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Feminist utopian writings from the 1970s included a clearly defined rhetorical purpose: to undermine the assumption of hidden male privilege in language and society. The creative conversation defining this rhetorical purpose gives evidence of a community of peers engaging in invention as a social act even while publishing separately. Writers including Samuel Delany, Joanna Russ, James Tiptree, Jr., and Ursula Le Guin were writing science fiction as well as communicating regularly with one another during the same moments that they were becoming fully conscious of the need to express the experiences of women (and others) in American literary and academic society. These creative artists formed a group of loosely affiliated peers who had evolved to the same basic conclusion concerning the need for a literature and theory that could finally address the science of social justice. Their literary productions have been well-studied as contemporaneous feminist utopias since Russ's 1981 essay "Recent Feminist Utopias." However, much can be understood about their rhetorical process of spreading the meme of feminist equality once we go beyond the literary productions and more closely examine their letters, essays, and commentary. This dissertation will show that this group of utopian fiction writers can be studied as exactly that: a loosely connected, collaborative, creative group of peers with specific ideas about how humanity could be better if assumptions of male superiority were undermined and with the rhetorical means to spread those ideas in ways which changed the literary and social conversation.

LET'S JUST STEAL THE ROCKETS: 1970S FEMINIST SCIENCE FICTION
AS RADICAL RHETORICAL REVISIONING

by

Patrick Nolan Belk

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Committee Chair

To Erica Belk Thomas
and to Mellany Belk, Cassie Belk Bowlin,
Savannah, Shelby, Deanna, Abby, Katie,
and all the other women who have meant the world to me

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by PATRICK NOLAN BELK has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I

1970S FEMINIST SCIENCE FICTION, THE UTOPIAN IMPULSE, AND THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

“Man in Space”
By Billy Collins

All you have to do is listen to the way a man
sometimes talks to his wife at a table of people
and notice how intent he is on making his point
even though her lower lip is beginning to quiver,

and you will know why the women in science
fiction movies who inhabit a planet of their own
are not pictured making a salad or reading a magazine
when the men from earth arrive in their rocket,

why they are always standing in a semicircle
with their arms folded, their bare legs set apart,
their breasts protected by hard metal disks.

Sexism Defeats Science

As any student of twentieth century popular culture can tell you, Golden Age science fiction of the 1940s and 1950s worked to change the sociological imagination, providing visual and narrative images of humans in space, creating new common assumptions about space travel and paving the way for men in rockets, harnessing new scientific and technological discoveries, to capture the anti-Soviet political climate and ride it to the moon. By the spring of 1960, the Mercury space program defined for all Americans the Right Stuff for space exploration: handsome, strong, bright, young, white

men. Ironically, as the nation embraced these future astronauts, claiming in them the best vision of American culture, that single-sex, single-race vision was being dismantled through the maturing American Civil Rights movement and the blooming women's movement. As participants in these new social movements, not all women or men were comfortable with NASA's inherent sexism.¹ As a practical challenge to the common belief that only men should go to space, a loosely-affiliated group of very experienced female pilots, supported by various philanthropists independent of NASA, began training and testing according to the same physical and psychological guidelines required of the male Mercury astronaut candidates.

This group, known as the Mercury 13, was successful in showing the abilities of women as potential space explorers. By the spring of 1960, when the U. S. Navy stopped allowing them to test, thirteen women had passed the major initial set of tests and at least one of these women had passed all of the tests required to clear men for space exploration (Luce). Certainly by the time Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman in space, anyone who cared would have known that women were not only as well prepared biologically for space but were actually better prepared than men. As *The Milwaukee Sentinel* points out, admittedly in an article stuck in the "society" pages between images of dresses and articles about the new teenage furniture market, science had already shown that women were smaller, thereby saving room for more scientific equipment and other space needs; women were less susceptible to radiation poisoning and less prone to stress-related illnesses including sudden heart attacks; and women were better capable psychologically to withstand the loneliness which days of deprivation in space required

(“Disappointed Lady” 1.5). Despite such proof of women’s advantage or even the irrefutable proof that a woman with much less training than the Mercury 13 had become a cosmonaut, NASA refused to consider women fit for space. Americans simply could not stomach it, an anonymous NASA commander claimed (Madrigal). Alexis Madrigal claims, “The truth is, the sexism of the day overwhelmed the science of the day.”

And the “sexism of the day” was undeniable. In the June 1962 society pages of the *Pittsburgh Press*, commentator Ruth Heimbeucher argues that while she promotes female equality, she could never imagine women in space. She questions the ability of society to accept women astronauts: “Can you imagine anything more unflattering to a female figure – any figure – than a pressurized space suit, full of lumps and bumps that aren’t there? And space boots that do nothing, even for the slimmest ankle, a helmet that flattens a bouffant hairdo even before a countdown is halfway counted down.” Such segregation did not go unnoticed. As the critic Janice Bogstad notes, “If I had ever believed in the objectivity of science and technology as presently practiced, this persistent virtual exclusion of women from such things as the space program and persistent underplaying of their role in the media would have shaken that belief” (Bogstad and Emrys 2). As an alternative to discussions of female astronauts being relegated to the society pages, the accomplished politician and journalist Clare Boothe Luce, writing for *Life*, did give the Mercury 13 women a well-developed article in June 1963 titled “A Blue-eyed Blonde with a New Hair-do Stars in a Russian Space Spectacular: She Orbits Over the Sex Barrier.” Luce compared the lack of initiative at NASA when it came to women in space to the successful Soviet space program’s use of

blue-eyed blonde astronaut Valentina Tereshkova. Along with photos of the Mercury 13, *Life* spent a page showing photos of cosmonaut Valya with her new “do” and in her helmet. As her title suggests, even *Life* knew what mattered most. Certainly no American would ever require a woman to wear an unflattering space helmet! At no point during the Apollo program that followed did women gain admittance to astronaut training; yet, by the 1980s, NASA proudly included women on various shuttle flights and other missions. Somewhere in those two decades, the image of women in space helmets changed from Heimbeucher’s incredulity to Sally Ride’s smiling face.

“Ideas and products and messages and behaviors spread just like viruses do,” claims Malcolm Gladwell in the introduction to *The Tipping Point*. The book describes how sociological change happens in a society – not as a gradual upward slope – but rather exponentially. In the conversation of 1970s feminist utopian authors, we find just such a tipping point: the moment when the meme – the tiniest reproducible germ of thought – that women and men are all humans and should be treated equally infects enough of American society to cause an epidemic-like change in thought. The following dissertation will take a close look at one segment of the culture of the middle 1970s – that of feminist utopian authors writing in the science fiction field – in order to examine how this paradigm shift of inclusion for women, at least at the level of language, occurred. Here we will examine what changed in the social consciousness of a group of engaged artists and how that change was propagated by looking at these writers who shared not only a placement as utopian science fiction authors but also a genuine connection with one another and a willingness to critique their own changing approaches to feminism.

Beginning by defining the feminist utopian tradition as a place of activism, we will see how these authors used the utopian tradition to both investigate the positive effects of revisioning gender norms for themselves as well as to move their audience toward similar revisioning of such norms for the betterment of society. Ultimately, the dissertation will engage with the letters, articles, commentary, and fiction of a small group of loosely affiliated peers in conversation, focusing primarily on the writings of Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, James Tiptree, Jr., and Samuel Delany while including as part of the conversation a broader selection of their contemporaries such as Suzy McKee Charnas, Sally Gearhart, Jeffrey Smith, Marge Piercy, and others.

Changing the World One Word at a Time

The original introduction to the television show *Star Trek* exemplifies the beautiful promise that many people in America and elsewhere around the world felt in the middle 1960s. The show, first pitched as *Wagon Train to the Stars*, presents a communist utopian future where each person, regardless of nationality or even species, could rise to the peak of his abilities while exploring the universe – not to conquer but to better understand. It is filled with the promise of technology as well as tolerance and understanding. The bridge of the starship Enterprise was captained by a plucky American, of course, but it was manned by a Russian, a Japanese, and a true alien. It even had a woman – a black woman. Such an addition to the crew did not go unnoticed: “Even a popular television show like *Star Trek* shows a spaceship with a mixed crew,” writes Joanna Russ; “fifteen years ago this was unthinkable” (“The Image of Women” 210).

Still, as Russ points out, the women on *The Enterprise* were hardly equal to the men: “the ladies of the crew spend their time as nurses, stewardesses and telephone operators” (210, n16). Even the woman working on the bridge, despite her rank, did not seem to be part of the chain of command. In effect, her only job was in relaying communications from a terminal in front of her to the captain, sort of like a reverse form of office dictation. But she was there, on the ship, on the voyage. And once she got to kiss the captain. Despite its clear forward-looking political message as a piece of utopian fiction, it is easy to pick apart the original *Star Trek* when we begin to examine it with a critical eye trained in even the slightest bit of feminist theory. Such exercise is belied, however, by the undeniable hope the show gave to many viewers, a large number of whom were women. The utopian methodology of the show suggested the possibility that the future would be radically different from the present and different in ways that made the future undeniably better for everyone. If the catchy phrase “where no man has gone before” seemed to unintentionally relegate women to the sidelines, surely that was more an effect of the English language which stubbornly refuses to have a useful gender-neutral pronoun, right?

Fast-forward twenty years to the second incarnation of *Star Trek*. Even if the storylines were a bit more obviously philosophical, the main thrust of *The Next Generation* remained the same as the original show: the inclusive bridge command structure now included the great enemy Klingon; the universe was gladly giving up its mysteries to the communist utopian society of the Federation; the command crew remained predominately male except for the empath (of course the show must have a

woman to interpret feelings) and the medical officer. Still, something felt different about this show. Perhaps it was the fact that though he was obviously male and British and a bit stuffy, the lead was a feminist rather than the overly masculine captain of the 1960s; or perhaps it was that the introductory voice over to the show had changed slightly to “where no one has gone before,” thereby consciously including not only men but also women and others in this utopian future. Certainly it is undeniable that the change in the show’s language from “man” in the 1960s to “one” in the 1980s can tell us something significant about a tipping point in language in the 1970s, at least on popular American television, and at least in the literary ghetto of utopian science fiction.

It was also in the middle of the 1970s in *The Selfish Gene* when Richard Dawkins first defined memes as chunks of thought which are passed like genes, only they replicate in the mind rather than in the womb (192). “Language seems to ‘evolve’ by non-genetic means, and at a rate which is orders of magnitude faster than genetic evolution,” Dawkins observes (189). As the replicators of ideas, memes change human thought and, provided they are mutations of current thought, if successful, provide new ways of thinking just as newly mutated genes, if successful, provide new ways of living, thereby facilitating Darwinian evolution. Hence, in 1976 as a biologist in England, Dawkins was providing a framework for understanding what only a few short years later the philosopher Richard Rorty would call “edifying discourse.” For Rorty, edification is the “project of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking” (*Philosophy* 360). Edification may include the “hermeneutic activity of making connections [...]. But it may instead consist in the ‘poetic’ activity of thinking up such new aims, new words, or new

disciplines, followed by [...] the attempt to reinterpret our familiar surroundings in the unfamiliar terms of our new inventions”; either approach fails to be “constructive” in the way of accepted construction through normal discourse (360). Just as mutations are the key to understanding Darwinian evolution in biology, the key to Rorty’s understanding of edification is “abnormal discourse” which works to challenge normal discourse by estranging the audience’s experience. He claims, “edifying discourse is *supposed* to be abnormal, to take us out of our old selves by the power of strangeness, to aid us in becoming new beings” (Rorty, *Philosophy*, 360; emphasis in original). Although most abnormal discourse is meaningless and thereby fruitless, it is only through such abnormality that the human conversation can evolve. For Rorty, “the point of edifying philosophy is to keep the conversation going rather than to find objective truth. [...] Edifying philosophy is not only abnormal but reactive, having sense only as a protest against attempts to close off conversation by proposals for universal” agreement about the static truth of reality (*Philosophy* 377). And just as Darwinian evolution suggests a world in flux, edifying philosophy allows us to understand how human society changes through the production of new sociological possibilities.

An important part of understanding the sociological possibility of a tipping point approach is the realization that memes such as the idea of feminist equality can exist for long periods of time in human consciousness at the individual level before they reach a point where they suddenly change the sociological imagination. As the articles on the Mercury 13 candidates show, women reading the society pages or *Life* magazine not only cared about their hair-dos but also about the future of other women in space. And there

were certainly feminist stories of women in future societies available before 1969, but these articles and stories did not create the necessary gravity to shift popular opinion, to create a culture-wide feminist consciousness-raising. It was only in the 1970s through the fictional investigation of futures with radically different gender structures, repeated in larger and larger numbers of science fiction stories, in fan-driven commentary, articles, and academic work, that the meme of feminist equality was able to shift the sociological consciousness of a larger society.

The meme of feminist equality is understood as the mutation in thought that presents women as inherently equal with men despite religious lessons and physical size. It has existed as an identifiable meme in various forms in Western thought for millennia. Even if the scope of this meme is narrowed to the field of utopian literature, a tradition of feminist utopias stretches back several hundred years in English literature alone. And narrowing further to what could easily be called American pulp-style science fiction, the meme of feminist equality regularly appears in several well-respected (repeatedly anthologized) stories if not in the most popular novels beginning in the 1930s. However, this meme did not significantly shift the genre of science fiction until 1969 with the publication of Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*. From that point, it spread so quickly in the next few years that even those spreading the meme had trouble keeping up. By the middle 1970s, the meme of feminist equality in science fiction was such that men such as Brian Aldiss and Harlan Ellison who were defining the field claimed writing by women which focused on spreading the meme of feminist equality as the best contemporary writing in the field.

Certainly after this tipping point in the middle 1970s, feminist memes in science fiction became almost commonplace. By the 1980s not only were books such as Joan Slonczewski's *A Door Into Ocean* and Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis trilogy espousing feminist utopias or dystopias quite common (and commonly award winners and best sellers), but also books without such overt aims such as galaxy-spanning (and traditionally hyper-masculine) space operas such as Iain M. Bank's best-selling Culture series could easily present entire galactic civilizations founded in feminist utopian principles without such construct being considered notable. In fact, even with its conscious change from "man" to "one," *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, being part of the culturally hesitant mainstream of primetime television, seemed quite dated to many of the readers of science fiction in the 1980s. These viewers had already accepted the tipping point of feminism in the genre and could not comfortably imagine a better future for humanity without a great deal more feminist equality than that portrayed on the show.

Collaboration and the Sociological Imagination

Writing nearly a hundred years ago, John Dewey suggests that social change such as this tipping point toward feminist equality occurs when like-minded individuals join together in "cooperative voluntary endeavor[s]" (269). Such movements, rather than being collectivist political actions, are collaborations wherein individual experience is key to the success of social action. Dewey claims that "in fact the great social changes which have produced new social institutions have been the cumulative effect of flank movements" and that "movements going on in the interstices of the existing order are

those which will in fact shape the future” (271). Over the course of the last several decades, flank movements opposed to discrimination based on race, gender, and sexuality have appeared or reappeared “in the interstices.” The individuals present in each of these flank movements have championed the idea of associated effort promoted by Jane Addams in the decades leading to Dewey and again, with the 1964 Harvard University Press re-issue of her influential *Democracy and Social Ethics*. In attempting to revision Addams as a public philosopher along the likes of her friend Dewey, Maurice Hamington argues for accepting her as “founding a critical feminist pragmatism” grounded in a “*radical feminism*” which, rather than seeking to provide greater access for women in any contemporary social reality, challenges “existing structures” and revisions said social reality (10, emphasis in original). Addams writes, “Progress must always come through the individual who varies from the type and has sufficient energy to express this variation.... Progress, however, is not secure until the mass has conformed to this new righteousness” (159). In effect, the individual may have a utopian vision, but until she can share that meme with the masses through the sociological imagination, such vision can not serve the feminist-pragmatist agenda as what Herbert Marcuse calls the “historical imperative” to continue the change of humanity for the better.

Writing about the importance of a shared sociological imagination as the foundation for such change, Avery Gordon claims, “We need to know where we live in order to imagine living elsewhere. We need to imagine living elsewhere before we can live there” (101). To better understand the nature of change supported by the utopian impulse, I would change Gordon’s second sentence to: “We need to imagine that living

elsewhere is possible before we can create the elsewhere and live there.” In order for the spreading of new memes to be effective, we must have theorists who actively provide reasons for change. Socially conscious theorists such as Simone De Beauvoir are, therefore, responsible to break the reader out of the society pages and show us “where we live” before creative language users such as Le Guin, Delany, Tiptree, and Russ can work to spread alternative realities or lived experience by helping us “imagine living elsewhere.” Only after the sociological imagination includes radical alternatives can society begin the moves that make living elsewhere possible.

Marcuse argues that such movements in the sociological imagination are a historical imperative for humanity, and that this imperative is accomplished through a use of the “utopian impulse” – an artistic statement which encourages humanity to become better. George Herbert Mead, skirting a metaphysical use of the sociological imagination, suggests, “We determine what the world has been by the anxious search for the means of making it better, and we are substituting the goal of a society aware of its own values and minded intelligently to pursue them, for” a metaphysical utopia set up outside of human control (108). Certainly such a metaphysical utopia can work to convince individuals to become better. However, by its very nature such utopia most often works against full social engagement: if a belief in a heavenly paradise may make you worship a particular god in a particular manner or even emulate the great deeds of a god or a hero, such belief usually also rests on the assumption that you are special in the eyes of the gods who judge you. In effect, much of the access to Valhalla or Heaven or the Elysian Fields lies

in the individual being better than other individuals. These static and perfect utopias are not for everyone, in part because they would cease to be utopias if everyone was invited.

However, in suggesting that humanity can substitute a better world in the here-and-now for a heavenly utopia attainable by only a few, Mead argues, “Since society has endowed us with self-consciousness, we can enter personally into the largest undertakings which the intercourse of rational selves extends before us [...] and make our own the values in which we are involved through those undertakings in which the community of all rational beings is engaged” (109). Note the inclusionary nature of Mead’s and Marcuse’s historical imperative. It works as a pragmatic method of social engagement to influence society in order to improve lived experience for the entire cultural group. The American movement of social feminism that became prevalent following the publications of De Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* entered into just such an undertaking. This movement included not only those feminist theorists who were writing powerful critiques of contemporary social structures (“where we live”) but also creative artists (sometimes, such as with Russ and Delany, the same individuals as the theorists) who were envisioning a world of radical difference from the normality they inhabited in the 1960s and 1970s.

Although the utopian tradition has been a staple of critical thought for millennia, it is often, ironically, dismissed as meaningless fantasy or even distraction by those seeking genuine change in society. Like satire, with which it regularly shares a page, utopia requires a different mode of thinking, a different use of language, and different reading conventions than does writing about the normality of the mundane world.

Utopian writing contains a rhetorical purpose: to consistently expand the historical imperative by offering alternatives to the lived experience of its audience. The rhetorical method of utopia is to present difference in order to critique reality, to show the audience that things can be radically different in order to break normal discourse about reality and provide space for genuine social change. If, as Lev Vygotsky claims, “the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual” (36), then the rhetorical power of utopia is the creation of new social constructs which, through juxtaposition with the known construct of the audience, provide avenues for changing word meaning.² Unlike most of the content of analytical works like *The Second Sex* or *The Feminine Mystique* which asks readers to dissect lived experience, utopian discourse asks the reader to take a step outside reality in order to imagine a radically different lived experience. The reason that De Beauvoir’s and Friedan’s books end as they do with utopian statements is because after any such critical analysis of the short-comings of human society, the utopian impulse provides radically different visions with which to contrast actual lived experience, creating the foundations for changing word meanings and thereby real hope for social change.

Contrary to its detractors, and as Mead implies, drastically unlike the fantasy and mythic traditions with which it is often lumped, utopian discourse is intimately connected to the reader and writer’s lived experience of reality. The discourse’s express purpose is improving that reality through changing the way humans socially construct it, thereby changing the way language users create thoughts about the society to which they belong. Vygotsky defines this shift as the developing meaning of words, a situation wherein “it is

not merely the content of a word that changes, but the way in which reality is generalized and reflected in a word” (213). For instance, it is the evolving nature of words such as “female” and “man” that make Russ’s title *The Female Man* so provocative; with this title, the reader is asked before even beginning the novel to radically question definitions of gender in order to un-stick word meaning and provide room for new thoughts. It is in contrasting their personal lived experience of “female” and “man” with Russ’s radically different lived experiences and seeing that their actual lived experience fails to provide meaning for the full experiences of human lives that the audience of utopian discourse can begin to shift their thoughts to a radically different definition of gender and of self. Utopia does not so much create a blueprint of how to get from here to a better future as it provides impetus for going there.

In considering how the utopian impulse as a rhetorical convention provides hope for the oppressed of the world, Paulo Freire writes, “Imagination and conjecture about a different world than the one of oppression, are as necessary to the praxis of historical ‘subjects’ (agents) in the process of transforming reality as it necessarily belongs to human toil that that the worker or artisan first have in his or her head a design, a ‘conjecture,’ of what he or she is about to make” (*Pedagogy of Hope* 30). Such a statement connects the utopian impulse directly to a Platonic understanding of Marcuse’s historical imperative – the utopian impulse works to transform reality by providing those agents following the impulse with a possibility of something radically different and better. For such possibility to exist, however, it must be created in the imagination not of one artist but of a social group empowered through such vision. And though such

creation must use the normal discourse known by its society, such discourse must be challenged by edifying discourse in order for those creating a better future to describe something radically different from normality – their lived experiences – in, as Freire puts it, a language specific to the oppressed “which, emerging from and returning upon their reality, sketches out the conjectures, the designs, the anticipations of their new world” (30). The purpose of such language is to produce “realistic” experiences of living elsewhere – such experiences could then be read deconstructively³ by members of the discourse community with the specific intent of changing the knowledge of what that community experiences as possible reality.⁴

Such a reading of literature is certainly pragmatic in its approach. Utopian fiction’s power as a stimulant in the historical imperative rests on the rhetorical effect of the utopian impulse on the foundation of the sociological imagination: connecting the individual “experience” of a utopian vision to the “common experience” of the reader and ultimately of humankind in order to juxtapose radically different experiences. Following Mead and Dewey, one can see that the purpose of feminist science fiction of the 1970s is not mainly to present an entertaining, character and plot-driven story (though we certainly hope for and find such literature in the utopian tradition); rather, the purpose of this group is to give readers new collective experiences with which they can critique the society to which they belong. These collective experiences are Gordon’s examples of imagining “living elsewhere” which enable readers to join the community of peers who have a shared vision of social change.

Science Fiction, Epistemology, and the Critique of Reality

Considering the possibilities of science fiction (as opposed to realistic fiction) to breathe life into not-yet-realized feminists ideas and other social theories, Joanna Russ claims, “High culture is still dominated by realism... but surely the ‘paraliterary’ genres exist to receive and express what can’t easily be contained by realism” (“On ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” 162). As a historical survey of science fiction would suggest, an investigation of social change as a radical departure from the normality of the reader’s lived experience is one of the fundamental rhetorical aims underpinning science fiction. Science fiction presents new images for the sociological imagination, but unlike fantasy, those images are (or should be) based in the growing and changing knowledge we have about how the universe (how society) “really” works. “Like much ‘post-modern’ literature (Nabokov, Borges),” Russ suggests, “science fiction deals commonly, typically, and often insistently, with epistemology.... It is the only modern literature that attempts to assimilate imaginatively scientific knowledge about reality” (“Towards an Aesthetic” 11). Science fiction extrapolates from the known in much the same way that science itself does: this is why so many science fiction stories, such as Tom Godwin’s “The Cold Equations” or Le Guin’s critical utopia “The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas,” work most effectively as philosophical thought experiments. In the forms of thinking which underpin the genre of science fiction, Russ argues, the treatment of an admittedly imaginary idea “becomes complicated, plausible and (in that sense) realistic... realistic in the sense of making concessions to sense, actuality, and logic” (“The Wearing Out” 49). In its endeavor to “assimilate imaginatively scientific knowledge about reality,” science

fiction works more like philosophical theory about reality than like literary fiction. In fact, Russ suggests, “One must have a taste for abstract analysis to write science fiction... or criticism” (*To Write Like* xvi). Similarly arguing for understanding science fiction as “a privileged and paradigmatic genre [...] for critical theory,” Carl Freedman claims, “science fiction is of all forms of fiction today the one that bears the deepest and most interesting affinity with the rigors of dialectical thinking” (*Critical Theory* xv). In understanding how science fiction assimilates critical theory such as Marcuse’s historical imperative, Freedman and Russ suggest that, especially as it embraces utopian discourse and reconstructs lived experience, the genre serves to critique reality, challenging normal discourse and expanding the horizons of human potential. Freedman claims, “I do believe that both critical theory and science fiction have the potential to play a role in the liberation of humanity from oppression” (xx).

Such emphasis on how the genre embraces the historical imperative underscores the fact that science fiction has historically been a genre devoted to the utopian impulse. James Gunn claims that science fiction is the literature of change and the literature of thought (as opposed to character or action); in effect, he argues that science fiction has always been more philosophy than “literature” in that it is always about the placement of the human species in the universe (“Toward a Definition” 8). Darko Suvin claims, “SF sees the norms of any age, including emphatically its own, as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to a *cognitive* view” (“Estrangement and Cognition” 26). Additionally, Suvin writes, “In the twentieth century SF has moved into the sphere of anthropological and cosmological thought, becoming a diagnosis, a warning, a call to understanding and

action, and – most important – a mapping of possible alternatives” (31). Although Suvin’s mapping of alternatives is not specifically feminist, once such estrangement from normality begins to be explored, social change becomes key to changing the extrapolated possibilities. For instance, once Abraham Maslow presents the utopian possibility of each human becoming a fully realized self, some science fiction writer such as Delany is going to write about a society (or several) where the goal of the entire society, such as that of the moon Triton in *Trouble on Triton*, is to facilitate such realization. In taking this cognitive view of their own knowledge and lived experiences, 1970s feminist writers were able to present alternative social constructions containing different degrees of feminism which then allow readers to experience what it would be like to live in worlds where gender is valued differently.

1970s Feminist Utopian Writers as a Community of Peers

In taking on the normal conventions of the science fiction genre but applying them in abnormal rhetorical moves – in essence, in stealing the rockets from a genre too often associated with “maledom” as Le Guin calls it – feminist utopian writers are able to create theory as literature in a genre which has traditionally used its literature to critique “where we live.” The feminist movement in science fiction writing – an example of Dewey’s “cooperative voluntary endeavor” – spurred by New Wave science fiction of the late 1960s, created powerful feminist fiction which demanded change, taking the known language of the genre and revisioning it. In order to understand how the feminist science fiction writers of the 1970s were helping their readers imagine a world other than the one

they inhabited, we need to understand them as part of the larger Western movement of social feminism that became prevalent following the publications of *The Second Sex* and *The Feminine Mystique*. Feminist utopian writings from Friedan through the 1970s provided a radical departure from not only the static feminist utopias of a couple generations before, such as the feminist pragmatist Charlotte Perkins Gilman's island of *Herland*, but also from the previous generation's popular (and overly masculinized) dystopian constructions of George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*. Unlike these static utopias and dystopias, however, 1970s feminist writers embraced utopia as method, so Tom Moylan argues. Rather than providing examples of perfect societies, they embraced ambiguity and heuristic solutions to present narratives focused on dynamic change. Their utopias were in the process of becoming, filled with uncertainty and incomplete, just as the authors of those utopias were works-in-progress who had difficulties imagining such better worlds.

Beginning in the 1960s, science fiction writers, while remaining at the cutting edge of physics, chemistry, and biology which had defined the genre since H. G. Wells, were also able to embrace the social theories of the 1960s and 1970s as topics for the genre. In her 1971 article "The Wearing Out of Genre Materials," Russ argues that science fiction is "theoretically open-ended: that is, new science fiction is possible as long as there is new science" and new combinations of sciences (54). Russ sees the possibilities of the genre expanding because of a "multitude of infant sciences like ethology and psychology" coupled with what she sees as the unification of disciplines in a continuity from physics through the biological and social sciences to philosophy and

ultimately the arts: “This opens the whole world and every single extant discipline to science fiction” (54). As a critic, Russ makes high claims for science fiction as a genre; yet at least for feminism, those claims are well-founded. As Freedman says in *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, “what Russ’s work can help us to understand is that science fiction is an especially appropriate form for feminism” (131). For instance, building on the sociological theory that gender is a false construct of society, Le Guin creates an androgynous race of humans in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Although Le Guin suggests that too many men found her vision non-threatening while many women wanted her to go much further in establishing a non-gendered society, such androgynous humans added a great deal to the sociological imagination of those on the verge of change in 1969 who needed a vision of living without gender. Meanwhile, Delany’s fictional work, such as his multi-award-winning 1966 novel *Babel-17*, addresses ideas of semiotics through the fictional application of the theories of Ferdinand De Saussure and Jacques Derrida. And in his extra-literary commentary and in novels such 1975’s *Trouble on Triton*, Delany engages specifically with the theoretical work of Michel Foucault. Not only in her critical analyses but also in her fiction, including her most well-known novel, *The Female Man*, Russ engages directly with many contemporaneous pathways in the social sciences. Her writing deals with, among other ideas, arguments about biological pre-determinism through genetics versus social constructionism and the utopian impulse found in the call for the autonomous self as explored in Eric Berne’s theories of Transactional Analysis.

Feminist New Age writers including Delany, Russ, Tiptree, Le Guin, and others were writing science fiction as well as communicating regularly with one another during

the same moments that they were becoming fully conscious of the need to express the experiences of women (and others) in American literary and academic society. Although they did not work in concert or even necessarily agree with one another, these creative artists formed a group of loosely affiliated peers who had evolved to the same basic conclusion concerning the need for a literature and theory that could finally address the science of social justice. They embraced the science fiction genre in order to use its rhetorical expectations which include the utopian impulse to create possibilities of social alternatives which could critique the assumptions of normality in gender relations. In defining a similar group of intellectuals pushing society forward in *Trouble on Triton*, Delany names the “Circle” as “a collection of extremely talented artists and scientists, some of whom were also connected with the University, some of whom not, but all of whom lived and worked (sometimes together, sometimes in opposition)” in the same intellectual space (297-298). “A great deal of personal, social, and spiritual interplay occurred between members of the Circle [...]. But it is what these men and women brought to it, rather than what they took from it, that ultimately make the Circle the fascinating moment in the intellectual life [...] that it is” (299). The group of feminist science fiction writers on which this dissertation focuses is similar in every way to Delany’s Circle. Their literary productions have been well-studied as feminist utopias since Russ’s 1981 essay “Recent Feminist Utopias” and appear together in various studies by critics from Moylan and Frederic Jameson to Jennifer Burwell, Marleen Barr, Justine Larbalestier, Helen Merrick, and others. Much of the collaboration undertaken by this group is recorded not in the literary productions but rather in their mostly

unexamined letters, essays, and commentary. This commentary was published sometimes together with the literature but often in the much smaller and more engaged community reading the *Forum* of the Science Fiction Writers of America as well as self-published fanzines of the time period such as the short-lived feminist fanzine *The Witch and the Chameleon* and *Khatru 3 & 4: The Women's Symposium*, from the fall of 1975.

