

Altered States: Feminist Utopian Literature

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Abstract

This thesis interrogates the interaction between feminist utopianism and altered states of consciousness in fiction from 1970 onwards. The thesis develops further both Lyman Tower Sargent's definition of utopianism as "social dreaming" and Tom Moylan's understanding of critical utopia. It also develops and expands Lucy Sargisson's definition of feminist utopianism as subversive, fluid, ambiguous and committed to ongoing personal and social transformation. Utopianism must challenge society's norms and values, offering both social critique and social vision. I argue throughout this work that transforming individual consciousness is a vital step towards social change.

The thesis focuses on four altered states of consciousness: madness, dreaming, spirituality and telepathy. These states are situated within a theoretical context, and are then explicated further through close literary analysis of feminist utopian literature. Altered states offer a metaphor for the need to think differently, and highlight the importance of looking at society in new and alternative ways. In a significant number of feminist utopian texts, utopia is accessed through a dream or a vision, through spiritual meditation, telepathy, or a state of "madness". Within these texts, altered states are not only used as a means of accessing utopia but are also represented within the narrative as a means of maintaining or sustaining the utopian vision. Additionally, I show that altered states refers to the place of utopia, which is altered, or different to, contemporary society. The reader may also enter into an altered state through the process of reading the text, as their beliefs and assumptions about "the way things are" are challenged, denaturalised and subverted.

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Chapter One

Utopianism and Feminist Interventions

There is little consensus within utopian studies over what the terms 'utopia' or 'utopianism' mean, which has led to widespread confusion and disagreement. This dissension, which appears to be rife across the disciplines in which utopian thought promulgates itself, has simply become an aspect of the utopian wallpaper, and to be a utopian scholar, one must simply immerse oneself, or perhaps revel, in theoretical dispute. As Kenneth Roemer comments, '[o]ne of the most exciting and ludicrous characteristics of students of utopian literature is that they often don't know what they're talking about; or, to put it more gently, they find it difficult to define their topic' (319-20). Peter Stillman adds, '[d]efining utopias is difficult in the best of circumstances. The field is politically charged and contested: liberals, conservatives, socialists, and utopians of all stripes propound definitions to fit their agenda' (9-10). Clearly, one of the dangers of definitions is their exclusive nature, and as many, including myself, see the study of utopia to be an exploration and subversion of social and literary boundaries, to start any project by erecting barriers is clearly problematic. Consequently, as no one definition can be acceptable to all, I will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of various definitions, and will develop within my discussion the idea of utopia as fluid, ambiguous, always in process and always progressing towards further change and transformation. I will also utilise Lyman Tower Sargent's definition of utopia as 'social dreaming' because it foregrounds two key aspects of utopianism that are crucial to my discussion of

utopianism and altered states: the ongoing relationship between the individual and the social and between the private dream and the public expression of that dream.

Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in 1516, arguably represents the utopian novel's debut, and it was More who gave us the term 'utopia' with its pun on the words eutopia (good place) and outopia (no place). However, utopias existed long before More's text, principally in mythology, including 'golden ages, arcadias, earthly paradises, fortunate isles, isles of the blest', and festivals such as 'Saturnalia, the Feast of Fools, and Carnival where the world is turned upside down for a few days' (Sargent, 'The Three Faces' 10). An example of an 'isle of the blest' might be the island of HyBrasil which appeared on maps from 1325 onwards off the south west coast of Ireland: '[s]hrouded in mist, it was reputed only to be visible every seven years, when the fog would lift and a land of enchantment could be seen where fairy queens, healers and magicians lived in gleaming cities' (Coates 9). In myths such as these one will find 'simplicity, unity, security, immortality or an easy death, unity with God or the gods, abundance without labour, and no enmity between homo sapiens and the other animals' (Sargent 'The Three Faces,' 10). Thus these 'body utopias' to use Sargent's phrase, centre on abundance and sensual pleasure, and are reflected in literary forms in texts such as the Land of Cockaigne, in which food flies into the mouth and every desire is gratified. Early utopian dreams were also expressed in politics and philosophy, in the creation of ideal cities and architecture, as well as in the arts; Plato's *Republic* is usually deemed to be one of the first utopian designs, with its vision and detailed description of the ideal state. It would seem that utopian dreaming is a universal phenomenon, and as Sargent comments, it seems likely that 'the overwhelming majority of people – probably it is even possible to say all – are, at some time

dissatisfied and consider how their lives might be improved' ('The Three Faces 3').¹ Thus More did not invent the idea of utopia, or utopian desire, only the literary genre of utopia.²

Since the sixteenth century, the term 'utopia' has been used in a wide variety of contexts not restricted to the literary novel, so that the term 'utopianism' refers not only to the utopian genre and utopian literature, but also to utopian theory and utopian thought. Lucian Hölscher traces the history of the term 'Utopie', (in its German usage) from the literary genre to its use linguistically, theoretically and lexicographically. As Hölscher notes, the term Utopia has always been ambiguous, referring variously to More's book, to literature, social reform and social reform movements. Sargent further distinguishes between utopian literature, communitarianism and utopian social theory, dividing utopian literature between "body utopias", or utopias where desire is gratified by non-human effort, such as God, or the gods, nature or supernatural means, and "city utopias", in which humans contrive a utopian design. Carrying both positive and negative connotations, the term utopia developed as an abstract term across a number of languages between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. During this period the term referred principally to those who indulged in fantasy, who believed in the possibility of a perfect world or who sought to create an ideal society that had no basis in reality (Hölscher). Thus utopianism became associated with impracticality and irrationality; as Fourier notes, '[i]t is the dream of good without the means of

¹ Kumar and Levitas would disagree, see *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, and *The Concept of Utopia* respectively for discussion of this issue.

² More's *Utopia* also derives from the traditional genre of satire. Utopia and satire are linked because both focus on what is and what might be. However, they differ in their emphases, as satires emphasise the perceived wrongs of society, concentrating on its follies and vices, whereas utopias stress a positive alternative ideal to the contemporary present. More mixes both utopianism and satire in his book, so that it is often difficult to see where he is recommending the lifestyles of his Utopians, and where he is satirising his own society's problems. *Gulliver's Travels* is generally deemed to fall into the category of satire rather than utopianism, because even though Swift describes various utopian societies he emphasises the negative rather than the positive.

implementation' (quoted in Hölscher 23). To call someone utopian or a utopist has therefore historically been an act of dismissal, if not abuse; Marx, for example, tended to reject utopian schemes for they were not, in his view, based on historical analysis, because they ignored class and economic issues.³

The term utopia has always been rooted in an idea or dream of an alternative society, or of better ways of being; beginning with a thought that becomes an idea, utopia therefore concerns our ability to conceive and meditate on alternative realities. Historically, utopia has been linked with the 'ideal' in the sense of being that which is perfect and does not yet exist. Hölscher notes that this usage of the ideal is of 'a mental image of that which is not to be found anywhere in the world of external appearance while its realisation seems worth moving towards' (37). Raymond Williams identifies two main modern senses of the term idealism:

(i) its original philosophical sense, in which, though with many variations of definition, ideas are held to underlie or to form all reality; (ii) its wider modern sense of a way of thinking in which some higher or better state is projected as a way of judging conduct or of indicating action. (152)

Utopian thinking clearly links with both these definitions of idealism, and historically the terms "utopian" and the "ideal" frequently overlapped in their usage.⁴ If utopianism is based on abstract thought and ideas, then it is also, as Mannheim recognised in the twentieth century, linked with ideology, which has been defined as 'abstract and false thought' (Williams 155). Ideology, which originally referred to 'the science of ideas' or the 'philosophy of the mind' is another ambiguous

³ However, in the late eighteenth century the spatial element of utopia was accompanied by a temporal one, which added an historical criterion to the term; for if utopia is located in the future, then the process of moving from the present to the future utopia must be documented, as Hölscher notes, 'while the utopia in space is subject to the logic of the critical mirror, the utopia in time is subject to the criterion of historical continuity it is forced to make the transition from the present to the future plausible' (32).

⁴ See below for further discussion of the links between utopianism and philosophical idealism.

term that has generated a number of different meanings (quoted in Williams 154). Tom Moylan defines ideology as:

a more general set of practices that shape the self-understanding of individuals. It is a representational system of values, opinions, knowledge, and images which articulates the individual's lived relationship to the transpersonal realities of the social structure as experienced by a particular social class. (*Demand* 17-18)

While dominant ideologies can be opposed by oppositional ideologies such as feminism, whatever their content, they still structure our perceptions and beliefs. In the light of Louis Althusser's work, ideologies are now not simply seen as false consciousness, but rather as lived experience, as all knowledge and experience is understood to be tied up in different ideologies. Althusser argued that ideology represents 'the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence' (123). Subjects cannot exist outside ideology, indeed they are produced through it: there is no escape. Clearly this view of ideology has implications for utopianism, for if ideology is "everywhere" then utopia cannot be free from ideology either. However, Karl Mannheim differentiated between utopia and ideology, arguing that ideology represents negative beliefs, and utopia positive beliefs. He therefore thought that utopian thinking could transcend ideology. However, this opposition between ideology and utopia is an over-simplification, if Althusser's theory is taken into account. As Moylan notes, utopia and ideology are not dialectically opposed, rather '[w]e must see the utopian impulse as operating *within* the ideological, both helping it along and pulling against it' (*Demand* 19, original emphasis).⁵ Clearly, feminist utopias work within the ideological, as they utilise feminist ideologies in their creation of utopian spaces. At the same time,

⁵ Hölischer notes that 'Mannheim's distinction between 'Ideologie' and 'Utopie' was of course not free of ideological prejudice itself, given its orientation to a historical-philosophical model of progress. He admitted it was practically impossible for the contemporary observer to differentiate between the two. This was because it was only in retrospect that the objective function of states of consciousness in society, i.e. that which had persistently questioned the existing social order, became clear' (47).

however, they work to counter both dominant ideologies of sexism (and often racism, classism, capitalism etc.) and also feminism, in order to create a new space that is, perhaps, free from ideology. Whether such freedom is possible will be discussed further in relation to the texts.

In the twentieth century, Ernst Bloch has probably written the most on utopian thought, including three volumes of text on the subject, which he defined as 'the principle of hope'. Originally published in 1959, *The Principle of Hope* was not translated into English until 1986, so its impact in Britain has been rather belated. Bloch identifies utopianism with universal hope, and his project is a philosophical one, intended to recuperate utopianism for humanity as a whole, believing it to have been lost in twentieth-century doom and gloom. Thus he explores the utopian spirit among a wide variety of media, including the fairy tale, film, theatre, travel consumerism, madness,⁶ literature, medicine, politics, technology and architecture. His definition of utopia as hope is necessarily inclusive – any cultural form can be recuperated through utopian daydreaming. Bloch believes that 'forward dreaming,' that which is 'Not-Yet Conscious' or 'Not-Yet-Become' needs to be examined in order to understand what it is to be human; that this field has been neglected, he finds curious (*The Principle* 6). He therefore collapses divisions between past, present and future, with his claim that the future can become visible in the past and the present, because the past is only viewed and interpreted in the present, and because the present always contains that which is Not-Yet of the future. Opening up awareness of the Not-Yet will therefore open up humanity to the possibilities of utopia.

⁶ To be discussed further below.

While Bloch searches for the 'utopian spirit' within culture, Frank and Fritzie Manuel plot expressions of utopianism within literature and art. The Manuels also offer a broad definition of utopianism in their epic narrative *Utopian Thought in the Western World*. In their book they refuse to define utopia, rather, they see it as having a 'fluid identity' as they explain, 'our primary purpose is to dwell on the multifarious changes of utopian experience through the centuries, and, as Nietzsche taught, only that which has no history can be defined' (5). Consequently, 'those looking for a dictionary label or a pat phrase had better try elsewhere' (5). Despite this disclaimer, their selection of utopian texts (which covers everything from political tracts and philosophy to literature and art and spans five centuries) tends towards those writers who advocate social transformation. Consequently, they exclude texts that are predominantly fantasies and daydreams.⁷ And significantly they also limit their attentions to male-authored texts, dismissing women's utopian fiction as 'not a major concern of serious utopian thought' (7). The Manuel's overall exclusion of women's utopian texts could be excused on the grounds of the evolution of their work; earlier versions appeared in articles published as long ago as 1956, when many women's utopian texts had not been "discovered" or written. However their male bias is also an example of a lack of interest in gender issues or women's utopias in mainstream utopian bibliographies prior to the 1970s; it is also an example of a certain conception of "The Western World". The Manuel's elimination of utopian fantasies and daydreams from their study not only overlooks a rich source of utopian material, it also reflects their narrow (gendered) view of utopianism, despite the stated aim of ambiguity and fluidity in their definition.

⁷ This is not to say that I think that fantasies and daydreams cannot lead to social transformation, but that the Manuels made this conclusion.

Despite the broad range of historical meanings which the terms utopia and utopianism have acquired, they are still commonly associated with the literary utopian novel, and it is with the utopian novel that this research is concerned. The traditional utopian literary genre has remained remarkably faithful to the structure of More's *Utopia* in the description of an ideal place, located elsewhere, either geographically or temporally, traditionally a place of peace and harmony, perfection and stability, a state to which man (sic) could aspire. Darko Suvin offers one of the most widely accepted definitions of contemporary literary utopianism, describing it as:

The verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms and individual relationships are organised according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis. (132)

Suvin locates utopianism quite firmly within a literary context, and even more specifically as the '*sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction*' (144). Interestingly, Suvin also positions the term within a masculinist terrain: 'Utopia is a vivid witness to desperately-needed alternative possibilities of "the world of men", of human life' (122). The use of the words 'more perfect than' signifies a clear step away from, but at the same time retains strong links with, the notion of perfection within utopia. Clearly, Suvin does not view utopia as a perfect state or space to which humanity should aspire, but as 'more perfect than' the author's community. He explicates this view: 'we have no further excuse for insisting on absolute perfection, but only on a state radically better or based on a more perfect principle than that prevailing in the author's community, as a hallmark of the utopian genre' (129).³

³Suvin goes on to describe utopias as 'thematically open', an important element in the critical utopia which will be discussed below (134).

Lyman Tower Sargent, the major bibliographer in the field of utopian studies and a prolific writer within this area, tackles definitions of utopianism with characteristic energy. Following Suvin, Sargent defines utopias, within the context of the literary genre, as describing:

An imaginary society in some detail [. . .] it must be a society - a condition in which there is human (or some equivalent) interaction in a number of different forms and in which human beings (or their equivalent) express themselves in a variety of ways. ('Utopia' 142)

In a later essay he expands on these ideas, clearly dividing the categories of utopianism into utopia, eutopia, dystopia, utopian satire, anti-utopia and critical utopia. These definitions have become almost *de rigueur* in utopian literary criticism, (although usually contested or qualified to some extent) so I shall outline each one in turn. Firstly, Sargent defines utopianism as 'social dreaming', and utopia, as 'a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space' ('The Three Faces' 3, 9). This concept of 'social dreaming' is an important one, because utopian ideas tap into and are fed by social visions. One of the reasons that individual utopian visions or fantasises are often rejected by utopians and anti-utopians alike, is because of a perceived lack of a social aspect to the utopian vision. Clearly there is a tension between the idea of the dream, which denotes an individual experience, and the social, which refers to a shared cultural practice. Yet the process of sharing the dream, or the utopian vision, through the literary text, means that the individual idea moves into social discourse. Thus the idea of social dreaming is not a paradox, rather it brings together the private and the public, the individual and the social in one space. A eutopia is a utopia that is intended to be better than the reader's contemporary society, a dystopia one that is intended to be considerably worse. A utopian satire is a utopia that is intended as a critique of contemporary society, and an anti-utopia one that critiques utopianism. Finally, drawing on Tom Moylan's definition, Sargent describes the critical utopia as a utopia that is better

than contemporary society but contains difficult problems. As can be seen from these definitions, Sargent, like Suvin, explicitly rejects any notion of perfection within utopianism or utopias, and this is a significant element to his work, which implicitly (and often explicitly) critiques other utopian theorists: '[p]erfect, perfection, and their variants are freely used by scholars in defining utopias. They should not be [. . .] Perfection is the exception not the norm' ('The Three Faces' 9 original emphasis). As Sargent notes, the charge of perfection in connection with utopianism is used as a means of undermining and critiquing its worth and political viability. Therefore, its rejection is a significant step. However, the disavowal of perfection is not accepted by many anti-utopian writers who still snub utopianism because they believe it contains this characteristic.⁹ And some utopian theorists also cling to the idea of perfection as an ideal to be upheld within utopian thought.

A traditional view of utopianism is encapsulated in Barbara Goodwin's definition: 'Utopia denotes an elaborate vision of "the good life" in a perfect society which is viewed as an integrated totality' (*The Politics of Utopia* 16). Krishan Kumar also follows a traditional view of utopia, which is described as containing clear boundaries and representing a perfect world. Kumar, like Suvin and Sargent, defines utopia within the context of a literary genre: '[u]topianism distinguishes itself from other forms of the ideal society, and from other forms of social and political theory, by being in the first place a piece of fiction. It is, using the term in its broadest sense, a species of "science fiction"' (*Utopianism* 20). Kumar delineates his ideas around the concept of the perfectibility of humanity (also a Protestant ideal) and therefore the possibility of a perfect utopian society: '[u]topia, however open ended it aspires to be, must in principle be bounded. It is the perfect

⁹ See, for example, Sally Kitch.

society and its organisation is the embodiment of perfection.'(*Utopianism* 55). The belief that utopia contains clear boundaries and describes a perfect society directly disagrees with contemporary work on critical utopias, and Kumar does not engage with these ideas in his book.

Ruth Levitas defines utopia more broadly than the writers above, in terms of desire, writing that: 'utopia is the expression of the desire for a better way of being' (*The Concept of Utopia* 8). Levitas does not believe that utopian thought is intrinsic to humanity, nor that it is universal. She distinguishes between hope and desire, because she believes that hope is grounded in realism, whereas desire is not. Thus utopianism need not necessarily lead to any hope for a utopian future, nor is it linked with political thought or action. Avoiding both normative and descriptive elements in her discussion of utopia, Levitas ends up by embracing any kind of vision as long as it is motivated by desire, making her definition largely unhelpful. She concludes, rather confusingly that:

If utopia is not to remain 'draped in black', that hope must be recovered – the hope that we may collectively build a world of peace, justice, co-operation and equality in which human creativity can find its full expression. The dream becomes vision only when hope is invested in an agency capable of transformation. The political problem remains the search for that agency and the possibility of hope; and only if we find it will we see our dreams come true. (200)

Thus, at the end of her work she deserts her definition of utopia as desire to embrace utopia as hope, a notion that she discounted earlier in the book.¹⁰

While the 'death of utopia' is frequently cited in any description of the contemporary cultural and intellectual milieu, especially since the fall of the Berlin wall, the number and variety of

¹⁰ As Levitas has recently noted, her definition of utopia as desire has been complicated by very recent postmodern discourses, and this will be addressed below.

literary utopian texts that have been published in the last 30 years do not attest to this fact. A litany of twentieth century wars and disasters are always listed at this point, accompanied by the reminder that popular dystopias such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1962) and George Orwell's *1984* (1949) reveal more of the climate of the times than utopian dreams. In a recent article, utopian critic Krishan Kumar pessimistically states that 'Utopia has lost its audience' due to declining beliefs in religion, philosophy and ideologies, and the popular growth of postmodernism, which he believes has led to a loss of utopia within society, except within the 'ghettos' of feminism and environmental fiction ('Utopias and Anti-Utopias' 263). Russell Jacoby echoes this view in his recent book which tackles *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy*. Jacoby rails against the contemporary cultural and intellectual climate where 'radicalism and the utopian spirit that sustains it have ceased to be major political or even intellectual forces' (7). He argues that there is no sustained belief that life could be substantially different or better from today's capitalist societies. The general political vision is practical, pragmatic and liberal, leaving no room for radicalism or utopianism. Immanuel Wallerstein also dismisses utopias: '[t]he real problem, with all utopias of which I am aware, is not only that they have existed nowhere heretofore but they seem to me, and to many others, dreams of heaven that could never exist on earth' (1). His vision of the future as a time of disorder and disintegration concludes with the observation that it will be 'a very difficult one for all who live it' (35). Yet all of these writers also retain a desire that utopianism return: Kumar concludes that:

Utopia will be reborn, even in forms that we cannot anticipate. What seems important today is to understand why it is so difficult for us to contemplate utopia, and the consequences of failing to do so. That by itself might play some part in recovering this historic vehicle of mankind's hopes and desires. ('Utopias and Anti-Utopias' 266)

Jacoby also believes that the utopian impulse must return to contemporary political and cultural thought: 'in an era of political resignation and fatigue the utopian spirit remains more necessary than ever [. . .] the effort to envision other possibilities of life and society remains urgent and constitutes the essential precondition for doing something' (181). And Wallerstein, too, even with his rejection of the term utopia, simultaneously embraces his own term 'utopistics', which he defines as 'the serious assessment of historical alternatives, the exercise of our judgement as the substantive rationality of alternative possible historical systems' (1). His third chapter, entitled 'A Substantively Rational World, or Can Paradise Be Regained?' argues that because we are in an era of fundamental change we need to think now about what kind of world we want to live in and how we are going to get there. He remains committed to a utopian hope that in the very near future, the advance of a new order will introduce a non-capitalist, more democratic world of equality without racism, sexism or ethnic conflict. Thus utopianism still retains a hold on the imagination of political thinkers, even though some might disavow the term, both inside and outside utopian studies.¹¹ This disavowal seems to result from a fear that the term utopia refers to dreaming without action, and also a belief that utopianism signifies perfectability, and this perfectability is renounced. As Anne Cranny-Francis comments, if the utopian dream deflects attention fully away from the thinker's own society then utopia only acts as escape rather than engagement with social critique (107-9). Critics of utopianism tend to emphasise what they see as its lack of political and social accountability. However, surely politics and dreaming go together?

¹¹ Recent works on utopia include Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent's *The Utopia Reader* (1999); John Carey's *The Faber Book of Utopias* (1999); David Harvey's *Spaces of Hope* (2000); Patrick Parrinder's *Learning from Other Worlds* (2001); Schaer, Claeys and Sargent's *Utopia: the Search for The Ideal Society in the Western World* (2000), Barbara Goodwin's *The Philosophy of Utopia* (2001) and Chris Coates' *Utopia Britannica* (2001).

Postmodernism continues to be cited as one of the death knells of utopian thought; fundamentally incompatible with utopianism and contributing towards its demise in the late twentieth century. It is argued that postmodernism invalidates any notion of utopia, because utopianism is steeped in Enlightenment values of truth, progress, history, morality and justice. The death of “narrative” necessarily entails the death of the utopian narrative. And this is the argument that anti-utopian critics, such as Sally Kitch and utopian theorists, such as Krishan Kumar make. Kumar comments that, '[u]topia has lost its audience' because it has become closeted within social and cultural theory and ignored by society at large ('Utopia and Anti-Utopia' 283). But surely the advent of postmodernism has *not* killed off utopianism, but rather, has altered utopianism for the better. Critical utopias do not pretend to be blueprints of the future nor to be perfect. They are neither closed, nor complete and they are definitely not static; rather, critical utopias are open, fluid and self-reflexive. Constantly critical, they often parody themselves, contain both utopian and dystopian thought in one narrative, and are often ambiguous and argumentative. Because the impact of postmodernism on utopianism has been so significant, I will briefly discuss some aspects of recent, relevant postmodern utopian theory.

Fredric Jameson, Marxist critic of postmodernism, is also interested in the concept of utopia, claiming that: '[t]here is, I think, no more pressing task for progressive people in the First World than tirelessly to analyse and diagnose the fear and anxiety before Utopia itself' (*The Seeds of Time* 61). Jameson defines postmodernism as a 'symptom of the deeper structural changes in our society and its culture as a whole – or in other words in the mode of production' (*The Seeds of Time*

xii). His view that postmodernism is fundamentally concerned with change and the fear of change is necessarily related to utopianism, which is also concerned with change. Jameson sees the failure of the utopian vision in the late twentieth century to be a failure of the imagination, and also that the movement against utopian thinking is a product of utopianism itself; utopian desire, he argues, is everywhere, even where utopianism is denied or rejected. Accordingly, he argues that the value of utopian thinking cannot be overstated: 'the attempt at a radically different system releases the imagination and the Utopian fantasy in a radically different way from our own, one that includes different kinds of narrative possibilities' (*The Seeds of Time* 76). But because utopianism is widely interpreted as the negation of everything that we know, it also becomes something that we fear – thus it represents both desire and fear. The problem of representing utopia, however is an insurmountable one, because in Jameson's eyes, utopia cannot be represented; once written, or described, utopia becomes foreclosed and the freedom that it is supposed to represent disappears. Jameson is concerned that utopia cannot escape the negative effects of ideology, but at the same time, he sees utopia as utilising ideology for emancipatory purposes: 'the effectively ideological is also, at the same time, necessarily Utopian' (*The Political Unconscious* 286). Hence Louis Marin's definition of utopia as the 'ideological critique of the ideological' (quoted in Bartkowski 10). In order to get round this problem, or move beyond ideology, Jameson ignores the content of the utopian narrative, instead viewing utopia as a machine: 'the Utopian text does not tell a story at all; it describes a mechanism or even a kind of machine' (*The Seeds of Time* 56). Thus expressions of utopian freedoms or desires can only exist within the gaps of a text, within what it does not and cannot say about utopia, in its failures and omissions. As Moylan comments, speaking of this element of Jameson's work,

the utopian elements lie in what the mechanics of the text accomplish with regard to its imaginative relationship with the world from which the content was imaginatively drawn. Thus, the "true vocation" of Utopia is found not simply on the page but in the production of the page. (*Scraps* 92)

Clearly, this represents a problem for the utopian writer, who cannot represent a utopian narrative without betraying their ideological bias. Perhaps then an empty text represents the ideal utopian narrative? Ironically, Jameson suggests this is the case, as he celebrates the work of art that 'is nothing but form and has somehow absorbed or expunged everything that was content' (*The Seeds of Time* 35). The notion of art without content also represents a postmodern textuality. Jameson's conclusion that the content of utopian fiction is not utopian, rather a 'determinate type of praxis' is clearly troublesome (6). As Peter Fitting notes, this insistence is rather problematic for the reading of many utopian texts, which attempt to represent a coherent utopian vision, in order to offer an alternative to the reader's current social situation:

My double bind stems from the recognition, on the one hand, that by accepting his [Jameson's] arguments about the "true vocation" of the utopia, thereby abandoning the consideration of the utopia in terms of its ability to portray an alternative, we are apparently left with only its critical and negative dimension. This certainly helps us to understand the "conditioning possibility" of a specific utopian world, and the buried contradiction it is attempting to resolve, but it does not satisfactorily acknowledge the positive aspects which brought us to utopias in the first place. (*The Concept of Utopia* 14)

The positive aspects that Fitting is referring to are the visions of alternatives that literary utopias provide. While Fitting admits to not being able to 'resolve this dilemma' and uneasily juggles the two views, I would submit that this "dilemma" is yet another example of the paradoxes within utopian studies and that, like the "problem" of definition, need not be resolved, but rather merely acknowledged (15). Certainly, contradictions exist in the "problem" of representing utopia, but when a literary utopia is read with these incongruities in mind, then productive utopian thinking can take place, for it is only through these tensions that critical thinking can emerge. My use of

the term utopia will retain the notion of utopian content as well as form, as I explore the ways in which novels develop utopian communities as well as looking at the ways that utopia is represented as absence and negation.

Tom Moylan's key text, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* has initiated much debate with its claim that the "critical utopia" of the 1970s onwards is qualitatively different from the traditional utopian texts that went before. Moylan sees the new utopias as reflecting the oppositional theory and anti-hegemonic politics of the late twentieth century; critical utopias therefore confront and develop the postmodern ideas of utopia elaborated in Jameson's work. Moylan describes utopian writing as 'rooted in the unfulfilled needs and wants of specific classes, groups, and individuals in their unique historical contexts' (*Demand* 1). Moylan therefore situates utopia within both Levitas and Jameson's locus of desire, but also within the historical context that Jameson in particular emphasises as central to the study of postmodernism. In the twentieth century, Moylan argues, utopian desire has become largely sublimated within consumerism, and any needs or desires that are expressed outside the desire for commodities are perceived to be aberrant. But the negation of utopia that took place in the early to mid twentieth century was brought to a halt in the 60s by the oppositional counter-culture that gave rise to a particular group of utopian novels in the 70s which actively, 'negated the negation of utopia by the forces of twentieth century history' (*Demand* 10). Moylan describes these new utopias, such as Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1979,) Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1978) and Samuel Delany's *Triton* (1976) as critical utopias. By this term he means:

“[c]ritical” in the Enlightenment sense of *critique* – that is expressions of oppositional thought, unveiling, debunking, of both the genre itself and the historical situation. As well as “critical” in the nuclear sense of the *critical mass* required to make the necessary explosive reaction. (*Demand* 10)

Interestingly, Moylan’s definition, with its utilisation of Enlightenment thought, becomes part of a tradition that elsewhere he tries to reject. Central concerns in the critical utopia include an awareness of the limitations within the utopian tradition, an emphasis on the conflict between the originary world and the utopian society and an emphasis also on the problems and imperfections within the utopian society itself. The critical utopia represents simultaneously a destruction of the traditional utopian genre *and* its transformation, undermining dominant ideology through strategies of subversion and opposition. Moylan’s optimistic attitude to these new utopias is infused with excitement for the power of the oppositional visions that they represent: [t]he new opposition is deeply infused with the politics of autonomy, democratic socialism, ecology, and especially feminism’ (*Demand* 11). The ‘new historic bloc’ that he identifies is comprised of ‘feminism, ecology, and self-management’ which ‘finds itself engaged in the task of opening up oppositional spaces in the social fabric from which further subversion of the system can be launched’ (*Demand* 27-28). Like Jameson, Moylan also describes utopia as non-representable, but unlike Jameson he does believe that expressions of utopianism are possible. Thus Moylan is interested in utopia as process, arguing that the utopian text always exceeds its content, for ‘the utopian process must be held open as a symbolic resolution of historical contradictions that finds its importance not in the particulars of those resolutions but in the very *act* of imagining them, in the *form* of utopia itself’ (39). In his more recent work *Scraps of the Uninhabited Sky* Moylan moves on to a discussion of critical dystopias, which he views as the “new” utopias that have taken over from the critical utopias of the 60s and 70s. Moylan’s work has itself been central to

contemporary research into utopian literature, particularly within the area of feminist utopian literature, which will be discussed below. His emphasis on the process of utopian writing, on the act of creating a utopian space, and on the contradictions within utopian texts will be pursued in this thesis.

In a recent essay, Levitas explores the concept and function of utopia in late capitalist society, probing the consequences of recent theories, such as Moylan's, of utopianism as provisional and reflexive, emphasising process over representation or content. Maintaining her definition of utopia as the expression of desire, Levitas argues that utopia has three functions: compensation, critique and change ('For Utopia' 27-28). However, she warns that contemporary postmodern utopianism is in danger of losing the last function, because the critical element may have become so well developed that any commitment to beliefs or ideologies becomes impossible; '[i]t is unclear that utopia thus understood can move beyond the function of critique' because there exists an inability to project a utopian vision ('For Utopia' 40). Tobin Siebers, however, rejects such a view. He states that 'postmodernism is a utopian philosophy' because, like utopianism, postmodernism 'demonstrates both a relentless dissatisfaction with the here and now as well as a bewilderment about the possibility of thinking beyond the here and how' (2, 3). Both postmodernists and utopianists aspire to desire in new ways, thus the two projects contain fundamental affinities.

Running parallel to these ideas about utopia, and simultaneously interacting with them, are some neglected notions of utopia as a mental phenomenon, which this thesis will examine in detail.

Whilst utopianism has been defined as 'social dreaming' or as the capacity to imagine or conceptualise better ways of being most utopian criticism stops there, ignoring the act of utopian fantasising, and the psychological elements present within utopian dreaming (Sargent 'The Three Faces' 3). Yet this element of utopianism is central to my discussion, and has, in fact, been touched on by a number of theorists. Bloch, for example, in his view of utopia as hope and daydream, clearly positions utopianism within the realm of the psychological, and his work has had a significant impact on the recent study of utopian thought.

All utopian thought begins as an act of fantasising or daydream; while some dreams develop into novels or poems, architecture or political rhetoric, others remain within the realms of the mind, as an individual act of fantasy. This latter type of utopian thought has too easily been dismissed within utopian writing, in the manner of the Manuels, who categorically reject fantasising as a valid form of utopian expression. Such a dismissal seems to be related to the fear that utopian fantasies lack political efficacy. As discussed above, disavowals of utopianism per se are generally linked to the belief that utopianism cannot be political. It is interesting that utopian scholars also harbour this fear and separate off certain utopias as out of bounds. It is my contention that utopian fantasies and dreams should be included as part of the utopian genre and that they too can have political effect. However, it is not my intention here to set up a distinction between psychological and social utopias, or to differentiate between those utopias that develop out of the mind into a public space and those that do not. Rather, I wish to highlight the similarities between the two types of utopian thought, and at the same time to focus on those texts that emphasise the idea of utopia as daydream, because they have been largely ignored within utopian criticism.

“Mental utopias” or “psychological utopias” as they have been variously termed, refer to utopias that exist primarily within an individual’s mind. In this thesis, I will focus on literary texts that utilise and develop the notion of utopia as a psychological project of dream and fantasy.¹² This form of utopianism emerges from philosophical idealism, the belief that the external world is created by the psyche. José Eduardo dos Reis explains:

For idealist philosophy, the world is a mental phenomenon ruled by spatio-temporal determinations and logical categories, the so-called a priori forms of knowledge, that are inherent to mental processes [. . .] to idealise does not mean to beautify or to perfect, but to make present (to re-present) the world through the mediation of the ideas and images of the knowing subject. (46)

Reis argues that within this context utopianism can be represented purely as an idea or state of mind. The utopia that is created within the mind could be a clearly represented utopian society, or it could be a fragmentary utopian moment, a partial vision. This view links with the idea of utopia as a state of temporality, and Reis claims that utopian texts often:

Deploy coeval, past or futurist idealisations. Since it results from the will to perfect and live a better life, utopia is, therefore, a state of consciousness with different temporal ramifications, somehow existing with other states of consciousness directed toward the representation of the actual state of the world. (49)

Reis, referring to the work of Bloch, argues that this utopian state of consciousness can (only) be achieved by accessing the “lived moment” which would involve ‘some kind of ontological transformation [. . .] a sort of epiphanic experience, purely immanent within the structure of the world, in which everything is seen as it truly is’ (52).¹³

¹² However, this is not to set up a separate category of ‘mental utopias’ separate from other types of utopia. The texts that I will be studying can also be studied in other ways, and many of these studies have ignored the psychological elements within the texts.

¹³ This is a modernist concept, used by Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson, among others.

Frank E. Manuel traces the development of “eupsychian” thinking in twentieth-century utopias in his article ‘Towards a Psychological History of Utopias’. While Manuel uses the terms interchangeably, I think that the term ‘eupsychias’ has a slightly different meaning to that of psychological utopias because it refers to the work of those writers who believe that complete psychological fulfilment can be achieved. Therefore while mental utopias or psychological utopias are accessed through the mind, eupsychias refer to blissful or spiritual psychic states – the two may overlap (and often will) but are not necessarily the same. Manuel borrows the term ‘eupsychias’ from Abraham Maslow who believed that complete psychic happiness could be achieved. Maslow theorised that people are motivated by a hierarchy of needs, beginning with safety and sustenance, rising through to love, esteem and status, then to intellectual and aesthetic satisfaction and finally to self-actualisation. Once one need is satisfied then the next will automatically emerge, with self-actualisation representing the final (utopian/eupsychian) stage. Manuel follows the trajectory of psychological utopian thought in the twentieth century from writers such as Teilhard de Chardin, J.B.S. Haldane and Julian Huxley who all believed in ‘psychosocial evolution’, which represents a new world of consciousness (312). This new world is characterised by universal love and benign spirituality. Manuel also identifies a separate strain of psychological utopian thought in the work of Freudian revisionists, such as Erich Fromm, Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse.¹⁴ These writers argue that sexual emancipation can be achieved with the free reign of the libido. There is no repression in their models, and desire enjoys free play. In *The Fear of Freedom*, Fromm argues that a utopian society should be centred on making spontaneous connections with others and nature, in order to avoid alienation and loneliness. Consequently, this fusion with others would

¹⁴ These writers are problematic for feminist theory because of their failure to analyse gender issues in their works.

necessitate a fundamental change in consciousness. Brown argues also that the act of changing consciousness also implies a change in the unconscious. In *Life Against Death*, Brown claims that the development of a healthy culture will only be possible if we rid ourselves of repression, and therefore the unconscious, altogether. Brown, like Fromm, also calls for a return to nature as a process of healing in order to overcome alienation from the self. In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse argues that our ultimate goal in society should be liberation from repression, which would lead to a new consciousness. Marcuse claims that the realm of phantasy, which is dominated by the pleasure principle, acts as a utopian space in which to critique reality. In a healthy society, the pleasure principle would dominate our mental activities, and therefore a new consciousness would prevail.¹⁵

The idea of the mental utopia is most prominent in feminist utopian literature, where utopian change is perceived to be a product of the ability to fantasise. Rosemary Jackson has argued that literary fantasy is always produced within, and determined by, its social context, thus 'the literary fantastic is never free [. . .] fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence or loss' (3). Jackson emphasises the subversive aspects of fantasy, and describes abnormal psychological states such as hallucinations, dreams and insanity as being common in fantastic texts. The relationship between fantasy and utopianism has been touched on briefly by Sargent who claims that:

At its base utopianism is social dreaming, and includes elements of fantasy, most commonly early in the history of utopianism, but they never entirely disappear – probably because a degree of fantasy is necessary to human

¹⁵ This privileging of the pleasure principle, however, conflicts with the feminist utopian texts under discussion, which tend to prioritise the reality principle. These views also conflict with Lacanian ideas which emphasise difference, the Symbolic and repression as necessary to human subjectivity.

psychic health. But, of course, to get lost in fantasy is dangerous to that health. ('The Three Faces' 4)

This dual propensity of fantasy to be both normal and yet potentially dangerous has led some critics of utopianism to reject it out of hand. But, as Sargent concludes, once this conflict has been accepted, to then reject utopianism per se inevitably 'produces both personal and social pathology' ('The Three Faces' 28). Clearly the line between utopianism and personal pathology, or "madness" is one fraught with danger. Bloch confirms this view, claiming that utopian thinking can often be linked with lunacy, paranoia, neuroses and delusions (92, 473). He argues strongly for the similarities between the utopian thinker and the schizophrenic and the paranoiac:

Almost every utopia in fact, whether medical, social or technological, has paranoiac caricatures; for every real innovator there are hundreds of fantastic, unreal, mad ones. If one could fish out the mad ideas which are swimming around in the aura of lunatic asylums [. . .] we would find the most astonishing prefigurations created by paranoia. (93)

Later he concludes that, 'a utopian talent slips off the rails in a paranoid way, indeed almost voluntarily succumbs to a delusion...in the case of great utopians - we see that there is also method in their madness' (473). Bloch here presents a dialectical view of both utopianism and madness, one moment arguing for a fine line between the utopian and the mad person, but the next unable to separate the two at all, reiterating Sargent's point that there are dual propensities within fantasy. Interestingly, Manuel excludes from his study those utopias 'which become so exclusively personal that they border on schizophrenia' ('Toward a Psychological History' 293) giving, as an example of such a text a woman's utopian novel, Margaret Cavendish's *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*. Interestingly, Cavendish's work has been repeatedly dismissed as a product of her "madness". These intersections between utopianism and madness will be explored further in the next chapter, but now I will focus on women's utopian fiction.

Unfortunately for the female sex, women's liberation is often missing from male utopian fiction. From More through to Bellamy and Wells, Sargent traces the role of women in English eutopian fiction and finds the issue of women's rights and equality remarkably absent. If they do address the 'problem' of women's role, authors reinforce traditional sex roles, often emphasising the special role of woman as mother and wife:

The eutopia has been generally unimaginative regarding women's position in society. It can be divided into four categories – one insisting that she be clearly subservient to man, one saying women are already in eutopia, and one suggesting that fairly minor reforms are all that is necessary. Finally, many eutopias view men and women as different species with specific, sex-defined social roles that will determine their position in any eutopia. For these works equality is found in women filling their sex role and not aspiring to change it. (Sargent 'An Ambiguous Legacy' 97)

It could be argued that a genre that has seemed to be ingrained with inequality from its inception, can offer little to feminism. More's text explicitly creates inequalities in his Utopia, promoting slavery as a means of providing menial services to the majority and opportunity for punishing criminals, and ordering women to be submissive to their husbands. Therefore, whilst utopian novels challenge contemporary norms and values, they also reflect them. More's sixteenth century text offers a reflection and meditation on his contemporary society, whilst also being politically radical. In the twentieth century, feminist utopian texts are able to challenge gender norms and values, whilst reflecting the shifts within culture that make these challenges possible.

As I have already noted, women's utopian fiction has been neglected within the mainstream utopian genre, but feminist research in this area has addressed this oversight. Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* first published in 1405, is probably the first utopian text authored by a woman, and preceded More's novel by over a hundred years. Margaret Cavendish's

The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World published in 1666 was the first English women's utopia, and Mary Griffith's 'Three Hundred Years Hence' published in 1836 is the first American women's utopian text. These three important women's utopian texts have been largely ignored within mainstream utopian studies, and did not appear in utopian bibliographies until the 1970s. It was not until feminist critics began to address the neglect of women's utopias in the 70s that women's utopian texts became visible for the first time, and in the process, many were discovered, recovered and some republished. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, for example, serialised in 1905, was 'rediscovered' in the 70s and published in book form by The Women's Press for the first time in 1979. As more research has taken place within the last thirty years, the number of women's utopian texts grows. Frank and Fritzie Manuel's *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, published in 1979, dismisses women's utopias as unimportant, and discusses none. But Glenn Negley's *Utopian Literature: A Bibliography*, published in 1977, lists over 60 women utopian writers, out of a total of 1600. Lyman Tower Sargent's *British and American Utopian Literature 1515-1975: An Annotated Bibliography* first published in 1979 lists about 160 women authors, and in his revised 1988 edition, this number is more than doubled. Daphne Patai's bibliography which lists British and American utopias by women published between 1836 and 1979 lists over 100 women authors. Darby Lewes cites 149 women's utopias published between 1870 and 1920. Carol Farley Kessler's bibliography of American women's utopian texts published between 1824 and 1988, lists 269 texts, of which 50 were published between 1975 and 1979. Of those written before the 70s, 104 were written between 1824 and 1920, 49 were written between 1920 and 1970, and 116 were written in the 18 years between 1970 and 1988. While many of the earlier texts are not feminist, from the 70s onwards many of the novels and stories deal with gender issues within a feminist context. In

addition, before the 1970s only a very small proportion of utopian novels were authored by women, and a smaller proportion of those were feminist. Of those utopias written after 1970 the majority have been written by women, and a large proportion of those are feminist.

Thus the 1970s saw a sudden growth in feminist utopian literature and criticism, which led to an explosion in both women's and feminist utopian literature being published, both old and new. This interest was largely a product of the women's liberation movement of the 60s, whose ideas spawned dozens and dozens of feminist utopian texts expressing positive feminist possibilities. It was largely from the 1970s onwards that feminism significantly impacted on the trajectory of the literary utopian genre. As Kumar notes, writing in 2000, feminist utopias are 'perhaps the most thriving form of utopia at the present time' ('Utopia and Anti-Utopia' 262).¹⁶ My primary bibliography of texts published from 1970 onwards lists over 70 feminist utopian texts, and the spread across the three decades is remarkably even. My study begins in the 70s, because, as Moylan notes, it represented the key decade in the growth of feminist utopian fiction. While the 70s were crucial, however, the 80s and 90s have also been surprisingly rich in feminist utopian texts, with a healthy mix of utopias and dystopias written and published. Despite the general feeling that dystopias are the predominant mode of utopian writing during this period, this is not the case. In the 80s there were more utopias than dystopias written, and in the 90s only slightly more dystopias written, with many of these comprising critical dystopias, containing utopian elements or themes. This study will focus on feminist utopias that emphasise the psychological elements of utopianism, and approximately twenty-five (over a third) of the texts listed in my

¹⁶ It seems to be *de rigueur* for utopian critics to make such a statement and then go on to ignore feminist utopias within their discussion, or to tack it onto a lengthy exploration of male authored texts.

bibliography are of interest. Of these twenty-five texts I will focus on thirteen, which have been chosen for the ways in which they discuss the issue of utopia as a mental state, and the act of accessing utopia through altered states of consciousness within a critical feminist context.

Definitions of feminist utopianism are, like definitions of utopianism, wide-ranging and contested. It is hardly surprising that as there is no such thing as feminism in the singular, that consequently there is no single definition of feminist utopianism per se. As Sarah Webster Goodwin and Libby Falk Jones warn, '[o]ne woman's utopia is another's nightmare: feminism itself takes on a range of meanings' (ix). Feminism has evolved quite appreciably within the last thirty years, and has many more different concerns today than it ever had in the past. Additionally, there have always been many types of feminism, reflecting different cultural and ideological beliefs about 'woman', gender and sexuality. In the 60s and 70s, cultural feminisms, radical feminisms and socialist feminisms were prevalent, while in the 80s and 90s, postmodern feminisms, ecofeminisms and indeed post-feminism have acquired more potency. While cultural feminists celebrate notions of 'woman' and femininity, postmodern feminists deconstruct the concept of 'woman' and indeed gender. While radical feminists may seek a women-only space within which to create a gendered political project, socialist feminists are more likely to seek gender integration and work towards a politics that includes issues of class and economics as well as gender. Whilst deconstructing gender, ecofeminists also look at the similarities between the oppression of women and the oppression of animals and the natural world. These are very broad generalisations, and many feminists do not sit within discrete categories, but they give an indication of some of the ideological differences

between feminists, and some historical shifts over the decades, which will clearly be reflected in any utopian vision. These shifts will be traced in later chapters through readings of the texts.

Yet the differences between feminisms have not stopped theorists attempting clarification in terms of definitions. For example, Frances Bartkowski claims that '[f]eminist fictions' are the "places" where women speak the desires that frame the anticipatory consciousness of utopia made concrete, bringing the not-yet into the here and now' (162). In a similar vein, also emphasising desire, Sarah Lefanu states that the feminist utopia is 'an imaginary place, a nowhere land, a realm like the unconscious, where dreams may flourish and desires be realised' (53). Lucy Sargisson argues that:

Utopian thinking is thinking that creates and operates inside a new place or space that has previously appeared inconceivable. Writing from or towards a good place that is no place, glancing over her shoulder at the place whence she came, the utopian feminist escapes the restrictions of patriarchal scholarship. (*Contemporary* 41)

While I agree overall with the spirit of Sargisson's definition, I would temper her enthusiasm slightly with some qualifications. While utopian thinking does try to create alternative places for original, transgressive politics, the "newness" of these spaces is questionable. The utopian genre is steeped in literary, ideological and indeed patriarchal history, which the feminist writer must confront when writing within this genre. Thus the utopian feminist can never really escape the restrictions of patriarchal scholarship, she can only hope to challenge and subvert the ideas of her predecessors, whilst writing within the genre.

Three writers, two of whom have written their own feminist utopian novels, have offered definitions of the feminist utopia, in the process trying to seek some common ground between the novels. Carol Pearson made the first attempt at a definition in her article 'Coming Home: Four Feminist Utopias and Patriarchal Experience' first published in 1981. She states that '[f]eminist utopian fiction implicitly or explicitly criticises the patriarchy while it emphasises society's habit of restricting and alienating women' ('Coming Home' 63). The four works that she discusses are all American: Mary Bradley Lanes' *Mizora: A World of Women* (1890 [1999]), Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915 [1979]) Dorothy Bryant's *The Km of Ata are Waiting for You* (1971) and Mary Staton's *From the Legend of Biel* (1975). In these four novels she identifies common characteristics between these texts, namely that patriarchy is viewed as unnatural and damaging to both women and men's potential, and secondly that a sexually egalitarian society gives a sense of 'coming home to a nurturing, liberating environment' ('Coming Home' 63). Furthermore, Pearson also identifies major concerns in feminist utopias such as low status and pay for women's work, ideologies about female 'nature', issues of violence, the division between public and private, reclamation of the self, toleration and elimination of hierarchies. Clearly, these issues reflect concerns within the women's liberation movement of the 60s. Pearson also identifies the prevalence of the earth mother goddess symbol, which she sees as personifying 'the philosophical vision underlying a feminist utopia' ('Coming Home' 69).

In the same year, Joanna Russ's article 'Recent Feminist Utopias' was also published, which focused on eleven feminist utopian novels, including her own *The Female Man*. Ten out of

eleven of the authors she discusses are American, the exception being Monique Wittig and her novel *Les Guérillères*.¹⁷ Russ acknowledges the slippery nature of the term 'utopian':

Although "utopia" may be a misnomer for some of these works many of which (like *Triton* or *The Dispossessed*) present not perfect societies but only ones better than our own, "feminist" is not. All these fictions present societies [. . .] that are conceived by the author as better in explicitly feminist terms and for explicitly feminist reasons. ('Recent Feminist Utopias' 134)

Russ sees these novels not only as emerging from the modern feminist movement but made possible by it, and she identifies much common ground in the themes and issues raised. Key themes noted include the communal, quasi-tribal nature of the communities, which are concerned with ecology and peace and are usually classless, sexually permissive, often lesbian, and celebrate female bonding and female strength. Physical freedom and harmony and connection with the natural world are all stressed.

Sally Gearhart, who wrote *The Wanderingground: Stories of the Hill Women*, a separatist lesbian utopia, identifies five key feminist concerns in the eleven novels¹⁸ she studies: collective process, lesbian separatism, sources of violence, technology and nature, and racism. Furthermore she states that:

[A] feminist utopian novel is one which *a.* contrasts the present with an envisioned idealised society (separated from the present by time or space), *b.* offers a comprehensive critique of present values/conditions, *c.* sees men or male institutions as a major cause of present social ills, and *d.* presents women not only as at least the equals of men but also as the sole arbiters of their reproductive functions. ('Future Visions' 296)

¹⁷ The other nine texts are as follows: Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, Suzy McKee Charnas' *Motherlines*, Samuel Delany's *Triton*, Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Shattered Chain*, Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderingground: Stories of the Hill Women*, Catherine Madsden's 'Commodore Bork and the Compost,' Raccoona Sheldon's 'Your Faces, O My Sisters! Your Faces Filled of Light!' and James Tiptree, Jr's 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?' (Both Raccoona Sheldon and James Tiptree, Jr are the pseudonyms of Alice Sheldon).

¹⁸ Gearhart's texts are: Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Ruins of Isis* and *The Shattered Chain*, Dorothy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You*, Suzy McKee Charnas' *Motherlines*, Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderingground*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Joanna Russ' *The Female Man*, Rochelle Singer's *The Demeter Flower*, Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* and Donna J Young's *Retreat: As it Was!*

Gearhart's definition, which is a radical feminist model, highlights some of the problems in trying to pin down feminist utopianism. While her definition tells us a lot about priorities at the time, I find Gearhart's definition too confining, limiting feminist utopian visions rather sharply. The emphasis on the ideal society clearly relies on a traditional definition of utopianism and rules out many contemporary utopias, such as Russ' *The Female Man* (1975) and Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) which celebrate more ambiguous and critical utopian spaces. The citing of men or male institutions as the primary source of feminist concern limits the scope of the feminist utopia, and would rule out those utopias that attempt to change the meanings of what "man" and "male" mean within society, in an attempt to move beyond current gender ideologies: Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1978) would be such an example. The reference to reproduction is also misleading, as many texts do not concern themselves with this issue, including Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (1969) and Esther Broner's *A Weave of Women* (1985).

