

Exploring the Role of Gender in the Depiction of Utopia in Selected Novels

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Introduction

We can only know what we can truly imagine. Finally what we see comes from ourselves.

(Piercy 1983, 322)

The above quotation by author Marge Piercy is resonant with regard to the topic of this dissertation. If analysed within the context of creating fiction, Piercy's implication here is that one tends to write about what one knows, suggesting that an author's unique experiences will invariably influence the subject matter he/she addresses in a narrative. In this dissertation I explore the role played by gender in the fictional depiction of utopia, which entails the portrayal of societies alternate to that in which the author is situated. According to the author's social context, therefore, the society depicted will be either progressive or chaotic. Works of utopian fiction thus function mimetically to a degree, as they tend to indicate the state of the society from which an author writes via the critique presented. As gender is traditionally relied upon as one of the fundamental markers of identity in Western society, the social experience of an author within such a society is inexorably tied to his/her gender, therefore influencing his/her representation of utopia. Thus whilst an author can, for all intents and purposes, portray characters of any gender identity, sexual orientation, and/or biological sex with sensitivity and validity, it does appear that many are inclined towards writing about that which they have personally experienced, and so "can truly imagine" (Piercy 1983, 322), particularly within the utopian genre with its reflective nature.

Kofi Annan claims that "gender equality is critical to the development and peace of every nation" (quoted in Lee 2005, 1), linking together gender and social development, and implying that without gender equality there can be no social progress. This is pertinent to my argument, in that I posit that the second-wave feminist movement that took place within the Western world during the 1960s and beyond had a profound impact on the relationship between gender and utopian fiction. The second wave created widespread and/or heightened awareness among the members of Western society with regard to the socially constructed and so mutable nature of the traditional male/female gender binary and the associated myth of male superiority, and of the potentially harmful and restrictive natures of both (Magarey 2001, 3-4). This influenced many utopian authors to examine issues of gender within their texts, largely as the genre involves a thorough critical analysis of the social and historical

context from which an author writes, and focusses on social improvement. Although the use of gender as a means by which to demonstrate the positive and negative aspects of the author's society is evident throughout the genre, I argue that this increased as a result of the second wave, as a greater proportion of Western society began to consciously interrogate gender as related to the experience of the individual, as well as to social progress. I rely upon three utopian texts to illustrate these points: *Woman on the Edge of Time* by Marge Piercy (1983 [1976]), *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood (2009 [2003]), and *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy (2007 [2006]), providing an in-depth critical analysis of each.

In order to create a foundation from which to explore my primary texts, I include in this dissertation a summary of the history of the utopian literary genre. I employ Plato's *The Republic* (1998 [360 B.C.E.]), Thomas More's *Utopia* (2005 [1516]), H.G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (2002 [1905]), and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (2006 [1932]) to demonstrate the existence of the various conventions of the genre, and to reveal the changes undergone within utopian writing since its inception. Upon examining these texts, it becomes apparent that utopian literature is traditionally entrenched within the Western paradigms of patriarchy and androcentrism – all four authors appearing largely unaware of the socially constructed nature of gender, and generally portraying the concept of male primacy as fixed and inevitable within their texts. As each text was written prior to second-wave feminism, in contrast to my primary sources, this supports my assertion that the patriarchal tradition of the genre only began to shift discernibly as a result of the movement. Also noteworthy is the fact that Plato, More, Wells and Huxley are all men, and so possibly less disposed towards exploring the position of women within their societies due to a lack of personal experience in this regard; after all, as Piercy says, ““what we see comes from ourselves”” (1983, 322). Additionally, whilst it is rather cynical and cannot be definitively said of any of these authors, the fact that each of the four authors fails to genuinely challenge patriarchal ideologies within his text may very well be a result of his privileged location within its structures.

So as to expand my argument regarding the impact of the second wave on utopian literature, I briefly explore the utopian novels of female authors Margaret Cavendish and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, entitled *The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World* (2014 [1666]) and *Herland* (1979 [1915]) respectively. Both authors strive to defy the patriarchal tradition within their texts – a tradition that kept them repressed within their societies, and which the characters they portray resist in a variety of ways. Gilman in particular employs

gender as a vehicle through which to indicate the positive and negative aspects of her society. However, both Cavendish and Gilman maintain ties to the traditional androcentrism of the genre to a significant extent. This is possibly due to the dearth of discourse regarding revised notions of gender within the societies from which they wrote, in which the systems of patriarchy remained intractable.

My exploration of the aforementioned utopian texts of Piercy, Atwood and McCarthy reveals some interesting points. Whilst each of these novels was written during a time in which the majority of the population was aware of the restrictions imposed by rigid gender roles and norms, all three authors were born prior to the second wave, and grew up in Western societies in which patriarchal ideologies remained largely unchallenged. Thus each author's personal experiences include some degree of struggle as associated with his/her gender. Therefore, the combination of individual experience and the consciousness created by second-wave feminism has potentially assisted each author with regard to his/her criticism of the strictures of patriarchy. This pertains most readily to Piercy and McCarthy, both of whom portray protagonists of their own gender. However, Atwood diverges from these two by depicting, as a woman writer, a male protagonist, and by including in her novel a comparatively thorough examination of both the male and female positions within phallogentric society. Atwood appears to take advantage of the fact that, at the time of writing, gender roles in her society were less strictly demarcated than those of her childhood. Thus Atwood disrupts the traditional gender binary as an author, and so can be said to embody the ideals of the second wave with regard to *Oryx and Crake*.

Throughout this dissertation I refer to various terms with specific definitions in mind. In order to avoid ambiguity these definitions must be explained, as the terms can – and frequently do – overlap. The term “utopia” was coined by More upon the publication of his eponymous novel in 1516 (Vieira 2010, 3), and as I refer to it is an umbrella term, encompassing the variants “eutopia” and “dystopia” (Fitting 2009, 126). As previously mentioned, a utopian society is one alternate to that from which the author writes, generally with regard to political ideologies and structures, cultural norms, values and practices, and economic systems (Milojevic 2002, 3). Utopian societies are frequently set in the future and are often physically isolated (Vieira 2010, 5). The etymology of the word lies in the Greek words “ouk”, meaning not, and “topos”, denoting place (4). Thus utopia refers simultaneously to a place and to “no-place”: a society that cannot subsist beyond the realm of

the imagination and so translate into reality (4).

Also defined by More is the derivation “eutopia”, which denotes an alternate society considered to be good (5). The social conditions within eutopia are superior to those of present society as experienced by the author within his/her particular historical context (5). “Dystopia” is often mistakenly defined as the inverse of eutopia (Gordin, Tilley & Prakash 2010, 1); however, it is more like the latter’s evil twin. As both stem from utopia the two share several characteristics, but a dystopian society is one in which aspects of present society (again, as experienced by the author) have deteriorated drastically, and/or have gone horribly awry (Fitting 2009, 126). “Dys” derives from the Greek “dus”, which refers to something abnormal or diseased (Vieira 2010, 16). Krishnan Kumar describes these two states of utopia as such: “The one paints the future in glowing tones; the other colors it black” (1989, 3). Thus in relation to Annan’s statement, the fictional depiction of a eutopian society will possibly include a promotion of gender equality, whilst a dystopian society might be represented as adhering to the traditional Western notion of male primacy, both of which will be influenced by the author’s gendered experiences and his/her historical positioning regarding the second wave. Fictional eutopian and dystopian societies are represented as fully formed, and so they can exist outside of the abstract (Vieira 2010, 5). Whilst utopia denotes a “no-place” (4) that cannot be inhabited, in eutopian and dystopian societies “we will not find sketches but plans that have been put into practice” (5). In opposition to utopia’s self-contradictory nature, therefore, eutopia and dystopia offer respectively pleasant and unpleasant locations which can be occupied, and which are founded upon schemes thorough enough to seem plausible.

With reference to my exploration of gender, the terms “biological sex”, “sexual orientation”, “gender identity” and “gender behaviour” must be understood. Examining these terms in relation to one another inevitably opens up the biological essentialism versus social constructionism debate (DeLamater & Hyde 1998, 10). Biological essentialism, defined by Karl Popper as referring to “the realities which lie behind the appearances”, involves the belief that “certain phenomena are natural, inevitable, and biologically determined”, whilst social constructionism refers to reality as a social conception (quoted in DeLamater & Hyde 1998, 10). According to my understanding of the terms “biological sex”, “sexual orientation”, “gender identity” and “gender behaviour”, it is only one’s biological sex that is biologically determined. Of course, one’s biological sex may involve ambiguities, such as in the case of

intersex individuals. However, generally an individual can be deemed either male or female according to his/her physical attributes, namely the genitalia with which he/she has been born (Freud 2006, 619). One's sexual orientation, gender identity and gender behaviour are complex social constructions, and ostensibly involve personal choice on the part of the individual. Sexual orientation pertains to one's sexuality: towards which gender one experiences sexual attraction (Burke 1996, 208). This is not as simple a phenomenon as it appears, with bisexuality acting as an example of the multifaceted nature of human sexual orientation (207). As "no gene has been found" (207) linking biological sex and sexual orientation, the latter can be deemed a social construct. Gender identity refers to whether an individual identifies himself/herself as a male or as a female (DeLamater & Hyde 1998, 10). However, as with sexual orientation, gender identity is multifarious – it pertains to a spectrum along which male and female are positioned, rather than two precise destinations disallowing any divergence (Burke 1996, 167). Gender behaviour relates to the way in which an individual conducts himself/herself: in a manner deemed either masculine or feminine (208).

It must be noted that my exploration of utopian fiction is limited to Western literature. I do not agree with Kumar's rather short-sighted opinion that "the modern western utopia invented in the Europe of the Renaissance – is the only utopia" (quoted in Milojevic 2002, 2). However, I concur with Ivana Milojevic's assertion that, as the terms "utopia", "eutopia", and "dystopia" were formulated in the West, to utilise these Western terms to explain non-Western works of literature may prove problematic (2). In light of this, each of the novels I have chosen as a primary text was written by a Western author and is based in the Western world, and so addresses issues with which I am familiar and/or by which I have been directly affected as a member of the highly Westernised, globally connected country of South Africa. These issues include androcentrism, the media, technological and scientific innovation, and environmental destruction, each of which is discussed at varying levels of intensity in at least two of the selected novels.

Whilst Piercy and Atwood are frequently explored in relation to one another, both authors writing as women with objectives pertaining to second wave ideals, my inclusion of McCarthy lends originality to my discussion. There are numerous similarities apparent regarding all three of the authors and their texts, which demonstrate the conventions evident within the utopian genre, as well as the focus placed by many utopian writers upon issues of gender after the second wave. All three authors portray the limitations of rigid gender roles

and norms through their protagonists, each of whom suffers beneath the yoke of either stereotypical masculinity or femininity to some degree. Each author also makes note of the fact that the ideologies of patriarchy are pervasive and unrelenting, depicting through various characters how deeply embedded the members of a society are within its structures. Piercy and Atwood examine the role of sex in the representation of utopia, and how it can function as a tool to keep women objectified and commodified within phallocentrism, as well as its potential to liberate individuals from the paradigms of patriarchy. The two also include in their novels an exploration of the potential of scientific and technological innovations to assist in the creation of eutopia as well as dystopia, depending on the intentions of those in control. Piercy and McCarthy explore notions of motherhood in their narratives, and the ways in which a woman's maternal identity can restrict and repress her, and Atwood and McCarthy portray the tenuousness of human futurity in the face of apocalyptic disaster.

However, there are many differences evident among the writers as well as their texts (particularly when McCarthy and his novel *The Road* are taken into consideration), revealing the ultimate flexibility of the utopian genre, and the diverse methods by which similar messages can be conveyed within literature. Significant is the fact that Piercy and Atwood are women, and McCarthy is a man, and thus whilst each possesses unique life experiences, those of Piercy and Atwood can possibly be more readily aligned with regard to the impact of one's gender upon one's experiences. This can be supported in that both women analyse the ill effects of patriarchy upon females in the selected novels, whereas (as previously mentioned) McCarthy focusses on male characters.

In addition to the fascinating dynamic created by examining these three novels in relation to one another, I have chosen these authors and their texts owing to the relevance of each to the topic of gender within utopian literature, exploring each author's oeuvre, as well as the opinions they have expressed concerning gender issues. My research into these facets of the authors' careers has presented me with unexpected challenges which have at times opposed the points I initially set out to make, and so has contributed greatly to shaping my argument and the conclusions I reach. For example, the contrast between the criticisms aimed at McCarthy regarding the paucity of women represented throughout his oeuvre, and his own attitude towards the topic, reveals the potential significance of an actual author's personal experiences concerning the issues addressed in his/her fiction (bearing in mind the mediating presence of the implied, text-internal author). This is evident concerning Marge Piercy,

whose upbringing has had a significant influence on the feminist content of her poetry, novels, and essays, as well as on her stance as a political activist. Piercy grew up in America in a “typical patriarchal working-class family”, and as a young Jewish woman in a neighbourhood rife with racial and religious tension, felt “the wrong [...] sex, volume level, class, and emotional coloration” (Piercy quoted in Furlanetto 2014, 416). Throughout her childhood, Piercy was surrounded by chauvinism, anti-Semitism, and class-based prejudice (Horowitz 2009, 1), and she has confronted these issues as an adult through her fiction, such as in the novel *He, She and It* (2010 [1991]). In this novel, the Jewish protagonist yearns to reclaim her role as a mother after losing custody of her son to his father, who possesses a higher social standing than she does within their future capitalist society. Piercy has explained that the 1960s provided her with a “watershed” period, as for the first time she came into contact with “others who were equally committed to fight for a different world” (Furlanetto 2014, 417), lending her the vocabulary she had lacked in the past: “I’m something but what that something was, I didn’t know” (Piercy quoted in Furlanetto 2014, 417). Piercy uses the insight she has gained from her personal experiences in her activism as well as her fiction, saying, “Every artist creates with open eyes” (2010, 26). Piercy notes the mixed messages women receive within phallogentric society, pointing out how in her home town “Virginity was highly prized”, and yet “you could also see ads [...] for abortion and prostitution” in the local newspapers (quoted in Bartels 2005, 1) – women seemingly limited according to their sexuality.

Like Piercy, Margaret Atwood is widely considered to be a feminist author, and her approach to gender related issues has transformed throughout her oeuvre as the concept of gender itself has evolved, demonstrating her to be a sound contributor to cultural phenomena. The socially conscious nature of Atwood’s literature is evident for example in a collection of poetry she wrote entitled *Power Politics* (1996 [1971]), in which she highlights the artificiality of gender stereotypes by inverting them, portraying women to possess a tendency towards aggression, and refusing to depict men as autonomous heroes. In a poem from the anthology called “She Considers Evading Him” (the name itself indicating a subversion of phallogentric norms), Atwood details the end of a romantic relationship through a female speaker, whose independence and agency contrast with her male lover’s vulnerability: “my farewell smile/ which would be inconvenient/ but final” (Atwood quoted in Nischik 2000, 27). In terms of her personal beliefs regarding gender, Atwood explains, “I don’t believe in the male point of view any more than I believe in the female point of view” (quoted in Morris 1990, 1), this

notion of the eradication of the gender binary indicative of her second wave values. At the same time, Atwood notes how the majority of society still abides by this binary and its inherent power imbalance, saying: “men in this society have different kinds of, and more, power than women do” (quoted in Morris 1990, 1).

McCarthy is well known for his portrayal of male characters and his exploration of issues of stereotypical masculinity, evident throughout his career as a playwright, screenwriter and novelist. McCarthy’s tendency to concentrate on the male position within society has incited much criticism, many claiming that by neglecting to explore issues related to women and femininity, McCarthy has essentially failed to analyse gender roles. The *New Yorker* describes McCarthy’s novels to be “claustrophobically male-locked” (Wood quoted in Hage 2010, 169), and John W. Tucker notes that, when women are included in his narratives, they remain “thinly realized” (2007, 3), explaining that this prevents McCarthy’s works from resonating on a universal level. McCarthy’s novel *Suttree* (1979) has been denigrated for containing misogynistic content, Tucker describing the narrative as possessing an “antiwoman core” (2007, iv), with the text’s male characters continuously devaluing its female characters. However, I find such criticism, whilst stemming from valuable observations, to be overly pessimistic in terms of McCarthy’s intentions. In response to a question concerning his rare inclusion of women within his literature, McCarthy explains that “Women are tough. I don’t pretend to understand women” (quoted in Hage, 2010, 169). Whilst McCarthy’s personal views cannot be directly applied to those expressed in his literature, his statement can be viewed as indicative of a certain laziness and apathy, the admission that he struggles to understand and so presumably portray women carrying the implication that he has not attempted to do so. However, McCarthy’s depiction of men and masculinity not only indicates his awareness of patriarchal gender roles and the associated restrictions, but also pertains to my assertion that a writer tends to write about what he/she knows – and in McCarthy’s case, his experiences have been those of a boy and then a man. Additionally, for the purposes of this dissertation, McCarthy’s almost exclusive focus on male characters in *The Road* allows for an intensely nuanced and substantial account of masculinity in the Western world. Alongside the selected works of feminists Piercy and Atwood, this provides me with valuable material regarding the formulation of my argument.

In terms of methodology, I approach the research of my dissertation according to Catherine Belsey’s definition of textual analysis. Belsey examines the relevance of textual analysis,

stating it to be indispensable regarding research within the field of cultural criticism (2005, 160). This is therefore applicable to my dissertation, in that I thoroughly examine a variety of English literary texts, and employ them to explore cultural phenomena. A point upon which Belsey places much emphasis is that a researcher should analyse his/her primary texts before referring to secondary sources (171). Thus only after having noted the questions posed by a text should the researcher set out to answer them. This is certainly the method by which I have approached this task, undertaking several readings of each primary text before exploring the apposite secondary texts. My interpretations of these texts rely in part upon the knowledge I have gained from my position within a specific historical, cultural, political and social framework, as well as on extra-textual knowledge such as that ascertained from my secondary sources.

According to Belsey, research is an independent act to a large extent, in that the researcher's contribution to knowledge originates in the self (163). In relation to this, a potentially troubling question is addressed rather satisfactorily by Belsey. She considers how textual analysis differs from purely subjective free association, explaining the role of the third party (usually the reader) to be integral in this regard (164). Roland Barthes argues that this third party is not necessarily an actual individual, but instead can exist as a position in relation to a text (cited in Belsey 2005, 165). Barthes also refers to this "position" as a "destination" (quoted in Belsey 2005, 165), in that a text cannot be considered complete until it has been read and interpreted by a third party, who therefore contributes to the creation of the text's meaning (cited in Belsey 2005, 165). As Barthes notes: "a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader" (quoted in Belsey 2005, 165). Therefore, via the presence of a third party, this dissertation will continue to generate meaning beyond that which I have attributed to it, and so will contribute to ongoing academic debate as a more complex literary criticism than would be possible if generated from a single party. Belsey argues that the aim of research is to uncover something new within a specific field, through a process of rearranging ideas that have potentially already been explored so as to create an original supposition (163). She claims that paradigms do not have to shift for research to be relevant, and that the contribution to knowledge made via textual analysis can be slight, but nevertheless meaningful (163). Therefore, through my research, I aim to make a difference to the way in which the relationship between utopian literature and gender is considered.

The next chapter pertains to the topic of utopia, with specific reference to the utopian literary genre. I explore the development of the genre from its conception through to the twenty-first century, noting the transitions it has undergone throughout various historical contexts. I also discuss the numerous generic conventions associated with utopian fiction, and argue that much of the relevance of the genre lies in the fact that it serves as social criticism. I maintain that the social critique offered by works of utopian fiction can persuade the reader to adopt new attitudes, potentially allowing him/her to conceptualise the possibility for progress within his/her own social context.

Chapter 1: A Historical Overview of the Utopian Literary Genre

In this chapter I provide an overview of the history of utopian fiction in the West, employing Plato's *The Republic* (1998 [360 B.C.E.]) as a starting point, and concluding with twentieth-century texts. I examine the ebb and flow of the genre throughout various historical contexts, noting its ultimate resilience. Included in the chapter is an exploration of the concept of genre, with particular reference to the utopian literary genre and its conventions as crystallised by Thomas More. I maintain that the utopian genre plays a crucial role in inciting both social critique and potentially social progress. My exploration of four canonical works of the genre, Plato's *The Republic*, More's *Utopia* (2005 [1516]), H.G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (2002 [1905]) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (2006 [1932]), demonstrates how utopian fiction reflects the socio-political context from which it was written. As I discuss these temporally diverse texts chronologically, the simultaneous flexibility and conformity of the genre becomes apparent.

As a prologue to my discussion of utopian literature, I think it pertinent to consider what is meant by the term "genre". "Genre" is derived from the Latin word denoting kind or class, and within literary theory refers to classified groupings of idiosyncratic texts (Chandler 1997, 1). Daniel Chandler notes that the broadest genre divisions within literature are between poetry, prose, and drama, each of which is further partitioned according to various characteristics (1). The elements of a text often referred to in determining genre include content (namely setting and themes), and form (relating to style and structure) (2). Philip Abbott argues that "All texts can be defined in terms of genre", but admits to the complexity involved in defining genre, and in assigning texts to a particular genre (2008, 335). Thus discrepancies tend to emerge when identifying genre owing to its abstract nature. As Chandler explains, "The classification and hierarchal taxonomy of genres is not a neutral and 'objective' procedure" (1997, 1). The genre of utopian literature is therefore vulnerable to such discrepancies, and as a result is diverse and versatile. Abbott notes the "numerous variations in structure and content" (2008, 343) perceptible throughout this genre, substantiated by Lucy Sargisson's argument that utopian literature involves a "transmission of boundaries" (quoted in Abbott 2008, 343). In relation, Abbott explores the "genre paradox" – the fact that within a genre exist particular characters, plot structures, and narrative styles among others, and yet the texts may differ from one another to quite an extent (335). Thus both variation and familiarity are inherent to genre. It is argued that there are

many literary genres and sub-genres as yet unidentified, and that the quantity of these within a society depends upon its complexity and multiplicity (Chandler 1997, 1). Genre is a cultural concept, and each text belonging to a particular literary genre is “a product of the historical and literary times” from which it was conceived (Baccolini 2004, 519). Typically, the texts within a genre do not necessarily exhibit all of the qualities associated with that genre, and so theorists frequently refer to the grouping of texts as based upon “family resemblances” (Chandler 1997, 2). The word “resemblance” is key, as these groupings are made owing to similarities among texts, rather than the presence of shared and rigorous patterns (2).

The presence of commonalities within a genre can be interpreted in several ways; for example, these conventionalised elements can lead to “underreading” (Kermode 1989, 1). Frank Kermode, who conceived the term, describes under-reading as leaving sections of a novel “‘virtually unread’”: “‘the less manifest portions of a text (its secrets) tend to remain secret, tend to resist all but abnormally attentive scrutiny’” (quoted in Abbott 2008, 338). Whilst elements of a genre must be understood in order for a text to be under-read, fewer demands are placed upon the reader than there would be were the text not associated with a strictly defined genre (336). Raffaella Baccolini’s description of genre as “contracts between a writer and a specific public” demonstrates this (2004, 519). In this statement Baccolini implies that, when reading a work of a distinct genre, the reader enters into a type of agreement with the author regarding the latter’s adherence to anticipated conventions. Thus the reader makes demands of the text according to his/her expectations, focussing on the aspects of the text that comply with these, and possibly disregarding those that do not. This may prevent the reader from accessing the full extent of available meaning. However, Abbott notes that if the expectations of the reader are met, he/she feels rewarded for the cognitive effort involved in formulating these assumptions (2008, 337). This incentive can be used to explain why literary genres remain so popular. Abbott queries, “Why should one spend time reading narratives that are so similar? Why, for that matter, should one write works that are so similar to those of other authors?” (335), relying upon Kermode to answer these questions: “the ease of reading explains the interest in these kinds of texts and is the pay-off for similarity” (cited in Abbott 2008, 336). Thus the homogenous elements apparent among various works within a literary genre potentially render these texts readily identifiable and accessible.

Psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud believes that the repetition evident among the texts of a genre

will satisfy the “infantile wishes” of the reader (cited in Abbott 2008, 337). I interpret this potentially beneficial effect of homogeneity to provide the reader with some degree of escapism. This is certainly apparent within utopian literature. Eutopian texts invite the reader into an idyllic world in which the societal ills of his/her community have been rectified (Moynan 1992, 92). The possibility of such a society becoming reality is inherent to eutopian fiction, and so the reader is supplied with a view into a quixotic life, whilst also being assured of its potential imminence (92). Dystopian texts can offer escapist comfort in a dissimilar way, in that the reader feels relieved not to be living in the chaos revealed (Vieira 2010, 17). In relation to this, Steph Lawler discusses the oppression suffered by twentieth-century working class women (2000, 113). Their longing to obtain some measure of “cultural and symbolic capital”, including social recognition, is essentially a longing to escape the working-class life, as well as rigid gender roles (116). As Lawler explains, the working-class woman is relegated to the realm of the “other” on two counts: once for being female, and again for being lower-class (122).

Lawler’s argument is apposite regarding Marge Piercy’s novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1983 [1976]) and its escapist potential, created through the text’s adherence to generic conventions. Protagonist Consuelo Ramos, a Mexican-American woman struggling on welfare, encounters gender and class based strictures every day: “She was human garbage carried to the dump” (Piercy 1983, 24). So as to afford both the reader and Connie some reprieve from this world, Piercy includes dramatically contrasting depictions of eutopia and dystopia in the novel. Upon encountering the future eutopian society of Mattapoissett, in which “the complete effacement of conventional gender differences” is evident (Booker 1994, 339), Connie feels “loosened [...] released, lighter than air” (Piercy 1983, 317), and is imbued with hope for a better future. In opposition to this is the future dystopia in which Connie meets the “cartoon of femininity” that is Gildina, a surgically-enhanced sex worker (281). Gildina is under constant surveillance by the men who control her, and has nothing more to look forward to than dying in her forties and having her organs harvested by “the richies” (284). This dystopian future reminds Connie that her situation, however dire, could decline further: “So that was the other world that might come to be” (281). Despite the horror Connie experiences at this revelation, it also instils a sense of hope within her, as she realises the potential she possesses to prevent this future from becoming reality. Thus the reader, accompanying Connie on her journey of realisation, feels intensely relieved not to inhabit this hideous world, and is also able to escape briefly the predicaments present within his/her own

society. This is not to say that utopian literature is valuable only as escapism, nor that every utopian text allows for this relief, but it is certainly a quality evident within many works of the genre.

Although the term “utopia” only came into being in the early sixteenth century, literary depictions of alternate societies began prior to this. Hilary Masin declares the Garden of Eden to be the original utopia, stating many of the utopias that followed to be projections of this “Paradise lost” (2013, 3). According to Masin, the myth of innate human corruption continues to generate the desire for absolution through the creation of an improved society (3). Plato’s *The Republic* was published in approximately 360 B.C.E., pre-dating the formalisation of the literary genre. Despite this, Plato’s text exhibits many of the characteristics regarded as intrinsic to utopian fiction, according to the narrative model as consolidated by More (Vieira 2010, 6). For example, the tradition of Western political systems is closely examined within each of the texts (Abbott 2008, 339). According to Nicole Pohl there are two types of utopian texts: archistic and anarchistic (2010, 51-52). An archistic utopia is one in which a society is carefully controlled by governmental forces, whilst anarchistic utopias focus on autonomy and liberal self-rule (51-52). Either way, the utopian impulse contains humans at the centre, disregarding the potential power of external forces such as the divine (Vieira 2010, 7).

Typically, utopian societies are located away from present society as determined by the author, either spatially, temporally, or both (Abbott 2008, 339). More’s eutopia, for example, is set on an island completely alien to sixteenth-century Europe (339). Generally in a utopian narrative a traveller comes across a remote land and receives a tour from a member of the society, as well as an explanation of local customs (339). In most cases the origin of the society and the name of its founder are detailed. However, many of the earlier utopian writers fail to convey the means of implementation that allowed for the society’s establishment (339). Regarding eutopia, the visitor tends to quickly put aside any doubts as to its superiority to every other society (339). As Abbott describes it, “spirited objections seem to cease” (339). The visitor typically leaves the utopia and returns home, eager to inform others about the mysterious land he or she encountered (Vieira 2010, 8). Fatima Vieira claims that early utopian fiction discards the past and removes the future, providing instead a “frozen image of the present” (9). According to Vieira, once improvement or disaster has been established, these model societies depicted “don’t allow for historical change” (9). In comparison, she

describes modern utopias as consisting of “a guiding principle that could even be transcended” (15), revealing the shift undergone within the genre from stagnant to increasingly dynamic societies. Substantiating this further is Pohl’s argument that the dynamic utopian texts of the past two centuries serve as “discourses on change itself” (2010, 51). In this regard, eutopian writing is not limited to criticising the society from which it stems, and frequently new ideas permitting further progress are included in the depiction of a future world (Vieira 2010, 8).

Utopian fiction shares conventions with other genres, for example science fiction and speculative fiction, and is frequently confused with both (7). According to Baccolini, science fiction acts as “a form of counternarrative to hegemonic discourse” (2004, 519), as does utopian fiction. Initially the two genres were distinguished according to the different motives of each: whilst writers of science fiction paid heed to technological and scientific innovations, utopian authors portrayed ordered human societies (Vieira 2010, 7). However, as political discourse seeped into science fiction it became increasingly linked to utopian literature (7-8). As utopian fiction began before science fiction, a term used widely only from the mid-twentieth century (Fitting 2009, 121), the latter can be placed as subordinate to the former (Vieira 2010, 8). Validating this is Kumar’s opinion that science fiction is “too vast and heterogeneous a field [...] to carry the cause of either utopia or anti-utopia on its own” (1989, 7). However, he does explain that science fiction can potentially advance the eutopian cause of “banishing want and waste”, largely through the representation of technology as pertinent to the formation of an improved society (7). Therefore, although the two genres intertwine at various points, ultimately they diverge from one another according to the essential aims of each.

Thus the existence of a specific literary genre consisting of works of utopian fiction goes undisputed. But what is the relevance of this genre to its readers and authors? I introduce this discussion concerning the pertinence of the utopian literary genre with a quotation by Oscar Wilde: “A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing” (quoted in Pohl 2010, 51). To paraphrase this quotation, the teleological destiny of humanity is utopia. Supporting this is Ernst Bloch, who describes the utopian impulse as “an anthropological given” (cited in Levitas 2007, 290). Assuming Wilde meant this statement to be understood in a metaphorical sense, his emphatic belief in the human aspiration towards inhabiting a country different from

one's own is substantiated by the ubiquitous nature of the utopian literary genre. The following assertion by John Gray serves to reiterate this point: "throughout most of history, humanity has been haunted by the thought of a perfect society" (2011, 9). Literary depictions of perfect societies (or rather, eutopias) offer the reader greater access to this fantasy, as the presence of a text, an author, and an unlimited, anonymous readership legitimises previously private and unsubstantiated yearnings. The author, however, is afforded the opportunity to play God when constructing his or her version of an ideal society, escaping the "mental and ideological imprisonment" of present society (Jameson quoted in Fitting 2009, 127). Author Cormac McCarthy, explored at length in the fifth chapter, summarises the true nature of humanity as "not rage or deceit or terror or logic or craft or even sorrow" (quoted in Cooper 2011, 218). Instead, McCarthy proclaims, "It is longing" (quoted in Cooper 2011, 218). Bloch believes that the only way in which humans can express the longing for eutopia is by "imagining its fulfilment", carried out effectively through fiction (cited in Levitas 2007, 290). Referring again to Wilde's quotation, the implication is that without "the desire for a better life" (Vieira 2010, 6), something for which to yearn, humans risk losing the ontological meaning that renders physical survival necessary (Zibrak 2012, 109).

