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A queer look at feminist science fiction: Examing Sally Miller Gearhart's The Kanshou

Jennifer Jodelle Floerke

A QUEER LOOK AT FEMINIST SCIENCE FICTION:

EXAMINING SALLY MILLER GEARHART'S *THE KANSHOU*

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A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

Communication Studies

———————————

by

Jennifer Jodelle Floerke

December 2005

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Approved by:

Fred Jandt, Chair,   23 Nov 2005
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a queer theory analysis of the
feminist science fiction novel *The Kanshou* by Sally Miller
Gearhart. After exploring both male and female authored
science fiction in the literature review, two themes were
found to be dominant. These themes are identified as the
discussion of nature and technology and the intersection
of the two, and collective and individual based societies
or self placement in societies. These two themes have
commonly exemplified both gender dichotomies and sexual
orientation binaries in traditional science fiction. The
goal of this thesis is to answer the questions, can the
traditional themes that are prevalent in male authored
science fiction and feminist science fiction in
representing gender and sexual orientation dichotomies be
found in *The Kanshou*? And does Gearhart challenge these
dichotomies by destabilizing them?

To answer these questions first the themes were
identified in *The Kanshou,* answering the first research
question. Then to answer the second, queer theory is
employed as the methodology to analyze the two themes.
Two tenets of queer theory were established as the lens by
which to examine the text. These two tenets involve

contesting categories of gender identity and sexual
orientation. Examples of the themes were then illustrated
and then examined through this lens.

The analysis found determined that Gearhart's *The
Kanshou* does challenge traditional sociological norms of
binary gender identities and sexual orientation the
majority of the time. There are a few examples that
support traditional constructs but it is determined that
The Kanshou is a queer text that supports the queer claim
that gender identity and sexual orientation is more
elastic and complex than traditional dichotomies suggest.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my children, Cody and Kaytlin for their patience and understanding throughout all of the journeys required to complete this thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

WOMEN IN OUTER SPACE: CREATING DISCURSIVE SPACE

Introduction

Science fiction is a form of literature that can take

a reader into impossible worlds to experience alternative

realities sometimes only slightly resembling the existing

societal structure. For example, historically, science

fiction has been written and read by men. Scattered

contributions were made by female writers but usually

under male pseudonyms or as anonymous authors. In recent

years however, there has been a surge of female authors

that are using science fiction as an expressive voice

against patriarchal oppression, as a way to tell stories

about women, and as a way to suggest alternate ways of

being in the world. Put simply by bell hooks (2000),

"Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexual

exploitation, and oppression" (p. 1). She challenges

people to better understand sexism to therefore to better

understand feminism. She also challenges feminists by

pointing out that it is not only men that can be sexist,

"The movement shifted to an all-out effort to create

gender justice. But women could not band together to

further feminism without confronting our sexist thinking" (hooks, 2000, p. 3). As feminists began to discuss issues of sex, race, and class, their voices became more powerful through inclusion and reflection.

Feminist science fiction fulfills many functions for the feminist movement as defined by bell hooks. First, it provides an outlet for the author's ideas. Traditionally, there has been a lack of opportunity for women to share their herstory with the public and with each other through literature in the past due to hegemony. The foundations of published literature were established by those who were privileged, therefore leaving a void where many marginalized, often times female, narratives should have been recorded as well. The emergence and growing popularity of feminist science fiction however, provides an opportunity for women to express their ideas, views, and feelings about the world while connecting to the larger collective voice of women (Lefanu, 1994).

The second way that science fiction functions for feminist writers is that it makes contemporary feminist theory available by integrating it into an accessible, entertaining narrative form. Many feminist topics are trapped in an academic setting which is only available to

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a privileged community of people that have the opportunity to pursue higher education. Gloria Anzaldua (2000), a professor and feminist author, expresses that important issues of sexism and feminism are too often forgotten in academia and encourages college students to go with their heart and share their voices to the larger world outside of the ivory tower. Feminist science fiction is a step towards her charge.

Feminisms are also discussed in political settings where the issues are often minimized and absorb the negative connotations of politics in general. Like academia, the political realm is limited to those people who are allowed to voice opinions and make decisions that do not necessarily include a diverse representation of the general population. Science fiction brings accessibility and readability of feminist issues out of the realm of academia and politics and defines the issues through narratives and presents them to a wider audience.

The third way science fiction functions for the feminist movement is that it provides an alternative to mainstream heteronormative fiction. The inclusion of queer characters, like Jez and Dicken the lesbian heroines in *The Kanshou* for example, in feminist science fiction

provides an opportunity for queer readers to read about queer characters which the reader may identify more closely with than traditional characters. For example, the characters deviate from what is considered the "normal" traditional heroes and provide alternative heroes and heroines who do not just exist within the story, but who actively shape the societies within the stories, allowing readers who may fall outside of the social majority to possibly relate more closely to the characters in the novels.

Unfortunately, a misconception about feminism can cause feminist science fiction to appear to be exclusively for women. However, feminist science fiction is no more just for women than traditional science fiction is solely intended for a male audience. The basic formula of science fiction exists in both traditional and feminist science fiction. For example, traditional and feminist science fiction books contain many of the same themes. The description of dystopian or utopian societies, living in collective societies versus individualistic separation of societies, and the intersection between technology and nature are typically reoccurring themes in traditional and feminist science fiction.

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The *Kanshou*, by Sally Miller Gearhart is the text
that is used in this analysis because it encompasses many
of the general, overarching themes of feminist science
fiction and is therefore a good sample of feminist science
fiction. Another reason this text was used for this
analysis is that its author was a professor of
communication studies and was a well known activist which
provides a unique perspective. This thesis identifies and
critically examines these underlying themes that exist in
The Kanshou. Specifically, a queer theory perspective is
employed to provide an analysis of the text to compare the
findings with previous feminist critiques of similar
texts. The utility of queer theory as a method of
critical analysis is also examined. *The Kanshou* is used
specifically to answer the following research questions:
1. Can the traditional themes that are prevalent in
traditional science fiction and feminist science fiction
in representing gender identity dichotomies be found in
The Kanshou? 2. Can the traditional themes that are
prevalent in traditional science fiction and feminist
science fiction in representing sexual orientation
dichotomies be found in *The Kanshou*? 3. Does Gearhart

challenge these dichotomies by destabilizing them? 4. If so, how?

Theoretical Approach

Queer theory is becoming more approachable in critical theory because it is a pragmatic approach that can be utilized in the social sciences and humanities. It is used to deconstruct dichotomous ideologies of gender and sexuality that many other theories fail to do. It allows for definitions to mutate or even to be non-existent in an attempt to eliminate or reduce the foundation of the reciprocal polarization that is prevalent. This polarization gives the illusion of a linear balance or the assumption that a balance exists or should exist. Whittle (1996) states that queer theory, "attempts to undermine the very foundations of modernist thought - the binary codification of our apparent existence, the divergent sex and gender categories of a one-dimensional creed: sexual duality and its resultant heterosexist centrism" (p. 200).

Queer theorists also aim to incorporate race, ethnicity, social class, and personal experience into theory and discussion. Thus, queer theory aims to bring

voice and authority to those who have been silenced and oppressed by the institutions and ideologies of society. In this way, queer theory and feminist science fiction have similar goals. Queer theory scholars embrace discursive possibilities and through conceptual elasticity can maintain an expansive reach to self and others to understand ourselves as well as others (Gearheart, 2003, Forward). Theoreticians who use queer theory are critical of dualistic thinking and they use this construct to expose dichotomies that exist within hegemonic herteronormative society.

Though feminist theories can also aim for many of these goals, some feminist approaches have been used to examine feminist science fiction. Relatively little research of feminist science fiction has employed queer theory. It is important to expand the examination of science fiction literature to a queer scope because even though a lot of feminisms are inclusive of men, the term, outside of academia, is generally thought to be gender related and is interpreted by many to be for women only. The struggle to redefine feminisms has been ongoing for third wave feminists who are trying to destigmatize the term and women who identify with it. One way to accomplish

this is to use queer theory analysis to explicitly deconstruct distinctions of sexuality and gender.

This thesis moves beyond the categorizations of identity and sexual orientation that suppress individuals into groups according to class, race, sexuality, gender, and other self identifiers by using a queer lens that destabilizes those definitions and promotes a non-identity or even an anti-identity approach. Judith Butler (1993) sees identity as a double-edged sword she writes, "Identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as rallying points for a laboratory contention of that very oppression" (p.). Queer theory attempts to destabilize these categories while resisting redefining new ones.

This thesis intends to add to this growing body of research by showing queer theory's utility in the discipline of communication studies. While the term itself is not one that everyone is comfortable with using or identifying with, this notion is seemingly changing as exposure to what it means can be seen in the theory that is put into practice.

Sally Miller Gearhart

The Kanshou, published in 2002, is a feminist science fiction novel written by Sally Miller Gearhart. It is the first in the *Earthkeep* trilogy. *The Magister* was released the following year and *The Steward* is not yet finished. Combined, these three books complete the series. Gearhart has also written the acclaimed novel *Wanderground*.

Gearhart is also well known for her activist work with the late Harvey Milk in defeating the 1978 Briggs Initiative in California that aimed to keep homosexuals out of schools. She taught for twenty years at the California State University, San Francisco where she also founded the National Lesbian Rights Center (Foss, Foss, & Griffin, 1999).

Choosing *The Kanshou*

The Kanshou, was chosen for this analysis because it possesses many of the reoccurring aspects of the science fiction genre while simultaneously incorporating queer ideas. It is important to note that it is not the aim of this thesis to make a generalization about all feminist science fiction. However, the analysis of a single piece

of literature is important to pursue because it offers insight about the genre. The second book in Gearhart's series, *The Magister*, is not included in this analysis because, as with many trilogies, the middle book is often a pivotal point that presents new ideas that will not be addressed until the third book. After reading *The Magister*, it was decided that it would be difficult to include in this analysis due to the amount of new and unanswered questions that are presented and the additional characters introduced. It was anticipated that these new developments might create confusion without the accompaniment of the third book which at the time of this study is not released. *The Kanshou* can very easily stand alone for the purposes of this analysis. As the first of the series, it sets the tone and lays the foundation. Thus, it is appropriate to examine for the purposes of this thesis.

A Brief Summary of *The Kanshou*

The Kanshou is set in 2087 of the Common Era (C.E.) on planet Earth, renamed Little Blue. There have been many changes on the planet that make it somewhat unrecognizable. Sixty-six years before the story begins,

every non-human animal mysteriously dies. It is said that they chose to extinct themselves due to the violence that has been inflicted on them and their habitat. The impact of this loss is immeasurable. There are still some people that remember the time that animals shared the planet with them, but the majority of the population has grown up with no actual contact with animals. People's only experiences with animals are through doing mental exercises that can be learned and practiced in order to see images of animals, or by talking to others about them.

