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**TWO FEMINIST UTOPIAS:  
*HERLAND AND WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME***

M.A.Thesis in American Studies

by

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## ABSTRACT

‘Utopia’ can be expressed in a variety of ways, but it can simply be defined as an imaginary world in which people can live happily, peacefully and harmoniously; everyone can lead secure lives without fear of anything. A utopia is a visionary world in which people can have adequate food and shelter; a utopia is a fictitious world all the debilitating conditions, ills and faults of the present societies are eliminated. So, this thesis tries to examine utopian writing and the basic characteristics of utopias in general; it investigates feminist utopias and how women’s literary writing produces visions of the present and the future by analyzing Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* and Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Thomas More’s *Utopia*, as an example written by a man, is also analyzed from feminist perspective, and in this way feminist utopias are compared to the traditional utopias. So, how the world is perceived by the feminist utopia writers are explored from different angles.

It is known that utopias are the products of their times like the other literary works; thus, it can be said that they are wonderful formats for examining the traditions, customs and ethics of their times. Therefore, feminist utopias, apart from the traditional utopias, question sex and gender issues, women’s place in a patriarchal society, and they explore the multiple layers of oppression of women in detail. Moreover, they criticize and redefine the traditional roles of women as wives and mothers by presenting alternative worlds from feminist perspective.

The final point this thesis focuses on is the social and political developments between the period of the two novels, and in this way it demonstrates that utopias give

hope and optimism to the readers, because utopias are powerful tools to criticize the ills of the present time and urge people to work to reach those desired worlds. It shouldn't be forgotten that a utopia is a call for change, and therefore,, they awaken the readers and make them aware of the misapplications in their own worlds.

Funda Şükür Öney

## INTRODUCTION

### UTOPIAN WRITING AND ITS SOCIAL FUNCTION

*The only authentic image of the future is, in the end, the failure of the present.*

*Terry Eagleton( qtd Moylan 273)*

The word ‘Utopia’ is derived from the Greek words ‘eu’ (‘good’), and ‘ou’ (‘no’), combined with the word ‘topos’ (‘place’). Thus a utopia is simply described a perfect ,an ideal place that doesn’t exist. It can also be explained as alternatively a ‘good place’ but ‘no place’. A utopia is the dream of something better. It is the philosophy of striving for the best life for everyone. Utopian societies are described in considerable detail; they are located in specific time and space, but , nevertheless, they only exist in the mind. They are just the products of imagination. Utopias are the depictions of people’s desires, hopes, wishes and aspirations. In other words, utopias are guides, plans for humanity’s future. It can be said that a utopia is a conceptual device which shows the reader that an alternative way of life is possible. A utopia may be an imaginary concept but, it is a means of hope; it is an important vehicle by which humans seek to transform what they perceive to be unsatisfactory.

According to Marge Piercy, one of the most productive feminist writers in 1970s, a utopia is what you don’t have, it is the fantasies about what you lack in society (“Utopian Feminist Visions”1), or as Terry Eagleton says it is just an image of the future which stems from the ills and failures of the present societies. On the other hand, Francis Bartkowski thinks that utopias are the tales of disabling and enabling conditions of desire( 4). As it is seen, these explanations also prove that a ‘utopia’ is a product of

imagination; therefore, 'utopia' appears as a sub-genre of science fiction. Writing a utopia can be thought of as a way of thinking. It can also be considered as dreaming of better worlds in which people live together harmoniously and peacefully; better environments where people know nothing about war, danger and pollution; better societies where people can live under equal conditions without hierarchy. Writing a utopia is an attempt to make everything better for everyone else. If so, 'BETTER' is the key word that utopias plant in the mind.

But why do authors write utopias? What is the function of utopias? Is it so important to write them, if utopias are just products of imagination and fantasy? Is it possible to make these fantasies or dreams real? Are these better worlds accessible?

This thesis will focus on the importance and power of imagination; it will analyze two examples of feminist utopias written in 20th century by comparing Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*; and finally it will try to show the improvements and changes in feminist ideology between the period of these two utopian novels and to prove that feminist utopias give 'hope' and 'optimism' for the future societies. Utopias, as a sub-genre of science fiction, should be regarded as a call for change. It is true that utopias are just fantasies, products of imagination, fictitious worlds; however, it shouldn't be forgotten that they have power to mirror and reflect society with all its wrongs and ills. The concept of utopia stems from the discontent with the world in which one lives; so, inevitably utopias challenge the societies and environments in which they are produced. Utopias, as works of fiction, are very important tools to examine the traditions, customs, morals and ethics of their times. They make the reader aware of the misapplications, errors and faults of societies. Thus it can be claimed that a utopia shows the power of imagination

and its great affect on society. In ‘ ‘Utopian Feminist Visions Transcription’’ Marge Piercy points out the importance of utopian fiction with these words: ‘ ‘If you cannot imagine something different, you cannot work toward it!’’(1)

Ruth Levitas , the writer of *The Concept of Utopia*, also seems to agree with Piercy’s ideas about the important function of utopias: ‘ ‘Utopias’ role is not to express desire directly, but to work towards an understanding of what is necessary for human fullfilment, broadening, deepening and raising of aspirations in terms quite different from those of their everyday life.’’( qtd. Moylan 85)

From these words it is very clear that ‘ ‘utopias’’, as the products of fantasies, are not simple visions or just imaginary worlds in which one desires to live. They have power to encourage people to work toward it. Before discussing feminist utopias in particular, it will be useful to mention the general characteristics of utopias in detail and their function in a society.

First of all, in most of the utopias, the protagonist, who is sometimes the narrator, is an outsider, a stranger to the utopian society. This person generally travels to these places and with the help of the native guides, learns about the culture of the utopian society. So , the protagonist finds opportunity to compare these ideal places with their present times and societies. In this way the author criticizes the contemporary social, cultural, political, economic and ethical problems. Therefore, *travelling* is an important feature of utopias.

Secondly, utopias give the reader a higher sense of freedom, possibility and optimism. They bring hope and expectations of a better life. They attack the oppressive sides of society and seek an ideal place for the members of which are all equal and happy. In addition to that, they all question the environment in which they are created.



So, questioning can be regarded as a crucial characteristic of utopias. Therefore, as Ruth Levitas points out ‘ ‘Utopias have a capacity to serve as a motivating force for a social critique and change ‘ ’ ( Moylan 85).

In terms of genre, utopias are works of fiction; thus, they all allow the writer unlimited opportunities, ideas, and settings unlike the conventional mainstream novels. The reason feminist writers in the 1970s preferred this genre stems from these unlimited and unrestrictive choices. Feminist writers escape into the utopia because in utopias boundaries are just limited only by the ability to imagine something new and radical. This genre provides the writer freedom, so the authors can easily deconstruct language, setting and other traditions of their time, and playing with words, they can recreate the world and human relations in the way they like. Tom Moylan summarizes the meaning and function of utopias with these words in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky*: ‘ ‘As a literary artifact, it is not a static picture of perfection, but rather a dynamic representation of human relations in motion, not perfect but better than what can be found in the author’s world’ ’(76).

Utopias also have didactic aspects in which everybody finds opportunity to analyze and criticize society, and from which everybody can infer lessons.

According to Sargent, ‘ ‘utopia’ ’ is a social dreaming, a designation that the dreams and nightmares that concern the ways in which groups of people arrange their lives and which usually envision a radically different society than the one in which the dreamers live’ ’ (qtd. Moylan 74).

Moreover, Charlotte Perkins Gilman describes utopias as ‘ ‘cultural work that enact social changes, can function as social action, can convey alternative versions and

visions of human action- a position of clear self consciousness regarding literary didacticism'' (qtd. Donawerth and Kolmerten ed. 127).

It is very clear from these words that utopias are more than simple visions, or imaginary worlds. They have social functions. They reflect all the wrongs, ills, and immoralities of societies, and urge the reader to wake up and struggle for that better world. Now that the readers of utopias begin to see the misapplications and faults of societies in which they live, inevitably they get angry and discontented with the circumstances under which they have to live. Therefore, ' 'anger'' and ' 'provocation'' can be regarded as a strong motivating force in creating utopias; especially feminist utopias, because feminism itself is radical even today. Writing a utopia is the result of oppression. An inevitable consequence of this is anger. Utopias are the voices of people who have been made invisible and silent. For this reason, feminist utopias are best examples of provocation and anger, which will be analyzed in detail in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

As a result, it can be said that all utopias are in search of equality for everybody, which is impossible to find in a capitalist regime. They all seek egalitarian societies in which people can live harmoniously, and peacefully together. All utopias try to show the social desire to eliminate rivalry, hierarchy and hostility. They tend to criticize the inequalities among the people, that have been created by the capitalist system.

It is known that Thomas More's *Utopia* is one of the predecessors of this genre. Before studying the two feminist utopian novels in detail, it will be helpful to examine Thomas More's *Utopia* briefly, as an example of a utopia written by a man.

More's book includes two parts. In the first part, the social ills and faults of sixteenth century Europe are presented; then in the second part, a European man,

whose name is Raphael Hythloday, visits that alternative society and reports what he sees in that place. In the first part of the book, the problems of English society in the sixteenth century have been mentioned. In the second part, the solutions are shown in the utopia. Thomas More's criticism is mostly based on the economic system of England and he disapproves of the capitalist system. He seems to show the inequalities, disparities between the rich and the poor people. According to Thomas More, this money based system leads to hostility between the wealthy people and the poor. The rich people abused the poor in the sixteenth century, which then, worsened the gap between the privileged class and a lower class.

In the second part of the book, More creates his imaginary world; his utopia, and in this way he presents the social desire to live happily and equally. All the problems of part 1 seem to be solved in part 2. In the utopia, there is peace and tranquility. Nobody has to fight with anyone or anything to survive. Everybody owns everything. There is no class discrimination. 'Communism' is presented as an alternative, a solution to the handicaps of capitalist English society. In the utopia the government meets all the needs of its citizens. People live peacefully in the community. All the people work and eat together without knowing anything about rivalry and individual competition for material gain. Even all the houses are identical, which indicates that nobody or nothing is superior over the other.

On the surface everything seems to be based on equality, at least better than the capitalist English society in sixteenth century, but is it so? Is everybody really equal in More's *Utopia*?

From the feminist perspective, More's *Utopia* is questionable. For instance, the houses are ruled by the eldest male members of the families. When women get married,

they have to change their houses and transfer to their husbands' houses. The authorities of the houses are always males: ' 'Their women , when they grow up, are married out ; but all the males , both children and grandchildren live still in the same house , in great obedience to their common parent, unless his age has weakened his understanding'' ( 37).

In addition to that husbands have right to punish their wives if women do something wrong. Even though More's ideal place seems to be based on equality, men are presented as powerful members of society: ' ' Husbands have power to correct their wives , and parents to chastise their children unless the fault is so great that a public punishment is thought necessary for striking terror into others'' ( 60).

Thomas More might have dreamt of an ideal and radical society based on equality, but, from a modern perspective the unequal circumstances are not so different for women. When it comes to gender roles, More's *Utopia* seems to fail. It shouldn't be disregarded that in More's *Utopia* women are given some rights. For example, women can work together with men; they can have education. These rights might be quite radical when it is evaluated from the perspective of the sixteenth century, but, from the feminist point of view , it is quite reminiscent of the same patriarchal system; and it is highly oppressive for women.

It is unquestionable that lots of things have changed from the sixteenth century. Especially after the World War I , women writers entered the world of males by using the genre of science fiction; they began to write feminist utopias and expressed their desires for a better life more freely in their works.

In *Feminist Utopias*, Francis Bartkowski points out how different were the utopias imagined by women writers with these words: ' 'What makes these utopian

fictions feminist is that women are not dismissed as one question among many as in classical utopias; their place is everywhere''(24).

On the other hand , according to Joanna Russ , ‘ all these fictions present societies that are conceived by the author as better in explicitly feminist terms and for explicitly feminist reasons’’ ( 134).

Now that in classical utopias women have been dismissed and women writers began writing feminist utopias with explicitly feminist terms and reasons , lets analyze the characteristics of feminist utopias and try to answer this important question: What makes a utopia feminist?

## WHAT MAKES A UTOPIA FEMINIST?

It is known that writers of utopias say what the ordinary people cannot say. They are the voices of public, of the poor, and of the ones who have been silenced and made invisible. Writers of utopias can reflect the society with all the faults and and ills; therefore, they urge and provoke the reader to take into action. Because their message is clear: “Unless people think or imagine something better, they cannot reach those desired conditions!”. As it can be seen, they present what is missing in reality. In a way, as Joanna Russ states, utopian writers “dare to dream.” Therefore, writing a utopia is a struggle to have better living conditions. Women have always been rendered silent and invisible; kept away from the men’s world. But especially in the twentieth century, women authors used the advantages of science fiction very skillfully and hence feminist utopias became very popular. Through writing utopias, women authors found a chance to create a medium for advocating social change from a feminist perspective. Thanks to utopias, women authors were able to make serious public analysis of contemporary sex roles. They communicated new and radical ideas concerning sex roles and they challenged the moral, ethical values of societies about women. Therefore, the influx of women into this previously male literary subculture must be considered as a significant change for popular culture.

The reason why women authors chose this genre is quite understandable. First of all, (on the surface!) it was just a fiction; so women wrote just about their dreams, their desires and fantasies. They wrote what they lacked in society. They wrote how they suffered, how they were alienated from society; they cried out how sad, how alone they were via their works. Because it is very well known that women’s place is

thought to be at home and their primary job is to be dutiful, obedient wives and become mothers. In men's world there is no such thing as self fulfillment for women. They can find joy and self fulfillment only when they keep their house and bring up children. Actually this situation is very much like imprisonment. In a way women are doomed to be locked at home. Their only guilt is to be females. I use the word *female* deliberately, because females learn how to be women and learn their gender roles in the society. Gayle Rubin explains gender as "oppressive social norms". According to her, "gender is the oppressive result of a social production process" (qtd. Moi 24).

