

# Utopian Separatism

## *Feminism and Science Fiction*

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## Feminism and Science Fiction

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Utopian Separatism: Feminism and Science Fiction

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## Abstract

This thesis deals with three works of feminist science fiction. The three novels I will examine are Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) and Sarah Hall's *Daughters of the North* (2007). My central question in this thesis will be: To what extent are these novels representing contemporary feminisms? My thesis will therefore set out to examine the political and social context in which these novels were written, and also the impact of the genre in itself. By using their different feminisms as a point of departure, I will also examine how they approach gender as a social construction in science fiction through using utopian and dystopian strategies. Starting from the assumption that one can approach "literary narrative as a place where theory takes place" (182), as Judith Butler argues in *Bodies that Matter*, I will examine the importance of feminism in the narratives and also approach the context in which these novels are written.



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# Introduction

My aim in this thesis is to examine how three women writers in different periods of history have represented feminism in science fiction. By using their different feminisms as a point of departure, I will also examine how they approach gender as a social construction in science fiction through using both utopian and dystopian strategies. Starting from the assumption that one can approach “literary narrative as a place where theory takes place” (182), as Judith Butler argues in *Bodies that Matter*, I will examine the importance of gender roles in the narratives and also approach the context in which these novels are written.

The three novels I will examine are Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915), Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (1975) and Sarah Hall’s *Daughters of the North* (2007). My central question in this thesis will be: To what extent are these novels representing contemporary feminisms? My thesis will therefore set out to examine the political and social context in which these novels were written, but also the impact of the genre in itself. How is utopian and dystopian fiction used as an important strategy to convey certain truths about contemporary society, and has it had a historical significance? In this thesis I hope to give a satisfactory close reading of the novels and the contexts that they emerged from, both literary and theoretically.

Feminist science fiction can be seen as a politically active genre. The genre of science fiction in itself, and especially science fiction with utopian or dystopian dimensions, is often written in a political context. By defining a genre as being feminist, it also relies on a certain degree of political consciousness as to modes and topics of writing. However, the consciousness around the genre being politicized from so many of the women writers themselves, as the comments on the genre by Joanna Russ and Ursula K. Le Guin will illustrate, allows for this assumption.

I believe that feminism, despite women having gained many rights since first-wave feminism, still has its place and importance in our cultural and political environment. The way feminism today also intersects with other fields, such as queer, ecological and postcolonial studies is yet another way of keeping it relevant.

The discussion regarding whether feminism is still important today, takes on many forms. One of them is the assumption that feminism has gone too far in most western societies, and that men and children are suffering under the freedom of their liberated wives

and mothers. Another claim is that women are not allowed to simply be mothers and homemakers any longer. This claim also relies on the idea that the women who choose to stay at home are frowned upon by women who choose to pursue an active professional life. These notions are also often based on a binary view of gender as the natural result of biology. Many of these notions are also built on a view that seeks to maintain a patriarchal structure of society and support a strong emphasis on a biologically deterministic view of gender and sexuality, which in turn can be seen as a method for maintaining heteronormativity. Through my close reading of these novels, I will have a considerable focus on the historical context of the different waves of feminism that these three novels represent, and in that context I want to discern why feminism continues to stay important for our understanding of gender and sex.

I believe science fiction is one of the most effective genres for depicting what could be different and changed for the better in a society. Not only does science fiction often deal with matters that are highly relevant to us in terms of how we decide to shape our future, but also what we can do with our present situation. By presenting these alternative worlds and universes we are faced with a notion of what could go wrong, or what we can do better. By presenting worlds where our traditional views of gender are challenged, science fiction is also challenging the meaning of gender binaries and its normative notions in our societies. Another aspect, which makes science fiction interesting contemporaneously, is the new technological and environmental challenges we are faced with in our fast changing times.

This introduction will consist of three main parts. I will begin with a brief introduction to the primary texts, presenting information with regards to publication and reception. I will then move on to more general background and genre information, and approach the place of science fiction within a feminist discourse, I will also introduce and explain some of the terms I will be using in this thesis. In the last part, I will return to the specifics of this thesis, discussing theory, methodology, and structure. The novels in this thesis will be discussed chronologically; this is to be able to reflect on their intertextual context, and also to be able to see the subsequent works in a historical framework.

## The authors and the primary texts

The first novel I will examine in this thesis is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*. *Herland* is probably the most widely read of the three novels I will be discussing, this is also significant in the respect that it has received the most attention from critics and scholars, particularly from the perspective of feminism and Gilman's radical views on gender.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman is probably best known today for her short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" from 1892. However, Gilman was widely known contemporaneously for being an advocate for women's rights. In 1898 she published *Women and Economics*, a work that attracted widespread attention and established her career as a speaker, writer and as one of the leading intellectual women of her time. Gilman's success was evident as the book was immediately republished the following year. *Women and Economics* appeared in a total of seven editions in the United States and Great Britain and was translated into seven languages (*Women and Economics* xiii).

Gilman's position within the women's movement of her time was firmly established by the publication of *Women and Economics*. In her biography on Gilman, *To Herland and Beyond*, Ann J. Lane mentions favorable reviews of the book from several magazines and newspapers. Both the *Nation* and the *London Daily Chronicle* compared Gilman's work to John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. It was also considered as an important contribution to the women's movement by the *Englishwoman's Review* and as a work that could be compared in its contemporary significance to Mary Astell's *Defence of Women* and Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Lane 9).

In his preface to *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Nonfiction Reader*, Larry Ceplair illustrates how Gilman's interests informed her on a wide range of topics: "Positive Darwinism, the social gospel, social welfare, feminism (including its purity, temperance and suffrage streams), socialism (Bellamy Nationalism and Fabianism), populism, progressivism" (ix). All these topics combined gave Gilman a theoretical background, which made her able to make informed comments and writings on gender, women's rights and the importance of social consciousness.

*The Forerunner* was a monthly magazine, published by Charlotte Perkins Gilman from 1909 to 1916. In a statement of purpose from the first issue of the magazine in 1909, she states that the magazine is about "people, principles, and the questions of every-day life; the

personal and public problems of to-day. It gives a clear, consistent view of human life and how to live it" (*Reader* 195). Gilman sought to share her views on approximately everything that she felt could and should be changed in order to make America and the rest of the world a better place. In *The Forerunner*, she published shorter fiction and longer serialized stories, and a vast variety of non-fiction writings ranging from domestic problems, such as an article on why dogs should not be kept as pets, to articles encompassing politics and foreign relations. *Herland*, its prequel *Moving the Mountain*, and the sequel *With Her in Ourland* were all serialized and published in *The Forerunner*. In addition to publishing book length fiction in her magazine, she also serialized and published several non-fiction books on various topics. One of these books was *The Man-Made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture*. It was also published as a book in 1912.

*Herland* tells the story of three young American men who sets out to explore uncharted territory. The expedition goes searching for a society rumored to consist of only women, which they find and names Herland. The story of their experiences in Herland is narrated in first person by one of the men, Vandyck Jennings. Throughout the novel the narrative polarizes the differences between Herland and the United States. The utopian dimension to Gilman's *Herland* is made clear by comparing the women's outstanding and peaceful society to the negative aspects of the society the men came from. Herland is clearly superior, and it almost borders on the comical how perfect everything is in this all-woman society.

*The Female Man* by Joanna Russ is the second novel I will examine in this thesis. Russ started working on *The Female Man* in the late 1960s and in her essay "Recent Feminist Utopias" she states that she finished the novel in 1971 (*To Write* 133). *The Female Man* is perhaps not as widely read as Gilman's *Herland*, but it still has a central place within the feminist science fiction canon. One of the reasons for its importance is the consciousness Russ had around *The Female Man* being an explicitly feminist text. In addition to writing science fiction, Joanna Russ also wrote about science fiction. In 1970 Russ contributed her essay "The Image of Women in Science Fiction" to *The Red Clay Reader*, a small literary magazine. The essay was later reprinted in Susan Koppelman Cornillon's book *The Image of Women in Fiction* in 1972, and in the science fiction magazine *Vertex* in 1974. "The Image of Women in Science Fiction" is a comment on how women were portrayed in science fiction, and the lack of imagination in regards to creating worlds where gender and sexuality might differ from contemporary society. It was on its second re-publication that the essay really

started to attract attention. The subsequent issues of *Vertex* were filled with replies to Russ's essay, both negative and positive (Merrick 59). At the end of the essay, Russ says that she hesitated between calling her essay "The Image of Women in Science Fiction" and "Women in Science Fiction," but that if she had chosen the latter she would have had very little to say. Russ ends her essay by stating: "There are plenty of images of women in science fiction. There are hardly any women" (91).

In *The Female Man*, the world of Whileaway and the character Janet Evason is based on Russ's short story "When it Changed", which was published in 1972. The short story received the Nebula award for best short story in the same year, but also received a somewhat similar reception as her essay would. *The Female Man* in turn was described by science fiction author Michael G. Coney as "a horrible, sickening story" and that "[t]he hatred, the destructiveness that comes out in the story makes me sick for humanity" (Coney qtd. in *Secret Feminist* 65). In many ways the mixed reception of both her essay and her short story fuels a passage in *The Female Man* where she (or rather the implied author) makes assumptions as to how the novel will be perceived:

We would gladly have listened to her (they said) *if only she had spoken like a lady*. But they are liars and the truth is not in them. Shriill... vituperative... no concern for the future of society... maanderings of antiquated feminism... selfish femlib... 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, [...] Q.E.D. Quod erat demonstrandum. It has been proved. (101-102)

This is only a short excerpt from the passage and it is uncertain whether Russ wrote it into *The Female Man* before or after she saw the reactions to her the short story and essay. Either way, her presentiment regarding the reception of her book was in many ways correct.

The novel narrates the lives of four women living in parallel worlds. The worlds differ in time and place and can be read as alternative histories, as they are different versions of the same earth and woman. When the women start travelling between these parallel worlds, they become aware of their different views on what being a woman entails and how society and culture can have an impact on how the notion of gender is created.

The third and last novel I will examine in this thesis is Sarah Hall's novel *Daughters of the North* from 2007. The novel was originally published in the United Kingdom under the

title *The Carhullan Army*. As I am using the American edition, I will employ the title *Daughters of the North* throughout the thesis. *Daughters of the North* is the third novel from Sarah Hall, preceded by *Haweswater* (2002) and *The Electric Michelangelo* (2004). Both Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Joanna Russ were American, while Sarah Hall is British. When I decided which authors I would include in my thesis, Hall's novel was the only one I had read and studied before. The fact that the novel is published fairly recent makes the scholarly criticism in short supply.

Hall's novel has its place among other feminist science fiction novels, especially because engages several strategies to communicate with them. One of the strategies is that it incorporates several different feminisms. The novel is concerned, as the other two primary texts, with separatism. It also brings in the nature/nurture conflict in terms of gender as a social construction. Through the novel's ecofeminist perspective, it also questions women's relationship to nature, and also the complexity of changing one's own inscribed nature. Another strategy is the level of intertextuality in *Daughters of the North*. Upon reading the novel, I found that it had a strong resonance of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Atwood's novel from 1985 depicts an America in the near future, in which a theocracy has overthrown the government and drastically reduced the rights of women. In *Daughters of the North*, food is scarce and they receive canned food from the United States with Christian messages attached to it. The totalitarian organization Sons of Jacob, which has replaced the government in the United States in *The Handmaid's Tale*, also has a resonance in the ruling Authority in *Daughters of the North*. Both regimes exert totalitarian control under the pretext of rebuilding their countries. In the autumn of 2011, Sarah Hall presented a BBC Radio 4 broadcast entitled *Cat Women of the Moon*, in which she examined the relationship of sex, gender and reproduction in science fiction. In the program she places her own novel, *Daughters of the North*, in the context of other novels that deal with many of the same topics, including *Herland* and *The Female Man*.

The novel received overall good reviews. Colin Greenland of *The Guardian* described it as "tough, thorny, bloodyminded", and *The Times* hailed it as "a meditation on the inequality and difference of gender" ("Praise for *Daughters of the North*" qtd. in Hall, no pagination). Sarah Hall also won the James Tiptree, Jr. Award for *Daughters of the North* in 2007. The James Tiptree, Jr. Award is an annual literary prize for works of science fiction that expand or explore the understanding of gender. The award was initiated in February 1991 by science fiction authors Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler. The prize is awarded and discussed



yearly at WisCon, the annual feminist-oriented Wisconsin Science Fiction convention. Joanna Russ was also awarded a retrospective The James Tiptree, Jr. Award for her novel *The Female Man* and her short story “When it Changed” in 1996.

## **Feminist Science Fiction**

Science fiction as a genre is open-ended. It has the potential to imagine new possibilities and new technologies. As the narrative is often set in the future or in a parallel universe, it also has the ability to explore new sexualities and worlds without gender. All three novels in this thesis involve all-female societies, which in their own ways examine how a society or community could be different without two binary genders. Thus, separatism is the premise upon which these societies are built. Separatism is also reliant on being the other, of being separated from a different kind of society. Gilman’s *Herland* and Russ’s *The Female Man* presents societies in which this separation has lasted for so long that a world with two sexes, or more, seems alien to the women who reside there. In Hall’s *Daughters of the North*, however, the separation is quite recent and the separatist commune of Carhullan also has more contact with the societies that exist outside their all-female enclave. The reason for my interest in the depiction of these societies with only women is that there is a congruity between how the different feminisms are represented.

The impact of imagining worlds with women only is that it also depicts a world where women can do everything and be everything. These novels therefore set out to deconstruct the socially construed gender dichotomy in which women are deemed always to be biologically inferior. Other science fiction writers have chosen different strategies for examining gender roles as a social construction. One of these writers is Ursula K. Le Guin with her novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin created a planet called Winter and the people living on Winter are neuter. However, they have the possibility of alternating between male and female sexual characteristics when they are in a state of estrus. In Ursula K. Le Guin’s essay “Is Gender Necessary?” from 1976, she describes how she

began to feel uneasy about how she defined and understood gender and sexuality, and that this led her to write her science fiction novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Le Guin describes the novel as a thought experiment to see if gender roles are necessary (161). In Le Guin's novel, she has chosen to give all her characters male pronouns. This aspect of the novel was criticized by Joanna Russ in "The Image of Women in Science Fiction" (89), where she writes that "there is a human observer on Winter and he is male; and there is a native hero and *he* is male – at least 'he' is *masculine in gender, if not in sex*" (emphasis in original, 90). It is reasonable to assume that Le Guin viewed the male pronoun as a generic one. The example of Le Guin's novel illustrates that science fiction writers have used different strategies to explore gender and sexuality. This thesis, however, will concentrate on the writers who have used a separatist strategy.

In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, Abrams and Harpham defines Science Fiction as a term that

encompass[es] novels and short stories that represent an imagined reality that is radically different from the world of our ordinary experience [...] in which an explicit attempt is made to render plausible the fictional world by reference to known or imagined scientific principles, or to a projected advance in technology, or to a drastic change in the organization of society. (356)

In the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, Farah Mendelsohn claims "Science fiction is less a genre – a body of writing from which one can expect certain plot elements and specific tropes – than an ongoing discussion" (1).

The discussion of the elasticity of the genre is also apparent in how the three novels in this thesis can be described as science fiction. The understanding of these books as science fiction varies with each novel. Gilman's *Herland* can be described as science fiction, because it effectively describes a "drastic change in the organization of society." What if women were to develop a society without men for two thousand years? Gilman answers this question in *Herland*, and by creating a utopian world she creates a world of difference. The world of difference is also central to Russ's *The Female Man* and Hall's *Daughters of the North*. The two latter novels are also set in the future and, in the case of *The Female Man*, in parallel worlds. A projected advance in technology is only apparent in *The Female Man*. However, all three novels can also be considered "soft" science fiction, rather than "hard" science fiction.

There exists a general notion that when women write science fiction, it is often focused on the soft sciences. The distinctions within the genre are somewhat unclear, but the common notion of the terminology is that “soft” science fiction focuses more on aspects of anthropology, politics, ecology, sociology and psychology, while “hard” science fiction is directed towards technology, chemistry and physics. Schlobin claims that most women who write science fiction “write what could be variously labeled as ‘social’, ‘humanistic’, or ‘soft’ science fiction. While all their works contain the extrapolated factual material characteristic of science fiction, they really focus on the future of humanity and its possible future traits and societies” (30).

The three novels in this thesis also represent utopias and dystopias, although the dichotomies within the novels are of a varying degree. In *Feminism, Economics and Utopia*, the idea of utopia is explained:

The idea of “*Utopia*” was named by Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in 1516. (Utopia is a pun on two Greek terms, “ou topos” meaning no place and “eu topos” meaning good place.) A utopian vision can be seen as a thought experiment for philosophers, social scientists, economists, and other theoreticians, no matter whether they are feminist or not. Utopias reflect beliefs of what an “ideal” society should be like and also imply a critique of the current state of affairs. (Willemsen qtd. in Schönplflug 5)

Almost always present to contrast the utopia is dystopia. According to Abrams and Harpham, the term dystopia (meaning bad place) “has recently come to be applied to works of fiction, including science fiction, that represent a very unpleasant imaginary world in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order, are projected into a disastrous future culmination” (417). Dystopia and utopia will be used to describe scenarios in all three chapters in this thesis. I would also like to include the term ustopia, coined by Margaret Atwood, in this introduction. Atwood suggests that the word ustopia, a combination of dystopia and utopia, is necessary because one cannot exist without the other (*In Other Worlds* 66). An ustopian story thus contains both dystopia and utopia. The three primary texts in this thesis are concerned with both utopian and dystopian dimensions of society, although the dichotomies between the two terms are manifested in varying degree.

This thesis is mainly concerned with feminist science fiction. In *The Poetics of Science Fiction*, Peter Stockwell describes a change in science fiction from the 1970s onward where

“science fiction was adopted by the women’s movement to express the desire for a more equal society, whether by reversing reality, presenting an idealised polemic, or extrapolating oppression from elements of our own world” (9). This is disputed by Connie Willis when she claims that:

The current version of women in science fiction before the 1960s [...] goes like this: There weren’t any. Only men wrote science fiction because the field was completely closed to women. Then in the late 60s and early 70s, a group of feminist writers led by Joanna Russ and Ursula K. Le Guin stormed the barricades, and women began writing (and sometimes even editing) science fiction. Before that, nada... There’s only one problem with this version of women in SF – it’s not true. (Willis qtd. in Larbalestier 152)

In this thesis I will be examining three works of feminist science fiction, ranging in period from 1915 to 2007. The criticism of the current view in the 1990s of women in science fiction, as presented by Willis in the passage above, does not center only towards the fact that there were many feminist utopias by women in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century that are overlooked, but also on the fact that there were also a number of science fiction stories by women writers from the 1940s and onwards. One of the conditioning factors for women writing science fiction in the mid-twentieth century was that in order to have texts published, women often had to take on a male pseudonym. For example, until 1977 science fiction fans believed James Tiptree, Jr. was a man. James Tiptree, Jr. had written a myriad of well-received science fiction stories such as “The Girl Who Was Plugged In” and “Houston, Houston, Do You Read?” Both short stories were awarded the two major science fiction awards in America; the Nebula and the Hugo awards for best short story in 1973 and 1974 respectively. The discovery that James Tiptree, Jr. was in fact a woman named Alice B. Sheldon, led to a re-evaluation of the significance of the author’s gender in writing science fiction (Larbalestier 182). Sheldon was not the only woman among the science fiction writers of her time who wrote under a male pseudonym or used a gender non-specific name. Women writers of science fiction from the same period, writing under male pseudonyms or using only their initials for gender ambiguity, includes Murray Constantine, Andre Norton, L. Taylor Hansen, C. J. Cherryh, Vernon Lee, Paul Ashwell, and C. L. Moore. The necessity for these women writers to use male pseudonyms suggest the challenges women had to face both in

that period of history and within a specific literary genre.