The human demographic changed dramatically as well after the planet experienced a massive increase in natural disasters, followed by widespread disease. The vaccinations that were aimed at getting these epidemics under control ended up having alarming side effects. By 2040 women's fertility plummeted and the Y chromosome became suppressed in men. This resulted in a massive change in the population with females out numbering males 12 to 1.

When men became the minority, woman began reshaping ideologies on a global level. These changes happened all over the planet simultaneously but did not shift smoothly or peacefully. They did, however, change rapidly. By

2087, Little Blue is hardly recognizable as once being Earth. Many things had changed including, family structures, reproduction, geographical boundaries, communities and societies, and the peacekeeping effort. The Kanshoubu is the name of the global, governmental body made up of women that are dedicated to being a guardian and watcher over the others that share the planet. These women are called Kanshou. They are respected and seen as being caring and thoughtful in their peacekeeping efforts.

Many of the tough problems that Earth dealt with have been successfully managed on Little Blue like famine, however one thing that had not changed was violence. A planet wide movement is beginning to grow that suggests the biological testing for an organic cause for human violence should be enacted. It is proposed that the habitants (prisoners) be the ones tested. There is a split view on whether or not this is going too far and violating the habitants' rights, who are primarily men. Through this scenario, Gearhart explored not only the defining charateristics that make something a violent act, but also closely examined the contradictions that arise with the ideas of using violence to alleviate violence. It is stated in The Labrys Manual, which is the guide by

which the Kanshou act:

> I both abhor violence and practice it daily, for I
> physically restrain the freedom of those who would
> harm others...I at least practice the Principle of
> Least Necessary Restraint in the violence that I do
> commit; and that if my Kanshoumates and I do our jobs
> well, we may ultimately bring about a nonviolent
> world, a world in which Kanshou will not be necessary
> (Gearhart, p. 53)

The primary characters are ex-lovers Jezabel "Jez" Stronglaces and Zella "Zude" Terremoto Adverd. These women share a powerful bond which is deeply explored in the story but they also happen to hold opposing views on the habitant testing issue. Through these and other characters, Gearhart presents many difficult scenarios that present issues of how humanity deals with the nature of violence, technology, power, and peaceful living, while not excluding the touching emotions that accompany these women through their hero journeys.

CHAPTER TWO

SCIENCE FICTION EVOLUTION

Introduction

As with the integration of women in many different male

dominated forums, problems can surface concerning the

marginalized viewpoint of a population. This chapter

includes the issues between male and female authored

science fiction and offers a brief description of the

history of science fiction and the themes that have

emerged throughout time. Then the chapter includes a

discussion of women's reaction to science fiction by

looking at how women have used science fiction as a

collective voice for many issues that have concerned women

throughout the years.

The History of Science Fiction

     Traditionally, science fiction has been a male

dominated form of fictional media. There are two general

backdrops for science fiction fantasy: utopian and

dystopian. Cranny-Francis (1990) states that the creation

of utopian societies focus on the ideal and that by

allowing for these possibilities, it allows for a clearer

understanding to contrast with the current state of the real world. It offers the audience the opportunity to fantasize about life without oppression and traditional power conflicts.

The other popular theme is that of dystopian stories. This is the opposite of utopian thinking in which the worlds described are often post apocalyptic wastelands that have been destroyed over time because the patriarchal influence has continued to be destructive to women and nature. The depiction is very bleak and shows the reader what could happen if the real world does not take drastic measures to change its current self-destructive course.

In science fiction writing, the authors either write about the world in a dystopian or utopian way. Some of the specific ways in which utopias are represented that are discussed in this chapter include, the conflict between nature and technology and hive or communist type cultures verse the individual hero. Current social ideologies function in science fiction to help situate these themes into what the reader can relate to in his or her own life and are often the driving force behind creating utopias or dystopias. Issues of colonialism, imperialism, socialism, communism, and liberation can be identified within the

science fiction novels that were written in those climates and themes were used to develop a story in which the characters, namely the heroes, can conquer the woes of society and, in turn, embrace the ideologies that are sought. Due to the fact that society has been predominantly ruled by men, coupled with the fact that men have also dominated the writing of science fiction, most of these novels depicted men as the heroes and saviors of the planet and even the entire galaxy. A few early books that depict this scenario include Ray Bradbury's *The Puppet Master*, Arthur C. Clark's *City of the Stars*, and Frank Herbert's *Dune*.

Men in Science Fiction

The masculine hero journey that creates adventure narratives involving technology throughout science fiction resembles the traditions of western "cowboy" fiction. Eisenstein (1976) suggests that this theme along with other themes discussed can be explained best by looking at the way H. G. Wells used the process of evolution in his writings which led to an interesting view of "man" (used both literally and collectively). In his book, *The Time Machine*, this evolution is described in a way that builds

worlds, species, and communities around the evolving

characters throughout their lives. Feminist authors are

also trying to build definitions of female identity both

biologically as well as through gender identity and

possible reconstruction in modern societies.

Historical and fictional texts alike have omitted or

misrepresented the experiences of the minority for so long

that it has become expected that the majority can define

and control reality for them and unfortunately, many

readers will believe their falsities. H. G. Wells (1981),

one of the most famous science fiction/fantasy writers of

his time illustrates this point when writing:

> It is impossible to find any one with the
> capacity for writing sanely about women at
> the present day. If a man writes about
> women, nine times out of ten he ends up
> being sentimental, and in the tenth case he
> becomes hysterical. If a woman writes
> about women, in nine cases out of ten it is
> because, being unhappy with her own male-
> folk, she sees only the intolerable side of
> existing sexual relationships: thus her
> work is validated by an unnatural and
> distorted view not only of man but of
> woman's absolute need of man, if she is to
> enjoy her life to the full possibilities.
> The tenth woman, like the tenth man, grows
> hysterical because she has had a healthy
> everyday relationship with a man.
> (paragraph 2)

Wells continues throughout his work to freely state his view of women and women writers and simultaneously assume he understands them by speaking for women with authority. This assumption is allowed to remain unless women as well as all marginalized groups of people write or otherwise express their experiences. Many women writers are doing just that through science fiction, creating worlds where the focus is not on how they co-exist with man but how women can in fact exist without them.

It is important to look at the characters and their roles within a story in order to explore issues of gender identity and sexual orientation because the characters are what develop the themes that are to be examined. As with many fictional stories, hero(es) are often the main character/s so the reader can identify with and cheer on that person/persons throughout the story and share in their struggles and the accomplishments. The absence of women and other minorities throughout history in all forms of media has allowed for a stereotyped view of what constitutes a hero. Fernback (2000) discusses issues of gender roles through her examination of hero myths. She parallels the hero journey present in westerns with those

that occur in science fiction. She states that science fiction fantasies are essentially "cowboy" movies with technology incorporated to aid in the masculinity of the characters and as a way for men to dominate nature and conquest new frontiers. Further, Ellis (1990) adds that it is common in science fiction to see a battle between ecology and technology. Technology is generally masculine and nature and simplicity is a representation of the feminine.

Even though all science fiction has the freedom to create worlds based on the inhabitant's needs, most popular novels are still primarily written from the majority voice. Traditionally, science fiction novels have been written by men and subsequently the main characters are usually men. Other than the binary groups of "good guys" versus "bad guys" there are essentially only two other ways to distinguish the characters; the men and the others. Characters such as aliens, monsters, animals, women, and other minority groups presented, are all sub-characters that collectively make up the minority or Other.

Garnett's (1990) examination of the popular fiction novels *Dracula* and *The Beetle* explores issues of

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imperialism, gender and genre, and sexual transgressions in relation to the Other that can be applied to the critical examination of any science fiction/fantasy text. Edward Said's theories in *Orientalism* were used to describe and define the treatment of the characters in the novels in which Others included the characters that are aliens/monsters and women. While these books Garnett investigated do not have aliens in the way that science fiction narratives do, they still have monsters and minorities that are lumped into that category and receive the same treatment and representation as extraterrestrials in science fiction. The findings showed these characters to be essentially voiceless and marginalized.

Typically, science fiction/fantasy novels tend to be about a world wide or galactic battle between good and evil. Emerging and advanced technology is either the solution or the problem in these scenarios. Likewise, nature is either seen as an archaic way of life to be avoided or a utopia to be achieved. The organic and the technological become representations of the battle that insures in these stories. In many cases, food is technologically constructed instead of organically grown, characters are often spending the majority of their time

in space where the only view is of computer panels or port holes that reveal the empty vastness of outer space instead of sky, vegetation, and wildlife. When such images of nature are represented, it is often depicted as primitive and dangerous, as well as feminine -- something to be adored, consumed, and conquered.

Male authored, traditional science fiction also utilizes the theme of individuality verses a collective community. The hero is generally someone who accepts little help from others, preferring to work alone to establish himself as an individual. This independent hero, most likely a man, is wise and untrusting and sees it as his responsibility to save the world from the impeding doom of a collective community. For example, in Frank Herbert's novel, *Dune*, the hero is the "chosen one" sent to deliver a doomed planet from its oppressive collective. Likewise, in Arthur A Clark's book, *City of the Stars*, the hero saves the world from the aliens that plan to take over the Earth.

This theme emerged and stayed popular during the era of communism and the cold war. Communism was represented as many things such as the pods that would steal one's identity in the science fiction film, *Invasion of the Body*

Snatchers, or Amazon women from far off primitive planets, or any collective group that was alien in its behaviors and uniform. Heikamp (1996) refers to these cultures as "hive cultures". Hive cultures are generally communities lead by a matriarch (queen bee is a common analogy) and have female followers. After researching both male and female written science fiction Heikamp states, "The negative views of hive cultures reflect fears associated with the dangers of the burgeoning atomic age and the perceived threat of communism. In both cases, the male-dominated military force successfully defeats the alien hive culture" (paragraph 6).

The themes developed in science fiction were not necessarily directed against women or minorities maliciously. The stories were mere reflections of society or of what the author wanted to change about society for better or worse. However, many women and minority groups were omitted or misrepresented in these stories making it necessary for them to address this issue by writing their own depictions of the world and in turn speaking their voice that has not been printed in previous books.

Feminist Reactions

Possibly the first female science fiction writer who utilized her voice to create utopias for her readers authored *The Blazing World* in the seventeenth century. It has not been widely read and the author's name is uncertain however, Khanna (1994) notes that it is a landmark novel that explores the utopian values and themes that are present in many modern feminist science fiction novels and other media forms. It suggests a more flexible identity which transcends into freedom from gender roles.