Elaborating on the idea of longing as a key element of utopia, Ruth Levitas declares that the desire for a different world originates with a sense that "something's missing" (quoted in Moylan 1992, 92). This feeling of lack encourages people to analyse their socio-political contexts, searching for what it is they crave – Levitas asserting that generally these cravings pertain to the gap between one's needs and wants, and the availability of resources with which to satisfy these (cited in Moylan 1992, 91-92). Thus Levitas aligns desire with social critique, determining utopian thought to possess a political as well as existential nature. With this in mind, eutopian literature inspires the reader to search for positive alternatives to the social problems with which he/she is faced (92), and dystopian literature places moral responsibility on the reader, in that he/she becomes aware that the chaos recounted can be avoided should the necessary social reform occur (Vieira 2010, 17). As Vieira describes it, "writers of dystopias present very negative images of the future", to which they expect "a very positive reaction on the part of their readers" (17), whilst Karl Mannheim and Frederick Polak believe that "our images of the future help to shape our actual future" (quoted in Fitting 2009, 126). These "critical utopias" therefore play a considerable role in galvanising social progress via prompting the reader's appraisal of his/her context, as a polemical portrayal of an improved, alternate society can be didactic and pragmatic (Vieira 2010, 18).

Baccolini notes that the ambiguity afforded by open-ended, pluralistic utopias allows for intense social criticism, as they create “a space of contestation and opposition” in which ideas diverging from the status quo can flourish (2004, 520). Thus my earlier assertion regarding escapism as one example of many functions of utopian literature can be verified.

Another fundamental quality of the utopian genre is hope, Levitas explains, which is associated alongside desire with this function of transformation (cited in Moylan 1992, 92). Hope carries within it the idea that the desire for progress may be realised, and so inspires the forward motion necessary for advancement to occur (92). As Plato describes it, hope “is mightiest to sway the restless soul of man” (1998, 19). Substantiating this further, Joyce Hertzler claims that works of eutopian literature “breathe a spirit which gives hope, and encourages action” (quoted in Fitting 2009, 124). However, not every society is positioned in such a way that allows for progress, whereas every society is subject to criticism (Moylan 1992, 92). Therefore desire permeates eutopian thought more thoroughly than hope, as the former is not dependent on the “issue of perceived possibility” (Levitas quoted in Moylan 1992, 92). This certainly accounts for the pervasiveness of eutopian fiction throughout various historical contexts, as frequently it is during the darkest periods of human life that such texts have been produced prolifically (Kumar 1989, 3). Hope can play a role in dystopian literature, although the overtly optimistic notion of human perfection contained within many eutopian texts is generally rejected within dystopian thought (Vieira 2010, 17). However, by demonstrating to the reader the necessity of fabricating an improved society, dystopian fiction implies that progress is possible.

Utopian fiction is referred to by Vieira as built upon “a tradition of thought” (5). In light of this statement, the various historical contexts of which utopian fiction has been a part is summarised neatly by Kumar. Kumar provides a synopsis of the historical ebb and flow of the corpus of utopian literature from the early sixteenth century. This is a rather simplistic condensation of a perennial and broad genre, and it relies frequently upon generalisations. However, taken as a basic outline, Kumar’s glance at the history of utopian literature allows for a clearer understanding of the genre. In the wake of More’s *Utopia*, eutopian writing flourished throughout the Western world, particularly in Europe (Kumar 1989, 1). The Renaissance focus on utilising reason to build a future for humanity, rather than passively allowing fate to mould one’s life, contributed to the development of eutopian literature during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Vieira 2010, 4). Many of the beliefs advocated

during the Renaissance were based upon ancient Greek and Roman teachings, which were considered to be “the peak of mankind’s intellectual achievement” (4). People gained faith in the human ability to effect change, although the notion of reaching perfection was marred by the Christian theology pertaining to the fall of mankind dominant within this period (4). The discovery of new land by Christopher Columbus, among other explorers, further broadened the scope of Western thinking (4).

The Enlightenment era owed much of its logic to the Renaissance discovery of the power of human reason (9). Indicative of this is the fact that the Enlightenment period was deemed “the Age of Reason” (10). During this period, various scientific developments occurred, and the theory of evolution gained critical acclaim (10). As Vieira explains, “History was now envisaged as a process of infinite improvement”, and people began to question the socio-political structures in which they were enmeshed (10). The belief in the human capacity to achieve perfection was no longer hindered, with logic cited as a basis for this perspective (9). To a large extent, myth and religion were transposed by the new-found assurances of humanity’s ability and potential (Masin 2013, 3). In 1792 socialist utopian writer Thomas Paine declared his generation to be “the Adam of a new world”, convinced that the merging of morals and politics would give rise to a eutopian state (quoted in Vieira 2010, 11). The opinion commonly held in Europe at this time was that civilians, if adequately educated, were equipped to catalyse social progress, rendering repressive governments superfluous (12). This stance bears negative connotations alongside all of the optimism, however, in that it implies that without strict regulation social improvement cannot occur (11).

Despite its generally strong presence from the sixteenth century onwards, the development of utopian literature underwent several lulls (19). Vieira discusses how various utopian forms, such as that inspired by the Renaissance, “ceased to be applicable to subsequent historical moments” (19), demonstrating the perpetual motion of the genre in accordance with social context. For example, the years subsequent to the French Revolution (1789-1799) saw eutopian fiction temporarily “consigned to the dustbin of history”, as it appeared for a time as if the power to bring about ideals existed within the common people, rendering fictitious depictions of eutopia seemingly redundant (Kumar 1989, 1). Another example pertains to the opinion of prominent socialists, who tended to view utopian literature with distrust (1). Both Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels believed utopia to connote a substanceless dream that ultimately stunted social growth (Levitas 2007, 289). However, socialism was presented as

the perfect tool with which to bring about the construction of an improved world, an aim shared with utopian thought (Kumar 1989, 2). Eutopian literature provides a form of blueprint for a socialist future, and so the genre enjoyed a rise in popularity despite the initial reluctance of some socialist thinkers (2).

Much of the utopian fiction produced during the nineteenth century was of a socialist nature (2). Edward Bellamy's 1887 novel *Looking Backward* (2008) depicts the improvement of society as dependent on political transformation, and upon the creation of fraternity among community members (Widdicombe 2009, 296). Further demonstrating the novel's socialist inclinations is the emphasis placed by Bellamy upon economic equality and universal education (297). Socialist utopian fiction was not a uniform movement, but the authors shared the mindset that anyone capable of instituting positive social change was morally obligated to do so (Vieira 2010, 12). Social theorists reiterated the notion upheld by the Enlightenment thinkers – that a harmonious and just society was within reach should the “natural qualities of mankind” be correctly utilised (Masin 2013, 3-4). However, the great trust people placed in humanity's potential to enact positive change proved falsely optimistic (Vieira 2010, 15). The idealistic anticipation of many that people “would be able to transcend [...] human limitations” (15) soon soured into scepticism. One of the criticisms aimed at *Looking Backward*, for example, pertains to Bellamy's belief in the malleability of human nature according to social context, which many declared to be unrealistic (Widdicombe 2009, 296). Further illustrating this increasing scepticism was the fact that socialism appeared to function only within “isolated experimental communities”, rather than entire nations as originally envisaged (Kumar 1989, 1).

Kumar asserts H.G. Wells to have been instrumental in carrying utopian fiction from the nineteenth century into the twentieth (3). Kumar alludes to Wells as significant during this period as he played a large role in the advent of science fiction, a genre that Kumar claims “increasingly absorbed utopia” (3). The initial affiliation between the two genres was largely a result of the various historical atrocities that occurred during the twentieth century as explored within utopian fiction, and the fact that these tended to rely upon technological and scientific advances – as previously mentioned, a topic comprising much of science fiction's subject matter. These advances, whilst advantageous in many ways, had the adverse effect of permitting the establishment of totalitarian regimes (Vieira 2010, 18). One such example pertains to Nazism and the Holocaust, which demonstrated the hideous potential of scientific

innovation, Masin describing science here as “put to use as a weapon of mass murder” (2013, 4). Whilst utopian fiction is generally used to oppose totalitarianism by presenting alternative political structures and criticising those in existence, utopia itself has been accused of possessing a totalitarian nature (Levitas 2007, 297). Abbott claims that the repetition encompassed within many genres “is a form of ideological manipulation” (2008, 337), a fictitious utopian society for example entailing “the imposition of systems on reluctant populations” (Levitas 2007, 297). Indicative of the utopian genre’s tenacity throughout various historical contexts is the fact that eutopia’s ““shadow””, dystopia, thrived during this dismal period (Moylan quoted in Fitting 2009, 127). The production of dystopian literature expanded as a reaction to this era of war, genocide, the rise of Communism and Fascism, and pervasive paranoia (Vieira 2010, 18). As a result of such events people grew increasingly disillusioned with human nature, and the future of humanity started to appear dubious (18). The Cold War, and associated omnipresent threat of nuclear attack, had a particularly profound impact on the repression of social and political activism, and so many turned to expressing themselves through fiction rather than verbal protest (Fitting 2009, 121). Gray even declares dystopian thinking to be more necessary to human existence than eutopian (cited in Masin 2013, 5). However, as Kumar writes, dystopian writing did not replace eutopian fiction, despite the occurrence of events which were essentially “mocking commentaries” on eutopian aspirations (1989, 5). The relationship between fictitious eutopias and dystopias is one of symbiosis, the two explained by Kumar to “gain sustenance from each other’s energy and power” (3). He argues that it is the very presence of eutopian texts that allows dystopian texts to survive (6). Demonstrating this is Kumar’s assertion that the existence of a pervading sense of doom throughout the second half of the twentieth century was countered by a purposefully optimistic eutopian attitude, adopted by some “to lighten the oppressiveness” (7).

A tangible example of the survival of eutopian thought during the twentieth century is provided by the formation of the United Nations (in which Wells was integral) in 1945 (5). Kumar therefore echoes Wilde’s contention that the utopian imagination is a fundamental component of human life, and the persistence of the eutopian genre supports Bloch’s belief that such longing can only be expressed through the portrayal of its fulfilment: “without the literary utopia there would be no striking images, no concrete pictures, by which to remember and fix in the mind the utopian vision” (9). However, there was a period before eutopian fiction truly regained momentum that paralleled the considerable cessation of eutopian

thought following the French Revolution (9). As in the early nineteenth century utopia briefly appeared obsolete: as Kumar puts it, for a time general opinion maintained that “The age of utopias is past” (9). Industrialisation and the associated trend of urbanisation played a role in moving past this, however, as these socio-economic changes were relevant to the utopian desire for progress (9). In addition, from the failures of modernity and the advent of post-modernity emerged the meta-narrative form that allowed utopian literature to reach new heights (4).

The 1960s were salient regarding utopian literature, which underwent a massive proliferation during this decade. Developing in association with the ascension of second-wave feminism, the Civil Rights Movement and increased environmental awareness was the desire to seek positive alternatives to the societal ills of the present (Vieira 2010, 18). Writers focussed on creating “better radical traditions and alternative visions” to the problems faced by the members of Western society (Fitting 2009, 121), and utopian fiction was regarded as a potentially catalytic strategy, with creativity functioning as its impetus (Kumar 1989, 21). “All power to the imagination” appeared as graffiti on Parisian buildings courtesy of student radicals (10). Activists and authors explored issues such as consumerism, capitalism and technology (11), evident for example in Aldous Huxley’s 1962 novel *Island*, which is described by Kumar as a reversal of Huxley’s 1932 dystopian novel *Brave New World* (1989, 11). Topics such as human behaviour modification and the use of recreational drugs, explored in *Brave New World*, are dealt with completely differently in *Island* (11). Rather than allowing for the repression of people at the hands of irresponsible authorities, in *Island* Huxley portrays such issues as potentially progressive. The psychedelic “moksha-medicine” (Huxley 1962, 23), for example, is depicted as guiding the characters that take it to self-liberation. This is in stark opposition to the “soma” (Huxley 2006, 60) ingested by people in *Brave New World*, which dulls any budding emotions, keeping civilians passive and so easily controlled.

In *Island*, Huxley blends Western science with Eastern religion, and creates an image of an environmentally-aware, community-conscious society (Lush 2000, 1). This utopia is powerfully indicative of the dominant values of many countercultural Westerners in the 1960s (Kumar 1989, 11). In the novel snakes appear to the protagonist Will as “a terror infinitely worse” than the fear of death (Huxley 1962, 54), a possible allusion to the original fall of humanity, described by Masin as associated with the first example of a utopian

narrative (2013, 3). This demonstrates the ties that exist between various literary utopias, irrespective of temporality, as is evident throughout my analysis of texts of the genre. Set on the fictional Buddhist island Pala, the characters in *Island* focus on achieving “Nirvana”: a state of prosperity and general blissfulness which many yearn to attain (Lush 2000, 1). For example, the inhabitants of Pala meditate regularly: ““You just sit there with muscles relaxed and a mind open to the sunlight and the clouds [...] open in the end to that formless, wordless Not-Thought”” (Huxley 1962, 60). This offers an example of behaviour modification as used to benefit the individual, rather than as a mode of political control. The inhabitants of Pala are pacifists and have no army, science is used as a productive rather than destructive tool, and the societal ills of the Western 1960s, such as overpopulation, do not exist in this community (Lush 2000, 1). Thus Huxley’s *Island*, particularly when examined in contrast to *Brave New World*, is an accurate representation of the socio-political concerns and utopian mindset of many living during this decade.

Thus it is evident that utopian fiction has “given proof of its extraordinary capacity to survive by reinventing itself” (Vieira 2010, 22), with both eutopian and dystopian literature present to some degree throughout the approximately five centuries since More’s inception of the terms. I devote the rest of this chapter to expanding upon Plato’s *The Republic*, More’s *Utopia*, Wells’s *A Modern Utopia* and Huxley’s *Brave New World*, each touched upon previously. Although there exist vast temporal gaps between some of the texts (for example, almost two thousand years passed between the publications of Plato’s *The Republic* and More’s *Utopia*), each can be regarded as a canonical work of the utopian genre. Exploring these texts in chronological order highlights the commonalities that prevail among them, which demonstrates the presence of certain conventions within the genre. The diversity and flexibility of the genre is also evident upon examining these works, as each differs from the others in various ways. I provide a simple outline of each text, discussing the main points foregrounded by the authors. I also consider the social contexts from which each author wrote, but do not address the significance of gender with regard to these texts, as this will be investigated in the second chapter.

Mark L. McPherran opines Plato’s *The Republic* to be “of astounding influence and importance” (2010, 1), with which I agree. In addition to inspiring More, and so the formation of the genre, Plato’s text motivated the works of early utopian writers such as St Augustine and Cicero (4). Plato has been described as “the father of idealism”, and is

arguably the first utopian author to scrutinise the role of education, its link to morality, and its progressive potential within society (5). As previously mentioned, *The Republic* was published prior to the inauguration of the term “utopia”, but follows the format that later became a convention of the genre. Originally written in Latin, the text details Plato’s notion of the ideal state. The narrative relies to a large extent upon the historical character Socrates, a real-life mentor of Plato’s (2). Plato structures much of *The Republic* around the procurement of “eudaimonia”, a Grecian concept referring to human happiness and success (8). This state of well-being is generally viewed as the end product of a series of morally sound choices: “he is content if he himself can somehow live out life here untainted by injustice and impious actions” (Plato 1998, 200).

C.C.W. Taylor notes that *The Republic* consists of two fundamental ideas (2012, 1). The first refers to the relegation of society’s members according to training and personality, thus positioning each person so as to make the most of his/her natural inclinations (1). The prosperity of the “polis” (6) or society, according to Plato, depends heavily on this system of specialisation (1). The other significant idea Plato promotes is that of the elimination of any social structures or institutions that pose a threat to social cohesion (1), and so to the formation of an ideal society (McPherran 2010, 5). Plato’s proposals include the abolishment of the family unit, his reasoning here being that without personal relationships, there is no impetus for internecine aggression (Taylor 2012, 4). The number of children produced by the members of Plato’s state is regulated, to ensure that the population level remains optimal for maximum social production (5). Plato relies upon eugenics in forming his state, the healthier and more intelligent members of society allowed to reproduce more profusely than those less genetically blessed (5). Autonomy and monogamy are therefore disallowed, all of the above points indicative of Plato’s focus on the community as opposed to the individual (5). Thus sexual intercourse and reproduction in *The Republic* are for purely economic purposes (6). The roles into which the people of the state are roughly divided are those of rulers, defenders and producers (3), but class divisions are expunged to create greater social unity (2). The way of life to which Plato would have been accustomed, with society divided along civic and domestic lines (4), is therefore absent in *The Republic*, proving it to be a society alternate to the author’s. Plato has been criticised for disregarding the disputably incorrigible nature of humanity (Brown 2009, 15), a trend continued by various Enlightenment thinkers and socialists. Gray, among others, disagrees with Plato, and claims conflict to be an inescapable aspect of human life, which ultimately prevents the attainment of genuine social harmony

(cited in Masin 2013, 7). Claire P. Curtis concurs with Gray, arguing that it is only by acknowledging the existence of tension that one allows for social cooperation (2006, 2). Eric Brown describes Plato's ideal state to be technically conceivable (2009, 16). However, substantiating the opinions of Gray and Curtis, Brown adds "but humans are psychologically unable to create and sustain such a city" (16).

During Plato's time, many of his propositions were considered revolutionary and radical, such as the abolition of private property and of the institution of marriage, and the communal care of children. However, whilst reading this text in 2015, many of these so-called radical ideas appear unremarkable. This demonstrates the importance of studying a text with the author's circumstances in mind. Apposite here is Agnes Heller's notion of "togetherness": the idea that a cultural artefact must be examined in light of the time frame in which it was created, bearing in mind prevalent cultural norms (cited in Widdicombe 2009, 308). Plato grew up during a period of great civil antagonism, evident in his extreme reaction to the potential dangers of internal tensions within a community (Taylor 2012, 1). For example, Plato represents education as a system to which society must adhere strictly, largely as it is this system that channels individuals into suitable occupations (1). Thus education potentially plays a meaningful role in keeping the members of a society subjugated, by placing them into satisfying and inflexible economic roles from which they are therefore unlikely to stray, and by ensuring that they are vulnerable to indoctrination and discipline from an early age (2). As Taylor notes, there is an "absolute prohibition on educational innovation" in *The Republic* (3). Plato was profoundly aware of the moral apathy present among the members of his society, and aimed to contest this in his text by encouraging ideas of objective truth and the benefits of selflessness (Ingram 2007, 1). This was largely a reaction against the rise of Sophism, and the Sophist distrust concerning the existence and significance of morality (1). As Plato proclaims, "the tales which the young first hear should be models of virtuous thoughts" (1998, 222).

Plato contradicts himself at several points during *The Republic*, with reference for example to the role of the guardians of his state. Plato describes the wives of the male guardians as communal property: "the Guardians are to hold their property in common, and so wives and children are to be held in common" (3). However, this completely counteracts his earlier assertion that the concept of marriage is non-existent within the state, and that the female companions of the male Guardians are not wives but rather child-bearing "comrades with

whom the male Guardians share all the tasks of guardianship” (4). Jason Ingram refers to these contradictions as “performative”, in that the reader is obliged to question the information provided by Plato and so take on an active role in the construction of the text’s meaning (2007, 1). As Ingram puts it, “readers are required to engage in intense interpretive effort to puzzle out Plato’s position” regarding social improvement (1), thus rendering the reader aware of the role he/she could potentially play in engaging with ideas of progress within his/her own social context.

The fact that I have already mentioned More several times in this chapter demonstrates his significance regarding utopian literature. As discussed prior to this, More’s importance to the genre begins with the terms he coined (Vieira 2010, 3). In addition, it is in *Utopia* that the traditional utopian literary form is prescribed to a large extent (6). More relays the story of protagonist Raphael Hythloday to the reader via a first-person narrator, who listens in astonishment as Hythloday describes eutopia, an island ““better governed and living happier than we”” (More 2005, 45). The orthodox format of a utopian text, outlined previously, involves the depiction of an explorer’s introduction to an alternate and geographically isolated land, around which he/she receives a tour (Abbott 2008, 339). The protagonist’s increasing suspension of disbelief and growing admiration for this idealistically superior society is the next step in the structure (339), as developed in *Utopia*. Hythloday explains how he lived among the members of Utopia for five years, and so witnessed first-hand their customs and laws, which ““far excel all the rest of mankind”” (More 2005, 47). Upon his return and the recounting of his adventure, it becomes apparent that Hythloday prefers this society to his own, which he now finds lacking. As More questions: ““who does more earnestly long for a change than he that is uneasy in his present circumstances?”” (36). Thus the social criticism typically present within utopian fiction is apparent in *Utopia*, for example when Hythloday questions despairingly, ““The hardest point of all is, what to do with England?”” (32), indicating his desire for progress. The narrator conveys Hythloday’s denigration of his society and its erroneous ways, as well as his plans regarding the rectification of these: ““patterns might be taken for correcting the errors of these nations among whom we live”” (10). Lastly, More names the conqueror and founder of the land, Utopus, another aspect of the text that became a custom of the genre (47).

More’s propositions apropos of the creation of a eutopian society include a harsh punitive system, people ““treated in such a manner as to make them see the necessity of being honest””

(25). More astutely points out that the opportunity and/or need to commit crimes must be abolished first, directing the rhetorical “you first make thieves and then punish them?” towards the sixteenth-century English society in which he was positioned (21). In order to remove the necessity of punishment, however, More promotes hard work and universal education. The emphasis More places on education acts as an example of *Utopia*'s ties to Plato's *The Republic*. Included in More's posited system of education is travel, as well as the appreciation of music and literature. As with Plato, More disallows the private ownership of property in his ideal society, advocating the “just distribution of things” to equate to a fair and balanced society (42). More cites agriculture and the sharing of provisions to be important, Hythloday stating that the Utopians ““give that overplus of which they make no use to their neighbours”” (49). The impact of the Renaissance upon More's mode of utopian thought is evident in his inclusion of Roman teachings, Hythloday explaining how many elements of the eutopian state were inspired by Roman travellers, whose ship was wrecked on the Utopian shore 1200 years prior to his visit.

As Lyman Tower Sargent explains, More's novel is to a large extent “the standard fare – Christian, hierarchical, basically authoritarian”, and thus strongly indicative of the era during which it was executed, and so of the author's personal experiences (1976, 1). For example, More includes slaves on his eutopian island, which contradicts his promotion of social justice and equality. These slaves, captives from foreign lands, fulfil ““uneasy and sordid services”” (More 2005, 64), and ““are kept at perpetual labour, and are always chained”” (92). Slavery was present in various forms and at various degrees of intensity throughout the West, including Britain, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and so was a system familiar to More (Carey 2013, 1). Additionally, Hythloday proudly recalls to the narrator his successful conversion of numerous Utopians to Christianity: ““many of them came over to our religion”” (More 2005, 115). This occurs despite the diversity of religious beliefs on the island, some ““worshipping the sun, others the moon or one of the planets””, several paying heed to one ““eternal, invisible, infinite”” deity (114). More was a faithful and at times zealous Christian, “wearing a hair shirt, taking a log for a pillow, and whipping himself on Fridays” (Price 2005, 2). His depiction of the proliferation of Christianity in *Utopia* reflects this, as well as the myopic and hubristic mindset prevalent among many Christians in sixteenth-century Europe. This mindset remained widespread well into the eighteenth century during which The London Missionary Society was founded, setting up missions in various parts of South Africa, for example, so as to “save the soul of the heathen” (Goldblatt 1971, 7). Again

relating to Plato, More possessed the conviction that humanity contains great potential, and so believed humans capable of formidable achievements – only if situated within a rigidly structured society, however.

As with More's writing, Wells's oeuvre was strongly affected by the society in which he lived. In his earlier novels Wells tended to digress from fellow socialists by rejecting the common method of depicting the future in overtly optimistic tones, and "imagining the dizzy heights to which science could raise mankind" (Kumar 1989, 7). Instead he relayed harsh critiques of socialism and science, writing texts that issued a "somber warning" to readers (3). After writing several such texts, Wells began to depart from the portrayal of dystopia and move towards executing more positive depictions of society's future, such as in his novel *A Modern Utopia*. In the novel, Wells's ideal society is run efficiently by socialists and scientists. Thus in spite of his earlier rejection of such schools of thought, Wells ended up forming a part of what Kumar refers to as the "science and society" movement (6). This movement consisted of various scientists and mathematicians who placed their hopes on science as holding the key to achieving the goals of "freedom, peace, and plenty" (6). Physics, for example, was attributed the task of harnessing the great forces of nature, whilst biology and psychology were believed to possess the ability to solve all problems relating to the human body and mind respectively. The narrator in *A Modern Utopia*, a botanist, is "magically translated" to a eutopian society (Ferns 1999, 43). Wells frequently writes in the future tense, as the eutopia he propounds exists not as the traditional established society, but rather as an illustration of what present society could evolve into, demonstrative of the constant shifts apparent within the utopian genre. In the novel Wells envisions a "whole and happy world" (2002, 8), following much the same format as More's *Utopia* and so further consolidating various traits of the genre (Vieira 2010, 3-5). For example, Wells's eutopia is isolated from surrounding areas: "It's a different planet – a long way away. Practically at an infinite distance" (Wells 2002, 140). Wells, like More, places stress upon the establishment of a strong judicial system, as well as on travel as a means of education. He also praises the Industrial Revolution's invention and utilisation of machinery for "abolishing the need of labour [...] the last base reason for anyone's servitude or inferiority" (90).

Many of the ideas posited by Wells in *A Modern Utopia* still resonate today. The influence of the technological and scientific developments of the late nineteenth century upon Wells is evident in his eutopia, including Charles Darwin's theory of "the survival of the fittest"

(Kumar 1989, 10). Wells opposes Plato and More in his belief that human nature is ultimately unalterable, citing sexual rivalry and aggression among people to be unavoidable. This reveals a diverse and rather heuristic approach to utopian literature in that, rather than adhering to the Enlightenment belief in the possibility of human perfection (Masin 2013, 3-4), Wells focussed on the empirical knowledge with which he had been faced. However, Wells does not promote resignation alongside this acceptance of human characteristics, but rather encourages channelling these qualities towards creative rather than destructive ends. Wells's eutopia proves itself modern therefore in that it is attainable, a "state of affairs at once possible and more desirable than the world in which I live" (Wells 2002, 2). In the beginning of the text Wells states his intention to be "to consider it as an educational process" (1), thus promoting the idea of a kinetic rather than static society. *A Modern Utopia* is thus divergent from traditional utopian literature (such as that written by Plato and More) in many ways, in that it refers to a continuous progression of social development. Wells also posits a universal eutopia, unrelated therefore to "the development of any special race or type of culture" (184), but instead appertaining to the "synthesis of once widely different forms of government; socially and morally, a synthesis of a great variety of domestic traditions and ethical habits" (185).

In contrast to Wells's utopia, the utopias of Plato and More appear jejune, devoid of "That which is the blood and warmth and reality of life" (11). One of the main ways in which Wells's views conflict with those of Plato is that, whilst the latter focusses on the community, Wells believes individuality to be noteworthy. Wells rejects the traditional utopian creation of a homogeneous society, promoting instead an acceptance of "mental contrariety" (108). However, as with Plato and More, Wells contradicts himself several times during the course of *A Modern Utopia*. Subsequent to suggesting a heterogeneous society, Wells declares that all social degenerates are to be eliminated from his eutopia: "kill all deformed and monstrous and evilly diseased births" (125). Wells argues that "All these people spoil the world for others" (124). Wells contradicts the universality of his eutopia by describing "the people who are black – the people who have fuzzy hair and flattish noses, and no claws to speak of" along appallingly prejudiced lines, claiming such individuals as "no longer held to be within the pale of humanity" (284). Wells serves here as a mouthpiece for the general opinions prevalent in Western Europe during the early twentieth century (Kumar 1989, 10). Thus whilst Wells's novel indicates a shift within the utopian genre, the social context of the author appears pertinent regarding his construction of an alternate society.

Like Wells, Huxley was inspired by the scientific and technological advances occurring in his society. In *Brave New World*, one of many dystopias prompted by the horrors of the twentieth century, Huxley portrays science as a means through which the masses can be repressed by a powerful World State (9). This proved to be a foreshadowing of the “bare and emotionless application of science” to come within the next decade, that is the barbaric experiments conducted upon the victims of the Holocaust (6). Kumar describes Huxley’s novel as a “damning satire” (9) and “anti-science” (7), whilst Masin explains it to confront “ideas of scientific manipulation” by purposefully exaggerating the technological and scientific processes that gained influence during the early twentieth century (2013, 5). For example, in the novel people are “decanted” (Huxley 2006, 18) rather than born; viviparous reproduction has been eliminated and society is bred in laboratories. The concepts of monogamy, environmentalism, art and the family unit have also been eradicated, largely through the use of hypnopaedia, during which young people are subjected to seemingly endless repetitions of the mantras they ultimately swallow as absolute truth. An example of such a mantra is ““ending is better than mending”” (36), intended to direct people towards interminable spending, to keep “the wheels steadily turning” (156). Individual thought and reason have been replaced with superficial and widespread satisfaction, evident in a conversation between characters Fanny and Lenina in which one of them states incredulously, ““There was a thing called the soul”” (37). The resultant contented civilians essentially incapable of questioning the status quo function as the ultimate consumers – the pliant sheep required to perpetuate the system. As the character the Controller explains it, ““independence won’t take you safely to the end”” (159). The mass-production Huxley maligns extends in this dystopia to people: “Bokanovsky’s process” is used to create around ““ninety-six human beings [...] where only one grew before”” (7), granting the capitalist system that many more labourers and consumers. The urgency for immediate gratification evident among the stupefied members of this society is one example of how Huxley exaggerates various facets of twentieth-century life, strongly implying that such a dystopia is impending should humanity continue along a certain path.

In *Brave New World*, sex is one of the methods utilised by those in charge to lull the public into a false sense of contentment: ““No pains have been spared [...] to preserve you, so far as that is possible, from having emotions at all”” (32). As Fanny urges Lenina, ““you ought to be a little more promiscuous”” (31), as in this dystopia spending a significant amount of time

with any one person is frowned upon, whilst accumulating as many sexual conquests as possible is routine. The society portrayed in *Brave New World* is anti-egalitarian and divided into five main strata: the Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta and Epsilon castes. In order to maintain this system of stratification, certain embryos are deprived of oxygen and/or fed small quantities of alcohol as, for example, “in Epsilons [...] we don’t need human intelligence” (12). The test-tube babies of different castes are also conditioned according to “their unescapable social destiny” (13), for instance embryos fated to spend their lives labouring in the tropics are periodically exposed to heat. This also promotes satisfaction among the civilians, preventing uprisings of any form, as people are bred to enjoy the particular economic role into which they are forced.