It is unquestionable that many things have changed in the 21st century; many improvements have been achieved by and for women. But, unless the present patriarchal systems change, there are still a lot of things to do by and for women. Thus, they will continue to imagine something better; they will go on writing utopias with feminist terms and feminist reasons and they will struggle against oppression. I completely believe that women will succeed in having the desired world based on equality for every member of society. It shouldn't be forgotten that utopias are important tools for human development.

As it is pointed out in the introduction, fiction gives the writer freedom and unlimited choices in terms of setting, time and characters. So women preferred and loved utopian fiction. In 1970s, feminist utopias became very popular in American Literature. Now that the main concern of this thesis is feminist utopias, it will be practical to mention the basic characteristics of feminist utopias.

One of the basic characteristics of feminist utopias is the importance of nature and the earth. It will be seen that both in *Herland* and in *Mattapoissett*, the utopian society in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, most of the citizens deal with agriculture. They

cultivate the earth successfully; therefore, there is no such thing as poverty or famine. The earth is fertile; fruits and other kinds of food are abundant. Everybody can easily reach those foods and eat whatever they like. It is known that earth and nature are symbolically associated with females in literature. Thus, in these utopias people live close to nature. In this way, women utopia writers seem to show women's desire to live in nature. It can be inferred that women don't like cities; they don't want to live in urban areas, because urban life means alienation for women. It reminds the female readers of their loneliness, their secondary position, and their subordination in cities. The urban environment is artificial; society is man-made; thus everything in urban life is organised artificially. Society determines gender rules; society says what to do, what not to do. It is society which tells them they are *women* not females. In *To Write Like a Woman*, Joanna Russ states the plight of women in urban environment and she points out why women writers prefer nature and agricultural life as their settings with these words: ‘ ‘ The dislike of urban environments realistically reflects women's experiences of such places- women don't own city streets, not even in fantasy. Nor do they have much to say in the kind of business that makes, sustains and goes on in cities’’ (145).

As a consequence, most of the feminist utopias are ecology minded; and they are friendly to nature. There is no place for pollution, and the destruction of the earth.

The abundance of food and the fertility of the earth in these utopias is a direct criticism of the dishonourable, dirty, indecent side of industrialization and the capitalist system which enables rich business owners to oppress and abuse the poor. Women utopia writers harshly criticize the injustices and inequalities of capitalism by representing the richness of earth, and they dream about a world where everybody can live in equal conditions.



Another important aspect of feminist utopias is the importance of ‘physical work’. Each one works on the fields; they prefer a communal life. In the Western cultures, middle class women had to sit at home and play their roles accordingly. They were thought to be the ‘Angels in the House.’ Their primary task was to be good mothers and obedient wives. On the other hand lower class women had to work and support their families, as they were too poor to sit at home. Whether they are middle class women or poor women, their situation must be considered the shame of patriarchal capitalist system, because both living conditions for women are restrictive. If a woman is doomed to sit at home all day doing tedious housework and trying to bring up children, this is the same as shutting a person up in a prison. It means taking one’s freedom, and the capacity to think away from that person. This turns a person into a passive object. On the other hand, forcing a poor woman to work is another shame; because these women had no choice except for working. They were too poor and weak to survive in that brutal system. But, in feminist utopias all women work; some of them work in agricultural fields, some of them work as artists and, most importantly, they all have a good education. Physical labor is exalted in feminist utopias, because working means production; if someone participates in the process of production it makes her feel important. It is a kind of self fulfillment. In *Utopian Science Fiction by Women* it is stated by Carol A. Kolmerten that ‘work is a social experience that gives women a sense of worth’ (115).

Furthermore, the important role of physical work in feminist utopias is pointed out in detail with these words by Carol A. Kolmerten: ‘One of the most important needs of the individual women who populate the women’s books is the need for a life where their work is valued and where they are significant producers of what the culture

values. Most of the women writers not only proposed meaningful work for their female characters, but also showed them at work'' (115).

In addition to that, in feminist utopias 'communal life' is preferred. People, especially women, work together and get pleasure from it. This communal life implies the loneliness of women in cities. Contrary to urban life, in utopias all the loneliness or problems are shared in a communal life; nobody is alone in these societies. Every member of the society is loved, cared for and protected equally. All the responsibilities are shared by the citizens of society. Thus, these responsibilities and duties don't become a burden for women.

Another issue that feminist utopias deal with is motherhood and parenting. These are considered as the crucial duty of societies. In the patriarchal system, motherhood or parenting are exclusively seen as women's jobs, which become a heavy burden for them. Nevertheless, in feminist utopias these duties are questioned, and they are shown as everybody's problem. In feminist utopias child rearing is considered so important that this process isn't left to the hands of a single mother. The responsibilities of childrearing is shared by every member of the society. Thanks to solidarity and cooperation child rearing doesn't become a tiresome job for a mother. In some of the utopias, males participate actively in the process of child rearing. As a result, it can be said that feminist utopia writers want co-operation and solidarity. They desire to live in communal or 'quasi-tribal' social systems, which make women feel safe. Most of the feminist utopias advocate socialism or communism. They reject individual egoism and the individual competition for survival, which results from the capitalist system.

Finally, women express their yearnings for egalitarian regimes. They wish to live in societies in which all discriminations such as race, class, sex and gender are eliminated. Sex and gender issues, which are neglected in classic utopias, are the other characteristics of feminist utopias. It is known that sex is a biological term, but gender, or gender roles, are arbitrary rules that society dictates. Women are expected to be gentle, fragile, cheerful, shy and soft-spoken in the patriarchal capitalist system. Their only duties are thought to be obedient, loyal wives and good mothers. The only proper place for women is considered to be their houses. The outside world is shut up for women because it is men's world. Endowed with these attributes, women have to hold the function of a peace making housebound creature inevitable for a society's stability. It is not wrong to say that men have to over emphasize the honourable profession of home making of women in order to maintain the sexist hierarchy. Women have always been associated with nature; women have always symbolized the emotional side of human beings. However, men have been thought to be active, rational, strong, intellectual, aggressive, dominant and forceful. Unlike women, men's place is always outside the house. As we have seen, while men are presented unlimited space and opportunities, women are restricted in their homes and made silent and invisible by the arbitrary social norms. At this point, it is impossible to disagree with Simone de Beauvoir who claims ' ' one is not born but becomes a woman'' (qtd Moi 5).

Now that sex and gender issues are the fundamental characteristics of feminist utopias, I find it very important to understand the philosophy of Simone De Beauvoir to highlight the secondary position of women. According to her, females are actually the other half of humanity, but their bodies are perceived to be defective, inferior, or peculiar by males. They have ovaries, a uterus ; therefore, female bodies are considered

to be ‘ ‘ walking wombs’’ by males. Simone De Beauvoir thinks that female body and capacity to give birth imprison her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her nature. For this reason, women are thought to be relative to men. A man’s body is always thought to be direct and normal in connection with the world but, the body of a woman is always thought to be dependent. Women are not regarded as autonomous beings. Men are seen as *the Subject, the Essential, the Absolute*, but women are regarded as *the Inessential, the Object*. Thus, they become *the Other*. In other words females become *the Second Sex* in the male dominated system. But, Simone De Beauvoir claims that the body is not ‘ ‘ a thing’’, it is ‘ ‘a situation’’. According to her philosophy situations can change, and this secondary position of women will not continue forever, if they cling each other, work together with solidarity, they can regain their rights and freedom. She explains the reason of women’s inferior positions with these words in her famous book *the Second Sex*:

In truth , however, the nature of things is no more immutably given, once for all, than is historical reality. If woman seems to be the inessential which never becomes the essential, it is because she herself fails to bring about this change. Proletarians say ‘ ‘We’’; Negroes also. Regarding themselves as subjects, they transform the bourgeois, the whites into ‘others’’. But women don’t say ‘ ‘We’’ ....They don’t authentically assume a subjective attitude. Women’s effort has never been anything more than a symbollic agitation. They have gained only what men have been willing to grant; they have taken nothing, they have only received. (19)

As it can be understood from these lines, nothing is unchangable. Oppressive gender roles for women are not determined by biology. They are just man-made social norms; they are artificial. Thus, they are questionable. In feminist utopias , women writers deal with these arbitrary social norms , and they question sex and gender issues. They also give hope to the female readers that they can regain their rights and free themselves from the oppressive gender roles which are imposed by the patriarchal system. It is very obvious that Beauvoir focuses on the importance of androgynism and personhood, and argues that women, apart from their reproductive function, are the same as men. Therefore, women must be considered as persons, not as sexual objects. As a result it can be said that most feminist utopias echo Simone De Beauvoir's philosophy, and prove that women can change their own fate. Feminist utopias show that the solutions are in the hands of women.

In feminist utopias women dream of worlds where oppressive gender roles are eliminated. Gayle Rubin seems to summarize what these writers feel:

I personally feel that the feminist movement must dream of even more than the elimination of the oppression of women. It must dream of the elimination of the obligatory sexualities and sex roles. The dream I find most compelling is one of an androgynous and genderless( though not sexless) society in which one's sexual anatomy is irrelevant to who one is, what one does, and with whom one makes love. (qtd. Moi 27)

Another sex and gender issue is the freedom of women's body and sexuality. The Feminist Movement gained power in 1960s and the invention of birth control pills enabled women to experience sexuality freely without thinking about pregnancy; so,

most of the feminist utopia writers presented women's wish to free their bodies and sexuality from the hegemony of patriarchal system. In many feminist utopias women are set free to control their bodies; autonomy is given to women. They become mothers only when they *decide* to give birth to a child. Moreover, nobody is ashamed of having sexual relations with the one she desires. Nobody has power to control the other's body. Each woman is presented as an autonomous individual. Nobody has the right to show mastery over another's body. No one is superior over the other.

As a consequence, women strongly criticize and reject the patriarchal system and they wish to get rid of the oppressive gender roles, which society imposes upon people in general. Women express their hope for a society where women and even homosexuals are no longer seen as 'the Other'. They no longer want to be on the edge of time and society; they want to be within the society with equal rights and equal conditions with men.

In the light of this information, this thesis will analyze two feminist utopias, the first of which is *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

## HERLAND

‘ *The dream becomes vision only when hope is invested in an agency capable of transformation. The political problem remains the search for that agency and possibility of hope; and only if we find it will we see our dreams come true*’

Ruth Levitas ( qtd. Moylan 67)

*Herland* can be considered the predecessor of feminist utopias , because it carries most of the characteristics of the genre. It was first published in serial form in 1915, in a monthly magazine called the *Forerunner*. Therefore, this novella consists of 12 chapters. Then in 1979, it was published again in the book form. As it is stated before, feminist utopias became popular in 1970s; therefore, it is not surprising that *Herland* was not so well known and effective in the years after it was first published.

*Herland* is the story of three adventurers who discover a valley in the uplands, the population of which is all female. These three adventurers are all male characters and the story is told by one of the three male characters, whose name is Vandyck Jennings. Van informs the reader that all these three men have a lot of common points, one of which is ‘ ‘science.’’ One day the three of them have a chance to join in a scientific expedition . They pass through rivers, lakes, and dense forests. In the end , when they arrive that place, they encounter savage tribes. Surprisingly the three men come to learn the story of the womanland, while the savages are talking. After that, the three of them , with great curiosity, decide to find that exotic place the population of which is all women. Inevitably, they had different expectations about that land. Each of them had dreams about the women in that place. They all expected to find beautiful, attractive women to flirt with; but, nevertheless, they were suspicious about the existence of such a place. None of them believed that women could establish a

civilization without men, because women were always supposed to have low intellect and they were always thought to be weak and submissive creatures lacking of rational thinking and ability to organize themselves. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that these three men are the typical representatives of the male dominant American society in the beginning of twentieth century. It will be seen in detail that these three males have quite oppressive attitudes towards women. The ways the male characters behave in the beginning of the story remind the reader of the strict Victorian values about women.

Before mentioning Herland, and the rules of that all female society, it will be helpful to study the three male characters in detail.

Vandyck Jennings is the narrator and also the protagonist of the story. The whole narration is told from a male perspective; and from the first person's point of view. Vandyck is a sociologist, a well educated intellectual. Actually, three of them have good jobs and they are all gentlemen with Victorian values about women. Therefore, they are the antithesis of the ideology presented by the author in *Herland*. For instance, Vandyck believes that women are inherently inferior beings. At university he sees that women are poor at maths and science. Moreover, he doesn't believe that women can create a society without men. At first they didn't take ladyland seriously, even though they were curious about it. Vandyck is convinced that women are incapable beings, but Gilman seems to refute this idea by creating such an ideal society and show people that how the world would look if women were given the chance to create such societies.

His other friend is Jeff Margrave . It is reported by Van that Jeff is a doctor, but also he is very good at writing poetry, which indicates that he is very romantic. He is also a botanist, which shows that he is close to nature and it can be inferred indirectly



that he is close to women. It is seen in the later parts of the story, in his relation with Celis, that he is very romantic and chivalrous. He is very genteel, and also over protective when he is together with a woman. He puts women on pedestals and thinks that women are too fragile to protect themselves. His excessive protectiveness will actually be dangerous in his relation with Celis.

In the years during which *Herland* was published, women were protesting against the oppressive patriarchal system. They claimed that they could protect themselves and they expressed their desire for freedom. They were not fragile objects to be put on pedestals; they were just human beings like men; they were the other half of humanity as Simone De Beauvoir suggested. The women of *Herland* represent these ideas. They are strong, athletic human beings capable of protecting themselves. They don't need a man's protection as these women are accustomed to living without men for two thousand years. Therefore, these oppressive values are challenged with Jeff's exaggerated affection and behaviour toward women.

Terry O. Nicholson is the third of the three male adventurers. According to Van, Terry is rich enough to do as he pleased. He is sophisticated and intelligent. He has a lot of talents and he has great interest in mechanics and electricity. In the beginning of the twentieth century, these activities were thought to be proof of higher civilization of the Euro-American culture, so they were manly issues. Thus, Terry is a typical representative of a bourgeois male of his time. The reader is also informed that he has all kinds of boats, motorcars, and planes. For this reason, he is fond of exploration. Terry has a 'macho' spirit. Terry is highly aware of his attraction and power, so he always sees himself as the center of attention of women. Terry, like his friend Van, believes that women are inferior beings; men are always superior to women and men

should master over women. Otherwise, there wouldn't be social order and civilization , according to Terry. As he has such thoughts about women, he doesn't believe that there can be a society the whole population of which is female. He only dreams about beautiful girls in that land and makes fun of that civilization.

