

“Subversive Feminist Thrusts”:
Feminist Dystopian Writing and Religious Fundamentalism in
Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Louise Marley’s *The Terrorists of Irustan*,
Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It*, and Sheri S. Tepper’s *Raising the Stones*

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Although science fiction does not normally deal with religion, feminist writers, especially in the utopian/dystopian sub-genre of science fiction, recognized the dangers of fundamentalism and its infusion into American politics in the 1980s and began to address those dangers through genre writing. In this project, I address how feminist authors critique religious fundamentalism, linked to the rise of the Religious Right in the United States, through Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Marley’s *The Terrorists of Irustan*, Piercy’s *He, She and It*, and Tepper’s *Raising the Stones*. These texts interrogate fundamentalist manifestations of Abrahamic religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. They form an arc, beginning with a totalitarian theocratic dystopia with a faint utopian impulse (Atwood), and progressing non-chronologically through a totalitarian theocratic dystopia with active resistance and a stronger utopian impulse (Marley), to ambiguously utopic religious communities surrounded by a dystopian world (Piercy), to a more fully-realized utopic religious community that actively defeats fundamentalist regimes that would destroy it (Tepper).

Using feminist intersectional analysis and Schüssler Fiorenza’s heuristic of kyriarchy, I argue that feminist dystopian writing transgresses not only genre but also the “master narratives”

of Western culture through its examination of and warnings against religious fundamentalism and theocratic governance. I scrutinize why and how a number of feminist science fiction authors engage in this debate, especially in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century feminist dystopian and utopian writing. Feminist science fiction writers interrogate religious fundamentalism to expose its inherent misogyny and oppression, activities that are frequently played out on women's bodies. Furthermore, I argue that feminist utopian and dystopian writing which criticizes fundamentalist manifestations of Abrahamic religions challenges the legitimacy of the underpinnings of Western thought and culture in myriad ways.

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Dedication

for the partner and the offspring

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Introduction

“Religion without humanity is a poor human stuff.”
 – Sojourner Truth (Gilbert and Titus 26)

“For this is what dystopian future fictions recount: what *would have happened* if their empirical and implied readerships had not been moved to prevent it.”
 – Andrew Milner, “Changing the Climate: The Politics of Dystopia” (354)

Science fiction is an ideal vehicle for distributing progressive social theories to a popular audience, distilled through narrative form rather than through highly specialized, academic discourse. However, science fiction, and its related utopian and dystopian sub-genre, has traditionally tended to focus on male-centered quest narratives that may appear to push against the boundaries of social norms—to expand the universe, as it were, of possibility for white, heterosexual, upper-class, able-bodied men—but in reality frequently re-inscribe patriarchal standards for women and subaltern Others. In utopian and dystopian writing, the fascination with science and technology functions as a means for male protagonists to exert power and control over their societies and shape them to fit an androcentric ideal of a fulfilled life, free of work and want. Although some writers transgress the predictable generic outcomes of science fiction, they rarely do so in ways that remove (white, heterosexual, upper-class) men from a position as representative of the universal human being.

Genres of fiction in popular culture, such as science fiction, fantasy, mystery, romance, and other forms produced primarily for popular consumption in mass market formats, generally follow certain formulae: readers come to generic texts with a set of expectations based on the genre in which the book is written and marketed. In science fiction, for example, readers generally expect a text to combine advanced technology with space exploration or colonization

that is clearly set in a future time relative to the reader's own lived reality. However, science fiction texts by non-feminist writers also tend to exhibit some of the characteristics of non-genre literature, normally aimed at a broad audience, such as a focus on a male protagonist, his struggle against society or himself, and his acts of heroism, however ambiguous those might be. Generic formulae influence cultural values and norms by, in some cases, reinforcing traditionally-held social norms and in others, by questioning those values. As John G. Cawelti observes, "Formulas assist in the process of assimilating changes in values to traditional imaginative constructs" (36). Often, writers press against the boundaries set by the formula of a specific genre in the service of changing cultural and social values.

Feminist science fiction writers also use science fiction and its mass popular appeal to distill social and political theory and to comment on social and cultural conditions to a wide audience—with a twist. Generally speaking, science fiction seldom focuses on gender, race or ethnicity, class, sexuality, or other aspects of identity in their novels. Feminist science fiction writers, on the other hand, have taken seriously not only the emergence of the counterculture in the 1960s and the Second Wave of the feminist movement in the 1970s, but also the rise of the Religious Right and the conservative swing of the political pendulum in the United States that resulted in the 1980s backlash against feminist civil rights. The politicization of fundamentalist Christianity in US politics created an environment hostile to the changes in society that Second Wave feminist activism and the Civil Rights Movement had made possible and reflected an on-going obsession with returning the status of women and subaltern Others to 1950s—or earlier—norms. In concert with feminist theorists¹ from the 1980s and into the 1990s who called for examination of multiple sites of identity and the oppression that arises from sexism, racism,

¹ Susan Stanford Friedman catalogues a plethora of feminist critics engaged in, and calling for, intersectional analysis in the 1980s and beyond: Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Jordan, Gayatri Spivak, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, among others (*Mappings* 21, 50, 246 n.12, 246 n.13).

classism, and more, feminist science fiction writers address multiple sites of oppression in their fiction.

Feminist science fiction writers transgress genre through “subversive feminist thrusts” (Michael 167) that query the legitimacy of genre boundaries, gender binaries, and traditional, male-centered “master narratives.” Feminist writing, across many genres, has frequently engaged in challenging the inequalities of readers’ and authors’ cultural and social milieus while also offering ideas for activism and ideals of equality and humanity worth striving toward. Feminist science fiction writers actively rebel against the master narrative formula of science fiction, and literature more generally, by focusing on women’s experiences of the world, while still adopting some of the generic characteristics of science fiction—even these, however, can be and are revised in feminist science fiction texts. Some feminist critics² maintain that feminist writers’ scrutiny of gender pushes at genre boundaries, as well as societal ones, in their texts.

Moreover, some feminist critics³ argue that the utopian and dystopian sub-genre of science fiction blurs generic boundaries by incorporating multiple genres into single texts. For example, feminist utopian and dystopian novels often combine elements from fantasy, slave narrative, detective story, fable, epistolary novel, romance, quest narrative, historical novel, satire, polemic, ecotopia, and more. Instead of the static societies depicted in most non-feminist, male-authored, traditional utopian writing, described by a traveler or newcomer, feminist utopian writing in the twentieth century contrasts utopia with a dystopia that is frequently misogynistic and actively attempting to destroy the utopic community, inside the text. Feminist utopias do not necessarily center on a single protagonist (male or female) and her quest for self-realization or

² See Gubar, Barr, Baruch, and Rohrich.

³ See Baccolini and Donawerth.

knowledge of the utopian society presented. Furthermore, feminist dystopian writing, while nearly always set in the future or the near-future, tends to confront contemporary social and cultural models that subordinate women and subaltern Others to (white, heterosexual, upper-class, able-bodied) men. Because feminist dystopian writing often draws from multiple genres in addition to science fiction, it engages a history of generic and literary narratives that ignore, silence, erase, and oppress women and demands a re-reading of women and their experiences.

While non-feminist science fiction authors may occasionally offer expositions of religion, religiosity, and religious fundamentalism, they do not examine how identity may be affected by and interact with religious practices, doctrine, and discourse, or how religion may subsequently create or reinforce sites of oppression and domination. Many science fiction texts handle religion by omission: they neglect acknowledgement that religion can provide meaning in people's lives and can form a part of individuals' identities. Frequently in science fiction, and its sub-genre of utopian and dystopian writing, if religion is mentioned at all, its treatment is negative and the characters engaged in religious practice seem provincial and naïve—relics of the past—in the futuristic age of technology and space travel. Although religion enters some science fiction texts, writers typically include it to expose religious adherents as ignorant and dogmatic without an accompanying investigation of how religion has the potential to bring meaning into individuals' lives or serve as a social good. Furthermore, science fiction's repudiation of religion as a valid aspect of identity and a relevant social phenomenon seems embedded in the genre's underlying rhetoric of progress. Science fiction bases its premise as a genre on technology, empirical experimentation, and (potentially) provable scientific theories, and thus conventionally assumes that sustaining a belief in God is rather difficult if not impossible. Science fiction's generic fixation on technological progress seems to expose a desire

to unseat an unprovable God and make humanity, specifically men, into gods themselves through their control of (outer) space, (faster-than-light) time, (exploitable) resources, and (alien) Others.

Although science fiction does not normally deal with religion, feminist writers, especially in the utopian/dystopian subset of science fiction, recognized the dangers of fundamentalism and its infusion into American politics and began to address those dangers through genre writing while also transgressing genre conventions. Feminist utopian and dystopian writers that critique fundamentalist religion and its intersection with gender also integrate multiple genre styles into single texts. This hybridity contests the boundaries of generic formulae while simultaneously employing social commentary, interrogating cultural norms, and “represent[ing] resistance to a hegemonic ideology” (Baccolini, “Gender and Genre” 18). Furthermore, through these hybrid forms, late twentieth-century feminist science fiction writers present commentary on organized religion, specifically in its fundamentalist forms, in ways that demonstrate the intersection of various aspects of identity with religious faith. Therefore, the following research questions arise: What happens to genre when feminist dystopian and utopian writing evaluates religious fundamentalism and the intersection of gender and religious aspects of identity? If these assessments also simultaneously transgress genre boundaries, how do these factors trouble the dominance of gendered values that privilege white, heterosexual, upper-class, able-bodied men in science fiction texts? What sort of social commentary do these representations of fundamentalist aspects of Abrahamic religious traditions and their oppression of women and marginalized Others provide? How does adding religion as a theme of social analysis affect genre, specifically the science fiction format, and what potential effects do fundamentalist religious dystopias have on culture?

Feminist science fiction writing, especially in the utopian/dystopian sub-genre, closely follows political trends and circulates alternative view points on politics, culture, and society. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, American feminist utopian writing was buoyed by the political and social gains of the Second Wave of the feminist movement. The resurgence of a period of backlash in the 1980s and the heightening of Cold War militarization wrought changes in the feminist movement and in feminist utopian writing, resulting in a distinctive, and persistent, dystopian turn.⁴ The didactic thrust of feminist authors' narrative messages against fundamentalism problematizes the conservative backlash of the 1980s and intervenes in theoretical (and theological) arguments in the political arena through a popular medium. These writers directly respond to the continued denial of universal human rights to women and subaltern Others. Transgressions of genre abound through the hybridity of these texts and their challenge to traditional master narratives, that is, male-centered narratives that promulgate Western ideology. The female and/or feminist point of view also undermines male-centered norms by using women's voices to defy the assumed universality of human experience. Furthermore, feminist voices demonstrate that utopia is not "the good place," or in any sense ideal, without equality for women and subaltern men. Feminist utopian and dystopian texts demonstrate that utopia is a process, rather than a static state, and that utopian communities must continually strive for improvement.

Feminist utopian and dystopian writing which criticizes religious fundamentalism challenges the legitimacy of the underpinnings of Western thought and culture in ways that political dystopias do not. In the 1970s, primarily using the utopian sub-genre, feminist science fiction authors introduced positive views of goddess- and Earth-mother-centered religions into science fiction texts. In their estimation, in order to overthrow patriarchy permanently, at every

⁴ See Barr, Cranny-Francis, Fitting, and Patai.

level of society, gynocentric religions need to replace paternalistic gods, male leadership and control of the religious sphere, and the masculinized view of women as impure or blameworthy and therefore subordinate to men. Feminist utopian writers, in many respects, reclaim religion from fundamentalist orthodoxy and its resistance to recognizing the full humanity of women through gynocentric religions. Their critique of fundamentalist religious institutions is implicit in their texts, rather than directly narrated, through contrasting contemporary fundamentalism with the peaceful and compassionate goddess-centered religions depicted in utopian writing.

Concurrent with the 1980s backlash against Second Wave Feminism, feminist writing underwent a dystopian turn from the goddess-centered utopian visions of the 1970s to frightening dystopian imaginings that featured the dangers of fundamentalism. In the 1980s and into the 1990s, feminist dystopian writers tend to follow the science fiction rejection of religion as a meaningful aspect of life; however, feminist science fiction does not generally participate in the science fiction trope of elevating women into “gods” with ultimate control over their environments and other sentient beings. Rather, feminist dystopian writers use their appraisals of religious fundamentalism as a way to examine contemporary trends in US culture, particularly the rise of the Religious Right and the conservative backlash against feminist advancements for women. Through the utopian impulse in dystopian texts, feminist voices undermine religious justifications for maintaining the male-dominated systems of power in Western societies. Moreover, they argue that legal changes are not enough to ensure equality since laws can be reversed and liberal progress can be legislated out of existence. Feminist dystopias and utopias that investigate religious fundamentalism seek to expose, and possibly change, the inherent misogyny in Western culture and the unequal structures of power that Western ideology has perpetuated so that a privileged few retain control of the social order.

Exploring the “Gap” in Science Fiction Scholarship

Although most science fiction is secularist and venerates technological advancement over belief in the supernatural or divine, this perspective does not reflect the reality of many people's lives—of which religion is an abiding part. Though primarily concerned with Christianity, Linda Woodhead has pointed out the “lacunae” of scholarship on the intersection of religion and gender in sociological studies despite the large numbers of women who make up the majority of attendees of religious services in the United States (72). Moreover, despite a small number of science fiction anthologies whose themes involve the treatment of religion in science fiction settings,⁵ few feminist and non-feminist critics have explored the interplay of religion and gender in science fiction and/or in the utopian/dystopian sub-genre other than as incidental to a larger analysis of patriarchy. Feminist science fiction writers criticize this religiously-justified oppression of women and the subsequent cultural implications of women's inferiority while simultaneously questioning the validity of science fiction's marginalization of religion and its potential to create meaning in people's lives.

Furthermore, feminist writers reject science fiction's re-inscription of patriarchal gender roles—roles perpetuated throughout mainstream Western philosophy and frequently justified through tenets of fundamentalist religious faiths that resist modern progress. Feminist science fiction writers view religious fundamentalism as inherently misogynist, due to selective literal interpretation of sacred texts, internal Othering, and boundary-policing of women in ways that always subordinates women to men. They also regard fundamentalism as inherently corrupt because of its hypocrisy, based on its tenets, toward women. Although mainstream religious faiths have made progress to varying degrees toward equality, I would argue that religious

⁵ See Mayo Mohs's *Other Worlds, Other Gods; Adventures in Religious Science Fiction* (1971); Jack Dann's *Wandering Stars* (1974) and *More Wandering Stars* (1981); Stephen Hayward and Sarah Lefanu's *God: An Anthology of Fiction* (1992).

fundamentalism and its insistence upon “tradition” are essential to perpetuating the institutions that have arisen in Western thought and culture. My purpose in this project is to fill a portion of the gap in feminist science fiction criticism and lead to an expanded dialogue on the intersection of various aspects of identity and fundamentalist religion in feminist science fiction and its implications for gender, race, sexual orientation, class.

Like feminists in the political arena, many contemporary feminist writers ask whether the inherent patriarchal structures of religion can be reformed, revisioned, or reclaimed to be gender equal or if certain faiths are so enmeshed in patriarchy as to be irredeemable from a feminist standpoint. Feminist utopian writers of the 1970s seem to judge traditional religions of any type as irredeemable. However, feminist dystopian writers since the 1980s may find fundamentalist manifestations of faith irredeemable, but do not unilaterally condemn all religion as such. Despite science fiction’s tendency toward secularism and use of technology to exemplify the human condition, oppression of women and subaltern men by social and political institutions continues to present an ever-growing need for equality across many facets of identity. Although feminist science fiction authors are writing for primarily Western, middle-class audiences in which women have not made the same advancements in eradicating the oppressive elements of religious doctrine, particularly in fundamentalist sects, as they seem to have made in other areas of American society, they address science fiction’s and utopian and dystopian writing’s predilection for leaving out women’s experiences and women’s voices. They do so through examination of the very basis of Western thought and culture and religion’s influence upon it, especially through fundamentalist aberrations of mainstream traditions. Without such consideration, infusing equality in lasting and meaningful ways into our culture may present an insurmountable task.

What interests me are the ways in which feminist science fiction writers deploy accounts of religious fundamentalism in their fictional texts and why this is central to an interrogation of social conditions. I will scrutinize why and how a number of feminist science fiction authors are engaging in this debate, especially in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century feminist dystopian and utopian writing. I focus on texts that engage with the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These faiths have a god-figure in common, share some sacred texts and tenets, and are highly influential in national politics in various parts of the world. Feminist dystopian writing that critiques fundamentalism engages in this assessment more thoroughly and critically than science fiction generally or most feminist science fiction does not evaluate religious fundamentalism more specifically.

Methodological Framework

Taking into account myriad factors of identity and sites of oppression that intersect with religious institutions necessitates the formulation of a coherent analytical system. Female feminist authors write the majority of texts that criticize fundamentalism in dystopian and utopian writing, and are thus writing from positions of gender disadvantage within the political and social system. As such, they are inimitably qualified to challenge the status quo concerning patriarchal and other norms. Patricia Hill Collins's, Donna Haraway's, and Sandra Harding's theories about the situated knowledges of women of color⁶ argue that women who are at the bottom of the system of power because of additional factors like class, age, sexuality, and race, receive the brunt of patriarchal oppression and are uniquely positioned to expose the misogynist underpinnings of Western institutions. All of the imagined societies described in the texts that I intend to utilize exhibit characteristics of *kyriarchy*—the interlocking axes of domination and privilege that determine the nature of relationships and the power differentials that affect them—

⁶ Agathangelou and Ling call the concept of situated knowledges “worlding”; Harding calls it “standpoint theory.”

either in the religion(s) examined and/or the societies in which those religions function that resemble religious and societal norms existing on Earth in the past and in this historical moment. While gender is the main focus of my argument and analysis, an individual's positioning in Western power structures depends on multiple aspects of identity that fluctuate and become more or less important depending on the individual's interactions with others, who are also multiply positioned. Depending upon various factors, gender or other aspects of identity may be more or less important, more or less identifiable in unequal power relationships.

Along with feminist theorists in the academy in the 1980s, feminist theologians in the 1970s and 1980s explored returns to the sacred roots of religious faiths in order to reconcile their religion with gender equality. One such feminist theologian is Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. In the 1990s, after Kimberlé Crenshaw first articulated the term "intersectionality" for feminist analysis in 1989, Schüssler Fiorenza coined the term *kyriarchy* in the course of her biblical studies and feminist re-theorization of Christian theology. Maybe one should say Schüssler Fiorenza "recycled" the term from ancient Greek: *kyrios* means "master" and *archein* means "to rule or dominate." Schüssler Fiorenza argues that while ancient Greek society was democratic in theory, the social structure was actually *kyriarchal* in nature: although each person theoretically had a vote in the conduct of the affairs of the *polis*, the only people who could exercise this privilege were propertied, educated, freeborn, male citizens to whom women, slaves of either gender, non-citizens, and members of the lower socio-economic classes were subordinated (*Jesus* 14). Kyriarchy, as we see it today in contemporary institutions and social structures, is an outgrowth of the slave-master, lord-subordinate relationships in ancient Greek society. Kyriarchy represents a set of power relations which form the underlying structure of democracy as a political system in Western thought and culture.

Dovetailing with the movement among feminist theorists generally toward intersectional analysis of different axes of power and marginalization, Schüssler Fiorenza advocates for use of the term “kyriarchy” because “patriarchy” needs to be redefined as a broader analytic category that captures other nuances of domination and oppression beyond gender. Thus, in *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation*, Schüssler Fiorenza defines kyriarchy succinctly as “a socio-cultural and religious system of domination constituted by intersecting multiplicative structures of oppression” (118). In other words, kyriarchy presents a way of describing the intersecting axes of power structures and subject positions of identity categories (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, religion, nationality, etc.). At any given time, one or more aspects of identity may become privileged, such as one’s experience of race and class through gender or one’s experience of class through age and religion, but these stratifications fluctuate and are not fixed. Schüssler Fiorenza writes that “a critical feminist analytic does not understand kyriarchy as an essentialist a-historical system. Instead, it articulates kyriarchy as a heuristic, . . . [a] concept, or as a diagnostic, analytic instrument that allows us to investigate the multiplicative interdependence of gender, race, and class stratifications as well as their discursive inscriptions and ideological reproductions” (119). In “Filling the Glass: Gender Perspectives on Families,” Myra Marx Ferree argues for a similar concept of power relations in families and other institutions specifically involving gender as a fluid category: “the gender perspective rejects gender as a static norm or ideal (the so-called *gender role*), and instead defines gender as a social relation characterized by power inequalities that hierarchically produce, organize, and evaluate masculinities and femininities through the contested but controlling practices of individuals, organizations, and societies” (424). Serving as

a point of departure for critical inquiry, kyriarchal characteristics are evident in the societies and/or religions of feminist utopian and dystopian novels on multiple levels.

For me, and the purposes of this dissertation, kyriarchy presents a stream-lined means of articulating what bell hooks calls the “interlocking structures of domination” (*Talking Back* 175). The concept of kyriarchy lends itself to intersectional analysis as a vocabulary for scrutinizing the systems and institutions in which we live. For example, Ange-Marie Hancock defines intersectionality as “identif[ying] the hegemonic (ideas, cultures, and ideologies), structural (social institutions), disciplinary (bureaucratic hierarchies and administrative practices), and interpersonal (routinized interactions among individuals) playing fields upon which race, gender, class, and other categories or traditions of difference interact to produce society” (“Multiplication” 74). All of these levels and the relationships between them function to form the kyriarchy that governs social institutions and personal behaviors. Schüssler Fiorenza attributes to kyriarchy the following characteristics: 1) operates as “a complex pyramidal system of domination that works through violence of economic exploitation and lived subordination” that is constantly in flux (*Wisdom Ways* 121); 2) differs in operation in different historic moments and geographic locations (121-22); 3) applies to all structures of social stratification in multiplicative rather than parallel ways (122); 4) depends on having a servant or other subordinated class through specious concepts of “naturalized” status and the circumscription of education, legal rights, etc., as well as the use of violence to maintain subordination (122); 5) and remains “in tension with a democratic ethos and system of equality and freedom” (122). Additionally Schüssler Fiorenza defines *kyriocentrism* as “the cultural-religious-ideological systems and intersecting discourses of race, gender, heterosexuality, class, and ethnicity that produce, legitimate, inculcate, and sustain kyriarchy” (*Wisdom Ways* 211), an argument that

echoes Crenshaw's "intersecting patterns of racism and sexism" ("Mapping the Margins" 1243) as well as other feminist theories of intersectionality. Schüssler Fiorenza draws a parallel between androcentrism and kyriocentrism in that both operate on the following four levels: 1) grammatic-linguistic level: language "places elite men in the center" and marginalizes, silences and renders invisible "wo/men";⁷ 2) symbolic-cultural level: "constructs and naturalizes gender, race, class, and colonial relations as essentialist differences"; 3) ideological-cultural level: normalizes prejudice and bigotry and disguises the socially constructed nature of reality; 4) social-institutional level: "maintains the second-class citizenship of all others" except elite men through social, political, economic, and religious means (*Wisdom Ways* 124). Using the term kyriocentrism in place of androcentrism, like using kyriarchy in place of patriarchy, is a broader means of defining multiple sites of oppression, including gender, but also demonstrates how gender interacts with other marginalizing aspects of identity and power. The characteristics of kyriarchy and kyriocentrism serve as the basis of determining whether an institution is kyriarchal as well as demonstrates the necessity of intersectional analysis of kyriarchal systems based on the pervasive power relationships between different levels of the kyriarchal pyramid.

Feminist intersectional analysis using Schüssler Fiorenza's theoretical framework of kyriarchy and kyriocentrism is especially suitable for analysis of feminist dystopias that focus on religious fundamentalism. A critical assessment of patriarchy and gender alone is not encompassing enough to fully analyze and contextualize feminist dystopian texts' attacks on religious fundamentalism. Although the primary concern of the texts I employ in this project is gender, feminist writers are also cognizant of gender's intersection with other aspects of identity;

⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza uses the construction "wo/men" to mean all women and subaltern men and to show that this category is a social construct; the slash is intended to destabilize and "underscore the difference between wo/men and within individual wo/men," and show that wo/men are not a unified social grouping with the same concerns or subject to the same kinds of kyriocentrism (*Wisdom Ways* 216).

their advocacy for equality is not limited to women but includes all marginalized and subordinated groups and meshes with the moves within feminist theory and criticism, arising out of the 1980s, to address all structures of oppression. The concepts of kyriarchy and kyriocentrism give the literary critic a vocabulary and a theoretical framework that is intersectional; that facilitates discussion of the different axes of power operating in any historical-geographic time-space; that encourages examination of relationships between axes within a kyriarchal system; and that invites comparison between different kyriarchal institutions.

Text Selection and Chapter Outlines

This project will contribute a contextualization of feminist utopian and dystopian writing that addresses and critically assesses religious fundamentalism and how these critiques fit into the utopian and dystopian sub-genre of science fiction. The primary texts I have chosen are a part of or follow from the 1980s dystopian turn in feminist utopian writing; all were published between 1984 and 1999. In order to address the gap in feminist science fiction criticism of the intersection between religion and gender and other aspects of identity, I use texts that interrogate Abrahamic religious traditions and practices in their fundamentalist and most dogmatic forms. Because all three major Abrahamic religious faiths have active and vocal fundamentalist sects that tend to receive the bulk of media attention, these off-shoots have become the representatives, to a degree, of the mainstream branches of the faiths from which they have diverged. Consequently, the more progressive mainstream branches' messages seem lost underneath the cacophony of fundamentalist faiths' extremist rhetoric. Therefore, the texts in this project function as exemplary representations of fundamentalist Islam, Christianity, and Judaism.