These definitions and the attempts at identifying common themes and concerns described above are helpful in illuminating some of the key issues within this field of study. However, it seems that the desire for unification, to identify commonalities and connections often ends up excluding certain texts. While many of the 70s utopian texts cited above do carry common concerns, it is often in their differences that productive debate can emerge. As research in this area broadens to include texts written in the 80s and 90s, critiques must offer more divergent views of utopia, responding to postmodern analyses that identify differences and contradictions between the texts.

There have been at least 12 books and dozens of articles specifically focused on women and utopian fiction published since 1970; further texts and numerous articles cover women's speculative fiction, science fiction or "feminist fabulation" (in Marleen Barr's terminology). In 1981, Marleen Barr produced her first edited collection, entitled *Future Females: A Critical Anthology* which contains articles on women in science fiction. Containing one article by a utopian scholar, Lyman Tower Sargent, on the place of women in eutopian fiction, and two articles on Ursula Le Guin, the rest focus on the role of women in non-utopian science fiction. This collection was followed in 1983 by Barr's second edited collection *Women in Utopia: Critical Interpretations*, which, as the title suggests, focuses exclusively on women's utopian fiction and women in utopian fiction.

In 1984, three books were published that covered aspects of women's utopian and speculative fiction. *Women in Search of Utopia: Mavericks and Mythmakers* edited by Ruby Rohrlich and Elaine Baruch Hoffman, covers a wide range of utopian visions engendered by women, ranging from research into mythical matriarchal societies, to intentional communities in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries and contemporary literary and artistic utopias. In her introduction, Baruch argues that women's and men's utopias are qualitatively different, '[f]or men, utopia has often involved imposing control over the individual who is seen as a threat to the group. For women, on the contrary, utopia is a way of arriving at freedom' (xii). Beginning with this bold (and inaccurate) statement, Baruch goes on to argue that 'for most women, utopia is statelessness and the overcoming of hierarchy and the traditional splits between human beings and nature, subject and other, man and woman, parent and child' (xii). These over-generalisations do not really add to the debate on feminist utopianism, because they essentialise what 'most women' might want

from utopia. More helpfully, however, later on in the book, Baruch emphasises the idea of utopia as process: 'feminist utopias accept change, indeed see it as inevitable [. . .] The fixed divisions between ideal and real, reason and madness, before and after, inside and outside, dissolve. Definitions become fluid. Either/or polarities disappear. Beginnings and endings alike are rejected. Utopia is process' (207). In *Daring to Dream: Utopian Fiction by United States Women Before 1950*, Carol Farley Kessler views utopias as 'spiritual guides' and important in framing 'a new consciousness permitting the exploration of a more complete range of human possibilities' (xvii). She traces the emergence of early utopian fiction by American women, ending with an important bibliography of the texts she discovered, which was cited above. In the same year, Natalie Rosinsky published *Feminist Futures: Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction*. While her focus is on speculative fiction, Rosinsky examines a number of utopian texts in her study, but her focus is limited to mainly American writers.

In 1988, Nan Albinski published her survey, *Women's Utopias in British and American Fiction* which focuses on the general historical development of utopian literature by British and American women in the twentieth century. Albinski concentrates her discussion on the dominant themes in these novels during various periods in the twentieth century up until the late 80s, identifying three important trends and shifts across the decades: firstly, of women achieving equality with men, secondly, the withdrawal of women from patriarchal society and the creation of a women-only space, and thirdly the reformation of patriarchal society through the integration of women-centred values. Albinski's study is comprehensive, providing a wealth of bibliographical primary material. However, she does not explore the evolving critical nature of feminist utopias, instead remaining

committed to a view of utopia as static and totalising, which limits some of her readings and interpretations.

Frances Bartkowski's *Feminist Utopias* published in 1989 represents the first book-length study focused exclusively on contemporary feminist utopian fiction, and she chooses texts published between 1969 and 1986, including *Herland*, which was only first published in book form in 1979. Heavily dependent on the work of Ernst Bloch, Bartkowski locates feminist utopian fiction within a locus of desire, and she identifies millennial discourses of fear and desire to be central to the texts she discusses. Following Bloch, and also Levitas, she defines utopia as daydream, as the not-yet of the future: 'feminist fiction and feminist theory are fundamentally utopian in that they declare that which is not-yet as the basis for a feminist practice, textual, political, or otherwise' (12). Bartkowski traces generic changes in the feminist utopian form, studying the texts through their development of issues of power. But, like Albinski, Bartkowski largely ignores the critical nature of the new utopias, retaining a tendency to see utopias as future perfect and therefore not exploring their critical or ambiguous elements. Also, whilst acknowledging the emphasis on consciousness in these texts, she doesn't probe further and explore why or how feminist utopian texts develop utopian consciousness. She also rejects feminist utopian science fiction as 'masculinist' and separatist texts like *The Wandering* as essentialist. This tendency to create rigidly exclusive boundaries around her terms works against her stated belief that feminist utopian fiction works to dissolve dualities (44).

In 1990, Anne Cranny-Francis published her *Feminist Fiction: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* including analyses of feminist science fiction, feminist fantasy and feminist utopias within the study. Cranny-Francis argues that feminist utopias act to politicise the reader, deconstructing dominant ideologies, and positioning the reader as active. She also sees feminist utopian fiction as fundamentally revolutionary, offering women an opportunity to imagine a different, feminist perspective. Cranny-Francis also acknowledges that contemporary feminist utopian fictions are 'part of the constitution of the postmodern consciousness' whilst at the same time having a political objective to address gender ideologies (127).

1990 also saw Sarah Webster Goodwin and Libby Falk Jones' edited collection *Feminist, Utopia, and Narrative*, which presents an eclectic mix of research on feminist utopian literature. In *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970's* published a year later, Angelica Bammer explores the ongoing relationship between feminism and utopianism in 1970's literature: '[t]he estranged look of the Other is also potentially the most utopian. For it is they for whom Otherness, in concrete terms, means discrimination and disempowerment, who are likely to express the principle of hope with the greatest sense of urgency' (4). This statement leads to her view that it is the partial vision that is more utopian than the comprehensive vision. Bammer explores 70s feminist literature for its utopian elements, and therefore examines a wide terrain of feminist texts that may or may not be considered 'full-blown utopias' but contain utopian moments (4). Defining utopia as '*an approach toward*' rather than a fixed vision or perfect place, Bammer engages with postmodern and critical definitions of utopia (7, original emphasis). Bammer views utopia as a powerful strategy for change, yet she claims that if both feminism and utopianism are to survive

they need to evolve further. She concludes that feminist utopianism of the 80s has not moved on from the work of the 70s, a claim that I shall explore and contest throughout this thesis.

In 1994 Jane Donawerth and Carol Kolmerton produced their edited collection *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference* which argues that women's utopian and science fiction constitutes a continuous literary tradition from the seventeenth century to the present day. Certainly, there is a continuity in the tradition in the period that I am studying. Donawerth and Kolmerton agree that 'many of the 1970s feminist utopias grapple with the imperfectability of utopian - even feminist - desire' (11). Dana Shugar's *Separatism and Women's Community* published in 1995, explores the politics of feminist/lesbian separatist theory through discussion of the practice of women's separatist communities and separatist utopian fiction. Shugar argues that separatist theories have had a significant impact on the development and structure of separatist collectives, and that in turn the collectives have impacted on the theory itself. The breakdown of a significant number of separatist collectives in the 60s and 70s led to the development of separatist utopian fiction written as a means to try and resolve or neutralise the problems of essentialism, racism, classism, and discord between women that had been the downfall of so many new communities. The fiction then, Shugar argues, had an important role in forming new theory and new separatist practices because it offered different ways of negotiating the problems of separatist practice. Rather than offering a blueprint of an ideal community, these utopian fictions offer community as process, as a means of providing unity and resolution to disagreements without ignoring the real problems inherent in setting up a collective of women. As Shugar states:

The genre of separatist utopian literature served to move concepts of community beyond their ideological binds. Fantastical enough not be limited

by representations of community found in separatist theory or historical narrative, separatist utopias worked in their communities to establish new paradigms for both the quest for and shape of that community. (182)

Annamarie Jagose also tackles lesbian utopian space in her *Lesbian Utopics* published in 1994. She argues that the 'space held by "lesbian," at once liberatory and elsewhere, is a utopic space' (3). Yet this exteriority is immediately problematic, if, from a post-structuralist perspective we argue that there is never a place completely "outside" culture. Indeed, Jagose argues that the lesbian utopic space is always paradoxical because it is always at once both inside and outside. Jagose insists that the lesbian is always constructed through discourse, thus the lesbian is not unmarked by that discourse, and is not essentially exterior, transgressive or emancipatory (5). As she says herself, 'the category "lesbian" is not essentially radical or subversive. Indeed the category "lesbian" is not essentially anything. It does not have a fixed valence, a signification that is proper to itself' (9). Rather, lesbian is an indeterminate category: unstable and mobile, it refuses definition, or has a contextual, provisional one.

It was left to Lucy Sargisson to tackle the issue of critical contemporary feminist utopianism, and she does so in both her article, 'Contemporary Feminist Utopianism: Practising Utopia on Utopia' and also her book, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*, both published in 1996. In both texts, Sargisson, drawing on Moylan's work on critical utopias, argues that a clear shift can be identified within contemporary feminist utopianism away from universal tendencies traditionally associated with utopia. She argues that feminist utopianism offers a bridge between feminist theory and postmodernist theory, and also traditional utopianism, because it explores the possibility of political relations, particularly power relations, without seeking to resolve the issues raised. Sargisson rejects definitions of utopia that are purely form or content-based. Her approach

emphasises the function of feminist utopias, with some attention to form and content. This approach, which is similar to Moylan's, allows for an analysis which focuses on the process of creating utopian visions, and of their effect. Fully embracing a position of utopia as open-ended process, Sargisson locates the feminist utopia as being situated beyond binary opposition; locating her utopianism "outside" patriarchy, Sargisson remains somewhat paradoxically committed to a modernist exteriority which in other areas she rejects. Sargisson does not agree completely with Moylan's analysis, finding his work overall too optimistic about the possibilities for partnership between anti-hegemonic forces. As Sargisson points out, one of the problems facing feminisms today is the acknowledged difference between the social group "women" and the political group "feminists", and simply drawing feminists, ecologists, socialists and other oppositional groups together into a homogenous "utopian" group will not overcome these differences. Like Bartkowski, Sargisson also finds strong links between feminism and utopianism: '[f]eminism too has radically subversive potential, and for this reason it finds utopia a comfortable position from which to critique' (*Contemporary* 41). Finally, Sargisson views feminist utopianism as provoking a paradigm shift in consciousness, because, she claims, utopian fiction operates within a subversive political space: '[t]he function of these [utopian] texts, I suggest, remains that of political opposition to the status quo, and of transgression of that which maintains the dominant relations of the political present. Put simply, these texts break and transform societal and cultural rules' (*Contemporary* 21). Yet it has also been argued that because the utopian space is necessarily "outside" dominant discourses, it ultimately reproduces women's marginality, and is therefore politically limited. As Jean Pfaelzer comments, 'to what degree does the separateness of the feminist utopia reinscribe women's "otherness" in its attempt to subvert and criticise it?' (*The*

Changing' 284). While the work of Moylan, Sargisson and Burwell (see below) has largely undermined the argument that the utopian space is critically disengaged, there still remains a crucial gap between writing utopian theory/fiction and creating a political praxis. Sargisson makes a lot of demands on the new feminist utopianism, seeing it as transgressive, transformative, subversive and dynamic, disruptive of traditional utopian structures and committed to open-ended process. Moreover, Sargisson's work is now one of the defining texts of contemporary feminist utopianism, as she deploys postmodernist and post-structuralist discourses in her readings of feminist utopian fiction. My research will attempt to incorporate and develop Sargisson's work, as I utilise her vision of feminist utopianism whilst at the same time interrogating her optimistic claim that the 'utopian feminist escapes the restrictions of patriarchal scholarship' (*Contemporary* 41). The issue of the political efficacy of the utopian space, which remains problematic, will also be explored further.

In 1997, Jennifer Burwell produced *Notes on Nowhere: Feminism, Utopian Logic, and Social Transformation*. In her text, Burwell provides a post-structuralist critique of political and literary meanings within feminist utopian texts, concentrating on the transformative relationship between the individual and the social body, which, she suggests, is related to the transformative utopian space. Like Moylan and Sargisson, Burwell is interested in the critical nature of utopias, because of what she sees as the difficulty of creating a space from which to critique existing conditions. She therefore explores the potential of the utopian space as a critical tool for developing postmodern theories of identity, power and the body. Burwell argues that the utopian and the critical are intimately connected because while the utopian seeks to break from existing conditions, the critical teases out the contradictions within them: '[w]ithout a utopian horizon, the critical impulse can

achieve no distance from existing conditions and no normative point from which to launch a critique; without the engagement of the critical impulse, the utopian impulse becomes totally disconnected from the historical conditions of its production' (ix). Drawing on Jameson's work, Burwell asks: 'how do we break with existing conditions and imagine alternatives, while at the same time recognising the way in which these conditions have constituted our hopes, our wishes, and even the nature of our resistance?' (24). Thus, Burwell is interested in looking at how utopian texts express the logic of social transformation. In feminist critical utopias, she argues, there is movement away from utopia as an absolute outside to existing conditions, because they expose rather than neutralise social contradiction, disrupting the homology between individual and social body, and developing a dialogic relationship between self and other, utopia and dystopia. Burwell therefore views utopia as a process and a relation, not a space or position, that is characterised by partiality and defined by desire. Utopia and critique act in relation to one another within culture and within history; neither can be abstracted from culture or history because they spring from it. Therefore any examination of the critical or utopian impulse requires an examination of the productive relations between representations of the subject, ideology, point of view and narrative form.

In 2000, the utopian backlash also struck within feminist utopianism, as Sally Kitch deftly demonstrates. Kitch attacks utopian thought as 'falsely optimistic, idealising, lacking self-reflection, and binary' (4). She rejects any view of utopianism as critical or transformative, preferring to see it as short-sighted, dangerous, totalising, and fundamentally divisive. Kitch, a former feminist utopian, who does not see herself a part of a feminist backlash, just a utopian one, relies on a

definition of utopianism that ignores most contemporary critical work. She retains a commitment to a view of utopia as perfect, seeing it as a process of 'restarting humanity from scratch' (1), adding:

By utopianism I mean a compendium of attitudes about and strategies for social change that share the characteristics of utopian designs and visions. Those characteristics include a belief that good societies produce good people and that human needs and social values are constant and can be anticipated through careful advanced planning. (2 original emphasis)

Such a definition ignores postmodern work on utopianism, Moylan's work on critical utopias and Sargisson's model of contemporary feminist utopianism. Kitch, however, only tackles Sargisson, whose work she criticises as too optimistic of the possibilities for feminist critical utopian visions that are both subversive and transformative. This criticism may be valid, but instead of working through these concerns, Kitch chooses to reject Sargisson's model of feminist utopianism completely. In the place of utopianism, Kitch argues for a critical philosophical realism that is more analytic, acknowledges change, and is pragmatic.¹⁹ According to Kitch, realism is contested, complicated and open-ended, attributes that she fails to find in utopianism. Kitch's hope is that '[i]f I have done my job in this book, then utopianism as a thought process lies in tiny glittering pieces at my readers' feet' (259). But even she cannot renounce utopianism completely. Her realist critique is in fact a 'post-utopian' critical analysis, which she believes is required to critique utopian texts sufficiently. In turn she still finds feminist utopian texts rich, inventive and optimistic, opening up new conceptual spaces. She does not exhort feminists to avoid reading this fiction, rather to read it more critically, to celebrate it, but also reveal its limitations. Her criticism therefore, which is at its conclusion, pragmatic, fails to lay utopianism to rest, as she has hoped, but rather offers further opportunities for its critique and development. Finally, it seems interesting to

¹⁹ Kitch's work is an example of a recent rehabilitation of realism within critical theory.

me that Kitch's view of realism, which she views as a critique of, and a result of utopianism, actually appears to mimic the contemporary feminist utopianism that she rejects so rigidly in Sargisson. If both writers embrace feminist utopian novels as rich, creative and inventive, and both seek new readings of the texts, then where does their difference really lie, except in a difference between their definitions of terms? Interestingly, Kitch's critique also returns us to Jameson's claim that all anti-utopian arguments spring from a belief in utopianism. In her recent book *The Task of Utopia: A Pragmatist and Feminist Perspective* Erin McKenna more deftly and more helpfully distinguishes between different kinds of utopian thought, separating utopias into end-state, anarchist and process models, and embracing a process model of utopia that combines pragmatism with feminism. While the combination of pragmatism, feminism and utopia is an interesting, and often illuminating one, I still remain a little wary of feminist utopian theories that under-emphasise the importance of the imagination to feminism. If utopian thought becomes too grounded, then surely it risks the danger of never being able to fly freely?

Intersecting with discourses on feminist utopianism lies research within feminist science fiction and indeed the relationship between feminist science fiction and feminist utopian fiction is often a complementary one. Many feminist utopias, such as Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* and Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* are written within the genre of science fiction and some critics argue that utopianism is a subset of the science fiction genre, although utopists tend to disagree. Writers such as Marleen Barr, Lucie Armitt, Robin Roberts, Jane Donawerth and Sarah Lefanu have written widely on the intersection between these two genres. Sarah Lefanu, for example,

published her book, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* in 1988, exploring the relationship between feminism and science fiction as one of mutuality.²⁰ She argues that:

By borrowing from other literary forms it [science fiction] lets writers defamiliarise the familiar, and make familiar the new and strange. These twin possibilities, apparently contradictory (but SF is full of contradictions), offer enormous scope to women writers who are thus released from the constraints of realism. The social and sexual hierarchies of the contemporary world can be examined through the process of 'estrangement', thus challenging normative ideas of gender roles; and visions of different worlds can be created, made familiar to the reader through the process of the narrative. (21-2)

Moving onto a discussion of feminist utopias Lefanu claims that they operate in a "no place" as well as a good place: '[t]hey express potentiality rather than achievement. They could perhaps be seen as messages from the unconscious, translated through the author's imaginative powers from the language of dreams into the language of materiality, for without dreams we cannot hope to change the world' (70). Lefanu privileges a view of utopia as nowhere, existing within the imaginary, 'a realm like the unconscious, where dreams may flourish and desires be realised' (52). She therefore draws out the ambiguity that feminist utopias represent, whilst emphasising their role in exploring women's desires.

In 1991, Lucie Armit's edited collection *Where No Man Has Gone Before: Women and Science Fiction* appeared, including several chapters on feminist utopian fiction. Her most recent book *Contemporary Women's Fiction and the Fantastic* published in 2000 looks at the grotesque utopia and also critiques the concept of the cyborg in the work of Octavia Butler, Joanna Russ and Marge Piercy. In *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction* written in 1993, Robin Roberts clearly places feminist utopianism as a subset of science fiction. Roberts relies on traditional definitions of

²⁰ Published simply as *Feminism and Science Fiction* in the US a year later.

utopia as perfect and non-existent and also sees them as a predominantly female separatist space, ignoring the many feminist utopian texts that include men (66). She also argues that feminist utopias provide 'a blueprint for the future' a view that explicitly refutes any notion of utopianism as dynamic process that both Sargisson and Burwell, and to a lesser extent, Lefanu engage with (69). Roberts also associates feminist utopias with feminine values, ignoring the desire in many of these texts to move beyond gender stereotypes, beyond notions of the masculine and feminine. Because science fiction is the genre that Roberts is working in, she devalues the 'subset' of utopia within it. Rather arbitrarily she excludes certain texts as not utopian, for example dismissing Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* as 'not a utopia because it presents a world with both a utopian culture and a dystopian one and focuses equally on the two' (113). She also ultimately dismisses feminist utopian fiction as essentialist and simplistic pointing to feminist science fiction as containing utopian elements but more successfully including the possibility of a non-sexist, non-racist, and non-classist society (87). But this seems to contradict her discussion of feminist utopian texts such as *The Kin of Ata are Waiting For You*, *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Female Man*, which are in no way essentialist or simplistic. Indeed, she also adds that feminist utopias 'isolate issues of gender and frequently [. . .] espouse a model of essentialism. Feminist utopias resolutely idealise all-female societies, while feminist science fiction depicts conflicts between opposite points of view' (91). Her belief that science fiction is 'better' than utopias is reiterated again and again, yet she offers little proof that this is the case. Indeed, she later praises texts such as *A Door into Ocean* and *The Marriages Between Zones Three, Four and Five*, texts that many theorists, and myself, would define as feminist utopian, but she only discusses them within a feminist science fiction perspective. Because she relies on traditional views of utopias as closed, fixed and perfect, Roberts fails to see

the potential in contemporary feminist utopias for freedom, growth and transformation. Instead, she finds these qualities only in what she terms feminist science fiction. It seems that her boundaries are too rigid, and need more flexibility.²¹ Roberts' analysis therefore reveals the inability of traditional definitions of utopia to deal with the new critical feminist utopias.

My approach to the feminist utopian novels I discuss in this thesis will focus specifically on the connections made between feminist utopianism and altered states of consciousness. I will discuss four types of altered states within the feminist utopian texts under discussion. These are madness, dreaming, spirituality and telepathy. These states have been chosen because of their frequent recurrence within the feminist utopian genre, and because they offer a way of categorising these themes in a broadly inclusive, yet clearly definable manner. Altered states offer a metaphor for the need to think differently, of the importance of looking at society, at social problems, in a new or alternative way. Altered states of consciousness are utilised within many feminist utopian novels in a number of ways; I call these processes "altered states" because this term refers to the altered state of consciousness that the character experiences in order to access utopia. Firstly, in many of these texts, utopia is accessed through a dream or a vision, through spiritual meditation, telepathy, or a state of "madness". Secondly, within these texts, altered states are not only used as a means of accessing utopia but are also represented within the narratives as a means of maintaining or sustaining the utopia. Thirdly, in these novels, utopia is frequently represented primarily as a state of mind. "Altered states" also refers to the place of utopia, which is also altered, or different to, contemporary society. Additionally, there is the possibility that the reader, as they read the

²¹ However, Roberts does emphasise feminist science fiction's use of alternative powers, such as magic and telepathy.

utopian narrative, engages with the text, so that they become, as Darko Suvin has argued, estranged from the text and from their views. This too, means that the reader may enter into an “altered state” through the process of reading the text, as their beliefs and assumptions about “the way things are” are challenged, denaturalised and subverted. It is thus possible, and certainly desirable, that they emerge from their reading with the knowledge that alternative ways of being are not only possible, but perhaps preferable.

Tom Moylan and Fredric Jameson have argued that utopia can never be clearly represented, and that it is almost impossible for us to think and feel as though we were not brought up within a hierarchised, class-stratified society, yet the “almost” here holds the key to utopian texts. While it may be true that utopia can never be fully represented through narrative, the possibility exists that utopianism may be present as a critical process of engagement between writer, text and reader. Angelica Bammer refers to the “partial vision” of utopia, and Nadia Khouri to the ‘limitations of consciousness that condition the author’s manipulation of the SF genre and their incapability of conceiving a utopian outcome in spite of an obvious yearning for utopia’ (55). Khouri also sees this incapability as resulting from the embeddedness of the author in contemporary society, inevitably caught up in the ‘historical contradictions’ of the present (56). This means that any utopia is inevitably foreclosed, and that only through ‘a dialectic between consciousness and objective world’ can utopia ever be (partially) achieved (60). However, following Jean Pfaelzer, I argue that contemporary feminist utopian fiction focuses on this dialectic and is intended to be read in a fragmented manner, articulating shifting positions in an attempt to represent this partial vision: “[t]he new utopian discourse breaks down the traditional mimetic

contract with the reader, in order to stimulate a cognitive revision of historical process in the mind of the reader' ('Response' 193). These utopian texts create new structures, fragmenting the text through 'multiple protagonists; multiple narrators; interpolated time frames; frequent shifts among past, present, and future; and frequent shifts among dreams, awakenings, and drug-induced states of consciousness' ('Response' 194). Furthermore, she argues, the utopian journey is accessed through 'the fantastic, the subjective, the dream [. . .] through narrative sleights of hand' ('Response' 197). These 'narrative sleights of hand' emphasise the deconstructive nature of the texts, and of utopia, involving the reader in a process of constant re-negotiation of their assumptions about contemporary society. Thus a double vision is created as the narrative works to estrange the reader through fantastical and often disturbing structures (Pfaelzer 'The Changing'). As Drucilla Cornell argues, '[a] good definition of *utopian* is that what is possible cannot be known in advance of social transformation' which is reminiscent of Fredric Jameson's argument that we cannot conceive utopia yet, thus can never represent it, because its potential is inconceivable within our current social structure (*At the Heart* 185, original emphasis). In her work, Cornell emphasises the importance of the imaginary domain, which she describes as 'the space of the "as if" in which we imagine who we might be if we made ourselves our own end and claimed ourselves as our own person' (*At the Heart* 8). This focus on what ought to be, not what is, is crucial to utopian thinking – always projecting forward, moving beyond current gender ideologies that seek to constrain our thoughts and desires. Whilst recognising the constraints of dominant ideologies, and the 'moorings of our own symbolic order' there remains a crucial fluid space for alternative ways of thinking and representing the self (182). As Cornell writes, 'none of us starts from scratch – each of us wrestles with the ideas of the good life that are culturally available to us. Formed as

we are by the world into which we are thrown and which engages us because we are set in the midst of it, the process of mining and shifting our values as we make them our own is a lifelong project' (38). The 'imaginary domain' then, is a useful device, not just because it represents something we can aspire to in the future, but because it is something that we can work for now in the present, and is indeed already an aspect of contemporary thought. As Cornell notes, '[t]he ideal of the imaginary domain gives form to what is actually happening. People are claiming the space, both psychic and public, for a self-representation of their sexuate being [. . .] To give symbolic form to what is being claimed in actuality is part of the role of *ideals* in political philosophy' (*At the Heart* 178, original emphasis). Thus the imaginary domain is both an ideal and yet also a reality. Clearly, the utopian is not something that is 'out there' but is already, to some extent, 'in here'. In order to work towards a utopian future, we must build on the present moment. These visions lead us to utopia, but are also problematic for if they locate the utopian vision in a dream, or a drug-induced state of consciousness, or, indeed, "madness", then we must re-evaluate our attitudes towards these states before we can accept the utopia in the text. Thus the altered states within these texts reflect both a narrative device used to represent a partial vision of utopia, but also disrupt and subvert concepts of utopianism itself.

In this chapter I have provided an overview of definitions of utopianism, and the relationship of feminist utopianism to the literary utopian genre. Whilst utopian studies remains a challenging and diverse area of study, refusing to be pinned down and constantly evading definition, it continues to offer many rewards to the utopian scholar who perseveres. The

following chapter will explore further the theoretical and cultural context of the debates on altered states of consciousness and their relation to utopianism.

Chapter Two

Accessing Utopia through Altered States

Within the different oppositional movements of the 1960s and 70s, developing alternative states of consciousness as a means of political resistance was widespread. As Debra Michals notes, “[t]he 1960s were awash with countercultural strategies for social revolution, many of which built upon varying notions of ‘consciousness’ as the key to overhauling society. For these groups, consciousness referred to adopting a new perception, becoming aware of the ways in which the existing patriarchal, capitalistic order co-opted the individual’s core human existence and identity (42). In the women’s liberation movement, consciousness-raising was utilised as a political tool to empower women, in order that they might make the connection between their personal problems and social and political issues. Additionally, within the women’s spirituality movement, a new spiritual consciousness was sought as women aspired to: ‘a wholeness that unites the dualisms of spirit and body, rational and irrational, nature and freedom, spiritual and social, life and death, which have plagued Western consciousness’ (Christ *Diving* 8). Carol Christ roots women’s spirituality in wholeness and spiritual integration, which, she believes, can effect real change in women’s lives. In the counterculture, it was commonly believed that “deconditioning” the mind from mainstream values was critical if social transformation was ever to be possible: [t]o rid oneself of the drives that produced aggression, authoritarianism, sexism, racism, intolerance, and sexual repression, counterculturists sought to disinherit pernicious social conditioning

through a process alternately dubbed “deschooling,” “reimprinting,” or “deconditioning” (Braunstein & Doyle, 15). While this process could be facilitated by the taking of drugs, such as LSD, other means of deconditioning the mind included major lifestyle changes, as individuals “Turn[ed] on, Tune[d] in, [and] Drop[ped] Out”¹ through experimentation in new (and old) religions, unconventional sexual relationships and alternative living arrangements, such as communal living.² The anti-psychiatrists of the 60s and 70s also argued that what is termed “madness” could be reinterpreted in political, not personal or medical terms, a result of capitalist disenfranchisement; and at the same time saw its potential to be utilised as a liberatory response, making possible psychic and spiritual renewal through a facilitated journey through the psyche (Laing, Cooper). Thus within the women’s liberation movement, the burgeoning women’s spirituality movement, within the counterculture, and areas of anti-psychiatry, altered states were increasingly celebrated as a means of liberation from conventional modes of thinking and being. Clearly, it is no coincidence that these disparate (but often intersecting) movements were all turning inwards towards the mind for the answers to social problems. And it is certainly no coincidence that feminist utopian writers followed suit in exploring further the possibilities of altered states. Whilst my thesis discusses four altered states in detail – madness, dreaming, spirituality and telepathy – these states have principally been studied within three discrete areas: psychology, psychiatry and religion. In this chapter, I explore these areas further in the search for accounts of liberation through changing consciousness.

¹As David Farber notes, the phrase, “Turn On, Tune in, Drop Out” introduced by Dr. Timothy Leary as an advertising slogan for LSD, was intended to refer to a constructive expansion of the mind and to further interactions with others. However, it was interpreted by the press in a more limited way to mean simply getting stoned (32).

² See David Farber and Timothy Miller for further discussion of countercultural experimentation.

Perhaps as a result of the countercultural interest in altered states, psychological, sociological and anthropological research in this area exploded in the 1960s and 70s. Defining the area of study, Stanley Krippner identified twenty states of consciousness: dreaming, sleeping, hypnopompic, hyperalert, lethargic, rapture, hysteric, fragmentation, regressive, meditative, trance, reverie, daydreaming, internal scanning, stupor, coma, stored memory, expanded consciousness and "normal". A. M. Ludwig characterised altered states as involving a wide variety of alterations in emotional and psychological modes of thought, including disturbed time sense, loss of control and inhibition, changes in emotional expression, body-image changes and perceptual distortions, a sense of the ineffable, and feelings of rejuvenation or hope. It was also found that altered states could be caused by either a reduction of external stimulation, an increase of external stimulation and emotional arousal, focused and selective hyperalertness, decreased alertness and somato-psychological factors (Wolfgang Jilek). This research led to the conclusion that altered states are a universal phenomenon, and Jilek states that '[t]he capacity of attaining altered states of consciousness is a universal property of the human central nervous system, as evidenced by the ubiquitous occurrence of trance phenomena though time and space. However the prevalence of these phenomena appears to be a function of sociocultural variables' (179).

However, research into altered states has been complicated by the fact that their experience cannot be objectively monitored or studied, and psychologists and sociologists must therefore rely on

(subjective) reports from their subjects. Objectivity has also been compromised by the widely held assumption in the West that altered states are a result of mental illness. As Colleen Ward notes:

The [medical] model is apparently problematic in that it implies "objective" diagnostic criteria that are independent of both cultural appraisals and individuals' experiential interpretations. This is particularly important in that the diagnosis of certain mental "illnesses" is predicated on alterations or disturbances of consciousness as defined by Western, organic medical practices. (9)

Because of this Western bias, it has been assumed that active modes of consciousness are "normal" and "best" because they are associated with a state of striving toward achievement. Receptive modes of consciousness, conversely, are assumed to be "abnormal", "inferior", or "deviant". Yet in non-Western cultures, research shows that altered states are both common and accepted as a part of every day life, and social constructionists conclude that 'ordinary states of consciousness are specialised constructs and are in many ways quite arbitrary and culturally relative' (Ward 12). The cultural construction of states of consciousness shapes the experience, prevalence and perception of these states. Among the Eskimo population disturbances of consciousness are common and accepted, yet within the Western medical model are "diagnosed" as hysterical behaviour. And in Taiwan, the experience of "Hsieh-ping" is characterised by alterations in consciousness, disorientation, and visual and auditory hallucinations. Within Taiwan these experiences are variously viewed as harmless, eccentric and perhaps entertaining, yet Western psychologists would define them as pathological.³

³ Ward cites a study by Bourguignon and Evascu that found that 90% of a world-wide sample of 488 societies displayed trance and or possession. In his essay on possession syndrome in India, C. R. Chandra Sheker cites many incidences of psychiatrists classifying possession as a psychiatric syndrome, such as senile dementia, melancholia, epilepsy, paranoia, mania, hysteria, schizophrenia and compulsive neurosis (83).

While the medical model approaches altered states from the perspective of pathology, these experiences in non-Western cultures are usually placed within a religious and philosophical framework. For example, Lewis argues that in many cultures, spiritual possession has a social function, 'to uphold official morality, religious tradition and established power' (cited in Ward 129). While certain types of spiritual possession can have a positive, healing effect on an individual, other types of possession can have negative effects and can cause an incapacity to cope and sickness. Thus altered states in non-Western cultures are not viewed unproblematically, rather they might be better viewed as dialectical. Lewis found in his research that spiritual possession was more common in low status individuals, particularly women, and was interpreted within cultures as a form of social protest against subordination and oppression (Ward 130). Thus, it could be argued, possession functions in other cultures as madness does in Western culture, where madness is diagnosed more frequently in marginalised members of society. Jean-Pierre Valla and Raymond Prince argue that when altered states are interpreted by individuals as religious experiences they act as a 'self-healing mechanism' (149). They cite a number of studies carried out in the U.K. and America that together agree that, across class, between 20% and 40% of the population reported some type of mystical or religious experience, such as hallucinations and ecstatic experiences, and that those who had such experiences reported better mental health than those who reported no such experiences (149-50). In a similar vein, Jilek's research in North American Indian cultures discovered that spirit dance is used as a means of healing psychological and behavioural problems. These problems are identified as an illness of the spirit, and are thus healed through a ritual process that involves a death and rebirth cycle. Altered states are

facilitated by drumming, sensory deprivation, fasting, singing and dancing. Also, Richard Katz's work with the !Kung people of the Kalahari Desert found that through ritual, altered states are used to facilitate healing and connectedness between community members. Thus it could be concluded from this research that when altered states are experienced within the medical model as psychopathological they are perceived by the individual as generally negative and unpleasant, but if those states are encountered within the context of a religious framework, then they are more likely to be experienced as positive and healing. This reinterpretation of altered states within a spiritual framework is expressed in Dorothy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You* (1971) where dreaming and meditation hold the key to the spiritual lives of the Atans. The Atans use altered states not only to access and interpret their dream lives, but also to represent utopia. The narrator of the novel, who remains nameless throughout, is healed psychologically, emotionally and spiritually through his dream life in Ata. Storytelling, ritual and dancing accompany ritual fasting and sensory deprivation which facilitate similar altered states to those found in North American Indian cultures. In Judy Grahn's *Mundane's World* (1988) the people of Mundane believe that every living thing exists in connection with one another through life energies, which can be accessed and utilised for the purposes of health and knowledge. Only through a lived connection with every part of the natural world can humans, animals, birds and nature exist in harmony. To this end, humans can access the consciousness of other life forms, and in doing so can gain valuable knowledge about themselves and each other. The menarche ritual, which all girls celebrate, involves sensory deprivation, high temperatures and fasting to induce altered states. During

this period the girls have the ability to communicate with birds, animals and the natural world and access different axes of time. This process facilitates the “becoming” of the girls into womanhood.

Research into dreaming activity was also heavily researched in the 70s. Theories of dreaming locate the cause and function of dreaming activity in a variety of ways. Up until the twentieth century some theories of dreams argued that dreaming was a continuation of daily psychic activity, a by-product of the mind continuing to work whilst the body rests. Alternatively, it was argued that dreaming was produced by stimuli that the body registers whilst asleep, and thus was a somatic, not a psychic process. It was also argued that dreaming was a product of superior psychical activity, and therefore had a utilitarian function. Drawing on this latter theory, J. A. Hadfield argued that dreams have a biological function in solving the problems of everyday life, thus ‘*dreams stand in the place of experience*’ (65, original emphasis). In doing so they aid us in reliving experiences of the day, warning us of possible consequences of our actions and helping us to work towards a solution of problems. Working in a similar way to ideation, or daydreaming, therefore, Hadfield argued that dreaming acts as a means of reproducing ideas and images in the brain in order to plan for future activities. However bizarre their content, dreams ‘nevertheless deal with truth’ (78). Because dreams are able to draw on material in the mind that is unconscious and subconscious, Hadfield claims that it may be possible that dreams can be telepathic and precognitive, thus while the conscious mind deals with the limited present, the subconscious may have access to a wider range of experience, which can lead to what we then call premonitions. These dream theories therefore account for dreams as arising out of day-to-day

activity. Conversely, in Freudian terms, dreams can have much deeper meanings, constituting wish fulfilment; Freud claimed that: '*a dream is a (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish*' (*The Interpretation of Dreams*, 244, original emphasis). Freud argued that all dreams concern wish fulfilment, and that when a wish cannot be fulfilled in reality, it is realised in fantasy, during sleep, as a dream. Freud also argued that our desires, or wishes, primarily concern sex, and therefore most dreams have some sexual orientation. Thus Freud presented a causal approach to dreams: dreams are fuelled by a simple desire or craving, originating in the unconscious, which is largely composed of infantile memories and desires. Dreams are a product of repression, a result of desires that are checked and thwarted and pushed into our unconscious. While Freud argued that repression is necessary to function in (capitalist) society, it is interesting that dreams are still important in utopian societies, where repression may be seen as unnecessary. Therefore, in Freud's work, a dream is a 'distorted substitute for something else', working to satisfy the desire for something forbidden ('Introductory Lectures'144). But where do these desires originate? According to Freudian theory, if dreamers dream of ungendered bodies, these desires derive from (pre-Oedipal) infantile needs and fantasies. Thus these desires derive from the infantile body; they are therefore familiar, and not other to the self. In Lacanian terms, desire is constituted by loss, and the desire to return to the pre-Oedipal state of wholeness and completeness with the mother. This desire haunts our lives, yet it can never be fulfilled, because subjectivity is formed through the splitting into self and other. Thus within Lacanian theory, any search for utopian wholeness is fruitless, and the belief that desire can ever be fulfilled is a misconception. This is significant to utopian studies, because any text that places wholeness, or the search for wholeness, at its

centre, is doomed to failure. This constituted a problem within traditional utopian texts that sought perfection; once achieved, there was no need for further individual or social growth and development – and the utopia became static. In contrast, the critical utopian text, which rejects perfection and stasis and embraces ambiguity and conflict, retains a human desire for change and divergence, which drives people on. Desire, therefore is understood to be a necessary part of human life, and its (permanent) fulfilment is neither desirable nor achievable. However, Ernst Bloch conceives desire in a different way to Freud and Lacan. Bloch views the human subject as a historical subject, constituted by a mass of unfulfilled desires, which are directly related to, and fed by, their place within society. Bloch's subject is also teleological, and moves towards the fulfilment of these desires. However, in order to achieve their potential, people must move beyond the realisation of everyday desires, towards the realisation of collective and revolutionary desires which could transform society. For Bloch, this would be a socialist utopia, and would represent an unalienated subjectivity.

Psychoanalytic theory is clearly relevant to utopian dreaming because of the links that are made between desire and dreaming activity. If our dreams are a product of our unconscious (repressed) desires, and their function is to allow our desires to be realised in fantasy, then it could be argued that dreams have two possible functions. Firstly, as a means of displacing unfulfilled desires into fantasy life, dreaming activity could compensate for the disappointment of desires in waking life, and discourage the need for desires to be realised. Thus dreaming could have an anti-utopian function, for if desires are satisfied in dreams, they need not be satisfied in "real life". Or secondly, the exploration of dream

life and the prioritisation of dreaming activity could be viewed as an important site of utopian desire and activity. Through the dream, the dreamer becomes dissatisfied with real life and so seeks to realise their desires in reality. Rather than being compensatory, therefore, dreaming activity becomes anticipatory. Writers such as Erich Fromm, Norman O. Brown and Herbert Marcuse have chosen to explore this second function.⁴

Drawing on Freud's work, Carl Jung also developed a theory of dreams. While Freud focused on the (sexual) cause of dreams, delving into past memories and infantile experiences, Jung preferred to focus on the purpose of the dream, and on what information it provides for the dreamer's future. Jung's theory is therefore useful from a utopian perspective, because it describes how dreams can be used to drive us forward. Jung identified certain archetypes within dreams, common mythological motifs or symbols, which are present in many dreams, and contribute to his theory that the unconscious is only partly personal or subjective, but is also collective. The collective unconscious generates "big" or "meaningful" dreams which are concerned not with personal experiences, but with intrinsic meanings, collective emotions and universal human problems (77-8). Jung therefore saw dreams as having a prospective, or revelatory, function, rather than a causative one. Jung's work has been problematic for feminists because of the ways that he idealises and fixes the terms masculinity and femininity. Drawing on Jung's work, Naomi Goldenberg argues that dreams can be analysed to access spiritual processes at work in the psyche. Dream activity therefore needs to be taken seriously, and

⁴Discussed above.

through active transformation of the dream, individuals can achieve greater spiritual and therapeutic insight. Goldenberg claims that it is important for women to use dreams to change their reality and within New Age theory analysis of dreams has become incredibly popular, as a means of self-help and therapeutic analysis. However, both Jungian theory and New Age theory are infamously apolitical, and while feminist utopias draw on their creativity and popularity they also seek to politicise dreaming activity and locate it within the realm of feminist politics.

Aldous Huxley argues in *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* that altering states of consciousness is essential for individuals to experience heightened perception and awareness of the world and one another. Huxley used drugs to facilitate altered states through the taking of the drug mescaline, which has similar effects to LSD. He experienced a world transformed into 'a slow dance of golden lights. A little later there were sumptuous red surfaces swelling and expanding from bright nodes of energy that vibrated into a continuously changing, patterned life' (*The Doors* 6). This experience facilitates a heightened awareness of the '[i]s-ness' of things, of 'creation – the miracle, moment by moment of naked existence' (*The Doors* 7). During his intoxication Huxley was delivered from 'the world of selves, of time, of moral judgements and utilitarian considerations, the world [. . .] of self assertion, of cocksureness, of over-valued words and idolatrously worshipped notions' (*The Doors* 22). The search for and consumption of chemicals that will induce altered states has existed throughout history, in the form of alcohol, tobacco, herbal sedatives, narcotics and hallucinogens and their synthetic counterparts. These drugs are taken in an attempt to transcend, for however brief a

time, the self, and the everyday environment. Huxley comments that '[t]he urge to transcend self-conscious selfhood is, as I have said, a principal appetite of the soul' (*The Doors* 46). The experiencing of altered states should be used, periodically, Huxley argues, as a sabbatical retreat in order that everyone might be subjected to transcendental experience, consisting of 'timeless illumination' (*The Doors* 55). This process, Huxley hopes, would lead to individuals losing some of their arrogance and insolence, and gaining a little more wisdom, happiness and humility, and to be capable of a more satisfying interaction with the world. Thus altered states represent a means of looking at the world in a different way, offering a new, alternative perspective.

Very few feminist utopias discuss drug taking as a means of accessing a utopian consciousness. Drugs are more likely to be represented as dangerous to individual freedom and health, such as in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1978) where the drugs that Connie is given dull her capacity to think. In the dystopian section of the novel, Gildina has pills for every situation, discharged by a pill-dispenser by her bed, comprising: '[r]isers, soothers, sleepers, wakers, euphors, passion pills, the whole works' (292). Drugs, now completely divorced from the medical profession, are an essential part of an everyday lifestyle, mimicking and replacing the experiences themselves. However, it could also be argued that the drugs given to Connie in the psychiatric hospital actually facilitated her utopian hallucinations. In Josephine Saxton's short story 'Alien Sensation' (1978) drugs are injected or swallowed for entertainment. Individuals live in darkened rooms, never moving from their beds, their only activity taking place in the mind, facilitated by drugs. Drugs provide the only sensory experiences

available, and they provide pure pleasure, yet some individuals rebel against this utopia, foregoing endless utopian entertainment, for repeated periods of complete unconsciousness, inducing an early death. Where no experience is “real” and where every type of pleasure is intensified and prolonged, the story warns, the ‘joy of living’ diminishes, so that every day experiences become overwhelming (68). In feminist utopias then, drugs tend to be viewed with distrust, although a distinction is made between chemical and ‘natural’ drugs. In *Mundane’s World* the Snake clan temple holds ‘drug plants and seedlings’ (41), used in the clan’s work of healing and transformation. But drugs are only part of the solution, used in combination with other means of accessing altered states, such as rain dances, fasting, sensory deprivation and meditation, as already discussed. Thus alternatives to drugs are usually preferred in these texts, perhaps because of their attendant dangers. Huxley explores the dialectical possibilities of drug-taking in his dystopian *Brave New World* (1932) and utopian *Island* (1962). In the former, which was written before Huxley’s experiences with mescaline, the drug soma is taken to provide an escape mechanism for any minor emotional distress:

Now – such is progress – the old men work, the old men copulate, the old men have no time, no leisure from pleasure, not a moment to sit down and think – or if ever by some unlucky chance such a crevice of time should yawn in the solid substance of their distractions, there is always soma, delicious soma, half a gramme for a half-holiday, a gramme for a weekend, two grammes for a trip to the gorgeous East, three for a dark eternity on the moon. (*Brave* 49)

Soma is just one in a number of paraphernalia utilised by the World Controllers to produce a stable society which has “evolved” beyond independent thought and creativity. Consciousness-altering drugs are therefore represented within the text as intellectually and emotionally stultifying, akin to the related measures to produce fully controllable genetic clones, programmed with hypnopaedic suggestion.

However, in *Island* Huxley presents a very different view of drug-taking, as he privileges altered states in relation to utopianism. On the utopian island of Pala, the people believe in 'Hypnotism and Pantheism and Free Love' (*Island* 56). Medical care includes attention to diet, autosuggestion, negative ions and meditation (66). Additionally, the inhabitants of Pala regularly take moksha-medicine in order to undergo the ultimate mystical experience, which is described as therapeutic and transforming. The mental transformation that occurs after taking the drug has overwhelming value for the individual, promoting an altered awareness of the world which Will Farnaby describes as a "Luminous Bliss" (1271) that allows him to love selflessly for the first time, and accept his own mortality. The taking of moksha-medicine enriches all concerned, uniting everyone in an experience of shared enlightenment which transcends any notion of the individual, as all become one in a 'limitless, undifferentiated awareness' (272). In defence of the admonition that usage of this 'dope' (as its critics call it) is a strictly private and solitary experience, and, by implication, without any social value, Dr. Robert McPhail, a Palanese resident argues:

So maybe the whole thing does happen inside one's skull. Maybe it is private and there's no unitive knowledge of anything but one's own physiology. Who cares? The fact remains that the experience can open one's eyes and make one blessed and transform one's whole life. (*Island* 141)

David Farber argues that LSD, a synthetic drug that produces similar effects to mescaline, was used within the countercultural movement in the 1960s as a means to produce radical cultural change. During this period, both prescribed and non-prescribed drugs were becoming a way of life for many: 'by the early 60s, Americans had officially decided that consciousness-changing drugs worked and that

they should be massively deployed to change people's consciousness. Americans accepted an intoxicated state as either medically or recreationally necessary – at least for some Americans, some of the time (19). As Farber notes, in America, by 1965, doctors were writing over a hundred million prescriptions for tranquillisers and over twenty million prescriptions for amphetamines to help people function in everyday society. Alcohol and tobacco were also ubiquitous. It could be argued that in today's 'Prozac Nation' the problem is even more widespread. LSD was therefore a part of this general drug-taking culture and was welcomed by many for curing psychological problems and facilitating higher consciousness. Dr Timothy Leary, who promoted LSD in America, believed the drug could allow individuals greater knowledge of their minds and could develop individual's spirituality. LSD was lauded because of its mind-altering capacities, and was used variously as a therapeutic, spiritual and political tool. While many within the psychedelic counterculture believed that LSD was the key stratagem for a new expanded consciousness, there existed severe rifts within the movement, between those who wanted to use LSD solely for pure self transformation and life-style politics, and those who wanted a social and political revolution. For the former, such as Timothy Leary, taking LSD could 'facilitate a permanent spiritual transformation'; consequently they believed everyone should take LSD because 'nothing less than the entire history of human thought had to be reconsidered in light of the psychedelic experience' (Lee & Shlain 99, 107). Leary rejected any notions of political activism because he believed all politics were corrupt, thus the psychedelic session was the only activism within his movement. His group, called the League for Spiritual Discovery had just two commandments, "Thou shalt not alter the consciousness of thy fellow man" and "Thou shalt not prevent thy fellow man from

altering his own consciousness” (Lee & Shlain 161). For the latter group, however, LSD on its own was not enough for social transformation to occur; it had to be matched with a left-wing socialist programme for change: they therefore rejected LSD as a political tool. The two groups never achieved consensus, and thus never effectively worked together. The LSD movement very gradually faded out of the psycho-political arena in the 70s, although it is still popular as an hallucinogenic today. The use of LSD as a “utopiate” therefore was limited, because there was no attempt to move beyond personal psychic transformation to further social change; the belief that drugs held the answer to all social problems was unrealistic. As Lee and Shlain argue in their social history of LSD, the drug’s uses have been explored in a variety of ways: by the CIA as a “truth drug” and also as a “confusion” drug to prevent agents from telling secrets; as a therapeutic tool for alcoholics and impotence; a spiritual tool for transcendence and a politically subversive tool for social liberation. Consequently, they conclude that:

A common mistake with respect to LSD was to attribute the personal effects of an acid trip to something inherent in the drug itself; as a result of this subtle transference, acid acquired the qualities of a particular mind-set or milieu, depending on who was experimenting with it. The love-and-peace vibrations thought to be intrinsic to the psychedelic high were largely an amplified reflection of the unique spirit that animated the mid-1960s, just as the CIA’s obsession with LSD-induced anxiety and terror mirrored the Cold War paranoia of the espionage establishment. (200)

If an LSD trip can become whatever you want it to be, then perhaps it could be a utopian tool, but it could be a dystopian one as well, which is perhaps why feminist utopians have tended to leave drug taking alone within their texts. Also, the LSD culture was very male-oriented and sexist, and feminists may well have felt they wanted to ignore this aspect of countercultural thought; the “trip” is also a

gendered narrative. Interestingly, within discourses on LSD the same impetus exists as within discourses on altered states, to classify the “trip” as either spiritual or psychopathological.

Despite these countercultural views and cross-cultural research on altered states, the medical model of madness is predominant in the Western world. In the twentieth century it is commonly assumed that the experience of altered states of consciousness, particularly delusions – such as the ability to read minds - and hallucinations, are symptoms of ‘madness,’ ‘mental illness’ or ‘mental disorder.’ Since the nineteenth century, the experience, diagnosis and treatment of madness has taken place entirely within the medical, and later, psychiatric profession. By the end of the nineteenth century, psychiatry was a well-established profession, developing classifications of mental illnesses for diagnostic purposes, searching for biological causes and devising specific treatments. The desire to place madness within a psychopathological framework appears to have emerged from the growing confidence in science and its ability to explain all human experience in terms of genetics and biology. Yet the medicalisation of madness obscures the very different ways that madness has been perceived, experienced and treated across the centuries, from the belief that madness was caused by possession by the devil or evil spirits, to the idea that it was caused by an imbalance in the humours or, indeed, immorality.