It will be seen that Terry is also the most aggressive of all. At the end of their experiences in Herland, Terry gets married to Alima, one of the girls in Herland, but, as he cannot change his oppressive and humiliating values about women, he attacks her and tries to rape her. According to the moral ethics of his time, once a woman gets married , she becomes the possession of that man, and the husband has right to have sex with his wife whenever he wants, even if by using physical force. Nevertheless, his brutal attempt results in punishment and he is banished from Herland.

As it can be seen, all the oppressive thoughts and values about women of his era are challenged with this utopia and these three male characters are shown as the typical representatives of the capitalist and patriarchal system.

One of the members of savage tribes informs them that the women's country is located up in the hills. Van, Terry, and Jeff prepare themselves and set out on their journey. The adventurers recognize that they cannot reach the land by car as it is located behind the hills. This country is completely isolated from the rest of the world. The whole place is surrounded by sheer cliffs and rocks; therefore, it is inaccessible without a plane. They prepare Terry's biplane and enter the women's country through air. In *Feminist Utopias* Francis Bartkowski interprets their arrival to Herland as voyeuristic: ‘ ‘Van, Jeff and Terry approach Herland ‘ manfully’. They arrive by plane and powered boat, armed with instrument of voyeuristic power: camera, binoculars and guns’’ ( 29).

Their approach to the land is manful, because these male adventurers expect to find beautiful girls hopping around. The camera and the binoculars symbolically represent their desire to watch these sexual beings. They don't expect to find rational, thinking, athletic and strong women capable of creating such a high civilization. In the minds of these men ' 'women'' are just sexual beings, not individuals. As a result, they are reduced to objects. Moreover, "the guns" can be interpreted as phallic symbols or, the representations of power and authority. The guns also symbolically represent the aggressive side of males.

When the three men land, what they see is completely different from what they expected. Van describes the place with these words: ' ' A land in a state of perfect cultivation, where even the forests looked as if they were cared for; a land that looked like an enormous park, only it was even more evidently an enormous garden.....I confess that we paid small attention to the clean, well built roads, to the attractive architecture, to the ordered beauty of the little town''(13).

After they see such a civilization, they again insist that there must be men, especially Terry is so sure that he says 'of course there are men!'. In a short while they stumble upon the country. To their great surprise, they can't find men anywhere. Vandyck goes on with his description of Herland. As it is pointed out before, peace, harmony, order, abundance of food, fertility of earth are the characteristics of feminist utopias and in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopia, the reader is presented with that kind of ideal place. The roads are perfect; everywhere is full of flowers, trees are all fruitbearing; there are also fountains to which birdbaths are added in the streets. Moreover, the men are very surprised that there is no dirt, noise and smoke. Here Gilman seems to imply the dirt and smoke that is brought by industrialization and

capitalism as the products of male dominant world. In another description Van says: ‘ ‘Everywhere was beauty, order, perfect cleanness, and the pleasantest sense of home over it all’’ (21).

The order and harmony is perceived everywhere . Even their animals are tamed. Birds sing melodically; so there is nothing disturbing in this place. There are no wild beasts ,except for a few tamed cats.

The three men expected a savage country and primitive women without men, but this country is quite different from their expectations; in addition to that, it is more civilized in comparison to the U.S.A. With this description of Herland, Gilman attempts to refute the ideas represented by these male characters and she shows that these negative and humiliating ideas about women are the results of prejudices. If women are given chance to create societies, they would look better than our own. Gilman aims to convince her readers that women can achieve everything men can do. Women are in fact omnicompetent if the restraints on their activities are removed. Gilman also emphasizes the idea that if women can manage to free themselves from being in a secondary position, there is no human task they cannot accomplish. At this point, she shares the same ideology with Simone De Beauvoir who argues that women can free themselves through individual decisions and collective action.

As we have seen, Herland women and their society are the embodiment of these ideas. The men are impressed by the careful constructed buildings, architecture and cultivation. While the men are walking around with the hope of finding men somewhere, they hear the giggles of the three Herland girls, who will be their future wives. Ellador, one of the girls, introduces herself and her friends, Alima and Celis, to these guests. Terry, who is very proud of himself, presents a shining neclace to the girls

with the hope of attracting them. He uses this necklace of big varicoloured stones, as bait. Alima tricks him, grasps the necklace quickly, and the girls escape so swiftly that even though the men chase after them, they cannot catch the girls, because these girls are very athletic, strong and fit. Actually the girls are not interested in that precious sparkling necklace in the way Terry hoped. Terry uses this material object to tempt one of the girls, but, Herland is completely different from the money-based, capitalist society of Terry's.

As the adventurers try to explore the inner parts of the town, they are suddenly surrounded by the women of Herland, who are not young, but stout, healthy and vigorous. Terry, again full of pride, presents a scarf to one of the women. She accepts it. Then he offers a rhinestone circlet and a jewelled crown to the other women, which shows how materialist he is. He is unquestionably the product of capitalist society. Moreover, Terry fancies himself as the ladies' man. He is accustomed to being admired by women. Without a woman to admire him, flirt with him, or be impressed by him, Terry's sense of himself as a man is challenged. He feels insecure without women. Therefore, it can be said that he is also dependent on women. So, by presenting such gifts he wants to impress and control the women; he intends to create gratitude and obligation in women. In this way he aims to manipulate the women. Contrary to his expectations these women don't give importance to such materials. They just accept them as simple gifts. After that the women want the men to enter a big building, but as Terry and the others think that they might be imprisoned in that building, they resist the women. Terry pulls his gun and fires it. So the women give them a kind of anaesthesia and put them in a fortress. When they wake up, they find themselves in that big building. They are provided with comfortable clothes which are identical to those

the women wear. Men's wearing the same clothes as women's is very significant in deconstructing the traditional gender roles and sexual hierarchy, because the clothes are designed to be practical. For instance, the men realize the innumerable pockets in the clothing they wear, which allow them to carry as much food as they can find. In addition to that they recognize that the women don't dress decoratively unlike the women of their own society. Therefore, the clothes are uni-sex. They are not made to distinguish one's sex. So, the men cannot help appreciating the practical and efficient function of the clothes.

Other things the men see in the building are the perfectly designed and decorated rooms. Outside their rooms they find tables full of food. Their personal possessions are left in their rooms except for their guns. The women didn't harm them. Moreover, the men find primers on the tables for them to learn their language quickly. Three tutors, Moadine, Somel and Zava, have been waiting for them to teach the culture of Herland. With the help of these tutors, the three men are expected to behave properly. They learn most of the Herland culture from these women.

Gilman's novella is also a satire. It very successfully criticizes the American society in which the book was written. Through the innocent questions and horrified reactions of the women in Herland, Gilman uses humour and satirizes American society skillfully. M. Keith Booker points out the function of the dialogues between the men and their tutors in *Dystopian Literature*: 'The most effective satire of *Herland*, however, not as much from the descriptions of this feminine society, but as from the attempts of the three male visitors to explain their own society to the women' (52).

The ancient history of Herland is told by the tutors to the visitors and it is informed that there was a polygamous society in their land before. They had connection

with other nations thanks to a passage through the mountains. They had ships, commerce, an army and a king. There was also slavery in their land. As it can easily be inferred, it was a patriarchal, hierarchal society like other countries of that time. But after a volcanic eruption, the passage was filled up, and the connection with the rest of the world was blocked. The whole land was surrounded with rocks and cliffs. Gilman uses this depiction here to create a typical setting for her utopia. Because utopian societies are generally isolated from the rest of the world; they don't have connection with other cultures, therefore, they can remain ideal and different. So the rocks and cliffs symbolize this isolation.

It is also informed that nearly all the men in the land died as a result of the disaster. There were no men to rule, to protect and feed them. The women had no chance but to cling each other, because they had to live together. Instead of mourning for their desperate situation, they supported each other. They organized their society with all the rational lines possible, realizing that they would never survive without cooperation. They cultivated the earth, worked together, and founded their country again, a better one than the first. They made a great civilization completely isolated from the rest of the world. Here Gilman seems to encourage her female readers that women can achieve everything and they can liberate themselves from restrictions of the patriarchal system; and finally she tries to prove that women are not actually dependent on men. In a way, with *Herland* Gilman recommends her female contemporaries to come together against the unbearable patriarchal order. These ideas are quite the same as Simone De Beauvoir's, but Gilman shows the way to women's liberation nearly thirty years before Beauvoir.

The tutors also inform the male visitors about the miraculous virgin births of Herlanders and explain how the girls have inherited the gift of solo production, which is called *parthenogenesis*, and how the whole society has become *female*. So the male visitors learn why the women of Herland have made a special temple called ‘Maaia’. The temple is important and significant, because Maaia is the Goddess of Motherhood, the only God worshipped by the monotheistic culture of Herland. This miraculous virgin birth is so important in this society that ‘ ‘motherhood’ ’ is seen as a religion. It is so sacred that the whole culture is based on this concept and on child rearing. Being a mother is a holy thing in Herland; it is the higher social service. Becoming a mother is a great joy and pride for women. According to Herlanders ‘ ‘motherhood’ ’ keeps the whole society together. A child is the child of all women in the society, so a child is not seen as a possession of one woman. Child rearing is everybody’s job; therefore, the responsibilities of having a child are shared by everybody. In Herland having a child is such a great and important job that it requires cooperation. As it is seen in many feminist utopias thanks to cooperation and solidarity, women don’t consider their jobs as a burden. Moreover, it gives the feeling of safety. Each member of the society is loved, cared for and protected. There is no isolation, or subordination for women in Herland, unlike the ‘ ‘civilized’ ’ societies of the Western world and America. Instead, there is comfort, health, love, peace and harmony, which is brought by holy motherhood and sisterhood. The importance of motherhood and sisterhood is described with these words in *Herland*:

‘ ‘ To them the longed for motherhood was not only a personal joy, but a nation’s hope. Their twentyfive daughters in turn, in a stronger hope, a richer, wider



outlook, with the devoted love and care of all the surviving population, grew up as a holy sisterhood''(59).

As Francis Bartkowski points out in *Feminist Utopias* ' 'Gilman's *Herland* is a mother text''(23). According to her, ' ' the rest of the novel continually returns to motherhood as the primary institution and even religion of this society'' ( 30).

Gilman believes that through motherhood and sisterhood the whole society becomes a unity without individual competition, rivalry and hostility. Members of the Herland society live a communal life in which everybody has equal rights. Nobody is superior to another. Gilman also criticizes the capitalist system which is based on materialism, self improvement and individual competition. In the years *Herland* was first published , ' ' the American Dream'' ideology was highly dominant and popular. Therefore, the government seemed indifferent to the problems of the poor. According to this ideology, one can get very rich and successful if he works very hard. Alger Horatio's *Ragged Dick* was shown as a good example of this ideology. Capitalism advocates a "Survival of the Fittest" theory. Followers of capitalism show nature as an example to justify themselves and say that even in nature the strongest ones always survive, but the weakest ones are always doomed to die. According to capitalism, nothing is equal, not even in nature. In other words as Turkish people say ' ' The big fish always swallows up the little fish.' ' So, governments did nothing to help the poor people. One must be strong and rich to survive in this system. Everything depends on the individual endeavours. In *Herland* Gilman strongly criticizes this policy and offers socialism as a solution to cure the ills of society. So it can be claimed that *Herland* is a socialist-feminist work.

Feminists, while they were speaking out for women's rights, they demanded participation in society. On the other hand, it is known that socialism is linked with the labor force which is abused and oppressed in capitalist system. Therefore, *Herland* advocates both women's rights, and shows the value of the labor force by presenting all female members working willingly and happily in the society. Most of the Herland women work. Some of them work in fields, and deal with agriculture, some of them deal with arts but none of them are idle. Everybody participates in society. For instance, Ellador is a good example of a well educated, intellectual, working woman. It is reported that when she was a little child, she found an insect dangerous for trees and the food, she made a considerable contribution to eliminate it. Her success was made known in the whole country by her teacher and praised by everyone.

Physical labor is exulted in this country. Everybody works not for individual success or self fulfillment, but they work for the good and benefit for the whole community. Thus, while the tutors Somel, Moadine and Zava are talking with the three men, they get very surprised and shocked when they learnt that nobody works in the U.S.A unless they *have to*:

‘ ‘ ...No man would work unless he had to,’ Terry declared. ‘ ‘

No one, man or woman would work without incentive.....The

men do everything. We don't allow our women to work.

Women are loved-idolized-honored-kept in home to care for the

children’’ Zava gets surprised and asks:

‘ ‘Do no women work?’’

‘ ‘Some have to, of the poorer sort. About seven or eight

million’’ says Terry. (62)

It can be inferred from this dialogue, the three men's 'civilized' world is actually a shame for the women of Herland, who know nothing about being poor, and they don't even know the meaning of *have to*. Because, these women work willingly, they work for joy, for the benefit of their country, not because of obligation.

As it is stated above, Herlanders do everything for the benefit of their country. They believe that if each member of a society is good, conscious, reasonable and well educated, the whole community becomes good. Herlanders give extra importance to education. According to them, education and child-rearing means 'Making People.' The children of Herland are thought to be the hope for their nation. They are not seen as their parents' possessions; they are not oppressed by their parents as in most present societies. They are regarded as the center of their community. Each child is loved, protected and cared for equally and each one is educated according to her abilities, interests and talents. Herland women's first aim is 'how to make the best kind of people.'