With the rise of fundamentalist sects in Abrahamic religions since the late 1970s, I chose the following texts for their enduring relevance in the contemporary political, social, and cultural

climate of the new millennium: Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1984); Louise Marley's *The Terrorists of Irustan* (1999); Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* (1991); and Sheri S. Tepper's *Raising the Stones* (1990). These writers engage fundamentalist Abrahamic faiths across two decades of the dystopian turn and the continued attacks on women's rights and autonomy. Atwood, an atheist writing in the midst of the 1980s backlash, challenges fundamentalist Christianity and the theocratic leanings of the Religious Right that are still operating in American politics nearly three decades later. Marley, a Roman Catholic convert, protests Islamic fundamentalism and presents an implicit comparison of the Religious Right's influence in US politics with Islamist "barbarism" and theocracy that the West is so quick to condemn. Although Marley published her novel in the late 1990s, the intervening decade of the United States' interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan and the frequent demonization of Islam contribute to the text's continuing relevancy. Piercy, a Reconstructionist Jew writing in the early 1990s, engages Orthodox Judaism, and fundamentalism more generally, in her novel, in response to the ongoing rise of the Religious Right, while also arguing for recognition of religion as an aspect of identity with the capacity for positive benefits for the community and the individual. In her early 1990s text, Tepper, an atheist, roundly criticizes various types of fundamentalism, from misogynist cults to faiths steeped in dogmatic religiosity, even as she advocates for religious freedom for religious faiths that realize their utopic rather than their dystopic potential.

Each text makes implicit and explicit arguments against fundamentalism and the inherent subjugation of women and subaltern Others in Western culture. In some sense, all four writers are observing fundamentalist phenomena from the outside, but they all recognize the dangers of what fundamentalist control of the political arena and beyond mean for women and subaltern Others. The dangers that fundamentalism present for women and subaltern men have not

decreased in the interim between the publication of these texts and the current historical moment. Some would argue that, in the United States, we are closer than ever to theocratic rule that would return women to the status of minor children.

In Chapter 1, I first turn to analyzing the rise of the Religious Right and its interactions with feminism, and then investigate the kyriarchal nature of fundamentalist faiths and the traits that various denominations of fundamentalism share. Next, I situate feminist utopian and dystopian writing from the last forty years in order to contextualize the genre within science fiction and its social-political milieu, including how the rise of the Religious Right may have affected this type of writing and outlining feminist objections to fundamentalist Abrahamic faiths. I discuss the genre's feminist appraisals of fundamentalism in Abrahamic religious traditions and how their analyses expose the kyriarchal aspects of fundamentalist faiths through the oppression of women and subaltern men, and the lack of progress toward gender equality. I also examine how gender and religious faith intersect with other identity categories.

The fiction texts I have selected to analyze in the remaining chapters move from totalitarian dystopias to an ambiguous utopia to a more fully realized utopia. In order to create possibilities for improving and changing the dystopic nature of reality, these texts demonstrate various ways to resist kyriarchal institutions and challenge the kyriocentric basis of Western thought and culture. Atwood's depiction of a totalitarian, theocratic state leaves little room for resistance or hope while Marley's portrayal of a similar totalitarian, theocratic state exposes gaps that can be exploited by active resistance. Piercy's representation of the future offers two fledgling utopian communities that are, however, still endangered but possess the potential to flourish. Tepper's religious utopia has the capacity to defend itself against fundamentalist threats

and envisions religion as potentially beneficial for human beings when freed from fundamentalist dogma and resistance to equality.

My non-chronological ordering of these novels in their respective chapters demonstrates a progression from dystopic extremes, with faint utopian impulses, toward alternatives and blueprints, though by no means definitive or coercive, for utopic religious communities that embrace egalitarian concepts and question fundamentalism and religiosity in myriad ways. In this respect, I follow Lyman Tower Sargent's exhortation to "*commit* eutopia," or to continue to work toward utopic ideals (Moylan and Baccolini 230; emphasis in original). Despite the loss of hope within the feminist community and the apparent permanency of the dystopian turn, these authors continue to "*commit* eutopia" as an essential facet of their social commentary.

The arc from dystopia to utopian potential begins in Chapter 2 with Atwood's dystopic *The Handmaid's Tale*, which represents fundamentalist Christianity. This text features a protagonist who is seemingly passive in her resistance and exhibits a faint utopian impulse. *The Handmaid's Tale* offers a critical assessment of a totalitarian regime based on Christian fundamentalism in which women are returned to the status of commodities of elite men and only valued for their reproductive capacities. While many feminist science fiction writers, such as Octavia Butler, Starhawk, and Sheri S. Tepper, have interrogated Christian fundamentalism in the United States in the late twentieth century, *The Handmaid's Tale*, the oldest text in this project, remains one of the richest literary contributions to the dystopian genre and to fictional accounts of religious fundamentalism; it also clearly represents the 1980s' dystopian turn away from the feminist utopian writing of the 1970s. This feminist dystopia identifies the kyriocentrism of religious regimes that do not allow alternative narratives for people's lives and insist on a white, Christian, heteronormative point of view for all, masking violence against

women behind an aura of protecting women from themselves and everyone else. Furthermore, Atwood exposes how technology might be used in the service of oppression rather than as a mechanism of liberatory progress. Atwood's text demonstrates Nira Yuval-Davis's theorizing that links Woman (as symbol) with how ideological apparatuses police and shape women's material realities.⁸ Atwood also exposes the nature of religion when it is superimposed over an existing society and its values and how religion becomes so intertwined in a culture's norms and mores that religion is no longer distinguishable or separable from the original culture.

In Chapter 3, I discuss Louise Marley's *The Terrorists of Irustan* and its representation of fundamentalist Islam as a totalitarian dystopia featuring a protagonist who is more active in her resistance as well as a utopian impulse that is more clearly present in the text than in *The Handmaid's Tale*. This text criticizes religiously fundamentalist societies and cultures which overtly oppress women while also censuring contemporary American society and its lack of gender equality that is less explicit in people's lives. The thrust of the text is the protagonist's recognition of the oppressiveness of her society and its inherent unfairness due to the gendered nature of the theocratic structure, and her resolve to bring about change by embarking on a path of terrorist violence and covert resistance. The text offers a feminist analysis of kyriarchy, primarily the intersection of kyriocentrism and religion and its violent effects on women, particularly wives and mothers, though the text focuses to some extent on other conflicts created by kyriocentrism such as class status, the visibly disabled, sexuality, and the oppression of young men by older men with power. This text offers a range of criticism of religious fundamentalism across multiple axes of kyriarchal oppression which makes it exemplary in its breadth and depth. The novel's Muslim overtones present specific sites for comparison with contemporary US culture as well as offer an exploration of Islamic fundamentalism. Additionally, Marley links

⁸ See also Sered and Narayan.

religious fundamentalism with economic and technological motivations that might otherwise be masked by social and public discourse and furthers Atwood's gestures toward the nature of religion as superimposed over an existing culture and its traditions.

In Chapter 4, I turn to Marge Piercy's *He, She and It* and its engagement with Orthodox Judaism, a novel which introduces dystopic but non-totalitarian religious elements, highlights a protagonist who actively resists kyriarchal oppression, and offers two somewhat ambiguous utopic religious communities. This text presents a future Norika (North America) in which affluent multi-national conglomerates have divided the Earth between them and labor for these conglomerates resembles indentured servitude. The storyline follows Shira as she helps to socialize the cyborg Yod, produced in the Jewish free-town of Tikva, paralleled in the text by Shira's grandmother's retelling of the legend of the golem of Prague who saved the Jewish ghetto from genocide in the late sixteenth century. In many respects, this text is primarily an interrogation of what it means to be human interpellated into implicit commentary on Judaic tradition and Orthodox fundamentalism. However, the question of what makes someone human (and when) is an enduring aspect of Abrahamic religious traditions, and this text's depiction of religious faith in a secular dystopian environment confronts various aspects of religious belief and theology and their relation to or incorporation of ontology. Moreover, the text investigates the linking of technology to oppression of a cyborg and the conglomerates' use of technology to oppress their employees. The text also foregrounds gender as a site of societal contention. *He, She and It* makes an explicit link between economic motivations and the potential for oppression as well as proffers blueprints toward forming religious—yet egalitarian—utopias and a reclamation of Judaism from paternalistic orthodoxy.

In Chapter 5, I conclude with a discussion of Sheri S. Tepper's *Raising the Stones*. Some of the religious faiths Tepper depicts echo the dystopian aspects of the other texts and their resistance to oppression, but this novel expands upon the utopian impulse by presenting a design for an inclusive, utopic religious community. This text evaluates religious fundamentalism while simultaneously critiquing limitations to religious freedom—provided the practice of one religion doesn't demand the annihilation of other faiths. In this novel, a supernatural presence on a colonized farming planet results in the human colonizers founding a new religion—a religion with hardly any religious trappings or demands upon its adherents. Although this new religion is benign, existing faiths with characteristics of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, and/or Orthodox Judaism perceive the new faith as a threat and react violently. One may more accurately categorize this text as a critical utopia, rather than a dystopia, in that the colonized farming planet, though not without its problems, is primarily peaceful and in some ways an idealized community in which to live. The dystopic elements lie in the other religions' attacks on the planet and its inhabitants and in how the religions represented oppress and subordinate women and lower-classes of men. *Raising the Stones* not only depicts a Holy War, it questions whether violence (interpersonal, communal, or ideological) in the name of one's god is ever justified. This text explores identity as linked to religious faith and specifically to kyriocentric anxiety over fatherhood, and it exposes religious justifications for the control of women. Additionally, the text offers a partial blueprint for overcoming religious oppression and forming a (revisioned) religious utopia.

Through genre transgressions and feminist-centered narratives, feminist utopian and dystopian writing critiques fundamentalism with “subversive feminist thrusts” that interrogate the very core beliefs of Western thought and culture. These feminist subversions of Western

ideology make evident the misogyny, homophobia, and class disparities that form the framework of kyriarchal systems of power and embed privilege for an elite few and inequality for Others. Furthermore, feminism is itself an ongoing utopian project and using feminism as a critical lens through which to view literature, particularly utopian and dystopian writing that addresses the intersection of gender and religious fundamentalism, evinces utopia and the utopian impulse as a process of never-ending improvement rather than as an unachievable cultural stasis.

Chapter 1

The Feminist Utopian and Dystopian Genre, the Rise of the Religious Right, and Fundamentalism

“Feminism, today, is the most utopian project around. That is, it demands the most radical and truly revolutionary transformation of society. . . .”

– Daphne Patai, “Beyond Defensiveness” (151)⁹

Feminist science fiction authors who critique fundamentalism participate in a re-imagining of equality cast against the inherent kyriarchal structures and kyriocentrism of religious faiths. While religion has been used in many cultures as a means of reinforcing kyriocentric ideals and social norms, feminist science fiction, especially in utopian and dystopian writing, frequently indicts fundamentalist manifestations of mainstream religions. Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan identify “religion and popular culture in dialogue” (10) as one of the ways in which religion and popular culture relate to each other.¹⁰ I would add that, often, this dialogue takes place, or at least begins, within the pages of feminist dystopian texts. Anne Cranny-Francis asserts that feminists use genre fiction as a means of disseminating ideology because of its popularity and potential for reaching a large audience (9). Therefore, one of the primary ways that popular culture enters into a dialogue with religion about these issues is through science fiction and more specifically through feminist dystopian writing which critiques fundamentalism. Conceivably, feminist dystopian texts that interrogate fundamentalism could generate avenues for resistance to kyriarchal norms in the reader’s reality.

⁹ Daphne Patai has exhibited a curious evolution in her politics. Her work in the 1980s was feminist but turned, in the late 1990s and 2000s, toward an anti-women’s studies stance and then an outright anti-feminist stance, in which she argues that feminism suppresses men. I do find her early work quite useful in discussing feminist utopian and dystopian writing, but acknowledge that Patai herself has retreated from her earlier philosophical posture.

¹⁰ The other ways Forbes and Mahan identify are: “1) religion in popular culture; 2) popular culture in religion; 3) popular culture as religion” (10).

Feminist science fiction authors turned away from writing utopian texts to dystopian texts because the rise of the Religious Right¹¹ threatened to reverse the civil rights gains of women, queer persons, and subaltern Others. The late 1960s and 70s saw a rise in the publication of feminist utopian texts in the science fiction genre of literature¹² during the onset and height of Second Wave feminism, a time of political and ideological upheaval surrounding feminism specifically. Yet in the 1980s, feminist utopian writing decreased and feminist dystopian writing assumed ascendancy of the genre. Frances Bonner attributes the decline in utopian writing to the fact that women science fiction writers began participating in the sci-fi genre and its sub-genres such as space opera in greater numbers than ever before, writing “more or less conventional” texts (104) that one can characterize as “feminised,” or portraying women as having already gained equality, if not carrying an overtly feminist message. However, feminist dystopian writers realized that the social and political conditions of the 1980s were no longer conducive to furthering women’s equality and began writing texts that warned against the gradual erosion of women’s rights in US society. The prevalence of feminist dystopian texts from the 1980s and well into the first decade of the new millennium shows no indication of lessening. As such, the following questions arise: How has feminist writing, especially in the utopian and dystopian genre, responded to social conditions and most recently to the rise of the Religious Right and the threat of fundamentalist theocratic governance? How do feminist science fiction writers engage

¹¹ I prefer the term “Religious Right” because it applies generally to conservative and/or orthodox Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sects. The Religious Right in the United States is predominantly made up of Protestant Christians and some authors use the term “Christian Right” instead.

¹² Cranny-Francis argues that this trend is not exclusive to the science fiction genre but crosses into other genres like fantasy, romance and mystery as well: “Feminist writers are now performing a complex aesthetic/ideological manoeuvre; utilizing their relegation as inferior or mass culture producers in order to show the legitimating processes in operation; using generic forms in order to show the ideological processes (of patriarchy) in (textual) operation. They are working with literary forms that have always been women’s special providence—from economic necessity and through masculinist characterization (the two not unrelated, of course)—and their contemporary manipulation of these forms is enlightened by the practical advances of the Women’s Movement since the 1960s and its accompanying theoretical development” (6).

with fundamentalist threats to women's autonomy? What does feminist science fiction expose about fundamentalism and its maintenance of a kyriarchal power structure in defiance of the utopian tenets, such as equality, compassion, and aid to the impoverished, of their own doctrine?

The majority of science fiction texts, including utopian and dystopian writing, treat religion in a similar manner: science and technology, not to mention space travel and colonization, have led to an apparent abandonment—if not downright refutation—of religion and its impact on people's lives and identities in the texts themselves.¹³ When religion is treated, even peripherally, in science fiction, such as in David Weber's *Honor Harrington* series or Lois McMaster Bujold's *Miles VorKosigan* series,¹⁴ it is most often a quaint tradition that members of a society adhere to without much critical thought or is employed by the author as a cult run amok that threatens the established order of the protagonist's society and culture. In an essay titled "Religious Imagination and Imagined Religion," Adam J. Frisch and Joseph Martos contend that science fiction authors primarily examine or include religion in their texts when they intend to satirize religion and religious or ritual behaviors: "what [science fiction authors] are usually doing is condemning religiosity, that is, the external and shallow trappings of organized religion. The basis for their negative evaluation of religiosity is their sometimes unconsciously positive estimation of religion, at least of religion's traditional concern for the fundamental nature of things, the ultimate meaning of existence, and the ethically good life" (25). One example of this condemnation of religiosity by a male author is John Scalzi's *The God Engines* (2009), which

¹³ In "Amazing Stories: How Science Fiction Sacralizes the Secular," Peter Pels argues that science fiction has "reinvented 'religion' to fit the secular experiences of modern people" (214) through ritualizing and fetishizing aspects of technology and technological advancement as sources of wonder.

¹⁴ I categorize both of these series as space opera. The *Honor Harrington* series (1993-2012, various titles) by David Weber is pseudo-feminist: the main character is a woman and equality has apparently been achieved in her society, yet Weber often falls back on traditional gender roles in his treatment of women apart from the protagonist. Based on personal experience as a military servicemember, Weber's depiction of women's experiences of the military ring hollow. The *Miles VorKosigan* saga (1986-2012, various titles) by Lois McMaster Bujold is feminist in its philosophy but does not necessarily focus on gender issues.

obliquely critiques a religious tradition that enslaves the Other. Yet the “positive estimation” of religion only appears as a ghost in these (male-authored) texts and is very rarely examined explicitly.¹⁵ Conversely, Robert Reilly argues in *The Transcendent Adventure* that the main reason science fiction deals with religious themes is “the author’s personal search for some sort of absolute truth or transcendent reality. Such a search is best exemplified in the work of three authors, Philip K. Dick, Philip José Farmer, and Frank Herbert. Each of these three men has written a series of works that may be regarded as the outward manifestation of an inward search” (5).¹⁶ However, Farmer’s *The Unreasoning Mask* (1981) includes diverse religion references, yet fails to interrogate religious faith beyond formulating the existence of God.¹⁷

I would argue that feminist science fiction writers are very conscious of and conspicuous in their estimations of religion, specifically in its fundamentalist forms. They seem to lack the elements of an “inward search” that Reilly finds in male authors. Although I agree that many feminist science fiction writers condemn “religiosity,” they do so for much more complex reasons than Reilly and others seem to uncover. The “negative evaluation of religiosity” for feminist writers probes more deeply into criticizing the underlying systems of oppression and not only the “external and shallow trappings” of fundamentalist faiths.

Feminist dystopian texts warn over and over again that the goal of fundamentalism is male control of women’s fertility and, by extension, total control of women. The anti-feminist

¹⁵ Two exceptions are James Blish’s *A Case of Conscience* (1958) and Carl Sagan’s *Contact* (1985), both of which present a “positive estimation” of Christianity. Jack Dann’s anthologies of short stories by Jewish authors, *Wandering Stars* (1974) and *More Wandering Stars* (1981) contain narratives that range from positive estimations of Judaism to satirizing of religiosity. Phyllis Gottleib’s short story “Tauf Alef” (1981) combines both. Donald Moffitt’s *Crescent in the Sky* (1989) and *A Gathering of Stars* (1990) revert to a negative estimation of religion without a substantial interrogation of the depicted religion (Islam).

¹⁶ Reilly’s book and its included essays analyze only male authors of science fiction. Reilly includes analysis of one female author, Doris Lessing, in the essays on fantasy authors.

¹⁷ Ian Watson’s *God’s World* (1979) is similar in this respect.

rhetoric of the Religious Right and fundamentalist faiths in the United States has popular appeal among those most threatened by changes to their society's kyriarchal system of power.

Fundamentalism is less an aberration than an expression of structural inequalities present in Western society and an integral part of our institutions and the values these institutions propagate. Feminist science fiction writers engage fundamentalism, and the political movement it is allied to in US politics, and warn against fundamentalism's misogyny and reproduction of kyriarchal structures that oppress the non-male, non-heterosexual, non-white, non-elite Other.

The Utopian and Dystopian Genre – An Overview

At a Sawyer Seminar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the spring of 2012, V. Spike Peterson harked back to the hopefulness of the 1970s Second Wave and the plethora of utopian writing produced during such a period of hope and change. When she asked me if feminists were writing utopias, my unsatisfactory answer was “not since *Ammonite*,” published nearly twenty years prior. Peterson lamented that feminists still needed the hope that utopian writing provides. Moreover, Tom Moylan reiterates the linking of utopian and dystopian writing with contemporaneous political and social postures and attitudes, and predictably, a loss of hope: “the twentieth-century experience suggests that dystopias are produced at times of political oppression and (consequent) apathy, arising from the despair of the oppressed about the possibility of intervention in a powerful, authoritarian state” (*Demand the Impossible* 142). The threat of a Christian theocracy in the United States and the not-fully-realized promise of the legal gains of Second Wave feminist activism seem to have made this loss of hope manifest among feminist writers.

However, while feminist science fiction authors may not be writing utopias, their dystopian texts do not descend into utter despair. Rather, Raffaella Baccolini and Moylan argue

that the utopian impulse within feminist dystopic texts sets them apart from the more traditional non-feminist dystopias like Yevgeny Zamiatin's *We* (1923) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) (*Dark Horizons* 7).¹⁸ While I would counter that some of the more recent non-feminist dystopias¹⁹ also retain a utopian impulse, Baccolini and Moylan's emphasis on feminist dystopias' resistance to closure is important to the analysis of these types of texts. They posit that "by rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel, the critical dystopia opens a space of contestation and opposition for those collective 'ex-centric' subjects whose class, gender, race, sexuality, and other positions are not empowered by hegemonic rule" (7). Many texts contain a utopian impulse, even those outside of the utopian and dystopian genre; however, the feminist dystopias' hope for change in the future, if not within the text itself, resists the dystopian nature of the reader's reality and promulgates the potential for challenging the status quo of oppressive institutions. In "Future/Present: The End of Science Fiction," Veronica Hollinger calls this "a *present-tense*" quality in literature and argues that "as millennial thinking catches up with science fiction, the future becomes nothing more than a kind of displaced version of the present" (218) that supplants eschatological theories. One hopes, then, that feminist dystopian texts not only act as a means of interrogating oppressive conditions, but also serve as catalysts for active resistance to hegemonic, kyriocentric norms and narratives while disputing predictions of humanity's doom.

¹⁸ Ignatius Donnelly's *Cæsar's Column* (1890) and Karin Boye's *Kallocajn* (1940) are other examples of traditional, non-feminist dystopias that foreclose a utopian impulse. Additionally, the majority of the short stories in Isaac Asimov's anthology *The Last Man on Earth* (1985) resist a utopian impulse. One exception to Baccolini and Moylan's premise regarding the lack of a utopian impulse in a "classic" non-feminist dystopia is Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) which contains a robust utopian impulse within the text.

¹⁹ Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006); Dan Simmons' *Hyperion* series: *Hyperion* (1989), *The Fall of Hyperion* (1991), *Endymion* (1996), and *The Rise of Endymion* (1998); Misha's *Red Spider White Web* (1990); and Tatyana Tolstaya's *The Slynx* (2003), to name a few examples.

The ideal societies of utopian writing may seem to occupy one end of the spectrum while the beleaguered and chaotic societies of dystopian writing populate the other end; yet both are implicated in each other. Cranny-Francis argues that “[t]he essential difference between the utopian and dystopian figure is that the former discursively indicates the real, the latter signifies the real” (125). In other words, a utopian work demonstrates to the reader how contemporary society falls short of a desired ideal and “functions as an apology for existing conditions” (Burwell 41). A utopia will not seem ideal unless compared to the reader’s contemporary society and culture in which the dystopian elements may be thrown into sharp relief. A dystopian work, on the other hand, demonstrates to the reader how a fictional reality exemplifies and critiques contemporary society by taking the contradictions and conditions within a specific text to their extended and necessarily abhorrent limits. By comparison, the reader’s contemporary society may seem to incorporate utopian elements that are absent in a dystopian culture.

Feminist dystopian writing first and foremost challenges kyriarchal norms but also has other distinct characteristics. Dystopian texts tend to transgress genre boundaries through hybridized texts that challenge traditional Western narratives centered around men. No matter how bleak the dystopian conditions, nearly all feminist dystopian texts have a utopian impulse that either describes or gestures toward ways to resist kyriarchal oppression and/or projects a vision of equality. Dystopian texts refuse biological essentialism and argue that men and women must learn to live together on equal terms. Typically through estrangement, dystopias propose changes to the kyriarchal structures of society and specifically dissect the social constructedness of gender and gender binaries. Because dystopian writing tends to parallel and respond to trends in political and social conditions, dystopian texts often serve as warnings of what society may become if kyriarchal systems are fully realized.

The extrapolation²⁰ of science fiction texts into another time and/or place creates a condition called “estrangement” or “defamiliarization”²¹ in which readers can step outside their own cultural milieus in order to more objectively analyze differences—positive or negative—from the civilization in the text. In *The Dystopian Impulse in Modern Literature*, M. Keith Booker describes this effect as applied specifically to the dystopian sub-genre:

The principal technique of dystopian fiction is defamiliarization: by focusing their critiques of society on spatially or temporally distant settings, dystopian fictions provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural and inevitable. [Dystopia] links the emergence of new perspectives on literary themes to specific social and political issues in the real world. (19)

Estrangement comprises the technique employed in science fiction and in dystopian writing to generate social critique and impart a philosophical vision to a mass, popular audience.

The technique of estrangement functions in feminist science fiction texts, including the dystopian and utopian subset of the genre, by focusing on gender and additional types of Othering that the reader may view as normalized facets of modern life. Cranny-Francis argues that although the technology and cultural customs of the fictional world may be strange and different, these traits are “intelligible to the reader” and possess “the ability to make the everyday

²⁰ Extrapolation is a technique used broadly in science fiction genre writing that utilizes a future setting or some other means of time displacement, while projecting how elements of contemporary civilization, such as pollution or political policies, will play out in the future (Cranny-Francis 67). For example, many of the feminist utopias from the 1970s take place in post-nuclear-holocaust realities. The authors have extrapolated future scenarios from the arms race during the Cold War that the world would be forever changed by both sides obliterating each other and nearly everything else on earth along with them.