As early as the 1920s in the emerging pulps of that time, women have been using the science fiction platform to discuss their domestic space (or place rather). Donawerth (1994) reveals that science fiction encyclopedias and histories omit female writers from their pages even though many women contributed to the genre that appeared in them. This parallels the exclusion of women's voices in social situations, politics, government and many other male dominated spheres in the 20th century.

In 1971, Joanna Russ published a statement in a science fiction magazine that said she was entitling her essay on women in science fiction, *The Image of Women in Science Fiction* rather than *Women in Science Fiction*

because she said that if she chose the latter there would be very little to say (Lafanu, 1989). After this statement there were many female writers that accepted the challenge of writing more about family, sex, and gender roles in science fiction. Pamela Sargent published three anthologies that she did not consider to be feminist but include many stories by women that made big strides in the genre in the 1970 including authors like, James Tiptree Jr, Marge Piercy, Ursula K. Le Guin, and Pamala Zoline, just to name a few (Sargent, 1979).

Even though women writers shared the romanticization of science with men, they often depicted technology or science as an advancement to free women by the transformation of domestic spaces. This is a reflection of the social issues that women face regarding gender roles. Women authors also touch topics ranging from androgynous characters to abolishing childbirth. Rather than using technology as a way to control nature or other human beings for colonization or other militaristic purposes, women writers primarily aimed to use science fiction as a social voice.

The theme of technology was carried over from traditional science fiction writings because it represents

a myriad of possibilities that the future hold --

including hope and change. When discussing the

relationship traditional science fiction has with

technology Freedman (2003) writes,

> Science fiction must scorn the concept of regression
> to the premodern, even while encountering substantial
> difficulty with the kinds of progression that
> postmodernity has in fact entailed. In other words,
> is it the generic nature of science fiction to
> confront the future, not matter how unpromising a
> critical and utopian activity that may seem to be"
> (p. 200)

Likewise, Worlmark (1999) describes the approach female

science fiction writers take toward technology,

"Technology and the urban environment are associated with

the repressive structures of patriarchy in a way that

comes perilously close to re-enactment of the duality of

nature and culture" (p. 231).

In feminist science fiction Joan Gordon (1991)

states, "Not only are feminist science fiction utopias

dominated by images of a pastoral, organic world, but that

most feminist SF utopias incorporates a longing to go

forward into the idealized past of the earth's earlier

matriarchal nature religions" (p. 199). For example,

Rosenthal (1994) takes a deeper look at Gaskell's *Cranford*

and compares its ideals of utopias to those of the Amazon

utopias in which she discovers that the communities are created by marginalized groups accepting their place in the eyes of the dominant ruling society but at the same time rejecting them by retreating to an alternate community that is built on their own ideals. The "better" world would allow women to live in a pastoral reality that they can create based on their values. However, there are many women writing about the absence of men in order to eliminate the marginalization of women and the re-visitation of nature over technology planet wide. Some examples of this are Sally Miller Gearhart's *Wanderground*, and Suzy McKee Charnas's, *Walk to the End of the World*.

During the 1970s when women were becoming more involved in writing science fiction and were seemingly dedicated to answering Russ's call to explore ideologies of family, sexuality, and gender. Lefanu (1991) states, "Women have brought politics into the genre. They have brought women into the genre. They have broadened it scope and have taken its possibilities seriously" (p. 180). One of the ways that women did this was by providing alternate means of reproduction and/or childbirth. Since birth control was a political issue during the 1960s and 1970s this seemed like a natural response. Barr (1987)

describes, "In texts where women's biology literally becomes woman's destiny, basic reproductive freedoms become feminist utopian dreams" (p. 129). Thus, women are using science fiction to create new worlds and suggest new possibilities for women while simultaneously protesting the current political constraints against them.

The challenges made against the social norms regarding gender roles emerged in part, from women's maternal conception of the family. This conception or picture of the family, began to be voiced more loudly by Margret Sanger and the first wave feminists in the early 1900s who fought for birth control rights of women (Kennedy, 1970). Later, feminists during the civil rights movement rekindled the efforts and began to challenge the conception by discussing child-rearing as unpaid labor in the patriarchal system (Pfaelzer, 1994). The utopias created in feminist science fiction demystify motherhood and reevaluate sentimental fiction. It offers a vision of ideal space for women that may or may not incorporate the realities of maternity and domestic labor. This translates into the creation of alternate ways to approach domestic chores as well as childbirth compared to male dominated science fiction.

Along with the ideas of alternate reproduction,
feminist science fiction has been a forum for freedom from
traditional sex roles in terms of sexuality. Lefanu
(1989) writes, "Feminist SF challenges the notion of a
natural heterosexuality, a notion common to SF written by
men, despite the strange absence of female characters" (p.
71). The science fiction/fantasy forum is wide open to
introducing relationships that occur heterosexually,
homosexually, between different species of
aliens/humanoids or any combination of those, as well as
them occurring monogamously or otherwise. The ideologies
of the societies and worlds can be invented to suit the
needs of the inhabitants freeing them of sexual oppression
unlike here on Earth at this time. In Lefanu's (1994)
analysis of the *Solution Tree* by Naomi Mitchison, she
found that homosexuality in the story is more of the norm
and heterosexuality is depicted as being "deviant" (p.
154). There are also references to heterosexuality being
linked to aggression. Barr (1990) found that "Flasher"
novels can be described as being sex-role-reversal tales;
they depict men as the dependent gender and being
ignorant. In some books, she states, men do the

mothering, have breasts, or are completely obsolete in the child creating and rearing process.

The second theme that diverges from traditional science fiction is the individual verses collective theme. In traditional science fiction the hero stands out as an individual. He is usually an average person who through the story, manages to achieve near impossible heroics. *Star Wars'* Luke Skywalker is an example of the typical science fiction hero. He grew up as a farm boy and ends up saving the universe from the massive armies of the faceless collective - the storm troopers.

In feminist science fiction, the writers' aim is typically more focused on the integration of marginalized characters as heroes. Developing a new model for a hero is a challenging task however, when attempting to eliminate assumptions of only two gender identities which may only perpetuate stereotypical gender roles. Merrick (1999) transcribes the comments of Kelley Eskridge as she describes the difficulty in trying to write characters that do not necessarily aim to defy the societal gender or

sex roles but rather make them irrelevant:

> By refusing to create a gender context for Mars
> (a humanoid character in her novel), and by
> doing my best to remove any cues in the story
> that support assumptions about Mar's gender, I
> was trying to create a character whose
> experience any reader might be able to access.
> It's too easy for people who subscribe to
> expected gender norms to then use gender as a
> way of denying that certain experience is
> possible to them. (p. 181)

Feminist science fiction attempts to free these groups that have not only been silenced as they exist in science fiction but also as they exist as readers that participate in science fiction. Pearson (1999) supports this effort to address marginalized voices, specifically she comments on the representation on the queer community, "lesbians, and gay men have become less alien in the world of science fiction in the last little while; we have, indeed, experienced a minor boom in the publishing of stories of "alternative sexuality" (last paragraph). She does, however, explain that even though there are more gay and lesbian characters in science fiction they are still lumped into the alien or minority category in mainstream texts.

The characters that are represented are not only different than traditional characters because they are

part of a marginalized population, but also because they
tend to be part of a collective group or have that as a
goal rather than taking on the task of the individual hero
role. Self glory and gratification is less seen in
feminist science fiction than in male science fiction.
Family and community are a larger part of society and are
seen as strong groups that are called upon for the journey
at hand rather than being depicted as the enemy.
Basically, the hives are a desired way of life in feminist
science fiction rather than the enemy or the
representation of threat to the individual.

Whether in a hive culture or in one of another name,
women have often times depicted themselves as being self
sufficient and in this way they are creating exclusivity
from men. This binary approach often creates ways to omit
the necessity of males altogether, including biologically.
Barr (1992) discusses the difference between male and
female heroes, sexuality, and reproduction in science
fiction. She states that in traditional male science
fiction women are often portrayed as sexual fantasy
objects for men, they are hooked up to some sort of birth
machine, or they are in a hive culture that is seen as
being a danger or a threat to the balance of society (the

patriarchy). In order for women to escape these roles

they have to create a way to not need men to reproduce or

to sustain life.

Barr (1993) explains the new depiction of the hero

communities when she quotes Joanna Russ as saying, "They

are classless, without government, ecologically minded,

with a strong feeling of the natural world, quasi-tribal

in feeling and quasi-family in structure, the societies of

these [feminist utopias] stories are sexually

permissive...to separate sexuality from questions of

ownership, reproduction, and social structures" (p. 41).

Depicting communities in the texts in which women can live

together in peace with nature and without violence or

oppression is a way in which the utopia can provide relief

from the pressures of domestication.

Another element that is present in a lot of feminist

literature is the incorporation of the female author's

voice. Lucie Armitt (1991) states, "Language is of

paramount importance with regard to how we structure

reality. There is a need for women to challenge the

patriarchal bases of language if we are also to challenge

the patriarchal bases of society" (p. 123). This

participation of incorporating personal experience creates

stories that offer an opportunity for female readers to identify with the main female characters and also the author who wrote it in a way that adds to authenticity and credibility even when reading a fictional tale. It can be a powerful tool in creating believable scenarios of peace and freedom from oppression that many marginalized readers may have difficulty imagining otherwise. Kessler (1994) found that while examining Charlotte Perkins Gilman's, *Pragmatopian Stories*, Gilman's personal biography was used as a reason for her need to create a utopia outside of the larger more social awareness and action reasons. She also wrote *The Yellow Wallpaper* which was a dystopian story. Kessler claims that the integration of the personal into her writing made the narratives much more powerful and reliable. For feminist writers including those of feminist science fiction, it is important to look inward at individuality and personal identity and leave room for difference in order to not further marginalize the Other.

Discussion

Science fiction has a rich history in popular culture and has progressed as media has expanded by crossing into many forms of media including magazines, books,

television, and film. Darko Suvin (1979) defines it as, "A literary genre whose necessity and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (p. 7). Relying on the blending of myth and fantasy with realities existing in the real world, themes have emerged that provide a template by which the stories are created.

The authors of many forms of fiction aim to tell a new story that are often relevant to the current social or political climate while in the context of the formula in which audiences are familiar. For example, a reader interested in a mystery novel can expect that someone will commit a crime and that there will be several suspects along with many twists to the plot. Another example of fictional formula is with romance novels. In this type of fiction there is likely to be a hero that saves a helpless or distressed woman. The setting will be in an exotic land during a romanticized time period where the characters face much turmoil before living happily ever after.

