opinion, Gilman wanted to free the women with the absence of the father from the reproductive system, and, furthermore, with the absence of the discussion on fatherhood, she wanted to emphasize that motherhood is more important than fatherhood. The fact that this can also be seen in nature further underlines the influence of Darwin on Gilman's fictional and non-fictional writing. Terry's experience supports the Herlandian notion of dispensability of fatherhood. During his marriage to Alima, Terry feels suffocated because of his idea that "the only thing [these women] can think about is fatherhood" (124). In our patriarchal society, motherhood is still considered a holy task of women, one full of "mystique" according to Betty Friedan, so much so that women who do not wish to become mothers are talked into it so that they don't end up being *inadequate* women. Here in Herland, this is exactly how Terry feels about fatherhood, which is highly satirical keeping in mind the notion that he is the projection of patriarchy in the novel.

In due time, the men's courtship with Celis, Alima and Ellador prospers. Jeff treats Celis as if he was a knight in shining armour; Vandyck and Ellador are best friends besides their love and affection for one another. However, as can be guessed easily, Terry and Alima have certain problems that arise from Terry's patriarchal ideas of femininity and masculinity, and his desire to impose them on Alima. According to Vandyck, there are no problems in terms of affection; the women "were interested, profoundly interested, but it was not the kind of interest we were

looking for" (89). Vandyck attributes the women's lack of individual, sexual love to their nature and history. The women's *raison d'être* is motherhood, not individually but communally. Thus, they have no idea what a personal, individual, sexual love means. As argued by Vandyck, "two thousand years' disuse had left very little of the instinct" (93). This idea, of course, underlines the notion that Vandyck is also a patriarchal victim of "compulsory heterosexuality" – the women would perfectly harbour sexual love for each other. In my opinion, it is only their common goal of motherhood that has rendered the other aspects of life irrelevant and dispensable for them.

"The Great New Hope" (139) is the name that is given to this new venture of a mother *and* a father together to raise a child. Thus, it is understood that their endeavour of matrimony is also associated with their desire to raise their children in a way that they believe is better. This idea is further discussed through Ellador's answer to going to the United States.

> I understand it's not like ours. I can see how monotonous our quiet life must seem to you, how much more stirring yours must be. It must be like the biological change you told me about when the second sex was introduced – a far greater movement, constant change, with new possibilities of growth. (135)

Despite all the warning they might be expected to get from the information Vandyck gives them and from Terry's patriarchal behaviours, the women of Herland are largely ignorant of the apparati of oppression present in the United States. Humbly, they criticize their own being instead of criticizing the foreign and oppressive conditions of the world outside.

The women of Herland do not know or practice the ceremony of marriage;

therefore, when it comes to matrimonial rites, they and the men experience certain problems. The first problem they encounter is the idea of private ownership – of a woman and of a house. The women, naturally, cannot make sense of this obsession of men. They argue that their jobs are all over the country and they do not wish to live in a confined space (97), which is an idea that the men cannot comprehend. From this argument on housing, Alima cleverly finds a learning opportunity about the lives of North American women in their houses.

> "There!" triumphed Alima. "One or two or no children, and three or four servants. Not what do those women *do*?"
>
> We explained as best we might. We talked of "social duties," disingenuously banking on their not interpreting the words as we did; we talked of hospitality, entertainment, and various "interests." All the time we knew that to these large-minded women whose whole mental outlook was so collective, the limitations of a wholly personal life were inconceivable. (98)

On the contrary, this explanation leads Alima to believe that their lives in Herland are not as rich as the lives of women in the United States. The second problem they face concerns the men's desire to give the women their names. The men explain to the women that their patriarchal ceremony of "name-giving" conveys ownership of the women and *not* vice versa – an idea to which the women strongly object. One other problem that is encountered is marital relations, namely sexual relations, or the lack thereof. Here as well Ellador questions the behaviour of animals in terms of mating. She finds it redundant to mate before and after mating season, and actually she finds it altogether redundant since parthenogenesis is possible in Herland. Vandyck tries to appeal to Ellador using their love for each other; however, Terry is

not as sensitive. His series of violent and oppressive acts cause him to be expelled from Herland, which is a form of retribution not available in our world. Furthermore, women argue that sex for procreation is against nature, and this can be observed in the fact that animals are not engaging in it for pleasure only (138). According to Vandyck, the life cycles of men and women are different. The man has to struggle and conquer, and establish his family, whereas it is enough for the women to secure a husband (102). The marital problems of the men and the women stem from this difference in family units of patriarchal United States and matriarchal Herland.

f. Representation of Gender Roles

In the three men's first encounter with Herlanders, they introduce themselves with physical gestures because they don't have the same language. This may be handled as a metaphor for the idea that in our modern world, language is a gendered phenomenon. Gilman further underlines this notion by giving the women a language of their own. Terry is the object of the harshest satire that Gilman points toward stupid, stubborn, crude, and primitive male chauvinism.

While admiring the city and seeing that it is not savage but a civilized country, Terry further holds to the belief that there must be men in the country. The idea that women cannot create such a well-rounded country is underlined with each of Terry's discourses. At the beginning of the novel, Terry ridicules women's possible arrows saying that the poisoned arrow could target his heart (16). His ridicule continues after he sees the women: "Peaches! […] Peacherinos – apricot-nectarines! Whew!" Terry thinks that "baits" would work on women who wouldn't come closer to the men and wouldn't let the men come closer to them either. The

baits are as good as a typical misogynist like Terry would conjure up: jewellery. Not knowing danger or restriction, women decide to take the baits and run away. Terry the hunter can't hunt the women down with jewellery. On the other hand, women are interested in them for the sake of workmanship (90), not in order to possess them as gifts. Moreover, Terry is also fascinated by the speed of the three women, believing that women are not capable of physical endurance. Many of the questions and doubts that surface in their needs regarding Herland, especially the ideology of racial nationalism, social Darwinism, eugenics, are suspended, if not suppressed, by the example of Terry's outrageous misogynism.

Marching women close both ends of the street, waiting for the three men to try to pass into their country. Here the authority and power resides in women, as opposed to the plight of the twentieth century women. The men trespass into their country and they are to be questioned for their acts. The men have felt as though they are at the top of the world when they enter Herland. They are courageous men who are there to conquer the lands of the women. However, when they encounter the marching women, they feel like "small boys, very small boys, caught doing mischief in some gracious lady's house" (21). Their idea of self as man turns into being boys except for Terry, the one who never manages to let go of his patriarchal upbringing and thought patterns. In the encounter, Terry, again, offers the women a piece of jewellery – which is again accepted and passes out of sight. Terry's gifts would have worked on the women he associated with in the real United States; however, the women of Herland take the gifts for what they are: merely gifts with no implication to be read between the lines. Terry, on the other hand, refers to these unrelenting women as "a regiment of old Colonels" (22). The fact that he associates authority with masculine militarist power is again a portrayal of gender differences. Women

can also attain authority just like the Herlanders do against Terry and the other men. In the end, they have to enter the building in front of them. They fear the women, because of their number and defamiliarizing characteristics; however, they express their feelings to be something else: "We can't fight them, of course. […] They are all women!" (24). In the end of their encounter, when they are born inside the building "lifted like children, straddling helpless children, […] struggling manfully, but held secure most womanfully" (25). They are put to sleep, just as a mother would do to her child, but with the help of anaesthesia.

The women keep questioning the obvious differences in women and men when they are listening to the story of the rest of the world. While the three men and three women are discussing the breeding, keeping and mating of cats in Herland and dogs in the United States, it is clear that they are actually talking about the gender categories of women and men. This idea is further signalled when Somel questions the logic behind keeping an aggressive animal: "Do we understand that you keep an animal – an unmated male animal – that bites children? About how many are there of them, please?" (53). This idea of keeping a dog opposes their deeply rooted idea of utilitarianism and Darwinism. They can't conceive of the idea of keeping a pet that would hurt a child, as children are very important for Herlanders. Furthermore, Herlanders learn that most women in the United States don't have to work and the ones that do work are the poorest ones. This mentality confounds Herlanders in that they do believe that there is no need for motivation to work. Everyone does and should work for the betterment of the whole society at large.

In the three adventurer men, it is possible to see the embodiment of three different attitudes to women. During the scientific expedition they join before venturing into Herland, people are talking about a place that is "dangerous" and

"deadly" (4) as women and the moon are usually coupled in Western thought that associates women with lunacy. Terry is used as a tool by Gilman to question the norms of Western society because he is the one man who cannot break free of the patriarchal assumptions he has been consciously and subconsciously taught. He still associates maleness with authority – this can be exemplified by his naming the strong women "the Colonels". Furthermore, Terry argues that women can't organize and do anything productive due to their jealous nature (59). He also states that "motherhood" is not enough to make one a woman. His idea of femininity is far different from that of Herland – a place where women do not need to make references to femininity as there is no masculinity. Terry criticizes these women for not being feminine enough: "A less feminine lot I never saw. A child apiece doesn't seem to be enough to develop what I call motherliness" (74). Again he clings fast to the ideals of patriarchal motherhood.

Upon asking the women why they are being kept under close scrutiny, the men understand that their idea of "gentleman" does not mean the same thing to these women. Thinking that they fear that the men would harm the girls, women explain that the young girls would harm the men instead. Thus, their idea of masculinity is once more subverted. Even in the light of all the evidence against Terry's ideas, he still cannot accept the facts of Herland: "Confound their grandmotherly minds!" Terry said. "Of course they can't understand a Man's World! They aren't human – they are just a pack of Fe-Fe-Females!" (81). In his blind rage and insistence, he disavows women humanity as well. Vandyck makes a confession that would clearly summarize the patriarchal idea of femininity.

> 'Woman' in the abstract is young, and, we assume, charming. As they get older they pass off the stage, somehow, into private ownership

> mostly, or out of it altogether. But these good ladies were very much on the stage, and yet any one of them might have been a grandmother. (22)

Vandyck, in his objective scientific approach that balances the other men, peacefully and gracefully accepts and understand the Herlanders.

In Herland, the masculinity of the three men doesn't remain intact because there is no masculinity in Herland to begin with. They, first and foremost, recognize this; "they don't seem to notice our being men. […] It's as if our being men was a minor incident" (32). For Herlanders, their masculinity is handled as if it was childhood. Furthermore, for the men, hair was another transient point of their masculinity into femininity. "We began to rather prize those beards of ours; they were almost our sole distinction among those tall and sturdy women, with their cropped hair and sexless costume" (85). The only difference between the sexes, in Herland, has been rendered into just physical appearance and the three men are the odd ones because they do not possess razors of any kind. The men further exemplify their hair as a softening agent where they trespass their own ideas of femininity: "Terry was a very impressive figure, his strong featured softened by the somewhat longer hair" (85).