In the essay “Feminist theory and science fiction,” Veronica Hollinger maintains that although science fiction “has often been called ‘the literature of change’, for the most part it has been slow to recognize the historical contingency and cultural conventionality of many of our ideas about sexual identity and desire, about gendered behaviour and about the ‘natural’ roles of women and men” (126). In the three novels I will examine in this thesis, a re-examination of gender and sexuality are some of the main concerns of the authors. Science fiction as a genre could be seen as a way of expressing a contemporary need for change or for highlighting the possible dangerous directions a society could take. The dichotomy utopia/dystopia is often a grey area. In some texts it depends entirely on the reader how they perceive the situation offered to them in a work of science fiction.

In *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction*, Robin Roberts suggests that “feminist utopias enact the strategy of separatism through alternative science, a reworking of myths about mothering and the valorization of the qualities identified as feminine: an emphasis on community, home and family. This paradigm functions in response to male dominated science fiction” (66). *Herland*, *The Female Man* and *Daughters of the North* are bound together through their strategy of separatism and Auerbach points out that “‘the great-minded over-mothers’ of *Herland* are the staunch progenitors of such contemporary female Utopias as Joanna Russ’s evanescent *Whileaway*” (qtd in Roberts 66).

All three novels can be said to portray predominantly white, middle-class communities. Gilman’s novel is also influenced by the then popular science of eugenics, something which seems to be the case for several feminist utopias from the nineteenth century. Roberts claims that these feminist utopias are not only exclusionary in terms of men, but also in terms of race (66). Russ and Hall do not include issues concerning race in the same way as Gilman does, on the other hand, they do not include it at all in the themes they discuss in their novels. Hollinger mentions Octavia Butler as one of the few black writers of science fiction, and suggests that “Butler also presents very complex human–alien interactions that dramatize how our experiences of sex and gender are inextricably intersected by experiences of race. (130) In addition to Butler, I would also claim that Samuel Delany in equal measures has dealt with the same issues within his science fiction novels. However, given that the novels in this thesis do not actually deal with experiences of race, at least not in regards to gender and sexuality, I will not include this theme in my thesis. The issue of eugenics will be dealt with briefly in Chapter One, as Charlotte Perkins Gilman seems to have had an interest in that particular

field.

## **Theory, Methodology and Structure**

In this thesis I will examine the three novels through close reading and also approach them in the context of the feminist movement at the time they were written. My close reading will focus on themes that are central to all three novels; motherhood, gender roles and sexuality. In addition to close reading, I will compare and contrast the novels from the second chapter onwards.

Through a focus on gender roles and performativity, I will also approach how heteronormativity as “universal” and “natural” can be challenged in feminist science fiction. The theory I will use is taken mostly from the point of view of feminism and queer and gender studies, and especially where these different fields intersect. Three of the theorists I will use as a theoretical framework in this thesis are Judith Butler, Donna Haraway and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, each having made a substantial impact on the aforementioned fields of study. I will also approach other women writers of science fiction and use their thoughts and comments on the genre, including Joanna Russ and Ursula K. Le Guin.

My initial goal in this thesis is to contextualize these texts in order to show that even though they are science fiction novels, which describe societies and worlds entirely different from ours, they are also texts that are consciously commenting on their contemporary society. I will therefore also depend largely on the three different works and the authors’ contemporary view of feminism and feminist theory. The first chapter will consequently for the most part rely on the theoretical writings of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The second chapter will be influenced by Joanna Russ’s own views on feminism and science fiction in addition to Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*. The third chapter will incorporate several different feminist theories, as a certain degree of multiplicity within feminism is of relevance to a reading of *Daughters of the North*.

My reading of these three novels will be informed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's stance that "an understanding of virtually any aspect of Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition"(1). In addition to Sedgwick, as before mentioned, Judith Butler's understanding of gender as performance will influence my close reading and analysis, as well as her definition of the "heterosexual matrix" as "a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender [...] that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined, through the compulsive practice of heterosexuality" (151). Donna Haraway's writings on "cyborg feminism" will also be used, especially in relation to Chapter Two. In her essay "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," Haraway comments that "[t]he cyborgs populating feminist science fiction make very problematic the statuses of man or woman, human, artifact, member of a race, individual identity, or body" (36). Haraway's theory thus entails that through rearticulating the premise of being human, one has to rearticulate the status of gender.

My thesis will consist of three chapters, each dealing mainly with one of the primary texts. Chapter One will predominantly be concerned with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*. As I mentioned in the beginning of the introduction, I will present the texts in a chronological order. All three chapters will deal with three central themes; gender roles, sexuality, and motherhood. In Chapter One, I will begin by giving an outline of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's view on feminism, before I move on to examining the portrayal of *Herland* as a utopia. In addition to the analysis of *Herland* as a depiction of utopia, I will also give some background information about the popularity and significance of utopian fiction in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. I will then discuss the main themes; gender roles, motherhood and sexuality in three separate parts before giving a few conclusive comments.

The second chapter will chiefly deal with Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, however, I will also compare and contrast it to *Herland* in some of the thematical readings. In the introduction of Chapter Two, I will also position *The Female Man* within the context of *Herland*. Then in the second part I will discuss Joanna Russ's scholarly work on science fiction in relation to her novel. In the following part I will give an account of the four parallel worlds that are presented in *The Female Man* and their significance. In the same section I will also discuss the structure and narration of the novel. As with Chapter One, I will then examine the main themes of the thesis.

Much of the same structure applies to the third chapter, in which I will be examining Sarah Hall's *Daughters of the North*. In the introduction I will present *Daughters of the North* in the context of the two other primary texts. I will also give an account of how Hall relates her novel to a feminist discourse. In the second part of the chapter, I will discuss the utopian and dystopian dimensions of her text and how they relate to each other. In the same section, I will also examine the structure and narration of the novel. In the third part, I will approach the novel in a context of different feminisms, including separatist feminism and ecofeminism. In the two remaining parts, I will discuss the main themes, but I will be shifting my focus from motherhood and childrearing to reproductive control, as the latter topic is more relevant to *Daughters of the North*. Throughout Chapter Three, I will also compare and contrast some of the main themes to the two other chapters. Finally, in the thesis conclusion, I will incorporate a comparative reading of all three novels and their main themes.



## Chapter One: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*

And as we got farther and farther upstream, in a dark tangle of rivers, lakes, morasses, and dense forests, with here and there an unexpected long spur running out from the big mountains beyond, I noticed that more and more of these savages had a story about a strange and terrible Woman Land in the high distance. (Gilman 2)

The main intention in this chapter is to show how Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian novel *Herland* represents her ideas and theoretical stances in a fictionalized form. In *Herland*, she managed to create a world where she could prove that women could be just as able as men, as well as being considerably better at a few things. By writing the history of an all-female society, she is at the same time writing an alternative history, based on how she believed a society could develop in the time span of two thousand years with only women. The narrative is at times very humorous, ridiculous and even dangerous. Gilman's understanding of the genre of utopian fiction gave her the tools she needed to explore her ideas in fiction while at the same time be actively engaged in "cultural work" through her text. The legacy of Gilman's utopian fiction can be traced to many other later feminist science fiction works. Her novel is often mentioned in studies of science fiction as a genre and is a central early text in the canon of feminist science fiction.

In Gilman's text "Feminism" written for *Encyclopedia of Social Reform* in 1908, she defines feminism as:

[A] term applied to what was earlier known as 'The Woman's Movement' and still earlier, as 'Women's Rights.' That Movement, in its largest sense, consists in the development of human qualities and functions among women; in their entering upon social relationships, instead of remaining, as has been universally the case, restricted to the sexual and the domestic. It is in large part individual and unconscious, but is also increasingly conscious and organized." (*Reader* 183)

Gilman's interest in feminism and the rights of women took the radical direction of complete gender equality. In an article on Ellen Key published in *The Forerunner* in 1913, she states that she is not "primarily 'a feminist,' but a humanist" (*Reader* 234). Gilman's stance in relation to feminism meant for her that the bettering of all human life was to be the consequence of equal rights and possibilities for women.

*Herland* can be viewed as a fictionalized version of many of Gilman's ideas and theoretical stances. This is congruent with what is often seen as a main incentive to write utopias, a wish to change and create awareness around a contemporary problem, or to show a solution. Utopias can therefore often be seen as a sort of "theory in praxis," except that it is highly fictionalized, often being set in a far away world, time or planet. In my close reading of the text, I will incorporate Gilman's ideas and theoretical stances, as they often are consistent with the ideas she puts forth in *Herland*. In the first section of this chapter I will examine *Herland* as a work of utopian fiction, in addition to looking at the novel in itself I will also discuss the importance and history of utopian fiction in Gilman's time. In the same section I will also approach the structure and narrative as an example of both Gilman's satire and didacticism. I will then discuss the main themes in the context of Gilman's theoretical writings. The first topic I will examine is gender roles and physical representations. In the third part, I will discuss motherhood and the implications of asexual reproduction in *Herland*. In the last part I am going to look at sexuality and marriage.

### ***Herland* as utopia: "[A] strange and terrible Woman Land"**

In 1915, the utopia as a genre was already established. In Carol A. Kolmerten's article "Text and Contexts: American Women Envision Utopia, 1890-1920," she writes that in the years between 1890 and 1919, there were more than thirty American women writing utopian novels "depicting their versions of a better world" (107). The most important topics in these books were motherhood and marriage and discovering the different solutions to letting women work

outside their homes in an equal manner to men for the common good of society, as well as finding a way of giving all children the best care and upbringing possible.

*Herland* is presented as a utopia on the basis of the observations of the first-person narrator Vandyck Jennings, also known as Van, who travels to Herland with his friends Jeff Margrave and Terry O. Nicholson. Through Van's conversations with the women of *Herland*, and the men's experience we are shown the world of Herland. The premise of being a utopia relies on being different and better than another place. In *Herland*, the utopian world the women live in is contrasted with the world the men came from and the society Gilman's readers live in. The interesting aspect of *Herland* as a utopia is that from at least one of the men's viewpoint it is not instinctively a better world. Terry Nicholson has such difficulties adjusting to life in Herland that in the end he is forced to leave. A more detailed description of his character will follow, but he is throughout the novel, singled out as being both ignorant and being the one character that fails to see Herland as a better place for men and women alike.

In *Herland*, Gilman managed to include many of her theoretical stances, but perhaps her most important project in *Herland*, as well as in other works, was to illustrate how the gender binaries and the sexualisation of women proved detrimental to all human life. She wanted to demonstrate what society could be like if women were treated as equal human beings instead of subordinate creatures of a mythical sex. The following paragraph from *Herland* presents Van's matured view of the situation after the men have been in Herland for some time and have been educated in the history and philosophy of the country. It is also an example of how straightforwardly didactic Gilman's *Herland* can be:

We have two life cycles: the man's and the woman's. To the man there is growth, struggle, conquest, the establishment of his family, and as much further success in gain or ambition as he can achieve. To the woman, growth, the securing of a husband, the subordinate activities of family life, and afterward such "social" or charitable interests as her position allows. Here was but one cycle, and that a large one. The child entered upon a broad open field of life, in which motherhood was the one great personal contribution to the national life, and all the rest the individual share in their common activities. (101)

Through proving her theories in *Herland*, Gilman sets out to convince her readers that the way women subsist in her time and how they have lived their lives throughout the majority of our known history is flawed, and is in fact an impediment to further positive human development.

To what effect Gilman creates a believable lost world is not really of the essence, as we are dealing with utopian fiction, however there is an attempt to describe a plausible reason why the country of Herland has remained hidden for two thousand years. It is probable that Gilman was thinking of the Amazon rain forest when she was trying to locate a setting for her all-female society, this can be extracted from the climate she describes in the book and also how Herland remained hidden all those years in a dense, uncharted forest. Although the exact location is not given, we can see the resonance of both Amazon myth and geography in Van's descriptions:

And as we got farther and farther upstream, in a dark tangle of rivers, lakes, morasses, and dense forests, with here and there an unexpected long spur running out from the big mountains beyond, I noticed that more and more of these savages had a story about a strange and terrible Woman Land in the high distance. (2)

The Amazon area is said to have been named by the Spanish explorer and conquistador Francisco de Orrellana. De Orrellana encountered a tribe in the Amazon where women fought alongside the men. He described the women as Amazons, a name derived from ancient Greek legends retold by Herodotus and Diodorus. In *Herland*, Gilman uses the existing mythology and creates her own legend within the book in regards to how the country is described: "None of them had ever seen it. It was dangerous, deadly, they said, for any man to go there. But there were tales of long ago, when some brave investigator had seen it -- a Big Country, Big Houses, Plenty People -- All Women" (3). The existing mythology surrounding this all-female society is seen in the book as something that is feared by the natives, but seems attractive to the adventurous American men in how they envision what they will find in such a country: "There was something attractive to a bunch of unattached young men in finding an undiscovered country of a strictly Amazonian nature" (5). The fact that the men are described as "unattached" evokes an image of an expected sexual freedom upon finding an all-female society. Perhaps the men's idea is that if they go to a country with

only women, all the women will automatically be romantically interested in them, for their simple reason that they are the only men there.

In *Herland*, Gilman presents a society free from the possible problems of a “bi-sexual” world. The society and its structures are highly evolved and its inhabitants seem to live harmoniously in a world without diseases, poverty and fear. The men find it difficult to come to terms with the idea of a non-gendered society and Terry deems female cooperation impossible from the very beginning: “They would fight among themselves,” Terry insisted. “Women always do. We mustn't look to find any sort of order and organization” (8). The history of the women that they encounter in Herland proves him wrong.

Overpopulation was a topic that was highly relevant in Gilman’s time, and population control and the distribution of natural resources was one of the topics she focused on in the novel. The Herlanders’s solution to this problem illustrates the importance and possibilities of female cooperation. For a long period of time, the women of Herland gave birth to five children each. Eventually they started to suffer from “the pressure of population” as there were not enough resources to feed all the Herlanders. Gilman writes that the women avoided certain measures, such as a “struggle for existence” which would result in “an everlasting writhing mass of underbred people trying to get ahead of one another” (68), or going on “predatory excursions to get more land from somebody else, or to get more food from somebody else, to maintain their struggling mass” (68). Instead, the women had a council and decided: ““With 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”” (68). In *Herland*, Gilman reacts against her own society by providing an account of how things could be done differently and often better under the direct influence of women.

The latter half of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth was a period in which the US suffered under economic instability and several major economic depressions, such as the panic of 1893 and the panic of 1907. It was also a time of increasing modernization and the rise of big corporations. Gilman recognized the importance of women gaining a voice in society so that the human aspect was still represented in modern industrialized world. Gilman considered women to have certain inherent qualities such as an instinct for parenting and care, which she believed men lacked.

Two of her main influences were Lester F. Ward and Edward Bellamy. Ward was a sociologist, botanist and paleontologist and was a follower of both Charles Darwin’s theory of

evolution and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's theory about acquired hereditary traits. It was especially Ward's theory about gynaeocentric culture that Gilman found useful in her own stances. In an article introducing the term, Ward writes that "Woman is the great unchanging trunk of the great genealogic tree. [...] Woman is the race, and the race can only be raised up as she is raised up" (Qtd. in *Reader* 27). In Gilman's *The Man-Made World*, which she dedicated to Ward, Gilman defines gynaeocentric theory as proving that women were the original "race type, and the male, originally but a sex type, reaching a later equality with the female, and, in the human race, becoming her master for a considerable historical period" (5).

Another influence is Edward Bellamy (Gilman, *Moving* 5). In 1887, Bellamy published his utopia entitled *Looking Backwards*, which tells the story of a man who falls asleep and wakes up 113 years later to find that the world has been transformed into a socialist utopia. The popularity of the book spurred a political movement with as many as 162 Bellamy clubs appearing with the agenda of recreating Bellamy's fictional world. Graham J. Murphy describes the popularity of Bellamy's utopian fiction as an example of the general popularity the genre gained, especially in the 1850s following industrialization. Murphy uses the word "eutopia" and defines it as a "non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in the time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which the reader lived." (Seargent qtd. in Murphy 428) Bellamy's utopia became an inspiration for many socialists in the United States and his work seems to have influenced Gilman to create her own utopia. When Gilman wrote her ideas and theories into a fictional form, the most successful outcome would have been the direct rise of social movements from her text; on the other hand, the changes Gilman presented were probably more radical and her utopia did not gain the same popularity or impact as Bellamy.

In the essay "Consider Her Ways: The Cultural Work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Pragmatopian Stories, 1908-1913," Carol Farley Kessler examines the didactic incentive in Gilman's poetics. Kessler claims that the way Gilman wrote can be seen as "cultural work," as her writings can "enact social changes, can function as social action, can convey alternative versions/visions of human action – a position of clear self-consciousness regarding literary didacticism"(127). In *The Man-Made World*, Gilman illustrates this point herself when she claims:

The makers of books are the makers of thoughts and feelings for people in general. Fiction is the most popular form in which this world food is taken. If it were true, it would teach us life easily, swiftly, truly; teach not by preaching but by truly representing; and we should grow up becoming acquainted with a far wider range of life in books than could ever be our in person. Then meeting life in reality we should be wise-and not be disappointed. (101)

Gilman's wide range of knowledge and ideas are presented and represented through the different characters of *Herland*. In the book, there are satirical comments and stereotypes, but also what appears to be an intense desire to make change possible through appealing to a wider audience.

In the chapter "Comparisons are Odious," we are presented with different facts from the men about the situation for women in contemporary America. These comparisons are mainly led on by questions from their teachers, Somel, Moadine and Zava, as they wish to learn more about the "bi-sexual" world. The narrator, Van, seems to struggle with telling the women of Herland, how the situation for women is in the rest of the world. Van, who is a student of sociology, seems to have the most nuanced and learned view about the different peoples of the world. Van is also the character that is most open to accepting the differences between the women they meet in Herland and the women in their own culture. Van accepts the differences on scientific terms, by examining how the women have developed without the presence of men. The scientific aspect makes his assessment of the situation even more well founded, and gives a truly didactic dimension to the text.

As Van becomes familiarized with the women of Herland, he realizes that the condition of women in the rest of the world is not as it should be. Therefore he seems reluctant to telling the women about how women are perceived in his world, and is constantly observing the reaction of his teachers in Herland when they tell them about the "bi-sexual" world. The other two men, especially Terry, do not seem to understand how his world may seem to the women of Herland. In a conversation about how women should take care of the home, and preferably not work outside it, Jeff has to admit that one third of all women in America belongs to the poorest class, which very often has to work outside the home to have enough money, and he "solemnly replied that, on the contrary, the poorer they were, the more children they had. That too, he explained, was a law of nature: 'Reproduction is in inverse proportion to individuation'" (63).

In order to show the readers what can be changed in her own society, Gilman lets the three American men become aware of their society's shortcomings when it is compared to Herland. Gilman frequently creates situations that guide the men towards a greater insight, and they are finally able to see how bad the situation is for women in their own world, when they encounter a society where almost everything is different.

Van's narrative begins with an apology for the possible inaccuracy of the text, as it is written from memory. The beginning of the book modifies the rest of his narrative in the sense that the readers are aware that he might remember some things and omit others, while the things he remembers might not have happened in the exact manner in which he describes. Still, Van appears to be intelligent and rational, and he has the objective tools to describe the society the men encounter in Herland. Van is not only presented as the most understanding and likable male character, he is also presented as being reliable, and his discoveries in Herland are scientific because he has prior experience from his field of study. When the men discuss and fantasize about what they will find in an all-female country, Van enters as the voice of reason:

If there is such a place -- and there does seem some foundation for believing it -- you'll find it's built on a sort of matriarchal principle, that's all. The men have a separate cult of their own, less socially developed than the women, and make them an annual visit - - a sort of wedding call. This is a condition known to have existed -- here's just a survival. They've got some peculiarly isolated valley or tableland up there, and their primeval customs have survived. That's all there is to it. (7)

But even Van could not anticipate the most fantastic aspect of their society, the women's ability to conceive without men, and he also has his misgivings about their society. Yet, Van is willing to learn from the women they encounter. He is also willing to accept the differences as a better alternative than the condition of women in America. Van sees the limitations of the other two men and considers himself to hold "a middle ground, highly scientific, of course, and used to argue learnedly about the physiological limitations of the sex". He also admits that the other men "were not in the least 'advanced' on the woman question" (9).