The people of this society worship the influential American industrialist Henry Ford as their god (Ford 2007, 10), Christian crosses remodelled to create the symbolic “T” in Ford’s honour. This serves as an unmistakable emblem of the capitalist-driven society from which Huxley wrote, the author condemning this system for example through the portrayal of subversive character Bernard Marx, his surname ripe with socialist connotations. Bernard, despite being ostensibly of the Alpha caste, does not fit into this society at all, longing instead to feel “More on my own, not so completely a part of something else” (Huxley 2006, 61). Huxley uses this rather insubordinate, “alien and alone” (43) character to illustrate the fundamentally dystopian nature of the society, as he is one of the few characters to exhibit frustration and displeasure. Bernard refuses to swallow the soma drug Lenina offers him to render him jolly “instead of feeling miserable” (62), explaining that he would rather feel genuinely unhappy than falsely satisfied. However, as dissident as Bernard is, upon visiting the land of the “savages” (69) in New Mexico, he encounters characters John and Linda and feels “profoundly squeamish” (92) at their physical appearances. This highlights the extensiveness of social conditioning, in that even the more rebellious members of a society are irredeemably embedded within its structures. Linda, a former sexual partner of the dystopia’s Director, went astray decades previously on a trip to this land. After being left behind by the helicopter, Linda was forced to live among the so-called savages for decades, and so to some extent has adapted to this drastically different way of life. Her son John, the Director’s illegitimate child, was born in this land and so, for all intents and purposes, is a “savage” himself. These “savages” perform “repulsive habits and customs” (69) such as marriage, parental child-rearing and religious rites. Lenina, who accompanies Bernard on the trip, observes an old man: “His face was profoundly wrinkled and black, like a mask of

obsidian. The toothless mouth had fallen in [...] His body was bent and emaciated to the bone, almost fleshless” (75). This sight causes her to panic, as she has never before witnessed the effects of aging unhindered by scientific intervention. Huxley’s depiction of Lenina’s horror at something as organic as the aging process acts as a damning social critique, as well as a warning to the reader, demonstrating how extreme technological and scientific advances can create a reality utterly separate from all that is natural.

Linda and John are taken away from their community to the dystopia, where John contrasts starkly with the substance-less people of this society. John is a man divided, growing up among the so-called savages and yet, upon aping their customs as a child, being punished by Linda for acting in a manner not befitting the world in which she grew up. John ultimately turns against the dystopia’s abolishment of “those horrible emotions” (33), saying, ““But I don’t want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin”” (63). John came across the collected works of William Shakespeare as an adolescent, and was drawn to the “terrible beautiful magic” of his words (88). John uses the words and concepts he discovers in these works, such as “Time and Death and God” (91), to create his own small culture of one, caught as he is between two increasingly opposing ways of life. John unintentionally mimics Bernard, acting as a more extreme version of this character, claiming ““I’d rather be unhappy than have the sort of false, lying happiness you were having here”” (119). It is John who deems the dystopia “a brave new world” (107), an allusion to one of his beloved Shakespearean plays, before he realises the existence of the society’s sinister underbelly. Huxley includes a considerable amount of intertextuality in *Brave New World*, with references to Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot and Wells present within the text. I interpret these allusions to the past to be Huxley’s attempt at highlighting the failures of the present, especially as books are deemed ““pornographic”” (157) and taboo in this ““year of stability, A.F. 632”” (6).

Peter Edgerly Firchow describes *Brave New World* as “very modern” (1984, 1) as it departs, even more so than Wells’s text, from the traditional, More-style utopian form. Huxley refrains from providing the reader with any conception of how the society was formed, and offers “random odds and ends” of information rather than outlining in detail the structure of this dystopia (2). Firchow explains how Huxley essentially abandons the reader, leaving him/her to navigate this new world alone in much the same manner as the character John (2). This is a shift away from the traditional utopian text, which generally leads the reader

painstakingly through the narrative (2). An example of the indirect nature of the narrative relates to the continuous eavesdropping that occurs in the novel: “‘Hush!’ said Bernard suddenly, and lifted a warning finger; they listened” (Huxley 2006, 47). *Brave New World* lends itself to endless debate, and so my exploration of this utopian novel only scratches the surface of the complexity of meanings present within the text. However, this overview certainly reveals the pessimistic mindset prevalent in the twentieth century. The relatively recent publication of the novel also unveils the shifts undergone within the utopian literary genre since Plato’s text, as well as the stability of various generic conventions over time.

Thus the sheer tenacity of the utopian literary genre throughout various socio-political contexts proves its historical relevance. The role that a utopian literary text plays in revealing both the positive and negative aspects of the society from which it was written is evident, demonstrating the genre’s ability to provide social criticism, and potentially the conceptualisation of social progress. In the second chapter I analyse the affiliation between utopian literature and gender, the latter a social issue frequently dealt with through works of the genre, particularly during and after second-wave feminism. It is apparent that, alongside the historical progression of the utopian genre, the concept of gender has evolved. Using this chapter’s exploration of utopian literature’s development as a background, therefore, I am able to effectively analyse the changes undergone regarding the concept of gender as apparent within various utopian texts.

Chapter 2: The Role of Gender in Utopian Literature

Having discussed utopian literature at length in the previous chapter, my focus in this chapter is on the role of gender within the genre. I consider gender throughout this dissertation along two related lines: firstly, the gendered experiences of the author, and the potential effect of this on his/her portrayal of utopia; and secondly, the ways in which gender is utilised in a utopian text to demonstrate societal ills and/or strengths. As a precursor to this discussion I include an analysis of the term “gender”: its connotations and history as a concept within Western culture. As I consider second-wave feminism to have had a profound influence on the relationship between gender and utopian fiction, I explore succinctly the objectives and consequences of this movement. I refer again to the texts of Plato, Thomas More, H.G. Wells and Aldous Huxley, the outline of each provided in the preceding chapter serving as the necessary background from which to briefly appraise the topic of gender within these works. The fact that these four authors are male, and wrote their texts prior to the second wave is significant to my argument: each considers social progress in terms of the benefits it can offer men, and so each demonstrates a strong adherence to the patriarchal, androcentric assumptions of traditional Western culture.

In contrast to these four authors, I explore the lives and utopian fiction of authors Margaret Cavendish and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, both of whom wrote as women before the second wave, within a traditionally male-dominated genre, as well as within phallogocentric social systems. Simply by executing fiction of a utopian nature as female authors Cavendish and Gilman defied the norm, the radical content of their novels compounding this rupture from the Western paradigm of male primacy. In Gilman’s novel *Herland* (1979 [1915]) in particular, gender is employed as a tool with which to demonstrate the destructive impact of rigid social roles, and the potentially progressive results of female empowerment. Thus Gilman’s involvement in the “Woman Movement”, or “first-wave feminism”, is evident, as she protests against “the sexual double standard governing heterosexual relationships” in her text (Magarey 2001, 1-2). The emphasis each of these authors places on dismantling the status quo of female inferiority supports my earlier assertion regarding an author’s gender. It appears that the personal experiences of an author as related to his/her social and historical context can potentially influence the way in which he/she portrays utopia in a text – in this case, the experience of being repressed within a patriarchal society appears to have encouraged these women to oppose this system via their fiction. However, the general public

reactions to the works of Cavendish and Gilman, and the ties evident within these texts to traditional patriarchal structures, render it apparent that it was only with the second wave that the problematic nature of Western notions of gender was recognised and critically challenged throughout society.

Western society relies heavily upon a system of binaries in the construction of meaning: good/evil, light/dark, heaven/hell (Gullickson 2000, 3). Each half of these dichotomies is therefore defined as much by what it opposes as by what it comprises. Ubiquitous within Western culture is the male/female binary, according to which society is frequently divided before any other categorisation. Judith Butler explains traditional assumptions of gender to position males (deemed so due to the presence of a penis and testicles) as ““aggressive, logical, and mechanically-minded””, and females (defined according to the presence of a vagina) as ““passive, emotional, and nurturing”” (quoted in Gullickson 2000, 3). Thus gender can be considered a “developed discursive practice” (Foucault 1990, 68). Phyllis Burke relates gender to sexuality, describing the socially “correct” gender-defined sexual roles to be of “masculine sexual potency” and “feminine sexual submission” (1996, xiv). These unyielding categories render any individual who does not fit perfectly into the space allotted them as “confused, sick, or even sinful” in the eyes of society (Gullickson 2000, 3). It must be noted that in many ways the classification of society along gendered lines is practical, as generally the number of males and females in any given population is roughly equal. However, the male/female binary is fundamentally problematic as it is based entirely upon unsustainable heteronormative assumptions (Gullickson 2000, 3). Homosexuality and transgender offer two pertinent examples as to why this opposition is deeply flawed: biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender behaviour cannot be irrefutably aligned. In relation to this, throughout this dissertation I make reference to the genders of authors as well as characters, principally as this allows me to argue the points I posit. At times, this appears to involve some measure of reliance upon the gender binary, for example when I compare the social experiences of male authors such as Plato to female authors such as Gilman. However, at no point do I position either gender as superior or inferior to the other, and I do not make assumptions along heteronormative lines.

The acutely problematic nature of the male/female binary can be effectively explored according to Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis of gender. In *The Second Sex* (2011 [1949]), de Beauvoir argues that whilst biological sex might not determine one’s gender behaviour,

societal norms and prejudices will (2011, 26). Although theoretically an individual is able to choose whether to behave as masculine or as feminine (or somewhere in between the two), what exactly this gender-specific behaviour entails is culturally determined (26). As Burke explains, “What is masculine in one world might be feminine in another” (1996, 139). For example, whilst traditional Western society generally accepts a young girl playing in a maternal manner with dolls as the norm, a young boy doing the same will most likely be considered abnormal, and be redirected towards more “masculine” behaviour, such as playing with toy cars. Thus the male/female binary upon which Western society is largely premised works to channel individuals into rigid roles. Should an individual deviate from the mould into which he/she has been forced, he/she may be ostracised by society (30). Thus an undefined third space is created in which individuals pertaining to neither the male nor female category are placed. Therefore, not only can the heteronormative assumption aligning biological sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender behaviour be challenged, but so too can the actual existence of a binary. De Beauvoir asserts the problematic nature of dividing society according to two inflexible gender categories, explaining that the two genders are not diametrically opposed and in fact recurrently overlap (cited in Gullickson 2000, 3-4).

During second-wave feminism (which began approximately in the 1960s), the gender binary was challenged in earnest, and women’s rights to education, work, and control over their own bodies were championed, among other objectives (Rampton 2014, 1). Magarey claims that the second-wave feminists aimed to wrench open and ultimately remove “the bars of the cage that imprisoned” women, despite their increased involvement within the legal sphere as a result of the first wave (2001, 1). Members of the movement (including leading feminist theorists such as Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, Erica Jong and Kate Millett) (Bernstein 2005, 1) considered the experience of women in its entirety, looking at aspects of female life such as relationships, sexuality, body image, and child care (Rampton 2014, 1). As Diana Coole observes, in order to ““relieve the daily miseries of women”” the entire ““socio-economic fabric”” needed to be reorganised, which is what the second-wave feminists set out to do (quoted in Diamanti 2007, 117). Magarey notes that the movement essentially aimed towards creating “new definitions of womanhood, definitions of women as ‘human beings’” (2001, 3), as well as encouraging “mutual care and consideration” between the sexes (4). Whilst various facets of the movement existed – for example some radical feminists promoted female dominance – generally second-wave feminists aspired towards eliminating

gender inequality (Rampton 2014, 1). Relating to the previous discussion of the traditional alignment of biological sex and gender, the second-wave movement asserted that the anatomy and social role/s of an individual are distinct from one another (Gullickson 2000, 4). Various social breakthroughs occurred as a result of this movement, one example being the right to employ irreconcilable differences as an incentive for divorce (Rampton 2014, 1). The advent of the contraceptive pill in 1960 allowed many second-wave objectives to flourish in the Western world, as women no longer had to put aside their studies or careers due to unplanned pregnancies (1).

The second wave was a reaction to the traditional relationship between men and women in Western society: one of superiority versus inferiority respectively. The deeply entrenched nature of Western gender roles can be seen in the Biblical tale of Adam and Eve. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Hilary Masin claims the Garden of Eden to be the original utopia (2013, 3). This narrative is imbued with gendered assumptions: Eve, generated from male flesh, fulfils the role of submissive companion turned morally-corrupt seductress, luring Adam (and ultimately all of humanity) into a world of sin via her inherent female flaws. Thus the initial tale of a lost eutopia can be traced to the innate weakness of a woman in the face of temptation, setting the tone for the patriarchal tradition of utopian literature to follow. In 1948, M. Claude Mauriac expressed his views that even the ideas of the most intelligent women derive from those already postulated by men (cited in de Beauvoir 2011, 33). In relation to this claim, and alluding perhaps to the tale of Adam and Eve, de Beauvoir pronounces that “Humanity is male, and man defines woman”, and that “the woman’s body seems devoid of meaning without reference to the male” (26), with the intention of defying this mindset. Included in the introduction to *The Second Sex* is a quotation by Pythagoras: “a good principle that created order, light, and man and a bad principle that created chaos, darkness, and woman” (quoted in de Beauvoir 2011, 5), further demonstrating the connotations of male as positive and correct, and female as negative and wrong. Anna Gullickson notes that to be female is conventionally “seen as a lack”, and that a woman’s status is generally as the “other”, a non-male (2000, 4). Apposite to this discussion is Sigmund Freud’s analysis of human gender identity, as he reflects and so perpetuates the traditional Western attitude towards gender. Freud relies upon the social norms present within early twentieth-century society when outlining his argument in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (2006 [1900]), which sees people reaching either a normative or non-normative end (cited in Gullickson 2000, 8).

Freud believes all children to be initially “bisexual” (in that his/her gender identity and sexual orientation remain undefined) (cited in Gullickson 2000, 14), which Butler argues should be termed ““double heterosexuality””, relating as it does to a heteronormative paradigm (quoted in Gullickson 2000, 14). Freud theorises that every child undergoes a key moment of realisation regarding the formation of his/her gender identity, occurring when the child sees the genitalia of the opposite sex for the first time (cited in Gullickson 2000, 9). Freud declares the female child to immediately perceive herself as lacking what the male possesses, rather than as owning something different but equally valuable: ““She makes her decision in a flash”” (quoted in Gullickson 2000, 9). Freud claims that this interpretation of lack leads to the girl’s deduction that she has been castrated, possibly as a punishment for some unidentified misdeed (cited in Gullickson 2000, 9). Gullickson refers to this perceived castration as “a metaphor for societal disapproval” (19) – the real lack not concerning the so-called missing flesh, but rather the qualities men supposedly possess that women supposedly do not. Ultimately, Freud explains, a young girl will replace this yearning to own a penis with the desire to have a child (cited in Gullickson 2000, 9), implying that the female function essentially boils down to reproduction as a means by which to redeem inherent deficiencies.

Michel Foucault describes the female body as commonly considered to be “thoroughly saturated with sexuality”, possibly assessed as such due to the significant role it plays in the continuation of society (1990, 104). It is not surprising then that de Beauvoir regards the reproductive aspect of womanhood to be a “curse” (cited in Gullickson 2000, 14). The double standard is marked, men generally not perceived predominantly as sexual beings despite the obvious role they play in reproduction. Referring again to Freud, he argues that whilst the male child does not suffer from the so-called insufficiency of possessing female genitalia, he does experience a profound fear of castration (cited in Gullickson 2000, 10). This is largely a result of his having viewed female genitalia, and interpreted them as the potential consequence of committing a transgression (cited in Gullickson 2000, 10). A boy’s penis is his primary sexual focus, and the male condition is therefore fundamentally centred on the dread of (symbolically) losing this object (10). Freud’s implication here is that a male’s deepest terror lies in having that which renders him superior to females, “the power of the phallus” (20), removed, bringing him “down” to the level of women. With Freud’s theories in mind, Foucault’s belief that gender acts as a locus of power between men and women can be verified (1990, 103).

However, as previously illustrated, the male/female binary (the existence of a binary itself a problematic concept) is based upon mutable socially-constructed assumptions. As de Beauvoir asserts, biology cannot, and so should not, be linked to social destiny (cited in Gullickson 2000, 3), as the notions of male dominance and female subordination are essentially artificial. It must be noted that Freud “was not very concerned with woman’s destiny; it is clear that he modelled his description of it on that of masculine destiny, merely modifying some of the traits” (de Beauvoir 2011, 74). Butler points out the contradictions present in Freud’s views: his stance that gender is not a natural concept but rather a cultural construct, opposed with his essential alliance of gender with biology (cited in Gullickson 2000, 6). Freud himself was aware of the limitations of his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, which includes a preface proclaiming that “The author is under no illusion as to the deficiencies and obscurities of this little work” (2006, 617). During the twentieth century, gender, particularly the dominance of the male in society, was becoming increasingly challenged as a notion (Kumar 1989, 11), and so Freud’s noticeably phallogocentric theories cannot be taken as law. Freud’s beliefs make up only a small section of gender studies, but the fact that his collection of essays was published in 1900 demonstrates the strong presence of an androcentric mindset within Western society as recently as the last century. Freud’s automatic assumption that the penis symbolises power and control, and the vagina a dearth of these qualities and so impotence, is indicative of his patriarchal perspective. When exploring gender within the earlier, pre-second wave utopian texts in particular, the prevalence of such patriarchal assumptions is apparent. Thus despite the existence of theories opposing Freud’s, “the belief in women’s inferiority continued unabated” within many spheres of life, including utopian fiction, for much of the twentieth century (Sargent 1976, 1). As Marina Leslie claims, “utopia’s corrections of social norms are notoriously unstable where the advancement of women’s station is concerned” (1996, 9), a phenomenon only challenged in earnest from the 1960s onward.

Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* has been described as “a feminist bible” (Gullickson 2000, 11), and the text “upon which much of the modern feminist movement was built” (19). De Beauvoir’s greatest contribution to twentieth-century gender discourse in the West pertains largely to her candidness: “No woman before her had written publicly [...] about the most intimate secrets of her sex” (14). However, whilst de Beauvoir played a role in creating the foundation upon which second-wave feminism grew, her views were inspired greatly by

first-wave feminism. The first wave began in the mid-nineteenth century and continued into the early twentieth century, with roots as far back as the fourteenth century (Rampton 2014, 1). Christine de Pisan, born in 1364, has been cited as one of the first feminists, a widower who wrote so as to earn a living for herself and her children, as well as to promote the relevance of women within society (1). The first wave was made up of “complex and wide-ranging” viewpoints, but focussed mainly on attaining women’s suffrage (Magarey 2001, 2). The first-wave feminists are described by Susan Magarey as “politically limited, and sexually repressed” in comparison to the members of the second-wave movement (2). Germaine Greer even disdainfully comments that the first-wave feminists ““were anxious to point out that they did not seek to disrupt society”” (quoted in Magarey 2001, 1), which I interpret as indicative of the radicalism of much of the second wave, rather than of the restrictions of the first wave. The first wave achieved much of what it set out to accomplish – for example, women gained suffrage in the United States in 1920 (Rampton 2014, 1).

It is important to note that men can contribute substantially towards attaining the objectives of feminism, and that the history of the movement includes many male activists protesting against gender inequality (Christian 1994, 3). Mary Eagleton claims that, prior to second-wave feminism, there was a dearth of male interest regarding gynocriticism (1991, 17). She rather cynically describes any male attention paid to feminism prior to the second wave as taking either “a conservative position which ignored feminism in the hope that one day it would go away”, or “a progressive posture” (18-19). The progressive posture concurred that a space – both ideological and physical – was required for women alongside men, Eagleton asserting that this was frequently accompanied by a great deal of male reluctance (19). Although Eagleton’s argument is simplistic at times, it can be said that it was only with the second wave that Western notions of gender were widely and thoroughly challenged. However, whilst men can and do participate in feminism, whether or not men can be considered feminists is a complex issue on much debate has occurred. For example, Julia Kristeva argues that men can be feminists, claiming that it is one’s subject position rather than biological sex that determines one’s revolutionary potential (cited in Eagleton 1991, 46). Eagleton disagrees with Kristeva, and points out the potential dangers of even including men in feminism, with reference in particular to feminist literature (20). Eagleton asserts that “there are occasions when men gain credit from feminism in a way that women do not [...] men can achieve status by declaring their feminism”, which may contribute towards “eroding its political agenda” (20). Should women become “a reference point, an object of exchange

between men” through male participation in feminism, Eagleton declares that women will be silenced once more (20). Thus there is a possibility that male involvement in feminist discourse will create yet another space in which women are displaced in favour of men (20). Eagleton ends her argument by expressing her concern that “by identifying with female oppression, men can again become benign fathers to whom women are grateful” (20). Whilst Stephen Heath disagrees with Eagleton to an extent, arguing that men can potentially play a positive role in ending the oppression of women, he warns that the entrance of men into feminist discourse will invariably be accompanied by domination and appropriation, synonymous as these are with the traditional male position (cited in Eagleton 1991, 194). Heath concurs with Eagleton, however, in that he believes it to be ultimately impossible for a man to be a feminist, as men are agents of the very structures feminism aims to transform, such as the economy (cited in Eagleton 1991, 194). Thus according to Heath, a male feminist would be simultaneously responsible for ensuring that transformation occurs, and for allowing patriarchal structures to exist. Therefore, as Heath explains it, whilst women are the subjects of feminism and the force behind it, men are objects, merely “part of the analysis” at best (cited in Eagleton 1991, 194). In relation to Heath’s argument, de Beauvoir claims that even “The man most sympathetic to women never knows her concrete situation fully” (2011, 34). De Beauvoir asserts that that which is frequently termed “the problem of woman” has, in fact, “always been a problem of men” (8), implying both the necessity of men regarding the struggle to attain gender equality, and that many of the problems facing Western women exist as a result of androcentrism. Bearing these diverse opinions in mind, I agree with Kristeva, in that I believe that feminism requires participation from both genders so as to abide by its essential maxim of gender equality.

In terms of the general relationship between gender and utopian fiction, a shift is evident from the 1960s onwards, as male authors in particular began to engage more thoroughly with the problematic nature of Western patriarchy than in pre-second wave texts. Eagleton’s claim that “what is happening in literature parallels what is happening in other areas of society” is apposite here (1991, 17). Literature tends to have a mimetic function, evident in the rise of feminist utopian fiction during the 1970s in particular (18). These texts tend to advocate gender equality, asserting that this will allow for the creation of “a better, even an ideal, society”, feminist ideals thus incorporated into eutopian aspirations (Lensing 2006, 87). According to Dennis M. Lensing, the utopian genre serves as “a highly useful literary mode” (87) concerning feminist writers, as it enables them to “develop their various social visions”

(87). Virginia Tiger's claim that utopian literature "permits the representation of fluid rather than static gender relations" contributes to this argument (quoted in Watkins 2012, 120). The utopian texts produced during and subsequent to the second wave frequently focus on the dissolution of gender separatism, with men and women coexisting for the benefit of society (Lensing 2006, 88-89). This demonstrates the dramatic shift that the utopian genre underwent as a result of the movement: whilst radicalism was often utilised in opposing patriarchy by pre-second wave feminist authors, later texts tend to promote gender equality across all spheres of society (88-89).

Expanding upon this discussion, I now consider the role of the gendered experience of the author in the pre-second wave texts of Plato, More, Wells and Huxley. These authors appear to be almost entirely unaware of the phallogocentric mindsets they possess as members of their own Western societies, and perhaps as a result of this, gender remains a predominantly unchallenged notion within their texts. In addition, unlike Cavendish and Gilman, none of the four named male authors purposefully utilises gender as a tool with which to point out societal ills. Thus my argument that an author's individual experiences potentially impact his/her representation of utopia is applicable (again, taking into account the mediating presence of the implied, text-internal author): in addition to their historical positions within patriarchal society, these writers only ever experienced living within these structures as men. As these four texts were examined in the previous chapter, I do not provide an explanation of the texts' structures, contexts or content in this discussion. Working through these authors chronologically, I again start with Plato's *The Republic* (1998 [360 B.C.E.]).

In his proposal for a vastly improved state in *The Republic*, Plato appears at times to posit ideas later embodied in radical feminist thought (Taylor 2012, 2). For example, he proffers "the then startling proposal" (Bluestone 1987, 3) that the guardians of his ideal state can be male and female, and that access to education should not be reliant upon gender (Taylor 2012, 4). As Plato explains, "If women are expected to do the same work as men, we must teach them the same things" (1998, 59). However, as Taylor argues, Plato's ideas are not directed towards the emancipation of women (2012, 2). Plato ultimately locates women as subordinate to men, but holds that the division of state members according to gender is unnecessary regarding the achievement of social justice and harmony (7). In fact, many of his ideas are essentially "hostile to much that is central to feminism", and are aimed instead at attaining social cohesion (2). Natalie Harris Bluestone describes Plato's belief in female

inferiority as containing “Unsubstantiated views of women’s differences and unexamined assumptions about women’s limitations” (1987, 4), highlighting Plato’s failure to question the dominant notions of gender as pertaining to the individual within his society. De Beauvoir’s declaration that “Among the blessings Plato thanked the gods for was, first, being born free and not a slave and, second, a man and not a woman” (2011, 31), whilst speculative, draws attention to the fact that Plato’s own experiences as a man within a male-dominated society may very well have prevented him from challenging phallocentrism. Similarly, Bluestone describes Plato as being rather misogynistic at times, referring to his declaration that “a man who lives an ignoble life will be demoted after death, condemned to live as a woman” (1987, 13). Ultimately, any moves Plato makes towards gender equality and the general upliftment of women in *The Republic* are a means to the end that is his ideal society, and so, as Filio Diamanti puts it, based upon “functionalist criteria” (2007, 118). Thus any progress Plato’s proposals may have incited regarding the lot of women in society would have been purely by default, rather than in line with his true intentions.

In More’s *Utopia* (2005 [1516]), Lensing claims women to be portrayed as “servile insofar as they are mentioned at all” (2006, 87), whilst Diamanti notes them to be positioned as subordinate to men (2007, 118). In the patrilineal society depicted, women, alongside the slaves, prepare the meals and perform the majority of the household chores, ““which suit best with their weakness”” (More 2005, 55). Before attending church, the members of More’s society bow down to one another in a gesture of respect, a ritual strongly indicative of the hierarchical and chauvinistic nature of this community. Whilst children kneel before their parents, wives must kneel before their husbands in a similar show of submission and acknowledgment of authority: ““wives serve their husbands”” (62). More writes that ““no beauty recommends a wife so much to her husband as [...] her obedience”” (97), emphasising the patriarchal nature of his eutopia. Only men are deemed fit to work on the land, and those in positions of power, such as the magistrates and princes, are exclusively male (53). Ironically, More claims to exhibit a humanist perspective in his writing, declaring that ““all people should be treated the same on the grounds that they are all humans”” (199). However, the fact that he continues to depict women as vastly inferior to men in the society supposedly alternate from his own, indicates More’s apparent oblivion to the socially constructed nature of the gender binary and the associated notion of male superiority.

In the beginning of H.G. Wells’s *A Modern Utopia* (2002 [1905]) he declares, “I tried to

review the social organisation in a different way” (2002, 1). However, in much the same manner as More, Wells’s portrayal of “essentially feminine” and “distinctly masculine” (174) individuals in his utopia demonstrates his automatic acceptance of Western gender roles and norms. Despite his apparent aim to depict a social order vastly different from the one to which he was accustomed, Wells perpetuates the dominant patriarchal ideologies of the early twentieth century in *A Modern Utopia*, offering greater freedom to men but declaring that “women may be free in theory and not in practice” (163). Wells’s validation for this argument lies in his belief that women are ultimately inferior to men, unable “to produce as much value as a man for the same amount of work” (163). In light of this, Wells argues that providing women with “legal and technical equality” to men will ultimately “be a mockery” to all involved (163). In the novel, motherhood is considered a service to the state, which, whilst placing value on women as essential to the continuation of society, also places restrictions upon them. In addition, Wells argues that the “chastity of the wife” is paramount to social cohesion (169), the notion of women as sacred vessels of life thus serving to confine rather than uplift them.

Wells notes that women may “mingle, according to their quality, in the counsels and intellectual development of men” (177), implying that it is only an elite minority of women that is worthy of male company and academic pursuit. This notion of female inferiority is compounded by Wells’s chauvinistic and limiting description of ideal women: “all are graceful and bear themselves with quiet dignity” (196). However, Wells does demonstrate a slight shift in the consideration of gender, with reference to his aim to “determine how far the wide and widening differences between the human sexes is inherent and inevitable, and how far it is an accident of social development that may be converted and reduced under a different social regimen” (176). He also declares that “the Utopian State will throw its weight upon the side of those who advocate the independence of women and their conventional equality with men” (179), thus exhibiting a certain pulling away from the phallocentrism of traditional Western society. However, Wells contradicts these statements at numerous points in the narrative, and his overall adherence to the idea of male primacy can be attributed to his historical positioning as prior to the second wave, as well as perhaps to his own gendered experience.

As with Wells’s novel, Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (2006 [1932]) exhibits a degree of shift away from traditional Western concepts of gender. This possibly indicates that, as the

onset of the second wave approached, a larger portion of the population was growing more socially conscious. By contrast, it might simply be a result of the individual perspectives of the two specific authors involved. Indicative of this shift, Huxley includes significant female characters in his narrative, such as Lenina and Linda, whilst Plato, More and Wells focus only on male characters. In Huxley's dystopia, the socio-economic role an individual plays in his/her community is dependent on caste rather than gender, in contrast for example to Wells's community in which women play a minimal role in the labour force. Huxley's inclusion of the socially valuable "freemartins" in the novel, genderless individuals created through Bokanovsky's process (Huxley 2006, 11), indicates an awareness of the futility and impracticality of dividing society into two gender-defined categories. The sexual promiscuity encouraged in men in Huxley's society is equally encouraged among women, the stereotypical notion of female chastity, promoted for example in *A Modern Utopia*, eliminated completely. However, Huxley still exhibits substantial links to the androcentric tradition of the utopian genre, seemingly unable to escape the confines of his phallogocentric, pre-second wave society. An apposite example of this is provided by the fact that all of the characters with power and authority in the novel are male, such as the Director and Henry who together run the Hatchery. In addition, the introduction to the novel sees a group of exclusively male students receiving a tour of the Hatchery, during which it is explained that whilst the female embryos are sterilised, the males are not. As opposed to the high temperature to which the female embryos are exposed, the male embryos are kept at a lower temperature as "Full blood heat sterilizes" (6). Thus a preference for men is evident in *Brave New World* – men still hold positions of power, are physically able to reproduce, and those of the higher castes receive more intensive education than their female counterparts.