²¹ I prefer the term “estrangement” to “defamiliarization” and will use it exclusively, though I find Booker’s definition of “defamiliarization” more succinct than Darko Suvin’s definition of “estrangement.” “Estrangement,” from my surveys of science fiction and dystopian theory and criticism, is the more widely used term although both “estrangement” and “defamiliarization” seem to be used interchangeably in discussions of feminist science fiction and utopian/dystopian writing.

world look strange or new” (60), thus opening up gaps in the social construction of reality to examination. Furthermore, Dunja M. Mohr argues in *Worlds Apart: Dualism and Transgression in Contemporary Female Dystopias* that “[w]omen writers do use the stock conventions of dystopia, but—carrying patriarchy, technological advances, and the oppression of women to a logical extreme—they refocus these to expose their interrelation with questions of gender hierarchy, biological reproduction, and women's rights; in short, with sexual politics” (36). In other words, the societies depicted in feminist dystopias illuminate the absurdities and contradictions of contemporary society and culture, especially alleged biological, physiological, emotional, and mental differences between women and men, and create a space for identifying and re-evaluating social constructions of gender in our own society and elsewhere in the world.

Also functioning as sites of contestation within feminist dystopic texts are the employment of multiple genres and “blurring of different genre conventions” (Baccolini “Finding Utopia in Dystopia” 166) within individual novels. This hybridity pushes the boundaries of generic formulae while simultaneously employing social commentary, interrogating cultural norms, and critiquing the intersection of gender and other aspects of identity which trouble the dominance of gendered values that privilege white, heterosexual, upper-class, able-bodied men in science fiction texts. Furthermore, Baccolini claims that feminist dystopias compose an “*impure* genre, with permeable borders which allow contamination with other genres, that represents resistance to a hegemonic ideology and renovates the resisting nature of sf” (“Gender and Genre” 18). The transgressive postures of feminist dystopian texts subvert and redefine genre in conjunction with challenging kyriocentric attitudes in the reader’s reality.

Furthermore, in dystopian writing, the protagonist, resulting from her dissatisfaction with the conditions of her social position, becomes the agent for resistance and change while simultaneously producing space for examination of the reader's social position and the institutions that coercively enforce privilege or lack thereof in the reader's reality. As Maria Varsam argues, the reader experiences the dystopian conditions of the depicted society through the text's positioning of the protagonist (205) which can create space for evaluation. What sets feminist dystopian writing apart, then, is the inside/outside function of the text and the reader's reactions that can serve as a means of assessing society and catalyzing change.

For more than a century, the utopian genre has functioned as means for women to imagine futures in which they are treated as the equals of men and are recognized as fully human. Unlike the majority of male-authored utopian visions, feminist utopias have offered ideal societies where gender roles are not merely or coercively reproduced. In *The Politics of Utopia*, Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor posit that "utopias enrich our understanding of the world by offering a global, or total, view of ideal social organization and operation, by contrast with the more partial, schematic views proffered by political theory. . . . [U]topianism takes an integrative rather than a partial view and attempts to make explicit the interconnections of the various elements of the ideal society" (210). Feminist utopian writing exploits these interconnections. Moreover, the trends in feminist utopian and dystopian writing have closely matched the political climate of American society, including periods of feminist activism and the subsequent resistance to the perception of advancements toward women's equality, or "backlashes." During the 1970s, at the height of the Second Wave of the women's movement, feminist utopian writing proliferated as well, and feminist authors interrogated ideas of worlds with equality. In some cases, feminist writers imagined worlds without men, a fiction that

endorsed a theory that women could only gain true freedom and complete realization as human beings in men's absence. The resurgence of a period of backlash in the 1980s concurrent with the rise of the Religious Right, however, produced changes in the feminist movement and in feminist utopian writing. Because the utopian sub-genre of science fiction was "ideally suited for exploring the potential of women's changing roles" (Barr, *Alien to Femininity* xi), many of the 1970s feminist utopias share similar traits in their representations of ideal societies. They appropriate, as well as subvert, the literary conventions frequently employed in the genre of science fiction, conventions such as: science and/or technology and the knowledge of it; the alien viewpoint; extrapolation; the quest narrative; and estrangement (Cranny-Francis 45, 63, 67, 69, 60). Not all feminist utopian and dystopian texts make use of every science fiction convention, and their authors pursue these conventions in different ways. As women became aware of the dismissive and discriminatory treatment to which a kyriarchal society subjected them during the Second Wave, feminist writers created a needed space for women's discourse to help women envision an egalitarian society in which they were treated with respect and human dignity.

Traditionally, utopias written by men, up to and including the twentieth century, tend to reproduce accepted and naturalized gender roles with the possible improvement of freeing women, as wives and mothers, from household drudgery, but rarely do male-authored utopias change the structure of the nuclear family, nor do they overtly interrogate class distinctions or gender constructions. While male-authored utopias range from the pastoral, such as William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), Austin Tappan Wright's *Islandia* (1942), or B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two* (1976), to the more technologically advanced, such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1887), they invariably focus on and privilege male control of social institutions, which is merely another reproduction of reality. Rather than an ideal community that is utopian

for all of its inhabitants, not only the ones already privileged by kyriarchy, men's utopian writing is usually only utopian for (white, heterosexual) men. In *Women in Search of Utopia*, Elaine Hoffman Baruch and Ruby Rohrlich assert that men's utopian writing differs from women's, or more specifically, from feminist utopian writing:

Not freedom, but escape from freedom seems to be the message of many male utopias. For men, utopia has often involved imposing control over the individual who is seen as a threat to the group. For women, on the contrary, utopia is a way of arriving at freedom. Perhaps because they have been allowed so little individuation, women do not see the individual as a threat to society. Men seem to want to recover an imaginary perfection through rules and restrictions. Women want to eliminate those restrictions, having been in the prison of gender for so long. (xii)

Baruch and Rohrlich's hypothesis may be particularly applicable to utopian writing: women would like the same freedoms that certain privileged men seem willing to easily give up in return for their ideal of what society should be. Dystopia, on the other hand, seems to entail severe restrictions of women's and men's freedoms.

More importantly, feminist dystopian and utopian writing bends, blends, and breaks genre boundaries in myriad ways and questions the supremacy of kyriarchal paradigms in Western thought and culture. Unlike the closed and static nature of men's utopian writing, feminist utopias are utopias-in-process that may have reached an idyllic state but still face additional internal and external struggles and have avenues in their communities through which to address these struggles. In this sense, as Lucy Sargisson observes, utopias by feminist writers are unlike utopias by non-feminists²² that seem to strive for perfection and arrive at stasis (20).

²² Non-feminist writers tend to be male. One exception is Thea Plym Alexander. Her novel, *2150 A.D.* (1976), is a pseudo-feminist utopia based on the 1970s "free love" movement, which seems to benefit the male protagonist and

Additionally, Tom Moylan underscores the flexibility and process-oriented nature of feminist utopias by observing that “feminist perception or understanding constitutes a continual intervention in the dominant patriarchal ideology and its practice; that a feminist consciousness is necessarily activist” (*Demand the Impossible* 140-41). Feminist utopian writing holds out the possibility of change in social gender norms as a continual evolution. Unlike men’s utopias, feminist utopian writing also transgresses established societal and cultural norms which, as Moylan notes, “are revealed as ideological constructs” (141), in order to critique social constructions of gender. Feminist utopian writing acts as catalyst for potential changes to kyriarchal institutions and kyriocentric attitudes.

In addition to utilizing the conventions of science fiction, feminist utopias, as a sub-genre, contribute their own conventions that are usually absent in non-feminist utopian writing. Joanna Russ outlines some of these traits in her landmark essay “Recent Feminist Utopias”: communal living or focus on family units as the base of society; concern with ecology; lack of class distinctions; simple assumptions that gender stereotypes do not apply; absence of physical war in lieu of ideological warfare; sexual permissiveness; physical freedom to live and travel safely; freedom to pursue any kind of job regardless of gender; and female bonding and friendship (*To Write Like a Woman* 136-39). Feminist utopian writing also presents solutions for universalized parenthood and a more equal distribution of power, or in some cases, a distribution beneficial to women by removing men from the equation. Feminist utopias also use technology and technological progress to replace the kinds of services men reap from the “patriarchal

does not explore women’s feelings and experiences, sexual or otherwise. The one female character of significance in the text is in need of rescue by the male protagonist and his sidekick and displays no agency of her own. I consider *2150 A.D.* a propaganda piece for the cult Alexander founded, and her son perpetuates, rather than a work of utopian literature.

dividend,”²³ making that dividend available to everyone and releasing women from positions of servitude that inordinately benefit men and subjugate women. Jenny Wolmark ascribes the additional convention of cataclysmic disaster to the science fiction genre as a whole (81), but I include it with feminist utopian themes because a great many feminist authors of utopias set their novels in post-nuclear-holocaust realities in which the futuristic societies justify their equality and/or separatism by attributing the holocaust to the inherent corruptions of kyriarchal structures and the need for a new paradigm of equalized power-sharing.

Utopian and dystopian literature as a genre corresponds to trends in feminist activism and reacts to concurrent social, political, and cultural conditions. Although the genre of utopian writing has a long history in Western philosophy, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed an increase in the publication of utopian literature in general (Cranny-Francis, 112). The First Wave of the feminist movement in the United States paralleled the publication of feminist utopias²⁴ as women agitated for suffrage for the half of the adult population of the US denied the right to vote. During that time, utopias comprised their own literary genre and had not moved entirely under the auspices of science fiction or “speculative fiction.”²⁵ In the 1930s and 1940s, the swing toward dystopias in literature firmly rooted the utopian genre within science fiction in that dystopias, and subsequent utopias, imagined futuristic societies and

²³ Raewyn Connell uses the term “patriarchal dividend” to indicate “the advantage to men as a group from maintaining an unequal gender order. Money income is not the only kind of benefit. Others are authority, respect, service, safety, housing, access to institutional power, emotional support, and control over one’s own life. The patriarchal dividend, of course, is reduced as overall gender equality grows. It is important to note that the patriarchal dividend is the benefit to men *as a group*. Some men get more of it than others, other men get less, or none, depending on their locations in the social order. . . . The patriarchal dividend is the main stakes in contemporary gender politics. Its scale makes patriarchy worth defending” (142, emphasis in original).

²⁴ Some examples are: Anne Denton Cridge’s *Man’s Rights, or How Would You Like It?* (1870); Mary E. Bradley Lane’s *Mizora* (1881); Rokeya Sakhawat Hossein’s *Sultana’s Dream* (1905); and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland* (1915).

²⁵ “Speculative fiction” is the blanket term used by Marleen Barr to describe science fiction, fantasy, and utopian genre literature (*Alien to Femininity* xxi, n. 1).

technological advances rather than ideal societies contemporary with their era of publication. Feminist activism decreased in general after women obtained the right to vote, and the publication of feminist utopias diminished. The imagining of ideal societies gave way to dystopian visions which featured a “society apparently worse than the writer’s/reader’s own” (Cranny-Francis 125). Cranny-Francis attributes this change in literature, from the ideal to the nightmare state, to the political events of the first half of the twentieth century. She speculates that “the instability in Western society during this period—which included two world wars and a major depression—may account at least in part for the paucity of utopias” (125). The rise of Communism in Asia and Eastern Europe also threatened Western ideology. The potentially corrupting practices of capitalism may have contributed to the movement from utopia to dystopia in literature, as seen in George Orwell’s *1984* (1949). With the rise of dystopian literature, however, feminist writers, for the most part, did not participate in this trend.²⁶

Although British and American feminist utopian discourses had developed their own patterns,²⁷ they diverged significantly during the post-First Wave backlash in that American feminists were, as Nan Bowman Albinski writes, “silent” (111). Albinski notes that American feminist writers did not seem to have “the fears of British women writers that women might be a particularly oppressed class in a totalitarian state” (111), as evinced by the lack of dystopian texts by American feminists during the interwar period.²⁸

²⁶ A notable exception is Katharine Burdekin, an Englishwoman writing as Murray Constantine, and her novel *Swastika Night* (1937), set in a Nazi-controlled Europe in the twenty-sixth century in which the sexes are segregated. Burdekin also wrote *The End of This Day’s Business* (1989) which depicts a matriarchal dystopian society. This text is frequently miscategorized as a utopia because women are in power; the text does have a strong utopian impulse.

²⁷ For further analysis of the differing trends in American and British feminist utopian discourse through 1987, see Albinski’s *Women’s Utopias in British and American Fiction*.

²⁸ American dystopian writing by women in the 1950s tended to focus on post-nuclear-holocaust narratives. Judith Merrill’s *Shadow on the Hearth* (1950), Leigh Brackett’s *The Long Tomorrow* (1955) and C.L. Moore’s *Doomsday Morning* (1957) explored the very real anxieties surrounding a nuclear attack through women’s experiences.

The next trend in feminist utopian and dystopian writing was a return to the utopian project of equality. The gains of minorities in civil rights, the rise of the counterculture, economic changes brought about by more women in the workplace, and demands for equitable pay for women's contributions to the production process added to the cultural and social turmoil. Utopian texts provided a space for feminists to envision the possibility of better societies, ones that treated women as human beings rather than as chattel or commodities. Novels like Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) depict futuristic societies in which women and men are treated equally, while Suzy McKee Charnas's *Motherlines* (1978) and Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979) imagine futuristic societies in which women live, often communally, without men.²⁹ The 1970s feminist texts offer, on one level, metaphorical blueprints for equality and its potential in Western culture in the context of the social constructedness of gender, and, on other levels, expose and critique the ubiquitous and insidious nature of kyriarchy and its ramifications in contemporary American society. These texts also critique the traditional kyriarchal control and use of women's bodies for reproduction as a means of oppression.

The 1970s feminist utopias took up the work, begun by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century feminist writers, of questioning the social construction of gender by disputing that some human characteristics were inherently feminine or masculine, or by evaluating traditional feminine characteristics and concluding that these traits held value for humanity and should not be underestimated or disregarded as unimportant because Western culture identified them with women rather than with men. Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* gives examples of the

²⁹ Other separatist examples are: Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975); James Tiptree, Jr.'s novella "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" (1976); and Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères* (1974). Mary Staton's *From the Legend of Biel* (1975) and Dorothy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You* (1976) are dual-gender utopias. Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Ruins of Isis* (1978) depicts a matriarchal community.

former in that all the people in the utopian community of Mattapoisett display the self-confidence and fearlessness previously considered masculine traits, while men nurture their children, including breast-feeding them, in a manner previously associated with the feminine. Gearhart's *The Wanderground*, provides an example of the latter type of feminist utopia by showing women connected with nature and with each other for the benefit of their communities and the Earth itself.

The feminist separatist utopias of the 1970s³⁰ seem to express, in varying degrees, a gynocentric biological essentialism.³¹ This essentialism is based in a recognition of the heretofore unacknowledged power of motherhood and reproductive capacity. Susan H. Lees writes: "The values of motherhood [in separatist utopias] appear to arise not from social constructs but from the experience of motherhood itself, which, apparently, makes women nurturers, encourages environmental awareness and appreciation for conservation, and develops altruism, creativity, and a host of other human virtues" (230). In other words, the all-female societies depicted in separatist utopias privilege women as more connected to nature, less aggressive, more nurturing, and more *human* because of their abilities to conceive and bear children. The women reproduce through parthenogenesis or with medical assistance, thereby permanently disassociating sexuality and pleasure from pregnancy and motherhood. What the 1970s feminist separatist utopias do not explore are ways in which women and men can inhabit a reality that affords both genders the equality and respect due all human beings. Although the 1970s dual-gender utopias address this conundrum, they did so during a hopeful period for

³⁰ Specifically *Motherlines*, *The Wanderground*, and *The Female Man*.

³¹ Although some scholars have criticized the 1970s separatist utopias as practicing biological essentialism in that only lesbian sexuality seems authentically healthy and "normal," Jane Donawerth argues in *Frankenstein's Daughters* that these texts do not engage in biological essentialism exclusive of men and inclusive of only one sexual orientation, but rather that the 1970s separatist utopias merely represent the attempt to create "safe place[s] for lesbian pleasure" (94).

women's equality through challenging assumptions about gender and exposing those assumptions as social constructions and thus invalid when envisioned in a non-kyriocentric society. Most of the texts, separatist and dual-gender alike, devote only a few lines or paragraphs to explaining how their women-only or egalitarian communities evolved from the kyriarchal societies of the contemporary moment instead of exploring ways in which to reconcile the reality of human aggression and distribution of power with their utopian visions.³²

Feminist women dominated utopian writing in the 1970s and male, non-feminist writers did not substantially contribute to the genre. Outside of a few ecotopias³³ and Samuel R. Delaney's sub-titled "heterotopia" *Triton* (1976), which does explore gender issues, male writers did not participate in the feminist trend in utopian writing in the 1970s other than to depict futuristic male-dominated societies that reproduced, sometimes viciously, kyriarchal norms; female-dominated societies in texts written by men fared no better.³⁴ Patai laments in "Beyond

³² A notable exception to both the separatist and dual-gender branches of feminist utopian writing was a limited focus on androgyny in feminist utopian writing. For example, Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) explores androgyny through a sexually fluid alien culture, and Theodore Sturgeon's *Venus Plus X* (1960) interrogates gender taboos, especially concerning sexuality, in a utopia in which sexual difference has been eliminated through hermaphroditism. Considering how influential Le Guin's text in particular was on Second Wave feminist ideology, it seems odd that more texts exploring androgyny as a utopian concept were not published, though one could argue that among the dual-gender feminist utopias, Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* does put forth some ideas surrounding androgyny as a desirable social trait. Although androgyny was a very prominent concept early in the Second Wave of the feminist movement, the term became unusable because of critics like Mary Daly, Adrienne Rich, and Elizabeth Lane Beardsley who "repudiated androgyny precisely for enforcing sexist and repressive notions of sexuality" (Hargreaves 116). This may account for the lack of androgynous visions in feminist utopian texts. Le Guin's and Sturgeon's texts, however, seem to function as precursors of the 1970s feminist utopian trend, a trend that did not substantially envision androgyny as a force for social change.

³³ Non-feminist ecotopias include: D. Keith Mano's *The Bridge* (1973); Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975); and Mack Reynolds's *Commune 2000AD* (1974) which reads more like a love letter to socialism than an ecotopia. More ecotopias by men followed such as David Brin's *Uplift* series (1980s and 1990s), Kim Stanley Robinson's *California* trilogy (1984, 1988, and 1990), and L. Neil Smith's *The Probability Broach* (1980) which I categorize as an alternate history rather than an ecotopia.

³⁴ See Joanna Russ's essay "Amor Vincit Foeminan: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction" (in *To Write Like a Woman* 41-59) for analysis of nine male writers' and one female author's depictions of female-dominated worlds.

Defensiveness” that she could not find any utopian text, written by a man, that proposed a male-only society or embraced homosexuality (164).³⁵ Moreover, she observes:

It is not surprising . . . that women have envisioned societies without men, while men have not envisioned the reverse. The men would be giving up domination that cuts across racial and economic lines; while the women, in envisioning a society without men, are merely giving up their roles of victims and becoming persons. Utopias by women—radically feminist, even separatist, utopias—seem to recognize the danger of the aggressive/dominant male gender role to human society, and it is in response to the oppression and despair created by these roles that their alternative societies are envisioned. These societies are typically cooperative, creative, and non-aggressive in the sense that aggression is not a normal means for validating one’s worth, as it is for men in our society. By contrast, even in the most enlightened of the men’s utopias . . . one finds that the authors’ imaginations faltered when it came to envisioning women’s place in these utopias. Although supposedly egalitarian and nonsexist, these utopias regularly reveal a rather conventional division of labor and power and the male is still assumed to be the model and measure of all things. (“Beyond Defensiveness” 164-65)

Furthermore, utopias written by men from previous eras generally reprise traditional gender roles and hardly mention women at all (Baruch and Rohrlich 204). Male authors’ lack of participation

³⁵ I have found one science fiction example of a men-only society: *Ethan of Athos* (1986), published three years after Patai’s essay. *Ethan of Athos* was written by Lois McMaster Bujold, a woman. While this novel is feminist in its politics, I consider it neither a utopian nor a dystopian text but rather mainstream science fiction. I have also come across an anthology of utopian short stories, *The New Improved Sun*, edited by Thomas M. Disch (1975). The majority of the stories were written by men, though some of the stories were written and/or published prior to the 1970s, but they do not depict male-only societies or homosexuality, nor do they interrogate gender identity.

in imagining egalitarian utopian communities during the 1970s may indicate a site of resistance to the changes proposed and agitated for by the Second Wave of feminism and the real changes going on in women's lives. This lack of participation may also merely indicate another facet of a more widespread reaction against the feminist movement as it gained momentum in American society in the 1970s: most male authors were not invested in feminism, despite the clear advantages to society as a whole.

In general, the production of feminist utopias began to ebb as the 1970s drew to a close and the conservative Reagan administration was installed in the White House in 1981; feminist utopian writing has not experienced any large-scale upsurge since. Some feminist writers persisted with the utopian moment into the 1980s such as Katherine V. Forrest in *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* (1984) and Joan Slonczewski in *A Door into Ocean* (1986), both lesbian separatist utopias,³⁶ and Judith Moffett's *Pennterra* (1987), which depicts a potential utopia in progress challenged by colonists who would reproduce Earth society to the detriment of the planet and all its inhabitants. Among male writers after the 1970s, Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* trilogy³⁷ presents a utopia that has apparently achieved gender equality; however, the *Mars* books do not interrogate gender, sexuality, or queerness in a critical way. In the 1990s, Starhawk published the utopian *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) about a pan-sexual, pantheistic society, and Nicola Griffith published a lesbian separatist utopia, *Ammonite* (1993). However, Bonner argues that

³⁶ Forrest followed up *Daughters of a Coral Dawn* with two more volumes, *Daughters of an Amber Noon* (2002), and *Daughters of an Emerald Dusk* (2004). However, while the utopian society (the Unity) of *Coral Dawn* is present in *Amber Noon*, this narrative focuses on a dystopian United States from which lesbian women escape. The third book in the trilogy, located on another planet, depicts the women as losing their ability to reproduce and whose fewer and fewer succeeding generations of daughters are evolving into a different kind of human being. *Emerald Dusk* ends with the women abandoning the utopian planet to the daughters to return to a (hopefully) changed Earth. While a utopian impulse is present in all three books of the trilogy, only *Coral Dawn* actually depicts a tenable utopian society in any detail. Slonczewski's sequel to *Door into Ocean*, *Daughter of Elysium* (1993), takes place on the same planet as the lesbian separatist utopian community but focuses primarily on a sterile society drowning in its own materialism. Thus, I would categorize it as a dystopia with glimpses into the utopian community.

³⁷ *Red Mars* (1993), *Green Mars* (1994), and *Blue Mars* (1996).

the conservative backlash may have permeated the publishing world and led to the diminished numbers of feminist utopian texts.³⁸ Bonner succinctly observes that “[a]uthors may want to produce utopian and other feminist works, but they are then subject to the willingness of publishers to accept and market them” (104). This raises an interesting question: are feminist writers no longer producing feminist utopias, or are publishers and agents rejecting the manuscripts? Given the established link between waves of feminism and utopian and dystopian writing, I would cautiously hazard that in the political and social milieu of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and the increasing attacks on women’s bodily autonomy, continued lack of pay equity, and backlash against marriage equality for QUILTBAG persons,³⁹ it is the former. Apart from the authors reviewed briefly above, the predominantly feminist utopian writing of the 1970s does not extend very far into the succeeding decades and not at all into the new millennium.

Utopian and dystopian writing, linked as it has been with political and cultural trends, does not possess immunity from what is happening in American society. While some of the feminist utopian novels of the 1970s include dystopian societies or dystopian aspects of contemporary society, the 1980s and its attendant “reaction to women’s ‘progress’ . . . interpreted time and again by men . . . as spelling their own masculine doom” (Faludi xix),

³⁸ Bonner reports that Nicola Griffith’s rumored second book, also about a female separatist society, “ran foul of her publishers” (104). I confirmed with Nicola Griffith via email that she did not write a (rumored) unpublished lesbian separatist novel. Griffith claims that the publisher of *Ammonite* wanted a sequel, and she refused (Griffith, “Re: questions about rumors”). Her essay with her partner, Kelley Eskridge, “War Machine/Time Machine” (2008), details firing her agent over the agent’s rejection of a lesbian protagonist in *Slow River* (1995). (*Slow River*, a dystopian ecotopia, went on to win a Nebula.) Presumably, this event served as the basis for Bonner’s assertions about Griffith and the publishing industry in “From *The Female Man* to the *Virtual Girl*: Whatever Happened to Feminist SF?” (1996). I emailed Bonner to ask for clarification, but she no longer has her notes from which she compiled her essay and does not recall the details of the rumor.

³⁹ “QUILTBAG” is the acronym coined by Nicola Griffith and Kelley Eskridge to encompass all aspects of the queer community (Griffith and Eskridge) that is gaining wider use among feminists and queer theorists who analyze popular culture: Q – queer or questioning; U – unisex, undecided, or unidentified; I – intersex; L – lesbian; T – transgender, transsexual, transvestite, or transitioning; B – bisexual; A – asexual; G – gay or genderqueer. Compiled from urbandictionary.com and queerdictionary.tumblr.com.

emerged as the era for writing feminist dystopias. As Faludi documents in American culture at large, men's resistance to women's advancement and renegotiation of power structures produced a backlash against the feminist movement in general. As Fitting argues, the "utopian moment seems to have ended. More recent fictions no longer give us images of a radically different future, in which the values and ideals of feminism have been extended to much of the planet, but rather offer depressing images of a brutal reestablishment of capitalist patriarchy" ("Turn" 142). Laws and the public status of women may have changed but underlying cultural norms concerning gender have been slower to respond. Additionally, Cranny-Francis posits that "twentieth century experience suggests that dystopias are produced at times of political oppression and (consequent) apathy, arising from the despair of the oppressed about the possibility of intervention in a powerful, authoritarian state" (142), an oppression greatly felt by women in American society (Faludi xv).