Terry Nicholson is the man with the most difficulty adapting to an all-female society. Through the descriptions of him we get the impression that he has always relied on his



sexuality and seeing women as subordinate to men. As they discuss what awaits them, Van describes Terry:

And Terry, in his secret heart, had visions of a sort of sublimated summer resort -- just Girls and Girls and Girls -- and that he was going to be -- well, Terry was popular among women even when there were other men around, and it's not to be wondered at that he had pleasant dreams of what might happen. I could see it in his eyes as he lay there, looking at the long blue rollers slipping by, and fingering that impressive mustache of his. (7)

Terry has a highly sexualized view of women and is described as a man's man. The difficulties he encounters in Herland have much to do with his own feminine ideals. It is almost as if he is afraid that he will become less of a man, if he conforms to their society.

Jeff Margrave is considered to be the southern gentleman of their small group. Van describes Jeff as being "a tender soul. I think he thought that country -- if there was one -- was just blossoming with roses and babies and canaries and tidies, and all that sort of thing" (7). Jeff is romantic and wishes to put women on a pedestal. He also believes that an all-women society will be "like a nunnery under an abbess -- a peaceful, harmonious sisterhood" (8). To which Van replies: "Nuns, indeed! Your peaceful sisterhoods were all celibate, Jeff, and under vows of obedience. These are just women, and mothers, and where there's motherhood you don't find sisterhood -- not much" (8). The idea that women are constantly at odds with each other is proved wrong in *Herland*. Gilman seems to suggest that when sexual relationships are absent from human relationships, true sisterhood can finally blossom.

Jeff eventually manages to adapt to the Herland ways, but he has more initial difficulties than Van because of his idealizing of women and his image of women as the weaker sex. When he encounters intelligent, hard-working and physically strong women in Herland he is forced to reconsider his own notions, and he realizes that they are more alike than he had first anticipated.

## **Gender roles and physical representations: “They were not young. They were not old. They were not, in the girl sense, beautiful”**

The first women they encounter in Herland are described as girls, although the men were uncertain in the beginning due to their appearance: “We saw short hair, hatless, loose, and shining; a suit of some light firm stuff, the closest of tunics and kneebreeches, met by trim gaiters. As bright and smooth as parrots and as unaware of danger, they swung there before us, wholly at ease” (15). The way the women look and also how they behave is the first manifestation of what is to come; the girls display a confidence and physical strength that the men are surprised to see in women. Interestingly, Terry’s initial reaction to seeing the women is very positive, as they are very close to what he wished for, and after the women run off he exclaims: “Mother of Mike, boys -- what Gorgeous Girls! To climb like that! to run like that! and afraid of nothing. This country suits me all right. Let's get ahead” (17). Clearly impressed by their appearance and agility, he holds on to his vision of a country filled with young and beautiful women. Conversely, the next women they meet are in Terry’s opinion old.

When Van first sees the women, he seems struck by the fact they look so different to what they may have anticipated: “They were not young. They were not old. They were not, in the girl sense, beautiful” (19). Yet, they are described as looking healthy, wise, serene and “wholly unafraid, evidently assured and determined” (19) by Van, but much to Terry’s dismay as he exclaims: “Every one of 'em over forty as I'm a sinner” (20).

It seems that Gilman is also reflecting on the subject of age discrimination against women, especially as the general idea used to be that life was over for a woman when she had passed forty; a notion that probably was very relevant in Gilman’s time, and is not far from the truth in our own. When a woman is no longer sexually desirable, her children are adults and have left home and she has no occupation of her own, what is her worth? This is a question Gilman surely had to come to terms with in her own society, as was the case for most women. And while Van recognizes the women as wise, confident and serene, Terry only sees them as old. Van considers this and contemplates that ““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”” (20). The fact that the women all seem so confident and unafraid is one of the elements of their nature that really confounds the

men. It is as if they automatically expected to be seen as an authority and by meeting these women their position is immediately unsettled.

In *Herland* there is a certain aspect of Gilman's views that seems unsettling to most readers today. In the early twentieth century, eugenics was considered a relatively popular and important science and the consequences Gilman believed that "pure breeding" could have for society creates a resistance to many of her other ideas when reading her texts at the present time. This has to be taken into account, especially as the notions of breeding and genetically pure "races" seeps into a good deal of her writings. Upon being asked if there were any negative aspects of *Herland*, Van's teacher Moadine replies that they have not had a criminal in *Herland* in six hundred years and that they have "'made it our first business to train out, to breed out, when possible, the lowest types'" (82). Another peculiar aspect of this notion of breeding out negative qualities is how the Herlanders bred their cats to become completely quiet and not to hunt birds, but only rodents that could damage the crops (49).

In an article from *The Forerunner* called the "New Mothers of the New World" from June 1913, we see an example of how her fiction is closely related to her non-fiction writing and what seems to be an overall view on life and human development. In the 1913 article, she states that when women finally realize their own human worth and gain equality, they will say: "We shall only marry clean men, fit to be fathers. The others may be serviceable citizens, if they are able, but they shall not be fathers. We will breed a better stock on earth by proper selection – that is a mother's duty" (*Reader* 249). The connection between the feminism of Gilman and eugenics is highlighted in Alys Eve Weinbaum's article "Writing feminist genealogy: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, racial nationalism, and the reproduction of maternalist feminism," where she writes about Gilman that "like a number of First Wave feminists, [she] was involved in shoring up an evolutionary discourse about white civilized womanhood" (274). The fact that Gilman had these views should not be overlooked, as eugenics was incorporated into the feminist stances of many women at the time.

Gilman describes the appearance of the women in *Herland*, and their alien behavior in lengthy passages throughout the novel. One of the reasons that she gave the topic so much consideration in her novel is the fact that clothing and appearance was of great significance to how a woman was perceived at the time. When the men are imprisoned in *Herland* all their clothes are taken from them and replaced with clothes from the Herlanders. The clothing in *Herland* is described in detail as practical and comfortable:

The garments were simple in the extreme, and absolutely comfortable, physically, though of course we all felt like supes in the theater. There was a one-piece cotton undergarment, thin and soft, that reached over the knees and shoulders, something like the one-piece pajamas some fellows wear, and a kind of half-hose, that came up to just under the knee and stayed there —had elastic tops of their own, and covered the edges of the first. (26)

The superiority of the clothing in Herland is presented as a triumph of a genderless society. The women of Herland do not need to worry about their appearance in relation to how men see them (and would like to see them), and they have chosen to wear clothes that are practical for work and comfortable for leisure. Van also remarks on how the clothes had “pockets in surprising number and variety. They were in all their garments, and the middle one in particular was shingled with them” (38). The logical placement of the pockets and the aesthetics of the garments illustrate Van’s view that the clothes and all the other things the Herlanders made were created in “the action of a practical intelligence, coupled with fine artistic feeling, and, apparently, untrammelled by any injurious influences” (74). The specific descriptions of the clothes in *Herland* is another way for Gilman to represent what she believed to be one of the problems for women’s equality in her time. In her essay “Why Women Do Not Reform Their Dress” in *Women’s Journal* (1886), she describes how wearing the clothes they did held women back:

The present style of dress means, with varying limits, backache, sideache, headache and many another ache; corns, lame, tender, or swollen feet, weak clumsy, and useless compared to what they should be; a crowd of diseases, heavy and light; a general condition of feebleness and awkwardness and total inferiority as an animal organism; with a thousand attendant inconveniences and restrictions and unnatural distortions amounting to hideousness. (*Reader* 23-24)

In Gilman’s opinion, the physical pains of women were less than the psychological pain you would experience if you actually wore more practical and comfortable clothes.

Another aspect of their appearance is the women’s short hair. In Herland all the women wear their hair short: “They all wore short hair, some few inches at the most; some curly, some not; all light and clean and fresh looking” (30). In 1915 short hair on a woman

was still seldom seen. In Herland, Van wonders why a “woman’s crown of hair” (30) is so admired. Jeff, on the other hand, does not seem to have done any nuanced thinking on the subject and simply wishes for the women to have long hair in Herland, because then “they would look so much more feminine.” (30)

While the women’s hair is shorter than what the men were used to, their own hair grows longer, something which is commented upon several places in the book. When Terry gets dressed in the new clothes they are given by the Herlanders, Van observes that Terry’s hair has become somewhat longer than “when we left the last barber” (26). The men also soon learn to appreciate their facial hair in a new way, when they discover that their beard is the one thing that immediately separates them from the women. The descriptions of hair is thus elementary in Gilman’s efforts to diffuse the gender binaries, yet the men almost cling to their last traces of traditional masculinity. During their stay in Herland, the men find that the women do not own any razors, to which Terry comments: “With so many old women you’d think there’d be some razors”. Jeff, on the other hand, points out how “he never before had seen such complete absence of facial hair on women” and suggests that the lack of men led to the women being even more “feminine” by not having any visible facial hair (73). The fact that the women of Herland have no visible facial hair can be seen as an example on how the theory of evolution appeared to Gilman. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Gilman was a follower of both Darwin and Lamarck’s theories. In the novel, she depicts a Lamarckian idea of evolution when she explains how facial hair, when women only inherited traits from the women before them and not men, would in the end completely disappear, even in older women who went through hormonal changes.

In the article “Hair Today, Shorn Tomorrow? Hair Symbolism, Gender, and the Agency of Self,” Karen Stevenson also mentions that Gilman may reflect the views of well-known physiognomists of her time who “linked female hairiness with ‘less-developed’ criminals and lower orders. Certainly Gilman’s perceptions of ‘less-developed’ nations and peoples were much less liberal than her views on women” (235). Gilman’s reasons for stating that these women were free of facial hair can therefore have multiple incentives, but the main reason for specifying this seems to be a desire to characterize the Herlanders as a highly developed people with Aryan origin. Stevenson also claims that Gilman “took to the lecture circle in 1916 to promote short hair for women not only as healthier and more comfortable, but as a mark of women’s political and ideological progress toward sexual equality” (219). The wish for equality between men and women did not stop at being able to vote for Gilman.

Her wish was to eradicate all binary gender traits that seemed irrational and unpractical, such as long hair and the maintenance that comes with it as well as impractical and constraining clothing for women.

One of the most general assumptions in relation to gender binaries is that women are the weaker of the sexes. Another argument often seen in discussions on the matter is that physical body of a woman usually has a higher percentage of body fat in order to carry a child through pregnancy. Throughout history, physical education and athleticism has mainly been associated with men. In Gilman's autobiography, she describes how important exercise and physical fitness was to her: "I was never vain of my looks, nor of any professional achievements, but am absurdly vain of my physical strength and agility" (*The Living* 67). In a chapter entitled "Health and Beauty" in Gilman's *A Man Made World*, she sees the discouragement of female fitness as another method of suppressing women:

The confinement to the house alone, cutting women off from sunshine and air, is by itself an injury; and the range of occupation allowed them is not such as to develop a high standard of either health or beauty. Thus we have cut off half the race from the strengthening influence of natural selection, and so lowered our race-standards in large degree. (50)

Gilman's own careful regime concerning her health coincides with her greater cause: the development of the human race, which she believed was reliant on women gaining strength both physically and mentally. In *Herland*, all the women are described as healthy and vigorous. In the chapter entitled "A Peculiar Imprisonment," she describes how the women of Herland attain their physical fitness through exercise. When the men see how the women exercise, they are impressed with their abilities, but they are also confounded by the women's lack of competitiveness: "They had games, too, a good many of them, but we found them rather uninteresting at first. It was like two people playing solitaire to see who would get it first; more like a race or a — a competitive examination, than a real game with some fight in it" (32). Jeff grants that even though there is not much of a competition, he is certain that the games the women engage in are educational. It seems that Gilman equates competitiveness with an entirely male and negative element. Hence, in a world consisting of only women competition would not be necessary. When Gilman imagined a world without any concept of competition, she also echoed the idea behind "the survival of the fittest." In *Herland*, where

the women use reason and logical cooperation in their stride towards reaching the physical and mental perfection of their people, competition becomes redundant.

**Motherhood: “Mother-love with them was not a brute passion, a mere ‘instinct,’ a wholly personal feeling; it was – a religion”**

Gilman’s own experience of motherhood would have been viewed as unconventional in her own time, and still would in most present-day societies. Gilman had one daughter with her first husband, who lived with Gilman for six years after their divorce and moved to live with her father when she was nine. Gilman was publically criticized for her choices in regards to motherhood, however she continued to write about motherhood and parenting in many of her subsequent works. In *Women and Economics*, she questions the condition of motherhood:

Does the human mother, by her motherhood, thereby lose control of brain and body, lose power and skill and desire for any other work? Do we see before us the human race, with all its females segregated entirely to the uses of motherhood, consecrated, set apart, specially developed, spending every power of their nature on the service of their children? (19)

Gilman sees the contemporaneous condition of motherhood as problematic, and she is probably resonating the difficulties she faced when she decided to send her daughter to live with her father instead of her mother. In *Herland*, a collective child rearing exemplifies the solution to the problems of combining motherhood and work. In Gilman’s utopia, every single child is treated alike and all are loved equally. Gilman writes about child rearing in detail and describes how the child would stay with its birth mother the first year and be nurtured by her, before entering the communal nurseries where they would be taken care of by competent co-mothers. The situation described by Gilman in her utopian novel does not

seem too far from the social systems in place for parents in certain countries with strongly implemented welfare systems. However in many countries, it is still difficult for women to have a career and children, and in Gilman's time it was almost impossible.

The issue of education is also highly relevant in *Herland* and is discussed as Van questions the women, and realizes the failings of education in his home country. Van's teacher Somel introduces him to Herland's theories of education and states that the two powers that are most important to them is "a clear, far-reaching judgment, and a strong well-used will. We spend our best efforts, all through childhood and youth, in developing these faculties, individual judgment and will" (106). In Gilman's book *Concerning Children* published in 1900, she also expresses her concerns about the focus on teaching children obedience. She believed this focus could prove damaging for the children's further development. In the book Gilman answers her own question: "On what characteristics does our human pre-eminence rest?" with "On our breadth and accuracy of judgment and force of will" (*Reader* 117). The use of the same stances in *Herland* as in her earlier theoretical texts shows the consistency of her work. The idea of an upbringing based on the total submission of the child to its parent is also relevant in a broader sense. She states that if it is right to do this to a child, then it is also right to subjugate women. The emphasis on the importance of a balanced upbringing and education for the children in *Herland* is deeply rooted in Gilman's ideas about the importance of giving children the care and freedom they needed to develop into independent and open-minded individuals. This perspective was also rooted in the difficulties women faced, and in many ways still face, in balancing work outside the home with domestic life.

The asexual reproductive ability of the women in *Herland* is probably one of the most fantastical aspects of the novel. The women in *Herland* get pregnant without men and through a process of thought. In the book, the men refer to the phenomenon as parthenogenesis, although a scientific explanation is not offered:

"Well – there are some rather high forms of insect life in which it occurs. Parthenogenesis, we call it -- that means virgin birth." She could not follow him. "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?" He passed this over rather hurriedly, saying that the same term would apply, but was seldom used. (45)

In Gilman's satiric mode of writing *Herland*, she manages to expose the men's lack of consciousness in regards to their own use of sex-distinctions. When Jeff says that the term "virgin" is used about the female animals before they have mated, he unwillingly reveals both that he thinks the subject too sensitive to apply to humans directly and that he is reluctant to use the term about men, thus implying that the topic of virginity is only relevant when speaking about women.

In *Encyclopædia Britannica* parthenogenesis is defined as a "biological reproduction that involves development of a female (rarely a male) gamete (sex cell) without fertilization. It occurs commonly among lower plants and invertebrate animals, particularly rotifers, aphids, ants, wasps, and bees" ("Parthenogenesis"). The explanations given in *Herland* have little to do with science and cells and more to do with spirituality and a strong belief in evolutionary race progress.

The history of parthenogenesis in *Herland* begins with war and natural disasters, which wiped out all the men save for a few slaves. The slaves then killed all the remaining boys in the country and many of the women too. The remaining women then fought the men and killed them all. After some time one woman gave birth to a girl and four more followed. They in turn gave birth to five girls each, and as every girl continued to give birth to five girls their nation prospered. The original mother was placed in the "Temple of Maaia — their Goddess of Motherhood" (56), and motherhood continued to be the most significant element of their society. The cult of motherhood in *Herland* is described as something that is elevated beyond the individual: "Mother-love with them was not a brute passion, a mere 'instinct,' a wholly personal feeling; it was — a religion" (68). The comparison between religion and motherhood is an issue that Gilman addresses specifically in her book *His Religion and Hers* (1923). In *His Religion and Hers*, she claims that if the religions of the world had developed through women's minds they would "have shown one deep essential difference, the difference between birth and death. The man was interested in one end of life, she in the other. He was moved to faith, fear, and hope for the future; she to love and labor in the present" (Reader 296). The essential difference lies therefore in the women's nature, thus, Gilman concludes that because a woman is able to give birth to a child, motherhood is where the main focus of her religion would be. In continuing her reasoning for this difference in

religions, she writes that “To the death-based religion the main question is, ‘What is going to happen to me after I am dead?’ – a posthumous egotism. To the birth-based religion the main question is, ‘What must be done for the child who is borne?’ – an immediate altruism” (*Reader* 296).

Because Gilman published *Herland* in installments in her magazine, it is possible to see a congruent strain of thought in both her fiction and non-fiction. In the 1915 July issue of *The Forerunner*, she published a text called “Birth Control” where she states that she believes that sex should be for reasons of procreation only, and that men and women should abstain from sex for any other reason rather than using contraception. The preceding issue of the *Forerunner* had featured a chapter from *Herland* where the men learn about how the women controlled the population in Herland and which also illustrates Gilman’s view on abortion:

“But what I do not understand, naturally, is how you prevent it. I gathered that each woman had five. You have no tyrannical husbands to hold in check – and you surely do not destroy the unborn - ” The look of ghastly horror she gave me I shall never forget. She started from her chair, pale, her eyes blazing. “Destroy the unborn -!” she said in a hard whisper. “Do men do that in your country?” “Men!” I began to answer, rather hotly, and then saw the gulf before me. None of us wanted these women to think that *our* women, of whom we boasted so proudly, were in any way inferior to them. (69)

Gilman presents a view of abortion that corresponds with the general notion of her time. Movements for the criminalization of abortion in the United States did not take hold until the mid-nineteenth century, and before that abortion had not caused a considerable amount of controversy and was generally not discussed publicly. However, by the early twentieth century abortion had become illegal in all states (Rose 4). In Gilman’s article on birth control, she is adamant that sex without the intention of procreation is unnatural, and should therefore be avoided. Gilman states that sex for pleasure is a “grave injury of the higher processes of human development” (*Reader* 253). The relation between sex and diseases was also significant in Gilman’s time. The exploitation of women for sex work was probably another incentive for Gilman’s inclination to restrict birth control, as well as the threat of men contracting sexually transmitted diseases from prostitutes and passing it on to their wives.

The women in Herland are shocked to hear about the custom of abortion from the visiting men. In Herland the women can control their parthenogenesis and their impulses to have children through thought; abortion is therefore never needed in Herland. Their ability to control their pregnancies with their mind gives an illustration of how Gilman could have seen a possible solution to unwanted pregnancies by granting women more rights, especially in regards to their own bodies and limitations on sex. Thus, the women of Herland are in complete control over their own lives, as they are in control over their bodies and how many children they would like to have.

Throughout the book, it becomes clear that the topic of motherhood is interwoven into almost all the other topics mentioned, and especially in relation to the topics of marriage, education, and naming. As the very idea of motherhood is also linked to how they have survived and stayed isolated for so long, it can be said to be the driving force behind everything the women do in their life. In 1915, the Canadian author and social activist Nellie McClung published her work *In Times Like These*, where she made the case for female suffrage. Many of her arguments for female suffrage seem to be based on an assumption of female moral superiority created by of their maternal instinct. McClung writes: “Deeply rooted in every woman's heart is the love and care of children” (25). Her arguments follow a trajectory that claims that people who were against women gaining the vote also saw children as a burden. However, where McClung and Gilman saw an appreciation of the women’s roles as mothers as a way for women to branch out into public spheres, there were other feminists at the time, such as Ellen Key, who believed women’s main purpose were to be mothers and that this therefore should count as waged labor. Gilman’s proposal in regards to the socialization of childcare was controversial and contradictory to other feminists of the time.