In contrast to these four utopian texts, throughout the next few paragraphs I discuss female writer Margaret Cavendish's novel *The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World* (2014 [1666]). Marina Leslie introduces her analysis of Cavendish's feminist utopia, which she deems to be the first of its kind, with a quotation: "women [...] will set the whole world in a flame" (Makin quoted in Leslie 1996, 6). Despite her position as a relatively well educated duchess, Cavendish found herself sidelined as a woman due to the patriarchy of seventeenth century England (6). Opposing this forcefully, Cavendish penned *The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World*, her protagonist a heroine whose feats are presented "as a matter of course" and "a natural wonder of the world", rather than as a divergence from the norm (6). Cavendish was nicknamed "Mad Madge" on account of her

so-called radical notions of female strength, indicative of the social context in which she lived (6). A fellow woman writer even referred to Cavendish as insane, stating there to be “soberer people in Bedlam” (Osborne quoted in Leslie 1996, 6). Lee Cullen Khanna describes the novel as “an alternative utopian tradition” (quoted in Leslie 1996, 7), *The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World* transgressive even in its position as a text written by a woman.

It must be noted that, possibly due to its status as a nascent utopian work, Cavendish’s novel recalls many aspects of the traditional androcentrism of the utopian form (7). However, this may indicate more than just Cavendish’s susceptibility to the norm promoted during her time. Leslie comments that the novel’s adherence to the utopian topos works towards creating its unorthodox feminist intent, as the reader’s focus is placed not on the novel’s structure, but rather on the digression of Cavendish’s characters from the patriarchal standard (7). In addition, employing the traditional generic form as a background against which male superiority is challenged renders it evident that the utopian literary genre need not change drastically to allow for new concepts of gender to emerge, highlighting how unnecessary the continuation of a patriarchal mode of thinking really is. The contrast between the earlier utopian texts, such as those of Plato and More, and Cavendish’s novel is emphasised by the adherence to traditional generic conventions exhibited by each author. In other words, Plato, More and Cavendish rely upon the same narrative style and structure in imparting at times radically different meanings, demonstrating the ultimate flexibility of the genre.

In *The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World*, Cavendish takes a look at female aspirations as determined by women, rather than men. Women are posited by Cavendish to be more than mere objects of male desire. Her female protagonist becomes Empress of the Blazing World, a society in which women have been emancipated from the “reproductive mandates” limiting them in reality (18). New generations are born from the bodies of the elderly, which undergo a lengthy process of “purgation by every orifice” due to the ingestion of a certain tree gum (18-19). A thick scab forms around the bodies and then breaks open, and the new bodies are wrapped in cloth for nine months. From this period of gestation emerge fully-formed, twenty-year-old adults. Thus Cavendish, in her portrayal of the “artificial manipulations of nature”, creates a rupture between gender and biology, discouraging the traditional synonymy between woman and “mother” (18). This discarding of maternity, according to Leslie, protects female virtue and allows for the production of female

power, and so the “utopian emancipation” of women (18-19). By the end of the narrative, the protagonist has not only been “central to political consolidation in the new world”, but has also played an inimitable role in the restoration of order in her homeland (13). The Empress mobilises forces and organises an invasion of her country so as to chase away intrusive forces that threaten its stability (14). As Leslie comments, “Feminine virtue becomes a medium for action” (14).

Cavendish’s empowerment of women was taken to be emasculating by many within her society (12). Leslie notes Cavendish’s extremism in her depiction of female potency, as the novel works at “Redirecting rather than neutralizing masculine fears” (6). Cavendish retains gender divisions to a large extent, but places women as dominant rather than men. She subverts the traditional “male-as-mind” and “female-as-matter” trope with her “woman-on-top” narrative, which unveils “a symmetrical identity in female power and male paranoia, female utopia and male dystopia” (12). (In this quotation, Leslie’s definition of “utopia” complies with my definition of “eutopia”, as outlined in the introduction.) According to Leslie, then, Cavendish’s promotion of female strength relies upon male subjugation, resulting in a reversed form of gender disequilibrium. This contradicts Cavendish’s declaration that “there was no difference of Sexes amongst them”, referring to the human spirit as a genderless and sexless entity (2014, 1). Cavendish’s extreme approach to gender dynamics signifies the despair she felt regarding her society, as she appears to have believed it necessary to employ radicalism so as to attain a receptive audience. An example of the author’s depiction of men as impotent can be seen during the protagonist’s sea voyage, during which she discovers the land she eventually shapes into a eutopia. After being captured by a love-sick merchant and his men, the protagonist survives a journey across the tempestuous ocean whilst all of the men on board die. Despite initially being taken prisoner, the protagonist demonstrates a great deal of power, not only inducing men to acts of rashness via her desirability, but prevailing alone within a relentlessly harsh physical environment. Further locating female agency as dominant over male, many of the male characters in the novel are quasi-animal, such as the Worm-Men, Ape-Men, and Lice-Men. Lisa T. Sarasohn notes the common alignment of animals with an absence of will and reason, these “senseless, and irrational” beings assigned various social responsibilities by the Empress (2010, 170). This positions these male creatures as submissive to female authority (170). Significantly, when referring to humanity, the protagonist employs as normative the feminine pronoun, in stark contrast to the typical use of the masculine pronoun, evident for example in Plato’s *The*

Republic.

Whilst rather tragic, it is also understandable that the novel Cavendish wrote challenging androcentrism was ultimately disregarded by the male-dominated literary sphere (Leslie 1996, 7). Thus the novel did not “set the whole world in a flame” (Makin quoted in Leslie 1996, 6) as Cavendish had hoped. Whilst this can be attributed partly to the “congealed torrent” that is Cavendish’s narrative style, and the fact that common opinion held her utopia to be “a private and narcissistic fantasy”, Leslie argues that, “even if she were power-mad, Cavendish is scarcely mad [...] for seeking control *as a woman*” (12). In addition, Cavendish’s bid to depict a personal utopia, rather than one applicable to all women, highlights women to be individuals rather than a homogeneous group defined by biological sex (21). Therefore it can be seen how Cavendish’s experiences as a woman had a substantial impact on her fiction, inspiring her to employ gender as a tool with which to demonstrate the ills of her society, namely patriarchy. Cavendish does diverge from the traditional utopias of authors such as More in her views, and so can be used as an example of the malleability of the utopian literary form. Cavendish’s novel also demonstrates the presence of feminist utopian texts prior to the second wave. However, as previously mentioned, the omnipresence of the patriarchal system is also apparent in the text, Cavendish seemingly unable to genuinely evade its confines. Cavendish’s approach to the female physical form verifies this (8). Leslie writes that Cavendish either refers to female physicality as “a kind of prop for dazzling and illusory displays”, or not at all (8). The female body, in other words, is either utterly spectacular or completely evanescent in the novel, Cavendish implying that women must achieve a certain physical standard, in order to avoid being bypassed.

Krishnan Kumar opines that the earlier works of utopian fiction depict women as “firmly subordinated to men”, and cites Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* as playing a significant role in subverting this tradition (1989, 11). Described by Haley Salinas as “a radical, fictional, feminist utopia” (2004, 2), Gilman’s *Herland* is powerfully indicative of the overriding approach to gender as experienced by the author during her lifetime. After years of repression, living as a woman in the predominantly patriarchal late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Gilman resolved to devote her life to “private aspiration and development” (quoted in Salinas 2004, 1). Gilman’s yearning for autonomy appears to have stemmed in part from her upbringing: she grew up without a father, in a family continuously desperate for financial stability (1). When Gilman was old enough to work and so contribute

to her family's dire financial situation, she found herself severely limited regarding employment options (1). Very few jobs were considered acceptable for a respectable young woman to perform, and so Gilman was forced to work in low-income jobs of little or no satisfaction so as to supplement her mother's equally meagre wages (1). Gilman grew incensed at the position allotted her on account of her biological sex, longing to oppose the social system that kept her and her family unnecessarily bound to poverty (1). Gilman's attitude of self-empowerment extended to her marriage; upon marrying for the first time she wrote to her husband, "I will give and give and give you *of myself*, but never give myself to you or any man" (quoted in Salinas 2004, 1). Her husband, Charles Walter Stetson, declared Gilman to be unnatural (in much the same way as Cavendish was by various members of her society), believing a woman's role to revolve around domestic responsibilities rather than the pursuit of self-actualisation (2). Gilman's attitude towards marriage was certainly unusual for the time – she requested that her husband live separately from her, and that they spend the night together only when "the erotic tendency was at a maximum" (quoted in Salinas 2004, 2). Gilman's approach to sex was wildly controversial for the early twentieth century, mainly in that she admitted to the otherwise taboo existence of female sexual desire, as well as attempting to dictate to her husband the conditions surrounding the fulfilment of this desire. However, despite her autonomous stance, Gilman succumbed to the wishes of her husband and the couple lived together for years, the author even attributing her personal discovery of "the truth of the womanhood" to Stetson (2). This arrangement did not last though, and Gilman left Stetson after a severe battle with depression, finding herself once again single and so battling to stay above the breadline (2).

In 1892 Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (2008) was published, in which she provides a thinly veiled autobiographical account of her unravelling sanity, and the appalling treatment she received for it at the hands of a male physician (Lane 1979, v). Gilman was deemed to be suffering from "hysteria", a common diagnosis given to women during this era, determining them to be weak and so allowing for their continued oppression (v). Whilst ill Gilman was forbidden from writing, disallowing her the freedom and independence gained via the self-expressive nature of her fiction (v). The facts that Gilman was (at times forcefully) discouraged from writing by various male figures in her life and that her literary expressions of frustration at the repression of women received harsh criticism, reveal the phallogocentric mindset of this period (v). Although in *Herland*, published more than twenty years after "The Yellow Wallpaper", Gilman advocates an exclusively female and highly

successful society rather than depicting a woman's struggle within patriarchy, the same message is conveyed: the traditional Western positioning of men as superior to women stunts social progress. Thus Ruth Levitas's assertion that the social context in which an author is mired profoundly affects his/her depiction of utopia is evident (cited in Moylan 1992, 92), in that Gilman's experiences shaped her portrayal of eutopia as a female-run society. In addition, this demonstrates how the gender of the author can play a role in shaping his/her representation of utopia.

Salinas claims that *Herland* demonstrates how "the American system had failed in terms of allowing women full humanity" (2004, 2). As Ann J. Lane puts it, "the Herland women expose the hideousness of much that to us is commonplace", forcing the reader to question and criticise the ways in which his/her own society is structured (1979, xv). Gilman's radicalism (she focusses on the empowerment of women rather than gender equality) is indicative of the repressive system in which she lived. The fact that Gilman wrote *Herland* almost three centuries after Cavendish's equally radical novel reveals the dearth of any significant progress in Western society regarding gender during this period. Emphasising this is the way in which Gilman expresses her views through the mode of fiction, as any sociological writing penned by a woman would most likely have been quickly dismissed (xv). *Herland*'s eutopia presents "a humane social order built upon the values [...] identified most closely as female values" (ix). Gilman essentially eliminates men from *Herland*, as the parthenogenetic (asexual) system of reproduction employed in the society renders any female reliance upon males unnecessary. In addition to this, the women in the society produce only female offspring. In contrast to Cavendish, Gilman implies motherhood to be an integral part of female life, which does deny the possibility of womanhood beyond reproduction to a degree. Gilman narrates the novel via three male characters, whose purposeful encounter with this foreign matriarchal society carries two contradictory connotations. The intrusion of these men into the women's space can be viewed as symbolic of the sexual act, women passively receptive to male obtrusion. However, in light of Gilman's views, it appears more likely that her intention was to invert the norm by placing these men as the social outsiders, and so as the "other", with women as the subjects. The traditional utopian mode is employed in *Herland*, the women explaining the "humane social values" (Lant 1990, 291) of their society and lifestyle to the male visitors.

Gilman's character Vandyck Jennings (Van) appears to be her interpretation of "the perfect

male character”, in that he neither idolises nor dismisses the women living in Herland (Salinas 2004, 3). Instead, he approaches them as fellow human beings, demonstrating an interest in their customs such as those associated with education and religion. In contrast, the character Terry Nicholson is portrayed as chauvinistic, and before encountering the women’s society assumes it to be dysfunctional and in desperate need of a civilising male influence. Upon approaching the community Terry wields a gun, its apparent necessity revealing his belief in female savagery without the stabilising force of male authority. Terry insists that the men ““mustn’t look to find any sort of order and organization”” in Herland (Gilman 1979, 8), whilst the third male character Jeff believes the society will be idyllically nun-like, ““a peaceful, harmonious sisterhood”” (8). Van’s disregard of both suppositions and his proclamation that ““These are just women”” (8) demonstrates both a potentially demeaning attitude towards women, and a potentially progressive approach – women viewed as humans rather than ideal beings or primitive savages. As they journey through the land the men, particularly Terry, make many sexist and generalised statements, such as ““Women like to be run after”” (17), ““we know they are very limited beings”” (141), and ““We all know women can’t organize – that they scarp like anything – are frightfully jealous”” (58). They think of the women as having “suffered the loss of everything masculine” (67), rather than as independent and empowered. Whilst I acknowledge Gilman’s complex social position, and the fact that, like Cavendish, she employed some degree of radicalism so as to be heard, I do find her depiction of these male characters to be deeply sexist at times: that is in the stereotypical roles into which they are simplistically placed.

In contrast to Van, Terry and Jeff, the women of Herland are baffled by the notion of gender-specific characteristics, enquiring ““surely there are characteristics enough which belong to People?”” (89). The notion of traditional gender roles is challenged further during a conversation between one of the male characters and a Herland inhabitant: “He said, rather lamely, that women were not built for heavy work. She looked out across the fields to where some women were working, building [...], looked back at the nearest town with its women-built houses” (92). The women ask the men about the role of women in their society, and are shocked to realise that the majority of women, who make up around half of the population, do not work. Their incredulity highlights the ultimate inefficiency of this custom, especially when it is contrasted with the highly functional economy of Herland, in which poverty remains a nonexistent concept. Van begins to question his idea of what constitutes a female, analysing for example the foolishness (which he has never before considered) of assuming all

women to be long-haired. He realises that women exist beyond the male ideal, and that long hair is frequently the preferred style according to the male gaze. Van thinks to himself that “those ‘feminine charms’ we are so fond of are not feminine at all, but mere reflected masculinity – developed to please us because they had to please us” (59). In Herland, however, the women have only themselves and their fellow females to please. These women neither possess, nor desire to possess, the qualities traditionally considered feminine by the men. Rather, they place much emphasis on the importance of education in creating a continuously progressive society, in which “they grew together – not by competition, but by united action” (60).

Before meeting the younger women of Herland, the men are warned that they may encounter harm. This startles them greatly, subverting their automatic assumption that they, as males, would be the ones posing a potential threat. As one of the older women explains, if one of the men was to hurt any of the women he ““would have to face a million mothers”” (66), demonstrating the solidarity present within this society. Upon describing sexual reproduction to the Herland inhabitants, Jeff uses the word “virgin” (45), which is unfamiliar to the women. When they query the term, and whether it also applies to a male ““who has not mated””, Jeff states that ““the same term would apply, but was seldom used”” (45). This again underscores the disequilibrium within the men’s society – the double standard of placing value on female virginity whilst honouring male sexual conquests. Whilst among the women the men pay careful attention to the grooming of their beards, as these “were almost our sole distinction among these tall and sturdy women, with their cropped hair and sexless costume” (84). The men’s desire to remain as masculine in appearance as possible whilst in Herland reveals how, despite witnessing the socially advanced nature of this community, these men strive to maintain ties to stereotypical notions of masculinity in a bid to secure some sense of power and control in this foreign world. The fact that Van, the most open-minded of the men, is included in this demonstrates Gilman’s awareness of how deeply gender roles are instilled within members of Western society.

Indicative of the subordinate status of women during this era is the reception *Herland* received among the general public. As with her former husband, Gilman was regarded by many as radical and even aberrant upon the novel’s publication (Salinas 2004, 6). However, although her views were certainly unorthodox for the time, *Herland* maintains ties to the Western status quo in a way that parallels Cavendish’s utopian text. The character Van is the

only one of the explorers not to engage in sexual activity with any of the women in Gilman's utopia, and when he leaves it is with a woman, Ellador, with whom he has fallen in love. Whilst Van's behaviour initially appears chivalrous, his sexual abstinence carries the implication that by engaging in extra-marital sexual intercourse with Ellador, he would have detracted from her worth. It also seems that the reward for Ellador's sexual purity is a marriage proposal, not only positioning her as a commodity to be kept pristine, but also implying marriage to be the ultimate prize for a woman. As Lane states, "To be 'virtuous' a woman needs but one 'virtue' – chastity" (1979, xi), a notion Gilman appears to support to some degree. Ellador leaves her beloved land so as to be with Van, lending him agency, and placing her as his property to do with as he pleases (xvii). However, Ellador's ultimate resistance to the loss of her autonomy leads Van to state, "I'd rather have you with me – on your own terms – that not to have you", locating this character again as a type of bridge between the world of the men and Herland (Gilman 1979, 141).

Despite her rather prejudiced treatment of the male characters for much of the narrative, Gilman does include a brief analysis of the potentially adverse effects of male domination on men in the novel. Lane's explanation that patriarchy creates men that "suffer from personalities distorted by their habits of dominance and power" is apposite here (1979, xi). The character Terry in *Herland* can be viewed as an exemplification of this personality distortion, locked as he is into a phallogentric frame of mind and symbolically blind at times to alternative ways of living. Declarations made by Terry such as, "They aren't human – they're just a pack of Fe-Fe-Females!" (Gilman 1979, 80) reveals his restrictively narrow mindset, particularly when he is compared to the other two men, who explain the Herland women to possess "a highly developed mentality quite comparable to that of Ancient Greece" (85). Jeff even states, "I never saw, I never dreamed of, such universal peace and good will and mutual affection", with reference to the women's society (98). As well as this, Terry discovers that the flirting that had served him so well at home offends and repels the Herland women, which leaves him feeling rather powerless and so resentful: "his compliments puzzled and annoyed" (86), implying his dominance over women to be the root from which his ego stems. Terry argues that "A wife is the woman who belongs to a man" (118), but upon marrying the Herland native Alima, his "pet conviction that a woman loves to be mastered" (132) proves horribly wrong. When he attempts to control her, Alima requests that he be put to death, in lieu of which he is exiled from the land. Thus Terry appears at times to be a victim of patriarchy, his attitudes and behaviour heavily mediated by his belief in male

supremacy. Ultimately, the men learn to no longer equate women with submission, Terry's dreams of Herland as consisting of "a rosebud garden of girls" (88) from which to choose turned on its head: "They were not pets. They were not servants. They were not timid, inexperienced, weak" (141).

Lane explains that *Herland* allows "The caged creature [...] her freedom, and thereby her sanity" (1979, vii), alluding of course to Gilman. Lane continues by commenting that Gilman seeks to "destroy the molds into which people, especially but not only, female people, were forced" (x), apparent in Gilman's portrayal of both the female and (to a lesser extent, however) male positions within patriarchy. Lane portrays Gilman as having viewed the empowerment of women as the ideal method through which to reorganise society, as women are the "bearers of the cultural values of love and cooperation, and because women have been excluded from the sources of power" (xxii). Gilman considers women to be dehumanised within the patriarchal mode, and maintains that so-called "masculine traits are simply human traits, which have been denied to women [...], such as courage, strength, creativity, generosity, and integrity" (xi). Thus my comparison of the texts of authors Plato, More, Wells and Huxley with the works of Cavendish and Gilman contributes to my argument that, irrespective of the era during which a utopian text is written, the gendered experience of an author can affect his/her representation of alternate societies.

It must be noted that my exploration of the connection between gender and utopian fiction tends to place more emphasis on the state of the feminine than of the masculine. This is not a contradiction of the very point I set out to make – that rigid definitions of gender and the associated inequalities must be challenged and eventually overcome for social progress to occur – but rather a natural reaction to the predominance of patriarchal viewpoints throughout Western culture and the utopian genre. The following three chapters discuss at length the role of gender within my primary texts, the next chapter involving an analysis of Marge Piercy's novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1983 [1976]).

Chapter 3: Marge Piercy: *Woman on the Edge of Time*

I have chosen to discuss Marge Piercy's 1976 novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1983) prior to the other two utopian texts I explore at some length in this dissertation. Not only was Piercy's novel written and published first, but it includes depictions of eutopia and dystopia, as opposed to the other texts which focus almost entirely on the latter. Piercy utilises the two forms of utopia not as polemics, but rather as counterpoints "in constant dialogue" (Evans 2012, 1). Piercy's portrayal of both agreeable and disagreeable alternate future societies "asks the reader to imagine [...] first a diminishing and then a flourishing of [...] human capabilities" (Trainor 2005, 26). *Woman on the Edge of Time* therefore demonstrates how depictions of both eutopia and dystopia serve to incite social critique and potentially social progress, and so can be described as a "critical utopia" (Vieira 2010, 18). The novel also provides an apposite starting point regarding my exploration of the role of an author's gendered experiences in his/her representation of utopia in my primary texts, as Piercy interrogates and challenges Western heteronormativity and patriarchy from the perspectives of a bisexual woman and a feminist. In addition, Piercy employs gender as a vehicle through which to highlight the ills and strengths of the social context from which she wrote. *Woman on the Edge of Time* exemplifies the second-wave feminism utopian texts, revealing the remarkable transition undergone by the genre as a result of this movement.

In her literature, Piercy employs the socio-political insight she has gained during her years as an activist, noting that "utopia tends to be possible when people are coming to consciousness" (quoted in Furlanetto 2014, 420). Piercy's literary oeuvre forms a significant part of her activism, and she claims to attempt to provide the disenfranchised with "validation and dignity" through her fiction, encouraging her readers to surpass the social prejudices to which they are accustomed (quoted in Horowitz 2009, 1). As Piercy notes, the reader may get to know a character in a novel whom he/she "would refuse to know in ordinary life", due to various social biases (quoted in Horowitz 2009, 1). Having "grappled with issues of identity" (1) throughout her life, Piercy's depiction of the battle of her female protagonist Connie to obtain a sense of self in a patriarchal society appears authentic. In relation, the novel can be referred to as "speculative fiction", in that it portrays events that have occurred, or could occur, in reality (Byrne 2012, 1). In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy reveals the socially constructed natures of gender and sexual orientation, the concerns she addresses much the same as those focussed on by the second wave movement. The

contrast between Connie's dystopian present, the eutopian society of Mattapoissett, and the potential dystopian future encountered by Connie demonstrates Piercy's own negative experiences of phallocentrism and heteronormativity, as well as her belief that these traditional Western ideologies disallow social progress. For example, the largely androgynous nature of Piercy's utopia appears synonymous with social prosperity, whereas Connie's present "hampers women" (Byrne 2012, 1).

Woman on the Edge of Time is based in a largely dystopian, rigidly socially stratified version of 1970s New York. As a Mexican-American woman, Connie is treated as "at the bottom of the socio-economic scale" (Walker quoted in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 88) by the majority of those around her, particularly white male authority figures. Piercy describes her protagonist in terms of submission: "The Mexican woman Consuelo the meek, dressed in black with her eyes downcast, never speaking unless addressed" (1983, 37). Connie lives in the seedy neighbourhood of El Barrio, barely making ends meet as a poorly educated and socially disempowered Hispanic widow. By the time the reader encounters Connie she has already endured much tragedy, including the deaths of two significant men in her life. Most of Connie's pain, however, is rooted in the loss of her daughter Angelina, who was taken away from her by social services following a bout of grief-inspired violence. Connie describes her life as involving "hunger, again pain, again loss" (25), only the fact that she is "Too proud to die" (41) keeping her from committing suicide at her lowest points. As a teenager Connie vows vehemently not to be like her endlessly labouring and repressed mother, screaming "I won't grow up like you Mama! To suffer and serve. Never to live my own life!" (38). Her protest is cut short when her father enters and disciplines her physically, reminding her of her place as a woman in a household centred on the needs of men, such as her brother: "It's everything for Luis and nothing for me" (38). However, as an adult she reflects upon her mother's response of "You'll do what women do. You'll pay your debt to your family for your blood" (38), a prophesy that Connie finds herself reluctantly fulfilling, the product of being "raised [...] under a code" (82) of female subservience. Connie recalls her grandmother and the lowly position she occupied as a woman of colour, having to maintain her strength for the sake of her children as "crisis after crisis broke over her" (218). It is alarming to note that Connie's life, until Piercy offers her and the reader reprieve in the form of eutopia, is strikingly similar to her grandmother's, the passing of time clearly unaccompanied by a transition regarding the role of women in this society. For example, Dolly, Connie's niece, resorts to abusing recreational drugs as a means by which to cope with her life as a prostitute,

and almost all of the men depicted in Connie's present are abusive towards the women around them in some way: Connie's former lover Eddie, her father, and Luis. In relation to this, Piercy describes the lot of women within this phallogentric society as involving "the raw stuff of fear" (76).

Connie notes the deeply rooted nature of the notion of female inferiority within her society, referring for example to the way in which women attack one another by insulting each other's sexuality: "You goddamn whore!" (102), thus inflicting the "stigmata" of gender upon themselves (98). Another example involves Dolly, who refuses Connie's pleas and stays with her abusive pimp and boyfriend Geraldo, stating, "He is my man [...] What can I do?" (16), perpetuating the Western legacy of patriarchy through her acquiescence. The tertiary education that made Connie feel "almost where she wanted to be" (42) ends with an unplanned pregnancy, the father of the baby able to continue with his studies. The only decent job Connie ever manages to obtain is lost when she is replaced by the next "hot Latin" secretary by the lecherous professor for whom she works (43). Although Connie remembers her late husband Martin fondly as "his love had given her worth" (237), the relationship was built upon Connie's reliance on Martin's dominance, evident in the previous quotation. During her marriages, Connie tried desperately hard to fulfil the stereotypical role of a "good" wife, hoping to please her husbands and so attain some sense of security and belonging: "she had done all those things she had always been told to do – the small pretenses, the little laughs" (36). Connie's desire to behave in a manner she believes to be appropriate as a woman and as a wife, and her feelings of wretchedness upon failing to do so demonstrate the pervasiveness and tenacity of gender norms, as well as the limitations they impose. Even the protagonist's full name, Consuelo Camacho Alvarez Ramos, one of the chief markers of her identity, has been determined according to the men surrounding her: her father and two of her husbands. One of the grievances of the second-wave feminists relates to the fact that women are frequently defined in relation to men (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 19), Piercy pointing out the archaic and restrictive nature of this social custom. Connie describes to the character Luciente "the three women" of whom she consists, disregarding the names relating to men which render her a "servant of servants, silent as clay" (Piercy 1983, 114). It is as "Connie" that the protagonist feels some measure of empowerment, explaining this aspect of her personality as "Connie, who managed to get two years of college [...] Connie got decent jobs [...] and fought welfare for a little extra money" (114). Connie does possess emotional strength and mental ability, but the many trappings of her androcentric society

have prevented her from accessing this potential: “Connie has engaged, and continues to engage, in some critical reflection regarding the plan and purpose of her life but the resources available to her to fulfill these plans are so inaccessible” (Trainor 2005, 34).

Connie’s situation reaches its lowest ebb when she is incarcerated in the mental asylums Bellevue and then Rockover, the latter described as a “wastebasket” into which those whom society does not accept are thrown (Piercy 1983, 14). Connie is sent to Bellevue after attacking Geraldo, in an attempt to prevent him from forcing Dolly to undergo an abortion by “that butcher who does it on all the whores cheap” (16). Suffering a broken rib and severe burns from the attack, Connie is treated by the doctors as “meat registered for the scales” (11), and is fed heavy doses of the anti-psychotic drug Thorazine, rather than receiving the medical attention she desperately needs. As Seda Peksen-Yanikoglu notes, each of the mental hospitals depicted in the novel can be described as a “microcosmic representation of the whole patriarchal society and its institutions” (2008, 91). A few elite men, predominantly white, exploit the largely female staff that works beneath them, and use vulnerable patients to achieve their own avaricious ends. As one of the nurses complains, “We just don’t live right [...] We just the muscle around here” (Piercy 1983, 13). In turn, the nurses pay minimal attention to the patients: “They acted as if they couldn’t hear you” (11), and when acknowledging them do so with a patronising attitude: “You’ve been a bad girl again” (22). The female patients, particularly those of colour, rank lowest in the social stratum, Connie describing how “White men got off on descriptions of brown and black women being beaten” (85-86). Those running the “bughouse” (8) are aware of the patients’ vulnerability, especially as many of these so-called social degenerates have no visitors in the form of family or friends. This vulnerability is capitalised upon by the doctors, and various patients are forced to undergo electroshock therapy as part of a larger psychosurgical experiment. Ostensibly for the patients’ benefit, by directly stimulating the brains of those selected, the doctors are able to subdue the patients and so control them: “A little brain damage to jolt you into behaving right” (73). Chosen at random, the patients taken to the “shock shop” (72) “entered [...] death”, and return to the wards as “shock zombies”, “jumbled, weak, dribbling saliva” (73). This process appears metaphorical regarding the treatment of women in Connie’s phallogocentric society, as well as of any individual who does not fit into its heteronormative categories. As previously touched upon, notions of male superiority and female inferiority are insidious and unrelenting, the message of female subservience reiterated constantly through various facets of society, such as the media and the attitude of an individual’s family

(DeLamater & Hyde 1998, 10). As the categories frequently used to define people in a society such as that from which Piercy wrote are socially constructed, those viewed as inferior are, essentially, chosen at random much like the asylum's guinea pigs. Not only do these categories make "shock zombies" (Piercy 1983, 73) out of those they degrade, but by programming the population to believe that one's destiny is a result of one's biological sex and the gender identity it tends to determine, even the empowered within Western society are the victims of mind-numbing indoctrination. The ultimate irony regarding the two mental asylums portrayed refers to the fact that they are there to heal those admitted to them. However, it is only by leaving the hospital that these patients may achieve some level of normalcy and well-being, most markedly in Connie's case. Therefore, with reference to Peksen-Yanikoglu's claim that the asylums act as microcosmic depictions of patriarchy, it is only by escaping the phallogocentric institutions in which she is located that Connie can attain the self-worth and capacity to flourish denied her in her society.