The Feminist Writers and the Shape of the Future

In an introduction to “Recent Feminist Utopias,” written in 1995, Russ suggests that the utopian impulse which drove much feminist writing in the 1970s was a matter of the writers experiencing “parallel evolution” (133). Her point is that writers such as herself, the French novelist Monique Wittig, the American outlier Sally Gearhart, and even mainstream writers such as Ira Levin each wrote at least parts of their feminist utopias or dystopias without reading those of the other writers. Instead of influencing one another, Russ suggests that these authors were sharing the experience of finding useful rhetorical constructs similar to those used by Gilman and her fellow utopian authors of two generations earlier. Although the memes of feminist equality are clearly similar to those used by Gilman (and much, much earlier by Margaret Cavendish), what is missing from Russ’s quick introduction is an acknowledgment of the utopian impulse that was “in the air” in the 1970s – certainly in Wittig’s France and also in Gearhart’s San Francisco. As Jeanne Gomoll points out:

It was not one or two or a mere scattering of women, after all, who participated in women’s renaissance in science fiction. It was a great BUNCH of women: too

many to discourage or ignore individually, too good to pretend to be flukes. In fact, their work was so pervasive, so obvious, so influential, and they won so many of the major awards, that their work demands to be considered centrally as one looks back on the late '70s and early '80s. They broadened the scope of Sf exploration from mere technology to include personal and social themes as well. Their work and their (our) concerns are of central importance to any remembered history or critique.

Certainly a great “BUNCH” of feminist writers did emerge at the forefront of science fiction in the 1970s, and although women had always participated in what Brian Aldiss calls the “ghetto” of this pulp genre, they were rarely acknowledged as leaders in the field. As Gomoll reminds us, “From 1953 through 1967 there had not been one single woman to win a Hugo award for fiction. Between 1968 and 1984 there were eleven.” Clearly something changed. A tipping point was reached.

The key in focusing on a group of peers using similar rhetorical conventions in order to push forth a social agenda is to define shared experiences for them. Understanding rhetorical invention as what Karen Burke LeFevre calls a “social act,” it is not enough to suggest Russ’s parallel evolution unless these writers communicated with one another about the memes which promote such evolution. Whereas for instance, it would be disingenuous to talk about Gilman’s *Herland* or Wittig’s *Les Guérillères* as influences on the group of writers without evidence of such influence, looking at not only the feminist arguments of Friedan and De Beauvoir but also the utopian impulse as shown in the historical imperative theory of Marcuse, the personal enrichment psychology of Berne, the humanist idealism of James, the notion of the ambiguity of Taoism, and the heterotopia created by Foucault should prove fruitful. Evidence shows

that each of these theories directly influenced our group. Therefore, as this dissertation focuses on the slice of the “conversation of [hu]mankind” represented by the group, it will investigate shared experiences and personal connections.

In middle 1970s feminist utopian writings the meme of female equality was used consciously to buttress a clearly defined rhetorical purpose: to undermine the assumption of hidden male privilege in language and society. In order to see this meme at work, I will focus on writers and correspondents ranging from Le Guin to Vonda McIntyre, Charnas, Delany, Tiptree, and Piercy with Russ as their center. These writers make up a discrete group of creative artists, analyzing their literary output and their shared conversation will prove fruitful in examining how changes in language work to not only create changes in human society but also, through the historical imperative fueled by the utopian impulse, to create a better society. The creative conversation defining this rhetorical purpose, gives evidence of a community of writers engaging in invention as a social act even while publishing separately. In examining this discourse community, I will bring together a few distinct lines of inquiry: I will first seek to define the utopian impulse as a rhetorical method and iterate the importance of affecting the sociological imagination through invention and collaboration, and then through examining the “conversation of [hu]mankind” as it occurred among the group, define the 1970s feminist science fiction movement as a conscious moment of utopian discourse while simultaneously showing (as in the work of Addams, Marcuse, Moylan, and Jameson) the importance of the utopian impulse to our ever-shifting understanding of ourselves as humans. I will show through a close reading of various forms of commentary how

redefining gendered terms (like “he” and “female man”) as an act of edifying discourse can be a liberating experience not only for those like Delany, Russ, and Gearhart for whom the definitions never fit, but also for those like Le Guin, Tiptree, Charnas, and most of their readers for whom the definitions fit but remained unconsciously constrictive. Ultimately, the project argues that this group of utopian fiction writers can be studied as exactly that: a loosely connected, collaborative, creative group of peers – a discourse community – with specific ideas about how humanity could be better if assumptions of male superiority were undermined and with the means to spread those ideas in ways which changed the literary and social conversation.

CHAPTER II

UTOPIA IS A PROCESS, NOT A GOAL

Literary discourse is infused with the utopian impulse, that desire to make something better out of human society. Since the beginning of recorded writing, humans have transcribed dreams of better places. Most of these – Eden, Valhalla, The Elysian Fields – were static constructions reached through some supernatural step beyond life. Several, however, were designed as alternatives to lived experience. Atlantis and similar places were constructed in language to become part of the reality of the world, places across the ocean or the desert or the mountains where things were simply better than here. Such constructions often used a type of argumentative discourse wherein the “there” over the mountain was compared and contrasted with the “here” so that here was found wanting. Usually these constructions were designed as backdrops for adventure, but sometimes – most famously in Plato’s *Republic* – the constructions were used specifically as alternative spaces through which to critique commonly held beliefs or practices in sociological, theological, or philosophical arguments. Taking the philosophical approach of Plato and combining it with the some of the adventure stories of those places across the seas, in the early sixteenth century Thomas More created his *Utopia* which gave not only its name but also its design to the literary genre of which it remains the best known example.

The full title of More's work is *Concerning the Best State of a Commonwealth and the New Island of Utopia*. An obvious pun on the Greek *ou* for "no" and *topos* for "place," More's island name Utopia is also thought to be a pun on the Greek *eu* for "happy," thereby creating a "happy" or better place to imagine which the reader would recognize as no-place (More 5, n1). It is this notion of the imaginary happy place as a conscious social construction – a society planned at some institutional level to achieve human peace, happiness, or some other standard of perfection – that has become the standard design of utopia as a literary genre, a design recurring dozens of times since More, notably in works such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. The design also recurs, significantly for our purposes, in an entire subgenre of feminist utopias beginning at least as early as Margaret Cavendish's 1666 *The Blazing World* and continuing well into the twentieth century with works such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1915 *Herland* and James Tiptree, Jr.'s novella *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* from 1976.

Sadly or at the least ironically, the group of writers including Tiptree, Ursula Le Guin, Samuel Delany, and Joanna Russ cannot be expected to have read *The Blazing World* or *Herland* (which, being published only serially in Gilman's own newsletter in 1915, was lost to readers until its book publication in 1979). However, the recovery of women writers of genre literature such as Mary Shelley (a recovery to which Russ contributed an introduction written in 1974 to Shelley's *Tales and Stories*) and of such feminist fiction as Gilman's utopian novel was a significant contribution to literary studies of the 1970s and particularly important to Russ as her academic publications

show.⁵ In addition to such recovery of women writers, members of the group actively engaged with utopian rhetorical conventions, understanding the philosophical utopias such as More's as well as the feminist utopian impulse found in Virginia Woolf to be antecedents to the sociological and philosophical arguments being made in the conversation in 1970s feminist science fiction.

Russ's 1975 essay "Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction" connects the younger and larger genre of science fiction to the utopian impulse, showing that writings such as Bertolt Brecht's "A Short Organum for the Theatre" were part of the immediate conversation of the Circle in the early 1970s (11). In a similar vein, in 1975 as introduction to and impetus for her most famous short story, the 1973 literary utopia "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," Le Guin quotes Williams James's "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life" wherein James posits the possibility of "millions kept permanently happy on the one simple condition that a certain lost soul on the far-off edge of things should lead a life of lonely torment" (*Twelve Winds* 224). She discusses in a few short paragraphs how James's focus on "the higher, more penetrating ideals" as "revolutionary" suggests to her, as James writes, that ideals should be understood as "the probable causes of future experience" (qtd. in *Twelve Winds* 224-225). James had much to say about the power of utopia such as "Faiths and utopias are the noblest exercises of human reason" (109), and Le Guin's quoting him in the introduction to her most famous story, an introduction read by most of her peers, makes his philosophy of revolutionary ideals and utopia, truncated as it is, part of the conversation of the group.

Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" ends by following those who walk away from Omelas. Though these walkers leave the utopia intact, allowing it to rest on the torment of the "lost soul on the far-off edge of things," they follow a vision of an even more perfect utopia:

Each alone, they go west or north, towards the mountains. They go on. They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into darkness, and they do not come back. The place they go towards is a place even less imaginable to most of us than the city of happiness. I cannot describe it at all. It is possible that it does not exist. But they seem to know where they are going, the ones who walk away from Omelas. (231)

The search for ever better versions of utopia as the testing grounds for future experience is a pragmatic approach to the literary genre, demanding a change from the description of a perfect place to a description of a better place which leaves open the possibility of still better places to come. As Herbert Marcuse defines it, such an approach allows for the revision of society to unfold as a succession of radically different ideas fueled by a universal utopian impulse. Pragmatically, this impulse serves as James's cause of "future experience," and according to Maurice Hamington, it was just such an impulse that led Jane Addams to work with Hull House as a template for a pragmatist utopian vision founded on the goal of human progress.

In order to more closely examine how the feminist science fiction writers of the 1970s used the utopian impulse to create alternative lived experiences which enabled their readers to step outside normal social constructions, I look at two things: utopian writing as a tradition in the field of science fiction, and the utopian impulse as an active part of the discourse of the group. Beyond establishing a history of utopianism in the

genre as found in popular histories of science fiction such as Brian Aldiss' *Billion Year Spree* (published 1973) and in the contemporaneous academic writings of James Gunn and Darko Suvin, it is also necessary to see the utopian impulse in the culture of the times as well as to examine how critics like Tom Moylan and Frederic Jameson see the utopian influence working in science fiction in the middle 1970s. Such analysis will provide grounding for better understanding how feminist writers such as Le Guin, Delany, Russ, and Tiptree embraced the utopian impulse to revision the worn-out genre of science fiction and defanged critique of utopia to promote a pragmatic feminist movement founded in utopian revisioning of lived reality. Such a movement focused on the utopian impulse as a dynamic catalyst for change and saw in that change the drive for hope in a better tomorrow – even if that better tomorrow remains, like the place beyond Omelas, unimaginable to those who seek it.

Utopia as Forebearer of Science Fiction

Though by the 1970s utopia and dystopia had become literary subgenres to the over-arching genre of science fiction, every commentator on the history of science fiction includes the great literary utopias as part of the roots of the genre. Brian Aldiss suggests that while early narratives about extra-planetary travel are certainly precursors to modern science fiction, the “great utopias have a better claim” (65). Beginning with More's *Utopia*, Aldiss lists ten utopias or dystopias which work as foundational science fiction texts, stepping down the centuries from More's 1516 publication to the 1949 publication of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It is no surprise that, considering they worked

together as chroniclers of the genre, James Gunn's more academic work would find similar examples to Aldiss' popular history. Indeed, Gunn's multi-volume *The Road to Science Fiction* finds the beginnings of science fiction literature not only in the first extra-planetary narratives such as Lucian of Samosata's *A True Story* which includes a trip to the moon as envisaged in 170 C.E., but also in the philosophical utopias of More, Francis Bacon, and Jonathan Swift. In volume 1 of his history, published in 1977, Gunn makes the claim, well accepted in literary circles, that with his coinage of the term "utopia" More also created the first version of the genre deserving of the name: "his semifictionalized narrative was the start of a new way of organizing and dramatizing an author's ideas about how to improve human conditions" (24). Gunn and Aldiss clearly show that those defining science fiction in the 1970s consistently found the genre's roots in a centuries-long utopian tradition.

While Aldiss and Gunn were science fiction writers who did popular histories of the genre, Darko Suvin is in many ways the key figure in academic science fiction scholarship in the 1970s. Considering how involved the feminist writers were in not only writing science fiction but also analyzing it, Suvin's genre-defining study *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, published by Yale University Press in 1979 but mostly "prepared" during the 1973-1974 academic year, shows with some clarity the major focus of the field in relation to utopia during the early 1970s (xvii). *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* is dedicated to seven "friends and comrades from *Science Fiction Studies*," a group including Le Guin and Fred Pohl (the publisher of *The Female Man*) among others. Such a dedication, along with more personal

correspondence⁶ with writers like Russ, cements Suvin's position as an academic addressing the ideas which his contemporaries found most engaging. *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* not only provides a piece of the intellectual puzzle from 1974, but also provides a highly influential piece of the successive academic studies of the feminist utopias of the 1970s. Such influence can be seen through Suvin's contributions to Tom Moylan's influential *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* and to Fredric Jameson's monumental *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* where Jameson claims Suvin as one of his "comrades" in the dedication.

In defining his poetics of science fiction, Suvin argues for a genre which sees as its purpose the attempt to change, at least intellectually, the place of humankind in the universe: "The aliens – utopians, monsters, or simply differing strangers – are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world. But the mirror is not only a reflecting one, virgin womb and alchemical dynamo: the mirror is a crucible" (5). This crucible is what Suvin calls, "cognitive estrangement," and when understood to operate at the level of syntax, the crucible is identical to Richard Rorty's abnormal discourse. Suvin pulls his understanding of estrangement from Bertolt Brecht's 1949 essay "A Short Organum for the Theatre,"⁷ quoting as primary inspiration the following: "A representation which estranges⁸ is one which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar" (qtd in Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, 6; original Brecht 192). Brecht suggests that estrangement in art is "designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp today"

(192). Elaborating on how such freedom allows the observer to see, as Galileo did, the same old pendulum swinging in a brand new way, Brecht argues that art must “amaze its public, and this can be achieved by a technique of alienating [estranging] the familiar” (192).

Taking Brecht’s notion of estrangement as the purpose of science fiction, Suvin argues that in “SF the attitude of estrangement [...] has grown into the *formal framework* of the genre” (7, emphasis in original). While mundane fiction strives to reflect “the author’s empirical environment” (*Metamorphoses* 4, n1) and myth or religion uses estrangement from the mundane in order to “explain once and for all the essence of phenomena” (7), science fiction seeks to take the reader outside of mundane reality in order to see such reality as flux. In the Women’s Symposium issue of Jeffrey Smith’s fanzine *Khatru*, Suzy McKee Charnas explains the value of such estrangement to the feminist writers as:

Through science fiction, I can see the same drab realities illuminated with the brilliance of the strange; everything becomes transmuted, fresh, newly-meaningful, full of writing-possibilities. Besides, distance helps in dealing with matters too painful, huge and paralyzing to handle close up.

Better yet, instead of having to twist “reality” in order to create “realistic” free female characters in today’s unfree society, the SF writer can create the societies that would produce those characters, not as exceptions of limited meaning and impact, but as the healthy, solid norm. (Smith and Gomoll 9)

Understanding science fiction as crucible enables Suvin to claim, “SF sees the norms of any age, including emphatically its own, as unique, changeable, and therefore subject to a *cognitive view*” (7, emphasis in original). Suvin’s point here is best understood when

science fiction is posited as a genre that sees itself first as philosophy and then as fiction, hence Suvin's definition of science fiction as "*a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal framework is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment*" (7-8, emphasis in original). Such a definition removes science fiction from the kinds of study applicable to most literary genres, finding it, as Russ suggests, "a changeling in the literary cradle" ("Towards an Aesthetic" 10). However, this changeling's roots delve deeply into centuries of the utopian tradition in philosophical argument and literature.

Suvin works to carve out a place for utopia as both a sub-genre of science fiction as well as its "aunt." He defines utopia as "the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis" (*Metamorphoses* 49). Introducing utopia as a literary genre, Suvin quotes Francis Bacon: "a sound argument may be drawn from Poesy, to show that there is agreeable to the spirit of man a more ample greatness, a more perfect order, and a more beautiful variety than it can [...] find in nature" (qtd in *Metamorphoses* 37). Bacon sees utopia as topoi for an argument about the betterment of humankind. Rather than finding that no-place outside of human experience, it is clear for More and Bacon as for Suvin that utopia may be no-place in the natural world; it is certainly not fantasy or myth. For it to be intellectually effective as a stimulant for social change, utopia must work as a

possibility attainable without metaphysical influence. “What is literally even more important” than a utopia being constructed by human rather than supernatural power, Suvin claims, is that “such a construct is *located in this world*. Utopia is an Other World immanent in the world of human endeavor, dominion, and hypothetic possibility” (*Metamorphoses* 42, emphasis in original). As such, the ambiguous utopias created by the 1970s feminist writers, such as that in Tiptree’s *Houston, Houston, Do You Read* and Delany’s *Trouble on Triton*, work as stimulants for social change precisely because the reader can understand how such places can be reached from where she stands now, and this understanding serves as Suvin’s crucible.

Ultimately, utopia is a rhetorical device wherein an alternative human-made social construct which seems an improvement on social reality is realized in the reader’s imagination in order to be contrasted with the reader’s lived experience. Following Ernst Bloch and in terms similar to those used by Russ in “Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction,” Suvin claims that literary utopia “is a heuristic device for perfectibility, an epistemological and not an ontological entity” (*Metamorphoses* 52). “If utopia is, then, philosophically, a method rather than a state, it cannot be realized or not realized – it can only be applied,” and such application happens when the text is “read as a dramatic dialogue” with a reader willing to pay attention to the argument of the utopia and to engage philosophically with an understanding of how to make the world a better place (52). Whereas literature in general seeks to “faithfully reproduce” the empirical reality surrounding the author and reader:

Utopia, on the contrary, endeavors to illuminate [people's] relationships to other [people] and to their surroundings by the basic device of a radically different location for the postulated novel human relations of its fable [...]. One should insist on the crucial concept of a radically different location, and an *alternative formal framework* functioning by explicit or implicit reference to the author's empirical environment. Without this reference, nonutopian readers, having no yardstick for comparison, could not understand the alternative novelty. Conversely, without such a return and feedback into the reader's normality there would be no function for utopias or other [estrangements]: 'the real function of estrangement is – and must be – the provision of a shocking and distancing mirror above the all too familiar reality.' No-place is defined by both not being and yet being like Place, by being the opposite and more perfect version of Place. (Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, 53-54; emphasis in original and containing a quotation from Ernst Block)

An understanding of utopia as a crucible, a method, an estrangement of the reader's normality, allows the reader to see the utopian impulse as a break with normal discourse rather than as a mere artistic creation of a beautiful place somewhere not here. As Rorty suggests, it is the use of abnormal discourse that allows for change, but as such, abnormal breaks make way for new versions of normal discourse; therefore, new breaks, new estrangements must regularly be introduced.

Utopian Impulse Works as the Dream of a Better Tomorrow

Paulo Freire argues that in order to help oppressed people recover their "stolen humanity," the "program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people" (*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* 95). Such content focuses on the position of the oppressed people but rests on an examination of their aspirations. Without understanding the aspirations of the subject, education would lack agency and political action would be impotent – why fight without

hope for something better? Thus, a pragmatic approach to social change works at two levels: it engages with people “where we are” and moves them forward by providing hope for attaining somewhere better, and it is this utopian impulse to move toward a better future that defines the pragmatist utopian tradition. While accepting that pragmatists, focused as they are on lived experience, “keep utopias at arm’s length,” Maurice Hamington argues for an alternative concept of the pragmatist utopia as a work-in-progress striving for an ever better future (177). Following Erin McKenna, Hamington defines the “process utopia” as “tenuous and dynamic rather than fixed and perfect” (179). According to Hamington, “Hull House provides a concrete historical example of one version of how feminist pragmatism in action might look” (180). Jane Addams and Hull House argued for the possibility of a better future for women and pragmatically set out to create that future while constantly redefining what that better future would contain. In looking for a shift in pragmatist philosophy to better accept utopian dreams such as the vision of Hull House, Hamington asks, “why can’t philosophy take the risk of offering tenuous, fallible, and amenable visions of a better life?” And in accepting the feminist pragmatist utopian moment, he finds “not a utopia of ends, but a utopia of means [where it] is the shared journey and struggle that is utopian” (180). In his conclusion, Hamington connects Addams to the pragmatism of Freire’s utopian impulse toward “hope” and of bell hooks’s feminism as a welcoming radical revisioning of the future, claiming that each of the three activists “view hope as an action verb, not as a passive state of wishing” (184). Such radical revisioning is precisely what Russ in particular was after when she created *Whileaway*, her woman-only utopia. With this creation, Russ provides hope for a

society wherein all people are allowed to reach their various potentials, wherein all people work toward the common good but with as little personal sacrifice as the society can afford, and wherein all people are not only allowed but encouraged to marry for love and to have children who matter to them as individuals. Such a place has the kinds of challenges, dangers, and boons that any good hero quest would require. So, what makes it special? Just that all the heroes are women. Such radical revisioning allows Russ to speak the truth for herself and other women, and that truth is one of hope for a world where all people can live full lives – such is the hope of feminism.

A clear connection between the pragmatic approach to hope represented by the lived experience of Addams, Freire, and hooks can be seen when defining the feminist pragmatist⁹ utopian impulse with not only the practice of physically helping others in a social setting, but also with the practice of, as Kenneth Burke tells us, convincing others to act by rhetorically changing what they define as possible, giving them new dreams to dream, in effect. Russ's *Whileaway* is such a dream, and a highly influential one, as Vonda McIntyre suggests in *Khatru*: "The changes in my own personal philosophy and ambitions are due to the women's movement in general and to Joanna Russ in particular" (Smith and Gomoll 7).

Certainly Jane Addams emphasizes human experience as the test of all social endeavors. But like James, Addams understands that ideals may be transmitted through fictionalized versions of reality like Russ's *Whileaway*. She argues that novels are keys to understanding the experiences of many "because they in a measure satisfy an unformulated belief that to see farther, to know all sorts of men, in an indefinite way, is a

preparation for better social adjustment – for the remedying of social ills” (8). And Addams finds in these novels a wide range of human experiences, claiming, “Partly through this wide reading of human life, we find in ourselves a new affinity for all men, which probably never existed in the world before” (9). While Addams herself pragmatically acted upon the community surrounding Hull House, she encouraged world-wide changes in the human condition, understanding that such changes could only happen as society accepted new moral ideals. She claims, “it is obvious that [moral] ideas only operate upon the popular mind through will and character, and must be dramatized before they reach the mass of men” (227). Addams hope was to spread ideas of inclusion in order to build a foundation for the “remedying of social ills,” and her explanation about how moral ideas spread through novels which teach “a new affinity for all” reflects her understanding of a pragmatic approach to cultural transformation which would embrace the critical utopias of the 1970s.

In explaining how such dramatizing works pragmatically to stimulate social change, Rorty claims, “You have to describe the country in terms of what you passionately hope it will become, as well as in terms of what you know it to be now. You have to be loyal to a dream country rather than to the one to which you wake up every morning. Unless such loyalty exists, the ideal has no chance of becoming actual” (*Achieving Our Country* 101). Dr. King’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech invokes these pragmatic moves as described by Freire and Rorty, calling forth utopian rhetoric to argue for a change in the situation of African-Americans. As a work of political action, this speech directly engages with the concrete situation of the oppressed but frames the

objective of this group as a utopian dream of equality and access to the best that America has to offer its citizens. This speech engages, as does Freire's pedagogy, in what is arguably the highest function of rhetoric: the use of language and symbol to invoke imagination and emotion in the audience in order to lead that audience toward a belief in a better version of humanity. Such rhetoric contains the utopian impulse at its core.

In a her recent article "The Rhetorical Function of Utopia," Marlana Portolano argues that rather than being simply an alternate location with which to contrast this reality, utopia should be understood as "a functional quality of rhetoric: It aims to make a better society by first imagining it" (119). Working with utopian theorists such as Ernst Bloch and Karl Mannheim as well as with rhetorical theorists such as Kenneth Burke, Portolano argues that at least as it is invoked in the mid-twentieth century, "utopia is the imaginative means by which the material culture is propelled to social change" (Portolano 125). Such imaginative means is an artistic move with a pragmatic aim: to foster progress. Rorty, in promoting the functionality of the utopian dream country, claims, "Progress is, as Thomas Kuhn suggested, measured by the extent to which we have made ourselves better than we were in the past rather than by our increased proximity to a goal" (*Achieving Our Country* 28). For dreamers such as Rorty, Freire, and King, the utopian impulse is more about raising the bar of human success in order to give impetus for future growth and change than about attaining any kind of goal. Progress is the point of the dream.

In explaining how this utopian impulse worked to change the sociological imagination, Rorty reminds his reader of John Dewey's approach to social change:

“Dewey was as convinced as Foucault that the subject is a social construction, that discursive practices go all the way down to the bottom of our minds and hearts. But he insisted that the only point of society is to construct subjects capable of ever more novel, every richer, forms of human happiness” (*Achieving Our Country* 31). If the subject is a social construction, then the utopian impulse is the key to constructing a subject filled with hope. Herbert Marcuse’s arguments about the historical imperative and its shaping influence on society and on individual subjects directly engage with how the utopian impulse works to fight repression and promote social change. He writes:

freedom is not a ‘fact’, neither a transcendental nor a historical fact – it is the faculty (and activity) of me ‘synthesizing’ (organizing) the data of experience [...]. And this radically critical synthesis of experience occurs in the light of the real possibility of a ‘better world to live in’, in the light of the possible reduction of pain, cruelty, injustice, stupidity [...]. [This historical revolutionary imperative] is indeed not only a political but also (and perhaps even primarily) an intellectual and moral imperative, for intelligence and morality themselves become revolutionary factors if freed from their service as handmaidens of repression. (“Freedom” 216)

The ability to synthesize experience is key to the ability to act. Once a subject understands her place in the world, her exposure to alternative experiences of better places to live as part of her education provides her with the “intellectual and moral imperative” to become an agent against repression. As Freire suggests, it is through education that subjects learn to speak their truths such as those found in feminist conscious-raising novels such as *The Female Man* and then to engage in political action which might include teaching like Russ and Sally Gearhart and certainly includes writing

like that of Le Guin, Tiptree, Charnas, and Delany in order to serve the historical and moral and intellectual imperative which drives humans forward.

Marcuse argues in his 1966 work *Eros and Civilization* that human imagination is powerful because it exists outside the reality principle: “Imagination envisions the reconciliation of the individual with the whole, of desire with realization, of happiness with reason. While this harmony has been removed into utopia by the established reality principle, phantasy insists that it must and can become real, that behind the illusion lies *knowledge*” (143, emphasis in original). The knowledge envisioned as truth by the imagination is realized in art. However, artistic truths fail if an “uncompromising adherence” is demanded in order for them to become reality. Instead, the truths of art are meant as what Marcuse, following A. N. Whitehead, calls the “Great Refusal”: “This Great Refusal is the protest against unnecessary oppression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom” (149). This refusal could only be taken seriously in art. In “political theory and even philosophy,” Marcuse maintains, “it was almost universally defamed as utopia” (150). Relegating utopia to the philosophical wasteland is pragmatic if utopia is seen as an unattainable ideal. But, if the utopian impulse is understood as a pragmatic pathway for social change similar to Addams’s argument for dramatizing moral ideas, then the Great Refusal to accept the dehumanizing conditions of reality becomes utopian as it creates an artistic imperative to “reasonably envisage” a “state of civilization” where human needs can be effectively met (151).

Notably for Marcuse and repeated throughout 1970s utopias, such a civilization would likely include a “regression to a lower standard of living” in order to achieve real

“progress in freedom” (153). Ultimately, Marcuse argues, a refocus of humans toward self-determination rather than materialism, toward freedom for all rather than domination, would be a “new basic experience of being” which would “change the human existence in its entirety” (158). Such significant changes are prevalent in 1970s (and later) feminist science fiction. Vonda McIntyre, discussing the submissions she received as editor of the first original-story feminist science fiction collection *Aurora*, writes in *Khatru*, “One surprise was that female-participant (or female-only) societies were almost invariably portrayed as more ecologically aware. Virtually all the stories we bought postulated very great changes in the basic structure of society” (Smith and Gomoll 36). These great changes, focused on ecological sustainability as well as reconstructions of gender conventions, support not only a “regression” to a simpler way of living, but also a definite idea of feminist equality as progress toward freedom.

Similarly to Freire, Marcuse argues that the only way the historical imperative toward human freedom could break established society from its repressive and destructive positions was “by the praxis of a class whose vital need was, not the perpetuation and amelioration but the abolition of the established society. And this abolition would be liberation” (“Freedom” 214). Marcuse argues that freedom begins as negation: existing structures of society must collapse (or be destroyed) before new structures can be built. Self-determination is the foundational element key to any successful movement toward human freedom – self-determination is both the goal (the reason for the change) and the agency (the ability to make the change). To show the value of creative art as the foundation of social change, Marcuse calls up the “Greek notion of

the affinity between art and technics [...]: The artist possesses the ideas which, as final causes, guide the construction of certain things” in much the same way an architect’s paper model determines the construction of a home. In this understanding, “art creates another universe of thought and practice against and within the existing one” (*One-Dimensional Man* 238). Ultimately for Marcuse (and especially relevant for our purposes), art’s “ability to ‘project’ existence, to define yet unrealized possibilities could then be envisaged as *validated by and functioning in the scientific-technological transformation of the world*. Rather than being the handmaiden of the established apparatus, beautifying its business and its misery, art would become a technique for destroying this business and this misery” (*One-Dimensional Man* 239, emphasis in original).

Admittedly, Marcuse and Freire have a definite Marxist approach to change (if Marxism is defined as a social movement meant to undermine the ruling class and destroy the class-based society in order for underclasses to gain opportunity not to rule but to better themselves and the world around them), but, as a short perusal of the 1970s feminist utopias would show, so do the key authors in the feminist movement.¹⁰ Le Guin’s *Anarres*, Russ’s *Whileaway*, Delany’s *Triton*, Gearhart’s *Wanderground*, and Tiptree’s future Earth each present an alternative utopian reality where capitalism and consumerism have ceased to be the driving forces behind human action. Instead, the desire for personal autonomy and the creation of societies which see such a search for autonomy as the highest human endeavor are central to feminist utopian fiction.

Utopian Method in the Culture of the 1970s Feminists

Although it is tempting at every historical stage to claim that change is “in the air,” one would be hard pressed not to see the middle decades of the twentieth century as genuine decades of social change. The utopian impulse was everywhere evident as central to the changes taking place world-wide, changes which then fed the utopian vision of a better world. The decolonization of Africa and South Asia, the technological achievements of the Soviet Union and the U. S. space industries, and the aforementioned American Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and similar movements elsewhere were all inspirational moments of social change experienced through news media and other avenues by the group of feminist writers. However, such movements are literally too distant for many of the writers to see them as anything more than news of hope. Delany’s race notwithstanding, the feminist science fiction writers of the 1970s focused on the feminist utopian impulse to find a better world as it related more directly to their lives. Their hope for a better world through active social engagement and study reflected ideas made famous by Susanne K. Langer, Marcuse, and others. They were inspired by changes in psychology such as the hope for taking charge of one’s own psychological well-being in a broken world as presented by Viktor Frankl’s Logotherapy, Eric Berne’s Transactional Analysis, and Frederick Perls’ Gestalt Theory. They created societies engaged with worries about ecology and overpopulation and hope for a better relationship with the natural world inspired by Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* and Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb*. And most importantly, they defined a feminist moral imperative by

dramatizing contemporaneous arguments for the realization of a society where gender equality was well-established.

Utopian promise permeated much of American society following the end of the Second World War. Arguments such as that in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Abraham Maslow's *Motivation and Personality*, and Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* specifically told each reader that a better world was waiting as long as he could satisfy his basic needs and follow his bliss. De Beauvoir and Friedan cracked open the door for each woman to also follow her bliss, even if she had no idea where it would lead. Psychology became a feature of mainstream American culture, and it was a psychology that worked for the individual. Le Guin declared herself Jungian well before the middle 1970s, and it is easy to see her heroes as those who have chosen to follow their bliss even if ignorant of where it might lead – surely Shevek's move beyond the wall of Anarres in *The Dispossessed* was clearly meant to evoke the great hero's quest, for instance. Psychology as forward motion for humanity through understanding appears more blatantly in Delany's *Triton* where the utopian city on Triton is designed around a popularized version of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; Delany's alter-ego in the novel, Professor Slade, is obsessed with symbolic logic and “also concerned with psychology – specifically the psychology of the philosopher” (303). Clearly Delany and Le Guin look to self-improvement through an understanding of psychology and the social sciences as part of the building blocks of their utopian fictions; however, it is Russ who most directly engages with the ramifications of promoting gender equality.