According to Kim Johnson-Bogart's article "The Utopian Imagination of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Reconstruction of Meaning in *Herland*", men are amazed that the Herlanders do not notice their manhood because their idea of self is directly associated with their sense of being a man. They, thus, notice that the meaning of their patriarchal words do not coincide with what they experience in Herland (88). The absence of masculinity is advantageous on the women's part. There are no men in Herland and the women there do not know what evil means. They don't have

wars, conflicts, private property or fear of anything natural or unnatural. The elimination of negative events also created the cognitive estrangement the women experience when they are introduced to patriarchal terminology (such as "wife") through discourse with the venturing men.

Another important point in the novel is the occasion where the men address the lot of girls, who are eager to learn, and accept questions about the world outside. Terry, the patriarchal foil, is not at peace with women wanting to learn either; he "was reduced to a rather combative group: keen, logical, inquiring minds, not overtly sensitive, the very kind he liked least" (87). In the absence of ideas that suppress women's learning and questioning, the minds of these girls prospered beyond acceptance to Terry's patriarchal ideas of femininity.

> Terry was furious about it. We could hardly blame him. "Girls!" he burst forth […] "Call those *girls!*" […] "Boys! Nothing but boys, most of 'em. A standoffish, disagreeable lot at that.Critical, impertinent youngsters. No girls at all. (88)

Consequently, it is possible to consider Terry a sad stock character, a victim of patriarchy. It can be unfair to judge him individually because all his life he has been programmed into a mould of patriarchal masculinity. Thus, it is rendered impossible for him to understand these women and consider them feminine without losing his own idea of self, which is his idea of manhood.

After Terry's disturbing behaviour towards Alima, he is punished with exile from Herland. While returning home, Vandyck (due to safety requirements in the plane) and Ellador (in order to learn more about the world at large) are accompanying Terry to the United States. During their journey to the plane, Terry is under strict guard in order to protect the citizens of Herland from his violent bouts.

He still makes fun of the behaviours of women. “They’re all old maids – children or not. They don’t know the first thing about Sex” (134). It is argued here that when Terry says “sex”, he means the male sex because, according to him, masculinity is “the life force” (134). Despite parthenogenesis that is available in Herland, Terry associates the life creating force with masculinity. In short, Terry represents a hopeless imprisonment of the individual by the patriarchy’s cultural indoctrination and socializing apparati of family, education and public opinion.

CHAPTER III

A PROPER STUDY OF WOMANKIND IN *THE FEMALE MAN*

Go, little book, trot through Texas and Vermont and Alaska and Maryland and Washington and Florida and Canada and England and France; bob a curtsey at the shrines of Friedan, Millett, Greer, Firestone, and all the rest. (213)

a. The Writer and the Work

For a novel such as *The Female Man*, the life of the author, Joanna Russ, is of special significance. She was born in 1937, in the United States. She wrote science fiction and non-fiction literary theory books. As a lesbian writer, she challenged masculinity in all spheres of life. Anger and irony pour through most of her works such as *And Chaos Died* (1970), *The Female Man* (1975), *The Two of Them* (1978), *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983) and *To Write Like a Woman* (1995). Furthermore, according to Samuel Delany, Joanna Russ "is one of the finest – and most necessary – writers of American fiction to publish after 1959" (500).

The Female Man (1975) is based on Russ' 1972 short story "When It Changed". There are four different places and timelines in the novel. At the beginning of the novel, Janet Evason suddenly appears in Jeannine's timeline. Janet is from Whileaway, a world in the future where a plague kills all the men. Together with Jeannine, Janet goes to Joanna's world. In Joanna's world, Janet and Jeannine are taken to a party to see the interactions of women and men. Janet, a woman who knows no men, doesn't interact with the men the way men are accustomed to. After the party, Janet wishes to experience a social family setting. Following this experience, Jeannine and Joanna go to Whileaway with Janet, and then the three Js

go back to, first, Joanna's world and then to Jael's world, where there is a war between female and male societies. Jael explains that she looks for the three women in order to create a society without men. Everyone agrees with Jael's plans, except for Janet. In the end, women cannot agree on a plan to resolve gender and free women. Through these four women from different economic and social backgrounds, Russ examines the appropriation and subversion of gender paradigms. Joanna is a university professor from the twentieth century world. Jeannine is from an alternate world in which Great Depression never ended. Janet is from Whileaway, a future society in which there are no men at all. Finally, Jael is from a future before Whileaway, in which there are two lands: Womanland and Manland, which are constantly at war. Through these projections, Russ examines what could have been, what should have been and what has come to happen.

The novel can be seen as a response to the Second Wave Feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, and pays tribute to "Friedan, Millett, Greer, Firestone, and all the rest" (213). These writers can be considered to be Russ's fuel for anger against patriarchy. In her novel, she presents four alternate and overlapping worlds, which are teeming with gender related conflicts. Jael's war and elimination of men altogether results in the happy and serene utopia of Janet. Therefore, it can be argued that Russ' vision entails taking action against patriarchy since it is not going to abolish itself. By having different worlds and different women from the same genotype, Russ shows that gender is socially constructed in that the woman is the same but her circumstances and society change her. Thus, it is safe to assume that the changes in gender categories come with the changes in society.

b. Narrative Perspective

First and foremost, *The Female Man* is not an easy novel to read. It is highly fragmented (a supporting idea for our reality and identity being fragmented as well), and the fragments do not have equal lengths or features. This is a break from the traditional science fiction that have linear chronological plots written by male authors. Russ' novel is also replete with her ideas on gender roles and patriarchy; therefore, it is safe to say that the novel has non-fiction segments in which Russ meditates on significant gender issues with poetic rage. The sections of the novel are told through first person narrative, with interventions from the author herself. Due to the fact that the fragments are conveyed through first person narrative, it becomes difficult to follow to whom the train of thought belongs. Furthermore, the novel has a time travel aspect that creates a temporal, as well as spatial, ambiguity in narration. It can be argued that this ambiguity makes the characters "everywoman" in that the women that are narrated in the novel can be anyone, anywhere and in anytime. This is a functionalist and highly creative usage of the time travel trope in order to lay bare the gender roles and their societal construction. Throughout, the readers' expectations of the normative narrative are subdued and subverted because this is a speculative work as opposed to being a traditional novel.

Some sections are told by Joanna the author, and in other sections Joanna also interferes as the author, which makes the novel self-reflexive: "[Jael] took us topside in the branch elevator: The Young One, The Weak One, The Strong One, as she called us in her own mind. I'm the author and I know" (165). Her interference with her characters makes it possible to underline the aspects she finds important. For instance, Jael would not label her companions as such out loud, and we wouldn't

have known about her opinions unless Joanna interfered with Jael's third person narrative section. Another interesting intervention is her own predictions of the critique of her book:

> Shrill … vituperative … no concern for the future of society … maunderings of antiquated feminism … selfish fem lib … needs a good lay … this shapeless book … of course a calm and objective discussion is beyond … twisted, neurotic … some truth buried in a largely hysterical … of very limited interest, I should … another tract for the trash-can … […] the usual boring obligatory references to Lesbianism … denial of the profound sexual polarity which … an all too womanly refusal to face facts … pseudo-masculine brusqueness … the ladies'-magazine level … trivial topics like housework and the predictable screams of … […] anatomy is destiny … destiny is anatomy … a female lack of experience which … (140-1)

Here in this section Russ is, in a way, criticizing the critiques coming from both women and men who bash and subdue feminine writing that tries to heighten feminist consciousness and subvert dominant narratives.

In this novel there are four worlds, thus it becomes important to examine its utopian and dystopian visions. Whileaway is reflected as the utopia whereas Jael's world, divided into Womanland and Manland, is the dystopia. Since Russ gave the characters a chance to interact, according to Sargent, the novel creates "a dialogue between utopian and dystopian energies in projecting its angry and committed feminist message" (238). Through the interaction between Janet and Jael, it is possible to observe this dialogue. In Whileaway there are no men, and in Jael's world women and men are separated. Their relations are made more subversive and

violent because of the absence of gender categories. For instance, in the lack of women in Manland, dominant men transform their weaker members into changed or half-changed beings with feminine attributes. In contrast, in the absence of men in Whileaway, women become more violent and stronger than they are in Joanna's world; however, the men of Jael's world create people to subjugate. In this aspect it is clear that Whileaway, with its agrarian community and freedom, is the utopian perspective whereas Jael's Womanland and Manland, where people trade babies for money, is the dystopian mirror of Whileaway. Furthermore, in the novel it is emphasized that Jael's time continuum takes place prior to Janet's Whileaway; therefore, it is obvious that the dystopia of Jael is to turn into the utopia of Janet. This narrative turn subverts the dominant genre features of utopian fiction in that something always goes wrong in utopia, and utopia turns into a dystopia and/or it has an inherent dystopian mirror. However, in Russ' work, dystopia occurs before the utopia that is the world without men. In this respect Russ is aware of the fact that utopias and dystopias are the constitutive "others" of each other.

c. Intertextuality

In *The Female Man*, tropology of metamorphosis is used in Joanna's transformation into a man. Joanna states that this transformation is only spiritual and behavioural as opposed to being physical. However, she also states that she "had been a man before, but only briefly and in a crowd" (20). She turns into a man in order to be respected for her accomplishments and transcend the socially constructed limits of being a woman. As readers we don't encounter physical transformation;

however, in this context of gender contestation, physical transformation may be irrelevant. The rhetoric of metamorphosis is deployed to contest gendering.

There is also a clear biblical reference in *The Female Man*, which is the character name of Jael. Jael is a heroine in Hebrew Bible who killed Sisera to deliver Israel from the troops of King Jabin. Sisera is a character that oppressed the people of Israel for a long period. In Russ' novel, Jael kills the "Boss-man", the leader of Manlanders, in a violent manner when he tries to rape her. This retribution she endows to the leader of Manlanders is similar to that of Jael in Hebrew Bible. They are both rendered as redeemers of the oppressed in their own contexts: Israelites and women. This is also hinted in the song Janet sings, which stands as a foreshadowing of Jael's plan to overthrow men altogether: "I know / That my / Rede-emer / Liveth / And She / Shall stand / Upon the latter da-ay / On Earth" (57).

Reference to Sigmund Freud's work is another important allusion in *The Female Man*. According to Freud, a female child realizes that her genitals are different from that of a male child's. Therefore, she grows up with a lack, "the female lack". In *The Female Man*, Laura says she is "a victim of penis envy so [she] can't ever be happy or lead a normal life" (65). Russ goes on to criticize society for creating props (such as songs) that aggravate the issue. The remedy would be to eliminate all such props that strengthen gender roles.

There are also various theoretical allusions in the novel, one of which is to Donna Harraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" with the cyborg character of Davy. In her article Haraway argues that the cyborg is salvation: "The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary

between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (149). With this statement Haraway blurs the lines between machine and organism, and this would solve the problems of women in that most of them are deemed physical, thus natural, to women's being. Furthermore, she continues to theorize the benefits of the cyborg.

> The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no track with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity. In a sense, the cyborg has no origin story in the Western sense – a 'final' irony since the cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic telos of the 'West's' escalating dominations of abstract individuation, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space. (150).