Thus Connie's present is clearly dystopian, representative as it is of a society in which conditions are unpleasant for the majority of those subject to them (Fitting 2009, 126). Piercy's stance as a feminist is apparent in her portrayal of this dystopia, for example through her employment of the concept of the body as a site for social action (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 22). One of the theories of French feminist Hélène Cixous, significant to second-wave feminism, aligns the censorship of the body with the censorship of speech (cited in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 22). Relevant here is Jacques Lacan's argument that as one enters the realm of language, one becomes a social being (cited in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 1). In the case of traditional Western society, therefore, entering the realm of language entails entering patriarchal culture, which serves to censor those it deems inferior. The institutions comprising this patriarchal culture, such as the media, have created the illusion that women's bodies do not belong to women themselves, but instead "are the property of the male gaze" (Cixous quoted in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 23). The women in Piercy's dystopian present lack control over their own bodies, and are, to a large degree, silent members of the society of which they are a part. In Bellevue, for example, Connie is strapped to a bed upon arrival, and is not allowed to visit the bathroom. Eventually unable to control her bladder, Connie urinates in the bed, "lying wet in her own piss while her body screamed" (Piercy 1983, 12). Her shame at her physical condition is overpowering: "She smelled bad. She stank!", exacerbated by the nurses' revolted reactions to her: "these animals [...] You wonder how they can live with themselves" (13). The fact that these nurses are women highlights how even the

disempowered within patriarchy work to propagate its strictures. In addition to this, upon undergoing a badly-performed abortion when she was younger, Connie underwent a hysterectomy she did not need nor want, as “the residents wanted practice” (37). Her mother too was “spayed”, as Connie puts it, describing herself post-surgery as “no longer a woman. An empty shell” (37), thus defining her status as a woman according to the limits of her reproductive potential. Connie also lacks a voice, literally at times: “During hospitalization, she has been mute” (375). On a figurative level, upon her admission to Bellevue, Connie is refused the opportunity to voice her side of the story regarding Geraldo, despite repeatedly attempting to make herself heard. Instead, “Man to man, pimp and doctor discussed her condition” (11). The French feminists, such as Cixous, focus on the role that language, including in the form of a text, can play in transforming the androcentric status quo, so allowing for women’s liberation and empowerment (1). According to Cixous’s suppositions, both the body and language, once freed from the constraints of the phallogocentric, can position femininity as associated with “abundance, creative extravagance, playful excess”, rather than absence (Morris quoted in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 21). Cixous encourages women to embrace their bodies in a bid to open up speech, claiming that liberation can occur through women’s “writing their bodies”, and taking back ownership of their physical selves from men (cited in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 21-22). This sense of reclaiming one’s body and voice is evident in *Mattapoisett*, in which the problems of Connie’s present have been almost completely rectified. The dramatic contrast between Piercy’s handling of gender in the dystopian present and in the eutopian future renders her anti-phallogocentric views apparent: whilst her dystopia is mired in heteronormativity and patriarchy, Piercy’s eutopia exhibits androgyny, bisexuality, and considerable egalitarianism.

Opposing Connie’s present in which “Ugliness had surrounded [... and] imprisoned” her throughout her life (Piercy 1983, 273-274), Piercy introduces a “prescriptive outline for the possibility of a better future” (Curtis 2006, 148) in the form of *Mattapoisett*, a society that embodies the ideals of second-wave feminism. Set in the year 2137, this community combines the best of the pastoral and technological worlds, the latter demonstrated in the automated nature of many unpleasant and/or heavily laborious tasks. Connie’s initial reaction to this “seemingly new-age hippy commune” is one of disappointment (Evans 2012, 1), as this community seems backward and primitive to her. Her idea of an improved society involves the abolition of any form of suffering, and she “expresses disgust with the prevalence of human failings – insanity, illness, death – which have not been eradicated”

(Green 1977, 1) in Mattapoissett, indicative of the values of the society in which she is enmeshed. However, Connie soon finds great comfort and hope in Mattapoissett, befriending many of the people she meets and even taking a lover in the form of the gentle and kind male character Bee. This eutopia is almost completely free from the gender roles and norms to which Connie is accustomed – “the most intractable difference among human beings” appears to have been eliminated (1). The people in Mattapoissett can be regarded as androgynous, with reference in particular to dress and behaviour, so much so that Connie initially mistakes Luciente, through whom she establishes a link to Mattapoissett, as a man: “too confident, too unself-conscious, too aggressive and sure and graceful in the wrong kind of totally coordinated way to be a woman” (Piercy 1983, 91). As Frances Bartkowski notes, “[s]uch misrecognitions are inevitable in a culture where heterosexuality is the norm, and where biological sex is immediately trained into a cultural gender identity” (quoted in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 91). With regard to Connie’s experience, confidence and aggression are characteristics synonymous with masculinity, leaving femininity associated with self-effacement and passivity: “a man is supposed to be ... strong, hold his liquor [...], able to beat other men [...], tough, macho” (Piercy 1983, 112), indicative of the harsh expectations placed upon men as well as women within patriarchy. Piercy’s inclusion of this initial misrecognition underscores the socially constructed nature of gender roles and norms, highlighting the artificiality of both.

Rather poignant is Connie’s disappointment when Luciente does not exhibit any signs of sexual attraction towards her, when she still believes Luciente to be a man. Not only does Connie assess people according to heteronormative assumptions, therefore, but despite resenting and fearing male sexual attention, Connie has learnt to prize it as a means through which to attain love, means of survival, and some small measure of her own worth. Paradoxically, sex serves to both validate and devalue Connie, the latter evident in Kim Trainor’s description of her as a tool “to serve other people’s ends” (2005, 26). After viewing Luciente’s mix of what Connie considers to be feminine and masculine characteristics, such as her long hair and “workman’s hands” (Piercy 1983, 33) respectively, Connie deems Luciente to be an “effeminate girlish male” (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 92), as opposed to a female. As Peksen-Yanikoglu puts it, “This is exactly how the binary logic of patriarchy works” – the male always associated with primacy (92). Connie also automatically assumes Luciente to be a threat, someone not to be trusted. It is only when Connie discovers that she is in fact a woman that she “no longer felt in the least afraid of Luciente” (Piercy 1983, 59),

expressive of the treatment she has received at the hands of men thus far. Before discovering and accepting her ability to act as a “receptive” (34), capable of telepathy and time travel, Connie interprets Luciente’s description of her as such to mean that she is passive, symptomatic of a life continuously regarded with “that human-to-cockroach look” (18). “Luciente” denotes “shining, brilliant, full of light” (28), which is symbolic regarding this character’s role in uplifting Connie from the “dark journey” of her life (23).

In Mattapoissett gendered pronouns have been abolished, and people refer to one another as “per”, derived from the gender neutral “person” (47). With reference to Cixous’s notion of language as a patriarchal tool (cited in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 22), therefore, it is evident that the men and women in Mattapoissett participate equally within language, which no longer possesses an ideological function regarding gender. Prepubescents in this community undergo a process referred to as “naming” (Piercy 1983, 69), which includes the individual’s selection of his/her own non-gender specific name. Members of this society attain the respect of others according to the skills they possess and to the contribution they make towards the community, rather than to which gender they pertain according to biological sex. Trainor claims that, in order for a woman to flourish in a society, it is necessary that she should have “sovereignty of her body’s boundaries, security from assault, including sexual assault, and reproductive choice” (2005, 27). Piercy both includes and goes beyond these prerequisites to female empowerment in her eutopia, the men of Mattapoissett possessing the same degree of sexual autonomy and security as the women. In this way, Piercy’s status as a second-wave feminist is evident, as she promotes the ideal of gender equality rather than simply the emancipation of women.

As previously mentioned, Piercy endorses androgyny as allowing for greater social equality. Thus Piercy displays a similarity to Virginia Woolf, widely considered “the founding mother” regarding the rise of feminism, who believed that androgyny and so a dissipation of gender roles would contribute to the eradication of patriarchy (Eagleton 1991, 1). Connie’s initial bewilderment at Luciente’s androgynous appearance and mannerisms renders the categories of gender and sexuality, and the link between the two, ridiculous and redundant. Within Mattapoissett, clothing is unisex and stereotypical gender roles do not exist. For example, when Connie witnesses “a man with a mustache [...] weeping openly” (Piercy 1983, 66) she is horrified by this display of male emotional fragility, whilst the community regards the man’s behaviour as acceptable. In addition, the character Magdalena explains to

Connie that children are no longer supplied with “toys for teaching sex roles” (130) as they were in the past. After visiting Mattapoissett several times, Connie grows to appreciate the absence of many of the more unpleasant aspects of male-dominated society. For example, when Connie explains Dolly’s occupation as a prostitute to Luciente, Luciente is unfamiliar with the term, as the patriarchal language of Connie’s world is nonexistent in Mattapoissett. As M. Keith Booker argues, Piercy’s novel differs from those of many of the earlier, pre-second wave utopian authors, as it possesses “the imaginative leap required” to realise that gender equality should be among the “various other social hierarchies leveled” in the depiction of an ideal society (1994, 338).

Connie is initially appalled by Mattapoissett’s system of artificial reproduction, in which children are conceived and gestated in imitation wombs in “brooders”, the reasoning behind this system directed at creating gender equality: “Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we’d never be equal” (Piercy 1983, 97). As Filio Diamanti explains it, reproduction and domesticity have been used historically “as an excuse to keep women in their ‘proper’ places” (2007, 118) – a phenomenon eliminated from Mattapoissett owing to the eradication of the synonymy of childbirth with women. At first Connie feels hatred towards the “bland bottleborn monsters of the future, born without pain” (Piercy 1983, 98), envious that these children are brought into the world free from the ties viviparous birth carries, and from which she has suffered – those of class and creed. Another factor contributing to Connie’s disgust relates to the role of motherhood in her world: the women among whom Connie has lived have been valued largely, and sometimes solely, as mothers. Connie appreciates the fact that within her society “motherhood and everything related to it makes women feel special and in power” (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 97), and that this is one privilege to which men are not privy. Connie fears that, in a world in which women do not have babies, they will be regarded as superfluous.

Possibly exacerbating Connie’s distaste for this system is the fact that patriarchal institutions robbed her of her ability to be a mother, both physically and by taking away her daughter, rendering the notion of motherhood even more precious. However, as Luciente explains to Connie, women are still able to mother the young in Mattapoissett, as three “comothers” are assigned on a voluntary basis to every child (Piercy 1983, 126). Connie remains displeased though, saying “how dare any man share that pleasure” (126), as to be a comother is not gender dependent and so the men can and do volunteer, mothering therefore possessing a

social rather than biological nature (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 97). This disrupts both the “father as the law and mother as the domestic” social roles, particularly as the word “father” has become obsolete in this alternate future (96). So as to avoid “love misunderstandings” (Piercy 1983, 117), the comothers are discouraged from entering into sexual relationships with one another, which eradicates the concept of the nuclear family in Mattapoisett, alongside the widespread practice of polyamory. Men are able to breastfeed the babies they comother by taking hormones, and so the traditional association of femaleness and bodily attachment regarding children is removed: “He had breasts. Not large ones. Small breasts, like a flat-chested woman temporarily swollen with milk” (126). This system allows women and men equal opportunities in terms of careers, as to mother a child is a choice that can be made by any member of society. Thus “work is not associated with masculinity and childcare with femininity” (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 97). The topic of reproduction features prominently within the feminist utopias of the 1970s, related as it is to the issue of female liberation (Lensing 2006, 92). Piercy appears to take the stance that “women’s liberation requires freedom from the burdens of reproduction” (92), evident in the fact that Connie’s incarceration results largely from Dolly’s pregnancy. Piercy therefore shares Donna Haraway’s belief that “the flaw in women’s position in the body politic” relates to “the organic demands of reproduction” (quoted in Lensing 2006, 93).

Upon her first visit to Mattapoisett, Connie disdainfully observes the people within the community to be child-like. However, she later realises that they are simply free from the social restrictions that dictate to the people in her world how to behave. She notes that one of the most significant restrictions of her society relates to gender and sexual orientation, both of which are traditionally determined by biological sex. The character Skip, whom Connie meets during her time in Rockover, can be used to demonstrate Piercy’s denouncement of Western heteronormativity. Skip is a homosexual man, and so is in the asylum as he is considered sick, as homosexuality “equals perversion in heterosexist terms” (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 95). Initially sent for treatment at the age of thirteen, as “My parents thought I didn’t work right” (Piercy 1983, 136), the pressure with which Skip is faced regarding suppressing his true identity results in his suicide. Thus whilst he manages to escape the confines of his society through death, Skip ultimately falls victim to its relentless pursuit of heteronormativity. Only two options appear available to the individuals within Connie’s society: either abide by “the father’s rules” (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 95), or “speak outside this order” at the risk of being “heard as insane” (Waugh quoted in Peksen-

Yanikoglu 2008, 96). In relation to this, Deirdre Byrne notes how Connie's dystopian present "condemns people for following their natural inclinations" (2012, 1). Skip's time in Rockover exemplifies this condemnation, evident when he explains to Connie the treatment he receives: "They stuck electrodes on my prick and showed me dirty pictures, and when I got a hard-on about men, they shocked me" (Piercy 1983, 157). After receiving several rounds of electroshock therapy to "cure" him of his homosexuality, with which he is personally comfortable, Skip says, "I don't feel any love at all. I feel like a big block of ice" (279), and so ironically he is considered healed.

Throughout the temporal journey that is *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy depicts strikingly similar characters. The relevant characters exhibit parallel characteristics concerning one another, but the manner in which they are received by their different societies highlights the flaws and/or strengths of their worlds, with particular reference to gender and sexuality. The character Jackrabbit, living in Mattapoissett, can be viewed as "Skip's futuristic doppelgänger" (Byrne 2012, 1), whose sexual urges are generally celebrated rather than rejected. Jackrabbit enjoys a voracious sex life with both male and female partners, his name chosen due to his urge "to couple with everybody" (Piercy 1983, 119), as well as because of his "big penis" (69). Another character from Connie's society who appears to have doppelgängers in Mattapoissett is her friend Sybil, condemned for her use of witchcraft, her independence, and her lack of interest in men: "Sybil was a fighter [...] She didn't deny herself [...] wouldn't give up or go under and wouldn't be broken" (76). Sybil's disregard for men is largely a result of her unwillingness to sell "herself to any man" (76), a considerable possibility should she enter into a heterosexual relationship in her society. Sybil's obvious senses of self-worth and self-reliance pose a threat to the stability of patriarchy, and so she is "heard as insane" and locked up (Waugh quoted in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 96). In comparison to Sybil is "Diana the rose" (Piercy 1983, 93), whose use of herbs to heal is respected and cherished in Mattapoissett, rather than viewed with suspicion and hostility as Sybil's skills are. In terms of Sybil's chastity, the character Magdalena appears to be the eutopian version of her, but rather than being regarded with scorn as an "old maid [...] A woman who can't get a man", is accepted: "It's per way" (129). Piercy's portrayal of Sybil in relation to Diana and Magdalena emphasises how emancipated the women in Mattapoissett are, as opposed to their repressed state in the dystopian present. Characters such as Skip and Sybil are placed in institutions like Rockover as "they do not fit in the roles that are cut out for everyone" (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 95),

whereas Mattapoisett “accepts and even welcomes precisely the differences that have marginalized” the members of Connie’s present (Booker 1994, 340). It is largely the shortcomings of their society that have rendered people such as Connie, Skip, and Sybil “insane”, as no divergence is allowed from its rigid concepts of heteronormativity and patriarchy. Whilst there are “madhouses” (Piercy 1983, 115) in Mattapoisett for those struggling with emotional problems, these institutions are free from the connotations of social rejection attached firmly to those in Connie’s world. Exacerbating this contrast, in Mattapoisett people are actually encouraged to get ““in touch with the buried self and the inner mind”” (117).

To emphasise the potentially dismal consequences of maintaining archaic structures of androcentrism, Piercy includes a brief depiction of another possible future alongside that of Mattapoisett. This dystopia is even more hideous than the dystopian present of the 1970s, and is essentially an intensification of the latter, with the issues obstructing Connie’s society from progressing exaggerated in this world. Upon accidentally travelling into this future Connie meets Gildina, who works as a prostitute in a world driven by technology and white capitalist male authority. Technology is therefore explored in *Woman on the Edge of Time* as both potentially innovative and as dangerous, the latter evident when it is employed for tyrannous purposes. As Booker explains, “technology has been a central tool” through which male power has solidified its presence regarding phallogentric societies such as Connie’s (1994, 343). In the future dystopia, technological advancements have been used in precisely this way, with Gildina carved into an idealised sex object for the gratification of men, technology therefore playing a role in the establishment and perpetuation of structures of control. Connie gapes in horror at Gildina, described by Booker as “mutilated” (340), her surgically-enhanced body a caricature of femininity according to stereotypical and phallogentric Western standards: “a tiny waist, enormous sharp breasts that stuck out [...], her hips and buttocks were oversized and audaciously curved” (Piercy 1983, 281-282). Through Gildina, Connie learns of a world in which reality is tempered by psychotropic drugs, and permeated by a prevailing fear of male sovereignty. Any capacity to flourish, as Trainor describes it, has been diminished in Gildina, whose sole purpose in this world is to entertain wealthy men (2005, 25).

With reference to her promotion of gender equality, Piercy includes a depiction of the unpleasantness of the male condition in this future dystopia, in which rigid gender divisions

and roles are firmly in place. The only male character Connie encounters is portrayed as robotic and a physical parody of masculinity: “close to seven feet tall [...] his voice as he barked at her was extremely deep, beyond the ordinary human range” (Piercy 1983, 292). Referred to as “the guard”, this man is both slavishly devoted and vulnerable to the ““multi that owns us”” (293), the one entity capable of destroying him if he is disloyal. His relationship with Gildina is that of the oppressor versus the oppressed, and when he threatens to send her to ““the organ bank””, he does so “with savage glee” (293). Gildina’s fear of men is palpable – she constantly monitors her behaviour according to Cash, her contractor: ““Cash is at me already”” (286). Additionally, when the guard admonishes Gildina upon discovering Connie in the room, she “began to blubber” with terror (293). Elton Furlanetto describes how “the dividing line between person and thing has been erased” in this dystopia (2014, 417), which demonstrates to both Connie and the reader the potential society possesses to regress into a disordered world of extreme technological advances and severe gender divisions. It is therefore evident that Connie’s immediate intervention is necessary to ensure that the alternate future of Mattapoisett is not replaced by this abysmal society: “if Mattapoisett does not come to be, then a nightmare world of exploitation will” (Lensing 2006, 98). Thus Connie’s realisation that “Alternate universes exist” (Byrne 2012, 1) coincides with an attainment of the knowledge that she possesses the agency, and so responsibility, to incite positive social action. The disparities between Mattapoisett and this dystopian future, and the homogeneous elements apparent between this dystopia and that of Connie’s present, operate on two levels: whilst patriarchy is criticised and found wanting in favour of a largely androgynous society, the conceptualisation of methods by which social improvement can occur is potentially inspired in both Connie and the reader.

Lyman Tower Sargent and Lucy Sargisson analyse the roles played by sex and sexuality in Piercy’s utopias, arguing that the positive and negative aspects of a society are frequently reflected through these dynamics (2014, 299). The future dystopia Piercy depicts appears to be constructed around sex, as a currency as well as a form of gratuitous entertainment. Gildina’s statement that ““All the flacks make contracts”” (Piercy 1983, 283) refers to the fact that everyone within the middle class either pays for or provides sexual services, depending on whether they are respectively male or female. Another example lies in the “Sense-all” on which Gildina watches holographic images, as it contains various sexually explicit “HG’s”, the descriptions beneath the titles including: “A bulgy contracty amuses herself while her man is away with a large boxer dog”, and the violent: “Stronger rapes weaker with dildo”

(287). Sex is often utilised as a means by which to control members of society, such as in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (2006 [1932]), in which promiscuity keeps people satisfied and so politically complacent. The tripartite relationship between sex, sexuality and gender, as explored in the previous chapter, is significant to this discussion. Sex and sexuality have arguably been neglected in favour of gender in past considerations of utopian fiction, but are frequently indicative of the forces of control within a society, especially in the case of repressive systems such as patriarchy (Sargent & Sargisson 2014, 299). Bearing in mind the fact that technology can be linked to sex and sexuality, in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy's future dystopia sees women converted via technological advances into objectified sex toys. However, the system of artificial reproduction in Mattapoissett, for example, demonstrates the potential technology possesses when related to sex, sexuality, and gender to emancipate rather than incapacitate women.

The power relations within each of Piercy's utopias can be understood through the way in which sexual relations are practised, normalised and institutionalised in each society (Sargent & Sargisson 2014, 299). In Connie's present, sex is intertwined with ethnic, racial and class inequalities, and is strongly associated with defined gender roles. In opposition to both this present dystopia and the future dystopia in which Gildina is subject to a heavily policed sex contract, sex in Piercy's eutopia is not monitored. There are no real norms regarding sex and sexuality in Mattapoissett, and any attempts Connie makes to categorise people according to gender and sexuality simply confuses those within the community. The meaning of sex in Mattapoissett differs from the meaning of sex in Connie's world, especially as sex within the former no longer possesses a reproductive function. Sargent and Sargisson discuss the view that good sex can improve politics and so can possess an ideological function, as it can allow people to focus on their needs as well as to think independently and so resist political dogma (299). On the other side of the coin is bad sex, which often reflects destructive attitudes and systems (299).

The treatment of sexual relations within utopian fiction has changed over time, with factors such as cultural contexts and personal beliefs playing a role in this (299). Change is also slow in the fields of sex and sexuality regarding literature; Mel Evans for example pointing out how Piercy's exploration of gender and sexuality may appear "trite" when perceived "after 30 years of trans-activism that has both evolved and disrupted understandings and expressions of gendered bodies" (2012, 1). However, Piercy's approach to sex, sexuality, and

gender in *Woman on the Edge of Time* is expressive of the era in which she wrote, and contains many of the ideas fundamental to second-wave feminism.

With regard to the topic of sex and sexuality, it is not only Piercy's experience as a woman that plays a significant role in her portrayal of utopia in *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Piercy's sexual orientation is equally important, and serves as a further example of an aspect of her identity that has kept her repressed within society. As discussed in the previous chapter, Sigmund Freud proposes the notion that children are initially bisexual, and that social intervention is required to shape an individual's sexual orientation and gender identity (cited in Gullickson 2000, 14). Pertinent with regard to Piercy is the implication carried by Freud's theory – that as a result of social mediation, a child's gender identity and sexual orientation will develop in line with heteronormative assumptions (cited in Gullickson 2000, 3). To remain bisexual (in terms of sexual orientation) can therefore be viewed as aberrant according to Freud's views, as it entails stagnating within a pre-social and ultimately socially unacceptable state. Again, as formerly noted, Freud's theories reflect to a significant extent the dominant approach to gender and sexuality in twentieth-century Western society (Kumar 1989, 11). Thus Piercy, as a bisexual member of such a society, was ostracised to various degrees as a result of her sexual orientation (Furlanetto 2014, 416). The social rejection she experienced as an individual fitting into neither the strictly defined heterosexual nor homosexual categories is evident in the sexually liberated nature of Piercy's ideal society.

Sexuality in Mattapoisett is non-gender specific, Luciente explaining to Connie that “the most intense mating” of which she was a part was with another woman, but that “Mostly I've liked males” (Piercy 1983, 56). Character Parra informs Connie that “All coupling, all befriending goes on between biological males, biological females, or both” (207). A lover in Mattapoisett is referred to as either a “sweetfriend” (49) or a “pillowfriend” (125), thus eliminating gender-specific terms such as “girlfriend” and “boyfriend”. Homosexual relations in Connie's dystopian present are considered disgusting and abnormal, evident for example through Skip's incarceration at Rockover. In addition, in harsh contrast to the largely uncomplicated and pleasurable sex enjoyed in Mattapoisett, where “we couple [...] For love, for pleasure, for relief, out of habit, out of curiosity and lust” (56), heterosexual sex in Connie's present is portrayed largely as something sordid, an act to be endured by women: “As for sex, it reminded me of going to the dentist” (77). Sex in Connie's world is also depicted as based entirely upon the more powerful male partner's pleasure, a woman

described debasingly as “a dumb hole people push things in or rub against” (77). Thus Connie’s present remains mired in heteronormative and phallogocentric assumptions, whilst sexuality in the eutopian Mattapoisett is fluid and reliant upon personal choice rather than cultural constraints: “We don’t find coupling bad unless it involves pain or is not invited” (131). *Woman on the Edge of Time* therefore offers a critique of twentieth-century Western approaches to sex and sexuality, Piercy depicting rigid sex-related norms to be archaic and harmful to social progress.

Apposite to the topic of bisexuality is Peksen-Yanikoglu’s analysis of Piercy’s novel from the perspective of *écriture féminine*, which translates to “women’s writing”, and denotes a strain of French feminist theory that came about in the 1970s (2008, iv). Hélène Cixous, who contributed to *écriture féminine*, argues that feminists “must write about women and bring women to writing” in order to achieve the aims of feminism, namely gender equality (quoted in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 45). Whilst men can and do engage in *écriture féminine*, according to the French feminists it is a more difficult process than for a woman to become involved (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 44). Concerning Freud’s theories, as men tend to abandon their initial bisexuality due to a fear of castration, it is apparently more emotionally onerous for a male author to adopt the bisexual psychology necessary to adequately oppose phallogocentrism (cited in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 44). *Écriture féminine* acts as the antithesis of phallogocentric language, and therefore offers feminists a means through which to escape and challenge the notion of male superiority which obscures feminist intent, and works to repress women’s experiences and limit men (20).

Whilst criticised for demonising authors employing conventional literary styles (46), the consideration of *écriture féminine* is applicable regarding Piercy’s novel. Piercy, like the *écriture féminine* authors, aims to deconstruct the binaries within “the whole social-pigeonholing establishment” (1983, 18) through her novel, as “bisexuality is essential in decentring the hegemony of the male sex” (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 43). This relates not only to sexual orientation, in that bisexuality opposes the patriarchal promotion of heteronormativity, but also to the concept of writing with a “bisexual mind”, which entails attempting to adopt a gender-neutral viewpoint (43). Writing with a “bisexual mind”, therefore, creates the neutral territory necessary to promote new ways of considering gender and sexuality (43). As Peksen-Yanikoglu points out, “The importance in *écriture féminine* is being human whether female or male” (43). This attitude is evident in Piercy’s eutopia, Parra

explaining to Connie that the Western male/female binary and its promotion of male primacy is “not a useful set of categories. We tend to divvy people up by what they’re good at and bad at, strengths and weaknesses, gifts and failings” (Piercy 1983, 207). Thus the members of Mattapoissett, alongside those involved in *écriture féminine*, ensure that “neither sex is privileged and neither is repressed. They are both equally present and equally acknowledged” (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 44). Piercy’s representation of eutopia therefore embodies to a large extent the chief principles of *écriture féminine*, as does her attempt to affect a “bisexual mind” whilst writing. In addition, her personal experience as bisexual (in terms of sexual orientation) plays a noteworthy role in this regard (43).

Much emphasis was placed by the feminist utopias of the 1960s and 1970s in the belief that “gender relations are very significant, even central, to any vision of the future” (Lensing 2006, 101), and the portrayals of eutopia and dystopia within these texts tend to involve a promotion of the dissolution of gender divisions. Not only does Piercy’s novel exemplify the changes occurring regarding gender during this era, but it also demonstrates various transitions undergone by the utopian genre in terms of its conventions – for example, in its elements of pluralism and ambiguity (101). The utopian fiction of this period refers to social improvement as an unrestricted and continuous process, frequently depicting ecologically-conscious economic and social methods as allowing for the destructive practices of present times to be rectified (101). The eutopias of the past tend to have been built out of thin air, involving a “robotic focus on problem-solving” (Curtis 2006, 148), with the issues of the society from which the eutopia was constructed resolved without any mention of how this came about. In Mattapoissett, for example, Luciente explains to Connie the frugal methods employed to put right the malpractices of her present, such as over-farming: “We have limited resources. We plan cooperatively. We can afford to waste ... nothing” (Piercy 1983, 117). Luciente refers to Connie’s lifetime as “The Age of Greed and Waste” (47), and “fat, wasteful, thing-filled times!” (61). As Lensing explains, the economic surges associated with World War II allowed for many social movements, such as feminism, to occur, as people were able to focus on issues beyond mere survival (2006, 101). However, the abundance of capital also created various problems such as increasing environmental damage, and so the feminist utopian texts of the 1960s and beyond display an awareness of the necessity of promoting gender equality, as well as of realising society’s responsibility in setting right various other wrongs (101). As Claire P. Curtis explains, “Piercy is more interested in thinking through a transformation, if not of human nature, then of human behavior” (2006,

156). Ultimately, what positions Piercy's narrative as progressive within the genre is its representation of a "clearly achievable and wholly human" society (159). In relation to the novel's ambiguous nature, Piercy leaves the narrative open-ended and so subject to a myriad of interpretations, thus embodying the defiance of the oppressive systems she portrays (Booker 1994, 341). The novel ends with Connie "on her bed, waiting" (Piercy 1983, 371), having just poisoned several of the Rockover staff. Through refusing the reader a "tidy denouement" (Evans 2012, 1), Piercy breaks the mould of utopian tradition by requesting that the reader contribute to the construction of meaning.

Another example of the genre's evolution concerns the increasing focus placed by authors upon the individual, rather than on the community (Curtis 2006, 148). Human agency is explored as integral to the creation of order, with revolution being conceptualised as not inexorable but to be incited (98). Connie is implicated in this promotion of dynamic action, as it becomes apparent that the responsibility rests on her regarding the establishment of an improved world: "That was Luciente's war, and she was enlisted in it" (Piercy 1983, 295). Furlanetto notes that Connie "decides to leave the position of object and become subject of her actions" during the course of the novel (2014, 428). Positioned alongside the diminishing and then flourishing of Connie's sense of self and capabilities is the reader: "in our emotional investment in this character, we viscerally experience with her these two radically different states of being" (Trainor 2005, 28). The reader's identification with the protagonist is characteristic of feminist science fiction (29), as is the novel's emphasis on "the separateness of individuals who cannot be reduced to a lumpen quantity" (30), utilised by Piercy to fulfil her utopian aspiration of abolishing the traditional Western promotion of homogeneity. Piercy's application of aspects of the science fiction genre in her novel can be attributed to the fact that the genre "offers alternatives. It frees the imagination" (Furlanetto 2014, 425). *Woman on the Edge of Time* exhibits an "advocacy of decentralization and openness of form", apparent for example in Mattapoisett's status as a small, agrarian community with an economy based on conservation, rather than as a large urban centre (Lensing 2006, 96). In addition, the establishment of utopia is viewed by Piercy as a continual process, in contrast to the static utopias of the past, such as those written by Plato and Thomas More (96). Piercy's idea of eutopia thus pertains to a society in which values "are still being struggled for" (98). This can be seen in that, in addition to the minor internal disputes within Mattapoisett, larger problems exist: for example, the ongoing war between this community and enemies living on space platforms and the moon, implied to be from the dystopia Connie accidentally

encounters. As Curtis notes, the creation of eutopia is “not the attempt to bring about heaven on earth”, but rather is performed within a “contemporary paradigm that acknowledges the dangers of positing an ideal” (2006, 148).

Woman on the Edge of Time can be considered the apotheosis of Tom Moylan’s definition of a “critical utopia” (1992, 92), in that the novel is self-reflexive and disrupts the utopian tradition, including, for example, “much more commentary on the operations of the text itself” (Furlanetto 2014, 418). Thus not only does Piercy critically analyse her own socio-political context in her text, but she also challenges the conventions of the genre as linked to patriarchy, noting its limitations and articulating “the tension between the utopian societies and the empirical worlds from which they arise” (418). As Piercy explains, ““The utopias that men have created are very rigid”” (quoted in Furlanetto 2014, 421). She therefore rejects the phallogocentric roots of the genre, and uses it instead to open up a space in which the problematic nature of womanhood in a male-dominated world can be adequately addressed (Lensing 2006, 87): “A place where women are not punished for their sexuality” (Furlanetto 2014, 421). Piercy refers to Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1979 [1915]) as attempting to create such a space, although Gilman was restricted as she wrote prior to the second wave. Thus Piercy’s intentions as an author and an activist are evident and interlinked – *Woman on the Edge of Time* epitomises the vast shift undergone by utopian literature during the 1960s and beyond, largely as a result of second-wave feminism.