The same is true of science fiction. The convention usually consists of a situation that threatens the human race. There are representations of good and evil that are in critical conflict. The reader can also expect that there will be a representation of life on Earth that is different than what is currently in existence. This forum, therefore, has provided feminist writers the ability to express their ideals by creating realities through narrative. It is a creative way of theorizing what could have been or what should be while describing what that might look like and how characters might interact there in detailed scenarios to audiences. The availability of feminist science fiction is increasing as more and more people are becoming aware of the feminine influence on the male dominated forum of science fiction/fantasy novels. However, it is still miniscule in comparison to the male authored texts available. Providing more literature for marginalized audiences by marginalized authors is critical for the queer agenda.

When examining feminist science fiction utopias it is important to look at how they are less oppressive for others. The binaries that are reinforced between men and women can be equally as oppressive if the tables are

simply turned toward the opposing group. The freedom that can be achieved by creating more non-oppressive worlds can be accomplished outside of gendered stereotypes and binary role reversal. One way is to look at the communities that are created that provide the peaceful living of the planets' inhabitants.

Anoenot and Suvin (1979) state that feminist science fiction has the responsibility to bring to light the issues of imperialism and other oppressive behaviors that exist in the patriarchy that may go unnoticed to their reader's everyday lives. Adding to this idea, Theall (1975) discusses how Ursula Le Guin, possibly the most notable feminist science fiction writer, uses elements of both utopian and dystopian societies in her books not only for the purpose of expanding awareness, but to provoke social change. It is important to note that the answer is not to merely flip the issues in a binary fashion, but rather develop a more inclusive medium in which to discuss the changing world, therefore a new perspective must be used to examine these texts. Queer theory provides the language and deconstructive approach that enables a more critical examination of feminist science fiction texts.

CHAPTER THREE

QUEER THEORY: CONTESTING THE NORMS

Introduction

Queer theory has developed to challenge the modern system of sexuality as a body of knowledge that structures and organizes the personal, institutional, and cultural life of individuals in Western societies (Yep, Lovaas, Elia, *Queering Communication,* 2003). The term "queer" is a word that not everyone is comfortable using but it has emerged in academia as a term of empowerment and inclusion. It is ambiguously defined and therefore allows an individual to articulate his or her own queerness rather than rely on the traditional constructs of gender and sexuality to do so. Thus, it challenges the narrowly defined identities of masculine, feminine, male, female, gay or straight by providing a new language by which to discuss these constructs. Queer theory aims to destabilize and provide a more multidimensional alternative that offers many points on the continuum rather than limiting the options to two seemingly binary options. These points can shift and move throughout an individual's life (Vassi, 2004).

The deconstructive nature of the theory comes from its inherent concern to discuss issues of those who are silenced and oppressed by the institutions and ideologies of contemporary Western society. Identity politics as a mode of organizing, is intimately connected to the idea that some social groups are oppressed; that is, one's identity as woman or Native American for example, makes one peculiarly vulnerable to cultural imperialism, violence, exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness (Young, 1990). Queer theory is a postmodern and a post structural response to identity politics and aims to provide a way to examine labels that have been used to polarize and categorize individuals. The goal and focus according to Yep, Lovaas, and Elia (2003) is to "imagine different social realities and sharing ideas, passions, and lived experiences" (p. 2) in order to strengthen queer theory in communication studies.

This chapter begins with the birth of queer theory in communication studies. Then a brief explanation of how it differs from Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender (GLBT) Studies is included. A discussion of the importance of queer theory is next. Finally, the chapter concludes with

how queer theory has been used to destabilize identity and category constructs.

Queer Theory's History

Many of the theories developed to bring voices to the margins gained more visibility during the civil rights movement. Though the term "queer theory" had not yet been coined, institutions and ideologies were being challenged though feminisms, and other activists groups. By the 1960s and 1970s class politics had been somewhat suppressed, allowing for the emergence of identity politics based on factors other than class. Such movements included second wave feminism and the civil rights movement. During these years people were grouped together according to their experiences of oppression. The groups were created by common race, gender, ethnicity, social class, and sexual orientation. As people started demanding equal rights they also began to expose other social and political issues that were important to the people living outside of what was the majority demographic in government at the time which was white, middle class, heterosexual, and male.

Queen and Schemel (1997) describe identity politics as, "The implication that identities are fixed, non-problematic, and nonnegotiable -- and that they come with built in philosophies" (p. 37). Further, what seems to be critical about the "identity" in identity politics is the experience of the subject, especially in relation to his or her experience with oppression. Experience, critics argue, is never epistemologically available with a single meaning (Scott, 1992). As a result, Judith Butler (1993) explains that, "the discursive proliferation of queer has been enabled in part by the knowledge that identities are fictitious -- that is, produced by and productive of material effects but nevertheless arbitrary, contingent and ideologically motivated" (p. 223). Therefore, identity politics and categories need to be challenged and destabilized and not just renamed or restructured.

It was also during the 1970s that the communication studies discipline began to integrate GLBT studies, however, it has done so very slowly. *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* did not publish an essay on homosexuality until 1976 (Yep, 2003). The National Communication Association, formerly, Speech Communication Association, that was founded in 1914, did not have a gay

caucus until Fred Jandt and James Darsey fought for one in 1978 (Gearheart, 2003). This not only created a forum for gay and lesbian issues to be heard within the discipline, it also was an academic stance against heteronormativity that provided support for those individuals who had until then, none.

Nearly ten years later the GLBT division was established at the National Communication Association in 1997. The Western States Communication Association featured several panels on queer communication at their conference in Vancouver in 1999 (Yep, et. al., 2003). So progress was beginning.

The actual term "queer theory" was coined in 1990 by Teresa de Lauretis at a conference that was held at University of California, Santa Cruz in February 1990. Helperin (2003) states, "She had the courage, conviction, to pair the scurrilous term (queer) with the holy-word 'theory'. Her usage was scandalously offensive...The conjunction was more than merely mischievous; it was deliberately disruptive" (p. 2). However offensive the phrase was at its birth, it has proven that it can take on multiple meanings and continue to "deliberately disrupt" the social norms in society and in academia.

The Difference Between Gay, Lesbian,
Bisexual, Transgender Studies
and Queer Theory

It is important to make the distinction between queer theory and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender (GLBT) studies. GLBT studies seeks out equality and focuses on similar issues of sexuality and gender. However, it was formed to bring issues into view that pertain to the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender categories to give those individuals who identify as being GLBT a voice in which they can claim their experiences and realities. The problem that queer theorists find in doing this is that by defining smaller groups (GLBT) to fight the dominant group (Heterosexual), the result gives the appearance that the smaller groups are the ones affected by the hegemony of issues like heteronormativity.

Queer theory sees that everyone is in fact affected by these oppressive constructs (Sedwick, 1990). By recategorizing GLBT as queer, it leaves the categories wide open for individuals to identify with as they choose. It also gives a more fluid option to identity with that can fluctuate between categories of GLBT and queer, or other identity categories by which individuals previously identified. This is the aspect of queer theory that makes

it a useful tool for this analysis. It's tenets of contesting categories and contesting identity will be further discussed in the literature review on queer theory in this thesis.

The Need for a Queer Perspective

Heteronormativity is a hegemonic construct that runs so deep in Western society that often times it is unnoticed by the majority of people within society. Discourses inside and outside of academia assume that people are heterosexual by default. Most academic journals, course readings, as well as class discussions imply heterosexuality unless it is otherwise labeled. The emergence of GLBT classes has increased the visibility of classes that are inclusive of a queer perspective but there are not many courses, if any, that include the heterosexual precursor before the title of the class. The same is true of popular press and other publications. If a queer person enters a bookstore or magazine stand, he or she would need to find the designated special interest area in order to find the section that contains the majority of the queer texts. It is usually called the gay and lesbian section. However, there is not a heterosexual

section in the standard bookstore. The assumption that texts are heterosexual unless otherwise labeled is problematic regardless of which sector or level of society in which it occurs in.

Another assumption that queer theory seeks to challenge is the construction of binary genders and sexualities. Genders in the United States are often referred to as being opposite which perpetuates the belief in identity politics by polarizing gender as well as the social construction of strict gender roles. The popularity of books like *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus* serve as examples of how deep rooted gender roles and expectations run in society. Television representations are also good examples of how gender identities and stereotypes are reinforced. Every time a woman is seen doing "feminine" tasks such as cooking, cleaning, caring for a child or family, and men are seen fixing a car, doing manual labor jobs, and drinking beer and watching or discussing sports, the messages are supporting and reinforcing these stereotypical gender roles. Often when there is a deviation from these roles there is simultaneously a presence of overt and deliberate reinforcement of gender roles as well. For example, when

an advertisement shows a woman smoking a cigar, which is perceived in society as being a "masculine" behavior, she also possesses those traits that are viewed as being "feminine" like cleavage, make-up, or other visual images that reinforces her overriding femininity. This gives the appearance that the advertisement is challenging some of the social gender roles when in actuality it is supporting and reinforcing them (Nielsen, 2000).

Queer theory challenges these gender roles by first recognizing that they exist and then by aiming to destabilize them. Rather than dividing gender or sexual orientation into two concrete categories, it suggests that those concepts are more fluid.

Heterosexuality as the default sexuality also creates a problem on another level. Queer theory points out that thinking of sexuality in the binary terms of heterosexual and homosexual is limiting. Heteronormativity assumes that heterosexuality is not only the primary or "normal" sexuality but also fails to view it as the complex construct that is an institution, identity, practice, and experience (Elia, 2003). Therefore, heteronormativity is not just a queer issue but one that affects the identity of all people.

Queer rhetoric claims that there is nothing "normal" about heterosexuality but that it is instead socially constructed and reinforced. Some of the ways that these ideas are perpetuated and made invisible are through media representations of what is normal. By defining homosexuality as being abnormal, or by placing homosexual literature in a separate section from the "normal" mainstream (i.e. heterosexual books in a book store) may perpetuate binary thinking making it reflexive to polarize sexuality or normalize heterosexuality. For example, unless someone stereotypically "looks gay" or "acts gay" he can be easily be assumed to be heterosexual due to the invisibility of the identity. For example, in a classroom that is racially or ethnically diverse, everyone in that class is aware of different identities based on skin color in the classroom, however, queerness is an invisible minority which can create isolation and perpetuate heteronormativity unless those students that identify as queer make a distinct point to out themselves as queer to the class.

It is important, however, to point out that separation also emphasizes difference. Exploring the differences between individuals and their identities is

important because the differences are where individual identity lies. However, separation for oppressive purposes, or to hinder inaccessibility, is obviously nonproductive and not supported by queer theory. An example of assuming that assimilation is necessary or preferred is the United States is the "melting pot" analogy. This term implies that the United States is made up of many cultures that are becoming one culture. It places the focus on assimilation rather than on difference and, in turn, minimizes the cultures that function outside of the predominant one. Cultural studies and feminisms, as well as queer theory, shift the focus on embracing and understanding difference rather than erasing difference in order to broaden perceptive. Queer theory also aims to magnify rather than eliminate difference with the mainstream center of society. People who embrace this approach want to be visible from the center but not subsumed into the interior, nor do they want to be continually compared to the center.