Although Gilman seems to be an essentialist feminist in the way she promotes certain traits and qualities as inherent in women and not men, in the manner that men are aggressive and create wars while women are caring and wish only the best for their children, she is also radical in her opinions that women can be as physically and mentally fit to do all kinds of work. Furthermore, Gilman can be seen as a radical feminist in the sense that she claimed that the feminine traits by which men define women only exist because men need them in order objectify women and make them the weaker sex, and that these traits can be altered and should be altered in order for women to be fully human.

## **Marriage and sexuality in *Herland*: “[T]hey don't know the first thing about Sex”**

Sexuality in *Herland* is virtually non-existent in the narrative, and yet it is very present in an indirect form. In the book, the women are described as having no sexual desires, and the struggle to grasp the concept of sexual relationships when the men try to explain what they are or make sexual advances towards them. In stark contrast to what Terry imagined awaited him in a country with only women, they seem to have simply forgotten about sex and desire, leaving only a desire to have children and for improving their race.

The relationship between the women is not really described in terms of mutual respect and familiarity, and the only love expressed is that between mother and child, and later on between husband and wife. However, when Van tells Ellador about the expectations of marriage and of having a sexual relationship, she thinks the idea sounds beautiful because it stimulates creative work. This is yet another example of the satiric mode in which Gilman writes. In her article “Birth Control,” Gilman wrote that one of the most often used arguments for having sex without the intent of producing a child was that it could stimulate creativity (*Reader* 254). The “higher function” of stimulating creativity is a claim that Gilman seems to find ridiculous. She measures the assumption against all the evils she believes are created by people having sex just for pleasure, such as “shameful diseases” (255). In *Herland*, Ellador does not give in to Van’s sexual advances, and although Van struggles with this he is so satisfied with all the other aspects of their relationship, such as mutual respect, that he forgets “the one point which was not satisfied, and got along very well until mealtime” (129). In the course of reading this novel, one is confronted with the prudishness of the text. The fact that the women seem to be completely devoid of sexuality, and even romantic friendships seem rather unlikely; it can appear as an incomplete portrait of a fictional universe for contemporary readers of the text. As an explanation to why the women’s sexuality is non-existent, we are told that this too is partly a result of “good” breeding: “Two thousand years’ disuse had left very little of the instinct; also we must remember that those who had at times manifested it as atavistic exceptions were often, by that very fact, denied motherhood” (92). This suggests that there had been women in *Herland* who expressed sexual feelings for other women, but even though their society consisted of only women, this was seen as an abnormality that had to be eradicated. Passionate romantic friendships between women in the

late nineteenth and early twentieth century were often expressed in letters; several of the biographies written about Gilman question her sexuality and her close friendships with women. Her friendship with Martha Luther is often used to illustrate a relationship that could have had more to it than just friendship. In 1881 Gilman wrote to Martha and expressed her love:

I think it highly probable (ahem!) that you love me however I squirm, love the steady care around which I so variously revolve, love me and will love me – why in the name of heaven have we so confounded love with passion that it sounds to our century-tutored ears either wicked or absurd between women? It is no longer friendship between us, it is love. (Qtd. in *Reader* 14)

This expression of love does not promise any physical manifestations. In her autobiography, Gilman writes about her relationship with Martha that “In our perfect concord there was no Freudian taint, but peace of mind, understanding, comfort, deep affection – and I had no one else” (qtd. in Lane 79). However, the question of social acceptance and occurrences of romantic and sexual same-sex relationships in the nineteenth and early twentieth century has been widely discussed by feminist scholars from the 1970s and onwards, and in an article from 1975 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg writes that these types of relationships between women were “were socially acceptable and fully compatible with heterosexual marriage” (19). It seems that to the extent Gilman could imagine a world that accepted sexual relationships between women, she was dependent on a perpetuation of heterosexual normativity in order to fulfill her project of improving the human race. Although the connection can be made between the power structures of a patriarchal society, which she opposed, and heterosexuality as having a reinforcing effect in creating gender binaries, Gilman probably saw the need for abstaining from sex as more important to her project than exploring the sexuality of women.

In *Herland*, the men are surprised to find that the women do not have surnames; in the early years of childhood they are sometimes referred to by their mother’s name: “When they are babies, we do speak of them, at times, as ‘Essa’s Lato,’ or ‘Novine’s Amel’; but that is merely descriptive and conversational” (76). The tradition of keeping a family name is thought of as obsolete in *Herland*, as everyone can trace their line of ancestry back to the first mother two thousands years ago. The sense of equality that arises from the lack of surnames is also important, as it contains the implication that you should be judged on your own merits,

and not on what your family has done before you. The question of naming also extends into the spheres of property and ownership, of things and human beings. When the men learn that the Herlanders still sign their names on things they make, they learn it is in the spirit of pride of having made a well-crafted product. The children, as Terry's teacher explains, are not known by their mother's name because "the finished product is not a private one" (76). The children's upbringing is a collective effort and they are not seen as anyone's property or private product. When the men marry three of the Herland women, they are also faced with the problem of naming, as the three men, and especially in Terry's case, feel that a wife taking her husband's name is an important part of marriage: "Terry, always irritating her, said it was a sign of possession. 'You are going to be Mrs. Nicholson,' he said. 'Mrs. T. O. Nicholson. That shows everyone that you are my wife'" (118). The whole concept of marriage is difficult for the women to grasp, and the expectations the men bring from their culture and project onto the women in marriage cause many difficulties.

In Gilman's *Man-Made World*, she writes about the problems that marriage creates for women, especially in regards to the notion that it was men were the ones who had the power to choose who to marry:

Beyond this positive deteriorative effect on women through man's arbitrary choice comes the negative effect of woman's lack of choice. Bought or stolen or given by her father, she was deprived of the innately feminine right and duty of choosing. 'Who giveth this woman?' we still inquire in our archaic marriage service, and one man steps forward and gives her to another man. (22)

In addition to claiming that because men chose whom to marry, rather than the other way around could, be disadvantageous for the further development of the human race, Gilman is also implying that the marriage institution can be seen as a continuation of slavery. This is apparent in the sense that a woman is at first seen as the property of her father, who then gives her away to her husband. When married she becomes her husband's property, as illustrated by Terry's comment about how Alima should become Mrs. T. O. Nicholson. Marriage could be experienced as a loss of identity for women, as one lost one's name. However, a sexual relationship and subsequent legitimate children were only obtainable through marriage. Marriage can therefore be perceived as an important institution in this novel, but it is still not presented as a necessity, as the concept of marriage is completely new to the women in

*Herland*. It is also in their married life the men in the book run into the most apparent difficulties, as their views on how women should behave undergo several challenges.

The narrator Van with all his insight and acceptance is the one who has most success in adapting to married life in Herland; Jeff has trouble because he is too chivalrous and Terry has problems because his expectations of domestic life and sex are not met. After their marriages to the three girls, whom were the first women they met in Herland, the men encounter difficulties because of their varying notions of home and domestic life. The women in *Herland* see the home as a place to relax after a day's work, just as the men would do, although it is not defined as a "woman's sphere" as the women mainly work outside the home. Meals are provided in communal settings. Even though they are now committed to each other through marriage, the men and women live in separate houses. There is disagreement in the matters of housekeeping between the men and the women. This is also reflected in the discrepancy in their expectations to having a sexual relationship. Terry complains that he might as well not be married because his wife "don't know the first thing about Sex" (134). From the very beginning of the narrative, Terry is described as a very sexual man, and it is his sexual desires that render him unable to adapt to this new world. The other men manage, though they might have difficulties understanding the women's lack of sexuality, but Terry attempts to force himself on his wife. Alima along with other Herlanders averts the attempted rape, as they are physically able to overpower Terry.

The image of rape is very significant. Had Alima been a woman in "Ourland," she may not have been physically or mentally strong enough to prevent the attack. In fact, the general notion of the time was that when a woman was married, she became one with her husband and did not have a claim to set the limits for her own body. Marriage meant that a husband had lawful unlimited sexual access to his wife, and actual laws against marital rape were not implemented in the United States until 1984. In Nancy F. Cott's *Public Vows: a History of Marriage and the Nation*, she writes that the subject of marital rape is still questioned in several states. This is also argued in Jill E. Hasday's article "Contest and Consent: A Legal History of Marital Rape," where she states that "[a] majority of states still retain some form of the rule exempting a husband from prosecution for raping his wife" (1484). Thus implying that a nineteenth century view on a woman's limited rights within marriage remains almost unchanged.

The right of a woman to decide over her own body was one of the main causes for first-wave feminists and this especially in regards to a reform of the marriage laws. The need

to change the institution of marriage also concerned the questions of the right to divorce and property rights. In *Women and Economics*, Gilman argues that marriage as a “sexuo-economic” relation that had destroyed a pre-existing natural balance. She writes that women’s economic dependence on men had reduced them to being a sex rather than an entire human being (37). She also claims that “the economic status of marriage rudely breaks in upon love’s young dream. On the economic side, apart from all the sweetness and truth of the sex-relation, the woman in marrying becomes the house-servant, or at least the housekeeper, of the man” (219). Van, Terry and Jeff thus enter into their marriages with the three women from Herland with certain expectations of how a marriage should be, and the equality and collectivism of the society in Herland bewilder the men.

In Kathleen Lant’s article “The Rape of the Text: Charlotte Gilman's Violation of Herland,” Lant claims that Terry’s excessive sexualization of women and his attempted rape of Alima makes Gilman’s text intrinsically masculine and that Gilman has created a story where “feminist ideology notwithstanding, this story is almost exclusively impelled by the ‘sex-motive’; she cannot, it seems, satisfy her narrative requirements without violating her own ideologies” (303). Thus by creating the conflict between Terry and Alima, and by including several foreshadowings to his assault, Gilman does not manage to steer away from fashioning a narrative rooted in patriarchal assumptions. However, without the conflict of Terry’s sexual desires in an asexual world, the story would have lacked the excitement and terror which she probably meant to induce in her readers.

The attempted rape of Alima and the men’s intrusion into the utopian society of *Herland* can serve as an image for the right of a woman to decide over her own body. Terry’s constant transgression of the women’s values and unwillingness to change forces him to leave Herland. The women later decide not to seek contact with the rest of the world on the basis of their experiences with the three men. Terry’s initial reaction is that he will “get an expedition fixed up to force an entry into Ma-land” (146), however, he is persuaded to let go of the idea and matriarchy continues to prevail in Herland.

In this chapter, my main project has been to connect Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s theoretical writings to her fiction. Gilman’s novel is an exemplification of “literary narrative as a place where theory takes place” (*Bodies* 182). As mentioned in the introduction, *Herland* has both a prequel and a sequel. The preceding book, *Moving the Mountain*, did not involve the same characters as *Herland*, but shares similar didactic strategies. In chapter five of *Moving the Mountain*, Gilman references H. G. Wells, one of her fellow utopian writers:



“‘That turbid freshet of an Englishman, Wells, who did so much to stir his generation, said, ‘I am wholly feminist’ — and he was! He saw women only as females and wanted them endowed as such. He was never able to see them as human beings and amply competent to take care of themselves’” (105-106). Gilman’s project as a whole was to enable women to be defined as human beings, and not just women. Her rejection of the word feminism seems to have very modern connotations to it. She wanted more than anything to involve women in all aspects of life. However, she still had a very essentialist view of what it meant to be a woman. The women in *Herland* manage to create a wonderful society *because* they are women. They are inherently more peaceful and thoughtful for the reason that they are mothers. The feminism, or rather humanism, that Gilman represents through her novel is probably her main incentive for writing the work in itself. Apart from the widespread use of sarcasm in the novel, it does not really seem that the writing in itself is as important as the message she wants to convey.

In an interview with BBC Radio 4, Sarah Hall comments that science fiction novels have conversations across the decades (Flynn). Keeping this in mind, I will approach how the two other novels I examine in this thesis use narrative strategies to reveal something about feminism in their own time, and also how they relate to earlier works of utopian feminist science fiction, with particular emphasis on *Herland*.

## Chapter Two: *The Female Man* by Joanna Russ

[T]he end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist movement, not just the elimination of male *privilege* but of the sex *distinction* itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally. (Firestone 11)

In the second chapter of my thesis I will examine Joanna Russ's novel *The Female Man*. *The Female Man* was written by Russ in the late 1960s, but was not published until 1975. When examining Russ's novel it makes sense to return to what Sarah Hall said about science fiction's tendency to have intertextual conversations across the decades. One of the reasons is that in her essay "Recent Feminist Utopias," Joanna Russ mentions how Gilman's *Herland* can be seen as a product of the first wave of feminism (*To Write* 134).

The leap in time from 1915 to 1975 is a considerable one, but it is not unreasonable to argue that the growth and development of feminism was at a standstill in the United States in the years after the First World War and leading up to the mid sixties. It is also important to point out that although *Herland* was originally published in *The Forerunner* in 1915, it was not published in book form until 1979. The time in which Russ published her novel can now be seen as the beginning of the later period of second-wave feminism. The criticism Russ contributed to feminism and the science fiction genre is also of a great significance. It is as clear from her writing, as it is from Gilman's, that there is a didactic purpose embedded in her fiction.

In order to examine *The Female Man* as a work of fiction within the specific sub-genre of feminist utopian science fiction, I will begin by taking in to consideration what Russ herself wrote on the subject. In her essay "Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction," Russ states that science fiction, although being considered literature, has to be judged by different criteria than what we would normally consider literature (*To Write* 3). Russ believes that applying a traditional view of literary traits onto science fiction is inadequate and that we need to evaluate science fiction from a different set of aesthetics. My analysis of *Herland* in the previous chapter introduced didacticism as one of the main incentives for writing utopian fiction. In Russ's essay, she claims that science fiction is inherently didactic. Russ's reasoning in calling science fiction didactic is grounded in its focus on different sciences, both "soft"

and “hard”. She also points out that its nature of being didactic causes problems for contemporary literary criticism (*To Write* 4). This is a problem Russ believes that science fiction shares with medieval literature. To be able to analyze explicitly didactic literature, one has to be aware of “what system of beliefs or ideas constitutes the substance of its didacticism” (*To Write* 6). It is only when we are conscious of those elements, that there is the possibility a genuine interpretation. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*, I approached the text and its expressed didacticism from the basis of her non-fiction writing. By doing so, I tried to comprehend the beliefs that were the foundation of her didacticism. In my analysis of *The Female Man*, I will apply similar approaches. There are, however, many central differences, especially when considering the status feminism had reached by the 1970s and the awareness that existed around creating a feminist sub-genre within science fiction. In order to fully understand Russ’s didactic purposes, I will begin this chapter by presenting her views on feminism and science fiction. In the following section, I will discuss the four parallel worlds that are presented in *The Female Man*, and their importance. In the same section I will also offer a few comments on the style, structure and narrative aspects of the novel, as I believe these aspects are of great significance to how readers approach *The Female Man*. In the two subsequent sections, I will examine the main themes of the thesis. Motherhood and marriage will be discussed in the context of Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*, and in the last part I will employ Donna Haraway’s “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” in my discussion of gender and sexuality in *The Female Man*.

## **Joanna Russ and “The Image of Women in Science Fiction”**

The common definition of science fiction as “what if” literature also defines it as being different from fantasy literature; not only does science fiction have to be grounded in some sort of actual science, but it also has to give a believable account of how things could be, and in some instances – should be (Cornillon 79). Fantasy, although often set in universes sharing myths and landscapes of medieval literature, often lacks the ability to comment upon

contemporary society that science fiction can provide. Although fantasy books and their societies often are different from ours, they seldom challenge existing views. Yet Science fiction does not always challenge what is considered the norm, and as in all other genres and sub-genres you will also find examples of badly written science fiction stories. According to Russ's view, "bad science fiction" (*To Write* 6) is especially science fiction that ignores "what is known." One of the interesting features of science fiction is the reimagining of what is already known, and the genre's ability to represent and envision a future that in many ways is likely to happen some day.

In Russ's essay "*Amor Vincit Foeminam: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*," she examines ten science fiction stories written by men (and Alice Sheldon writing under the pseudonym James Tiptree Jr.). The stories she includes in her analysis were written between 1926 and 1973. All ten stories depict a "battle of the sexes" scenario, and each of the stories, perhaps with the exception of Sheldon/Tiptree, are explicitly sexist. Russ claims that the main conflict, being the "battle of the sexes", is "resolved – either for all women or for an exemplary woman – by some sort of phallic display, and the men's victory (which is identical with the women's defeat) is not a military or political event, but a quasi-religious conversion of the women" (*To Write* 43). In Russ's analysis of the texts, she argues that the men are victorious simply by the agency of being men, and that the stories are not plausible because they offer no other explanation for the defeat of the women than their inherent will to be dominated by men and an inability to be good rulers. In these stories it is "natural" that men are the authority and there seem to be no need to create a universe with a different set of politics or military structure.

From reading Russ's analysis, it seems that the existence of these sexist science fiction stories may be rooted in the same foundation as the existence of feminist science fiction from the same period. The need for men to write such stories, as opposed to traditional science fiction where women play a very little part or no part at all, could be that these texts were a reaction to an anxiety about women gaining more rights and becoming more independent. The need to write an all-male utopia has never been as urgent as the need to envision one with just women, because there are so many portrayals of all-male societies in other forms of literature as well as in science fiction. Books written about wars or adventure stories almost exclusively feature men only, and as women were excluded from taking part in the public sphere up until fairly recent times, there is hardly any need for men to imagine a world without women.

In an essay entitled “Recent Feminist Utopias” (1981), Russ examines several works of feminist science fiction published in the mid-1970s. She includes only one text written by a male writer, and that is Samuel Delany’s *Triton*. The fact that Delany is African American and homosexual makes him a part of two extensively marginalized groups in the United States in the 1970s. Delany’s work explored sexuality and gender in a way that made him relevant in the discourse of feminist science fiction, especially because he was one of the very few men in science fiction who were engaged in writing about these topics in the genre.

Russ describes her essay as an effort to try to “sum up” what had been happening in feminist science fiction in relation to the women’s movement of the 1970s. In the introduction to her essay, she also mentions Carol Pearson and her study of nineteenth-century feminist utopias and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*. Russ describes the similarities between what was happening then and in the early 1970s as an example of a parallel “evolution” (*To Write* 133). Russ states that “just as Gilman and Lane were responding to the women’s movement of their time, so the works I discuss here are not only contemporaneous with the modern feminist movement but also made possible by it” (*To Write* 134-135). By including *The Female Man* among the works she examines in this essay, Russ is making a clear statement of its context in both textual and political terms. In the following sections of this chapter, I will analyze how conventions around sexuality, gender and heteronormativity are challenged and highlighted in the different worlds of *The Female Man*.

The different worlds and the more openly described sexuality of Russ’s novel clearly belong to another time in history and at another point in feminism than Gilman’s *Herland*. In addition to Russ’s own essays and fiction, I will examine her work in the context of Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. Russ mentions Firestone in her 1973 essay on the popular modern gothic novels of her time entitled “Somebody’s Trying to Kill Me and I Think It’s My Husband.” Firestone’s ideas for a feminist revolution and a restructuring of society are clearly visible in Russ’s utopian world of *Whileaway*.

*The Dialectic of Sex* was published in 1970 and became a central text of second-wave feminism. As a radical feminist, the end goal for Firestone was complete gender equality; this involved a comprehensive deconstruction of the nuclear family and ultimately even a change in the biological nature of women in regards to pregnancy. Firestone also claims that at the time there was no “literary image of this future society [...] not even a utopian feminist literature in existence” (227). Her claim leaves out Gilman’s *Herland* and several other

feminist utopias from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, with her claim in mind, it is also possible to read *The Female Man* as the answer to Firestone's requests.