Therefore, through her portrayal of vastly different utopian societies in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy offers a harsh critique of the various ills of the 1970s American society from which she wrote, the novel taking the form of a critical utopia (Moylan 1992, 92). As Evans notes, “Utopic visions are [...] useful insofar as they shed critical light on the present” (2012, 1). Ruth Levitas’s argument that the desire of an individual to improve his/her social situation stems from a sense of lack is applicable here (cited in Moylan 1992, 92). The process of searching for a means through which to resolve this lack involves an analysis of one’s socio-political context, and this social critique potentially allows for social progress (92). This feeling that ““something’s missing”” (Levitas quoted in Moylan 1992, 92) is shared by Piercy and her character Connie, the latter discovering the solution to a life of “too little of what her soul could imagine” (Piercy 1983, 274) in the form of Mattapoisett. Connie learns that the position of inferiority allocated to her as a woman in her dystopian present “which she has accepted as ‘natural’” (Waugh cited in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 90) is, in fact, ““the product

of relations of power and economic interest which function to deprive her of agency as effectively as electrodes implanted in the brain” (Waugh quoted in Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 90). The contrasting utopian societies depicted serve to illustrate the fundamentally restrictive natures of heteronormativity and patriarchy, as well as the possibility of attaining a world free from such strictures. Apt, therefore, is Byrne’s description of the novel as a “call to arms, a warning and a manifesto” (2012, 1). Piercy’s status as a bisexual woman, and as a feminist, is crucial regarding her portrayal of utopia, as her personal experiences allow her to render the deficiencies of various social ideologies with authenticity and sensitivity.

In the next chapter I explore Margaret Atwood’s dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* (2009 [2003]), which is similar to *Woman on the Edge of Time* in various ways, with reference in particular to its female authorship and criticism of traditional Western concepts of gender.

Chapter 4: Margaret Atwood: *Oryx and Crake*

The first of a trilogy, Margaret Atwood's 2003 novel *Oryx and Crake* (2009) considers the harmful effects of Western notions of gender, as with Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1983 [1976]). Other similarities evident between the two texts include the facts that both employ the utopian literary genre, as well as the category of speculative fiction. With reference to the latter, Atwood claims that the alternate dystopian society portrayed in *Oryx and Crake* maintains links to reality, and "could really happen" (quoted in Severac 2012, 10). Atwood diverges from Piercy, however, through her use of a male, rather than female, protagonist. Thus Atwood portrays "the artificiality and instability of both masculinity and femininity" (Irshad 2012, 2) from the viewpoint of a white, upper-class male – adopting the perspective of the supposedly privileged and powerful in opposition to that of the disenfranchised. The Canadian Atwood appears to base *Oryx and Crake* in the United States during the late twenty-first century: whilst never explicitly defined, this setting becomes discernible through indirect references, such as the melting of the polar ice caps destroying Harvard University. Thus the social structures criticised by Atwood bear similarities to those confronted by Piercy, with reference in particular to phallocentrism. Writing post-second wave, Atwood's general commentary regarding the ideologies and processes of feminism renders her a sympathiser with the movement (Guthrie 2007, 4). In relation to this, in *Oryx and Crake* Atwood explores the role played by traditional notions of gender in creating social discord, thus providing a social critique as well as possibly inciting a mind-shift within the reader, enabling him/her to conceptualise the potential for progress within his/her social context.

Atwood's narrative in the novel is non-linear: like Piercy, she takes the reader on a temporal journey between past and present. However, only one alternate reality is presented in *Oryx and Crake*, as opposed to Piercy's portrayal of three disparate worlds. It must be noted, however, that the reality Atwood details does transform considerably throughout the course of the narrative. The protagonist's past as Jimmy is interposed with his present as the self-titled Snowman, in a manner demonstrating how rapidly and dramatically scientific and technological innovations aimed at creating eutopia can instead intensify a society's dystopian state. This double narrative sees the anti-hero Snowman retrospectively examine the society in which he grew up as Jimmy – a clearly dystopian world mired in biotechnology, consumerism, the media, and class-based prejudice. The early years of

Jimmy's childhood are spent living with his increasingly estranged parents in the "Modules", a gated community lower on the socio-economic stratum than the "Compounds" (Atwood 2009, 21) into which his family eventually moves. The move is a result of the promotion of Jimmy's unnamed father, a genographer working to perfect the "pigoons" (11) – pigs created solely to host harvestable human organs – which serves to push his wife Sharon away from the family emotionally and physically. The palpable tension between his parents before Sharon disappears, and their obvious uninterest in him, moulds Jimmy into a resentful and lonely adolescent, who escapes his unpleasant home life through the internet alongside his equally discontented friend Crake.

The two teenagers spend most of their time watching graphically violent and sexually explicit videos on the web, smoking marijuana, and playing intellectually meritorious but ethically dubious computer games. One such game is named "Blood and Roses", which works "along the lines of Monopoly", and counters historical atrocities such as wars against human achievements such as "stellar works of architecture" (54). The callousness of the game: "The exchange rates – one Mona Lisa equalled Bergen-Belsen" (55), and: "individual rapes and murders didn't count, there had to have been a large number of people wiped out" (54), exemplifies the casual attitude affected by the boys' society concerning the suffering of others. This is also evident regarding the videos Jimmy and Crake watch online, which include recordings of human surgery, live executions, child pornography, and animal snuff. The ready availability of such subject matter, and its sheer volume, leave the boys almost totally inured to shock: "these quickly grew repetitious [...] one cat being torn apart by hand, was much like another" (57). Although Snowman reminisces about "the days of his outrage" (81) as Jimmy, in his need to idealise the past so as to cope with the present, he appears to forget about the early onset of his cynicism and apathy, and the fact that any indignation he experienced was the result of issues directly affecting him. The over-exposure to gratuitous violence and sex experienced by the boys results in their becoming increasingly emotionally detached, a phenomenon apparent among the people of Atwood's own twenty-first century Western society. This parallel reveals to the reader his/her own moral ambiguity and ennui, and the role these can play in allowing for the continuation of detrimental social customs. Jimmy's world is therefore an exaggerated version of the society from which Atwood wrote, thus highlighting its flaws, and causing the reader "to wonder about our own society and its vices, about [...] our responsibility as human beings" (Severac 2012, 11).

In Jimmy's society, genetic modification is cited as holding the key to the creation of the ideal human civilisation, although only those at the top of the economic hierarchy can possibly benefit. The media plays a paramount role in establishing and maintaining this emphasis on technological and scientific innovations, the "cult of perfection" (21) created through advertisements inciting a desire within the public to pursue the promises of youth, beauty and virility, as offered to them via biotechnological advances. In addition to the fact that only the wealthy elite can access these innovations to which "Every aspect of society is linked" (21), they remain entirely unregulated by any system of law, and so are vulnerable to abuse (22). The multinational corporations behind this biotechnology are "constrained by nothing except the profit motive" (Walter 2003, 1), and so work to steer humanity toward an utter reliance upon science and technology so as to generate optimal income. One of the biggest flaws of Jimmy's dystopian world, therefore, alongside this avarice and a troubling lack of emotional connectedness, is the short-sightedness of those in power. The attempt to control nature for the gain of the minority is "enacted on an expectation of immediate advantage" (Galbreath 2010, 1). Resources are utilised as needed, with little to no consideration evident regarding the inevitable depletion of that which has become indispensable. An overwhelmingly hubristic attitude is apparent in that, rather than issuing "an amendment of destructive activities" upon realising the disastrously "crumbling natural infrastructure" (1), further resources are sought. Thus immediate gratification takes precedence over long-term planning, with selfish desires underpinning the economy of this "hierarchal, purified" society (Severac 2012, 11). In addition, although the ruling paramilitary organisation, the CorpSeCorps, remains a largely "invisible, indistinct figure", the strict surveillance it employs is omnipresent, the citizens subject to it demonstrating a "broad acceptance of the loss of private life [...] in the name of improvement" (13). Thus the structures of control in this society work to both repress the population, and to falsely convince its members that this repression serves to benefit them.

Jimmy is very much a product of his society, displaying for the most part a deep-seated arrogance and a startling lack of empathy. Although an unhappy child and teenager, Jimmy is highly privileged materially, and well aware of his family's advantaged position within an economically divided society. As the members of this society are categorised largely according to their ability regarding "the biologic domain", and thus the role they can potentially play in advancing the greater aims of "genetic modification and scientific improvements" (13), Jimmy's family enjoys substantial rewards as the result of his father's

occupation. For example, their house in the Compounds is excessively large, with an indoor swimming pool and private gym. Despite knowing that outside the Compounds exist poverty, disease and crime, however, Jimmy never seems “revolted by the striking inequalities with his own lifestyle and the country in which he lives” (15). The general assumption evident regarding the privileged members of Jimmy’s community appears to be that “they are only spectators of what happens around them” (16), therefore ostensibly absolving them of all responsibility regarding the enactment of positive social change. Adeline Severac notes the existence of an “anesthesia of any subversive feelings” (13) apparent among this population, which serves to perpetuate its hierarchical nature. The social norms that categorise and regulate people in this dystopia appear “neither questionable, nor even questioned” (13), mainly as they have been institutionalised to the extent that they appear natural and so “apparently irremovable” (15). In this way, the characters are alienated not only from one another, but also from themselves – either unable or unwilling to make the connection between their positions in society and its failings.

Jimmy’s society is segregated according to class, and the majority of the population is crammed into the cities or “pleeblands”: “endless billboards and neon signs and stretches of buildings, tall and short; endless dingy-looking streets, countless vehicles of all kinds, some of them with clouds of smoke coming out the back; thousands of people” (Atwood 2009, 22). The physical boundaries between the Compounds and the pleeblands are as unyielding as the social partitions, with “sterile transport corridors and the high-speed bullet trains” (22) in place to “protect” the rich elite from their poorer counterparts. As Atwood explains, upper-class individuals such as the members of Jimmy’s family “didn’t go into the cities unless they had to, and then never alone” (22). Jimmy’s father’s comparison between the Compounds and castles from “the days of knights and dragons” is apposite here, as he explains to his son that “Castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside” (22), with reference to the relentless hierarchy of which they are a part. Similarly, the houses and occupational headquarters within the Compounds, and to a lesser extent the Modules, are encompassed by “walls and gates and searchlights”, employed to shield the scientists and their work from the threats of “Other companies, other countries, various factions and plotters” (22). Thus the people within Jimmy’s world are isolated from one another spatially as well as socially and emotionally, and a sense of paranoia pervades society in terms of internal and external potential hazards.

One of Jimmy's earliest memories is of a huge bonfire, which he attended with his father at the age of "five, maybe six" (13). The fire, consisting of "an enormous pile of cows and sheep and pigs" doused in gasoline so as to rid the community of a pernicious virus, strikes Jimmy as profoundly disturbing – he worries "about the animals, because they were being burned and surely that would hurt them", and is haunted by the suspicion that they were "looking at him reproachfully out of their burning eyes" (15). This bonfire can be viewed as "an exemplification and symbolization" (Severac 2012, 19) of this society's need for sanitisation, the result of an almost obsessive fear of disease spawned by the community's intense focus on biotechnology. As well as this, Jimmy's horror at the scene compared to his father's reaction (the only emotion his father displays is anger towards whoever may be responsible for spreading the virus), highlights the way in which the members of this society are conditioned to lose their sense of compassion as they grow older. Owing to the traditional synonymy of masculinity and emotional hardness this refers particularly to the men and boys.

Atwood's portrayal of Jimmy's parents, and of the relationships between the members of the family, is significant regarding the problematic nature of Western concepts of gender as addressed in *Oryx and Crake*. Laura Braza's opinion that the author's "primary concern seems to be about gender roles in society" is applicable here (2005, 134). Atwood writes with reference to the social constraints to which she has been personally subjected, recycling "cultural norms and ideas in new combinations in order to stretch the boundaries" (Greenblatt quoted in Braza 2005, 134). Through largely stereotypically gendered characters, Atwood portrays how Western gender norms and roles hinder individuals, as well as general social advancement. Braza's claim that "powerful male characters and powerless female characters" (136) are juxtaposed in the novel is apt concerning Jimmy's father and mother, both of whom exhibit various qualities traditionally attributed to men and women respectively. However, Atwood's portrayal of Jimmy's parents and the "oppositional and reciprocal relationship between the two genders" (Guthrie 2007, 5) is not without ambiguity. Neither Sharon nor her husband can be deemed omnipotent or entirely powerless, wholly good or utterly corrupt. The indefinite nature of these characters demonstrates the impracticality of attempting to identify an individual according to gender roles and norms, despite the fact that certain gender-specific characteristics may be evident within him/her.

The familial relationships depicted in the novel play a considerable role in the formation of

Jimmy's masculine identity, as well as in the way in which he relates to women. Jimmy's mother's depression and eventual acts of rebellion have a dire impact on her son, and stem from her inability to justify the unethical nature of the work she was doing as a microbiologist, before resigning from her job to become a housewife. Initially working alongside Jimmy's father at the company OrganInc (prior to his promotion to HelthWyzer), Sharon grows increasingly disturbed by the profit motivated and morally unsound character of her job, which involves modifying the receptors of bioform proteins to prevent the pigoons from becoming ill. The pigoons have been adapted to possess a "rapid-maturity gene", which allows these creatures to produce a number of organs simultaneously, as well as to "grow more organs, much as a lobster could grow another claw to replace a missing one" (Atwood 2009, 18), for example upon the reaping of a heart. Whilst this is geared towards improving human health and longevity to an extent, it is also murky territory concerning animal cruelty – the pigoons "lie around in poop and pee" (21), and undergo regular surgeries. As well as this, rather disturbingly, "bacon and ham sandwiches and pork pies" (19) recurrently feature on the menu in the staff cafeteria, despite the presence of human cells within the creatures from whom the meat appears to have been obtained. Sharon is one of the few characters in the novel to respond to the fact that the "vast uncontrolled experiment" being carried out by the world's scientists is not only morally erroneous, but potentially disastrous (157). As she explains to her husband, "'You're interfering with the building blocks of life [...] It's ... sacrilegious'" (39). Thus Sharon diverges from the majority of her society in that she is aware of the mutable nature of its structures, and she aims to alter the system to allow for a less biotechnologically-driven way of life, and so for greater human equality. The ambiguity of Atwood's characters is evident here, as whilst Sharon adheres to a strict moral code regarding the state of her society, she fails Jimmy as a parent. Sharon's powerlessness in the face of the corrosion of her society is mitigated by her ultimate independence, which she asserts by running away from her family and her socially advantaged position so as to protest the practices she opposes, geared as they are around "'a structure of values that was formed elsewhere, by others, and matched to other needs'" (Atwood quoted in Guthrie 2007, 7). However, whilst this can be viewed as morally honourable, Sharon's abandonment of her son is selfish, and her initial lethargy and depression render her weak and ineffective for much of Jimmy's childhood.

When he is still very young, Jimmy acts out and attempts to manipulate Sharon to get a reaction, whether it be laughter or tears: "Anything was better than the flat voice, the blank

eyes” (Atwood 2009, 25). For example, Jimmy will pester his mother for ““a dog [...], a parrot [...], a baby sister”” (25), both triumphant and deflated by Sharon’s eventual response of crying, slapping him, or screaming, ““It’s all shit, it’s total shit, it’s hopeless!”” (26). It is during these episodes when he manages “to create such an effect” (26) that Jimmy feels the most affection for his mother, having forged some measure of contact with her. Although it is negative attention that Sharon bestows upon her son at these times, it allows Jimmy to feel a rare sense of significance. In between her periods of inactivity and paranoia, Sharon experiences “days when she appeared brisk and purposeful, and aimed”, when “She was like a real mother and he was like a real child” (23). These days grow increasingly infrequent, however, and as he gets older Jimmy puts up an emotional wall to guard himself from his mother. For example, he entertains his classmates with cruel depictions of his family life, using his left hand as a “puppet” to portray “Righteous Mom [... who] complained and accused” (41). Whilst Jimmy harbours some shame at this “major piece of treachery” (41), it also assists him in coping with his parents’ indifference towards him, acting as a form of passive-aggressive revenge. However, his real hope is that his mother will confront him about his poor behaviour, and so prove her love for him as well as his own relevance within his family: “She must have had some sort of positive emotion [...] Wasn’t there supposed to be a maternal bond?” (42). Upon discovering her absence and the note she leaves for Jimmy and his father, the young man “was enraged [... He] mourned for weeks. No, for months” (42). In a heart-rending attempt to feel close to his mother, Jimmy dons her dressing gown: “It still smelled of her, of the jasmine-based perfume she used to wear” (188).

Sharon’s role in the family, from the point at which the story begins, is largely that of the traditional wife and mother – she cooks, cleans, and is financially supported by her husband: ““paying for your room and board [...], putting the food on your table”” (39). On her so-called good days, Sharon’s idea of fulfilling the role of a respectable wife and mother involves being “carefully dressed”, wearing lipstick, and presenting to her son “a lunch [...], arranged and extravagant” (25), along the lines of a caricatured fifties’ housewife. When Jimmy’s father brings a rakunk (a genetically modified racoon/skunk hybrid) home for the boy to keep as a pet, Sharon self-consciously conducts herself like a stereotypical mother. Woodenly, “as if she was a bystander” or acting out a scripted role, she warns Jimmy, ““if Killer wets on the floor, be sure you clean it up”” (35). Thus Sharon, much like Connie in Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*, has been socially conditioned to believe that womanhood entails a specific form of behaviour. Further paralleling Piercy’s protagonist,

Sharon has deduced that if she is to be “good”, and so socially accepted as a woman, she must abide by this behaviour. It is poignant to note then that it is generally during a phase in which she is trying to please her husband and son that Sharon adheres to this mode of conduct, implying that the male members of this family have particular expectations of her as its sole female member. The fact that Sharon aims to meet these expectations signifies the patriarchal nature of her family, functioning here as a reflection of society at large. Not only does it not come naturally to her, but this behaviour does not make anyone in the family – including Sharon – happy, revealing the futile nature of traditional gender roles. The combination of Sharon’s conventionally feminine behaviour and her depression, anger, and emotional inaccessibility leaves Jimmy with an extremely negative concept of, and attitude towards, women. Thus Atwood employs the character of Jimmy’s mother to reveal the inimical impact that rigidly patriarchal Western notions of gender (still practised in the author’s society to a large extent) can have on individuals, demonstrating the impractical and limiting nature of these archaic concepts.

As a young adult, after years of no contact with his mother besides the sporadic arrival of postcards signed with the pseudonym “Aunt Monica” (47), Jimmy sees Sharon on television at a protest against the Happicuppa coffee corporation. As part of a group opposing the use of genetic modification in the industry as it would reduce “labourers to starvation-level poverty” (122), Sharon’s “candid blue eyes” (124) are instantly recognisable to Jimmy. His reaction to seeing his mother: “Love jolted through him, abrupt and painful, followed by anger” (122) reveals his confusing mix of feelings towards her. This bewildering blend of resentment, fury, longing and need, directed towards the woman who deserted him even before she left, manifests itself in Jimmy’s romantic and sexual relationships with women. Whilst at the tertiary institution Martha Graham, Jimmy exploits the narrative of his mother’s leaving to pick up girls, using it as a hook to reel in the emotionally fragile, to be used and cast aside at his leisure. As Atwood describes it, “By then his mother had attained the status of a mythical being”, and in relating the story of her disappearance, Jimmy is usually able to “wring out a tear or two” from his latest admirer (131). Jimmy’s interpretation of women remains that they are “mysterious” and “uncontrollable”, much like the “variable-weather” (14), and he feels powerless around and disgusted by them. Exacerbating his feelings of weakness and self-loathing is Jimmy’s overriding desire for contact with women, both emotional and physical; with reference to the latter, he feels “jerked around by his own dick” (230). Jimmy finds himself seeking out idealistic women, whose hurts “he’d apply himself to [...] like a

poultice” (130). These women appear to be like his mother in their vulnerability and neediness, particularly evident in Jimmy’s relationship with the conceptual artist Amanda: “‘You have a good heart,’ she’d told him” (16). Throughout his time at Martha Graham, Jimmy manipulates the girls he encounters, portraying just the right amount of misery to ensure their constant concern: “These women would begin to see how fractured he was, they’d want to help him [...] They saw him as a creative project: the raw material, Jimmy in his present gloomy form; the end product, a happy Jimmy” (130). Thus Jimmy tries – in vain – to satisfy the cravings he has been left with from his relationship with his mother, that is for attention and nurturing, via his sexual and romantic relationships.

Jimmy’s relationship with the beautiful and exotic Oryx, however, is vastly different from his previous dealings with women in many ways. As teenagers, Jimmy and Crake first spot Oryx, or a little girl from whom she appears to grow up, in a child pornography video on the Internet. The video, on a site called HottTotts, features “Oryx” as part of a “trio of soulless pixies”, performing sexual acts on a grown man: “The effect was both innocent and obscene” (63). Each of the girls, who all appear to be around eight years old, look frightened, and one of them is crying whilst “going over the guy with their kittenish tongues and their tiny fingers” (63). When “Oryx” turns to look at the camera, Jimmy feels “burned [...], eaten into, as if by acid” (63). He imagines the girl to look at him with contempt, reminding him of all of his failings: “I see you watching. I know you” (63). Jimmy feels intense guilt after watching the video, the first time he has felt guilt in years, and certainly the first time he has experienced anything other than mild aversion whilst viewing such abhorrent content. The little girl, and later the woman Jimmy believes to be her, acts almost as Jimmy’s lost conscience, reminding him of his humanity and ability to feel love, compassion, loyalty, and genuine pain. Besides his mother, and to a lesser extent Crake, Oryx is the only person for whom Jimmy truly feels something: “joy, crushing his whole body in its boa-constrictor grip” (84).

Although it remains uncertain as to whether or not Oryx is the child in the HottTotts video, through her recollections it becomes evident that she did work in the pornography industry whilst underage, and was also a prostitute for some time. When she was very young, Oryx was sold by the people of her poverty-stricken Asian village to a man who supposedly took the children he bought into big cities “to sell flowers to tourists” (80), and from then on was passed along from man to corrupt man. Revealing the horrors through which Oryx has lived

is her explanation to Jimmy that “love was undependable, it came and then it went, so it was good to have a money value, because then at least those who wanted to make a profit from you would make sure you were fed enough and not damaged too much” (87). Whilst living with the men making the films, Oryx and the other children whom they had bought were allowed to watch the adult pornography being made, and were given marijuana and beer to keep them calm. One of the men had sex with Oryx regularly: “Jack wanted to do movie things with her when there were no movies” (97), despite the fact that she was approximately fifteen years his junior. Jimmy’s rage at the men who hurt and exploited Oryx demonstrates an emotional depth of which even he had started to doubt the existence: “He’d wanted to track down and personally injure anyone who had ever done harm to her or made her unhappy” (93). His stereotypically masculine reaction to pain – anger, and a desire to physically punish those responsible for it – contrasts with Oryx’s acquiescence and passivity: “Don’t worry so much, Jimmy [...], he could have done much worse things to me” (93). Both characters have been socially conditioned to behave according to the gender roles and norms attached to their biological sexes, Oryx tragically reacting to her life spent as a sex object with traditionally feminine resignation and submission (Butler cited in Gullickson 2000, 3).

Unlike the other relatively protected and privileged women encountered by Jimmy, therefore, Oryx is unimpressed by the story of his mother, her impassive and at times flippant attitude: “your mother went somewhere else? Too bad” (Atwood 2009, 131), sealing Jimmy’s devotion. As he himself questions, “Was that the hook – that he could never get from her what the others had given him so freely?” (131). Oryx’s generally unsympathetic approach towards Jimmy parallels the way in which his mother treated him to a substantial degree. Thus it is apparent that Jimmy spends much of his life as a young adult pursuing women who remind him, largely subconsciously, of the one woman from whom he truly yearns for love. Whilst he quickly becomes bored with the women who offer him a diluted version of this love, however, Oryx’s inability and/or refusal to truly open up to Jimmy keeps him transfixed, even after her death. Like Sharon, Oryx remains emotionally impenetrable to Jimmy, and so perpetuates his neediness via a vicious circle of desire and rejection. Thus Oryx exists as a type of personal utopia for Jimmy: seemingly flawless and to be obsessed over, yet never to be truly attained. In addition, perhaps part of the reason as to why Jimmy loves Oryx so desperately is that he can relate to her in some way – despite their vastly different upbringings, she too has an emotional wall firmly in place: “She liked to keep only

the bright side of herself turned towards him. She liked to shine” (93). Additionally, the possibility of breaking down this wall offers Jimmy a chance to redeem his past transgressions concerning women, principally his mother, who is accompanied in Jimmy’s mind by overwhelming guilt. For once, Jimmy wants to act as the saviour, rather than as the pampered saved, although this ultimately proves to be impossible in relation to Oryx. Oryx therefore lends Jimmy a sense of purpose in an increasingly meaningless and lonely world.

Whilst supposedly alone in the post-apocalyptic wilderness, Snowman feels Oryx’s presence, and imagines that he can hear her whispering to him: “If he put out his hand he could touch her; but that would make her vanish” (77). Woefully, this mirrors the relationship between the two whilst Oryx is still alive, as any attempts Jimmy makes to get close to her only drives her further away. Oryx becomes a source of comfort to Snowman, as well as a voice of reason: ““There is so much beautiful in the world if you look around. You are looking only at the dirt under your feet [...] It’s not good for you”” (100). In stark contrast to every other woman with whom Jimmy has been involved, with Oryx ““It wasn’t just the sex [...] You know I love you”” (77). Unlike his previous lovers, Oryx does not simply represent a figure towards which Jimmy can vent his frustrations at his mother, but she also offers him the chance to experience love (albeit of an unrequited nature), as well as companionship. It must be noted that it is only after he learns of his mother’s death that Jimmy meets and falls for the grown-up Oryx, employed by Crake as both his personal mistress and as a worker in the Paradise Dome in which he conducts his wild experiments. Snowman remembers the first time he saw Oryx: “Enter Oryx [...] Gazing into those eyes, Jimmy had a moment of pure bliss, pure terror” (209-210). Jimmy has recently discovered that his mother was executed for treason, after accidentally encountering and watching the video of her murder: “the guards were taking off the blindfold [...] No question, it was his mother [...] zap zap zap [...] they almost took her head off” (177). After witnessing this gory and deeply traumatic scene, Jimmy reacts far more strongly than he might have anticipated. He starts missing work regularly and is consumed by depression, concluding: “one big shark’s mouth, the universe” (178). Thus it is during a period of intense vulnerability that Jimmy meets Oryx, possibly another factor contributing to his attachment to her. According to the theories of Melanie Klein, in order for an individual to become and/or remain psychologically “healthy”, he/she must possess the “capacity to mourn”, and the ability to enact reparations (cited in Guthrie 2007, 18). Jimmy fails to truly mourn the loss of his mother, instead (as previously mentioned) projecting his grief onto his relationships, which ultimately exacerbates any

negative emotions as he is unable to achieve closure. As well as this, Sharon's death prevents the possibility of Jimmy's making amends with her, leaving him emotionally unstable.

Jimmy's relationship with his rather misogynistic father is also significant in terms of the ways in which he interacts with women, and is used by Atwood to demonstrate the destructive effects of traditional concepts of masculinity on men. Atwood's location as an author writing after second-wave feminism is therefore apparent: she blatantly criticises stereotypical notions of gender regarding both the male and female positions within society, adopting a "bisexual mind" (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 43) to an even greater extent than Piercy, and promotes the dissolution of these antiquated structures to allow for positive social change. Jimmy's father persists in Snowman's mind not as a person, but rather as a symbol of Western masculinity, an idea reiterated by Atwood's neglecting to name this character. Whilst the memory of his mother remains lucid: "a clear image, full colour, with a glossy white paper frame", Snowman battles to remember his father's face: "What did his father look like? [... He] can recall his father only in details" (Atwood 2009, 33). Jimmy's father represents the patriarchal ideal to a large extent – he is financially prosperous, and he rarely (if ever) exhibits any powerful emotions. When he does speak to Jimmy he does so in a painfully false "straight-talking man-to-man act" (37), referring to his son as "'buddy'" (21) and "'pal'" (16), and so essentially avoiding his paternal role in favour of a strained – yet less emotionally taxing – form of friendship. Atwood describes how Jimmy "was given a knife [...] for his ninth birthday, by his father. His father was always giving him tools" (27), expressive of his father's desire to make a "man" out of Jimmy from an early age by enforcing upon him the trappings of conventional masculinity. Jimmy's father's attitude towards his wife is one of scorn and condescension, and he dismisses and so undermines her feelings of anger and depression to Jimmy by saying, "'Never mind, old buddy [...]. Women always get hot under the collar. She'll cool down'" (14). Thus not only does his father inspire in Jimmy a disdainful approach regarding his mother, but he also fails to adequately protect his son from Sharon's mental breakdown and moments of cruelty. Jimmy is therefore exposed to the more unpleasant aspects of Western masculinity, such as chauvinism and bravado, whilst deprived of those elements that may have benefitted him, such as being offered a sense of security.

The way in which his father treats his mother has a profound impact on Jimmy's relationships with the opposite sex, and he mimics his father's indifference and disrespect towards his wife

in his own interactions with women. During his relationship with Amanda, Jimmy lives with her in the Modules as he is unemployed, and at one point teases her by saying, “I could join the ranks of the permanently unemployed. Or, hey, I could go on being a kept man, like now” (169). Unintentionally parroting the words of his father in the face of his mother’s disapproval, Jimmy responds to Amanda’s displeasure at this statement by shouting, “Joke! Joke! Don’t kill me” (169). Jimmy takes advantage of Amanda’s generosity, and whilst staying with her does little to assist her around the house: “he took a turn in the kitchen now and then” (165-166). After “she’d inserted a few pointed remarks about pulling your own weight” (169), Jimmy decides to end the relationship, especially since “Things hadn’t been that good in the sack lately” (169). He starts to carefully plan his “exit lines”, which involve dishonest clichés such as “I’m not what you need, you deserve better” (169). Not only does Jimmy intend to twist the situation so as to place all responsibility upon Amanda, but he actually looks forward to what he imagines will be a gratifyingly dramatic break-up: “a heartfelt, plangent, and action-filled finale [...] it was best to work up to these things” (169). Jimmy displays an almost complete disregard for Amanda’s feelings, taking what he can from her and leaving as soon as she requests reciprocation. As with his father, however, Jimmy’s callous attitude towards his relationships makes him neither happy nor content. Although Atwood fails to divulge the emotions of Jimmy’s father to the same extent as those of his mother, he appears to lead an emotionally empty and deeply lonely life, largely as a result of his adherence to the patriarchal ideologies dominant in his society: “All this negative stuff, this is no good, that’s no good, nothing’s ever good enough” (38). His emotional isolation is apparent for example through his forced joviality, the fact that he employs this persona around his own wife and child indicative of his need to appear in control at all times, an effect of the persistent social conditioning to which he has been exposed.