Queering Communication Studies

Communication studies has had a slow start when it comes to integrating queer theory into its discipline.

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However, Yep has compiled an anthology entitled, *From Disciplining the Queers to Queering the Discipline*, that was recently published in 2004, and provides the discipline with a collection of how communication scholars are using queer theory. Included in this collection are several essays that use queer theory as a method, a theory, or both. The essay, *Queering Communication: Starting the Conversation*, written by Yep, Lovaas, and Elia, outlines the focus on many of the issues that are discussed in this literature review but also calls for the action of communication scholars to integrate queer theory into their research and allow for different perspectives to be applied to a variety of texts. It challenges academic writing as a formula and encourages a new style that is more self inclusive and incorporative of experiences (Yep et. al., 2003).

Progress has seemingly broken down some of the barriers but publications addressing queer issues in communication studies where multiple perspectives are still somewhat rare. According to Yep, Lovaas, and Elia (2003), "To date there are only two published volumes in the field and both of them can be best categorized as projects in the realm of more traditional Gay and Lesbian

Studies rather than contemporary Queer Theory" (p. 3). The first of these publications is a collection of essays in Chesbro's 1981, *Gayspeak: Gay Male and Lesbian Communication*. The second collection edited by Ringer, *Queer Words, Queer Images: Communication and the Construction of Homosexuality*, was published in 1994. Butler's, *Gender Trouble*, and Sedwick's, *Epistemology of the Closet*, are also important texts that embrace many of the goals and ideas that are discussed in what since has been formally entitled queer theory.

Queer theory is versatile and has been used to examine topics such as textualizing the body (Owen, 2003), performance, as a way to study gender (Alexander, 2003; Butler, 1999; Gingrich-Philbrooke, 2003; Kopelson, 2002; Pitts, 2000; Wallace, 2002), sex work and identities as texts (Roof et. al., 1995; McKay, 1999; Nakayama & Correy, 2003), and ageism (Elia, 2003; Harrison, 2001). Queer theorists have also created a shift in the way that television is examined. Larry Gross, for instance, is often referred to when discussing the intersection of media and queer theory. He has published several texts on the subject including *Image Ethics* in which he explores the ethical responsibilities of the media as a powerful

forum in popular culture as it relates to the portrayals of gays and lesbians. He helped pave the way for many other researchers to begin studying media in a similar way.

It is becoming increasingly important as the media evolves and broadens its scope of characters and stories. Goldman (1996) claims that though the gay and lesbian community is not the only group misrepresented in television, or excluded from it, the group is still possibly the most invisible and most highly stereotyped demographic. Due to the widely diverse television audiences, the medium's representations of society are important to examine and understand in regards to the message's intended meaning and what they actually portray. While television is very popular, it is not the only form of entertainment media that needs to be challenged with a queer lens. When examining novels and queer fiction, as well as mainstream fiction, a researcher should place the media under the same responsibility even though the forum is more specialized and the audience demographics may differ.

Recently there has been more attention given to queer issues on television. For example, the Nickelodeon

network aired a documentary entitled *My Family is Different.* It was about gay and lesbian parented families that contested the traditional category of family. The airing of the show created great controversy in the mainstream population but received praise among the gay and lesbian community (Henderson, 2003). Shows like this are similar to books in that the audience generally seeks them out as a specific entertainment or information that is of interest to them. Henderson (2003) used queer theory as a method to look at how this particular documentary took on the task of talking to children and parents about gay and lesbian parented families. It can be predicted that there will be more studies like this in the future as more programs begin to focus on these issues or as the focus broadens into other forms of media and literature.

In addition to the documentary mentioned there are also weekly programs that have main or reoccurring gay characters like *Will and Grace, Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, Ellen, and Roseanne.* Battles and Marrow-Hilton (2002) looked at representations of gay men on *Will and Grace* and found that they were portrayed stereotypically with an apparent lack of masculinity, and merely focused

on those characters' interpersonal relationships and did not attempt to look at their relationship with the outside world. Further, the authors argued that the show also over simplified their characters by continually focusing primarily on sexual tension among the queer characters. Authors concluded that the show reinforces heterosexism to a primarily mainstream audience. Other television shows that are making an effort to bring people closer to subjects of social taboo include premium networks such as HBO's *Six Feet Under*, Showtime's *Queer as Folk*, and the newly released *L Word*. The television exposure of gay characters increases the forum of queer fiction because it is such a wide reaching, easily accessible form of media. Without the pressures for televised time slots, sponsorship through advertising and FCC (Federal Communications Commission) pressures and concerns about content suitable and appealing for an arguably uncertain audience, books can be written for a more specific audience. Science fiction story telling can challenge the mainstream without as many roadblocks as television, making the medium and genre a powerful voice.

Tenets of Queer Theory

Queer theory is both theoretical and pragmatic. It is used as a means to analyze and theorize or to evoke social change. Ways in which this is done is by asking questions of a particular text and its context. The questions that are pertinent to *The Kanshou*, are under the umbrella of tenets of contesting categories of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Contesting categories of gender identity and sexual orientation is to ask questions about the nature of the categories that are constructed in ideologies, societies, communities, or a text in this case. How did these categories emerge? What is their nature? What practices or behaviors reinforce or dictate these category formations and the acceptance thereof?

When contesting identity critics may examine a specific category of identity. The aim is to see if the text destabilizes the socially constructed and accepted notions of identity and all of the labels that are used to describe or oppress the individual by belonging to or being forced into the socially fixed identity construct of gender. The very identity of "queer" is an example of a

way that individuals have contested identity and the labels that are associated with them.

Liberalism has been the catchall label for the political left that is supposed to speak up for and defend the rights and equality of everyone. However, there are many underrepresented groups that do not get support or recognition from the liberal end, including sexual minorities. This lack of support leaves many queers or other underrepresented marginalized groups with an assumed voice that really does not speak for them and actually oppresses them by shutting them out under the assumption that "liberalism" means the pursuit of liberty for all. Queer theory suggests that individuals need to speak out by using their own voice rather than allowing mainstream liberals to speak for them. Feminist science fiction is one way this can be achieved. Granted, examining one book to see if it destabilizes socially constructed categories of gender identity and sexual orientation does not suggest that all feminist science fiction novels do the same, nor does it imply that all male written science fiction always reinforces them. Nevertheless, utilizing the theory to explore a singular text adds to the growing body of work

being done with a queer perspective while simultaneously examine a recent text in the science fiction genre.

Discussion

The elasticity that queer theory has brought to many disciplines including English, gender studies, women studies and in this case, communication studies has provided versatility. This review of literature on queer theory provides just a glimpse of the possibilities of queer theory's impact and potential on the discipline. By examining artifacts and texts such as feminist science fiction as well as other gay and lesbian fictional publications, the theory itself is challenged by looking at queer texts that have been written for a primarily queer audience. Deconstruction of gender roles and sexuality are important in exploring culture and identity and how those images are presented to society through media representations including literature. Extending the adaptability and critical lens of queer theory to the forum of feminist science fiction will add to the literature in an attempt to gain further understanding of queer texts.

Using two tenets of queer theory, contesting categories and contesting identity, is theoretically and methodologically sound to determine if *The Kanshou* is a queer text that is destabilizing traditional category norms and identity binaries that society reinforces. The traditional ideologies of sex orientation and gender roles that have been discussed in this chapter is examined in *The Kanshou* in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE KANSHOU: DESTABILIZING CATEGORIES

Introduction

This examination of *The Kanshou* using queer theory,
is organized into two themes. These themes have been
briefly discussed in chapter two as being prominent in
both traditional male written science fiction and feminist
science fiction. Specific sentences or phrases from the
story act as units of analysis in this chapter. A queer
lens will then be employed to determine if Gearhart
contests the dichotomies that have emerged through the
history of science fiction literature by writing about
them differently. The two themes that are used include
(1) nature and technology, and (2) individual and
collective. In chapter two, it was explained that these
two themes are staples in science fiction writing. Men
used them to strengthen their character's social gendered
roles and likewise, feminist authors began utilizing the
same themes to challenge the male authored works' use of
those themes by presenting the feminine viewpoint and
alternative ways to approach the issues in the stories.

Nature and technology and individual and collective
are the most prominent themes that occur throughout this
particular text as well. Specifically, they are used
within the overarching theme of violence. The concept of
violence is something that cannot be simply defined.
There are physical acts of violence, verbal violence,
ideological violence, emotional violence, just to name a
few, and along with the many forms of violence there are
innumerable degrees of violence. These factors make it
difficult to approach the topic of violence. Science
fiction, both male authored and female authored, addresses
many issues of violence. *The Kanshou* fits this mold as
well therefore, the frame of this thesis that holds the
themes together are the underlying issue of how to deal
with the problem of violence.

Method

This chapter employs a queer lens to analyze *The
Kanshou* to answer the posed research questions by first
looking at how sexual categories are constructed and
depicted throughout the text in order to determine if
Gearhart is destabilizing the traditional dichotomy of
heterosexual and homosexual that is represented in

previous science fiction texts. Second, this chapter
examines how gender identity manifests in each of the two
themes in order to ascertain if traditional gender
polarity is also destabilized.

Contesting Categories of
Sexual Orientation

The arrangement of binary sexual categories,
heterosexual/homosexual, in order to define and separate
certain behaviors, did not emerge until the late
nineteenth century (Foucault, 1978). Once these
categories emerged, the inevitable binary of those
categories became visible with one half often privileged
while the other is the marker of what is outside, excluded
and oppressed. In society heterosexuality is normalized
and idealized. However, the construct of heterosexuality
relies upon its homosexual marginalized and stigmatized
counterpart, marked as "abnormal" and/or "deviant", to
entrench itself as the "norm" and/or "natural" category
(Butler, 1994). Thus, the polarization of sexuality
created heteronormativity. As these categories become
more stable constructs in society, the need to destabilize
them becomes more important.

According to Yep (2003), "Queer theory is not a traditional theory that can be described and explicated in propositional form. Queer theory, then, is more about an open system of discursive and conceptual possibilities than a rigid and fixed theoretical model" (p. 38). Therefore, utilizing queer theory as a method to examine a literary text will be performed by being suspicious of, and asking questions about sexual categories and gender identities that are found in the text. Plummer (1981/1998) suggests asking questions concerning the emergence of sexual categories, how sexual activity leads to labeling oneself, or conversely, how labeling oneself might initiate sexual activity. Plummer also suggests developing questions that evaluate social structure and institutions that either support sexual categories of destabilize them. Foucault (1988) adds sexual categories are also categories of power and are not conceptually sealed. He suggests that queer theory be used to examine these systems as well by again, asking questions or being suspicious of the category's construction or its representation.