In the Herland education system, children never know that they are being educated, because there is no formal schooling. Gilman shows how boring and restrictive the education system is in the U.S.A. In Herland, each child is guided by well educated teachers but they don't dictate anything. Children reach knowledge and information by themselves. The curiosity of children is encouraged so they can manage to get knowledge. The children are trained in nature. In their education system, there are no sins or shames. They are not punished when they do something wrong. Instead they are just taught to find the right way. The children are educated with great patience, tolerance and sympathy. As Van says, this was education for citizenship. Every opportunity is supplied for the education of children. It is also

reported by Van that ‘ ‘ the language itself is clarified and symplified, made easy and beautiful for the sake of the children’’(103). At this point, I think it is very necessary to point out the importance of language in this work, before further analysis of the education system of Herland. It is known that language is an important means of communication. Through language, people talk, express their feelings, emotions and ideas; through language they send and receive messages. Therefore, language is also an important medium for changing information and thought among people. It shouldn't be forgotten that language is shaped in a social context, so it can be said that language is an efficient system for sharing cultural knowledge. It is very obvious that culture and language cannot be seperated from each other, because language also plays a crucial role in the construction of culture. Culture is shaped by and conveyed in language. Thus, language reflects social structure, social values, attitudes and ideas. Through language one generation can pass its customs, beliefs to the next generations, and again with the help of language, members of a society come to be aware of their places in it. As stated above, language constructs social realities. Herlanders seem to have already realized the crucial function of a language by simplifying and modifying their own language. So they have created their own reality, constructed their own culture, made life easy for themselves and for their children. The language of Herlanders is not described in detail. The reader doesn't know anything about the vocabulary or the grammar structure of this language. Nevertheless, the women use their own language , in this way they aim to teach Herland culture to the male visitors. For this reason, the first things the tutors present to the males are the primers successfully prepared for the education of the children. These women are quite aware that without language neither communication nor education is possible for them. The usage of a specific language of

Herlanders is very significant in this work, because the aim of this feminist utopia, like the others, is to deconstruct the sexist hierarchy in every field. For this reason, it shouldn't be expected from these women to adopt a language like English, which is full of sexist connotations and gender specific terms. It is not surprising that these women use their own language and teach it to the American males. Now that a language reflects reality, women must ignore the gender specific words such as *he/ she /himself /herself /man* or *woman* etc. As English includes those sexist words, it inevitably perpetuates the negative gender stereotypes. In order to end this discrimination, the sexist language must be denied, and Herlanders create their own reality and gender neutral culture. The feminists of the 1970s attacked the sexist language and made substantial changes to the culture, which will be explained in detail in the analysis of *Woman on the Edge of Time*, but Gilman's idea here seems to be a modest basis for the gender neutral language of the 70's feminist ideology.

After mentioning the important function of a language, we can turn back to the education system of Herland, and continue analyzing the details. Gilman seems to suggest that the greatest shortcoming of her own society lies in the quality of its education. In order that the children can learn the language and their culture easily, Herlanders make up imaginative tales that include many repetitive verses. Moreover, for the intellectual development of children, they devise games and make up new ones each time.

As for the babies, they made carefully designed houses and gardens with interesting and fascinating materials. There are no stairs, no corners, or small objects to swallow. Every detail is thought out carefully. After Van learns much about the civilization of Herland, he cannot help thinking of how inferior his own society is in

comparison to Herland: ‘ ‘ As I looked into these methods and compared them with our own, my strange uncomfortable sense of race humility grew apace’ ’(105).

Another factor which develops Herland society is the importance given to ‘ ‘change.’ ’ Herlanders accept that everything changes even though they have no connection with other cultures. Thus , their society is not a static one. There is no law in force for more than twenty years.

In many aspects, Herland’s society is better than Gilman’s own society, and Gilman finds opportunity to challenge the living conditions, education system, inequalities and flaws of her own society. Furthermore, by means of her imaginary world, she criticizes the women’s position in terms of the oppressive gender roles. As a consequence, Gilman’s Herland performs its duty as a critical utopia. The importance of utopias is understood better with the words of Tom Moylan:

More than entertainment, other than activism, the critical utopias had and still have their place in furthering the process of ideological critique, consciousness-raising and social dreaming/ planning that necessarily inform the practice of those who are politically committed to producing a social reality better than, and beyond, the one that currently oppresses and destroys humanity and nature. ( 82)

At the end of the story, after learning so many things about the Herland culture, the three adventurers fall in love with the girls they see at the beginning of their visit to Herland, and they want to get married to them. Nevertheless, some problems occur, inevitably, in their relations, through which Gilman finds opportunity to criticize the traditional marriages and family life in many ways; moreover, she tries to show how

women are confined and restricted in this system. These women know nothing about sexual relations and marriage, as they have lived without males for two thousand years. In traditional patriarchal societies, when men get married, they consider their wives as their possessions. Women have to take their husbands' surnames, at which Herland women get very surprised again. Vandyk reports that Herland women earn their names. There is no such thing as a 'surname'. O-DU-MERA is a good example of how these women earn their names. O-du Mera is the ruler of Herland. When she was born, the name 'Mera', which means 'thinker', was given to her. As she grew up, 'Du' was added to her name, as she became a highly respected woman. 'Du' indicates 'wisdom'. Finally 'O' was added to her name to show her greatness. This method shows that people earn their names. So a 'name' becomes an indication of one's personality. Nobody has to take the other's name. Each woman in Herland is an autonomous individual; they are not dependent on anybody. Therefore, when they learn how American women take their husband's surnames, they are surprised, but also reject this system. It is the first handicap of their marriages.

Secondly, these three girls don't agree to live in private houses with their husbands, as there are no private homes in Herland. Individual freedom is respected, yet communal life is seen as more important and privileged than the individual freedom. Thus, the men have some difficulties in understanding the women. Van explains this problem with these words: 'All the time we knew that these large minded women whose mental outlook was so collective, the limitations of a wholly personal life was inconceivable' (98).

The other important problem in their marriages is the girls' indifference to 'sexuality.' Men try to explain that sexuality is also the indication of love; but the

girls fail to understand them. According to the girls, sexuality is an alternative way of producing offspring. As motherhood is regarded as sacred, the women of Herland don't reject this coupling.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman writes about her own critique of motherhood and sexuality in *Women and Economics*:

More sacred than religion, more binding than the law...

This matriolatry is a sentiment so deep seated, widespread, and long established as to be dominant in every class of minds. It is so associated with our religious instincts, on the one hand, and our sex instincts, on the other, both of which we have long been forbidden to discuss. The one being too holy, and the other too unholy. (18)

It shouldn't be disregarded that Gilman's worldviews and her ideas about women are very radical according to her own society. It is not wrong to say that she wants to plant the idea that women are the other half of humanity and hence, they must be regarded as human individuals. But on the other hand, it is certain that something is missing without the contribution of the masculine half of humanity in Herland, so the girls agree to marry the male visitors, and as Herlanders are open to change, they easily welcome the marriages. It must be kept in mind that men and women are the two halves of humanity and societies must be based on this philosophy. Through the triple marriages, Gilman skillfully puts male superiority into question. She criticizes the ethical value system of traditional patriarchal societies and redefines the conventional conceptions such as marriage, home, motherhood and sexuality. With these marriages, Gilman seems to say that traditional expectations in marriages must be radically revised.



The relations or marriages among men and women must be based on mutual love and respect. In the novel, the relations of the married couples are raised on an interpersonal level that allows the development of tenderness, respect, equality and friendship. But on the point of *sexuality* the author completely eliminates sexuality as a physical, passionate and romantic side of love. At this point, this feminist utopia can be criticized from the modern feminist perspective, because excluding sexuality from the intimate relationship between the two loving human beings is against human nature.

It will be seen that in most of the feminist utopias written in 1970s, including Marge Piercy's *Woman on The Edge of Time*, sex is completely separated from reproductivity. In the 1970s women dream of sexual freedom in their utopias. They experience sexuality more freely and they regard it as an indication of mutual love. However, in *Herland* sexual relation is seen just as an alternative way of reproduction, but it shouldn't be forgotten that in the years *Herland* was published, women didn't have even right to vote; The Nineteenth Amendment had not even passed yet; birth control pills had not been invented and 'abortion rights' were completely unthinkable. So thinking sexuality together with reproductivity is quite understandable.

It will be useful to have a look at the marriages of the couples in detail to understand Gilman's message and her criticism of the traditional patriarchal values.

Van and Ellador's relationship seems to be the best of the three. Gilman presents "Ellador" as the representative of the new woman of her time. She is strong, intellectual, and self-confident unlike the traditional females of Gilman's time. She works like the other females in *Herland* and she has a career. Ellador exemplifies human potential. She is quite different from the traditional women. She wants to accompany her husband to America, because she is also curious and she is in quest for

an understanding of human nature as a whole. Furthermore, it must be noted that Ellador becomes the representative of Herland culture in America. On the other hand, Van, as a well educated gentleman and a sociologist, puts aside his old sexist assumptions and prejudices against women. He really tries to understand the principles of Herland culture. In the end, he sees Ellador as an individual, not as a sexual being. He understands the absurdity of the oppressive gender roles imposed upon women, and he sees how arbitrarily and artificially they are designed. Therefore, Van and Ellador's marriage is presented as true love. Gilman tries to show that happy marriage can only be achieved only when males change their minds and see women as individuals.

Jeff and Celis' marriage is relatively good. Jeff is the one who celebrates Herland culture from the beginning. His exaggerated protective attitude towards Celis sometimes creates problems between the two but nevertheless, he understands Celis, he praises the qualities of Herland culture and he decides to stay in Herland. It seems that because of his tenderness, he is rewarded by a child in the story.

But the final marriage between Terry and Alima turns out to be a nightmare, because Terry is the most resistant to change his mind. He still clings to his old values and he shuts himself up to the new ideas and new cultures. He cannot understand the high quality of Herland society. One night he attacks Alima and tries to rape her. As stated before, he believes that women like being mastered by their men, but he cannot understand that things are quite different for Herland's women. He is harshly punished and sent into exile. He is forced to leave Herland forever.

Van and Jeff seem to have relatively happy marriages as they have tried to understand the culture of this miraculous society. Van gives up his old ideas about sexuality and begins to see Ellador as an individual being. Jeff is the one who admires

the women in Herland from the beginning. Gilman's message is very clear: ‘ ‘ If such intellectual men can change their minds and begin to see women as individuals, the whole society can change its values about women.’ ’

The final point that must be mentioned is the narration style of the novella. The whole story is told from the perspective of a man, who changes his mind completely about women. In this way Gilman gives a message as it is stated before. Thus, it can be said that the artistic quality is in secondary position in comparison to its message. The story has didactic elements. For this reason, prose is chosen to carry its message clearly and easily.

Many readers, especially men, may find Gilman's *Herland* as absurd; or they may not find this fictitious world ideal. From the modern feminist perspective, this novella can be criticized, but Gilman presents just an alternative way of life. It shouldn't be forgotten that feminist utopias do not show the reader *perfect* places; however, they present just better places than the authors' own societies, and they urge the readers to think differently. Consequently they give ‘ ‘hope’ ’ to readers and inspire them to work toward those better places.

## WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME

*This book is written in blood  
Is it written only in blood?  
No, some of it is written in tears.  
Are the blood and tears all mine?  
Yes, they've been in the past  
But the future is a different matter*

Joanna Russ *The Female Man*

Joanna Russ expresses not only the predicament of women in her own oppressive society, but also her hope and belief that everything will change positively for women in the future. In the meantime, she summarizes the function and importance of feminist utopias to criticize and change the social values that subordinate women. Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* is another good example of feminist utopias written in 1970s. It is a rich book which enables the reader to evaluate and analyze the society from different dimensions such as social and ethnic inequality, economic disparity, and discrimination of sex and gender roles.

The protagonist of the novel is a thirty year –old Chicana woman who has been pushed to the fringes of society. First of all, she is seen as inferior because of her ethnic heritage; secondly she is economically disadvantaged -she has neither job- nor money, and finally, she is a woman struggling to survive in the male dominant white American society. This is the story of the plight of a poor Chicana woman; it is the story of how a woman from a different ethnic culture is victimized by American society. This is also the blood and tears of Connie Ramos who is labeled insane, dangerous and vilolent. So, she is put in a mental institution where her nightmarish story is successfully and skillfully interwoven with the utopian world of the future. Connie claims that she can

communicate with the future. A person called Luciente from the future contacts Connie Ramos through telepathy and takes her to Mattapoissett, the future society where all the ills and misdeeds of Connie's time are eliminated and all the problems are solved. Like Joanna Russ, Piercy also seems to show her hope for future societies by creating such a beautiful world and she implants optimism in her readers' minds. Miriam Rosenthal points out in her essay the hope that Marge Piercy gives in this feminist utopia: 'As a contrast to those dour pictures, we are also given a vivid picture of a future society that provides hope for humanity and serves as the only refuge for our protagonist' (1).

In the beginning of the novel, the reader is presented with Connie's niece Dolly who is severely beaten by her boy friend and also her pimp Geraldo. The reader is informed that she is forced to work as a prostitute by Geraldo. In the first paragraphs Dolly's terrible situation is described in detail which shocks and irritates the reader. Dolly gets pregnant by Geraldo with the hope of quitting prostitution, but Geraldo gets very angry and forces her to have an abortion. As Dolly forcefully rejects killing her own baby, Geraldo beats her nearly to death. When Dolly comes to Connie to ask for help, she sees that blood is oozing from her mouth; her left eye is swollen, and one of her teeth has been broken. Dolly also informs Connie that Geraldo kicked her in the belly so that she could lose her baby, after which she began to bleed terribly. While Connie is trying to help her niece and cure her bruises, Geraldo comes to the door with a doctor to perform the abortion. Dolly wants this baby terribly; she begs him not to touch it, but Geraldo begins to beat her again. As a woman, she doesn't have control over her body. Geraldo decides whether to have this baby or not, but he decides to abort it. Moreover, he doesn't believe that it is his own child. Connie Ramos hates Geraldo so much that she wants to kill him. In order to protect her niece, she takes the

wine bottle from the kitchen table and smashes it into Geraldo's face and breaks his nose. . Her pleasure, her delight and disgust is described with these words: ‘ ‘ His nose flattened like a squashed bug on a windshield’ '( 8).