As early as November of 1970 Delany and Russ were corresponding about the kinds of changes the world might see if gender equality were a reality. In a Thanksgiving letter to Russ, Delany refers to De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in such a way as to show that both would have a comfortable reading knowledge of the book. In fact, the feminist writers were quite familiar with works such as *The Second Sex* and Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. These calls-to-arms model a pragmatic feminist utopian discourse. De Beauvoir, for instance, ends her book with a desire for a future of which she has "no conception" but knows that it is better for both men and women and that it can only come about through the conscious imagining of a better place. "Let us not forget that our lack of imagination depopulates the future," she says. "But the humanity of tomorrow will be living in its flesh and its conscious liberty; that time will be its present and it will in turn prefer it. New relations of flesh and sentiment of which we have no conception will arise between the sexes" (730). De Beauvoir's utopian statement, occurring at the conclusion of the Second World War in a France that was looking backwards in many ways, is an argument for inconceivable societal changes related to gender which neither she nor her readers can know but which she believes will result in a truly better world: It is only "when we abolish the slavery of half of humanity, together with the whole system of hypocrisy that that implies, [that] the 'division' of humanity will reveal its genuine significance and the human couple will find its true form" (731). Such a hope is clearly feminist and utopian in method. De Beauvoir critiques her contemporary society in order to promote action from her reader which will shed the trappings of the reader's normality and replace it with a place not yet imagined.

Friedan's American version of De Beauvoir's call-to-arms, published in 1963 just as most of the feminist writers were beginning to write science fiction, is also full of hope in a future that promises nothing more but to be better for women than the present:

Who knows what women can be when they are finally free to become themselves? Who knows what women's intelligence will contribute when it can be nourished without denying love? Who knows of the possibilities of love when men and women share not only children, home, and garden, not only the fulfillment of their biological roles, but the responsibilities and passions of the work that creates the human future and the full human knowledge of who they are? It has barely begun, the search of women for themselves. But the time is at hand when the voices of the feminine mystique can no longer drown out the inner voice that is driving women on to become complete. (364)

Such arguments call to mind Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own*, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, and even Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*. Like these earlier feminist texts, Friedan and De Beauvoir look for utopia not in the achievement of a goal but in the process by which humans will move toward that goal. For feminists, Adrienne Rich argues in 1971, this movement, fed in anger, can work to challenge the accepted normality through "re-vision" (18). As Laura Micciche describes them, "feminist rhetorics foreground writing as a political, imaginative act through which to reenvision reality" (176). Thus the feminist utopias were "political, imaginative" acts which served to challenge reality through realizing alternative experiences. But when I see that Cavendish admits that her utopia may not work for any other woman, that Wollstonecraft and Woolf only suggest changes because they have faith in a better tomorrow but cannot describe it, and that neither de Beauvoir nor Friedan can describe the world they hope to see coming, I am not surprised that the 1970s

feminist utopias rarely present readers with a vision of static utopia. Even as each inspires the reader to act for a better feminist future, Le Guin's utopia is "ambiguous"; Tiptree's is severely limiting; Delany's is a "heterotopia"; and Russ's (like Woolf's and Friedan's) is finally unimaginable.

Critical Utopia as Rhetorical Method

Suvin argues that if utopia is method, it cannot be "realized or not realized" as a construct in this world but only "applied" as an argument about this world. Delany's application of utopia becomes, following Foucault, heterotopia while Le Guin's application, showing the difficulties in achieving utopia as at least as important as the goal of realizing it, remains ambiguous. And Russ's multiple presentations of alternatives in *The Female Man* contain only one utopia, Whileaway, out of the four possible worlds shown, and this "utopia" is the only world shown where a citizen could be killed for simply not wanting to belong, suggesting, as does Tiptree, that not only would utopia be a rare achievement for humans, it may even be impossible as a goal. These approaches to utopia certainly spend as much effort deconstructing the idea of a perfect society as they do representing such societies. In doing so, they present the effort to attain utopia as more important than any particular utopia which might be attained, perhaps even arguing ironically that destabilizing any attained utopia would be the primary device necessary to attempt to deliver utopia.

Such moves from these writers to both establish and present utopias in the process of deconstructing themselves in the 1970s are the subject of Tom Moylan's utopian study

Demand the Impossible. As the basis for these moves, Moylan argues that, indeed, utopia must be understood as a method of inspiring social change. Beginning with Thomas More's *Utopia*, Moylan argues, the images presented as utopia "were not blueprints to be imposed directly on everyday reality, but they were the beginnings, at the level of imagination, of actual solutions to current problems" (3). Moore's utopian vision is a static vision meant to inspire change through the dialectical contrast with the reader's lived experience. For Moylan, utopia as a static "other-world" ceased to work for readers once the Earth became well enough described that islands like Atlantis or countries like El Dorado could no longer be hidden. By the 1850s, utopian writers were offering "the heuristic utopia" (a term coined by M. H. Abendsour) which presented alternative values to those present in the reader's lived experience but achievable through changes in lived reality.¹¹ These heuristic utopias, which peaked at the turn of the twentieth century, "offered a strength of vision that sought to subvert or at least reform the modern economic and political arrangement from within" (Moylan 6).

As an example of how these heuristic utopias worked as predecessors to the later 1970s utopias, consider the argument for women's suffrage as a utopian impulse. Such an argument, for instance, clearly presented an alternative to lived experience: a society wherein women were as responsible for directing the political tide of a nation as men. Utopias such as *Herland* suggested that if women were allowed control of politics, then wars may cease, children could be better cared for, and even normal domestic life would improve through communal sharing of responsibilities. These social changes for the better obviously affected the American populace as not only the contemporaneous

women's suffrage but also the prohibition movements showed. However, because of the failed social experiments of utopia visited on the world during the next generation through totalitarian Russian-communist and German-fascist movements, by the middle of the twentieth century, utopia was "muted" as a rhetorical movement in American political and economic life. Instead, the utopian impulse found its outlet through consumer society and escapism to temporary utopias such as Disney's parks which presented mid-century America as the best of all possibilities (Moylan 8). The mid-century literature embraced dystopia instead, where "utopian figures of hope were transmuted into an attack on present social systems which claim to be already existing utopias" (Moylan 9).

Although members of the same literary genre, the utopias of the 1970s did not follow from either the pre-war utopias or the post-war dystopias. Rather, they were a reflection of the *Zeitgeist* of the times, the attempt to capture in narrative the social upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s. As Moylan describes it, feminist science fiction authors "negated the negation of utopia by the forces of twentieth century history [...]. Thus, utopian writing in the 1970s was saved by its own destruction and transformation in the 'critical utopia.' (10). Moylan argues that the rhetorical shifts of these new utopias create a time-bound literary movement which focuses on the growing pains of social change at least as much as on the value of such change. "The power of subversive imagining to move people beyond the present toward a more fulfilling future is now expressed and understood as a more complex mechanism than those writing and working for radical change during the last wave of utopian discourse in the 1890s might have experienced," Moylan claims, because in the 1970s such subversive imagining involved accepting and

embracing a society filled with difference rather than creating social sameness (15-16).

For Delany, utopia on Triton must make room for every person including those who reject it; for Le Guin, utopia on Anarres must mean sacrificing not only the safety and security of the current economic and political system, but also most of its pleasantries.

Similarly, the utopias of Russ, Tiptree, and Gearhart suggest that the critical utopia offers its reader *less* than she is likely to receive in the current system, but it does offer the one most important thing: freedom to be.¹² Russ explains this move toward freedom in the

Khatru Women's Symposium:

One further word: the issue is freedom, of course. But is so in a very radical and scary way, in my opinion. Many feminists (male and female) are going beyond the expansion of opportunity for women and into territory that is existentially frightening: a vision of the human race without the idea of sexual polarity that is taught all of us from birth [...]. When this disappears, you find yourself in something very like Sartre's anguish of freedom. There is no longer anyone to tell you who you are, what you "ought" to do or be or feel, and it becomes frighteningly clear that we are not in nature but in culture, that sexual dichotomy or polarity are social constructs and not natural facts. This is very scary indeed. (Smith and Gomoll 103)

This scary imperative toward freedom of gender identity is part of the overall moral imperative of feminism, of course; but, as Russ explains, the end result is unknowable.

"According to child psychologists, children learn they are girls and boys long before they learn any other identity. What happens when that goes?" (103). The feminist utopian writers do not know where we go from here, and admit that such endeavors are "scary," but they are all eager to participate in the journey.

Like Freire and Marcuse, Moylan understands the utopian impulse as a process of becoming better. The drive for utopia “must always speak in figures which call out structurally for completion and exegesis in theory and practice” (23). Again, the utopian method is one of setting ever higher bars in order to fulfill humanity’s historical imperative. And as Rorty and Marcuse demonstrate, such a method must be understood as process rather than goal: “In generating preconceptual images of human fulfillment that radically break with the prevailing social system, utopian discourse articulates the possibility of other ways of living in the world. The strength of critical utopian expression lies not in the particular social structures it portrays but in the very act of portraying a utopian vision itself” (26-27). Here the rhetorical act of the critical utopias – creating dynamic utopias in the process of becoming – is a pragmatic reaction to the contemporaneous realization arising from psychology, sociology, and feminist consciousness raising that humans are always a work in progress; so, the perfect human society can only ever be a reflection of that human work which posits the possibility of a better self in order to encourage the reader to strive for that better self.

Moylan – following Jameson following Marcuse and taking a radical departure from a normal understanding of literary utopia as the presentation of a perfect place – argues, Utopia “can offer no systematic solution of its own. It can only offer itself as an activity which opens human imagination beyond the present limits” (40). Instead, just as those who walk away from Le Guin’s *Omelas* understand, the rhetorical aim “of the critical utopia [is] to break with the status quo and open up a radical path to a not yet realized future” (Moylan 50). And this future is one where the freedom to be an

autonomous self supersedes all other needs. Like Freire and Marcuse, Moylan claims that the utopian impulse emphasizes “historical change via human activism,” and, he adds, for the critical utopias of the 1970s, “freedom rather than necessity has become the driving force” (51). Discussing this moment in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, John Clute and Peter Nicholls suggest that while utopia had remained a static construction for centuries, in the twentieth century such an approach was rejected in favor of “deep ambiguity, tending towards rejection” of such social constructs, and that by the middle 1970s, Le Guin’s “ambiguous utopia” and Delany’s “ambiguous heterotopia” imply “that the word [utopia] has been devalued along with the dream and [now carries] forward the notion that human individuals are so different and so prone to change, that only a very heterogeneous society [like Delany’s Triton] could possibly aspire to provide utopian opportunities for all” (1261, 1262). Clearly such an understanding of utopia, embracing the freedom inherent in Marcuse’s historical imperative, emphasizes its ambiguities and mutability much more than the genre’s more traditional static construction.

In the 1970s critical utopias, “The radical utopian impulse is part of the historical process of social struggle and change. It is the dream that moves us on” (Moylan 194-195). This dream, like the one in Dr. King’s speech, works by disrupting normal discourse through presenting multiple alternative lived experiences in the process of becoming, thereby providing not only the dream of a better place, but also the understanding needed to be comfortable with the process of change and instability. Moylan describes the disruptive power of such utopias as open-ended dreaming:

The utopian societies imaged in critical utopias ultimately refer to something other than a predictable alternative paradigm, for at their core they identify self-critical utopian discourse itself as a process that can tear apart the dominant ideological web. Here, then, critical utopian discourse becomes a seditious expression of social change and popular sovereignty carried on in a permanently open process of envisioning what is not yet. (213)

Without this continual envisioning and revisioning, the rhetorical power of the utopian impulse becomes impotent. As Mannheim explains, “The disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. [...] [W]ith the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it” (236). Like Freire and King, the authors of the critical feminist utopias were in the process of shaping history through revisioning the world and envisioning alternatives.

As works of pragmatist utopian revision, the feminist utopias of the 1970s were usually open-ended – the utopias not yet realized versions of what they were striving to achieve. Rather than presenting either a static utopia or dystopia, the critical utopias of Le Guin, Russ, Charnas, Gearhart, Piercy, and Delany include the growing experience of becoming utopia as an integral part of the narrative. In dwelling on the process of change, these novels are able to “more directly articulate” not only the dynamic, ongoing process of utopia as method but also are able to focus on the “continuing presence of difference and imperfection with utopian society itself and thus render more recognizable and dynamic alternatives” (10-11). These novels present the struggles of their authors to examine radically different alternatives to lived experience in order to shift the parameters of normal discourse to include the meme of feminist equality. For these

authors, “Utopia is not simply a *place*, it is a *practice*” (Moylan 89, emphasis in original). They reenergize the utopian approach as they use it to track their own changing social consciousness. Utopia becomes not the static (and stagnant, for a 1970s audience embracing difference) place of *The Republic* or Atlantis but rather the aforementioned alternatives of Russ’s *The Female Man*, the “ambiguous” utopia of Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*, and the heterotopia of Delany’s *Triton*. As strategic rhetorical constructs, these 1970s utopias “help to provoke our imaginations as we work out new strategies to meet our needs and desires. They challenge us to play with alternatives and thereby break out of the ideological chains that have restricted our socialized imaginations” (Moylan 204).

CHAPTER III

RHETORICAL THEORY, COLLABORATION, AND EDIFYING DISCOURSE

In calling the feminist utopias of the 1970s “strategic rhetorical constructs,” I present them as pragmatic works of rhetoric spreading the meme of feminist equality in order to destabilize the contemporaneous understanding of gender construction. The critical utopias are rhetorical constructs designed by feminist activists who specifically set out to challenge the status quo. In the case of Joanna Russ or Sally Gearhart such challenge happened not only or even mainly through fiction but also through attempts to revision the political position of women in the academy as well as in publishing and other such power structures. For other writers such as Samuel Delany, Ursula Le Guin, Suzy McKee Charnas, and James Tiptree, Jr., writing itself served as a public example of their personal philosophical journeys on the route toward becoming more fully realized humans. Similarly to W. E. B. Dubois’s use of the term “double consciousness” to refer to marginalized members of society who had to act both within and without established discourse communities, feminist writers like Russ, Tiptree, Gearhart, and Delany specifically sought to bring what David Bleich calls the “double perspective” of their personal experience of marginalization along with their common experience of 1970s Western culture to their composition process. They sought “to present doubleness and plurality (not pluralism)” in their creations (Bleich xi). In effect, they asked to be accepted and understood rather than supported or agreed with. Each of these writers

chose science fiction because of the genre's inherent ability to revision the world, allowing the reader to simultaneously see the real world as well as the possibilities inherent in a radical reshaping of such reality.

The science fiction of the Golden Age¹³ of the 1940s and 1950s served as an example of how a group of writers, editors, and fans could change public opinion by intentionally introducing memes of space exploration and expected technological advancements through cheap publications available on newsstands throughout the U. S. Perhaps the Mercury 13 could not become the first people on the moon because the editor John Campbell and writers such as Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein could only imagine tall, broad, white, "manly" men as explorers of the galaxy. However, there is no doubt that the imaginings of Campbell and his cadre of writers made it much easier for the scientists birthing the American space program as well as the American public as a whole to see Americans on the moon. Within a couple decades of the beginning the pulp science fiction movement in 1926, images of space ships and rockets were easily found not only in the pulp magazines but also on the cover of *Popular Mechanics* and even in the pages of *Collier's* where several of Ray Bradbury's stories from *The Martian Chronicles* were published. Much as Mahatma Ghandi's dream of a free India and Dr. King's dream of a racially-equal society drove world-wide social movements, the dream of Golden Age science fiction to see an American-dominated system of space exploration served to change the sociological imagination of the American public by saturating it with memes of successful rockets, robots, computers, and astronauts.

Just as the Golden Age writers, led by Heinlein, Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Fred Pohl, and a few others,¹⁴ worked collaboratively to promote an agenda of scientific achievement and space exploration, feminist writers worked collaboratively in the science fiction genre of the 1970s as a peer community to promote their agenda of social change. In the early 1960s Americans began to assume a future of flying cars, rocket ships, and robot housekeepers as seen in the overly conventional cartoon *The Jetsons*, and by the late 1960s *Star Trek* was taking viewers on its own strange but believable trip throughout the galaxy. However, such futuristic visions failed to present the kind of radical shift in gender conventions sought by Simone De Beauvoir and Betty Friedan. Having seen how stories of rocket ships could move the collective imagination of Western society to embrace space exploration as an expected goal, convincing the U. S. public to dedicate large sums of money and a great deal of patience to seeing part of that vision fulfilled, feminists of the 1970s were prepared to use the same rhetorical strategies to promote radical social change in the lived experience of women and others. As example of what these feminists sought in science fiction, Vonda McIntyre writes in the fanzine *Khatru*, “I realized its potential for exploring the kinds of changes that our society is going through and will continue to go through, sociological, technological, etc. That’s what attracts me to SF now” (Smith and Gomoll 7). Such writing to explore sociological changes demanded by feminism was clearly conscious and collaborative. In order to better understand how the feminist utopian writers sought to spread the meme of feminist equality, this chapter will investigate a kind of feminist methodology structured around utopian ambiguity and rhetorical invention through various forms of

collaboration, such as that found in the fanzines of the 1970s, in order to produce a kind of disruptive edifying discourse which would deconstruct the conventions of normal gender relations.

Utopian Ambiguity as Feminist Rhetorical Methodology

Contemporary rhetorical theorists happily embrace the understanding of the utopian impulse as an integral part of a writer's rhetorical strategy. These theorists see writing as, in the words of Hélène Cixous, "precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (879, emphasis in original). Cixous first explained her understanding of the *techne* of rhetoric as empowering for women writers in 1975, and her approach to writing as a pathway to change for women rhetors, similar to that examined in Paulo Freire's pedagogy, should be considered part of the *Zeitgeist* of the times. This understanding of writing as the place where change occurs was embraced by several contemporary theorists. Marlana Portolano argues that bridging the gap between rhetorical studies and utopian studies will create a better understanding of how the utopian impulse works rhetorically,¹⁵ serving as the impetus for change. She argues, "the anticipatory impulse is what changes attitudes, what impels self-identification with a cause or a group, what persuades people to action – all of which are definitions of rhetoric in contemporary theories authored by rhetoricians such as Kenneth Burke, Chaim Perelman, Stanley Fish, and others" (130). Many rhetoricians today would argue that possibly the highest function of rhetoric is to change ideas and attitudes in the

sociological imagination of an audience in order to lead that audience to make a change in the world. Wayne C. Booth's study of ethics in fiction, *The Company We Keep*, for instance, addresses how narrative is weighted with the kinds of ethical lessons which teach readers how to create themselves as moral agents.

The impulse to be better moral agents and more active members of various social communities is rooted in the rhetorical presentation of the possibility of a better world (a utopian *topoi*) worth the sacrifice of normal reality. The impetus to birth a better society, Portolano suggests, "is dependent on a rhetorical, utopian imagination: the art of inventing utopian topics and using them in linguistic, artistic, or architectural works to persuade others in an ethical way to improve and fulfill human desire. [...] In particular, Marcuse's 'education of desire' resembles Kenneth Burke's explanation of literary or artistic form as the evocation and fulfillment of desire" (132). De-emphasizing Burke's lack of understanding of utopia¹⁶ as pragmatic rhetorical *topoi*, Portolano suggests, "The important thing to take away from Burke's ramblings, though, is the humanistic sense that the search for perfection is inherent in human nature and that understanding this utopian impulse can only help us to live and to seek happiness" (137). What Portolano finds here in Burke is Marcuse's "historical imperative" – the utopian impulse is rhetorically persuasive because it realizes the human imperative to strive for that better society one finds over the mountain or across the sea. This utopian impulse served Golden Age science fiction writers well as they sold the American public on the idea of giant rockets and handsome astronauts. However, when the utopian impulse is itself the point of the writing, as in the critical utopias, then the goal of utopia becomes as

ambiguous as the utopias described. A reader of Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* can understand how capitalism can erode the souls of many of its practitioners; however, the reader must also realize that the freedom inherent in extreme wealth allows for a kind of personal realization, hedonistic in nature, that is simply absent from the kind of mutually supportive communist society promoted as an alternative. Likewise, a reader of Delany's *Trouble on Triton* discovers that even a heterotopia which supports the utopic goals of every member of its society cannot free a person from the walls he raises inside himself. As such, all utopian visions become ambiguous; yet, it is this very ambiguity which provides room to imagine genuine revolutionary change.

Even while embracing a rhetorical theory which understands the persuasive nature of utopia, a reader might underestimate the open-ended, non-goal-oriented approach that feminist writing such as that in the critical utopias presents. When it comes to defining rhetoric as a way of understanding women's writing, theorists such as Kate Ronald and Joy Ritchie suggest, perhaps what challenges those theorists looking for a pragmatic approach to rhetorical acts is simply the ambiguity¹⁷ present in much feminist writing. Erin McKenna argues for such understanding: "Pragmatist and feminist philosophies push us to embrace plurality as a way to achieve more workable knowledge, to take concrete lived experience seriously, and to embrace the changing and plural nature of realities" (239). Embracing plurality means looking for better answers instead of "right" or non-ambiguous answers, and such ambiguity is present in not only open-ended arguments, but also in the construction of women's rhetorics often taking the form of works-in-progress.

In her highly influential essay “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision,” Adrienne Rich argues for a specifically feminist approach to writing, suggesting that readers of women’s writing must be open to not only ambiguity but even to a topsy-turvy approach. “[I]f the imagination is to transcend and transform experience,” Rich writes, “it has to question, to challenge, to conceive of alternatives, perhaps to the very life you are living at that moment. You have to be free to play around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn into its opposite or to call experimentally by another name. For writing is re-naming” (23). Discussing her own impulse to create such contrasting experiences, Russ claims, “If any theme runs through all my work, it is what Adrienne Rich once called ‘re-vision,’ i.e., the re-perceiving of experience” (*To Write Like* xv). Russ uses Rich’s notion of “revision” in her own academic work where she seeks to bring women’s writing to the forefront of literary study. Rich’s “re-naming” is foundational to feminist rhetoric. Micciche claims:

Feminist methodologies indeed require a writerly ethos sensitive to situatedness [...] and a view of knowledge as always partial and in process. This construction of ethos is at odds with definitions that tend to crowd writing textbooks, the cornerstones of which include certainty and credibility, not doubt and wonder. The later signify crucial ingredients for conceptualizing and proposing altered realities, common goals of feminist rhetorics. The rhetorical tradition places almost exclusive importance on definitions of ethos that privilege the individual speaking or writing well, while feminist constructs of ethos often emphasize collective identity and collaboration as significant to knowledge building and the development of credibility. (175)

Here feminist methodologies reject the assumption of individual mastery and embrace the idea of knowledge as not simply socially constructed but actually in flux. In realizing

Richard Rorty's idea of edifying philosophy, such feminists present "altered realities" as part of a hermeneutical conversation wherein static epistemological "certainty" is dismissed in favor of dynamic creative acts of abnormal discourse.

Le Guin's 1974 short story "The Day Before the Revolution" presents just such a dynamic moment. In it, Le Guin follows her character Odo, the founder of the movement of Odonianism which serves as the intellectual foundation for the communist anarchy of *The Dispossessed* which occurs "several generations" after her death. Rather than allowing Odo to participate in the fruit of her life's work, Le Guin presents her as an old woman, and tells her story as it occurs on the brink of the great success of her life: the Revolution which will lead to a radically new structure for society. Odo here exists in a liminal state. She has no real idea of what a world based on her philosophy would look like, yet she does know that such a world may have no place for her in it. Writing *The Dispossessed* "was a long and hard job for me, and absorbed me totally for many months," Le Guin writes. "When it was done I felt lost exiled — a displaced person. I was very grateful, therefore, when Odo came out of the shadows and across the gulf of Probability, and wanted a story written, not about the world she made, but about herself" (235). While the goal of Odo was a world free of sexism, free of the control of money over people, and free of the constraints of social responsibilities, she could not really imagine such a world. Le Guin writes in a very poignant line that says as much about her own process toward feminism and personal fulfillment as it does about Odo and her life's journey, "This story is about one of the ones who walked away from Omelas" (235). Like Le Guin in writing *The Dispossessed*, Odo fought for a better world as best she

could, but she saw that fight as part of an ambiguous and un-ending process rather than as a journey with a clear goal.

Reading Women's Rhetorics as Theory: Le Guin's Earthsea Revisioned

In examining how writers such as Le Guin use the “intentional variety” inherent in ambiguous and multiple possibilities in order to create agency, Micciche asserts that a goal of feminist rhetors “is to unstick normative conventions from fixed locations, making possible a questioning of what is in order to make claims for what might be” (177). It is through this unsticking of “normative conventions” that “writing becomes a means for invention, not only of ideas but also of alternative realities and their etchings on and in language” (Micciche 179). Such writing acts as Cixous’s “springboard for subversive thought” and presents itself as the kind of *praxis* which Ronald and Ritchie claim as “a central feature of women’s rhetorical stances” (xxviii). Ronald and Ritchie call for a widening of “definitions of rhetorical theory to include women’s writing practice and to read women’s rhetorics *as theory*” (xxvii, emphasis in original). If readers do begin understanding “women’s rhetorics” as rhetorical theory, Ronald and Ritchie suggest, these readers will notice:

how women writers have added to the canon of rhetoric new *topoi*, new topics/places from which arguments can be made. We have already suggested that different *topoi* [...] offer new strategies for inventing arguments, mounting evidence, and persuading audiences. In other words, women’s rhetorics expand the locus of rhetoric for all speakers and writers. (xxiii)

Lisa Maria Hogeland's work on the consciousness-raising novels of the 1970s American feminist movement shows how these novels expand notions of feminist rhetoric.

Although Hogeland does not specifically reference new-rhetorical theories, her analysis of the work of feminist utopian writers of the 1970s delves into the rhetoric of the texts. Specifically, she discusses feminist utopian fiction as a choice of genre meant to carve out new spaces to take the work of the consciousness-raising novels into a future setting where feminist worlds can exist. Hogeland connects in particular Russ's *The Female Man* to the women's liberation movement through a discussion of it as both a war-between-the-sexes novel and a consciousness-raising novel focused on changing its reader's awareness of the world in order to change the world. Certainly such fiction as well as the fanzine conversations in *Khatru* and *The Witch and the Chameleon* and the critiques Le Guin makes on her own writing as her personal feminist identity changes serve as new *topoi* to challenge the preconceptions of an established American ideal society.

In her fantasy writing of the 1960s and 1970s, what we know as the Earthsea trilogy, Le Guin is unconsciously sexist, a sexism she critiques in her 1992 Oxford lecture *Earthsea Revisioned*. In Earthsea women have places always inferior to and dependent upon men; women cannot attend "college" and must instead learn "women's work"; women are literally disempowered because of gender/sex. Le Guin's public critique of her own journey to feminism, traced in various interviews and most coherently, honestly, and vulnerably in the essays "Is Gender Necessary" and "Is Gender Necessary Redux" as well as in *Earthsea Revisioned*, serves as a prime example of what Ronald and Ritchie ask for when they wish to read women's rhetorics as theory. Among

the feminist utopian writers, Le Guin's adolescent wizard trilogy is consistently met with disdain. As Delany explains in a letter to Russ, "I picked up Ursula's *Earthsea* trilogy [...]. You warned me. I mean, you wrote me a letter about the first one. But, Christ! I think they're appalling (and, yes, one of the reasons that are so appalling is because they are as good as they are. Scene after scene, there is a feel of real life and real color. But at what cost!)" (Letter, middle July 1974). He continues on to deconstruct the weakness of the books as simply one of leaving women out of the story: "the women have literally all disappeared from the village. They haven't *gone* anywhere. [...] But the women have *vanished!* And it's bad, bad, bad!" (Letter, middle July 1974; emphasis in original). And Delany's comment when a woman finally does show up as a central character in *The Tombs of Atuan* is especially damning: "All I can honestly say is that I *hope* you haven't read it! It's got a heroine, and it is so sick making I'm frankly ready to give up on Ursula for Good!" (Letter, middle July 1974; emphasis in original).

What makes Le Guin's lecture *Earthsea Revisioned* so powerful as a work of revisioned women's writing is its openness to Delany's critiques as found by Le Guin herself. She writes, "where are all the women in Earthsea? Two of the books of the trilogy have no major female characters, and in all three the protagonist, in the precise sense of the word, is male," and echoing Delany's private complaint to Russ, Le Guin writes, "In *The Tombs of Atuan*, Arha/Tenar is not a hero, she is a heroine. The two English words are enormously different in their implications and value [...]. Tenar, a heroine, is not a free agent" (9). It was only after embracing feminism in the 1970s that Le Guin was able to revision *Earthsea*, producing a fourth book focused on "gendering"

the point of view, turning the male story of Earthsea on its head by seeing the sexist society through the eyes of a woman.

“In my lifetime as a writer,” Le Guin says in the lecture, “I have lived through a revolution, a great and ongoing revolution. When the world turns over, you can’t go on thinking upside down. What was innocence [in the original trilogy] is now irresponsibility. Visions must be revisioned” (*Earthsea Revisioned* 12). Le Guin’s revisioning of Earthsea is a deliberate response to her own journey into feminism. Unlike Odo, who was allowed to retire on the day before the revolution, Le Guin was turned upside down in the midst of the women’s movement. She found freedom through the conversations in the fanzine *Khatru* and through the demands her fellow writers placed upon her in the 1970s. She writes:

To begin to imagine freedom, the myths of gender, like the myths of race, have to be exploded and discarded. My fiction does that by these troubling and ugly embodiments [of gendering].

Oh, they say, what a shame, Le Guin has politicized her delightful fantasy world, Earthsea will never be the same.

I’ll say it won’t. (*Earthsea Revisioned* 24)

Once Le Guin realized her own responsibility to create worlds which “knocked” holes in traditional male narrative and mythic structures, she also realized that in destroying the comfortable traditional structures she was eliminating the safety such narratives presented as the boon of the hero. She decided, “I didn’t want to leave Ged and Tenar and their dragon-child safe. I wanted to leave them free” (*Earthsea Revisioned* 26). It is the kind of

freedom that those who walk away from Omelas seek: a world as yet unimaginable, but with great possibility to be better.

Knowledge Creation as Invention in Collaboration

In order to understand how writers such as Le Guin and Russ worked to affect the moral imperative of their audience, we need to understand how communities shape and define or “compose” knowledge. In his discussion of the power of writing to affect an audience, Kenneth Bruffee argues, “The feminist movement of the sixties and seventies, for example, had used [Freire’s] pedagogy to help women change their attitudes toward themselves and to reconstruct their role in society” (*Collaborative Learning* 7). Bruffee bases his argument about how women worked as agents to change their position in society on a definition of knowledge as a social construct. He follows learning theorists such as Mead, Dewey, and Vygotsky to suggest that meaning is made through collaboration – no idea is meaningful until it is communicated in a discourse community, and no discourse community is useful unless it is communicating ideas and creating thoughts in its members.