As a result, during the rise of the Religious Right and the Reagan-Bush administration's backlash against the feminist movement, the production of feminist dystopian texts began in earnest. The political and cultural milieu that set the conditions for dystopian writing for feminist authors included the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (Cranny-Francis 142), the negative portrayal of feminism by the media (Faludi xi), and the fracturing that occurred within the feminist movement itself and among women who disassociated themselves from "feminism" because of conflicting ideologies (Baumgardner and Richards 48). The dystopian turn became fully underway with the publication of Naomi Mitchison's *Solution Three* (1975), Zoë Fairbairns's *Benefits* (1979), Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* (1984), its sequel *The Judas Rose* (1985), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985).⁴⁰ These novels depict

⁴⁰ Although Cranny-Francis places Suzy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) as the first feminist fully-dystopian text (142) during the Second Wave era, its sequel, *Motherlines* (1979), reverts to the utopian format.

dystopian societies in which women have been relegated to juvenile or lower-class status, with a subsequent revocation of their rights as fully-fledged citizens. Women's few remaining "rights" tend to be characterized by a perceived need for women's protection as the physically, mentally, and emotionally "weaker" sex who cannot be trusted to manage its own fertility.⁴¹ These novels spoke to very real fears among feminist writers and their reading audiences of the instability of the gains made during feminism's Second Wave. All of the dystopian texts from the 1980s dialogically engage the 1970s feminist utopias, particularly the lesbian separatist texts, with the idea that we cannot simply get rid of men in order to realize a utopian community. Rather, these texts present arguments that feminism must consider whether women and men can live together in a mutually respectful, decent, and egalitarian society that acknowledges the full humanity of both genders and how society could begin moving in that direction.⁴²

Bradley's *The Shattered Chain* (1976) also precedes the dystopian turn. Straddling the "border" of the utopian turn to dystopia is Doris Lessing's *The Marriages of Zones Three, Four and Five* (1980), which combines utopia and dystopias in the same novel but highlights utopianism as a process rather than an end state. Other feminist dystopias from the same era include: Angela Carter's *Heroes and Villains* (1969) and *The Passion of New Eve* (1977); Russ's *We Who Are About To...* (1977); Shelly Singer's *The Demeter Flower* (1980); Louky Bersianik's *The Euguélionne* (1981); Elisabeth Vonarburg's *The Silent City* (1981); Bradley's *Thendara House* (1983); Gerd Brantenberg's *Egalia's Daughters* (1985); M.K. Wren's *A Gift Upon the Shore* (1985); Anna Livia's *Bulldozer Rising* (1988); Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy: *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1989), and *Imago* (1989); and Carolyn See's *Golden Days* (1987). Some critics categorize E. M. Broner's *A Weave of Women* (1978) as a feminist utopia; the novel does have a strong utopian impulse, however, the text's elements of magical realism should not be confused with science fiction.

⁴¹ Three others dystopias from the 1980s are frequently miscategorized as utopias: Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1989), the lesser known B.J. Salterberg's *The Outlander: Captivity* (1989), and Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (1986). All three of these novels depict gender-segregated societies, though *The Shore of Women* is the only one that depicts a truly lesbian-separatist community; the other communities are heterosexual and both foreclose the possibility of lesbian relationships. Critics tend to mistakenly categorize these texts as utopias because their separatism resembles the utopian communities of feminist 1970s utopias; however, the argument of each (eugenics, resocialization, and existence outside of society, respectively) for solving male violence is based on manipulation and oppression rather than transparency and teamwork. Although the utopian impulse is present and pervasive in each of these texts, the communities depicted are dystopic because women and men are not equal in their societies and the women actively oppress certain groups of men.

⁴² The 1980s dystopian turn also includes the creation of cyberpunk as a sub-genre with William Gibson's seminal novel, *Neuromancer* (1984). Though cyberpunk's roots can be traced back to Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), perhaps more widely known from Ridley Scott's filmic rendition as *Blade Runner* (1982), the cyberpunk genre emerged in the 1980s with novels set in futuristic post-industrial eras and concerned with the use and abuse of technology, artificial intelligence, and cyberspace or virtual realities. Although this genre has been

While the majority of feminist writers seem to have largely abandoned utopian writing, dystopian writing has flourished well into the 1990s⁴³ and the new millennium. Charnas's lesbian separatist utopia *Motherlines* (1978) gave rise to two sequels, *The Furies* (1994) and *The Conqueror's Child* (1999), in which women re-engage with the male-dominated society that had oppressed them.⁴⁴ *Into the Forest* (1998) by Jean Hegland continues the post-nuclear-holocaust themes of earlier utopias with a withdrawal into nature but in a dystopian context. Nancy Kress's *Sleepless* trilogy,⁴⁵ explores genetic engineering and class issues through the creation of an elite class of humans in twenty-second-century North America. Furthermore, Le Guin's *Four Ways to Forgiveness* (1995) examines four different cultures on two planets and the gender oppression inherent in so-called free and slave societies, and *The Telling* (2000) continues the dystopian trend into the twenty-first century.⁴⁶

dominated by male writers who do not necessarily critique gender norms and tend to reproduce them, some feminist writers have written novels in the cyberpunk style: Pat Cadigan (*Patterns*, 1989 and *Synners*, 1991); Lisa Mason (*Arachne* 1990); Melissa Scott (*Dreaming Metal*, 1997, and *The Shape of Their Hearts*, 1998), and Kelley Eskridge (*Solitaire* 2004). For the majority of male authors who write dystopias, cyberpunk appears to be the genre of choice with a few notable exceptions: Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980); David Brin's *The Postman* (1997) and *Uplift* trilogies: *Startide Rising* (1984), *Sundiver* (1985), *The Uplift War* (1987), *Brightness Reef* (1996), *Infinity's Shore* (1997), and *Heaven's Reach* (1999); S. M. Stirling's *Change* series: *Dies the Fire* (2005), *The Protector's War* (2005), *A Meeting at Corvallis* (2007), *The Sunrise Lands* (2008), *The Scourge of God* (2009), *The Sword of the Lady* (2010), *The Tears of the Sun* (2011), *The High King of Montival* (2011), and *Lord of the Mountains* (2012); Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005); Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006); and Robinson's ecotopic *Science in the Capital* trilogy: *Forty Signs of Rain* (2005), *Fifty Degrees Below* (2007), and *Sixty Days and Counting* (2007).

⁴³ Other feminist dystopias from the 1990s include but are not limited to: Emma Bull's *Bone Dance* (1991); Tepper's *Beauty* (1991) and *Six Moon Dance* (1998); Eleanor Arnason's *A Woman of the Iron People* (1991); Vonarburg's *In the Mothers' Land* (1992); Gillian Rubenstein's *Galax-Arena* (1992); and Kathleen Ann Goonan's *The Bones of Time* (1996).

⁴⁴ Interestingly, Charnas's novels serve as an allegory for the feminist movement from pre-Second Wave into the Third Wave of the 1990s.

⁴⁵ *Beggars in Spain* (1993), *Beggars and Choosers* (1994) and *Beggars Ride* (1996).

⁴⁶ The plethora of feminist dystopias since the turn of the millennium includes but is not limited to: Lisa Lerner's *Just Like Beauty* (2002); Cheryl Bernard's *Turning on the Girls* (2002); Kay Kenyon's *The Braided World* (2003); Leigh Richards's *Califia's Daughters* (2004); Gwyneth Jones's *Life* (2004); L. Timmel Duchamp's *Marq'ssan Cycle* series: *Alanya to Alanya* (2005), *Renegade* (2006), *Tsunami* (2007), *Blood in the Fruit* (2007) and *Stretto* (2008); Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2004) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009); Ninni Holmqvist's *The Unit* (2008); Sarah Hall's *Daughters of the North* (2008); Suzanne Collins's young adult trilogy: *The Hunger Games* (2008),

The way in which the genre has kept pace with contemporary political and cultural milieu throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century exposes the oppressive interactions between various axes of kyriarchal systems and institutions. The characteristics of the utopian and dystopian genre draw upon science fiction as well as other literary formulations that enable writers to create narratives that interrogate gender and other sites of domination and offer not only possibilities for egalitarian futures but also possibilities for resisting and undermining kyriarchal oppression and enforcement of the status quo. Feminist science fiction texts pose warnings, through their dystopian visions, of how kyriarchal institutions such as religious fundamentalism seek to reverse modern progress, but also propose, through their utopian impulses, hope for equality for everyone.

The Rise of the Religious Right

The participation of religious faiths in American politics has waxed and waned throughout US history and seems primarily reactive to the fluctuations in culture also prevalent in society in given historical eras; most recently religious faiths have entered the political arena as a reaction to feminism. Although religious organizations were actively involved in US politics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in the abolitionist and temperance movements, Protestant evangelicals suffered an ignominious defeat over the teaching of evolution in the classroom resulting from the Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925 and withdrew from the political arena for nearly forty years. However, the 1960s rise of the counterculture movement as well as the significant gains made in civil rights legislation, the beginnings of the women's liberation movement (feminism's Second Wave) and a series of Supreme Court decisions supporting equality and the separation of church and state prompted "a wave of

Catching Fire (2009), and *Mockingjay* (2010); Megan McCafferty's *Bumped* (2011) and *Thumped* (2012); Jane Rogers's *The Testament of Jessie Lamb* (2012); and Greg Egan's *Orthogonal* series, *The Clockwork Rocket* (2011) and *The Eternal Flame* (2012). Doris Lessing's *The Cleft* (2008) is an alternate history.

discontent among evangelicals and fundamentalists” (Berlet, “Roots”). The unease that mainly Protestant evangelicals felt in the face of social justice gains in the United States was rooted in a concern that the government encroached too far by secularizing and/or regulating what Protestant evangelicals viewed as residing in the private, and specifically religious, domain (Berlet, “The Roots of Dominionism”). While these issues encompassed school prayer, pornography, abortion, homosexuality, anti-militarism as well as accommodation for the disabled and people of color, Michael Jones maintains that due to changing gender roles in society at large and in religious institutions, “[f]emale leadership in churches was the first source of male distress” (4). Jones posits that the expansion of roles for women in Protestant churches and women’s eventual encroachment into ordination and preaching from the pulpit was a distinct threat to the kyriarchal order and had to be contained.

Regardless of the source of Protestant evangelical Christians’ unease, they developed a perception of government interference in their religious values. Vocal advocates for Christians’ involvement in the secular arena, like the Reverend Billy Graham, urged a return to active participation in politics “to fight the influence of Godless communism at home and abroad” in the 1950s (Berlet and Quigley 24). From their pulpits, Graham and other ministers urged evangelical Protestants to assume a politically active role that engaged in electing candidates, repealing laws and changing government structures to better reflect conservative religious values. At the same time in the political arena, Joseph McCarthy and his anti-Communist witch hunts in the 1950s not only focused on ferreting out alleged Communist sympathizers but also whipped up a frenzy of fear over the perceived secularization of the state. According to Chip Berlet and Margaret Quigley, McCarthy’s fall and the defeat of Barry Goldwater’s presidential campaign in 1964 somewhat crippled the hard right of the Republican Party, which then needed

to redefine itself and create some distance from its defeated racist platforms (22-23). In a scramble to build a “New Right” with a more acceptable image, Republicans established a vast right-wing infrastructure and marketing machine to challenge liberal social policies and programs. The Republican Party’s rhetoric, marketing, and need for votes coincided with Protestant evangelicals’ heightened fears of the 1960s liberal counterculture and their “renewed interest in the political process” and served to deliver a “grassroots constituency that respond[ed] to the rhetoric” of the Right (24). Sara Diamond asserts that this alliance solidified in 1975, and since then, “leaders of the Christian Right have built one organization after another, with the avowed purpose of winning state power, i.e. the power to influence, if not dictate, public policy” (44-45). Berlet furthers this analysis by arguing that “[t]his social movement of conservative Christian evangelicals was mobilized by the Christian Right, who joined with ultraconservative political operatives to take over the Republican Party,” not merely establish a voting bloc within it (“Roots”). In time, what was ostensibly a culture war, or maybe a counter-counterculture war, transformed into rhetoric about restoring “family values,” including “support for traditional hierarchical sex roles and opposition to feminism, employed mothers, contraception, abortion, divorce, sex education, school-based health clinics, extramarital sex, and gay and lesbian sex, among other issues” (Berlet and Quigley 33). In other words, various religious faiths in the US, but primarily Protestant Christians, reacted negatively to perceived liberal progress and re-entered the political arena in myriad ways, but mainly as a voting bloc. This religious voting bloc found its political vehicle in the Republican Party.

Although Graham and other ministers drew large audiences of Protestant evangelicals, many of whom became more politically involved, evangelical Protestants are not a monolithic group. Rather, evangelical Christians constitute a field of political, social, and religious beliefs

that range from progressive to moderate to extremely reactionary. For example, many evangelical Christians are heavily involved in environmental activism and/or social and charitable programs to help poor and low-income people in a variety of ways from food and clothing banks to educational opportunities. Although many scholars tend to use the terms “evangelical” and “fundamentalist” Protestants/Christians interchangeably, there is a marked difference between the two that developed during the forty-year interim between the Scopes trial and Billy Graham’s ministry.⁴⁷ Fundamentalists are, in fact, a sub-movement of evangelical Christianity. Nearly all evangelicals and fundamentalists believe strongly in proselytizing in order to spread Christianity to everyone. Both evangelicals and fundamentalists believe in the authority and inerrancy of scripture; however, evangelicals are more likely to allow for metaphorical interpretation of sacred texts while fundamentalists insist on literal interpretation of the same texts. Barry Hankins posits that fundamentalists “make up the right wing of evangelicalism” and points to fundamentalist tendencies toward militancy and separatism that are not evident in other evangelical groups (6). Evangelicals “support liberal democracy,” unlike fundamentalists who wish to install a Christian theocracy in the United States (Pally 13). Furthermore, in “Fundamentalism vs. Progressive Christianity,” Kalen Fristad argues that not only do fundamentalists and evangelicals have divergent theological ontologies in that evangelicals accentuate the loving aspects of God while fundamentalists focus on the judgmental facets of God, but fundamentalists tend to have co-dependent relationships between members, the congregation as a whole, and religious leaders. Fristad argues that this co-dependency is unhealthy because it frequently leads to fundamentalist separatism—adherents believe that their specific denomination or church is the one “true” way to salvation—and imbues religious leaders

⁴⁷ Many scholars conflate fundamentalism and evangelicalism and use the terms interchangeably. I will indicate with *sic* in quoted material when I believe the author is conflating the two or is misusing “evangelical” when the context of their writing indicates “fundamentalist.”

and congregations with inordinate power over individual members. While I recognize that fundamentalist faiths are by no means monolithic in their beliefs or practices and consist of many subsets, the fundamentalism that feminist science fiction writers critique meet the general criteria mentioned above that distinguish fundamentalists from evangelical Christians and meet one other essential criterion: fundamentalists “reject legal steps to ensure equality between the sexes and typically exclude women from the senior ranks of religious leadership” (Ruthven 114) while evangelicals are concerned with “civil society activism” (Pally 110) to restore economic fairness and enhance liberal democracy for all citizens simultaneously with advancing religion (17). While many evangelicals populate the Religious Right, its reactionary rhetoric and political leanings are more indicative of fundamentalist beliefs—and control—than evangelicalism.

During the rise of the Religious Right and the massive mobilization of its voters subsumed under the patronage of the Republican Party and its gains in influence over the Republican Party as a whole, the Left failed to respond adequately, if at all. Diamond estimates that in the two decades after the “marrying” of the Religious Right to the Republican Party, “the Democrats stood idly by, unwilling and unable to respond because Democrats will challenge neither the prerogatives of big business nor the ideological premises that keep people from challenging class, racial, and gender inequality” (48). Democrats and the Left failed, in other words, to bring about substantial changes in the underlying cultural values that allow kyriarchal institutions to perpetuate themselves. Wendy Brown maintains that in the 1980s the Left became bogged down in melancholic fetishizing of disproven or no longer useful political ideologies, such as communism and (pure) socialism, missed political opportunities to reassert liberal values, and lost sight of the contemporary political landscape (*Politics* 4). Furthermore, Diamond argues that in addition to the Democratic Party, “the real left, battered down by

external repression and its own internal foibles, has not responded either. The left has been unidimensionally focused on the atrocities waged at the highest levels of state power, and has been unwilling to recognize that significant numbers of our fellow citizens are decidedly reactionary” (48). What this Left melancholy entails, then, is an inability to deal with the present political moment and take advantage of new opportunities for radical change. W. Brown writes, “The irony of melancholia, of course, is that attachment to the object of one’s sorrowful loss supersedes the desire to recover from this loss, to live free of it in the present, to be unburdened by it” (*Politics* 169). The Left’s attachment to out-dated political ideals and systems served to create a political vacuum that the Religious Right, in its takeover of the Republican Party, was poised to fill. Alternatively, perhaps the Left became complacent in its belief that most people would exercise critical thinking skills and actually understand the specious nature of the “family values” rhetoric which the Religious Right, under the auspices of the Republican Party, launched against the American public. Either way, through the Left’s complacency or melancholy, it ceded the political field and allowed space for the Religious Right to flourish politically in the 1980s, simultaneously with the backlash against feminism.

One of the principal reasons for the Religious Right’s mobilization into politics is the perceived threat of secularism and the push for a complete separation of church and state as outlined in the Constitution. Early in its formation, the Religious Right was “offended that the [Supreme] Court was willing to extend the principle of the ‘free exercise’ of faith (demanded by the First Amendment) to religions that were not even Christian, and incensed by the judges’ principled determination to put all faiths on the same level . . . experienc[ing] these interventions as a secularist offensive” (Armstrong, *Battle* 268, 269). In reality, this “secularist offensive” was nothing more than applying freedom of religion evenly across multiple religious faiths,

distancing government and the rule of law from theocratic ideologies, and withdrawing some of the privileges Protestant Christianity had enjoyed as the majority religion in the US.

Historically, secularism in the United States takes the form of de facto Christian Protestantism and is not truly a separation of church and state.⁴⁸ Kathleen Sands observes that when the Religious Right rose to prominence, “with the growing fundamentalism that infused the Religious Right, the religion that asserted itself in the 1970s was that of a revitalized patriarchalism. This evangelical [*sic*] patriarchalism looked religious in a way that secularized liberal Protestantism did not” (56). While fundamentalists regarded secularization of the public sphere as an attack on their religious values—an attack which they categorized as evil in its apparent godlessness—what most fundamentalists, and many mainstream Protestants and evangelicals, failed to recognize was that secularism in the US actually defaulted to Protestant Christianity and in many ways marginalized non-Christians and Catholics.

Despite the fallacy that American secularism was indeed secular and free of religious influences, this watered down version of Protestantism was not religious enough for the Religious Right—a group increasingly dominated by fundamentalists who hoped to re-sacralize the political arena resulting in a government and society resembling a Puritan theocracy. During the rise of the Religious Right in the 1970s, including the development of sub-groups such as Dominionists and Christian Reconstructionists, whom Berlet identifies as the most reactionary due to their avowed goals of instituting a Christian theocracy in the US, fundamentalists as a whole spread throughout the Religious Right (“Roots”). Some fundamentalist groups within the Religious Right, such as Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority and Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition, were manipulated by the Reagan administration in the 1980s, which had also succeeded in splitting the Catholic voting bloc, formerly solidly Democratic in their voting practices, as well

⁴⁸ See Sands, Jakobsen and Pellegrini, Pally, and Fessenden.

as wooed most evangelical Protestants to the Republican Party (Berlet and Quigley, 26-27). While the Religious Right was rocked by ministerial adultery and sex scandals in the late 1980s and had less influence under the presidency of George H.W. Bush, in the 1990s, “their influence has not so much waned as shifted. Concentrating more heavily on local elections, such as school boards, they are considered a core constituency of the Republican party whose voting power must be acknowledged” (Manning 43). In the intervening years, however, evangelical activism at the national level has once again increased, especially within the Republican Party, and is highly influenced by the more fundamentalist-leaning ideologies.⁴⁹ In *God Gave Us the Right*, Christel Manning argues that due to non-Protestant immigrants and the incursion of Jews and Catholics into the middle class in the 1970s, “[t]he resurgence of fundamentalism within Protestantism . . . is a reaction against the decline of Protestant hegemony in the United States in the twentieth century” (48). Furthermore, Diamond notes that the Religious Right increased its presence at the polls in major national elections in every election since 1994 and showed no indications of leveling off (45). However, in the 2012 Presidential Election, Protestant evangelical turn-out may have decreased slightly from 2008 (Tashman).⁵⁰

What is troubling to many outside of the Religious Right and the Republican Party, and especially to writers of feminist science fiction, is the insistence on fundamentalist values that reproduce, again and again, the kyriarchal family model which designates men as income-earners

⁴⁹ Manning notes similar, though not as pervasive, upswings in Orthodox Judaism and Roman Catholicism; however, I would argue that mainstream Catholicism as practiced in the United States remains less conservative than the fundamentalist pronouncements and expectations of the Vatican. Orthodox Judaism, while fundamentalist in its pronouncements for Jews, also recognizes that non-Jews hold other religious beliefs and does not have an expectation that Jewish law applies to non-Jews. This restriction of Jewish laws to Jews among the Orthodox does not extend to the ultra-Orthodox (Haredim), who do police the behavior of non-ultra-Orthodox Jews as well as members of their own communities.

⁵⁰ Exit polls indicated about the same number or slightly larger of self-identified “Christian evangelicals” or “born-again Protestants” turned out to the polls, 54 percent in 2008 and 53 percent in 2012 (Olsen). Nearly thirty percent of white “evangelicals” voted to re-elect President Obama, in a departure from expectations of the Religious Right and the Republican Party’s support for Mitt Romney, a Mormon (Gilgoff).

in the public sphere and relegates women exclusively to subordinate roles in the domestic sphere. The entry of women into the workplace and educational institutions and women's growing capacity for economic independence from male relatives, as well as substantial changes in sexual mores, threaten the fundamentalist paradigm of the nuclear family which fundamentalists see as an affront to God's plan for civilization. In *The Battle for God*, Karen Armstrong echoes these points and identifies changing gender roles as the source of (male) consternation:

Protestant fundamentalists and Christian conservatives in most of the denominations seem to have felt unmanned by the evil forces of secular humanism. They appeared deeply concerned about male impotence. . . . Men were impotent, sexually troubled, worried about satisfying their wives, or about how their performance compared with that of other men. The reason for this was the new self-assertion of women; even fundamentalist women were infected by this cultural virus and, as a result, men were becoming "feminized" or even "castrated." (312)

Furthermore, Armstrong identifies the endemic homophobia of fundamentalists as another reason for their perceived "impotence" and a "feminization" of society along with higher rates of divorce and women's financial independence from working outside the home, all due to "secular humanism" and feminism (312). Armstrong credits much of the upsurge in fundamentalism in the Religious Right to these perceived threats to masculinity:

Fundamentalist writers on family values were united in their conviction that America needed real men. But, interestingly, some fundamentalists seemed to have buried worries about what they considered to be an emasculating tendency in Christianity itself, which had become a religion of womanly values: forgiveness,

mercy, and tenderness. . . . The activism of the New Christian Right sprang in part from fundamental fear. Fundamentalists felt obscurely castrated and profoundly undermined. (312-13)

Fundamentalists believe that society should be organized in such a way as to remain true to “God’s plan” for human beings. These moves toward theocracy insist on the preservation of kyriarchal hierarchies and women’s submission to men and confinement to the domestic sphere. Women’s submission shores up ideologies of masculine domination and reinforces them as naturalized rather than socially constructed.

Fundamentalism and its influence on the political platform of the Religious Right exhibits the reactionary nature of fundamentalists faiths based on perceived threats that women’s autonomy and equality pose to masculinity. Woodhead contends that although women and men in the United States have left their respective religious traditions in droves (“Feminism” 74-75), Christianity has undergone a “feminization” based on a shifting focus of religion to relationships and religion’s relational value to its adherents:

For if women live and work within the sphere of domestic and relational ties, then presumably their religion relates closely to this lifeworld . . . religions of difference in modern times have served to resource and sanctify the domestic realm, whilst spiritualities of life have performed similar functions in relation to more loosely organized forms of intimacy. Where many women are concerned then, one might expect that religion would continue to have as great a significance in modern as in premodern times. Equally, one would have to question the “iron care and anomie” conclusion that their religion becomes “privatized” in the sense that it becomes a matter of concern only to the private individual or the self.

Instead, one might say that religion becomes more thoroughly “feminized” and relational. (76-77)

This apparent “feminization” of religion, though ostensibly in the domestic sphere, may explain one aspect of the crisis of masculinity that Armstrong documents in the fundamentalists’ resistance to changing gender roles, even when women remain in traditional domestic roles as wives and mothers. When women refuse traditional domestic roles and enter the political and work arenas, fundamentalists interpret this movement as forcing a redefinition of the public sphere as no longer wholly masculine.