This chapter presents excerpts from *The Kanshou* that represent both the nature and technology theme and the

collective and individual theme that are common in science fiction. Each passage is then subject to the questions suggested by Plummer and Foucault or similarly pertinent questions of category development or representation. A strict list of questions was considered but rejected to preserve the inherent elasticity of queer theory.

Contesting Categories of
Gender Identities

After examples of both nature and technology and the collective and the individual are examined to see if sexual categories in *The Kanshou* are destabilized and contested or if they reinforce the social dichotomization of heterosexual and homosexual binaries, new examples are presented to be analyzed to determine if traditional gender identities are contested. According to Butler (1990), "Identity categories are instruments of regulatory systems, rather as normalizing labels of oppressive regimes or as the connecting points to fight against that very oppression" (p. 14). When examining the use of gender identities in *The Kanshou* through a queer lens it is again difficult to establish a stringent set of questions to pose on each example. Like the

heterosexual/homosexual binaries that exist in categorizing sexual orientation, gender identity is also commonly polarized as male/female or masculine/feminine categories. In a recent, somewhat controversial, article, *Queer Theory by Men* written by Ian Halley, feminism is challenged as being reductive to category binaries. Halley (2004) states,

> The trouble with feminism is its resignation to category binaries that it cannot seem to get around or through, despite its accepted hybridities of history, race, class, and method. Although "different feminisms" distinguish women and men "differently", under them all "men" and "women" are almost always conceived as two discrete, if still yet distinct, human groups nonetheless. (p. 8)

Therefore, Halley concludes that employing queer theory as a tool of critical analysis of gender rather than feminist theory can lead the questions away from the binaries and into a more fluid deconstruction of identity. Although some feminists have challenged his claim, such as Robyn Wiegman (2004) and Ranjana Khanna (2004), the challenge for queer theory is to ask new questions of gender.

In this chapter, the examples again, are representations of the two themes of nature and technology and the collective and the individual. After each example is illustrated, gender identity is examined by asking

questions that aim to uncover binaries that reinforce societal gender norms or possible feminist binaries that polarize through feminine celebration or male exclusion in order to determine if Gearhart is destabilizing identify categories in *The Kanshou*.

Contesting Categories of Sexual Orientation in *The Kanshou*

To reiterate what was discussed in the literature review of science fiction in chapter two, nature and technology is a common theme that has been used in traditional, male written science fiction to illustrate male dominance. The representations are generally dichotomized as men using technology or technology guiding men to dominate women, or the symbolic representation of women through nature. Likewise, it was discussed that the female responses to these depictions were commonly to write fiction that illustrate men as unnecessary or the symbolic representation of men through technology as unnecessary. Looking at how Gearhart intersects technology and nature is actually examining how she is intersecting men with women, women with women, and men with men -- sexual categories.

Nature and Technology

An example of women representing nature is illustrated by the concept of women flying without the need of technology. In *The Kanshou* women who share a strong bond can fly while "spooning" each other. Women who are intimately connected to one another do not need technology to experience flight, which is a representation of freedom. The book does not illustrate men having this capability therefore, the men must rely on technology to supply them with the freedom of flight. This division of what is achievable for lesbian partners is not achievable by either homosexual male partners or heterosexual partners creates categories. However, Gearhart does not specifically state that these women have to be current sex partners, just that they have to be intimately connected. This ambiguity leaves room for additional possibilities outside of what was presented directly in the story and therefore weakening the definitiveness of the category. Likewise, even though flight is being used as a representation of the strongest intimacy shared between two people, it is not a common occurrence in the story. It is seen as being a unique bond similar to a "soul mate" connection that is rare so it does not necessarily act as

an excluding category by way of determining a "norm" and a "deviant". It is therefore determined that this example illustrates category construction by dividing sexual partners into two groups, those that can achieve flight with their sexual partner and those who cannot. However, Gearhart allows for enough ambiguity that it cannot be determined how exclusive this category is, or how fluid it is, or even how stable it is in the societal framework of *The Kanshou* leaving room for arguments that could suggest that this small select group of women that can achieve flight while "spooning" actually destabilize the existing sexual categories of what can be achieved between sexual partners in the real world. From this angle, Gearhart is contesting categories by suggesting that there is more possible than what society has already explained and categorized.

Family is another construct that Gearhart discusses through the use of the nature and technology theme. She does not suggest that living together as a family unit determines sexuality. For example, two or more women, who live together and are raising children or participating in a family does not necessarily imply that they are lesbians. So even though the symbolisms follow the

tradition of nature representing women and technology representing men may apply in this example, she uses those depictions to destabilize the traditional categories that due to social ideologies of a nuclear family consisting of a man, woman, and child so easily fall into place when discussing issues of categories of sexual orientation.

Another way that Gearhart challenges binary categories of sexual relationships is through the concept of sex healers. These are women who voluntarily participate in sex with violent offenders as a sort of natural, medicinal cure for violent behavior opposed to a more technology based method like the proposed research on areas of the brain to be removed to alleviate violent behaviors. When Gearhart refers to the sex healers she never specifies that these women are necessarily heterosexual. All that is said is, "I hear the women enjoy it" (p. 18). Other questions are asked by characters in the story but are never answered, like "Are there colonies of such men for the healing of criminal women? Or maybe these women also feel a responsibility to be sex healers for convicted women offenders" (p. 19). Because these questions are not answered it is unknown if sex healing is exclusively a practice between women and

men. In terms of sexuality as a category, Gearhart is breaking free from conventional ideas and assumptions by suggesting new ways of viewing sex while also leaving many concepts openly undefined.

Collective and Individual

As discussed in chapter two, the roles of individuals and collective communities are commonly used in traditional science fiction and feminist science fiction and how individual heroism has generally been portrayed as a masculine element while the collective community has generally been portrayed as a feminine family raising element. While this distinction illustrates gender role division, it also illustrates categories of sexual orientation by implying that the man, woman, child model is the working family model, while not providing an alternative model for same sex partners or other parenting situations. In the traditional representations of this model, the categories are polarized by only supplying one representation of the family model, where father can be the hero, and the mother is the caregiver while being a part of the collective of other women that form the community. Anything outside of this model then becomes the opposite of the norm -- deviant (Foucault, 1978).

In *The Kanshou* Gearhart blurs the lines of the traditional constructs of family. She suggests less of an individual, dynamic of the traditional parent family model. The idea that a collective group or community can raise children and care give for one another is used in *The Kanshou* to challenge the heterosexual model. Gearhart destabilizes the foundation without redefining it which allows for a more inclusive concept of the collective and the individual.

The sex healers, as mentioned earlier, are another example of a collective group that have taken on a category by being labeled "sex healers". Gearhart is careful to address that the sex healers are not necessarily heterosexual or homosexual women. She is ambiguous in not defining whether or not they are in relationships with other men or women, have families, or consider the sex healing to equate to a relationship with the inhabitant in which they are sexually active with. This group of women are acting as a part of a collective effort to eliminate violent behavior but are also acting as individuals by having sex with inhabitants illustrating how Gearhart contests categories of sexual orientation.

Contesting Categories of Gender
Identities in *The Kanshou*

Identity is used to imply many different aspects of
the self including sexuality and gender. .In this thesis,
categories are looked at to discuss sexuality and
identities to discuss gender. Both terms are constructs
that are used by society and individuals alike to define
and separate, and traditionally to dichotomize for power
purposes. Science fiction, as mentioned in chapter two,
historically tells the stories of male heroes on a quest
to save or defeat. The role of women is usually reduced
to one of three, 1) maiden, the sex object, 2) mother, the
maternal care giver, or 3) the crone, who gives the hero
advice. The women that are not the main heroin, but side
characters, reflect the perspective of the social climate
of the time. The women's response to this was to write
science fiction that depicted the women as the heroes.
This was typically done by rejecting the traditionally
masculine gender roles that helped the male hero succeed
and emphasizing the more traditionally feminine gender
roles which he trivialized. Again, this dichotomizing
approach, though it offers another perspective, is only
reinforcing the concept of gender roles either through

embellishing them or by directly opposing them. The real liberation from gender roles is to destabilize them.

Nature and Technology

The theme of nature and technology is explored again in this section but is examined as it intersects with gender representations. The two largest aspects of the story that reflect this intersection are the animal genocide and the inhabitant testing issues. As stated in the synopsis, prior to women becoming the majority on Little Blue, the animals disappeared from the planet. It is stated that they decided to leave the Earth because man has mistreated the Earth and nature, including all living creatures other than human beings.

This is an important representation because animals are often used to symbolize innocence and nature. Their disappearance in this story might merely mean that men had destroyed nature and killed the animals along with it. However, Gearhart's use of this theme differs from the traditional one by specifying that the animals chose to leave the planet. She humanizes them and shows that the acts of violence toward them resulted in them choosing to extinguish themselves. Thus, nature is not represented as stagnant or helpless in *The Kanshou*. This empowers nature

over technology, which is simply at the disposal of a non-animal human to wield. It is common in traditional science fiction to have the opposite occur; the technology manages to gain human-like life that liberates it from human control.

Along with animals representing nature, they also can represent women while men act as the representation of technology and the oppressors of the animals because they were in power when the environment was being polluted and little, if any, respect was shown to the non-human animals of the planet. Even when relying on these gendered representations of nature and technology, however, there is another factor that must be added. Near the close of the book, it is discovered that the child population is beginning to decrease and a correlation is found between that of the animals as they decided to die off and the death rate in the child population. This suggests that maybe male domination over nature was not the only reason that the animals chose to die off because the children are preparing to make the same decision and women out number men 12 to 1 and are the societal leaders. This is important because it illustrates how Gearhart challenges the simple dichotomous explanations of gender as

responsible for genocide. The result is a contention of gender roles in a way that reveals the complex variables that make up gender identities. She does not pit men against women nor suggest that men and women are "opposite" sexes. She destabilizes the male/female dichotomy to leave the concept of gender open which will, in turn, allow for more discussion and evaluation whenever a new or evolving variable presents itself.

Traditionally, technology is used to improve life and to protect life. This is commonly illustrated through droids, robots or transport devices, to make life easier for humans. Technology is also employed to make weapons for protection. *The Kanshou* is not without this dynamic and the women are not without this aspect. There are technological devices such as ballbreakers which are referred to as a weapon. They are defined as being "Contraband crystals, tuned electronically or by a witch, which are being illegally distributed and sometimes used to castrate violent men, particularly rapists" (p. 249). These are interesting weapons because they are both crystals, which are seemingly a representation of nature, but they are also electronically tuned on occasion which suggests the use of technology. Thus, Gearhart is

challenging traditional gender role representations found in science fiction by showing that some women will use technology to create weapons, and further, they will use those weapons in a violent manner. She blurs the lines of gender roles by illustrating that violent acts can be performed by anyone regardless of gender.