In 1972 Joanna Russ contributed her essay "The Image of Women in Science Fiction" to Susan Koppelman Cornillon's book *The Image of Women in Fiction*. In the essay Russ claims that even the men who were considered to write "sophisticated" science fiction, such as Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov, represented a far away future that kept "the relations between the sexes as those of present-day, white middle-class suburbia [...] *and that world is never questioned*" (emphasis in original, 81). Russ begins her essay by paraphrasing Samuel Delany's definition of science fiction by saying that "science fiction should not offend against what is known to be known" and what "might be" (79). In many ways Russ probably had more radical views on gender and sex than most of her contemporary male science fiction colleagues, however, it is possible to say that Russ regarded the male writer's image of women in science fiction to offend against "what is known to be known" and certainly what "might be." On the other hand, it seems that Russ also viewed the lack of imagination when it came to sex and gender as bad writing and as ignorance on the part of these authors. When you use your imaginative skills in order to envision a future, maybe many thousands years away from the present, how is it that gender roles and sexuality have remained exactly the same? If entirely new infrastructures and technology are in place, it is more than likely that traditional gender roles and family relations are challenged and changed.

In Russ's essay, she not only describes the "he-man" culture in science fiction as being very popular with immature male adolescent readers, she also in a rather satiric tone patronizes the authors of these books, as she comments: "they want to be progressive, God bless them, but they don't know how" (85). Russ finishes her essay with the claim that "There are plenty of images of women in science fiction. There are hardly any women" (91). The essay was later published in the science fiction magazine *Vertex* in 1974, and the reactions were considerable. In Helen Merrick's *The Secret Feminist Cabal*, she goes through science fiction magazines and fanzines and provides an extensive overview of the reception of Russ's essay. The subsequent issues of *Vertex* featured both critique and support of Russ's essay, and it was clear that it had struck a nerve. One example of the discussion is a letter from the renowned science fiction author Philip K. Dick answering to one of the other commentators who had found her essay unnecessary, hostile and incorrect:

It was like telling the blacks that they only ‘imagined’ that somehow things in the world were different to them, that they only somehow ‘imagined’ that their needs, its articulations in our writing, were being ignored. It is a conspiracy of silence, and Joanna, despite the fact that she felt the need of attacking us on a personal level, shattered that silence, for the good of us all. (Dick qtd in Merrick 61)

The reactions to her essay in many ways proved Russ’s point: not only were most male science fiction writers maintaining the same sense of heteronormativity in their imagined future worlds, they were also largely ethnocentric.

### **The parallel worlds of *The Female Man*: “Somebody is collecting J’s”**

The novel narrates the lives of four women, (Jeannine, Joanna, Janet and Jael) living in parallel worlds. The worlds differ in time and place and can be read as alternative histories, as they are different versions of earth. When the women start travelling between these parallel worlds, they become aware of their different views on gender and what it means to be a woman.

The parallel world that seems closest to our own is Joanna’s. Her world is set in the late nineteen-sixties and she is the namesake of the author. Joanna is the third of the J’s that are introduced to the reader, and the third first-person narrator. Reading a text with four different first-person narrators can have its challenges as to who is actually speaking. Another challenge is that some of the text is presented as a “lecture” (29) and that the text is so didactic and seemingly personal in mode that it in some parts could be read as an essay, rather than fiction.

*The Female Man* is a novel that is explicitly feminist; the timing of its release, the contents, the author and the genre all play an important role in its portrayed feminism. Joanna refers to herself as having changed into a “female man” and although she has the possibility of a career (she is a college professor) and in many ways has equal rights to men, she is still

surrounded by expectations built on stereotypes as to how she should behave as a woman. In Joanna's world, even though there is a strong and visible feminist movement, women are still considered inferior to men. Joanna points out that even though she has had a successful career she feels like women only make up ten percent of society. She sums it up by saying:

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 neighborhood supermarket is male. My landlord is male. Most taxi-drivers are male. All cops are male. [...] I think most of the people in the world are male. (144-145)

Joanna's solution is to adopt the role of a "female man"; she identifies the limitations of her gender specific role in society and wishes to change it. The first passage narrated by Joanna reads: "I had just changed into a man, me, Joanna. I mean a female man, of course; my body and soul were exactly the same" (8). The manifestations of Joanna's change are not described in the novel. However, the process of change in itself becomes important. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler claims that "[i]f gender is the social construction of sex, and if there is no access to this 'sex' except by means of its construction, then it appears not only that sex is absorbed by gender, but that 'sex' becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a fantasy[...]" (5). Although the change may only be visible to Joanna, the act of changing allows her to deconstruct her gender. By doing so, she becomes able view the limitations of being labeled a certain gender in a wider perspective. The notion of becoming a female man also attains the notion of female masculinity, a subject dealt with in detail in Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*, in which she asserts that while she does not believe that a completely genderless society is the best solution, or even a likely one. Halberstam asserts that "a major step toward gender parity, and one that has been grossly overlooked, is the cultivation of female masculinity" (272).

The first of the worlds we encounter in *The Female Man* is Whileaway and the character Janet Evason Belin. Whileaway is an all-female world, possibly in the future, with advanced technology. 800 years earlier a plague killed all the men in Whileaway. Since then the women have managed to create a highly sophisticated reproduction technology. Janet Evason is a mother and married. She is also a "Safety and Peace" officer and has been chosen by her authorities to travel between the parallel worlds. Janet comes from a world that is



completely genderless, as there are only women in Whileaway. She looks different than the other women from the other worlds and is also more “masculine” in her behavior.

The second world we encounter is a world similar to earth, except that this world never managed to recover from the Depression and the second world war never happened, the year is 1969 and the character we encounter from this world is Jeannine Dadier. Jeannine works as a librarian and is engaged to her boyfriend Cal. Jeannine believes her true purpose in life is to be dependant on a man and to marry. Her views on gender and marriage are challenged in the other parallel worlds. In the end she is ready to assert herself without being dependent on a man. Jeannine works in a New York City library for the Work Projects Administration. The fact that she is still working for a New Deal agency is the first narrative indication that the great depression never completely let go in the parallel world in which she resides. The WPA was discontinued in 1943, after the unemployment rates dropped due to the Second World War. This also signifies that the Second World War never took place. In a matter of a few sentences, Russ manages to set the mode and establish the political landscape of Jeannine’s world.

Towards the end of the novel, all three women from the earlier mentioned worlds, meet Alice Reasoner. Alice Reasoner, or Jael, is from a world where there is an ongoing war between men and women, which has lasted forty years. Jael is the one who brings the other women together and is also the initiator of the travelling between the parallel worlds. At the end of the novel, there is a realization that all four women share the same genetics and are in fact variations of the same human being. How they consider themselves and how they have developed is just a consequence of the different environments they live in.

At the end of chapter seven, there is an ominous comment about how “Somebody is collecting J’s” (111). This is commented just before they meet Jael for the first time. When Jael explains that they are “essentially the same genotype, modified by age, by circumstances, by education, by diet, by learning, by God knows what” (114), she is pointing to the fact that their biology is also subjected to culture and that it can be altered. Jeannine is weak, soft and inactive, while Janet is strong, hard and healthy and Joanna is somewhere in the middle. Yet somehow they are all the same. Jael also explains that as she is travelling between parallel universes the actions in one world cannot impact the other. In order to show how nature has its history, Russ creates these four women who are basically the same, but yet radically different. The four women look different physically because they have lived entirely different lives in very diverse environments. By stating that these women are in fact the same

“genotype”, she is saying something about how she believes biology is subjected to culture. By bringing all of these women together, she is making the issue of women’s right universal by stating that even though they are different, they share the same difficulties and responsibilities.

The structure and narration of *The Female Man* can at times be very demanding for the reader. However, the many voices that are intertwined in the novel can also work as an illustration of the collective struggle of women. *The Female Man* is divided into nine chapters, and each of these is also divided into sections. Some of the sections are entirely from one character’s point of view and others change between characters and locations. Not only is there a constant intertwining of the different character’s perspective, but there is also the interconnection of worlds and names. For example, in part nine there is an entire section where the first-person narrator speaks of having a relationship with Laura Rose. Laura Rose is the girl that Janet pursues a relationship with in Joanne’s world, but the narrator is not Janet. In this section the narrator speaks of being lesbian and about her feelings for men. It seems more likely that the narrator could be Joanna, or someone else completely.

Although the text and the different voices can sometimes come across as confusing, there seems to be a purpose to the intertwining of voices. If all the Js share the same genetic structure, it seems logical that they also share a narrative. When these narrative boundaries are broken down and become fluid the characters follow in the same direction, and in some instances it is not actually important who is narrating. This also gives room for a narrator speaking as the author, or maybe even Joanna Russ speaking as herself to give “lectures” and to comment on the writing itself. We see this in part seven, where Joanna comments on her own writing and its apparent femininity:

You will notice that even my diction is becoming feminine, thus revealing my true nature; I am not saying “Damn” any more, or “Blast”; I am putting in lots of qualifiers like “rather,” I am writing in these breathless little feminine tags, she threw herself down on the bed, I have no structure (she thought), my thoughts seep out shapelessly like menstrual fluid, it is all very female and deep and full of essences, it is very primitive and full of “and’s,” it is called “run-on sentences”. (99)

In *The Female Man*, it is seldom clear exactly who is speaking, but there are often clues to who it is. The constantly interlinked narratives are illustrated in a passage where the Js go

their different ways: “We got up and paid our quintuple bill; then we went out into the street. I said goodbye and went off with Laur, I, Janet; I also watched them go, I, Joanna; moreover I went off to show Jael the city, I Jeannine, I Jael, I myself” (151).

However, in one instance there is an example where Jael also comments on the text: ““When I—not the ‘I’ above but the ‘I’ down here, naturally; that’s Janet up there” (66), it is not said specifically that it actually is Jael, but one can deduct that it is not one of the other Js, as she describes them in the third person. After the four Js meet, the first person narration is mainly from Jael’s point of view. However, in one instance the “author” comments in the text on what Jael is thinking: “The Young One, The Weak One, The Strong One, as she called us in her own mind. I’m the author and I know” (117). The narrator in the text makes herself known as an author and concludes that she should be thought of in her “usual portable form”. In accordance with the presence of an author throughout the text, the novel ends with a sort of postscript with well wishes for the book:

Go, little book, trot through Texas and Vermont and Alaska and Maryland and Washington and Florida and Canada and England and France; bob a curtsey at the shrines of Friedan, Millet, Greer, Firestone, and all the rest; [...] Do not get glum when you are no longer understood, little book. Do not curse your fate. Do not reach up from readers' laps and punch the readers' noses.

Rejoice, little book! For on that day, we will be free (152).

The postscript exemplifies Russ’s didactic purpose and also the satirical tone in which it is written. The women Russ encourages her book to “bob a curtsey” at are not accidental, and neither is the placing of their names inside her book. Although *The Female Man* is at times a humorous and satiric novel, it is also a very serious book with clear didactic intentions. Sarah Lefanu claims that by writing in a didactic and satiric mode, Russ compels her readers to be engaged in the text (*In the Chinks* 183). Lefanu’s claim that Russ as a writer actively engages her readers is illustrated by Russ’s use of the postscript.

## **Motherhood and Marriage: “Humanity is unnatural!”**

In Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*, motherhood was portrayed as being the Herlander’s one true calling in life. Motherhood was their religion and their reason to live. However, Gilman was also radical in her description of how the children of Herland should be brought up. The idea of children being cared for by a larger community instead of only having the close ties of a nuclear family to rely on was one of the theoretical stances that Gilman brought forth in *Herland*. In *The Female Man*, only Janet is a mother. In the Whileaway, the rearing of children is also the concern of the community rather than the parents alone. The children of Whileaway leave their family at the age of four or five to live in communal housing and go to school.

Technology plays a considerable role in the conception of children in Whileaway; both in the process of conception (by merging ova) and in the way the Whileawayan’s “genetic surgeons” perfect the children’s genetic structure. The meddling with nature that takes place in Whileaway is not described in a negative manner or with any ethical repercussions. Rather, it is an example of how far they have progressed. There is, however, a sense of comedy in the way the genetic surgery is accounted for: “‘Humanity is unnatural!’ exclaimed the philosopher Dunyasha Bernadetteson (A.C. 344—426), who suffered all her life from the slip of a genetic surgeon's hand which had given her one mother's jaw and the other mother's teeth—orthodontia is hardly ever necessary on Whileaway. Her daughter's teeth, however, were perfect” (10). The act of tempering with the genetics of a human being brings forth associations to eugenics and its underlying desire to cleanse out unwanted traits. In spite of this, the topic of creating these “perfect” women does not seem to be addressed as problematic in *The Female Man*. The genetic surgery in *The Female Man* seems to be compatible with the process of breeding out unwanted personal traits in *Herland*. However, the type of “designer babies” they are creating in Whileaway, seems to be closer to the direction reproductive technology might actually take in the future.

The women of Whileaway do not suffer under the threat of unwanted pregnancies. Just like the women in *Herland*, they are able to control when they get pregnant, but unlike the Herlanders it is not merely a process of the mind but rather one of science. In Whileaway most women bear their children at thirty and share communal nurseries for the children: “Food, cleanliness, and shelter are not the mother's business; Whileawayans say with a

straight face that she must be free to attend to the child's 'finer spiritual needs' ” (39). This approach to rearing children is in stark contrast to how Joanna views maternity:

Do you enjoy playing with other people's children—for ten minutes? Good! This reveals that you have Maternal Instinct and you will be forever wretched if you do not instantly have a baby of your own (or three or four) and take care of that unfortunate victimized object twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, fifty-two weeks a year, for eighteen years, all by yourself (Don't expect much help). (109)

The pressure for women to be mothers and to display this inherent maternal instinct is not a relic of the past; in fact in most cultures the pressure is still there and I will go as far as claiming that in most cultures one is still perceived as unfulfilled as a woman if one chooses not to have children.

Another possibly problematic aspect of having children is the need for an economical support system that enables equal opportunities for parental leave. If such a system is non-existent, it can make the mother entirely dependent on her partner's income, and give her a disadvantage in later professional life. The United States is one of four countries in the world that still does not have a national law mandating maternity/parental leave (the other three are Liberia, Swaziland and Papua New Guinea). The law concerning parental leave varies in the different American states, but for many women maintaining a professional career and having children are mutually exclusive.

In Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, she states that the first demand in a feminist revolution should be: “*The freeing of women from the tyranny of their reproductive biology by every means available, and the diffusion of the childbearing and childrearing role to the society as a whole, men as well as women*” (emphasis in original, 206). Firestone does not only demand better childcare services and nurseries available to all, but also a society where reproduction is not limited to women only. Firestone mentions the possibility of technology to alter the biological nature in regards to “embryology”, and this could suggest that Firestone believed that the solution would be extracorporeal pregnancy in artificial wombs.

Interestingly, she also mentions two science fiction classics in the same connection: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and George Orwell's *1984*. *Brave New World* holds one of the most well known fictional examples of extracorporeal pregnancy in artificial wombs, and Firestone thus has a point when she says that this is what people will associate with her

suggestions. Although both *Brave New World* and *1984* are outstanding examples of science fiction, their view on gender roles and sexuality hardly differ from those of the authors' contemporaneous society. It is very likely that they did not consider the possible positive implications of freeing women from having the sole responsibility for childbearing, or that they did not consider any implications for women at all. In Helen Merrick's essay "Gender and Science Fiction," she mentions Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) as another example of extracorporeal pregnancy. In Piercy's novel "Mattapoissett is a 'culturally androgynous' society, a paradigm of an egalitarian, ecologically sustainable world where artificial wombs are used so that no one gives birth but both men and women 'mother' (and breastfeed)" (Merrick 248). Piercy's novel is thus an example of how the concept of extracorporeal pregnancy, as implied by Firestone, might have positive consequences for both men and women in an egalitarian world.

In Whileaway, where both parents have the possibility of becoming mothers, there is no biological differentiation. Whileaway as a utopia is in many ways representative of the radical feminist revolution Firestone calls for in *The Dialectic of Sex*, with the exception that there are no males in the Whileawayan world. Russ's solutions, especially with regard to childbearing and childrearing, are similar to those of Firestone.

In Whileaway, the children are taught practical skills and learn "how to run machines, how to get along without machines, law, transportation, physical theory, and so on. They learn gymnastics and mechanics. They learn practical medicine. They learn how to swim and shoot. They continue (by themselves) to dance, to sing, to paint, to play, to do everything their Mommies did" (39). The autonomy of children is also one of Firestone's main points, as she states that the second demand should be: "*The full self-determination, including economic independence, of both women and children*" (emphasis in original, 207). The third demand is "*The total integration of women and children into all aspects of the larger society*" (emphasis in original, 208). Firestone's demands for an ideal future are made into a fictional reality in Whileaway, but it seems to have come at a cost since there no longer are any men. The biological diversity is reduced by the fact that there are only women, however, this may have scientific reasons. Two women can theoretically only create female offspring, and there is no mention of whether the genetic surgeons of Whileaway are so advanced that they could also have created male babies.

The children of Whileaway are mainly taught practical abilities, and are ready to face the world when they reach puberty; some of the children "wild with the desire for exploration,

travel all around the world—usually in the company of other children—bands of children going to visit this or that [...] are a common sight on Whileaway” (40). Whileaway is by all standards a safe place for all. Because of how the society is structured, the children become both economically independent and are an integral part of the larger society.

**Sexuality and gender roles: “Alas! Those who were shocked at my making love that way to a man are now shocked at my making love to a machine; you can't win”**

In *Herland*, Gilman did not include any allusions to the women having sexual relationships. This can be seen as a product of her time, rather than an exercise in moral judgment. In *The Female Man*, Russ included several different types of sexual relationships, including one between two women and between a human and a cyborg. In this section, I will first examine the significance of the four parallel worlds and then continue by examining motherhood and sexuality in the different worlds.

When Janet travels from Whileaway to Joanna’s world, she attracts a considerable amount of attention. Although there is no explanation for exactly why everyone accepts that she has travelled from another world to their own, it seems that everyone truly believes her when she informs the public that she is from a parallel world. It would have been easy to dismiss her as being mad and by consequence doubt the mental soundness of the people who saw her arriving, but instead the people of Joanna’s world are mostly concerned with the fact that there are no men on Whileaway and that this should be changed. In a televised interview, a reporter asks Janet if she wants to “banish sex from Whileaway” since “[o]ne sex is half a species” (9). The reporter continues by adding all the elements he believes to be represented by the word “sex”: “family, love family, love, erotic attraction—call it what you like—we all know that your people are competent and intelligent individuals, but do you think that's enough? Surely you have the intellectual knowledge of biology in other species to know what I'm talking about” (9). Janet, who is married with children, is incapable of understanding his

question. When the reporter has to explicitly question her about “copulation,” Janet is willing to explain, but is cut short by the TV-channel’s intervention from sharing specific, and perhaps controversial, facts about sexual relationships in Whileaway.

In the scene with the reporter Russ highlights several issues. The first issue is the reporter’s inability to see a sexual relationship as complete between two persons of the same sex. Secondly, there is the reporter’s difficulty with the word “sex” as a term, as he uses it about both family life and erotic attraction. Since Janet is censored by the TV channel when she is about to explain lovemaking in Whileaway, the degree of censorship connected to maintain a view of heteronormativity as the only way of life also becomes a central issue. The public sphere is not considered to be a proper place to discuss such matters as an alternative way of life. Janet’s experience with sexuality differs from the three other J’s, and although Jeannine, Joanna and Jael’s worlds are different in many ways, their views on sexuality do not differ radically. Jael claims that she is an “old fashioned girl” when she reveals that she has a sexual relationship to a male cyborg (140), and Jeannine and Joanna are both living in worlds where homosexuality is taboo, and maybe even criminalized. Jeannine dreams of marriage, but feels that her boyfriend is not man enough to take care of her. Joanna states that her “career of the sexless sex object” began when she was eleven (109).

Another side of the sexuality in Whileaway is that there is no way of “being *out too late* in Whileaway, or *up too early*, or *in the wrong part of town*, or *unescorted*. You cannot fall out of the kinship web and become sexual prey for strangers, for there is no prey and there are no strangers—the web is world-wide” (emphasis in original, 62). The attempted rape in *Herland* has resonance here; in the utopian society of Whileaway there is no such danger. Rape of women as an element of warfare, and as a general threat to women pretty much everywhere, has been and is still very present in most women’s minds. However, it is not only the absence of men in Whileaway that leads to the threat of rape being eliminated; it is also due to a strong sense of community. The strong “kinship web” described in Whileaway is a result of their strong family ties and communal approaches to child rearing. In *The Dialectic of Sex*, Firestone’s fourth demand for a feminist revolution is that all women and children should have the freedom to do whatever they wish sexually (209). Firestone also claims that “child sexuality had to be repressed because it was a threat to the precarious internal balance of the family.” In a society where the nuclear family had disintegrated, monogamy would be considered unnatural (209).