These current theories of knowledge as a social artifact are now widely accepted in fields as far ranging as the hard sciences (after Thomas Kuhn), child psychology (after Lev Vygotsky), and composition and rhetorical studies. Andrea Lunsford, for instance, argues:

collaboration both in theory and practice reflects a broad-based epistemological shift, a shift in the way we view knowledge. The shift involves a move from

viewing knowledge and reality as things exterior to or outside of us, as immediately accessible, individually knowable, measurable, and shareable – to viewing knowledge and reality as mediated by or constructed through language in social use, as socially constructed, contextualized, as, in short, the product of *collaboration*. (93, emphasis in original)

Similarly, Bruffee suggests, “We establish knowledge or justify belief collaboratively by challenging each other’s biases and presuppositions; by negotiating collectively toward new paradigms of perception, thought, feeling, and expression; and by joining larger, more experienced communities of knowledgeable peers” (“Collaborative” 427).

Although Bruffee is focusing here more on the ways students might enter ongoing conversations rather than on ways writers can engage with knowledge communities in order to create shifts in knowledge and understanding, even for Bruffee such arguments for the social construction of knowledge undermine claims that epistemological certainty is the foundation of knowledge.¹⁸

Bruffee credits Rorty with defining this “nonfoundationalist” position, following Rorty’s claim that “we understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief” (*Philosophy* 170). Bruffee suggests, “From the very beginning of our lives we construct knowledge in conversation with other people” (“Collaborative” 427). As users of discourse, however, we are only able to join new communities if we assent to “those communities’ interests, values, language, and paradigm of perception and thought” (427). Furthermore, Bruffee claims, “If, as Rorty suggests, knowledge is a social artifact... then the generation of knowledge, what we call ‘creativity,’ must also be a social process” which “occurs between coherent communities or within communities when consensus no

longer exists with regard to rules, assumptions, goals, values, or mores” (429). Bruffee’s use of the “conversation,” focusing as it does on becoming a member of a discourse community, falls short of its possibilities as examined in Rorty; however, his understanding that collaboration is the vehicle for knowledge production in discourse communities explains how knowledge production is specifically tied to the expectations and the mores of an author’s society.

Combining Herbert Marcuse’s historical imperative with John Dewey’s idea of creative artists working at the “interstices” leads to the conclusion that human agents work in concert to continually pull apart and reconstruct meaning in order to define a better version of life. Such meaning is constructed as an act of learning or growing. As Bruffee writes, “if we accept the premise that knowledge is an artifact created by a community of knowledgeable peers constituted by the language of that community, and that learning is a social and not an individual process then to learn is [...] to work collaboratively to establish and maintain knowledge among a community of knowledgeable peers” (“Collaborative” 427). Here the key is to see knowledge creation as an act of rhetoric – and the social creation of knowledge as well as the act of creating new knowledge happens as an individual works within a community. As Bruffee puts it, “The nonfoundationalist social constructionist understanding of knowledge [suggests that if] it lodges anywhere, it is in the conversation that goes on among the members of a community of knowledgeable peers and [what Michael Oakeshott calls] the ‘conversation of mankind’” (*Collaborative Learning* 153). In contrast to the idea “that an individual of more or less fixed absolute capacities confronts the world and in striving for the truth

constructs a world-view out of the data of his experiences,” Mannheim tells us, “it is much more correct to say that knowledge is from the very beginning a co-operative process of group life, in which everyone unfolds his knowledge within the framework of a common fate, a common activity, and the overcoming of common difficulties (in which, however, each has a different share)” (26). Or as Vygotsky puts it, “In our conception, the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual” (36).

In further investigating the rhetorical composition process as a pragmatic approach to knowledge production in collaboration, Karen LeFevre suggests, “Rhetorical invention thus cannot be viewed as the totally private act of an individual. It presupposes the existence of others and is oriented to take into account their knowledge, attitudes, and values” (46). In her study *Invention as a Social Act*, LeFevre understands “rhetorical invention as a search for wisdom” (20) and as a “dynamic process that not only finds but also creates that which is the substance of discourse” (7). Taking Mead’s theory of meaning creation as her theoretical foundation, LeFevre focuses on creation through social engagement. LeFevre also echoes Marcuse, suggesting, “[a] culture cannot ‘think’ ideas without the synthesis made possible by individuals who interact with culture in certain ways, nor can individuals create ideas in a vacuum removed from society and culture” (36). Ultimately, LeFevre emphasizes two aspects of rhetorical invention as it relates to language: “first, language as an active force in the ways we constitute reality and invent material for discourse, and second, invention with language as a dialectic between individual and social realms” (97). Following Ernst Cassirer, she argues, “it is

not enough to say that we use language to constitute reality; it is equally important to say that we do this *together*, in a culture, and that culture, by its creations, can influence future thought” (114, emphasis in original). LeFevre’s emphasis on the dialectical nature of thought production encourages us to see collaboration in language use – “invention as a social act,” as LeFevre puts it – as key to revising the sociological imagination.¹⁹

The community of 1970s feminist science fiction writers includes the group of fellow writers who use the same constructs as well as the audience which understands the reading conventions used by those writers. Bruffee defines this development of thought as Collaborative Learning: “Collaborative Learning models the conversation by which communities of knowledgeable peers construct knowledge,” and since this conversation often takes place through writing, “writing lies at the center of collaborative learning as one of the most important elements in the craft of interdependence” (*Collaborative Learning* 53). And this interdependence is key to understanding of the feminist rhetorical method. As Bruffee explains, “The indirect, displaced conversation between writers and readers does not get underway at all except by virtue of a complex web of agreements already in place. [...] Agreements of this sort constitute the community, the peer group that ‘speaks out language,’ within which and to the members of which we write and read” (Bruffee, *Collaborative Learning*, 56). Without a shared set of values about the *techné* of the critical utopian *topoi* and about the society-wide devaluation of woman – even as these values remained in flux, the feminist utopian writers of the 1970s would have been unable to engage in a community. They would have lacked the peer connections required to learn about themselves and the world collaboratively.

Edifying Philosophy as Method of Change

Repeatedly in letters and fanzines feminist utopian writers support the idea that their acts of invention were in large part determined by the community of peers to which they belonged. In examining the power of such community to work pragmatically in order to provide room for feminist engagement with the world, Charlene Seigfried quotes Le Guin's claim that her stories and books "were written from the fragile but real security of women's solidarity" (9). As she has stated many times,²⁰ Le Guin found support from the community of readers and writers who made up the science fiction community of the 1960s and 1970s as she created and re-created herself as the woman writer and activist and rhetorical theorist she has ultimately become. Whereas Le Guin defines this movement loosely, Russ and Delany are much more specific. In her essay "Recent Feminist Utopias" (1981), Russ provides a list of writers active in the movement. This list includes Monique Wittig, Suzy McKee Charnas, Le Guin, Delany, herself, Tiptree (as Alice Sheldon), Marion Zimmer Bradley, Marge Piercy, Sally Gearhart, and Catherine Madsden (133-134). Delany lists the strong feminist writers "who came to prominent attention at that time: [himself], Russ, Charnas, Le Guin, and later Tiptree, [Vonda] McIntyre, [James] Varley (male), [Elizabeth] Lynn, and [Pamela] Sargent: a very, very strong current in the recent sea of SF production" (*Silent Interviews* 211). Charnas also argues for understanding the science fiction feminists as a group: it would not hurt for people "to realize that we women sf writers are, if not a collective, at least a sort of group ourselves, with good feelings for each other, and a sharing spirit" (Letter, 30 August 1974). Certainly these writers understood that engaging in open conversation was a direct

pathway to bettering themselves and their fellow humans. To that end, Delany suggests that in striving to promote a better understanding of the world around his readers, his project for the last forty years has been getting them to engage with language through rich discursive models (“Art of Fiction” 54-55). Seeing how these authors place themselves in a peer community provides a frame for understanding which authors they considered peers and which groups of readers they saw as sharing the necessary reading conventions to fully explore their arguments. However, such understanding fails to show how these authors expected to engage each other and their readers in supporting ideas of radical social change.

Composition theorists such as Bruffee understand writing in a peer community to be a pragmatic approach to a writer’s ability to jointly create knowledge through entering a discourse community; feminist theorists such as Cixous, Rich, and Russ see writing as a pathway to a radical revision of contemporaneous thought concerning the placement of gender. Whereas feminist composition theorists often define writing as a feminist pragmatist practice designed to radically redefine human existence, Richard Rorty questions the joining of feminism and pragmatism. Certainly Rorty sees great value in defining knowledge as a social construct based on a plurality of experiences: “If we see knowledge as a matter of conversation and of social practice, rather than as an attempt to mirror nature,” we will not fall prey to the “quest for certainty” but rather can understand how knowledge is ever changing just as the human creatures creating it through discourse are ever changing (*Philosophy* 171). And like Marcuse, Rorty sees such collaboration as

a foundation for the historical imperative: changing through discourse is a dynamic process of positive growth.

However, in his article “Feminism, Ideology, and Deconstruction: A Pragmatist View,” Rorty argues that insofar as pragmatism works to *reform* current social structures, any kind of pragmatist feminism would lack the radical revisioning of society necessary for significant social change. An underlying thread throughout his essay is the idea that feminism is a radical re-definition of society rather than a process for reforming it; as he writes, “the most efficient way to expose or demystify an existing practice would seem to be by suggesting an alternative practice, rather than criticizing the current one. [...] That means sketching an alternative future and a scenario of political action that might take us from the present to that future” (“Feminism, Ideology” 96). Echoing Burke’s comment “The basic function of rhetoric [is] the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (41), Rorty argues, “All that matters is what we can do to persuade people to act differently than in the past” (“Feminism, Ideology” 100). And it is with this statement that Rorty himself bridges the gap he defined between the pragmatism which promotes a process of incremental change and the feminism which demands a radical shift from present practices. Echoing the notion of process utopia discussed above, Rorty writes, “Nothing politically useful happens until people begin saying things never said before – thereby permitting us to visualize new practices, as opposed to analyzing old ones” (“Feminism, Ideology” 100). It is this process of “saying things never said before” that Rorty understands as edifying philosophy.

Edifying philosophy is that break with common understanding, what Dewey calls, “breaking the crust of convention” (qtd. in Rorty, *Philosophy*, 379), that embraces the disruption of normal discourse in order to make room for Marcuse’s historical imperative. Rorty’s understanding of edification is “abnormal discourse” which works to challenge normal discourse by estranging the audience’s experience. He claims, “edifying discourse is *supposed* to be abnormal, to take us out of our old selves by the power of strangeness, to aid us in becoming new beings” (Rorty, *Philosophy*, 360; emphasis in original). Sally Gearhart explains such disruption in regards to feminist communicative acts:

If we think of communicative acts not as attempts to change others or even as attempts to inform or to help them, then [...] Communication can be a deliberate 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; it can be a milieu in which those who are ready to be persuaded may persuade themselves, may choose to hear or choose to learn. (“Womanization of Rhetoric” 198)

Gearhart’s idea of an women’s rhetoric which makes room for people to “change themselves” moves the rhetorical process away from power and toward an invitational system similar to Oakeshott’s conversation: “it is important that the whole communication environment be understood as a *matrix*, a womb. [...] it is an atmosphere in which meanings are generated and nurtured. [...] we are a co-creator and co-sustainer of the atmosphere in whose infinity of possible transformations we will all change” (“Womanization of Rhetoric” 199-200). In relating how such edifying philosophy operates in science fiction, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. revisits Darko Suvin’s idea of

estrangement and his model of the “novum”: “The novum may well inspire readers to view their ideological embeddedness with fresh eyes; but a precondition for this is the ecstatic sense of being freed from predetermined relations, the opening up of a familiar, fully mapped, and hence seemingly enclosed world, out from the authoritarianism of [...] defined reality” (55). The estrangement is that breaking of convention found through abnormal discourse which frees the participant up to explore multiple alternatives and find avenues for progress. For Gearhart, this change in human relations in order to embrace multiple approaches – to invite as many people into the conversation as possible rather than closing off possibilities – is exactly what Rorty sees as the “politically useful” thing that happens in edifying philosophy.

In his influential 1979 study *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty extrapolates his idea of edifying philosophy from the “Conversation of Mankind” described by Oakeshott. Whereas Bruffee downplays this conversation to be one of near-conformity, Oakeshott argues:

In conversation, ‘facts’ appear to be resolved once more into the possibilities from which they were made; ‘certainties’ are shown to be combustible, not by being brought in contact with other ‘certainties’ or with doubts, but by being kindled by the presence of ideas or another order; approximations are revealed between notions normally remote from one another. Thoughts of different species take wing and play round one another, responding to each other’s movements and provoking one another to fresh exertions. (198)

In defining conversation as a place where epistemological certainty may go up in flames as language attempts to contain ideas which react explosively to one another, Oakeshott embraces the kind of radical revision of knowledge the feminists reach for when they

celebrate a plurality of voices. He suggests that such plurality neither expects nor demands conformity: “Properly speaking, [conversation] is impossible in the absence of a diversity of voices: in it different universes of discourse meet, acknowledge each other and enjoy an oblique relationship which neither requires nor forecasts their being assimilated to one another” (198-199). Instead of seeing in it a way for writers to pragmatically assimilate a discourse, Oakeshott defines conversation as a serious playful exchange where threads may be “put by for another day but never concluded.” Such playful exchange does not seem as serious as argumentative discourse or as scientific inquiry which both seek conformity and a “right” answer. And in denying any hierarchy, such conversation reinforces playfulness at the cost of a key tradition in Western thought: the idea of the mastery of things (Oakeshott 201). Like the ambiguity underlying feminist rhetoric and so prevalent in the critical utopias of the 1970s, such playfulness ignores the need to reach consensus. Yet Oakeshott is very clear that in such conversation, “Each voice represents a serious engagement” and that “without this seriousness the conversation would lack impetus”(201-202). The key to participation in the conversation is that “each voice learns to be playful, learns to understand itself conversationally and to recognize itself as a voice among other voices” (202).

While I do not wish to dismiss Bruffee’s value in extending Oakeshott’s conversation to composition theory in order to explain how writers pragmatically enter into expected discourse communities, such limiting of Oakeshott’s conversation significantly undermines Rorty’s philosophical point, especially his use of normal and abnormal discourse. In appraising the value of Rorty’s thought to composition theory,

Xin Lui Gale finds that Bruffee does not go far enough in understanding the possibility of Rorty's notion of abnormal discourse. Gale claims, "Bruffee's conversational model, devoid of the tension between normal and abnormal discourse in Rorty's notion of conversation, overemphasizes the importance of communal consensus as the goal of conversation" (65). Gale's major complaint is that Bruffee weakens the power of Rorty's model as a useful lens through which to examine the composition process: "That Bruffee's conversational model should be considered equivalent to Rorty's philosophical concept of conversation is, indeed, a grave misunderstanding of Rorty" (Gale 65). For Gale:

Bruffee fails to realize that for Rorty the conversation is both means and end in itself, a human pursuit of knowledge, a humanizing process in which space for new wonders is kept open, a hermeneutic endeavor to confront and embrace the incompatible values, ideas, and language games, a way of human existence and growth. Consensus is not the goal of Rorty's conversation: there may be hope for consensus, but dissensus is the dynamic, the enjoyment, the moment that should be seized and valued in conversation. (Gale 66)

In the writings of 1970s feminist utopians, the contributions to fanzines, such as *The Witch and the Chameleon* and, especially, to Jeffrey Smith's *Khatru Women's Symposium*, are the clearest examples of such edifying conversation. Here the writers have "an agreed-upon set of conventions about what counts as a relevant contribution, what counts as answering a question, what counts as having a good argument for that answer or a good criticism of it" as called for by Rorty (*Philosophy* 320).

*Fanzine as Ideal Location for Collaborative Rhetorical Invention through Conversation:
Khatru 3 & 4 – “Symposium: Women in Science Fiction”*

It is impossible to fully understand how the conversation of feminist SF writers worked in the 1970s without understanding the place of fanzines in the conversation. Even more than the valuable letters, and often in concert with them, fanzines – magazines created and printed by often dedicated and sometimes distracted fan editors with no real financial backing – provided the primary means of communication between these writers. Although there is no such thing as an ordinary fanzine, these works do have several traits in common: they were usually produced for a limited amount of time measured in months or a few years; they were put together in the editor’s spare room or home office and during his or her limited free time; and they were non-professional publications with very limited readership. As a whole, they were wide open to any and all aspects of the genre, but an individual fanzine usually had a very small scope of interest.

In format, fanzines looked to semi-professional and professional publications such as the Science Fiction Writer’s Association’s *Forum* or to *Locus*, the magazine of record in the field. In the fanzines you could find reprints of important speeches, articles, or editorials; new writings discussing the field by the editor or by her/his friends; newly printed fiction or other art; and a dedicated letter column often including conversations happening over several issues. The letters to fanzines were the basic means of conversation for the community of writers. Here they would write to one another publicly, so that readers could see ideas develop and arguments happen. Many of these discussions, like fan discussions anywhere, involved the kind of writing being done in the

field. Often these discussions provided opportunities for writers to discuss ideas publicly across great distances and time, and many such discussions in the 1970s revolved around the feminist movement as it related to current SF writing. Of these discussions, the most significant is that of *Khatru 3 & 4* – “Symposium: Women in Science Fiction,” first published in November 1975 (usually known as the *Khatru* Women’s Symposium). Although the exchange in *Khatru* is civil and respectful, other fanzine-published writings which also directly influenced the conversation of SF feminist writers were often quite confrontational. These included the Joanna Russ *Vertex* defense of feminism in science fiction as well as the entire run of *The Witch and the Chameleon*, particularly the exchange of public letters concerning the value of feminism between Marion Zimmer Bradley and Joanna Russ.

The archival importance of the *Khatru* Women’s Symposium to a study of the feminist movement in science fiction is almost impossible to overstate. “It rather takes you aback, to realize how much of what’s passed into the SF record – on feminism, on women – comes from this single source,” claims the feminist author and theorist Gwyneth Jones (qtd. in Smith and Gomoll 131). The reason for the importance of the source is Smith’s ignorance of feminism, an ignorance that he felt he shared with most readers and which he felt certain some of the best writers would be happy to correct. Smith, encouraged by writers such as Tiptree who found in him a friend and confidant, and aided by the science fiction literary agent Virginia Kidd, mailed out what he considered to be a fairly simple letter asking a series of questions related to the changing perception of women in the genre, both as authors and as characters. His letter went out

on 9 October 1974 when books such as Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, Russ's *The Female Man*, Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World*, and many of Tiptree's best short stories were in the spotlight. Although he intentionally sought out writers who would be sympathetic to women in the field,²¹ Smith created a fairly wide-ranging panel of award-winning authors and active professionals and placed them in a conversation with one another. That conversation sought to explain feminism to a welcoming readership of science fiction fans, but its primary rhetorical value occurs when it is understood as a (mostly) women's rhetoric specifically designed to be read as theory. It is heuristic and ambiguous while maintaining a clear focus on promoting the meme of feminist equality.

For many fanzines, the letter column includes not only letters to the editor but also responses to those letters from other letter writers. Usually those letters would be in follow-up issues, but often enough an editor would solicit responses before publishing, thereby printing an exchange together for the reader's benefit. The symposium took this idea of initial letters and responses and developed an approach wherein each participant would receive packets from Smith of the original responses to his questionnaire. Then, as the participants responded to each other's letters as found in the packets, Smith would condense the responses and solicit more from certain writers, following different trains of thought which he grouped in the published double-issue. This means that though the writers saw the letters from one another in a generally chronological form, the reader sees Smith's edited construction which looks more like a panel conversation than a grouping of letters. Both praised and damned for his editing, Smith made no secret of the fact that the symposium response was heavier than he expected, and that editing the issue

overwhelmed him for much of 1975. Despite the snail's pace of sending and receiving hard copies of letters from eleven participants, many of whom were writing simultaneous responses to questions they could have better answered in serial, Smith received 168 pages of letters over seven months and published almost all of them in some form.

Statements made by the feminist utopian writers of the 1970s which first appeared in the Women's Symposium can be found spread throughout this dissertation. Therefore, to prove the continuing value of the conversation contained there, I will only take a moment to focus on one small section of the Women's Symposium: Le Guin's final comment. In this two-page letter, coming after months of reading letters on feminism written by her friends and peers, she argues, perhaps with a bit of self-flagellation, that "it's time we [feminists] try to start intelligently and passionately and compassionately considering, proposing, inventing, and acting out *alternatives*. If even people in science fiction can't do that, can't look forward instead of back, it's bad news for the women's movement, and everybody else" (qtd. in Smith and Gomoll 100, emphasis in original). But just as with *The Left Hand of Darkness*, it is when she goes beyond the initial Symposium that Le Guin is most open, vulnerable, and powerful.

Reflecting back for a republication of the Symposium in December of 1992, in what she calls the "scolding poor Ursula-of-1975," Le Guin writes, "It takes me back to what was not a good period in my life. [...] I really didn't, I really don't want to re-live that time. Or to re-read some of the things I was saying then. Or to realize how profoundly, fearfully deaf I was to some things people were trying to say to me" (qtd. in Smith and Gomoll 115). Her tone through most of the Symposium was defensive and

even dismissive; as she says, she “was just a scared woman striking out,” but by 1992 she was able to realize the value of “the real feminism expressed in the Symposium (principally by McIntyre & Russ). I wasn’t able then to understand that they were offering me a genuine map of the territory, a true one, the kind you keep and use” (115). Ultimately, though, Le Guin celebrates the Symposium: “the Symposium wasn’t wasted on me. It taught me. I did listen, I did hear, when I could; I did begin to understand, finally. Thank you: especially you, Vonda. Especially you, Joanna. Especially you, our lost Alice” (115). And Le Guin ends her 1992 comments not in looking forward, but in looking back to the brilliance and fortitude of Alice Sheldon playing Tiptree: “Her brilliance and sweetness and quickness and courage burns life fire, it leaves a sense of suffering. She lied to us yet she never betrayed us, never once” (116). These layered thanks from Le Guin for the maps feminism gave her to survive life reflect most clearly the value of the conversation taking place between the feminists in the middle 1970s. It is in her realization that the abnormal discourse of Russ’s and McIntyre’s feminism, along with the Alice Sheldon’s performance as Tiptree, had become her normal discourse by the time she wrote *Earthsea Revisioned* that Le Guin shows most clearly her own growth as a feminist rhetor.

Abnormal Discourse in Joanna Russ’s “When It Changed”

Normal discourse is concerned with an intellectual product which "can be agreed to be true by all participants whom the other participants count as 'rational'" (Rorty, *Philosophy*, 320). Such normal discourse in Golden Age science fiction presented young,

white, male astronauts because the image of such heroes pre-existed in the posters, films, and stories of the heroes of the great wars. A pragmatic approach to challenging the belief that women could not be astronauts would involve proving, as the Mercury 13 did, that women could serve in the same role as that already defined for men – the women's choice was simply to become exactly like the men, flat hair and all. Abnormal discourse, on the other hand, does not seek to be a new epistemological paradigm. Its product can be "anything from nonsense to intellectual revolution, and there is no discipline which describes it, any more than there is a discipline devoted to the study of the unpredictable, or of 'creativity'²²" (Rorty, *Philosophy* 320). Abnormal discourse – the presentation of women as much more successful astronauts than their male counterparts as found in Tiptree's *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* for instance – works more like Oakeshott's conversation as it can destabilize established knowledge, using expected meanings as flammable fuel for new ways of understanding. Such focus in the conversation on how the participants differ²³ is key to establishing the parameters of the discourse community as well as to understanding how the participants are creating unexpected meanings from the fuel of normal discourse.

To generate abnormal discourse requires a realization that abnormal discourse makes sense only in opposition to the tradition of normal discourse and that we are taking a "conscious departure from a well-understood norm" when we adopt the attitude of edifying philosophers (Rorty, *Philosophy*, 366). The feminist utopian writers embrace the science fiction tradition but then each take conscious departures from it in order to expand the sociological imagination in specifically feminist ways. Tiptree does not show

how women are just as good as men when it comes to space travel; rather, he shows that women are substantially better than men. Instead of merely reversing gender as Miriam deFord does in “The Superior Sex,” Le Guin presents a world with gender but without gender difference for humans in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. In *Trouble on Triton* Delany presents a hero who fails at being a masculine man so he becomes the emasculated woman his failure needed to succeed, thereby using the normal construction of such a woman to serve as proof of its own ridiculousness. And Russ presents the ultimate in plurality as she uses *The Female Man* to deconstruct her own psyche, presenting as the novel’s greatest challenge the bridging of the gaps between the five versions of herself who stylistically as well as intellectually destroy the control she as author has over the construction of her novel and herself.

As the initial foray into the investigation of self that became the novel *The Female Man*, Russ wrote “When It Changed,” published to great acclaim in Harlan Ellison’s *Again, Dangerous Visions* collection in 1972. She claims that the story resulted from her attempt to revision Le Guin’s pronoun construction in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. What the story accomplishes is a rhetorical trick brought about by the reader’s gender-biased assumptions. Whereas the normal reading conventions of science fiction suggest to a reader that anything can be reconstituted to mean nearly anything else – Delany uses the phrase “she turned on her left side” to discuss these reading conventions (*Triton* Appendix A:3). A science fiction audience would know not to expect this phrase to suggest a woman rolling onto her side in a bed. It may mean that, but it may also mean that a female cyborg has recently been upgraded and is now rebooting her left side power.

In “When It Changed,” Russ challenges the science fiction reader to expand such open reading conventions to gender constructions.

Speaking of the importance of Russ’s story, Marlene Barr argues that in “When It Changed,” “Russ revives the grand cliché of science fiction plot formulas, the alien encounter. Her feminist version of the alien encounter tale gives new meaning to common words. When human males are aliens in a feminist community, according to the residents of that community, females are defined as people and males become the Other” (64). Such “new meaning” is found first through Russ’s choice of narrator, a “person” who is riding down the road in a car driven by “his” wife – it must be “his,” right? But after two pages Russ surprises the reader with the knowledge that the narrator is “Janet” and that Katy is “her” wife. Russ has here presented her reader with a challenge: nothing about the abnormal discourse is outside the bounds of science fiction, but understanding that Janet, a human woman, is married to Katy, a human woman, is far outside the bounds of normal discourse as even science fiction readers expected it in 1972.

When a page later the men visiting Janet’s planet Whileaway ask, “Where are all your people?” the reader is confronted again with an abnormal piece of discourse (255). Janet answers the men, explaining about the plague that killed all the Whileawayan men and forces the women to survive and then thrive through parthenogenesis. At the end of her thorough explanation, she is again asked, simply, “Where are all the people?” Janet is appalled: “I realized then that he did not mean people, he meant *men*” (256, emphasis in original). In the *Khatru* Women’s Symposium Delany writes of his sadness when confronted by the normal discourse wherein “people” are men. He was discussing new

fiction with the daughter of a friend who told him that she did not read stories about women, she read stories about people, and “even a twelve-year-old [girl] already knows that women are *not* people” (Smith and Gomoll 26, emphasis in original). Russ’s point is exactly this: readers of science fiction are as steeped in conventional gender constructions as any other readers. As Le Guin discovered with the Earthsea trilogy, stories about heroes are not stories about women. However, Russ is not interested in promoting such constructions, seeking instead to break the crust of the conventions which uphold such limiting positions for women in society. Her *Whileaway* is a watershed moment in utopian fiction, showing not the creation but the destruction of a feminist utopia which provided a better world for all people, but perhaps only because all people happened to be women.

It is important to understand that just as Woolf, De Beauvoir, and Friedan are unable to see the end result of the pragmatist process of utopian dreaming, instead insisting on promoting the process of dreaming, the feminist utopian writers of the 1970s understood their purpose to be keeping the dream moving forward. “[K]eeping a conversation going [is] a sufficient aim of [edifying] philosophy,” Rorty argues. “[T]o see wisdom as consisting in the ability to sustain a conversation, is to see human beings as generators of new descriptions” of their experiences (*Philosophy* 378). Abnormal discourse depends on the existence of normal discourse for being reactive; it is aware that edifying philosophy “falls into self-deception whenever it tries to do more than send the conversation off in new directions” (378). This is why Russ ends *The Female Man* in a moment of ambiguous nostalgia wherein she tells the book itself that its purpose will only

be fully realized once it is seen as an artifact of a time of inequality – a time seen as nearly unbelievable by her future readers. Russ does not provide a pragmatic solution, but in taking her “conscious departure” from the normal discourse of science fiction writing, she does present several simultaneous alternatives for women. Rorty emphasizes that even if “such new directions may, perhaps, engender new normal discourses, new sciences, new philosophical research programs, and thus new objective truths,” they are “not the point of edifying philosophy, only accidental byproducts” (*Philosophy* 378–379).

Again, it is in embracing the ambiguous process of growth and change, rather than in defining a certain set of conventions or defending a static reality, that such dialectical discourse is so valuable. Abnormal discourse does not contend with normal discourse for power, Rorty stresses: “The point is always the same—to perform the social function which Dewey called ‘breaking the crust of convention,’ preventing man from deluding himself with the notion that he knows himself, or anything else, except under optional descriptions” (*Philosophy* 379). In entering into the normal discourse of utopian science fiction, the feminist utopian writers embraced a genre which promised a space for feminist revisioning as normal discourse but which actually only provided them with fuel for the fire. Therefore, they brought fire in the form of disruption to their readers through the radical changes they created in the genre by telling stories in substantially different ways. Ultimately, through the telling of “heterogeneous” and “ambiguous” utopias, these writers consciously use abnormal discourse in order to simply and powerfully open the normal discourse of science fiction to new feminist possibilities.

CHAPTER IV

RHETORICAL REVISION AND SCIENCE FICTION

Science fiction was arguably a strange place for feminists of the 1960s to find themselves a home. With its focus on science and engineering, the genre most often concerned itself with topics which were assumed to be uninteresting to women. They were no more *supposed* to be fans of science fiction than they were *supposed* to be astronauts. And the women who wrote science fiction in the Golden Age of the 1940s and 1950s, similar to those women writers who wished to be taken seriously as literary figures in the nineteenth century, often used only their initials like C. L. Moore or changed their names to reflect the gender bias of the genre like Andre Norton. They also usually wrote stories that could have easily been written by men, focusing on space adventures and often populated by different Buck Rogers-types. Protagonists in science fiction stories were expected to be men. Exceptions such as those found in “That Only a Mother” and “No Woman Born,”²⁴ while expressing feminist concerns, still relegated women to passive, subservient roles. However, by the late 1960s women writers like Joanna Russ, Alice Sheldon (as James Tiptree, Jr.), Marge Piercy, Ursula Le Guin,²⁵ and others found possibility in the genre which they did not see elsewhere.

These feminist writers sought to use the genre as a way of investigating various philosophical questions about the way the world worked. Le Guin, the daughter of anthropologists, created a galactic civilization where she could create social experiments

on planet-wide scales. *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* are each part of this civilization, though the social experiment on the one is to remove gender (and race) while the experiment on the other is to describe a workable version of anarchic utopia in progress. Russ began publishing in 1959, focusing first on a fantasy series now known as *The Adventures of Alyx* before turning to science fiction late in the 1960s, first by putting Alyx in space and then by drafting the first version of *The Female Man* several years before it was published. In her influential essay “The Wearing Out of Genre Materials” from 1971’s *College English*, she suggests that as a genre science fiction had worn out much of the rocket science which had made it so important; but, she claims:

Science fiction is the only genre I know that is theoretically open-ended: that is, new science fiction is possible as long as there is new science. [...] Science fiction, therefore, need not limit itself to certain kinds of characters, certain locales, certain emotions, or certain plot devices. Whoever writes fiction about how things might be if they were not as they are; writes this seriously; and does not offend against what is known to be known (as Samuel Delany puts it) is writing science fiction. (54)

Yet writers who embraced writing about things that “were not as they are” often eschewed the label of science fiction. Kurt Vonnegut initially denied the label, the aliens in *Slaughterhouse-Five* notwithstanding, and Ira Levin did not even have to deny it, despite replacing the wives in Stepford with androids.