When women, feminism, and liberal progress threaten the boundaries of the social order which fundamentalists seek to preserve, fundamentalists police those boundaries and resist their flexibility all the more stridently. Karen McCarthy Brown argues that fundamentalist groups experience anxiety over masculinity and thus maintain a reactive posture which results in the enforcement of boundaries surrounding the roles, behavior, and appearance (new or revived) of women and children (180). She suggests that “fundamentalist groups often arise in situations where social, cultural, and economic power is up for grabs. . . . Far from being essentially marginal to the societies in which they exist, fundamentalists are often directly involved in the political and economic issues of their time and place. And they often have a significant, if precarious, stake in them” (190). What is at stake for fundamentalists that differs from the usual economic, security, and social issues that drive most political participation, is to prevent the chaos inherent in the perceived secularization of gender roles and the immorality such a loss of clearly defined roles, and by extension loss of control of women, entails. Fundamentalists view themselves as locked in an epic battle of good versus evil that, if fundamentalists are triumphant, will reverse the legal and social gains that women and homosexual persons have made in the

latter half of the twentieth century and establish “a theoretically coherent and factually true account of the world” (W. Brown, *Politics* 23) in the form of a Christian, biblically-based theocracy. Fundamentalist adherents regard their vision of the social order as not subject to debate or compromise since they believe that their views come directly from the “Word of God.”

Furthermore, the fundamentalists’ desire for an idealized Christian theocracy is evident in their apocryphal eschatology and advocacy of a return to religious doctrine which is inherently misogynistic and homophobic. They mistake the violent silencing of women, queer persons, and minority groups in previous eras for an absence of those groups from, or as insignificant to, history. In *When Religion Becomes Evil*, Charles Kimball states:

The literature and rhetoric of groups in the New Religious Right reveal nostalgia for an ideal time that has been lost . . . and warnings about the danger awaiting this nation if it continues to turn its back on God. . . . These matters, while highly charged, appear to be far removed from religiously motivated violence in the Middle East and elsewhere. There is a direct link, however. They share a religious conviction that the perceived ideal has been lost and must be restored through institutions of the state. (117-18)

While this ideal never actually existed under the Puritans or any other group in US history, the legalized oppression and subjugation of women, children, queers, ethnic and religious minorities, and the poor has been to some extent eroded by social justice gains in the twentieth century, gains which preclude fundamentalist men from taking full advantage of the patriarchal dividend. Additionally, fundamentalists have developed a “siege mentality” in which they perceive socially liberal policies as a threat to their religious freedom and a further descent into secularism

(Armstrong, *Battle* 279).⁵¹ The reactive nature of the siege mentality results in the shoring up of boundaries around women and children, or as M. Jones writes, “what is always present in resurgences of fundamentalist religious belief: a reassertion of and defense of patriarchy” (1).

For fundamentalists, kyriarchy and its system of privilege for men at the top must be defended against feminist inroads. I would expand upon Susan Faludi’s characterization of the political climate of the 1980s as an anti-feminist backlash against women (xix) by pointing out that the formation and rise of the Religious Right was an integral part of what made the backlash possible as well as so insidious and difficult to counter: it is exceedingly difficult for religious adherents to make compromises about their version of a God-given “truth.” It is also difficult for non-adherents to make any headway in a debate once the opposing side abandons reasoned arguments and invokes the emotional, and thus unprovable, beliefs of their specific faith. Moreover, Manning observes that “religious conservatives . . . argue that they are giving voice to a previously silent moral majority that has always rejected the excesses of liberalism. Such rhetoric has led some observers to conclude that we are in the midst of a culture war, in which gender has become the central battleground” (36). I would agree that we are in a culture war and that gender, or rather the specific control of women, children, queers and other marginalized groups, is central to the struggle especially since the Religious Right frequently collapses what they view as the immorality and degeneration of society under one encompassing category of blame: feminism. For example, outlawing or restricting abortion or access to it continues to occupy a focal point on the list of fundamentalist aims for the Religious Right, and in the plank in the Republican Party platform, especially since abortion serves as a rallying point for

⁵¹ We have seen the siege mentality most recently in the protests by religious organizations that view insurance coverage of birth control for their employees, a preventative health measure, as a threat to their First Amendment rights, even when the religious entity incurs no change to the cost of coverage which is born by the insurers. The siege mentality, of course, allows religious organizations to elide the fact that they are imposing religious views upon their employees and thus interfering with the employees’ First Amendment rights.

emotional appeals for support. Re-establishing (male) control of women and their bodies, as exhibited through anti-choice rhetoric and legislative limitations on abortion, shores up the perceived erosions to masculinity and traditional kyriarchal power that feminism poses.

As emotionally appealing as the so-called “pro-life” movement may be, however, the real agenda of the Religious Right is less concerned with preserving human life from the point of conception than with the control of women’s bodies and the reduction of sex to procreation within marriage. After all, pregnant women cannot fully engage in physically demanding aspects of their jobs during their pregnancies; women with young children are frequently burdened with the majority of the care-giving and, with more children, eventually reach an economic break-point in which paying for childcare costs more than the lesser-earning parent staying home full-time. Yet sex outside of heterosexual marriage, especially without the consequences of pregnancy for women who use birth control, is as serious a threat to the patriarchal dividend as women in the workplace. Jung, Hunt, and Balakrishnan posit in *Good Sex* that “[r]eligions have been the traditional guardians of sexual norms and practices. In fact, patriarchal religions are infamous for their taboos and proscriptions with regard to women and sex” (xi). While I could argue that because women were historically considered commodities and that some sexual “crimes” were actually crimes against property as well as family honor, this viewpoint still reduces women to the level of commodities and objects rather than recognizing them as fully human. If the “pro-life” stance of the Religious Right is held up to scrutiny, then one would assume that the Religious Right would make provisions to support pregnant women and their children in any socioeconomic circumstances in order to eliminate the financial reasons women give for seeking abortions. Additionally, one would assume that the Religious Right would support comprehensive sex education for teens and young adults as well as free and

plentiful distribution of birth control in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies from being conceived at all. The Religious Right's political platform does neither: it does not promote social programs, such as subsidized daycare, WIC, TANF, or SNAP,⁵² that would financially and socially support women as mothers, nor does it advocate any type of sex education training other than abstinence-based programs, despite such programs' abysmal record of actually preventing teen pregnancy and sex. Concomitantly, as Christina Page observes, "[r]educing abortions has, in a sense, become problematic for [anti-choice supporters]. The problem is that it means favoring the use of contraception, and, in effect, endorsing a way of life, and a view of sex, that they oppose perhaps even more strongly than they oppose abortion"; that is, the Religious Right opposes "sex for pleasure" (6).⁵³ As a result, preventing abortions may be a focal point for whipping up frenzied emotional support for the Religious Right and the Republican Party, but being "pro-life" has been increasingly defined as "find[ing] fault with every kind of birth control. . . . To be pro-life means to favor abstinence until marriage, in part because they believe that sex is supposed to be for one purpose only: to procreate" (3). Page argues that the pro-choice and anti-choice movements are "essentially about competing ways of life" (3) and competing views of the purposes of (heterosexual) sex. Yet because of the kyriocentric nature of the American social system that privileges white, heterosexual, upper-class men and their bodily autonomy, this struggle is being played out over the control of women's bodies and women's perceived

⁵² WIC (Women, Infants and Children) subsidizes the cost of dairy and formula supplies for pregnant and nursing women, infants, and children under age five. TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families), more widely known as "welfare," pays a stipend to low- or no-income families; since the majority of TANF recipients are poor female heads-of-household, the payments could, theoretically, enable mothers to stay home with their children, in the absence of a male head-of-household. SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), better known as "food stamps," subsidizes food purchases for low- or no-income families; many SNAP recipients do have at least one adult income-earner in the household but the income is insufficient to support the family.

⁵³ Gay and lesbian sex precludes the need for birth control and is solely pursued for pleasure; thus, it logically follows that the fundamentalists who make up the Religious Right would find same-sex pleasure completely abhorrent and "sinful." Furthermore, since same-sex marriage or civil unions are currently available in only nine states, most gay and lesbian sex, by fundamentalist definition, is also "fornication."

(im)morality for engaging in sexual pleasure without wanting to be continuously pregnant and tied to the raising of children.

The threats that fundamentalists perceive to their world view, posed by feminism and the secularization of society, violates fundamentalists' ideologies of gender, order, and "God's plan" for human civilization—i.e., male retention of the patriarchal dividend and preservation of the kyriarchal order. The welcomed infiltration of the Religious Right into the Republican Party as part of the substantial voting bloc poses its own threats to liberal progress, particularly equal rights for women and QUILTBAG persons. Armstrong writes that "[r]eligion has once again become a force that no government can safely ignore. It is now an essential part of the modern scene and will certainly play an important role in the domestic and international affairs of the future. It is crucial, therefore, that we try to understand what this type of religiosity means, how and for what reasons it developed, what it can tell us about our culture, and how best we should deal with it" (*Battle x*). For example, in the United States, it would seem impossible for an atheist or other non-Christian to be elected to the presidency despite a clause in the Constitution that precludes any sort of religious qualification as a prerequisite to hold a public office.

While the focus of my project is on politics in the United States, fundamentalists have made incursions into government in various parts of the world and the reactionary stances that threaten the repeal of hard-won equality and human rights should neither be ignored nor made light of. The rampant deployment of Christian fundamentalism in the United States, the stranglehold that the Orthodox rabbinate holds over the Israeli government, and the various Islamist bids for government overthrow undertaken before and as a result of the Arab Spring are all indicators of the seriousness of fundamentalist threats to secular (or secular-seeming)

governments and to basic human rights in contemporary society—rights which may not be in line with a fundamentalist faith’s teachings or values.

Feminist Dystopian Writers and Religious Fundamentalism

Feminist authors, recognizing the threat the rise of the Religious Right posed to women’s civil rights’ gains as a result of Second Wave feminist activism, responded to contemporary politics and social issues through the dystopian genre. Much of feminist utopian writing in the 1970s did not focus on religion per se but did introduce concepts of goddess-centered religions as part of their utopian ideal, particularly in gender-separatist formulations. In the late 1970s/1980s’ turn toward dystopian writing that overlapped with the utopian period, feminist texts either did not deal with religion in any substantive way, such as Elgin’s *Native Tongue* (1984), which makes little mention of religion, or shows religion as a tool of power, such as Sargent’s *The Shore of Women* (1986), in which the goddess-centered religion is used to further the oppression of men. The 1980s feminist dystopian texts focused instead on political and many cultural aspects of kyriarchy, or they employed extant Abrahamic religious traditions as the foci or as part of their critiques rather than goddess-centered or other fictitious religions. For example, Charnas’s *Walk to the End of the World* (1974), Lee Killough’s *A Voice Out of Ramah* (1978), and Tepper’s *The Gate to Women’s Country* (1989) all deal with fundamentalist forms of Christianity, while Elgin’s short story “For the Sake of Grace” (1969), and Russ’s novel, *The Two of Them* (1978),⁵⁴ deal with fundamentalist Islam. Feminist dystopian texts that do focus on religion tend to portray oppression of women through fundamentalist manifestations of Abrahamic faiths that are completely divorced from mainstream Abrahamic religious tenets. Furthermore, because of the rise of vociferous fundamentalist factions in American social and

⁵⁴ Russ loosely based *The Two of Them* on Elgin’s story.

political life that are stridently anti-feminist including the Religious Right (Sered 194), feminist texts continue to critique the dystopian aspect of Abrahamic religious traditions,⁵⁵ as in Amin Maalouf's *The First Century After Beatrice* (1992); Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993); Flynn Connolly's *The Rising of the Moon* (1993); Tepper's *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* (1996); Butler's *The Parable of the Talents* (1998); Robinson's *The Years of Rice and Salt* (2002);⁵⁶ and Hillary Jordan's *When She Woke* (2011). In the current political climate of the United States, awash with (limiting) "family values" rhetoric and legislative inroads of the Religious Right into equal rights and bodily autonomy, the dystopian moment is far from drawing to a close.

While I have mostly addressed the rise of the Religious Right in the United States, all three Abrahamic religions have fundamentalist sects and some "family resemblances" (Wittgenstein, qtd in Ruthven 9) in common, even when their behaviors, eschatologies, and goals diverge. Generally, fundamentalist religions demonstrate ideologies that Haideh Moghissi categorizes as "anti-modernity,⁵⁷ anti-democracy, and anti-feminism" (70). These three traits of fundamentalism are quite closely entwined since both modernity and democracy and their underlying tenets of social progress and equality can also be viewed as feminist.

⁵⁵ Some texts critique religion using non-Abrahamic faiths, but these too are generally depicted as fundamentalist in some respect such as Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009), Scott's *Silence Leigh* trilogy: *Five-Twelfths of Heaven* (1985), *Silence in Solitude* (1986), and *The Empress of Earth* (1987); Maureen F. McHugh's *Nekropolis* (2001); Michèle Roberts's *The Book of Mrs. Noah* (1987); Katie Waitman's *The Divided* (1999); or Zilpha Keatley Snyder's young adult trilogy *Below the Root* (1976), *And All the Between* (1977), and *Until the Celebration* (1978). Gael Baudino's *Water!* series, *O Greenest Branch!* (1995), *The Dove Looked In* (1996), and *Branch and Crown* (1996), may more accurately be categorized as alternate history, but critiques Christianity overtly and Islam covertly. Sharon Shinn's *Samaria* series, *Archangel* (1997), *Jovah's Angel* (1998), *The Alleluia Files* (1999), *Angelica* (2004), and *Angel-Seeker* (2005), a mix between science fiction and fantasy, obliquely critiques both Christianity and atheism.

⁵⁶ *The Years of Rice and Salt* can also be categorized as an alternate history, but one that is exceedingly dystopic for women.

⁵⁷ "Modernity" is a fraught and much contested term; scholars have extensively critiqued "modernity" as a "master narrative" of Western progress and its neglect of alternative narratives. Moghissi uses "modernity" as diametrically opposed to "tradition." For this project, I have chosen to adopt Moghissi's usage and meaning of "anti-modernity" as a resistance to progressive and liberal ideas, including democracy and feminism, justified through a reliance upon "tradition."

Fundamentalists believe in an idealized version of the past, from which society has departed by not adhering to the “true” faith, and, further, that the adherents of a specific faith can recapture this “golden age” and bring it to fruition in modern life through practicing an “authentic” version of the religious faith that usually entails literal interpretation of sacred texts to “weaken and overthrow the corrupted state now in power” (60). Moghissi argues that to reach this goal of fundamentalist theocracy, “the most violent and brutal tactics are justified. Once in power, the fundamentalists again, self-righteously, justify the use of absolute and brutal force to suppress their opposition” (60) even to the detriment of ignoring the peaceful and compassionate aspects of their own religious beliefs. Literal interpretations of sacred texts very rarely seem to embrace democratic or progressive principles, much less feminist ones.

What makes fundamentalists anti-modern is their espoused ideologies of an idealized past, especially concerning gender roles and the inscribing of the “proper place” for subaltern Others in society—all conditions which feminist dystopian writers object to and warn against in their novels. As evident in the Religious Right’s use of mass media—e.g., televangelists, publishing, radio shows, gospel music, cable networks (Hoover 56, 57, 62), and most recently the internet and social media—fundamentalists have few qualms about availing themselves of modern technology to send their messages and fund-raising pleas to as wide and as varied audiences as possible. Paradoxically, fundamentalists also tend to exploit technology in order to cater to specific audiences and further separate themselves from the mainstream of society that they view as secular and therefore corrupt. Moghissi delineates the salient difference between being anti-modern in one’s thinking and being anti-technology in one’s everyday practices: “fundamentalists are against the ideas and ideals of modernity but not against the products of modernization, which they appreciate and use to establish their premodern social and political

order” (71). Fundamentalists should not be confused with Luddites as having an aversion to modern technology which can automate and computerize menial and often mundane tasks and facilitate more efficiency in the workplace as well as the home. Rather, fundamentalists fear that modern *ideas*, such as equality for women or queer persons, are threats to “moral values” (Hawley and Proudfoot 12). Such ideas will lead to an irrevocable overthrow of the kyriarchal structure of their religion, thus redistributing power and undermining men’s control over their respective homes and (male) religious leaders’ control over the religious community. While this fear is not unfounded, per se, it seems irrational for fundamentalists to cling to traditional gender roles that are clearly out-dated and ill-equipped for modern lifestyles which demand two incomes to maintain a middle-class household in the United States.

Feminist dystopian writers recognize the theocratic impulses of fundamentalist faiths which spring from anti-democratic tendencies. As Kimball notes about Christian “exclusivism” and Moghissi attributes to “rampant anti-Semitism” and a desire for an “authentic” Islamic state among Islamists, fundamentalists are anti-democratic when they aspire to change the national government into a religious theocracy. Whether by revolution and overthrow of the existing state or through use of the democratic process to install leaders sympathetic to the fundamentalists’ agenda to repeal civil and social progress, fundamentalists’ goals involve nationalist movements toward theocracy. Moghissi additionally argues that once a theocratic state is established, non-adherents become “second-class citizens” and the more moderate sects of the religion that has come to power are soon labeled as false interpretations and their followers are subjected to the same bigotry as non-adherents (72). This indicates that fundamentalists, like those in the Religious Right, who may use the democratic process to gain power and shape government to their own ends, will also ultimately abandon democratic ideals that insist upon

recognizing the rights of all citizens. They do this in order to reshape the kyriarchal order so that the adherents of the fundamentalist religion occupy the places of power and privilege and others who do not follow that specific religious tradition are relegated to the lower levels and subjugated accordingly. As Moghissi succinctly observes, “Theocratic rule is always authoritarian” (148). The anti-democratic tendencies of fundamentalist religions not only depart from the peaceful and compassionate doctrines of Abrahamic religious traditions, but they are also “determined to subjugate all aspects of human life—be they economic, political, cultural, aesthetic, familial or personal—to the will of God, as declared in religious scripture” (70) as they interpret it. Armstrong observes that “[f]undamentalists have no time for democracy, pluralism, religious toleration, peacekeeping, free speech, or the separation of church and state” (*Battle* ix). Because democratic ideas entail acceptance of difference and others who believe differently as well as differing interpretations of sacred texts, such acceptance threatens fundamentalists’ belief that their religious faith is the one, true path to God.

At the institutional level, as analyzed in feminist dystopias that depict totalitarian theocracies, fundamentalism operates in the kyriarchal power structure with the goal of subsuming all aspects of life under a theocratic state. Varsam identifies Louis Althusser’s Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA), as frequently employed by societies in feminist dystopias as a means of keeping women and others in the population cowed: “If women are made to believe that everything in their society is as it should be and unchangeable, then there will be no desire for change or revolt. In dystopias as much as in slave narratives, this ‘belief’ that change is futile leads many to accept the given reality and their place within it . . .” (215). For example, in creating a nation-state that is governed by religious authorities, feminist science fiction writers create texts that converge Althusser’s RSAs

and ISAs into a monolithic religious, political, and social institution in which no other human institutions, except possibly economic black markets, have any effect or influence on how people live and the things they believe in order to run their society. Althusser states that “it is clear that whereas the—unified—(Repressive) State Apparatus belongs entirely to the public domain, much the larger part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (in their apparent dispersion) are part, on the contrary, of the *private* domain” (97, emphasis in original), thus exemplifying a public/private binary⁵⁸ which does not necessarily represent women’s lived experiences. More saliently, perhaps, this binary reinforces traditional gender roles which overwhelmingly limit women to domestic space and foreclose their economic opportunities as well as opportunities to build influence and power structures of their own in the public sphere. Althusser goes on to argue that both RSAs and ISAs employ repression and ideology, physical and mental violence, which he views, somewhat positively, as a site for struggle.⁵⁹ In feminist dystopian writing, however, this stark segregation of the public and private and collapse of RSAs and ISAs into a single, totalitarian apparatus serves to circumscribe women’s freedom and violently repress resistance. While these conditions may ultimately serve as a site for struggle, the harm, which can result in death, done to women and subaltern men as individuals and as groups through violent repression is cruel in the extreme and completely against democratic principles.

The anti-feminist position of fundamentalist faiths is linked to both anti-modernity and anti-democracy in that democratic ideals include equality for women and queer persons, and modern progress, inextricably intertwined with industrialization, capitalism, and globalization,

⁵⁸ This is not to say that I endorse a public/private binary point of view. Gal and Kligman’s rendering of public and private space as fractals (parts of the public in the private, parts of the private in the public) is generally useful in disproving the idea of a binary. See *The Politics of Gender after Socialism* for a fuller explanation of this theory.

⁵⁹ Althusser primarily discusses RSAs and ISAs in relation to class issues rather than gender; however, his theory about how institutions work, violently and ideologically, to ensure compliance from a given population seems especially applicable to feminist dystopian texts.

endorses women's participation in the marketplace and the public arena rather than limiting women to the domestic sphere. Fundamentalists rely on narratives of biological essentialism as the basis for their arguments that "a woman's place is in the home/kitchen." This idea that women and men have distinct, though necessary, roles is called complementarianism. However, complementarianism is yet another manifestation of gender separation, or perhaps more accurately, the segregation of women. Moghissi states, "To control women and regain the authority of the patriarchal family are central objectives in the fundamentalist utopia. . . . Society must be changed to revitalize the gendered religious dogma prescribed in holy texts. . . . They all feel that because of their natural and biological differences, women should have different roles in the family and society" (72). While complementarianism may boast that men and women are "equal" in the eyes of God and the church, the fact that women are placed in the subordinated roles and limited in their opportunities to enter the public sphere once again demonstrates that "separate but equal" is a bankrupt idea, especially in contemporary American society.

Rather than equal human beings, as feminist dystopian writers posit, women are, for fundamentalists, the repositories of the religious tradition who transmit that tradition to the next generation. In the introduction to *Nothing Sacred*, Katha Pollitt maintains that "[a]ll fundamentalisms express great concern and respect for the family and childraising, the traditional sphere of women, and for traditional culture, of which women are typically the custodians" (xiii). When feminism and feminist legislation, programs, and ideologies give women an alternative view of their potential as fully-realized human beings beyond marriage and motherhood, they challenge fundamentalist tenets that protect the presumed sacredness of the home. What fundamentalists are really attempting to protect, however, is the "sacredness" of male dominance in the home through physical, financial, and ideological means and the control

of women's bodies and agency in order to preserve the "patriarchal dividend" and kyriarchal power structures. Pollitt argues that "the opposite of fundamentalism is feminism" (xiv), and I would expand upon her argument by contending that fundamentalism is diametrically opposed to multi-cultural, multi-ethnic/racial, gender-inclusive feminism that employs intersectional analysis to critique and challenge kyriarchal institutions. Feminism and specifically feminist dystopian and utopian writing present a counternarrative to fundamentalist ideology concerning "family values" and thus undermines kyriarchal control of women as singular transmitters of religious values to their children.

Feminist dystopian writers engage in this counternarrative through their examination of fundamentalist faith's anti-modernity, anti-democracy, and anti-feminism. Their dystopian visions exhibit the reality of fundamentalist oppression of women and subaltern Others through the auspices of religious faith. In feminist dystopias that also include utopian religious communities, as ambiguous as those societies might be, they demonstrate how modernity, democracy, and feminism work in concert to release everyone from kyriocentric axes of oppression and privilege. Additionally, fundamentalist entities exhibit specific characteristics that reflect their anti-modern, anti-democratic, and anti-feminist qualities such as ideologies of gender (Hawley and Proudfoot 25) which include a sense of women as Other (27) and boundary policing; a sense of besetment (21); a sense of nostalgia for a by-gone or "golden" age (30); and a sense of religious machismo (32).

First, as Hawley and Proudfoot argue, fundamentalists assume a militant position toward what they oppose, a militancy that "signals that the oppositional posture is what actually defines fundamentalism. Fundamentalists do not merely detach themselves from certain trends in modern culture; they commit themselves to battle against those trends" (12). This militancy is a

reaction against perceived threats springing from a sense of besetment (21). Fundamentalists not only feel buffeted by moral dilemmas that arise in everyday life but also feel persecuted as a religious minority, leading to the development of a “siege mentality.” Jay M. Harris maintains that in many cases, their perception is a valid one: “many of the groups we routinely identify as fundamentalist have good reason to feel beset: they have had alien ideas and values imposed on them; . . . modernity, on many levels, has been profoundly disorienting for many groups, religious and otherwise; and at times this disorientation has been deliberately imposed on inhospitable cultures” (160). While Jews and Muslims in the United States are religious and ethnic minorities, Christians are clearly the majority population. Within Christianity and its divisions between Catholic and innumerable Protestant denominations, fundamentalist sects also constitute religious minorities so the perception of minority status may have some merit. Yet, as Hawley and Proudfoot point out, “with surprising regularity, fundamentalists talk as though they represent a majority—not a minority—point of view” (22). They cite the example of Jerry Falwell, who claimed to speak for a “silent majority,” and demonstrate the fundamentalist perception that “if fundamentalists are not the actual majority, they should be—or were, when times were better” (22). By possessing a minority complex and actually being minority groups within a larger majority group, yet claiming to speak for a majority of society, fundamentalists position themselves so that they can claim to be victimized while also claiming to represent the general populace; this presents a paradox of reasoning. One example of this paradox might be how Religious Right and Republican pundits have recently proclaimed a “war on Christmas” because of various state agencies and schools using inclusive language like “Happy Holidays” instead of “Merry Christmas.” The Religious Right is simultaneously acting victimized by a so-called “war” on a religious holiday specific to Christians, though other faiths’ observances are

hardly acknowledged in public during the holiday season, but also claiming to speak for the majority of Americans who do celebrate Christmas in some form.

Fundamentalist ideologies of gender, which inform their anti-feminism, are generally steeped in biological essentialism that purport differences between women and men and the necessity of special roles for them in society based upon these “God-given” differences. The special roles of complementarianism, however, usually tend to privilege men and lead to the subjugation and subordination of women to men. Biological differences and the circumscribed positions that women fill in the fundamentalist reckoning of gender roles tend to exert a sense of the Otherness and inferiority of women to men. Hawley and Proudfoot contend that “in groups led by men whose identity is constructed in important ways by their own confrontation with an external ‘other,’ great weight falls on the need to control the other ‘others’ in their midst” (27). Because of fundamentalists’ (perceived or real) besetment, they devote a significant amount of time and resources to policing potential “backsliders and apostates” (27) as well as shoring up the boundaries around what establishes their sect as different from mainstream denominations. Hawley and Proudfoot conclude that as a result of this continuous internal and external boundary-policing, “great efforts are made to assert control over the more accessible other in its midst: woman” (27). In this sleight of hand, the external Otherness of non-fundamentalists is transposed onto the internal Other of women who can be controlled and policed more effectively than outsiders.