In Whileaway children usually start having sex when they reach puberty, and the



organic connections between adults and children also gives room for one of the only taboos they have in *Whileaway*: “Taboos on *Whileaway*: sexual relations with anybody considerably older or younger than oneself, waste, ignorance, offending others without intending to” (42). When Janet is in Joanne’s world, she transgresses this taboo when she initiates a sexual relationship with Laura. There are not many sex scenes in *The Female Man*, but there is one between Janet and Laura as well as one between Jael and Davy. The first described sexual encounter is between Laura and Janet, and an affair that is troubling for Janet. This is not because of the fact that she is married, as in *Whileaway* no one “marries monogamously” (42), but due to the age difference taboo.

By positioning Janet within these two other problems surrounding her sexuality, one of them concerning a perceived infidelity (although the same rules do not apply in *Whileaway*), and the other one a taboo concerning a considerable difference in age, Russ reveals that these issues are not restricted to one type of sexuality. The issue of feeling abnormal, however, resonates in both Laura and Janet, as they each struggle with their respective societies’ taboos in relation to their sexualities. As Laura and Joanna are from the same world, they are surely aware of the homophobia that prevails in their society, but also the slow progress with regard to a wider acceptance of homosexuality. At about the same time as Joanna Russ started writing *The Female Man*, the Stonewall Riots erupted in New York and came to be the one of the defining moments for the gay rights movement. Four years after the riots the American Psychiatric Society removed homosexuality from its handbook of disorders. Homosexuality was completely decriminalized by law in the state of New York in 1980, but it took more than twenty years after that before the entire nation followed suit. In *The Female Man*, the issue of criminalization of homosexuality becomes of importance. As Laura and Janet are about to have sex for the first time, the voice of Joanna intervenes and says: “There is propaganda and propaganda and I represented again to Janet that what she was about to do was a serious crime” (56). Exactly which crime is in question is not explicitly explained, however, it can be either the fact that Laura is only seventeen and Janet probably closer to forty or it can be the act of two women having sex. Either way, both women are transgressing certain norms in their separate worlds. By juxtapositioning these two apparent transgressions, Russ is highlighting a society’s ability to create taboos surrounding sexuality based on culture and politics.

In *Whileaway*, they treat vibrators as important “heirlooms.” When Jeannine accidentally stumbles across Janet’s vibrator, she fails to recognize it. Joanna, on the other

hand, knows what its purpose is and explains that it is a communication device from Whileaway:

“What it does to your body,” said I, choosing my words with extreme care, “is nothing compared to what it does to your mind, Jeannine. It will ruin your mind. It will explode in your brains and drive you crazy. You will never be the same again. You will be lost to respectability and decency and decorum and dependency and all sorts of other nice, normal things beginning with a D. It will kill you, Jeannine. You will be dead, dead, dead.” (107)

Joanna’s view of Janet’s vibrator may very well be satirical, but the fact that Jeannine lives in a world where she has probably not even heard of a vibrator and its uses, and that it is connected to shame in Joanna’s world, is enough to grant the matter a level of seriousness. Even today there are voices in the United States who believe that vibrators and other sex toys are detrimental to the population. Up until recent times, there has also been a ban on selling sex toys in many of the southern states. One of Alabama’s most prolific critics of sex toys, Baptist preacher Dan Ireland, claims that: “There are moral ways and immoral ways to use a firearm ... There is no moral way to use one of these devices [vibrators and dildos]” (Appel). The idea that sex should not be practiced outside marriage or without the purpose of reproduction is probably still strong in some parts of the United States. A sense of shamefulness, as illustrated by the passage narrated by Joanna, is mixed with a tongue-in-cheek narration from Joanna’s point of view, when she says, “Janet later offered to lend me hers on the grounds that she and Laur no longer needed it” (107). Joanna’s mixed approach towards the vibrator conveys something about the degree of moral policing which was in place at the time.

In Jane Gerhard’s essay “Revisiting ‘The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm’: The Female Orgasm in American Sexual Thought and Second Wave Feminism,” she examines Anne Koedt’s “The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm” from 1968 and other contemporary feminist text concerning the same issue. Gerhard writes that Koedt’s essay became an instant “feminist classic” and that when Koedt attacked vaginal orgasm as a myth “or more pointedly, as a fraudulent misinformation campaign that created a host of psychological problems for women, she appeared to challenge the very foundation of heterosexuality as it was understood in psychoanalytic, medical, and popular discourse” (449). Koedt’s essay was one of many

written by women in the same period highlighting “vaginal orgasm” as a completely misconstrued idea supporting a patriarchal heteronormativity. Freud formalized this theory in 1905 by stating that women could have clitoral orgasm, but that this changed in puberty when women gained the ability to have vaginal orgasms instead. Freud’s contribution to the study of sexuality had therefore “carried the double mission in expert discourse of naturalizing heterosexuality and essentializing the erotic underpinnings of reproduction” (450). In *The Female Man*, Janet has to teach Laura how to achieve an orgasm, and the sex scene between Janet and Laura thus becomes an example of exactly how deeply rooted the misconception of women’s sexuality was.

In Jeannine’s world technology and sexuality is still much the same as during the Great Depression. Jeannine seems to think more about marriage than about sex, she lives in a world where there still is no decent way to have the one without the other. The gender roles in Jeannine’s society determine how she expects her boyfriend Cal to act. In Jeannine’s opinion, Cal is not masculine enough and she fears that he will not be able to take care of both of them. Her family wants Jeannine to marry and be happy, and to do the “proper thing” for a girl who is approaching her thirties. By all accounts, it seems that this is Jeannine’s wish, too, at least until she meets Jael and is taken to her world.

It is possible to suggest that Jeannine represents an essentialist feminist view of women as being inherently more emotional and intuitive than men, much in accordance with a view shared by many first-wave feminists and later anti-feminists. This becomes apparent when she speaks of her own abilities to communicate with nature: “Women's magic, women's intuition rule here, the subtle deftness forbidden to the clumsier sex” (79). Men are seen as out of touch with the inside of things. Upon meeting Janet, Jeannine is struck and seemingly repelled by how different she is. In many ways Janet is a manifestation of the “masculine” Jeannine is dreaming of, especially as Janet begins her narrative by stating: “I've fought four duels. I've killed four times” (1).

When Jeannine goes on vacation with her family, she is determined to find someone to marry, to make it work and to conform to her society’s demands. Jeannine goes on a date, but when the man tries to get closer she finds herself disgusted by his approaches. This is then followed by the parenthesis: “Freud says disgust is a prominent expression of the sexual life in civilized people” (88). In Jeannine’s world, one is not supposed to be “in touch with your sexuality” and the private is miles apart from the public, leading to all expressions of sexual desire, and especially for a woman, having shameful connotations. Conversely, as much as

Jeannine wants to fit in, she is also aware of the fact that she will not be considered a complete person without marrying a man: “She was frightened, almost, by the access of being that came to her from him, frightened at the richness of the whole scene, at how much she felt without feeling it for him, terrified lest the sun might go behind a cloud and withdraw everything from her again” (88). Jeannine becomes conscious of her position in the world and the consequences marriage would have for her, but the fact that she has to be with a man to be complete frightens her and leads her to doubt if that is what she really wants.

Jael has a sexual relationship with a male cyborg that is a part of her house. Davy the cyborg is portrayed as almost child-like. He is an innocent and yet he becomes a sexual object for Jael. It can be unsettling to read an account of how he is part of the house, and how he is trained to react to the movements of Jael’s face: “he sits [...] at my feet with his hands around his knees and proceeded to laugh at the right places in the conversation (he takes his cues from my face)” (132). Davy is controlled alongside the house by a main computer. Jael says that she wonders whether he has a consciousness or not, but it does not seem to trouble her any further. Jael describes him as a beautiful blue-eyed blonde and when she has sex with him he reaches his climax by being penetrated by her. The reversal of traditional heterosexual gender roles as described in the scenes with Davy were perhaps more shocking at the time. For me, however, the most controversial part of this account is Jael’s willingness to use Davy and to knowingly shy away from the fact that he may have a consciousness.

The image of the sex robot has been central in many science fiction novels, both old and new, and Russ uses this image to her advantage. Not only are the sex robots traditionally almost exclusively female, they are also more often described as being more robotic (or android/gynoid) than human. The portrayal of Davy as a lobotomized beautiful adolescent, possibly built from the stem cells of a chimpanzee, makes him far more human than something built from metal. The fact that a computer controls Davy, instead of the other way around, implies that he is a cyborg in a reductive sense, whereas Jael, who has used technology to her advantage by surgically acquiring metal fangs and claws, is a cyborg in the enhancing sense. When the three Js walk in on Davy and Jael having sex their reactions are very different. Jael then explains that Davy is a machine: “Jeannine doesn't understand what we're talking about; Joanna does and is appalled; Janet is thinking. I shoed them into the main room and told them who he was. Alas! Those who were shocked at my making love that way to a man are now shocked at my making love to a machine; you can't win” (142). Again, it is Jeannine who does not comprehend the situation, as she lives in a world where ideas

surrounding sex and technology have not progressed in the ways of Whileaway and Joanna's world. When she states that Joanna is appalled and Janet is thinking, it seems that both of them are considering the ethical consequences of keeping a servant who is also a sex object, but then again it is possible to compare Davy's situation to that of many women. Thus the issue of Davy being an exploited and computer controlled cyborg, might have more to do with subverting traditional views on gender roles than the ethical use of robots and cyborgs. However, while Davy might not be completely human, he is still a viable effort to rearticulate the concept of gender. Davy performs a gender, as he is a cyborg with male genitals, but inherently in his nature of being "non-human" it is easier to break with the standard conventions of gender binaries. In "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," Donna Haraway suggests that "[f]eminist cyborg stories have the task of recoding communication and intelligence to subvert command and control" (33). In her essay, Haraway mentions Joanna Russ as one of the "theorists for cyborgs" (31). Through the portrayal of Davy, Jael and the genetically enhanced Whileawayans, it becomes apparent how rearticulating the human body as part technology can have consequences for the articulation of gender.

The notion of gender and sex becomes further complicated by the introduction of another society within Jael's world. Jael's world is divided into Womanland and Manland. In Womanland the women have sexual relationships with each other and with men (such as Davy), while in Manland they begin a surgical sex change on a set of chosen boys when they are sixteen:

One out of seven fails early and makes the full change; one out of seven fails later and (refusing surgery) makes only half a change: artists, illusionists, impressionists of femininity who keep their genitalia but who grow slim, grow languid, grow emotional and feminine, all this the effect of spirit only. Five out of seven Manlanders make it; these are 'real-men.' The others are 'the changed' or 'the half-changed.' All real-men like the changed; some real-men like the half-changed; none of the real-men like real-men, for that would be abnormal. (118)

The treatment of transgender people in *The Female Man* has been subject to some criticism within the feminist science fiction community. Although Russ is not dealing specifically with transgender people (after all, the boys in Manland have no choice or saying in whether to become a woman, changed or half-changed, or stay a man), there has been uneasiness

surrounding her treatment of the subject in recent times. Joanna Russ's view on this, according to science fiction critic and publisher Cheryl Morgan, is "pretty much in line with how Feminism viewed them at the time the book was written. It was widely assumed that trans women were a product of a male plot to do away with 'real' women and replace them with compliant 'fake' women (and trans men didn't exist)" ("Queering SFF"). Russ's view on transsexuality in the 1970s was also the subject of a question in 2007, when Samuel Delany interviewed her on her contribution to feminist science fiction. In the interview, Russ states that both her view on gay men and transsexual women had changed substantially since the time she wrote *The Female Man* ("The Legendary").

In the course of their time in Jael's world, the four Js venture into Manland and meet one of Jael's contacts, who has set up a meeting with a man called Boss. Jael is in Manland as a delegate for Womanland and meets Boss to discuss the situation between the two groups. But instead of going into a dialogue with Jael, Boss tries to force himself on her:

"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. [...] 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." (129)

The view so unequivocally expressed by Boss, is an example of how women are seen as sexual objects. Although Boss's character might seem over the top and caricatured, he is a reasonable example of extreme male chauvinism. The incident also says something about the justification of rape in many cultures and how people still feel justified in arguing (about rape victims) that: "she was out too late by herself, and her skirt was too short, she was practically asking for it." However, Jael is not afraid of Boss. She is a trained assassin and has most probably killed many times before. In addition to her previous experience in assassination, she has also enhanced her body with technology in order to be stronger and more efficient in her tasks:

Boss was muttering something angry about his erection so, angry enough for two, I produced my own— by this I mean that the grafted muscles on my fingers and hands pulled back the loose skin, with that characteristic, itchy tickling, and of course you are

wise; you have guessed that I do not have Cancer on my fingers but Claws, talons like a cat's but bigger, a little more dull than wood brads but good for tearing. (129)

Jael is described as strong and powerful, and how she compares her claws to Boss's erection in another example of a subversion of gender roles. Jael vanquishes Boss by using her secret weapon, similar to how men have overpowered women with their penises in the sexist science fiction stories mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The killing of Boss leads to a realization for the three other Js about what Jael is and is capable of. It is also their first experience of an actual "battle of the sexes" scenario. Jael's ultimate plan for bringing all the Js together is to create platforms of support in their worlds. Jeannine and Joanna welcomes Jael's plan, but Janet is reluctant and refuses. Their different reactions can be traced to their different situations. Both Joanna and Jeannine are unhappy with the way women are treated in their respective worlds and would like to see it change. Janet, on the other hand, is not familiar with the possible ways people are discriminated against based on their gender and is therefore unwilling to comply with Jael's wishes.

In Sarah Lefanu's *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, she contends that "Russ's feminism is to be found not so much in her utopian creations as in her deconstruction of gender identity, of masculine and feminine behaviour" (175). However, Jeanne Cortiel claims that it is the contradictions between the essentialist views and the deconstruction of gender identity, which "make up her most significant contribution to feminism" (228). The main difference between the utopia created by Gilman in *Herland*, and the utopian Whileaway as imagined by Russ in *The Female Man*, is that the women residing in Whileaway are essentially flawed. They might be genetically modified to be more intelligent and physically perfect, but they still fight duels and fall in love with each other.

## Chapter Three: Sarah Hall's *Daughters of the North*

“It’s still all about body and sexuality for us,” [...] “We are controlled by those things; psychologically, financially, eternally. We endorse the manmade competition between ourselves that disunites us, stripping us of our true ability. We don’t believe we can govern better, and until we believe this, we never will. It’s time for a new society”. (Hall 51)

In this chapter my focus will be directed towards Sarah Hall’s 2007 novel *Daughters of the North*. The novel depicts a future Britain that has suffered a breakdown after warfare over resources, ecological catastrophes and pollution. The protagonist and narrator Sister, lives in the dystopian industrial city of Rith, which is under the strict regime of the Authority. The government sets out to regulate the population by forcing women to have a contraceptive implant. Sister escapes to an all-female farming commune called Carhullan. As the novel progresses, Carhullan builds a guerilla army and is resolute to fight the government. The novel shows how Sister changes, not only her mentality, but also her physical appearance. Sister grows stronger in both these ways, although she also succumbs to group mentality in order to join the Carhullan army.

The question of women in war is central to all three novels in this thesis, especially since warfare and criminality is completely lacking in Gilman’s *Herland*, except as an explanation for how they ended up being an all-female society. In both *The Female Man* and *Daughters of the North* women go to war against men, while in *Herland* war and other threats is eradicated due to the lack of men. The question of women being able to fight in a war and being physically strong enough is central in both *The Female Man* and *Daughters of the North*. In Russ’ novel, women are more than capable of fighting given the right conditions. The same could be said about Sister’s ability to change her body and the way she is willing to change into a soldier.

In a 2007 interview Hall mentions her upbringing in Cumbria and the fierce agricultural women, she saw there, as an inspiration for *Daughters of the North*. Hall continues by saying:



They terrified me when I was young. But they're also quite comforting to be around. I've always admired that strength in women. And I was thinking about self-sufficiency – those women had always managed farms. I've always been interested in the history of radical feminism – what happened to those women of the 1960s and '70s. (Brown, "Floods, curses, fanatics")

The interesting aspect of Hall revisiting the radical feminism of the 1960s and 70s is that many of the topics ardently debated by feminists at the time, such as gender, sexuality and abortion, still are controversial issues today. In the appendix to the American edition of her novel, Hall states that her book is about "the repression and the liberation of women" ("Conversation" 4). By taking these statements about Hall's authorial intentions as a point of departure, it gives coherence to approaching this novel in the context of the other two novels I have examined, and as an exploration of different feminisms, as well as a geo-political dystopia.

The first section of this chapter will be examining the utopian and dystopian dimensions of *Daughters of the North*. It will also give an account of how the narrative and structural features of the novel function as a dystopian framework. As Hall herself expressed, her novel evokes the radical feminism of the late 1960s and 70s. The second section will therefore examine the novel in the context of radical feminism, particularly from an ecological and separatist feminist perspective. The last two sections will examine the novel in a gender and sexuality perspective, with a focus on how the protagonist evolves physically and psychologically.

### **Utopian and dystopian dimensions: "She did not try to describe Carhullan as any kind of Utopia"**

In *Daughters of the North*, there are two specific settings that each symbolizes very different societies. The first location in the book is the dystopian city of Rith. Rith is industrial and

plagued by sickness and desperation. In an almost Orwellian spirit, a group of officials called the Authority controls Rith.

Sister becomes aware of the negative consequences the Authority's ruling has on women, and when her husband Andrew tries to explain why the strict control of the Authority is necessary, she retaliates: "She's a female, is she, this country that's been fucked over" (31)? The fact that Andrew uses a female pronoun when describing Great Britain, is not out of the ordinary, but the connotation it has for Sister, gives it a another meaning. The catastrophes and misery in the country, eventually led to even stronger subjugation of women and Sister compares this to being fucked over. The rape analogy is evident in Sister's anger at Andrew. The country and its citizens have lost the ability to take charge of their own life, and are left in the grip of the Authority. Instead of standing up to the Authority, Andrew has joined their ranks.

Rith is described as an unnatural and industrial setting. When Sister sets out to find Carhullan, she also finds a way to reconnect to her own self through nature. Sister's return to nature can be seen as representative of a view both working for and against feminism, and can be seen as an illustration of the special contract between women and nature. This view can be represented in at least two ways: women are closer to nature than men; therefore they have a deeper sense of what nature "is about" and feel a greater ecological responsibility. They follow the moon phases, and are more intuitive and holistic in their approach to nature. The second version is that because women are closer to nature than men, they are wilder and more animal-like, subjected to mood swings and irrational behavior; therefore being unfit to be leaders and in need of being controlled by men, just like nature and animals. The alleged congruity between women and nature can as a result have very different outcomes, but the most essential one, which binds the two representations together, is otherness. If nature and women are seen as separate from men and civilization (or culture), then the same dichotomy also creates an imbalance of power.

The contrast between Sister's passive existence in Rith and her active life in Carhullan is further enhanced by the fact that while work in Rith was described as futile and destroying, work in Carhullan is portrayed as therapeutic. Sister realizes that her efforts at the factory were "for nothing" (53). The turbines they made at the factory where she worked in Rith were stored in a warehouse, even though electricity is scarce. Technology is available in Rith, but not the power and fuel to use it, and on her way out to Carhullan, Sister passes deserted cars and villages. When she joins the Carhullan workforce, one of the other women tells her that

the working close to nature felt therapeutic. Although Sister became physically exhausted after her first day of working with the peat, she also felt “more satisfied” (131), than she could remember ever feeling before. The contradictory nature of the two places adds to the ecological aspect of *Daughters of the North*, while nature is traditionally linked to women, technology is linked to men. Patrocínio Schweickart asserts that the dichotomy between nature and science is an important theme in many feminist utopias and dystopias and that “[f]eminist utopists are keenly aware that science and technology have brought us to the edge of ecological disaster” (203). Schweickart continues to say that one of the most important elements “of the feminist perspective is the realization that, in patriarchy, science and technology are governed by the same principle that governs the relationship between the sexes – the master/slave dialectic between self and Other” (210). In *Daughters of the North*, we can imagine that they go from a world that is as technologically advanced as ours, back to a world where electricity is in short supply and technology is only for the privileged. In the novel there is talk about a media blackout and information is censored for the general public. Electricity is only available for a few hours each day, and the use of cars is limited to the Authority. *Daughters of the North* presents a future without the information technology our society has become so dependant on. Without internet and smartphones, the possibility of implementing a strong censorship and control becomes much more attainable than it would be in present-day society.