Arguing against the criticisms which some peers and fans brought to bear on the genre in the 1970s, Nobel laureate Doris Lessing submits that those opposed to SF are:

very ignorant people, you know, and they lay down the law. This is what depresses me. I get letters saying, “Why is it that you have turned your back on

realism and the truth?” “Why have you *escaped* into science fiction?” These people have never read a word of science fiction, obviously, and they don’t know that the best social criticism of our time is in science fiction. And they’ll certainly never find out because they’re too prejudiced to read it, probably. This kind of thing is really annoying. (169)

Lessing’s complaint rests on the two-pronged assumption that the genre is primarily entertaining escapism not meant to be taken seriously, and that the secondary value of the genre is relegated to what are now known as the hard sciences. Clearly such assumptions reject not only the single genre where women could be created as fully autonomous selves outside a patriarchal society, but also reject many great works of social criticism such as George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-four* and Aldus Huxley’s *Brave New World*. In dismissing the power of the genre as a work of social criticism, fans and critics ignore the power of literature as theory summed up by Judith Butler as: “literary narrative [is] a place where theory takes place” (*Bodies* 182). The genre of science fiction, focusing as it does primarily on thought experiment as opposed to character or plot as other literary genres do, is a fruitful place for theory to take place. Samuel Delany claims, “science fiction has traditionally been at the forefront of the dramatization process by which new models for thinking about the world are disseminated” (“Orders of Chaos” 122). And as Veronica Hollinger explains, “When the theoretical focus turns to issues of gender and sexuality, science fiction is a particularly useful discourse within which to represent, through the metaphors of narrative, the philosophical and political conceptualizations deployed within critical theory” (Hollinger 301-302). In effect, if a writer wants to investigate the worlds hoped for at the end of Simone De Beauvoir and Betty Friedan’s

feminist calls-to-arms, she would have to create a science fiction story, because the reality of 1960s gender relations had no room for a collective experience of equality.

While, as Lessing complains, many critics see science fiction as a genre a writer uses to escape reality, Russ finds in the “refuge” of the genre a place to become fully female. As Russ puts it: “When the here-and-now of un-idealized human relations is intolerable, one can find refuge” in the “speculative and the future” (125, 126). However, too many critics take this move, this act of becoming a “refuge” from reality, as a weakness. Russ explains:

In the 1950s, when I was taught English literature, dissatisfaction with reality was supposed to be A Very Bad Thing. It was only in the 1960s that the power of dissatisfaction and desire exploded into radical utopianism (as it did in Wollstonecraft Shelley’s early years) and students in Paris spray-painted on walls such slogans as “*Soyons raisonnables. Demandons l’impossible.*” (Let’s be reasonable/right. Let’s ask the impossible.) Wollstonecraft Shelley’s use of fantasy is an instance of this and her work draws strongly on very female experience, from the terror of isolation in *The Last Man* to what [Ellen] Moers calls the myth of birth in *Frankenstein*. So science fiction had a mother. Well! (121)

It is in embracing this “Very Bad Thing” that women such as Margaret Cavendish, Mary Shelley, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman helped create what for Russ is not only a founding element of SF but also a necessary component of feminism – the act of radical revisioning of current social structures.

Roots in the Tradition of Radical Revisioning

Fiction which radically shifts gender relations in imagining the world otherwise has been a staple of literature for centuries, dating back at least to Margaret Cavendish's 1666 romance *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*. Although Cavendish was not the first to posit alternate worlds – the idea was quite popular in the seventeenth Century with writers such as Cyrano de Bergerac and Aphra Behn – she remains notable for finding in her alternate Philosophical World a place of genuine refuge for women. In her introduction to Margaret Cavendish's 1666 romance *The Blazing World*, Kate Lilley discusses her use of fiction as theoretical discourse to claim a place for feminism in seventeenth Century England: "Cavendish used the interdicted practices of writing and publishing to challenge the negative consequences for women of patriarchal codes of femininity, delighting in the subversive potential of generic and intellectual hybridization" (xiv). *The Blazing World* works as theoretical, even abnormal, discourse to claim a place for feminism in seventeenth Century England by hybridizing the popular scientific discussions of the aggressively all-male Royal Society with the concerns of the intellectually engaged, passionate, and capable seventeenth century women of which Cavendish is perhaps the most notable example. She manages this hybridization by creating lived experience in the science fiction realm. In the imagined society she presents, Cavendish's women are considered equal to if not superior to the men of their world, a world ruled by a benevolent Empress. Concerning the power of imagining a world created by a woman and ruled by a woman, Cavendish writes in her epilogue, "and if any should like the World I have made, and be willing to be my

Subjects, they may imagine themselves such, and they are such; I mean, in their Minds, Fancies or Imaginations; but if they cannot endure to be subjects they may create Worlds of their own, and Govern themselves as they please” (251). In reasoning through the best scientific knowledge available, Cavendish sees a world radically different from her lived experience, and through sharing this vision of radical utopianism she provides a version of living otherwise which could be successfully internalized by the female readers she specifically invites to collaborate with her vision and who she hopes will then be able to live elsewhere in either her imaginary world or in worlds they are now empowered to create.

Admittedly, escaping into the imaginary feminist worlds of Cavendish’s romance skirts very close to Richard Rorty’s critique of attempts to combine pragmatism and feminism. If the goal of such refuge is to escape reality rather than to provide places from which women can be empowered to critique their own social positions and strive to challenge and radically change the sociological imagination, then such escape is worthless as a pragmatic attempt to make the world better. Marge Piercy, however, presents an alternative argument for seeing in these refuges the kind of thought experimentation which supports the critiques expected in critical theory:

Imagination is powerful, whether it’s working to make us envision our inner strengths and the vast energy and resources locked into ordinary people and capable of shining out in crisis, capable of breaking out into great good or great evil; or whether imagination is showing us utopias, dystopias or merely societies in which some variable has changed [...] When such [societies are] imagined we can better understand ourselves by seeing what we are not, to better grasp what we are. We can also then understand what we want to move toward and what we

want to prevent in the worlds our children must inhabit. (“Active in Time” 107-108)

Cavendish’s *Blazing World* is admittedly an imaginary creation – as is Russ’s *Whileaway*, Tiptree’s or Samuel Delany’s future solar system, and Le Guin’s *Winter*. Cavendish’s impulse to use this imaginary creation and her fictional experience as functionally theoretical – to, as Judith Butler writes, “think about worlds that might one day become thinkable, sayable, legible” (*Excitable Speech* 41) – provides her readers with a specific contrast to their own experience. Such contrast is exactly what the sociological imagination provides. Speaking about the use of sociological imagination to produce new possibilities, Butler argues that we must be willing to open up “foreclosed” knowledge “in order to expand the domain of linguistic survival. The resignification of speech requires opening new concepts, speaking in ways that have never yet been legitimated, and hence producing legitimation in new and future forms” (41).

The memes of feminist equality, working toward legitimation, were steadily repeated in feminist utopias for two hundred years before they spread effectively enough to give the pragmatic feminists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries such as Gilman a tipping point to challenge the subservient place of women as valuable only for child-rearing and housekeeping. This tipping point helped the women’s suffragists as well as the prohibitionists succeed in achieving pragmatic goals of social change in the early twentieth century. Yet even as these changes were occurring, writers such as Virginia Woolf (at the end of *A Room of One’s Own*) were suggesting that the vision of a

future when a woman could live a life of an autonomous creative artist supported by her society was still a hundred years away.

Although such acts of radical utopianism as Gilman's *Herland* and other feminist utopias did arise in the later part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, such texts basically disappeared from the literary landscape following the two world wars. For instance, *Herland*, initially published in serial form in Gilman's own monthly magazine *The Forerunner* in 1915, was not available as a book until 1979, despite Gilman's popularity. Because she would not have easy access to the full narrative of feminism which connected her through generations back to Aphra Behn and Margaret Cavendish, the reader looking for feminist leanings in 1960s SF found herself in the same situation as Cavendish's reader from three centuries prior: she must create a world of her own where she could govern herself as she pleased. In the 1960s, instead of finding examples of radical feminist utopias, readers of science fiction were much more likely to find all-male stories where women were either completely absent (as they would be in the Mercury and Apollo programs) or where they were sidelined as needing rescue, protection, or reassurance. Perhaps the only notable exception to seeing a history of women in science fiction surrounds Mary Shelley. Although he leaves Cavendish out of his history of proto-science fiction (a chapter called, notably, "Pilgrim Fathers") in his influential *Billion Year Spree* (1973), Brian Aldiss finds in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* "the first true example of the genre" (10). Aldiss's point is certainly not to artificially elevate the status of women writers – in fact, his book sees most of the history of science fiction as the "Ghetto of Retarded Boyhood" from which it returned only during the

“revolutions” of the 1960s (306). However, in defining Shelley as the first “true” science fiction author (rather than Milton or Swift or even Defoe, each of whom he discusses) Aldiss gives a nod to what the field owes at least one woman. Writing about Shelley’s life work in 1974, Russ agrees with Aldiss’s placement of Shelley as a science fiction author, also finding that, “at least in the case of *Frankenstein: A Modern Prometheus*, [Shelley] created the first definite, unmistakable, science-fiction novel” (“On Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley” 126). Still, the normal discourse of Aldiss’s “ghetto of retarded boyhood” provided almost no room for the intellectually engaged, scientifically literate women for whom Cavendish wrote *The Blazing World* three-hundred years earlier.

Yet novels trapped in the realism of mid-twentieth century America, novels such as *Lolita* by Russ’s teacher Vladimir Nabakov or Sylvia Plath’s powerful *The Bell Jar*, for example, could do no more than reflect the state of a world which forced even the most courageous women to exist in lives circumscribed by male power. Piercy, looking for her own ideas to be reflected in the literature of the 1960s, found the contemporary mainstream novel both “rather more exotic” and yet more “infinitely boring and insulting” than her own “deep sense” of what “life on other planets might be projected to be.” In a 1974 letter to Russ, she writes, “the reason I got interested in SF a few years ago was partly in despair at the more conventional novel.” Therefore Piercy, eager to connect to like-minded writers and readers, began reading science fiction as well as reaching out to peers such as Russ. But even the genre disappointed her. Hungry for the alternative lived experiences she expected to find in the genre of Cavendish, Mary Shelley, and Gilman, she instead found that it “was a profound let down” in that “most of it projected

the same old shit forever” (Letter to Russ, 18 Mar. 1974). In the *Khatru Women’s* Symposium, Russ laments the missing long-term memory of the field: “One forgets that the 19th century – pre “Golden Age” – was full of Utopian writing and SF and that the supposed ancestress of the field is Mary Shelley” (Smith and Gomoll 7). And such forgetfulness permeated even the collections of the 1960s. Although she could find a couple of bright spots such as Miriam Allen deFord’s *Xenogenesis* and Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Piercy quickly understood that in order to deliver on the promise of the genre of science fiction to provide alternative feminist experiences, she would have to join with Le Guin, Russ, Tiptree, and other women writers and create such ambiguous utopias herself.

A good example of how science fiction can present alternatives to lived reality, deFord’s *Xenogenesis*²⁶ was published in 1969 and referenced by Piercy alongside *The Left Hand of Darkness* as a precursor to her own writing of science fiction (Letter to Russ, 23 Feb. 1974). Though deFord is considered to be of the preceding generation of authors, publishing mainly in the two decades prior, the satirical story “The Superior Sex” (1968) clearly engages the emerging feminist concerns of writers like Russ and Tiptree. DeFord’s satire is one of a type wherein male and female roles are reversed in a strictly matriarchal society so that the ridiculousness of gender roles can be highlighted. Containing lines such as “It isn’t *nice* for a may [sic] to try to set himself up as a woman’s equal, which nature never intended him to be” and “we men *aren’t* just seed-bearers and playthings. We have brains too, and if they’d educate us and give us a chance, we could do everything that they can,” the story manages to echo many popular

feminist statements – and all from the viewpoint of the male characters, who are trapped in a harem servicing “Her Highness” (14, 15, emphasis in original). The main character William, a man sent from Earth to this alternative reality, finally argues that on Earth, “we’re all human beings together, with immense variability, and sex isn’t the limiting factor” (16). Of course, deFord’s point is just the opposite, that although in the 1960s women are no longer kept in harems in the polite Western society of her readers, the reality is that women are treated as far less than the equals of men.

Stories like “The Superior Sex” were popular with science fiction magazine audiences, as they rarely challenged the conventions of a genre that had embraced such satires since Gulliver visited Laputa – and their conventional reversal of sex roles was easy to laugh off. However, deFord’s stature as a well-known SF writer did allow for the publication of a collection of her stories so that her particular appraisal of the gender divide would be read by a larger audience including engaged women such as Piercy, who explained to Russ that she did not read the science fiction magazines but did read books. This larger audience of book readers allowed for the gender reversal of “The Superior Sex” and its consciousness raising statements such as “It is to flatter your masculine vanity that we call you husbands and pretend that you are completely human beings in the same sense we are” (21) to add a bit more fuel to the fire that Friedan had lit earlier in the decade.

DeFord’s *Xenogenesis* was a part of a Western movement in fiction which pushed feminist issues to the forefront of the science fiction genre and which included not only Americans like deFord, Le Guin, Russ, and Ira Levin, but also British writers led by

Lessing and, as a prime example of the movement, the French writer Monique Wittig's militant novel *Les Guérillères*. Wittig's dystopia, like deFord's role-reversal and Levin's thriller *The Stepford Wives*, all exhibit a female-centered approach to social critique as examined in the genre of science fiction. Still, these writers did not directly influence one another at every step. Wittig's novel, for instance, was published in English in 1971, but according to Russ,²⁷ the novel was not read by most American women writing feminist science fiction until after the middle 1970s.²⁸ Russ suggests that what we see from these far-flung writers is "parallel evolution" ("Recent Feminist Utopias" 133). Understanding this intercontinental movement as a sea-change in utopian fiction similar to what Tom Moylan defines as the critical utopia, Hollinger claims, "Writers such as Joanna Russ and Monique Wittig have created literary worlds in which the range of social and political practices available to women have not been constrained by a binarism that situates women on the 'feminine' side of an essentialized and insurmountable gender divide" (304). Clearly such a defeat of the gender divide examined by Simone De Beauvoir was a welcome alternative to the "same old shit forever" Piercy had found in science fiction.

Although such writers were generally celebrated by fans, they were, as Lessing laments, often shunned by critics. In effect, Russ suggests that theorists, especially literary theorists, ignored the science fiction feminists because they were women (see Russ's *How to Suppress Women's Writing*). Notably editors Robert Silverberg and Harlan Ellison argue for their acceptance in the larger field of science fiction writing for the same reason: because they were women with a new vision. Ellison, introducing Russ's influential story "When It Changed," writes, "as far as I'm concerned, the best

writers in sf today are the women” (249). Silverberg, in his introduction to the feminist science fiction collection *The Crystal Ship*, which includes a story by Vonda McIntyre, writes, “science fiction is no longer so exclusively unisexual, for which let us rejoice,” and let us celebrate these stories “written by human beings who bring to their work that special perception that is the inevitable consequence of having been raised as women in our society. To be female is, I think, neither better nor worse than to be male; but it is *different*, it is beyond doubt *different*, and the difference has value for us all” (2-3, emphasis in original).

Thus, the feminist utopian writers, like those of the larger Western feminist science fiction movement of which they are a part, together with editors such as Ellison and Silverberg, made room for new kinds of engagement with the social theories of the 1970s. As Tom Moylan writes, “Thus, in the literary space opened up by the science fiction of the 1960s, the critical utopian novel could be written” (42). And although many critics did ignore the changes these writers were bringing to the genre, others such as Robert Scholes, Moylan, and Fredric Jameson celebrated what the women were accomplishing. As Scholes and his collaborator Eric Rabkin write in 1977:

We *are* of two sexes, in some sense doomed to alien extremes, and we must make a special effort to see one another as humans who can work together and be friendly without always falling into sexually stereotyped patterns of behavior.... [T]he most important aspect of *The Left Hand of Darkness* for our purposes is the way it shows how mature science fiction can find unique perspectives from which to examine the problems and possibilities of our age. (230)

Aldiss, a popularizer if not a critic of science fiction, agrees with the value of this movement: “I agree with Harlan Ellison much of the best writing in science fiction today (1973) is being done by women. [...] What has made the difference is the disappearance of the Philistine –male-chauvinist-pig attitude. [...] Science fiction has returned from the Ghetto of Retarded Boyhood” (306). Aldiss’s point, along with Ellison and Scholes, is that the production of these feminist writers was changing the genre, opening it up to what Russ and Lessing had argued were its most valuable contributions: social criticism of the lived experience and the hope that comes along with radically revisioning life itself.

What is immediately apparent about the celebration surrounding the feminist science fiction movement is that it happened as part of the movement. Editors like Silverberg and Ellison pushed the movement forward by choosing fiction written by these feminists to highlight in their collections; critics like Scholes and Jameson chose to focus their energies on these contemporary feminists; and the fan community, led by fanzine editors such as Jeffrey Smith, Amanda Bankier, and Jeanne Gomoll, as well as by active fans such as Susan Wood, recognized the value of this change for the genre as a whole. As Wood wrote in 1978, “If the first generation of [American] SF writers were primarily adventure-story hacks, and the second generation were the science-trained men like Asimov, Heinlein and Clarke, then perhaps the third generation, women and men, can be cultural anthropologists and sociologists, genuinely examining new forms of social organizations in the only fiction that allows us to play god” (18).

Reading Paraliteratures as Pragmatic, Even Didactic, Literary Constructions

When considering literary works whose main purpose is to present utopian constructions of hope rather than faithful reconstructions of normality, critics must take a step – perhaps a few steps – away from the normal conventions of literary analysis. In *A Theory of Discourse*, James Kinneavy discusses the pragmatic theory of literature, suggesting that theories of reading and writing which allow for authors to consciously promote social change are “commonly... called didactic theories” (326). Although he admits that, “if we believe Susan Sontag, such sociological novels make up the vast majority of the novels written today,” Kinneavy critiques such an approach to writing and reading literature, claiming that it “cannot account for literary form or esthetic emotions” (329, 333); here he clearly presents a personal hierarchy of literary values wherein “literary form or esthetic emotions” are elevated above changes in the sociological imagination. Kinneavy’s assumptions about pragmatic literature may be valid in a critical analysis of the fiction of normality (though even then his hierarchy may prove invalid); regardless, like much standard literary criticisms, it fails when applied to science fiction, a genre which, as Russ claims, “is collective in outlook, didactic, materialistic, and, paradoxically, often intensely religious or mystical” (“Towards an Aesthetic” 10-11). Echoing Lessing’s lament about those who fail to take the genre of science fiction seriously, Le Guin redefines the cultural and academic ghettoization of science fiction along gender lines:

science fiction, historically an intensely masculine field, has been feminized – not by women writing it, but in the sense of being defined as inauthentic by the men

who control literary criticism in the journals and in academe. People totally ignorant of science fiction are authorized to despise it by the Establishmentarians of literature, who declare it to be inherently second-rate – i.e., feminine, as compared to the masculine of canonical fiction. (“Books:” 53)

Instead of attempting to read what Samuel Delany called “paraliteratures” (“A Dialogue” 30) such as utopian fiction in the same way one would read a consciously literary novel, Russ and Le Guin argue that such works be read through the lens of their sociological purposes.

To show the value of reading certain works of literature as expressions of lived experiences that readers can fruitfully deconstruct, Russ reads Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s oft-anthologized story “The Yellow Wallpaper” not as a character-driven study but as a ghost story. Specifically arguing against limited psychoanalytical approaches to feminist literature, Russ suggests that if we read “The Yellow Wallpaper” as a ghost story rather than as realistic fiction, it becomes clear that the “story is a feminist fable, the heroine Everywoman, the husband/ doctor the Patriarch and the sister the patriarchy’s Forewoman” (*To Write Like* 162). In addition to these three characters, Russ sees a fourth: the ghost of another woman behind the wallpaper. Clearly, the ghost could not exist in a work of realistic fiction focused on female psychosis – she would be a figment of the imagination of the character rather than a completely different character, and it is this different character that is meant as commentary on the social structure of Gilman’s story. For when the wife in Gilman’s story attempts to explain her perspective of reality, such a perspective is dismissed as mental illness.

A woman's need to explain her alternative perspective of the situation of her life is here easily dismissed by a patriarchal order which claims to know her life better than she knows it. This reading of the story, not as a tale of psychosis but as a ghost story, highlights Gilman's indictment of the institution of sexism which consistently invalidates women's experiences. Ultimately, in Russ's reading, the story is more about that dismissal of women than about any "human" character. Russ writes, "What Gilman does in the story... is put together the most vivid and dramatic images of 'madness' she could find in the literary and medical traditions of her time and then link these to the invalidation 'women' experience from a society in which they are always treated as somehow 'in the wrong'" (163). For Russ, reading Gilman's story without primarily considering its didactic purpose fails the story, leaving out the sociological underpinnings which are, after all, the point.

Reading a story like "The Yellow Wallpaper" as a rhetorical argument against the second class status of women in society rather than as a work of character and plot-driven literature allows the reader to eschew a purely psychoanalytical reading of a single character in favor of a reading wherein the characters become theoretical types. As Russ claims, "despite superficial similarities to naturalistic (or other) modern fiction, the protagonists of science fiction [and, here, horror] are always collective, never individual persons" ("Towards an Aesthetic" 5). As collectives, the characters' experiences become shared experiences. In other words, the characters of science fiction have a "common experience" which the reader should be able to share rather than simply observe. In the case of Gilman's *Everywoman*, the reader finds a lived experience of invalidation at the

hands of the patriarchy. As well-developed as the characters might be, Gilman's point in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is to critique the patriarchal society in which she lived (as can be seen in various of her works including the utopia *Herland*). Whereas using a genre which allows the reader to see her not-well-defined characters as types enables Gilman to provide a critique of her sexist society as the primary goal of her writing, ignoring this purpose lessens the value of the story as a critique of society.

Straddling a middle ground between the seriousness of Gilman's story and the scathing satire of deFord's, James Tiptree's 1973 story "The Women Men Don't See" presents a woman's desire to escape the mundane world where men fail to see her as human. This story presents Ruth Parsons as an Everywoman, a "furtively unconventional middle-aged woman with an empty bed" (133). Like the wife in Gilman's story, Ruth is a collective. Le Guin, arguing for the value of using the story to show the alienation of women in contemporary society, writes, "'The Women Men Don't See' [argues ...] that ordinary women, the plain women, the women men don't see, do not belong to the Man's World. They are, literally, aliens. To make their own world they must remake it" ("Books:" 53). Tiptree suggests in the *Khatru* Women's Symposium that the character Ruth Parsons was an answer to the question "What is a woman?" which haunted him: "One of my first answers was that women are really truly *aliens*" (Smith and Gomoll 21, emphasis in original). Ruth Parsons argues that she cannot belong in this world because men will never give equality to women. She claims that "women's lib [...] is doomed" (133), that "Women have no rights [...] except what men allow" (134), and that men will only allow women their freedom as long as it suits men: "Men live to struggle against

each other; we're just part of the battlefield. It'll never change unless you change the whole world" (134). This is certainly a pessimistic reading of the feminist movement in 1973, and one Tiptree repeats in the *Khatru* Women's Symposium: "Because of their physical, political and economic weakness, the women's movement is *dependent on the civilized acceptance of men*" (Smith and Gomoll 21, emphasis in original).

Ultimately, Don, the out-of-touch male narrator of Tiptree's story, notices that "Mrs. Ruth Parsons isn't even living in the same world with me" (135). Of course, she has already told Don this, explaining that the two genders might as well be different species: "What women do is survive. We live by ones and twos in the chinks of your world-machine" (134). Comparing women to opossums surviving in the "chinks" of the world and comparing men to aliens, Ruth Parsons is an Everywoman who highlights the overt sexism present in a well-meaning man like Don. Ironically, by presenting the narrator as this well-meaning man and by presenting herself as the old Uncle Tip, Alice Sheldon fooled even those men who argued for the wider acceptance of feminist science fiction. In addition to Julie Phillips in her biography *James Tiptree, Jr.: The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon*, others such as Wendy Pearson have remarked on Alice Sheldon's use of Tiptree as much more than a mere *nom de plume*: "'Tiptree' was more than just a pseudonym for Sheldon. He was a recluse whom no one ever met, who had voluminous correspondence with editors, other writers, and fans and took part in a variety of sf-related events, such as the symposium on women in science fiction printed in the fanzine *Khatru*" (171). When considering how skeptical Tiptree was about the chances of the women's movement without the support of men, I would argue that part of Sheldon's

point in performing Tiptree was to model just such a man – an older white professional man – who had achieved his own consciousness raising and was dedicated to supporting the women’s movement. Tiptree as such a model, combined with Le Guin’s open and vulnerable discussion of her journey to become feminist and Russ’s rage at a society bent on limiting her every choice, helped show me (and readers like me) alternatives to lived reality which could lead to individually better people.

An example of just such a well-meaning man, Silverberg wrote, “It has been suggested that Tiptree is female, a theory that I find absurd, for there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree’s writing. I don’t think the novels of Jane Austen could have been written by a man nor the stories of Ernest Hemingway by a woman, and in the same way I believe the author of the James Tiptree stories is male” (“Who is Tiptree” xii). And it was as a man that Tiptree was so effective. As Betty King puts it, “[Tiptree] broke ground on the alienated woman theme. Her so-called masculine writing style made her popular with both women and men, a fact which resulted in widespread exposure to the theme of the alienated woman” (King 143). In his introduction to Tiptree’s collected stories, Silverberg celebrates Tiptree’s ability to destroy expected gendered readings because as Sheldon’s performance piece, Tiptree was male. Silverberg writes, “She fooled me beautifully, along with everyone else, and called into question the entire notion of what is ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ in fiction” (“Who is Tiptree” xviii). As Le Guin suggested, in calling into question tired definitions of gender difference, Tiptree, both as author and as performance art piece gifted with a full personality and a range of friends and acquaintances, challenged the established male constructions by focusing a

“masculine” style on the problems women faced. Here Sheldon reverses De Beauvoir’s oft-repeated claim that “one is not born, but, rather, *becomes* a woman” in order to “become”²⁹ the man she needed to support her personal feminist journey.

For Tiptree, as for Gilman, the only way to move beyond the problems women faced was to highlight those problems. Russ, writing about her own focus on the problems women face in the here-and-now, also argues for the value of highlighting those problems, of showing the “mud”: “You may think that the aim of art is not to wallow in the mud but to get us out of it. I do believe that first we must recognize that we *are* in the mud and this particular kind of mud is not the one I’ve found in fiction. Therefore I set out to portray it. [“Daddy’s Girl”] is a cold, nauseated story” (Letter to Elizabeth Fisher, 1 Sep. 1976). The kind of gender-based problems found in Tiptree’s “The Women Men Don’t See” serve to create a collective understanding of the problems women face while also providing the kind of refuge sought by Russ and Piercy and found in science fiction. Tiptree presents a way out for Ruth Parsons, even if that way is a fanciful trip to tour the galaxy with aliens who have no grasp of human speech. Hollinger sees such possibility as very pessimistic: “The unremitting pessimism in [Tiptree’s] stories arises, at least in part, from Tiptree’s determination to follow the implications of gender difference to their grimly logical conclusion; her stories read like darkly parodic representations of the extremes of gender difference” (Hollinger 305). However, as Ruth Parsons shows, Tiptree’s most powerful stories do not focus on “extreme of gender difference” at all. Ruth is perfectly normal, as is Don. They are middle-aged, middle-class white Americans who talk past one another instead of to one another. Thus the “unremitting pessimism” is,

like that of Gilman's story, merely the tragedy of well-meaning men and women who find it impossible to experience the empathy necessary to bridge the gender gap. Tiptree's focus on the collective experience of women living in the "chinks" of the world is key to understanding how science fiction works to expose the obvious by highlighting not the oddity of an alien encounter, but the pessimism only exists if the reader believes, as Ruth does, that the alienation of women is already beyond repair.

Science fiction's power as stimulant of knowledge rests on exactly this philosophical movement, the foundation of the sociological imagination: connecting the individual "experience" of character to the "common experience" of humankind. As this exchange between Russ and Delany shows, the feminist writers were conscious of the power of the genre because of its ability to present radical alternatives to the common experience of its readers:

Russ: Science fiction is a natural, in a way, for any kind of radical thought. Because it is about things that have not happened and do not happen.... It's very fruitful if you want to present the concerns of any marginal group, because you are doing it in a world where things are different....

Delany: For example, science fiction is the only place an American adolescent can go to find a picture of society that by definition is better than ours... ("Dialogue" 29)

Following George Mead and John Dewey, one can see that the purpose of feminist science fiction of the 1970s, as the purpose of Gilman in writing "The Yellow Wallpaper," deFord in "The Superior Sex," and Tiptree in "The Women Men Don't See," is not mainly to present an entertaining, character and plot-driven story; rather, the

purpose of such stories is to give readers new collective experiences with which they can critique the society to which they belong. As Le Guin suggests about women writers of SF, “our imagination of how things might be different, or better, is urgently wanted” by feminists seeking alternatives (“Books:” 54). It is only through these critiques that readers can begin to embrace the possibility of a radical revisioning of the gender and power structures found in the world. These collective experiences are Avery Gordon’s examples of imagining “living elsewhere” which enable readers to join the community of peers who have a shared vision of social change.

Science Fiction and Double Consciousness

Seeing the function of the genre as one of critique and analysis, Russ claims, “because so much of what’s presented to us as ‘the real world’ or ‘the way it is’ is so obviously untrue that a great deal of social energy must be mobilized to hide that gross and ghastly fact [...]. Hence, my love for science fiction, which analyzes reality by changing it” (*To Write Like* xv). The way science fiction effects such change is through what W. E. B. Dubois called “double consciousness,” what feminist critic Pamela Annas calls “dual-vision,” and what Mead, following A. N. Whitehead, also calls “double consciousness” wherein a person is able to experience two realities simultaneously (and legitimately). Mead uses Whitehead’s idea to develop his theory of the self in development with its surroundings, focusing on the relativity inherent in the perspective of the consciousness. Suggesting that the mind can occupy “alternative systems [or realities] that are simultaneously mutually exclusive,” Mead claims:

The mind passes from one to another in its so-called consciousness, and the world is a different world from the standpoint³⁰ of one attitude from what it is from another. We say the world cannot occupy both meanings, if they are mutually exclusive, but passage in a mind enables it to do so by means of transformations. All that we need to recognize is that the world had the one aspect from one point of view and that it now has the other aspect from another point of view. (100-101)

In effect, Mead argues for this double consciousness as part of his discussion of what constitutes “having a mind”: if a human can accept “two mutually exclusive situations as both legitimate, it is because as a minded organism he can be in both” and his “contention is that they are both real for a mind that can occupy [...] both systems” (101-102). Mead is using this movement of double consciousness to suggest the ability of empathy in the minded organism: it is only through taking on the “role of another” that such organisms are able to communicate. Of course, such communication is what enables collaboration and knowledge production.