Fundamentalists react to women’s progress and perceived threats to their religious faith with boundary policing. In addition to the “feminization” of religion that fundamentalists fear and react against, fundamentalists regard the secularization of modern life as undermining their religious faith. This produces a reactionary anxiety and upsurge in boundary-setting for women,

children, and queers and strengthens the desire to re-sacralize the public sphere—in specific ways. Sands brings this fundamentalist desire to merge the private sphere of religion with the so-called secular, public arena back to the fundamentalist establishment of a religious binary by pointing out that, “evangelical [*sic*] Protestantism alone is thought to be the true and only religious foundation for the American polity. It is as if generic religion, having been stripped of its feigned universality, is being morphed by evangelicals [*sic*] into an unabashedly ethnocentric nationalism” (61). The boundary-policing, anxiety over gender and masculinity, and desire to establish specific religious theocracies are only some of the areas in which fundamentalists exhibit their binary world view that distinguishes them from mainstream religious groups.

Fundamentalists attempt to return the status of women to that of previous eras through an erosion of women’s human rights, arising from a sense of nostalgia. Nostalgia is, invariably, predicated upon an idealization of the past, remembered or not. Yet this idealized past is itself mythical in nature and, supplemented by faulty memories, was not a lived reality but rather a gleaning of specific halcyon moments that selectively ignores the negative, traumatic, or oppressive aspects of the past. It is, after all, easier when feeling beset by modern life and what fundamentalists view as a degeneration of moral values to yearn for a return to a “golden age” where men ostensibly had clear control over women and other marginalized groups. Hawley and Proudfoot and K. Brown attribute some of this nostalgia to a Freudian “connection between religion and childhood” (31). While I would not completely discount such a connection, fundamentalists’ nostalgia seems more clearly linked to the utopian potential and/or eschatology described in their sacred texts. For Christians and Muslims, living by certain precepts, primarily a profession of faith, guarantees another life in paradise and an escape from Armageddon; for Jews, living by certain precepts will help to usher in the Messianic age. Here, the connection to

nostalgia is that fundamentalists (and admittedly many evangelicals and other non-fundamentalists as well), perceive the world as worsening and growing closer to a time of apocalypse and a complementary belief that the world was not worsening prior to the modern era, or not as quickly, and was therefore somehow “better.” Whether the world and its societies were “better” in previous eras is debatable and usually comes down to the question which dystopian texts implicitly ask: “better for whom?” The crux of the issue, then, is that fundamentalists perceive the world as having been better for their group specifically in a previous era (whether it was in reality), and disregard other truths about society demonstrating that previous eras were not, in fact, “better” for other minority groups who were disenfranchised, illiterate, lacked civil rights, were enslaved or a litany of other forms of oppression that were, and in some ways still are, in operation. Moreover, many fundamentalist groups did not exist in previous eras and their sense of nostalgia is entirely manufactured and deluded.

Feminist science fiction writers recognize the link between fundamentalist nostalgia and gender. This link involves further policing of boundaries regarding women, QUILTBAG persons and minorities, based upon an idealized, previous era in which middle-class (white) women had no options other than working in the home, queers were not “out,” and racial and ethnic minorities were controlled through immigration restrictions and lack of access to education and upward mobility through various professions. Regardless, the fundamentalist mindset believes that ushering in a “golden age” that is a return to a mythical and idealized past will establish their righteousness should the end of days come to pass or, instead, would hasten the coming of a Messiah or a final Judgment Day (Kimball 105). Fundamentalist nostalgia, it seems, is a mechanism for continuing to exert control over and circumscribe the roles of women (and men) as well as keep kyriarchal power in the hands of certain men, similar to previous eras.

Hawley and Proudfoot argue that the Othering and nostalgia that fundamentalist groups exhibit is complicated by “religious machismo” (32). Above, I have already alluded to Armstrong’s and K. Brown’s arguments that fundamentalists display anxiety over perceived threats to masculinity from women’s encroachment into the public sphere as well as from a “feminization” of religious values. Armstrong links this masculinity crisis to the militancy of the Religious Right; Brown links it to a re-inscribing of control of women and children, and I would add QUILTBAG persons; M. Jones categorizes it as a “defense of patriarchy” (1), which I would expand to a defense of kyriarchal power; and Moghissi and Pollitt purport that fundamentalism is anti-feminist. Throughout feminist dystopian writing, feminist writers demonstrate how all of these arguments resonate with the idea that fundamentalists embrace a mindset that delineates men as superior and women as inferior beings that must be protected, dominated, and controlled. Yet, as Woodhead observes, “religion does not have a monopoly on sexism, chauvinism or domestic abuse. I am not aware of any evidence that levels of abuse have any significant correlation with religious or secular adherence” (“Secular Privilege” 56). Furthermore, drawing upon Connell’s work, Anna M. Agathangelou and L. H. M. Ling write:

Hegemonic masculinity comes from customary norms and practices. When agents of hegemonic masculinity feel threatened by outside forces, hypermasculinity arises by inflating, exaggerating, or otherwise distorting conventional understandings of masculinity. . . . Bouts of hypermasculinity occur when patriarchal elites goad each other on, escalating the inflations, exaggerations, and distortions with each round. Hypermasculinity *needs*

hyperfemininity to perform but does not acknowledge this dependence and devalues it at the same time. (3)⁶⁰

Clearly, machismo or masculinity crises and anxieties that provoke bouts of hypermasculinity in a population are not limited to religious groups alone. However, in view of the focus of this project on feminist examinations of fundamentalism, it is not enough to say that the religious machismo which manifests itself in fundamentalist groups is merely following the patterns of larger society and culture. At least one factor that makes religious machismo different is the pervasive misogynistic interpretations of sacred texts, particularly because fundamentalists tend to regard sacred texts as the literal, and therefore infallible and unchallengeable, “Word of God.”

Feminist dystopian writers identify the dangers of literal interpretation of sacred texts, written and interpreted by men, as detrimental to women’s autonomy and humanity. Furthermore, a plethora of critics and theologians categorize the literal interpretation of sacred texts as a characteristic of fundamentalism.⁶¹ Fundamentalists view sacred texts as words spoken directly by the mouth of God, and therefore inerrant. They disregard the fact that all sacred texts were written and interpreted by (primarily male) human beings who were not only fallible but were also the products of their cultural-historical moment. Literal interpretation also disregards the fact that Christian fundamentalists, who are most prevalent in the United States, tend to read the Christian Bible in English translation rather than in the original Hebrew or Greek.⁶² Kimball

⁶⁰ Agathangelou and Ling also contend that hyperfemininity reacts to hegemonic femininity as well as redefines and depends on it (4). Hegemonic femininity is the mainstream norms and practices that perpetuate images or expectations of society for what comprises femininity; hyperfemininity (or hypermasculinity) can eventually “reformulate” hegemonic femininity (or masculinity) into this hyper state.

⁶¹ See Kimball, Hawley and Proudfoot, Armstrong, Harris, Berlet, Schüssler Fiorenza, and Plaskow, among others.

⁶² Islam avoids the translation conundrum for the Qur’an by insisting that it can only be read in Arabic (though unofficial translations do exist); however, the *hadith*, or sayings attributed to Muhammad, are subject to dispute and interpretation in spite of resistance to translation. Islam has a long history of commentary on the Qur’an that expounds on different interpretations; the divine revelation to Muhammad is never subject to questioning, but what a

argues that “[n]o one takes the [Christian] Bible literally” and those who make claims that they do so “are either ignorant or self-deluded” (57), especially since these claims are easily disproven by asking if someone who interprets the Christian Bible literally executes their disobedient children (Deuteronomy 21:18-21),⁶³ possesses slaves (Leviticus 25:44), believes in selling all of one’s possessions and giving the money to the poor (Luke 14:26-33), and so on. Rather, Kimball insists that fundamentalists’ literal interpretations of the Christian Bible are selective in nature (57) and that this type of absolutism, which masks its selectivity, eventually leads to violent behavior and “destructive consequences” (56). These “destructive consequences” not only allow for boundary policing, but such rigid beliefs in the inerrancy of sacred texts also lead to demonizing and dehumanizing women, QUILTBAG persons, and other subaltern groups, and justifying punishment or acts of violence against those who do not interpret sacred texts with the same literalism (51-52).⁶⁴ Furthermore, literal interpretation often leads to contradictions, particularly surrounding the “nature” of women. Hawley and Proudfoot note that “[f]or every text that places well-domesticated womanhood on a religious pedestal, another one announces that, if uncontrolled, women are the root of all evil” (27).

Literal interpretation of sacred texts leads to a loss of the ability to examine a text critically for metaphorical meaning that may have more salient applications to modern

text may mean is open to endless interpretation. Many Jews, even those in the more liberal denominations, read Hebrew, but outside of the rabbinate, Orthodox communities, and yeshivas that specialize in reading the Tanakh and Talmud (commentary) in Hebrew, most American Jews also rely on English translations and commentaries published in English. Many Jews also utilize midrash, or retellings of biblical stories from the ancient era to the contemporary one, to discern meaning in a text.

⁶³ An exception is Charlie Fuqua, a Republican candidate for the Arkansas House of Representatives in the 2012 election who served as a House member from 1996-98. He advocates the death penalty for rebellious teenagers in his (electronic) book *God’s Law*, and also supports expelling all Muslims from the United States. Fuqua lost his election bid. His publisher, American Book Publishing, is listed on the “Writer Beware” list of the Science Fiction Writers’ Association and is apparently a pay-to-publish company.

⁶⁴ Two examples of these violent manifestations are the assassination of abortion providers or suicide bombers who kill innocent civilians.

circumstances. Armstrong notes that in the modern era, we have lost the distinction between *mythos* and *logos* in our examination of ourselves and the world around us:

Myth . . . was concerned with what was thought to be timeless and constant in our existence. Myth looked back to the origins of life, to the foundations of culture, and to the deepest levels of the human mind. Myth was not concerned with practical matters, but with meaning. Unless we find some significance in our lives, we mortal men and women fall very easily into despair. The *mythos* of a society provided people with a context that made sense of their day-to-day lives; it directed their attention to the eternal and universal. . . . The various mythological stories, which were not intended to be taken literally, were an ancient form of psychology. (xiii)

In other words, sacred texts along with oral narratives and other stories were meant to be interpreted allegorically or metaphorically. *Logos*, on the other hand, concerned what could be experienced by the senses and proven, more or less empirically. Armstrong writes that “*Logos* was the rational, pragmatic, and scientific thought that enabled men and women to function well in the world. . . . Unlike myth, *logos* must relate exactly to facts and correspond to external realities if it is to be effective. It must work efficiently in the mundane world” (xiv). Armstrong further argues that fundamentalists collapse *mythos* into *logos* and claim that their ideology has a scientific or provable basis—that the mythological is actually logical (366). One example of this merging is Christian fundamentalists’ insistence on teaching Intelligent Design in science classes either alongside or as a replacement for the theory of evolution; in another example, some fundamentalists claim that the age of the Earth is between six and ten thousand years, based on dating events in sacred texts, rather than 4.5 billion years as established by the geologic proof of

radiometric dating of rocks. This loss of the distinction between *mythos* and *logos* and subsequent interpretation of sacred texts as literal and infallible not only leads to hypocrisy and the demonizing of Others but also precludes fundamentalists from realizing greater meaning from sacred texts that could “provide a rich source of wisdom and guidance in the vicissitudes of life” (Kimball 52). Unfortunately, as Kimball posits, “[w]hen adherents lose sight of the symbolic nature of language about God, religion is easily corrupted” (51); as such fundamentalism is inherently corrupt, a condition of religion which feminist writers astutely perceive and warn against.

Further augmenting the collapse of *mythos* and *logos* in fundamentalist faiths is the collapse of women into Woman-as-symbol. For example, the virgin/whore binary used to categorize women is fully symbolic in nature; yet women are still subjected to such categories that elide the nuances of their material lives. In *Gender and Nation*, Nira Yuval-Davis states that “[a]ccording to different national projects, under specific historical circumstances, some or all women of childbearing age groups would be called on, sometimes bribed, and sometimes even forced, to have more, or fewer, children” (22), actions which demonstrate that the control of women and their reproduction is frequently a concern of the state. She also makes apparent the link between Woman-as-symbol and how ideological apparatuses regulate and shape women’s material realities. Because of their reproductive capacity to have children, women become repositories of culture, and, with their primary involvement in child-raising, they also become responsible for transmitting that culture, whether national, racial, ethnic, or religious, to the next generation. Yuval-Davis’s and others’ theories of the commodification of women into cultural repositories and their reduction to objects by the state all make explicit that control of women rests in ideological frameworks—including fundamentalist ones. Susan Starr Sered expands

upon Yuval-Davis's thesis of Woman-as-symbol to postulate that Woman and material women are conflated by "religious interactions" (194). She means that the symbolic use of women in religion, whether as the "Good Woman," who is a submissive wife and caring mother, or the "Bad Woman," who is rebellious, sinful, or sexually uncontrolled, often supersedes what real women are and how they behave. Rather than viewing women as autonomous and fully-realized subjects, Sered asserts that "[f]rom the point of view of patriarchal institutions, women are problematic symbols because they always 'threaten' to turn into agents. . . . Because women know themselves to be agents, many cultures do things to women's bodies to encourage or force them to internalize an understanding of themselves as symbols" (195). Sered also contends that the intersection between Woman-as-symbol, creation myths that "naturalize" the difference and positioning of women, and real women is a source of tension in most religions (195). When fundamentalists take literally sacred texts that recount myths of origin, this tension strains even more what separation may exist between Woman-as-symbol and women. As a result, Sered observes that "it is often at the fuzzy meeting points of symbol and agency (Woman and women) that we find the most extensive control of women, as well as conflict regarding that control" (195). This observation echoes Hawley and Proudfoot's contention that fundamentalists practice a religious machismo and boundary-policing of women, children, and queer persons. It also echoes fundamentalists' anti-feminist stance because feminism speaks to the potential to subvert this kyriarchal control of women.

In dystopian texts, feminist writers demonstrate the contingent nature of women's civil rights and twentieth century gains in social and cultural attitudes. While feminism has made limited progress in legal and work arenas, women are not fully equal to men in American society. Furthermore, women's progress in some arenas is met with negative fundamentalist

reactions in religious communities. Additionally, Sered argues that religion generally has not progressed toward equality and egalitarian treatment of all its adherents as quickly as other social and civil institutions: “In the religious sphere, in contrast, the development of Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Hindu feminist discourses has been paralleled by the development of fundamentalist discourses that give renewed—and often harshly unprecedented—emphasis to patriarchal values. A preliminary question we must ask is why religion has (behaved) differently than other social institutions in regard to gender and change” (194). In this statement, Sered somewhat elides the progress that mainstream religious denominations⁶⁵ have made in regard to gender equality that may more effectively mirror feminist gains in other institutions. However, her point about the parallel development of fundamentalist off-shoots of Abrahamic religions is well-taken: fundamentalist sects have reacted more virulently and violently to women’s advances in civil society and attempted to halt, at a minimum, women in fundamentalist families from availing themselves of those advances. More recently in American politics, fundamentalists have targeted rolling back those advances that concern control of their fertility for all women. One example is the resistance of fundamentalists to women working outside the home and, potentially more threatening, securing their own incomes and financial independence from the male head of household. Another example is the resistance of fundamentalist organizations to ordaining women as clergy and assuming visible leadership positions within the religious community.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ I.e., Reform, Reconstruction and Conservative Judaism, myriad Protestant denominations, mainstream Catholicism, and mainstream Islam.

⁶⁶ Ironically for the Vatican, the conflation of priests into the symbolic representation of Jesus as “Man” or male symbol, has also created conflict surrounding the ordination of women. Sered calls this conflict “unresolved, precisely because Christ’s (and the priest’s) sex and celibate sexuality are seen as having symbolic value” (209). I would argue that unless the Vatican were to undergo a major change and repudiate its fundamentalist policies, the issue is less “unresolved” and better characterized as “moot” in light of the symbolic designation of priests-as-Man/Jesus. Despite the Vatican’s severely damaged reputation due to child molestation scandals and its difficulty in recruiting and retaining new priests, the Vatican shows no signs of allowing women to be ordained as priests and/or relaxing the celibacy rules for the priesthood. On the flip side, Catholic nuns have enjoyed extreme popularity in

Feminist dystopian writers identify and protest these trends in US politics through their critiques of religious fundamentalism.

Feminist dystopian writing illustrates the horrific dependent states to which fundamentalism reduces women and subaltern Others. Because fundamentalist women do not have access to resources, it leads to these women's treatment as the symbolic Woman who are then held to impossible standards of dress, behavior, and purity. Sered posits that when men are absent or less in control of economic and social resources and when women are able to use those resources and exercise agency, then the tension between Woman-as-symbol and real women tends to recede and the distinction is more apparent. The reverse occurs, and the tension is heightened, when fundamentalist men have greater control of resources (206). Furthermore, Sered writes that "in situations in which women have limited agency and therefore are dependent upon men to support and defend them, the symbol Woman tends to take on greater salience, leading to efforts to impress upon women's bodies and souls the imprint of Woman. The elevation of Woman is achieved through the suppression of women's autonomy" (203). In many fundamentalist sects, this suppression of autonomy amounts to strictures regarding dress, sexuality, freedom of movement, freedom of expression, and even bodily alterations. Fundamentalists would ultimately impose these conditions on all women through theocratic governments but in the meantime settle for using their influence over the Religious Right and the Republican Party to weaken the rights of all women in the United States.

Feminist dystopian texts work to expose the specious arguments regarding women that fundamentalists espouse and the inherent dangers of such arguments. Alongside feminist

American society, especially during the campaign season leading up to the 2012 presidential election. Nuns are generally viewed as adhering to authentic Catholicism: helping the poor and performing charitable acts. Despite these religious women's proven dedication and their unblemished (by comparison with priests) reputation, the Vatican still refuses to ordain nuns and install them as full religious leaders.

dystopian authors, Kimball maintains that “religion becomes evil” when fundamentalist characteristics are present in a religious institution because this leads to blind obedience and a lack of critical thinking upon the part of the religion’s adherents. With de rigueur blind obedience, a fundamentalist institution then can justify engaging in behaviors that harm others and thus abandon the tenets of its religion that exhort followers to be peaceful and act with compassion. Kimball writes, “Whatever religious people may say about their love of God or the mandates of their religion, when their behavior toward others is violent and destructive, when it causes suffering among their neighbors, you can be sure the religion has been corrupted and reform is desperately needed” (39). In this respect, the utopian potential of religion, especially for women and other marginalized groups, is completely subsumed by the dystopic potential of religion to oppress non-adherents and the Other within religious communities. For some feminist science fiction writers, when the dystopic potential of religion overwhelms the utopic elements the faith might have, that religion and its political influence becomes untenable.

Feminist dystopian authors first prove the irredeemableness of fundamentalist religions, and then provide metaphorical blueprints for affecting change. Like feminist dystopian critiques of fundamentalism, many feminist theologians are engaged in reclaiming, revisioning, or reforming their religious faiths. When Islamic feminists participate in *ijtihad*, a Muslim tradition of reinterpretation and critical thinking about issues connected with sacred texts and the law, and Jewish and Christian feminist theologians engage in reinterpreting sacred texts, they not only demonstrate the plasticity of the religion but also expose whether a religious faith is inherently corrupt, and thus irredeemable from the standpoint of gender equality. Feminist theologians’ participation in a process that for thousands of years has excluded women and

women's experiences is critical for transformation.⁶⁷ In *Dislocating Cultures*, Uma Narayan argues,

Just as feminists have a stake in redefining prevailing notions of "Nation," feminists in various parts of the world often have an important stake in redefining a number of "religious traditions". . . . Many religious traditions are in fact more capacious than fundamentalist adherents allow. Insisting on humane and inclusive interpretations of religious traditions might, in many contexts, be crucial components in countering the deployment of religious discourses. (35)

Religion can be flexible, open to change and can incorporate ideas and practices from other religious faiths (Friedman, "Religion" 6). However, fundamentalists insist upon the literal inerrancy of sacred texts, do not acknowledge their own selection biases, and use those texts to circumscribe the roles of women and to conflate real women into Woman-as-symbol, for which flexibility and potential for transformation are decidedly lacking. Fundamentalist manifestations of mainstream Abrahamic religions may very well be irredeemable and unsalvageable as religious faiths that not only do not honor their own tenets but continue to harm and restrict the religious, legal and civil freedoms of others. Feminist dystopian writers provide social commentary that challenges fundamentalist formations of religious faith in order to alert their readers to the dangers of fundamentalist thought and practices and how fundamentalism preserves and may worsen the status quo of women as subordinated in the kyriarchal system of Western culture.

⁶⁷ For a more detailed discussion of feminist theologians and their mission in religious studies see Joy and Neumaier-Dargyay's *Gender, Genre and Religion: Feminist Reflections*.

Conclusion

Feminist science fiction authors tend to show religion as oppressive toward women, and frequently lower-class or other subaltern men. Additionally, feminist dystopic writers critique religion, especially when religion takes on fundamentalist overtones, because religious faiths take the form of kyriarchal organizations that systematically oppress women and because women have not made the same progress in dismantling oppression in religious institutions as they appear to have made in the workplace and in the law in the West. However, despite science fiction's tendency toward secularism and use of technology to exemplify the human condition, oppression of women and subaltern men by social and political institutions continues to present an ever-growing need for equality across many aspects of identity. Feminist science fiction, then, in the genre of dystopian writing, takes on religious themes and religious orthodoxy itself not so much a result of an author's inward search for a higher power but to call attention to the oppressive aspects of organized religions, particularly the fundamentalist branches of Abrahamic religions as practiced in contemporary society, and to expose the kyriarchal aspects of certain religious faiths and warn against their influence on culture as a whole.

Feminist dystopian writers employ religious critiques in order to argue against fundamentalism and its distinguishing components that, when taken together, would signal corrupted religious faith: anti-modernity, anti-democracy, and anti-feminism; a sense of besetment; ideologies of gender; boundary policing; nostalgia; religious machismo; and (selective) literal interpretations of sacred texts. In the broader view, feminist science fiction authors recognize the importance of more deeply examining kyriarchal culture and its origins in order to critique the latent cultural aspects of political systems. Furthermore, Abrahamic

religions,⁶⁸ especially in the fundamentalist forms, tend to demonize women on the one hand as the perpetrators of sin and the repositories of evil and impurity and, on the other hand, venerate women as the keepers and transmitters of cultural and moral values performing the faith's most valuable task in caring for the next generation of believers—a task that is so time-consuming, women are hard-pressed to leave the home. Both sets of beliefs about women cast them as the symbolic Woman and result in a disregard for material, living women and their autonomy as human beings.

Finally, feminist dystopian writing warns against the rise of the Religious Right and how implementation of their theocratic policies would seriously erode women's civil and human rights. The Religious Right's agenda, based on its ties to fundamentalist ideologies that advocate for traditional gender roles that subjugate women and subaltern Others, subverts the gains that women and other minority groups have made in the latter half of the twentieth century and seeks to keep kyriarchal structures, and the benefits for the white, heterosexual, upper-class, and able-bodied men, in place. Through explorations of myriad types of families, queer relationships, alternative reproductive strategies, and women's potential for empowerment, feminist dystopian writing challenges traditional Western narratives embraced by conservatives and fundamentalists in the Religious Right.

⁶⁸ Hinduism and Confucianism do not have texts that attribute some sort of “original sin” or “fall of man” to women; however, both traditions are extremely kyriocentric in nature and routinely have oppressed women through religious and cultural tenets.

Chapter 2

“Give Me Children or Else I Die”: Control, Hypocrisy, and Resistance in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*

“It’s a truism that enemy states tend to mirror one another in organization and methods. . . . What form will the United States assume now that it’s opposed by unrelenting religious fanaticisms? Will it soon produce rule by the same kind of religious fanaticism, only of a different sect? Will the more repressive elements within it triumph, returning it to its origins as a Puritan theocracy and giving us *The Handmaid’s Tale* in everything but the outfits?”
– Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds* (90)

The Handmaid’s Tale (1985) was a seminal novel in the feminist turn from utopian to dystopian writing during the 1980s backlash and offers a critique of religious fundamentalism of a Christian-modeled faith in which women are returned to the status of commodities of elite men and only valued for their reproductive capacities or other limited and circumscribed functions. Atwood’s dystopia employs estrangement to great effect through a setting that seems only a few years into the future and yet, nearly thirty years later, still produces the same sense of horrific possibility. The novel also identifies the kyriocentrism of fundamentalist religious denominations that do not allow alternative narratives for people’s lives and insist on a Christian, heteronormative point of view for all, masking violence against women behind an aura of protecting women from themselves and from men.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, a Christian fundamentalist regime calling itself the Republic of Gilead has staged a military coup in the New England portion of the United States and established itself as the theocratic government. Although the setting of the book is limited to the surrounding environs of Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the text does not make clear how far the nation-state of Gilead actually extends other than to exclude the re-established Republic of Texas and to forcibly resettle the Sons of Ham (African-Americans) in

what was formerly North Dakota. The Colonies of Unwomen (elderly, non-fertile, and otherwise undesirable women) and Gender Traitors (gay men) lie at the environmentally devastated and toxic periphery of Gilead and also function as “the fate worse than death,” the threat of which keeps people in Gilead cooperative with the state and complicit with the regime’s restrictions.