Since the cyborg is a creature that transcends gender, it would be the salvation of women. Furthermore, owing to the fact that it had no premeditated history, it would be innocent of all the positive and negative aspects attributed to women. In the novel, Davy is a cyborg that lives with Jael, and she identifies Davy as "the most beautiful man in the world" (185). Consequently, the most beautiful man is the man who is not gendered. Instead of women being cyborgs to transcend the patriarchal assumptions of gender, Russ makes the worker of the house a male cyborg and names him Davy.

d. The Ways of the World

When looking at the worlds of *The Female Man*, it is possible to observe that there are four distinct worlds: Joanna's world of 1970s North America, Jeannine's

alternative North America, Janet's utopian Whileaway and Jael's dystopian Womanland and Manland. Each world has its own version of reality, and in these versions social relations are considerably distinct from each other.

Joanna is the writer herself, and the sections in which she dominates the narrative are a mix of fiction and non-fiction. She hints that she is inspired by her daily life while writing those fragments because Joanna is a professor at a university which is largely populated by male professors. She is also influenced by the Second Wave Feminism of the 1970s and its commitment to radical action against patriarchy.

Jeannine's world of alternative North America is almost as bad as Jael's dystopia in that women's rights are not respected. In her world there are only two roles possible for a woman: wife and/or mother. Women are not visible in social and political spaces. This is observable in Janet's exclamation: "(The first thing said by the second man ever to visit Whileaway was, 'Where are all the men?' Janet Evason, appearing in the Pentagon, hands in her pockets, feet planted far apart, said, 'Where the dickens are all the women'?)" (8).

Jeannine, in a way, is the weakest link of the genotype of Js. Even though she senses that her society is oppressive, she cannot help but placate it by becoming a wife. The difficulty she experiences is apparent in her interior monologue:

> Jeannine, you'll never get a good job. […] There aren't any now. And if there were, they'd never give them to a woman, let alone a grown up baby like you. Do you think you could hold down a really good job, even if you could get one? They're all boring anyway, hard and boring. You don't want to be a dried-up old spinster at forty, but that's what you will be if you go on like this. You're twenty-nine.

> You're getting old. You ought to marry someone who can take care of you, Jeannine. (113-14)

In Whileaway the utopian energies of the novel at large can be observed; however, they are contested by dystopian dynamics. The plague that left half the population dead only attacked the male citizens of Whileaway which used to have two continents named North and South Continents. A short history of Whileaway is given (21), and it is different from the histories of our world in that the inventors and thinkers are all women. It can be argued that this is due to the fact that there are no men in Whileaway to subjugate women and banish them from the reaches of education and social life. The history examines the technological advancements (houses with portable power sources, fuel-alcohol motors, solar cells for centralized power, matter-anti matter reactors) and the development of genetic surgery which paves the way for reproduction without male counterparts.

During the women's visit to Whileaway, Jeannine finds the lack of governmental security interesting. Janet says that there is no government in Whileaway that would control the entire activity of the country from one place" (91). Here Russ emphasizes that a normative government is not successful in protecting its citizens. That is why it isn't included in her contemplation of utopia. Since there are no dangers stemming from patriarchy, there is no need for a centralized government.

In the absence of men, there is nothing for Whileawayan women to fear. Expressions such as being out too late, being in the wrong part of town (81) don't make sense in Whileaway because everyone belongs to everyone, and one can never fall out of the kinship web. In Russ' words, in Whileaway there is "no one who will follow you and try to embarrass you by whispering obscenities in your ear, no one

who will attempt to rape you, no one who will warn you of the dangers of the street, no one who will stand on street corners" (81).

As such, it is understood from the very beginning of the novel that there are no men in Whileaway, and there are lots of physical and intellectual activities for younger and older women. There are sexual relationships between women; however, there are no nuclear family units. According to Pamela J. Annas, as stated in her article "New Worlds, New Words: Androgyny in Feminist Science Fiction", like many feminist utopias Whileaway is also an anarchist society with emphasis on individuality and social responsibility (149). Everything and everyone belongs to everyone else – a point which renders crime rare if not impossible. Waste and ignorance, alongside murder and theft, are some of the crimes that are punished in Whileaway. Furthermore, there are no taboos and restrictions when it comes to sexual relations except for one: it is forbidden for Whileawayans to have transgenerational relations. They cannot have intercourse with people much older or younger.

Whileaway has a very hardworking public. The citizens work incessantly until they become senior citizens. After that, they still continue to work; however, they only engage in theoretical work and planning. In the industry, the invention of the induction helmet makes it possible for Whileawayans to engage in dangerous and laborious work from a distance. In this utopia, women work in every part of the country, doing jobs that require strength, agility and perseverance, which renders their gender roles mute.

Celebrations and rituals are important for Whileawayans. In contrast to our society in which most celebratory events are highly consumerist in their essence, in

Whileaway most of the celebrations are part of the natural and social machinery of the country:

> the full moon/ the Winter solstice/ the Summer solstice/ the Autumnal equinox/ the vernal equinox/ the flowering of trees/ the flowering of bushes/ the planting of seeds/ happy copulation/ unhappy copulation/ longing/ jokes/ leaves falling off the trees (where deciduous)/ acquiring new shoes/ wearing same/ birth/ the contemplation of a work of art/ marriages / sport/ divorces/ anything at all/ nothing at all/ great ideas/ death (102)

Similar to its other aspects, Whileaway is anti-patriarchal in its celebrations as well. Among the rituals related to nature, Whileawayans also celebrate some events that are deemed unfavourable such as unhappy copulation and divorces. There is also a strong connection to nature in Whileaway. For instance, the citizens of Whileaway provide companionship to cows, "who pine and die unless spoken to affectionately" (51). In spite of all these utopian aspects, Whileaway hides a "plague" which will be uncovered by Jael of *The Female Man*.

Jael, the warrior-like hero of *The Female Man*, is "an employee of the Bureau of Comparative Ethnology" (158). The women travel to her world, in which there are two districts called Womanland and Manland. Years of conflict and war have existed between the women and men of the world. Manlanders buy male babies from the Womanlanders, and then some of these male babies are turned into changed/half-changed men on whom the stronger men can exert their power. Womanland, however, requires that women become strong if not stronger than the men in Manland. They need military training in order to actually fight the men in wars. Thus, some women are raised as woman-man to be stronger and more "manly".

Jael travels in time and space in order to get all the Js together and start a revolution. “We want bases on your worlds; we want raw materials if you’ve got them. We want places to recuperate and places to hide an army; we want places to store our machines” (200). Basically, Jael and Womanland are getting ready to start an all-out war against Manland in order to eradicate men altogether. Joanna is neutral, Jeannine is scared and Janet is passively reluctant. Thus, it becomes necessary for Jael to share the truth with them.

> Let me give you something to carry away with you, friend: that ‘plague’ you talk of is a lie. I know. The world-lines around you are not so different from yours or mine or theirs and there is no plague in any of them, not any of them. Whileaway’s plague is a big lie. Your ancestors lied about it. It is I who gave you your ‘plague,’ my dear, about which you can now pietize and moralize to your heart’s content; I, I, I, I am the plague, Janet Evason. I and the war I fought built your world for you, I and those like me, we gave you a thousand years of peace and love and the Whileawayan flowers nourish themselves on the bones of the men we have slain. (211)

So, no utopia is uncontaminated neither in its inception nor its completion.

e. Family Unit

In terms of family, marriage and motherhood, Whileaway gives the reader the most important details, as opposed to the other worlds where no information is given (Jael) or the information is historically stable (Jeannine).

Marriage in Whileaway is not a monogamous matrimony. Families are organized as clans of thirty people consisting of as many as four mothers and their children. In contrast to the mothers in the Western family structures, in Whileaway mothers do not engage in housework. According to Whileawayans, the mother "must be free to attend to the child's finer spiritual needs" (50). As opposed to a state of private ownership, the citizens of Whileaway are in constant travel. They work in various locations of the country. Thus, they are not tied down to a locale even when they are a part of a family. In this respect Janet mentions that her home is in her shoes (99).

Motherhood is celebrated with a vacation in Whileaway. Actually, motherhood is the only time a Whileawayan gets a vacation from a life of constant work. During their vacation the mothers take care of the babies in baby rooms which "are full of people reading, painting, singing, as much as they can, to the children, with the children, over the children" (14). As can be observed, the time spent with children is very important in this utopia as it is in Plato's *Republic* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*. The education of children also include running machines, working without machines, law, transportation, physical theory, gymnastics, mechanics and medicine all of which are practical skills (50). They also learn how to swim and shoot as these are the abilities they will need in their lives.

In the first page of the novel Janet mentions her wife, Vittoria, a fact that lets the reader know that the country in which Janet lives is not a heterosexual one. When Janet Evason travels through time and arrives at the time of Jeannine, she is welcomed with great interest. While being interviewed by a journalist, Janet is asked whether she expects men to visit Whileaway, a question she finds abruptly surprising. She is also amazed when the journalist assumes that Whileawayans do

wish for men to return to Whileaway. On the contrary, Whileawayans do not need men at all. The journalist thinks that copulation is out of the question owing to the fact that there are no men. Here the patriarchal assumption that women cannot exist without men is subverted in that Whileawayans have existed for centuries by joining their ova through genetic surgery.

f. Representation of Gender Roles

In *The Female Man*, the reader is confronted with four different women and consequently four different worlds in which women and men are represented in different manners. For this reason it is important to examine the idea behind this contemplation of different worlds. According to Pamela J. Annas, "eliminating one sex in order to allow full development as human beings to the other is at one end of a spectrum of ways the concept of androgyny has been used in feminist science fiction" (150). It is not possible to observe androgyny in all separatist feminist science fiction – for instance, in *Herland* there are no men in their country; however, women do not hate men. On the contrary, they want to get to know them and reinitiate a bisexual race. Nevertheless, in *The Female Man*, the negative energies against men are easily noticeable in Jael's and Joanna's narrative fragments. This aspect of the novel further emphasizes the sex-role polarity and problematizes the categories of gender.

While looking at the representation of gender in this novel, it is important to look at the construction of utopia because therein lies the answer to the question of women. In Whileaway there are no men; therefore, it can be argued that Russ deconstructs gender categories by eliminating the male gender and playing with the

female gender. Whileaway immensely differs from the worlds of Joanna and Jeannine because in their worlds women are revered neither for being women nor for being human beings. On the contrary, in their worlds human beings are referred to as "mankind" – an umbrella term that refers to both women and men, subjugating women as it does so. According to Sargent, the construction of Whileaway stems from the oppositional politics of the 1960s which included environmental responsibility, individual liberty and community (238).