In the descriptions of the two different locations in *Daughters of the North*, there is a rigid dichotomy between Rith and Carhullan. The dichotomy between the locations is further enforced by the difference the change of location makes for Sister. In Rith, Sister leads a passive and unfulfilling life, both politically and physically. Conversely, she becomes active in both senses in Carhullan. Carhullan is a different utopia than Herland and Whileaway. It exists almost within a system that is described as a dystopia, yet is only possible because it is working on the outside of the system. In many ways a utopia is dependant on a more dystopian setting to exist as a better place, yet both utopias in the two other chapters exist more separated from their dystopian context than Carhullan. The fact that Carhullan exists in a closer symbiosis with Rith and the Authority, also gives the utopian nature of Carhullan a sense of ambiguity. Although it becomes evident that the actions of the Authority, especially in regards to women, are wrong, the inner workings of Carhullan are also reminiscent of guerrilla armies or terrorist factions.

The structural outline of *Daughters of the North* is an important factor in the narrative.

The novel is divided into seven different files, which are described at the beginning of the book as a “statement of female prisoner detained under Section 4 (b) of the Insurgency (Unrestricted Powers) Act” (no pagination). There is no statement as to whether the regime that held Sister detained is still in power, but the fact that the transcript of statement is described as *recovered*, could indicate that the Authority eventually had lost their grip on the public. It is also a sense of being included as a reader, in something that belongs to another time in history. It is as if the text was recovered for a reason, perhaps for the cause of enlightening the public about a past regime.

The novel begins, after it has been introduced as a recovered statement, with the sentences: “My name is Sister. It is the name that was given to me three years ago. It is what the others called me. It is what I call myself. Before that, my name was unimportant” (5). The fact that all the women in Carhullan referred to each others as sisters, but still had others names, is important in regards to Sister being known by that name only. She is the last woman to enter Carhullan, and becomes instrumental in Jackie’s decision to rise up against the Authority.

The fact that Sister remains Sister, and has forsaken the name that was given to her and which was registered in the systems of the Authority, lays the foundation for her complete detachment from her old life. The name Sister, also invokes the concept of women coming together in sisterhood, their plight and joys are the same and they should approach each other as sisters in order to change society. The notion of sisterhood to unify all women seems largely a second-wave feminist phenomenon, especially in the context of sisterhood within an all female commune. Sister as a narrator is simultaneously unreliable and reliable. Her narrative gives us insight into her psychological and physical struggle to change herself, and her journey towards becoming the woman she believes to be her true self. The unreliability of the narrative comes through in the structure of the novel. If this is a statement written down by the Authority, after the women are captured and incarcerated in Rith, is the document really trustworthy? Although Andrew’s opinions are voiced at the beginning of the book, we do not see the perspective of the Authority and the general public in the novel, and there might be more than one side to the story. The only given perspective is that of an “unofficial” seeking a group of marginalized outsiders.

The positioning of Sister as the “chosen one” is further enhanced by the fact that at the very end of the novel, a dying Jackie tells her: ““It’s enough now. It’s enough. Someone has to live through this, and tell them about us. Tell them everything about us, Sister. Make them

understand what we did and who we were. Make them see” (207). Sister as the narrator is told by Jackie to continue her work through telling their story.

### **Ecological and Separatist perspectives: “People might think I’m an extremist, but it’s for everyone’s sake”**

In Alice Echols’s *Daring to Be Bad* (1989), she writes that the development of ecofeminism from the 1980s was informed by a reinvigoration of the idea of female difference: “Eco-feminists and feminist pacifists have argued that women by virtue of their closeness to nature are in a unique position to avert ecological ruin or nuclear annihilation” (288). In opposition to Echols’s view many “[e]cofeminists see the nature/culture dualism and the dominant male model of humanity as leading not only to oppression of women, but also to the destruction of nature and to racism and social inequality” (Plumwood qtd. in Mark-Canty 155). The contrasting views surrounding ecofeminism are rooted in the notion that women are inherently closer to nature than men and therefore have a stronger ecological sensibility. While it is possible to view ecofeminism in the light of essentialist feminism, such as the criticism expressed by Echols, the most common notion in regards to ecofeminism today is that it encompasses many different feminist discourses, as well as an ecological viewpoint, in its strategies.

In *Daughters of the North*, Hall manages to use the ecofeminist discourse in its multiplicity. By depicting the patriarchal, misogynistic Rith as an industrial, fruitless place, without any reverence or understanding for nature, it is clearly a dystopia – not only for women, but also in ecological terms. Carhullan, on the other hand, represents in many ways an ecological utopia. Even though Carhullan can be characterized as utopian, it still struggles with diseases and hardship. When Sister is introduced to the Carhullan way of life, Jackie informs her of the diseases she is likely to have: “There were gastro-sicknesses [...] Women had thrush. There were ringworms. Parasites” (95-96). However, the suffering in Carhullan cannot compete with the distress Sister felt in Rith. In Carhullan, Sister not only learns how to

work with nature, instead of against it. She also learns how to change her own nature, by changing her body into that of a soldier. Thus, the very ability of the women to become physically strong, and their will to use violence, challenges the general essentialist feminist view of women as inherently more peaceful.

The sense of freedom, which Sister experiences once she is out of Rith, is unequivocally linked to nature and the open spaces in which it is found. Upon Sister's return to nature she says: "Here I was breathing air no one else's breath competed for. I was no longer complicit in a wrecked and regulated existence. I was not its regulated subject" (41). The freedom Sister experiences on her way out of Rith is freedom from oppression. She is allowed to be herself, and she has made a conscious choice not to follow the Authority.

Sister's awareness of her newly gained freedom from the Authority's control resonates in her feeling complete in her own body again: "I was aware of my own warm predominance in the environment, my inhabited skin, my being. I suddenly felt myself again, a self I had not been for so long" (41). The system employed by the Authority, had controlled every single aspect of her life, even down to her own bodily functions. Sister's sense of regaining her identity is crucial to her development in the novel. However, Sister's independence and sense of self becomes second to the group-identity she adopts in the Carhullan army.

The character of Jackie Nixon, Carhullan's de facto leader is problematic, in the sense that she assumes considerable control and influence on other people's lives in such a small community. The all-female commune of Carhullan is a strictly separatist feminist project, and this becomes evident when even the two small boys who are born and raised there are sent away to the nearby farm, where a few men live in connection to Carhullan. In an essay from 1977 Marilyn Frye defines feminist separatism as a "separation of various sorts or modes from men and from institutions, relationships, roles and activities that are male-defined, male-dominated, and operating for the benefit of males and the maintenance of male privilege – this separation being initiated or maintained, at will, *by women*" (emphasis in original, 92). In Frye's essay she is mainly concerned with lesbian separatism, and the different small-scale options there are for feminist separatism. However, one of the earliest and most well known examples of a feminist separatist commune was Cell 16, which was founded by Roxanne Dunbar in 1968. In the first issue of Cell 16's magazine *No More Fun and Games*, Dunbar proclaimed their intentions for the group:

A vanguard of women must operate to show women the possibility of a new society [...] Our means, other than our educational efforts and the formation of communes will be secret. We shall not fight on the enemy's grounds, on his streets, in his courts, legislatures, 'radical' movements, marriage, media. (Dunbar qtd. in Echols 159)

Cell 16 was a heterosexual female commune, and their members and readers of their magazine were encouraged to learn karate, practice celibacy and to break with the traditional expectations society held to women. Cell 16 believed, in opposition to many other radical feminist groups of the time, that women had to change first, and subsequently men would follow their change (Echols 159-164). The character of Jackie Nixon seems to be taken from the context of these female communes in the 1960s and '70s. While travelling to Carhullan, Sister remembers an interview with Jackie where she stated an opinion similar to that of Dunbar:

“It’s still all about body and sexuality for us,” [...] “We are controlled by those things; psychologically, financially, eternally. We endorse the manmade competition between ourselves that disunites us, stripping us of our true ability. We don’t believe we can govern better, and until we believe this, we never will. It’s time for are new society”  
(51)

Jackie Nixon is a former elite soldier with an academic background from Cambridge. In Carhullan, she has the role of a leader and an army commander. She trains and commands an army unit, which Sister joins. When Jackie is about to convince the others that the time is right to go to war, she is described by Sister as a prophet and that “she was leading the way” (164).

In opposition to Cell 16’s first statement about not fighting on enemy ground, Dunbar declared in February 1969, “that at some point ‘warfare (guerrilla style)’ would be necessary” (Echols 159). Cell 16 implemented no major actions, and the group disbanded in 1973. Much in the same manner, the initial thought behind Carhullan was not to bring forth a guerrilla army; it was rather going to serve as an example of environmental responsibility and sustainability. However, as the world around them changed for the worse, Jackie sees no other way out than launching an attack on Rith and the Authority. In a speech she comments how they have created true liberty in Carhullan, and that with their freedom comes responsibility:

“We cannot stand by and allow the Authority to do what it is doing any more. We cannot wait for them to take apart what we’ve made” (165-166).

While the Carhullan army’s constant training for battle is described in detail throughout the novel, the subsequent siege of Rith is only described in a few paragraphs at the very end. The paragraphs describing the siege depict what happened after the actual battle. Sister claims that they held the town for “fifty-three days” (207), although we do not learn exactly what happened in those days. The last part of the novel is called “Data Lost”. It is difficult to discern why Hall chose to omit the actual fighting scenes between the Carhullan army and the Authority. One of the effects of the leaving out the actual siege is that the plot ends without really being finished, and many questions are left unanswered. It is especially unsatisfying if one thinks of Sister’s change in the novel, as so much of it was derived from her going into military training. Maybe one of the reasons for omitting the fighting scenes is that radical feminism very seldom in reality practiced political violence.

In Lindsey Churchill’s essay “Exploring Feminism’s Complex Relationship with Political Violence: An Analysis of the Weathermen, Radical Feminism and the New Left,” Churchill asserts that the question of using political violence splintered radical feminism in the late 1960s and 70s (28). Churchill states that “[r]adical-cultural feminists such as Jane Alpert believed that women were essentially non-violent. Pacifist feminists desired for both men and women to reject violence, while pro-violent feminists advocated for a violent solution to the problems of patriarchy” (41). The divergence between these different feminisms reflects how important the question of political violence has been in the discourse of second wave feminism.

One of the advocates for the use of political violence against men was Valerie Solanas. In 1967 she wrote and published *SCUM Manifesto*, in which she proclaimed that:

“Life” in this “society” being, at best, an utter bore and no aspect of “society” being at all relevant to women, there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation and eliminate the male sex. (1)

Solanas went on to shoot Andy Warhol in 1968. Churchill asserts that since Solanas did not show any remorse, she rebelled against “certain feminist claims that women are more compassionate and less violent” (40). After the shooting, the jury deemed Solanas



incompetent and decided to send her to an insane asylum. Churchill writes that the jury's justification for "not sending Solanas to prison reinforced the belief that no woman could be so unapologetically violent without being crazy" (40). Society's inability to see women as violent is reflected in the treatment of Solanas. This is discussed in *Daughters of the North*, when Jackie asks Sister if she thinks women can be violent, or if they are inherently more peaceful than men, to which Sister replies: "I think women are naturally just as violent. Especially when we're young. But we're taught it's not in keeping with our gender, that it's not feminine behaviour" (116-117). Sister's comment places her in the landscape of a radical feminist discourse in which both the physical and psychological binaries between the genders are broken down. When Sister approaches the subject of violence in women, she also views the reluctance in women to partake in violence as a learned behavior. In *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler describes a process of repetitions, which makes this learned behavior a societal norm:

Performativity cannot be understood outside a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo [...]. (Emphasis in original, 95)

When Sister joins the Carhullan commune, and ultimately their army, she defies what she has earlier known to be her true identity as a woman in Rith. Within Butler's framework it is possible to read Sister's transformation as a break with the constraints and taboos that held her back in Rith.

## **Reproductive control: “obsessing over maternal rights”**

In the beginning of the novel, we learn how “[p]eople traded with their bodies, their professions, they signed up for futurized loans” (30). Rith is in a downfall with increasing suicide rates and an extensive use of narcotics. The detrimental state of society is seen clearly by Sister, and she believes that the system has to be changed. Her husband Andrew, on the other hand, decides that the only possibility of a good life in Rith is to conform to the Authority’s system. In the process of becoming a part of the Authority’s system, he alienates Sister, which leads to slow disintegration of their relationship.

The Authority plays an active part in controlling everyday life. One of the central issues in Hall’s novel is how the Authority has taken control over the female body and reproduction. The Authority has made it mandatory for all women to have a contraceptive metal coil inserted. The metal coil is made longer than it needs to be for its contraceptive uses in order to make routine checks easier. Sister experiences the fitting of the coil as an intrusion on her body and identity. Although they were not allowed to have children before, the compulsory barrier contraceptive becomes a more direct way of controlling reproduction. When Sister becomes the subject of one of the routine spot-checks of the coil, she realizes the extent of the power exercised by the Authority. They are allowed to stop any women in the street and take them to the back of a car in order to check if their coil is still in place. When Sister questions why the use of contraceptives suddenly is restrained to women only, Andrew replies that it is a matter of practicalities (33). The fact remains, however, that the women in Rith are more oppressed by the control of reproduction than the men. It is difficult to see fitting of the coil as just a practicality. The methods used by the Authority points in the direction of wanting to control women through gaining control over their reproductive abilities. When Sister has had her coil fitted in the clinic, she discovers that Andrew has a very different reaction to the contraceptive device. Rather than feeling compassion and understanding, Andrew is sexually aroused by the thought of her coil. This disgusts Sister, but she nonetheless allows him to have sexual intercourse with her.

The consequence of women being unable to have children, leads to a notion among the men in the society that sex is freer when the threat of unwanted pregnancies is absent. The popular notion of the era of “free love” in the 1960s came in the context of new contraceptive technology directed towards women. The contraceptive pill was introduced to the consumers

in 1960. Although originally only prescribed for married women, it became for many the very offset of a sexual revolution. Furthermore, the driver of the van in the beginning of the novel sees the fitting of the coil as a “return to the era of free love” (16).

In novel, the Authority’s fitting of the coil is seen as a positive action from the men’s point of view, and Andrew also claims that Sister’s reaction to the coil is a way of her “obsessing over maternal rights” (33). In Rith you may eventually earn the possibility of having children through hard work and the right connections. It is also indicated that there is a lottery, where you could win the opportunity to have your coil removed in order to get pregnant. The problems around population control is a central topic in *Herland*, but by the power of being a utopia it is solved by the women being able to control pregnancies themselves. In *The Female Man*, pregnancy is exclusively mentioned in the context of Whileaway, also a utopian world, where the women themselves choose when to get pregnant. Conversely, in two of the most well known dystopias written by women in more recent times, the problem is not population control, but rather the inability to conceive. In Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), sterility is widespread and many have difficulties in conceiving. Although men can be sterile in Atwood’s dystopian society, “[t]here is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that’s the law” (61). Whereas, in P. D. James’ dystopian novel *Children of Men* (1992), all men in the UK became sterile in 1994 and the country is steadily depopulating. Both these novels envision a dystopian future in which the problem is not overpopulation, as it is in *Daughters of the North*, but rather depopulation, or the threat of it. In both novels, this is also a problem mainly stemming from the lack of fertility in men, not women.

It is interesting that Hall chooses to create a society where the threat is overpopulation, especially as this is a problem most people think of in the context of developing countries. In fact, in most well developed countries, the problem is more often depopulation. It has been claimed that in countries such as India and Indonesia there have been attempts at implementing population control programs where the government encouraged the implantation of contraceptive devices, such as the intrauterine device, without any provisions for removing the device in case of health problems or in the case of wanting to get pregnant (*Bioethics* 166). In a similar manner to the coil in *The Daughters of the North*, it was an attempt at sterilization, without actually having to implement it as such.

There can be different reasons for Hall to be focusing on overpopulation rather than depopulation in *Daughters of the North*. One of these reasons can be to show that there is a possibility that there will be a dramatic decrease in natural resources, even the basics such as food and water. Another issue in the overpopulation problematic could be to show in full effect that the Britain in Hall's novel can no longer be compared to what it is today. It's lack of social infrastructures and natural resources, has made Rith more similar to how we perceive less developed countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Sexuality and gender: “[S]he was deconstructing the old disabled versions of our sex”**

In Rith, Sister no longer feels sexual attraction towards Andrew. The mandatory coil has provided a new way of degrading women, especially when it comes to being subjected to random spot-checks. Not only are the women forced to get a coil implanted in their body; they can also be stopped at any moment in the street and be asked to take off their clothing in order to be checked. Another possible consequence of making the implant mandatory is an increased sexualisation of women, perhaps even making the threat of rape greater as a consequence that women can no longer get pregnant. One implication could also be that the fitting of a contraceptive device in young girls who have just started menstruating, some of them as young as ten or eleven, could contribute to an increased sexualisation of young girls and children.

In Carhullan, Sister is warned by Jackie to keep quiet about her sexual orientation: ““I don't care if you are a murrey, just don't put it about, eh? I don't need these bitches to be squabbling over new cunt. Not now”” (85). However, Sister does eventually pursue a relationship with another woman in Carhullan, namely Shruti. Their relationship ends when Sister joins Jackie's army unit. Sister becomes increasingly focused on the psychological and physical challenges that she is going through in the unit, and a relationship with Shruti becomes impossible. Instead, she meets up with Calum, one of the men from the adjoining farm, whom she has casual sex with.

The relationship between the men on the nearby farm and the Carhullan commune is complicated. The men are dependant on the women, and are described as living under dire circumstances as Sister observes them for the first time: “I could see immediately that they did not have the vitality of the Sisters and I wondered in what conditions they lived, whether their existence was poorer, and how much they depended on the women for their survival” (135). The impression of the men is further enhanced by the fact that the women give them fruit they carried in their pockets and when the men ask if they can have some peat (136). The men are also described as being underweight and frail looking. There are also two young boys living there who grew up in the Carhullan commune, but they were sent to live with the men when they reached ten years of age. Several of the women have sexual relations with the men. Chloe, a member of the Carhullan commune is also married to Martyn, one of the men down at the farm.

In Carhullan, there seems to be tension between the women in regards the situation with the men living so close and the two young boys who were sent away from Carhullan. The weakness of their strong separatist viewpoint is that there are no grey areas; surely, if the boys were raised in the Carhullan commune until they were ten they would probably share the views of the women who raised them. In comparison, the fourteen year old Megan, whom is also raised in the commune, is described by Sister as “the most confident girl I had ever met” (106). The description of Megan echoes that of the Herlanders and Whilawayans, without the presence of gender binaries in the children, in these cases only girls, will grow up differently. Different in the sense that they are able to create an identity based on their own actions and merits, rather than being concerned with fitting in to a certain gender stereotypical box. When the concern about categorization and polarization is absent, they are freer to become more independent and confident in their ways.

Both Megan and the boys are described as being different from other children Sister has encountered. Megan is confident and mature, yet very open and considerate, while the boys whom Sister meets when she goes to the men’s lodgings instantly embrace her and share some of “Megan’s candour” (138). The different opinions the women of Carhullan have about the men also serve as an example of the differences within radical feminism; such as changing the existing system for the better through working inside it, or trying to work completely outside the current system to build new structures.