Offred, the protagonist and narrator of the story, is a Handmaid in the house of a Commander. As a woman of child-bearing age, she is rehabilitated at a Red Center as a state-sanctioned concubine or mistress, of sorts, for the procreative use of a series of Commanders. Offred is denied her name⁶⁹ and identity, separated from her family, and reduced to being a “two-legged womb” for increasing Gilead’s waning white population. Along with Handmaids, women in Gilead, with the exception of the Aunts, are prohibited from reading words, or anything beyond pictorial signs, and are confined to the domestic sphere. Yet even after placing severe restrictions on women’s mobility in public space, Gilead further defines women by class status. There are five categories of women: the Wives of Commanders, who ostensibly control the home but still cannot move outside it without permission; Marthas, or domestic workers; Econowives who are lower class and must perform all functions (Wife, Handmaid, Martha) for their husbands’ households; the highly secret Jezebels, women kept as (forcibly sterilized) prostitutes for the Commanders and other men of status until one’s “snatch wears out” and they are discarded in the Colonies as Unwomen, performing nuclear-waste clean up until they die of radiation poisoning; and the Aunts, seemingly the only women who work outside the home, in the Red Centers, due to their having demonstrated their belief in Gilead’s “traditional, family values.” Men are also divided into classes: the Commanders, older men who hold most of the power; the Eyes, who are the intelligence corps and secret police about whom little is generally

⁶⁹ “Offred” is a patronymic combination of “of” and “Fred,” the name of her Commander; Handmaids’ names change with their postings to different households.

known; the Angels, or soldiers; and the Guardians of the Faith, or the local police force and other men assigned to Commanders' households as drivers or aides who perform other menial duties. The text also makes clear that race, ethnicity, and other formulations of cultural difference apart from whiteness and Christianity are not acceptable in Gileadean society; people of color, non-Christians, and other undersirables are deported or executed outright.

In *Fictional Feminism: How American Bestsellers Affect the Movement for Women's Equality*, Kim Loudermilk argues that *The Handmaid's Tale* puts forth a "fictional feminism," through its critique of some Second Wave feminists' biological essentialism and lesbian separatism that valorized women and feminine qualities over men and masculine qualities. Furthermore, Loudermilk considers the novel's argument about the apparent complacency of Third Wave feminists who take for granted the legal and political gains for women achieved in the 1970s as another aspect of "fictional feminism." While I would agree that Atwood engages with Second and Third Wave feminists, Atwood's examinations of portions of these movements are, after all, valid ones and not meant to monolithically represent all feminisms or feminists. What appears to be the sticking point for Loudermilk is that *The Handmaid's Tale* offers no way forward or alternative for feminism to follow (136) in the resolution of the novel.⁷⁰ In another vein, Meredith Tax supposes in "World Culture War," that "[fundamentalist] movements have in common a desire for racial, ethnic, and religious homogeneity; an apocalyptic vision of purification through bloodshed; and a patriarchal view of women and the family. I call them atavistic because of the way they yearn for a mythic past, often the age of barbarism, when their nation, tribe, or religion was great" (23). These are the conditions Atwood's Gilead seems to exemplify and are also characteristic of fundamentalist institutions. Furthermore, Atwood exposes how technology might be used in the service of oppression rather than as a mechanism

⁷⁰ Incidentally, Loudermilk does not offer alternatives or a way forward of her own.

of liberatory progress. Atwood's text demonstrates Nira Yuval-Davis's theorizing of the link between Woman (as a symbol) and how ideological apparatuses police and shape women's material realities. Atwood also exposes the nature of religion when it is superimposed over an existing society and its values and how religion becomes so intertwined in a culture's norms and mores as to become inseparable and nearly indistinguishable from the original culture. With all of these factors operating in the text, what role does Atwood's deployment of religion in a science fiction take, and, especially in a feminist dystopic text, how does it serve as commentary on current social conditions and the sustainment of kyriarchal norms?

Religious Views and Critical Reception

As discussed in Chapter 1, authors of feminist dystopian writing frequently criticize fundamentalist manifestations of Abrahamic religions rather than, like many male science fiction writers, explore religion in their texts as part of an "inward search" of their own beliefs or to find some ultimate version of "truth." Nor do feminist dystopian writers discount religion entirely. Yet for Margaret Atwood,⁷¹ the daughter of a dietician and an entomologist who spent a good portion of her childhood in remote woodlands of Canada, her views of religion do not suggest an "inward search" through her fiction at all and are decidedly agnostic. Atwood's firm grounding in science and scientific reasoning seems to preclude, for her, the possibility of deities or supernatural beings prescribed by religious affiliation and practice. She writes in *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*: "Maybe your survival chances are better if you think there is a powerful being on your side who has a master plan. But there probably isn't much

⁷¹ For many years, Atwood denied that she writes "science fiction" and preferred to call her work "speculative fiction." However, after a conversation on a panel with Ursula K. Le Guin, Atwood discovered that her definition of "speculative fiction" was Le Guin's definition of "science fiction" and what Atwood had called "science fiction" (meaning "things that could not really happen" like space aliens and dragons), Le Guin calls "fantasy." While Atwood does not outright acknowledge a change of opinion, she admits she will no longer resist the label of "science fiction": "So that clears it all up, more or less. When it comes to genres, the borders are increasingly undefended, and things slip back and forth across them with insouciance" (*In Other Worlds* 6-7). Atwood dedicated *In Other Worlds* to Le Guin.

more to it than that” (55). Furthermore, Atwood claimed in an interview that “I have no institutional allegiance. My background is scientific. Much of what you may interpret as mysticism [in my writing] is simply science translated into a literary form” and that if she had to choose an existing religion it would be Roman Catholicism due to the central role of a female figure, the Virgin Mary—an aspect missing from Protestantism as well as other religious faiths (Hammond 28). For Atwood, “[t]he other alternative would be to become a Quaker because you're not given any images; you're given a relationship to the divine. While there is a God the Father, women do participate in the religion. Really I'm a pantheist” (28). While Atwood's own professions of “faith,” as it were, seem to range from all gods to none, she would also argue that a science fiction imaginary can replace religion as a guiding factor in people's lives and identity:

Why this migration of the West's more recent founding mythologies—our once-essential core stories of the Judeo-Christian era—from Earth to Planet X? Possibly because—as a society—we no longer believe in the old religious furniture, or not enough to make it part of our waking “realistic” life. If you have a conversation with the Devil and admit to it, you're liable to end up in a psychiatric ward, not sizzling at the stake. Supernatural creatures with wings and burning bushes that speak are unlikely to be encountered in a novel about stockbrokers unless the stockbrokers have been taking mind-altering substances. But such creatures are thoroughly at home on Planet X. So that's why Heaven and Hell—or at least some of the shapes their inhabitants have traditionally taken—have gone to Planet X. . . . They've moved shop because they're acceptable to us there, whereas they wouldn't be here. . . . And many of us are more than willing to engage with them there because—say some theorists—our

own deep inner selves still contain the archetypal patterns that produced them. (*In Other Worlds* 64-65)

Although Atwood recognizes that religion can be an aspect of identity, she also seems willing to entertain the Freudian concept of religion as created to fulfill underlying human psychological needs. She purports, however, that literature, specifically science fiction, can become another vehicle for fulfilling those needs.

Atwood writes speculative/science fiction, but her examination of cultural issues, especially gender, do not always engage with religious fundamentalism. Atwood thoroughly criticizes kyriocentric Christianity and its privileging of white, elite, heterosexual men in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Later, in *The Year of the Flood* (2009), she satirizes the hippie-cult, God's Gardeners, in their pantheistic cobbling together of environmental and charitable philosophies that are, at times, hypocritical in the cult members' execution of their tenets and far too feeble to withstand the environmental destruction already unleashed on a future United States. However, as Janet Larson notes, "Atwood has said she is 'not interested' in 'remythologizing' Father-God religion [as matriarchal]. She would 'prefer an egalitarian or human religion' that sacralizes neither male nor female" (37). Her short story, "Freeforall," originally published in 1986, presents a matriarchal society, in direct contrast to the extreme patriarchy of *The Handmaid's Tale*. In this near-future, American and Canadian societies are so disease-ridden that the emergent system consists of matriarchal Houses which trade brides and grooms between each other of sexually "pure" young people who can be certified as disease-free. The Houses started out as battered women's shelters, lesbian co-ops, and the like, and these predominantly women's enclaves became the only safe (i.e., disease-free) spaces in which to raise children; thus, they have risen to prominence through their power over the reproductive process. Diseased people

are thrown into carnivalesque, enclosed “freeforalls” where they can do anything they want to do except leave. The people in the freeforalls exercise total sexual permissiveness, but those outside expect the freeforall denizens to eventually die of their diseases. Food is provided but not much else, and babies born in the freeforalls don’t survive for long. Some in the freeforalls commit suicide—it is a prison, after all. The Houses exercise censorship and gender segregation in which girls learn about negotiation and bargaining while the boys learn “war games,” most likely because adult men may go into the military after fulfilling their contracts to father children in another House. The argument here is not so much in dialogue with *The Handmaid’s Tale* about religious fundamentalism but rather an alternate exploration of the same issue: with women in charge, dystopia is still a distinct possibility.

Although Atwood has always foregrounded feminism and women’s experience in her fiction and a great deal of her poetry, her growing political awareness seemed to resonate more strongly in her writing upon publication of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, especially due to her research into human rights violations and her collection of news items from religious and political leaders upon which she based much of the novel. Atwood had become politically active, particularly in Amnesty International, by the 1980s, prior to writing *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Thompson 25-26). At the intersection of Atwood’s increasing political involvement, her female narrators, and her feminist sensibilities also lies the rise of the Religious Right in American politics and the backlash against women and feminism that gained momentum in the 1980s. Atwood insists that nothing about Gilead is invented, and also stating in “Notes for Further Thought,”⁷² published in the 1998 edition of *The Handmaid’s Tale*:

The roots of the book go back to my study of the American Puritans. The society they founded in America was not a democracy as we know it, but a theocracy. In

⁷² Atwood also suggests her sources in the “Historical Notes” section at the end of *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

addition, I found myself increasingly alarmed by statements made frequently by religious leaders in the United States; and then a variety of events from around the world could not be ignored, particularly the rising fanaticism of the Iranian monotheocracy. The thing to remember is that there is nothing new about the society depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* except the time and place. . . . It is an imagined account of what happens when not uncommon pronouncements about women are taken to their logical conclusions. (392)

The Handmaid's Tale emerged in this social and political milieu as a surprising tour-de-force that not only served as a warning and protest against the contemporary kyriarchal tendencies of Western societies and fundamentalist Christianity in particular but also firmly established Atwood as a science fiction author and, more saliently, a writer to be reckoned with.

The critical reception of the book ranges from laudatory to indifferent and trivializing. Despite frequent attempts by local communities to ban *The Handmaid's Tale* from the classroom (American Library Association),⁷³ the novel won the Canadian Governor's General award (1986), the Arthur C. Clarke Award for science fiction (1987), and nominations for the Booker Prize (1986), the Nebula Prize (1986), and the Prometheus Award (1987). Perhaps the more telling indicators of the novel's success lie both in the commercial and the critical arenas: the novel has remained continuously in print since its first publication and is the subject of hundreds, if not thousands, of critical papers and other scholarship that examine myriad themes from the novel as well as language, structure, and form. Lee Briscoe Thompson asserts in *Scarlet Letters*, "For Atwood *The Handmaid's Tale* was, in booksellers' terminology, a 'breakthrough' into larger reading markets, a popular success that made Atwood, in a word, famous. . . . *The*

⁷³ *The Handmaid's Tale* was #37 on the 1990-1999 list (ALA, "100 Most Frequently Challenged Books" and #88 on the 2000-2009 list (ALA, "Top 100 Banned/Challenged Books").

Handmaid's Tale was the first book by Atwood to reach the best-seller charts in the United States, and it appeared on all the lists within two weeks of its American publication" (13). Yet in "Alice in Disneyland: Criticism as Commodity in *The Handmaid's Tale*," Chinmoy Banerjee dismisses the critical success of the novel, arguing that "[t]he difference between a dystopia that retains its critical force and one that has lost it in becoming a commodity, is that the former presents its negative vision as a question on the horizon of our present experience, while the latter simply accepts the vision as its starting point, as the mere condition of its narrative" (76). In other words, Banerjee categorizes the novel as the latter on the basis of its commercial success while ignoring its critical success. I would argue that Atwood certainly has not yielded the critical force of her text because its initial success was not expected and its continued analytic use in academic and critical settings undermines the idea of the novel's commodification and subsequent loss of "critical force." Rather, Atwood's text remains a powerful indictment of the dangers of fundamentalist ideologies and their gestures toward theocratic governance.

Because *The Handmaid's Tale* has received so much critical and scholarly analysis, finding something new to say about the text presents a unique challenge. While some recognize Offred's (passive) resistances to the Gileadean regime, the critics tend to condemn her unreliability as a narrator and assume that her passivity results from cowardice and/or falling in love, a position which I refute. More importantly, most scholars and critics have focused on the totalitarianism of Gilead but do not analyze the religious trappings in which that totalitarianism cloaks itself. Based on her research and commitment to representing actual circumstances and conditions for women in theocratic states, Atwood's text displays a distinct awareness of the Religious Right's misogyny and their preliminary attempts to destabilize women's rights and the gains facilitated by Second Wave feminism. Atwood's dystopic commentary on the current

political and societal milieu specifically attacks fundamentalism and its theocratic impulses through her depiction of Gilead and how the realization of a theocratic government would play out in the United States.

Genre

Not only does Offred transgress the kyriarchal system that oppresses her through the act of telling her story but the novel also transgresses multiple genres as well. The novel's hybridity is reinforced by drawing upon the genres of satire,⁷⁴ realism, slave narrative,⁷⁵ Gothic romance,⁷⁶ and protest novels while appropriating the elements of science fiction through the futuristic setting and use of technology. Baccolini argues that *The Handmaid's Tale* "blurs the borders" between the epistolary,⁷⁷ diary, and historical novel genres while remaining firmly fixed within utopian and dystopian writing ("Gender and Genre" 13). Because of its literary richness and the many layers of meaning in the text, *The Handmaid's Tale* moves skillfully among all of these genres, employing traits from each and forming them into a cohesive whole that simultaneously represents several genres and incorporates elements of several more.

Additionally, the framing of the novel between its dedications, epigrams, and the "Historical Notes," can subtly alter the suspension of disbelief and the sense of estrangement that a dystopian text normally entails, perhaps demands, for the reader. Magali Cornier Michael reads the undermining of Offred's narrative as part of Atwood's critique of contemporary society and her real purpose. She argues that a "gap opens up between the narrator's oral story and the scholars' reading and writing of her story. Within this gap lies the novel's most subversive

⁷⁴ Kaler focuses on the satiric inversion of Roman Catholic female religious communities (43-44).

⁷⁵ Dodson likens the text to a slave narrative as well as a confessional ("We Lived in the Blank White Spaces" 67).

⁷⁶ Banerjee insists that the Gothic elements of the novel remove it from the dystopian tradition entirely (82-83).

⁷⁷ See Kaufmann also.

feminist thrust. Indeed, I am arguing that Atwood's novel accentuates its feminist agenda by emphasizing the gap that exists between women's lived material existence or histories and official history" (166-67). This gap opens up the possibility of interaction with the reader by allowing the reader to determine the outcome of the story and, in this respect, reveals to the reader sites of resistance to challenge theocracy and to challenge the latent misogyny in kyriarchal systems.⁷⁸ In "Naming Names: Identity and Identification in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," Tom Henthorne contends that the interactive, and radical, nature of the text "induces her readers to participate in the recovery of the protagonist's name, an action that would be forbidden within Gilead, the dystopian state in which the novel is set" (105).⁷⁹ Furthermore, "Denay Nunavit" (deny none of it) and other instances of punning in the text also engage the reader in the possibility of subliminal messages throughout the novel. The interactive nature of *The Handmaid's Tale* signals that "[t]he text refuses to do to the reader what Gilead does to its women—and that is turn them into passive objects" (Raschke 265). The active engagement that this text demands of its audience is an opportunity for readers to exercise their own agency in resistance to traditional master narratives.

Perhaps the greatest transgression of genre that Atwood offers in *The Handmaid's Tale* is, as Coral Ann Howells argues, "what has traditionally been left out of the dystopia" and, as we have seen, non-feminist utopia: a woman's point of view ("Transgressing Genre" 142).

Although Professor Pieixoto attempts to discredit Offred's narrative, the satirical nature of the

⁷⁸ See Raschke.

⁷⁹ The narrator's real name is most likely June. At the very beginning of the novel, the women secretly exchange names during their re-education at the Red Center: "Alma, Janine, Dolores, Moira, June" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* 5). All of the names appear later in the book with increasing importance of the person's closeness to the narrator, Offred. Moira, for example, is the narrator's best friend and the penultimate name before the one not assigned to another character: June. "June" is mentioned next in the novel referring to the weather and time of year: "It's almost like June" (57); and in an admonition from Aunt Lydia against falling in love: "No more June-ing and mooning around here, girls" (285). Unlike a careful reader, Pieixoto does not participate in the interactive game of guessing Offred's real name and offers no suggestions about her pre-coup identity.

“Historical Notes” produces the opposite effect of calling attention to Pieixoto’s ridiculous fixation on the Commanders and blindness toward Offred’s lived experience; this added section subtly reaffirms Offred’s veracity and her willingness to grant that history is not stable. Moreover, Howells posits that “her story shifts the structural relation between the private and public worlds of the dystopia, where the officially silenced Other becomes the central narrative voice, displacing the grand narratives of the Bible and official Gileadean history. This is *herstory*, a deconstructive view of patriarchal authority” (142). Offred’s narrative challenges the kyriocentric nature of Western epistemology and ontology and warns readers of the fragility of social and legal gains for marginalized groups in the absence of underlying cultural shifts.⁸⁰ Moreover, the text lays bare the connection between the demonization of women in Christian theology due to Eve’s “original sin” and the subordination and subjugation of women and Others for millennia.⁸¹ Atwood uses religious fundamentalism not only to expose the horrific limits of kyriocentric thought and its religious justifications but also to expose religious institutions and their stratified traditions as potentially the last bastions against equality and change.

In the dystopian tradition of warning the reader, Atwood makes clear the dystopic potential of religion when a religious sect’s values fail to yield to progressive change and fall into fundamentalism. Because of women’s limited roles in religious leadership and interpretation of sacred texts, in both mainstream and fundamentalist religious faiths, their experiences have not been valued and, in many cases, were silenced or repressed altogether. It follows, then, that a utopia conceived by men on religious foundations would not be utopic in the slightest for women; in the case of Gilead, the regime only presents the possibility of utopia for

⁸⁰ See Michael.

⁸¹ See Singh and Jantzen for discussion of this linking in the text. See Balmer, Ferguson and K. Brown for discussion of “original sin,” women, and fundamentalism.

elite men, thus remaining true to established kyriarchal power structures and widening the gap between those who have power and autonomy and those who do not. Atwood has also pointed to the dystopic potential of religion in interviews and the recently published *In Other Worlds*. Speaking to Cathy Davidson, Atwood alluded to the selective interpretation of sacred texts: “You can develop any set of beliefs by using the Bible” (qtd in Vevaina 224). In her own essay collection, Atwood writes that her purpose in using the epigram from Genesis 30: 1-3, “ought to warn the reader against the dangers inherent in applying every word in that extremely varied document literally” (*In Other Worlds*, 89).⁸² As Kimball argues, literal interpretations of sacred texts are always selective; it would appear that such selectivity also leans toward a reinforcement of traditional gender roles and validation of kyriocentric institutions.

Unlike classic dystopia which forecloses a utopian impulse, the utopian impulse in *The Handmaid's Tale* seems, for the most part, to lie outside the text in the reader's hope for a different future rather than in the utopic potential of religion. As presented in Gilead, Atwood neither exhibits an inward search for meaning nor a positive estimation of religion; the view of (fundamentalist) religion in the text is entirely negative. The “inward search” for spirituality is refused in the nature of the communal activities that, while emotionally exhausting, are tools employed by the regime as emotional release valves and mechanisms for maintaining social control as well as complicity and are void of any vestige of worship or reverence for the Christian God. The only “god” worshipped in Gilead is the regime itself, also exemplified by Pieixoto's fascination with Gilead's “genius” through “synthesis” (Atwood, *The Handmaid's*

⁸² Genesis 30:1-3 – “And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. / And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? / And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her, and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her” (KJV).

Tale 389). Likewise, Offred calls upon God a single time during her ordeal in Gilead (251-53).⁸³ Unlike the “gods” in Scalzi’s *The God Engines*, who are tangible, the “God” of Gilead is utterly silent and removed; the soul scrolls may call on God constantly, but Gilead’s God offers no response, nor does the God to whom Offred prays. In fact, as Linda Kauffman observes, Atwood amalgamates traits from myriad religiously-based cultures and non-religious institutions: “the Spanish inquisitors, the Puritans, Khomeini’s Iranian followers, the KGB, the CIA . . . Hitler’s tactics of encircling urban centers, persecuting Jews, eliminating undesirables, and using female bodies as laboratories for genetic reproduction” (239). It would seem that the religious-based organizations have employed tactics of terror and violence, down through the centuries, similar to non-religious institutions, foreclosing the utopic possibilities of religious doctrine. Rather, the utopian impulse outside the text also lies with the reader to respond to Atwood’s warning and take action to prevent the advent of a fundamentalist theocracy.

Despite the text’s overarching lack of a positive estimation of religion, unlike other writers in the science fiction genre, Atwood does gesture toward an argument for religious faiths to live up to their utopic potential. Not only would the Christian Bible not withstand scrutiny if Offred and others besides Commanders could obtain copies for themselves, the novel mentions religious groups such as the Quakers, Catholics and Baptists who are actively fighting Gilead and attempt to rescue the persecuted, such as Handmaids.⁸⁴ Gabriel McKee argues that “Atwood

⁸³ Offred mangles the Christian “Lord’s Prayer” not in her most desperate moment when she might have been discovered in her affair with Nick and going toward her execution, but rather after learning the previous Handmaid committed suicide (242), remembering the betrayal of her family’s escape, and feeling overcome with helplessness because she is “forgetting too much” (250) about her daughter and her husband.

⁸⁴ Kauffman contends that “even Southern Baptists start a civil war, which to Atwood proves that there is considerable resistance, even among groups one would have thought would support a fundamentalist takeover. Her view of the Southern Baptists, however, seems overly optimistic in reality, for the 14.6-million-member denomination in 1987 elected a leader who endorses a literal interpretation of the Bible, insisting that ‘the narratives of Scripture are historically and factually accurate.’ A moderate minister who dissented from the majority vote noted that the election ‘seems to reflect the agenda of the fundamentalist takeover’” (239). The text does not specify

makes a point of emphasizing the fact that many Christians opposed the theocratic coup. . . .

These selfless rebels are the true Christians in Atwood's story, and their sacrifice demonstrates the *caritas* that is the true core of the [Christian] church" (209). However, the utopic principles of religious faiths in any society do not seem so easily realized and while mainstream religious traditions may have made some progress toward realizing their faith's utopic potential, even that progress has been hard won by women, racial and ethnic minorities, and QUILTBAG persons.

Control of Women

Contrary to Reilly's claims about why science fiction writers take on religious topics in their writing, Atwood deploys religion in *The Handmaid's Tale* to explore the control of women that religious fundamentalism valorizes and the hypocrisy of religious practice that inheres in religiosity by taking fundamentalism to its "logical extremes" (Mohr 36). For example, in creating a nation-state that religious authorities govern, Atwood creates a text that converges Louis Althusser's Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) into a monolithic religious, political, and social institution in which no other human institutions, except possibly an economic black market and the rumored May Day resistance, have any effect or influence on how people live and the things they believe in order to run their society.

Furthermore, Carl Freedman observes that while it may be impossible to segregate women in the same ways that societies have traditionally and physically segregated ethnic and religious minorities and that women frequently have varying class statuses based on their husbands' or fathers' class, "male dominance manifests itself by unequal divisions of labor and power *within* the household, and also by the structurally socioeconomic threat aimed at any woman who would disrupt the domestic status quo" (131-32). Accordingly, Atwood demonstrates the segregation of

the Southern Baptist Convention, as Kauffman assumes, though they are the largest denomination nation-wide and the most probable population of Baptists in the "Appalachian Highlands" in the text.

women by the dress-as-uniform and color designations of function⁸⁵ as an instantaneous means of establishing control over women by their function/position in the household.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the public and private, as contentious and fluid as those spaces are in actuality, have been completely collapsed into each other where the former privacy afforded to religious practice is a public requirement. Religious ritual is foregrounded in public space in such activities as: Salvagings, public hangings in which the Handmaids pull on the rope of women accused of (unknown) crimes; Particutions, public executions in which frenzied Handmaids assault and beat convicted “rapists” (actually political prisoners) to death similar to ancient stoning; and Prayvaganzas, large religious festivals for the wedding of Commanders’ daughters to Angels who have achieved enough status to be entitled to Wives. Additionally, the Ceremony in which Commanders attempt to impregnate Handmaids while the Handmaid lies between the legs of the Commander’s Wife, who grips the Handmaid’s hands, while lacking intimacy, is only semi-private: the entire household is aware of the Handmaid’s menstrual cycle and what days she is most likely to be ovulating and that the sex act is taking place. All of these events are punctuated or preceded by the reading of verses from the Christian Old Testament⁸⁶ that are used to justify executions for a variety of crimes from adultery to homosexuality to abortion and to rationalize the commodification of women in marriage and rape for procreative purposes. In “The Global Rise of Religious Nationalism,” Mark Juergensmeyer observes that,

⁸⁵ Handmaids – red; Wives – powder blue; Marthas – green; Econo-Wives – red, green and blue stripes; Aunts – military khaki.