Since the nineteenth century, medicine and psychiatry have had a powerful influence in forming our conceptions of “healthy” and “unhealthy” states of mind. Today, psychiatrists ‘formally

construct the dominant social discourse through which mental disorder is constituted and given meaning' (Joan Busfield 51). In this period, the term "madness" has been heavily marked by medical, legal and political discourses as pathological, and as something to be feared and stigmatised. Modern psychiatry bases all diagnoses of mental illness on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association and the International Statistical Classification of Diseases (ICD). These are updated frequently: the DSM is currently in its fourth edition, and the ICD in its tenth, indicating that classifications are constantly evolving and frequently contested, and there is no single standard of criteria for diagnosing mental illnesses. Rather, as Busfield notes, 'mental disorder is a culturally and socially relative category whose precise boundaries and meanings vary over time and place and are highly contested. It is, to use a sociological phrase, a "social construct"' (59). Whilst the classifications of mental illness claim to be objective, it has been repeatedly argued that the classifications involve deeply embedded judgements about what is "normal" and "abnormal" behaviour, what is "good" mental health, and what is not (Denise Russell, Jane Ussher). The variety of treatments available for mental disorders also reflects disparate ideas about its causes. Therapies range from physical treatments such as drugs, ECT and surgery, to psychoanalysis, behaviour therapy, clinical therapy and humanistic therapy.

The work of the anti-psychiatrists was influential in the 1960s and 70s and provided an antidote and vital critical perspective to the dominance of the medical model of psychiatry, offering an alternative view of the experience of madness. Critics such as R. D. Laing, David Cooper and Thomas

Szasz attempted to expose the ideological nature of psychiatry. In *The Myth of Mental Illness and Ideology and Insanity*, Szasz argued that there is no such thing as mental illness, and that through psychiatry, society designates certain behaviours to be “sick” rather than acknowledge them as rule-breaking, deviant or simply different to the social norm.⁵ He says:

The expression “mental illness” is a metaphor that we have come to mistake for a fact. We call people physically ill when their body-functioning violates certain anatomical and psychological norms; similarly, we call people mentally ill when their personal conduct violates certain ethical, political, and social norms. (*Ideology and Insanity* 23)

Szasz argued that calling such people ill is unhelpful to them and dangerous to society. The term “mental illness” obscures differences between different problems and directs attentions away from social, political or interpersonal problems, instead focusing on the individual; certain rule-breaking behaviours are therefore depoliticised. Designating someone as ill denies them agency and responsibility, rendering him or her passive and powerless is a political act. Szasz argued that the values and ideologies that permeate psychiatry need to be exposed in order to understand that it is an ideological instrument of social control. Szasz therefore reinterprets mental illness as “problems of living”, in terms of oppression and conditioning, as a product of social interactions and of unequal power relations in society. Viewed in this way, psychiatry must be viewed as an abusive relationship because it focuses on the individual in isolation from their position within society. The drugs, shock therapy and surgery that are commonly used in the treatment of mental illness make this a particular dangerous power relationship. Laing and A. Esterson echo this attack on psychiatric diagnoses, arguing that “schizophrenia” is not a ‘fact’ but an ‘assumption, a theory, a hypothesis’ (11). Consequently, Laing

⁵ Recent biological and genetic research may challenge this argument.

and Esterson state that they 'do not accept' "schizophrenia" as being a biochemical, neurophysiological, psychological fact, and we regard it as palpable error, in the present state of the evidence, to take it to be a fact. Nor do we assume its existence. Nor do we adopt it as a hypothesis. We propose no model of it' (12). In his classic text *The Divided Self*, Laing argues that the diagnosis of mental illness involves a moral judgement that is purely subjective:

The critical test of whether or not a patient is psychotic is a lack of congruity, an incongruity, a clash between him and me. The 'psychotic' is the name we have for the other person in a disjunctive relationship of a particular kind. It is only because of this interpersonal disjunction that we start to examine his urine, and look for anomalies in the graphs of the electrical activity of his brain. (36)

David Cooper in *Psychiatry and Anti-Psychiatry* describes the diagnosis of mental illness as a form of deliberate invalidation of an individual: 'psychiatry, over a major area of its whole field of operation, has been co-operating in the systematic invalidation of a wide category of persons' (x). Thus he sees the practice of psychiatry as a form of violence on the individual diagnosed as "mad".

The anti-psychiatrists' critiques have been helpful to feminist critiques of madness, because they have deconstructed the meanings which madness has generated. If madness is a subjective and arbitrary label, based on the observation and interpretation of social behaviours which in themselves are context and time dependent, it could be argued that madness itself merely denotes the distance from a cultural ideal of behaviour. Thus the label of madness is used as a form of social control, establishing boundaries from which those defined as "normal" eject those defined as "abnormal". Utilising the work of the anti-psychiatrists, feminists, such as Phyllis Chesler, Jane Ussher and Denise Russell have focused on both the higher proportion of women diagnosed with mental illness and

gender factors in treatments. They argue too that madness is a social construct, but also that it is a gendered construct, because women are more likely to suffer “madness” because of oppression within society, and because of gender bias within psychiatry. However these feminist writers have also criticised the anti-psychiatrists for their consistent lack of analysis of gender issues within psychiatry. Laing and Esterson, Szasz and Cooper all ignore gender issues in relation to their patients’ situation. They invariably refer to “man” and “man’s” situation, despite the fact that women are often their focus. Similarly, although Szasz refers to mental illness as a product of an imbalance of power, he ignores the fact that women make up the majority of those deemed “mentally ill” and that psychiatrists are predominantly male. As Shelagh Supeene writes, Szasz ‘underestimates the coercive, intrinsically unequal power relationship between therapist and patient’ (89). Furthermore, while Laing, Szasz and Cooper all critique the institution of psychiatry, they continue to practise as psychiatrists, and thus do not aim to abolish psychiatry, merely to reform it; their objectivity is consequently severely compromised. Because Szasz believes mentally ill patients create their own illness, even perhaps lie about their illness in a bid for attention and help, Supeene argues that Szasz inevitably ends up blaming the patient (92-3). Most importantly, women’s experiences as mental patients is not politicised, for as Chesler comments, these critics:

All ascribe [sic] to a double standard of mental health and/or to many patriarchal myths about “femininity” – e.g. female inferiority or female evil... Further all clinicians are involved in the institution of private practice – an institution which, like a mental asylum, is structurally modelled upon that of marriage and the family. (106)

Furthermore, as Elaine Showalter argues, the anti-psychiatrists’ approach was often damaging to women, ‘antipsychiatry had no coherent analysis to offer women’ because it was ‘male-dominated, yet

unaware of its own sexism' (*The Female Malady* 246). In addition it came 'perilously close to exploiting its women patients' through the use of sexual therapy which involved (male) therapists sleeping with (women) patients (*The Female Malady* 246-7). Laing also romanticised the figure of the mad person as a figure of protest and rebellion, which naively oversimplified many patients' experiences. The individual labelled mentally ill, usually drugged, perhaps hospitalised, perhaps operated on, certainly distressed, unhappy and removed from their everyday life, is neither empowered nor politically active.

Feminist writers have therefore taken up where the anti-psychiatrists left off, in exploring the idea that madness, as a discursive practice, functions as a form of social control, positioning individuals as "mad" for reasons that serve those in power, and in the process interacting with other discourses such as those of misogyny, power, sexuality and criminality. Madness has therefore developed into a highly politicised and gendered category. Feminist perspectives on madness have focused on the imbalance in the higher proportion of women suffering madness, but also on gender factors in diagnosis and treatments. This disproportion, it has been argued, is due to the ways that madness is constructed as a gendered disorder. Chesler's pioneering text *Women and Madness*, first published in 1972, had a significant impact on women's awareness of sexism and misogyny within the psychiatric profession, and also on feminist discourses on madness. Chesler argues that the traditional female role actually promotes medical definitions of mental illness: 'most women display "female" psychiatric symptoms such as depression, frigidity, paranoia, psychoneurosis, suicide attempts, and anxiety' (40). Thus she theorises that 'what we consider "madness," whether it appears in women or in men, is either

the acting out of the devalued female role or the total or partial rejection of one's sex-role stereotype' (56). Chesler views the psychiatric profession as deeply invested in patriarchal and misogynistic beliefs about masculine and feminine behaviours and male and female roles. Women who reject the female role are viewed as schizophrenic, promiscuous or lesbian, yet if they act out the female role to an extreme they are seen as neurotic or psychotic. In contrast while men who reject the male role are also viewed negatively as neurotic or psychotic, when they act out the male role to the extreme they are labelled criminals or sociopaths. Thus 'the kinds of behaviour that are considered "criminal" and "mentally ill" are sex-typed, and each sex is conditioned accordingly' (57). Chesler discusses the lives of four women who were diagnosed as mad, and found that signs of creative expression, religious interests and a rejection of the female role were interpreted by their husbands or fathers to be "sick". Chesler considers the traditional female role to be structured around loss and sacrifice, and that women are 'categorically denied the experience of cultural supremacy, humanity, and renewal based on their sexual identity [. . .] in different ways women are defined mad by this fact. Such madness is essentially an intense experience of female biological, sexual, and cultural castration, and a doomed search for potency' (31). Chesler concludes that '[m]ost twentieth-century women who are psychiatrically labelled, privately treated, and publicly hospitalised, are not mad' (25). In a famous study in the 1970s, Inge Broverman found that the idea of good mental health is strongly linked with masculine values. This led to the view that femininity was pathological, as psychiatrists viewed women as submissive and emotion, and less independent and aggressive than men. Thus psychiatrists view a healthy adult as male, and a sick adult as female. While Chesler's work had a significant impact on subsequent feminist

discourses on madness, some problems can be identified in her work. Chesler continues to draw a line between those women falsely diagnosed as “mad” because of sexism and misogyny, and those who are “genuinely” mad, without any explanation of how one can tell the difference, if there is one at all. She seems to distinguish the “genuinely” mad as those suffering from schizophrenia. However, writers such as Russell rigorously question the diagnosis of schizophrenia, arguing that rather than being a stable classification, it is culturally variable, involving a large number of symptoms, and without any single cause identified. Feminist critics argue that diagnosing women as mentally ill rather than angry or unhappy depoliticises their feelings, and blames women for problems within society. The focus on the woman as the locus of “her” mental health problems ignores the fact that changes in society are necessary for women to be mentally well.

In contrast to the medical model’s focus on the individual, the anti-psychiatrists and feminists favour alternative forms of therapy, involving different social environments. David Cooper offers a form of treatment that takes place outside the hospital, which is community-based and largely experimental:

What is needed is a small community of about thirty or forty people which will function without the usual clinical preoccupations and prejudices, without rigid, externally imposed staff-patient hierarchisation, and with full and active involvement of families of people in the community. In such an ‘experimental’ community a person will not have to contend with the alienated desires of others who try to beat him into shape, to cure him of trying to become the person he really is. He will at last have the chance to discover and explore authentic relatedness to others. Such a community does not yet exist but may be created.

(40)

Such a claim for the therapeutic value of small communities is explored within utopian thought. In a similar vein, Laing believed that alternative communities could facilitate the self-knowledge and growth of the individual. As Elaine Showalter notes, Kingsley Hall, one of Laing's experiments, was the centre of countercultural activity in London, a place where writers, artists, rock groups and students congregated (*The Female Malady* 231). Through this process, which deconstructed the patient-therapist relationship, Laing wanted to highlight the beneficial aspects of the experience of madness, '[m]adness need not be all breakdown. It may also be break-through. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death' (*The Politics of Experience* 110). Thus he facilitated this liberation through the creation of communities that allowed and even encouraged different forms of behaviour.

Chesler argues that women need to develop positive women-centred myths that draw on the power of the female. She draws extensively on myths of goddess figures because, she argues, they represent potent symbols of female spirituality, strength, and power that are not found in contemporary patriarchal society. Furthermore, women need to experience a shift in consciousness that will allow them to nurture themselves, by developing "ideal groups" that function as places of respect, supporting women's liberty, security, achievement and love. Busfield and Russell both argue that instead of "mad" experiences it would be better to speak of human experiences, and this would facilitate the search for social causes for human problems. In a similar vein, Ussher argues that individual and political solutions need to be found, with feminist therapy for women acknowledging

politics and gender ideology. Showalter also locates women's hope for the future in the feminist therapy movement, in which a new psychology for women could be developed (*The Female Malady* 250). Feminist therapist, Laura Brown argues that the aim of feminist therapy is liberation. Feminist therapy must be committed to radical social change and the belief that a feminist future is possible:

Feminist therapy is the practice of a genuinely revolutionary act in which both lives and society are changed. It is a discourse that subverts patriarchy which it identifies as a major source of damage in human lives. Subversion best describes a process in which the power of the patriarchy is turned upon itself to revolution and healing, a revolution that, because it is subtle and not frontal, can be effective even in the face of formidable obstacles. (17)

Thus the role of feminist therapy is to resist, subvert and confront patriarchy, looking beyond patriarchy, perhaps through the use of feminist science fiction and utopian literature. Feminist utopian texts promote both an alternative attitude to women's madness, echoing the work of Ussher and Russell et al, and also develop feminist therapies for women's ill health. In *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) altered states are moved out of the medical model and are utilised as a means of accessing a utopian consciousness. Trance, meditation, dreams, dancing and many other means of ritual are used to channel energies, facilitate connection with one another and maximise mental health. No one in the hospital is diagnosed with mental illness because it does not exist within the community. One of the central characters, Madrone, heals people by moving ch'i, or energy, from herself to those who are sick, thus altered states are used to heal. Feminist therapies, which involve working towards a feminist utopian society, are no longer necessary when San Franciscan society is feminist and utopian. In *Women on the Edge of Time*, Piercy strongly criticises the psychiatric system for being misogynist, racist, homophobic and classist. Connie, who is diagnosed and treated as a schizophrenic, is "treated" with

drugs and surgery, in an effort to control her behaviour, which is perceived to be troublesome. As a Chicana woman, poor, single, with little higher education and poor health, she is indeed troublesome to mainstream society. Yet in Mattapoissett, madness is viewed in a completely different way. It seems perfectly normal for Connie to be able to access Luciente's consciousness – to access her thoughts and emotions through a telepathic link. There, no one is diagnosed with madness by a doctor, rather if someone wishes to spend some time alone, they go away by themselves to explore themselves. "Madness" and altered states are therefore something to be celebrated and enjoyed, rather than feared and stigmatised.

Whilst madness was a particularly popular subject of study in the 60s and 70s, it has not completely slipped from public view; indeed, there are calls to place it more firmly on the academic agenda. *The Feminist Review* devoted a special issue to women and mental health in 2001, and in the wake of the terrorist attacks in America on September 11 2001, the journal *Index on Censorship* also devoted an issue to the subject of madness and the ways that countries such as China and Italy are certifying people who disagree with political policy. Also in 2001, Lynne Segal called for the revitalisation of academic debate about the social origins of mental illness:

Without either glamorising or dismissing mental illness, we urgently need to engage with the possibilities and dangers of what some call the "serotonin revolution", as anti-depressants such as Prozac become the most widely sought after and prescribed drugs. With new medications promising that even the severest states of depression or psychosis are treatable, "madness" has lost some of its stigma. ('Opinion' 13)

But, Segal warns, the belief that all misery and psychological disturbances can be “cured” creates further problems and marginalises those who do not get “well.”

Schizophrenia epitomises our vision of the ‘mad’ person, and has fascinated writers in the twentieth century as diverse as Szasz, Laing, Showalter, Janet Frame and Michel Foucault. While the symptoms of this “illness” are varied, they often involve ‘thought disorders, incongruent emotions, hallucinations and delusions’ (Russell 73). Schizophrenia literally means a split within the mind, where the individual separates her or himself from external reality and withdraws into a fantasy world. The individual often becomes increasingly confused and frightened as they withdraw further into their own world. While hallucinations, hearing “voices” and delusions are the most common symptoms with those diagnosed with schizophrenia, these experiences have not always been pathologised, as already discussed above, for in other contexts, hallucinations and delusions are valued as altered states of consciousness. Schizophrenia as a way of being seems to fit well into postmodern society, characterised as it is by loss: of power, identity, truth, autonomy and choice; schizophrenia seems to reflect the fragmentary, multiple nature of postmodern life. Katherine Landis argues that schizophrenia is an apt signifier for the way that the individual survives in the postmodern world, and is used within literature ‘to represent one type of response to life today. In its metaphoric role, schizophrenia results directly from social forces. When life becomes too difficult to endure, writers seem to be saying, one “reasonable” response is to opt out psychically – to disengage from reality and create one’s world anew’ (6). Thus, Landis argues, madness serves a rhetorical function, to reflect

individual psychic breakdown in a society in which 'insanity offers the "sanest" route' (7). Novels must be read 'schizophrenically' in order to detect a character's madness, for, she argues, many novels about madness are often read as though the character were not mad, but actually moving into the future, or visiting alien worlds, or turning into vampires. Thus texts about madness, are often read as genre fiction. While Landis' argument for a 'schizophrenic novel' is strong, her analysis of such novels tends to obscure alternative readings, so that she can only read the characters as schizophrenic and nothing else. For example, in her analysis of *Woman on the Edge of Time* she finds Connie insane, her utopian visions of Mattapoissett a product of her schizophrenia. Such a reading, which endorses the doctor's diagnosis, appears counter to the novel's narrative trajectory, which shows that Connie is, in fact, quite rational in all of her thoughts and actions. Piercy's narrative shows that Connie is neither sane nor insane, and that the term madness has little meaning in an oppressive society. Rather, it serves a political function of controlling individuals who subvert definitions of what is "normal" behaviour. It is more useful then to offer the 'schizophrenic novel' as just one way of reading a novel, so that other interpretations can be layered onto the text. In a similar vein, Evelyne Keitel argues that '[p]sychopathology seems to be one of the central themes of contemporary literature' (1). Keitel argues that the experience of reading about a character's madness causes similar psychotic emotions, such as 'ambivalent or negative emotions [. . .] pleasure as well as oppression, paralysis and anxiety' (2). Texts about madness fascinate us, Keitel claims, because of the tensions experienced in the reading of a psychotic text, of the conflicts between rationality and irrationality. They offer us representations of what we hope never to experience – psychotic dissolution.

Women's writing has often explored the theme of madness, perhaps because many women writers have been diagnosed and treated within the psychiatric system. Indeed, the woman novelist is often portrayed as a hysteric; in the twentieth-century, writers such as Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sylvia Plath and Janet Frame are known as much for their "mental health problems" as their fiction. And there has also been an attempt by critics to psychoanalyse women's writing, and to find mental illnesses like anorexia in the work of women such as Emily Bronte and Emily Dickinson. Hysteria has been associated with women for centuries; derived from the Greek word 'hyster' meaning womb, it is almost inevitable that women will be seen to suffer hysteria. Freud theorised that hysteria was a result of an inability to express desire; because of the way that women are positioned in relation to the phallus, women represent lack and loss, and therefore will never be able to fully articulate female desire. Thus the 'riddle of femininity', can never be expressed (*New* 149). According to Lacan, language is phallogocentric, thus the most important signifier is the phallus. Women can never signify anything other than lack, weakness and negativity, therefore when women speak and write they can only write about the experience of the other. Within psychoanalysis, femininity is seen as an intrinsically hysterical position, and women's writing must necessarily reflect this hysteria, for it can never be truly expressive of female desire. The woman writer speaks out, and therefore subverts her femininity, but at the same time she complies by using masculine language. Only through metaphor, dreams, and what Kristeva calls semiotic language – linked to the pre-oedipal – can desire

rupture women's texts. Following this "patriarchal logic", Juliet Mitchell argues that women's hysteria is the result of women using patriarchal language to talk about female desire:

The woman novelist must be an hysteric. Hysteria is the woman's simultaneous acceptance and refusal of the organisation of sexuality under patriarchal capitalism. It is simultaneously what a woman can do both to be feminine and to refuse femininity, within patriarchal discourse. And I think that is exactly what the novel is; I do not believe there is such a thing as female writing, a 'woman's voice'. There is the hysteric's voice which is the woman's masculine language (one has to speak 'masculinely' in a phallogocentric world) talking about feminine experience. It's both simultaneously the woman novelist's refusal of the woman's world – she is, after all, a novelist – and her construction from within a masculine world of that women's world. It touches on both. (101)

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* initiated much critical debate within women's writing, with its declaration that women's madness signifies protest against the patriarchal order. They propose that in order to write the woman writer is fundamentally split, experiencing an "anxiety of authorship" – a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a "precursor" that the act of writing will isolate or destroy her' (49). Consequently, they argue that defining oneself as an author is incompatible with defining oneself as a woman, which can cause not only alienation and debilitation but also a 'female schizophrenia of authorship' (78). In 'Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy' Shoshana Felman also argues that woman represents madness. She theorises that in men's literature, woman represents madness because she is the Other, and different from man. Women writers are therefore locked into phallogocentric language, in which man is associated with reason and sanity, and women with unreason and madness. Moving away from these oppositions becomes troublesome: [h]ow can madness [. . .] be conceived outside of its dichotomous opposition to sanity, without being subjugated to reason? How can difference as such be

thought out as non-subordinate to identity? In other words, how can thought break away from the logic of polar oppositions?' (10). Thus the problem for women is 'how to avoid speaking both as mad and as not mad' (20). This can only occur through the re-invention of language, 'to re-learn how to speak: to speak not only against, but outside of the specular phallogocentric structure, to establish a discourse the status of which would no longer be defined by the phallacy of masculine meaning' (20). If, as Felman argues, madness is 'one of the most subversive of all cultural questions' then what does it mean to write of madness (*Writing and Madness* 12)? Felman argues that the novel's relationship with madness is fundamental, because madness is linked with desire and language. Thus, she claims that the novel has a schizophrenic structure, tempting, and at the same time, negating madness. This desire to disrupt language and binary oppositions is echoed in the work of Luce Irigaray who argues that women are silenced by language, and this silencing can lead only to madness: '[t]he rejection, the excursion of a female imaginary certainly puts woman in the position of experiencing herself only fragmentarily, in the little-structured margins of a dominant ideology as waste, or excess, what is left of a mirror invested by the (masculine) "subject" to reflect himself, to copy himself' (*This Sex* 30). In order to counter this marginalisation, Irigaray argues that women must engage with multiplicity, 'of never being simply one' which opens up a utopian vision of limitless possibilities (*This Sex* 31). In the same vein as Felman, she argues that reversing binary oppositions is not enough, rather complete destruction of hierarchical and binary structures is necessary, making a 'disruptive excess' possible (*This Sex* 78). The hysteric or madwoman is unable to speak her desire in masculine language, and while she tries to communicate her desire through her body, she is, in Irigaray's eyes, both powerless and revolutionary. Through the

development of a female language, women's writing can disrupt and disturb the patriarchal status quo. Irigaray therefore gestures towards a utopian feminine writing that is fluid, tactile and dynamic, breaking through syntax and reason, and privileging plurality. While Irigaray's view of the madwoman is dialectical, reflecting both utopian and dystopian aspects, she has been criticised by Felman for her claim that women are totally repressed and silenced by patriarchal culture. As Felman comments, if women are completely silenced, how does she (or any woman) speak at all ('Women and Madness' 10)? Clearly, there is a problem in romanticising the madwoman as a figure of political or revolutionary dissent. But Irigaray acknowledges these problems in her writing, presenting both the dangers, and yet also the possibilities for women to recreate language in a way that expresses utopian desire.

Hélène Cixous who has also written of the hysteric, often fails to capture this ambivalence. In 'The Laugh of the Medusa' and 'Sorties,' Cixous outlines the utopian possibilities for women's writing, drawing on the idea that thinking and writing are in themselves politically transformative practices, 'I shall speak about women's writing; about what it will do. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing ('Laugh' 345). Writing, for Cixous, is inherently utopian, because it accesses spaces of subversion and transformation. Cixous argues that hysterics are 'the supplicants of yesterday, who come as forebears of the new women, after whom no intersubjective relation will ever be the same [. . .] Before long your efficacy will be seen at work when your speech is no longer suppressed, its point turned in against your breast, but written out over against the other' ('Laugh' 257). Instead of internalising feelings and pain, as the hysteric does, women must transform these emotions

outwards into language, reclaiming language, 'explode it, turn it around, and seize it' ('Laugh' 257). Cixous argues, then, for a transformation of "madness" into utopian writing and creativity; seeking to mutate silent, inexpressible fear and pain, into the angry outpourings of feminine self-expression. Cixous claims that the hysteric embodies paradox, she is both powerless as feminised victim, but also disruptive and challenging to the status quo, because she rejects the passive female role, instead articulating all of her anger and pain. She is alienated from (patriarchal) language, unable to articulate her self through words, and she is alienated from her self and from her femininity. Her femininity as a woman within the masculine order makes no(n)sense to her. The "woman" that she sees all around her does not fit with her own experiences of herself; thus she becomes split. This connection of the hysteric or 'madwoman' to the power of subversion and political disruption is a contentious one. As noted above, this was also the argument of the anti-psychiatrists, who tended to romanticise the madman (sic) as a symbol of political dissent. Jennifer Burwell comments that it is dangerous to consistently privilege margin over centre, because this risks permanently exiling those on the margins (31). And Catherine Clément is also wary of this point of view. In an exchange between Clément and Cixous, Cixous claims, '[h]ysteria is necessarily an element that disturbs arrangements; wherever it is, it shakes up all those who want to install themselves, who want to install something that is going to work, to repeat.' To which Clément replies, '[y]es, it introduces dissension, but it doesn't explode anything at all (*Newly Born Woman* 156). In her own writing, Clément acknowledges the plural role of the hysteric. She makes distinct connections between sorcerers (or witches) and hysterics (or madwomen), and uses them as representations of female experience in patriarchal culture. According to her, they both

inhabit an imaginary zone, a place of exclusion and alienation, of splitting and transformation. The sorceress and the hysteric are the same women, represented through different discourses within culture. Yet both are oppressed and trapped. The sorceress is physically chained and punished by society, the hysteric in turn is bound by her symptoms, and her inability to express her self. The hysteric is a 'witch in reverse, turned back within herself, she has put all her eroticizing into internal pain ('Newly Born Woman' 39). In a similar vein, in *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* Elaine Showalter asks 'can we redefine hysteria in a way that allows more space for the mysteries for human emotions?' (11). Showalter is calling for a complete reconceptualisation of the distinctions between mind and body and health and sickness. While Showalter rejects the idea that madness is a liberating and subversive space for women, she views hysterical symptoms as a somatic sign of a naturally human emotional distress. She therefore seeks to move the terms of "madness" out of the medical terrain, and, in the process, to transform the concept of hysteria into a universal experience.

In her book on 'mad intertextuality' in women's contemporary fiction, Monica Kaup argues that texts about women's madness have re-positioned the experience of madness on the literary map. In the 1970s, she claims, women's madness was portrayed as positive and visionary (126) as writers such as Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood, Bessie Head and Marge Piercy utilised madness as a means of accessing power (126). As Kaup notes, these writers are successful in 'effectively dissociating madness from its medical label of illness and instead valorising its capacities for insight, knowledge, and revelation' (126). A 'willed project towards breakthrough' means that the 'madwoman has transcended

her status as a passive victim of the combined forces of illness and social circumstance to figure as a self-determining heroine on another stage, an “elsewhere” carved out by means of an energy potential springing from the specificity of mad perceptions and insight’ (126-7).

This view of the hysteric as a highly subversive figure has been very popular within feminist theory throughout the 1970s and 80s, but has been countered by feminist writers such as Nina Baym and Marta Caminero-Santangelo who argue that feminists who emphasise the associations between women and madness end up marginalising women and reinforcing the idea that women have no voice within culture. Baym claims that readings of madness in women’s texts limit alternative interpretations, and end up emphasising gender difference. Santangelo argues that the concept of madness can never be utopian, because it is so closely allied with the negative associations of mental illness. ‘Perhaps’ Santangelo counters, ‘the reason why the madwoman continues to be such an enticing figure is that she offers the illusion of power, although she in fact provides a symbolic resolution whose only outcome must be greater powerlessness’ (3). Santangelo goes on to suggest that women’s writings about madness contradict feminist readings that madness is liberatory and subversive. Instead, she finds that these texts show that women are silenced by their experience of madness, only finding their voice once released from the confines of the psychiatric hospital. Santangelo’s argument seems convincing, because it speaks to the rational side of the argument; women’s autobiographies show that the experience of madness is disabling and painful and unpleasant, and this cannot be denied. Thus, she concludes if madness is negative, then any association between women and madness can only be

damaging to women. But Santangelo is caught up within the oppositions that writers like Felman, Irigaray and Cixous are attempting to deconstruct. She is associating madness with unreason and irrationality, without questioning or critiquing these associations. Felman and Irigaray work to challenge existing meanings surrounding madness, so that madness, and the experience of madness can be transformed into something else. For this to occur, however, a transformation in the social structure also needs to take place. Santangelo fails to recognise these links when she argues that these writers are rejecting social change in exchange for a celebration of madness (180). She concludes that feminists must 'privilege the forms of agency, and of active transformation in all its forms, which women engage in. And in so doing, let us open an imaginative space for women to be able to escape from madness by envisioning themselves as agents' (181). Felman, Irigaray and Cixous, and feminist utopian writers, make a more subtle argument that madness is locked into cultural meanings, which locate the experience and representation of madness within the sphere of illness and disability. However these meanings can be changed, and in the process, the experience of madness would change for women also.

These arguments represent some of the conflicting views that surround the figure of the madwoman, and some issues surrounding the discussion of madness, schizophrenia and hysteria, within a sociological, cultural and literary context. In a variety of texts from the 60s onwards therefore, madness has become increasingly contested. Viewed by the medical establishment as a biological disease caused by biochemical imbalances or genetic disorders, countercultural discourses see madness

variously as caused by society's malfunctioning, and at the same time to be utilised as a liberatory response, making possible psychic and spiritual renewal. Cultural and psychoanalytic feminists celebrate madness as a means of cultural subversion and dissent. The link between madness and liberation, between psychic breakdown and breakthrough is reiterated in the work of such writers as Laing, Lessing, Atwood and Piercy. As Kaup notes, madness is revalued as a 'psychic journey' which often leads to self-discovery, self-renewal and, in the work of utopian writers, social action and change (126). These transformative views of madness and other altered states have been effectively utilised by writers of feminist utopian fiction who represent these states as a means of accessing utopian states of consciousness.

Focusing more specifically on women's writing, Kathleen Komar argues that women writers have created literary utopian spaces in which to negotiate these issues. She identifies two strategies in the treatment of space in women's fiction; the first is the exploration of female space in the external world, and the second is the interior space of the female mind. This interior space is textualised through fiction, as the text itself becomes a space of definition and affirmation of the female (90-1). This use of the text to explore female spaces, Komar argues, is a strategy to avoid madness. Komar traces the ways that, [f]emale characters retreat into the interior space of the mind [. . .] Female characters have long retrenched in the attic spaces of madness. But contemporary female characters often re-emerge from their bouts with near madness to declare a new, relational sense of the self [. . .] which emphasises preoedipal relationships and interpersonal connectedness' (98). She adds, [t]his ego

flexibility and relational thinking helps some contemporary women characters to escape madness into a new space of psychological, spiritual, and social relationships.' (98). Creating a female self through language, the text itself is transformed into a re-visionary site. Thus, Komar argues that women can create mental utopias within literary texts:

The space of the literary text becomes a site of critical rethinking and often of female rebirth. The textual space allows women writers to create new psychological shapes that displace the hierarchical patriarchal structures in favour of relationship, communality, and interiority. This new literary space author/ises women to throw a few new curves into contemporary culture. (105)

While it could be argued that 'altered states of consciousness' cannot effect change in the material world, and that these utopias therefore represent a limited form of escapism for women and a retreat into their psyches, I would not agree. Many of the texts discussed affirm the interaction between consciousness and the world, of the importance of social action. Transforming individual consciousness is only the first step – but a necessary step – towards social change. According to Rosemary Jackson, the ability to fantasise often represents unconscious desires for change in the world. These desires, once articulated through utopian texts, can then act to problematise cultural norms. As David Harvey remarks in his recent work *Spaces of Hope*, '[t]hrough changing our world we change ourselves. How then, can any of us talk about social change without at the same time being prepared, both mentally and physically, to change ourselves' (234-5)? From a feminist perspective, Carol Christ expresses a similar view regarding the notion that the social and spiritual are intimately entwined and mutually interactive:

Women's spiritual quest provides new visions of individual and shared power that can inspire a transformation of culture and society... Women's spiritual quest thus is not an alternative to women's social quest, but rather is one dimension of the larger quest women have embarked upon to create a new world. (*Diving Deep* 131)

An alternative explanation of altered states is to view them within the context of spirituality. Within discourses on spirituality, the concept, experience and "treatment" of madness is transformed, and altered states are positively reinterpreted as a means of spiritual renewal, rebirth and growth. Rather than representing debilitation and disease, altered states are presented as a means of psychic healing. The feminist spirituality movement has inspired a number of feminist utopian writers to incorporate an image of the goddess in their utopian visions, in novels such as Sunlight's *Womonseed* (1986), Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) and Elisabeth Vonarburg's *In the Mother's Land* (1992). In *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, a wide array of Goddesses and Gods are worshipped, including Gaia, Kali, Buddha, African orishas and Aphrodite. In *Womonseed*, the woman's community worships the Goddess who reflects the women themselves for 'they know that they are Goddess' (4). In *In the Mother's Land*, a matriarchal community worships Elli, who exists in their mythology as the being that created the earth: 'Elli created everything, as you know. One day, Elli decided that Elli was bored with being all alone, and so Elli took a bit of Elliself and began to unwind Elliself, like a ball of wool. And that's how Elli made the daylight and the night, earth and water for the plants and [...] Elli created us' (18). Carol Pearson finds in feminist utopias:

A consciousness which fuses thought and feeling. Although this consciousness does not call for the worship of a "god," a vision of an earth mother goddess often personifies the philosophical vision underlying a feminist utopia [...] the mother goddess represents life in all its fluidity and contradictions. The goddess personifies a vision which is consistent with female experience. ('Coming Home' 69)

Lucy Sargisson argues that a 'transgressive approach to the concept of spirituality is a recurrent theme in feminist utopian theory and fiction. It is, I suggest, utopian in its function because, by rendering previous conceptual structures, divisions, and borders unnecessary, it creates the potential for new ways of conceptualising and thinking' (*Contemporary* 138). However, Sargisson finds that women's spirituality and ecofeminist spirituality are not fundamentally transgressive, because they have a tendency to 'stop their analyses at the point of inversion or reversal of dualistic and hierarchical constructions. This results in a final utopian position in which previously devalued 'feminine' values and attributes are dominant and found a new utopian (in the traditional sense of the word) ethic' (*Contemporary* 143). Certainly, this is a problem in much writing on spirituality in this area, and also in some feminist utopian texts, and will be explored in the following chapters.

A belief in feminist spirituality is often accompanied by a willingness to embrace a wide variety of altered states, as they are incorporated into the spirituality and the culture of the utopia. For example, in *The Fifth Sacred Thing*, the utopians use psychic energies to heal and develop telepathic powers and use dreams to interpret their experiences. These beliefs are logical to their belief system which incorporates the idea that every single living thing is connected, and that these energies can be accessed and utilised. Gaining a new spiritual consciousness is an integral part of any religion, not least within the women's spirituality movement. The spiritual consciousness that is gained, however, is not only spiritual, but transformative, rooted in a new consciousness of the earth, animals, each other, and of all of the natural world. The belief in the sacredness of the self, engenders a view that exploring the

self is a valid activity, and that any means of exploring the inner mind is acceptable and a form of self-knowledge. The idea that the self is sacred and is the key to personal and social change is derived in part from the New Age movement, which represents a diverse collection of beliefs and practices, ranging from holistic therapies to New Religious Movements, weekend seminars and festivals. Yet New Age thought is united in its belief in the sacredness of the self and that '[a] new consciousness, and all that it brings with it, is essential. This alone opens the way to experiencing the spirituality of other people or the natural order; this alone provides the resources for fulfilling the potential of the planet' (Heelas 29). Here, Heelas emphasises that both a social and environmental conscience is necessary for the New Ager; social change can be effected through self-responsibility and through inner spirituality, which will bring about harmony, peace and happiness. Thus, Heelas concludes, New Age thought is 'a highly optimistic, celebratory, utopian and spiritual form of humanism' (28). New Age thought came into prominence in the 1960s when self-spirituality became popular as part of the countercultural movement. Since then, interest in spirituality has grown, as individuals have drawn from eastern religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Sufism, and social movements such as feminism, environmentalism and alternative therapies. Feminist spirituality has emerged from this melange, and while New Age thought has been widely criticised for the dominance of patriarchal, materialistic and capitalist thinking within its ranks (Sjöö, Coward, Diamond), feminist spirituality has embraced aspects of New Age thought.

The feminist spirituality movement developed in the 1970s as a result of the social movements mentioned above, and also has strong Pagan and Wiccan influences. This movement is unique amongst every other type of religion, in that it has a female theology; an image of the goddess is often pre-eminent as an archetype. Yet it is clearly erroneous to speak of feminist spirituality in the singular, for practitioners are to be found across a wide range of theologies, and engage in a variety of alternative practices. However, a helpful model is provided by Cynthia Eller who identifies five primary characteristics of feminist spirituality: a valuing of women's empowerment, the practice of ritual or magic, a reverence of nature, a critique of gender and gender ideologies and the favouring of a revisionist version of Western history (*Living* 6). Eller identifies certain tensions within these criteria, especially around views of nature, and of gender. There is a strong tendency in parts of the women's spirituality movement to celebrate femininity and the female and to focus on women as the source of a natural and pre-eminent divine and sacred essence rooted in women's ability to give birth.⁶ This viewpoint is enhanced by Pagan influences because Paganism is structured around sexual dichotomy. However, feminist spirituality has partially moved away from simple celebrations of the female, and is often active in a more complex critique of gender and its social and cultural construction. Starhawk's work reflects this movement, as her earlier writing prioritises sexual difference and tends to exclude men. But in her later work she is careful to stress that maleness and femaleness are not fixed qualities,

⁶ For example, Sjöö, whilst critiquing New Age thought for patriarchalism and dualistic thinking then goes on to celebrate women's special abilities to commune with nature, and women's psychic powers. She claims that women can become 'whole' through Goddess spirituality, that women 'know' what is needed to change the world. This is where critics like Rosalind Coward find problems, because in this interpretation of a woman-centred spirituality, there is a tendency to slip into an uncritical valorisation of the female or feminine which are unhelpful to feminism.

and that neither the female nor the male should be placed in opposition. She explains that in her earlier work,

I saw femaleness and maleness as reified qualities, like liquids that could fill us. I believed, only with Jung, that each woman had within her a male self, and each man a female self. Now I find these concepts unhelpful and misleading. Today I don't use the terms female energy and male energy. I don't identify femaleness or maleness with specific sets of qualities or predispositions. While I have found images of the goddess empowering to me as a woman, I no longer look to the Goddesses and Gods to define for me what woman or man should be. (*The Spiral Dance* 20)

Only when there is a sustained critique of masculinity and femininity can feminist spirituality be truly utopian and transformative.

Drawing from New Age thought, Paganism and Wicca, feminist spiritualities usually view the goddess as immanent in every aspect of nature, so that all becomes sacred and worthy of respect and worship. Such a theology clearly has links with ecological movements, and there is a significant crossover between the feminist spirituality movement and the ecology movement, most notably in the relatively recent development of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism contains many threads and positions, but at its heart lies a belief that attitudes of destruction to the earth and nature are linked to misogynistic attitudes and the oppression of women. Much ecofeminist work also contains spiritual thought, based on a belief in the sacredness of all life, and a spiritual connection with all life forms. A utopian ecofeminist future would see both men and women living together in harmony with nature. Carolyn Merchant defines ecofeminism as entailing 'new gender relations between women and men and between humans and nature [. . .] radical ecofeminism analyses environmental problems from within its

critique of patriarchy and offers alternatives that could liberate both women and nature' ('Ecofeminism' 100).

Feminist spirituality contains a strong political orientation that seeks to move beyond the personal. As Jean Waldron comments, '[f]eminist Spirituality, like most liberation spirituality, seeks to permeate the political as well as the personal realms, and to animate action as one of its responses to a God whom it believes to be loving and just. It is a spirituality which has the vision of transformation towards a relating society, where there is mutuality, acceptance and justice for all. The mutuality is not just between power and people, but with creation and the earth' (68). Elizabeth Puttick argues that women's spirituality needs to be placed within the context of feminism, '[i]t is clear that the goddess as a symbol has no innate meaning value or predetermined social outcome. It is therefore important that in Western culture goddess worship should take place in a feminist context, in order to ground and integrate the spiritual with the social and political issues' (203). Starhawk clarifies this point: 'Let us be clear that when I say Goddess I am not talking about a being somewhere outside of this world, nor am I proposing a new belief system. I am talking about choosing an attitude: choosing to take this living world, the people and creatures on it, as the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, to see the world, the earth, and our lives as sacred' (*Dreaming the Dark* 11). The goddess is therefore a symbol onto which feminists place specific meanings and ideas, in order to create a transformative theology. It could be argued that the multiplicity of meanings available within feminist spiritualities are a strength rather than a weakness, and contribute to the utopian ideas that are generated. Carol Christ claims that '[t]he

Goddesses show us that the female can be symbolic of all that is creative and powerful in the universe. The simplest and most profound meaning of the image of the Goddess is the legitimacy and goodness of female power, the female body, and female will' (*Rebirth* 22). In another context she claims that '[t]he affirmation of female power contained in the Goddess symbol has both psychological and political consequences. Psychologically, it means the defeat of the view engendered by patriarchy that women's power is inferior and dangerous. This new "mood" of affirmation of female power also leads to new "motivations"; it supports and undergirds women's trust in their own power and the power of other women in family and society' ('Why Women Need the Goddess' 278). Clearly there is a danger of essentialism within certain aspects of goddess spirituality. The association made between the glorification of the goddess and the celebration of the female only underlines female difference. While some writers in this area do suffer from essentialism, other writers manage to articulate a more sophisticated view of gender that allows for flexibility in its representation of both men and women, and doesn't mark the goddess with a purely female biological body. Eller argues that the goddess is both one and many, she escapes any attempt at definition, because these attempts constrain individual experience of her. There is also no consensus of the gendered nature of the Goddess, of whether she is all female, whether she contains male elements, or whether she is ultimately genderless, existing beyond gender. In a chapter entitled 'Not Just God in a Skirt' Eller argues, '[p]art of the reason spiritual feminists keep coming back to female imagery (apart from its obvious feminist appeal) is that the goddess is representative of many qualities that have long been regarded as "feminine," [. . .] Her femaleness is not solely a matter of biological sex (or some spiritual counterpart), but is an

identification with things denigrated as feminine and an opposite to ideals uplifted as manly' (*Living* 135). Thus there are many differences in how the goddess is conceptualised, and the meanings which are assigned to her. Christ clearly supports a cultural feminist view that all that is female is good, and thus the Goddess should reflect positive female qualities. However, Eller emphasises the multiple meanings that the Goddess generates, so that she embodies no fixed meanings. Eller concludes that the differences within the feminist spirituality movement reveal its resistance to dogma and its ability to incorporate many different ideas and views. Christ also maintains that the many meanings that the goddess incorporates reveal the richness of women's relationship to her, and that they will continue to reinvent their spirituality on an individual level. Donna Haraway in 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs' concludes that she would rather be a cyborg than a goddess. But feminist spirituality is not about making women into goddesses, it is more about the reinvention, story telling and proliferation of identities that Haraway herself applauds.

The political aspect of feminist spirituality is therefore aimed at generating a new powerful woman-centred consciousness. Mary Daly argues that the women's movement has 'the revolutionary potential of women's liberation for challenging the forms in which consciousness incarnates itself and for changing consciousness' (*Beyond God The Father* 7). Consequently, a new space will be opened up, 'a new space, in which women are free to become who we are, in which there are real and significant alternatives to the prefabricated identities provided within the enclosed spaces of patriarchal institutions' (40). Again, Daly, like Christ, relies on essentialist views of "woman", yet their belief that

social and psychic transformation is possible does contain utopian possibilities. Starhawk also writes powerfully of women's spiritual and political consciousness. Starhawk, who describes her work as uniting the spiritual and the political, constantly returns to the issue of changing consciousness. She articulates new modes of thinking towards social and spiritual change through dreaming, asking, '[h]ow do we find the dark within and transform it, own it as our own power? How do we dream it into a new image, dream it into actions that will change the world into a place where no more horror stories happen, where there are no more victims' (*Dreaming* xxvii)? The answer is through changing consciousness, which involves gaining power-from-within, or what Starhawk terms "immanence." Immanence is a spiritual power emanating from the Goddess, or could more simply be located in the self. Utopian change can only be achieved, she argues, through 'the art of changing consciousness at will' (*Dreaming* 13), which is the key to all of her writings. In her view, changing consciousness can be achieved through mundane activities such as protest, letter writing and speeches, but also through psychic development; ultimately, however, changing consciousness involves making connections with one another and with the earth. In her practical work in Goddess worship, Starhawk utilises trance states as a means of ritual, 'I see "trance" not as one particular state, but as many fluid possibilities of consciousness. I know that human beings naturally move in and out of these states all the time' (*Dreaming* xvi). Starhawk's writing and political activities exemplify aspects of feminist spirituality working affectively to unite spirit and politics. She articulates vital links between ideas and action; she lives according to her ideals, writing of her beliefs and visions of the future, promoting Goddess worship, and campaigning for ecological and political sustainability. Spiritual ecofeminism is therefore

rooted in a new consciousness of the world that we live in, and of the possibilities of transformation for the future; articulating both an individual change in consciousness, and a communal vision of consciousness as connection to one another and nature.

Discussion of the transformational nature of altered states has therefore taken place across a wide array of discourses, some of which have confined the study of altered states within a medical straitjacket, and others which have tried to explore them within a spiritual context. Feminist utopian texts have taken up some of these discussions through their use of altered states within utopia. In the following chapters I will explore further the relationship between feminist utopianism and altered states through a detailed discussion of the primary texts.

Chapter Three

Madness

Throughout the 1960s and 70s the concept of “madness” was put under scrutiny in a wide variety of discourses. Madness functions as an altered state of consciousness within feminist utopian fiction, particularly those texts published in the 1970s and 80s, as a means of accessing and sustaining utopian visions. In this chapter I will explore the links between women’s madness and feminist utopian fiction, arguing that these utopias utilise discourses on women’s madness in order to explore the personal and political consequences for women of being labelled as “mad” in contemporary society. At the same time, they offer a means of looking at “madness” in new ways.

In an essay, first published in 1971, on the problems women writers face, Joanna Russ argues that women have two choices when it comes to plots – the ‘Love Story’ plot, or the ‘How She Went Crazy’ plot (‘What Can a Heroine Do?’ 84-5). The ‘How She Went Crazy Plot’, which Russ gently derides as limiting for women, has been a very popular form of women’s writing. If a woman writer rejects these plot choices, Russ warns, as she inevitably must (‘One cannot write *The Bell Jar*, or *Jane Eyre*, good as it is, forever’) then she must look to other literary genres which offer less gender-bound prescriptions of masculinity and femininity (85). Feminist utopian writers have merged the ‘crazy plot’ with the science fiction genre, to create an ambiguous hybrid; interestingly, much writing on women’s

madness embraces hybridity and ambiguity in its structures and forms. Fact and fiction become intertwined and overlaid, so that “truths” become something that are not related to objective facts, but something that the individual must discern for herself. As Lauren Slater writes in her ‘memoir with lies’: ‘I learned that truth is bendable, that what you wish is every bit as real as what you are’ (*Spasm* 5). As Russ notes, women’s experience of madness has been a significant theme in women’s writing for centuries. From the 60s onwards there has been a proliferation of autobiographical and fictional writing about the experiences of women with general mental breakdown and their treatment within the psychiatric system. There are too many to mention all of them here, but key texts of the 60s and 70s include Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* (1963), Joanne Greenberg’s *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* (1964), Janet Frame’s *Faces in the Water* (1961) and Marie Cardinal’s *The Words to Say it* (1975, transl. 1984). These detailed and intense narratives offer powerful indictments of psychiatric institutionalisation, and reflect popular criticisms made by the anti-psychiatrists during this period. While these texts are largely autobiographical, fictional texts on women’s madness have also been very popular, and novels such as Christine Brooke-Rose’s *Amalgamemnon* (1984), Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook* (1962) and *The Four-Gated City* (1969) and Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* (1972) have become well-known feminist texts. These narratives describe the pressures on women in the 50s and 60s to conform to a strict definition of femininity, often leading to emotional and physical breakdown. As Maroula Joannou notes, these texts, resist ‘any notion that madness is a purely individual phenomenon rather than an involuntary response to the pressures which *all* women experience’ (16). Thus the collective gendered experience of madness, or mental breakdown or pressure, is emphasised. In Lessing’s work the liberatory and

often utopian aspects of madness are highlighted and celebrated. In *The Four-Gated City* those labelled as mad are represented as accessing altered states of consciousness, which prove psychologically and emotionally educative. Lessing links these experiences with psychic powers such as telepathy, which, she claims, can be consciously developed, and could act as the key to utopian changes in the future. These texts have been followed up in the 80s and 90s with more reflective commentaries on the experiences of specific mental illnesses, such as depression, manic depression and borderline personality disorder. In these later texts, sufferers are usually out-patients, treated with drugs, and offered little, if any, emotional or psychological support. Again, these texts reflect the changes in attitudes towards those with mental problems in these later decades. Now the term "madness" has been replaced by "mental illness" or "mental disorder" as the emphasis shifts to interpreting these experiences through the lens of disease and illness again. These later autobiographical narratives explore the role of medication in the lives of the authors, describing how important support structures are, and how they often crumble under the pressures of mental illness. Important texts during this period have been, Susanna Kaysen's *Girl, Interrupted* (1983), Kate Millett's *The Loony Bin Trip* (1990), Lauren Slater's *Welcome to My Country* (1996) and Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation* (1994). In *The Loony-Bin Trip*, feminist Kate Millett describes her attempts to create a utopian art colony as an antidote to her treatments within psychiatric asylums. Madness here, then becomes a textual site of fantasy, representing the possibility of escape from the reality and restrictions of the every day.