Joanna appears to be the writer Joanna Russ herself, and she is from the 1970s, the time of Second Wave Feminism and radical feminism. She is the woman in the title *The Female Man* – she chooses to become a female-man: "I had just changed into a man, me, Joanna. I mean a female man, of course; my body and soul were exactly the same. So there's me also" (5). Despite the fact that her workplace is a university, she suffers from misogynistic and sexist attitude of her colleagues. This is one of the reasons for her transformation into a female man. In her character, she (and the writer) challenges the traditional categories of gender in that she starts being seen as a man due to her accomplishments.

> I thought that surely when I had acquired my Ph.D. and my professorship and my tennis medal and my engineer's contract and my ten thousand a year and my full-time housekeeper and my reputation and the respect of my colleagues, when I had grown strong, tall, and beautiful, when my I.Q. shot past 200, when I had genius, *then* I could take off my sandwich board. I left my smiles and happy laughter at home. I'm not a woman; I'm a man. I'm a man with a woman's face. I'm a woman with a man's mind. Everybody says so. (133).

Being a woman with a man's mind here distinguishes women from the domain of intellect, accomplishment, professional challenges, in other words, from the domain of men. Here Joanna implies that in order to be respected as a human being, she has to become a woman with a man's mind.

Joanna further underlines the problem of women's invisibility from the public sphere.

> My doctor is male. / My lawyer is male. / My tax-accountant is male. / The grocery-store-owner (on the corner) is male. / The janitor in my apartment building is male. / The president of my bank is male. / The manager of the neighbourhood supermarket is male. / My landlord is male. / Most taxi-drivers are male. / All cops are male. / All firemen are male. / The designers of my car are male. / The factory workers who made the car are male. / The dealer I bought it from is male. / Almost all my colleagues are male. / My employer is male. / The Army is male. / The Navy is male. / The government is (mostly) male. / I think of the people in the world are male. (203)

Joanna follows with an argument that although many professions are available to women, they are mostly jobs that are done in private spheres such as homes, offices, schools and churches. The jobs that are available and deemed suitable to women restrict the women to invisibility. Furthermore, even when they have the chance to be working and wage-earning citizens, their professional lives end when they are married: "Men succeed. Women get married / Men fail. Women get married. / Men enter monasteries. Women get married. / Men start wars. Women get married. / Men stop them. Women get married. / Dull, dull" (126). This expression further underlines the fact that women and men are not equal. "Separate but equal, right?

Men make the decisions and women make the dinners. I expected him to start in about that mystically-wonderful-experience-which-no-man-can-know crap" (67). Here Joanna makes a direct reference to Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in which women's marginalization for her motherhood is criticized.

Apart from criticizing men through Joanna, Russ also criticizes women in *The Female Man.* First of all, it is clearly observable in her fragment "The Great Happiness Contest" (116). In this fragment the first woman is happy because she has a husband whom she loves and two children. Since she has fulfilled the patriarchal expectations required of her, she is conditioned to be happy. The second woman says she is *even* happier, which starts the contest between women, because her husband does the dishes every Wednesday. The idea of men who *help* with housework has been criticized in many aspects since housework is not a natural labour of women to begin with. Helping argues that it actually is women's natural task, which is one of the many unjust sexual divisions of labour in the private sphere. The third woman further problematizes the issues at hand. She is happy because her husband has been faithful (as he should have been under matrimonial vows), because he helps with the housework when he is asked (he should already do [*not help with*] the housework even when he is not asked to) and because he *wouldn't mind* if she had a job. Apparently, the third woman is happy for the rights she already should have. The fourth woman, on the other hand, doesn't mention her husband at all. She has six children and a part-time job. Nonetheless, she is happier when she is serving her family at home. Last but not least, Joanna joins the happiness contest by saying she has a Noble Peace Prize, fourteen published novels, six lovers, a town house, a box at Metropolitan Opera. She also states that she flies a plane, fixes her own car and can do eighteen push-ups before breakfast. Here, without a doubt, Joanna is a female

man as opposed to the other women who follow the patriarchal plan to fake happiness designed for them. Instead of looking at their inner selves and realize that they actually are not as happy as they think they are. These women attack Joanna for being happy and unfeminine: "All the Women: Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill" (116).

Joanna continues to criticize the patriarchal assumptions of women and femininity. First of all, she criticizes "Maternal Instinct" (151) that is observable when a woman enjoys playing with other people's children for ten minutes. Secondly, she criticizes "Feminine Incompleteness" (152) that is felt when a woman is so lonely that she needs a man, a family and children to fill that void. Last but not least, she criticizes "True Womanliness" that surfaces when a woman likes men's bodies, an idea that makes lesbian women unwomanly. In the light of all these criticizing of women and their acceptance of being subdued by the mysterious ways of patriarchy, Joanna loves herself despite inclinations to the contrary. Nonetheless, she chooses to become a female-man in order to be respected for who she is.

> I love my body dearly and yet I would copulate with a rhinoceros if I could become not-a-woman. There is the vanity training, the obedience training, the self-effacement training, the deference training, the dependency training, the passivity training, the rivalry training, the stupidity training, the placation training. How am I to put this together with my human life, my intellectual life, my solitude, my transcendence, my brains, and my fearful, fearful ambition? […] You can't unite woman and human any more than you can unite matter and anti-matter. (151)

Whether one puts women on a pedestal or insults them beyond recognition, they are marginalized, and this further problematizes the gap between basic human needs and rights and the plight of women.

In her criticism of men, Joanna argues that the word "men" has come to mean "humankind" at large. For this idea she gives five examples (93) that emphasize her point. She further analyses the assumptions around men and mankind.

> Man, one assumes, is the proper study of Mankind. Years ago we were all cave Men. Then there is Java Man and the future of Man and the values of Western Man and existential Man and economic Man and Freudian Man and the man in the moon and modern Man and eighteenth-century Man and too many Mans to count or look at or believe. There is Mankind. (139)

In the absence of women from all categories of language, it is difficult to locate and salvage them in science, history and anthropology. That's why it is no wonder that women are invisible in many centuries of world histories.

Janet is the character through whom Whileaway is observed; however, at the beginning of the novel the reader knows her as an ambassador who appears in Broadway. She has travelled through time and space in order to see the world of 1970s. Upon her arrival she is depicted as a woman with "fair, dirty hair flying and her khaki shorts and shirt stained with sweat" (4). Here it is observed that she is not portrayed as a typical feminine woman of the 1970s; on the contrary, she looks like a man of that period. She also threatens the policeman "with *le savate*" (4) – something many women would not do. Since Janet lives in a place where women are equal and their accomplishments are valuable, she is considered to be unfeminine. Consequently, Russ subverts gender categories with the character of Janet.

Janet's first encounter with the strangers is important in that she doesn't name the men (as the men in *Herland* does to women and their country); instead she calls them "Number One", "Number Two" and "Number Three" (23). By not naming them, she doesn't conquer and map them, and also she doesn't find them significant enough to be named. In the end, they are only men. Upon analysing the strangers in her surrounding, she is trying to find someone to take her to their leader.

> The door opened at this point and a young woman walked in, a woman of thirty years or so, elaborately painted and dressed. I know I should not have assumed anything, but one must work with what one has; and I assumed that her dress indicated a mother. That is, someone on vacation, someone with leisure, someone who's close to the information network and full of intellectual curiosity. If there's a top class (I said to myself), this is it. (23)

Ignorant of the plight of mothers in 1970s North America, Janet assumes that a person who is appearing nice and to be on vacation, is a mother, and as all mothers are important people in Whileaway, she assumes they are given the same significance in 1970s North America. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

The bar scene is of utmost importance in that it is the locale where Janet observes the interaction of women and men in public sphere. The man in the bar starts the conversation in a very nonchalant manner: "I hear so much about the New Feminism here in America. Surely it's not necessary, is it?" (37). He is surrounded by women whose names are, cleverly, Sposissa, Eglantissa, Aphrodissa, Clarissa, Lucrissa, Wailissa, Lamentissa and Travailissa, who all agree that Second Wave Feminism is not necessary at all. Furthermore, Saccharissa adds insult to the injury by saying "I would [certainly] like to see all those women athletes from the

Olympics compete with all those men athletes; I don't imagine any of these women athletes could even come neah [sic] the men" (42). Here Russ criticizes the so-called feminism of women who ascribe to the idea that even though there should be equality for women and men, they are naturally unequal. After that, the man asks the same question to Janet, to which she answers by saying that she doesn't know any men. The man goes on arguing, in the absence of any dominant women to stop him, and the voice inside Janet's head keeps telling herself to be polite and patient.

> Now nobody can be more in favour of women getting their rights than I am. Do you want to sit down? Let's. As I said, I'm all in favour of it. Adds a decorative touch to the office, eh? Ha ha! Ha haha! Unequal pay is a disgrace. But you've got to remember, Janet, that women have certain physical limitations, and you have to work within your physical limitations. For example, […] you have to take into account that there are more than two thousand rapes in New York City alone in every particular year. I'm not saying of course that that's a good thing, but you have to take it into account. Men are physically stronger than women, you know. (43-4)

In Jeannine's world there are little blue books and little pink books people carry around with them. When Janet shouts "savages" to the man who talks too much for her taste, he looks up the word savage only to find the following definition: "Masculine, brute, virile, powerful, good" (45). Furthermore, in the pink book "brutality" is defined as "Man's bad temper is the woman's fault. It is also the woman's responsibility to patch things up afterwards" (47).

Jeannine is the character through whom the reader experiences the 1970s North America with an alternate history: Great Depression never ends. It can be

argued that she is the weakest character in that she succumbs to the patriarchal scheme planned for her. Nonetheless, she wants to change when she meets Janet and her "unfeminine" ways.

> Before Janet appeared on this planet, I was moody, ill-at-ease, unhappy, and hard to be with. I didn't relish my breakfast. I spent my whole day combing my hair and putting on make-up. Other girls practiced with the shot-put and compared archery scores, but I – indifferent to javelin and crossbow, positively repelled by horticulture and ice hockey – all I did was dress for The Man / smile for The Man / talk wittily to The Man / sympathize with The Man / flatter The Man / understand The Man / defer to The Man / entertain The Man / keep The Man / live for The Man. (29).

In this section Jeannine summarizes not only her life but also the lives of many other women. Furthermore, Russ criticizes the familial restrictions placed on wives by husbands. Jeannine and Cal are discussing whether she should work or not. In order to realize herself, Jeannine needs to enter the public sphere and earn a wage. However, her husband thinks that she is being irrational: "But darling, by the time we deduct the cost of a baby-sitter and nursery school, a higher tax bracket, and your box lunches from your pay, it actually costs us money for you to work. So you see, you aren't making money at all. You can't make money. Only I can make money. Stop working" (118). In this fragment Jeannine is made to believe that she is irrational, she cannot work and her working would be a strain on home economy. On the contrary, her working would be a strain on her husband's ego.

Jael is the character Russ utilizes in order to show that woman are not "feminine" by design. Here the reader encounters a character that resembles a

warrior hero, preparing for a war against the men. This character brings about the idea that nurture works against nature, and this notion further underlines the idea that gender roles aren't innately imprinted but socially constructed.