Geraldo symbolizes the whole male power and male order, which Connie resists. Connie's attempt to kill Geraldo is the foreshadowing of her rebellion against the male dominant social order at the end of the book. The reader is informed that Connie has always been abused by men; therefore Geraldo is the symbol of oppressive male power which she hates:

He was the man who had pimped her favourite niece, her baby, the pimp who had beaten Dolly and sold her to other pigs to empty themselves in, who robbed Dolly and slapped her daughter Nita and took away the money squeezed out of the pollution of Dolly's flesh... Geraldo was her father who had beaten her every week of her childhood; her second husband, who had sent her into emergency blood running down her legs. He was El Muro , who had raped her and then beaten her because she wouldn't lie and she had enjoyed it. ( 6)

Just even those lines are enough to make one's flesh creep, and therefore, the reader begins to question the social ills more in detail and inevitably sympathize with Connie who resists obeying male authority.

Geraldo brings Connie to Bellevue Hospital claiming that she is a crazy woman to be cured. The doctors believe Geraldo without even interviewing her, and she is incarcerated in that hospital and labeled as ‘ ‘insane’’. Connie is locked up in a gloomy hospital room by the capitalist male power. She is a poor, aging Chicana woman;

moreover, the hospital has records on her from before, so nobody condescends to talk to her. Dolly also lies on behalf of Geraldo, and sells Connie out by saying that she really attacked Geraldo using physical force. There is nothing left for Connie but to accept that she is really insane. Connie's restraint is symbolic of the women's condition in a capitalist patriarchal system.

Connie had just wanted to protect her niece from the brutal treatment of Geraldo; she wanted to save her niece's life by screaming and protesting against the authority, but now she finds herself alone in the cold, stinking hospital bed.

We learn that Connie's character has always been rebellious, provocative and aggressive. When she was a little child, she protested against her mother and told her that she would go to college and have a different life than her mother, which is severely rebuked by her mother: ' ' I won't grow up like you Mama! To suffer and serve. Never to live my own life! I won't! ... Nothing in life but having babies, cooking and keeping the house. Mamacita, believe me. I love you! But I'm going to travel. I'm going to be someone''(38).

Even when she was a child, she was resistant to the traditions and customs. Her mother insists that she should do what women do, but Connie defies the social system and aggressively rejects being a cliché woman. Whenever she revolts against the oppressive power, she is silenced, made invisible and called ' 'crazy.' ' She is made passive again by shutting her up in a mental hospital. At this point the reader is left with those confusing questions: ' 'Is she really mad?' ' or ' 'Is the society mad?' ' ' 'If Connie is mad, is it something so dangerous to be afraid of?' ' 'If she is mad, what are the reasons behind her madness?' ' And finally ' 'What is the distinction between 'mad'

and ‘normal’?’’ ‘Isn’t it interesting that Dolly is thought to be sane but Connie is labelled insane while she is trying to help and protect her niece?’

Actually the message is clear. When someone, especially a woman, rebels against the established order, she is pushed to the edges of society, isolated by the authorities. They are either made invisible or silenced by labeling them ‘mad’. As a consequence, under these circumstances those ones are oppressed and punished. There is no choice for them to struggle to survive and try to overcome their loneliness.

Dolly is considered ‘sane,’ because she is the product of the patriarchal order. Whatever Geraldo does to her, she cannot dare to leave him; she doesn’t rebel; therefore, she accepts her role as a woman in this system. However, Connie is called a violent lunatic and put in an asylum, as she is a threat to the social order.

As it is stated above, Connie has no choice to overcome her loneliness. Marge Piercy takes the reader into the story very skillfully using stream of consciousness and flash back techniques and shows the fragmentation of Connie’s mind. The narration frequently shifts through which the reader learns both Connie’s life story in detail and shares her agonies with sympathy.

In the hospital room, when she lies on her bed, the narration shifts, and Connie’s mind goes back to the past and she remembers her lovers Martin and Claud, her heartless husband Eddie and her daughter Angelina. It will be helpful to analyze these characters in detail to better understand Connie and her despair.

Most of the male characters are brutal, aggressive and oppressive; in other words, they are typical representatives of patriarchal power. For instance, her brother chooses the way of white Anglo males. The reader learns that he has always been rewarded by material success. His fatness is the symbolic indication of his material



greed. He denies his own origins and even he changes his name to ‘ ‘ Lewis’’ which sounds more Anglo. The reader is also informed that Luis had many wives. He adopts the perspective of the predominant culture; therefore, it is not expected from him to understand his sister’s problems and sympathize with her. Luis is indifferent to Connie. When she is put in the mental hospital, Luis is on the side of Geraldo and he supports her restraint without even trying to listen to her. Luis carries all the typical qualities which society imposes. He is aggressive, ambitious, assertive, dominant, strong and forceful. He is the most important and favourite child of Connie’s patriarchal family. Thus, he is proud and privileged as a male. There is such a big gap between Connie and her brother Luis that, this estrangement is described with these words, when she comes to his house for the Thanksgiving day:

He was like the brother she had had all her life. But this middle-aged, overweight businessman in the dark gray suit and the white tie with its narrow dim stripe, the round moon face bulging into jowls, the forehead that ran well back to the middle of his scalp, the fat fingers with lodge ring that remained on the table as he talked as though he feared if let go of them, they would fly up- did she know him from some place? ( 346)

Another heartless male character is Connie’s second husband and her daughter Angelina’s father, Eddie. The reader is again shocked by the vicious character of Eddie, who beats Connie terribly, gives incurable damage to her body and psychology by forcing her to abortion. It can be inferred that Connie’s first suffering starts in her patriarchal family with her father and her brother Luis and then continues with her husband Eddie. Whenever she wants to rebel against this patriarchal power, she is

either punished or made silent and invisible. Society doesn't allow a woman to defend and protect herself :

Often when Eddie was about to strike her, she knew it and cowered before he drew back his hand for a blow. If it was a gift, she couldn't see what good it had done ever to her. When Eddie was going to hit her, he hit her anyhow. Maybe she had a moment to raise an arm to protect her face, but, if he knocked her down, it hurt as much. Her bruises were as sore and shameful. Her tears were as bitter... When she fought her hard and sour destiny, she seemed only to end up worse beaten, worse humiliated, more quickly alone. (36)

As it can easily be understood from this narration that Connie, as a poor Chicana woman, is abused, degraded and humiliated by male authority. She is the one who has been beaten harshly by males, and finally she is the one who is locked up and confined in an asylum as a sick woman by males again. Connie is the victim of patriarchal society. Actually Connie's plight and her nightmarish life, which will get worse in the hospitals, is reminiscent of many women who suffer in the oppressive male dominant system. So, those, especially women, who don't obey and serve to the established order are punished and isolated from society.

There are just a few male characters who fail to serve male authority. When men don't conform to the masculine ideals, society doesn't allow them to survive and, hence, depending on the dynamics of the system, ' ' death' ' is presented as the best ending for these male characters in the novel.

The first one is Connie's little brother Joe. It is learnt that he is the closest to her in age and temperament. He is Connie's favourite brother unlike Luis, but he dies soon after he is out of prison in California.

The second one is Martin, her first lover and her first husband. Martin also dies as he has feminine qualities. Unlike the other powerful male authorities, Martin is tender, sympathetic, sensitive and gentle. Connie feels herself safe and his love gives her a sense of worth. Martin marries Connie when she is left pregnant by a white American boy named Chuck. The reader learns that when Connie goes to college, in the American history lesson, she has to prepare her projects with a typewriter. Chuck has a good electric typewriter, but he doesn't know how to use it. He allows Connie to use it on condition that she should write his own papers. Connie accepts the bargain, which results in Connie's pregnancy. He rapes and leaves her pregnant. She is deserted without money. Then she has to quit school. Her family throw her out. She has to abort the baby by spending a lot of money. Under such difficult circumstances Martin marries Connie; gives her all his love without male prejudices.

Martin is an exception. He is different from the other brutal male characters in terms of both of his manners and his physical appearance: ‘ ‘ He had been beautiful, his body like the molten sun coppery and golden at once, his body in which strength and grace were balanced as in a great cat. His body had been almost girlish in its slenderness... Beautiful Martin had been with his face of sadness and grace, his eyes like brown rivers with something moving warily in their depths’’( 237).

It is understood from this description that he has dark skin like Connie. He, most probably, belongs to a different ethnic culture like Connie. He is skinny unlike Luis, he

is slender, and beautiful. He is not the symbol of oppressive power. He is an affectionate man, who will be murdered in the street.

The other male character Connie loved most is Claud. According to Connie, he has admirable and lovable qualities. He is a sweet man and a good father for Angelina. He cares, loves and supports them as if they were his own family. It is also informed that he is a black saxophone player; a talented pickpocket; moreover, he is blind. It can be said that he is another outcast in society; he is at the bottom in the hierarchical system. In other words, Connie and Claud share equal conditions. Perhaps the initial letters of their names *C*, is chosen by the author on purpose to show those equal conditions which strengthen their love. She finds a sense of worth, warmth and safety of which she had been deprived through her life:

He loved every bit of her. He would strole the silky skin on the other side of her arms until her breasts would begin to burn, he would play with her breasts with light teasing and then he would take great handfulls and nuzzle and suck, until her belly ached with wanting. He would run his thing against her languidly, slowly, slowly he would slip in and then ease out, slip in and ease out until she was thrusting him in herself with her hand. ( 101)

Claud is the only one to whom she makes love without fear. Theirs is a mutual and true love. She is neither beaten nor sexually abused in this relation, unlike her previous experiences. However, Claud is arrested and put in prison where he is exposed to a terrible scientific experiment and dies because of hepatitis.

Everybody and everything Connie loves in her life is taken away from her by society including her own daughter Angelina. After the death of Claud, Connie has a great depression and seeks relief by drinking too much alcohol. One day when she is drunk, she gets very angry with Angelina and beats her after which Angelina's arm is broken. Therefore, the government takes her to be raised by a foster family. Connie has no job, no husband, no money. She is completely left alone in this wicked world. She has always been deprived of her own mother's love and care, but now she mourns for her own incapacity as a mother. She cannot endure the absence of her daughter Angelina, which makes her life more unbearable.

While Connie contemplates her life during her confinement in the hospital, a person called Luciente comes from the year 2137, as Connie claims. At first Connie is afraid of her, as she is mistaken by the assumption that Luciente is a man. Actually she has difficulty in distinguishing Luciente's sex, because Luciente has a stout, well built physical appearance like a man, and she is dressed like a bum but, on the other hand, this person lacks the macho presence of men in Connie's family. This person has an effeminate voice, warm, gentle but calloused hands which reminds her of the hands of peasants working in the fields. Later on, Connie recognizes her breasts and understands that she is a female. Luciente explains the reason behind her telepathic visit and she declares that Connie is a 'catcher,' a 'receptive' a person whose mind and nervous system are open to an unusual extent...' (34). In other words, Luciente recognizes or senses the trouble and agony Connie has experienced. She is a sensitive, fragile, desperate and a lonely woman kept in an asylum. So, Luciente, comes to help Connie, to share her problems and to become a companion for Connie by offering to

take her to Mattapoisett, the future society of Luciente. Through telepathic contact, they manage to go to Mattapoisett.

Like Herland, Mattapoisett has all the characteristics of feminist utopias. It has many common points with Herland. When Connie first arrives in Mattapoisett, she expects to find high technology, big and well designed buildings and skyscrapers but, contrary to her expectations, she encounters a small village where people live close to nature. Luciente informs that they are all peasants and deal with agriculture. This is actually implied by the calloused hands of Luciente and the importance of physical work is stated in this society. Each region is ‘own-fed,’ in other words each region is self sufficient. Their society is not based on materialism. There is no poverty, famine or hunger in this place. Like Herland, people live a communal life. Individual competition or rivalry is eliminated. Everybody works together for the prosperity of their village. As these people cultivate the earth; it is fertile. The abundance of food is apparent in Mattapoisett. Connie is very surprised when she sees that cows, chickens, and goats graze around. Actually, at first, she finds the future society very primitive. The houses are like huts and they are scattered among the trees, shrubbery and gardens. Furthermore, along the paths, there are blooming flowers. Both Marge Piercy’s Mattapoisett and Gilman’s Herland seem to prove the idea that women don’t own cities and the business in it even in their fantasies. Because cities and everything related to them such as industrialization, capitalism, class discrimination, social roles are all man-made. Therefore, Gilman and Piercy present her characters living in nature peacefully and harmoniously without being polluted and corrupted by the arbitrarily designed male systems.

Even though the people in Mattapoissett make some changes in nature by using technology, they are still responsible for and respectful to nature.

Luciente informs us that there are windmills, rain –water holding systems and solar energy used in Mattapoissett. This society is also ecology-minded like the other feminist utopias. People are friendly to nature. Nothing is wasted; they compost everything compostable, and reuse it. Once Luciente expresses her fear and discontent of eating anything in Connie’s society, and she asserts that the food is full of poisonous chemicals, nitrites and hormones. But , in Mattapoissett, everything is natural and therefore people are healthy. Connie recognizes that people either walk or use bicycles, which indicates how these people are sensitive about ecology.

These people have great technology in fact, but it isn’t recognized at first sight. For instance, Luciente carries a kind of wristwatch called ‘ ‘kenner’’, which functions as a computer. It supplies all the information one needs. Moreover, as Luciente informs, they have machines, but they are used to do dirty or difficult jobs which nobody wants to do, such as manufacturing, mining or washing the dishes. They are all mechanically done. Connie gets more and more surprised when she learns the culture of Mattapoissett.

Luciente takes Connie to her house, but Luciente prefers the word ‘ ‘space’ ’ instead of ‘ ‘house.’ ’ In Mattapoissett, everybody has their own space. It means that individual freedom is respected. In traditional patriarchal societies, a ‘ ‘family,’ ’ a ‘ ‘house,’ ’ or ‘ ‘household’ ’ actually imply a man’s possessions as if they were his personal belongings. In the traditional family life, a woman’s place is thought to be at home; her primary job is thought to be a dutiful, submissive wife and to be a loving, caring, nurturing mother. It can be said that the traditional family life imprisons women

at home and makes them dependent, especially economically, on their husbands.