The women of Carhullan came to the commune for different reasons, but they all wished to get away from the present state of affairs and they all wished for a new kind of

community and societal structure. Some were orientated towards lesbian feminist separatism, some had suffered abuse from men and needed a sanctuary, and some of the women were probably there because they had an ecofeminist approach. Under the strict regime of the Authority, they were not allowed to gather in groups or to arrange protests. Carhullan is described as the largest grouping of unofficials and consisted of approximately sixty women. These women undoubtedly had a variety of views on feminism, but regardless their difference in opinions, Carhullan seemed like the better option.

Gender roles and the changeable body becomes a central topic in *Daughters of the North*. In Carhullan, Sister manages to change her body as well as her identity. When Sister first arrives in Carhullan, she has to go through a period of isolation in a dog box. She loses track of time in and struggles both physically and mentally:

I began to understand that I owned the abuse; I was the only persecutor. They were not killing me slowly, methodically with scalding instruments and wires. They were letting me break apart, so I could use the blunt edges of reason to stave in my mind, and jagged ones to lance open the blisters of sanity. (73-74)

Sister experiences the torture of being isolated in a small place as a catharsis, and even though she almost becomes delirious at the end, she seems to recognize these drastic means as necessary. In Rith, she felt like every aspect of her existence was useless, and in Carhullan she is ready to leave it all behind. In addition to the psychological pain of being trapped in the dog box, she is also broken down physically. After her period in isolation, she is taken care of by Lorry, who also removes the coil. Sister's experience of the removal is completely different from the fitting: "I did not have to explain myself or inch in to a difficult topic. I did not have to try to justify my discomfort, as I had to Andrew" (90). The removal of the coil becomes an important step in the direction of freeing herself from the control of Rith, and the coil also becomes instrumental as evidence of the cruelty of the Authority.

When Sister is expected to pass her coil around in the Carhullan meeting, it evokes the second-wave feminist phenomenon of consciousness-raising sessions. These sessions are described by Margaret Walters as an example of one of the most distinctive elements of the women's movement in the early seventies. Women formed groups of all sizes, where they could gather and speak of the topics that interested them. The consciousness-raising came in the form of sharing personal experiences with oppression. (Walters 108-112). The fact that

Sister is the last woman to arrive to Carhullan, and the only one who had the coil implanted, makes her an important voice in the commune. Sister becomes the one person who can give the other women a perspective on just how far the Authority's oppression of women has gone.

The consciousness-raising phenomenon comes hand in hand with another of the important slogans of second wave feminism: "the personal is political." By sharing her own experiences with the Authority, the coil and the monitors, Sister becomes the voice for all women in Rith, at least that is how it will be perceived in Carhullan. When women are forced to have a contraceptive implant by the government, it becomes impossible to escape the political in the personal. The regime of the Authority is a way of bringing theoretical ideas down to a very literal level. It is possible to say that the prevailing oppression of women does not come down to individuals, but rather intrinsic systems. This applies of course not only to women, but is also relevant to the discourses of sexuality and race. The effect the Authority has on every single woman is different, but they also share a lot of the same pain and fears. The brutality of Sister being incarcerated in a small confined space after a long and strenuous walk, marks the beginning of her breaking completely with her old self. However, Jackie's methods of "breaking you down to build you up" translates directly into how you build group mentality, and is crucial to the process of building Sister's trust afterwards.

The difference of Carhullan is not only marked by the way the women act and interact, but also by their appearance. There are not many descriptions of how the people in Rith look; this enhances the image of Rith as a dull and mechanical setting. On the other hand, the descriptions of the women in Carhullan are often closely linked to nature. One of the first women Sister meets is described as having hair like "an otter's pelt" (61), and Jackie's eyes "were the colour of slate riverbeds" (78). They also look completely different from the women Sister has known before: "I looked at her and I knew for certain she was one of Carhullan's residents. She was about my height. She was my size, and my sex, but she looked almost alien" (61). The fact that the women in Carhullan look so different reverberates with the image of the women in the two novels discussed in the previous chapters. A description further on in the novel puts additional emphasis on how their bodies have changed: "They did not look like girls, middle aged and older women. They seemed to be sexless, whittled back to muscle by toil and base nourishment, creatures who bore no sense of category, no dress code other than the one they chose" (118-119). By going to the Carhullan commune, and by entering Jackie's unit Sister's body changes drastically. Sister sees the change herself in a mirror, and describes it as a "metamorphosis that had occurred. [...] It was the anatomy of a

fanatic. It was the same body as the rest of the unit had fashioned for themselves” (204). Through Sister’s ability to change her body we are confronted with an action that counters the traditional view that women are biologically inferior to men in strength. The women of Carhullan are generally strong because of their heavy physical workload, and the women in Jackie’s unit have pushed their physical and mental capabilities even further. When Sister reflects on the tough methods employed by Jackie’s unit she states:

She did not make monsters of us. She simply gave us the power to remake ourselves into those inviolable creatures the God of Equality had intended us to be. We knew she was deconstructing the old disabled versions of our sex, and that her ruthlessness was adopted because those constructs were built to endure. (187)

The torturous time spent in the dog box, and the extreme exercise regime is all a part of Jackie’s plan. For outsiders it can seem as Sister is “groomed” for Jackie’s purpose, and it is difficult to discern if the attack on Rith is Jackie’s project alone, or if the community of Carhullan as a group thinks it through. Sister comments that there was “no mutiny at Carhullan” (176), even though there were those who opposed going into battle with the Authority. Chloe is the only one who voices her concerns, and Jackie eventually kills her and her husband because they are seen as a liability. Throughout the novel, Jackie shows a special interest in Sister. Sister’s arrival in Carhullan seems to have given the last spark to the ignition that is Jackie’s guerrilla army. Through conversations with Jackie, Sister becomes convinced that all people are capable of fighting, women as well as men, if they are driven to it. Jackie tells Sister a story about a hare that was stranded in the middle of a waterway, only to end the story by saying that “[a]ll animals can swim if they have to” (98). Jackie also confronts Sister with her own beliefs of what women are capable of in terms of violence, and questions why she didn’t fight back when she was fitted with the coil. However, Sister was still under the constraints of Rith, and even though a protest may have been sufficient if most the women in Rith agreed upon it, it is still a possibility that they would have been subjugated even further. When Jackie tries to explain why she ask Sister these questions, even though she sees that it is difficult for her, she says: ““It’s difficult, I know. You think I’m cruel. You think I’m a royal bitch. Maybe I am. Shit, I won’t lose any sleep over that. I just want to get to the bottom of why these things go on. I’m a dark fucking tourist, Sister, I like going to these places. It’s interesting to me. I’m interested in what holds people back. And what doesn’t””



(117-118). In *Daughters of the North*, Jackie is a brilliant leader because she knows how far she can push people and exactly what to say to get them there. Jackie tries to justify the fact that she is creating a guerrilla army to launch an attack on the government by saying: “People might think I’m an extremist, but it’s for everyone’s sake” (99). Jackie’s leadership makes her ambiguous in several manners. Firstly she is a character a reader is mostly accustomed to viewing as male. The character of an intelligent ex-elite soldier, who decides to fight against an authority’s wrongdoings, has a decidedly masculine connotation. However, Jackie is a woman, but she actively refuses to conform to the gender roles attributed to her. Another factor in the ambiguity of her status as leader is the fact that she is unyielding when it comes to killing Chloe and Martyn after seeing them as a potential liability. Sister states that Jackie did not try “to describe Carhullan as any kind of Utopia” (100). Yet, Sister experiences Carhullan as utopian, because she regains a sense of freedom and usefulness in the commune.

In *Daughters of the North*, we are faced with several feminist ideas and perspectives, and some of them do not necessarily belong to a contemporary strand of feminism. In today’s modern societies, feminism can be viewed as an outdated phenomenon. There is often talk about feminism gone too far, and many women do not recognize themselves as feminists because of the association they may have to radical and separatist feminist ideas. Although feminists do not necessarily hate men, or want to get rid of them, many people seem to be under just that impression. By distancing themselves from the current strands of feminism, they also fail to recognize what feminist activism has achieved throughout the last century. Hall manages, with her novel, to imagine a future world where women’s rights are restricted and the consequences it has, and at the same time revisits ideas and topics within feminism. By creating an all-female commune of “unofficials,” she is pointing towards the status women had before they had the right to vote. Women in the beginning of the twentieth century were still considered to be the property of their fathers and husbands. Their unofficial status was enforced by their lack of rights to property and their own body. The all-female commune is also a staple idea of separatist feminism and radical feminism in general which had its heyday during the second wave of feminism. The ecological aspect of the novel is important in the consideration of Hall’s ability to incorporate different feminist discourses. The ecofeminist movement becomes an important issue both in the incentive for starting up the Carhullan commune, and their ability to survive off the land. The women of Carhullan manage to exist entirely separated from the rest of society, because they have an ecological sensibility. However, the novel is as much as about an individual character becoming a fanatic as it is

about ecological apocalypse. Sister is presented as a very malleable protagonist, even though she has the courage and will to escape Rith.

## Conclusion

“Do not get glum when you are no longer understood, little book. Do not curse your fate. Do not reach up from readers' laps and punch the readers' noses.

Rejoice, little book! For on that day, we will be free.” (Russ 152)

The three novels I have presented my close reading of in this thesis can be read as different manifestations of feminist science fiction. The first novel, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, presented a perfect utopian alternative to her contemporaneous world. The second novel, Joanna Russ's *The Female Man*, also incorporated a similarly utopian world. However, Russ also portrayed three other worlds in her novel, of a varying dystopian nature. In the last novel, Sarah Hall's *Daughters of the North*, the utopia is no longer so unwaveringly perfect. In fact, it is difficult to discern whether the all-female commune of Carhullan really can be described as a utopia. The deciding matter in whether Carhullan can be described as a utopia is its strong dichotomy with the distinctly dystopian Rith.

In the introduction to this thesis, I set out to examine these three novels in the context of their contemporary feminisms, with the common ground that they all present a perspective of gender binaries as a social construction. The different feminisms represented in these texts can be said to belong to three different waves of feminism. The wave metaphor is in itself interesting in relation to these novels, as it indicates a movement between the different variations, rather than a clean break.

The main themes of this thesis were chosen because they feature prominently in science fiction written by women and have been of importance to the women's movement throughout the different waves of feminism. In the following section of the conclusion I will discuss comparative aspects of the three texts. I will begin by examining how gender roles and sexuality are depicted in all three novels. Then I will progress onto the topics of motherhood, reproduction and marriage.

The topic of whether gender and sex is a natural classification is questioned in all three novels. Gilman, Russ and Hall share an approach that questions the validity of gender binaries as a biological fact. In this aspect, their portrayal of the women living in separatism is

similar. In *Herland*, the women have existed without men for two thousand years. They have become physically and psychologically different from the women the men are used to in early twentieth-century America. Through her portrayal of Herland, Gilman sets out to show that women are just as capable as men. The greatest difference between Gilman's all-female society, and *Whileaway* and *Carhullan*, is that Gilman's novel also portrays women as being inherently better than men. While the women of *Whileaway* and *Carhullan* fight and make love, the women in *Herland* do neither. Thus, the fact that Gilman exclusively portrays the women of *Herland* as perfect, illustrates Gilman's essentialist view of women. Although she in many ways claims that the traditional gender roles are a construction of culture rather than nature, she also claims that woman is the original "race type." Men are therefore viewed as a sort of corruption of the race type, however, some are better than others and it seems that she sees a solution in breeding out the worst traits.

Similarly, men do not fare too well in the descriptions in *The Female Man*. Throughout Russ's novel men are mostly portrayed as ignorant brutes, but there is one exception: Jeannine's boyfriend Cal. Jeannine views Cal as not being masculine enough and wants to break up with him. In a conversation with Janet, she questions the fact that Cal "likes to get dressed up. He gets into the drapes like a sarong and puts on all my necklaces around his neck, and stands there with the curtain rod for a spear. He wants to be an actor, you know. But I think there's something wrong with him. Is it what they call transvestism?" (64) Jeannine also tells Janet that Cal is not sexual enough, as all "he does is pet and he says he likes it like that. He says it's like floating. Then when he does it you know, sometimes he cries. I never heard of a man doing that" (64). The fact that Cal's masculinity is questioned by Jeannine, could be a consequence of her not feeling adequate as a woman. Jeannine suffers from a feeling of inadequacy because she has not fulfilled the usual expectations of a woman her age, such as getting married and giving children. However, the descriptions of Cal also questions women's expectations of men. Is it reasonable to expect men to uphold a certain norm of masculinity, for women who want to be accepted into all spheres of society? The question Russ, rather indirectly, asks has as much to do with the rights of men as women. The problematic can be seen especially in regards to the question of having custody over children and parental leave for men. It also enters into a question of how society views men who take on traditionally female characteristics. Perhaps it is easier for Joanna to change into a "female man", than it is for Cal to be a "male woman." In *Daughters of the North*, the men living on the nearby farm seem subjugated by the women. The reason for this might be that it is one of

the methods the women of Carhullan use to take back their freedom and independence from men. Another aspect is that rather than a portrayal of gender oppression it may be seen as an illustration of a feudal community. Although Gilman's *Herland* is about women, it is also largely about how men view women. Gilman's view is that women are in some ways better than men. Yet, she portrays the narrator Van in a positive manner. Van, is depicted as being rational, friendly and intelligent. By making a man the narrator, Gilman may have wanted to increase the validity of her story in the minds of male readers.

Sexuality is only present in *Herland* as a constant tension between the men and the women. In *Herland* it is mostly the consequences of a sexual relationship, which is discussed, and not the actual act of sex. In both *The Female Man* and *Daughters of the North*, the characters engage in sexual relationships. The most interesting exploration of sexuality is found in *The Female Man*, especially in how Jael has a sexual relationship with a cyborg. In Jael's universe many of the sex/gender distinctions are broken down, and the readers have to question the coherence between sex, gender and sexuality. These aspects are not only explored regarding the cyborg Davy, but are also discussed in regards to the changed men in Manland. Some of the men in Manland are either changed or half changed into women. Jael explains that the men get the specifications for how a woman should look like from Womanland, but that she doubts "*if even the sex surgeons know what a real woman looks like. The specifications we send them every year grow wilder and wilder and there isn't a murmur of protest* (emphasis in original, 120). The creation of an "un-real" woman in *The Female Man* also produces a question as to whether sex and gender are innately linked, or if the specific notion of both is equally constructed. The men in Manland consider the changed as being exactly like a woman, even if they are aware that they are not born that way. The specifics, which they receive from Womanland as to how a woman should look according to her sex, could be different from what the women in Womanland actually look like. Yet, to the men's knowledge, they have created real women.

The view on both gender and sexuality seems to have changed radically in the years between 1915 and 2007, yet all three novels challenge the prevailing view of both sex and gender as something biologically inherent. *Daughters of the North* exemplifies a deconstruction of these gender notions, and it shows how women are able to change their body and consciousness. The narrator of the novel proves to be both strong and malleable. Sister is able to escape the confining society of Rith, but she also proves to be an easy target for Jackie's convictions. It becomes clear throughout the novel that Jackie's nature is very

convincing and dynamic. In the beginning, when Sister first meets her, she describes Jackie as having many faces (86) and that she felt suddenly “charmed by her. Then as quickly as it had arrived, the banter was gone and her face hardened again” (84). The many faces of Jackie enable her to be authoritative and charming at the same time, something that appeals greatly to Sister. Sister seems to feel an attraction towards Jackie, and throughout the book her attitude seems to fluctuate between admiration and love. Her admiration for Jackie, even though she remembers hearing resentment towards the Carhullan commune especially when they are described as “child-deserters, men-haters, cunt-lickers, or celibates” (48), reinforces this notion. The use of expressions such as “cunt-lickers” and “men-haters” suggest that a categorically negative view of homosexuality still prevails in society at the time when Sister first hears about the commune. The sexual relationships Sister has in Carhullan, both with men and women, do not really seem to comment on the negative connotations homosexuality has in her society. However, it becomes clear that her relationship with Shruti is experienced as far more fulfilling than her relationship with Andrew and Calum.

Conversely, the absence of sexual relationships between the women in *Herland* seems relatively natural due to the context in which it was written. As mentioned in Chapter One, romantic relationships between women were not uncommon, yet Gilman chooses to omit any notion of such relations in her novel. The absence of any sexual relationship between the women, makes the question of its meaning more significant. Why was it important for Gilman to omit sexual relationships and romantic friendships between women from her story? The reasons for Gilman leaving out such relationships between the women may have been rooted in a sense of shame related to the subject, and this may be related to issues around Gilman’s own relationship with women. Thus, one can claim that the aspect of their society that the author sees as least likely to change, or has personal difficulty with, is often omitted from utopian writing.

Motherhood, childrearing and reproduction are topics that have been dealt with in numerous science fiction stories. In two of the novels the reproduction is asexual: in *Herland* the women get pregnant through a quasi-religious process of parthenogenesis, while in *Whileaway* the women have scientific methods for merging ova. In both cases men are entirely out of the equation. In 2007, scientists managed to create human parthenogenesis in order to create embryonic stem cells (Cyranoski and Mullard). The advances in research have proven far more controversial than their fictional counterparts, and there are major ethical concerns in regards to this research and the actual use of stem cell treatments. The

descriptions of the genetic surgeons in Whileaway, and how they are capable of breeding away bad traits in Herland, can also be seen as controversial. The perfect babies they create in Herland and Whileaway can be seen in relation to the controversies surrounding selective abortion, especially in regards to Down's syndrome and gender selective abortion. Although the women of Herland and Whileaway do not need abortions, they have their ways of controlling human development through deciding which genes they prefer to persist.

The aspects of childrearing are also similar in *Herland* and *The Female Man*. Although the focus on childrearing is not as important in *Daughters of the North*, the novel shares the same positive view of a collective upbringing of children. Megan and the two boys in Carhullan are examples of the idea of multi-mothering. Megan tells Sister about how she was an experiment to see "what they could do without the influence" (107) of men. The success of Megan's upbringing is contrasted by the fact that the boys were sent away from the commune. The boys were probably also brought up without the influence of men, however, the commune (or its leader) viewed the separatist feminist aspect as being exclusive of children as well as adults. The inclusion of children in work and all aspects of life is apparent in all three novels. These views are congruent with Shulamith Firestone's demand for "[t]he total integration of women and children into all aspects of the larger society" (emphasis in original, 208). It is important to notice that Megan is only fourteen years old, yet she is in military training in Jackie's unit and partakes in the siege of Rith. The loss of the innocence of childhood for Megan can be paralleled with the fact that girls her age were forced to have contraceptive implants in Rith.

In *Herland* and *Daughters of the North* there are anxieties about overpopulation. In *Herland*, the women have resolved this issue by deciding not to have more children than one, while in *Daughters of the North* the Authority decides that all women has to have a mandatory contraceptive device implanted. In *Herland* the women's choice to bear one child is contrasted by the women in America who have more children than they can provide for. Thus, the problematic of overpopulation, while resolved in Herland, is still accounted for in Herland's dystopian counterpart. Concerns about reproductive rights are seldom the question in more recent science fiction, as it is more often centered on a fear of loosing reproductive abilities. In *Daughters of the North*, Sister's husband sees her reluctance to have the implant as her obsessing over her maternal rights, while Sister rather sees it as being concerned with her rights to her own body.

The continuity of the main themes of these novels reveals continuity within feminism. The waves of feminism signify that there is permanence in regards to which topics remain most crucial. This also implies that although many things have changed for the better, there is still room for improvement. Science fiction as a genre has the possibility of pinpointing important issues at hand, and at the same time providing an option as to how the situations could develop. In *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Ursula K. Le Guin describes science fiction as “thought experiments [...] not to predict the future [...] but to describe reality, the present world. Science fiction is not predictive, it is descriptive ” (156). This aspect applies both to utopian and dystopian fiction. Utopian fiction tries to show how society would look like if it was changed for the better, while dystopian fiction often takes a contemporary situation or challenge and depicts how things could develop for the worse.

Feminist science fiction is a multiplicity of actions. The feminist strategy of writing science fiction is a way of reclaiming a genre that has been dominated by male writers and male chauvinism. By depicting alternative worlds and histories, feminist science fiction creates a foundation for trying out new ideas and concepts while challenging old ones. Feminist science fiction can also be used as a strategy for leveling high theory with direct activism. When ideas and theories are tried out within an imaginary world they also become more available to the reader.



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