The masculine side of Jael's world can be seen through her interaction with the Boss-man when she goes to make a deal. He is a blatant and brute character who proposes another project to Jael: "Now it's obvious to anyone that we need each other. Even in separate camps we still have to trade, you still have to have the babies, things haven't changed that much. Now what I have in mind is an experimental project, a pilot project, you might say, in trying to get the two sides back together" (175). Jael, planning to start an all-out war against the men, does not favour this plan. Furthermore, Boss-man tries to rape Jael, and when he is stopped, he has not-so-surprising excuses.

> You're a beautiful woman. You've got a hole down there. You're a beautiful woman. You've got real, round tits and you've got a beautiful ass. You want me. It doesn't matter what you say. You're a woman, aren't you? This is the crown of your life. This is what God made you for. I'm going to fuck you. I'm going to screw you until you can't stand up. You want it. You want to be mastered. Natalie wants to be mastered. All you women, you're all women, you're sirens, you're beautiful, you're waiting for me, waiting for a man, waiting for me to stick it in, waiting for me, me, me. (181)

After his advances, the Boss-man is killed by Jael. Russ gives Jael the power and rage to kill the man before he succeeds in raping her. Rape, here, stands as a metaphor to show Jael's power. Raised as a man-woman, she isn't passive or

repressed by nature; she is powerful and agile by nurture. In her own words, “not everything with claws and teeth is a Pussycat” (188).

CHAPTER IV

WOMAN CAME FIRST ACCORDING TO *THE CLEFT*

> Perhaps it has been felt that an account of our beginnings that makes females the first and founding stock is unacceptable. In Rome now, a sect – the Christians – insist that the first female as brought forth from the body of a male. Very suspect stuff, I think. Some male invented that – the exact opposite of the truth. (27)

a. The Writer and the Work

Doris Lessing has been an active writer for many years who continues to write in her eighties. Among other awards, she is also a winner of a Nobel Prize for Literature, awarded shortly after the publication of her novel *The Cleft* (2007). The themes she has chosen are mostly women's liberation, Sufism and political breakdown. In addition to her novels, she has written short fiction and plays in order to convey her messages. Furthermore, with her *Canopus in Argos* series, she has been known to engage in science fiction as well.

One of her most recent books, *The Cleft*, is in fact a mythical creation story which is compiled by a Roman historian (a male, needless to say) who works on many sources recognized as partial and secret. At the beginning of the novel, Lessing states the point of origin of her novel. A recent scientific study asserts that the females were the first people on earth, as opposed to many accounts that claim that the females were in fact the latecomers. This creation story involves the gender categories constructed and maintained through pure socialization. Many aspects of the story are based on biological differences, reminiscent of the Freudian idea of "anatomy is destiny". The story, or the account, takes place in a territory, called "the

cleft". The term is also used to label the female characters and their genitalia. The group of women living there, untouched by males, produce only female offspring, until one day a deformity takes place, and one of the women bears a child with a different genitalia. The women initially want to get rid of such deformed products of nature; therefore, they place the babies on high rocks where they can be eaten by eagles. As more male babies are born, eagles start to carry them to a valley, and there the male babies start to grow with the help of friendly does that care for them, forming a community of boys. In time, the existence of two distinctly different and distant communities becomes apparent and the novel tells the story of these two communities, how they interact with each other, and how a Roman historian approaches this account of history.

The novel is divided into numerous sections with different narrative viewpoints. In each section, either place, time or people change. Most of the time the sections are separated, or interrupted, by the historian's attempt to make explanations or comments about the subject matter. The influence of oral tradition can be clearly seen in the narrative in that most of the important ideas and events are repeated. Many of those ideas are repeated in whole sentences, which give the impression that the whole narration used to be a bard's song sung in inns and taverns in old days, and that is how the story came to be documented in the end. It is my contention that, by employing these techniques, Lessing links the written tradition with the oral which provides her story with greater historical depth.

b. Narrative Perspective

This account that asserts that females came to existence earlier than the males is told through the perspective of a Roman historian, a man whose name is disguised.

In old age he decides to go through the archives and delve into what he assumes to be "a mass of material accumulated over ages, originating as oral history, some of it the same but written down later, all purporting to deal with the earliest records of us, the peoples of our earth" (5). The history he has decided to examine is considered to be strictly secret in that it holds information and experience crucial to the sociology of humankind.

Before the historian starts to narrate his version of the research, he takes time to clarify some issues that might come up in the minds of his audience. First of all, he deals with the differences in wording; he mentions some words that are *not* used in the account of the Clefts or the Monsters. Two such concepts, "we" or "I", are not used due to the fact that in the first communities there are no ideas of individual or communal identity. He also writes about the differences in time expressions. In the accounts of the Clefts and Monsters, which are obviously oral accounts, references to time and numbers are non-existent. Since the Clefts are a primitive community, they do not count their people or keep a calendar to maintain their lives. Therefore, when the historian writes "then" or "after that", or any other time expression for that matter, he wishes his readers to acknowledge that the dates, time periods or numbers are highly uncertain since none of the Clefts kept records as meticulously as the Romans did. Prior to beginning the tale, the historian also enlightens the reader about his research methods. He is working on the oral accounts of the Clefts and the Monsters, and he also works to show the consistency between the accounts as if he were trying to show the balance of the female and male sex. He starts his narration by setting an assertive and ambiguous title, "THE HISTORY" (29), which reflects the idea that there is only one accurate history and this piece of writing is the accurate one. However, the title refuses to declare what it is the history of in the first

place. Thus, the title of the historian's account signals the ambiguity of the events to come.

One of the ways this historian claims his authority of the text is by intervening upon it in various times and manners. Throughout the text, the historian interrupts the text in order to give comments, make explanations and propose additions. One of the first interruptions that stand out is the one where the historian expresses his assumptions on the female gender. While abandoning her *deformed* male baby, Astre begins to cry, and what the historian asserts here is that the tears have been allowed by the historian despite the fact that no crying had been documented in the histories (71). This point clearly underlines the fact that the idea of historiographic metafiction works here in many layers where the historian actually constructs the past, and therefore the present, by way of his assumptions while telling the history. Another purpose for which he interrupts the narrative is to present similarities between the Romans and the community of Clefts and Monsters, as he does when he emphasizes an allusion between the Spartans and how their mothers had to give their male children to men (146). He also uses his interventions to empathize with Horsa, the leader of the Monsters, and give voice to his male perspective more clearly, for instance, when he expresses his ideas on how he sees Horsa as a younger version of himself or a son of his (215).

There are many postmodern elements in *The Cleft* such as self-reflexivity and metafiction. The first evidence of self-reflexivity and metafiction can be seen at the beginning of the novel: "People wishing to avoid offence to their sensibilities may start the story on p.29. The following is not the earliest bit of history we have, but it is informative and so I am putting it first" (6). The novel employs the technique of fiction about fiction throughout its pages since the story is about a historian writing

history. Moreover, the fact that the historian keeps interrupting the narrative in order to speculate about the history also makes the reader aware of the inner workings of the narrative.

The fact that the narrator of this novel is a male historian raises the question of unilaterality in narration. The novel sets out to provide another account of creation in which females are the first beings. The reader's expectation that the female would be valorized over the male is not met when this feminine creation myth is narrated by a male. This choice of the novelist may reflect the notion that even when the females come to existence first, their history is created by a male historian with all his male presumptions and assumptions of a politically superior racial, social and gender position. Furthermore, both as a narrator and a historian of his time, the historian has full authority on the subject matter and how it is conveyed to future generations. The implication is that it is inevitable for women to escape the influence and authority of men.

It may also be argued that this narrative is an example of an Amazon community subverted. Traditionally it is known that Amazons are a community of strong, female warriors living together without men. In this context, we have women living together; however, they are the opposite of strong, warrior-like types, and they revel in the presence of men. Furthermore, they also become dependent on men in time in terms of reproduction, safety and exploration. This non-committal attitude may seem problematic for a feminist to write. However, Lessing is reported to have rejected the label "feminist".

c. The Ways of the World

In this historical account of female power, women and men live in separate communities with distinctively different features and rituals. Women live in caves that are situated in close vicinity to the sea. The wetness and safety of those caves are repeatedly underlined throughout the novel. As a symbol, the sea has numerous connotations, from vastness to sheer hazard; however, in this context the Clefts are highly comfortable with being close to the sea. Their fearlessness of the sea is clearly observed when a Cleft says that they are not scared of the sea and they are sea people (8). Furthermore, the Clefts mark their territory in that these women feel at one with the Cleft, their primary dwelling which also resembles the female genitalia. It also occasionally has red flowers flowing inside its chasm and this event coincides with the menstruation of the women living close to it. Thus, the women's connection to their territory is strongly stressed.

Following the women's encounter with the Monster babies, in other words male babies, they put these different babies on a high rock contemplating that the eagles would feed on them and these abominations would be gotten rid of. However, in time eagles stop eating the babies and instead they would take them to a nearby valley where the male babies would grow up to build huts (15). The historian does not mention how these huts come to exist or who constructs them. Compared to women's natural habitat of caves and a cleft, men have wrought dwellings that can protect them from the dangers of the forest. Even then, the men do not possess the safety of the caves and the cleft due to the fact that they are closer to the forest in which various dangerous animals reside. Moreover, they live within close vicinity to a river whose currents have taken many lives. Women, thinking they are all alone in

the world, become ill with fear when they see their deformed Monster babies grown into boys and men, living in huts. Even when women are comfortable around the men, they are still afraid of the nature of men's habitat and their reckless behaviours; "they simply could not understand the carelessness of the boys who did dangerous and foolish things" (106). These men do not possess the skills to protect their little ones from reckless deaths, let alone providing for their immediate needs. According to the historical account, the babies are looked after by the friendly does; however, they still need milk and additional care. In this depiction of women's apprehensive but mistaken assessment of the situation it's possible to detect a subtle humor directed at the women's limited outlook.

The reproductive lives of the Clefts can be, first of all, divided into two distinct sections: parthenogenic reproduction and heterosexual reproduction. Before the appearance of the Monsters and before the Clefts ascertain that copulation with the Monsters resulted in babies "after a certain time", the women reproduced on their own; "[t]hey were just born, that's all, no one did anything to make them" (11). They also contemplate the possibility of moon or a big fish helping them out with their reproduction. In various parts of the novel, they also wander into the sea, swimming with the waves in order to get pregnant with an original Cleft baby.

The maltreatment of the monster-babies through which the mothers abuse them by pulling on their penises is an instance of black humor that Lessing points on the kind of madness that cannot tolerate difference, whether that mentality belongs to men or women. This is Lessing's way of mocking exaggerated positions of radical feminism.