Women are not seen as individuals capable of fulfilling their own potential. So, instead of using the word ‘house,’ people in Mattapoissett use the word ‘space’. Thanks to the deconstruction of language, Piercy eliminates all the implications of a house, and she challenges the traditional family life. As a result, nobody becomes dependent on, or subservient to the other. ‘ ‘ We each have our own space! Only babies share space!... Connie you have a space of your own. How could one live otherwise? How meditate, think, compose songs, sleep, study?’’ ( 64)

At this point, Connie’s restriction in the wards of hospitals and society’s indifference and disrespect to individual freedom is criticized.

In Mattapoissett nobody lives with their family which surprises Connie who doesn’t know anything about the family relations and social values of the future society. In Mattapoissett each child has three mothers who don’t necessarily have to be females. These three people accept voluntarily to be the mothers of a child and cooperate to take the whole responsibility of that child. Unlike Connie’s own time, females don’t have to get pregnant and carry the children. People become mothers regardless of their sex; in other words, both females and males can be mothers. Piercy criticizes the traditional family system once again by creating an androgynous society. Instead of mentioning the biological side of motherhood and biological differences between males and females, she focuses on the function of motherhood and parenting. What’s more, she emphasizes the necessity of including males in child -rearing process.

Being a mother in Mattapoissett is a very important and holy process for both males and females. Through this system, the concept of motherhood and female qualities are exulted. Moreover, the responsibilities of having children and rearing



them are shared by males and females equally. So, this difficult job is not seen as a burden for women any more. On the contrary, being a mother and bringing up children is thought to be the greatest pleasure and joy for everybody. Like the women in Herland, the people of Mattapoisett regard children as the hope for their society.

The people in Mattapoisett actually have a great technology, which is understood better with the ‘ ‘ brooder.’’ The brooder is an artificial, woman’s womb like place where all the embryos are put together, so the babies grow up there. Females don’t get pregnant and give birth to children. The babies of the country are artificially produced via high technology. Some feminist critics like Shulamith Firestone claim that ‘ ‘reproduction and childbearing are the sources of gender oppression’’ (Booker 218). In *Dystopian Literature* Keith Booker also takes attention to this point and says that ‘ ‘ in Mattapoisett reproduction and parenting are entirely decoupled from sex and gender’’ (218).

In the brooder all the genes are mixed regardless of their race and ethnic culture; therefore, the population of Mattapoisett consists of both dark skinned and white people. Through this way, class and race discrimination are completely eliminated. Differences in ethnicity are valued and respected. Every member of the society is loved, cared for and protected like the women in Herland. This society is founded on the basis of equality. For this reason, sex and gender discrimination are unthinkable in Mattapoisett. One of the best examples of proving the equality between males and females is the fact that males can breastfeed, which astonishes Connie:

He had breasts. Not large ones. Small breasts, like a flat chested woman temporarily swollen with milk. Then with his red beard, his face of a sunburnt fortyfive year-old man, stern

visaged, long-nosed, thin lipped, he began to nurse . The baby stopped wailing and began to suck greedily. An expression of serene enjoyment spread over Barbarossa's intellectual, school master's face.' (126)

Connie learns from Luciente that some hormone is given to males to enable them to breastfeed, so, even the physical difference between males and females is abolished.

Through this system, the function of sex relations is also challenged. Having sex is seen as a physical activity just for fun, pleasure or relief; it is seen as the indication of mutual love. It isn't regarded as a way of production any more. Therefore, having sex is not an oppression for women in the future society. Women can experience sexuality freely , as there is no restriction for females, as there is in the patriarchal societies. Having sex is completely separated from the concept of production. In addition to that, women don't have to sell their bodies to earn their living. There is no such thing as prostitution , which saddens Luciente when she learns it in Connie's time:

- I've read of this and seen a drama too about person who sold per body to feed per family ! ... We don't buy or sell anything.

-But people go to bed , I guess? Asks Connie.

-Fasure we couple. Not for money, not for a living. For love, for pleasure, for relief, out of habit, out of curiosity and lust. Like you no? (56)

As it is understood from Luciente's words, even the language of Mattapoisett is altered to erase sex discrimination. The pronouns, possessive adjectives and reflexives

and all the structures indicating one's *sex* are changed. Instead, they prefer using *person, per, or perself* to focus on one's individuality rather than one's sex. Moreover, there are other words to show their affection to each other such as cores, mems, sweetfriends or comrade. These words imply the love and cooperation among people.

We know that language is the most important tool to convey and spread culture. Being aware of its crucial function in a society, Marge Piercy imagines a genderless society even the language of which is completely refined from the gender specific terms. The deconstruction of language is the most important element of this novel. In this way, Piercy awakens her reader to analyze and criticize the society and culture in which they live.

Another aspect Piercy seems to criticize in this feminist utopia is the education system of her own society. Like the other feminist utopias, the people in Mattapoissett see their children as the hope for their future, and therefore, give importance to the education system. The children are supplied with all the necessary materials in their learning process; but unlike the American education system, there is no formal schooling in that society. Children learn through experience, and children are not forced to do things. They have education according to their talents and their capacities: ‘ ‘ Person must not do what person cannot do’ ’ ( 128).

This sentence seems to be their life philosophy in Mattapoissett. Connie visits one of the nurseries in Mattapoissett and sees that children are very happy there. The nursery is airy, and there are little bells and windchimes, which sound relaxing. A person in the nursery sings a lullaby, which is full of repetitive verse and rhymes. This lullaby, full of rhymes, indicates that people design them to make the language learning process easy for children. We are informed by the teacher Magdalena that except in the

nursery, children don't have toys. It is known that toys are important instruments to shape a child's gender identity. Instead, in Mattapoissett ' 'children play farming, cooking, and repairing, fishing, diving and manufacture, plant breeding and baby tending'' ( 129).

As it can be seen, instead of focusing on the sex of children and trying to shape their gender identity, people encourage and improve the children's abilities, tendencies and capacities. In comparison to Connie's time, the children of Mattapoissett are more free.

Once, Connie sees a boy and a girl playing with each other's sexual organs. Connie asks the teacher why they don't stop them, but the teacher explains that they can only learn biology and discover their own bodies by examining each other. Unless they give any harm to each other, teachers don't stop them. According to Magdalena, stopping their playing means stopping their curiosity to learn. Luciente says with a criticism of Connie's society: ' ' We are not mad to control'' (132).

The problems of adolescence also seem to be solved in Mattapoissett. When the children are thought to be mature enough, they go for a journey for three months. During this period, they are not allowed to see their mothers. The adolescent is left alone somewhere without food and the protection of mothers. This person has to learn how to survive. If they finish the process successfully, they become adults. In addition to that, Luciente informs us that, the people in Mattapoissett have the right to change their names. There are no such things as ' 'surnames''. Most of the feminist utopias focus on the problem of naming. In the patriarchal system, everyone has a surname, but things are different for women. Before marriage, a woman has to use her father's surname; after marriage she has to use her husband's surname, or to use both of them.

Nevertheless, the consequence is same. A woman has to have a surname which indicates her dependence on a man. Surnames show a woman's place to which or to whom she belongs. Thus, surnames make women the possessions of men. Marge Piercy also finds an opportunity to criticize this system with her utopia, and expresses her desire for a world where women are no longer considered to be the possessions of men; instead they are regarded and treated as independent individuals.

After Connie has learnt so much about the culture of Mattapoissett, she remembers her own daughter Angelina, taken from her by force and given to a foster family, and then she wishes Angelina to live in Mattapoissett in believing that she would be safer and happier here:

She will be glad and strong, and she will not be afraid.

She will have enough. She will have pride. She will love her own brown skin and be loved for her strength, and her good work. She will walk in strength like a man, never sell her body and she will nurse her babies like a woman and live in love like a garden, like that children's house of many colours. People of the rainbow with its end fixed in earth, I give her to you! ( 133)

When Connie compares her own society with Mattapoissett, she prefers giving her own child to Luciente, because in Mattapoissett there is no crime, violence and disorder. People are not classified according to their sex, ethnicity and economic situation. Especially women don't become the victims of the institutions. Everybody is equally loved, valued and protected; everybody is listened to by the society; nobody is isolated from society and deserted to overcome loneliness.

Madhouses in Mattapoisett are considered to be places where people go when they need retreat and contemplation. Luciente explains that most of the people go to these places whenever they want and becoming mad is nothing to be ashamed of. Thus, these places are not the symbolic representations of limitation and restraint. On the contrary, people heal themselves by getting in touch with the buried self and inner mind. In Mattapoisett, people think that they sometimes may need to collapse, see visions or hear the voices of prophecy, but these are considered to be normal, and therefore, nobody condemns the other when they go to madhouses.

As it can be inferred, Piercy's utopia challenges her own society from many aspects and presents an alternative society. Sheila Delaney comments on Piercy's utopia and says that, ' ' Piercy's new society is surely one of the more attractive and sophisticated in the imaginative literature, a heavy blend of the late 1960s and early 1970s countercultures... decentralized, deurbanized, non-hierarchical and classless, multiracial and multicultural, industrial , agricultural, highly aesthetic, and sexually liberated'' (qtd. Shands 74).

Connie's time travelling through telepathic contact with Luciente is interrupted many times during the narration which shifts constantly. This time, it is learnt that Connie is moved to a mixed male and female ward in another hospital. Connie finds herself again in the cold, gloomy hospital room with the other patients who have to share the same fate with her. Soon she learns that the doctors will use a new kind of treatment, funded by government, to tame those dangerous, violent, ' 'mad'' people. After the beautiful trips to the future society of Luciente, the reader is shocked again with New York's mental hospitals and the brutal, vicious and horrific treatment of the doctors. The patients of the ward are chosen carefully, because each of them are the

outcasts of society. They have neither a family to protect them nor a place to shelter them. Each of them is poor and comes a different ethnic minority group. So, the government supports the idea of using this new experiment on those people. During the treatment, the doctors give drugs called ‘ ‘ thorazine’’ which numbs their brains. For this reason, Connie’s communication with Luciente stops. The doctors begin to operate on the patients and implant electrodes in their brains so that they can control their behaviour through conditioning. In other words, the doctors aim to tame these violent, crazy people in order that they can behave properly in society. Through this method, the government can control the ones who want to provoke the society and rebel against it. Actually, it is very clear that the authorities don’t want people who think differently and put them in asylums claiming that they are mad. With the electrodes, the patients, including Connie, are intended to be made passive objects incapable of thinking and feeling. Before the operations Connie’s fear and her uneasiness is described with these words:

Tomorrow they were going to stick a machine in her brain. She was the experiment. They would rape her body, her brain, her self. After this she she couldn’t trust her own feelings, she wouldn’t be her own. She would be their experimental monster. Their playing, their tool. She didn’t want to pass over to Mattapoissett tonight; she wanted to taste the last dregs of her identity before they took it from her. ( 273)

As it is stated the authorities don’t want her identity; they don’t see the patients as individuals; thus, they prefer passive human beings; in other words passive objects, incapable of thinking and criticizing. As opposed to Mattapoissett, New York and its

institutions are presented as a kind of dystopia. It is described as a nightmarish place with disorder, chaos and violence. Marge Piercy also criticizes the institutions and the authorities which serve the capitalist, patriarchal system in an aggressive tone in her narration. Therefore, this novel is highly reactive, provocative and challenging.

Because of the excessive dosage of the drug, Connie fails to communicate with Luciente and by mistake she travels to a wrong future. In chapter 15, Piercy creates a tableau of terror, a nightmarish world worse than Connie's own time. In this chapter Connie meets a woman called Gildina whose physical appearance altered to emphasize her feminine sexual characteristics. She has big breasts, tiny waist, flat stomach and oversized hips and buttocks. With this description, Gildina is presented as the caricature of femininity. We learn that, Gildina is a sexual contract worker, and functions as a sex object for a man, because, in Gildina's society women have to sign a contract with a man and serve them sexually during the time limited by the contract. It can be inferred that this contract system is the deconstruction of family and human relations. Women are forced to work as prostitutes, and kept at windowless, claustrophobic compartments of high apartment buildings. The outdoors and some pictures of nature are presented on the projector screens. People of this society have no choice to see nature any more. It is clear that they have high technology. The rooms are air-conditioned. All the jobs are done by machines but, nevertheless, their life is more like imprisonment. People of Gildina's society hardly go out for fear of disease and chaos. Food comes from corporate factory farms, and people use many pills such as soothers, sleepers, wakers and passion pills. People of Gildina's time are turned into passive objects. We also learn that the hierarchical system of Connie's society is exaggerated and worsened in Gildina's time. The rich people live in the higher flats of



skyscrapers, but the poor have to live in the lower parts of those buildings. They never have a chance to look up the sky. They are thought to be the walking organ banks of the rich people. Medical technology is used as a tool for oppression in this world. This horrific scenario is actually an exaggerated version of Connie's and other patients' situation in the hospital ward. Gildina says that she works for a man called "Cash." It can easily be inferred from his name that Gildina's world is a worsened form of the patriarchal, capitalist system, which Connie cannot endure any more and disconnects with the communication.

In chapter 15, Marge Piercy presents the reader with a dystopia, where the problems of America are not solved but worsened. According to David Lodge, the writer of *The Art of Fiction*, the purpose of creating a dystopia is 'not to reflect contemporary social reality, but to paint a daunting picture of a possible future' (137).

As David Lodge points out, Marge Piercy shows another alternative society to America, full of oppression, environmental destruction, class difference and sexual exploitation. As Keith Booker also states in her book *Dystopian Literature*, the message is very clear: 'We can continue the way we are going until we reach this dystopian state, or we can change our way and work toward utopia' (217).

Luciente and Gildina function as the two battling parts of Connie's unconscious. Luciente represents a harmonious, peaceful side which Connie longs for; the other represents Connie's desperate and hopeless condition in the hospital ward. Marge Piercy uses language very skillfully to imply this clash with the 'names'.

"Luciente" phonetically reminds the reader of "lucid" which means bright light making everything clear. On the other hand, "Gildina" phonetically can be associated with "gild" which means light with disturbing brightness. Kerstin W. Shands points

out the implications of names in *The Repair of the World*: ‘ ‘ Both Luciente and Gildina have names that associate to light, but with Gildina it is a garish tinsel light. It can also be noted that Luciente is light producing while Gildina is light reflecting’’ (75).