Rehabilitation is an opposing representation of nature and acts as an example of technology. Baliwicks are the start of the rehabilitation process. They are not like traditional prisons. They allow for more of the typical activities of life and are more comfortable. The inhabitants are allowed visits from the sex healers for rehabilitation purposes. As discussed earlier, sex healers are, "A whole colony of women who are committed to sexually pleasuring the violent offenders...The theory behind it is that if male sexual energy can be channeled into physical release, then urges to violence subside in direct proportion" (p. 18).

Another attempt at rehabilitation that is being experimented with in the baliwicks is the elimination of access to technology, "There is no technology beyond hand tools; the idea is that technology alienates and alienation is the perfect precondition for violence" (p.

17). This concept intersects both of the themes being examined in this essay. It represents a natural attempt to prevent violence instead of a technological one, while introducing the idea that individuality rather than a collective community, leads to violent behavior. Again showing how Gearhart chooses not to simply dichotomize the representations of gender as they pertain to violence. She discusses violence in such a fluid concept -- a problem that plagues the entire society. As it becomes more difficult to define and measure levels of violent acts, it becomes equally difficult to define and measure categories of gender roles. Thus, she destabilizes traditional constructs of gender categories in this instance.

The most predominantly discussed example of technology and nature theme is illustrated by the discussion of the Anti-Violence Protocols. This is a proposed solution to the problem of violence,

> It would involve brain surgeries that would inhibit an individual's physiological tendency toward violence, and perhaps the violent tendencies of their children. But physicians and researchers aren't even sure yet that there is such a violent center of the brain. To discover that center, they have proposed surgical experiments upon bailiwick habitants. (p. 22)

Technology is not an evil in and of itself, the women

must decide whether or not they are going to use this

technology as a violent device against fellow human beings

in hope to discover a way to reduce violence inflicted on

other human beings. The attention that Gearhart gives to

the complexity of the issues surrounding violent behavior

illustrates her commitment to destabilize traditional

categories. She apparently refuses to simplify the issue

into a male female dichotomy and asks hard-to-answer,

contradictory questions like, when is violence

permissible? How much violence is permissible? And who

should be permitted *to inflict it?* *The questions remain*

unanswered in The Kanshou which allows for the issues of

gender roles and violence to resist binary categories as

well.

However, there are also examples of how the issues of

violence and gender intersect in a way that realistically

illustrates the tendency to try to easily answer the

difficult questions by simply placing them in a category.

For example, Jez claims that men can never escape their

tendency to violence,

> Men are totally at the mercy of their biology! Look
> at wars and crime. Look at who is in the bailiwicks.
> It's men! They can't help it, it's hard-wired into
> them at the rock bottom they love cruelty and
> dominance. They're killers. Maybe we ought to just
> drain the testosterone out of them the minute they
> hit puberty. (p. 59)

Another example is when a different character

suggests that men are naturally inclined to be violent and

suggests the use of technology by women to test the nature

of men "ridding violence will rely on the testing of

violent men...Over 95 percent of violent acts are still

perpetuated by men" (p. 39). Gearhart's discussion of men

and women as they correlate with nature and technology

through representations of violence, illustrates again how

she destabilizes traditional gender dichotomies by looking

at the society that the women of Little Blue have created

and seeing that many of the same issues are present as

when the men were in power. She suggests that a solution,

or a large part of the solution or the difference between

when men were in power and the present situation is the

thought that women are putting toward the issues.

Gearhart offers the suggestion that by destabilizing deep

rooted social constructs change is occurring through the

act of self analysis not through analyzing constructs of gender behavior.

This is illustrated again, similarly when Zude expresses specific concerns about the language of the other characters when discussing issues of violence and gender by stating, "The jury is still out on the question of female violent potential. Until we can determine without question the incompatibility of violence with the feminine psyche, then our language must reflect that reality!" (p. 39). Gearhart suggests that it is through language and perspective that change is made not through violence and categorization.

Collective and Individual

In feminist writing it is not uncommon to read about "the sisterhood" or some sort of reference implying a connection between all women who are open and responsive to the idea that when women gather together there is an inherent sense of wholeness, completeness and empowerment. This idea is also present in *The Kanshou*. For example, the story discusses how someone's softself, which is, "The spiritual echo of the physical body which may at the will of the trained practitioner of psychic skills leave the hardself and move independently in physical space" (p.

255) can be shared. A being can occupy a willing

participant's body and experience what that body

experiences. The introduction of this concept was

seemingly something that was shared among women because

only female characters achieved it. Therefore, it

appeared to be a way that Gearhart categorized gender by

limiting the bond that men could share with one another.

However, as the story progresses, Gearhart is more

illusive about who can partake in the process. For

example, one of the male inhabitants refers to his

solfself and is continually trying to center himself

there. Also, he has a connection and relationship with a

tattoo of a woman on his arm that is possibly an example

of this sharing of a body experience. Gearhart's ability

to rely on ambiguity to resist categorization continually

insures that the text avoids clear lines of definition

that limit and categorize these concepts.

   This does not imply, however, that Gearhart does not

include structured institutions of any kind in *The*

Kanshou. Large collectives like the formation of the

Kanshoubu and the institutions like the baliwicks that are

formed in order to set certain individuals apart from the

rest in collective subgroups. It is difficult at times to

distinguish between the larger groups and the definite

individual, but when it comes to the issue of violence and

how to control those who commit acts of violence against

others the distinction is clear. For example, Jez

explains to some students that some options include

confining them to bailiwicks or controlled placement

groups for rehabilitation, which basically means to place

them within the larger collective to alleviate the violent

behavior. The other choice is to exile them, which

suggests that these dangerous people need to be far

outside of the collective community to alleviate the

possibility of violent behavior toward others.

In that discussion it appears that a collective

offers healing or support to someone that needs to be

rehabilitated. However, groups or collectives can also be

seen as dangerous. For example, Kamasa, a student in the

story, says, "My old-old-grandmam says she never met a man

she couldn't handle if he was all by himself. It was the

men in twos and threes and more that scared her" (p. 18).

Another student in the story agrees, "The dangerous ones

were those in groups, clubs, lodges, fraternities, and

armies" (p. 18). In this example, the student is

suggesting that men become more dangerous in a collective

group. This contrasts the example of the women who formed

and participate in the Kanshoubu. Suggesting that women

are collective beings and men are individual beings that

only get more violent when in a collective, reinforces the

way the traditional science fiction dichotomized gender

categories as explained in chapter two.

Gearhart does not negate the collective desires of

men, or suggest that it will only fuel violent behavior

when she proposes that men also seek to be a part of a

collective that is outside of the purpose of domination.

By doing so Gearhart suggests that the involvement in a

collective might curb male desire to act violently and

bring him closer to his softself. This can be seen in the

discussion that Gabe has with another inhabitant, Stone,

about his search for male companionship. He expresses

that he does not want to live in a world of women because

he does not connect with them and needs to have a

connection with a collective community. Gabe, one of the

primary male characters in the story describes this to his

fellow inhabitant by saying, "The happiest I ever been in

my life is in a bailiwick." He continues, "I realized it

when I finished my term up at Oslo. I [have] been looking

for men all my life. Strong men, interesting men.

Looking for men in a world of girls. And what's mostly in a bailiwick?" Gabe continues to explain that he is not gay but just desires the company and companionship of a collective community of men. Again, Gearhart uses the opinions of the characters to illustrate contradicting views to issues pertaining to gender categories and societal expectations and norms. In doing so, she avoids dichotomizing her characters and thus, destabilizes traditional notions of the roles of men and women on Little Blue as well as in the real world.

On the other hand, many male collectives of the past have produced violence as Zude describes, "Show me any of man's police force, any man's army, in all of military or societal history that has named its purpose: to make itself obsolete" (p. 89). Jez follows up by pointing out that purpose is the difference between these groups and that of the Kanshoubu, which seems to be the key point when examining this difficult contradiction. This desire challenges the tradition of men seeking companionship for the purpose of domination or force and suggests that maybe it is a human desire to be a part of something larger than the individual identity that society constructs for us.

For instance, while the story presents this paradox, Gearhart seemingly implies that collectives are more desirable. In the case of Stone, it is actually his decision to leave the male collective that ends his life. This decision comes about near the close of the book when the men he was in a collective with in the bailiwick fear the biological testing plan a revolt in which they will violently take hostages to negotiate the elimination of the impending protocols. Through this scenario Gearhart again brings to light the many complexities that surround gender and collective thinking. The men turn violent but not to oppress or conquer, but to defend them against what they see as violent women that are oppressing them. The book ends with the men and women in collective groups that both have violent plans in mind.

The animal exodus is a collective choice made by willing beings and therefore fits into the collective and the individual theme as well. It also intersects with gender identity. In traditional science fiction the collective is used to represent a mindless group that is a threat to the individual hero and it is his (it is usually a male character that plays the hero) responsibility to rid the earth of this threatening collective group that

could possibly take over individuality. The examples of

the aliens in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and the storm

troopers in *Star Wars* that were explained in chapter two

illustrate how being a part of a collective takes away

choice and freedom and is controlling and oppressive.

Gearhart depicts the collective of the animals in a much

different way. She empowers them by bringing them

together to make a unifying choice to remove themselves

from the abuses of which they were subjected. The

symbolism in this example might reflect similarities to

the sisterhood collective that offers freedom from male

oppression and that together, women can chose to remove

themselves from male dominated society to create their own

realities in their own collective. In this example, *The*

Kanshou follows the gendered norms of traditional science

fiction by implying that women seek a collective group,

represented in this case by animals. The male perspective

can be summed up in the words of a male student in the

story, Shaheed, "It's fine to use animals for human

purposes. First because, beings of greater intelligence

have the responsibility to train other beings; second,

because it's efficient; and third, because it's natural

for animals to be used by humans" (p. 12). This view of

men also reinforces the traditional dichotomous gender and presents a contradiction in the representations of gender in the text. Gearhart uses contradiction repeatedly to illustrate the difficulty in aiming to categorize such dynamic and complex issues like gender identity.

Discussion

An initial reading of *The Kanshou* may easily and superficially reveal several examples of dichotomization. However, when applying a critical queer approach and closely examining how the themes of nature and technology and collective and individual both support assumptions but simultaneously destabilizes them, there is a clear contention of norms prevalent in the text. The fact that the bailiwicks are filled with man because they are the primary exhibitors of violent acts against living beings, is an example of Gearhart reinforcing categorical dichotomies. Instances when Gearhart destabilizes category dichotomies include her depiction of the sex healers. They do no reinforce any category existing in society and are so complex they cannot be easily categorized because it is not "normal" to aim to

rehabilitate violent offenders with sexual affection in our present society.