Heterosexual reproduction changes the lives of the Clefts immensely. First of all, they need different names and terms for different people. This aspect is,

naturally, mentioned by the historian. The Clefts, as any single community consisting of the same gender, could not have labelled themselves, they are named later by people who deal with the theoretical side of the matters. Since there have solely been women in their world, the necessity for the words such as “female” and “male” do not arise in their community. This is how the Clefts realize the difference between the Monsters and themselves. First and foremost, these differences consist of physical differences, and are threatening and frightening for the Clefts. The ones who give birth to the Monsters feel that the others are ever watchful of them and their babies. Furthermore, since their babies are different, they don’t love or feed them as well as they would a Cleft baby. According to the accounts they are never adequately fed or loved (18). These babies that go about unfed and unloved are the luckier ones in that most of the Monster babies are put out on “the Killing Rock” (35) so that they can be eaten by the eagles. In time as the Monster babies start to grow large in number, the Clefts start to keep them as “pets” (35). In this context it is apparent that the male babies are marginalized for their difference and also turned into objects of ridicule and torture.

As constant with all cases of change, some of the Clefts start to adapt to the new situation. Astre and Maire are the two women whose names are known in historical records. When Astre gives birth to a Monster baby, she and Maire decide to take the babe to the place in the valley where the Monster babies grow into young boys. This idea is specifically fuelled by their curiosity of this newly emerging sex. Their first encounter with the Monsters is depicted poetically by the Roman historian.

> In the course of that afternoon and evening Maire copulated with them all. What I think we must imagine here is the flickering fast coupling

> of birds, which we all may see when we go to our farms and estates as the warm weather comes. (72)

Thus Maire bears the first baby of a new kind; a baby that comes to exist owing to heterosexual reproduction as opposed to the parthenogenic one. In other words, after this incident the Clefts clearly figure out that the different physical features possessed by the Monsters are used to make babies. Nonetheless, Maire and Astre are not allowed to have their different babies among the Clefts; therefore, they decide to take their new male babies to the valley.

Another difference brought on by heterosexual reproduction is the distinction of the new male babies from the Cleft babies and parthenogenic Monster babies.

> The girls who went to the valley and returned pregnant sat in the mouths of the caves and guarded their children, who were so different from the others. They walked early, talked early, and had to be watched every minute. Their mothers looked down at the rest of the tribe on the rocks, knew that their children had a double heritage, and noted the infants of the old kind were passive, easy, seldom cried, staying where they were set down; they were active only when they were put into water, where they swam about and were fearless. (103)

Consequently with the coming of these new babies, babies as well as mothers are subjected to prejudice and discrimination by the other Clefts and the Old Shes who are basically the rulers of the Clefts. Here the Old Shes who do not accept the men as normal creatures are portrayed as resistant to change and therefore challenge; their state of mind is described as "old, slow and suspicious" (115). Hence, Maire and Astre are seen as the disturbers of peace who change their ways by copulating with the grown Monster babies. For the Old Shes one of the most disturbing sides of this

change is the demanding babies. In the narrative the problematic aspect of the new babies is generalized as being demanding; they are noisy, active and needy. Thus, it can be inferred that the Old Shes do not wish to change their passive ways of lying in their caves and splashing in the sea. Here the age-old dichotomy of male/female is further emphasized when the quality of being active and noisy is brought about by the emergence of the male babies and when the women resist this change.

The spawning of the Monsters also resulted in the emergence of different instincts in the Clefts. In the novel it is reflected as a variety of sexual tension or reproductive urge, especially when Maire leaves her people and travels to the valley frequently to meet with the men owing to the fact that their "organs they did not know they had drove them across the mountain to the boys" (62). Maire and Astre cannot understand what is happening to their bodies and what is driving them to the men. The coming of men is shown as an instinctive urge that makes the women wake up from their passive slumbers by the sea.

Another important change that is apparent after the Monsters is the need for separate names. The Clefts don't need any differentiating names, other than a couple of titles that signify their task in the community; however, with the existence of the men, the women concentrate on their difference from the other community. This perspective into their distinctness emphasizes their differences within the community of women, thus leading to their desire to acquire individual identities. It also alludes to the division and rivalry experienced by women when in the society of men.

In the novel language does not seem to be a barrier between the Clefts and the Monsters. One of the reasons for this is that most of the narrative focuses on the physical relations and the anatomical differences between the two communities, and the arising situations thereof. However, there is mention of the comparison of their

language. The language of the men is described to be childish whereas the speech of the Clefts is far better. During their encounters, the Monsters try to learn the language of the Clefts. In fact, the old, childish language of the Monsters disintegrates with the death of the old, mutilated Monsters. This death also signifies the peace between the Clefts and the Monsters in that their presence reminds each party of the cruelties of the Clefts.

Feeling discomfort with the way the Monsters have changed their lives and have shaken their authority, the Old Shes plan to kill off all the Monsters residing in the valley. Their plan is insidious as "an Old She – the adventurous one – had ordered her girls to entice the boys to the cliffs above the shore" (121). This event surfaces as the first time the women in authority try to get back their power by eliminating the other party. However, they fail.

Towards the end of the novel the men decide to embark on an expedition around their territory. Their aim is to circle around their land in order to reach where they have begun, which is a highly colonialist and explorative enterprise. This journey of the men brings about problems for both parties in that women do not wish for the expedition to happen owing to the fact that the men want to take the little boys with them: " 'You cannot take little children with you,' " said Maronna – 'hysterical', said the men's history, 'indignant' said the women's account. What is interesting is that Horsa apparently meekly agreed" (193). As can be seen here, the idea of discovery and progress is barred by Maronna, the new ruler of the Clefts, a woman who clings to her community's passivity resembling the behaviour of the Old Shes. In the absence of the men, the Clefts become barren. They have lost their ability to give birth without the help of men. Whether this is a blessing or a curse is left ambiguous by the narrative:

> Maronna, as bad-tempered and empty of purpose as any of them, swam far into the waves and thought that one long ago a wave could deposit a babe into a womb – or, at least, so the old tales said; and she swam around and among the rocks and thought: perhaps it would happen again. […] And they all – the females – sat around under a full moon and told each other the ancient stories of how babes had once come into being because of strong moonlight. And perhaps, if they sat there long enough and stared long enough at the moon, then perhaps… (242)

The expedition ends in failure as little boys die during the journey and they don't succeed in finding new lands, plunders or riches. Furthermore, they also destroy the Cleft, which causes great conflict between the women and the men. Horsa's response to Maronna concerning the destruction of the Cleft is that there are better places to live (254) – a comment which cannot appease Maronna in her darkest hour. The women are deeply connected to their territory; they are highly attached to the Cleft both emotionally and anatomically. The destruction of this place marks the devastation of the supremacy of the Clefts in the historical accounts. Last but not least, according to the historian, this destruction also marks "the end of a tale and the beginning of the next" (260).

d. Family Unit

The Cleft is a story of origin (according to the historian, it is *the* story of origin); therefore, the concept of family is not invented or appropriated yet. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the novel an account of the interview between a

Monster and one of the Clefts, Maire, sheds light on the inner workings of the Clefts as a community: “I was born into the family of Cleft Watchers” (9). Here it is observed that there are certain groups of people with different tasks around the community. Some of these groups are Fish Catchers, Net Makers, Fish Skin Curers and Seaweed Collectors. As can be seen, the tasks arise from their habitat and survival requirements. What they reckon as family is nowhere near what a 21st century mind would think of a family. The most important point that disables the emergence of family for the Clefts is the fact that they can reproduce without the assistance of men. Since there are only women and since they can reproduce on their own, they don’t obtain the social roles of mother and father, and they also don’t need to form families in order to share conjugal tasks – all the tasks are shared within the community at large.

The Clefts naturally look after their young, especially well when they are female babies; however, as mentioned earlier, they leave their male babies on the Killing Rock for eagles to kill and eat. When the eagles decide not to eat these male babies and carry them to the valley, the problem of child caring arises. These male babies need to be fed, cared for and loved; however, there are no adults to do that in the valley. Does and deer become mother figures for the male babies, feeding and licking them (37). Abandoned by their mothers, these male babies find comfort in Mother Nature.

Heterosexual coupling obviously paves the way for the formation of a family unit; however, it takes a long time for the Clefts and the Monsters to find the concept necessary. Seeing the resemblance between the female and male, and the baby they have is the first clue they encounter in this matter. Since there are no mirrors, Maire realizes this fact while looking at the river (99). They have female babies and Clefts

that look alike; however, they don't consider the idea that the Monsters' appearance would be imprinted on a baby as well. This resemblance shows who the mother and the father of a baby is and this is how the first couples are formed.

> These three were a family, as we would know one, but what they made of it we may only guess. When the evening meal was finished and dark was falling over the valley, Maire and this youth and the child went to a shelter by themselves. That there was some sort of communion between them was evident, but what was it? What did it mean? (100)

The historical accounts don't have enough information concerning the relations within the family; therefore, the historian tries to connect the bits and pieces of information he can gather and in this process he likens this ancient social unit to a contemporary nuclear family. The historian does not know what Maronna thinks about this communion; however, it is mentioned that Horsa, the leader of the Monsters, thinks that having separate and monogamous couples create conflict over sharing the females (199). It is made clear at this point that the objectification of the female, as mother and wife, may start here in this historical account.

The new baby of the heterosexual reproduction brings about many changes to the communities. They are the babies that know how to cry and desire (85). They are the antinomies of the passive and dormant females of the sea. These babies reflect the masculine nature of the Monsters depicted in the novel as babies that "sounded desolate, lacking something" (86). However, what the baby lacks, the girls, Maire and Astre do not know. In the gynotopia the babies are pacified but they lose their individual aspirations and desires. This is another ambiguity that the narrative leaves unresolved.

In time, especially after the death of the Old Shes, new babies are fed, cared for and loved by the Clefts. They do not yet possess, or know that they possess, maternal instincts; however, they look after all the children of the community as customary. Therefore, it can be argued that in this novel motherhood is practised by nature since in the beginning they reproduce by natural ways and there are no members of another gender to look after the babies. While looking after the babies, they don't refer to themselves as women, females and mothers – everything is just perfectly natural. Consequently, the concept of fatherhood becomes a strange one at best.

> The two [Maire and Astre] did think a good deal about the others over there, in their valley. They were the fathers of the New One, and of the unborn infants, and of the little Monster Astre had taken to the valley. Fathers… a word that no one had needed, but now reverberated against the sound of mothers. If these Clefts were not mothers, then what were they? They were the mothers of Clefts and Monsters, mothers of us all, our ancient mothers. (87)

As can be observed from the account of the Clefts, they have a perfectly clear understanding of the concept of motherhood, which is natural to them; however, they don't possess a comprehensive idea of the concept of fatherhood, which is something that evolved later on when they understand that the babies look like their Monster fathers as well. Fatherhood works as a right of ownership of the woman and the child, as opposed to a person who has certain tasks and responsibilities when it comes to rearing a baby.

e. Representation of Gender Roles

In terms of gender representations, there are certain phases in the novel: the description of the female community as the only living one, the emergence of gender among the females, the introduction to the male community and the integration of the communities. First and foremost, the society is gradually introduced to heterosexual reproduction. Apart from their curiosity, they also search for relevant reflections in nature.