Stories like “The Women Men Don’t See” depend on the reader to accept a dual-vision. He is asked to understand the weakness of the well-meaning-man’s point-of-view, seeing it as that of normal gender relations, while also understanding the alternative point of view offered by the Everywoman Ruth. Similarly, in “When It Changed,” the reader is asked to understand not only the conventional story of having his wife, family, and whole planet threatened by invading aliens, but also having the alternative point of view where he is a woman married to a woman and where the invading aliens are Earth men. In explaining why the genre is such a valuable arena for feminist rhetorical practices, Pamela Annas writes, science fiction “shares with oppressed socio-economic groups a perceptual technique: dual vision. For oppressed groups, dual vision means seeing the

world and yourself through two sets of opposed values” (144). And writing science fiction informed by the radical utopian impulse provides authors such as Tiptree with the power of empathy as accessed through such dual-vision, and in using the empathy, they push readers to challenge current social structures. As Annas puts it:

The dual perception of oppressed groups has, however, the potential for becoming the dialectical perception of revolutionary groups. Dualism is static; dialectical thought, though still based on contradiction, is dynamic. It is a form of thinking which attempts to move from dualism to at least a conditional synthesis. Implicit in the form of SF literature is a non-ethnocentric and dialectical vision of society; nonethnocentric in that a fundamental premise of the genre is that things-as-they-are should be questioned rather than merely accepted and described; dialectical in that alternate paradigms are played off against any given reality. SF, no matter what its lapses in emphasis have been historically, is structurally suited to a role as revolutionary literature. (144)

In order to understand science fiction and its use of the utopian imagination as revolutionary, readers must see the radical revision presented as John Dewey’s “breaking the crust of convention”; and while stories like “The Women Men Don’t See” and “When It Changed” do not present alternative versions of Earth, they do present the possibility of radical difference for the women of the stories. Even if they must leave Earth with aliens or live as “half a species,” their chances for a better future as fully-realized beings are greater. This utopian impulse to strive to escape the mud and reach for the chances of a better future is the key to the rhetorical power of such stories.

Fiction infused with the radical utopian impulse celebrated by Herbert Marcuse and Tom Moylan works inside the larger field of science fiction to produce a genre which seeks to create new visions of “living elsewhere.” Fiction such as Tiptree’s feminist

stories asks the reader to see the possibility of a different reality, not so that it replaces normality, but so that it becomes a different lived experience for the reader. In this way, Russ suggests, “Science fiction uses language literally... it uses metonymy instead of metaphor... [it] is first and foremost linguistically literal and... materialistic” (“A Dialogue” 34); as Annas claims:

SF as a genre is more useful than ‘mainstream’ fiction for exploring possibilities for social change precisely because it allows idea to become flesh, abstraction to become concrete, imaginative extrapolation to become aesthetic reality. It allows the writer to create and the reader to experience and recreate a new or transformed world based on a set of assumptions different from those we usually accept. It allows the reader, for a while, to be reborn into a reborn world. And, through working out in concrete terms philosophical and political assumptions, it allows the reader to take back into her or his own life new possibilities. There is a dialectical relationship between the world and its imaginative and ideational reconstructions in the creations of the mind. The artist says for us what we almost knew and defamiliarizes what we thought we knew. (145-146)

A reader is expected to come to the genre embracing the dual-vision of its fictional presentation: the world is like this, but it really could be different. Unfortunately, critics who read science fiction as metaphor instead of embracing the “linguistically literal” revision of reality are going to miss at least two important elements: first, the ability of utopian fiction to enable the reader, through the use of dual vision, to imagine the world otherwise, and second, the use of the otherwise of utopian fiction to critique the social structures of this world.

To achieve her goal of dual vision, Russ wrote fiction which dangerously destabilizes even the surety of a single self. Following the work of Eric Berne and other psychologists and echoing that of Hélène Cixous, she created multiple versions of her

genotyped self to populate *The Female Man*. Specifically addressing the personal dangers of forcing oneself to experience this deconstruction of personality, Russ writes in *The Female Man* about “the knowledge you suffer when you’re an outsider... the perception of all experience through two sets of eyes, two systems of value, two habits of expectation, almost two minds” (137-138). Such multiplicity is clearly shown in this moment near the end of the novel when the personalities divide: “I said goodbye and went off with Laur, I, Janet; I also watched them go, I, Joanna; moreover I went off to show Jael the city, I Jeannine, I Jael, I myself” (212). Each of these “I” persons is Russ but each is only a version. As Farah Mendlesohn writes, “The Js of *The Female Man* share a genotype (perhaps), but they do not share a posture; their bodies do not confront the world in the same fashion” (ix). Russ would never be as passive as Jeannine or as violent as Jael, right? She would not seduce the underage Laur as Janet does, nor would she simply watch all of these women go off to save the world as Joanna does, right? As if promoting the very deconstruction of identity reflected in Russ’s use of the several “I” narrators, Hel  ne Cixous³¹ writes, “When id is ambiguously uttered – the wonder of being several – she doesn’t defend herself against these unknown women whom she’s surprised at becoming, but derives pleasure from this gift of alterability. I am spacious, singing flesh, on which is grafted no one knows which I, more or less human, but alive because of transformation” (889). The key is that “I, I, I, I” would (and does) do all of these things in the narrative (Russ, *The Female Man*, 211). And without an ability to empathize with each action of her characters, Russ’s reader will miss the whole point of the novel.

Whereas *The Female Man* is a time and space-travel adventure novel, it is never comfortably so. As with other postmodern fictions, it accepts genre conventions only to destroy them. However, unlike much post-modernism, Russ's novel has an ethical center, even a didactic point. "When women write science fiction," Hollinger writes, "they repeat generic conventions. But they repeat them differently, and sometimes excessively" thereby posing a challenge to SF's "unquestioned allegiance to heteronormative sexual relations and to the limiting gender distinctions that are one of the results of this heteronormativity" (314-315). Beginning with the title *The Female Man*, Russ undermines the conventions of science fiction, using a title that sounds as if it is describing a hybrid entity presents the novel as a first-contact alien adventure, but here, as in "The Women Men Don't See," the aliens are really the men who are incapable of understanding the alternative versions of humans presented as women. According to Janice Bogstad, "A female man is someone who finds that she must act like a man and like a woman at the same time" (Bogstad and Emrys 3). The novel is asking the reader to understand the gender trap in which a "female man" finds herself. Here, as in "The Women Men Don't See," the female characters must exist in worlds circumscribed by male power structures. However, Russ presents several alternatives including Jael's world where the genders are involved in an active world war and her most famous utopia, Janet's Whileaway, where men simply do not exist.

Revisioning Science Fiction as a Way to Steal the Rockets

In her “Manifesto for Cyborgs,” Donna Haraway, writing about the feminist science fiction movement as the significant social/ socialist movement of the 1970s and 1980s, includes Russ and Delany as two primary agents in the early part of the movement (36). Haraway acknowledges how both authors embrace the genre in order to use its genre expectations, language, etc., and both are part of a movement working at Dewey’s “interstices of the existing order” which sought to stretch the public space of the genre of science fiction writing to include experiences of “others” who were not given voices in mainstream writing or more traditional science fiction. Delany took advantage of the opportunities made available through science fiction, writing space opera adventures which deconstructed genre expectations and challenged the reader to embrace his deeply philosophical questioning of reality. Sarah Lefanu claims, furthermore, that Russ “recognized, along with other writers, such as Ursula Le Guin, James Tiptree, Jr. (Alice Sheldon) and Suzy McKee Charnas... what great opportunities [science] fiction offered” to address her feminist concerns (x-xi). According to Thomas Disch, “The moment [in “When It Changed”] when [Russ’s] Whileawayan narrator gets her first sight of the opposite sex is the defining moment of feminist SF” (132). Such a moment, reconstructing as it does the planetary visitation narratives of the Golden Age along lines defined by gender alienation, brings feminist revisioning and the utopian impulse to the forefront of science fiction, explaining, as Billy Collins puts it:

[...] why the women in science
fiction movies who inhabit a planet of their own

[...] are always standing in a semicircle
with their arms folded, their bare legs set apart,
their breasts protected by hard metal disks (5-6, 9-11)

According to Raffaella Baccolini, the strength of the feminist science fiction writers comes from their use of a genre which while not welcoming their liberating agenda, provided the kinds of generic conventions which worked to embrace radical revisioning. She writes, “Feminist appropriations of generic texts [...] have become radical re-visions of conservative genres” such as the critical utopias of the 1970s (15). And Le Guin celebrates the sea-change Haraway sees in the early part of the feminist movement, claiming, “when women invaded sf they brought a lot of luggage with them containing very durable materials from other worlds [...] things like men, women, and children” (“Books:” 52). Such appropriation of science fiction from the old guard of the Golden Age can perhaps best be understood if compared to the 1960s American space program. Imagine if the Mercury 13 had simply taken the program over, radically revisioning the structure of the program while showing clearly how much better suited women were to exploring space and investigating the mysteries of the universe first-hand.

In celebrating the revisioning of herself, Le Guin, Delany, Tiptree, Charnas, and others, Russ, despite her suggestion in *Khatru* that true feminist models do not yet exist, suggests that what matters most about the group is how the members see each modeling the kinds of writing that each desires to accomplish. Echoing Virginia Woolf’s argument in support of women’s writing from *A Room of One’s Own*, Russ claims, “Models as guides to action and as indications of possibility are important to all artists – indeed to all

people – but to aspiring women [and minority³²] artists they are doubly valuable” (*How to Suppress* 87). And while Le Guin’s *Left Hand of Darkness* began bending the generic possibilities of science fiction in ways that women like Piercy and men like Scholes could celebrate, it is the models, such as Tiptree’s “The Women Men Don’t See,” Charnas’s *Walk to the End of the World*, Gearhart’s *The Wanderground*, and Russ’s *The Female Man*, which show the “mud” of women’s lived experience while providing hope for an unimaginable radical alternative that ultimately provide the most hope. Change cannot occur without such acknowledgement that the existing structures must collapse. Yet, as Cavendish recognized centuries ago, only science fiction serves as a genre which can embrace the dual vision of seeing the world as it is and also seeing the possibility of radically different, even better worlds.

CHAPTER V

BREAKING THE CRUST OF CONVENTION:

THE LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS, THE FEMALE MAN, AURORA: BEYOND EQUALITY, AND TROUBLE ON TRITON

As this dissertation shows, feminists including Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, James Tiptree, Jr., and Samuel Delany coopted the genre of science fiction in order to investigate alternative possibilities of human existence wherein women were not constrained by a patriarchal power system. The value of science fiction to serve feminists in their endeavors to imagine a better world, and thereby begin creating it, was consciously used by these feminists as a pragmatic response to the constrictions of their contemporary realities. Sally Gearhart, explaining the rhetorical power of the utopian impulse, writes, “I believe in fantasy as one of the first steps in political action” (“Scholar as Activist” 4). Such “first steps” must happen in the imagination, as Marge Piercy claims. Yet without the freedom to imagine radical change, such political action is impotent. However, science fiction gives writers and readers the freedom to exercise the utopian impulse. Frederic Jameson suggests, “[science fiction’s] deepest vocation is over and over again to demonstrate and to dramatize our incapacity to imagine the future, to [show]... the atrophy in our time of what Marcuse has called the *utopian imagination*, the imagination of otherness and radical difference” (288). As Jane Addams suggests, it is through the dramatizing of alternate experiences that humans learn empathy and thereby

communication with other humans. Feminists embraced the genre precisely because it had room to both condemn reality – showing the “mud,” as Russ says – and to provide the hope for a radical alternative necessary for any political action. These feminists embraced what Le Guin called a “feminized” genre, breathing new power into a genre which had, upon the success of the Mercury and Apollo programs, exhausted much of its inspirational thrust.

According to Jameson, the 1970s feminist utopias reflected the cooption of the genre and the transition of the utopian impulse from one of static and stagnant future utopias to one resting on the idea of utopia as process where ambiguity is embraced, struggle is expected, and perfection is never to be trusted. He writes:

The overt utopian text or discourse has been seen as a sub-variety of SF in general. What is paradoxical is that at the very moment in which utopias were supposed to have come to an end, and in which that asphyxiation of the utopian impulse alluded to above is everywhere more and more tangible, SF has in recent years rediscovered its own utopian vocation, and given rise to a whole series of powerful new works – utopian and SF all at once – of which Ursula Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed*, Joanna Russ’ *The Female Man*, Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and Samuel Delany’s *Triton* are only the most remarkable monuments. (Jameson 288-289)

These writers stole the rockets of both the science fiction genre and the philosophical tradition of utopia. Their goal was to create alternatives which did not provide blueprints for reformation but showed that radical alternatives were imaginable. Gearhart, following Charlotte Bunch and commenting on the value of such alternatives to the feminist movement, says, “feminism as I understand it is an ideology of possibility, not probability but possibility, and we don’t dare knock out any possibility. [...] we can have

reforms within the system only if we are revolutionary in our consciousness and not reformist, only if we do not believe that we are going to change those institutions” (“Interview” 24). Therefore, the pragmatic use of the utopian impulse is to create even drastically improbable possibilities of radically different social structures such as Gearhart’s own process utopia found in *The Wanderground*. Once the radical, revolutionary possibilities are created, the limitations of contemporary reality can be revisioned as mere stumbling blocks toward the significant reformations necessary for the achievement of the revolutionary goals of the feminist movement. Note that the goal is not to create the utopian vision – such vision is never a goal, only a stimulant.

Seeing the creation of feminist utopian visions as pragmatic stimuli for social change directly addresses Richard Rorty’s concerns about connecting feminism and pragmatism. Yet, it is only in a genre which provides room for radically different realities that such pragmatic stimuli could even be created. As Tom Moylan writes:

It is no accident that this renewal and transcendence of utopian discourse in critical utopia that arise out of the radical political and social ruptures of the late 1960s was achieved by means of the generic possibilities of modern science fiction. For science fiction’s ability to posit alternative landscape and episteme, to shift the way we see and understand the present, coupled with the open form and self-reflexivity of experimental fiction supplies the literary mechanism by which the utopian impulse is liberated from its denial and cooptation by the totalizing structures and ideologies of the twentieth century. (194)

Understanding the use of the utopian impulse to provide hope for women gaining conscious realization of their positions as second or third class citizens is key to uncovering how these writers created alternative visions of shared reality. Perhaps even

more important is understanding how these writers shared their own feminist journey by embracing the vulnerability necessary to openly and honestly address their own paths. Such vulnerability underscores the very feminist methodologies Laura Micciche calls for, those requiring “a writerly ethos sensitive to situatedness [...] and a view of knowledge as always partial and in process” (175). As Jane Addams writes, “Progress must always come through the individual who varies from the type and has sufficient energy to express this variation.... Progress, however, is not secure until the mass has conformed to this new righteousness” (159). In effect, the individual may have a utopian vision, but until she can share that meme with the mass through the sociological imagination, such vision cannot serve the feminist-pragmatist agenda as what Herbert Marcuse calls the “historical imperative” to continue the change of humanity for the better. Such an approach sees the utopian impulse, described as key to the feminist journey, as the kind of rhetorical invention promoted by Karen Lefevre: a collective movement but one which must be taken singly.

In this chapter I will take a close look at a few of the most significant literary works created by the 1970s feminist writers and at the reactions of those in conversation with these writers. To that end, I will define *The Left Hand of Darkness* as an indispensable starting point; read Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* as the ideal “little book” of the movement; recognize the collection *Aurora: Beyond Equality* as a turning point for the movement (and for writers like Le Guin who takes the collection as the first in a long series of reflections on her journey to feminism and like Tiptree who there published *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?*); and I will end by investigating Delany’s

Trouble on Triton as his attempt to create the kind of heterotopia that must replace static utopia if the utopian impulse is going to come to fruition in any kind of realistic way.

Ursula Le Guin's Revisioning of Gender as Edifying Discourse

While it is certainly misleading and often impossible to focus on a single figure or text in defining the opening salvo of a political literary movement, especially one which has roots in the utopianism of Thomas More, the feminism of Mary Wollstonecraft, and the political idealism of Karl Marx, I can without reservation say that the cultural turn that we now know of as 1970s feminist science fiction begins with Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*. As Sarah Lefanu writes of Le Guin:

Her contribution to science fiction cannot be overestimated – she demands a seriousness from readers and from other writers that is enormously important [...]. Le Guin speaks *with* the voice of authority – although it is a voice that is at once self-critical and encouraging to others – rather than against it. Where Tiptree, Charnas, Russ can perhaps be seen as stowaways, taking over, redirecting the time-machine of the genre, seizing power in their own works to go this way and that, Le Guin is a traditional voyager. She invites the reader to accompany her as crew, not accomplice, and the reader is returned, dazzled perhaps, but unscathed. (*Feminism* 146, emphasis in original)

As Lefanu argues, Le Guin's value is primarily one of invitation – she invites readers to share her journey. According to Thomas Disch, “The most successful, and the most significant, feminist presence in the SF field has undoubtedly been that of Ursula Le Guin. [...] and she commands an unrivaled respect in those academic circles that pay attention to the genre. She is the most respectable SF writer going” (124-125). Despite arguments to the contrary, Disch is certain of Le Guin's status as a feminist, arguing, “Le

Guin's feminism is less overtly phobic of the male sex than that of Andrea Dworkin, but it is no less absolute" (125). I argue that Lefanu, Russ, and Delany underestimate the power of Le Guin's honesty and vulnerability. However, it is not in her fiction that she is most rhetorically challenging – that happens in her commentary, her criticism of her own learning and the story of her own journey to feminism as reflected in the writing of that fiction.

Regardless of whether feminists following Le Guin found her frustrating, as did Russ and Delany, or invigorating, as did Piercy, Suzy McKee Charnas, and Tiptree, the conversation around her 1969 novel proves its value to the movement. Inevitably, those critics such as Jameson and Moylan who focus on utopian thought and its importance in shifting the genre of science fiction, as well as those critics such as Linda Hogeland and Jennifer Burwell who focus on how feminists used the genre to promote consciousness-raising, only look to *The Left Hand of Darkness* as a precursor to the critical utopias of Russ's *The Female Man*, Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Delany's *Trouble on Triton*, and Le Guin's own *The Dispossessed*. However, after a careful reading of Le Guin's self-criticism as well as the conversation happening in the interstices – the letters and other commentary of these feminist writers, I know that in striving to accept the abnormal discourse of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the crust of the science fiction genre broke, opening it up for the discussion which followed and which is most clearly realized in Russ's *The Female Man* and in the *Khatru Women's Symposium*.

Le Guin's work serves as a quick glimpse of the changes in the sociological imagination through the evolving approach to gender. Le Guin, always an author for

whom fiction is a way to investigate her own philosophical questions, did not consider herself a feminist early in her career. As she moves beyond her conventional approach to gender in the original Earthsea trilogy, Le Guin's science fiction novels *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed* are much more clearly focused on the gender questions of the 1960s/1970s American feminist movement. Building on the theory that gender is a false construct of society, Le Guin created an androgynous race of humans in her 1969 novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Such a creation added a great deal to the sociological imagination of those who needed a vision of living without gender. In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the main population is gender neutral except for during a monthly cycle (like a mirror to menstruation) when they become sexually potent as either male or female. Le Guin's approach to gender in the novel is still very stereotyped, however; she calls the characters "men" unless they are cycling as female – showing the bias toward male identity as the norm. In *The Dispossessed*, written just a few years later, Le Guin has a communist-feminist society wherein all members are supposedly equal and then she has a capitalist society which is very sexist but where women actually have more power to fulfill their desires for sex as well as for knowledge and political power.

The reader can see distinct changes in Le Guin's approach to gender from Earthsea through the science fiction novels. When reconsidering her writing in 1987 in "Is Gender Necessary Redux," LeGuin suggests that in these early writings she did not pursue her vision far enough. She points out that too many men found her vision "safe" while many of her fellow feminists (and some of her science fiction peers) wanted her to go much further in establishing a non-gendered society. Criticizing her own short-

sightedness in being so conventional in *The Left Hand of Darkness* and even in 1976, Le Guin writes in 1987:

I now see it thus: Men were inclined to be satisfied with the book, which allowed them a safe trip into androgyny and back, from a conventionally male viewpoint. But many women wanted it to go further, to dare more, to explore androgyny from a woman's point of view as well as a man's. In fact, it does so, in that it was written by a woman. But this is admitted directly only in [Chapter 7] "The Question of Sex," the only voice of a woman in the book. I think women were justified in asking more courage of me and a more rigorous thinking-through of implications. ("Is Gender Necessary Redux" 16, emphasis in original)

Although she may have come short of where she would be twenty years later, Le Guin created *The Left Hand of Darkness* to investigate, for herself, what a human society without gender would feel like to a rather conventional Earth-man. Celebrating this moment as both a personal escape and as one of two major steps for feminist science fiction, in 1990 Le Guin writes, "I escaped maledom by inventing the androgynies of *The Left Hand of Darkness* [while] Russ's feminism, in *The Female Man*, became brilliantly polemical" ("Books:" 52).

Although the revisioned Le Guin proudly wore the feminist label in 1990, she was hesitant to claim the feminist utopian impulse as part of her goal in writing *The Left Hand of Darkness*, arguing that the novel is more an adventure story of one man's journey than the collective social questioning necessary for utopia. However, the utopian impulse as rhetorical convention is certainly present in the androgynous human society of Winter for many female readers searching for a radically different approach to gender. Le Guin, suggesting that the novel is not "a Utopia" claims, "it poses no *practicable* alternative to

contemporary society [...]. All it tries to do is open up an alternative viewpoint, to widen the imagination, without making any very definite suggestions as to what might be seen from that new viewpoint” (“Is Gender Necessary? Redux” 16, emphasis in original). Here Le Guin’s description of her purpose in *The Left Hand of Darkness* promotes exactly the kind of radical break with lived reality which defines the pragmatic use of the utopian impulse, presenting the reader with a widened viewpoint rather than a static goal. Winter may not be a utopia, but it is utopian when it comes to breaking the crust of gender conventions.

The Left Hand of Darkness serves as a moment when the meme of gender equality, existing for hundreds of years in utopian constructs, reaches such a point that it can no longer be ignored. Piercy, Charnas, Tiptree, and other feminists found here the utopian impulse described by Herbert Marcuse which shifted the world for the better. The book resonated with all who read it seriously, not because of its political intrigue or its planet-spanning adventure, but because of the tiny five pages of Chapter 7: “The Question of Sex.” With these pages Le Guin sneaks in the kind of abnormal discourse that is both ridiculous and that can drastically shift the parameters of normal discourse. Though it appears sixty pages into the text, this chapter does not exist as part of the narrative of the novel, working instead as a set of anthropological field notes presented from an earlier Earth envoy to Winter and merely inserted into the narrative. This fictional anthropologist was more interested in sexual practices than in social mores. However, Le Guin devotes almost exactly one page to how gendered Earthlings might react to the androgynous Gethenians of Winter:

The society of Gethen, in its daily functioning and in its continuity, is without sex.

Consider: Anyone can turn his hand to anything. This sounds very simple, but its psychological effects are incalculable. [...] no one is quite so thoroughly 'tied down' here as women, elsewhere, are likely to be – psychologically or physically. [...] Therefore nobody here is quite so free as a free male anywhere else. [...]

Consider: There is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive. In fact the whole tendency to dualism that pervades human thinking may be found to be lessened, or changed, on Winter.

[...] When you meet a Gethenian you cannot and must not do what a bisexual naturally does, which is to cast him into the role of Man or Woman, while adopting towards him a corresponding role dependent on your expectations of the patterned or possible interactions between persons of the same or opposite sex. Our entire pattern of socio-sexual interaction is nonexistent here. They cannot play this game.³³ They do not see one another as men or women. This is almost impossible for our imagination to accept. What is the first question we ask about a newborn baby?

Yet you cannot think of a Gethenian as 'it.' They are not neuters. [...] Lacking [an alternative] 'human pronoun' [...] I must say 'he,' for the same reasons we used the masculine pronoun in referring to a transcendent god: it is less defined, less specific, than the neuter or the feminine. But the very use of the pronoun in my thoughts leads me continually to forget that the [Gethenian] I am with is not a man, but a manwoman.

The [Earth ambassador], if one is sent, must be warned that unless he is very self-assured, or senile, his pride will suffer. A man wants his virility regarded, a woman wants her femininity appreciated, however indirect and subtle the indications of regard and appreciation. On Winter they will not exist. One is respected and judged only as a human being. It is an appalling experience. (68-69)

Whereas this chapter's importance to the narrative structure of *The Left Hand of Darkness* cannot be understated – it has no bearing on either character or plot – this one page of social commentary works as a paradigm shift in science fiction. Speaking of the value of this particular moment to the genre, Robert Scholes and Eric Rabkin claim:

To be judged only as a human being, without being allowed to fall back on one's male or female role, would indeed be an appalling experience, despite our many claims to the contrary. And to regard another person simply as a person is a feat beyond most human capacities. We *need* the help of sexual, racial, and other categories, but in relying on them we ignore something greater and deeper – our common humanity. (Scholes and Rabkin 228, emphasis in original)

Certainly this single page of gender discussion Le Guin provides has resonated in the genre, demanding now decades of response from critics as well as from Le Guin and spurring fictional responses in Russ's "When It Changed" and *The Female Man* and Delany's *Trouble on Triton* among many others.

The Left Hand of Darkness as *Gadfly*

Always her staunchest critic, Le Guin claims repeatedly, "Of course, if I wrote that novel today I'd do some things differently, perhaps handle certain issues more effectively and dramatically. But that's no big deal. I did it as best as I could at the time" ("An Interview with Ursula Le Guin" 40). Despite its reception and admitted shortcomings, Le Guin always intended *The Left Hand of Darkness* to be informed by feminism. She says:

My introduction [to feminism] was slow and late. All my early fiction tends to be male-centered. A couple of the Earthsea books have no women in them or only marginal woman figures. That's how hero stories worked; they were about men [w]ith the exception of just a few feminists like Joanna Russ [...]. My first feminist text was *The Left Hand of Darkness*, which I started writing in 1967. It was an early experience in deconstructing gender. Everybody was asking, "What is it to be a man? What is it to be a woman?" It's a hard question, so in *The Left Hand of Darkness* I eliminated gender to find out what would be left. Science fiction is a wonderful opportunity to play this game. ("Coming Back from Silence" 99)

Scholes, possibly Le Guin's most ardent contemporaneous academic admirer and a correspondent with both Le Guin and Russ, writes of the value of the cognitive dissonance created by her alternative experience of gender. Writing in 1975 he claims: "I submit that such a deliberate variation on human sexuality [as found in *The Left Hand of Darkness*] can help us to see the realities of our sexual situation more clearly, and to feel them more deeply, than any non-imaginative work of sociology or 'realistic' fiction" (*Structural Fabulation* 91). Scholes regularly uses Le Guin to serve as his example of the power of science fiction to destabilize the reader's reality in order to cause the reader to reach for something better. In 1977, he and Rabkin claim, "The alien encounter has been subtly altered by Le Guin until it becomes the obvious metaphor for relations between the human sexes. Only in science fiction could such a metaphor be made concrete in this way. And this is one of its major sources of strength – it literalizes metaphors, turning them into solid fictions, enacting them so as to release the imaginative energy compacted with the figure" (Scholes and Rabkin 229). And in his 1985 *Textual Power* he writes:

[science fiction] enables us to *see* the system which it violates [as fiction] as we have never seen that system before. And in [*The Left Hand of Darkness*], the system that it lets us see is the system of sexual difference itself, and it lets us see this system in a way that no realistic work of fiction, however eloquent, could accomplish. It enables us to see the system of sexual difference *as* a system because it has offered us a *differance* from *difference* – a place to stand from which we can finally see the earth and perhaps even move it. (*Textual Power* 119, emphasis in original)

Scholes is correct in his admiration for science fiction's ability to break the reader free from convention, showing how the abnormal discourse of Le Guin's "manwoman" can

force the reader to see the construction of gender as a construction. However, when giving so much praise to Le Guin's early novel, Scholes may be writing from the very perspective of that man Le Guin made comfortable with the "conventionally male viewpoint" of the novel. Certainly Russ and Charnas were made unhappy with the weak approach to gender deconstruction. Even Tiptree and Vonda McIntyre, defending Le Guin, admitted to her lack of fervor.

Russ spends the last section of her 1971 essay "The Image of Women in Science Fiction," which caused great controversy when it was reprinted in the fanzine *Vertex* in 1974, addressing the shortcomings of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, particularly the lack of women: "there is a human observer on Winter, and he is male; and there is a native hero and *he is male* – at least 'he' is *masculine in gender, if not in sex*" (214, emphasis in original). Russ's complaint was that not even the women writing science fiction were writing about women – and Le Guin's high writing ability seemed, for Russ, to make her more responsible to write about women being women. She writes in the essay:

The title I chose for this essay was 'The Image of Women in Science Fiction.' I hesitated between that and 'Women in Science Fiction' but if I had chosen the later, there would have been very little to say.

There are plenty of images of women in science fiction.

There are hardly any women. (217)

Beyond her criticism, Russ also commented on Le Guin's disappointing approach to gender in the afterward to "When It Changed" from 1972's *Again, Dangerous Visions*. By 1974, Le Guin knew that *The Left Hand of Darkness* had failed to address even her

own questions about gender construction, and she was not ashamed to admit it to her harshest public critic. In a letter to Russ, she admits:

[Genli Ai] is from Earth, which is a moderately backward world in my future-universe; and I really thought it was fairly clear that he is a quite naïve & conventional person (shaken to magnanimity by love): I wanted him to be that, anyhow, because I was trying to hook the make reader by giving him somebody quite ‘close to home’ to identify with – and, possibly, therefore, *be changed* with. A little bit. So here I would seriously & obdurately defend both what I tried to do, & what I did. Otherwise your criticisms of the book’s shortcomings are extremely fine, & God knows, if I had written it in 1974 instead of in 1966, I would have done things differently. (Letter, 9 Mar. 1974; emphasis in original)

Key to Le Guin’s purpose is giving the reader something to “*be changed* with. A little bit.” And the novel serves this purpose very well with science fiction’s often rather conservative readers. “With Le Guin what moves me is something in the vision and something in the sedate aliveness of her prose. And in both of these what you call Conservatism probably takes some role,” Scholes admits in a letter to Russ, responding, so it implies, to a conversation about Russ’s essay in *Vertex*. “*The Female Man* stirred me more than it moved me [...]. I love the variety, the differences that exist in any viable literary genre. I’m glad that you and Le Guin are doing your different things” (Letter, 9 Aug. 1975).

Unsatisfied with Le Guin’s defense, but unwilling to attack her personally, Russ wrote McIntyre on 24 Aug. 1974 about her disappointment in Le Guin’s approach to feminism. McIntyre replied by saying that although she did not have the ability to argue Russ out of her opinion, especially knowing that Delany shared it, she would defend Le Guin. McIntyre agrees that Le Guin’s approach to feminism lacks the emotional daring

and drive of Russ's or her own, but she demands that Russ accept Le Guin's approach and even reminds Russ that while the two of them regularly complain to one another about being alone and lonely, Le Guin manages to balance her life so that she is a wife and mother and author rather than being consumed by her feminism (Letter, 1 Sept. 1974). Attempting to help Russ understand why Le Guin was so necessary as a feminist in science fiction, Titprea also wrote her an impassioned letter, perhaps in response to the same letter she had written McIntyre:

But you must not dump on Ursula Le Guin. For this reason: Whether you know it or not she does good to your movement. There is a place on the front for those gentle souls who only say it indirectly. (I have told her she hasn't really found her voice yet – I happen to like – maybe love – her personally very much.) In any movement the out-front radicals are always peeing on the moderate wing, but you forget what a terribly broad spectrum of opposition you confront. The moderates – uncle Toms if you will – convert their own sector of the opposition very effectively, they speak to people who would run screaming from you. You are a Malcolm X; she is a sort of Martin King. Her *Left Hand of Darkness* – also ever her (to me better) *Lathe of Heaven* – quietly and unforgettably undercuts sexual stereotypes for certain readers you can't reach. Now maybe they *should* read you & more radical things; but they won't. They are only susceptible to seeping radicalism, to the slow percolation of low-voiced ideas. And the ideas ARE there, you know. Her style is the very quiet statement. When and if she tries to make a more direct one she may well fumble and lose effectiveness. I wish I could convince you to be glad of any elements of alliance and stop insisting that there is only one way to skin the chauvinist pig. Some pigs you have to reassure as you do it. You and your outspoken like are *indispensable*. But you are not alone. As Lenin or was it Marx said, from each according to his powers. She uses her powers. Quietly, persistently, she inserts the impression that there is something very wrong and absurd between the sexes. (Maybe you don't realise how clearly that idea comes through? It does.) That is a very useful function. Whether she lives up to what you think a WOMAN should be & say is, ultimately, irrelevant. Be content to lead and to be out there where the cold winds blow. (Letter, 22 Sept. 1974; emphasis in original)

Whereas Tiptree's argument is proven true by the responses of not only Scholes, but also literally hundreds of feminist readers such as Piercy who claim *The Left Hand of Darkness* as a pivotal moment in their own path of consciousness raising, Russ was not convinced. In her answer to Tiptree she basically says that the reader would have to bring his own feminist statement to the novel, and that makes life too easy for readers and thereby difficult for other writers. She writes, "I think one has to be as sensitive as you to see [Le Guin's feminism]; most reactions are simply that if U. K. Le Guin isn't complaining, why am I, Joanna Russ? [...] And I confess I do feel somewhat deserted by that" (qtd. in Phillips 333).