The experience of madness, seems at times in these texts, in their utopian moments, to act as a moment of release, from social mores, values and conventions, from the constrictions of every day, into a more immediate and intimate relationship with the body and mind. Madness is rewritten as a fantasy of release, and it is the act of writing, and re-writing, that is significant in the process of experiencing the madness. The writing process is also central to accepting the madness as an integrated aspect of the self. As Millett notes, 'the only way out [of madness] is to write [. . .] Only work, only writing can do it – can forestall depression. Work will save you, not their lousy pills and telling you you're crazy' (254-6). Yet in the process of writing, fact and fiction become confused, and a new self emerges through the narration, echoing the experience of madness, in which fantasy and reality become distorted, like a broken reflection. Slater, whose autobiographical narrative, *Spasm*, is subtitled *A Memoir with Lies*, admits that she faked a lot of her epileptic fits, and claims she suffered from Munchausen's syndrome, (in which patients pretend to be ill). She has also written in other books of her severe depression and borderline personality disorder (*Welcome to my Country, Prozac Diary*). Did she have all four illnesses, or just one, or none at all? In *Spasm*, Lauren writes that the hospital represents safety, offering her a well-defined role as a patient, which she knows well, and a release from the struggles of the outside world. She writes,

I would be his patient for years to come, because even long after the operation he would have to keep studying my brain. I saw my future then. Maybe during the day I would have a career, but I would always come here, where they would be waiting with thermometer and foot soaks, and if I ever did anything wrong, if I couldn't get into college or forever flunked Mrs. Bezen's math class, no one could blame me, for I was sick and being studied by a surgeon. (*Spasm* 93)

Thus madness, in the text, becomes a metaphor for confusion and despair. Marie Cardinal's well-known tale of her experiences of psychoanalysis, *The Words to Say It: An Autobiographical Novel* (1984) also has a subtitle that confuses genres. Cardinal, a novel writer, writes of her madness, of "the Thing", which haunted her through her adolescence, and her married life. Cardinal spent several years in a sanatorium, which she then runs away from to visit a psychoanalyst. Through the process of re-telling and writing about her childhood memories and dreams, Marie, or the 'I' of the narrator, realises that the roots of her madness, whose main feature is very heavy menstrual bleeding, rests in her relationship with her parents and her husband, and with her femininity. At one point, as she ties the Thing with her marriage, she writes,

The bursting forth of the Thing, its invasion of everything, coincided with the marriage. The Thing was fed by pregnancies, months of nursing, and the constant fatigue of a young woman with three children, a job, a house and a husband [. . .] I concluded that I had been sick ever since I had been living with Jean-Pierre, and he was the one who made me sick. (217-8)

Writing about the madness, writing through the madness, however, as with Slater, provides a release, '[t]o make them understand and to help those who lived in the hell where I also I lived, I promised myself that I would some day write an account of my analysis, and turn it into a novel in which I would tell of the healing of a woman as like me as if she were my own sister' (248). Thus, through the process of writing a split occurs, for '[i]n order to tell about the journey, the birth, in effect, I have to remove myself from the mad one, to keep her at a distance, to split myself in two' (9). Yet while writing offers to fill up the space that madness occupied, both remain vaguely unfulfilling, as Slater notes, 'What, I wondered, would fill the silence, the space in me? What would make me real? I had tried stealing, sickness, the lovely links of language, none of it had worked' (*Spasm* 155). Both the writing and the

madness are used and experienced as a mean of fulfilling these women's hungry desire, for an ease with the self, for satisfying relationships and for a hopeful future to work towards.

Kate Millett, author of *Sexual Politics*, interprets her diagnosis as manic-depressive as constituting a betrayal by her family: she was 'busted' by her husband, lover and sister, as her psychiatrist tells her "Your only mistake then was in trusting the people who brought you here" (41). But ultimately, the betrayal is of her own mind against herself; she cannot trust her own perceptions any more for they have been de-grounded. In a searing critique of the 'loony bin', Millett argues that "[t]he bin itself is insane, abnormal, a terrifying captivity, an irrational deprivation of every human need – so that maintaining reason within it is an overwhelming struggle" (218). The experience of madness involves a blurring of the edges between fantasy and reality, which is reflected in the text, which Millett writes as a form of catharsis. Yet on a re-reading, she finds that 'I find something in it rings false' (308) as though in the writing her story mutates into something strange and unfamiliar. However, the process of writing, for Millett, as for Slater and Cardinal, is key to her finding a 'way out'. In the hospital she writes letters on toilet paper, and when she leaves she writes her autobiographical story of her experiences: 'I wrote *the Loony-Bin Trip* in part to recover myself, my mind, even its claims to sanity. But in hope as well that I might relinquish that conundrum – sanity/insanity' (313). She concludes that we can say, 'that there is still "another country" in consciousness' but demurs over whether it should be called madness; 'if we go mad – so what? We would come back again if not chased away, exiled, isolated, confined' (314). Millett's book is important to her because it gives voice to her side of the

story of her experience of madness, which she was unable to tell when she was experiencing it, because everything she said was denied authority because she was “mad”. Thus her narrative is about setting the record straight, of reclaiming her subjectivity, her authority over her tale, of her self. Yet at the last, she reintegrates the madness back into her self, ‘Madness? Perhaps. A certain speed of thought, certain wonderful flights of ideas. Certain states of altered perception...’ (315). Millett’s struggle with being labelled mad by those she loves is one fraught with contradictions, as a feminist writer, civil rights activist, scholar, public speaker, writer, she demands to be heard, but the mantle of madness muffles and distorts her voice, so that she can no longer be listened to. Through the process of writing, however, Millett is able to create her own narrative of her version of her self.

In these texts then, madness becomes a metaphor for the problems and difficulties of living as a woman within patriarchal society, of coming to terms with a gendered self. Power and agency are both relinquished and then achieved through becoming a sick person, as attention is freely given to the “patient” by friends and family. Unhappiness precedes the madness, thus the experience becomes a journey into happiness and a stronger more mature sense of self. Madness represents a way of giving up control of the self, yet agency is also achieved through the process of moving away from madness into “sanity”, or alternatively, through the integration of madness into the self, in an acceptance of the ambiguities of the self and the complex “truths” of the self. The notion of a female self, and what it is, and how it is portrayed, is clearly central to these texts on madness. Many feminist novels show the development of female subjectivity, yet at the same time reveal that any search for authenticity is, as

Felski describes, 'self-defeating' (75). Felski identifies the confessional novel and the novel of self-discovery as two key feminist genres, and the madness texts described above clearly fit into both these categories, as the madness is confessed and the self within the madness explored and "discovered". Maria Lauret argues, with a slightly different emphasis, that feminist texts re-enact the process of achieving a female subjectivity. But more importantly, 'they assert the need for radical social change, whether that change is envisioned in Utopian fantasy of a feminist future or articulated in a critique of existing gender, race and class relations' (8). Feminist writers 'felt they were beginning to write themselves into being, not so much as authentic, unified and universal female selves but as authentic and legitimate political subjects hungry for change' (81). Here Lauret returns to this sense of authenticity, which haunts feminist texts. Yet at the same time, these texts reject unity and authenticity, mapping 'out the fragmentation of female subjectivity into the disparate elements that make up psychic life: conscious and unconscious, political understanding and recalcitrant fantasy, private and public'. They show that 'feminist knowledge gives a better grasp of the real, and that a necessarily fragmented subjectivity does not preclude female agency. It is precisely in the gap between reality as lived and social change as envisioned that their political significance lies' (95). As important sites of reconstruction, then, women's madness texts re-conceptualise and re-write the experience of madness, its consequences and possibilities, placing it into a social and political context and arguing for its transformation into something different. As texts that explore the contradictions of female subjectivity they can be placed at the centre of much feminist writing; as texts that desire social change, they can be placed at the centre of much utopian writing. However, a reading such as this is at the same time

problematised by the texts themselves, which evade clear-cut conclusions. Occasionally the madness, the feelings of despair and lack of control are politicised in these texts, as the authors locate their experiences within the social and political realm. However, most of the time they are not, instead they are worked through in a more personal way as a means of achieving self-actualisation, of moving into more diverse relationships with others. However, feminists have long defined the personal as political, and therefore in this sense, these texts are always about gaining political autonomy and agency.

There are three key utopian texts that develop madness as a central theme within the context of feminist utopianism. These are Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1978), Raccoona Sheldon's 'Your Sisters, O my Sisters! Your Faces Filled of Light!' (1976) and Josephine Saxton's *Queen of the States* (1986). I will also briefly discuss three further utopias that develop themes of madness: Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975), Dorothy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You* (1971) and Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993). Each of these texts engages with relevant discourses of madness during the period they were written. Thus Piercy's text reflects the liberatory possibilities of madness presented in the work of Laing and Chesler. Sheldon's story, however, is a more cautious tale that articulates both the potential of madness to represent psychic freedom, but at the same time warns of the regressive aspects to madness, and the dangers inherent in losing one's mind. Saxton's tale, written in the 80s, works on a different register to the earlier texts, critiquing and satirising the idea of the "madwoman" as saviour and heroine; at the same time, Saxton refuses to reject this figure completely as a positive

source of hope. Saxton's novel also reflects shifts within feminism of the 80s, such as the emergence of identity politics, postmodernism and New Age theory.

All three of the key texts have a main character who experiences, or may be experiencing, what the doctors diagnose as a psychotic breakdown, or split within their personality. In *Women on the Edge of Time*, Connie is diagnosed with schizophrenia, and is twice locked up in a psychiatric hospital. In *Queen of the States*, Magdalen is also in hospital, suffering from depression, delusions of grandeur (she thinks she is Queen of America), and hallucinations. The central character in 'Your Faces, O my Sisters!', who remains nameless, has escaped from a psychiatric hospital, where she appears to have been suffering from post-natal depression, causing delusions. All three characters have been submitted to harsh medical treatment: Connie is prescribed a cocktail of drugs, including the anti-psychotic drug Thorazine, and is submitted without her consent to experimental psycho-surgical procedure. Magdalen is given strong drugs to calm down her "mania", help her sleep dreamlessly, and inhibit her delusions, and the courier in 'Your Faces' is given drugs and electroshock treatment. All three women believe they can access a utopian reality in their mind; all three are locked up in hospitals because of it.

These texts, I argue, develop the feminist literature on madness by utilising science-fictional and utopian literary modes. One of the key differences between the madness texts and the feminist utopias, however, is that the latter are fictional, and do not draw on the author's personal experiences.¹

¹ Although Piercy's text, as she admits, is heavily researched and draws on the work of those in the Mental Liberation Front, journals and women she met in environments such as Women's Health Projects.

The utopias explore in detail the women's delusions and hallucinations; fleshing them out, so that the reader can enter into the delusion and see the world as the "madwoman" sees it. This process enables the reader to fully enter into the "delusional" or utopian realm, offering a fully realised alternative to the world that the mad woman lives in, in "reality". The two worlds, juxtaposed side by side, of psychiatric hospital and utopia, offers an implicit critique of contemporary society's attitudes towards both women and madness. In the "real" world, these women are unhappy, frustrated and distressed about their situation and their futures. In the utopian world, they find freedom and hope, and the realisation of their desires. They are not treated as mad, but are accepted and loved for who they are and what they can offer society. In the process, madness itself is critiqued as a form of social control and punishment of those who do not fit into patriarchal capitalist society. While these authors identify themselves as feminist writers, they have written within a wide variety of literary genres.²

Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* was first published in 1978, and is the most well known of the three texts. Piercy's oeuvre is unashamedly feminist and political, as she states, I've been politically active my whole life' and her work consistently emphasises the importance of visionary thinking:

If we can't imagine alternative futures – new and multitudinously exciting and soothing ways to give birth, care for and socialise our young, educate each other, heal each other [. . .] then we shall be stuck in boredom or in the types of

² Piercy has written historical novels, science-fiction and women's fiction, as well as poetry; Saxton writes science-fiction and postmodern fiction, both novels and short stories; Raccoona Sheldon (the pseudonym of Alice Sheldon, who also wrote under the name of James Tiptree Jr.) has mainly written science-fiction, both short stories and novels. Joanna Russ has written mainly science-fiction novels and short stories, as well as critical non-fiction; Dorothy Bryant has written science-fiction and women's fiction and non-fiction, and Starhawk has written novels and a number of non-fiction books on the Goddess and feminist spirituality movement.

romanticism disguised as political doctrine. ('Active in Time and History' 122, 108)

Written within the context of socialist feminism in the 1970s and the anti-psychiatry movements of the period, *Woman on the Edge of Time* engages with key debates within these discourses. The novel is very much a product of its time, and clearly Piercy has been influenced by the ideas of Laing and Cooper, and by the feminist theories of Chesler and Shulamith Firestone. The text portrays the representation of utopia through shifts in consciousness, as Piercy presents her utopian vision through the perspective of "hallucinations". It is a contested issue among critics whether Connie is "really" mad or not, and therefore to define her utopian visions as "hallucinations" is clearly contentious. I defend this usage, not because I believe that Connie is "really" mad, but because I prefer to leave the boundaries between sanity and madness blurred. In interview, Piercy has argued that Connie's visions are neither hallucination nor real, rather they lie somewhere in between (*Parti-Coloured* 110). Furthermore, I would argue, any reading of the novel that claims that the doctors are right and that Connie is clearly a schizophrenic, is inherently problematic, because the narrative repeatedly works to undermine the conclusions of the doctors. I therefore use the term critically in order to highlight these issues. Lucy Freibert states firmly that Connie is mad, and that the utopia in the novel is a 'psychological projection' caused by Connie's frustration' which causes her to create a fantasy world in which to escape ('World Views' 76). However, a more helpful interpretation to me is Natalie Rosinsky's argument that 'any attempt to categorise these chapter-long futuristic episodes as *either* madness *or* vision is distortingly irrelevant; these possibilities are complementary rather than mutually exclusive' (original emphasis 92).³

³ For further readings of the novel, see Rachel DuPlessis, Nadia Khouri and Jennifer Burwell.

Society labels Connie, the central character in the novel, as inherently sick and mad. Defined as a schizophrenic by the medical establishment for behaviours perceived as irrational and violent, Connie is positioned at the locus of a number of oppressive practices, the label of madness being only one of them. Madness is thus portrayed in the text as an effect of the abuse of power that the socially dominant exert over the socially marginalised. It functions as a form of punishment for deviant behaviour, and as a form of control that effectively silences and renders powerless the “mad” patient. Connie is constructed as a passive subject, denied autonomy, as her doctor comments, ‘What you don’t see, Connie is that if it wasn’t for us, you’d face spending the rest of your life where we found you’ (*Woman* 261). The doctors repeatedly fail to talk to Connie or contextualise her behaviour; indeed, they are so ignorant of her subjective experience that Dr Acker is able to say ‘she doesn’t have a history of hallucinations’ which ironically undercuts their repeated claims to be able to ‘read’ her (329). Yet while the doctors have no doubt of Connie’s “madness” the narrative works to destabilise this certainty, as the label of madness is sharply contrasted with the clarity and rationality of Connie’s thoughts, into which the reader is allowed access. However, the stigmatised label of madness becomes permanently attached to her identity, so that her actions and words are coloured by its pejorative tone, and her whole life is reinterpreted as a ‘pattern of disease’ (26).

Piercy uses madness within the context of the utopian genre in order to blur the boundaries between states of consciousness deemed “mad” and those defined as “utopian.” In so doing, Piercy

disrupts constructed notions of sanity and insanity, arguing that madness is a gendered construct in patriarchal society, exploited by those in power and used as a means of oppression. In the process, she attempts to deconstruct the culturally erected boundaries between health and sickness, mental health and madness. Connie accesses the utopian world of Mattapoisett through her ability to achieve different states of consciousness; her first awareness of an alternative utopian reality is of hazy memories of dreams featuring the mysterious Luciente, and she awakens one morning with 'the sense [. . .] that there was more she had not remembered, a sensation of return, blurred but convincing' (33). These cloudy memories and dreams soon overlap into daydreams and increasingly longer states of unconsciousness: by the end of the novel, Connie is spending up to twelve hours at a time in Mattapoisett. The narrative itself takes place entirely in Connie's consciousness, tracing her memories, fusing her current experiences in the mental hospital with her utopian and dystopian visions. Piercy does not validate one form of consciousness as more or less "real": all are possible co-existent realities. The existence of Mattapoisett is entirely dependent on Connie's consciousness, and similarly, she perceives Mattapoisett entirely through Luciente's conscious awareness, through a telepathic connection.

Connie's utopian "hallucinations" represent an opening of her mind towards different ontological possibilities; Luciente explains that Connie is 'an unusual person. Your mind is unusual. You're what we call a catcher, a receptive [. . .] a catcher is a person whose mind and nervous system are open, receptive to an unusual extent' (41-2). Connie's society does not value this receptiveness, but

in Mattapoisett it represents the ability to imagine and realise utopia. As Magdalena explains to Connie, 'We want to teach inknowing and outknowing [...] To feel with other beings. To catch, where the ability exists - instance, so strongly in you. We teach sharpening of the senses. Coning, going down, how to reach nevel, how to slow at will' (140). In Mattapoisett, as in the works of Erich Fromm and Norman O Brown, connection with others psychologically, emotionally and psychically, provides not only the key to mental health, but also to individual and collective change. Consequently, the people of Mattapoisett recognise the importance of accessing different conscious states, as Luciente tells Connie, 'in our culture you would be much admired' (42). This contrasts sharply with the label of violent, socially disorganised schizophrenic that Connie receives in her world.

In Mattapoisett, madness still exists, but it is not viewed as an illness, nor is it stigmatised, as Luciente explains, 'we do not use these words [sick and mad] to mean the same thing' (65). Rather, 'madhouses' are 'open to the air and pleasant' (65), they are places people go to retreat 'when they want to go down into themselves - to collapse, carry on, see visions, hear voices of prophecy, bang on the walls, relive infancy - getting in touch with the bruised self and the inner mind. We all lose parts of ourselves. We all make choices that go bad' (66). Thus madness becomes a self-affirming gesture, a source of pride and autonomy and is integrated into the normal psyche. On several occasions comparisons are drawn between Mattapoisett and the psychiatric hospital, as Connie compares the utopian dining hall to that at Rockover: 'Really, this could be a dining room in a madhouse, the way people ate naked with their emotions pouring out' (75). Both spaces also encourage physical contact

and philosophical discussion, as Connie remarks 'it's funny, but the way you talk reminds me of people... in the institution where I'm locked up' (122).

Woman on the Edge of Time contains detailed chapter-length descriptions of both the world of the hospital, and of the utopian society. Piercy incorporates multiple discourses, including the medical notes on Connie, which close the text. Linear narrative is disturbed through the shifts in time, and there is little closure as the story ends with the reader not really knowing Connie's fate. Having poisoned her doctors, Connie, 'her heart pounding terribly [. . .] sat on her bed, waiting' (376). The final chapter is comprised of excerpts from her medical notes, which trace Connie's medical history from her initial diagnosis to her implantation treatment. However, these notes then fade out, and the rest of the 'one hundred thirteen pages' are absent from the text, although, we are told, they 'followed Connie back to Rockover' (381). It could be argued, that, like the 'Historical Notes' at the end of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) which situate Offred's voice historically and give it a very different perspective, the medical notes throw a different light on Connie's tale. The 'Historical Notes' throw doubt on the validity of Offred's story, and, similarly, the medical notes reiterate the "madness" of Connie, and her lack of reliability as a narrator. However, as with the 'Historical Notes', which can be critiqued for the ways that the (male) academics reductively dismiss Offred's experiences, the medical notes also reveal the ways that Connie is misread and misrepresented. And if they are critiqued in this way, then can they be trusted to give a true account of Connie's future? Perhaps she does escape Rockover, and gets away with her actions - the narrative allows for a number of possibilities.

In spite of their construction as “hallucinations”, Connie’s utopian visions materially affect her position in the hospital, as her long periods of unconsciousness lead to the removal of an implant from her brain. This implant is initially placed as part of a research project aimed at “taming” violent behaviour. The implications of the doctors’ electrodes are horrifying because they represent an end to dreaming and fantasy - thus they figure an end to utopian dreaming and possibility. As one experimental patient comments, ‘I don’t dream no more. How come I can’t dream? Something’s missing’ (339).

As Tom Moylan notes, the relationship between Connie’s ‘telepathic empathy and dreams and the “actual” utopian society and its political fight’ asserts the beneficial power of utopian dreaming (*Demand* 153). Connie’s dreams enable her to imagine a life different from her own, providing her not only with the desire, but also the drive and perseverance, necessary for political change. Her dreams and hallucinations, therefore, are not experiences that lock Connie into a private solitary world, a criticism often made of utopias that privilege individual or psychological transformation. For example, Frank and Fritzie Manuel dismiss these types of utopias in their discussion of utopian texts: ‘[b]ut if the land of utopia were thrown open to every fantasy of an individual ideal situation the realm would be boundless. The personal daydream with its idiosyncratic fixations has to be excluded’ (7). They conclude, ‘[t]here are utopias so private that they border on schizophrenia’ (7). In contrast, I argue that Connie’s fantasies allow her to reach out to others in order to embrace an alternative social existence,

thus they are both utopian and politically transformative. While Connie, alone, is relatively weak and powerless, her visions push her to make a political statement. As Piercy writes in her poem, 'The low road': 'Alone, you can fight,/ you can refuse, you can/ take what revenge you can/ but they roll over you' (44). But, paradoxically, political action begins with just one person resisting and making a stand, 'It goes on one at a time,/ it starts when you care/ to act, it starts when you do/ it again after they said no/ it starts when you say *We*' (original emphasis 45). Both Connie, and the reader, are politicised through the experience of Connie's hallucinations, through the gap that is opened up between Connie's prospects in the "real" world, and Connie's potential in Mattapoissett. The utopian "future" of Mattapoissett is richly described, as Connie experiences the sights, tastes and sounds of utopia. Juxtaposed against the horrors of the psychiatric hospital and Connie's life with her family, and also against the dystopia within the text, the utopia is positioned as a possible future that must be worked towards in the present, because, as Luciente tells Connie, 'Yours is a crux-time. Alternate universes co-exist. Probabilities clash and possibilities wink out forever' (*Woman* 177). If 'the past is a disputed area', then so too is the future, which could be Mattapoissett, but could just as easily be the dystopian hell of Gildina's world (267).

Woman on the Edge of Time is not the only utopia to utilise alternative futures as a means of exploring madness. Raccoona Sheldon is the pseudonym of Alice Sheldon, who also wrote under the name of James Tiptree Jr. A popular science-fiction writer, James Tiptree Jr. wrote many short stories concerned with gender relations, in tales such as 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read?' (1976) and 'The

Women Men Don't See' (1973). Sheldon, who identified as a feminist, wanted to write some stories in the guise of a woman writer, 'a few violently prowoman ideas came to me, and I saw that they were simply noncredible under a man's name, so I invented a female pseudonym [Raccoona Sheldon] for these' (Tiptree 313, 390). Under this name she wrote four short stories, 'Angel Fix' (1974), 'Your Faces, O My Sisters! Your Faces Filled of Light!', 'Beaver Tales' (1976) and the Nebula award winning 'The Screwfly Solution' (1977). Sheldon's 'Your Faces, O My Sisters!', which is the only short story in this chapter, is a moving portrait of a young woman's search for utopia. Working within a critical dystopian mode, the story describes a dystopian nightmare that remains committed to utopian possibilities. The story opens with the young woman, a 'courier', who remains nameless throughout, running along the empty streets of Chi-cago, or She-cago, as she calls it. She sees herself as a messenger, for she has a story to tell, messages to send, a vision to impart. The narrative traces her thoughts and feelings as she traverses the streets, as she remembers when '[p]eople lived here once, all the way to the horizons. Smiling, she thinks of all those walls and windows full of people, living in turbulence and terror. Incredible' ('Your Faces!' 16). Thus the courier situates herself in a female only future, where everyone is a 'sister' and which has moved beyond the 'troubles', beyond the turbulence and terror, where there are '[n]o dangers left at all, in the whole free wide world!' (21, 17).

Yet the next section of the story reveals a different perspective, as Patrolman Lugioni, in his police car scouts the city, cursing the young woman for her stupidity for hitching at night. Cars fill the streets as 'the Saturday night madhouse tears on' (18). Clearly, there is a radical disjunction between

what the young woman sees around her, and others' point of view, and as the story continues, the young woman's perspective is juxtaposed against those who encounter her. While she feels strong, healthy and free, everyone she meets a sister and a friend, she is seen as 'crazy' or 'stoned' (19). Out on the streets she's a fool, as one woman who picks her up says afterwards, 'I have no sympathy at all. She's made her bed, I say [. . .] a girl like that is asking for it. Just asking for whatever she gets' (19-20). Described by one man (a doctor) as a 'strong-looking piece' (22), she is viewed by women as 'one of those bra-burners' (19) and a 'women [sic] lib freak' (33) as her craziness is equated with her feminism. It transpires that the courier has suffered some kind of post-natal depression, and has subsequently had drug and electric shock treatment. She is described as 'quite, quite helpless' and her doctor describes her delusion as taking 'the form of a belief that she's living in another world where everybody is her friend' (26). Thus the idea that one could live in such a world is labelled delusional and psychotic. Writing of "mad housewife" novels, Gayle Greene describes how the protagonists are 'confined in houses, apartments, basement flats [. . .] looking back on their lives and wondering how they managed to get stuck in a situation from which there is no exit' (59). In the young woman's mind her past life was a nightmare, where she was 'stuck back in history like a caged-up animal [. . .] Don't go outside, don't do this, don't do that, don't open the door, don't breathe. Danger everywhere' ('Your Faces!' 29). There is no way to escape, except through the mind.

The story is strongly located in Chicago, as the courier heads for Des Moines and points west, Lake Michigan behind her. She runs down the Stevenson Expressway, into Thirty-fifth street, Stony

Island, Archer Avenue, Dan Ryan Expressway, O'Hare Airport and onto the Ryan Freeway. The story also draws heavily on Henry Longfellow's epic poem 'The Song of Hiawatha', which tells the tale of a Native American prophet, Hiawatha, child of the West Wind, who is sent to earth to bring peace. He lives with his grandmother, Nokomis, on the shores of Lake Superior, and has many magical possessions, including mittens that give him great strength, and moccasins that enable him to cover a mile with one stride. Hiawatha enjoys an intimate communion with nature, and is able to speak with birds and animals, loving 'the rain-shower and the snowstorm,/ And the rushing of great rivers/ Through their palisades of pine-trees,/ And the thunder in the mountains' ('The Song' 3). The courier, like Hiawatha, also makes a journey West, behind her the 'shining Big Sea Water' which refers to Lake Superior in both texts. She refers repeatedly to 'wise old Nokomis' (17) who she would like to become, 'the good old Nokomis. *The wrinkled old Nokomis, many things Nokomis taught her...*' (19). Italicised sentences in the text are direct quotes from the Longfellow poem, with gender pronouns altered from he to she. The courier changes the gender of Hiawatha too, 'she always felt she *was* the sister Hiawatha somehow; it's one of the few pieces from the old days that makes any sense to her' (23). Like Hiawatha, she feels she can walk forever in her drive to deliver her mysterious messages, which may, like Hiawatha's, be messages of peace and happiness. Hiawatha brought a golden age to his people, and the courier also seeks such a time, where everyone lives in harmony.

The narrative is complex, composed of references to, and direct quotations from, Longfellow's poem, and the juxtaposition of passages which contrast the courier's thoughts with the reactions of

those around her. Broken sentences reflect the disconnected interior of the courier's mind, and words become distorted in her memory, as Lake Michigan, becomes 'Michi-gami' (17) in an inter-textual reference to Longfellow's 'Gitche-Gumee', or Lake Superior. The sounds all around her are transposed into the narrative, as the 'Rrrr-oom!' (17) of the cars and the '*Boom! Barooooommm-m-m!*' (18) of the lightning surrounds her. Like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper', the story is about the retreat of a woman into the attic spaces of her mind, and both stories can be read as both positive and negative, a utopian celebration of madness, or a dystopian retreat into abjection and powerlessness. The narrative resists easy explanations, and the tone of the story is indeed dark, encouraging, perhaps, a more fatalistic reading. I choose, in my reading of the story, to emphasise the utopian elements of the story, yet also acknowledge the contradictions of the text, and the pull of the narrative towards nihilism and death.

Like the protagonist of the Gilman story, who also remains nameless, the courier gradually disengages from language, struggling to understand those she meets, for they speak 'Sort of a strange dialect' (19), choosing instead, like Hiawatha, the native language of animals. At the climax of the story, the young woman is pursued by four men who attack, rape and kill her, while a policewoman looks on with disinterested contempt. The courier shouts for help from her sisters, but no one comes. As she dies, she thinks she sees her sisters coming to save her, and everything will be all right, and 'soon she, or someone like her, will be going on again, will be footing over the wide free Earth' (35). Like Hiawatha, who also departs for the 'land of the Hereafter' ('The Song' 160), the courier dies,

having briefly achieved her goal of living, if only in her mind, in a world of peace and happiness. Like Hiawatha's, her vision is destroyed by others, yet both hold onto their dreams. The courier sees 'in the light' that 'everything will be all right' ('Your Faces' 35); and at the end of the poem, Hiawatha too, has 'a look of exultation,/As of one who in a vision/ Sees what is to be, but is not' ('The Song' 154).

At the end of the story, the courier's utopian dream, (or her delusional vision) remains clear and strong, that she, or someone like her, will live in the future, in a peaceful, beautiful utopia. However, the story doesn't really have any closure; the courier's thoughts are abruptly halted mid-stream, as she dies, still hoping that someone like her 'will be going on again, will be footing over the wide free Earth, courier to Des Moines and points west -' ('Your Faces' 35). While the "true reality" can be read as the one in which the woman is crazy and delusional, running away from a psychiatric hospital after undergoing drug and shock treatment, the courier's "reality" is also perfectly "sane" and valid. Her desires for a peaceful and happy world where she is free and healthy make more sense to the reader than the dangers and conflict of the "real" world. Her critiques of the "past" and of its overcrowded polluted streets filled with cars, noise and danger are as stirring as her views of sexist advertisements, which seem to her weird and fantastic, the product of an awful history which has irrevocably transformed. Thus, the story represents a powerful critique of the negative cultural representations of women within patriarchal society, and of the physical and psychological constraints of marriage and motherhood. The courier's mother expresses her own frustration and anger, 'What did she want? Always running away. Freedom. Doesn't she know you can't have freedom? Why isn't this

world good enough for her? She had everything. If I can take it why can't she?' (29). Her mother warns that to have desires beyond the present is dangerous and will lead to madness.

Therefore the utopianism of the text lies in the tension that is created between the woman's vision of the world and the "reality" of the world. Working as a critical dystopia, a gap is opened up which all those who encounter the courier must engage with. Whether they reject the woman as 'crazy', 'stoned' or a 'woman lib freak' or whether they reluctantly see her as 'Happy and free', they are forced to confront their feelings about her and what she is saying (22). The reader, also, is alerted to the gap between the courier's perception of reality and what the other characters see as reality, and it is within that gap that productive utopian thinking takes place. In Darko Suvin's terminology, an estrangement takes place, or a positive negation, in which the "real" world becomes strange to the reader, and the utopian world becomes de-alienated (137). The narrative therefore creates a utopian moment in which the young woman is - briefly - no longer mad, but liberated from her pain and unhappiness, finally free from the social constraints that have caused her misery. In her analysis of this story, Carolyn Rhodes comments that it is 'piercingly clear that the blithe and confident "courier" is mad. The woman's joy and trust and self-assurance are her insanity' (36). Such a clear-cut reading, however, seems inconsistent with the narrative, which seems intended to disturb our notions of what is, and is not, mad. As Rhodes herself concludes, 'the story compel readers to ask a piercing question - who is really crazier, someone who envisions a world of joy and safety and sharing, or all of those others who have accepted the restraints and brutalities, and insist on the duty of the visionary to adjust

to the destructive, or to be destroyed?' (41). While the society around her remains bleak, seemingly locked into destructive and heartless social patterns, which involve complete alienation from others, and loss of community, the desires of women within this reality remain powerful. The young woman's mother articulates her own sense of despair, despite her anger towards her daughter's choices. The woman who comments that, 'she seemed so, I don't know. Happy and free. She – she was *fun*', expresses her own disappointment in a world that accepts unhappiness and distrust. Her husband's terse response, 'That's the sick part, honey' speaks to a world which translates joy into terms of sickness and delusion (22). These women, touched by the utopianism of the courier, momentarily experience a shift into an alternative, utopian perspective.

However, the courier does not achieve the self-determination that Connie in *Woman on the Edge of Time* accesses, and this is because she is unable to forge relations with her 'sisters'. She has become so immersed in her utopian vision that she cannot tell the difference between one level of consciousness and another. This inability to position herself, both within history, and within the social structure, proves fatal, and she becomes lost in the mazes of her mind. Connie is more successful because she can control her shifts in and out of different states of consciousness, or madness. She is therefore able to develop a sophisticated critique of her situation in the hospital, having firmly located herself in a social and historical context. Sheldon also highlights more sharply than Piercy the regressive aspects of madness; the courier becomes separated from society through her mental breakdown. She is unable to access a public space in which to voice either her anger or her hopes and

dreams. Without any means of access to this public space she becomes silenced, and others must speak for her and interpret her utterings. Thus the courier is very effectively silenced. Her silencing reflects Laing and Szasz's argument concerning the ways in which madness functions in society: to control and keep quiet those members who refuse to fit in and do as their told. The courier's rejection of the maternal and wifely role means that she has rejected her gender role within society. Thus Sheldon critiques the construction of femininity and gender roles within patriarchal society in the 70s, but also questions the limits of the utopian literary genre to allow escape for those who reject such roles. What freedom does the courier actually attain? Should we really be implying that death is a feminist solution to patriarchy? Sheldon offers few answers in her short story, instead leaving the reader with a profound sense of loss at the courier's death, and of the death of hope that she takes with her.

Josephine Saxton is the author of a number of novels and many short stories, which reveal a fascination with Freud and Jung, alternative religions and therapies.⁴ Saxton's work is also very much concerned with the possibilities of altered states, and explores the workings of the mind, with its complex dreams, hopes and fears. At the same time her writing is parodic and comic, as she playfully experiments with different genres and styles of writing. *Queen of the States* (1986) develops these influences and ideas, and tells the story of the many consciousnesses of Magdalen, as she travels on her

⁴ In her Jane Saint stories, Saxton explores Jung's notion of the Collective Unconscious as 'a real place, another dimension into which we may go, travel around, and discourse with the people and creatures there' (*The Consciousness* 1). She also describes 'The Consciousness Machine', the aim of which is to heal the mentally ill, to provide emotional and spiritual balance by inducing certain psychologically educative dreams and fantasies.

feminist journey of self-discovery. *Queen of the States* is a satiric postmodern text that draws on different writing styles, such as parody, science-fiction and feminist writing. The novel is, on one level, a parody of Piercy's text and women's madness novels as a whole, as Saxton gently satirises the popularity of the notion of the madwoman as genius or spiritual leader. Yet on another level, the novel constitutes an important text within the genre itself, developing the notion of madness as a means of accessing utopian consciousnesses.

The novel opens with a literal journey as Magdalen drives her car towards the moors, surrounded by rock formations and magnificent views. While she drives around the winding roads, the engine cuts out in her car, and as she gets out to investigate, something comes towards her:

Elliptical, pearly and fiery, very beautiful. She felt paralysed as she tried to put up her hands to fend it off for as it came near she could feel a prickly heat on her and her hair standing up wild. The sound quietened and Magdalen fell to her knees with weakness, all her will had disappeared. The sound stopped, and her consciousness waned as she was drawn upwards into the centre of the light.
(*Queen* 2-3)

Magdalen is whisked off to another planet, into a room without corners, to a place without time, where wherever she is, she remains at the centre. She decides that, 'if this was a delusion it did not matter; it was convincing enough to be real, therefore it was real' and this acceptance of alternative realities, and Magdalen's ability to access them, is symptomatic of the text as a whole, as it delves into Magdalen's 'multiple selves and the worlds which they inhabit' (6, 37).

The reader learns only gradually of Magdalen's situation in another reality, which could be described as the "real" world, but which is better read as just another of Magdalen's selves. It is difficult to pin down the number of realities that Magdalen inhabits, although the aliens identify:

seven concentric selves, all interlocking, making forty-nine states of being, each with seven levels of intensity and each in contact with the forty-nine states plus contact with the original seven at all times and places, and a central consciousness which can freely move about to any point in this network at any one time. (39)

As they conclude, 'To us this is a very limited experience of consciousness but you seem to make the most of it' (39). In chapter seven, Magdalen opens her eyes and finds herself in a hospital bed, a nurse standing over her, whom she recognises as Nurse Gerhard, 'a real bitch' (27). She is undergoing treatment for depression and delusions of grandeur – she thinks she is Queen of America (hence the pun on Queen of the States). However, Magdalen rejects the psychiatric hospital, instead embracing the exploration of her desires in the alien utopian world. These desires are rooted in the body, in sensuality, especially food and sex, and Magdalen indulges in both. Able to order any food she likes, she requests, 'smoked salmon, a lightly grilled lean steak, wholemeal bread and fresh goat's milk yoghurt with Jamaican banana honey' and through this succour to her physical desires she makes 'a bid for freedom' (29). Through her utopian "delusions", therefore, she seeks autonomy and power.

Magdalen's other selves or consciousnesses fill the text, as she rides across the Australian desert on a bicycle, gives birth and dies in a hollow in an English hill, lives a lonely existence in Golders Green and dwells in the White House with a herd of bison on the lawn. These dreams and memories disturb the narrative, and the reader must decide (or must she?) what is dream and what is recollection

or history, yet the two cannot really be distinguished. In addition to her alien abduction, Magdalen has one, brief, dream that is clearly utopian in content, in which the world is a garden, filled with people who love her and want to be friends with her. All is peaceful and harmonious and the water and air are pure. A man in the garden waits for her with a continual longing, holding a flower. In another passage, in New York, one of Magdalen's selves gives an impassioned speech on the steps of the Guggenheim Museum to a small crowd of people. She describes a utopian world of peace and love, where everyone is fed and housed, and where 'all will strive towards goodness' (117). While her friend, Louis, fears that Magdalen will be 'taken to a cell, deemed barmy, drugged, imprisoned' the eclectic crowd cheers her speech on (117). Magdalen continues to describe a cleaner world, free from pollution, racism and mental illness, full of healthy wholesome food, where all cultures will be valued. Significantly, there will be no more sexism, and indeed no marriage, but lots of love and sex, and male and female roles will be fluid, as will sexualities. The multi-racial, diverse crowd embraces each other after hearing Magdalen's speech in a 'magical' moment of 'love and peace and goodness' (120).

Madness is represented in the text in many ways. Firstly, it is characterised as a label that is placed on a person (usually female) who is suffering: Magdalen, who is locked in a loveless, sexually unfulfilling marriage yearns for independence and freedom: '[s]he wanted love, real physical love. Not words, promises, ideas, but the real thing' (143). Madness is also depicted as a strategy for coping with life's problems, a means of escape and fantasy: Magdalen allows her fantasies and desires to flourish, as she explores all her possible selves and their desires. Madness is also characterised as an ability to

access altered states of consciousness, akin to other hallucinatory experiences such as using drugs or meditating.

Through her experience of “madness” Magdalen takes control of her self and her destiny. Still holding firmly to her utopian vision she confidently removes herself from the psychiatric hospital and the alien planet, in order to confront her desires on a single plane of consciousness, for she is ‘equal to anything! Maybe’ (170). As in the Sheldon story, the utopianism of the text is rooted in the gap between Magdalen’s perceptions of reality and those of others around her. Within this gap, everyone who encounters Magdalen is forced to engage with her madness and her vision, and each character is affected in a different way. In particular, a group of characters, including her husband, her husband’s lover, her doctor, ex-lover and two fellow patients, all have transforming dreams and visions and decide that Magdalen is a guru who must be worshipped. They accept and internalise Magdalen’s alternative perspective, in the process rejecting the negative and oppressive aspects of contemporary society. Thus Magdalen has a powerful effect on those she encounters, forcing them to engage personally and politically. However, making Magdalen into a religious leader is the wrong choice, and leads the group away from political engagement towards a depoliticised religious anarchism, which Magdalen rejects: she wants neither power over others nor religious status, but freedom and independence. Magdalen thus casts-off the New Age alternative health and spiritual movement within which, as a woman, she has felt silenced and disempowered.⁵

⁵ Magdalen, who has suffered depression all of her life, has previously attempted to fill her longings by delving into various New Age philosophies, art and women’s literature. She has read Jung, Gurdjieff and Madame Blavatsky, been an art student and a model, experimented with Tantric yoga and Sufism, read Marge Piercy, Iris Murdoch and Kafka, and has travelled to

The utopianism of the novel is more ironic and parodic than that of either *Woman on the Edge of Time* or 'Your Faces O My Sisters!'. The alien world is not described in any detail, for Magdalen does not see much of the planet; rather, she is kept in a small room, for fear that she will be overwhelmed with the strangeness of the outside world. Instead, she is able to create her own ideal environment, which she fills with familiar objects from her own world and childhood, conjuring up foods and toys and a soft bed. Once again, the utopia works by juxtaposition, as the pleasures and timelessness of the alien world is contrasted with the denials and rush of the "real" world. The reader also experiences a utopian moment through the spaces opened up in Magdalen's dreams and visions, in which she imagines a world different to that in which she has been so desperately unhappy. The reader, like Magdalen, is politicised through the latter's discussions with the aliens about the norms and values of contemporary society, especially its sexual politics, forcing both into an awareness of alternative ways of thinking. Magdalen's empowerment is thus achieved as a result of her rejection of the medical label of madness, and, echoing Laing, re-values her experiences as a rational and sane response to a mad world, thus her experience of madness, as in the work of the anti-psychiatrists, becomes both subversive and liberatory. As she concludes, bravely, 'I'm on my own planet, out to lunch, and I like it by myself' (174).

America and Morocco in order to find herself. None of these exertions were successful, however, and it is only through her retreat into her mind, and exploration of her various conscious states, that she is able to find any sense of who she is and what she wants.

There are three further feminist utopias that are worth briefly exploring here. The first is Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975) a hugely popular feminist novel since the 70s, originally derived from an earlier short story, 'When it Changed' (1972).⁶ The title refers to the ways that women have to behave like men in order to fit into patriarchal society, and also to the fact that women are "man" or "men" too. The split that is induced in women to become like men, in a man's world could induce a "schizophrenic" split, as occurs in the novel. The epigraph to the novel is a quotation from R.D. Laing's *The Politics of Experience* (1967) a key text of the anti-psychiatry movement. In this book Laing argues that we are alienated from ourselves and each other, unable to conceive of another's experience, because we are locked into social and cultural ideological strait-jackets that make genuine human interactions impossible. Because we ignore our inner mind, the world of dreams, fantasies and desires, instead immersing ourselves in the outer, material world, we all undergo a damaging split, cutting ourselves off from meaningful experiences and relationships. Within such a society, the strategy of the mad person, especially the schizophrenic, is, ironically, a sane one. Thus, Laing defines schizophrenic behaviour as '*a special strategy that a person invents in order to live in an unlivable situation*' (original emphasis, 95). The quotation that Russ uses in her epigraph refers specifically to the many ways that men ('Jack') work to make women ('Jill') feel paranoid, stupid and silly for being unhappy. This passage directly relates to the novel, in which Russ describes the process by which Joanna (another J) works to demystify herself through a schizophrenic split.⁷ In fact, there are four J's in the novel, and they all

⁶ Joanna Russ says of this story that 'the first few paragraphs were dictated to me in a thoughtful, reasonable, whispering tone I had never heard before; and once the Daemon vanished – they always do – I had to finish the thing by myself and in a voice not my own' ('Afterword to When it Changed' 260). In the same article, she writes that women's "femininity" is 'pathology' (261).

⁷ Clearly, there are many ways that this novel can be read, and the notion that the four Js represent a schizophrenic split is just one interpretation.

appear to be three different versions of Joanna, in the form of Janet, Jeannine and Jael. The four Js can be “read” in a number of ways, as one character in four different universes, as three women brought together by Jael, or as conjured up by Joanna as a means of coping with her struggle as a ‘female man’. As Jeanne Cortiel writes, ‘two interlaced strands emerge: one in which Jael searches in different parallel universes for other versions of herself as allies in the war against Manland and another in which Joanna negotiates between her own different selves within herself trying to break through the limiting patriarchal narratives that inhibit her mind’ (198). Cortiel identifies a clear historical progression across these narrative strands, of three phases in the dialectic path, from patriarchal society, revolutionary war to gender-less utopia (77-8). However, she also notes that such a linear reading is challenged by the narrative itself, which disturbs such linearity, and notes that Joanna’s narrative ‘acquires a special status outside this dialectic as ‘basic’ narrative world’ (79). I prioritise the view that the three other Js are versions of J’s self, and that through these other personas, Joanna is able to envision her life as she might have lived it; in a utopian society, in a country still in the depression, and in a dystopian state. Through this schizophrenic splitting of herself into four people, Joanna, like Magdalen, explores her fears and desires, and the possibilities of herself in other worlds.

Before she split herself into four people, Joanna was ‘moody, ill-at-ease, unhappy, and hard to be with’, caught up in interminable roles of femininity which involved living for ‘The Man’ (29). So she ‘called up Janet, out of nothing, or she called up me [. . .] Oh, I made that woman up; you can believe

it!' and she immediately felt better (29-30).⁸ Clearly this is an example of utopian dreaming. Through her "madness", Joanna is able to see the world through the eyes of different women, through different perspectives. Through the eyes of Janet, who lives in the utopian Whileaway, Joanna, through a process of estrangement, sees more clearly the daily reductions and sexism of contemporary society. Through the eyes of Jeannine, who lives in a society which is more constricting than Joanna's, in which the strictures of femininity are both more obvious and more painful, she can see how that daily sexism has become more mystified and therefore more difficult to counter. And through the eyes of Jael, who lives in a world where men and women are literally at war with each other, where women can name their oppressor, Joanna sees her world stripped of this mystification, and therefore understands where her battles must be fought. Through her madness, Joanna is able to see more clearly the different aspects of her self, and the ways that society has sought to control and discipline her into a strictly feminine role. As Cortiel notes, 'a mental state which might be treated as multiple personality disorder by clinical psychology becomes a space for liberating acts of power' (199). At the conclusion of the story, Joanna has made a journey through her madness, and seeks to re-integrate her different personas into one, saying goodbye to each of them, for finally, 'We will be ourselves' (213). *The Female Man* develops different writing styles, manipulating multiple literary forms, including science-fiction, the pastoral, lyric, epic, fable and polemic. The use of multiple narrative styles disrupts all sense of plot development, serving to estrange the reader from the text and the characters. Whileaway is offered to Joanna, and the reader, as a possible future, but only one possible future. Jael asks for support from the

⁸ However, Jael presents another perspective, 'It came to me several months ago that I might find my other selves out there in the great, gray might-have-been' (*The Female Man* 160).

others in her war, because a utopian future must be fought for. As she tells Janet, 'I and the war I fought built your world for you, I and those like me, we gave you a thousand years of peace and love and the Whileawayan flowers nourish themselves on the bones of the men we have slain' (211). As in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, the past is indeed disputed terrain.

In Dorothy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You* (1971) altered states are explicitly linked with ideas about madness on a number of occasions. Early on in the narrative the narrator tells Salvatore that "Yours is a life based on delusion and hallucination" and associations between dreams and madness are consequently made a number of times (*The Kin* 67). The lives of the Atans initially seems "mad" to the narrator, because they base their lives round their dreams, believing them to be as real, if not more so, than their daily lives, and certainly holding more significance. At one point, the narrator, speaking with Augustine comments that 'in the great world, we lock up people who see things while awake, and when I laughed, she looked sad' (112). Later, in conversation with Sbgai, the narrator argues that "What you're saying is that you can't discriminate between the messages of a prophet and the ravings from a damaged brain." "Right" replies Sbgai (160). When the narrator scoffs at this notion, Sbgai asks him for a definition of insanity, and he finds it impossible. Thus the dreamers of Ata are irrevocably linked with those who are 'mad' because there is no way of distinguishing between the two, if there is a distinction at all. When the narrator returns to the outside world, and is on trial for murder, his lawyer pleads insanity for him, in an attempt to get him released. The narrator's complete confession of his assault on Connie appears to be so out of character, and therefore irrational, and his

behaviour on returning from Ata so erratic and unusual, that an insanity plea appears to be a viable option for him. Thus the lives of the Atans, and their way of being constitutes a kind of “madness” to those who live in the outside world, because they do not care about material things, only of living their lives through their dreams.

The Fifth Sacred Thing (1993) is a recent utopia, and, written in the 1990s, reflects recent shifts in attitudes towards madness. In contrast to earlier texts, Starhawk explores male madness, in the context of imprisonment and post-traumatic shock. Alternate chapters follow different stories: the novel opens with Maya, the matriarch, climbing a mountain, and Madrone, the healer, working in the hospital. The second chapter introduces us to Bird as he wakes up in prison. These alternate chapters continue until Bird returns to San Francisco, in Chapter eight. Bird is imprisoned by a totalitarian regime, and his mind is attacked for the secrets that he holds. For ten years, he remains locked inside himself, unable to remember who he is or anything about his past, until one day he “wakes up”. It becomes apparent that Bird has deliberately protected his psyche from the assault of his captors, as he:

imagined his mind and his memories were inside the rock. He set a ward, the tiniest speck of mindstuff, to watch and wait and bring him out again when it was safe or necessary [. . .] he took the crystal egg of his mind and his memories, of what was in him that he believed made him, and fled. The more they came after him with drugs and questions, the farther away he hid. And the stone was buried deep, deep underground. Where his mind had been was something opaque and resilient that memory bounced away from. (*The Fifth* 35-6)

This rolling up of his mind into a ball, is too effective however, and it takes Bird ten years to recover his sense of past, present and future. Regaining his mind is a kind of madness for Bird, as he mourns the lost decade, and his broken memories, which gradually return each day, but ‘still patchy, like those

early explorer's maps with vast spaces left blank' (55). While Bird's madness is, to a certain extent, self-induced, his tactic to protect his mind is a necessary means of survival. Bird's recovery is slow, but is significant to the preservation of the utopian city of San Francisco, because the information that he provides to the utopians when he escapes the prison, prepares them for the attack of the Millennialists. When Bird is captured again, he believes his mind to be completely broken, unable to withstand any more interrogation, he tells all his secrets. But, he is able to make one final powerful gesture of resistance. With his refusal to kill Maya, he realises that:

They had broken his hands, but they had not broken his voice, they had broken his will but they had not broken his ears, and if they took his ears they could never take his inner ear, the inner voice. And even when his voice was silenced, some voice could still continue to sing. For he realised now that he was wrong in thinking the music was in him. He was in the music, and it would always find an instrument. (473-4)

Bird's resilience ends the war, and the utopians are victorious. Bird is able to work through his "madness", creating within his mind a utopian space within which to think and act critically. While the "sane" thing to do would be to obey orders and preserve his life, he does the "insane" thing, and offers himself up to the army as a sacrifice. Through this "mad" act, the soldiers are able to see what they could not believe before, that Bird is a man of decency and honour, who will give up his life for those he loves. Thus in this utopian moment, they are able to distance themselves from the horror of the situation, in which they are killing, and have been killing their "enemies", and realise that they each have choices in all of their actions. Bird is able to come out of his madness, only through the support of his friends and loved ones. Thus Starhawk offers a solution to madness as involvement with the community, forging new connections within society, so that individuals do not retreat into the self, and

the mind, permanently. Her representation of madness within utopia differs from that of earlier texts in its emphasis on spirituality and the formation of new connections with society as a means of healing rifts within the mind.

A metaphor of madness is developed in these feminist utopias as a means of accessing a utopian vision. To be “mad” in these texts refers to the ability to have visions, or hallucinations, to believe in dreams and things that others cannot see. It refers to a schizophrenic split, a retreat into the corridors of the mind, and a partial, or whole, rejection of the outside, insane world. Offering a fantasy of madness, as a means of breakthrough, of an access to power and agency, these texts attempt to deconstruct the medical model of madness as illness and social deviance. The link with utopianism emphasises the positive aspects of alternative modes of thinking, offering a critique of the powerless, deluded mad person, who has nothing to offer society. Through the establishment of this connection between madness and utopianism, each term is opened up for further questioning, for if madness can be utopian, and thereby offer a political and transformative critique of society, then it cannot merely be dismissed as illness. Similarly, if utopianism can be “mad”, then it is important not to dismiss some of the more fantastical aspects of utopianism as politically disengaged. The two terms, rather than weakening each other, can strengthen one other, because they offer new ways of understanding both madness and utopianism. At the same time, any association between madness and utopianism remains somewhat problematic, because any discussion of madness as a utopian concept can result in its romanticisation, ignoring its destructive and negative tendencies. At the same time, these negative

aspects can rub off onto utopianism, leaving the term vulnerable to accusations of craziness or foolishness. Thus the relationship is a precarious one, and should be negotiated carefully. Similarly there is always a danger, or tension, in glamorising any aspect of madness. The romantic notion that madness is the key to art, creativity and genius is deeply problematic because it obscures the many painful and damaging aspects of mental illness. However, as a literary device, madness is useful because it disturbs questions of desire, meaning and language within a narrative. The function of madness comments on the limited strategies available to the women in these texts: located within a controlling patriarchal social structure, unhappy in their respectable middle-class marriages, without any strong female friendships, or support from family, they have no alternative but to retreat into madness. Madness thus functions as a form of escapism and retreat, and this might be its only function, unless there is a further movement towards a critical engagement with the past and present, and the causes and reasons of the madness. The courier fails to achieve this critical distancing, she loses herself in a utopian fantasy, which, although it scrutinises the social and cultural position of women and her place within society, is unable to make the further step towards politicising her feelings, and positioning herself within her critique. She has distanced herself from her feelings so much she can only see her past self as another figure in history; thus she floats adrift among her utopian desires. However, Connie, Magdalen and Joanna are able to successfully critique their situations, using their "madness" to form alternative, critical perspectives of the social structure, and utilising their altered states of consciousness as a tool within which to reflect differently on reality.