Prior to her disappearance, Sharon and Jimmy’s father fight constantly, about which the young Jimmy “felt guilty, because look what he’d made them do” (14). When Sharon leaves, Jimmy’s father’s predominant emotion appears to be relief, and he very quickly becomes involved with his lab technician Ramona: “bouts of giggly, growly sex going on” (45). Jimmy is essentially abandoned by his father as well as his mother at this point in the narrative, and is left alone with an overwhelming sense of rejection and loss. Despite her best efforts, Ramona is unable to provide Jimmy with the mother figure he needs, particularly as he is an adolescent and she is a good-looking woman: “Jimmy tried not to look at her breasts”

(47). Atwood takes great pains in describing Ramona's attractive appearance, comparing her to a teenage model Jimmy once saw in a hairdresser's window. Ramona is "young, younger than his father and even his mother" (20), and is portrayed as a trophy wife to some extent. Jimmy's unhappiness is exacerbated by his father's success within the biotechnological field, of which he becomes increasingly aware as he nears the end of high school. Jimmy constantly feels that there exists a yardstick to which he will never measure up, particularly as this standard is "so cloudy and immense that nobody could see it" (34). As he is "a mid-range student, high on his word scores but a poor average in the numbers columns" (118) Jimmy remains in his father's shadow, and develops a growing sense of failure. He is viewed as a dunce, although in another context he would have "shone like a diamond" (119), indicative of the homogeneity expected of its members by the society in which he lives. Jimmy's studies within the humanities at the largely redundant "joke" (127) that is Martha Graham leave him virtually unemployable, despite his significant aptitude regarding language. The fact that Jimmy is male – he is recurrently referred to as a words "man" (133) – and yet unable to achieve within the prized fields of science and technology, intensifies his lowly status in both his father's and his own eyes. Thus the model of masculinity presented to Jimmy whilst growing up involves financial success, sexual prowess among young and beautiful women, and emotional aloofness to the point of dispassion. Whilst in many ways Jimmy aims to abide by this model, his intellectual inclinations and his relationship with Oryx both serve to prevent him from ever fulfilling its requirements. As with Sharon, Jimmy's inability to perform according to the social expectations attached to his biological sex leaves him feeling incompetent and ashamed.

Apposite to this discussion of the role played by Jimmy's parents in the development of his masculine identity and his attitude towards women, is Sandi Guthrie's exploration of the impact of an individual's childhood on his/her life as an adult (2007, 9). Guthrie maintains that "the attainment of selfhood or personhood is a developmental achievement and not a biological given", thus implying that some individuals are unable to reach "a stable selfhood" as a result of negative experiences as an infant and/or child (11). Sigmund Freud promotes a similar theory, believing the events of an individual's life before the age of six to have a particularly profound impact on his/her growth into an adult (cited in Guthrie 2007, 9). Atwood's detailed narrative of Jimmy's childhood therefore appears significant, with both the familial relationships he experiences, and the gender roles he observes, contributing to his conduct and sense of self as a grownup. Klein notes the fact that a child's primary focus tends

to be on his/her mother, dependent as he/she is on her for survival (cited in Guthrie 2007, 11). In relation to this, Freud's theory of the "Oedipus complex" appears relevant concerning Jimmy's emotional development (Freud 2006, 835). In brief, the Oedipus complex refers to the establishment of a child's psychosexual self, which is reliant upon the interaction between the child and both the mother and father (835). Should the father figure be inadequately involved in the child's life, he/she will not move beyond the initial bisexuality of childhood to become a fully psychologically and sexually mature adult (Freud cited in Guthrie 2007, 22). As Jimmy's father's social "training for masculinity" has led to a denial of all emotional expression, he is absent from his son's life as a primary caretaker to a large extent (Saguaro quoted in Guthrie 2007, 22).

Consequently, Jimmy's involvement in "asymmetrical heterosexual relationships" (Saguaro quoted in Guthrie 2007, 23) as a young man can be explained, as he never moves beyond the Oedipal stage of wanting to "possess" his mother, and of failing to identify with his father (Freud 2006, 835). As previously discussed, Jimmy chases women who resemble his mother, thus positioning his father as a type of sexual rival. Further complicating matters is Sharon's absence from her son's life, and her initial incompetence in the face of adversity, as these reinforce within Jimmy the notion promoted by his father that women are volatile, weak, and ultimately inferior to men. As a result, Jimmy approaches women with distrust and contempt, whilst simultaneously desiring their approval so that he can reject them, in a bid to invert the power dynamic between himself and his mother. Unfortunately for Jimmy, however, not only does his mother's abandonment continue to sting despite the multiple break-ups he incites, but his passion for Oryx renders him weaker than ever – particularly as she wields the power in the relationship. Consequently, it appears that Jimmy fails to reach the "stable selfhood" of which Klein speaks (cited in Guthrie 2007, 11). With reference to the ambiguous nature of Atwood's characters in the novel, however, Jimmy's intense feelings for Oryx can be viewed as a sign of emotional durability, in that his vulnerability paradoxically demonstrates some measure of strength.

Alongside Atwood's portrayal of Jimmy's world, which provokes extensive social criticism in the reader, is Snowman's present: a representation of the future that could become reality, should society continue along its current path of materialism, environmental destruction, and genetic manipulation. As Severac explains, Atwood hopes to "strike the reader and to make him aware that the fiction he imagined was already underway in reality" (2012, 11). *Oryx and*

Crake therefore possesses an ideological function with regard to the moral responsibility of the reader, leaving him/her at times uncomfortably aware of his/her potential to conceptualise positive social change. The contrast between Jimmy's childhood of "decadence" (Labudova 2010, 136), and his early adult life of material underachievement, pales in comparison to the wretched battle for survival that is his post-apocalyptic reality as Snowman. Cementing this divide between the past and the present is Jimmy's adoption of a new identity soon after the catastrophe, fashioned with the "existing and not existing [...] stealthy, elusive" mythological Abominable Snowman in mind (Atwood 2009, 9). As Judith Butler explains, "identities are constituted by doing certain acts" (cited in Irshad 2012, 1), and so "The doer becomes formed from the doing" (quoted in Irshad 2012, 1). Thus the young man that was Jimmy is consciously replaced by the grown-up Snowman, skeletally thin and emotionally starved.

Until he encounters a small group of people towards the end of the novel, Snowman believes himself to be the last of his kind, almost "all visible traces of human habitation" (Atwood 2009, 152) gone in the eroded and sinister landscape in which he finds himself, the result of the outbreak of a "worldwide plague" (222). This plague, masterminded by Crake who studied bioengineering, leaves people with a "high fever, bleeding from the eyes and skin, convulsions, then breakdown of the inner organs, followed by death" (222). The "Jetspeed Ultra Virus Extraordinary" responsible for this "Red Death" (223) is hidden in and distributed via the BlyssPlus pills created by Crake and his staff in the RejoovenEsense Compound. Not only does Crake possess slightly sadistic inclinations, but he is also able to foresee the direness of human futurity as "the doctrine of unintended consequences is in full spate" (157). Crake therefore predicts, plans for, and ultimately catalyses the Noah's Ark-style "Great Rearrangement" (71) that occurs, aware of humanity's inexorable move towards utter destruction in the face of environmental, scientific and technological disaster.

Advertised as capable of preserving youth and boosting one's sex drive, the BlyssPlus pills sell rapidly worldwide, Jimmy later watching online as city after city falls victim to the "ebola-like disease" contained within them (Labudova 2010, 137): "The maps on the monitor screens lit up, spackled with red as if someone had flicked a loaded paintbrush at them" (Atwood 2009, 222). Jimmy discovers that, under the guise of a general vaccine to keep him safe when entering the pleeblands, Crake has immunised him to the virus. As the disease sets to work wiping out the planet's population, Crake kills Oryx and is in turn shot by Jimmy, to whom he directs his final words: "I'm counting on you" (226). Jimmy interprets this to

mean that he is to care for the humanoid creatures Crake manufactured prior to the calamity.

Seemingly unaccompanied besides “the Crakers” (69), as Oryx and Jimmy dubbed Crake’s post-human species, Snowman tries to build a new life for himself from the tattered scraps that remain of the world. The Crakers resemble humans in many ways, although they are all startlingly physically beautiful according to Western standards, and have been genetically adapted to possess a variety of features as found throughout the natural world. For example, Crake modifies these creatures to contain chlorophyll, which allows them to produce most of their own food. The Crakers are also caecotrophs, and so re-eat the “semi-digested herbage” (109) they egest in the manner of rabbits and hares, decreasing the amount of resources used and so preserving the environment. Their skin emits the scent of citrus to ward off mosquitoes, and they are able to purr at the same frequency as an ultrasound, much like cats, and so can cure minor injuries. Lacking as he does a “high opinion of human ingenuity” (68), Crake constructs the Crakers to be an improvement on mankind according to his personal ideals, and so they are bred to be devoid of the human characteristics he deems potentially dangerous and/or unnecessary. These include the ability to think abstractly, as well as to feel a sense of ownership and so jealousy. The vast differences evident between the Crakers and the humans encountered in the novel emphasise the deeply imperfect nature of twenty-first century Western society, particularly as it is a member of such a society that notes and attempts to rectify these imperfections. Whilst from Snowman’s perspective the post-plague world is undoubtedly dystopian, it exists as a form of eutopia for the Crakers, their superiority over the humans they have replaced apparent in their ability to thrive in a land in which most humans would quickly perish. The distinctions between the Crakers and humans, and the social criticism this diversity stimulates in the reader and in Snowman, is especially significant concerning notions of sexuality and gender.

Owing to Crake’s distaste for extreme emotions, and for the human desire for and simultaneous failure to maintain monogamy, he excludes from the Crakers the capacity to experience romantic love. Crake’s belief that love is “humiliating, because it put[s] you at a disadvantage” (132) motivates him to render the Crakers polyamorous, mating nonexclusively only when on heat. As a result, “Their sexuality was not a constant torment to them, not a cloud of turbulent hormones” (208), and there is no more “unrequited love [...] no more thwarted lust” (114), which also eradicates intra-specific aggression, rape, the sexual abuse of children, and prostitution – a few of the problems stunting progress in Crake’s

society. To allow for a more peaceful and ultimately prosperous species than humans, Crake engineers the Crakers in such a way that ensures that Western patriarchy will not recur among these creatures. Whilst differences do exist between the Crakers according to biological sex, such as the uniquely male ability to deter pests via a chemical present in their urine, owing to this species' incapacity to experience prejudice, pride, or greed, there is no gender-based hierarchical system in place. Instead, the different skills of each sex are employed to benefit the community as a whole, Atwood therefore pointing out the socially disadvantageous nature of patriarchy. Highlighting the restrictive nature of the gender conventions predominant within Crake and Jimmy's society is Snowman's reaction to the female Crakers. Despite the facts that they appear to be the only females left in the world, and that they are physically flawless in terms of Western conventions of beauty, Snowman views these creatures with repulsion: "these women arouse in Snowman not even the faintest stirrings of lust" (68). Shaista Irshad explains this to be strongly indicative of the social conditioning he received during his life as Jimmy, living in a patriarchal society (2012, 4). Largely as a result of the media, and of his father's approach to the opposite sex, Snowman's narrow perception of women involves a belief in their supposed inferiority and essentially defective natures (4). Thus according to his limited and inflexible notions of femininity, the superficially perfect female Crakers appear abnormal and so sexually unappealing to Snowman (4). Atwood's eco-feminist stance is evident here, as this socially progressive post-human world no longer sullied by phallocentrism is also free from the environmental malpractices rife in the worlds of Jimmy, Crake, and the reader (Watkins 2012, 122).

The success of the Crakers in the post-apocalyptic land underscores Atwood's argument that if humanity is to prevail, the lifestyles common among the members of Western societies such as her own need to adapt drastically to the increasingly calamitous conditions of the twenty-first century. The harmonious and gentle Crakers, especially when contrasted with the selfish and covetous people populating Crake and Jimmy's world, appear to be a metaphor for the social, environmental and economic policies required to prevent human society from disintegrating into an appallingly dystopian future. Thus Atwood utilises Snowman's present as a symbol of both the catastrophe imminent regarding modern society, as well as the potential this society and its members possess to avoid disaster. Atwood's use of an economically privileged and at times phallocentric male protagonist also plays a role in conveying the widespread nature of the negative effects of patriarchy, as well as of stereotypical gender roles and norms. Atwood's deviation from the tradition of portraying

harmful social customs through the disempowered members of society demonstrates how patriarchy hinders the progress of men (generally viewed as privileged within its structures) as well as women, emphasising the urgent need for transformation. In addition, the fact that Atwood's dystopia continues to worsen over a period of several decades speaks volumes concerning her opinion of the society from which she wrote. As with Piercy's future dystopia, Atwood's increasingly grim society serves as a warning to the reader: should no progress occur within the next century or so, human living conditions will be dismal at best and non-existent at worst.

Bearing in mind that Atwood's novel was published approximately thirty years after Piercy's, the utopian literary genre has shifted to a great enough extent that it is no longer regarded as exclusively male territory (Lensing 2006, 88-89). Thus Atwood's position as a woman writing within the genre is not in itself unusual, nor is her approach to gender especially unique. In many ways, her depiction of a dystopian society maintains links to the dystopian fiction of the past. For example, at Crake's prestigious university Watson-Crick, hiring sex workers through Student Services is promoted as "it avoids the diversion of energies into unproductive channels, and short-circuits malaise" (Atwood 2009, 143). This parallels the manner in which Aldous Huxley deals with sex in *Brave New World* (2006 [1932]): the members of this fictitious society are encouraged to engage in sexual intercourse with multiple partners so as to remain content. As Guthrie explains it, with reference to the theories of Michel Foucault, sexuality is a "social construction that has largely been used to bring the human body under tighter political control" (2007, 21). Another connection between the two novels can be seen in Snowman's desire to preserve some aspects of "his vanished life" (Atwood 2009, 73) via literature, and he is constantly quoting from "obsolete, ponderous" (8) poems and novels, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (2004 [1853]), and Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1999 [1969]). This is similar to the experience of the character John in *Brave New World*, whose passion for Shakespearean plays reveals his longing for the past, and serves to highlight the disorder of the present as depicted by the author. However, Atwood's text does not recall the androcentrism of traditional utopian fiction. The manner in which she criticises patriarchy and the associated gender roles and norms that stunt social progress is indicative of her position as a writer creating fiction with reference to the ideals of the second wave, which entail being simultaneously aware of and progressing past the traditional gender binary. Atwood conducts an explicit critique of Western notions of gender, striving to portray the

detrimental effects of these regarding both the male and female positions within society. She disrupts traditional concepts of gender via the ambiguous nature of her characters, both Jimmy and Sharon incapable of truly fitting into the categories assigned to them based upon their biological sexes. In addition, when these two characters do strive to fulfil their gendered roles, they are unhappy and unproductive, a point exacerbated by Jimmy's stereotypically masculine father's emotional detachment and dissatisfaction. Atwood also employs the characters Crake and Oryx in her criticism of Western gender stereotypes. Crake's disgust towards the society in which he lives emphasises the generally flawed nature of the reader's social context, whilst Oryx's characteristically feminine submission to mistreatment underscores the harmful impact of conventional gender roles.

The next chapter focusses on male author Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic dystopian novel *The Road* (2007 [2006]). McCarthy's criticism of rigid Western notions of masculinity in the novel (along much the same vein as Piercy and Atwood) demonstrates his historical positioning after second-wave feminism. However, he neglects to explore issues of femininity to a considerable degree, and portrays a paucity of female characters. Thus the role played by the social experiences of an author, concerning gender in particular, is clearly significant with regard to his/her depiction of utopia.

Chapter 5: Cormac McCarthy: *The Road*

Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic dystopian novel *The Road* (2007 [2006]) has been deemed, at heart, "a love story between a father and son" (Gehrke 2007, 151). Whilst this is rather reductive, the relationship between the unnamed man and boy journeying south through a devastated America is significant to my analysis of notions of patriarchy and gender roles in the novel. The physical absence of a mother figure, and the general paucity of female characters in the narrative, are fairly typical of McCarthy's notoriously masculine prose, and serve to demonstrate my point that an author's experiences within society, regarding gender in particular, play a potential role in his/her portrayal of utopia, through the mediation of the text-internal, implied author. However, whilst he largely fails to examine the position of women within twenty-first century society, McCarthy's subtle promotion of an alternative treatment of masculinity reveals his historical positioning after second-wave feminism. McCarthy's characters do not fully adhere to the gender roles attributed to them according to biological sex, and so display ambiguity in much the same way as Margaret Atwood's characters in *Oryx and Crake* (2009 [2003]). In relation to this, the traditionally feminine characteristics evident within McCarthy's male characters repeatedly assist them in their struggle to survive, implying the need for broader definitions of gender within the society from which the author wrote. The novel combines literary realism with fable, and chilling depictions of human barbarity with heart-warming examples of the endurance of morality in the face of utter destruction. Set in a stark and hideous wasteland, *The Road* offers a damning social critique, and so can possibly persuade the reader to conceptualise the potential for social progress within his/her own historical context.

Relevant to my discussion of the complex father/son relationship in the novel is the motif of the Holy Grail, as employed in *The Road*. As Dhira B. Mahoney explains, the Holy Grail is a "standard symbol" in Western culture for a "far-off, mysterious, out of reach" object (quoted in Cooper 2011, 218), which in *The Road* in particular allows for an exploration of the possibilities of human healing and preservation amid social corruption (220). The origin of the grail motif lies in the romantic tales of King Arthur's knights (219), as well as in Christian theology in the form of the vessel present at the Last Supper and Christ's crucifixion (Barber 2004, 120). Although various adaptations of the grail narrative exist, the version upon which McCarthy relies involves the dying "Wounded King" or "Fisher King", whose kingdom is falling into increasing disarray as a result of his injury, which is generally

depicted as the product of spiritual and moral degradation (Cooper 2011, 219-220). The grail, an emblem of restoration, is required to cure the Wounded King and to save his land (219-220). A second character is generally included in this narrative, and is noteworthy due to the role he plays in salvaging the kingdom (219). In Arthurian legend this character takes the form of a young boy named Perceval, who encounters the Wounded King and then sets out to restore the impotence of the dying man and his land through the attainment of a “symbolic vessel of divine healing” – a grail or chalice (219). Applicable to the grail narrative is the element of longing fundamental to utopian thought, as discussed in the first chapter with reference to McCarthy (Levitas cited in Moylan 1992, 92). Both the grail and utopian narratives involve the relentless yearning for an improved reality, to be achieved via the rectification of various social and moral ills (Gray cited in Masin 2013, 1).

In *The Road*, the character of the father represents the Wounded King, his injury a gash to the leg sustained when a fellow survivor shoots him with an arrow. Whilst unable to actually save the man’s life, the boy is clearly illustrative of Perceval, in that he provides his father with the ontological meaning essential for him to endure up until the point of death (Zibrak 2012, 107). The boy is born during an unstipulated catastrophe, and the joy of his birth amidst such despair and ruination positions him as a type of Messianic figure (Softing 2013, 710). Thus despite the prophecy of potential doom contained within the narrative, it is imbued with a sense of hope regarding humanity’s tenacity and capacity for good, almost entirely through the boy’s compassion and survival beyond the narrative’s end. McCarthy utilises the grail motif in his exploration of “how the human project may be preserved” (Cooper 2011, 219), contrasting the notion of redemption with the “Barren, silent, godless” (McCarthy 2007, 2) state of the characters’ surroundings, an exaggerated portrayal of twenty-first century societal disarray. McCarthy wrote the novel during a period of post-9/11 paranoia, and he plays upon the contemporary suspicion that humanity’s wrongdoings have caught up with it at last. Whilst the source of the apocalypse is never revealed, the ubiquitous presence of ash hints at a nuclear holocaust, or even a meteor strike as McCarthy has implied (Cooper 2011, 218). By refusing to disclose the origin of the disaster, McCarthy ensures that it remains universally threatening, and so enhances the reader’s feelings of helplessness and dread.

Whilst emblematic of Perceval, the boy can also be viewed as representative of the grail itself, as both indicate the possibility of humanity’s much-needed recovery. This is apparent

with reference to the boy's relationship with his father, as the child's innocence and dependence render him a type of vessel to be "filled" by the man. As Arielle Zibrak notes, a child is "the most sacred object at the center of the structure of contemporary culture" (2012, 104), aligning the boy with the grail, and positioning him as the fixed locus of the man's otherwise largely meaningless life. Whilst the relationship between the two is one of mutual gain, the man ensuring that the boy receives food, shelter, and protection from the roving bands of "bad guys" (McCarthy 2007, 80), it appears that the father obtains more in the way of psychological sustenance than the child for much of the narrative. In fact, the father is the more emotionally dependent member of this imbalanced pair to a significant extent – an abnormality according to the Western model of a heteronormative nuclear family (Gullickson 2003, 3). As with Perceval, who is depicted as growing up in an isolated forest, the boy's childhood is devoid of the structures of civilisation generally employed in the creation of meaning, such as the media and education. Unlike his father, who grew up prior to the catastrophe, the boy's only exposure to social norms is through the man, who therefore generates the ideological meaning that constitutes both of their lives "from the inside" (Zibrak 2012, 106). Zibrak notes the boy's consequential "inability to experience and process any of the events in his life independently of his father", which she claims leaves him incapable of forming his own "life narratives" (107). Whilst this overstates the case, evident for example in the fact that the boy's indelible and overwhelming goodness allows him to conceptualise his surroundings differently from his father, the emphasis Zibrak places on the man's ideological role in his son's life is significant. The man provides the boy with his sole link to the pre-apocalyptic world, and so the boy is utterly vulnerable with regard to his father's interpretation of the structures of meaning comprising this world. Thus the father/son relationship in the novel is a type of microcosmic representation of society at large, with the forces in charge of forming a social narrative attempting to disallow any divergence regarding the members it encapsulates. This is evident in the father's rather selfish refusal to allow the boy to interact freely with anyone besides himself, irrespective of this person's existence as a threat or potential ally. If this relationship is considered a metaphor for society, then, the man's desire to control the boy due to his reliance upon the child parallels the way in which ideological structures operate. Whilst these systems work to regulate a society, they also need the support of the members of this society to maintain their structure. Whilst the boy requires the man to survive physically, therefore, the man requires the boy as a vehicle through which to preserve meaning.

The man's constant affirmations to the child that they are the "good guys" (McCarthy 2007, 81), and that they are "carrying the fire" (a mantra denoting their inner decency) (136), additionally serve to comfort him. The man is therefore able to justify more readily the various unethical choices he makes, such as to steal, by recalling his words to the boy and so diminishing any moral complexity he encounters. Alongside the question posed by McCarthy in the novel regarding humanity's capacity to survive, is the terrifying question of whether or not humanity *deserves* to survive (Cooper 2011, 221). The latter is apparent in the author's description of the boy through his father's eyes as "like something out of a deathcamp. Starved, exhausted, sick with fear" (McCarthy 2007, 123). By reminding the reader of a historical atrocity such as the Holocaust, McCarthy forces him/her to consider humanity's intrinsic role in creating a wasteland such as that portrayed in the novel, and so to question the possibilities of human futurity. Through the refrain "We're still the good guys [...] We always will be" (81), the man reassures himself that he, at least, deserves to stay alive through whatever means necessary, as without him the boy – who appears to be the world's last vestige of hope and virtue – will die. The man is therefore painfully mindful of the fact that, without the boy, not only would he lack the impetus to go on, but also, to a substantial degree, the merit. Zibrak goes so far as to suggest that the child is merely a construction of the man's imagination, so necessary is he to his father's existential nourishment (2012, 109). As Zibrak argues, "To avoid death, one needs two things: a mode of survival and a reason to survive" (109), the latter received by the man in the form of a personal grail – his son. As the father doubts the possibility of a future for his son beyond a premature death, his efforts to protect his child can be viewed as primarily focussed on his own ideological and psychological survival: "the boy was all that stood between him and death" (McCarthy 2007, 29).

Whilst the man is conscious of his reliance upon the boy, he does not appear to consider his son's own need for a "boy" (Zibrak 2012, 112). When the boy sees another child, also a male "about his age" (McCarthy 2007, 88), the father's adamant assertion that "There's no one to see" (89) serves to deny the child his own grail, and thus to a large extent a sense of hope for salvation. This is apparent in the subsequent conversation the two hold: "Do you want to die? [...] I dont¹ care, the boy said, sobbing. I dont care" (89). Throughout the narrative, McCarthy employs dreams as a means by which to indicate the psychological state of his

¹ I have kept all quotations from *The Road* in line with McCarthy's idiosyncratic use of punctuation.

characters, and the boy's dream about a wind-up toy penguin that "came around the corner but nobody had wound it up" (37) carries two implications. First, the child is well aware of the inimitable role he plays in his relationship with his father as the "winder" keeping the man in motion. The boy's nightmare is therefore one of crushing responsibility, as well as of his own desperate want of a "winder". The second implication of the dream thus refers to the child's need for a reason to continue moving forward. As Zibrak notes, the boy's horror is located in the stationary nature of the winder (2012, 112), indicative of his own existential starvation.

In a bid to maintain his "cultural dominance" (107) over the boy, the man creates a dichotomy regarding the people they encounter, neatly dividing them into "good guys" (McCarthy 2007, 81) and "bad guys" (80). This permits him to place himself and his child in opposition to everybody else, both of them existing therefore as "the other's world entire" in many ways (4). It is interesting to note that the man retains "'the need for an Other'" (Zibrak 2012, 114) in his post-apocalyptic reality, and that without women to place into this socially-constructed space (as is the patriarchal norm), he turns instead to the cannibalistic nomads with whom they come into contact. This inadvertently equates women with so-called primitive beings bereft of moral integrity, highlighting Western society's traditional denigration of women to the lowly status of subaltern. The man's ideological supremacy over his son is potentially dangerous regarding the perpetuation of harmful social structures, and at numerous points throughout the narrative he unwittingly transfers notions of patriarchy onto the boy. For example, the father fails to mention to his son any of his own female relatives, most notably his mother, instead referring only to his father and uncle. The memories the father shares with the boy concerning these two men all involve typically masculine activities, such as rowing boats and chopping firewood. This imposes upon the child ideas of male dominance and physical strength, exacerbated by the stories his father tells him of masculine "courage and justice" (McCarthy 2007, 42) – idealised tales full of "shining examples of chivalry" (Cooper 2011, 222).

Much of the action in *The Road* is centred on the father's "ingenious survivalism" (Zibrak 2012, 117), as he searches for and manipulates various resources in an effort to keep himself and his son alive. In these scenes, McCarthy portrays the man as a physically capable and proficient provider despite the circumstances, presenting several detailed descriptions of his stereotypically masculine forays into sheds, toolboxes, and abandoned vehicles: "The cabin

was low with a vaulted roof and portholes along the side [...] He sat in the floor of the cockpit and sorted through the tools. Rusty but serviceable. Pliers, screwdrivers, wrenches. He latched the toolbox shut” (McCarthy 2007, 239-242). Although this male virility is not the only aspect of the man’s personality as disclosed by McCarthy, this character fulfils to a substantial extent the model of the “modern American alpha” man (Zibrak 2012, 117), a model which serves to further entrench within the boy traditional conventions of gender. However, as McCarthy endorses wider definitions of masculinity in the novel, his inclusion of the transmission of patriarchy appears purposeful. McCarthy underscores the insidious and pervasive essence of patriarchy through the man’s seeming oblivion to his own incorporation of such beliefs, and to the impact he is having on his child. The reader grows aware of the ease with which such ideologies are conveyed, and the socially-constructed and culturally-specific nature of patriarchy is exposed through its general inapplicability to the characters’ context. By contrast, the typically masculine elements of the man’s character do play a role in staving off death, and so are revealed to be constructive traits in their own right. Thus McCarthy’s position as an author writing after the second wave is apparent, as despite neglecting to explore female characters in the novel, he explores the Western concept of masculinity holistically and critically.

In terms of the period during which McCarthy wrote the novel, the “crisis in masculinity” experienced by post-9/11 American society also proves pertinent (Jarraway 2012, 49). David R. Jarraway argues that the traditional all-American male is associated with “cruelty and isolation”, an association solidified by the recurrent fictional representation of male characters as emotionally and physically hardy and self-governing (49). The terrorist attacks of 2001 caused the American public to reassess every aspect of life previously taken for granted, including stereotypical notions of masculinity (57). Society’s growing awareness of human vulnerability led to a noticeable move away from these notions, as the strict gender binary of Western tradition appeared increasingly irrelevant within the contemporary situation (51). Jarraway refers to this transition as “becoming-woman”, the word “woman” here deceptively non-gender specific (49). Instead, whilst the word “becoming” relates to the process involved, the term “woman” concerns a point ““*between* points”” (58) – a space adhering to neither stereotypically masculine nor feminine qualities, but rather to characteristics that serve to assist people with coping in a chaotic world. Jarraway identifies the process of “becoming-woman” to be evident within McCarthy’s literature, particularly with regard to *The Road*’s character of the man, whose conduct is gender-ambiguous (52).

Thus McCarthy's promotion of more flexible definitions of masculinity appears to have been influenced by his position as an author writing in post-9/11 America, a period composed of uncertainty, fear, and "embattled manhood" (56).

With reference again to the emblem of the grail, within traditional Western culture the chalice generally represents the feminine, as the shape resembles female genitalia (Barber 2004, 110). According to the regulations of heteronormativity, the fact that the man and boy are the sole constituents of their familial structure renders it imbalanced (Zibrak 2012, 114). Nell Sullivan refers to this dynamic as a "closed system of desire that effectively makes women unnecessary" (quoted in Zibrak 2012, 114-115), and whilst there is no sexual relationship evident between father and son in the novel, the man's reliance upon the boy positions him as a partner as well as a child. Thus the boy takes on the role of a female in his relationship with his father to an extent, demonstrating another apposite aspect of the grail motif in the narrative. This is apparent in terms of the traditionally feminine characteristics the child displays, such as sensitivity and an unwavering sense of compassion. These traits, deemed feminine according to Western stereotypes, assist the man in remaining psychologically alive by instilling within him a sense of hope, which in turn allows for the boy's corporeal survival. An example of the child's caring nature can be seen when he and his father encounter an old man named Ely on the road. After begging his father to allow him to help the old man, for whom he feels deep sympathy, the boy ensures that Ely is fed and kept safe for one night. When Ely questions why the boy helped him, saying, "Maybe he believes in God [...] He'll get over it", the father replies with complete certainty: "No he wont" (McCarthy 2007, 185), aware of his son's intrinsic kindness and belief in the value of others. These so-called feminine aspects of the boy's personality keep his father from losing faith in humanity's capacity to endure and progress, and so confirm his own survival, thus functioning as strengths. Not only does this indicate McCarthy's conviction that Western notions of masculinity need to expand and evolve, but it also promotes the dissolution of heteronormativity by emphasising the advantages of living beyond its limitations. Additionally, Ely's attitude towards the apocalypse, expressed through his pronouncement that "I knew this was coming [...] I always believed in it" (179) reiterates to the reader the necessity of his/her mobilisation, should he/she want to alter humanity's seemingly inexorable movement towards calamity.