Tiptree and McIntyre argued for the value of both Le Guin's approach and Russ's. Scholes, speaking as the voice of reason which caused Russ to threaten to violently attack him, suggested:

It is good to have some writers who are expressing anger mostly, going after present inequities with all the rhetoric at their disposal. This is what makes *Female Man* such a gutsy, grabbing book. But there is more than one way to raise a conscience. There is room for Le Guin as she is and you as you are and sf is richer, the world is richer, because of the difference between you. You have *both* taught me some things about sexism. (Letter, 25 Aug. 1975; emphasis in original)

However, Russ was not alone in judging Le Guin's feminism a failure. While not addressing the shortcomings of *The Left Hand of Darkness* directly, Delany did complain about the lack of sexual variation in Le Guin's work. While admiring her talent as a writer, especially a stylist, Delany found himself disgusted by the Earthsea trilogy, telling Russ, "I desperately want to write a book that can be used by young women and

young men for the same things that *Earthsea* can be used for, but that does not demand from women that they slice their own souls in half in payment, nor demand that the men assent to the great lie about what they are doing to women as a prerequisite for admission!” (Letter, middle July 1974). Additionally, Delany found *The Dispossessed* very problematic. In the nearly book-length essay “To Read *The Dispossessed*,” which by its very seriousness demands that Le Guin’s work be seen as significant, he argues that because she writes with a mastery of style absent from most fiction, the immaturity of her ideas is too often ignored by her critics and readers alike.

Beyond Delany, Charnas also expresses disappointment in Le Guin’s work. In 1976 Charnas wrote Russ about how, despite the love she had for the book when she first read it, *The Left Hand of Darkness* had come to disappoint her: “About Left Hand – All of a sudden I find it very hard to think about that book at all without coming up with the most negative, nasty thoughts.” The fact that “Ursula is an extremely elegant writer” combined with her lack of feminist initiative is for Charnas, as for Russ and Delany, the worst part of the problem. Looking back after publishing her own feminist critical utopia *Walk to the End of the World* and completing the sequel, Charnas writes, “I get the distinct impression that Left Hand was a very conservative book travelling under the guise of daring innovation which hinged entirely on the fact that its central gimmick was some tinkering with the sexual hardware of its people” (Letter, 23 Mar. 1976).

Ultimately, Charnas places Le Guin, who broke the conventions by directly challenging gender constraints, at the back of those feminists who dominated science fiction in the middle 1970s:

What Ursula does she does well. Maybe someday she'll push her perimeters further (why not? I have, and hope to continue to do so; same of you) maybe not. [...] you're the sharp one who goes plunging on ahead, I'm the plodder who stomps along as thoroughly as she can in her own track, and Ursula may end up left way back at the edge of the old territory staring after our backs [...] unless she manages to break free in the end and take some chances" (Letter, 29 Dec. 1976).

Certainly in retrospect it is easy to see that Le Guin has broken free; her 1987 essay "Is Gender Necessary? Redux," along with the 1990 article for *Ms.* "Books: The World of Science Fiction" and the 1993 lecture "Earthsea Revisited" positioned her by the middle 1990s as the primary voice of feminism in science fiction. It should not go unnoticed that much of Le Guin's feminist rhetorical contribution is a revisioning of her own journey to feminism.

Joanna Russ as Ring Leader, Ripping Apart the Crust of Convention

Beginning with "When It Changed" if not earlier, Joanna Russ developed a reputation as a contentious and demanding cultural critic. Her book reviews from *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* were often scathing in the way that Le Guin never was, as in this from her review of *The Dispossessed*: "Something has gone wrong; what I can only guess at. I suspect that Le Guin, who is relatively young as an artist, is still in the process of finding her own voice, a process partly hidden (as in Virginia Woolf's early work) by her extraordinary talent" ("Review" 111). And Russ's essays, printed first in academic journals and then reprinted in the fanzines and semi-prozines of the genre, challenged not only the position of women in science fiction but also the value of the genre at all. As a way of exhibiting the influence Russ had on her students (and by

extension, one assumes, on her audience, her peers, and himself), Delany retells a story from Jane Gallop's *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*. In the story, Gallop is attending the first all-women's dance at Cornell in 1971. Two women, a professor of Women's Studies and a student, enter as a couple. The professor is "One of the campus's best known feminists, an early leader in the national movement for women's studies, a published writer over six feet tall." Here Russ, the professor, and her date become a major symbol because Gallop and her fellow bare-chested community of female partiers "could recognize them as our sexuality, could affirm them as part of the new possibility opened to us as women by feminism" (qtd. in Delany, "Introduction," xiii). This example from Gallop by way of Delany shows how influential – how larger-than-life – Russ was for her students and by extension for her peers including Delany.

James Gunn writing in 1979 suggests: "The most explosive issue in contemporary science fiction has been feminism. Some writers have dealt with it in the older, more oblique fashion, as Ursula K. Le Guin did in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. But such subtlety often is scorned as cowardly, and current science fiction confronts such issues more directly" as Tiptree's stories including "The Women Men Don't See" and "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" show. "Perhaps the most vigorous attacks on male dominance have come from Joanna Russ" (*Road to Science Fiction* Vol. 3, 524). Certainly it was Russ of whom Harlan Ellison was speaking when he said that the best writers of science fiction were women. And even among the women Russ stands out as a stylistic wonder. However, Russ's postmodern approach to narrative challenged many readers, preventing her books from gaining quick publication or a wide readership. While

she claimed that Le Guin's influence could not be "overstated," Lefanu writes, "Joanna Russ is the single most important woman writer of science fiction, although she is not necessarily the most widely read" (*Feminism* 173). Celebrating her writing despite the private feud between them, Scholes, along with his collaborator Rabkin, claims:

[Russ's] contribution to the New Wave of science fiction is important in two respects: her language is among the most alive, vigorous and daring of any prose being written today (as might be expected from her dedicatory bow to Vladimir Nabokov and S. J. Perelman in *And Chaos Died*), and her commitment to radical feminism (as exemplified in *The Female Man*) is typical of the social consciousness of this movement [...]. In *The Female Man* she has used the visionary potential of science fiction to convey the contrast between life as it is presently lived by many women and life as it might be. Among other things, Russ has demonstrated the unique potential of science fiction for embodying radically different life styles. (Scholes and Rabkin 97)

Recognizing the need for "embodying radically different life styles" as key to the utopian impulse, Russ is never satisfied. As Carl Freedman writes, "what Russ's work can help us understand is that science fiction is an especially appropriate form for feminism" (*Critical Theory* 131). She was certainly, as Tiptree and Charnas both wrote of her, the leader of feminism in science fiction.

In her foreword to Russ's novel *The Two of Them*, Lefanu writes, "you can see in Russ's novels and stories a series of dialogues – interrogative, engaged and sometimes enraged with a world being turned inside out by the women's liberation movement" (viii). And in her forward to Russ's story collection *The Zanzibar Cat*, Piercy claims, "The push toward freedom, appetite, curiosity both intellectual and sensual, the desire to control and expand their own existence, figure far more importantly in the lives of her

female characters” than the traditional desires female characters were allowed in the discourse of fiction (xii). In an early 1972 letter Titprea cries out to Russ: “Find myself turning to women writers now. Specifically in sf. Something inside me [...] responding to cryptic signals of unguessed-at freedom. New paths out of hell, a new fight. Lead us” (qtd. in Phillips 291). Additionally, from Sally Gearhart Russ was repeatedly told, “You’re an outrageously brave woman. I get goose bumps to think of where your mind will be by the time all those others catch up with you” (Letter, 28 Apr. 1979).

In his introduction to her novel *We Who Are About To...* Delany, who might be considered Russ’s greatest cheerleader, writes, “My claims for Joanna Russ are large. She is one of the finest – and most necessary – writers of American fiction to publish between 1959... and 1998” (v). Like Lefanu, he promotes her writing specifically because of how it expresses her particular style of feminism: “[except for *And Chaos Died*], all the books grow directly from feminist concerns [...]. Feminism provides a structure for her arguments” (v-vi). However, Delany is careful to point out that “Russ’s point in all this is that man-the-oppressor-and-exploiter-of-women is not [...] defined by biological sex but is rather (‘by St. Marx and St. Engels,’ as Russ swears in at least one of her essays) constituted by socio-economics as a power structure at work on what Foucault would call a bio-political field” (xi). Delany celebrates Russ’s sophisticated approach to creating new visions for the sociological imagination especially because those new visions deal explicitly with the kinds of theoretical ideas about which he is also writing, she is also working to rip apart convention rather than simply break the crust.

Farah Mendlesohn is today revisioning Russ's value. Mendlesohn has recently edited both a collection of Russ's lesser-known work including reviews, essays, and letters, and a collection of critical essays written about Russ's value to science fiction and to feminism. She values Russ because:

Russ's writing gets under the skin. It is a burr under the saddle blanket; sharp, uncomfortable, provocative. She is the science fiction writer who most encapsulates Wittgenstein's exhortation that aesthetics is ethics. Reading Russ can be exhausting, emotionally harrowing. Russ challenges your most radical analysis. There can be no excuses, no exceptions; niceness is not a mitigating factor in the structures of oppression. Difference isn't enough. Niceness merely pads the cell. Only rage is enough. Russ wielded her rage like a scalpel, in reviews, critical essays and in her fiction. Her purpose was to challenge the agenda of others. (Mendlesohn ix)

In approaching Russ, whose career as a science fiction writer precedes her ambitious publications in the field of feminist literary recovery, Mendlesohn has chosen to focus on the most affecting of Russ's work, *The Female Man*. "A novel like *The Female Man* dissects the world, the construction of fiction, the assumptions of science fiction, the responses of reviewers, and finally the responses of far future readers," Mendlesohn writes. "It is steeped in genre consciousness" (viii). It is also steeped in what Russ considered most important about the feminist movement: autobiography.

The Little Book that Could

While opening up to Tiptree before knowing that he was a performance of Alice Sheldon, on whom the irony of the statement would not have been lost, Russ argues that intellectual women such as she have to deny themselves: "To move into the intellectual community at large you practically have to repudiate your sex [...]. It really results in

having to tear oneself in two. [...] To learn to write at all, I had to begin by thinking of myself as a sort of fake man, something that ended only with feminism” (qtd. in Phillips 223). And this journey became the foundation of Russ’s fiction, altering the normal discourse of science fiction enough to accept her story in *The Female Man*: “Either you write what is essentially autobiographical or you have to do something else. You cannot imitate a genre which was intended to exclude you” (qtd. in Perry 305). Like her correspondent Adrienne Rich, Russ finds energy in her personal journey through anger to feminism and through the revisioning of her reality which that journey provided. She says, “In the first few years after I became a feminist, which was ’69, ’70, ’71, I remember wondering if I was going to live through the anger because it was so awful” (qtd. in Perry 291). And it is this anger that “turns up in *The Female Man* with, literally, claws and fangs. She is what pulls the whole book together at the end – the actual, open experience of sheer rage” (qtd. in Perry 291). Russ’s rage permeates the novel, breaking through in moments such as this one: “If we are all mankind, it follows to my interested and righteous and right now very bright and beady little eyes, that I too am a Man and not at all a woman, for honestly now, who ever heard of cave Woman and existential Woman. [...] I am man [...] Listen to the female man. If you don’t, by God and all the saints, *I’ll break your neck*” (140, emphasis in original). Such anger is precisely what drew readers to her work. As Tiptree writes:

do you imagine that anyone with half a functional neurone [sic] can read your work and not have his fingers smoked by the bitter, multi-layered anger in it? It *smells* revolutionary [...]. It smells and smoulders [sic] like a volcano buried so long and deadly it is just beginning to wonder if it can explode. Fantastic anger.

[...] it has not escaped even my tiny dimming brain that you belong to the oldest and worst-squashed race on Earth. What more appropriate emotion than anger? What task more urgent than freeing & finding yourselves now [...]? (Letter, Aug./Sept. 1973; emphasis in original)

What “*smells* revolutionary” is the revisioning of reality through the intentional disruption of gender. “*The Female Man* is the antithesis of a utopian or dystopian novel; the book, in form and content, is the disruption of the expectations of [the universal masculine domination] and many other central gendered categories of linguistic production,” claims Donna Haraway, but perhaps more importantly, “Russ’s generic title figure is as much a disruption of the story of the universal Female as of the universal Man” (*Modest_Witness* 70). Russ found that she was only able to be completely herself when she was expressing the destruction of her person caused by the construction of gender. Her answer was to embrace the anger and violence, to “punch her readers’ noses” (*Female Man* 214).

In her comments to the first published edition of the story in Harlan Ellison’s *Again, Dangerous Visions*, Russ claims that “When It Changed” and, hence, *The Female Man* was inspired by what she saw as a weakness in *The Left Hand of Darkness*:

I had read a very fine SF novel, Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*, in which all the characters are humanoid hermaphrodites, and was wondering at the obduracy of the English language, in which everybody is “he” or “she” and “it” is reserved for typewriters. But how can one call a hermaphrodite “he,” as Miss Le Guin does? I tried (in my head) changing all the masculine pronouns to feminine ones, and marveled at the difference. And then I wondered why Miss Le Guin’s native “hero” is male in *every* important sexual encounter of his life except that with the human man in the book. Weeks later the Daemon suddenly whispered, “Katy drives like a maniac,” and I found myself on *Whileaway*. (261-262, emphasis in original)

Whileaway is the utopia from “When It Changed” that serves as backdrop for *The Female Man*, conspicuous in its absence. Rather than having men visit and change the utopia, as the story does, the novel brings Janet to a contemporary Earth. It also brings Jeannine, who comes from a hyper-sexist Earth which escaped the second World War but not the gender constraints of Victorian times when *The Angel in the House* ruled. And, as a surprise, it brings Jael, an assassin from a version of Earth (or of Whileaway) where the war between the sexes is an actual war. Each of these women share, the novel implies, a genotype – they are different versions of the usual narrator Joanna, who is sometimes the same as the author and sometimes not.

In addition to the way the narrative plays with the conventions of character by deconstructing the narrator, providing not only “dual” but “quadruple” vision, it also plays with the conventions of plot, focusing on the weakness of gender distinctions and the inability of Earth-bound English to express the full range of humanity. One of the more effective moments of breaking the crust of convention happens early in *The Female Man* when Janet, newly appeared from Whileaway, is interviewed on TV. The MC interviewing her asks about the love-life of the all-female Whileawayans:

MC: I am talking about sexual love.

JC (enlightened): Oh! You mean copulation.

MC: Yes.

JE: And you say we don't have that?

MC: Yes.

JE: How foolish of you. Of course we do.

MC: Ah? (He wants to say, “Don’t tell me”)

JE: With each other. Allow me to explain. (11)

Russ ends the page with what seems like a very conscious stab at *Life Magazine*'s coverage of the female cosmonaut and the Mercury 13, Russ suggests, “In Jeannine Dadier’s world,” Janet would be “asked by a lady commentator: How do the women of Whileaway do their hair?” (11).

This exchange is all too reminiscent of contemporary arguments surrounding homosexual identity in contemporary America even a generation after the novel was published. If “copulation” is defined as penetration of a vagina by a penis, then neither lesbians nor gay men can ever engage in love-making. Suggesting otherwise is radical in 1974 when homosexuality was still considered a disease by many professional psychologists. The humor of Janet’s interviewer’s discomfort underscores the desire many readers have to read about the lesbian sexual experience – and Russ does not disappoint, bringing such an experience to the forefront later in the novel. But here the discomfort is ridiculed by Janet who has already defined herself as normal and Earthlings as abnormal. Like Tiptree’s Ruth Parsons, Janet is an alien woman, but she refuses to live as an opossum.

In “The Wearing Out of Genre Materials” Russ preaches the value of bringing the genre of science fiction to bear on the social sciences. In *The Female Man* Russ connects her narrative to Eric Berne’s psychological theory of Transactional Analysis made

famous in his 1963 book *Games People Play*. Russ creates games such as “HIS LITTLE GIRL” and “AIN’T IT AWFUL” and then has her characters play those games as Berne described such games being played (35). As Viktor Frankl does before him, Berne argues that a person’s ability to know herself is key to finding happiness and achieving what Abraham Maslow calls autonomy. Russ, embracing this self-improvement present in the psychology of her time, uses Berne’s text in order to show how understanding games helps a woman understand herself and deconstruct the world around her. Of note is how Berne’s Transactional Analysis is internalized to teach the practitioner how to talk and listen to herself. The whole approach is to understand that each individual personality contains at least three parts with different drives and desires. These parts are not like Sigmund Freud’s id, ego, and super-ego. Instead, they each work as complete personalities, but they work best when they communicate effectively with one another. Like the “I, I, I, I” of Russ’s novel, the different personalities combine to form one self-reflexive person who can easily deconstruct herself in order to better understand the drive of either version of herself, and thence better grasp her own ambiguously constructed personhood.

In this knowledge through deconstruction, Berne argues, she will find her most healthy selves, though such knowledge may make her very lonely, as it does Joanna at the end of the novel. *Games People Play* presents normal discourse through showing scenarios in which people engage in interpersonal relationships. Most of the book is taken up with these scenarios; however, the end of book contains a section which attempts to go beyond game playing. This section rests on the utopian impulse of the reader to seek

autonomy, to become utopian inside her normality, through the use of abnormal discourse. A person should break conventions not be rebellious but to allow herself the freedom to become complete. Berne claims:

For certain fortunate people there is something which transcends all classifications of behavior, and that is awareness; something which rises above the programming of the past, and that is spontaneity; and something that is more rewarding than games, and that is intimacy. But all three of these may be frightening and even perilous to the unprepared. Perhaps they are better off as they are, seeking their solutions in popular techniques of social action, such as “togetherness.” This may mean that there is no hope for the human race, but there is hope for individual members of it. (184)

For Russ and others seeking to become autonomous selves, the hope is in becoming one of these “individual members” of the human race who might seek and find like-minded awakened individuals scattered around the globe. In *The Female Man*, Janet and Jael refuse to play the games people play, breaking convention through their use of abnormal discourse (and unexpected action) even as Russ constructs such games on the page. It is as if the author, like her reader, is still striving to become the autonomous self her characters have already become.

The central question of the novel revolves around exactly what kind of autonomous self the author wishes to be. Janet is freely and openly lesbian in a way that Russ still refused to embrace in 1974; Jael literally claws her enemies to death; Jeannine breaks free from her gender constraints and, following Jael, embraces her ability to violently determine her place in the world. Joanna’s gift, then, is to narrate these

movements of her various selves. However, near the end of that narration, she is still lamenting the position of women:

We [women] ought never to be taught to read. We fight through the constant male refractoriness of our surroundings; our souls are torn out of us with such shock that there isn't even any blood. Remember: I didn't want to be a "feminine" version or a diluted version or a special version or a subsidiary version or an ancillary version, or an adapted version of the heroes I admire. I want to be the heroes themselves. (206)

Ultimately, Russ's characters do become various kinds of heroes, but are they heroes we admire? According to Jennifer Burwell, "The central paradox addressed in *The Female Man* is the impossibility of conceptualizing oneself as both a woman and a human being" (90). She notes that the novel "is written out of the gap between discourses that hail women – out of the space between what the female protagonist wants for herself as a *human being* and the choices that society offers her as a *woman*," and that "*The Female Man* provides an opportunity to connect the postmodern argument for situated knowledge [...] with a specifically radical feminist understanding of how gendered society institutes demands upon and desires within women that are incompatible and contradictory" (Burwell 93, emphasis in original). At the end, it is not the characters that matter but the text – the rhetorical act of creating such characters simply feels braver than any action in which a hero might engage.

Reminiscent of Le Guin's ability to admit to the shortcomings of her writing, Russ's best moment is what may be the most significant moment in all feminist science fiction, the end of *The Female Man*:

Go, little book [...]; bob a curtsy at the shrines of Friedan, Millet, Greer, Firestone, and all the rest; behave yourself in living people's living rooms, neither looking ostentatious on the coffee table nor failing to persuade due to the dullness of your style; [...] and take your place bravely on the book racks of bus terminals and drugstores. Do not scream when you are ignored, for that will alarm people [...]. Live merrily, little daughter-book, even if I can't and we can't; recite yourself to all who will listen; stay hopeful and wise. [...] Do not complain when you become quaint and old-fashioned [...]; do not mutter angrily to yourself when young persons read you to hrooch and hrch and guffaw, wondering what the dickens you were all about. Do not get glum when you are no longer understood, little book. Do not curse your fate. Do not reach up from readers' laps and punch the readers' noses.

Rejoice, little book!

For on that day, we will be free. (213-214)

Ingrid Daemmrich notes that whereas violence is abundant in *The Female Man*, it is obvious from the final moments of the novel that Russ realizes “that her ‘little book’ could have far greater impact on reader’s attitudes and actions than its protagonists’ attacks have on their antagonists” (143). Like the “certain fortunate people” of Berne’s Transactional Analysis or like those who do walk away from Le Guin’s Omelas, the real heroes of *The Female Man* are the ones who simply reject the limitations placed upon them by society.

Le Guin, admitting to her own vulnerability and fear in a letter to Tiptree, says of *The Female Man*, “I reject it utterly – with so much vehemence, so much bitterness, that I know damn well that it strikes to something in me which I will not admit” (qtd. in Phillips 332). And, in her next letter she is still focused on *The Female Man* and what she refuses to admit: “The Old Eve leaps up and down deep within the darkness chanting KILL em all KILL em all BANG BANG BANG. It’s no good repressing her; but it’s no

good letting her out, as J. [Russ] wants to do, either. Somehow she has got to be *included*” (qtd. in Phillips 332, emphasis in original). What Le Guin has experienced is the very point of Russ’s narrative: when faced with the naked truth of her position as woman, a woman’s correct reaction is rage. And as the inclusion of Jael in the novel shows, even if she does not want to only become rage, she must learn to include that part of herself if she ever hopes to be whole. It is through the rage that she will complete her journey to transformation. It is this very rage that Delany embraces in the *Khatru* Women’s Symposium as “the most exciting piece of fiction of any sort, SF or otherwise,” he had read in the 1970s (Smith and Gomoll 68). Tom Moylan suggests, “*The Female Man* is a meditation on the role played by fantastic, visionary, indeed critical utopian, writing in the process of social revolution” (*Demand* 87). As in *Games People Play*, the individuals are saved by individual action which seeks to transform all of society. “*The Female Man* approaches collective transformation from the perspective of the individual female subject,” explains Burwell. “[In it] Utopia becomes a subjective cognitive projection that empowers the individual, and the radical feminism that informs Russ’s novel grounds its praxis in the experience of individual female agents” (Burwell 107). The little book wants everyone to change, but knows that it can only accomplish such a goal one person at a time.

Coming Together in Aurora to provide Tiptree’s Answer to Utopia

In 1974 Pamela Sargent produced the first collection of science fiction stories specifically designed to promote a feminist reading, *Women of Wonder: Science Fiction*

Stories by Women About Women. The collection contains twelve stories including Judith Merrill's "That Only a Mother" as well as stories by Le Guin, Russ, and McIntyre. However, the greatest contribution was Sargent's fifty page introduction "Women in Science Fiction." Sargent's analysis of the contributions to women and their treatment in the genre is a first-rate literary study which asks, "why a literature that prides itself on exploring alternatives or assumptions counter to what we normally believe has not been more concerned with the roles of women in the future[?]" (xv). However, the stories Sargent chose were reprints – nothing beyond her valuable introduction would be a change for the field.

Seeking to produce the first collection of original science fiction stories specifically gathered around the theme of feminism, in 1973 Vonda McIntyre and Susan Anderson put out a call for stories about what the future would be like after feminism succeeded. In order to publish Tiptree and Delany, they opened the submissions up to select men, though Delany did not provide a story. Still, they received several significant contributions including stories from Tiptree (and Alice Sheldon's other personality Raccoona Sheldon) and Russ, a selection from Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and an odd essay by Le Guin among other pieces. Writing about the construction of the book as a community endeavor, McIntyre says in the Women's Symposium issue of *Khatru*, "every story that we did buy came from personal friends (occasionally pestered personal friends) or, in two cases, from friends of one or another writer we had already bought from. Thus Joanna recommended our book to Marge Piercy, and Tip told Craig Strete" (Smith and Gomoll 36). Because of the construction of the collection, it took three years

for it to come to full completion, so though it was begun just after the publication of “When It Changed,” the book was not published until after *The Dispossessed* and *The Female Man* and simultaneously with Delany’s *Trouble on Triton*. In the letters between the various writers, one important point kept coming to the forefront: these feminists had no idea how to construct a world where *The Female Man* was no longer necessary.

Neither Tiptree nor Le Guin were comfortable creating un-ambiguous utopias, and Russ’s *Whileaway* seemed to be her beginning and ending point. In an October 1973 letter to McIntyre, Tiptree writes, “*I find in my heart I am so damn pessimistic I cannot imagine a better world*” (qtd. in Phillips 308, emphasis in original). And a winter away was no help, as a March 1974 letter to Russ shows: we feminist science fiction writers “think our imaginations roam to the misty horizons, but do they? Ha. Here Vonda [McIntyre] sets a simple story problem – describe this future some of us are actually working for, believe in. *And we (I) can’t!*” (qtd. in Phillips 308, emphasis in original). However, Tiptree did manage to write the award-winning novella *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* Perfectly answering the call for stories, the novella is consciously utopian in the tradition of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*: the Earth now has no men; women reproduce through cloning; the women share all duties but without a formal structure, and they live in ecological preserves which reflect a stewardship mentality.

The structure of the society of Tiptree’s future Earth is very similar to that of Russ’s *Whileaway*. However, the alien men who appear in Tiptree’s novella are clearly weaker if equally as unintelligent as those who appear in “When It Changed.” In fact, when the structure of the feminist utopia is described to them, the men, astronauts sent

forward in time from contemporary America, simply cannot believe it. “They’re giving us one of your science fiction stores,” the hyper-masculine Bud tells the ship’s doctor, dismissing the utopia by attaching it to the genre to which, ironically, it belongs (Tiptree, *Houston, Houston*, 37). Such an inside joke is sure to get a chuckle from the reader, but the point is much more subtle: as Le Guin has complained, the feminization of the genre of science fiction makes it all too easy to dismiss the alternative feminist visions informed by the utopian impulse. Books like *Women of Wonder* and *Aurora* were asking to be seriously considered, but Tiptree, at least, saw that the genre which these women were coopting came with a price. The women could steal the rockets of science fiction, knowing that those rockets had the best chance of taking them where they had wanted to go for centuries, but they had to realize as Doris Lessing laments, that these rockets would be dismissed by too, too many.

In *Houston, Houston, Do You Read*, Tiptree takes the task of creating a feminist utopia only somewhat seriously, only going so far as to create a female-centered space ship. The ship, the best example of a literal stolen rocket in the feminist stories, is built to be slow, steady, and large. It contains plants for recycling and animals for food. The creation of such a ship makes perfect sense to anyone who understands the way space exploration will ultimately work, but it fails to fit the preconceived ideal of tall pointy rockets with handsome young men strapped to the noses. For the women on this ship, just like those on *Whileaway*, the men signal a problem. They cannot be reintegrated into society because they are too dangerous. The men, of course, immediately expect to be greeted as saviors and are shocked when asked, “Why do there have to be men?”

“Because, dummy, otherwise nothing counts, that’s why,” answers the hyper-masculine Bud (81). Such statements are, admittedly, made under the influence of drugs, but only drugs that heighten the pre-existing traits of the men. For their part, the women tolerate the men, knowing as women that they always have the upper hand. In this way, Tiptree’s story differs drastically from Russ’s “When It Changed.” Nothing changes for these women – the men really are not a threat.

Houston, Houston, Do You Read also mirrors the moment of abnormal discourse which Janet faces in “When It Changed” when asked twice where “the people” are. Tiptree mimics the moment while reversing the power structure: the doctor asks, “what do you call yourselves? Women’s World? Liberation? Amazonia?” – all expected titles which a reader would find familiar from decades of reading about men visiting lost Amazons waiting to be rescued by brilliant and brawny men from Earth. But the answer does not fit: “Why, we call ourselves human beings [...]. Humanity, mankind.” She shrugs. “The human race” (92). Just like on *Whileaway*, without men the women have become “the people” – “humanity, mankind.” But unlike on *Whileaway*, the arrival of men does not damage that definition. Instead, the men clearly do not deserve the honor of being called “humanity,” and, despite being such perfect male specimens as astronauts must be in 1976, will never become part of “mankind” again. Tiptree’s discourse is not as radical as Russ’s and comes years later, but to a reader unfamiliar with “When It Changed” and *The Female Man, Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* would certainly break the crust of convention.

“Is Gender Necessary? Redux” as Ideal Women’s Rhetoric

Like Tiptree, and despite her personal support for the project (even in providing Vonda McIntyre a home during her early stages of soliciting manuscripts) Le Guin initially found herself incapable of providing a story for *Aurora*. In a January 1974 letter to Le Guin, Tiptree empathizes with Le Guin’s inability to construct a story: “Is it possible that this stuckness is Telling Us Something???” (qtd. in Phillips 309). And perhaps Le Guin’s “stuckness” was telling her something, since because of it she compromised with McIntyre and wrote a personal analysis responding to critics like Russ instead. Therefore, it is from Le Guin’s inability to write a story that her readers are gifted with the beginnings of what became a meaningful act of feminist rhetoric: the initial essay “Is Gender Necessary?” addresses her creation of androgynies in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. It is followed, much more significantly, in 1987 with “Is Gender Necessary? Redux” where she comments directly on the first essay. Le Guin’s open commentary on her own writing found in this commentary shows a kind of courage and vulnerability that Russ and others had missed from her writing and which Laura Micciche claims is the key to feminist methodologies.