After examining all of the examples illustrated in this chapter it is determined that first, the traditional themes that are prevalent in traditional male authored science fiction and feminist science fiction in representing gender and sexual orientation dichotomies are found in *The Kanshou*. Second, Gearhart does in fact challenge these dichotomies by destabilizing the traditional categories of gender identity and sexual orientation.

CHAPTER FIVE

LITTLE BLUE: A QUEER PLANET

Introduction

After a close examination of *The Kanshou* it is
determined the Gearhart both destabilizes traditional
categories of gender identity and sexual orientation in
the text by offering alternatives to the social norms that
have constructed the existing ideologies while
occasionally reinforcing them as well. Overall, she
explores areas of gender and sexual dichotomies in ways
that reveal that the traditional compartmentalized
categories are used as a foundation that is then
destabilized by presenting contradictions and ambiguity to
the equation.

Review

In chapter one, a brief overview of the text and the
author are presented. Justification for the specific use
of the *The Kanshou* is also discussed. Queer theory is
introduced as a critical perceptive and academic tool that
needs to be utilized more often in communication studies.
The question of whether or not Sally Miller Gearhart's

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book destabilizes traditional ideologies of gender and
sexuality while using traditional themes in science
fiction was posed.

Chapter two provided a brief history of science
fiction both traditional male written science fiction and
feminist or female written science fiction. A timeline of
science fiction was provided to show how it is evolving
and being challenged by those that are writing it. The
chapter also outlined the formulation of some common
themes used in science fiction and illustrated how they
are generally dichotomized by both traditional and
feminist texts. Through the discussion of science fiction
the two themes that were used in the analysis chapter,
nature and technology and collective and individual were
established.

In chapter three I discuss queer theory. I focused
on queer theory in communication studies but also
discussed the birth and evolution of the theory.
Distinctions between queer theory and GLBT studies were
also examined. Many examples of how queer theory is being
used in communication studies are provided to illustrate
how the body of research is expanding and becoming more
recognized in academia. There are a wide variety of

examples mentioned to show the versatility of the theory
as well. Contesting categories of sexual orientation and
gender identities were defined as the tenets of queer
theory that were used in the analysis chapter of the
thesis.

Chapter four is the analysis section. In that
chapter *The Kanshou* was represented by the themes that
were established in chapter two as being typical
representations of science fiction. Each example of the
two themes is then examined through a queer lens by the
use of both of the tenets defined in chapter three to
determine whether or not the text reinforces or
destabilizes the polarization of gender and sexuality.

Discussion

The emotional response I had to *The Kanshou* after
reading it for the first time sparked an interest in the
text itself as well as in the genre of feminist science
fiction. As a reader of science fiction, I had been
exposed to many ideas about how society might adapt or
evolve with a variety of changed circumstances. However,
there was something different about *The Kanshou* so I set
out to explore if that might be.

After researching the history of science fiction I was surprised to find so many female authored texts, some of which predate when I had previously thought women had entered the genre. Along with the science fiction stories came the analysis of them. There have been many feminist rhetorical criticisms of feminist science fiction, as illustrated in chapter two. However, discussions on the topic from a queer community is only beginning to emerge (Hurley, 1990) which is why I set out to employ queer theory as my method of analyzing this text.

I think it is imperative to utilize queer theory in communication studies because the voice of the queer community is getting louder and is gaining more representation in the media that is not always positive exposure. As discussed in chapter three, unfortunately, the increase in representation in media can also mean an increase in misrepresentation and stereotypes. Therefore, it is important to critically examine these artifacts through a queer lens to determine if the texts are breaking down norms or reinforcing them. Specifically, queer theory was used to examine *The Kanshou* because at first glance there appeared to be a struggle between the

binaries that are so often reinforced in science fiction
novels and queer theory addresses those issues.

The intersections that appear in *The Kanshou* do not
only make for exciting story telling, but also examine
important social issues that plague or challenge the world
such as violence, advancements in technology, destruction
of nature and natural resources, individual freedom, and
concepts surrounding living in a community. By examining
The Kanshou, the real, present world is put under a
microscope as well. Just as examining history allows for
us to see the mistakes of the past, exploring texts that
discuss current pressing issues in society, like *The
Kanshou*, can provide some insight about what the future
might hold.

A queer look at *The Kanshou* provides a queer look at
the world while legitimizing the queer voices and
perspectives that appear in the book. Granted, there has
been more exposure to queer representations in all forms
of media but still far less than non-queer
representations. However, after analyzing the text, I am
now of the belief that the queer lens is not something
that is merely employed as a tool for a specific analysis
but a perspective that once adopted, is difficult to

shelve and creates bias and categorical thinking.
Critically examining and challenging the polarized
ideologies of gender and sexuality that society embraces
becomes a function of life that allows for a queer
individual to create his or her own reality through
experience whether it be fiction or actuality.

Throughout the analysis of the themes of *The Kanshou*
Gearhart's representations can sometimes be viewed as
reinforcing traditional ideologies of gender and
sexuality. For example, men are the primary violent
offenders and women are still associated with nature.
However, the majority of the time they were being
challenged. Even though she uses the same themes that can
be found in other feminist science fiction and traditional
science fiction, she utilizes them differently by
expanding what is traditionally viewed as being homosexual
and heterosexual, and feminine and masculine. Her
characters do not follow the social ideologies that
construct these binary categories. Chapter four presents
several examples of how Gearhart challenges existing
institutions such as family, sexual partnership, and
incarceration establishments to name a few. She also
introduces new ideas of sexual orientation and gender

identity that have not been explored within typical traditional categories like, the sex healers, "spooning", and exploring the softself to provide a few examples from the analysis.

The Kanshou has been referred to as a feminist science fiction novel however, at the conclusion of this thesis I think it opens a door for a new category -- queer science fiction. Gearhart shapes her character's gender identities and sexual orientation in a fluid and seemingly contradictory way as she develops her futuristic version of the world, Little Blue. She uses the discussion of violence to illustrate the complexity of individuals and their attitudes, values and beliefs. Gearhart (1979) is a proponent of non-violence interaction with the world and believes that there is a difference in wanting things to change and wanting to change things. She states that, "The act of violence is in the intention to change another" (p. 196). Further, her contributions to this are exhibited not only in her science fiction writing but also her academic scholarship. She proposes that all forms of rhetoric be the "creation or co-creation of an atmosphere in which people or things, if and only if they have the internal basis for change, may change themselves" (p.

198). This ideology is present in the underpinnings of

The Kanshou as a queer text as well.

Through the act of writing science fiction, as

discussed in the introduction of this thesis, marginalized

voices can utilize the genre to enact change. Gearhart

does this by offering an invitation to the reader to

change. She achieves this type of invitational rhetoric

(Foss, 2004) in *The Kanshou* by destabilizing the

traditional categories of gender identity and sexual

orientation in a non-evasive, non-violent manner by,

> Instead of probing or invading, our natural path of
> wrapping around the givee, of being available to
> her/him without insisting; our giving is a presence,
> an offering, an opening... At the very most our
> giving takes the form of a push toward freedom for
> the givee, as in the act of birth (p. 198)

Her support of invitational rhetoric are exhibited in *The

Kanshou* not only by her destabilizing and challenging of

categories, but in the act of creating the world of Little

Blue and giving it to the world and thereby inviting them

into another reality in which the queer perspective is

enacted.

Limitations

There are some limitations to this study. In using a deconstructive methodology, like queer theory, that utilizes and encourages the use of inclusive interpretations and definitions, it may be difficult to deconstruct without redefining in the process. However, queer theory aims to minimize this limitation by redefining as minimally as possible and with more inclusive, elastic alternatives. A text examined from a queer lens leaves room for unique perspectives to aid in the analysis in areas of gender identity and issues related to sexual orientation.

Another issue is that the deep rooted system of dichotomizing ideologies is so entrenched in society that it may be possible that without categories and labeled behaviors people will not know how to identify themselves. For example, Wilson (1993) argues, "Just as the only true blasphemer is the individual who really believes in God, so transgression depends on, and may even reinforce, conventional understandings of what it is that is to be transgressed" (p. 109). Thus, the limitations of queer theory are contingent on what it is aiming to destabilize.

A limitation of queer theory as the method of analysis in this thesis was limiting because it was too rigid and therefore did not allow room for exploration outside of the boundaries that were established by the theory. This is not entirely the fault of the theory itself, but also the way it was employed. By defining the tenets of queer theory boundaries were set that did not alloy for analysis outside of that scope.

For this particular analysis of *The Kanshou* it was thought necessary to divide the text into themes and then use sentences from the text that reflect those themes, in order to create unites of analysis in which to apply queer theory. The aim of organizing the text into themes that are prevalent in the genre as a whole was to show that *The Kanshou* was a typical science fiction novel in that it addressed issues that are commonly present in the genre, thus, identifying the book as being a part of that genre and analyzed with that in mind. However, even though it was established that *The Kanshou* possessed the same sort of themes in its storyline.

Another limitation is that *The Kanshou*, is only a singular text among the larger body of feminist science fiction. Making overarching generalizations about all

feminist science fiction from the analysis of a singular

text is not a claim of this thesis. Likewise, dividing a

book into themes leaves other aspects, not represented in

those themes, out of the analysis. Taking an entire text

and dividing into main parts to analyze does not provide a

completely exhaustive analysis of the text. While I tried

to include the major representations of the themes that I

saw to be the most prevalent in the text, it was a

subjective process.

Future Research

While conducting the analysis of *The Kanshou* I

realized that the overarching theme of violence plays a

larger role in the story that I have first realized. I

think that a closer examination of this aspect would

enrich the analysis of violence and gender in future

research done on this text or other science fiction

novels.

The Kanshou is a part of the *Earthkeep* trilogy that

when I first started this thesis was not entirely

published. An examination of the three book trilogy in

their entirety would be an interesting research project in

the future. It would also be interesting to examine the

text from more than the two tenets of contesting categories of sexual orientation and gender identity that were used in this thesis to take a different angle and illustrate further the utility of queer theory. It would also be interesting to examine the issues of violence from a feminist perspective. It was established in this thesis that Gearhart challenges dichotomies of gender identity. I think she goes beyond that. I think she challenges feminisms. She has a unique style that was unfortunately not fleshed out in this thesis due to the approach that was taken. Her voice, as well as mine, was virtually unheard. I think further analysis on this text should be done with the inclusion of the authors' voice, both the author of the text and the author of the analysis, in order to obtain the discursive implications of the text.

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