As a consequence, the reader is presented with two clashing worlds. Either to produce light and create a new world with new systems or to reflect light, as Gildina does, and accept the oppressive, patriarchal, capitalist system and wait until we reach such a dystopian world.

Connie’s time travelling is a way of escaping from the oppression. Luciente’s society is a refuge for Connie where she finds warmth, love, friendship and cooperation. After seeing the harmonious system of Mattapoissett and the horrific vision of Gildina’s world, she decides to get away from the limitations of her own society and struggle to have a social system like ‘ ‘ Mattapoissett.’’ She is aware that unless something is done, her own society will be like the dystopian world of Gildina. Luciente’s words give Connie hope and encourage her to fight against the system:

Someday the gross repair will be done. The oceans will be balanced, the rivers flow clean, the wetlands and the forests flourish. There’ll be no more enemies. No THEM and US. We can quarrel joyously with each other about important matters of idea and art. The vestiges of old ways will fade. I can’t know that time- any more than you can ultimately know us. We can only know what we can truly imagine. Finally what we see comes from ourselves (322).

Then Connie declares that she is at war, she decides to fight back against the oppressive system. She takes some poison and kills all the doctors in the hospital.

Some readers may claim that Connie's murderous act proves her insanity; or some of them may argue that her violent murder indicates that she is really mad and therefore she made up stories about Luciente and Gildina, they may not take the novel seriously by saying that she only hallucinated through the novel. Whether these stories about Luciente and Gildina are the result of her hallucinations, whether Connie is mad or sane, these are the realities of life, and Piercy mirrors the society by reflecting all the misdeeds, ills and faults. As a result, Piercy enables the reader to criticize the arbitrary social norms and values. Many of the readers may not find Mattapoisset and Herland as ideal places, but the aim of utopias is not to create perfect places; they are just alternatives where most of the problems are solved. It shouldn't be forgotten that utopias are just better places than the ones in which they are produced.

Besides that, many readers may not like Connie's murderous act as a way of rebellion. They may even find such an ending useless; yet, Connie's murder must be interpreted as a Consciousness-Raising, which is implied by the initials of Connie Ramos. Piercy's talent in writing is apparent once again. In *Repair of the World* Kertsin W. Shands states that ' ' Ramos means a bouquet of flowers in Spanish' ' (78). That's why, it can be said that through this murder, her consciousness begins to flower.

Connie's murderous act may not be seen as a hope; it can also be perceived as self destruction by those readers, because nothing will change in the hospitals with her murder. On the contrary, the authorities will most probably never let Connie go out again, but actually Connie shows a kind of resistance; she proves her agency and, hence this novel doesn't end with the loss of Connie as Maria Lauret explains in *Liberating Literature*: ' ' Any act of resistance in this totalitarian context is better than none, because it establishes Connie's agency, if no one else's. Because of this agency, which

is circumscribed but not incapacitated by circumstance, *Woman on the Edge of Time* doesn't end in defeatism'' ( 166).

## COMMON POINTS IN *HERLAND* AND *WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME*

With the help of this general information about feminist utopias, it is very clear that both Gilman's *Herland* and Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* are prominent examples of feminist utopias written in the 20th century. The first one is chosen for its pioneering and forward-looking exposition of this genre; and the second one is an example of a fully mature tradition of feminist representation. It is known that *Woman on the Edge of Time* was written approximately fifty years later than *Herland*, the inevitable consequences of which are great differences between the two novels, but, nevertheless, there are also many common points on which most feminists have consensus.

First of all, as feminist utopias require, the utopian societies, presented as alternative to patriarchy and capitalism, are based on complete equality. It can be claimed that these utopias are more egalitarian in comparison with the utopias written by men, because these utopias are the voices of outcasts; of the ones who have been abused, exploited and humiliated. Women's place is not at home any more; they are everywhere and they participate fully in society. Not only do these utopias challenge the economic and social system, but also focus on the arbitrary gender roles, which are neglected in most of the utopias by men.

Both in *Mattapoissett* and *Herland*, people prefer communal a life in which every member is loved and protected equally. There is no violence, disorder, crime or chaos in these alternative societies. People live harmoniously and peacefully in their villages. Furthermore, everybody, regardless of one's sex, works in the fields, as these societies

are based on agriculture. At this point, the importance of physical work is emphasized, especially for women, and nobody is excluded from society.

Carol A. Kolmerten points out the importance and function of working in these utopias : ‘ ‘Utopian work in these novels by women means the doing of good for the entire community- a community that values not the making of money, but providing the best goods and services for its people’’ ( 116).

Through this method, nobody is isolated from the society and, thus the members of both Herland and Mattapoissett don't feel alone. Thanks to cooperation and solidarity, the responsibilities are shared. Nobody is seen as superior over another. As a result of this, there is neither exploitation, nor humiliation, nor selfishness in these societies.

Eco-feminism is apparent in both utopias. When Herland and Mattapoissett are described, it is stated that there is no dirt and pollution in streets. The people of Herland and Mattapoissett live close to nature; they cultivate the earth with great care. People are friendly to nature. That's why, fertility and the abundance of food and crops are important characteristics of these societies. In the depiction of Herland and Mattapoissett, it is stated that every place is full of flowers and fruit bearing trees. The houses are scattered among trees and plants, unlike the suffocating cities of America. Through such descriptions, the two feminist authors seem to express their dislike of urban lives and criticize the dirt and pollution brought by industrialization.

Another common point these two novels focus on is ‘ ‘children’’. Children are thought to be the hope of their countries; hence, they are given extra importance both in Herland and Mattapoissett. They are considered and treated as individuals; they are not the possessions of their parents any more. A child is everybody's child. People of

Herland and Mattapoisett are quite aware of the difficulties and responsibilities of rearing a child. Therefore, this process is shared by all members of society. Through cooperation, child-rearing doesn't become a burden for the mother.

The education system of America is also criticized in these novels. It is explained that both in Herland and Mattapoisett there is no formal schooling. This classic system is considered to be highly restrictive. According to feminist utopian authors, schooling limits the creative capacity of children. On the contrary, children learn things by doing and experiencing. Each child is provided with all the necessary materials and the proper environment in their learning process. What's more, well educated teachers guide and help them during this process. Nature is presented as an alternative to schools. For instance, when a child wants to learn something about animals or plants, he or she goes to nature and searches for information with the teachers. Children are classified and educated according to their talents, tendencies and capacities; not to their class, race and gender. It is seen that neither in Herland nor in Mattapoisett do children play with toys that impose gender roles on them. In addition to that, especially in *Herland*, women make up new games each time for the children to improve their intellectual capacity .

'Change' is another motivation of these societies. Nothing is static. For example, in *Herland*, there is no law more than a hundred years old; actually, every twenty years they change their laws. The two authors seem to focus on the uselessness of stability and show the necessity of transformations in societies. Carol Farley Kessler echoes this message in her essay 'Consider Her Ways': 'Change minds to change behaviour'(qtd. Donawerth and Kolmerten ed. 136).

The final, and the most crucial characteristic of these two feminist utopias is the harsh criticism of patriarchal system and oppressive gender roles brought by the system. In every part of the novels, the authors try to eliminate the discrimination between males and females. For instance, in both of the novels, the ‘ ‘clothes’’ of the people are described in detail. In *Herland* women wear tights and long tunics with lots of pockets, which enable them to carry their possessions. They only wear a kind of hat just to protect their faces from sun while working in the fields. None of the women wear accessories. When the male visitors come to Herland, they have to wear the same clothing as the women, which minimizes the physical distinctions between males and females. The clothes of the people in Mattapoissett are similar to those in Herland. Connie tells us that there is an adjustment in the seams of the pants which can be tightened or loosened, strengthened or shortened according to one’s size. People don’t have to change them when they gain or lose weight. As it can be understood, the clothes are designed to be practical; not to show one’s sexuality.

‘ ‘Naming’’ is presented as another way of rejecting male dominance over women in the two novels. In *Herland* women earn their names, which is explained by the example of O-Du-Mera. In Mattapoissett, the names are self chosen and people have right to change their names. In both of the novels, the meaninglessness of surnames is emphasized. In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, while Connie is explaining her name and surnames, the reader is also disturbed and irritated: ‘ ‘Consuelo is my Christian name, my first name. Ramos is my last name. When I was born, I was called Consuelo Camacho. Ramos is the name of my second husband; therefore, I am Consuelo Camacho Ramos.’’ She left out Alvarez, the name of her first husband, Martin, for simplicity’’ (69).



As it can easily be seen, by forcing them to have surnames, women are not seen as individuals. They become possessions of men. Surnames are just tools indicating to whom a woman belongs.

Both in *Herland* and *Mattapoissett* womanhood, domestic life, marriage, sexuality, reproductivity, and child-care are all examined and redefined. The traditional family life is challenged by the androgynous feature of the societies. But as the ways the authors follow in dealing with these issues differ from each other, they will be analyzed in detail in the last part of the thesis.

It can be concluded that both Gilman and Piercy create futuristic societies without social, political and sexual hierarchies, as Vida J. Maraloni points out in her essay, ‘ ‘these women writers brought the genre radicalism, feminism, socialism and heightened social consciousness in hopes of confronting the problematic and disturbing sides of human life’’(4).

Despite the common points the two novels focus on, there is fifty years between them, which entails some differences. Therefore, as the final part of the thesis, I want to mention those differences between the novels and try to explain what changed in that period.

## SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS BETWEEN THE TWO NOVELS

*Herland* was written in 1915, five years before the Nineteenth Amendment. It means that women didn't have even right to vote in that time. However, Gilman had already foreseen that solidarity and cooperation among women would bring success. In 1890 the National American Women Suffrage Association had been founded, and as a consequence of the efforts of those feminist groups and organizations, women managed to gain the right to vote with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. According to the Amendment neither any individual state or the federal government may deny a citizen the right to vote because of that citizen's sex. This period brought the '1st Wave of Feminism.' It was a great event, a great success but, it wasn't a complete achievement. Women were still subordinate to men. The great majority of women were still trapped in their domestic prison; and they were still economically dependent on their husbands. Women had not been considered real human beings in those times. In terms of sexuality, they were just 'walking wombs,' 'empty vessels' to be filled in. They had no right to control their bodies, so they were not autonomous individuals in the eyes of men. Their personalities had been completely denied. They had been doomed to do the tedious, tiresome housework and bring up children, which can be likened to the life of Sisyphus. In those years women had really restricted lives in comparison with the women of today. Gilman wrote her famous utopia in that time and suggested very radical ideas for women many years before the Women's Liberation Movement achieved most of its goals. Therefore, *Herland* is really amazing, fascinating and fantastic.

On the other hand, *Woman on the Edge of Time* was written in 1976, nearly sixty years later than *Herland*. During the fifty years, many things changed in

American society. Most importantly, the Feminist Movement became more powerful in the 1960s. Many more women were working outside their homes than ever, as a result of the First and Second World Wars, which inevitably gave them freedom and economic independence. On the other hand, with the invention of birth control pills, women's sexuality gained a new dimension. Women's sexuality, women's body and motherhood is questioned and redefined. Birth control pills enabled women to experience sexuality more freely and, sexual activity was separated from reproductivity. Sexual pleasure is not something to be enjoyed exclusively by men; it is for women as well, and this philosophy became acceptable in 1960s.

In 1966, a commission of women gathered in a hotel room and formed the National Organization for Women. These women got together and talked about their problems in the male dominant society and discussed how to overcome these problems. Katherine B. Payant explains the goal of this organization: ‘ ‘ Their goal was participation in the mainstream ...in equal partnership with men’’(14).

As Simone De Beauvoir suggests in *Second Sex*, women managed to think in ‘ ‘We's’’; they organized themselves into a unit, and they asserted their ‘ ‘subjectivity.’’

After this organization, another radical and younger feminist group appeared in the New Left Movement, and they introduced radical feminism. Before mentioning the New Left Movement in detail, it is necessary to explain radical feminist ideology as it is reflected in most of the feminist utopias.

They supported the idea that male and female discrimination is the source of the first class system. They believed that male domination later on originated other oppressions such as slavery, colonialism, imperialism. They also regarded capitalism as another kind of oppression and they see capitalism as one of the most important barriers

to end oppression. According to them, unless the system and its values change, society cannot be reformed in a significant way.

Secondly, radical feminists believed that family life, in which children's identities are shaped, must be changed. The process of child-rearing must be shared equally by males and females so that it shouldn't be a burden for women.

What's more, radical feminists emphasized the necessity of liberation from sexual oppression. According to them, women should have the control of their bodies and they must be able to experience sexuality freely.

Finally, radical feminists focused on the 'function of parenting' so that it shouldn't be the only task of women. They asserted that a 'woman' is primarily an individual. They also regarded domestic life and housework as very tedious and restrictive.

As stated before, the 1960s are very important years in American history, because during the decade the New Left Movement, the Black Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movements took place. With those movements people demanded equal rights, equal conditions in every part and institution of America. The New Left is described by Maria Lauret in this way: 'An expanding economy, a generation of post war babyboomers entering higher education, and resurgence of Black Civil Rights activism in the mid-late 1950s fuelled the rise of that amalgam of 1960s social movements which has come to be known as the New Left' (47).

The New Left programme offered participatory democracy as an alternative to the old traditions of 1930s communism. During this period, many organizations such as SDS (Students for a Democratic Society), SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) were founded in association with NAACP (National Association for the

Advancement of Coloured People). All their demands were to live in equal conditions. Therefore, Women's Liberation, which began with the foundation of N.O.W, must be thought of together with the New Left Movement. Women's Liberation is concerned with the means of change and seeks a solution in sisterhood, mutual trust and democracy.

As a consequence, women began to participate more actively in society. Being aware of their potential, they established their agencies. In the end, they recognized the real conditions of their existence and they defied the restrictive and prescriptive male-dominant social norms. Maria Lauret also explains this consciousness of women in her book *Liberating Literature*: ‘ ‘Any notion of political as residing in some form of organized collective action was shifted to collective consciousness, and from there to individual consciousness and action; in changing your gender role, you challenged that of all women’’ (62).