Research carried out in the 1970s attempted to establish whether mysticism was indeed an indication of spiritual quest, or, rather, whether it was a psychotic disorder (*Mysticism*). The researchers found several similarities between the mystic and the schizophrenic, such as a greater interest, or union with, the inner or transcendental, world. Ecstatic trances, auditory and visual hallucinations, states of illumination and the experiencing of transcendental levels of reality were also achieved by both groups. Like the Atans, the committee found that it was almost impossible to discriminate 'between the messages of a prophet and the ravings from a damaged brain', although they do emphasise the dangers of complete introversion and detachment from reality (*The Kin of Ata* 160). Thus only when the move into altered states is partial and links with others in the outer world are maintained, can a transformational shift become possible. The individual vision must become a collective action in order to effect social change. The courier effects a permanent retreat into the self, and while Connie engages with others and involves herself in political action, she is limited by what she can do, and places herself on a dangerous path in which her diagnosis of 'dangerous schizophrenic' is only re-confirmed. Magdalen and Joanna however, withdraw from their madness in order to fully engage with the world, and similarly, the narrator in *The Kin of Ata*, and Bird, use their experiences to achieve greater self knowledge and selflessness, and to help others to experience utopian moments.

A retreat into the mind as an inability to cope with the "real" world can be a safe, yet at the same time, dangerous response to social and political problems, because it is akin to sticking one's head in the ground. Utopian moments, in which transformative spaces are opened up, can be all too fleeting.

For the courier, they are too brief and they come too late; for the other women and men they are powerful enough to pull them through so that they can grasp (some form of) agency. These feminist utopian texts utilise altered states of consciousness as a metaphor for looking at society in a different way. Just as the “madwoman” offers a different perspective on sanity, so the utopia reflects back our society to us, in the form of a distorted mirror-image.

Chapter Four

Dreaming

In his epic work *The Principle of Hope* Ernst Bloch writes that the concept of hope is the essential element within utopian visions: 'the most important expectant emotion, the most authentic emotion of longing and thus of self, always remains in all of this – hope [. . .] Hope [. . .] *is therefore the most human of all mental feelings and only accessible to men, and it also refers to the furthest and brightest horizon*' (75, original emphasis). Locating this hope within the realm of imagination, part of Bloch's project strives to articulate the source and sense of utopia within dreams, and the hopes and desires which suffuse them, for, as he argues, '[n]obody has ever lived without daydreams, but it is a question of knowing them deeper and deeper and in this way keeping them trained unerringly, usefully, on what is right' (1). Thus, studying daydreams becomes essential to their understanding and realisation. Consisting of a number of physical drives which propel us forward, our urgent cravings develop into wishes, then dreams, becoming 'an imagined idea in which the desire causes what is its own to be pictured' (46). Yet, as Bloch acknowledges, wishing is a passive activity, there may be no desire to realise the wish. It is only when the wish becomes infused with hope that desire becomes imbued with a utopian or transformative spirit. And this hope is first expressed, according to Bloch, in our dreams, both night dreams and daydreams, which are 'a component (though a dislocated and not entirely homogenous one) in the vast field of utopian consciousness' (79).

Offering another model of an altered state of consciousness, dreaming activity has often been utilised within feminist utopian novels, particularly those written in the 70s, as a means of accessing and maintaining utopian states of consciousness. The dream world becomes a place into which characters can step, and experience for the first time, alternative ways of thinking and being. This dream world is situated alongside characters' everyday lives, and therefore denaturalises this 'normal' reality, and estranges them from the contemporary world. This gap between the dream and the everyday world opens up a utopian space within the text. At the same time, these dream states – because dream-like – are necessarily shadowy and elusive. They are rarely represented clearly, and indeed are often absent from the narrative itself. Often only present by inference, they slip away from the reader's grasp in a similar way to the utopianism of these texts. As indicated in Chapter One, both Jameson and Moylan discuss the impossibility of representing utopia. The location of utopia within the "dream world" emphasises this inability to express utopia clearly or unproblematically. Utilising dreaming as a means of utopian expression therefore highlights the impossibility of representing utopia. At the same time, however, utopian expression is located within everyday experience. Dreaming is an activity that everybody experiences, yet most dismiss as trivial or forget on awakening. Hovering within our unconscious experience, dreams also have the ability to pull at our consciousness during wakefulness, intruding on our thoughts. The realm of fantasy, according to Freud, links the unconscious with the conscious, thus if recognised as utopian activity, these novels appear to argue that dreaming becomes a state that could be utilised more effectively in the struggle for utopian transformation, linking ideas to action.

Bloch distinguishes between daydreams and night dreams as distinctly different, but at the same time having similar qualities. While night dreams are unclear, 'distorted and masked' day dreams are able to represent more clearly hopes and plans, building 'castles in the air' (79, 86). While night dreams can be oppressive and overwhelming, in day dreams the vision remains in our power; they are a product of our willed choice. Day dreams, can also, according to Bloch, concern 'world-improving', and these dreams 'seed the outwardness of their inwardness, they emerge like the extrovert rainbow, like a vault across the sky' (91, 92). Day dreams, finally, have an end vision, they seek fulfilment, unlike night dreams which remain constantly unsatisfied, thus:

The night-dream lives in regression, it is indiscriminately drawn into its images, the daydream projects its images into the future, by no means indiscriminately, but controllable even given the most impetuous imagination and mediatable with the objectively Possible. *The content of the night-dream is concealed and disguised, the content of the day-fantasy is open, fabulously inventive, anticipating, and its latency lies ahead.* (99, original emphasis)

The novels discussed in this thesis focus on daydreaming and it is this notion of anticipation, and the 'not-yet' that is crucial to Bloch's project: referring to that which is yet to come, that will emerge from the present, and is therefore to some extent existent in the present, but has not yet forced its way into our consciousnesses. Dreams represent a clear example of this process. Thus this 'not-yet' has political implications, because it points towards an alternative state of being. If the possibilities for change in the future already exist in the present, then in order to achieve a transformed future, we must act on those possibilities. If what we desire is already present in the here and now, then we must work in the present to make our desires a reality. Thus the relationship between dreaming and transformation

becomes critical at the point where the gap between the (dystopian) present and the (utopian) dream opens up. It is at this moment that the dreamer, and the reader, experiences the radical disjunction between what is, and what could be. Thus desire for change is initiated. Heavily influenced by Bloch's work, Ruth Levitas emphasises the importance of hope and desire to utopianism, defining utopianism as 'desire for a better way of being and living' (*The Concept* 7). Also drawing on Bloch's work, Frances Bartkowski argues that, 'thinking the not-yet is of particular importance for feminists, as it is here that freedom and necessity meet; for feminists working with narrative the not-yet can rewrite views of the past and present even as it projects possible futures' (10). Bartkowski argues that it is the gap between the present and the (feminist) future that offers us the most useful space for political transformation. Holding the vision of what could be, and tracing the antecedents of that vision within the present to locate action plans for change is key to feminist thought. Bartkowski emphasises the political nature of the daydream or utopian vision: 'the utopian impulse in thought and narrative may be conceived as an aesthetically organised and politically motivated daydream', the not-yet becoming the grounds for a feminist praxis, always looking forward to what could be (10). This 'what could be' is crucial to feminist thinking because patriarchal ideologies are so endemic to our thought processes and consciousness; utopian texts offer a conceptual way out of patriarchal social structures where gender is strictly encoded within the terms of masculinity and femininity.

When Lyman Tower Sargent defined utopianism as 'social dreaming' he was emphasising the importance of fantasy and desire to any utopian project, but was also signalling the relevance to

utopianism of dreaming as both individual and shared experience ('Three Faces' 4). The significance of simply being able to conceive a better world through fantasy is often overlooked or dismissed as "merely daydreaming", yet any utopian design must first be formed in the mind, before it can ever reach any more concrete representation. As Karl Mannheim notes, '[w]ishful thinking has always figured in human affairs. When the imagination finds no satisfaction in existing reality, it seeks refuge in wishfully constructed places and periods' (184). Such wishful thinking is utopian when it has 'a transformative effect upon the existing historical-social order' (185). Thus the link between dreaming and action becomes crucial to any discussion of utopianism. As Levitas notes, in reference to Mannheim, '[a] utopia is an idea which is acted on (passes over into conduct), changes the situation (shatters the prevailing order) and realises itself' (*The Concept* 75). Levitas' definition of utopianism as the ability to imagine or conceptualise better ways of being, clearly underlines the importance of dreaming, whilst emphasising a conjunctive need for political action: '[t]he dream becomes vision only when hope is invested in an agency capable of transformation' (*The Concept* 200). The dismissal of dreaming activity, whether experienced during sleeping or while awake, is a common one; and it has become a truism amongst those who dismiss utopianism, to link utopian dreaming with political disaffection or indeed political withdrawal: 'politically they [utopias] tend to rebound. For utopias are breeders of illusions and therefore, inevitably, of disillusion' warns Immanuel Wallerstein (1). Levitas adds that 'the very term utopia suggests to most people that this dream of the good life is an impossible dream – an escapist fantasy, at best a pleasant but pointless entertainment. Those utopians who seek to make their dreams come true are deemed to be hopelessly unrealistic, or worse, actively dangerous'

(*The Concept* 1). Clearly, there should be concern that dreaming becomes dangerous when it encourages disconnection with the realities of the real world. Most of the novels discussed in this chapter tread a careful line between exploring the transformatory potentialities of dreaming, and using dreaming as a form of positive escapism that does not alter the status quo. Bloch makes the distinction between abstract and concrete utopias in order to differentiate between 'the immaturity (fanaticism) of the undeveloped utopian function' and that which is 'fully attuned to the tendency of what is actually real' (145). The crucial difference between the two is consciousness: for hope to have a utopian function it must become '*conscious* in its act, *known* in its content' (144). The dream must be linked to the 'Real-Possible' which contains anticipatory possibilities that remain firmly rooted in the social possibilities of present conditions. The abstract utopia consists of only wishful thinking, it is compensatory, whereas the concrete utopia reaches forward into the future: it is anticipatory. Yet the boundaries between the two types of utopia in Bloch's work remains hazy – for who can determine whether utopian dreams are consciously created or otherwise? How can we know what is (truly) possible in the future? What seems like abstract utopianising today, could be the concrete utopianising of tomorrow, or the day after. Levitas argues that Bloch's distinction between the two forms of utopia is crucial 'if Bloch is to rehabilitate utopia as a transformative category within Marxism, rather than as a repository of desire' ('Educated Hope' 73). She concludes, however, that although the distinction is key, it remains incredibly difficult to define, for 'concrete utopia contains abstract elements [. . .] The task is to recover the core of concrete utopia from the dross of the abstract elements in which it is embedded' ('Educated Hope' 71). I argue, in contradiction to Bloch, that abstract utopias can be positive, because

they also reach into the future through the process of imagining what could be, both inspiring and motivating action. Angelika Bammer argues that the utopian dream must be 'grounded in history', and this idea of grounding utopianism in reality is clearly important if action is going to be taken in the present. 'What matters [. . .] is not whether the dream is "right," but whether the actions it inspires move us forward' (162) Bammer comments, and she concludes her book with the words of Christa Wolf, "[l]et us dream, with our critical faculties focused" (162). At the same time, this attempt to 'ground', 'realise', and 'concretise' utopianism seems to be quite paradoxical if utopian desires are seen as rising up out of opposition to the real. Sally Kitch's desire to replace utopianism with realism, and Erin McKenna's belief that utopianism needs to be pragmatic, make similar mistakes in my view. Surely, it is within the realms of fantasy that utopian activity flourishes? Is there not a danger that if utopianism is 'grounded' by having its wings clipped, that it will never fly again? In the rest of this chapter I will explore further the role of critical dreaming activity within feminist utopian fiction, as I look at the ways that dreams are used, in different ways, as a means of accessing and maintaining utopian states of consciousness.

In *The Kin of Ata are Waiting For You* first published in 1971 (under the title of *The Comforter*) Dorothy Bryant develops dreaming as a central motif, functioning as a means of both accessing and maintaining a utopian consciousness. Bryant is the author of a wide range of literature that frequently returns to the question of personal growth and spiritual development.¹ The novel follows the spiritual

¹ She has also written another novel that address issues, on a smaller scale, of utopianism, psychic phenomena, and mental illness. *Confessions of Madame Psyche* (1986) follows the life of Mei-li, a medium who, towards the end of the story, sets up a

growth and transformation of the male narrator, a misogynistic thriller writer, who, though materially successful, is psychologically and emotionally barren. Constantly searching for 'all the orgasms of life' but at the same time realising the futility of his goal, his wretchedness is echoed in his ever frequent nightmares which are, as he describes, 'perhaps, the only real thing in my life' (25, 26). The novel begins with the narrator, who remains nameless throughout, killing his girlfriend, Connie, in a fight. In a flight of panic, he crashes his car, and in the few horrifying moments as his car rolls over and over, he is absorbed into 'the horror of knowing' that death for him would consist of a 'permanent plunge into the nightmare' (5). But he does not die; rather he "wakes up" in Ata, among what seem to be a very primitive people who speak very little, and when they do speak, do so in a foreign language, which sounds familiar, but is at the same time incomprehensible. These people seem to spend their days sleeping, working, eating, and telling one another their dreams.

Written in the form of a moral tract, the novel clearly traces a trajectory of spiritual growth and transformation, following a protagonist who, at the lowest point in this life, commits a vile act, and must atone for his sins and seek a better way of being. In the utopian Ata, the narrator discovers his spiritual self through his renewed dream life. Whilst he initially attempts to control or dominate his dreams, he eventually learns, through Atan philosophy, that he must allow his dreams to flow freely. Dreaming is thus represented as a privileged psychic activity, which can both teach and instruct. The utopianism of the novel unfolds through representations of various altered states of consciousness,

utopian commune in the Santa Cruz Mountains, but ends up in a mental asylum. Mei-li discovers her own mental utopia not in the commune, but in the asylum, where she finds herself completely free to explore her self.

primarily through dreaming. Dreaming is both a means of accessing utopia, and comprises utopia itself. As a means of accessing utopia, dreams function in a number of ways. The world of Ata is experienced by the narrator primarily through what seems to be a dream; when he wakes up in darkness, he is unsure what constitutes “real life” and what constitutes “dream life”. At first he thinks that the murder he has just committed and the car crash were all a dream. “Reality” and “non-reality” continue to be confused as he sits for long periods in the blackness of the ka, (the Atan word for home²) thinking he has gone blind and deaf, for he can neither see nor hear anything. As he says, ‘I seemed to hang between two dark places, the nightmare of my death-sleep and this waking to blackness and shadows out of my sleep’ (8). Thus the status of Ata as a “dream world” is clear from the beginning of the novel, and is developed through the narrative, as the narrator gradually learns of the function of Ata as spiritual balance to the materialism and problems of the “real world”. The purpose of dreaming in the novel also holds further significance, because the Atans’ way of life acts as a counter-balance to the ‘insanity’ of the outside world, sustaining its very existence. The Atans’ way of life counteracts the evils of the outside world, offering a balance of good against evil. This “real world” is located elsewhere “outside” Ata, but also exists within the hearts and dreams of the Atans, for all are ‘kin’: family and community lie at the heart of this society. Those in the “real world” are characterised by their disconnection from their dreams, and this leads to suffering; out there ‘all is donagdeo, [bad] where the most admired are the farthest from their dreams’ (159). This cleavage from the life of the dream is slowly leading to individual and social devastation, and when the world comes close to this

² The word ‘ka’ is an ancient Egyptian word, meaning a copy of the human body, an invisible, yet still material, analogue of the soul (Grosz 62).

state, someone from Ata is chosen to return to the world, '[t]he human race is like a suicide, perched on the edge of a cliff, wavering, teetering' (139).

One of the most important things that the narrator learns about the Atans is that dreaming is central to their lives: they live to dream. One of the first rituals that he is witness to (without understanding its significance), is the daily process of dream-telling:

The two of them stood facing each other. They reached their arms upward as if to pull something from the roof. Instead, they swung their arms outward to the side and stood that way for a few seconds. Then, slowly, in simultaneous motion, they brought their hands together prayer-fashion, in front of their chests. As they stood that way, the bald man began to talk [. . .] He seemed to be telling something, conversationally. But this was not a conversation. The black woman stood attentive, listening. (15)

After the first man has finished, there is a pause and then the woman speaks for a few minutes, then the two nod at each other, drop their hands and walk out of the tent to wash. This ritual is practised by each Atan every single morning, and each individual's dreams are shared in this way. The process of sharing dreams serves to embed the private dreaming world within the social community. The ritual of dream-sharing also grounds the dream firmly within the community memory; dreams are not simply forgotten seconds after waking, rather they all re-told at least once, and more often if they seem to hold special significance. As Jamal tells the narrator, '[I]f you do not tell a dream right away, it slips away from you' (94-5). Thus the Atans' sleep and dream-time becomes more "real" to them than their waking lives; all aspire to be strong dreamers, and live their lives in order to dream well. Indeed, those who have waking dreams are viewed as particularly privileged. These dreams reflect Jungian theory more than Freudian; big and 'meaningful' dreams contain intrinsic meaning for the community, they

provide information for the dreamer's future. They do not offer reflection on the past, although they can offer healing and psychic integration. Yet the content of these dreams is almost completely absent from the text; while some are re-told as stories, the rest are conspicuous by their absence – as though their utopianism means they *cannot* be described. Thus the utopianism within the narrative remains largely absent, gesturing to an elsewhere within dreams, thus agreeing with Jameson's argument that utopianism is present only with the gaps and absences of a narrative.

Offering its inhabitants the opportunity for complete spiritual fulfilment and an end to repression, Atan life is structured completely around dreaming. The Atans' dreams dictate how they live their lives, although they accept that the messages of dreams are always opaque. "[Y]ou believe in these dreams. You think they are reality?" The narrator asks Chil-Sing, an Atan inhabitant. "Yes, they are reality." Chil-Sing replies. Frustrated, the narrator retorts, "But they happen only in your head!" (66). Chil-Sing disagrees, but later demurs, "Maybe you are the reality, and dreams are only dreams. From the beginning of time the kin of Ata have kept the way. Maybe your way is better" (80). Here, Chil-Sing demonstrates the Atans' ability to allow alternative perspectives to influence their convictions. Their dreams vary from simple wish fulfilments, such as the narrator's dream of a table filled with 'cakes and pies, red meat, a great mound of chocolate' (102-3) to prospective and revelatory dreams. Before the narrator's arrival, Augustine dreamed that 'a terrible, monstrous beast' emerged from the sea (71). The monster grabs hold of her and tries to pull her into the sea, but she resists and pulls him to the shore, where he is transformed into a man, filled with light. This dream anticipated the

narrator's arrival. The Atans refuse any form of fixed ideologies or beliefs, believing only that they must strive to read their dreams accurately, for these are their only form of guidance in life. If their dreams offer new forms of knowledge, these become integrated into their philosophies; change and development, are, therefore, central to their culture. However they also acknowledge that they cannot read their dreams accurately, thus the ontological status of their "dream" lives is constantly disrupted. As they admit, dreams are only dreams, they are not reality, but they are the only means to access reality that they know. They cannot know what dreams truly mean, because they have not been given the means to read them. Once they can, then they can live in the reality. But that will only happen when everyone lives for dreams and obeys them: this is the utopian goal. Lucy Sargisson argues that in the novel, 'the boundaries between spiritual and material life have ceased to exist' and clearly dreaming constitutes the whole of their lives, as the boundaries between work, play and prayer are all broken down so that 'spirituality in this utopian society is not external to everyday life' (*Contemporary* 138-9). Dream-time thus becomes the conditional present in the text, functioning as a transformative space that impacts powerfully on both the present and the future. Drawing on Jungian theory therefore, Bryant develops a society that prioritises dream life. Rather than representing a fulfilment of wishes not satisfied in waking life, as in Freudian theory, dreams work to make the dreamer whole again. This 'wholeness' is a state that is strived for, although whether it can ever be achieved, (except through death?) is not clear. Clearly the search for 'wholeness' is problematic, and the novel also deals with ideal forms of masculinity and femininity in ways that challenge a clear feminist reading. While gender roles are confronted within Ata, with both men and women taking on a range of tasks, the structures of

gender remain essentially unchanged. 'Wholeness' in the novel seems to imply achieving a balance between unreconstructed notions of masculinity and femininity, and a spiritual wholeness that transcends the body. If the focus remains on the spirit, then material change may be overlooked.

A brief look at another novel might make this problematic search for 'wholeness' clearer. Locating dreaming activity within a similar context, Judy Grahn's *Mundane's World* (1988), which will be discussed further in the next chapter, presents the utopian mythical society of Mundane, which is described as a 'city of dreamers' (5). In this place, 'the women say they dream babies into their bellies from spirits and the men dream of hunting animals who no longer live around the vicinity' (5). A deeply spiritual culture, drawing on Native American traditions, the people live in clans, one of which, the Snake clan, has a Moon temple, in which there is a trance room. Within the trance room 'people dreamed gathering energy for special purposes' and thus dreaming holds a special place in the cultural tradition of the people (41). The clans as a whole, but especially the Snake clan, take their dreams very seriously, for dreams can provide solutions to problems and guide future actions, as well as creating babies. The women dream in the bathhouse as well as the temple, but the most important dreaming takes place during the blood ceremony. The first menstruation is celebrated as a significant rite of passage for young girls. To celebrate the first menstrual blood, young women undergo a ceremony in which they 'stay four days and nights in the Ana pot' also called the 'dream chamber womb' (169). Neither eating nor drinking anything other than a little water they 'would lie together in the body of Ana, dreaming, and their dreams would blend together and have great significance not only for

themselves, for everyone they knew in the world of Mundane' (169). The chamber is hot, and outside female family and friends dance and sing. Falling into a trance-like state due to fasting, heat, and singing, the young girls are able to travel into other time periods, accessing past shared experiences, and enter the consciousness of other life forms. The experience is extremely intense, and the dream world becomes very real. The girls achieve a sense of wholeness or oneness with the natural world, which, although temporary, allows them to make personal and social connections with other life forms. Although the girls wake up and do not share their dreams in the same way again in the future, they are 'woven together in the images and events of each others' dream minds' and their shared dream will inform their own futures, as well as those who know them (190). Womanhood is being uncritically celebrated here, and the girls' apparent connection with the natural world reflects an essentialist belief that women are somehow closer to nature than men. 'Wholeness' also here implies an acceptance of current social structures, of gender differentiation, as the girls are ushered into their feminine roles. While the dream chamber offers the girls different perspectives so that they can see the connections between themselves and others, it also serves to embed them more firmly within the status quo of the community. Thus the possibilities for change might become more difficult.

However, Ata represents a form of liberal feminism, in which bodies are no longer strictly demarcated by sexual difference. Men and women are equal, to the extent that they dress alike and all have long hair; there is a lack of gender roles, as both women and men care for children, work in the fields, and are involved in food preparation. Child care is a community practice, with everyone

involved in looking after babies and children. In addition, people do not live in nuclear families, rather individuals sleep in a 'wheel' with twelve 'spokes'. In Atan language, while all is gendered masculine or feminine, human beings are neuter, this being 'a reflection of the way they lived [. . .] I never heard anyone referred to by pronouns of gender – no he or she. There were words for man and woman but they were almost never used' (50-1). A contrast is set up between the misogynistic ways of the narrator in his previous life, using and exploiting women, and eventually killing his girlfriend, and the sexual egalitarianism of Ata. When the narrator attempts to rape Augustine, the community gathers together to stop the act: rape is not tolerated in this society. Thus Atan society almost reflects a truly post-feminist world, where gender differentiation is no longer relevant. Yet there remains a significant emphasis on the balance between masculine and feminine in the novel, a reflection on the novel's Jungian roots, and these remain uncontested in the text.

In addition to the radical destabilisation of the categories of "dream" and "reality," *The Km of Ata are Waiting for You* also represents other examples of altered states of consciousness. Trances complement dream states: strong dreamers, such as Sbgai, Augustine, Salvatore, and later the narrator, all experience prolonged trance states in order to achieve higher levels of consciousness. Additionally, Augustine can read thoughts, has healing powers, and on one occasion effectively wills a tree to burst into flames. The Atans also have powerful mental powers when they focus as a group, as the community's shared consciousness activates utopian change. When a plane flies overhead they all freeze, and become invisible so that they remain unseen: this action protects Ata from discovery by the

“outside world”, which would inevitably lead to its destruction. Similarly, when a ship heads for the island, everyone concentrates and the island itself vanishes from sight. Thus altered states are entrenched within the daily life of the community, developing out of dreaming activity as a means of sustaining and protecting the utopian society.

Commenting on *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You*, Carol Pearson argues that the narrator ‘steps off the edge of his own time into the core of his own integrity’ and that he is only able to do so because of the release from linear time that the novel develops (‘Of Time’ 265). As the narrator comments, “Time doesn’t exist here,” I told Augustine. “There is only now,” she agreed. “It’s because nothing changes.” “Change comes, but very slow and sudden,” she said. “You contradict yourself.” “Yes” (173).³ Pearson locates a new political theory in contemporary feminist utopian fiction that is based on the principles that: time is linear and also relative; that although past, present, and future all co-exist, change can only occur in the present; and that moving into the utopian future involves taking responsibility for our own lives and also relinquishing control of everything (‘Of Time’ 260-1). Significantly, Pearson links this theory with mysticism or spirituality. She argues that these transformed views of time and causality indicate a new political practice which involves claiming our own lives in the present moment, and not waiting for political consensus, for only then can we, ‘take a leap of faith to be citizens of a utopian society - in progress - today’ (‘Of Time’ 268). This theory provides a helpful approach to the reading of *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You*, because of the ways that time is

³ See Kristeva’s notion of ‘Women’s Time’.

manipulated in order to access the “lived moment”. Ata dream-time can be drawn out into days, weeks, even months, but in the “outside world” is over in a second. Time is never linear in a dream, rather it jumps and swerves, accelerates and then dawdles. If dreaming represents the “lived moment”, then it becomes the key space within which to act, both politically and spiritually. This ties in with ‘the eternal present of utopianism’ discussed by José Eduardo dos Reis, in which he argues that a utopian state of consciousness can (only) be achieved by accessing the “lived moment” which would involve ‘some kind of ontological transformation [. . .] a sort of epiphanic experience, purely immanent within the structure of the world, in which everything is seen as it truly is’ (44, 52). This moment, which could be described as spiritual, is experienced as a change of consciousness, in which only the present exists, and one is truly living “in the moment”. As the narrator writes, ‘[t]ime was one; there was only now’ for in Ata, the present moment is all there is – there is no concept of past or future in their language (203). Therefore all thoughts and actions must take place in the now and this emphasis on the ‘now’ is also important for political change. Yet, a sense of future is also necessary to imagine and bring about change.

Dreaming also exists as utopia itself, because in Ata the object of life is to dream. Dreaming is both the end product of life, and also the means to achieving utopia. To dream is therefore to engage with utopia, to engage with the possibilities of life. Bryant suggests that utopia is both in and of the world: it is a perpetually present possibility. She therefore implicitly engages with, and develops, Bloch’s view of utopia as dream, and Sargent’s definition of utopianism as ‘social dreaming’ (‘Three

Faces' 4). It is also important to note that Atans can appear in one another's dreams, and through dreaming can communicate with someone living in the "real" outside world; thus dreaming crosses several boundaries of individual and shared experience. While the narrator is healed psychologically and emotionally through his experience of dreaming in Ata, when he returns to the outside world at the end of the novel, he "wakes up" in a hospital immediately after the car crash, although he has lived in Ata for over 20 years. As a result, he remains unsure what constitutes "dream" and what constitutes "reality". He eventually realises, or accepts, that both worlds are real, because whatever he believes in becomes real to him. Bryant therefore emphasises subjectivism in her development of the characters and the narrative. Yet the narrator's belief in Ata not only strengthens him and allows him to face his execution with courage, it fundamentally challenges his personality, and all of his social relations. His whole worldly perception is transformed by his experiences in Ata, so that when he returns to his house and life, he finds it repulsive and very unsettling, as he comments, 'I lived with the lights out and the drapes drawn' (214). The novel ends with the narrator facing the death penalty for the murder of Connie; while he waits on death row, however, he is able to access the Atan community through meditation and dream states; reunited once again with them and their love and support for him. At the end of the novel, the narrator addresses the reader directly:

Perhaps you picked up this book because of the sensation surrounding the trial [. . .] If you continued to read, it was because in this hasty and incomplete account, I told you something that at some level of your being, you already know. Something you know as an echo, as a *glimpse in a dream* or as a fragile hope you are ashamed to voice. (220, my emphasis)

Thus at the end of the story, the reader's dreams are also drawn into the textual narrative. The final words of the text invite the reader to actively engage with the spiritual philosophy of the book:

If a man like me could find himself in Ata and could re-learn the dream, and further, could glimpse for a moment the reality behind the dream... then how much easier it might be for you. You have only to want It, to believe in It, and tonight, when you close your eyes, you can begin your journey. The kin of Ata are waiting for you. Nagdeo. (220)

Such a textual resolution, with the narrator facing death, and the reader invited to join Ata (in place of him?) works to underline the cyclical processes of life and death presented in the novel, both of which are embedded in dreaming activity. If the object of life is to dream well, and death is but a continuation of dreaming, then death becomes part of the cycle of life. When someone dies they have 'simply been liberated into their dreams' (159). In this novel, utopia, therefore, is not concerned with rejecting death, but rather smoothing over the gaps between life and death, waking time and sleep time, so that the boundaries are healed over. Yet, with a conclusion that ends in death, this novel could be criticised for a resolution that is somewhat negative. Clearly, the narrator has experienced a personal and spiritual transformation, having been exposed to the alternative ideologies of Atan life, which have made him aware of the corruption and evil within contemporary society. But, locked up in prison and facing death as he is, where and how can political change occur? Similarities can be drawn here with Connie's character in *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Throughout the novel, Connie is locked up in a mental hospital, powerless and voiceless, and at the end of the text she faces only a future of further imprisonment in the mental health system. However, as I argued in the previous chapter, to claim that Connie is completely disempowered would be to fundamentally ignore the ways that she is in fact liberated by her utopian visions and the actions that they encourage her into. The novel exploits a dual narrative in which Connie is able to escape the present through her utopian visions, and yet at the same time is still locked up in hospital. Such a critique would also ignore the ways that politics are portrayed

in the novel as both personal and collective. In a similar way, the personal and spiritual transformation of the narrator in *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You* affects everyone else in Ata, as they are all permanently connected. As a well-known author, his public confession of the murder in the courtroom will also have political effects within contemporary society. His dream is also communicated through the text – he passes on his story for the public to read, so that they might learn from his experience. As in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, the key point of utopian activity within the novel also lies in the reader's engagement with the text. The contrast between the reader's materialist, capitalist society and Atan life's spiritual Jungian community opens up a huge gap in values and ideologies, in which utopian thinking takes place. The invitation offered to the reader to engage with the possibilities of utopia '[y]ou have only to want It, to believe in It' then attempts to bridge that gap, to make the utopian possibilities achievable in the reader's present (220). Thus, some of the ideological problems in the novel, of limited views of gender change, become part of the process of the reader's political engagement with the text. As Tom Moylan argues, in critical utopias the utopian blueprint is rejected in favour of the dream. It is in the very act of portraying a utopian vision, not what its content portrays, that is crucial. The utopian society is not meant to be viewed as perfect or whole, but as a means of opening up the future to different possibilities.

Ursula Le Guin is another author who writes about dreaming in connection with utopianism. Le Guin is the author of numerous science fiction novels and stories, and has won many awards in the field for her writing. She has written a number of utopian novels, including *The Left Hand of Darkness*

(1969) *The Dispossessed* (1974) *Always Coming Home* (1985) and *The Telling* (2000); and her short stories with a utopian bent include 'The Ones Who Walked Away from Omelas' (1973), 'The Day before the Revolution' (1974), and her novella *The Word for World is Forest* (1972). Le Guin is interested in, among other things, the personal and moral repercussions of utopian possibilities and change. Her works can clearly be placed within Tom Moylan's critical utopian mode, for they rigorously critique the idea of utopia itself, whilst exploring the possibilities for change. Thus, she creates elaborate alternative worlds, based on alternative political and gender systems, and then explores the consequences for individuals living there. For example, through Anarres in *The Dispossessed*, Le Guin explores the effects on individuals who have only lived in a radically altered anarchist and communist society. Anarres is neither perfect nor complete – you will find no wholeness – but offers an alternative way of living for its inhabitants, and its differences are juxtaposed against another society, Urras, which is riven with capitalist ideology. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, another well-known novel of Le Guin's, the planet of Gethen is inhabited by a largely androgynous people, who enter 'kemmer' five to six days out of a twenty-eight day cycle (similar to a menstrual cycle). If a suitable partner is found during this period, sexual characteristics of either male or female are simulated, so that gender becomes destabilised, as do gender roles. The human, Mr Ai, finds his own assumptions about gender, and his own gendered desires, severely disrupted by his visit to Gethen. As Le Guin comments, 'I eliminated gender, to find out what was left. Whatever was left would be, presumably, simply human' ('Is Gender Necessary?' 10). *The Word for World is Forest*, written in between these two novels, offers another critical utopian perspective that both describes a non-capitalist society struggling to survive amidst the threat of

destruction, and undertakes a deconstruction of gender roles. Le Guin says of this story, 'What I wanted to write about was the forest and the dream; that is, I wanted to describe a certain ecology from within' ('Afterward' 118).

The Word for World is Forest draws on this range of experiences, and explores the possibilities for dreaming as a means of guiding future actions. Written out of her experience of protesting against the Vietnam war, the story is strong on didactic rhetoric, as Le Guin herself admits, 'I succumbed, in part, to the lure of the pulpit' ('Author's Introduction', *The Word for World is Forest* 7). Le Guin employs a critical utopian strategy, setting up obtrusive oppositions between the mercenary Davidson and the dreamer, Selver, in order to provoke debate. This is where utopian thinking takes place, in the gaps between the arguments, where the reader is encouraged to situate herself.

Dreaming is a central element within the utopian culture of the Athsheans; within their culture, as in *Ata*, the purpose of life is to dream well. There is a quality in the air that entices inhabitants to dream, as even the cynical Davidson notices, 'there was something about this damn planet, its gold sunlight and hazy sky, its mild winds smelling of leafmould and pollen, something that makes you daydream. You mooched along thinking about conquistadors and destiny and stuff' (16). The people dream purposefully in order to find answers to questions, and their dreams shape their lives, as their lives shape their dreams. Torbor asks of Selver three key questions which the Athsheans live by: 'Do you hold the dream in your hands? Do you weave and shape, direct and follow, start and cease at will?

Can you walk the road your dream goes?' (31-2). Living by and through the dream is therefore a goal to strive for. However, this world is threatened by the greedy colonisation by Earth, led by the cold-hearted misogynist Captain Davidson. Davidson considers Forty Lands, which is named by Earth as World 41, or the New Tahiti Colony, merely as a place to be mined for its wood, a place to be tamed: 'That's what he was here for: to tame it' (11). He calls the native Athsheans, 'Creechies', and they are treated as mentally challenged slaves, likened to cows or gorillas, for they are definitely not viewed as human. Rather, they are 'lazy, they're dumb, they're treacherous, and they don't feel pain' (17-18). They also appear never to sleep, but just stare into space, gazing at nothing. When thousands of the Athsheans are enslaved by the colonisers, and their women raped, one slave, Selver dreams that he must take action. Gathering together, the Athsheans begin to fight back. And thus a war begins between the two cultures, between a culture used to violence and oppressing vulnerable peoples, and a pacifist culture intent on protecting its environment and its people's lives.⁴

Introduced from the second chapter onwards, Forty Lands is presented as a world of trees and forest, '[a]ll the colors of rust and sunset, brown-reds and pale greens' where '[t]here was no seeing everything at once: no certainty. The colours of rust and sunset kept changing in the hanging leaves of the copper willows, and you could not even say whether the leaves of the willows were brownish-red, or reddish-green, or green' (27). This ever changing environment reflects the ways of its inhabitants, as Coro Mena comments, '[t]he world is always new, [. . .] however old its roots' (32). There are many

⁴ A similar struggle is experienced in *The Fifth Sacred Thing*.

cultures within the Forty Lands: '[t]here were more languages than lands, and each with a different dialect for every town that spoke it; there were infinite ramifications of manners, morals, customs, crafts; physical types differed on each of the five Great Lands' (35). Thus difference is celebrated and Athshean culture is a peaceful one, there is no war or violence, and there appear to be no gender roles. Rape, violent assault, and murder are all incredibly rare, and there is little madness.

But when Selver and his companions attack and kill the 'yumens' of the city of Kelme Deva in order to halt the destruction of their world, their society is irrevocably altered. As Coro Mena states, after this act, everything will be changed, and in turn, 'all men's dreams [. . .] will be changed. They will never be the same again' (33). While Dr Lyubov, a human who has studied the Athsheans, claims that 'they are a static, stable, uniform society. They have no history. Perfectly integrated, and wholly unprogressive. You might say that like the forest they live in, they've attained a climax state' this is an outsider's point of view (52). As Lyubov gradually realises, this perspective is wholly mistaken, as proven by the willingness of the Athsheans to alter and progress their culture in response to attacks on it. However, their view of what constitutes progress might be different to a human one.

Before Selver's actions in killing the humans, the Athsheans experienced a wholeness of vision, or of being, in which 'the thing we had to do was the right thing to do; the way we had to go was the right way and led us home' (33). Thus there was no separation, or split, between their actions, and the "right" thing to do. However, once killing humans became a part of their culture, a fundamental split

occurred, as Coro Mena says to Selver '[f]or you've done what you had to do, and it was not right' (33). There now lies a contradiction between doing what has to be done, and doing what is "right"; thus what is "right" is brought into question. Although it would be too easy to say that the Athsheans have moved from a more simple or primitive existence to a more complicated, advanced one, they have certainly experienced a shift in their belief system. Selver's actions have affected every single Athshean; the implications of his dream, and the carrying out of his dream, does not just reflect his own personal morality, but that of the whole of his people, and their culture. The splitting that occurs within their culture suggests the original wholeness is not sustainable; difference and division constitutes an integral aspect to change and progression.

Disconnection from the dream causes problems in world-time; this is a common problem identified by the Athsheans, and one that is diagnosed in the humans. They criticise the 'yumens' for not dreaming except in sleep, for not training or directing their dreams. As Selver notes, 'yumens' call 'the world-time 'real' and the dream-time 'unreal,' as if that were the difference between them, and Ebor Dendep retorts: 'if they want to dream waking they take poisons so that the dreams go out of control, you said? How can people be any madder? They don't know the dream-time from the world-time, any more than a baby does' (40). This disconnection from the dream fundamentally weakens human cultures, for '[i]f the yumens are men they are men unfit or untaught to dream and act as men. Therefore they go about in torment killing and destroying, driven by the gods within' (41). Connection with the dream teaches individuals to do only what is right, and to be peaceful and nurturing. But when

Selver's dream tells him to kill and destroy, this is something completely new to the Athsheans, and thus alters the fabric of their lives forever. In the language of psychoanalysis, it could be argued that the Athsheans have shifted from a culture of the pre-Oedipal, a world of completeness and wholeness, to a culture where the law of the father is now in place. A fundamental split has occurred, in which the dream-time and world-time are out of kilter, where what is right within the dream, is not right within the world, where what has to be done to protect the world and its people, is at the same time not the "right" thing to do. The Athsheans cannot ever heal this split, as Selver tells Lepennon, 'You cannot take things that exist in the world and try to drive them back into the dream, to hold them inside the dream with walls and pretences. That is insanity. What is, is. There is no use pretending, now, that we do not know how to kill one another' (127). Into this garden of Eden, the serpent has brought knowledge, and although the Athsheans have not been banished from their garden, this knowledge has altered them irrevocably. Within Ata, the dream-time and world-time are kept in balance through the power of the Atan dreamers. Yet the imbalances in the world constantly seek to disrupt the lives of those who live there, and violence and unhappiness continue to prevail. The ultimate goal is for all to be connected to the dream, and in both Ata and Athshe, dreams guide the actions of all who dream and live there.

The utopian state of peacefulness that the Athsheans lived in, prior to the split, was achieved through their development of dream states, and the connection between dream-time and world-time. Using dreams to search for answers, Athsheans dream habitually, frequently falling into sleep during

the day, as they constantly access the dream: 'the old man looked at him through the long willow-leaves and saw him in his dreams' (27). Dreams offer new reflections on notions of truth, as Selver states, 'I'm not raving, this is true fact and dream' (32). Selver is seen to be 'a god, a changer, a bridge between realities' because of the importance of his dream and what it told him to do, and because his presence was dreamed by others beforehand (34). Those who dream strongly are therefore highly respected in this culture, as in Ata.

While both women and men can be Dreamers - those whose dreams guide the towns - Dreamers are, perhaps problematically for a feminist reading, largely male. No explanation is provided in the novel for this occurrence. However, women run all the cities and towns, and it is the task of the Old Women of the towns to interpret and pass on the dreams of the Dreamers, if they choose to do so (35). Men and women share an equal status therefore, although they take on different roles. Women are deemed the more sensible gender, as one female inhabitant comments of Selver, 'I wish he was a woman and would talk sense' (30). The rape and murder of Selver's wife initiates the transformation of Athshean society, as violence against women cannot be tolerated. The careless misogyny of Davidson in his use and abuse of women as merely products to be consumed and then discarded is unacceptable to the Athshean culture where women are valued as an integral aspect of society.

The resolution of the novel ties these strands together, emphasising the way that dreams propel dreamers into the future, whilst simultaneously effecting radical change in the present. The

Terrans withdraw from Athshe permanently, and one of the humans, Lepannon, asks Selver whether they can return to their state of non-violence, as they were before the Terran takeover. "We shall go" Lepannon says, "Within two days we shall be gone. All of us. Forever. Then the forests of Athshe will be as they were before" (128). But Selver replies, "Lyubov will be here [. . .] And Davidson will be here. Both of them. Maybe after I die people will be as they were before I was born, and before you came. But I do not think they will" (128). Thus the novel ends with the reader knowing that Athshe can never be healed completely again, but at the same time, that both good and bad have been brought to this society, and its future will surely be grounded in dreaming and hoping, and therefore will confront the violence within it, and not allow it to be wholly destructive. A reading of the novel could argue that the effects of colonialism on Athshe are irreparable; violence having entered the community, it can never recover. The spiritual community could neither resist colonisation, nor withdraw from an engagement with violence. Selver's transformation from dreamer to murderer is not especially positive. However, this novel, as with *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You* establishes that personal transformation is both political and collective. Selver's actions impact on the lives of all those around him, including the human visitors. In political terms, resistance is never futile, and impacts strongly on both sides.

Mary Staton's *The Legend of Biel* (1975) also engages with the complexities of dreaming, and its connection to utopianism. The novel is a little-discussed feminist utopian text, perhaps due to its complex narrative style, which I shall discuss below. The novel tells the story of two people, one

human and male, the other, alien and female. The first, Howard Scott, is a member of a probe team that is exploring the alien planet MC6. During the journey there, Howard dreams, through a narrative voice that addresses him directly, that life on earth represents death and insanity, [y]our heritage is a perversion [. . .] Your people are insane' (8). When Howard "wakes up" and he and his team begin exploration of the planet, he realises that MC6 is a perfect place, a utopia, which feels like 'home' to him. He decides that he wants to remain there for the rest of his life. Because he gives himself completely to the new planet, he is pulled into its time and consciousness: *'[h]e stood before an invisible but tangible barrier – time on one side, an entire new civilisation on the other. Willingness to change was the key to passage through'* (68, original emphasis). Pulled through into the new planet, named Thoacdien V, Howard's personality, memory and physical body are obliterated, as he is sucked into Thoacdien, and experiences first-hand the 'legend of Biel'. From this point onwards, Howard is caught up permanently with Biel's consciousness. Biel is the second character in the story, and the novel traces her spiritual journey, right from conception, where [a] sperm and an ovum collide' (69) to her emergence as a woman at the end of the text. The focus of the novel is on her growth to consciousness. A subject in an experiment by Thoacdien, Biel is one of a hundred fetuses that are given an experimental pre-birth injection of binol, which is described as 'pure information'. This chemical increases brain functioning exponentially, but is usually only injected after birth, and in smaller doses. Biel suffers several seizures as a result of the dose, and goes into a coma, but she survives. She is nurtured and fed, as are all babies, in artificial tanks called 'Gladdins', which completely fulfil all of the baby's physical needs. Functioning in a similar way to the birthing machines in Piercy's *Mattapoisett*, the Gladdins work to limit infants' contact with

humans until they have reached a level of maturity, although an assigned mentor will watch over the conception and 'birth' of the baby, and observe it in its Gladdin. The babies progress in their consciousness through a prolonged dream or psychological journey, called the 'Hall of One Thousand Chambers' which is composed of 'endless metaphorical realities and dreams and life-mazes' (109). Through this journey, individuals' identities are formed, as infants move into psychological equilibrium, what Carol Pearson calls 'an ethic based upon the full and free attainment of the self' ('Coming Home' 68).

The novel is written in a complex style, which is graphically diverse. Words cascade down the page, whole sections are written in italics, computer printouts of conversations appear and syntax is frequently fragmented. This narrative style is used to try to convey heterogeneous descriptions of dreams, thoughts and emotions, which challenge the reader to grapple with characters' experiences. It makes the narrative difficult to read, which is – perhaps - the point, as the reader is challenged to make sense of the text, encountering both a narrative style, and a world that is strange and different, in the same way that Howard Scott and Biel discover Thoacdien for the first time. The narrative style is also reminiscent of French feminist *écriture féminine* which Hélène Cixous has written about. *Ecriture féminine* is characterised by narrative breaks and gaps, and varied textual styles. It is concerned with writing the body, of placing the female body into writing, to express female desire and sexuality. Cixous argued that female desire has not yet been written about because of the problems of patriarchal language. In

the novel, Biel's female subjectivity is represented through this complex narrative style, as Staton works to describe her emerging sexuality and consciousness.

Thoacdien V, where the story is set, is part of a federation of planets, and is known as 'the planet of varieties'; composed largely of water it has four island continents, each with varying seasons and landscapes (108). Complex 187-A, where Biel is born, is situated on the western edge of the second largest continent, where the seasons are 'wind, birth (more commonly called fog) sun, and stillness' (109). It is the season of stillness that is unique to the Federation, and people visit during this season to sit and meditate, study, think and experience the quietness, where the sea is still, the wind vanishes and animals sleep or listen. Those born on this continent 'are capable of silence. They are capable of being motionless in every sense of the word for long periods of time. Others come here to learn that' (109).

The novel addresses many of the concerns that the psychoanalytic works of Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown explore in the search for new forms of consciousness, based on a repression-free subjectivity. Individuals born into Thoacdien have no contact with other humans until their identity is formed, thus Freudian phases of development, such as the Oedipal phase are avoided. Individuals do not, therefore, form their conceptions of self in relation to others, thus the self is not constructed through the exclusion of others. Instead, each infant comes to know her self through a process of similarity with others. When Biel first sees her reflection in a pool of water, she

does not recognise that it reflects herself, 'An image squats up from the pool and stares at her. !? The image has no identity in her mind. It is nothing. It is simply there' (153). Biel fractures the image in the pool, and watches as it reforms, becoming 'a dream – a reflection of the dreamer dreaming of the dreamer dreaming the dream' (153). Biel recognises the image as a presence in her dreams, but nothing more. Then she sees an insect and the insect's reflection in the water; she calls over to her mentor, Mikkran and then sees Mikkran, and Mikkran's reflection in the pool. Seeing how the two images coincide, Biel is able to recognise that the image facing her must also reflect her self, and 'She pats herself on the chest, drops her jaw, and makes a moaning sound which is both question and statement' (154). Mikkran 'gives the child a word. "I"' (154-5). This scene responds to, and challenges, Lacan's 'Mirror Stage', which describes the way that the infant first distinguishes between self and other, through an identification with an image outside him or herself. Occurring between the ages of six and eighteen months through a mirror reflection, (but it could also take place through seeing another child, or a parent) the child realises that there exists self and not-self. This act of identification leads to a new sense of the relations between self and not-self, so that 'he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates – the child's own body, and the persons and things around him' (Lacan, 2). But, crucially, this recognition constitutes a misrecognition for the child, leading, as Malcolm Bowie argues, to a delusion that the image is real, and reflects the self truthfully (Bowie 23). The mirror, therefore is 'a trap and a decoy' and thus 'falsehood and underhandedness are somehow ingrained into the ego in its first, formative moments' (23). The mirror stage induces alienation from the self: 'the

mirror-bemused infant, setting forth on his career of delusional ego-building, is condemned to the madness of the madhouse' (Bowie 24). In contrast, and in opposition to Lacan, Biel is able to recognise that her reflection is merely a reflection, and does not represent her, or her ideal self. Rather, because she sees her reflection in a pool of water, she can break up her reflection, and know that her own image is not similarly fractured, but remains coherent: 'the surface of the pool comes back together and rocks smoothly. The child leans over and looks at herself. She points at the image and places her hand on her chest. "I" (155).

While the Lacanian subject is formed through a radical split that can never become whole, seeking the fulfilment of a desire that can never be satisfied, the Thoacdien child's subjectivity is formed very differently. In Thoacdien, infants' subjectivity is not formed in relation to others. Thoacdiens, through a 'bloodless revolution' consciously worked to destroy the family, because 'the family is not only an inefficient system, it is a cruel one' (219) because it resists change. As Biel explains to the Higgittes, '[i]n the family learning is a process of psychological brutality at the end of which a child knows nothing but what is permissible for the tribe' (219-20). The family is replaced therefore with extra-uterine birthing, the mechanical Gladdin, and the mentor, who watches over the child with a 'healthy, motiveless love', a relationship based on 'mutual sovereignty' which teaches that 'two persons of relaxed and curious mind who learn and share together, who confront the unknown, also create joy' (220). Cared for initially by a Gladdin which is 'without identity' (85) the child is fed and loved by a machine that it does not bond with, and nurtures the infant 'without giving the child

preconceptions or programming it in any way' (85). The novel draws on texts such as R. D. Laing and A. Esterson's *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (1964) which blamed the nuclear family for creating unhealthy psychological dependencies. Shulamith Firestone's text *The Dialectic of Sex* (1971) took such ideas to a radical feminist extreme, arguing that the nuclear family needed to be completely rejected in favour of new forms of familial structures.⁵ Like Piercy and Staton, Firestone argued that reproductive technologies should be used to liberate women from pregnancy and child-bearing, the result being that women could finally achieve real equality with men.