> There is a tale that two of us were sitting by the sea, watching the waves and sometimes sliding in for a little swim, then they saw two of the fish we call breast fish, because that is what they look like, big puffy jellies, and they have tubes sticking out, like the Monsters, and one of the them stuck his tube into the other, and there were little eggs scattering through the water. (20)

This manifestation of nature is how the Clefts understand and claim that copulation with the Monsters is a natural phenomenon. This is also how they present their experience to the Old Shes but to no avail. It is interesting that while these creatures, who are closely connected to nature, again look to nature for answers, their leaders do not take heed.

One of the ways sexual difference is represented in the novel is by way of examining the anatomies of male and female individuals. During the interview of the Cleft by one of the Monsters, she claims that the Monster body is ugly, using the words that are used by the Monsters themselves.

> You get angry when I say Monsters, but just look at yourself. Look at yourself – and look at me. Go on, look. I am not wearing the red

> flower belt so you can see how I am. Now look at The Cleft, we are the same, The Cleft and the Clefts. No wonder you cover yourselves there, but we don't have to. We are nice to look at, like one of those shells we can pick off a rock after a storm. *Beautiful* – you taught us that word and I like to use it. I am beautiful, just like The Cleft with its pretty red flowers. But you are all bumps and lumps and the thing like a pipe which is sometimes like a sea squirt. Can you wonder that when the first babes like you were born we put them out for the eagles? (11)

This is how a Cleft undermines and denigrates the male body. This hostility may be due to the fact that the Monsters destroy the Cleft in the end. The Clefts also think that every organ in the body have a purpose. Consequently, they criticize the male body over its differences from the female body. One of these aspects is that they have nipples but not breasts: "Why have nipples at all when they aren't good for anything? You can't feed a babe with them, they are useless" (17). The Clefts' idea of having bodily functions is closely connected to motherhood. Thus, their idea of womanhood is inseparably aligned with that of motherhood. After some time of focusing on the differences between the Clefts and Monster babies, the Old Shes decide to look at the similarities between them: "the Monsters were really like us, except for your thing in front, and your flat breasts. It was like one of our babies. Cut off the thing in front and see what happens – well, they did cut it off and it died" (19). Here it can be observed that the curiosity of the Clefts leads to their cruelty.

> We must remember the first little males were badly mutilated, in ways I for one would rather not dwell on. Their "squirts" had been so mishandled, pulled and played with, and their sacs had sometimes

> been cut off for the game of extracting the stones, and above all, they had never known tenderness or maternal care. (36)

It is ironic that so many of the patriarchal binary oppositions should be reproduced by the Clefts in their segregated society. Labelling them monsters for the sake of their different bodies and behaviour turns them into the mutilated and suppressed Other. Therefore, the role of the powerful gender is subverted, at this junction, as the females are the ones with power; however, by abusing their power by mutilating the weak party, the females do not practice what they preach. Here it can be observed that patriarchy is not directly correlated with being male; it is more of a state of mind in which a female can also be patriarchal.

Another aspect of gender representation is the binary opposition of active/passive. In the novel, the women are portrayed as people who are "unused to fighting, or even aggression [and] physical activity" (22). For many years their life has consisted of lying on the ground and swimming. Their portrayal of passivity arises both in the discourse of the historian and the Monsters.

> [The Clefts] lay on rocks, the waves splashing them, like seals, like sick seals, because they are pale and seals are mostly black. At first we thought they were seals. Singing seals? We had never heard seals sing, though some say they have heard them. Then we knew they were the Clefts. (29)

They are also portrayed as people whose "minds were not set for questions, even a mild interest" (31). Moreover, they also have "long, slow, puzzled stares" (31). Their apathy and disdain towards the expedition of the Monsters also serves to underline the fact that they are against discovery, action and progress. It seems that they can live forever lying around, swimming and getting anatomically different

people killed. In this respect, a race of cruel and incredulous women are described as our descendants in the novel. Towards the end of the novel women become more active during the activities with the Monsters in the valley. As the historian also mentions, it is plausible to picture the soft, fat, slow females running and engaging in heavy physical activities (153). The women of the shores become more energetic after the encounter with the men; therefore, it can be inferred that without the Monsters the Clefts would simply continue their dormant lives without any achievements or progress until the end of time.

In contrast, the men are portrayed as active beings. Restlessness and recklessness are two distinct features they have. They explore the forest, kill animals for food, burn fires to keep animals at bay, befriend wild animals and so on. Consequently, their agility turns out to be dangerous as well. The Clefts observe their actions and behaviours in befuddlement.

> Were they mad? Hard to see a whole day's skimming stones over the waves as a sane activity. No, they were – at least sometimes – crazy. Perhaps the full moon affected them? After all, if the full moon regulated the women's fertility and their menses, then the full moon could wreak otherwise sane minds into lunacy. It was generally agreed in the end that the men were, if not mad, then deficient in understanding. (162)

While the Monsters criticize the Clefts for being timid and tiresome, the Clefts criticize the Monsters for being reckless and almost insane. The women support their argument of recklessness with the deaths of the small boys during the expedition and during general physical activities and games they play in the valley. Here the age-old disagreement between the two genders is clearly observed. It may

be argued that the text is underlining this point in order to show that even our old ancestors were focused on the same differences of gender in prehistoric times.

The novel challenges traditional gender roles through mock affirmation. There are two powerful ways Lessing recreates the binary opposition of active/passive. The first one is showing women as passive people who lay around by the sea with no curiosity and men as active people who explore their surroundings and engage in physical activities. The exaggerated construction of this binary opposition makes its satirical function more powerful. With this satire, Lessing might be criticising radical feminism and its essentialist approaches. This idea is further strengthened with the babies. Female babies of the Clefts are highly docile whereas the babies born as a result of copulation with men are active, creative and lively. This differentiation signifies the idea that separatism is not a practical solution to the problems brought about by patriarchy.

Desire is another aspect of gender representation that Lessing seems to have based on biological instances. After their discovery of heterosexual reproduction, both communities engage in constant reproductive activity. This activity affects the minds of both women and men; however, while the men have no idea what is eating them inside out, women know what they are craving.

> Maire thought a good deal about the Squirts over the mountain. She *felt* them as wanting her. It was not how she had handled their squirts that was in her mind: rather the hunger in their faces as they looked at her, a need that was like something pulling at her. (69)

Being needed and wanted is what draws the Clefts to the Monsters. Another important point is that the Clefts prefer mating with the Monsters due to the fact that

they have “the gift of making new people” (69). The Monsters’ cluelessness towards their own desires is also observed.

> The males – with their restless, ever-responding squirts, which were sometimes large, sometimes limp, but mostly stiff with need, so that it was unpleasant for them to bump into a bush or tall grass – did not know that their hungry wanting, their need, was the voice of their own Squirts down there, but felt as if it were their whole selves that wanted and needed. (88)

The desire of the Clefts and the Monsters also leads to their mutual need for each other. After having discovered heterosexual reproduction, the Clefts realize that they cannot reproduce otherwise. They can no longer bear children without the fertilization of men. This realization renders the Clefts reliant on men in order to have children. In the novel this is portrayed as a turning point for the women. Being reliant on men comes as a shock to them; nonetheless, they continue to be drawn to them as if bearing children is the most important aspect of their existence. Here a view of biological determinism can be observed in that anatomy is the destiny of our ancestors. The Monsters’ need for the Clefts can be, on the other hand, divided into two categories: their benightedly physical urge for the women and the little boys’ hunger for mother’s milk – neither of which makes them dependent on women either biologically or intellectually.

First sign of nurturing behaviour of women is observed when the little boys are taken to the women’s abode when they are injured. Furthermore, the women’s overall attitude seems to be nurturing and motherly towards the adult men as well.

> The women always talked down to the men, chiding and scolding. On one occasion, when Maronna arrived in the men’s camp, very angry,

> it was because some small boys had been killed in the fighting, when the fighting still went on, and she, speaking for all the women, was pointing out that it was easy for them, the men, who never took on the boys when they were small, but always when they had stopped being demanding children, and the women had done all the hard work of rearing them, feeding, nurturing. It took a moment, said Maronna, to kill someone, and that moment ended years of painstaking, difficult hard work. (177)

The criticism of the Monsters' recklessness coincides with the nurturing aspect of the Clefts in that the Clefts are acting both as partners and mothers of the men. This is also true, as mentioned in the novel, that many of the pairs are mother-son pairs – owing to the fact that all Clefts bear children and all their children live in the valley. Chances of mating with one's own son in this context are quite high. Again, the narrative is unclear about the incestuous dimension of the new situation that the clefts try to cope with.

The focus on the motherhood of the Clefts comes to a climax during the expedition of the Monsters. Aiming to locate new territories, the Monsters organize an expedition and on that expedition they plan to take little boys as well. This idea is strongly rejected by the Clefts who argue that the little boys would be killed. However, the Monsters take the little boys anyway and they get killed. Maronna reacts to this in a great deal of agony. Again the recklessness of the men and the motherliness of the women are underlined as they experience this loss. Here, the reader might even speculate on the associational implication of the name Maronna, with Madonna, the saving, lamenting mother of the Christian tradition. Even at her

darkest hour, she reflects her motherly nature to Horsa, who is forgiven in the comfortable embrace of Maronna (258).

Another point they argue about is that they cannot bear children without men.

> [Maronna] stood on a rock that gave her height over the women and the boys and said, "Look at us. There is not a filled womb among the lot of us. Look at our flat stomachs and our empty breasts. Surely we understand what is really speaking when we raise our voices and accuse others? This has never happened before: or there is no record of it. We need our men to return and fill our wombs. That is all. Surely we can wait patiently without behaving like little children..." And she wept. (241)

In the absence of the men, unprepared for anything that is not ordinary or similar to their habits, the Clefts experience discomfort at best. Feeling that bearing children is the meaning of their lives, the Clefts are deprived of the experience when the men are absent.

The rape instance that takes place in the novel poses to be another problem in terms of the representation of gender. At the beginning of the novel, four of the first men pay a visit to the place where the women live and they capture one of the Clefts. Taking her hostage, they rape her repeatedly and then they kill her. After that, for some reason, they decide to forget this experience.

> This murder was not recorded in their recitals of their history and they tried to forget it, and in the end did, just as the Clefts, when they did remember how they had tortured and tormented the Squirts, softened the tale and made it less, and then soon chose to believe there had been one monstrous babe they had hurt – just one. (48)

In a defensive stance, the historian presents the rape and murder with the example of the Clefts' mutilation of the first male babies. Trying to appropriate the two acts and making them equally cruel, the historian ends with the analogy of the Clefts' story being forgotten as well. However, throughout the novel, the curious cruelty of the Clefts keeps getting mentioned – due to the fact that the mutilated boy lives to tell the tale – however, the story of the raped and murdered (first murder at that) Cleft goes untouched.

Lessing's *The Clefts*, therefore, should be read as an ironic interrogation of the gynotopian tradition rather than a straightforward attempt at presenting yet another gynotopia.