When Russ argued that Le Guin was not going far enough in her novels, especially in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, what she wanted was Le Guin’s autobiography. With Le Guin’s personal commentary on her writing, that story is told and told in such a way that the reader is gifted with a powerful model of the process of becoming feminist. Between the 1966 beginnings of *The Left Hand of Darkness* and the 1987 comments in “Is Gender Necessary? Redux” Le Guin provides a glimpse of twenty years of personal

growth and proves her value to any who follow similar paths. Of interest to this dissertation is how Le Guin defended, in 1976, the choice to use the masculine pronouns of normal discourse for the androgynies of *Winter*, and how she openly regrets this in 1987. (The following plain text is from the 1976 essay “Is Gender Necessary?” while the bracketed comments in italics are all from Le Guin’s comments on that essay published as “Is Gender Necessary? Redux” in 1987.) She writes:

I call the Gethenians “he” because I utterly refuse to mangle English by inventing a pronoun for “he/she.” *[This “utter refusal” of 1968 restated in 1976 collapsed, utterly, within a couple years more. I still dislike invented pronouns, but I now dislike them less than the so-called generic pronoun he/him/his, which does in fact exclude women from discourse [...]. “He is the generic pronoun, damn it, in English. [...] But I do not consider this really very important. [I now consider it very important.] The pronouns wouldn’t matter at all if I had been cleverer at showing the “female” component of the Gethenian characters in action. [If I had realized how the pronouns I used shaped, directed, and controlled my own thinking, I might have been “cleverer.”]* (“Is Gender Necessary? Redux” 15).

Certainly in the middle 1970s Le Guin was dancing on the starting line, being left behind by Russ, McIntyre, Charnas, and Delany. However, her ability to challenge herself publically and privately, to take risks and unflinchingly critique her own journey to feminism, places her by 1992 as a feminist thinker and writer who can lead a vast host to embrace the ideals which she now preaches: feminism as an ambiguous anarchic challenge to the sociological reality humans face.

Delany as Outlier

Despite being in some ways the most popular of the writers to his peers, Delany was not the central figure in most private correspondence. Although he did connect with Jeffrey Smith and helped promote the *Khatru* Women's Symposium, Delany's only close correspondent among his fellow writers was Russ. As he was in the process of beginning *Trouble on Triton* he told her, "One of the problems though is that you have correspondents. I only have *one* correspondent: you. [...] I'd be very happy to hear from Tip. (Alas – which you are not to convey – I just wish I liked his stories better!)" (Letter, 1 October 1974; emphasis in original). Although he does not have a story in the collection, in her introduction to *Aurora* Susan Anderson holds him up as a model of how to write about post-feminist worlds: "Sexual equality is a given in Samuel R. Delany's universe – both sexes pilot spaceships, raise children, and explore the depths of the sea. Having transcended sexual stereotypes, he is able to concentrate on areas of *human* consciousness" (Anderson 13). Delany may not give himself quite that much credit, instead arguing for a personal ignorance of gender and therefore an insistence that it simply does not exist. As early as 1970 Delany was writing to Russ about his post gender ideas, claiming, "There just isn't any real difference between the sexes [...] and what can be culturally conditioned in, can damn well be culturally conditioned out again, or at least come to terms with by individual work and awareness" (Letter, 30 November 1970). As an example of how he, personally, sought to challenge "culturally conditioned" gender constructions, Delany began using "she" and "her" as his "general exemplary pronoun" as early as 1966, just when Le Guin refused such use in *The Left Hand of Darkness*,

though many editors insisted on changing his pronoun to the standard masculine. He says:

I'd never seen anyone else do it before. The decision was purely intellectual. But after writing a whole novel about the trials and tribulations of a woman poet, I just couldn't go on accepting that everything from children to animals to writers to parents were composed of nothing but males. I know a few writers – specifically in the science fiction field – took the idea over from me and began to do it too.

Today, thirty-odd years later, it's a commonplace in the style of everyone from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak to Richard Rorty. I'm quite prepared to believe other people – women and men – got the idea independently of me, or from any of the people who (like Joanna Russ) borrowed it from me. [...] Conscientiously changing the language is only likely to be done by a writer who fetishizes how the words strike the *reader*. (“A Silent Interview” 57, emphasis in original)

And Delany was always a writer interested in how words affected those who experienced them. In a 1986 written interview with Lloyd Hemingway, Delany celebrated his ability to write about literary and psychological theory in science fiction: “science fiction has often spoken of itself as the literature of ideas. It dramatizes notions of critical theory in much the same way that it dramatizes notions from any hard or soft science. It approaches the notion of deconstruction in much the way it would approach the notions of navens or of ion transfers” (*Silent Interviews* 71). Part of what Delany sees as dramatizing critical theory includes the shifting pronouns and questioning of gender construction so evident in his work.

During the time from the reception of “When It Changed” to the *Khatru* Women's Symposium, Delany was reading profusely and constructing his monumental novel *Dhalgren*. Seeing this novel as his personal *Moby Dick*, Delany threw himself into it.

And, though he liked the finished result, he felt it lacked the kind of feminist edge that Russ deemed necessary and that he wished to see in the best fiction. “I’m disappointed in [*Dhalgren*] from the Feminist point of view,” he told her. “Yes, it’s better than most. But at this point, what is needed is perfection. *Trouble on Triton* is better there” (Letter, 14 August 1974). Still, he was concerned that *Dhalgren* would be seen as a step back. As he wrote to Russ:

I’m rather curious (which is a Euphemism for worried) about what you’ll think of *Dhalgren*. It isn’t, I’m afraid, a feminist novel – though from time to time during the writing I convinced myself that it was. All it has, I’m afraid, is a few bows in the direction of femminism [sic], and I wonder now if that’s not worse than one that just cuts femminism [sic] out of its universe. I *don’t* think I’ve done what Ursula has done – preached equality and shown the usual shit [...]. But there are all sorts of places where I know it misses. (Letter, 1 October 1974; emphasis in original)

Despite his own successful consciousness-raising, *Dhalgren* was not a feminist book, but by 1975 Delany was no longer writing the kinds of stories that fit into collections like *Aurora*. His hopes to create his own story in conversation with the work of Russ and even Le Guin rested on his next novel, and Delany certainly used *Trouble on Triton* in conversation with the feminists of his time.

Trouble on Triton as Commentary on Feminist Utopias

Considered by many critics to be near the top of Delany’s artistic output, *Trouble on Triton* playfully deconstructs the standard narrative of war between the planets. In fact, the novel does such a good job breaking the conventions that almost no critic who

discusses the novel even addresses the story. Instead, the novel is read as a puzzle. As Carl Freedman says, “*Triton* robustly intellectualizes and hyper-intellectualizes, and finally presents itself as either a work of fiction that frequently adopts the forms of philosophy and critical theory, or as a theoretical exposition that employs the narrative and characterological devices of fiction – or rather, of course, both” (“About Delany Writing” 21). Arguably, *Trouble on Triton* answers too clearly Judith Butler’s call for a literature that is theory, and in doing so the novel is a challenge for lay readers who may be looking for the kind of cliché escape promised by stories of adult space adventure where the stories of the rockets come with lots of sex. Of course, the novel does give the reader such adventures – alongside Michel Foucault and Suzanne Langer.

While constructing his initial ideas about the *Khatru* Women’s Symposium’s questions, Delany considered how his novels worked to provide the kinds of adventures dismissed as mere escapism: “I’m too aware of how fantasy worlds sit in dialogue to the real. So a certain sort of Escape is denied me... thank God,” he tells Russ. “But She rewards you by narrowing what you can do more and more!” (Letter, 1 October 1974). Delany’s slippery use of pronouns here – particularly the still-unexpected “She” for “God” and the move from “me” to “you” – provides an example of how fluid Delany considered gender and identity to be at just the time he was beginning *Trouble on Triton*. The novel was then a way for Delany to work through this fluidity in a narrative that had no respect for gender constructions and which looked upon identity constructions as easily changeable but which contained a protagonist caught up in conventions similar to those Delany found in 1970s American culture. Delany sought to use the puzzle of the

novel to challenge his reader into breaking these conventions, thereby destabilizing her identity much as Russ sought the disruption of her identity in *The Female Man*.

Delany uses as his protagonist Bron, a man fully immersed in the culture of his own time but too often trapped by his desire for the security of a set of conservative gender and identity constructions similar to those of Delany's own readership. To break the crust of Bron's (and the reader's) conventional approach, Delany shows a complete disregard for the normal conventions of gendered terms, thereby causing his readers to question why such terms are constructed as they are. For instance, in one exchange between Bron and a police officer, the officer is described as very masculine: "burly," with "Grizzled hair" and a "hoarse voice." Yet, his job title is "e-girl": "let a girl do his job," he pleads with Bron. "I used to be an enforcement-girl – well, we called 'em enforcement-boys, there – in Pittsburgh" (61-62).

The destabilization of gender norms works pragmatically to create a moment of edifying discourse. The layers of abnormal discourse here take the reader through at least three steps. First, confronted with a masculinized male on a moon where one chooses one's masculine and feminine traits as easily as one chooses one's clothing, the reader understands that this man identifies proudly as male. Yet, he also proudly claims his job title, despite it being one of "girl." This acceptance of gendered job titles works regularly even in contemporary American society as women are policemen and firemen and as female military officers are called "sir" to show respect for their power. Delany turns the expected gendered terminology around, which is admittedly witty but not abnormal in the discourse. But then he goes one step farther in spinning the gendered terminology back to

an unexpectedly weak version of masculine. On the Earth of the *Trouble on Triton*, it seems, police officers are still defined by male terms, but the terms are equivalent to the female terms on Mars or the moons: “enforcement-boys” rather than policemen. In *Again, Dangerous Visions*, Harlan Ellison introduces Russ’s “When It Changed” with a question of gender reversal: why is the term “girl” appropriate for grown women while “boy” is never appropriate for grown men (249)? Delany seems to have taken Ellison’s question as a challenge, making the most “manly” man on Triton into a “girl” without putting him in drag. Such play causes the careful reader – and Delany takes pains to cultivate careful readers – to question not only the gendered terms in *Trouble on Triton*, but to pragmatically turn that questioning to the American English of 1976 wherein such gender-reversal-reversal broke the very conventions of the language which Ellison questioned in 1972.

To give another example of how *Trouble on Triton* consciously destabilizes preconceived ideas about identity in ways similar to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Delany presents the reader with a powerful hero character as friend to Bron. Sam is a “thick-lipped [...] Family man, high-powered, big, black, and handsome.” Yet he tells Bron, “Before I came to Triton, I was a rather unhappy, sallow-faced, blonde, blue-eyed (and terribly myopic) waitress” (126). Here Delany’s reader is meant to be as surprised as Bron – even in a book where sex-change is commonplace and where gender roles are quite fluid, the drastic shift from the powerful and confident “big, black, and handsome” character of Sam to a passive “sallow-faced, blonde, blue-eyed” waitress is jolting. However, the notion that the individual human Bron befriends contains the human

possibility to be both the passive waitress and the very powerful Sam is merely one of the many identity threats Bron confronts in the novel where homosexuality is a common and respected life-choice, where The Spike is a woman who dominates Bron in all ways while serving as his love-interest, and ultimately, where Bron completes his own sex change because as a man he had sought a passive, overly-feminized woman to “complete” him and never found her. So, he becomes her.

At the end of his narrative Bron has failed to break the conventions which The Spike and Sam so ardently wished he would. Instead, he becomes the overly-feminized woman seeking to please a man which he had personally desired when he was a man – a sad comment on the lack of agency Bron has, trapped as he is in all-to-familiar gender constructions. Such a narrative which abandons conventional men to their own conventions haunted Delany. He complains to Russ, “*Trouble on Triton* is a good novel” but it fails to meet the bar he set for himself, becoming “a hate novel about men instead of a positive [sic] novel about women.” It’s as if such a book is not possible, he suggests, asking, “couldn’t one write a good novel with good politics, good, well-written male (even if evil) characters, and good well-rounded women? I’m damned if I can figure out how” (Letter, 1 October 1974). Considering that neither Russ nor Tiptree nor Charnas nor Gearhart even attempt to write novels which include such well-rounded men, such a desire may be the only clear indication of difference between the radical alternatives Delany, as a male feminist, sought, and those created by his female compatriots.

Trouble on Triton presents the reader with several radical alternatives to the conventions of 1970s Earth. Triton itself is the heterotopia of the novel’s subtitle, serving

to provide a society as free from constraint as possible. Here even the limitations placed on the women of Whileaway or Tiptree's future Earth are missing. Citizens are guaranteed a certain level of income, a selection of excellent housing choices, jobs which help them reach their potentials as humans but which they do not have to take, and even a lawless zone for those who find the nearly absent constraints of the rest of Triton's society still too limiting. The normal static structure of utopia as found in Thomas More and in Tiptree is here destroyed and replaced with a world which fulfills a collective utopian vision by being as open to individual utopian impulses as possible. Delany found the impetus to be so open to various versions of "human" through his readings of Langer and Foucault. While writing the novel, Delany asks Russ, "Have you read Susan K. Langer's *MIND* [...] I really think it is one of those books that one can simply not call oneself a literate member of the twentieth century unless one has read. She is a philosopher in the great and expansive tradition" (Letter, 14 Aug. 1974). At the end of Bron's narrative Delany provides appendices which serve as the novel's internal commentary. In the appendices, the reader discovers some of the story of a brilliant professor active during the events described in *Trouble on Triton*. Notably, for several years this professor published only one thing: "her translation of Susanne K. Langer's *Mind*" (298). Although he does not detail any of Langer's ideas here, Delany is pointing his reader at critical theory which cannot help but break the crust of convention.

Just as with Langer, Delany does not discuss Foucault's ideas in the novel, but as the opening to the appendices, he provides his reader with an extended quotation from Foucault's *The Order of Things*:

Utopias afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to ‘hold together.’ This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental *fabula*: heterotopias . . . desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences. (qtd in Delany, *Trouble on Triton*, 292)

It is certainly doubtful that Delany expected many of his readers to have read Foucault or Langer, yet his readers did expect Delany’s fiction to provide them with food for thought about various linguistic and cultural theories which took his fancy. Readers which took the time to consider the quotation from Foucault would recognize Delany’s creation of heterotopia and, perhaps, open themselves up to destroying the syntax, to “stop[ping] words in their tracks” which allows them to gain the kind of dual vision that deconstructs the very reality of which it is constructed. Delany’s inclusion of Foucault at this juncture of his novel both explains his choice of subtitle and poses his novel as a purpose-driven intellectual exercise in understanding how the utopian impulse worked to destabilize normal discourse.

Like the writers submitting to *Aurora*, Delany sees *Trouble on Triton* as his attempt to create a post-feminist version of lived human reality. He states his personal moral imperative to write feminist fiction in the *Khatru* Women’s Symposium: “I feel no compunction to be intelligent, civilized, and rational over all this. I have a daughter to

rear and books to write that she can read someday without having to cut her soul in half to enter and enjoy them” (Smith and Gomoll 27). Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. addresses Delany’s goal of creating alternatives for his daughter, claiming that with the utopian writing of the 1970s, “Feminist writers used deconstructive and fabulist strategies, in which hidden presuppositions of the Euro-androcentric model are exposed, while refusing to construct unambiguous countermyths” (107). Delany sees in his feminist discourse not the elimination of men found in Tiptree and Russ nor the feminization of all humans found in Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*, but rather what Le Guin had attempted and failed in *The Left Hand of Darkness*: a complete reconciliation of male and female. As he explains to Russ, with *Trouble on Triton*, “I have written a novel that *hinges* about an un-imaginable reconciliation, where as you wouldn’t be caught dead doing such a thing. Well, I suppose I do believe that a reconciliation *must* come about *someday*. And no, I *can’t* envision what it would look like today!” (Letter, 22 October 1974; emphasis in original). Such a reconciliation for Delany hinges on the ability for each individual to choose gender and identity and on the creation of a social structure where any and all choices would be considered valid.

CHAPTER VI

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The feminists writing science fiction in the 1970s infused the genre with a utopian impulse toward a better future by creating alternative social structures and pragmatic process utopias. Gwyneth Jones writes about the power of their writings to challenge reality: “there is nothing like constructing a world, or recognizing a constructed world, for teaching you to see your own world as a construct” (*Deconstructing* 6). Jones writes, “it was probably Joanna Russ in her mid-1970s feminist sf, especially in *The Female Man*, who first recognized and demonstrated the power of a specifically science fictional text to deconstruct itself” (*Deconstructing* 6). Marlene Barr argues for the pragmatic use of such rhetorical power as a tool for women rhetors and readers: “Feminist science fiction is a key for unlocking patriarchy’s often hidden agendas; the treasure is a woman’s ability to use feminist reading positions as a means to live as freely as possible. [...] feminist science fiction [is] a repair manual that can be used by women who wish to fix patriarchy” (4). In order to work to repair the world and make it a safe place for Samuel Delany’s daughter Alyx, writers must use all available means. For the feminist writers of the 1970s, such means rested on destabilizing language expectations and revisioning gender constructions. “Science fiction, political fiction, parable, allegory, exemplum – all carry a heavier intellectual freight (and self-consciously so) than we are used to,” Joanna Russ reminds her readers. “All are didactic. All imply that human

problems are collective, as well as individual, and take these problems to be spiritual, social, perceptive, or cognitive. [...] science fiction [and] political fiction [...] provide myths for dealing with the kinds of experiences we are actually having now” (“What Can a Heroine Do?” 92).

Arguing for a wider appreciation for this kind feminist science fiction which sustained her personal journey, Janice Bogstad writes, “Feminism as an organizing principle validates and provides for the implementation of [the correct] sort of anger, a healthy response to an intolerable situation. As we work in the present, however, we must have the hope of a better future to sustain us” (Bogstad and Emrys 2). Science fiction serves as “our praxis as well as the place where we can develop our theory, our future” (Bogstad and Emrys 2). Bogstad admits, “it was in reading *The Female Man* by Joanna Russ that I discovered the shared nature of my experience of my own intellectuality as a contradictory construct” (Bogstad and Emrys 3). Through the impetus to make such personal discoveries, “SF can help us, as women and feminists, to learn how to replot our lives” – and by “replot,” Bogstad and her collaborator Barbara Emrys mean to imagine a life different from our current expectations of what is possible (3).

In her foreword to the Wesleyan University reprint of *Trouble on Triton*, Kathy Acker praises Delany’s success in creating a conversation with his readers. Her comments are just as valid if widened to include all of the 1970s feminist utopian writers. Their work:

becomes a conversation. A conversation, not only about identity, desire, and gender, but also about democracy, liberalism, and otherness. And, perhaps more

than anything, a conversation about societies that presume the possibilities of absolute knowledge and those societies whose ways of knowing are those of continuous unending searching and questioning. [...] a conversation [...] about the possibilities of being human. (xii)

Ursula Le Guin's fiction and her critique of that fiction work in conversation with one another; James Tiptree, Jr.'s writing works to bring a manwoman's perspective to ideas of feminism; and Russ's *The Female Man* actually is a conversation that happens mostly between different versions of her multiple selves. Perhaps, as Acker suggests, is it Delany who most effectively reaches out to the reader, providing as he does a heterotopia which welcomes all comers. The feminist methodology of his writing is one, like Le Guin's, of constant personal questioning and doubting – of questing for the perfection he knows his subjects deserve. Finally, the conversation these writers have with one another and with their readers is one defined by a feminist willingness to see society as “in progress,” to see utopia as “process,” and to see their own rhetorical agendas as that of using the meme of feminist equality to promote an edifying discourse undermining contemporary patriarchal assumptions. Tiptree speaks for all of these feminist utopian writers when he says, “I don't hold, nor do you, illusions about the great dazzling sanity of sf, no, it's more a matter of looking for the direction in which the darkness gives way to something that may be, someday, sunrise” (qtd. in Phillips 246).

Looking for Sunrise: A Conversation on the Possibilities of Being Human

If pragmatism involves gradual change – reformation rather than revolution, then feminism which calls for genuine revolution can not (as Richard Rorty suggests) be

pragmatic. However, feminist utopian thought, considered as a process which spurs change, but which is not ultimately the goal of such change, is certainly pragmatic. Harnessing the conventions of a male-dominated genre, which by definition produces alternative lived realities, provides feminists the ability to radically revision social and gender constructions in order to make room for genuine alteration of contemporary lived experiences.

Discussions of gender and genre are central to Wiscon, a science fiction convention dedicated to feminism which began because of the feminist movement in the 1970s and remains the most important fan-driven feminist conference in any genre (and perhaps simply the most important conference focused yearly on feminism in the U. S.). The conference gives out the Tiptree Award -- one of the premier science fiction awards. In 2014, the guests of honor for both the Science Fiction Research Association and for Wiscon were self-identified feminist writers including Andrea Hairston and Nisi Shawl. In May 2014, during a session titled "S/he and Other Inadequate Solutions: Solving Gender Neutrality," the question was asked, "Where do we go from here?" My answer was "more play!" Taking what is basic, what is assumed to be true, and undermining the assumption through play is key to shifting the possibilities society can imagine. Russ does this with the theories of Eric Berne, Delany does it with the idea of a static utopia, Tiptree does it with conventional science fiction plots, and Le Guin plays with her own philosophical questions. Playing with gender in fiction, as these authors do, allows the writer to undermine the reader's assumptions about gender in the so-called "real world."

Such play is still prevalent today. Ann Leckie's new novel *Ancillary Justice* is sweeping the awards scene. The book plays with gender construction through language in an obvious homage to *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Its hero is (seems to be) a small woman with near super-powers very similar to Jael in *The Female Man*. Leckie's way of playing with gender is to use only the female English pronouns, even if the characters are clearly male human figures. She also, as Le Guin does, asks questions about the nature and purpose of gender constructions in the course of the novel. Surprisingly, the pronoun usage in *Ancillary Justice* remain disconcerting even to an experienced reader expecting them. Leckie's novel proves that ideas of gender construction have certainly changed since the feminist utopias of the 1970s; however, it also proves that gender assumptions still undermine full human relations.

Much as changed in the forty years since the 1970s writers were creating the letters which make up the *Khatru Women's Symposium*, including the recognition of both Ursula Le Guin and Samuel Delany as Grand Masters of the genre. However, recent events in the field of science fiction suggest that even in the genre which produced such strong feminist writing, sexism remains prevalent at the highest levels of publishing and writing. Reacting to a recent set of misogynist postings on various blogs including that of the Science Fiction Writer's Association, *Lightspeed Magazine* set about trying to provide a forum for women to write science fiction which undermined the still-current assumptions about male privilege in the genre (and in society as a whole). The magazine's Kickstarter campaign to support "Women Destroying Science Fiction"

garnered 2,801 backers and reached more than ten times its funding goal (\$53,136 pledged of \$5,000 goal).

With its tenfold response, *Lightspeed's* Kickstarter campaign has shown that despite the remaining sexism in our society, the grassroots reaction of fans is no longer that of the ignorance of Jeffery Smith and the regular readers of *Khatru*. Instead, today's readers, fed as they are on Le Guin and Delany, expect feminism from their science fiction. The conversation supported by this campaign presents a new measurable and practical difference in the expectations of society regarding gender. Progress toward Tiptree's sunrise has been made, and now the utopian bar is moved farther so that the process toward a better world will continue.

NOTES

¹ NASA's sexism in relation to the astronaut corps was supported by a technicality: all astronaut candidates had to be trained on jet fighter planes at military academies. Women were not allowed into those training programs; therefore, women could not qualify to be astronauts. Such sexism continued for two decades before the first class of female candidates, including Sally Ride, was allowed to train for the space shuttle missions beginning in 1978.

² Lev Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of how evolving word meanings work as a process to create new thoughts based in "a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought" (218). In describing how the change of names, of a single word, can create a drastic change in meaning through the "exchange of characteristic features," Vygotsky uses a single shift in gender for a tree – if the shift changes the tree from masculine to feminine, the entire meaning of the poem which uses the tree as a metaphor is significantly changed (222-223).

³ For an interesting analysis of the value of reading such alternative lived experiences "deconstructively," see Kandice Chuh's *Imagine Otherwise: An Asian American Critique*.

⁴ Writing about this moment of human transformation at the level of syntax, Hélène Cixous claims, "it is time for [woman] to dislocate this 'within' [the discourse of man], to explode it, turn it around, and seize it: to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of" (887).

⁵ See, for instance, Russ's 1973 essay "Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband: The Modern Gothic" published in *The Journal of Popular Culture*.

⁶ Suvin's personal correspondence includes a 22 January 1974 letter to Russ, for instance, which is a response to a couple of letters from Russ and discusses in passing Suvin's reading of a thesis on Russ, Delany, and Le Guin, retracts an early recommendation he made to read Jameson's writing (on Hegel), and reports on his progress with *Metamorphoses* including his count of 700-odd books read and his current writing page count of 80. His dedication shows that Suvin considered himself a friend of Le Guin, and this letter proves that in 1974 he and Russ knew each other well as writers and intellectuals.

⁷ Although the evidence is not available to prove it, the inclusion of Brecht's essay in both Russ's 1975 article "Towards an Aesthetic of Science Fiction" and Suvin's use of Brecht in the pages of *Metamorphoses* which were written in early 1974 certainly suggest a conversational collaboration.

⁸ Although I reference the English translation of Brecht's "A Short Organum for the Theatre," Suvin's use of "estrangle" for "alienate" as well as his spelling of the title as "A Short Organon for the Theatre" suggest that he was working from his own translation and gives rise to what he saw, fifteen years after an established English translation, as a meaningful difference between "estrangement" and "alienation."

⁹ While Rorty sees pragmatism as unduly limiting radical feminist thought, Charlene Seigfried argues for a continued melding of the pragmatist and American feminist movements as an interdisciplinary path toward understanding how certain feminists have worked pragmatically to restructure the “social fabric” of lived experience. Certainly Addams works as a feminist pragmatist, as does Russ and (perhaps most obviously from the 1970s feminist authors) Gearhart.

¹⁰ Also note Both Suvin and Jameson’s use of “comrade” in describing the friends who influenced their major works about utopia.

¹¹ The rhetorical process of dystopia follows from this kind of heuristic utopian tradition but where the future degradation of humanity is avoidable if only humans would make the necessary changes today. The rhetorical method of such dystopias would prove a fruitful study in its own right.

¹² It goes without saying that such a view of utopia is very Western. In any of the contemporaneous locations around the globe where ex-colonies were coming into existence as nations, visions of utopia which embraced a “perfect” society where everyone had comfortable shelter and clothing and more than enough food led to very different images than those offered by the American feminist utopians.

¹³ Those seeking to research the importance of Golden Age science fiction and the editors Gernsback and Campbell would do well to start with James Gunn’s *The Road to Science Fiction* and with the biographies of authors such as Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke.

¹⁴ Although women such as C. L. Moore were important writers of the Golden Age, as recovery projects by Lisa Yazek and others show, these women writers were not leaders of science fiction writing to the same extent that Le Guin, Tiptree, Delany, and Russ became in the 1970s.

¹⁵ Charlene Seigfried argues for a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding how feminism and pragmatism can work as one. For an example of such disciplinary cross-pollination, see Tatiana Teslenko’s award winning dissertation where she, “proposes a pragmatic, situated approach to feminist utopia as a cultural, political, and rhetorical subject” (17). Here Teslenko brings Kenneth Burke’s rhetoric of identification along with new-rhetorical theories of genre to bear on the novels of Joanna Russ and Dorothy Bryant.

¹⁶ In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke follows outdated literary analyses of utopia as goal, therefore his presentation of utopia is that of an idealized perfection outside of human endeavor. As such Burke’s presentation fails to provide a pragmatic persuasive purpose or to present social change as the goal. Clearly his use of “utopia,” as Marx’s use, is limited to that of the static construct rather than to the process as defined by Marcuse.

¹⁷ Not all theorists (and perhaps not even Burke) are uncomfortable with such ambiguity in rhetorical constructs. I. A. Richards, for instance, argues, “The context theory of meaning will make us expect ambiguity to the widest extent and of the subtlest kinds nearly everywhere, and of course we find it. But where the old Rhetoric treated ambiguity as a fault in language, and hoped to confine or eliminate it, the new Rhetoric sees it as an inevitable consequence of the powers of language and as the indispensable means of most of our most important utterances” (40).

¹⁸ Certainly not all rhetorical theorists who accept the social construction paradigm find in it the kind of hope which Rorty finds. I. A. Richards sees the ambiguity of writing as problematic in that it undermines our certainties about meaning:

And thereby we re-discover that the world – so far from being a solid matter of fact – is rather a fabric of conventions, which for obscure reasons it has suited us in the past to manufacture and support. And that sometimes is a dismaying re-discovery which seems to unsettle our foundation [...] Intense preoccupations with the sources of our meanings is disturbing, increasing our sense that our beliefs are a veil and an artificial veil between ourselves and something that otherwise that through a veil we cannot know. (41-42)

Richards continues in this vein to dismiss as distracting what Annas will later see as a key to feminist rhetoric: the power of dual vision.

¹⁹ It is incumbent on us to realize that not all collaboration would work to benefit humanity or even the collaborators. Bending one's will to a social construction of knowledge that sees you as less than you are is detrimental. Some theorists have argued that we must always be aware of how we are collaborating in our conversations. In calling for an "Ethics of Collaboration," for instance, John Schilb suggests that collaborators need to be aware of how their work connects to the larger world around them.

²⁰ Le Guin has repeatedly spoken and written about women's solidarity as well as about her own slow embrace of the feminist movement. Seigfried is here quoting from Le Guin's November 1990 essay in *MS. Magazine*.

²¹ Jeffrey Smith responds to the notion that the symposium needed an anti-feminist, pro-status quo participant: "I think that someone taking an advocacy opinion would have allied all the other panelists against him, and I think the lack of a united front was one of the most important reasons for the symposium's success" (*Khatru* 55).

²² Actually, the study of creativity is fairly well-established in the field of psychology (and also as aesthetic philosophy) and was central in the conversation of the 1970s as Silvano Arieti's *Creativity: The Magic Synthesis* suggests. Arieti's interesting study works to bridge the gap between creativity as the act of a single human and the understanding of each person as a product of her society, actually calling for "a combination of the two approaches" (304).

²³ For more on how dissensus works to explain collectively "how people differ" and thereby creating fruitful collaborative experiences, see John Trimbur's "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning."

²⁴ *The Best of C. L. Moore* was published in 1975, thus bringing the feminist story "No Woman Born" (1944) into the world of the 1970s feminist science fiction readers. This story, about a perfect female cyborg who chooses to live finally as a human (and thus to die), serves as a hard link between the Creature of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the perfect housewife robot stories of science fiction's Golden Age of which it is a part, and the terror such cyborgs presented to Ira Levin's audience when *The Stepford Wives* was published in 1972 and filmed in 1975.

²⁵ Le Guin used the name U. K. Le Guin only once, as the second woman published in *Playboy*.

²⁶ Not to be confused with Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis trilogy published in the 1980s.

²⁷ Actually, Suzy McKee Charnas had read Wittig before writing *Walk to the End of the World* as she makes clear in a letter to Russ (24 February 1974) where she calls *Les Guérillères*, "a honey of a book."

²⁸ To bring this parallel evolution full circle, it is interesting to read, in an undated letter written in the mid-1980s, Wittig tell Russ that when she and her lover lived together in Greece, escaping the criticisms of contemporary Paris, *The Female Man* was indispensable to them.

²⁹ For more on the value of such gendered performance, Judith Butler's work such as the essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" remains key.

³⁰ Allison Wylie expands on the necessity of understanding standpoint in "Why Standpoint Matters," part of Sandra Harding's valuable collection *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*.

³¹ Of interest is Andrew Butler's article "Medusa Laughs" where he offers a "chiasmatic reading of Russ's work, suggesting congruences between it and Cixous's." Of course, as Butler makes clear, the publication dates of *The Female Man* and "The Laugh of the Medusa" make any direct influence between the two works nearly inconceivable.

³² Delany works in a similar way as a model for not only gay writers but also for black writers, especially black science fiction writers like his students Octavia Butler and Nalo Hopkinson.

³³ Eric Berne's *Games People Play* seems to serve as a foundation for Le Guin's understanding of human interactions much as it does for Joanna Russ in *The Female Man*. Considering how it also appears in the letters between various correspondents, Berne's deep analysis of human social transactions as well as his final utopian vision of a world without game playing clearly inform the feminism of the 1970s.

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