When the man dies, his son is finally offered some reprieve from the "cultural dictatorship"

(Zibrak 2012, 106) his father inflicted upon him. The motif of “carrying the fire” (McCarthy 2007, 136) proves apt here beyond its intimation of moral solidity, as it recalls the Celtic tradition in which a child on the cusp of independence takes fire from the family hearth to his/her new home, symbolising his/her new life free from parental influence (Cooper 2011, 227). Whilst the man’s death calls into question the tenacity of social structures and ideologies – will the boy’s notions of patriarchy endure? – the reader is also aware of the possibility that the boy may carve out his own systems of meaning in his father’s absence. In Chuck Palahniuk’s novel *Fight Club* (1996), the notion of returning to “ground zero” (Palahniuk 1996, 201) is discussed, involving an exploration of whether or not society can redeem its flaws by creating an entirely new narrative, liberated from the restrictions imposed by prior social structures. Of course this is essentially impossible, as without the knowledge already internalised by the boy he would be unable to create a social system of any form. Similarly, the family that takes the boy in a few days after his father’s death is heteronormative and nuclear, consisting of a mother, a father, a son, and a daughter. These people abide by stereotypical gender roles for the most part, the woman embracing the boy upon meeting him in a distinctly maternal manner: “she [...] put her arms around him and held him” (McCarthy 2007, 306). In contrast, it is the father who first approaches the boy, and who carries the family’s shotgun in the traditionally male role of the protector. Thus whilst he escapes his father’s cultural regime, the boy appears to enter directly into another of seemingly greater confines. However, with reference to the metaphor entailing the father/son dynamic as representative of twenty-first century Western society, the man’s death may very well indicate the social need for the termination of ideologies such as patriarchy and heteronormativity. As Ely says, foregrounding patriarchy’s increasing redundancy, “your fathers are dead in the ground” (209). In the same way that the father’s ideological dominance over the boy works to stunt the child’s psychological growth, archaic and restrictive social structures prevent social progress. The open-ended and pluralistic nature of the novel’s conclusion implies that the boy’s existential development will flourish without his father, suggesting that social progress is attainable should the necessary gestures occur. Thus the boy provides the reader with his/her own form of grail, offering him/her a glimpse into a future free from the constraints of traditional modes of social control, and so potentially evoking the conceptualisation of the potential for social progress.

It must be noted that the father cannot be cast in an entirely negative light. Indeed, with reference to the grail narrative, this character has been “wounded” as a result of social

conditions almost entirely beyond his control – the apocalypse, and the ideological structures imposed upon him prior to the catastrophe. The man is a victim of circumstance to a large extent, and is a character of pathos in that there is never really any genuine hope for his redemption or survival. In addition, whilst the man fails the boy as a parent in many ways, there is also a strong sense of love evident between the two: “You have my whole heart [...] You’re the best guy” (298). Thus the man’s reliance upon his child can be morally mitigated by the integral role he plays in the boy’s survival – a role driven by love as well as personal need. As the father is responsible for the boy’s continued physical existence, his actions also serve to grant the child the opportunity to thrive psychologically beyond his own death. Additionally, the man appears almost entirely unaware of his adherence to the ideologies of patriarchy, as well as to the fact that he enforces these upon his son. This demonstrates the persistence of such structures, therefore, rather than the man’s flaws as an individual. Like his son, the man exhibits various traditionally feminine characteristics, fulfilling the role of a mother as well as a father within the narrative. For example, the father tends to his son’s intimate physical needs in a way typically associated with a mother figure. Upon shooting a man whom he perceives to be a threat, a characteristically masculine act of violent aggression, the man tenderly washes his victim’s blood and brains from the boy’s hair: “he washed his hair again as well as he could [...] he wrapped him in the blanket and carried him to the fire” (77). Whilst performing this grim task, the man accepts full responsibility for his dual parental roles, thinking, “This is my child [...] That is my job” (77). Thus the man, though raised in an androcentric society, is able to embrace the “feminine” traits he possesses and use them to his and his son’s advantage. Although this behaviour is, to a degree, the result of the lack of a female figure in the family, it does demonstrate the man’s ambiguous adherence to gender roles and norms, revealing McCarthy’s promotion of increased flexibility in terms of Western notions of masculinity.

The character of the woman in *The Road* also displays ambiguity concerning her conformity to the gender norms ascribed to her according to biological sex. The reader never meets this character directly, but rather is introduced to her solely through the recollections of the man. Thus she is portrayed through the distorting lenses of bitterness and grief, having committed suicide when the boy was a few years old, and when the catastrophic event had only just occurred to reveal “The frailty of everything” (28). Although the reader’s immediate response to the woman may be one of alienation and dislike, therefore, McCarthy does not convey enough information about this character for her to be either vilified or deified. Instead, her

purpose in the narrative appears to be to indicate the ultimately indefinable nature of human beings, particularly regarding gender. The woman's absence has an intense impact on the gender-ambiguous behaviour of the man, as it forces him to take on a maternal as well as paternal role in the family. As a result of this, the woman influences her son's subsequent interpretation of gender roles. In order to analyse the blend of traditionally feminine and masculine characteristics obvious within the woman, her suicide must be discussed. Prior to her death, she has an intense conversation with the man regarding the increasingly bleak prospects of their family and of humanity, the man resolute that they must carry on struggling for the sake of their child. In response to this, the woman points out that "Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us [...] They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us" (58). Although these particular prophecies remain unfulfilled, the woman's general sentiments prove true – the lives of the man and boy as narrated to the reader consist of doggedly evading the petrifying prospects of rape, murder, and cannibalism. The woman's claim that "We're not survivors. We're the walking dead in a horror film" (57) applies specifically to the man's post-apocalyptic existence, the majority of which entails marching relentlessly towards a painful death. This is also accurate to an extent in relation to the boy. As Steve Gehrke notes, the man's devotion to keeping his child alive "make[s] so little difference" (2007, 151) in the end, as whilst there exists an element of hope in the narrative's conclusion, ultimately the boy remains trapped in a shattered world rife with crime and suffering. Possibly confirming the woman's predictions, McCarthy finishes the novel with a description of brook trout, whose scales poignantly resemble maps of a world that "could not be put back. Not to be made right again" (2007, 307).

The woman's declarations to her husband such as "I dont care", and "It doesnt mean anything to me" (57), tell of her utter dearth of any incentive to remain alive. She appears devoid of the yearning to endure apparent within her husband. The woman explains her urge to die to the man, saying, "I didnt bring myself to this. I was brought" (57), pointing out her undesired position in what she interprets to be a meaningless world. Thus in many ways, the woman's decision to end her life exhibits a significant amount of rationality, practicality, foresight and acceptance. Stating, "You'd rather wait for it to happen. But I cant" (58), the woman indicates her choice to take control of her own destiny, retaining some measure of dignity by opting to kill herself before someone else does. As well as this show of courage, the woman displays a sense of compassion and mercy regarding her son. As she clarifies to the man, "I'd take him with me if it werent for you [...] It's the right thing to do" (58). Whilst murdering

one's own child remains a universally horrifying and taboo concept, the woman's belief that it would be the most morally just action within the circumstances can be credited. If the boy really were to be raped, murdered and eaten, one can certainly see the appeal of a quick bullet to the head, particularly if it were to be issued by somebody who aimed to help, rather than to hurt. Further extenuating the woman's wish to kill the boy are his own words to his father on an especially cold and miserable night: "I wish I was with my mom" (56). When the father enquires, "You mean you wish that you were dead" (56), the boy replies in the affirmative, exhausted as he is of struggling. The fact that the woman is willing to take her child's life signifies a selfless attitude that is absent in the man, who keeps the boy alive partially for his own benefit. Applicable here is the woman's assertion that "They say that women dream of danger to those in their care and men of danger to themselves" (59). Zibrak explores the notion of penalty in the novel, explaining that the man "values punishment" (2012, 120). Whilst the woman takes all punishment upon herself by ending her life, however, the man (regardless of whether or not he is aware of it) punishes the boy to a large extent. Not only is he unreasonably dependent upon the child, but he is incapable of placing aside his own squeamish trepidation so as to rescue the boy. Upon a near escape from a group of cannibals, the man looks at his son and thinks, "Could you crush that beloved skull with a rock?" (McCarthy 2007, 120), concluding that he cannot: "I cant hold my son dead in my arms" (298).

However, the traditionally masculine traits of courage, logic, and action, interposed with traditionally feminine characteristics such as compassion and selflessness, must be examined in relation to the less honourable qualities revealed to be present within the woman through her suicide. Suicide is the quintessential escape, and so can alternatively be regarded as indicative of cowardice, emotional fragility, and selfishness – the first two in particular typically judged to be feminine. Contradicting her earlier expressions of concern about her son's future, the woman either fails to consider what will happen to the boy after she has died, or even worse, considers it but ultimately places her needs above her child's. She is also noticeably unsupportive of and callous towards her husband, who begs her not to end her life: "I'll do anything" (57). In response to his pleas the woman says coldly, "I dont care if you cry" (57), and her statement, "now I'm done" (57) indicates an intense level of self-absorption. The woman also exhibits very little anxiety concerning the man's welfare – despite his existence not only as a fellow human being, but also as her husband and the father of her child. Furthermore, she undermines the man's ability to defend their family (and so

challenges his masculinity, if viewed from a patriarchal perspective), declaring, “You cant protect us. You say you would die for us but what good is that?” (58). As the reader is aware, this proves to be an unsubstantiated accusation in that the man manages to keep their son alive, and also rather cruelly implies that the man’s very existence is futile. It is difficult to discern the boy’s feelings towards his mother, as his thoughts are only ever expressed in dialogue, and so in the mediating presence of the man. Throughout his literary oeuvre, McCarthy tends to kill off mother figures fairly early into the narrative, and so their sons are generally able to move on without “any conscious resentment” (Ellis quoted in Zibrak 2012, 111). This appears true regarding *The Road*’s young boy, who seems to associate his mother mainly with death: the “eternal nothingness” (McCarthy 2007, 59) into which she determinedly entered. However, had his mother lived, the boy’s susceptibility to his father’s ideological authority may have been diluted, and the weight of responsibility upon his small shoulders would definitely have been alleviated.

As the reader only encounters the character of the woman through the man’s greatly subjective memories, she is conveyed primarily according to her relationships with him and the boy: “as someone who had sex, as someone who gave birth, and as someone who died” (Zibrak 2012, 111). It is therefore easy to regard her as a set of events rather than as a human being, defined largely according to her sexuality and reproductive potential. This is reiterated by the woman’s unflattering references to herself using strongly gendered language: as “a faithless slut” with a “whorish heart”, who yields to the seductive allure of her “new lover”, death (McCarthy 2007, 58-59). In one of the man’s few recollections of his late wife, occurring in the form of a dream, she comes to him “out of a green and leafy canopy. Her nipples pipeclayed and her rib bones painted white. She wore a dress of gauze” (17). The connotations of this dream are immense, namely with reference to Eve and the concept of original sin. The verdant fecundity of the woman’s surroundings suggests the Garden of Eden, and divulges the man’s craving for the pre-apocalyptic world in which his wife was still alive and the earth had not yet been reduced to dust. Describing her as “his pale bride” (17), the man’s dream evokes the moral purity of his wife: either as evident in the past, or created solely as a fantasy. The white colour of the clay and paint adorning the woman’s body implies an innocence of which she is deficient in his conscious memories. McCarthy appears to align the woman’s suicide with Eve’s bite into the apple, as both acts are depicted as prompted by a tempting and sinister entity, and both have enormous repercussions on the lives of the women’s male partners and children (Masin 2013, 4). This allusion also allocates

a heavy portion of blame to the woman, indicating her to be the cause of the problems faced by the man and boy in the narrative. Whilst this cannot possibly be accurate bearing the apocalypse in mind, perhaps the man employs the woman as a form of scapegoat to aid his own endurance, substantiating my earlier claim that the reader obtains a strongly biased account of this character. Although she is wearing a dress in the dream it is made of a thin and diaphanous material, and her nipples, whilst covered by clay, are still exposed to a great enough extent to be remarked upon. Thus the woman is objectified in the dream, presented chiefly as a sexual being rather than as the autonomous individual she is shown to be in reality. Similarly, the woman's eyes are described as "downturned" (McCarthy 2007, 17) and she is smiling, both of which function as gestures of submission and imply a willingness to please. Therefore this dream may be just that – a dream the man carries of a wife who might have conceded to his desires and remained at his side, rather than blatantly ignoring his implorations and acting out her own largely destructive desires.

The dramatic contrast between the woman rendered in the dream, and the woman who actually existed in the narrative, reveals McCarthy to maintain ties to the patriarchal ideals of femininity dominant within the society from which he wrote. The fact that the man awakens the next morning to snow and "Beads of small gray ice" (17) indicates that his return to reality is cold, harsh, and deeply disappointing in comparison to the eutopian warmth of the dream. Thus the "dream woman" appears preferable to the actual woman whom he knew, implying the desirable wife and mother to be acquiescent, sexually attractive, and morally wholesome. Another allusion made to the woman that works to turn the reader's sympathies away from her and towards the two male characters occurs when the man says to the boy, "This is what the good guys do. They keep trying. They dont give up" (145). Although there is no indication that this statement has anything to do with the woman, and so is entirely indirect, it implies that she is not a good guy, as she essentially gave up by dying. This also relates to one of the two female characters outside of the family present in the novel, whom the man encounters when he murders the sniper responsible for injuring his leg. Entering the house from which the sniper shot him, the man finds a woman "sitting in the corner holding the man" (283). When he asks her, "They left you here, didnt they?", she replies, "I left myself here" (283). Zibrak argues that by staying with the dead man, the woman "ostensibly commits suicide" (2012, 115), as she chooses to remain behind without supplies when the other members of her group leave. Her actions therefore parallel those of the man's wife – despite making a conscious choice and so demonstrating autonomy, this woman also

arguably “gives up”. Thus due to the dearth of female characters in the novel, it can be deduced from the narrative that the majority of the women portrayed are “bad guys”, especially concerning the acutely restricted perspective of the boy. Therefore, not only does his mother’s suicide affect the boy’s concept of gender roles through the impact it has on the man, but it also influences the boy’s concept of femininity to include connotations of impotence, wickedness, and a lack of fortitude.

One of many strikingly beautiful and tragic images in *The Road* relates to the sun, which McCarthy describes as circling “the earth like a grieving mother with a lamp” (2007, 32). The sun’s simultaneous distance from the planet and figurative comparison to a woman searching for a vanished child, indicates that there are no longer any loving mothers left on this fictitious earth. It also emphasises that the boy’s mother is neither searching nor grieving for him, again pinpointing the woman as a “bad guy”. Lydia Cooper describes the character of the woman in relation to this image as embodying the “egocentrism and faithlessness” (2011, 223) that led to the destruction of this world, which links up with the man’s dream of her as an Eve-like figure. Whilst this image is clearly one of condemnation regarding the woman, McCarthy treats her with far more gentleness in a later scene involving the man. At one point in their journey, the man waits behind as the boy continues along the road, holding an old photograph of his wife. The man contemplates the picture for a while, and then “laid it down in the road [...] then he stood and they went on” (McCarthy 2007, 53). This moment of remembrance, however brief, takes the form of a ceremonial farewell: having carried the photograph in his wallet for approximately a decade, the man is now capable of leaving it to disintegrate. Whilst he displays neither overt grief nor any hesitation concerning abandoning the woman’s image to the harsh elements, there is also no sense of resentment evident in the man’s motions. Instead, there is tenderness to his laying down of the photograph, and strength in the way in which he walks away from it without looking back. This tenderness is transferred on to the reader, whose largely unpleasant impression of the woman thus far shifts to make room for acceptance. It can be said that the reader is able to “walk away” from the woman in much the same way as the man, thus capable of forgiving her to a degree for the appalling impact her actions have had on her husband and son. The pain the man has carried since the woman’s death appears to lift; he loves and has mourned deeply for her, but the man realises that in order for himself and his son to survive, they must keep moving forward rather than dwelling on past sorrows. This demonstrates the man’s emotional resilience, and foreshadows his ability to keep his son alive through endless sacrifice and resolve. On a

figurative level, the man's actions reveal the message McCarthy seems to convey to the reader: that for genuine social progress to occur, the adversities of the past must be "laid [...] down in the road" (53) – acknowledged, but left behind.

As with the character Crake in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, at times McCarthy appears to possess a low opinion of human capabilities, claiming that mankind will destroy itself "before an environmental catastrophe sets in" (quoted in Cooper 2011, 218). However, whilst *The Road* indicates this mindset through its predominantly dystopian nature, Inger-Anne Softing asserts that the novel also contains elements of eutopia (2013, 704). Softing maintains that a utopian space need not be physical nor literal, but can in fact exist within the realm of the human psyche (705). Thus the external world of the characters – the wretched landscape in which they live – is a dystopia, whereas the inner world of the boy's uncorrupted mind exists as a eutopia. Whilst Atwood's character Crake creates a post-human species as a personal means through which to attain some measure of redemption regarding humanity's failings, McCarthy appears to rely upon the child in much the same way as the man and the reader. Thus the boy is McCarthy's own version of a grail, functioning as the moral core necessary to keep the narrative from falling apart into pessimistic chaos. In relation to this, McCarthy describes *The Road* as "very much about the absolute best" in human nature (quoted in Cooper 2011, 228) – a statement that would lack merit were it not for the character of the boy.

Through the father/son relationship on which *The Road* is centred, therefore, McCarthy's exploration of traditional Western patriarchy and heteronormativity can be effectively analysed. McCarthy's thorough and critical examination of stereotypical notions of male dominance and masculinity demonstrates his position as an author writing after second-wave feminism, as does his conclusion that whilst these concepts contain some measure of accuracy and relevance, they can also be restrictive and harmful. However, McCarthy neglects to discuss the experiences of twenty-first century women, instead focussing almost entirely upon those of men. Despite his promotion of broader definitions of masculinity, McCarthy's female characters tend to exist merely as vehicles through which the male characters can be understood, rather than as independent individuals. The scarcity of female characters in the novel aggravates this, and additionally makes it difficult to truly discern the author's attitude towards women. These factors are pertinent concerning my argument that an author's personal experiences impact his/her portrayal of utopia. The fact that McCarthy's

experiences have been mediated largely according to his position as a male within society has possibly rendered him less inclined to represent that to which he cannot personally relate – the experiences of women. McCarthy also reverts at times to the very patriarchal ideologies he purports to oppose, for example implying the ideal woman to be stereotypically feminine: passive, physically attractive, and obedient. In *The Road*, McCarthy breaks several conventions of the utopian literary genre, such as through the non-specificity of the novel's setting, described as "neither a distant past nor a remote future" (Softing 2013, 706). The fact that the characters' physical location remains unclear renders the idea of an apocalypse potentially imminent or even immediate with regard to the social context of the reader, the novel thus likely to evoke within him/her the desire to conceptualise the potential for social progress. As Softing notes, the novel is combinational in nature, apparent in terms of the gender ambiguity displayed by the man, the woman, and the boy, as well as in McCarthy's inclusion of eutopian as well as dystopian elements in the narrative (705).

The next section of this dissertation concludes my argument concerning the role played by gender in the portrayal of utopia. As I have explored the utopian texts of Marge Piercy, Margaret Atwood, and Cormac McCarthy individually and at length, I will now analyse these three novels in contrast to one another, elaborating upon the various similarities and differences evident among them as well as the authors, as touched upon in the introduction.

Conclusion

Following my exploration of the utopian literary genre and Western notions of gender, and my analyses of various, temporally spaced utopian texts, I conclude my argument by elaborating upon several of the numerous similarities and differences evident regarding my three primary texts and their authors, as touched upon in the introduction. As previously mentioned, most of the commonalities present are between Piercy, Atwood, and their novels, whilst McCarthy's text tends to stand apart largely due to its almost exclusive focus on male characters.

Alongside the social and historical contexts of the authors, the temporal setting of each novel is significant in relation to the social critique traditionally offered by utopian literature. Although the three novels were written and published over a period of thirty years, the dystopian societies portrayed by Piercy, Atwood and McCarthy all appear to be set either during or shortly after the twenty-first century. Piercy's dystopia exists either alongside, or as an alternate to, the eutopian society *Mattapoisett*, thus in the year 2137. The post-apocalyptic dystopia inhabited by *Snowman* in Atwood's novel seems to be located in the late twenty-first century, and whilst McCarthy's narrative remains the most uncertain in terms of setting, his inclusion of cultural artefacts such as gas stations, Coca Cola, and large-scale advertisements places his novel at some point in the twenty-first or early twenty-second century – supported by his claim that he gained inspiration for the novel (published in 2006) whilst wondering about the state of the world “fifty or one hundred years” into the future (Hage 2010, 69). Each novel is set far enough into the future that it will remain temporally distant for several generations of readers, thus fulfilling its function as a social warning with regard to a broad readership. At the same time, however, by depicting disaster as occurring towards the end of the next hundred to two hundred years, the threat posed is also close enough to the present to incite fear in the reader – even if he/she is dead before the onset of this potential horror, his/her descendants will not be. Each of the dystopias represented, therefore, lurks ominously at some point in the future: imminent enough to terrify the reader and remind him/her of the necessity for immediate social, economic and political progress, and distant enough that there is adequate time in which this progress can occur. Thus the ability of the utopian genre to influence the mindset of the reader is evident within these three texts, each of which relays a condemnatory social critique.

With further reference to social criticism, each of three authors places a great deal of responsibility upon the reader by leaving his/her novel open-ended. In *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1983 [1976]), Piercy positions Connie between two possible fates, one of which entails a dynamic eutopia in which the environmental, political and social ills of the twentieth century have been almost fully rectified, the other consisting of a rigidly socially stratified dystopia mired in the abuse of science, technology, and women. Whilst Connie's actions have potentially destroyed her future, the novel's conclusion remains ambiguous and so leaves the reader unsettled – does Connie triumph, saving herself and establishing an improved future? Is she arrested for her crimes? Are her attempts to avoid dystopia ultimately futile? Piercy allows the reader to decide, essentially bestowing upon him/her the agency to determine not only Connie's, but humanity's, fate. *Oryx and Crake* (2009 [2003]) places the reader in a similar position, Snowman's discovery at the end of the novel that he is not in fact the last surviving human on earth filling the reader with trepidation, and forcing him/her to decide whether or not the newcomers will work alongside Snowman to create an improved version of humanity, among a myriad of other possible outcomes. Upon the man's death in *The Road* (2007 [2006]), the boy, like Snowman, must join a new group of people, McCarthy leaving the reader to conclude what happens to the child. By locating the reader as complicit in the generation of meaning regarding the narrative, therefore, each of these authors highlights the role human agency can play in determining the future, urging the reader to pay heed to his/her warning by refusing to grant him/her any resolution.

In terms of characters, there are numerous parallels between the protagonists of the three novels. Piercy's protagonist Connie, Jimmy/Snowman from Atwood's novel, and McCarthy's character of the man all experience the negative effects of being placed into rigid gender roles within patriarchal society. Connie is taken advantage of and mistreated by the majority of the men she encounters, such as her brother Luis and the doctors at Rockover, all of whom have been granted greater opportunities in life than Connie solely for being male. Throughout her life Connie endures being physically beaten, cursed at, fired from jobs and deprived of medical care due to her so-called inferior position as a woman. Despite railing against phallogentrism, however, Connie abides by its laws to a significant degree. Although she is unaware of it, Connie's desperation to please her husbands is an example of her adherence to patriarchal norms, as she monitors her behaviour to involve docility, reticence, and sweetness. Much like Connie, during his life as Jimmy, Atwood's character feels immensely pressurised by society to behave in a certain way. Observing the behaviour of his

stereotypically masculine father in particular, Jimmy strives to fulfil the role of a “man” as defined by society. His inability to do so slowly chips away at his self-esteem, indicative of the potentially detrimental impact that rigid gender roles and norms can have on an individual. The pressure Jimmy feels lessens as the narrative progresses, however, as the structures of his society are largely obliterated during the apocalypse. The man in *The Road* is almost totally oblivious to the patriarchal ideologies by which he lives, and which he projects onto his son, continuing to abide by these social laws despite the fact that stereotypically masculine behaviour proves futile at times in his post-apocalyptic world. Thus in addition to demonstrating the evils of patriarchy and the associated concepts of gender, these characters are employed by the authors to represent how deeply these ideologies are entrenched regarding the people they regulate.

Both Piercy and Atwood exhibit an eco-feminist stance in their novels, one of many parallels between the two authors and the selected texts. Eco-feminism entails the alignment of the mistreatment of the environment with the abuse of women in patriarchal society (Hughes & Wheeler 2013, 1). Within the West, a heightened consciousness concerning issues of the environment occurred around much the same time as second-wave feminism, and so it is not surprising that the objectives of the two came together (1). The anthropocentric attitude of this era was tempered by the realisation that “we are not aloof from our biosphere [... rather] we are enmeshed within it”, which rendered the general public painfully aware that, despite the twentieth century’s deluge of scientific and technological innovations, humanity still depends upon its natural surroundings to survive (1). The resultant sense of urgency to rectify the situation was exacerbated by the knowledge that the environmental devastation apparent was a result of human activity (1). In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, the beauty and fertility of the landscape in Mattapoissett contrasts harshly with the concrete jungle of Gildina’s dystopian reality. Piercy’s eutopia consists of a farming community thoroughly immersed in nature, the people of this society constantly admiring the aesthetics and fecundity of their surroundings: “big velvet flowers that gave off a fragrance of cloves [...] pigeons went fluttering and cooing” (Piercy 1983, 122). They take painstaking care of the environment, simultaneously amending the destruction of the past and ensuring that it does not reoccur. As previously explored, this society exhibits androgyny to a significant extent, with women and men granted the same opportunities and allocated similar tasks. In the future dystopia depicted, however, Gildina tells Connie matter-of-factly that she has never seen the sky, and reveals that people no longer have any need to leave their apartments, as all required

resources can be delivered to one's home via various technological devices. Almost everything about Gildina and her existence is artificial: her only companions are holographic images, her body has been intensely modified by surgery, and the food she eats bears almost no resemblance to the fresh fruit and vegetables eaten in Mattapoisett. Alongside this society's complete disregard for the environment as a habitat and as a valuable resource, therefore, is its subjugation and sexual objectification of women such as Gildina.

Like Piercy, Atwood highlights the necessity of female empowerment as well as the need to put a stop to environmental destruction, portraying Jimmy's world to be rife with the capitalist abuse of natural resources and the repression of women. Oryx parallels Gildina in many ways, also working as a prostitute and so fulfilling the desires of men who treat her as inferior. Oryx's childhood was spent starring in pornographic films, and even Crake, otherwise so aware of society's malpractices, treats her as a toy to a large extent. The two first meet when Crake hires Oryx for sex, and although he gives her a job, it entails nudity and obedience under his authority. In contrast to this society, Atwood presents the post-apocalyptic land of Snowman and the Crakers, in which both patriarchal notions of gender and the abuse of the environment have been eradicated. Crake intentionally creates his post-human species to use resources sparingly, and to lack the mental capacity and inclination to form social hierarchies of any kind. Snowman notes the increasingly healthy state of his surroundings: "grass and vetch and sea grapes merge into sand [...] Hundreds of birds are streaming across the sky" (Atwood 2009, 65), and observes the gender equality present among the Crakers.

Finally, what has enriched my argument greatly has been the contrast between the texts of Piercy and Atwood with that of McCarthy. Whilst I maintain that McCarthy's personal experiences as a male have contributed significantly to the dearth of women in *The Road*, the fact that Piercy and Atwood include male characters in their novels somewhat contradicts this, particularly as *Oryx and Crake* possesses a male protagonist. Thus it is clear that the preferences and intentions of the individual also come into play regarding the creation of fiction, irrespective of the author's gender and even historical positioning. As discussed briefly in the introduction, I find much of the criticism aimed at McCarthy during the course of his career to be unnecessarily harsh and simplistic for a variety of reasons. Most notably, the fact that McCarthy provides such a rigorous examination of Western notions of masculinity, analysing the expectations placed upon men as fathers, as husbands, and as

members of societies, demonstrates an acute awareness of the existence of the patriarchal paradigm and the gender roles and norms it enforces upon those living within its structures. McCarthy also makes note of the potential of motherhood to act as a burden, the character of the woman saying, “My heart was ripped out of me the night he was born” (59), with reference to her son. With these points in mind, critics such as James Wood who accuse McCarthy of failing to analyse the topic of gender appear to be misinterpreting the content of his texts (cited in Hage 2010, 169). In *The Road*, McCarthy portrays in detail the negative impact of phallogentrism on males, which has assisted me in understanding the various ill effects that traditional Western structures of gender can have on all members of society. Generally when the negative impact of these structures is analysed, it is with a focus on women, Piercy for example devoting the majority of her text to a discussion of the position of the female within patriarchy. Defying to an extent the accusation that ““he has a tendency to omit half the human race from serious scrutiny”” (Wood quoted in Hage 2010, 169) is McCarthy’s inclusion of both stereotypically masculine and feminine traits within each of his characters, which, whilst these characters are predominantly male, does reveal the author to promote broader and more flexible definitions of gender. McCarthy can be criticised here for implying that gender roles and norms need exist at all, particularly if his novel is compared to *Woman on the Edge of Time* which promotes androgyny as socially progressive. However, by incorporating a variety of traditionally gendered characteristics into each of his characters, McCarthy displays an appreciation for the value of heterogeneity, which relates to second wave ideals. This is especially apt when the impact of these traits is considered – with reference to the man, his ability to be both emotionally tender and resilient assists him in enduring for much of the narrative, thus allowing his son to survive and so potentially bring about some measure of salvation for humanity. McCarthy therefore appears to attribute to his characters the “bisexual mind” (Peksen-Yanikoglu 2008, 43) that Piercy and Atwood strive to attain as authors, aligning the three writers to a degree.

Furthermore, McCarthy does something that both Piercy and Atwood fail to do, and that is to depict the positive and beneficial aspects of conventional masculinity in his novel. If the character of the man were not able to fire a gun, start a fire or fashion tools out of found objects, all of which are stereotypically masculine tasks, the boy would not have survived. Thus viewed alongside the texts of Piercy and Atwood, which together offer a thorough examination of the role of women within patriarchy, McCarthy’s portrayal of the man and boy in *The Road* allows for a comprehensive understanding of the widespread social impacts

of androcentrism. McCarthy does maintain ties to the patriarchal tradition of the utopian genre – even the metaphorical content of the novel is male-oriented, with reference for example to the grail narrative with its concentration on a man and a boy. However, he also breaks away from this tradition, a relevant example pertaining to the fact that salvation lies not only in the character of the boy, but also potentially in the woman who takes the child in after his father's death. Finally, McCarthy's use of predominantly male characters indicates that the second wave, whilst it has transformed large sections of society for the better, is not an omnipotent force, and ultimately an individual is no more obliged to abide by its maxims than he/she is obliged to adhere to patriarchal ideologies.

The role of gender in the fictional portrayal of utopia, therefore, is a vast, dynamic, and fluid topic, full of contradictions and exceptions. My research has revealed that ultimately there is no definitive conclusion to be drawn; rather, there are a variety of factors that significantly influence the representation of alternate societies in utopian fiction: namely the social experience of the author as related to his/her gender and/or sexual orientation, and the ideals of the second-wave feminist movement.

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