Thus the child's first act of independence is to climb out of the Gladdin, yet the Gladdin continues to feed and look after the child, as she moves through the Hall of One Thousand Chambers. The Hall of One Thousand Chambers transforms infants from being 'isolated and relatively helpless' into 'youths who will emerge as full citizens' (109-110). 'During their journey their chambers are transformed into reflections of where they have been' as they experience, in a different reality/or consciousness, life-threatening challenges, love, and loss. This journey takes varying amounts of time, and individuals 'remain in their chambers, evolving themselves and their environments, destroying what must be destroyed in order to be free, creating what must be created in order to face the unknown' (110). Only when they emerge from the Hall do individuals encounter 'the reality and wonder of other people' (111). Staton, therefore, removes both parents and allows the child to individuate independently, before they are introduced to their peers, and their mentor – there are no

⁵ However, on the down side, Tim Guest's *My Life in Orange* (2004) describes some of the dangers of co-parenting in a commune.

further guardians or authority figures. As in other feminist utopias, such as *Woman on the Edge of Time*, therefore, the primary relationship between mother and child is destroyed in favour of communal child-raising. Desire for the mentor is allowed free reign in the Hall of One Thousand Chambers: there is no law of the father or castration anxiety to threaten the child. Desire in the novel is therefore more similar to Blochian desire than Freudian – the object of life is the trajectory towards the fulfilment of human desires, of moving beyond everyday desires towards an unselfish, unalienated relationship with others.

Lacan argued that the individual is born into language, into a language which does not belong to it, and is therefore subject to a law outside the self, the law of the father, represented by the phallus. When Mikkan “gives” the child language, “I”, and moments later, names her ‘Biel’, language becomes something that can be offered as a gift, and is at the same time separated from the law of the father (155). At the same time, this ‘giving’ of language occurs, not in “reality”, but in The Hall of One Thousand Chambers, through the dream, or psychological journey. Within Thoacdien, language was changed consciously, through a belief in linguistic determination, that ‘syntax is reality. It creates reality’ (176). Prior to the revolution, it was realised that language reinforced feelings of despair and fear: ‘the essential thrust of their language was control and ownership where control and ownership are not possible. Their syntax implied one thing and reality denied it. So they continually lost the battle to control and own. The result was despair’ (176). In contrast, Thoacdiens developed a language (which is not revealed in the novel) which focuses on ‘the pleasurable discovery of the possibilities in selfness’

which creates a reality focused on learning and developing the self to its full potential. The belief that (patriarchal) language creates (patriarchal) reality has been central to much feminist thought, particularly within cultural feminism. Cultural and radical feminist writer Mary Daly calls for women to gain a 'gynocentric consciousness' and to create gynocentric myths, which focus on women and their experiences. Her mission is to 'move beyond the imprisoning mental, physical, emotional, spiritual walls of the state of possession' into a new woman-identified world of female freedom (xxiv). The main method of achieving feminist transformation, she argues, is through challenging patriarchal language and myth, and she calls for women to create their own myths of the female. Echoing Monique Wittig in *Les Guérillères* (1969) she invents, discovers and re-members in an effort to free women from patriarchal narratives (*Gyn/Ecology* 24). Daly therefore articulates transformation as occurring through changing ideas about history, mythology and language, and her feminism is largely idealist, rooted in a belief that if meanings and ideas of women are changed, then the position of women in society will change in the process.

However, materialist feminisms reject idealism in favour of a feminist analysis based on material and political change. This approach is favoured because it is seen to link more clearly with analyses which focus on the economic causes of oppression, and because a materialist approach is believed to create more possibilities for effective social and political change. Joanna Russ's recent work highlights the importance of feminist political action in *What are We Fighting For? Sex, Race, Class, and the*

Future of Feminism in which she emphasises the necessity for women to act to make positive changes.

Russ critiques cultural feminisms as dangerously depoliticised:

The attempt to substitute for the uncompromising radicalism of the feminism of the late 1960s and early 1970s an account of women that sees us as a group with a "unique" psychology and "special" needs, possessors of an already existing "culture" that needs only to be recognised, is about to land a great many of us in the tar pit where (so to speak) our bones will be found in a hundred years or so and confused, not unreasonably, with those of the dinosaurs. (11)

It seems that this debate is not just one of emphasising language over the material or vice-versa, but rather of the connection between the two. Writers such as Daly believe that ideas construct reality, and that changing ideas and language about women will consequently change reality. Writers such as Russ believe that the material exists separately from ideas, although they do acknowledge that there is an important connection between ideas and ideologies in constructing realities. While cultural feminists oversimplify the relationship between ideas and reality, materialist feminists attempt to problematise the relationship. In her novel, Staton works within this gap – utilising both materialist ideas in her attack on the nuclear family, but also idealist ones in her construction of a new language. Her use of language in her story telling is also an attempt to use writing and language in a new way. In her utopian novel *Native Tongue* (1984) Suzette Haden Elgin also situates language at the centre of feminist utopian change. The women's language, Láadan, gives women the freedom to express their desires for the first time, and is the first step towards liberation. However, because change is limited to first creating a language, liberation is very slow, and the women are always in danger of having both their language and their freedom destroyed. Language is interrogated in a different way in *Mattapoisett*, where gender pronouns are removed, and everybody is referred to as 'per' rather than 'him' or 'her'. Similarly in June

Arnold's *The Cook and the Carpenter* (1973) characters are referred to as 'na' or 'nan' so that it is not clear whether characters are male or female. These subtle changes make huge differences to the reading of a novel, and can reveal some of the complexities of gendered language and its relationship to our assumptions regarding what is 'male' or 'female' behaviour.

Writing takes a central place in the work of Luce Irigaray whose vision for feminist change takes place within language; her work is therefore implicated in the problems of idealist thinking, but Irigaray works to oppose dichotomies, and would also oppose the distinction between idealism and materialism. Working within the realm of philosophy and poststructuralist theory, Irigaray gestures towards a utopian feminine writing that is fluid, tactile and dynamic. This utopian writing would break with syntax, with reason, and would privilege plurality, exploding ideas, concepts and forms. In this way, Irigaray attempts to articulate women's sexuality within patriarchal culture, as an alternative to the ways in which women's sexuality has been represented (or repressed) within our culture. Hers is a utopian project, an attempt to create a space for women to express themselves within culture. This fantasy is not about creating a polarised view of sexuality – a male view set against a female view, or about reversing the subject/object dichotomy. Rather, Irigaray's aim is, 'jamming the theoretical machinery itself, of suspending its pretension to the production of a truth and of a meaning that are excessively univocal' (*This Sex* 78). Her goal therefore is to move beyond dichotomised meanings, into a utopian space in which fantasies of the female can proliferate. However, Irigaray has been critiqued repeatedly for essentialism, because of her emphasis on the female body as a site of representation and

power. It has also been argued that because she accepts the Lacanian idea that women are outside phallogentric language, that she is locked within the belief that women can never gain power within society.⁶

Hélène Cixous also seeks to celebrate the place of women outside language. Echoing Virginia Woolf's exposition of women as 'Outsiders,' Cixous positively encourages the conceptualisation of women on the margins of society. Cixous privileges the idea of women as hysteric, of flirting with the possibilities of insanity. In 'The Laugh of the Medusa' and *The Newly Born Woman*, Cixous outlines the utopian possibilities for women's writing, drawing on the idea that thinking and writing are in themselves politically transformative practices, 'I shall speak about women's writing; about *what it will do*. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing' ('The Laugh of the Medusa' 245, original emphasis). Cixous urges women to write their desires and their body, and to place themselves into history, 'And why don't you write? Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it.' (246). Women, she argues, need to be re-written, because so far they have only been represented through a patriarchal perspective. Thus she calls for a deconstruction of the ways in which patriarchy has written "woman". Women, the 'repressed of culture' must write because, 'writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement towards a transformation of social and cultural structures' (248-9,

⁶ Shoshana Felman has interrogated Irigaray's claims that women are totally silenced by patriarchal culture, arguing that if woman are the Other, how does Irigaray speak at all? 'How can one speak from the place of the Other? How can the woman be thought about outside of the Masculine/Feminine framework, *other* than as opposed to man, without being subordinated to a primordial masculine model? How can madness, in a similar way, be conceived outside of its dichotomous opposition to sanity, without being subjugated to reason? How can difference as such be thought out as *non-subordinate* to identity? In other words, how can thought break away from the logic of polar oppositions?' (10).

original emphasis). Cixous enacts this libidinous writing in her own works, as she incorporates myth and fairytale, weaving together fact and fiction, theory and practice. Her work therefore not only theorises utopianism, it creates utopian spaces as well, and can therefore be allied to *Les Guéillères* or *The Wanderground* (1978) in its recreation of female centred myth and story.⁷ Both writers, therefore gain access – via dreaming – into a new symbolic and political space.

Thus in *the Legend of Biel*, the child learns language for herself, it does not come from “outside” the self, as it does in Lacanian theory, but from what Jung might call the collective unconscious. But in Thoacdien, the notion of an unconscious is problematic, because as there is no Oedipal phase, no primary repression occurs. Thus it could be argued that the unconscious does not exist here. Perhaps this is why the notion of dreaming in Thoacdien shifts in the text; sleep is usually dreamless, like ‘melting into endless wads of cotton’, yet ‘little clouds of dreams’ are sometimes present, which may be a dream, or a ‘seeming dream’ (277, 279). During the journey to MC6, Howard, with the rest of the team, is put into a dreamless sleep ‘one degree from death’ (8) to avoid the years spent travelling. During his “sleep”, he is able to learn of ‘the other side of himself’ as he ‘dreams of the dreamer dreaming of the dreamer dreaming the dream. He is concentric and simultaneous selves, and none of it is a dream’ (8). This notion of the ‘dreamer dreaming of the dreamer dreaming the dream’ recurs throughout the text. When Biel wakes from her first complete sleep in the village of Lir, she says ‘And I dreamed’ as though it were a remarkable thing, although she can remember nothing of her dream

⁷ However, Jennifer Burwell comments that it is dangerous to consistently privilege margin over centre, because this risks permanently exiling those on the margins (31).

(282). Rather than wish-fulfilments, Biel dreams of something that 'hasn't happened yet, and yet it happened long ago – which are both in the same place' (278). While the journey through *The Hall of One Thousand Chambers* appears to constitute a prolonged dream, within which further dreams are dreamt, it could also be cast as a meditative state, or hallucination, or spiritual journey through the psyche. Through this journey, Biel encounters the feminist dystopian Higgite community, a very strict patriarchal society, structured around war and violence. As Thoacdien says to Biel, 'Your encounter with the Higgites was your exploration into your own primitive brain and the violence it contains. Your responses to them was the beginning of your articulation and release' (326-7). Biel also visits another utopian society, called Lir, which views Thoacdien as a technocracy. Lirans completely reject all systems: '[w]e have said no to all systems good or bad, and to all who run systems, good, or bad' (298). Living only in the moment, striving for equilibrium, Lirans live in 'benevolent chaos' (297). Thus Biel is confronted with two polar extremes of utopia and dystopia, and when she emerges from her dream journey, her task will be to experience, as Thoacdien explains, '[t]hings beyond your dreams. Things you cannot imagine' (327).

The ending of the novel sees Biel slowly returning to consciousness, and realising that her experiences have all been a dream, "“You have manipulated my senses and I can no longer distinguish the dreams!”" she argues (319). Biel's experience, however, is unique, because her consciousness has merged with Howard's, and she can therefore experience time in a different way; as Kaj-Palmir explains, 'all time, which contains all events, exists right now, in one form or another. Times past,

present, and future are simultaneous [. . .] We have been completely trapped in Thoacdien time, even though we are entirely surrounded by other times of which we cannot even dream [. . .] You are not so trapped' (321). Through the merging of consciousness, through the dream process, change has occurred. Drawing on Pearson's theory that within contemporary feminist utopian fiction, time is treated in a different way, this novel develops the significance of time and consciousness to utopian practice. Biel's dream is real because she experienced it; and her dream allowed her to experience hunger, thirst, love and loss, without endangering her life. As in Hadfield's work on dreaming, '*dreams stand in the place of experience*' (65, original emphasis). The novel ends with four narrative threads; Biel is welcomed into the community as an adult; Thoacdien offers the probe team an invitation to join their culture; the exploration team leaves MC6, blowing the planet up; Thoacdien begins reconstruction of MC6, and welcomes the rebirth of Howard Scott. The cycle of life and dreaming continues, as Howard will enter into the dreaming process as he begins his journey. Thus the novel, as with the other texts, does not achieve any final narrative resolution, but points forward to the future – those on Thoacdien will continue evolving and learning, while those on earth will blindly continue to reject and fear the unknown. Death becomes a state that is not feared or vilified, but embraced. Each of the novels incorporates death into the utopian process, as merely another aspect of the dream. The destruction of MC6 at the end of the novel could be read as a negation of the utopian community in the face of prospective colonisation. As with Athshe, the spiritual community was unable to physically resist the violence of humanity. Yet the final section of the novel, which consists of a reading from Thoacdien, shows that MC6 will continue to exist – either it has not been completely physically

destroyed, or it continues to exist in non-physical form and will be re-built: 'RECONSTRUCTION OF MC6, THOACDIEN 75, IS PRIORITY ONE' (332). The re-birth of Howard Scott, 'THE ONE HUMAN WHO WAS ABLE TO FIND HIS WAY HERE THROUGH MUCH DARKNESS' will represent the first celebratory act of this planet. The resilience of Thoacdien to forgive, re-build, and welcome a human into its community, offers the reader a sense of hope that is clearly utopian.

These novels, therefore, attempt to foreground the utopian process of dreaming as both an individual and shared vision, particularly valuing the social dream. In *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You* dreaming exists as an altered reality, a space that is more perfect than the real, lived world, because it offers the only means to travel 'Home'. As such, there is a danger that dreaming becomes more important than the real world, and indeed, characters only live to dream, sacrificing relationships with lovers and family in order to dream well, and become strong dreamers. Thus the characters' hold on reality is at times tenuous. This is the danger of allowing the dream to take over; yet while the Atan life could be described as politically disengaged, it could be argued that their politics is enacted through their dreaming lives, which work to create balance in the real world. Their politics is spiritual and mystical, and effects change in alternative ways that are not grounded in materiality. For all its similarities to *Ata*, Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest* utilises dreaming in a more grounded way. While the Athsheans also structure their lives around dreaming, only a small percentage of their culture devotes their lives to dreaming; the rest are fully engaged in the everyday world. When Selver dreams his important dream, he acts without faltering, committing an extreme act of violence in defence of the

rape and murder of his wife. Thus in this novel, dreaming does not promote disconnection with the everyday world, rather, it informs and guides those activities. Perhaps there is more of the concrete utopia here, propelling the Athsheans into the future, with an anticipatory consciousness that refuses to remain locked in the past, but constantly pushes forward. Similarly, in *The Legend of Biel*, dreaming is used as a means of striving for change. Connection with the different parts of the self is key to the utopian project, so that relationships with others in the everyday world will be enhanced. In these texts, therefore, utopianism becomes not a process of disengagement with politics, but rather a politics of engagement with the self in community. Through the fantastic abstract utopia, concrete material change is effected. These novels foreground the idea of utopia as process, or, in Jameson's terminology, as 'a kind of machine' (*The Seeds of Time* 56). Expressions of utopian freedoms or desires exist primarily within the gaps of a text, within what it does not, or cannot, say about utopia. The location of utopia within the "dream world" emphasises this inability to express utopia clearly or unproblematically.

From a feminist perspective, these texts all present feminist societies, in which gender equality exists. All feature strong female protagonists, with enhanced connections to the natural world and powerful healing abilities. They also have the faculty to link in emotionally and psychologically with others, through dream states, and through their empathetic connections. Thus the novels explore, and in some cases, perpetuate, 1970s cultural feminism's essentialist notion of women as more connected with nature, animals and one another. When these roles are presented

uncritically, as in *Mundane's World*, then transformation is limited, because it stops short at transforming gender ideologies. Only when new representations of male and female relations are described, do these texts really pull the reader into an engagement with gender change. Through new constructions of language, alternative child-rearing arrangements, alternative gender roles, and more flexible views of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' these novels challenge patriarchal constructions of gender. These utopian women are not solely defined as mothers, carers or healers; rather, they take on a variety of roles. Augustine is represented as a leader, a visionary and a lover; Mikkan is both mentor, lover, guardian, and also an equal to Biel in the search for knowledge; Biel is both child and learner, and yet also teacher and sharer. When these novels do not simply define women in relation to their biology, they offer a broad spectrum of female experience. Similarly, when change is limited to altering only one aspect of society, such as language, the texts become locked into a monological critique of society. Instead, as most of these novels argue, political change can only be achieved through action on a number of fronts – material, spiritual and psychological. Dreaming, in these novels, therefore, represents one important aspect of a feminist utopian culture, acting within and across other altered states of consciousness, such as madness, spirituality and telepathy. Used within cultures that prioritise psychological and spiritual equilibrium, the analysis and exploration of dreams becomes one more way of discovering self truths and developing stronger interpersonal relations. Dreams become a way of envisioning new futures for women, exploring women's fantasy lives which can then be acted upon. The link between utopianism and dreaming in these novels is, therefore, a powerful one; dreaming promotes and sustains utopian

visions; as Bloch writes, '[n]obody has ever lived without daydreams, but it is a question of knowing them deeper and deeper and in this way keeping them trained unerringly, usefully, on what is right'

(1). In these novels, the decision concerning what is 'right' is rarely a simple one, and involves a long journey into and out of the dreaming self.

Chapter Five

Spirituality

There has been a huge growth in “New Age” theologies in the last thirty years. Originally emerging in the late nineteenth century, New Age thinking is not, in fact, new, but can be traced to key figures such as Madame Blavatsky, Jung and Gurdjieff; thinkers who believed in “self-spirituality” and self-enlightenment. By the 1920s, New Age thought, as we know it today, was emerging as a popular force, but it really came to prominence in the 60s and 70s, when “self-spirituality” became fashionable again as part of the counter cultural movement. Since this period, there has been further awareness of eastern religions in the West and in new social movements such as feminism, environmentalism and alternative health, which have intersected with New Age thought. Its growth also reflects a waning interest in Christianity; as Alison Pryce notes, the development of New Age spiritualities has taken place alongside a decline in traditional Christianity in Britain (97). As women have sought a place for themselves in religion, many have looked for alternative spiritualities that allow women an active role in ritual and practice. Paul Heelas argues that New Age spirituality is ‘a highly optimistic, celebratory, utopian and spiritual form of humanism [. . .] A new *consciousness*, and all that it brings with it, is essential. This alone opens the way to experience the spirituality of other people or the natural order, this alone provides the resources for fulfilling the potential of the planet’ (28-9, original emphasis). New Age spirituality is characterised by the belief that the self is sacred, thus spirituality is located within the self, although it can be mediated by outside influences, such as gurus, pagan deities, or Nature. Representing one aspect of New Age thought, but at the same time challenging many of the assumptions of the New Age, feminist spiritualities attempt to re-politicise and ground the spiritual in the material, as well as

the self. Woman is not constructed as 'other' to man, rather both men and women have an equal relationship to spirit, which is non-gendered. Moving away from a purely individualistic perspective, these spiritualities emphasise community over individuality.

Offering another example of an altered state of consciousness, spirituality, like madness, dreaming and telepathy, has been utilised frequently within feminist utopian novels as a means of accessing and sustaining utopian states of consciousness. While novels in the 70s and some texts in the 80s utilised madness and dreaming as a means of exploring utopian visions, novels in the 80s and 90s have tended to develop spirituality and telepathy, reflecting shifts in attitudes within feminism. Developing new forms of spirituality that are not patriarchal, these texts engage with New Age theologies, as well as feminist politics. The spiritual is developed as a central aspect of the utopian community, offering a common focus and purpose that binds members together. Spiritual practices are also often grounded in certain ethical beliefs that individuals agree to live by, which also binds together the community. The spiritualities offer both respite from everyday problems, but also a place to resolve those conflicts, as well as providing a space for thinking communally about bigger issues affecting the community. The spiritual represents a place both outside the everyday, but which is also central to the everyday; it is therefore immanent, and strives to be material and grounded in day-to-day activities. The spiritual aspect of the community also offers a utopian ideal which individuals work towards in an effort to create better relations with one another and the material world. There is rarely a vision of heaven or hell, rather utopia is situated in the here and now, in the mundane relationships and practical realities of living. The place of the spiritual offers (therefore) a utopian space, into which individuals can step, like the

space of the dream, or madness, as a means of accessing a different way of being. It is both an idealised space, but also a space that acknowledges conflicts and tensions. It represents an altered state of consciousness, because it often involves trances, or a communion with higher beings of power, or even more simply, a meditative space for reflection.

In this chapter I discuss the relationship between utopian community and feminist spiritualities within the context of three feminist utopian visions, and ask two questions: firstly, what is the relationship between community, spirituality and utopia? And secondly, what processes are involved in structuring a utopian community around the principles of feminist spiritualities? The novels discussed in this chapter offer very different spiritual visions, which emanate from different feminist, and perhaps spiritual, agendas. At the same time they are committed to the task of creating alternative forms of feminist community, and are written within the context of the feminist utopian literary genre. Whilst exploring the utopian and political nature of feminist spiritualities, I also wish to emphasise the mystical aspect to feminist spiritualities, focusing on spirituality as an altered state of consciousness. In Starhawk's practice, magic, a key aspect of her Goddess spirituality, is defined as 'the art of changing consciousness at will' and rituals frequently involve altering states of consciousness in order to facilitate connections with others and the natural world.

Historically, women have utilised spirituality as a means to access a public voice. As Elaine Hobby notes, writing about the seventeenth century, women had to be perceived to be 'modest' and 'chaste', therefore they had to find 'a repertoire of devices to make their writing a 'modest' act'

(9). One of these devices was to assert that God commanded them to write, and Hobby writes that over half the texts published by women between 1649 and 1688 were prophecies: 'it was felt that women's irrational and emotional essence and lack of strong personal will could make them especially receptive to the external Voice of God' (26). Hilary Hinds also writes that 'in relation to the figure of the author as prophet, then, femininity could, unusually for the seventeenth century, function to legitimate and authorise women's public and spiritual activities' (10). Following on from these early women writers, contemporary female authors have also utilised the voice of the spiritual to articulate a political message. Clearly there are tensions in attempting to 'marry' spirituality and politics, and problems also exist in the relationship between feminism and New Age thought. Feminists have critiqued New Age thought for its domination by men, and certainly at times it seems to reflect a masculinist philosophy. Central criticisms of New Age thought are that it is consumer oriented, narcissistic, that it has trivialised and commercialised old religions and practices and that it is harmful and creates a selfish politics of the self. Rosalind Coward has warned of the dangers of a theory that relies on uncritical notions of 'nature' and 'femininity' and there are certainly many writers who uphold essentialist views of 'woman' and femininity within New Age writing. For example, Valerie Saiving writes that because of our biology, women have a fundamentally different relationship to the divine, which leads her to argue that:

Perhaps the goal we should set ourselves is to rear our daughters in the older way, without too much formal education and without encouraging them to be independent, differentiated, free human beings of whom some contribution is expected other than the production of the next generation. If we could do this, our daughters might be able to find secure fulfilment in a simple femininity. After all the division of labour between the sexes worked fairly well for thousands of years, and we may be only asking for trouble by trying to modify that structure. (30)

Such a view is both sexist and essentialist, associating femininity with a privileged relation to nature and an impoverished relation to culture. As Coward points out, 'a whole new mythological woman has emerged. Part Goddess, part mother, part witch, part ancient healer, this woman is the symbol of creative and healing nature itself' (154). Monica Sjöö has also attacked New Age thought for its basis in patriarchal thinking: '[i]t has become clear to me that there is very little political questioning, no awareness of race, sex, class and imperialism within the New Age movement. It seems not to have heard what women have been saying for so many years' (41).¹ But Sjöö does not think that the New Age is apolitical, rather she argues that: 'it fits in very well with capitalism, which it in no way fundamentally challenges. The New Age wants change but not revolution and believes that humanity must somehow evolve into a better way of life' (42). Sjöö is particularly concerned with the patriarchal nature of the New Age, with its male gurus and masters, its unwillingness to challenge traditional gender roles in alternative communities, its belief in the benefits of the 'non-ego' (45-6). All of these factors contribute to the conservative nature of the New Age, which does not necessarily challenge traditional structures, but rather seeks to change people so that they can make a better fit into (patriarchal, capitalist) society. This is the end result of the materialism and wealth promotion side of the New Age, and also of the spiritual side – as individuals are encouraged to look to within to change themselves, not their world, and if they cannot, then this is a failure of will-power. Asoka Bandarage warns:

The New Age philosophy and life style is dominated by the white upper middle class [...] this movement, which draws so much of its inspiration, its ideas and even many of its names and symbols from non-Western cultures – Hindu, Buddhist, Native America – gives little if anything positive to those cultures in return. Divorced from a broader political struggle towards social

¹ Monica Sjöö however is a proponent of Goddess spirituality, which she differentiates sharply from the New Age movement. Yet other writers in this area are prepared to see affinities between the two movements (see for example, Cynthia Eller).

change, the New Age effort feeds into the cash nexus and materialistic values and behaviour of the status quo [...] Spirituality without politics. (80-81)

It does certainly seem as though the New Age evinces some conservative goals, aiming to reconcile individuals with society rather than challenging unequal social structures, thus it can never truly be a transformational position. However, the view that if everyone changed then so would society is a position similar to that of utopianism. Its view of the subject, and the possibility it offers of achieving individual wholeness and integration, (without radical social change) is clearly anathema to Freudian and Lacanian theory, and represents an idealistic view of humanity that prioritises individual transformation over social and material change.

Feminist spiritualities attempt to tackle some of these problems, re-politicising the spiritual from a feminist perspective, addressing issues of masculinist hegemony, and moving away from a belief in wholeness and integration. At the same time, they stress social, as well as individual change. Recent texts on women and community, such as Sasha Roseneil's *Common Women, Uncommon Practices*, Jone Salomonsen's *Enchanted Feminism* and La Verne Gagehabib and Barbara Summerhawk's *Circles of Power* have all highlighted the importance of developing feminist spiritualities in the process of community building. Roseneil's work on the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp reveals the importance for many women of a belief in magic and rituals, especially at the 'cosmic' green gate. The first gate to be set up outside the Main Gate, Green Gate attracted women interested in 'lesbian feminist politics, a desire to be in a women-only space or to live in the woods, [with] a particular interest in environmentalist issues or spirituality' (77). However, while one of the popular images of the Greenham Common Women was of the spiritual

earth mother, spirituality represented only one facet of the politics and community experienced there. As Roseneil notes, 'Some women invoked a language of feminist spirituality and magic [. . .] Other women, however, rejected this interest in spirituality and there was much ridiculing of 'cosmic' practices and ideas' (*Disarming Patriarchy* 69). The Reclaiming witches of San Francisco (to which Starhawk, a feminist utopian writer, belongs) clearly places spirituality at the centre of community life, as the collective writes: 'Reclaiming is a collective of women and men working to unite spirit and politics. Our vision is rooted in the religion and magic of the Goddess' (Salomonsen 41). Gagehabib and Summerhawk's text also emphasises woman-centred spirituality as a strong binding element within a community of lesbian women living on women's land in Oregon: '[a] key element that binds women to this community is its spirituality - a spirituality which defines the feminine as sacred' (90). This spirituality is very much linked with a belief in the importance of environmental issues and a lot of attention is paid to reducing waste and reliance on technology. As well as stressing the spiritual aspects of the communities, these writers all highlight the importance of fluid personal and social identities in the construction of alternative female communities, and of a need for self-reflexivity and openness to change and conflict. As Roseneil concludes:

[Greenham] drew its strength from a reflexive openness to change. It wanted neither women to behave like men nor to behave like women as either is currently constructed. Greenham moved beyond the same/different fixation of modern feminism. It employed a symbolic, strategic essentialism which mobilised women on the basis of their lived experiences of gender, while questioning, destabilising and transforming gender and sexual identities. (*Uncommon Women* 321)

Prioritising women's autonomy and self-determination, the community was participative, anti-hierarchical and anarchic, and at the same time 'operated with a coalitionist imperative, seeking to draw in and make space for women from a wide variety of backgrounds, with a range of political

and social experiences, of different ages, classes, ethnicities, nationalities and sexual and political identifications' (126).

A feminist community should respect and celebrate difference, but at the same time create some basis for shared identification; for Ann Ferguson: 'the constitutive goal of global feminist community must include [. . .] some basis for sameness, since the identification required for revolutionary love must be based on a minimal set of shared values' (386). Thus there is a dual desire to recognise difference and also acknowledge some kind of sameness. In her well-known essay 'The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference' Iris Marion Young issues a warning that this tension is irreconcilable. She writes that the quest for 'the ideal of community' can lead to the privileging of 'unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of the limits of one's understanding of others from their point of view' (300). Young argues that the desire for community is rooted in a desire for wholeness that can only generate further dichotomies and exclusions; consequently, oppositions are set up between the individual and the community. She therefore warns against integrationist theories of community that emphasise the connectedness of individuals over their separateness, terming these 'undesirably utopian'. Yet feminist communities work to move beyond these oppositions - as Roseneil claims Greenham did - and the communities within feminist utopian fiction clearly strive to achieve this balance. Young advocates a politics of difference that would recognise the differences between people living in a community. Her 'ideal of city life' which replaces the 'ideal of community' envisions a space in which people can live together 'as strangers,' each open to unassimilated otherness' (318-9). Yet city life can also be lonely and alienating, and utopias have the potential to offer the freedom of the city, with the

friendship and support of the community. In a similar vein, Ferguson argues for the creation of “oppositional communities” which would challenge existing practices and institutions, thus providing a point of critique of various forms of oppression. Lori Gruen develops this idea: ‘in oppositional communities, individuals will seek to expand the challenges to their selves and their status quo interests by seeking to include a diversity of perspectives’ (128-9). Young’s fears over the dangers posed to the separate self in communitarian theory have been countered by Frazer and Lacey who promote the idea of a relational self which is interdependent, living in relation to others, practices and institutions, but retaining uniqueness and independence (178). Such a notion of the self moves beyond dichotomised thinking: there is no choice between the individual and community, but the individual is positioned in relation to the community.

As Ferguson discusses, even within oppositional communities, a minimal set of shared values or some kind of community identification is also required. For many feminist utopian authors, spirituality provides this connection. The relationship between feminist utopianism and spirituality is one that is seldom acknowledged; yet Lucy Sargisson claims that a ‘transgressive approach to the concept of spirituality is a recurrent theme in feminist utopian theory and fiction’ (*Contemporary* 138). However, Sargisson is concerned that the spiritualities represented are often based on essentialist and dualistic conceptions of “woman”, concluding that this kind of thinking ‘cannot provoke truly *paradigmatic* shifts’ (143). Yet I argue, in my discussion of the novels, that many feminist utopian novels use spirituality as a means of developing and exploring utopian possibilities in a way that strives to be non-essentialist and transcends dualities.

Reading and writing has been central to the development of the feminist spirituality movement, as Eller notes, '[t]he most common entrée into feminist spirituality was through books' (33). Key texts, such as Margot Adler's *Drawing Down the Moon* and Starhawk's *The Spiral Dance* were popular in the 70s and early 80s because they offered 'how-to' books of paganism and wiccan practices that emphasised women's roles within rituals. But fiction has also been important to the movement too, as Pryce notes, '[f]iction can provide a source of empowerment and inspiration for those involved and can help create a sense of community' (129). While novels such as Doris Lessing's *The Four-Gated City* (1979), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1983) and Ellen Galford's *The Fires of Bride* (1993) discuss spirituality whilst critiquing gender relations and the idea of a patriarchal god, feminist utopian fiction has also proved a particularly popular genre for such debate. Feminist utopian writers have drawn on a variety of sources, including New Age thought, mythology, paganism, Eastern spirituality and Native American culture to develop unique feminist spiritual visions. Whilst some of these avoid essentialism, others don't. Starhawk in *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) draws on Goddess spirituality and New Age thought to develop her futuristic utopian San Francisco. In *The Kin of Ata are Waiting for You* (1971), Dorothy Bryant uses Jung and Eastern spirituality to create her island of Ata. Examples of other spiritual utopian texts include: Sunlight's *Womanseed* (1986), Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992), Elisabeth Vonarburg's *In the Mother's Land* (1992), Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderingground* (1978), and Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* (1986). These writers develop alternative spiritualities as a means of moving away from patriarchal religions and ideologies, to reflect a new feminist consciousness of the world. To speak of feminist spirituality in the singular is clearly erroneous, for practitioners are to be found across a wide range of theologies, and engage in a variety of alternative practices. Drawing on the work of Cynthia

Eller I am defining feminist spiritualities as those that a) question and critique the idea of a patriarchal god, b) interrogate traditional views of gender and gender relations, c) focus on the female and her relation to nature, particularly through the symbol of the Goddess, d) practice ritual and/or magic and e) view the spirituality as empowering women. As Eller notes, while dissension is common, it is also tolerated; there is no urge to create dogma, rather it is accepted that women have different beliefs and will practise in different ways (5). Yet despite this diversity, feminist spiritualities clearly have a common political goal: to challenge and critique gender relations. As Jean Waldron explains, '[f]eminist spirituality, like most liberation spirituality, seeks to permeate the political as well as the personal realms'(68), and Ursula King defines spirituality as 'something which permeates all human activities and experiences rather than being additional to them. Spirituality can be described as a process of transformation and growth, an organic and dynamic part of human development, of both individual and society' (5). Thus spirituality is not defined as a practice or force outside or separate from everyday life, rather it is an 'integral, holistic and dynamic force in human life and affairs' (King 6). This idea of spirituality as a holistic practice is clearly relevant to feminism, which seeks to highlight the connectedness of all areas of women's lives. As King comments, 'feminist thought acts as a decisive critical category for spirituality itself' whilst critiquing the exclusionary nature of traditional religions and spiritualities, feminists also positively seeks to discover new feminist possibilities within spirituality (6). In her thesis on what she terms 'Post-traditional feminist spirituality' (PTFS) Pryce notes that '[m]any of those contributing to PTFS identify the contemporary period as one of spiritual and religious change [. . .] there is a changing religious consciousness [. . .] often this changing consciousness is directly attributable to feminism' (98).

The feminist spirituality movement has largely taken place within a cultural feminist arena, with its celebration and glorification of the female and nature, which underscores its birth in the 1960s and 70s women's liberation movement. Yet feminist spiritualities are not restricted to a particular feminist position, and novels written in the 80s and 90s reflect developments within feminist politics, and particularly postmodern influences. In Butler's Parable novels, a humanistic materialist feminism is represented, and in *Mundane's World* a cultural ecofeminism is illustrated. While some feminists, such as Lynne Segal and Rosalind Coward reject spirituality as irrational and apolitical, it is strongly argued by those involved in feminist spiritualities that politics are central to both its theory and practice. Charlene Spretnak's influential edited collection of essays, *The Politics of Women's Spirituality* contains many essays that argue for the significance and relevance of politics to spirituality: '[t]he womanspirit movement emphasises a consciousness that inner must always be combined with outer, that the psychic is inseparable from the material, that political power cannot exist without spiritual power, and offers tools for developing our inner power' (Iglehart 408-9). Contrast this statement, written in the early 80s, with Starhawk's recent discussion, in which she argues that the edge between spirituality and politics is one of the most productive places to work, but at the same time can also produce conflicts and tensions, '[s]pirituality can bring life and vibrancy and imagination into activism – but the mixture of religion and politics can also fuel the most extreme and destructive acts and lead to systems of great repression' (*Wds of Power* 261). Yet whilst she incisively acknowledges the dangers ('Why bring ritual, magic, spirituality into action? Why mix up a clear, clean, militant critique of the world with woo-woo, mumbo-jumbo, New Age fluffy stuff?'), Starhawk argues that spirituality productively brings symbolism, myth and mystery to

politics, offering deeper connections between people and the natural world (262). Spirituality offers both a daily renewal of hope and energy, and a means of moving beneath the surface of the every day. Clearly, the debate has moved on; while both writers stress the importance of engaging spirituality and politics, in later works feminist spirituality is not (just) about empowering women and an individual politics, it is about confronting and engaging with political, social and economic inequalities. As Rita Felski comments, the political and spiritual are always connected: 'feminism and feminist fiction point outwards and forward, into social activity and political emancipation, but also backward and inward, into myth, spirituality, and the transformation of subjective consciousness' (128). In his 1991 essay, 'Mission Impossible? Liberation Theology and Utopian Praxis', Tom Moylan describes the relationship between the religious and the utopian as 'complex, fruitful and frustrating' and suggests that 'the religious terrain at times has been an important site for the development of the utopian impulse that arises out of humanity's experience of the radical insufficiency of present existence' (20). Liberation theology locates itself in the experience of the oppressed, and is therefore inherently political because it critiques religious discourses from the point of view of the oppressed and marginalised. Seeking revolutionary processes and liberation, this form of theology is grounded in materiality, and 'enlist[s] the discourse of religion in order to act as a minority religious remnant within the secular revolutionary project' (24). Ecofeminist activist and writer, Maria Mies argues that we need to develop a materialist spirituality that reintegrates spirit and matter, and rejects mechanical materialism and abstract spirituality. Thus in order to be politically effective, spirituality needs to be grounded in both the experience of the oppressed and the materiality of everyday existence. Cosimo Quarta also argues that both spiritual and material needs are central to human existence, and therefore utopianism and spiritual

transcendence do not exist in opposition to one another – as some have argued – rather, they coincide and work together, because both concern a quest for growth and knowledge. While Moylan is concerned that the religious impulse within utopianism must seek to resist tendencies towards totalisation and closure, particularly in terms of gender, he concludes that overall, liberation theology has acted as a positive force within oppositional politics, working to radicalise oppositional movements around the world. Clearly there must be concern, as Starhawk has also stated, for the politics of spirituality to resist co-option by those who seek to perpetuate dogma, intolerance and hatred of difference. Yet when feminist spiritualities self-consciously strive to resist these traits, they can offer many positive and productive sites of political resistance, as will be discussed in reference to the novels.

Mary Hunt claims that spirituality involves '[m]aking choices about the quality of life for oneself, and one's community' thus community and spirituality could be viewed as existing in a symbiotic relationship (105). Anne Primavesi argues that the sacred exists in the relationships we have with one another and with the natural world, therefore in creating new forms of community, it is not enough simply to add the ingredient of spirituality to the pot of community. Rather, a more complex process is involved, of weaving spirituality into the very fabric of communal life, to ensure that every single ecological relationship is considered. Therefore, a correlation is made between spirituality and ecology, a recurring theme within ecofeminism. In a similar fashion, it should be added, feminism is not a discrete political ideology that can be added on to the finished community. Feminism, with its radical interrogation of social structures, acts as a critical foundation for any feminist community, affecting every decision and every solution. Feminist

spiritualities then, will clearly have a different relationship to the community than other religions, because their aim is to relate to each individual fairly across gender, race, sexuality, class and other axes of difference. Patriarchal religions invariably construct different relationships between their deity and their members according to their gender, thus they inevitably create unequal gender relations which create hierarchies and oppression.

Octavia Butler is the author of a number of novels, which broadly fall into the category of 'science fiction'. An African American writer, Butler's work revolves around questions of difference and transformation. In her *Xenogenesis* series she tackles difference, colonialism and hybridity, as she explores a future in which humans have to change genetically in order to survive. In *The Parable of the Sower* (1993) and in her sequel, *The Parable of the Talents* (1998), Butler tells the story of Lauren Olamina, a young Black woman, and her ambition to create a utopian spirituality called Earthseed. Lauren develops this spirituality within the context of post-apocalyptic Los Angeles, where the capitalist structure has completely broken down, leading to social anomie. Fundamentalist Christianity sweeps the country, and a climate of extreme religious persecution and intolerance prevails. Lauren lives in a world almost completely without hope, in which to survive from day to day is all that most can dream of. Yet Lauren retains a wider spiritual vision that suffuses her hopes and dreams, and it is this utopian hope that fuels the narrative, despite its desperate backdrop of violence and despair.

The Parable of the Sower is written in the form of Lauren's diary, as she records in detail her reactions to the events of her daily life. The diary form, also taken up by Offred in Margaret

Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), offers an immediacy and personal perspective in the narrative, yet the reader should not be deceived that this is a constructed story nevertheless. The feelings of desperation and hopelessness are conveyed directly to the reader through this confessional form, which, Rita Felski argues, in her discussion of feminist writing, attempts to 'bridge the gap between life and text' in the search for an authenticity of experience (97). Yet Atwood, and Butler too, continually question this authenticity. *The Parable of the Sower* is also a story of a religious quest, as the characters travel across a dystopian "desert" in search of god, yet at the same time the gritty realism and survivalist mode works to draw the reader away from simple answers to searching religious questions, related to our purpose here on earth. While Lauren's search for spirituality and community offers a dream which seems unachievable at the beginning of the dystopian tale, the narrative trajectory anticipates a teleology that subsequently moves towards fulfilment, which is achieved in the creation of Acorn, Lauren's Earthseed community. Yet in the sequel, *The Parable of the Talents*, this narrative conclusion is compromised, as Acorn is destroyed, and the rebuilding must begin again. In this second novel, the narrative is diversely comprised of various sources such as the characters' memoirs, the autobiography of Lauren's daughter, Asha Vere/Larkin, and also Lauren's journal. These records all offer personal, subjective accounts of the experience of coping with dystopian realities, accounts which do not pretend to be objective or distanced. However, the counter-narrative that Asha/Larkin writes, offers a critique of her mother's choices and spirituality which distances the reader from Lauren's diary accounts. The second book, therefore, is more critical of Lauren's perspective, offering further scepticism of her utopian vision, whilst at the same time, the dominance of her journal narrative continually pulls the reader onto her side. The second novel ends with a number of

Earthseed members taking off into the stars to build new communities in space - clearly a utopian projection. However, this narrative closure is also problematised by Butler, who is writing at least one more, and possibly two more books in this series, as she follows these adventurers on their mission, thus there is a cyclical movement within the series, from utopia to dystopia, back to utopia.²

Because Earthseed grows out of Lauren's experiences during the Apocalypse, it is unsurprising that anarchy and crisis inform her spiritual vision. In a world of chaos, Lauren creates a god that reflects change. Her first Earthseed verse reads:

God is Power –

Infinite,

Irresistible,

Inexorable,

Indifferent,

And yet, God is Pliable-

Trickster,

Teacher,

Chaos,

Clay.

God exists to be shaped.

God is change. (*Sower* 24)

Lauren's creed draws on and critiques Christian parables, but remains committed to a belief that Earthseed reflects 'the literal truth' even though Lauren writes the verses herself. (24). Her naivety

² Thus this text functions as an ambiguous critical utopia in a similar way to Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, as it moves back and forth between utopia and dystopia, moving towards – but never reaching – utopian goals.

here – or perhaps egotism – reveals a resistance to self-critique, and an unwillingness to realise that all narratives - including her diary, and her verses - are constructed.

Lauren's spirituality is also developed partly in response to her experience of "hyperempathy syndrome" which allows her to experience other people's pleasure and pain. Both a blessing and a curse, "sharing" makes sufferers reluctant to inflict pain on others and makes sex doubly pleasurable, but at the same time makes survival difficult and is consequently viewed as a weakness by many. Despite her hatred of this "weakness", Lauren's empathy promotes connection with others, binding her more closely to her community members, not only because she shares their emotions, but also because she is more dependent on them for her safety. Representing an altered state of consciousness, sharing 'isn't real, after all' but, rather, is 'delusional' because the sharer isn't actually 'sharing' another's pain (10). Lauren is a sharer because her mother took a 'smart pill' called Paraceto before Lauren was born, causing drug damage. It is interesting that Butler uses this 'syndrome' in the novel, re-casting empathy as a 'disease' which hinders individuals. That empathy has become an illness, even a delusion – a mental illness - ironically reveals the depths of isolationism to which society has sunk. Yet despite her hatred of it, Lauren's syndrome unites her with others and makes her emotionally stronger. It is this empathy that pushes her to create a community where people look after each other, and where empathy becomes a strength not a weakness. Lauren's spirituality also represents a feminist alternative to patriarchal religions; as an African American, Lauren's spirituality also reflects her cultural and racial history, especially her ancestral history of slavery. The focus on lived experience and materiality highlights tendencies

within slave narratives that refuse spiritual transcendence or mysticism.³ As a form of liberation theology then, Earthseed is born of the unhappiness and frustration of the oppressed, seeking revolution and change, altering Biblical scripture in order to invoke an alternative vision based on experiences of those whose voices have gone unheard.

Formed around the three tenets of diversity, solidarity and destiny, the essentials of Earthseed are 'to learn to shape God with forethought, care, and work; to educate and benefit their community, their families, and themselves; and to contribute to the fulfilment of the Destiny' (240). The Destiny is probably the hardest part of Earthseed for people to digest. 'The Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars' insists Lauren, even though the Space programme in America has been dismantled, and there is no money for basic services such as food, education and health (71). But the Destiny is central, not peripheral to Earthseed, because it is about planning for the future, to create better worlds for people, not in an afterlife, but in this life, even though few of those who work for the Destiny will benefit from it. The Destiny is therefore about creating utopian communities in the future for one's children, and for one's friend's children, and that means creating decent and fulfilling communities and relationships in the present. As Travis explains, "The Destiny is important [. . .] for the unity and purpose that it gives us here on Earth. And in the future, it offers us a kind of species adulthood and species immortality when we scatter to the stars" (144).

³ See for example, M Ferguson (ed.) *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave related by Herself*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1987. and M. Busby, (ed.) *Daughters of Africa*. London: Vintage, 1992.

Earthseed's spirituality exists primarily through relationships. There is no god outside the self, rather god exists in relations between people, and in the choices and decisions that are made in response to changing events. Earthseed thus rejects any form of mysticism or transcendence: god is not worshipped or exalted, rather god exists in everyday relations. Thus the spiritual and material are not positioned in opposition to one another, rather the spirituality is experienced through the material; building communities is the aim of the spirituality. Earthseed therefore reflects several tenets of New Age thought, grounding spiritual experience within the self and everyday experience.⁴

Like Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Starhawk's *the Fifth Sacred Thing*, Earthseed constitutes a response to extreme Christian fundamentalism. Yet it is also formed as an alternative to the new religious movements which are springing up in response to social and political crisis, such as the character Richard Moss' patriarchal religion, which denies women any autonomy. Andrew Steel Jarrett's right wing Christianity is particularly intolerant of new religions. In contrast to this intolerance and rigidity, Earthseed attempts to embrace difference, encouraging open debate on its beliefs and is open to development and change, offering fluid spiritual practices that are democratic and feminist. Clearly, Lauren's comment that her creeds reflect the 'literal truth' are destabilised, rather, her creeds are negotiable. Lauren is very critical of religion, as her scripture warns, 'All religions are ultimately cargo cults./Adherents perform required rituals, follow/specific rules, and expect to be supernaturally/gifted with desired rewards' (293). Religion in its many forms, provides much of the struggle within the text between utopia and dystopia. All forms of

⁴ There are currently Earthseed communities that follow Butler's/Lauren's scripture in Quebec, Vermont, New York and California.

religion are fighting for survival, all of them reacting to, and adapting to, with varying success, changing circumstances. Lauren's father continues preaching, even though his church has burned down, preaching in people's houses and providing practical help within the community. Richard Moss develops a patriarchal religion claiming that 'God wants men to be patriarchs, rulers and protectors of women, and fathers of as many children as possible' (7). He has several wives, who he doesn't allow out of his home, and several of them have no education. Right-wing fundamentalist religions are also represented by the Senator, and later, President, Andrew Steele Jarret, whose desire to destroy any religion other than his own form of Christianity leads to his supporters burning people at the stake for being witches. Jarret's religious intolerance is explicitly divisive, and he rejects all other religions, particularly those, like Earthseed, that draw on different belief systems, as his rhetoric argues, 'Can our country be just a little bit Christian and a little bit Buddhist, maybe? How about a little bit Christian and a little bit Hindu?' (*Talents* 84).

Earthseed fits quite neatly into Eller's feminist spirituality model, and clearly contains certain qualities that would identify it as feminist. Earthseed's god is change, consequently, it has no gender, and is not a person, or even a thing, as Lauren comments, 'Change had no sex at all, and wasn't a person' (*Souer* 203). Because Lauren refuses to see god as a person, both men and women can relate to god in their own way – gender is not a factor. Lauren, the leader and creator of Earthseed, is a woman, but she does not exclude men from the religion in any way. Earthseed therefore values women's empowerment, as it does men's. Nature is respected and used, trees are planted to commemorate the dead, and Earthseed's name is drawn from the belief that humans are like plants, seeds that are spread by the wind, before taking root and growing. Thus Earthseed

clearly embraces Eller's five criteria for inclusion as a feminist spirituality: it questions and critiques the idea of a patriarchal god, interrogates traditional views of gender and gender relations, practices ritual and views the spirituality as empowering for women, nature is respected, and women are not associated with nature in a simple or essentialist way.

Thus Lauren sets up her utopian community, which she names Acorn, because she believes it will grow, which reflects the three tenets of Earthseed: diversity, solidarity and destiny. Composed of ex-slaves, orphaned children, the old, young, ill and healthy, black and white, all classes and cultures, Lauren comments that '[h]ere in Acorn, if people don't understand us, at least they accept us' (45). Living within Acorn involves an active choice to join an alternative community, which is viewed as a cult by outsiders. Yet, while most are initially wary of joining the Earthseed spirituality, they are all universally attracted to the Acorn community, where there is a small school, a doctor and individual housing. The community is self-sufficient, growing and selling its own food and looking after animals. Families are composed of people biologically unrelated and usually unmarried; people choose to live together and children are freely adopted. There are no gender roles, rather, people choose work that they enjoy, and every member makes a contribution. Acorn is an open community in which anyone is free to join or leave at any time, as long as they abide by two simple rules: everybody must contribute to the community through work and all must learn from and teach one another. Acorn is a community that actively encourages diversity, echoing Young's desire for a community of difference. Yet, Acorn does not reflect the "being-together" of strangers' that Young advocates in order to respect difference and facilitate 'undifferentiated otherness' (318-9). Rather, Lauren's community achieves a respect for difference,

while all are enmeshed in strong social relations, bound together by their commitment to Earthseed.

Tom Moylan describes Earthseed as a 'major spiritual and political movement' and clearly Earthseed is political because it seeks to create radical change through the creation of new communities (*Scraps* 230). As Moylan comments, Lauren's spirituality 'seeks to regain control over society in the name of a transcendent yet still secular project' that involves taking collective responsibility for change (229). In response to the political collapse of capitalism and government, Lauren proves a vision of an alternative society in which communities feed, teach and support one another. Through the creation of Acorn a utopian space is created in which to critique the dystopian world outside. Yet Moylan also argues that Acorn gradually disengages with the politics of the outside world, becoming introspective and isolated. Many within Acorn do not even want trade with "outsiders" and see any kind of contact as a risk not worth taking. Lauren comments, that 'We say "God is Change," but the truth is, we fear change as much as anyone else does' (67). While the community does vote to extend their trading activities, their apolitical stance and relative isolationism leads to their growing vulnerability and, perhaps, to their enslavement by Christian America. When Acorn is attacked and destroyed there is none outside to help them, or even notice that they are in trouble. At the end of *The Parable of the Talents*, Earthseed, now rebuilding new communities, still does not reach out to the wider community or interrogate mainstream politics. Anne Cranny-Francis warns that if the utopian dream deflects attention fully away from the thinker's own society then utopia only acts as escape rather than engagement with social critique (107-9). Yet I argue that this is not a failure of Earthseed, rather it represents a type of anarchic

politics that refuses to engage with liberal reformation, instead seeking a radical alternative. That this alternative is spatially elsewhere, does not make it politically ineffective, rather its successful existence might lead those on earth to critical self-examination, for this is the effect of utopian narratives, to open up the space for critical comparison.