CONCLUSION

INTERROGATING GYNOTOPIAS

Herland, *The Female Man* and *The Cleft* can be characterized as gynotopias since they are set in remote and exclusively female communities. Deeply touched by patriarchy, these female communities strive to survive under harsh conditions. Apart from being gynotopias, these novels can also be specified as critical utopias in that they are open-ended (*Herland* and *The Female Man*) and circular (*The Cleft*). Furthermore, they provide criticism without providing a certain, clear-cut solution or message, which makes them critical of the society and the utopian genre at large. Their criticism is directed against the central idea that men are the major cause of the current plight of women and that the male institutions established by these men should be abolished. Ironically, the novels do not offer resistance as a solution. They do not fight back when they are faced with the threats of patriarchal systems – they become parts of those systems by embracing them.

By the second half of the twentieth century it can be argued that female writers started to fill the shelves with works of science fiction. This belatedness may be explained by the correspondence of female science fiction with the rise of Second-wave feminism. Feminist science fiction is mostly written to question the categorization and boundaries of gender. Specifically the novels that belong to this genre question the masculine assumptions of patriarchy and the prescribed role of women in current social reality. According to M. Keith Booker's *The Science Fiction Handbook*, "women writers such as Leigh Brackett, Katherine MacLean, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and Judith Merril established a presence in science fiction from 1930s through the 1950s. However, many of these early writers […] adopted masculine pseudonyms in order to

avoid prejudice from their […] audience" (86). Margaret Atwood, Octavia Butler, Suzy McKee Charnas, Sally Miller Gearhart, Nicola Griffith, Ursula K. Le Guin, Marge Piercy, Joanna Russ, Joan Slonczewski, Alice Sheldon, Sheri S. Tepper are among the most important feminist science fiction writers of the twentieth century.

It is possible to compare *Herland*, *The Female Man* and *The Cleft* in terms of narration. In *Herland* the narrator is male – he is one of the explorers who pay a visit to Herland in order to discover and/or conquer. Throughout the novel the reader encounters Herland through his eyes and his naming process. As with all naming processes, finding, naming and defining anything comes to mean conquering and owning that particular thing. There are at least two possible ways of approaching the idea of a male narrator in a female-authored gynotopian novel. First one is to show the fallacies of male naming and conquering – even though a man is narrating, he cannot conquer Herland in a political sense. Not being able to command and conquer as they wish, the men are ridiculed and treated like children by the Herlanders. Second point of view is that despite the fact that women are powerful, they are represented by a man, which is similar to many social and political situations that can still be experienced in the 21st century. It can be a criticism of representation of women by men and lack of representation of women as well. In *The Female Man* the narration is fragmented into many sections with different styles and genres and narrators. Even though it is challenging to understand the identity of the narrator in all chapters, it is still clear that the narrator is one of the female characters. This temporal and spatial ambiguity might point to the idea that these women might be standing for Everywoman. Thus, they become representatives of women in many contexts. Another important point in this novel is that the women cannot agree on a plan that would work towards their salvation, which might be a criticism of lack of solidarity within feminist movements.

When compared to the previous novels in this study, *The Cleft* has an entirely different narrative structure in that it is a part of a mythical creation story, compiled by a Roman historian – thus the narrator is male. He insists that he is being impartial; however, his narrative is marked by a subtle tone of irony and mockery directed against the extremist claims of feminist separatism.

Separatism is another aspect of these novels that can be compared and contrasted. A formal and political separatism cannot be observed in any of these three novels; however, they are separated by nature. In *Herland* the men are wiped out after a war and the land of women is separated from the mainland by natural events. The women enjoy the company of the men who visit them, considering the encounter as a chance to re-establish a bi-sexual race. In *The Female Man* two worlds are presented to the reader's judgment: Whileaway and Jael's world consisting of Womanland and Manland. In Whileaway a plague kills all the men and the women are left alone as the consequence of this natural disaster. In Jael's world, on the other hand, a war takes place between Womanlanders and Manlanders. The state of separatism is almost the same in *The Cleft*, in which there is a female-only community until women start bearing male children. This gives rise to a male community that is nurtured by some of the animals that are friendly. Since animals carry these male babies to a valley in the forest, this separation can also be considered natural. The old and powerful members of the female community, the Old Shes, are opposed to the male community – even to the point of eradicating them altogether – but they can never prohibit either party from interacting with one another. Since there is no formal separatism, it is not surprising to see that these two communities come to reside together in time and their co-existence becomes might emphasize Lessing's questioning of exclusionist feminist policies.

When working on gender structures in fiction, it is important to examine familial constructions as well. In *Herland* there are no families because the women experience a communal lifestyle. Only the people deemed most appropriate are employed as mothers and since there are no men, they don't see the need for fathers. After meeting with the men, three marriage ceremonies are seen; however, they cannot succeed in becoming families in the sense that is familiar to the 21st century idea of family. On the other hand, in *The Female Man*, specifically in Whileaway, there are families but they are again very different from the common perception of nuclear family in the 21st century. In Whileaway a family consists of a clan of thirty people (mostly four mothers and their children). One of the most dominant parts of this type of family is that mothers do not engage in housework. Instead they spend most of their time socializing with their children in a peaceful setting. It is not possible to see a family structure in *The Cleft* either. Since there are no men, the women of *The Cleft* do not see the need for fathers, thus removing the need for the construction of a nuclear family. Nevertheless, an important event takes place when Astre and Maire discover that heterosexual reproduction results in the faces of the mother and father being imprinted on the child. Seeing the resemblance between people, the women get to discover who the fathers of their children are. Yet again, they don't start forming families all of a sudden. As in many parts of the novel, the historian fills in the gaps and states that they are considered to be "a family", which might be a legitimization of dominant social mores.

Reproduction is another important theme of gynotopias. In these three novels it is possible to observe three different scenarios on how women reproduce. In *Herland* it is stated that the women are asexual and they have a skill that can be called voluntary parthenogenesis – they can become pregnant using their thought patterns when they feel that they are ready to become mothers. In *The Female Man* there are two different

reproductive systems. In Jael's world Manlanders buy male babies from Womanlanders because they don't have women in Manland. In Whileaway, on the other hand, women reproduce owing to their accomplishment in genetic surgery. They join their ova in order to have children. It can be observed that the women are not dependent on men in order to reproduce. In *The Cleft*, however, there is a more complicated story. In the beginning, women reproduce via parthenogenesis and they are highly affected by the environment around them. After their encounter with men and heterosexual reproduction, they can no longer reproduce via parthenogenesis and become dependent on men in order to reproduce. Thus in *The Cleft* encounter with men ends up making women more powerless. In all three novels reproduction remains a problem that is not solved by gynotopian feminist vision.

In my opinion, *Herland*, *The Female Man* and *The Cleft* are not novels that pursue a goal of creating and announcing messages or lessons that can be learned. *Herland* structures itself as a novel that is narrated by a man and all three men in the novel represent a different aspect of misogyny. Furthermore, they are all ridiculed and proved wrong by the women. Therefore, it can be argued that the novel has a satirical approach as well. In the end women delight in the company of men. Not only do they try to learn about the ways of patriarchy, they are also willing to change their state of peaceful living. In other words, they are seduced by patriarchy as opposed to rejecting it. In *The Female Man*, the urge to fight and resist patriarchy can be clearly seen; however, the whole novel seems to emphasize the idea that salvation is hard to attain unless all women work together, individually and communally, to fight the evils of patriarchy. At the end of the novel, women cannot agree on what to do in order to protect their freedom. *The Cleft* portrays another problem – the problem of representation. Even when women seem to be the powerful agents in a mythical creation

story, they are narrated by a man who freely intervenes with and interrupts the narration in order to add details, emphasis and interpretations of his own. To complicate the matter, this point of view, especially when it assumes satiric and ironic tones, seems to correspond to the authorial point of view. So none of the three novels presents a gynotopia free from the tensions and contradictions of utopias in general.

There are also some shortcomings of gynotopia as a literary genre. First, and maybe the most significant, problem of gynotopia is that while it sets to criticize misogyny, the narratives mostly become laden with misandry. There are many instances of misandry in all three novels. For example, in *Herland* women don't have anything to fear and protect themselves from since there are no men in their country. It is statistically true that men are more dangerous than women; however, labelling men as evil doesn't solve the problem that is created by patriarchy as a system that suppresses and plagues both women and men. Another point of misandry in the novel is the treatment of Terry by the women and by Gilman. Terry is portrayed as the epitome of misogyny; however, Terry is only practicing what he has been taught by the system. There are no men in *Herland* but a system of patriarchy can still be established and maintained by women. It is a question of power, not of sexual differences. Instances of misandry are more apparent in *The Female Man*, especially in Jael's world where there is a war between Womanlanders and Manlanders. Jael plans to eradicate all men from the face of the earth, and the handful of men that are presented in the novel are the fearsome caricatures that should not be generalized. In Whileaway women don't see the need for men due to their absence in the first place. In short, it is possible to observe anger towards men throughout the whole novel. Last but not least, in *The Cleft* male babies are referred to as deformities and they are abused, tortured and sometimes killed.

In conclusion, even though the creation of a genre in which women can speculate freely is extremely beneficial, fixed representations of gender further problematize the relationship between them. The main problem with gynotopias may be the notion that they are doomed to fail. All utopias fail, which in turn creates dystopias. Utopia is unreachable; it is called utopia for this very reason. However, it is possible to underline the reasons why gynotopia fails to function. One of the most important reasons is that separatism is practically impossible in that the communities in the novels are separating themselves (or are passively separated) from men, not patriarchy. Since it is a political system, patriarchy and matriarchy have a lot of similarities in that in each of them only one party has the absolute power. Targeting male citizens, instead of the political system of patriarchy, as the source of all that is evil is one of the reasons why there is no peace in gynotopias. All in all, gynotopias arise from feminist premises and it can be clearly observed that the novels contain unequal treatment of people of different genders. In turn these narratives enter a vicious circle where women create gender assumptions similar to the ones created about themselves. While the literary genre is replete with opportunities of redemption and salvation, it continues to marginalize the inequality between women and men as members of different gender categories.

Gynotopian novel is a subgenre within science fiction, which is a genre that is heavily dominated by male writers. By entering the arena, female writers emphasized the fact that they can also write science fiction and this interaction breaks the tradition that has kept female writers away from science fiction. Writing gynotopian novels, female writers started to reclaim science fiction by creating a subgenre within that mainstream line of fiction. If we take one step back, it can be observed that these female writers also succeed in reclaiming science and technology because in gynotopian novels

women are in charge of learning, teaching and using science and technology in both their daily and professional lives. The subgenre of gynotopia continues to evolve while writers revisit the tradition in order to extend its possibilities and shed light on it from both positive and negative viewpoints. Gynotopian novels have a specific energy that carries potential and in order for this potential to be unlocked the subgenre should be kept alive and studied further.

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