As we have seen, many things happened and such movements affected the whole society on a great scale. It shouldn't be forgotten that each literary work carries the traces of its time and reflects the social, cultural and political values of the society in which it is produced. So both *Herland* and *Woman on the Edge of Time* reflect American society and criticize the misapplications of their times. Both of them may seem to deal with the same problems such as traditional gender roles, subjugation of women, parenting, motherhood, destruction of nature or corruption of society but, nevertheless, the sixty years full of social and political developments inevitably lead to some differences. At least the methods the authors use to deal with the problems differ from each other.

## IN WHAT WAY *WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME* DIFFERS FROM *HERLAND*?

First of all, both *Herland* and *Woman on the Edge of Time* question the traditional family relations in terms of gender roles, motherhood, and sexuality; they deconstruct and then redefine them, but of course in different ways. In *Herland* Gilman creates her female characters as ‘parthenogenetic’. Women in *Herland* get pregnant when they long for a child. Each woman, except for a few ones, is allowed to give birth to only one child. With the parthenogenetic characters, Gilman seems to refute the idea that women are insufficient beings; contrary to this, these women are self-sufficient, and they can even have children by themselves. Moreover, these women consciously get pregnant. A woman can have a child only when she longs for a baby. Therefore, they can control their bodies unlike the traditional women whose bodies are controlled by their husbands in patriarchal societies. Gilman underlines the importance of ‘birth control’ here. Women in *Herland* are aware of that overpopulation is dangerous. In order to be a self-sufficient country, they must control the growth of population. These ideas are very important and radical according to her own time. As we have seen, there isn’t a traditional family life in *Herland*. When a woman gives birth to a child, the baby doesn’t become a possession of the mother. Women rear the children in solidarity, because child-rearing is too important to be left to the hands of a single mother. Even though these women have other professions, they are primarily mothers. Becoming a mother is the supreme task and a great joy in *Herland*. On a biological level, mothers are still ‘females’ in this book. Becoming a mother is considered a feminine quality and the reproductive female body is overemphasized. Moreover, though children are reared through cooperation, it is still a feminine job. Men are completely excluded from this process. Even after the marriage of Celis and Jeff, who becomes the first father of

the parthenogenetic society, the reader cannot learn anything about whether Jeff deals with the baby or not or what kind of responsibility he takes. As a result, becoming a mother is still a ‘feminine’ quality.

Marge Piercy also deconstructs traditional family relations. Like Gilman, she imagines an androgynous society in which gender roles are completely removed. People are just males and females, not women and men any more. But, on the other hand, it is not easy to distinguish one’s sex, because females have, in general, stout bodies like males, and males are capable of breastfeeding. It is not important for the people in Mattapoisett to distinguish one’s sex as people are primarily ‘individuals,’ and ‘humans.’ Contrary to *Herland* in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, the female body is completely freed from reproductive capacity. Women no longer carry the babies in their wombs, and they no longer have to breastfeed. It is very obvious that this feminist utopia echoes Simone De Beauvoir’s philosophy about the reproductive female body. According to her, a body is not a ‘thing,’ it is a ‘situation,’ and it is always in a situation. A body is in relation with the world, so depending on the relations, it gains meaning; therefore, situations can change. Torril Moi interprets Beauvoir’s philosophy with these words: ‘For the logic of her argument is that greater freedom will produce new ways of being a woman, new ways of experiencing of possibilities of a woman’s body, not that women will forever be slaves to the inherently oppressive experience of chilbearing’ (66).

As it can be inferred from these lines, Beauvoir, considers the female reproductive body as inherently oppressive and this philosophy forces us to accept the conclusion that the reproductive body must be denied.

In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, the effects of Simone De Beauvoir's philosophy is apparent. In Mattapoisett, babies are grown out of the female body. All the embryos are put in the 'brooder,' a woman's womb-like place, and they grow there. So the reproductive female body is deconstructed .

Traditional ways of parenting and motherhood are also questioned in this novel. When a baby comes from the brooder, it has three mothers who voluntarily accept the responsibility for that child. They are not necessarily females; males can also be mothers. Here, Piercy focuses on the function of motherhood and parenting; childbearing and childrearing are not feminine jobs any more. Males participate actively in child-rearing process. Males and females accept each other as the two halves of humanity. Nobody is overtly concerned with the other's sex. They see each other only as individuals, as Simone De Beauvoir suggests. As a consequence, reproduction and parenting are completely decoupled from sex and gender.

Another point that the two novels question is sexuality, but here again, the ways the authors deal with the issue are different. In *Herland*, the parthenogenetic births of women may be interpreted as a rejection of male superiority in sexuality, and after the girls marry the male visitors, they reject non-productive sexual relations. They consent to have sex only when it results in reproduction. In other words they equate sexuality with reproduction. Herlanders consider sexuality as a new way, an alternative way to produce children. Sexuality isn't separated from reproductivity and sexual pleasure is not mentioned at all in this book. Frances Bartkowski explains the reason *Feminist Utopias*:

*Herland* is written in between what Linda Gordon has located as two distinct periods of feminism: a mid-nineteenth-



century ‘ ‘sexual ideal which I shall call domesticity,’ and a period surrounding World War First emphasizing ‘ ‘sexual liberation’ and ‘ ‘romanticizing the importance of sexual pleasure.’’ Gilman’s possibilities of representation are caught precisely between these two ideological moments. She has broken with the cult of ‘ ‘woman’s sphere’ but has not come to grips with speaking of sexual pleasure . (30)

On the other hand, in *Woman on the Edge of Time* women’s ‘ ‘sexuality’ is liberated. We know that this book was written in 1976 and at that time, the Women’s Liberation Movement had already affected American society. Birth control pills had already been invented; women had already gained the right of abortion. Therefore, in *Woman on the Edge of Time* women’s sexuality is presented more freely. In Mattapoisett, females can experience sexuality as well as males. Sexual pleasure is regarded as normal both for males and females.

In *Feminist Utopias*, the distinctive characteristic of 1970s feminism, which is also called Second Wave Feminism, is shown as ‘ ‘women’s own sexual pleasure, in relation to the norms of sexual behaviour which are distorted by male supremacy’ (33).

In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Connie’s sexual relations, her joy, and pleasure are described in detail, unlike the characters in *Herland*. Feminist authors seem to talk and write about sexuality more openly in 1970s. They can express their wishes about the liberation of women’s sexuality more freely in their novels. In one of the scenes, Connie has sex with Bee, one of the male characters in Mattapoisett, and her great pleasure is described by the author in this way: ‘ ‘Skin smooth against her tighs as his

head rested there, lips and tongue into there, where only Claud had done that before, so that pleasure came down wet and she melted into him'' (180).

The reader learns from Luciente's words that in Mattapoisett people just 'couple'', they have sex for pleasure, for relief. The word 'coupling' is very significant here, because all the connotations of 'having sex' such as reproduction and marriage are eliminated.

In Mattapoisett, sex is not an oppression for women any more. Moreover, there is no such thing as prostitution in Mattapoisett. It can be concluded that women's sexuality is no more restricted in the feminist utopias of 1970s. Having sex is not something to be ashamed of; it isn't regarded as sin in these novels.

Another point which distinguishes *Woman on the Edge of Time* from *Herland* is the issue of racial and ethnic discrimination. In *Herland*, the reader is not informed about the ethnic origins or race of the Herland women, so the reader assumes that Gilman criticizes the positions of either middle class, or lower class women who have to work to support their families. However, in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, inequalities among different races and different ethnic cultures are also mentioned. Once again, it is proved that the effects of political movements are apparent in the novel. Because the Civil Rights Movement took place in 1960s; with the passage of Civil Rights Act in 1964, all kinds of discrimination based on color, race, national origin and sex was denied. These developments supplied relative freedom, at least by law, for the colored people and also the others who belonged to different ethnic groups; and these developments are also reflected in most of the feminist utopias written in 1970s.

In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, all the citizens in Mattapoisett are equally loved, protected and cared for regardless of their race, sex or ethnic background. People in

Mattapoisett accept and welcome ethnic differences that marginalize Connie Ramos in her own world. The Mattapoisett community respects cultural differences and preserves cultural influences. Therefore, they design a genetic engineering programme to produce more darker- skinned people. They mix the genes via high technology, and put them in the brooder; then the babies are artificially produced. People in Mattapoisett have completely abolished racial discrimination. Their respect for racial and ethnic cultures is presented in this way: ‘ ‘Decisions were made forty years back to breed a high proportion of darker-skinned people and to mix the genes well through the population. At the same time, we decided to hold on to separate cultural identities. But we broke the bond between genes and culture, broke it forever. We want there to be no chance of racism again’’ (96).

Piercy seems to focus on the importance of the ideologies brought by the social movements of the 1960s, and by depicting Connie at the bottom of all the ladders in terms of sex, class and ethnic origins, she criticizes the predicaments of women who come from different ethnic groups in the male dominant white American society.

Besides the social and political developments, the use of high technology appears as another distinctive factor between the two novels. Piercy doesn't deny the usefulness of technology in *Woman on the Edge of Time*. In Mattapoisett technology is put to the uses of life. For instance, the life in Mattapoisett seems to be primitive at first sight, but there are important clues that it isn't so. First of all, in Mattapoisett, people have ‘ ‘kenners’’ which function as computers. They can get every information from this wristwatch-like instrument, which proves the high technology in Mattapoisett. Moreover, as stated before, these people have invented the ‘ ‘brooder’’ in which variety of embryos are put together, and this artificially designed woman's womb-like place

enables the babies grow out of female body. This system is another evidence of the high technology in Mattapoisett. What's more, men are given some hormone so that they can breastfeed, which cannot be done by today's technology. Finally, it is stated that, in Mattapoisett, some of the dirty and difficult works such as mining, manufacturing and washing the dishes are mechanically done. So, it can be inferred that in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, there are some works that nobody wants to do. Contrary to that, in *Herland* every work is valuable. No work is degraded and devaluated. At this point, it can be said that the effects of the great improvements in technology are apparent in *Woman on the Edge of Time*. The use of high technology in the utopian society of Mattapoisett is also the criticism of the technology used in contemporary societies, because the brain control treatment applied to Connie Ramos is very humiliating. This technology turns people's lives to a nightmare; it takes their personalities and turns them into passive objects. For instance, the doctors try a new treatment and make experiments on poor and black people; they implant electrodes in the brains of these people, and in this way, the doctors aim to control them. Connie's feelings before the operation are expressed in this way: ' 'She would be a walking monster with a little computer inside and a year's supply of dope to keep her stupid...She was a spoiled orange rotting green'' (277).

As it can easily be inferred from from these lines, the technology in Connie Ramos' time is dangerous, harmful; it incurably damages people's lives, but the technology in Mattapoisett is used to free and nurture humanity. It is responsible for and respectful to people and nature. As a result, technology plays a crucial role in *Woman on the Edge of Time*. In *Herland* nothing is said about technology. The reader just learns that there are well built roads and well designed forests, but what kind of

technology is used is not mentioned at all. So, together with the social and political developments in the years between the two novels, the improvements in technology are clearly recognized in *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

Finally, the last distinguishing point between the two novels is the narrative style and the techniques. As stated before, *Herland* is a first person narration. The whole story is told from the perspective of a typical patriarch, Vandyck Jennings, the protagonist. In the beginning of the novella, Vandyck informs the reader that this is written from memory. Therefore, the narration is recounted in a pseudo-documentary style; it is an explorer's journal. As the narrator and the protagonist of the story is male, the reader learns everything from a man's perspective; so the reader shares the opinions and ideas of the male narrator, which gives him a kind of power and authority. At the end of the story, this gentleman, full of prejudices against women, completely changes his mind, and appreciate the women's creative capacities in every field. It is very clear that, the narrative quality of this novella lacks some aesthetic merits of fiction. Gilman seems to give priority to the political message. As a result, the narration of *Herland* is pragmatic and didactic.

On the other hand, in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, the story is generally told from the third person's point of view, which gives all the details about the events and characters. Yet, sometimes the information is passed through dialogues. The third person narration enables the reader to learn the mind of an aging, poor Chicana woman, who suffers in the cruel patriarchal capitalist system. In this novel, the protagonist is a woman whose life is exemplary of the ones experiencing the same kinds of oppression. She is left without a job, she hasn't got a husband, her own daughter is taken from her and placed in foster care. With the help of the third person

narration the reader finds the opportunity to understand her life in detail, shares her agonies, and thus sympathizes with her. This narrative style reveals everything related to the protagonist. As a result the novel becomes the story of Connie Ramos. This time, the author gives power and authority to a woman who has been silenced and made invisible. Carol Kessler believes that ‘ ‘it’s focus on a poor Chicana affirms with sympathy the variety of women’s experience, and its radicalism ‘unashamedly’ acknowledges the important social function that fiction *should* have’’ ( qtd. Payant 104).

Piercy uses stream of consciousness and flash back techniques so skillfully that the reader nearly gets into Connie’s mind and learns all the details and fragmentation of her life. It is observed that the narration frequently changes. Once her predicament in the hospital ward is described, then the narration shifts surprisingly and Connie remembers her own childhood, her husbands, her lovers and her school life. Connie’s past, her present life and the future is combined very successfully through flash backs and stream of consciousness technique. The rhythm of the novel moves the reader back and forth. This non-linear structure can be interpreted as a result of the 1960s impulse to deconstruct the received culture.

I want to end this thesis with the words of Steven Lynn, which summarizes best the function and its important place of writing in a society: ‘ ‘ One of the wonderful things about words is that we can use them to try out ideas, to speculate, to put on roles and explore. We construct arguments and conduct analyses not only to persuade others but also to investigate things for ourselves - if we have an open, critical mind, that is’’ ( 180).

In spite of the differences and years between *Herland* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*, both Gilman and Piercy construct arguments enabling the reader to analyze and criticize the society. They awaken the reader to see the arbitrary social norms, oppressive, restrictive gender rules imposed upon women. They urge the reader to take into action to eliminate all kinds of oppression, subordination and humiliation. Through the utopias, they imagine a clean, peaceful, harmonious and genderless societies based on complete equality. They try out ideas and show that there can be other alternatives, to the ones who have open and critical minds!

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## ADDITIONAL WORK CONSULTED

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