The Parable novels therefore open up critical utopian spaces into which the reader can place herself; the gap between the dystopian present and the reader's social experience is also mediated by the utopian future envisaged on new planets, which is a key function of utopian texts. Butler is clearly critical of the utopian mode, and perhaps the dystopian mode as well; Jim Miller describes Butler's works as critical dystopias, 'motivated out of a utopian pessimism in that they force us to confront the dystopian elements of postmodern culture so that we can work through them and begin again' (337). However, this belief that we can 'begin again' seems to be quite clearly utopian, containing both hope and desire for change towards an alternative way of being. While Butler has herself stated that 'I find utopias ridiculous', her notion of utopia is one dominated by human perfection, and stasis, '[w]e're not going to have a perfect society until we get a few perfect humans, and that seems unlikely. Besides, any true utopia would almost certainly be incredibly boring' ('An Interview' 69). Within the critical utopian genre, the idea of perfection and stasis has been rejected, in favour of ambiguity, conflict and fluidity – terms that Butler might be much happier invoking. As Miller notes, 'Utopia is the unseen horizon that makes dystopian visions possible. Butler's critical dystopias force us to "work through" the dystopian before we can begin the effort to imagine a better world' (339). This unseen horizon is distinctly present in the Parable novels, presented through Lauren's spiritual utopian vision, utopian hope develops out of

dystopian despair; indeed, dystopian despair engenders utopian transformation. The seeds of change (to borrow from Jameson) are buried in the depths of dystopian pessimism; as Patricia Melzer notes, 'the relationship between utopian and dystopian elements is of mutual interdependency. Dystopia precedes transformation; it does not exclude utopia, but challenges it into existence' (36). The novels, therefore can be read as part of the critical utopian and/or dystopian mode, because they are both, in Tom Moylan's definition, texts which take 'on the present system and offer not only astute critiques of the order of things but also explorations of the oppositional spaces and possibilities from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration' (*Scraps* xv).

The ending of *The Parable of the Sowers* sees Lauren and her friends deciding to set up Acorn on Bankole's land, forming a compromise as the group chooses to make a safe home, although nowhere is safe any longer. They also bury their dead, both literally and symbolically, planting an acorn for each friend and family member who has passed away. The novel ends with a Biblical passage describing the parable of the sower – the novel's title – emphasising the roots of the story in Christian theology. The tension between Earthseed and Christianity is tangible in the novels; Earthseed draws on Biblical scripture in form and content, and each novel ends with a parable from the Bible. Earthseed reflects more of a reformist theology than a revolutionary one, because it is concerned with reforming a traditional religion, rather than completely rejecting biblical traditions.⁵ Yet at the same time it reflects a revolutionary, even anarchic politics.

⁵ See Christ & Plaskow 'Womanspirit Rising' in *Womanspirit Rising* 1-17 and also Pryce.

Traditional religious practises are also crucial to Marge Piercy's critical dystopia *He, She and It* (1991), published in Britain in the same year as *The Body of Glass*. The Black Zone in Israel is based on principles from different religious traditions, and is to be called Yerushalaim, a holy land for women. Malkah journeys to this place,

in the pursuit of pleasure and knowledge, in religious duty and exaltation, in the long study and exploration of holiness that has previously been revealed to me in the sea, in prayer and meditation, in my long life's work, but which I now go to encounter in the womb of religious, the sacred desert, the cave of dancing women. (419)

In this novel, Piercy presents Judaism as a starting point for alternative religious practices centred around those whose right to religious status – women, and other 'non-people' – has historically been denied. Her theology rejects key tenets of Judaism – particularly of the unequal place of women within it – and could be described as post-Jewish rather than Judaic. In a similar way, Lauren retains some of the hierarchical structures of Christianity – she is Earthseed's spiritual leader, and its key authority figure. Her desire for equality, therefore, remains in tension with her powerful and seductive authority, and her desire for leadership. As her daughter notes, 'She was one of those people who sucked you in, made you like her before you could even get to know her, and only then let you see what she might be really like' (*Talents* 359).

Starhawk is the author of two novels, and many non-fiction books on Goddess spirituality, including *The Spiral Dance* – a key 'how-to' text in the feminist spirituality movement – and her most recent book on globalisation and direct action, *Webs of Power*. Starhawk, who describes her work as uniting the spiritual and the political, is a writer and proponent of Goddess spirituality. Her writings, both fictional and non-fictional, constantly re-negotiate the tenets of Goddess spirituality,

reflecting the evolution of Starhawk's feminism over the decades. Yet she always returns to the issue of changing consciousness. She articulates new modes of thinking towards social and spiritual change, asking, '[h]ow do we find the dark within and transform it, own it as our own power? How do we dream it into a new image, dream it into actions that will change the world into a place where no more horror stories happen, where there are no more victims' (*Dreaming* xxvii)? The dark within, which could be glossed as the dystopian elements within society, can and must be transformed, Starhawk argues, specifically through changing consciousness, through gaining power-from-within. Power-from-within may be articulated as a spiritual power emanating from the Goddess, or could more simply be located in the self. Utopian change can only be achieved, she argues, through 'the art of changing consciousness at will' (*Dreaming* 13), which is the key to all of her writings. In her view, changing consciousness can be achieved through mundane activities such as protest, letter writing and speeches, but also through psychic development; ultimately, however, changing consciousness involves making connections with one another and with the earth. In her practical work in Goddess worship, Starhawk utilises trance states as a means of ritual, 'I see "trance" not as one particular state, but as many fluid possibilities of consciousness. I know that human beings naturally move in and out of these states all the time' (*Dreaming* xvi). Starhawk's writing and political activities exemplify vital links between ideas and action; she lives according to her ideals, writing of her beliefs and visions of the future, promoting Goddess worship, and campaigning for ecological and political sustainability. She describes her belief in the Goddess as a way of looking at the world:

I am talking about choosing an attitude: choosing to take this living world, the people and creatures on it, as the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, to see the world, the earth, and our lives as sacred. To say something is sacred is to say that we respect, cherish, and value it for its own being. When the world is

seen as being made up of living, dynamic, interconnected, inherently valuable beings, power can no longer be "seen as something people have" [. . .] immanent power, power-from-within, is not something we *have* but something we do. (*Dreaming* 11)

Such a view of the world, which views all forms of life as sacred, including the earth as a living being, she argues, must necessarily lead to fundamental changes in society, because if all life is seen as sacred then our relationships to those life forms must change. In order to change society, people must change their consciousnesses, and Starhawk includes this in her view of 'magic'. Starhawk defines magic as 'the art of changing consciousness at will' and thus magical activities might include ritual, meditation, chanting, and also political action. Starhawk's work is therefore inherently utopian, because it seeks transformation of the world, through fundamental changes in human relationships.

Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) is a novel written within the context of the Goddess and ecology movements, and develops ideas that are set out more formally in her non-fiction. The narrative is set in post-Apocalyptic San Francisco in the year 2048, where the inhabitants have set up a utopian community committed to non-violence. The apocalyptic tone of the text reflects a trend in the 90s towards apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic scenarios. Starhawk quite neatly utilises this theme for her message, which is that spiritual transformation can lead eventually to social change. The community contains a mixture of very practical solutions to ecological sustainability - such as the advanced development of solar and wind power to replace fossil fuels - and more unusual leaps into fantasy - such as computers based on silicon crystals grown from sea water, and computer technicians who visualise their formation. Thus the novel demands leaps of faith, but is also grounded in materiality. Outside San Francisco, war rages between the Millennialists - the

totalitarian fundamentalist government - and anyone who resists their politics. The Millennialists seek to take over the utopian city, and battle begins between the two factions. But the war engaged in is primarily one of imagination and consciousness, because the utopian citizens refuse to commit violence. As Maya, one of the central utopian characters argues:

The only war that counts is the war against the imagination [. . .] all war is first waged in the imagination, first conducted to limit our dreams and visions, to make us accept within ourselves its terms, to believe that our only choices are those that it lays before us. If we let the terms of force describe the terrain of our battle, we will lose. But if we hold to the power of our vision, our heartbeats, our imagination, we can fight on our own turf, which is the landscape of consciousness. There, the enemy cannot help but transform.
(*The Fifth* 238)

Thus the San Franciscans fight their war of non-violent resistance, refusing to be drawn into the processes of violence and antagonism with which the enemy engages. They practise non-violence in a variety of ways, including defensive tactics such as blowing up their own bridges, non-cooperation and confronting individual soldiers and offering them 'a place at their table' and a home within the utopian city. They also take up the haunting of soldiers who have killed members of their families. Yet not all of the city members agree with such steps. In a huge meeting, City members debate what they should do when attacked. On one side of the argument is the belief that violence only begets more violence, as one member notes, 'if we start choosing guns over food and water, we become what we're fighting against' (233). But on the other side of the argument is the claim that 'if we lose to the Stewards, we won't have the luxury of choosing food or water or anything else' (233). Yet to argue that these points of view lie at opposite poles is a mistake, rather they exist on the same spectrum. As the character Cress argues, there are different forms of non-violent resistance, which might include sabotage and judicious assassination (240). As Starhawk argues in *Webs of Power* 'to truly transform this system, we need to move beyond the

violence/nonviolence dichotomy' (206). Within the anti-globalisation movement different groups operate within different understandings of the term non-violence, resulting from different definitions of the term 'violence' itself, and different risks which they will endure. Starhawk defines violence broadly as: 'the capacity to inflict physical pain, harm or death, the capacity to punish by restricting freedom and limiting choices, the capacity to withhold vital resources or rewards, and the capacity to commit emotional and psychological damage, to shame and humiliate' (*Wells of Power* 224). In the novel, different groups in the City agree to disagree on what type of non-violent action they will carry out but achieve a consensus on their strategy of resistance and non-cooperation. However, the ending of the novel proves problematic in this area. Bird is given a gun and ordered to publicly execute Maya; he refuses and throws down his weapon. The General orders that the division in which Bird had been placed, kill Bird. But they refuse, because he is 'one of their own'; instead, the army turns on itself and begins to kill each other and victory for the utopians is assured – if only temporarily. Yet such a resolution challenges the themes of non-violence in the novel, as victory is achieved through violence – although the utopians keep their hands clean, they allow the army to kill for them. However, the ending of the novel avoids easy solutions – the issue of violence remains a problem which can neither be disavowed nor forgotten. Starhawk could have chosen a 'magical' solution, which brushed over the issues of violence and struggle that the novel raises. Instead she chose a resolution that accepts that wars never have easy, comfortable solutions.

Violence constitutes a significant aspect of many feminist utopias, indeed many only come about through a bloody revolution. Peaceful anti-violent utopias such as Charlotte Perkins

Gilman's *Herland* (1979) and Joanna Russ' *Whileaway* are founded on the violent deaths of men, albeit in the annals of the utopia's histories.⁶ Russ belies the myth-making element of pacifist utopias through the character Jael. As Jael in *The Female Man* (1975) tells Janet:

Whileaway's plague is a big lie. Your ancestors lied about it. It is I who gave you your 'plague,' my dear, about which you can now pietize and moralise to your heart's content; I, I, I, I am the plague, Janet Evason. I and the war I fought built your world for you, I and those like me, we gave you a thousand years of peace and love and the Whileawayan flowers nourish themselves on the bones of the men we have slain. (211)

Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (1969) also confronts the issue of violence: 'their violence is extreme' comments the narrator, as the women maim and kill men in revenge for past oppression (99). While violence here becomes the only 'sane' response to repair past ills, it also constitutes a means to an end, a fantastical device to rid the world of violence once and for all. While Angelika Bammer questions the meaning of the violence in the text, wondering whether it is real or metaphorical, the violence appears to act in both ways, destabilising notions of 'woman' as essentially non-violent and nurturing, but at the same time confronting the contradiction of a bloodless revolution. Russ' *Whileaway* is founded on 'the bones of the men we have slain' (211), a place where fighting duels and self-defence are the norm, but also where women can walk about at night safely, for '[t]here's no being *out late* in Whileaway, or *up too early*, or *in the wrong part of town*, or *unescorted*. You cannot fall out of the kinship web and become sexual prey for strangers, for there is no prey and there are no strangers' (81, original emphasis). Sally Gearhart's *The Wanderground* creates a safe haven for women in the wanderground, where violence is situated externally in the city, and remembered as a negative but also inevitable outcome of male-female relations. Rapes, killings and tortures are 'channelled' by remember-guides whose job it is to remind women of the

⁶ Molly Gloss' *The Dazzle of Day* addresses issues of non-violence within the context of Quakerism.

horrors of the patriarchal past, '[l]est we forget how we came here' (23). Gearhart's more recent utopias, *The Kanshou* (2002) and *The Magister* (2003) both place the issue of (male) violence at their centre. Male violence is contained and controlled by placing male offenders in bailiwicks (prisons), but there is a growing faction that wants to test for neurological causes of human violence, with the aim of eradicating it surgically. The women realise however, that the only way to heal the world is to eradicate violence completely through the dismantling of the world's peace-keeping body, the Kanshoubu. These texts tend to characterise violence as male, or largely a male problem, thus women only take on violent roles as a form of self-defence. Yet Starhawk avoids this characterisation – violence is not gendered in the novel, in fact she works hard to show that despite the brutalization that Bird has experienced, he still cannot rape Rosa, nor kill Maya, because of his early socialisation. The rituals of spirituality practised by the utopians, offer them a way out of cycles of individual violence – through the practice of empathy, shared consciousness, and a belief in the sanctity of all life; committing acts of violence becomes something that is anathema to the soul.

This commitment to self-sacrifice is echoed in *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. The utopians are committed to non-violent actions because they live with the belief that there are four sacred things: earth, air, fire and water. As they declare: '[t]he earth is a living, conscious being. In company with cultures of many different times and places, we name these things as sacred: air, fire, water, earth. Whether we see them as the breath, energy, blood and body of the Mother, or as the blessed gifts of a creator, or as symbols of the interconnected systems that sustain life, we know that nothing can live without them' (*The Fifth* Preface). This belief in the consciousness of the earth, and their

subsequent respect for it, leads to celebration of the four sacred things, through the manifestation of the fifth sacred thing, spirit, the most important of all. Spirit unites individuals, enabling them to engage in a number of altered states of consciousness. Through their conscious relationship with the earth, nature, and each other, the utopians achieve a psychic connection with one another which is manifested largely through telepathic exchanges and dream visitations. Individuals have the ability to control pain, carry out healing, and even travel out of the body. Spiritual rituals also offer a way of connecting individuals, linking them with their ancestors in a way that connects them directly to the past. Madrone, a healer in the city, can reach into a sick person's body and channel energy or *ch'i* into them. She can also view the structure of disease in the body, and fight it through her mental connection. Madrone's mixture of conventional medicine and energy healing is remarkably effective against many illnesses, but she needs to learn more to tackle a powerful virus that hits inside and outside the city. In order to understand the virus, she must confront the disease and take it within herself. This echoes the way that the 'other' is taken into the self throughout the novel – violence and the enemy must be acknowledged as a part of the self in order that they might be understood. Madrone also accesses an altered state of consciousness through the Melissa, a group of women who commune with bees. Madrone has to allow herself to be physically changed by the bees, opened up by them, so that she can channel the 'bee vision' which will allow her to access a group consciousness with the Melissa. This group consciousness gives her more healing power and knowledge than she could possibly access on her own. Madrone thus moves permanently into a different state of consciousness, in which communication moves beyond language, into instinct and smell, [e]ven when she stayed out of the bee mind, she knew what was blossoming and who was about to become ill. She walked through zones of smells, pungent sage,

new-leafed oak or sycamore, human sweat' (247). Madrone's openness to physical and mental change is a metaphor for the changes needed if utopia is to be achieved. It involves not only opening the mind, but also the body to different experiences, and altered relations with other people, animals and the natural world. Yet this opening up is not without danger; Madrone risks her life to save others and link into their minds and bodies.

The text also explores the negative aspects of altered states. Within the dystopian sections of the novel, the Millennialists use psychological warfare as part of a strategy to break down individual minds; this is set in contrast to the utopians who access shifts in consciousness in order to activate utopia. However, more problematically, Starhawk introduces the idea of 'mind healers' who 'heal' people who do not fit into utopian society (272). Mentioned only briefly, the mind healers "help" certain sections of the community such as people who do not want to work, criminals, and rapists. Thus it represents a form of social engineering and control that sits uneasily with the politics within the rest of the novel. The actual processes of mind healing and what it entails remains absent from the text, but offers a stark reminder that altered states can be abused.

The Goddess spirituality represented in the novel is an eclectic one that includes all types of religious practice. The people worship a wide variety of 'Goddesses and Gods, ancestry and spirits' including Gaia, Kali, Buddha, African orishas, Celtic Goddesses, the Virgin of Guadalupe and Aphrodite, to name but a few (11). Like Marge Piercy, Starhawk was brought up within the Jewish tradition, and has described herself as a Jewish witch, thus more traditional religions mix with newer rituals in the text. This inclusivity seems to be more effective than Lauren's Earthseed,

which creates more rigid boundaries over who can and cannot be included within the practice. Starhawk does include a basic criterion for inclusion however – individuals must believe that there are four sacred things, earth, air, fire and water, and recognise the fifth sacred thing, spirit. Thus spirituality works as a means of binding together communities, and providing a way of discussing issues such as non-violent resistance in a non-threatening forum.

The ability to effect magic or, in other words, to change consciousness at will, sustains the utopianism within the novel. But this utopianism remains unstable, perpetually at risk from the dystopian possibilities that exist not only outside the city, but also within the self. As Maya explains, there is the Good Reality (El Mundo) and the Bad Reality (El Mundo Malo), which constantly vie with one another: 'in the Good Reality you have a mild headache, in the Bad Reality you have a fatal brain disease [. . .] we walk in the Good Reality as if we were treading the thin skin on warm milk. It's always possible to break through and drown' (*The Fifth* 44). The boundary between utopia and dystopia is very fragile in the text, and the action constantly veers into the 'Bad Reality'. Consequently, the text retains a problematic dualism between good and evil, which are set in binary opposition to one another. Starhawk relies on the oppositions between the Good Reality and the Bad Reality to sustain the conflicts within the narrative. While the utopians worship the Goddess who represents wholeness and therefore lack of division, their daily lives are still structured by difference: oppositions between health and sickness, good and evil, natural and unnatural remain. In a similar way, dualisms between man and woman are also preserved. While the utopia is described as completely equal, without gender roles or oppression, it emerges from a cultural feminism that emphasises sexual difference and values women's experiences, rather than

seeking to destroy gender differences. Madrone takes on a traditional feminine 'motherly' role as healer and protector. Maya is the maternal grandmother who has visions and is moved to self-sacrifice. Bird's anger and bitterness is tied in with traditional constructions of masculinity, so that he feels emasculated by his damaged hand and negatively feminised by his experience of submission and torture. In a similar stereotypical way, lesbians are often 'butch' like the dominant, masculine Isis. The narrative therefore retreats from a radical destabilisation of dualisms that would have opened the text up to further utopian possibilities, something that is achieved more successfully in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*. However, it could also be argued that Starhawk's emphasis on the proximity and instability of El Mundo and El Mundo Malo show the binaries continually under threat and merging.

The community is also ambivalent about its own status as a utopia; Madrone claims that "We're not a utopia at all" (275). Yet, once again, her denial of her society as utopian seems to be based on a belief that utopias are 'perfect' places, where all conflicts are resolved. Instead it is a utopia based on 'hard choices' and compromises, a place where usefulness and sustainability are priorities, but also beauty and healing (275). Thus *The Fifth Sacred Thing* fits neatly into the genre of critical utopia, critical of its own status as utopia, in a state of constant process and evolution towards a better state of being. The novel also crosses other generic boundaries, containing elements of fantasy, science-fiction and thriller. While the resolution of the story is a little abrupt - the army dispatched in a page or so - it does not tie everything up neatly. Rather, the utopians must continue to work to rebuild, to debate, to worship:

"It will all be debated. What to do with the deserters. How to rebuild. Whether or not we should anticipate further attacks." "Tomorrow?"

Madrone said. It already was tomorrow, wasn't it? She had worked through the night and lost count of time. "Don't we get a day off?" "You're tired, I know. But these are pressing issues; we should at least begin the discussions. Of course, nothing will be resolved immediately." (480-1)

Mundane's World (1988) however, is a utopian novel that does seek resolution. Judy Grahn is the author of a number of non-fictional works on gender and sexuality, she is also a prominent poet, and *Mundane's World* is her first novel. Although first published in the late 80s, the novel engages with 60s and 70s cultural feminism. Set in a mythical world positioned outside capitalist and patriarchal structures, the novel is also placed outside temporality, in what Grahn calls 'all-time' in which past, present and future co-exist and intertwine. This notion of time echoes Julia Kristeva's notion of 'Women's Time', which she describes as a 'signifying space' that works against notions of gendered identity and the linear time of history (875). It also corresponds to Carol Pearson's theory of time, which was discussed in Chapter Four. *Mundane's World* follows the lives of a group of women and men who live in the city of Mundane, which is a 'city of dreamers' (Grahn 5). Mundane is 'a warm city on a busy river where there were so many different kinds of people no one would really mind another' (62). The people of Mundane live in clans, composed of the Snake, Bee, Lion and Tortoise clans, which have specialist roles within the community, such as farming, construction and healing. There are also pan-clan societies such as the Spider society of predictive women and the Arrow Society of crafty men. The pan-clan societies are simultaneously positioned both inside and outside of Mundane, both a part of, and apart from the city. The community is bound together by their spiritual beliefs, epitomised in the symbol of their Goddess, *Ana*: "[i]n a city of dreamers the clans are held together by a mutual knowing of numerous natural powers and especially one whose name they usually call *Ana* and who is a lady of many faces, some

other names and a great deal of body' (9-10). *Ana* embodies specific aspects of each clan, thus each individual sees something of themselves in her, and experiences her in a unique way. For example, for the Tortoise clan, Ana is 'Ana the earth and a planter and harvester of renewal'; for the Lion clan she is 'Ana of animals of companionship, terror and satisfaction' and for the Snake clan she is 'Ana the dreadful transformer' (106). Thus their Goddess represents an eclectic mix of meanings, which can be allied to Cynthia Eller's definition of Goddess worship as non-dogmatic.

Grahn uses lyrical, poetic language to build the various narrative strands of the story. Drawing from the myths and spiritual beliefs of Native American cultures, she uses rhythmic language and repetition to develop the cadence of her fable. Johanna Dehler describes this form of myth-making as providing 'models of orientation outside patriarchal and heterosexist social structures and thought patterns' because it offers a 'discourse mode that becomes an epistemological device to restructure a semantic environment traditionally based on gender prejudice' (35). Grahn relates the story of a young girl, Ernesta, and her journey of self-discovery; as Rita Felski notes, this is a popular feminist tool, depicting 'self-discovery as a process of awakening to an already given mythic identity or inner self' (127). While it is common for feminist self-discovery narratives to show a female character gaining a feminist awareness through her alienation from patriarchal society, in Grahn's story the process is somewhat different. Ernesta lives in a matriarchal society, in which women and men live in harmony together. Her journey, therefore, is partly one of minor rebellion against her family, and her expected role within it, but mainly of finding her place in the community, and realising her power as a strong female. At the beginning of the story, Ernesta, who has a wandering eye, is clumsy and forgetful, and her Aunts

scold her for having a 'scattered memory' and a 'whimsical nature' (Grahm 13). Ernesta experiences several challenges to her self-image, yet by the end of her spiritual journey, she is confident that her wandering eye will give her an essential alternative perspective, and her imagination and creativity will aid her in important decision-making.

The narrative is circular, constantly returning to the events at the beginning of the novel; the story begins when, 'five mostly brown young girls moved down by the riverside, stirring the bushes with the motions of their bodies' (1). Gathering reeds, they are confronted by a mother lion who is hungry. Using their various abilities of smell, sight and knowledge of the lion, the eldest of the girls, Ernesta, works out that on this hot day the lion is probably more thirsty than hungry, so she signals to the others and they slowly walk backwards towards the river, and dive in. The lion follows them, step by step, and reaching the river, begins to drink, for she is indeed thirsty. This becomes a key event in the lives of the people of Mundane; for the girls and their families it signals their move into a new maturity and knowledge of their world, for they have faced a hungry lion and escaped alive. All five girls, Ernesta, Jessi-ma, Fran-keen, Margedda and Dee, are important characters in the novel, although the narrative focuses on Ernesta and Jess-ima. At the same time as the girls encounter the lion, a woman, Lillian, lies dead at the eastern edge of the city. She is Jessi-ma's aunt, and no-one knows how or why she has died. The story follows the lives of the girls after their encounter with the lion, as they find a place within the community, which mourns the loss of Lillian. The girls move into adolescence together, and the novel culminates in the girls' shared menarche ritual, which involves them returning to the scene at the beginning of the story, as they see themselves encountering the lion through the perspectives of a vulture, an

owl and a dove, the cliff, the wind and the river. The circularity of the narrative enhances the sense that time is non-linear, and also circular, as the community grows and develops, but also moves in the natural cycles of life and death. Chapter headings ironically comment on their chapter content, with the girls' escape from the lion headed by the words, 'Reversing a Perilous Situation Doesn't Necessarily mean Skinning the Cat'. As the characters dissolve into the various natural elements, they reform again, with new perspectives and new knowledge with which to drive the community forward. Ernesta learns she will take a leading role within the Snake clan as a medicine woman, Margedda will become a shaman and Jessi-ma a teacher of her clan.

In Mundane, spirituality is deeply embedded within the community such that it is impossible to discuss community life without reference to spiritual beliefs. Every member lives with a deep respect for the natural earth and its energies, including all insects, birds and animals. The clans believe in life energies that exist between all living things, and the Snake clan live with especial regard to transforming and balancing these energies. This connection with the natural world is usually experienced through the "part-time" of everyday living, but further connection with other consciousnesses can be experienced in "all-time" and "eventual time". Indeed, the inhabitants have an enlarged concept of community that includes the consciousnesses of all the animals, insects, trees and other parts of the natural world as well as the human occupants of Mundane. As such, the narrative roams in and out of different consciousnesses, and we hear the thoughts of buzzards, ants, trees, donkeys and more. This relationship with animals and the natural world is echoed in the utopian society in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, where the inhabitants use sign language to talk to animals, and as Luciente states, 'You might say our -

you'd say religion? – ideas make us see ourselves as partners with water, air, birds, fish, trees” (125). In Sally Gearhart's recent novel *The Magister* (2003), an enhanced relationship with animals is achieved through the ability to communicate with them and access their thoughts. In Mundane, the clans have ancestral ties with many animals and plants: Donna's spirit guide is a weed, and Aunt Three has an oak tree as an ancestor.

As stated, Mundane is a matriarchal society; second names derive from the mother's side, thus Ernesta is Ernesta Mundane, taking the name of her grandmother. Her uncle is Blueberry Jon Mundane. There is no mention of Ernesta's father; Donna's spirit guide, the weed, sent Ernesta to Donna in a dream, as Donna says, “[t]his is my spirit mate, who was with me when I dreamed you into the purse of my belly. Here is why your eyes are black as berries and here is why you have such fine black hairs along your arms and a strong spine” (71). Here, alternative forms of reproduction are integrated into a spiritual mythology, as opposed to those in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, which uses technological innovation.

While the community consists of both women and men, the narrative focuses on the women of Mundane, who celebrate the vitality and fertility of the female in a number of festivals and ceremonies, such as the menarche ritual. Through this ritual, which has great portent for Mundane, the girls enter ‘all-time’ and ‘eventual time’ and move into the consciousness of other life forms. From new perspectives the girls see the energy grid that connects every living creature and understand how disconnection with the natural world threatens all who live in Mundane. While the central focus is on the women of Mundane, Grahn also creates an alternative space for men in the

community. While some men live with women, it is more usual for the sexes to live apart, and many of the men live in the roundhouse. Blueberry Jon fondly remembers:

how the other men looked and smelled inside a roundhouse of fellows gathered around a common fire, how their muscles gleamed as they reached for tools and how they would say sentences of memory such as the very most excellent way to chip a flint ax head or the way to check if a spoor belonged to a simple game animal or a more complexly animal one. He remembered then that the men would sometimes reach over with a bit of food to shove into each other's mouths, and this feeding each other in a comradely fashion he began to look forward to. (139-40)

While at first, Grahn seems to follow conventional views of masculinity in this passage, describing a traditionally masculine environment, her description of men feeding each other demonstrates the changed behaviours of men in her community.

But the novel does not demonstrate a radically different representation of gendered behaviours. As discussed in the last chapter, the novel reflects some of the problems of cultural feminism in its uncritical celebration of womanhood and femininity. While it is often a strength of feminist utopias to explore and disrupt conventional notions of masculinity and femininity, Grahn prefers a more simple reversal of structures of power, in which women are placed at the top, and men below. While men do not appear to be subordinated by this model, inequality still appears to be present within the culture, through the emphasis on "female" values. Ernesta and her friends' connection to the natural world reflects essentialist beliefs about the 'naturalness' of 'woman' which many other feminist utopian novels work hard to challenge and deconstruct. The celebration of the menarche, a common feature of cultural feminism, operates to emphasise women's biological function within the community. Women are consequently represented as 'natural' leaders because of their 'natural' powers – while this reversal of gender roles might seem

positive, it only serves to maintain hierarchical structures of power, and preserves biology as the basis of gender and social relations. This reversal of power is emphasised in the women's sexual power over men, as they sexually harass them at festivals: 'the women were noisy with raunchy sex joking [. . .] The men twirled their sticks rapidly grunting and looking at each other as the women sat ribaldly remarking with glistening eyes until the early wisps of smoke rose and the people shouted' (97). The gender of Ana – female – also structures the community's spiritual life around supposedly 'female' values of healing and nurturing. Goddess spirituality is also represented in a similar way in Sunlight's utopian novel, *Womenseed* (1986). Sunlight describes a mythic return to nature, in which women regain their lost female powers and create a society which worships and glorifies 'woman'. 'Woman' is clearly the centre of this novel, which ignores differences between women, rather it unites them as slaves under patriarchy, '[a]s the women awoke from this world of bondage, they saw paths that led away, and they set out to follow them' (3). The novel is composed of women's narratives as they tell of their dystopian experiences at the hands of men, and their release as they discover the women's community called Womenseed. This community, like Mundane, is also structured around the Goddess, or 'the Mother' and the belief that women are naturally nurturing, kind and peaceful. The exclusion of men from the community will therefore ensure a safe and happy society. Such a simplistic understanding of gender and gender relationships limits the novel's vision sharply. Men are defined solely as evil captors enslaving women, and women as victims seeking a safe haven from them. Thus the novel does not seek to challenge traditional views of gender at all.

While Mundane appears to be a stable utopia – which it is - it is not free from conflict, rather change and conflict are integrated into the community. At the beginning of the novel, the Bee clan is angry with the Snake clan for the latter's insistence on having a mural made of tiles for the midsummer festival, for which the Bee clan must bake hundreds of tiles in the heat of the summer. In retaliation, the Bee clan give the Snake clan all their children to look after, claiming they are too busy baking to look after them; the Snake clan organises an emergency meeting in the temple, and realising their error, postpone the mural until the next year. Later in the novel, the Tortoise clan is furious with Sonia of the Snake clan for getting carried away in a rain dance and causing a thunderous downpour of rain which threatens to destroy all the crops. A cursing ceremony takes place where formal masked cursers express their anger towards Sonia. Sonia and her family take on a voluntary exile and leave the city. But the Tortoise clan later regrets their action and Sonia's family is welcomed back, and the Spider Society wave smoke over them in order to change their magnetic field so there will be no more bitterness. Thus anger and discord are allowed a free reign of expression, and once expressed, conflicts are resolved.

In these novels, then, spirituality works to glue the communities together, not as an added ingredient, but through the utilisation of a spirituality that prioritises everyday relationships and values difference. In her book *Communities of Women* Nina Auerbach identifies the need for a communal bond as a feature of all of the (fictional) female communities she describes, the most obvious being that of gender, but in addition, common values, sexualities and politics are also important. In contrast, for Marilyn Frye who lives in a separatist feminist community, the disagreements between the women define the community. Rather than looking for common values

or traits, she argues that community happens when women create a space outside heterosexual patriarchal relations. She asks:

So what is there? What holds us in community? The answer seems to be either (1) nothing holds us in community, or (2) I've asked the wrong question. I opt for (2) [. . .] Instead of looking for something like common values to account for what holds us together, we should consider whatever kept us apart or works to keep us apart. (157)

Through gender separatism, Frye argues that 'lesbian connection[s]' will "naturally" take place (157). Clearly, what remains unspoken for Frye, is the common bond of gender and "natural" lesbian desire between women, which remains undeconstructed. Some feminist utopian novels also look beyond spirituality for this kind of communal bond. In single-sex utopias such as *The Wandering* (1978) or *Annemite* (1992), gender or lesbianism provides this nexus. In mixed-sex feminist utopias, however, some form of spirituality is frequently offered as a means of establishing connections. In the few mixed-sex feminist utopias that do not utilise spirituality, such as *Women on the Edge of Time*, fresh memories of an Apocalypse unite members in an ongoing desire to revolutionise human behaviour. Thus spirituality is not the *only* means through which a community can unite, but because of the connection between spirituality and community building, it is a significant option.

All four novels, *The Parable of the Sower*, *The Parable of the Talents*, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* and *Mundane's World* represent a dynamic relationship between utopia, spirituality and community. A number of processes can be identified in structuring a community around the principles of feminist spiritualities. All the communities utilise spiritual practices that are deeply relevant to their everyday lives; as Lauren notes, 'Earthseed deals with ongoing reality' (*The Parable of the Sower* 202). The

spiritualities encourage and respect difference, recognising that diversity is healthy and change inevitable. Because the spiritualities practised are feminist, there is a strong movement away from hierarchical structures; in each community, women (and men) are allocated equality, power and esteem because spiritual practices develop each individual with a respect both for themselves and for one another; consequently, both listen to and integrate one another's views. Within both novels, problems occur when individuals choose to force their own forms of religion on others. Such individuals are usually committed to a rigid belief in tradition and stasis, refusing to adapt to change. When dogma is preached and practised, individual rights to freedom and difference are denied. However the feminist forms of spirituality represented in the novels combat dogma with fluid and receptive forms of living and worship. While both Butler and Grahn utilise different spiritual practices, their aim is to create a feminist community based on difference that allows for and adapts to change without changing the core of the spiritual practice. This is starkly illustrated in *Mundane*, where those who might reject or forget the logic of their spirituality end up dislocating themselves from their environment. Both communities provide fora for debates and disputes that are integrated into their spiritual practices. Thus in *Acorn*, the weekly Gatherings provide a forum to debate *Earthseed* verses and to discuss disagreements and vote over key decisions. In *Mundane*, community decisions are discussed within the temples, and rituals used to resolve contentious issues. The formal process of cursing acts as a form of group catharsis, in which those identified as upsetting the equilibrium within the community are expelled and then reintegrated.

Yet problems also exist: these forms of spirituality are experienced without struggle. While those who join *Acorn* are not required to become members of *Earthseed*, the two are essentially a

package, and form the focus for the community, especially through the weekly Gatherings. While Lauren works for inclusiveness, those who resist Earthseed find themselves on the periphery of the group and may well leave; while Earthseed is a tolerant liberal spirituality, it struggles with those committed to misogynistic bigotry. Thus, while the simple rules of Acorn are that everyone must contribute to the community through working, learning and teaching, the unspoken rule is also that all must believe in, or at the very least, tolerate Earthseed. While this may seem unacceptable to some, toleration may be the key to forming successful communities, in addition to alternative places to go if differences in belief are too extreme. In Mundane, there is a wider acceptance of spiritual difference with the different clans offering variant forms of worship and belief, and for those seeking something completely different, there are the pan-clan groups, or more radically, cities outside Mundane. Fundamentally, while difference is generally celebrated in these communities, *spiritual* difference is often a stumbling block, and proves a critical point of negotiation and re-negotiation. The success or failure of the communities rests on their ability to respond to these problems.

In conclusion, all four novels represent what Ursula King has called a 'spirituality-of-being-in-the-world' (102), emphasising not transcendence of the mundane, but the spirit of the mundane itself. The sacredness of everyday relationships is celebrated in these texts in ways that affirm the materiality of spirituality. While feminist utopian critics, such as Sally Kitch and Erin McKenna, have recently attempted to ground feminist utopianism in realism and pragmatism, novels such as Butler's and Grahn's reaffirm the importance of the spiritual in contemporary feminist utopian thought. To quote King again, the search for a '*holistic, integral spirituality* which can respond to our

new [postmodern] situation demands creative and critical thinking of our traditions' (108). Through the development of different narrative modes, which challenge readers to rethink their reading strategies, feminist utopias offer a space within which to carry out this creative and critical thinking, and in the process, offer suggestive and original models of both feminist spirituality and feminist community.

Chapter Six

Telepathy

The term 'telepathy' was coined in England in 1882 by Frederic Myers in a journal concerned with psychical research, and was used to cover 'all cases of impression received at a distance without the normal operation of the recognised sense organs' (quoted in Roger Luckhurst 70). The term telepathy encompasses both distance and intimacy, two seemingly incongruous positions, and is comprised of the transmission of thoughts and emotions. First researched in the late nineteenth century, telepathy emerged during a *fin de siècle* period when a confusing and complex array of concerns and anxieties were being played out within English culture. A sense of apocalyptic crisis was often expressed, as fear of change, collapse, degeneration and decay within society as a whole led to both a questioning and rethinking of Victorian values, and a rejection of anything new and threatening to the social order. Central fears revolved around gender and sexuality, decadence, degeneration and imperialism, while issues of sexuality, mortality, morality and authority appeared to contemporary critics to be in crisis. The figures of disorder and chaos became increasingly, but not solely, focused on the issue of Woman; what was she, what should she be, what should she want, and what would she be in the future? Emerging within these concerns, telepathy was also inextricably linked with new technologies such as the telephone and telegram – devices also used to communicate across long distances. But whereas the telephone and the telegram are predicated on rational science, research into telepathy emerges from the less respected realms of spiritualism, mysticism and psychical research.

Yet, as Roger Luckhurst points out, psychical research attempted to connect itself to the orthodoxies of science in many different ways, aligning itself with other tele-technologies, '[p]sychical researchers did not produce a counter-knowledge to a scientific naturalist monolith: there was no simple structure to oppose. Rather, their knowledge merged along the fault-lines within a fragile edifice' (21). Indeed, both offered an alternative to the Church, and claimed to be democratic, participatory, and anti-authoritarian. Indeed, psychical researchers were proud that their explorations into telepathy could be empirically validated, and many tests were carried out to 'prove' or 'disprove' telepathic claims. The Society for Psychical Research, also established in 1882, followed scientific procedures to the letter, in the fields of experiment, observation and induction, as it disavowed any pretence of supernatural phenomena. If psychical phenomena existed, they were believed to be the result of the power of mental states to move physical matter, rather than ghostly or spiritual forces. However, psychical communication was also promoted as more efficient and indeed more reliable than other forms, so that 'in territories where Western communications had not yet reached, or were stretched to their limit, occult systems took over' (157). Thus the relationship between modern and psychic technologies was complex, as they were represented as both similar, and yet also different. Linked with other popular Victorian pastimes of mediumship and spiritualism, telepathy became entangled with questions of science and technology, psychology, mysticism and occultism, reflecting a mounting cultural interest in secularism and the rise of new age religions, as explored in the previous chapter.

The notion that one can transmit thoughts or emotions to another person across a distance immediately raises questions of space and time, of the relationship between self and other, of individuality and community. As William Stead argued, tele-technologies had the potential to make 'all the nations in all the continents next-door neighbours' reviving 'the ideal of human brotherhood' (quoted in Luckhurst, 139). While this ideal of forming new relationships with one another through alternative forms of communication is one that could have been utilised effectively within utopian thinking to dissolve racial and cultural boundaries, discourses surrounding telepathy in the late nineteenth century continued to be riven with class, race and gender prejudices. In personal narratives of telepathic experiences, individuals asserted the veracity of their story through their (middle or upper) class status, and at the same time, those with psychic abilities were often represented as working or lower-class, [w]hether supernatural capabilities rest in the working-class or raced body, or expose threats *from* them, these testimonies work over the liminality of the servant, at once inside domestic space yet outside the family' (150). The spirit was also associated frequently with the colonial subject, so that spirit voices or apparitions were said to be Oriental or native American, Spanish Indian, African or Arabic. Thus the spirit was represented as truly *other* to the predominantly white English or American middle-class medium, becoming a tool to juxtapose differences between civilization and primitive culture, Anglicanism and primitive religion, and Anglicanism and superstition. These oppositions had previously been explored in eighteenth century Oriental fiction and the Gothic novel. The ability to allow the spirit or thoughts of an African into the mind and body of a white English person was frequently linked with fears of transgressive hybridity and miscegenation.

At the same time telepathic sensitivity was also implicated with ideologies about femininity. Because women were believed to be more emotional, nervous and sensitive than men, more prone to hysteria and madness, it was argued that they were more capable of a permeability between self and other due to their biological make up. Thus telepathy was further linked to the 'other', associated with femininity, the native, the savage and the lower classes, it became a symbol of what was different to white middle class masculine Anglican society, both strangely fascinating but also perilously dangerous. Telepathy therefore reflected many of the ideas and fears surrounding 'woman' during the fin de siècle, during which the ideal feminine – wife and mother – and evil feminine – characterised by the New Woman or femme fatale – became strictly demarcated. Lyn Pykett identifies some of the central characteristics of the ideal feminine as domestic wife and mother, asexual, passionless, innocent, dutiful, self-sacrificing, dependent, slave and victim. Thus implicitly, the improper feminine became a demon, a subversive threat to the family, sexually knowing, self-assertive, desiring, independent, enslaving and a predator. Women were represented dualistically as either angel or vampire, virgin or whore. Thus because of women's innate suggestibility and sensitivity – even passivity – they were perceived to be ideally suited to telepathic experiences. As noted in the last chapter, women's perceived passivity and emotionality were believed to make them more receptive to messages from God. As telepathy and mediumship became more popular as entertainment and pastime, women utilised telepathy as they did spirituality, to access public spaces and gain a voice.

Telepathy functions as an altered state of consciousness within feminist utopian fiction, particularly within texts in the 1980s and 90s, in a number of ways. Firstly, as a means of opening up the boundaries between self and other, telepathy operates to transform interpersonal relationships. Secondly, as an alternative form of communication – the transmission of thoughts – telepathy is used to transcend and subvert patriarchal structures of language. Thirdly, telepathy can be used to develop empathetic relations between all living beings, including humans, animals, birds, and the natural elements. The ability to access another person's emotions, feelings and thoughts before they are verbalised works to open up individual awareness of self and other, and self in relation to other. As Nicholas Royle notes, 'the history of the term "telepathy" is intimately related to that of the concept of sympathy' (4) and telepathy therefore encourages understanding and common feeling between people. The individual is able to communicate in a 'purer' form, and individual pleasure and pain become shared pleasure and pain. While telepathic forms of communication can lessen feelings of loneliness, privacy has always been an issue of concern when considering sharing thoughts and feelings. It is crucial that individuals have control over the transmission of their thoughts. Within the dystopian genre, there is usually a lack of control over thought transmission, as will be discussed later, whereas within the utopian genre the individual retains control over their thoughts.

The concept of telepathy therefore raises questions about the notion of subjectivity, and where the self begins and ends. The Enlightenment view of the subject as a free, autonomous and rational being came under attack in the twentieth century. Freud argued, in contrast, that the subject is split

and irrational, driven by unconscious drives and desires. The 'normal' or 'ideal' subject in these discourses is always male, and thus the status of women within theories of subjectivity has been both neglected and delegitimised. Feminists have subsequently been torn between the attempt to create for the first time a female subjectivity that is rational and whole, in the Enlightenment tradition, and embracing psychoanalytic and postmodern notions of the split subject. It has been important to feminist politics in the past to identify a stable category of 'woman' or 'women' in order to develop a shared politics as a means to fight gender oppression. But numerous ruptures have occurred within feminism because many women have felt excluded by the 'woman' that feminism takes to be its subject. Thus postmodern feminists have attempted to delineate a feminist subject that avoids the pitfalls of totalisation.

Within postmodernism the notion of the subject is perceived to be in crisis, and attempts to create an identity politics, or to create categories for political use are regarded with grave suspicion. Feminist postmodern writers have followed suit and critiqued stable notions of female subjectivity. These writers draw heavily on the work of Michel Foucault who describes the subject as without any unity or 'truth' but created through discourses of power that seek to create a (fictional) view of the self as coherent and whole. Judith Butler argues that any category of 'woman' amounts to 'political closure' which is ultimately detrimental to the emancipation of women because any category is essentially normative and exclusive:

If one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its

gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. (*Gender Trouble* 325)

The belief that there is a category 'women' which has universal meaning is often linked with the essentialist idea that all women experience a common form of oppression and that this commonality overrides other differences between women. This view of women is reflected in the work of writers such as Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon and Mary Daly. In contrast, Butler argues that feminists should not use the term 'woman' uncritically, because it is a construction and needs to be understood as such. It is Butler's contention that:

The premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept the category. These domains of exclusion reveal the coercive and regulatory consequences of that construction, even when the constructions have been elaborated for emancipatory purposes. (*Gender Trouble* 4)

Butler's view of 'woman' is therefore provisional, and always in process, always in the act of becoming, of being performed as an ongoing discursive practice, and thus open to subversion and resignification.

Monique Wittig, a French materialist feminist, also questions the concept of 'woman' claiming that 'woman' is an ideological construction. She describes sex as a political class, accepting no natural sex, and no distinction between sex and gender. Her vision of 'woman,' then, is a construct that exists in binary opposition to man, and also exists within a heterosexual matrix:

women will have to abstract themselves from the definition "woman" which is imposed on them [. . .] the category "woman" as well as the category "man" are political and economic categories not eternal ones [. . .] once the class "men" disappears, "women" as a class will disappear as well [. . .] Our first task, it seems, is to always thoroughly dissociate "women" (the class from which we fight) and "woman" the myth. (*The Straight Mind* 11-15)

However, while Wittig seeks to retain the subject, (especially the lesbian subject) Butler does not, and while Wittig looks forward to a genderless future beyond power structures of oppression, Butler views subjectivity as embedded in structures of power. These debates surrounding subjectivity are relevant to feminist utopian fiction because these novels explore the different possibilities for women to negotiate and re-negotiate their relations to others and to structures of power within society. If the subject is not foreclosed, the possibility exists that she can be constructed differently. At the same time, subjects are always embedded within numerous communities – and relate to people within these multiple communities in different ways.

The issue of community, and how to define the self in relation to the community is therefore connected to discussions of subjectivity. The concept of community is popular in feminist writings, especially the idea of the all-female separatist community, which recurs frequently in feminist utopian fiction.¹ As discussed in the previous chapter, the New Age movement has provided an important alternative mode of community, and many women have been attracted to these, especially those within 'New Religious Movements'. Within these movements, communities are non-traditional and move away from the nuclear family. However, such communities are rarely feminist in nature, and as Elizabeth Puttick notes, women in search of an alternative to patriarchy are likely to be disappointed.

¹ See for example, *The Wandering* (1978), *The Demeter Flower* (1986), *Les Guérillères* (1969).

Historically, there has been a distinct paucity of communities that have been actively feminist, with some exceptions. It is interesting to note that in *Diggers and Dreamers 2000/2001 The Guide to Communal Living*, out of the 69 communities listed, only one community identifies itself as feminist. Even the socialist Owenite communities set up in the nineteenth century that professed feminism, failed to achieve equality in practice. The feminist spirituality movement has provided a feminist source of community for women, but these communities are not usually living communities, but rather temporary spaces in which women come together for short periods to practise rituals. Exceptions include a lesbian-feminist community in Southern Oregon, described in Gagehabib and Summerhawk's *Circles of Power*, the Reclaiming community in San Francisco and the Greenham Common communities of the 70s onwards. Separatism has been a popular force within radical feminism, especially among some lesbians, who argue that women need separate spaces from men, in order to empower women as a group. Separatism has been advocated as both a political strategy and as a political solution to patriarchy, but in both camps, the notion of an all-female community is celebrated as a way of resolving a number of feminist issues.² Separatist fantasies are popular, but have come under attack for ignoring differences between women, especially concerning racial and cultural issues. It is not surprising then, that women turn to feminist fiction, particularly feminist utopian fiction for examples of different feminist communities, both single-sex and mixed in order to explore different possibilities and concerns.³

² See Sonya Andermahr for a discussion of the differences between 'political separatism' and 'utopian separatism'.

³ See Rebecca D'Monte and Nicole Pohl ed. *Female Communities* (2000) and Susan Frye and Karen Robertson ed. *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens* (1999) for discussions of early women's communities.

Discussion of the political nature of communities, and the status of the political subject in relation to communities has largely taken place within the liberal-communitarian debate in political theory, and feminists have had a significant impact on this discussion. Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey define communitarianism as 'the thesis that the community, rather than the individual, the state, the nation or any other entity is and should be at the centre of our analysis and our value system' (1). Communitarians, such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer, have provided a useful criticism of liberalism, and feminist theorists such as Susan Moller Okin, Iris Marion Young, Marilyn Friedman and Drucilla Cornell have developed this critique from a feminist perspective. Seyla Benhabib, Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey have also critically engaged with these feminist debates, and I shall focus on their arguments in this discussion. Benhabib argues that communitarianism is rooted in disenchantment with the project of modernity, comprised of, 'an understandable disillusionment with a form of life that still perpetuates war, armament, environmental destruction and economic exploitation at the cost of satisfying basic human needs with human dignity' (2). She seeks to challenge this disillusionment with a reformation of the major principles of modernity, namely: moral and political universalism, moral autonomy, economic and social justice and equality, democratic participation and solidaristic human association (2).

Communitarians are positioned right across the political spectrum, thus their political goals are not always the same. However, some common themes can be observed across the divide, such as the emphasis on the 'embedded and embodied status of the individual person', the social nature of life,

identity, relationships and institutions, the value of public goods and communal practices, and the value of community (Frazer & Lacey 2). Communitarianism is a political position that critiques liberalism, and has been useful to feminists for its attack on the prevalence of liberalism in contemporary politics. Liberal individualism is composed of a number of beliefs, based on the Enlightenment view of the subject, such as viewing the individual as rational, with human rights and needs, with the right to freedom and equality predominant. It views the state as always potentially endangering the freedom of the individual, hence the development of the public-private realms as a means of protecting the individual's "private" life from the state. The state can act through the rule of law, but these laws must first be gained by public consent and there is also a commitment to social progress. While historically liberal feminists have often successfully utilised notions of universal equality and rationality in women's emancipation, these values have become problematic for feminists.

For example, feminists, utilising communitarian discourse, have critiqued the notion of the disembodied individual that ignores aspects of gender, emotions, physicality and other social conditions of existence. Women have traditionally been viewed as uniquely circumscribed by their bodies in ways that men are not, particularly through their capacity for reproduction. These views have had a significant impact on women's situation within society. But these issues are overlooked if the individual is viewed as transcending the body. Feminists have also interrogated liberalism's view of objective rationality because it is constructed without looking at the embodied individual. They have also critiqued the public-private dichotomy as problematic because there can never be a clear separation

between the two, as can be seen from current debates in the media about the 'private' lives of politicians and their impact on 'public' roles. The public-private dichotomy has a particular resonance for women who have been placed within the private realm and largely excluded from the public sphere. Feminists also argue that when the state does not intervene in the private realm that this is a political and not a neutral act, as in the cases of domestic violence, thus the private realm does not exist outside political debate.

But communitarianism is not an ideal partner for feminism for a number of reasons. Frazer and Lacey's central criticism is that communitarianism tends to be politically conservative, its ideal of community rooted in romanticism and idealism of the past. This conservatism is politically dangerous for feminism whose politics is embedded in radicalism. Additionally, feminists also argue that communitarianism lacks any political analysis or critique of community institutions, consequently there is a tendency to maintain the status quo without seeking to create new forms of community. There is no way of critiquing current forms of community because there is no objective moral or political standpoint; if the individual is created within the community, and all her views and values are created within that community, there is no point from which she can critique her environment. Communitarians are thus subject to 'social conformism, authoritarianism, and, from the standpoint of women, of patriarchalism' (Benhabib 74). This social conventionalism is very problematic, and is consistent with the fact that historically communities have commonly been the site of oppression for women, thus within themselves communities are not politically challenging. Communities are also

intrinsically exclusive, excluding those who do not belong, and communitarians do not critique the ways that certain members are included or individuals excluded, even though this often occurs on unequal grounds. So, for example, some join communities through choice (political or social groups) others through their birth (religion); women have traditionally been excluded from certain communities because of their gender, and clearly this has affected their access to political goods. Finally, there is no analysis of how communities might interact with each other.

As discussed in an earlier chapter, Iris Marion Young argues that communitarianism could be politically dangerous to feminism because it 'privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of the limits of one's understanding of others from their point of view' (300). This is an 'understandable dream' but is 'politically problematic' because it suppresses differences among people or excludes those who do not fit in (300). Young's fears over the dangers posed to the separate self in communitarian theory have been countered by Frazer and Lacey who accept that notions of the intersubjective self could be dangerous for notions of the objective critical subject, but argue for a relational self which is interdependent, living in relation to others, practices and institutions, but retaining uniqueness and independence (178). Such a notion of the self moves beyond dichotomised thinking: there is no absolute choice between the individual and community, but the individual is positioned in relation to the community.

These critiques are important because they highlight the ways that gender issues are often ignored within both poles of the liberal-communitarian debate. In contrast, Frazer and Lacey argue that political theory needs to move beyond the dichotomies of these two positions. Combining elements of both theories and at the same time utilising feminist poststructuralist theory, they argue for a new political theory which contains first and foremost a commitment to equality. This equality would include equality of material resources, formal equality and equality in levels of power and wellbeing. Welfare and autonomy would be valued in political life, and would entail a dismantling of the objectivism/relativism dichotomy, positively empowering people in relation to freedom and privacy. This theory, they argue, would address issues of oppression, because it would look at social processes and political injustice. Everyone would be involved in the political community in decision and policy making. A theory of power is also essential. Their view of the self is relational, critical and reflective. While the self is not viewed as unified, it is not fragmented or unstable, 'life in society generates multi-layered consciousness, but critically reflective subjects are capable of, and do, to different degrees, think about, rationalise, and compare notes about their many experiences' (201). These experiences are not damaging to the self, but open up the possibilities for engagement with political debates. Clearly, these issues are intrinsically related to the debates about subjectivity discussed above and the idea of telepathy intersects with these, because once individuals can communicate telepathically, the notion of an individual autonomous subject is compromised. The lived community is overlaid by the psychic community in which all individuals are linked, with access to one another's thoughts and feelings before they are vocalised. While telepathic thoughts remain embedded in language, which feminists

have argued is patriarchal, telepathic forms of communication are often represented as 'purer' or less tainted with patriarchy than speech.

Telepathy has had a significant position within women's writing since the nineteenth century, particularly within Gothic and historical fiction, where it is often linked with mediumship – telepathic communication with the dead – and spiritualism.⁴ Significantly, there is often a lack of agency for the individual within this genre of writing – characters unwillingly receive others' thoughts and feelings, they are literally taken over by them, rendered passive and rigid by the intruding mind of another. Yet women have also exploited their powers. The supernatural therefore is a metaphor, an agent to facilitate progress and change. Thus telepathy is used at certain points to emphasise and symbolise women's passivity and powerlessness within society, subject always to the thoughts and emotions of others. Within the genres of fantasy and science fiction, telepathy has become a very popular tool to signify altered relations between humans – often signalling a degenerative shift into mind control and madness, but also used in a positive way to open up the possibilities for human relationships. John Wyndham's *The Midwich Cuckoos* (1957) famously represented telepathic communication as threatening and terrorising, signifying deviancy, alienation and demonic possession. Telepathy was also used during the Cold War to denounce communism as mindless obedience. Feminist writer, Octavia Butler's Patternmaster series follows the attempts of a spirit in human form, Doro, to create a new superior race of telepaths. He considers 'his' people to belong to him – they are

⁴ Recent examples include Sarah Waters' *Affinity* (1999) and Michèle Roberts' *In the Red Kitchen* (1990).

his slaves – and they must ‘breed’ with whomever he tells them to. In *Mind of My Mind* (1977) Mary, a powerful female telepath who successfully challenges Doro’s power, creates a Pattern which links certain telepaths together, and allows her to place them on a mental leash, which she can tug at any time, ‘They formed a shifting pattern of light and colour. I had brought them together somehow. Now I was holding them together – and they didn’t want to be held’ (*Mind of My Mind* 54). These novels tackle notions of mental and physical slavery and freedom, as one character, Page, notes, “‘you make slaves of people? I’m going to be part of a group that makes slaves of people?’” (178). Ada replies that this is a new form of slavery, in which those people (mutes) who are looked after, are in fact healthier and more comfortable than they were before they were slaves. And, she notes, if they are not happy their minds can be changed so that they are happy. Clearly, freedom of thought is severely eroded. At the same time, these novels are ambivalent about the utopian possibilities of telepathy – the telepaths are indeed a superior race, with various powers of shape-shifting, telekinesis and healing. Yet their negative and condescending attitude to ‘mutes’ – humans who cannot read thoughts – sends a chilling warning to those who are ‘other’ – they must be subdued, controlled and enslaved. The period of transition, when individuals learn to control the thoughts that enter their mind, is represented as a time of pain and madness, when the telepath is overwhelmed with the emotions and experiences of others. Once again, agency is key here – when individuals are unable to block the transmission of their own thoughts, and control their reading of others there is no possibility of sanity or peace. In her short story ‘A Friend in Need’ (1981) Lisa Tuttle writes more positively of a telepathic connection between two young girls, Jane and Cecily, modelling telepathy as female. The two girls are able to reach out to

each other across several American states to become friends when they are growing up. While the ending of the story leaves the question open as to whether both girls were in fact 'real,' the story uses telepathy to explore each woman's sense of self, as her idealised other is mirrored back to her. Each uses the other to project her desires elsewhere, Jane escaping from a violent, disordered mother, Cecily seeking the opposite of herself. Phyllis Eisenstein explores the ambivalent relationship of two women in a telepathic connection in 'Attachment' (1974). A young American girl, Ellie has been aware of her telepathic relationship with an older German woman, Johanna, for as long as she can remember. In fact, their consciousnesses merged when Ellie was born, as Johanna became aware of a pressure enveloping her, 'a ghostly cocoon, contracting and expanding in slowly accelerating rhythm' (83). Thus here telepathy is embedded in ideas of female friendship and maternity. The two share bodily sensations, thoughts and dreams, and can see through one another's eyes but they can both control these shared experiences to a certain extent, 'to Ellie, Johanna's memories and experiences both waking and sleeping existed as a constant hum in the back of her mind, just below the threshold of consciousness; like the television set that her parents left on all day and deep into the night, they were there if she cared to concentrate on them, but they were easy to ignore. Except during sleep' (85). While the two women, of different generations, and of different nationalities and cultures, have different values and beliefs – for example, Johanna is a Catholic, Ellie an atheist – the two are bound together in a comforting inter-psychoic ring. Only when Johanna dies, does Ellie realise how much she has lost in losing this connection, 'Her mind, save her own hollow thoughts, was empty. *Johanna!* [. . .] the echoes and the shadows that had been with her since before birth were gone. For the first time in

memory, Ellie Greenfield was alone. She began to tremble' (89). What is normal and abnormal are reversed here, as the individual mind that is closed to another's becomes strange and alien.

Within feminist utopian fiction, telepathic communication is connected to either beliefs in spirituality or alternative science and technologies, as Robin Roberts notes, 'alternative science shapes and makes possible these formidable female communities [. . .] In the future, these magical powers are nurtured into a soft science [. . .] They share the powers of birth with men and hone skills of telepathy and precognition and heal with their minds and talk to animals. What seems insane or diabolical in the twentieth century becomes a science in the twenty-first' (81-85). Telepathy is used in these communities as a metaphor for enhanced female friendship and bonding, and maternal ties. Thus they seek to create new models of female solidarity that are not based on biology or reproduction. Some texts, however, still resort to an essential or innate female propensity for telepathy, which problematises its usage. Nan Albinski argues that psychic phenomena are important in feminist utopias, emphasising the way that social cohesion is achieved through a collective consciousness that includes dreaming and communication through ESP (175). Significantly, telepathy in these novels always includes some form of agency, and telepathy is viewed in a positive way as binding individuals and communities more closely together. Doris Lessing also argues in her fiction that women labelled as mad are in fact accessing altered states of consciousness, which can be immensely liberating and educative. She links

these experiences with psychic powers such as telepathy, which she claims can be consciously developed, and could act as the key to utopian changes in the future.⁵

Sally Gearhart's *The Wandering: Stories of the Hill Women* (1978) is a key feminist utopian text which places telepathy at its centre. Gearhart is best known for *The Wandering*, but she has also written a number of non-fiction works, which reflect her wider interests, including *Loving Women/Loving Men: Gay Liberation and the Church* and *A Feminist Tarot*. She has also recently published two new feminist utopias, part of a trilogy, *The Kanshou* (2002) and *The Magister* (2003). *The Wandering* emerges from a 70s cultural feminism that celebrates women as biological females, and the representation of telepathy reflects this preoccupation. The novel is composed of a collection of stories about the Hill Women, a community of women who have forsaken the city, leaving it to the men, because they view them as inevitably violent towards women. The novel is less about lesbian eroticism than it is about community, as Dana Shugar notes, 'the importance of lesbian separatism rests not in its identifications with an erotic politics but in its goals to create and expand women's communities' (128). Sarah Lefanu describes the novel's structure as 'dream-like...[it] takes us back to an earlier self, ignorant of the strictures and limitations concomitant with being female in a male-dominated world, a self whose imagination and desire are strong enough and clear enough to create a vision of the 'if only...' world that sweeps aside those limitations and explores instead the endless realm of potential' (69). There is no clear narrative strand, rather, each chapter follows different characters within the community in

⁵ In *The Four-Gated City* (1969) for example, Lynda believes that she is receiving telepathic communications, but is diagnosed as schizophrenic. When a revolution occurs, and people begin setting up utopian communities, telepathic abilities grow and develop amongst the children, offering transformed human relationships.

brief vignettes. The novel is rich in psychic technologies, with telepathy at its heart. The text begins with the character Jacqua opening her conscious awareness across the Eastern Ensconcement of the Wanderground. She can sense 'anger being spoken' yet spoken is not an accurate term, for 'she could grasp no words – only intentions' (1). She also hears 'in her head the clang of armour' (1) and then the thoughts of her friend Diana, "You're doing fine." The thought was enfolding her' (2). Thus the women can not only transmit and receive thoughts as a matter of course, they can also read emotions and hear sounds at a distance, and they do this through their ability to 'listenspread' and 'mindstretch', 'lock minds' and 'eye-see'. When minds are locked together the women's powers become stronger so that they can see further, levitate and even fly: 'The locked minds, Diana's eye-seeing pushing outward and away, expanding with her power' (4). Central to the women's telepathic powers however is their ability to shield their thoughts so that they are not permanently open, and are not constantly overwhelmed with the thoughts and emotions of others – as the pre-transition telepaths in Butler's Patternmaster series are, inducing psychosis. Telepathy, ultimately is about sharing and gathering power and energy – to strengthen the community of women, and to be used as a force against (male) violence. Telepathy is therefore used as an exclusionary form of communication, controlled by and utilised by women.

Because the boundaries of self and other are opened up through these psychic connections, interpersonal relationships are transformed. It becomes more difficult to hide negative feelings such as loneliness, fear or anger because these emotions can be picked up much more easily. When Seja tells

Alaka the story of Margaret's rape, Alaka forgets to shield, and is suddenly overwhelmed with the immediate experiences of Margaret: 'As Seja re-knew Margaret's horror and outrage, Alaka too, was absorbing the full force of the armoured woman's experience. She was aware that she was going to be deeply and violently ill' (22). This ability to share the horror and pain of attacks is utilised effectively within the community in a formal context through the remember-rooms. Here, remember-guides re-channel rapes, murders, tortures and atrocities that have taken place in the past to those who have never experienced them, 'Lest we forget how we came here [. . .] As a woman shared, she became a part of all their history' so that each individual becomes embedded in a psychic history of memories (23). The challenge to remember past patriarchal oppression becomes a simple one, therefore, because these lived memories can be accessed at any time by any member of the community. While this access to past memories has a positive effect in reinforcing the need for safe utopian spaces for women, it also has a negative effect because these experiences of rape and murder remain so fresh – they can never heal over. Thus the women, as individuals and a community, find it almost impossible to envision a world in which men are not violent and abusive, because their shared community of memories only serves to tell them that this is all that they are. Thus the remember rooms, with their wholly negative representation of men, serve to permanently bias women's views against them. 'Love men?' thinks Jacqua, 'The idea did not fit. It was uncomfortable and backwards in her mind. She tried it on from every angle but it would not adjust' (2). The existence of the gentles – celibate men– offers an alternative model of masculinity, but still these men are rejected because even though they do not threaten the women sexually, they are still perceived as disconnected from their own minds and bodies,

and thus dangerous because as men “They are driven [. . .] in their own madness to destroy themselves and us and any living thing” (3).

When the gentles contact the hillwomen and ask to speak to them, the women are initially very hostile. They come together psychically for a ‘gatherstretch’ in which they open up their individual consciousnesses to form a group consciousness. This happens nightly when the Long Dozen come together to discuss and share ‘all the women-matters, from threats of external danger to work rotations or the discovery of a covey of quail at a meadow’s edge’ (122). The twelve women serve a term and then other women take their place. When more important matters need to be discussed however, a larger gatherstretch is arranged in which as many women as possible join together to discuss a particular problem. One faction of women in this gatherstretch believes that ‘it did not matter that the gentles were men sworn to isolate themselves from women; if they were men then there was no reason for concourse with them’ (126). The gatherstretch allows these fears to be voiced and owned, and also alternative views as well. Fearful and angry emotions are shared, and then dissipated, ‘for a few moments they let the fear seize them all. Then, having faced it, they found no more fear to yield to’ (128). The women work through consensus decision-making. Each is asked whether they could yield on their position, and to acknowledge that their collective body can be broken up, and then the discussions begin. The women agree that a small group of women can go to meet the gentles, but those women are not allowed to speak for the women as a whole, they can only listen and bring back any messages. Thus the gatherstretch allows for improved communications between hundreds and

hundreds of women, each allowed a voice, a space to hear, and be heard and to share and express feelings of fear and anger.

Telepathy is also used to transcend and subvert patriarchal structures of language. Telepathy is represented as a swifter form of communication, which can transmit sensations, emotions, memories and feelings (20). "Let me see" said Ursula. She knew Ijeme would know what she meant by that, that *seeing* for Ursula meant understanding on all sense levels' (62). Ursula experiences an immediate flooding of emotions and feelings: 'As Ijeme opened to her, she was assaulted by a cacophony of feelings, tastes, colours, pictures, sounds, odours. Pain leapt in sharp blasts through her body. Streaks of rage, hurt, madness surged through her long bones' (62). Thus telepathic communication is described as being inherently *beyond* language, it is indeed pre-verbal, and thus could be linked with Kristeva's work on the semiotic and Freud's pre-oedipal. Kristeva argues that the semiotic is associated with pre-oedipal drives and forces which are pre-verbal and thus *outside* the law of the father. She connects the semiotic to a maternal, and therefore implicitly female, space which can be remembered or accessed through gaps and ruptures in language, where the meanings of language are disrupted by pulsions and rhythms. However, unlike Gearhart, Kristeva does not view the semiotic as exclusively female. New words have entered the language in *The Wandering* to describe altered states, such as 'learntogether', 'worry-reading', 'lonth' 'spanners' and 'toting'. An altered language is used here to reflect a more feminine form of communication, and a more female culture. As argued in a previous chapter, French language theorists such as Cixous and Irigaray have argued that language is masculinist and patriarchal,

and women need to develop a different language that reflects their different gendered experiences. There has also been an Anglo-American tradition of critiquing 'man-made' or sexist language. It has been argued that because language constructs and mediates social reality, that it plays a central role in reproducing the inequality of women. Developing new feminist languages then can become a key strategy for creating feminist change. Suzette Elgin pursues this line of thought in her feminist utopian trilogy, *Native Tongue* (1984) *The Judas Rose* (1988) and *Earthsong* (1994). Other writers also experiment with new words in their utopias, such as Marge Piercy's use of the pronoun 'per' for his or her in *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1978) and June Arnold's use of the word 'nan' for his or her in *The Cook and the Carpenter* (1973). Theorists such as Deborah Cameron however, temper this discussion by arguing that while language plays an important role in constructing and maintaining inequality, women can still use language to critique patriarchal structures, thus their oppression by and in language is not total. If women were completely oppressed by language, then they could never write feminist utopias.

Whilst the women in *The Wanderground* are able to develop more sophisticated forms of communication and change themselves in order to develop their relationships with one another, their belief that their psychic powers are linked with their biology limits the possibilities for transformation within their community: 'Somehow men – even gentles – found it difficult or impossible really to share power. "Meaningful communication is the meeting of two vessels, equally vulnerable, equally receptive, and equally desirous of hearing. In the listening is all real speaking"' (115). In this statement lies the belief that men are essentially unable to share power, unable to let themselves become vulnerable and

receptive to others. Thus men and women are 'no longer of the same species' (115), male and female difference seemingly rooted in incompatible natures, and attitudes towards the self and others. When the gentles demonstrate their own psychic abilities to the women – disproving these core beliefs – the women are shocked: 'The significance of what had happened burst upon the women. Evona's heart pounded' (178). The men define their telepathy as a bridge, unlike the women's enfoldment, 'We think it's a different form altogether [. . .] a form unique to men' (178). Thus the men too locate their psychic abilities within a gendered paradigm, which the women attack arguing that because the psychic abilities are about sharing power – which men are unable to do – they will only use their gifts to 'pry into the lives of others', 'to conquer them' becoming 'just another fancy prick to invade the world with. And you'll use it because you can't really communicate, you can't really love! Of course it's not an enfoldment. You couldn't enfold an ant if it crept into the middle of your hand!' (179). Although the women struggle with these types of anti-male beliefs, and realise they are deterministic and oversimplistic, the whole ideology of their community is based on political gender separatism. The use of psychic powers facilitates communication and promotes greater inter-personal relationships, but only between those people (women) who share this ability. Thus women must necessarily be limited in their ability to communicate with men, because men do not share their psychic abilities.

Telepathy is also used in the novel to develop empathetic relations between all living beings (except men). It is interesting to note that while men are described as 'another species' and therefore women have great difficulty both trusting and communicating with them, it is easy for them to share

psychic communication with birds, animals (of both sexes) and even trees and water. The women are able to transmit thoughts and emotions to birds and animals, asking for their help and protection, and able to give out comfort in return: "Earthsister," she said aloud to the water, "I want to join you." The word seemed to come from all around her. "Join" (11). Alaka communicates not only with the water, but also with fish, who are able to give her help when she is swimming deep under water, and also a tree, which warms her to dryness. These 'friendships' offer the women an enlarged sense of community, which echoes that of Grahn's *Mundane's World* and Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Gearhart's recent novel *The Magister* (2003), also describes transformed relationships with animals through the ability to communicate with them and access their thoughts. This method of communication allows the women to view animals as related to them in a closer way, with similar needs and desires. Animals, therefore are located closer to women than men are – whose needs and desires are represented as antithetical to women's.

Thus telepathy allows for more sensitive levels of communication between individuals and within group decision-making. Described as as natural as breathing (19) these psychic abilities also have the potential to be dangerous, however. When the women come together their powers take on a 'roaring madness [. . .] Zephyr was certain in that moment that they would all be whipped to the centre, sucked in, seared by their won speed, and doomed to spin forever in some internal cavern of paleness-and-white-light where none would know another or that another knew her not' (125). As a precursor

to Starhawk's work, Gearhart explores alternative forms of power within her utopia, with movement from power-over, to power-to.

The novel 'creates a neutralised, conceptual space wherein women can rethink their ideologies about women, men, separatism, consensus, and community. And the ability to think oneself 'beyond the box' creates the possibility for a renewed growth and continuation of those (albeit changed) communities' (Shugar 144). Such a notion of the self moves beyond dichotomised thinking: there is no choice between the individual and community, but the individual is positioned in relation to the community. It is this type of individual that Gearhart explores in her novel. But at the same time, these individuals – all women – are grounded in their gender, emotions, physicality and social conditions of existence; they are truly embodied subjects, an idea usually absent from communitarian discourse. Yet this total biological embodiment is also problematic from a feminist perspective because it is clearly essentialist. *The Wanderground* has been much criticised for its reliance on essentialist ideas of 'woman' and thus its inability to allow for gender transformation. The women of the *Wanderground* are unable to forget the past and move on into new, changed relationships with men, thus the novel fails to be fully transformational. While telepathy could have been used to facilitate improved communications between men and women, and thus engender better and closer relationships, Gearhart chooses to ground telepathy in biology and therefore it becomes divisive. The women remain isolated in the *Wanderground*, unable to trust men, unable to trust their own strengths and powers, instead locked into victimhood. Thus the novel ultimately fails to be fully utopian or transformational.

Elisabeth Vonarburg, a French writer, is the author of a number of novels and short stories, only a few translated into English. *In the Mother's Land* (1992) was published simultaneously in English and French, the French version entitled *Chroniques du Pays des Mères* (1992). A year later it was published in Canada under the title *The Mäerlande Chronicles* (1993). This proliferation of names and languages echoes some of the themes of the novel, of the difficulties of naming, and of the slipperiness and shifting meanings within language.⁶

'Imperfect choices in an imperfect world' lie at the centre of this feminist utopian society (155). Published in the 1990s, the novel reflects the author's interests in postmodern feminisms and theories of language and subjectivity, and the representations of telepathy reflect an anti-essentialist, anti-biologist perspective. The novel is set in a place called the Mother's Land, a woman-run society composed of a number of cities, including Bethely, Wardenberg, Amsherdam and Belmont. Outside the cities lie various Badlands – areas considered to be contaminated and polluted and therefore uninhabitable by humans, although they are believed to be populated by 'mutants'. The badlands represent the outside, or other to those in the city, 'a sort of "nowhere-land," a great emptiness that by its very contrast reaffirmed the existence of the only place that really mattered: Mäerlande' (162). By the end of the novel, however, the possibility of venturing into the badlands is opened up as they become a site of utopian possibility within the text, 'Where there was nothing, suddenly there would be

⁶ *In the Mother's Land* is set in the far future of another of Vonarburg's novels, *The Silent City* (1990).

something, a new thread in the Tapestry – no, a whole new *design* in the Tapestry! The dimensions of the whole world would be subtly enlarged, and people's minds and spirits would also have to enlarge to accommodate this changed world' (377). The story follows the character, Lisbei, as she grows up in Bethely, and gradually absorbs – and challenges – the values and beliefs of her culture. Bethely, like the other cities in the Mother's Land, (and indeed echoing Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*) is strictly hierarchised into breeding Lines, and women are stringently separated into mostas (non-people/girls who have not yet had the Malady), dottas (little girls/daughters), Greens (pre-menstrual women), Reds (fertile women), and Blues (infertile women). There are far more women than men in this society, a result of 'punishment' by their goddess, Elli, although it is inconclusive why the punishment should take this form, or what exactly men have done in the past, beyond bearing general responsibility for the Decline through their innate propensity for violence. At the centre of this society lies the Word of Elli, who created the world as it was, who is all-seeing and all-knowing, and whose creation story echoes and inverts the Christian one: 'Elli created everything, as you know. One day, Elli decided that Elli was bored with being all alone, and so Elli took a bit of Elliself and began to unwind Elliself, like a ball of wool. And that's how Elli made the daylight, and the night, earth and water for the plants' (18). Multiple narrative voices are filtered through the text, through an omniscient narrator, Lisbei's journal and various letters. The last chapter shifts into a completely different narrative voice, however, seemingly the voice of Garde, the im/mortal figure of Elli, who, it seems has put together the previous chapters, re-constructed through Lisbei's self-censored notebooks and letters. Thus the text is re-framed in the last chapter, as *The Handmaid's Tale* is re-framed in the Appendices by an alternative

narrative perspective and a leap into the future. The different narrative voices offer various perspectives on the story – reflecting the themes within the novel of the shifting nature of different standpoints. Much of the story is focussed on interpreting the word of Elli, through the voice of Garde, but it is only in the final chapter that Garde – if that is who the voice belongs to – is allowed to speak, and at the same time reveals her own hand in the story-telling.

Telepathy operates in the novel through a small group of people who have a ‘special empathetic ability’ which consists of the ability to see the ‘light’ or read one another’s auras (260). These characters, it is revealed at the end of the novel, are descended from Garde, who appears to be Elli in mortal form. This ability to read emotions and feelings – rather than thoughts – is connected to, and is intensified by, the mutation of the Malady, a sickness that strikes all children around the age of six. The majority die from this illness, but those who survive appear to have a much stronger immune system and resistance to disease. A by-product of this ability of the body to heal itself, however, can be infertility. Lisbei is first aware of her connection to her half-sister, Tula, through this ability to read her aura: ‘All she remembers is... what? The light, that’s it. Tula seems to appear in a pool of sunlight [. . .] Being with someone, feeling their presence inside or outside your own body like a sensation of heat, light, or smell. But with Tula it’s right, she feels this is where she belongs and the other belongs and knows it, too. And the soft flesh against her cheek feels like something remembered’ (6). Lisbei thinks that this connection is unique to her and Tula, but then also experiences it with another person:

What was it, this ripple of echoes, this spreading of phosphorescence, this amazing dancing back and forth between the gardiana and Lisbei? The gardiana’s face must have been very close to hers, but she remembers nothing about it, just

the murmuring glimmer and the flash of indignation in the midst of her stupor: what right had this gardiana to... it was only with Tula, the light, the resonance, the sharing! (16)

Lisbei and Tula experience a completeness, or oneness, with each other, and sharing the light appears to facilitate improved understanding of the other: 'I got into the habit of calling it light because the first time... Anyway, I always feel I can see them better, I mean the people who have it too, as though they were... in a better light. It's a light, but a kind of resonance as well' (395). However, for Toller, the experience is one of contact rather than seeing, thus it changes between each person, and perhaps between the sexes as well. Lisbei also experiences this sense of presence with her mother, but for the first time, experiences the blocking of these shared emotions; 'she sensed the presence. The light, the warmth, the resonance! But not as with Tula. No real echo in response' (51). Thus, as in *The Wanderground* these telepathic exchanges can be blocked, so that instead of warmth and light, only a steely mirror-like surface remains, and one's own emotions are reflected back, 'as though bouncing off a mirror, a smooth hard surface, brilliant and horribly familiar' (83). This mirror-lock is put into place for protection, when individuals feel vulnerable, but while telepathy operates in the novel to open up the boundaries between self and other, this defensive posture blocks off those opportunities for merging with the other, so that when Tula blocks off Lisbei, Lisbei becomes completely disconnected from her. Thus telepathy offers a potential in the novel for transformed interpersonal relationships that is rarely achieved, and the text problematises the whole notion of extra-linguistic communication. Lisbei spends her time trying not to read people's emotions, feeling different, and socially awkward, keeping her abilities a secret, 'as far as she knew, she'd never displayed her peculiar sensitivity in Wardenberg' (260). And she is rarely helped by her ability, rather, her capacity for interpersonal

relationships seems hindered by her stunted relationship with Tula. When Tula breaks off telepathic contact with Lisbei, each is broken, the wholeness is lost, as they move into a Lacanian symbolic order, of spoken words and divided subjectivity. However, as Tula remarks, the light between them actually obstructed their relationship because, “We’ve always assumed the other understood. Because of the light. I often used to wonder, if I’d been... normal, or if we’d been normal, would it have been better? We’d have been *forced* to speak to each other’ (416). Tula feels smothered by Lisbei’s influence; “You were suffocating me. You’re far stronger – your light is far stronger than mine” (417). Thus the novel explores the boundaries between self and other, debating whether the loss of them is positive. While the novel frequently questions and challenges the ability of language to be transparent, and constantly opens up multiple meanings and perspectives, spoken words here have the advantage of being relatively clear, and forcing issues out into the open.

Within the novel, telepathy is only used between humans, unlike in *The Wandering* where telepathy operates between humans, animals and various aspects of the natural world. Yet, as in *The Wandering*, it is a shock when men share the light, ‘she pushed the thought aside. With a *man*? The *light* with a man?’ (277). Men in this society are a distinct minority, and are clearly unequal, not allowed positions of power, believed to be weaker than women in mind and spirit, and distrusted because their ‘habit of violence was too ingrained’ (346). The female is the norm within this culture, and the male is deemed to be a deviation from this norm. While these core beliefs are contested by different groups within Mäerlande, and men fight for more powers and freedoms, the dominant ideology is that they are

dangerous and need to be suppressed. Romantic and sexual relationships between men and women, as in *The Wanderingground*, seem absurd, 'With the Male, there'd be this big queer thing inside her, pushing in as though... as though it were going to fill every bit of space!' (106). The custom is lesbian love – although the word lesbian is never mentioned in the novel, because this practice is considered the norm, 'the only body she could imagine so close to hers was Tula's, but that was completely different: they rolled over one another or caressed each other for the sheer *pleasure* of it!' (106). Heterosexual sex is formalised through the Celebration, in which the Mother and her Male enact the 'Dance' which is shrouded in mystery. While Lisbei does eventually have penetrative sex with a man – Toller, who shares the light – she does so only in the presence of another woman. Thus male-female relations are a struggle in this society, although many of the women appear to be working hard to challenge the anti-male bias of their culture.

Altered states of consciousness are thus integral to the story, as those with this 'special empathetic faculty' become key figures within Bethely and beyond, in the other cities, confronting and changing historical beliefs that are influencing current values and behaviours. The Malady induces high fevers, which generate hallucinations and altered states, and marks the symbolic entrance into the world of the little mosta, into language and personhood. The Malady is also changing humanity through its transformation (or mutation) of the biological system so that it can heal more quickly and easily; there is even hope that the Malady might one day create a perfect race (211). Lisbei also learns that the hallucinogenic drug, Agvite is used during the Celebration, as an aphrodisiac and a means of mystifying

the evening for all participants. Thus altered states are layered into the story at different levels, and are essential to constructing the utopianism of the society, which although 'imperfect' is still struggling towards a better world for everyone.

Mäerlande is an example of a feminist utopian society that is beginning to question its common assumptions and beliefs about the nature of women and men and their relationships to one another. Whilst most contemporary feminist utopias are reflexive and self-critical, moving toward further change, some are deeply unhappy with their status quo, and more impatient for future transformation. In Mäerlande, as in the *Wanderground*, men have been demonised for their inherent violent natures, and the danger they represent to women. In both texts, alternative forms of communication, through heightened sensory powers, are explored as a means of overcoming psychological barriers, firstly between women, and then, tentatively, between men and women. While both societies are founded on a belief in biological essentialism – that women are less prone to violence than men, have closer alliances with nature, can form more open, fluid relationships – the men who have had to live within these women-run societies begin, gradually, to change. Thus, as Andros in *The Wanderground* argues, “We begin, just barely begin, to live without violence, to learn what you started learning long ago” (180). Thus the extra-sensory perception within the novel – the ability of humans to change and adapt – becomes a metaphor for the ability of both men and women to transform their relationships with one another.

Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1992) echoes and adds its own distinctive voice to many of these arguments. Griffiths is a British writer who lives in the U.S., and is the author of a number of lesbian science fiction novels, including *Slow River* (1995) and *Stay* (2002). Also published in the 1990s, *Ammonite* reflects interests in lesbian feminist theories. It was Griffith's first novel and the theme of viral infection was conjured by her own experiences of illness – before she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis she was misdiagnosed with myalgic encephalomyelitis and then immune dysfunction syndrome, both conditions believed to be caused by a retrovirus. Researching viruses she discovered that: 'Women, I learned, were nine times more likely to contract lupus than men. And oh, I thought, oh: a sex-linked predisposition to deadly infection' ('Writing from the body'). Set in a future where different planets have been discovered, and colonised by Earth, the novel's theme revolves around individuals having to adapt and change to a new environment. The central character, Marghe, is sent to the planet GP, or Jeep, by Company, the government (or business) that runs Earth. It has been discovered on previous visits that Jeep is inhabited not only by natives - all women - but also by a virus that kills any men who set foot on the planet, and will kill a small percentage (23%) of women as well. Yet the native women are still procreating, and Marghe is sent to test a vaccine against the virus, and also to see how the women are reproducing without the male sex.

The novel is a relatively fast-plotted adventure story, that follows the movements of Marghe as she travels across Jeep, describing her encounters with the Mirrors; kidnapping by the Echraidhe tribe and eventual escape; her near death in a blizzard, and rescue by the women of Ollfoss. The story then

turns to Marghe's self development and growing self acceptance as she finds herself, falls in love, and as a typical heroine, saves the day. The utopianism of the novel, however, unfolds a little more gradually. Jeep initially appears to be a hostile, unforgiving land of disease and danger. If Marghe wishes to return to earth after visiting Jeep she must undergo extensive decontamination procedures that include: 'isolation; the removal of all subject's blood, marrow, lymph and intestinal flora and fauna and its replacement with normal healthy tissues' (*Ammonite* 2). However, it is also feared that even these measures will not be enough, and that no one who visits Jeep will be ever be allowed back on earth, "If you leave the airlock, if you take the vaccine, you'll never go home. Not ever" (4-5). Jeep therefore represents an alien other; it is not home, or familiar, or desirable, and it certainly doesn't appear, initially to be utopian. However, the novel goes on to explore the possibility of finding utopia within dystopia. Company security – called Mirrors – who have lived on Jeep for a number of years, live closeted up behind a large perimeter fence, with their weapons and fears, not daring, or wanting, to venture out to make alliances with the native women. Yet Marghe's first look at Jeep offers a hint of its possibilities, 'Jeep was encased in huge spiral banks of water vapor. The whole world glowed like milk and mother-of-pearl, like a lustrous shell set in a midnight ocean' (23). It is this world that Marghe must learn to live in, and love, and to which she must adapt her body and her mind.

Telepathic activity in the novel operates through the virus, which physically changes the women so that they experience heightened sensory awareness, a strengthened immune system, and have the ability to access a shared consciousness, through which they can reproduce

parthenogenetically through 'deepsearch' (borrowed from *The Warground*) and 'patterning'.⁷ The virus is central to the utopianism of the text, and also to the telepathy as it operates in the novel. Like the Malady in *In the Mother's Land*, the virus causes a high fever, headaches, weakness, hallucinations, coughing and can be fatal. The virus invades every part of the body, taking it over, 'The virus lived in it [her body] now, in every pore, every cell, every blood vessel and organ. It slid, cold and in control, through her brain. If she recovered, she would never be sure what dreams and memories were her own, and which were alien. She belonged to Jeep' (232). Taking in the virus, therefore, exposes Marghe to a physical, biological transformation that she has no choice but to accept. In accepting it, however, she opens herself up to new possibilities, commenting 'I feel different [. . .] I feel... like I could live for a year on sunshine and fresh air, like I might never get sick again' (235). Marghe experiences heightened sensitivities to sound, smell and taste, and feels herself more attuned to those around her and the natural world. The virus, therefore, provides her with an altered state of consciousness, which she must live in, and with, for the rest of her life.

The women native to Jeep view the changes that Marghe undergoes to be 'normal' because they all experience the virus as babies. Thus their ability to deepsearch and pattern is a part of what it is to be human there. While the virus is alien to Marghe, it is a part of their world and culture, and it becomes a part of Marghe too, as Jeep becomes her world and her culture. Thus as Marghe adapts to her environment, she is changed by it as it changes her, as Thenike tells her, 'Your body is changing,

⁷ Greg Bear's *Darwin's Radio* also explores the possibilities of a retrovirus in an evolutionary leap.

just as it does every time you get sick and another little piece of something else comes to live inside you [. . .] Is this unclean? No. It's life. All life connects. Sometimes, one kind of life is stronger than another' (232). Thus the virus is represented as another form of agent within the body, becoming a part of the lived body. While Marghe initially feels unclean, as though something is taking her over, she later feels cleansed by the virus. Thus there has been an important shift away from "purist" to impure or hybrid notions of female selfhood, akin to Haraway's move from goddess to cyborg. Deepsearching is linked with the virus, because those who have survived it can undergo deepsearch on their own, which involves a meditative journey into the individual's past, and one's ancestors, or it can be experienced with another person, a 'soestre', a lover one has chosen to have children with. It is within her first deepsearch that Marghe sees the ammonite shell, which is a motif that runs through the book. Deepsearch is a dreamlike trance-state that 'allows the adolescent to somehow access the memories of her ancestors. The trancing is so deep that psychosis may occur' (125). A deep meditative state, likened to a 'not-dream' (239) – because a conscious process - deepsearch can be used to explore the self and overcome past hurts. After waking from her 'not-dream' Marghe feels as though 'she had been inside herself in a way she had never thought possible; listening to her body as a whole, a magnificent, healthy whole. And she had done more: reliving memories of her childhood she had forgotten, experiencing again days she had never been wholly aware of' (240). Thus like the dream, this 'not-dream' allows the individual access to memories long-forgotten, and to discover knowledge not yet known: 'She had sent a question down all the avenues that opened before her: what is my name? And echoing back had come: Marghe [. . .] Marghe, and more' (240). She also sees her mother, who is dead, and speaks to her

and gives her an ammonite, which, she explains, is named after the god of Thebes, Amun, which means complete one. Marghe realises that this is now to be her name, Marghe Amun, because she is now complete. Clearly, Marghe is represented as seeking a pre-Oedipal 'wholeness', a return, perhaps, to the mother, to the infant self, where every desire was realised. Such fulfilment of desire is problematic in feminist and postmodern terms because 'wholeness' may be associated with the achievement of femininity, and connected with *essentialist views of nature and womanliness*. Postmodern feminism, in contrast, emphasises splits and ruptures, the proliferation of identities and subjectivities, so that 'woman' can take on a range of meanings that are provisional. Marghe's search for a 'true' name seeks to fix her identity and her self. While the novel usefully draws on Jungian theory in its understanding of the implications of dreaming to the individual's psyche, it also encounters problems within Jungian theory of the idealisation of masculinity and femininity, which are dealt with uncritically.

If deepsearch is experienced together with a 'soestre' - a lover - the ovas can divide, and reproduction can take place. The two lovers enter into a powerful trance state together, in which they are able to jointly access past memories, linked telepathically in 'deepbond'. Soestres are able to share dreams as well as memories because of this ability to trance together, and they develop a deep psychological, emotional and sexual bond. Thus telepathy is linked to sexual reproduction in the novel, in a way that could be regarded as essentialist. As in *The Wandering*, telepathy is gendered feminine, and its connections to female biology ensure that males are necessarily excluded. Telepathy is therefore

grounded in female biology. Viajeras – professional storytellers and historians – like Thenike, also use trances to draw in listeners into their stories, so that they can experience for themselves first-hand personal and social histories. Viajeras can also heal, have highly developed memories and negotiate disputes. When Marghe becomes a viajera, she embeds herself further in the history of her new world.

Telepathy, or deepsearch is also used to develop empathetic relations between other living beings as it does in *The Wanderground*. During her first guided meditation with a viajera, Marghe experiences firsthand what it is to be an animal - a goth – and realises that the goth, through the virus, is one of her ancestors, one of her 'people'. Thus Marghe is horrified when Leifin traps and kills a goth, because although Leifin also heard the story she didn't feel the connection that Marghe did, because she is 'twisted inside', lacking compassion and empathy (299). This lack, however, is an exception, rather than the norm. Violence continues to be a problem here – there are bloody conflicts between the tribes that end in death.

The deadly sickness that wipes out the male sex has been used as a tool within separatist feminist utopian literature to conveniently rid the world of men, but is also used as a metaphor for physical and psychological transformation. Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975) satirises the use of the plague metaphor as a convenient cop-out for separatist writers, allowing them to side-step the issue of violence. It is believed by Janet that the reason Whileaway is all-female is because of a plague that killed off men; however, Jael redresses this myth: 'Whileaway's plague is a big lie. Your ancestors lied

about it. It's I who gave you your 'plague,' my dear, about which you can now pietise and moralise to your heart's content; I, I, I, I am the plague, Janet Evason. I and the war I fought built your world for you, I and those lie me, we gave you a thousand years of peace and love and the Whileawayan flowers nourish themselves on the bones of the men we have slain' (211). Similarly *In the Mother's Land* uses a virus to explore the physical and psychological changes that are possible when a virus enters the body.

Patriarchy is absent on Jeep, although the presence of the Company Mirrors represents both the force and weakness of patriarchal power. This woman-only society has never known the male, and thus the female is the norm. Lesbian sexuality is thus also the norm, but because it is normal, the word is not ever mentioned in the text because there is no heterosexuality to compare it to. Monique Wittig questions the concept of 'woman' completely, as only existing in and through culture, 'The category of sex does not exist a priori, before all society. And as a category of dominance it cannot be a product of natural dominance but of the social dominance of women by men for there is nothing but social dominance' (5). Wittig's claim that 'lesbians are not women' is based on the belief that lesbians stand outside of the binary opposition between woman and man, and are therefore beyond the categories of sex. Griffith explores and illustrates these ideas within *Ammonite*, through her creation of a world of humans who happen to be female, where, therefore, no one is "woman", and consequently, no one is "lesbian." The women in the novel are, first and foremost, human, and women second, thus the categories of woman and lesbian become meaningless. However, Wittig's claim that lesbians are not women, appears to reify the lesbian as somehow existing in a utopian space "outside" discourse, so that

Wittig's lesbian becomes an exclusionary category that depends on heterosexuality for its existence. As Anna Marie Jagose emphasises, the lesbian is always constructed through discourse, and therefore cannot be essentially exterior to it. Rather, the term lesbian is finally empty of meaning, merely taking on definitions through culture. Griffith avoids loading the term lesbian with different meanings; in her society, women are simply humans dealing with day to day problems and their sexuality is not an issue.

The telepathic links between soestres facilitate improved relationships within tribal communities, but also between tribes. 'Trata' involves trade, but once set in place, an alliance is formed between communities, creating new connections and obligations. Thus trade is not divorced from responsibility. The telepathic connections relate to wider signals of communication between people, which through improved sensitivities could be further developed. As Marghe argues, 'we all resonate on a particular, unique frequency, but because all humans radiate within a narrow wave band we all receive and transmit those signals. All the time. We're in constant communication with each other and with the outside world' (368). Thus Griffith attempts to locate telepathy within the realm of science.

However, the Echraidhe are an example of a tribe that refuses to change, repudiating trade ('trata') with other communities, and not forging connections and relationships with other tribes. The result is a dying community, with a restricted diet, limited production and little future. Locked in feuds with another tribe, Aoife fears breaking with tradition, "We are at feud," she said finally, "done is

done.” “Change it.” “It has not been done before.” (136). While Marghe argues that “Situations change. Sometimes people have to do new things, things that have never been done before”, Aoife refuses to change the Echraidhe way (137). Power struggles between and within the tribes do exist; like Maerlande, the Echraidhe is strictly hierarchised, with the Levarch at the head. The women of Ollfoss are structured in a more egalitarian manner, with people living in small families, with no one at the head of the community. The Briogannon again offer an alternative form of community. Thus Griffith avoids essentialising women as non-violent, pacifist vegetarians, rather the women of Jeep are diverse, as Griffith comments in her afterword, ‘Women are not inherently passive or dominant, maternal or vicious. We are all different. We are all people. A women-only world, it seems to me, would shine with the entire spectrum of human behaviour: there would be capitalists and collectivists, hermits and clan members, sailors and cooks, idealists and tyrants’ (376). Thus Griffith questions not only what it is to be woman, but also what it is to be human, as Marghe observes, ‘These people were utterly human. But what was human? Human was not just family dinners, human was also the Inquisitions of Philip, the extermination of the Mayans, the terrible Reconstruction of the Community. Human meant cruelty as well as love, human was protecting one’s own at the expense of others. Human also meant having the capacity to change’ (107).

Griffith’s novel offers a critical utopian perspective that echoes that of many of the other novels in this thesis – Jeep is neither perfect nor stable, rather it presents difficult challenges and harsh realities. But it does offer a potential for changed human relations that are grounded in psychic, social

and biological transformation. The ability to connect telepathically and reproduce through this telepathic connection, enables the women of Jeep to survive without men, and therefore offers Griffith the opportunity to critique and explore gendered relations. Whilst this device enables many of the problems within patriarchal society to be eliminated – such as sexual inequality, male to female sexual violence, marriage and the nuclear family – Griffith concludes that because women are human, a woman-only world will still contain human problems, and therefore that struggle, conflict, violence and squabbles will still exist. Women are not inherently pacifist, or maternal or allied with nature in this novel, unlike those women in *The Wanderground* or *Mundane's World*. Thus Griffith divorces violence from maleness. Rather the female characters represent a range of views and differences. Thus Griffith does engage partially with feminist postmodern views of subjectivity and identity, because she represents women as more than 'woman', exceeding patriarchal definitions of 'woman' as the other to man, as the composite of his sexual needs and desires. Yet at the same time, the text depicts Marghe achieving a 'completeness' or 'oneness' with herself, and with her lover, Thenike. Thus a romantic ideology prevails in the text, that one is incomplete without another, and that desire can be fulfilled, and therefore completeness can be attained. Clearly these are not postmodern or feminist ideas – Marghe seeks to fix her identity as a viajera, to gain a place within her new family that is safe and stable. While she has opened herself up to change, altering her biological and psychic make-up and her career, she then seeks to slow change down.

Telepathy operates in these novels therefore, as do all the altered states discussed in this thesis, as a metaphor for utopian transformation. These texts offer a different perspective on old knotty problems, a 'what if?' that is the *sine qua non* within utopian texts. Telepathy works in a similar way to madness, spirituality and dreaming, as an extended metaphor for change, but also opens up the possibilities for human psychic development.⁸ Telepathy therefore operates within feminist utopian fiction as a means of exploring the possibilities of transformed relationships between women, and – sometimes – between women and men. The different representations of telepathy in these texts reflect various kinds of feminism. In earlier novels like *The Wandering* that espouse a cultural – and some might say essentialist – feminism, telepathy is linked closely with the female biological body. Women are shown to be telepathic because of their innate abilities to connect with one another, engendered by maternal feelings. In later novels such as *In the Mother's Land*, telepathic activity reflects postmodern concerns with notions of the boundaries between the self and other and of the possibilities of enhanced and equal male-female relationships. *Ammonite* also published in the 90s, explores and illustrates recent feminist theories of the 'lesbian' linking telepathic activity with lesbian means of reproduction and sexuality. Thus, telepathy continues to eschew ideological neutrality. In the late nineteenth century its representation was riven with class, race and gender prejudices, and in the late twentieth century, telepathy has continued to be used within literature as a political tool. As an altered state of consciousness, telepathy can work to reinforce gender prejudices, but can also be used to undermine them.

⁸ See Cornell *At the Heart of Freedom*.

Conclusion

The altered state of utopia

I have argued in this thesis that altered states of consciousness represent a significant, but previously neglected, strand of thought within contemporary feminist utopian fiction. Operating within the four spheres of madness, dreaming, spirituality and telepathy, these altered states have been utilised by feminist utopian authors as a metaphor to emphasise the different modes of thought necessary to leap into the utopian moment, to achieve the paradigm shift of consciousness necessary for radical transformative thought and action. Within the earlier period that this thesis discusses, of the 1970s and 80s, these novels tended to focus on madness and dreaming as a means of accessing and sustaining utopian visions, reflecting some of the idealism of the political movements of that era. Madness was re-interpreted as “problems of living”, as a liberatory moment that challenged the status quo, and was grasped by feminist writers as a means of moving into a utopian future. At the same time, the idea that the very force of one’s personal dreams could shatter and break open the stultifying present was also a product of 60s and 70s politics. If one could “turn on, tune in and drop out” as a means of changing the world, then why couldn’t one dream of a better future, and make it happen? Feminist utopian writers injected into these hopes and dreams a gendered critique, placing the patriarchal concept of “woman” at the crux of many social ills. Madness was presented as a gendered problem; if sanity was a social construct, it was also a gendered social construct that affected women

and men in significantly different ways. In feminist utopian societies, madness was reconceived in new ways, as liberating for women and men, as a method of emotional and psychological release that had huge benefits for the individual and the community. Dreaming was presented as not only a private, but also a social project, a means of accessing shared social visions, and channelling one's hopes and desires. I have identified a definite shift within the literature, during the 1980s, away from madness and dreaming, towards alternative altered states, namely spirituality and telepathy. The later novels of this period appear to distance themselves from utopian visions of madness and dreaming, instead, moving towards a somewhat more nuanced, multi-layered development of spirituality and telepathy as a means of accessing and sustaining utopian visions. This shift reflects trends within and beyond feminist theory in postmodernism, new age theory, spirituality and science fiction. At the same time, an even more fragmented, partial vision of utopia is presented in these later texts; utopia becomes a place that is even more distanced from the real world – only present in the spiritual world, or accessible in a different future in which humans can communicate in new ways. This distancing reflects both a political disenchantment with the transformatory possibilities of utopian dreaming, yet also a desire to *re-embed* utopianism with spiritual hope and exciting telepathic possibilities. Thus, spiritualities are developed as a means of placing women at the centre of theology, and to explore the impact on both the individual and the community when that spirituality is both materialist and feminist. Similarly, telepathy is cultivated as a means of analysing the stumbling blocks of communication, of exploring the limits of patriarchal language, and the role of language in community building.

There were many ways in which I could have approached this thesis differently. I could have plotted a close cultural history, moving from literary texts to key historic events and showing the impact of one on another. I could have explored the connections between women's utopian fiction and other genres of women's writing, picking up themes of madness, dreaming, spirituality and telepathy in women's autobiographical texts, the gothic and science fiction, to name but a few. In a similar vein, I could have identified utopian spaces within other genres of women's literature. Male-authored utopias are also largely missing from this thesis, and another avenue would have been to compare and contrast the development of altered states between women's and men's utopias. There are some authors who, because of the size of their oeuvre, deserve a thesis of their own – writers such as Doris Lessing, Ursula Le Guin and Marge Piercy – but this was not the place to do this work. While the literary analysis of feminist utopian texts that I chose to develop in my research offers just one way of studying this area, it seemed to offer a thorough and logical means of moving through a vast array of material. Plotting strategic developments within the feminist utopian genre and tying them in with key discourses of the contemporary period allowed me to make connections between fiction and politics that strengthened my argument that utopianism can have political efficacy.

Utopian fiction engages with and responds to political debates, and at the same time becomes a political machine in itself; at the end of this piece of research, I remain as committed now to the transformatory possibilities of utopian dreaming as I was at the beginning. But any sense of resolution here is merely a chimera. Utopian fiction will continue to grow and develop into the twenty-first century, as authors resist and challenge the limits of the genre set down by earlier writers. They will offer innovative generic shifts, new themes, and alternative visions, as we are presented with another altered state of utopia more strange and wonderful than we could possibly conceive right now. For the search for utopia continues.

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