⁸⁶ To avoid confusion since both Christianity and Judaism have sacred books in common, I will refer to the Christian Bible as the Christian Old/New Testaments and to the Jewish Bible as the Torah or Tanakh. The Torah consists of the same first five books as the Christian Old Testament; the Tanakh is a combination of the Torah, the Nevim, and the Ketuvim. The Tanakh and Christian Old Testament order the same books differently. The Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox and Coptic denominations also incorporate additional books into their versions of the Christian Old/New Testaments that Protestant Christians exclude.

In the case of religious nationalism, the ideology combines traditional religious beliefs in divine law and religious authority with the modern notion of the nation-state. If the ethnic religious nationalism *politicizes* religion by employing religious identities for political ends, an ideological form of religious nationalism does the opposite: it *religionizes* politics. It puts political issues and struggles within a sacred context. (69)

I would take this observation a step farther and argue that by “religionizing” private as well as political issues and attaching their meaning and necessity to a sacred text, the people of a nation-state can no longer voice dissent against the state’s imperatives because resistance is immediately termed heretical and sacrilegious, from a religious standpoint, and treasonous, from a political standpoint, an indicator of the anti-democratic tendencies of fundamentalism.

In Atwood’s view, a fundamentalist theocracy that cannot be challenged by its citizens is, presumably, dystopic for all but a privileged elite. However, the gendered nature of the way in which fundamentalist institutions control and subjugate women may be worse than mainstream society, in varying degrees, based on other factors such as class. In the case of Gilead, gender and fertility function as determinants of socioeconomic class; different classes of women experience different levels of control and subjugation. For example, in “The Courtroom and the Garden: Gender and Violence in Christendom,” Grace M. Jantzen argues that the positioning of women as inferior is naturalized through physical and mental weakness; therefore, through the literal interpretation of sacred texts, violence against women is religiously sanctioned:

Women are descendants of Eve . . . and surely it was Eve who first seduced Adam into sin. She is therefore a temptress who must be kept firmly in her place.

Alternatively it is claimed that women are the weaker sex, inferior to men in both

mind and body, so that men have the right—even the duty—to assert their God-given authority, violently if need be, since women may not be duly submissive unless coerced. Through many centuries of Christendom men have been seen as God-like in their rationality and mastery, while women have been conceptually linked with the body, sexuality, reproduction, and the earth—in short, with everything that would draw men away from their spiritual well-being. (29-30)

In other words, women simultaneously wield overwhelming power as sexual beings, but their “natural” inferiority is therefore problematic and requires male authority and guidance. Thus, in Gilead’s fundamentalist ideology, women’s sexuality must be controlled yet still utilized in service to the state and its procreative requirements. The Handmaids are venerated for their “service,” on the one hand, and on the other hand, strictly policed, surveilled, and disallowed from making choices for themselves. Furthermore, this fundamentalist and kyriocentric point of view collapses women into the symbol “Eve” and assumes that all women must be controlled in order to keep them from inciting men’s desire. In the Red Center, Aunt Lydia intones, “Men are sex machines. . . . They only want one thing” (186), implying that men cannot be held responsible for managing their sexual desire; and in Gilead, they are not: women are veiled (in public) and dressed in enveloping clothing as well as denied make up, skin care items, or any sort of beauty or youth enhancement product in order to desexualize them visually. The reduction of men to their sexual desire and their inability to control that sexual desire is thus projected onto women, placing women in positions of powerlessness to prevent or allow sexual access to their bodies. This anti-feminist viewpoint, of course, neglects to account for the flaw in its logic: if men are mentally superior, at least enough to resist the curiosity and novelty of

tasting an illicit apple, then men's assumed inability to manage and control their sexual desire would indicate men's mental weakness and lack of self-control.

On the one hand, fundamentalists merge all women into the symbolic construct of the "bad" Woman who is impure and must be controlled, while they simultaneously merge women into the symbolic "good" Woman who is viewed as a repository of virtue.⁸⁷ Randall Balmer asserts in "American Fundamentalism: The Ideal of Femininity," that "Such pronouncements [that place women on a pedestal] are so commonplace among American fundamentalists that it is easy to gloss over their significance. Those who purport to be the twentieth-century guardians of Christian orthodoxy—a tradition that, more often than not, has blamed Eve for Adam's downfall—now trumpet the unique purity of women, the 'highest form of God's creation.' These encomiums permeate fundamentalist piety" (47). In order for fundamentalist groups to ensure that women are locked into these symbolic roles, either separately or simultaneously, they force women to conform to certain paradigms of behavior such as not working outside the home except for volunteer work for the religious organization or dressing in a way that is considered "modest" so as to not incite the desire of men with whom a woman comes into contact.⁸⁸ Moreover, women's individual wombs and the control of their fertility become sites of contested loyalty to God and the religious denomination and/or nationalism. This further perpetuates turning women into symbols, rather than recognizing their agency as individuals: "According to different national projects, under specific historical circumstances, some or all women of childbearing age groups would be called on, sometimes bribed, and sometimes even forced, to

⁸⁷ This tendency resembles the virgin/whore dichotomies present in Christianity since the early Middle Ages.

⁸⁸ Fundamentalist sects often have strict rules about women's dress such as prohibitions against hem lengths above the knee; necklines that show cleavage or large portions of the back; or are generally considered "revealing," based on 1 Timothy 2:9. Some insist that women must wear dresses, based on Deuteronomy 22:5. Some fundamentalist sects frown upon women cutting their hair and also insist upon men maintaining short hair cuts, based on 1 Corinthians 11:3-15.

have more, or fewer, children” (Yuval-Davis, “Theorizing Gender and Nation” 22) in service to the state. When the theocratic state is also an authoritarian religion that does not recognize women as autonomous individuals and already polices their behavior at the expense of individual agency, women’s reproductive processes are completely subordinated to their husbands and their religious/government leaders; women no longer possess rights over their own bodies. The Republic of Gilead seeks first and foremost, due to the degradation of the environment to dangerously toxic levels, to control fertility—specifically to increase the population of the regime to supply soldiers for its military causes. Yet a free-for-all of sex among women and men of child-bearing age would directly contradict the biblical tenets of fundamentalist Christianity that values the chastity of women and makes no allowance for sexual intercourse outside of marriage. Rather, the regime employs control of women, especially control of their fertility and sexuality (or repression thereof), in order to reinforce the power of the elite white men of the regime and preserve their privilege and sense of entitlement.

To institutionalize the coercive nature of the regime’s religious tenets, Gilead’s RSA/ISA dictates language and proper behavior, as well as establishes a caste system that requires violent policing. This caste system is visually reinforced by the rigid dress code for women based on colored uniforms and veiling. Furthermore, as Agathangelou and Ling have discussed, these conceptions of masculinity and femininity become “hypermasculine” and “hyperfeminine” under the aegis of fundamentalism (3). As a result and through the outdated and anti-feminist tenets of sacred texts, women’s behavior, to include their sexuality and any expression of it, is policed in ways that can turn violent if the woman deviates from the fundamentalist denomination’s prescriptions. In “Violence Against Women in World Religions,” Christine E. Gudorf asserts that world religions validate and lend legitimacy to violence against women through marital rape;

enforced pregnancy; wife beating; limitations on or exclusion from property ownership; sexual harassment; restriction of women to domestic space; religious exclusion; and spiritual inferiority (10-12). Atwood makes each of these dimensions of violence glaringly apparent in Gilead as well as the state's endorsement and ideological justification for such violence. Certainly at the top of the list of violence against women in Gilead is the regime's idea of institutionalized rape and enforced pregnancy for the Handmaids, to whom the biblical aphorism of "*Give me children or else I die*" (114, emphasis in original) is directed with literal implications. Women in Gilead have neither money nor property of their own after their accounts and assets are frozen during the coup and, with the exception of the Aunts, women are mainly restricted to domestic space with required attendance at some, mainly gender-segregated, public ceremonies, the Handmaids' daily walks for exercise, and the Wives' round of visits for tea and sympathy. Although Gilead seems to have eliminated street harassment, Offred is sexually harassed by a gynecologist during one of her (required) monthly check-ups to certify her continued fertility and health, and by the Commander's demand that Offred kiss him on the lips as though she "meant it" (181) as the price for an illicit game of Scrabble. As for rape, marital or otherwise, Offred claims somewhat naively: "Nor does rape cover it: nothing is going on here that I haven't signed up for. There wasn't a lot of choice but there was some, and this is what I chose" (121). Offred's choice between death or institutionalized slavery and state-sanctioned rape, perhaps not far removed from laws requiring women to have trans-vaginal ultrasounds when they seek abortions, is not tenable given the violence of either alternative in order to produce the behavior the regime prescribes. In "*The Handmaid's Tale's Fertility Tourism*," Richard F. Storrow argues that "the religious regulation of reproduction in . . . Gilead makes it possible to see how religious doctrine can be politically transformed into bright-line, compulsory regulation bearing the imprimatur of

an unchallengeable deity. This overlay of religion in the regulation of assisted conception has a powerful effect on social dynamics, so powerful in fact that it can render the difference between choice and enslavement impossible to discern” (211). Wife-beating in Gilead may still be present, but it has also transformed into allowing the Wives to beat the Handmaid in their households because of “Scriptural precedent” (Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale* 21). The violence that Gilead perpetrates against all classes of women, particularly against the Handmaids and Jezebels, may vary in degree of application but is undoubtedly present and wielded in such a way as to benefit the theocratic state and punish the individual who strays from the “righteous path” of the symbolically idealized “good” Woman.

The ways in which Gilead polices the behavior of women are legion and correspond with the same types of prescriptions in fundamentalist religious institutions. Of primary importance, however, is Gilead’s control of women’s bodies and reproductive processes that also serves to repress women’s desire and eroticism. I have already briefly described the categorization of women in Gilead by their function—functions that are in many ways designations of reproductive capacity or the lack thereof. Offred’s Commander tells her “All we’ve done is return things to Nature’s norm” (285), to justify the ideology of Gilead’s reduction of women to their reproductive capacities. He uses biological essentialism and the weight of history to justify “tradition” as naturalized rather than socially constructed, thereby subject to revision. In the process, he negates the legal and social gains women had made in Western societies during the Second Wave of the feminist movement as “unnatural.” Furthermore, in “Not Fading into Another Landscape: Specters of American Empire in Margaret Atwood’s Fiction,” Lauren A. Rule connects “the designation of Offred as ‘national resource’” to the regime’s alignment of what they conceive of as “natural” with nationalist ideology in order “to legitimize their

commandments and institutionalize the practice of making women womb-machines” (632). Religious and nationalist fervor operate as the same hegemonic RSA/ISA.

Yet Gilead and its categorizations of women based on fertility divorces the “natural” function of reproduction from motherhood while “procreation and maternity are simultaneously idealized and dehumanized” (Rubenstein 102). Procreative sex is reduced to rape and the outcome of motherhood is to never be named an Unwoman and sent to the Colonies—or so the leadership of Gilead claims; given that undesirable women, such as elderly widows, disappear with increasing frequency, one must wonder how far the regime’s “reward” for motherhood can be trusted. Furthermore, the Handmaids are separated from their (healthy) children after a few months of breastfeeding; unhealthy babies, called “shredders,” are disposed of more expediently. In *Strategies for Identity: The Fiction of Margaret Atwood*, Eleonora Rao posits that “[t]he treatment of different forms of motherhood in *The Handmaid’s Tale* has the effect of undermining the dichotomy between nature and culture. What the patriarchal oligarchy in Gilead regards as natural, that is woman as ‘mother,’ is in fact shown to be a cultural construct” (19). Since the Handmaids will never be named as the mothers of their children, nor show up in the family photo albums or perform any role in their children’s lives other than as a biological incubator or surrogate, the “mothers” become the Wives who hold more status and power than the Handmaids; even then, the Marthas will presumably do most of the actual childcare. Yet Gilead’s insistence on biological motherhood or death for the Handmaids, “suggests that women are tragically incomplete without the experience of childbirth, a fitting ideological sentiment in the misogynist social context of Gilead” (Montelaro 234). I would argue that applied to the Wives, Gilead insists on (surrogate) motherhood and a concomitant elevation in status or shame and failure. Of course, since class and morality are working in tandem, “failed” Wives cannot be

put aside, so they retain their positions in the household but are subjected to the infidelity of their husbands with the younger, potentially fertile Handmaids living in their homes. The Handmaids' "failure" to reproduce carries a larger penalty: after three postings in different households Handmaids are sent to the Colonies and eventual death working in nuclear waste dumps. For Offred, on her third and final posting as a Handmaid, this possibility exposes to her and the reader how the Gileadean regime succeeded in ideologically establishing itself: "I want to keep on living, in any form. I resign my body freely, to the uses of others. They can do what they like with me. I am abject. I feel, for the first time, their true power" (368). Her "choice" to become a Handmaid occurred after the probable death of her husband and the state's abduction of her daughter: she could go to a Red Center for rehabilitation as a Handmaid or go to the Colonies as an Unwoman. Offred's "choice" is merely an attempt to delay an eventual, horrific death.

The only positive examples of motherhood in the text are Offred's sometimes contentious relationship with her mother and Offred's love for her own daughter. Handmaids' motherhood, by contrast, exemplifies bodily function separated from the experience of parental love in the same way that procreation has become sex separated from romantic love and intimate connection. Moreover, although the Handmaids may be temporarily valorized as "mothers" by Gileadean society, their near-immediate separation from their children subverts the regime's fundamentalist tenet that serves as justification for women's restriction to the home in order to care for children and pass down the society's moral values. Similarly, Western society is rife with laudatory rhetoric about the work mothers do and their contributions to raising the next generation, especially when women do so full-time rather than working outside the home. Yet this lip service to motherhood and involved parenting casts into relief the lack of support that society actually offers parents, but predominantly mothers, in terms of post-partum maternity and

paternity leave, accommodation for nursing and pumping, quality daycare, and affordable health care for women and their children. Ultimately, however, the Handmaids' reduction to "two-legged wombs" and "ambulatory chalices" and deprivation of their children as well as any positive experience of motherhood "highlights how women's reproductive capacities have made them vulnerable to male control" in contemporary US society (Rao 19). The nationalizing and religionizing of reproduction and motherhood exemplify the means by which fundamentalist regimes seek to subordinate women to keep them powerless and reveal the impetus to perpetuate kyriarchal axes of power in which men retain power and control by oppressing the Other.

In addition to the religionizing of reproduction, all forms of official communication, from the public events to the greetings Handmaids exchange on their daily walks, take place in a theocratic framework that suppresses difference and dissent and coercively enables surveillance and conformity to kyriocentric norms in social interactions. These interactions establish and reinforce asymmetric power relationships perpetuated by the theocratic state and enable the conflation of the ISAs with the RSAs. Through religionizing of communication, the state is able to collapse the public and the private into one totality with a populace who is "indoctrinated into so-called traditional values that are expressed in terms of universal truths, maxims, or slogans" which "makes all other modes of thought impossible" (Staels 457). Furthermore, the strict control of language extends to not only such extreme censorship of the written word that women are no longer allowed to read, but the forcible control of communication through speech effectively silences women and their ability to relate their experiences to others.

The text inextricably links speech with authority and power. Under a fundamentalist theocracy that curtails women's speech, women are robbed of their power to speak and rendered

powerless in the face of male authority. Unsurprisingly, this silencing has a precedent in the Christian New Testament of which Gilead takes full advantage.⁸⁹ Balmer argues that

This ideology, of course, is cloaked in biblical literalism. Paul, the apostle, is not usually regarded as a feminist, and fundamentalists generally refuse to see his proscriptions as culturally conditioned. While most fundamentalists have maneuvered around Paul's insistence that women keep their heads covered in church, they cannot see—or have elected *not* to see—his commands [for women] to keep silence and to be submissive as similarly culture-bound. Consequently, fundamentalist women are expected to be submissive, to demand no voice of authority in the church or in the home. (48-49)

The silencing of women in fundamentalist denominations is an example of selective literalism; what makes Gilead's selectivity obvious here is that women must be silent and cover their heads in all public spaces and in some domestic spaces, not just places of worship. As part of a marriage ceremony at a Prayvanganza for women, the Commander who speaks exhorts the new Wives to not "usurp authority over a man, but to be in silence" (286). Strangely, for an event ostensibly about praying, a custom in Abrahamic religions during which one talks directly to God, no one seems to do so. The women in attendance, Handmaids, Wives, and the Marthas and Econowives that can be spared from household drudgery, neither pray nor speak in any public capacity. They talk in "soft voices" (282) among themselves when they can, exchanging information, but are mostly silent and certainly not prayerful. Or rather, Offred's "prayer" takes the form of warning the new brides to "do your [sexual] duty in silence" (287) as a form of self-preservation. For Offred, her silence in public spaces and in the Commander's household is a

⁸⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:34: "women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says" (NIV).

form of survival. One could argue that not only women are restricted in their speech in order to avoid censure and punishment, especially since Gilead, we learn in the “Historical Notes,” enacts several purges among the high-ranking Commanders. In “Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*: Scheherazade in Dystopia,” Karen F. Stein contends that “[t]he powerful elite are themselves constrained by the repression they impose on others. Political repression, fear, caution, contribute to the silence of Gilead” (272). While it is true that the elite men of Gilead do have limitations on what they can read and say, particularly in public, their repression of women’s speech and literacy is disproportionately more severe and oppressive in its execution because it seeps into every aspect of the women’s lives.

The literal silencing of women in Gilead’s rhetoric and in its practices, based on a literal interpretation of a sacred text, feeds into an existing erasure of women’s experience from history. Similarly, fundamentalists’ biblically-based silencing of women, although not as extreme in nature, feeds into an erasure of women’s presence in the public sphere, a lack of value attributed to their work in the domestic sphere, a lack of authority in the domestic sphere, and an eventual repression of their materiality—the “good” Woman, after all, is more likely to be venerated for her silence than for her speech. Kauffman observes in “Special Delivery: Twenty-First-Century Epistolarity in *The Handmaid’s Tale*,” that Professor Pieixoto’s academic talk in the “Historical Notes” also demonstrates an equally insidious mechanism for silencing women in his inability, as a person operating from a place of kyriarchal privilege, to absorb the ramifications of Offred’s story. Pieixoto bemoans Offred’s narrative because she does not include any sort of tactical data about Gilead or her Commander. According to Kauffman, “[Pieixoto] ignores the fact that it is precisely because [Offred] is female that she is denied access to the kind of information he desires. Pieixoto and his cohorts are merely the most recent of a long series of epistolary editors

who appropriate the female voice for their own purposes—fame, fortune, power, self-aggrandizement, and self-congratulation” (224-25). Pieixoto’s silencing of Offred’s experiences is no less damaging and dismissive than Gilead’s attempts to silence all women, deeming their stories not important enough to tell, much less capture in print and share with others. Debra Raschke expands Kauffman’s argument about the silencing of Offred through Pieixoto’s undermining of her narrative and its authenticity to make obvious another silencing:

The woman chairing Pieixoto’s panel, objectified as the ‘Arctic Chair’ is but a token authority. . . . Objectified and silenced into passivity by Professor Pieixoto’s joke, Professor Maryann Crescent Moon, by chairing a panel that erases Offred’s story, also furthers women’s silencing. This is particularly ironic given the name and place of the university she represents, . . . (the much noted Deny-None-of-it); in fact, by her silence she denies all of it. (261)

In a different sense, Pieixoto’s indifference to the horrors of Offred’s narrative also attempts to “deny all of it,” by relegating a woman’s story to the edges and focusing on the identity of her Commander. However, establishing the true identity of Fred makes no difference to Offred’s tale; one Commander would seem to be the same as any other: he is a rapist who believes himself to be superior merely by possession of a penis. Yet the repression of women’s speech is not the only form of disempowerment the regime deploys.

In a departure from the Puritan model that Gilead has attempted to re-create in its theocratic incarnation of the state, women are not allowed to read printed words and particularly not the Christian Bible, which is locked away. The Puritans of the American colonial period were strong advocates for women’s literacy grounded on the idea that all “good” Christians must know how to read the Bible for themselves, an outgrowth of the Reformation idea that priests

were not needed as intercessors with God. Gilead's restriction of literacy to men and the Aunts as well as extreme censorship of reading materials for even those privileged groups resonates deeply with nineteenth-century African-American slave narratives, many of which describe the slave-narrator's quest to achieve literacy in order to prove their worth as intelligent human beings, to expand their own capacity for knowledge through reading, and to enable writing their narratives to expose the material conditions of slavery, and as propaganda pieces for the abolitionist movement. Just as most slave owners believed that the literacy of slaves was dangerous, Gilead transfers this anxiety over literacy and what literacy means in a framework of oppression to women. In *Worlds Apart*, Mohr contends that "[t]he rigid class system, the segregation of the sexes, surveillance, media propaganda, and ceremonialized public rituals of violence against state offenders (including executions and hangings) maintain a system of terror. The male monopoly on literacy, however, describes a far more insidious and perfidious measure of control" (234). Offred realizes that the Christian Bible is "an incendiary device: who knows what we'd make of it, if we ever got our hands on it? We can be read to from it, by him, but we cannot read" (112). In addition to the elite men of the kyriarchy using selective interpretations from the Christian Bible⁹⁰ to justify their oppression of women, QUILTBAG persons and marginalized Others, Offred understands that dissenters could also use the Bible in order to counter the Commanders and argue for a regime that more closely resembles the leadership example set forth by Jesus in the Christian New Testament.

While the repression of women's literacy is perhaps the most troubling aspect of Gilead's silencing maneuvers, Atwood also critiques censorship, of any kind. She points out the echoing

⁹⁰ See Thompson's *Scarlet Letters: Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale* (63-65), for an exhaustive list of biblical (and other) references gone awry and the selective use of sacred texts and how they are twisted to suit Gilead's ideological frame. *Scarlett Letters* is similar to a "critical studies guide," and briefly touches on background for the novel, critical reception, setting, themes, and importance as a literary work.

message between the Religious Right and some Second Wave feminists over the censorship of pornographic materials. In the feminist argument over pornography, Atwood seems to approve of the position of sex-positive feminists who maintain that women may enjoy pornography as much as men and that viewing pornography is an acceptable part of sex and the stimulation of desire. Anti-pornography feminists maintain the position that all pornography is inherently degrading and harmful to women. On the other hand, while anti-pornography feminists and the Religious Right share a similar purpose in censoring pornography, the Religious Right's motivation is based in a repression of sexual desire. What concerns Atwood, particularly as a writer, is that censorship of any kind generally leads down a slippery slope and can effectively muzzle creative and political thought. Rao writes: "*The Handmaid's Tale* shows how discourses of pro-censorship can easily be manipulated into values and ideas antithetical to feminism. The risk inherent in the censorship of pornography is implicitly stated. Censorship restrains and limits the area of free expression, and the novel indicates that in a situation of the general restriction of individual freedom it is women that will suffer most" (145).

The significance of Rao's connection of censorship to the manipulation of feminist values as well as the implications of censoring actions as specifically affecting women in a negative way should not be underestimated. The urge to censor reflects insecurity within the censoring group that a narrative could undermine the values and ideals of their philosophy or faith. For example, the Vatican attempted to censor Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2004), calling for a boycott, because of its fictionalized account of Catholicism, based loosely on contemporary work by feminist Christian theologians acknowledged at the front of the book. The novel historically establishes a more egalitarian belief system of the divine female and the divine male and asserts that male leadership in the Catholic Church suppressed the worship of a feminine divine in order

to consolidate male power and to subjugate women. The fact that *The Da Vinci Code* is a work of fiction did not seem to allay the Vatican's concerns that the book would "[sow] doubts and dangerous confusion among the faithful" ("Cardinal's Plea"). Apparently, Catholics could not be trusted to draw their own conclusions about the role of women in the Catholic Church or, more dangerously, might actually be interested in the work of feminist theologians that contradicts the Church's official history. In a similar vein, many conservative Christians who make up the Religious Right in the United States objected to and attempted to censor J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1999-2009)⁹¹ because they claimed the books were satanic tracts that would brainwash children into practicing witchcraft or believing in the occult, that Harry Potter was an anti-Christ figure, or that the books' use of witchcraft was an entry point for the "Devil."⁹² While insecurities over the impressions literary works might have on children may have some merit, limiting the freedom of expression of children and discouraging children from exploration and development of critical thinking skills through reading smacks of an authoritarianism that demands absolute obedience and punishes those who dare to express dissent or alternate beliefs contrary to kyriarchal authority.

For religious fundamentalists, the insecurity underlying censorship lies in the possibility of adherents repudiating their faith and/or challenging the (male) leadership on any number of issues. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Gilead's extreme censorship of pornography appropriates some Second Wave feminist sentiments regarding the degradation of women. However, the regime hypocritically degrades women through its own practice of state-sanctioned rape and the

⁹¹ Since the completion of the series, some critics have argued that *Harry Potter* is actually a Christian allegory (see John Granger's *Looking for God in Harry Potter*, published by a self-identified Christian media publisher).

⁹² For fundamentalist Christians, the devil/Satan/Lucifer is a real, supernatural figure who can interfere in people's daily lives and purposely leads "good" Christians away from God. For most Christians, the devil figure functions as a simulacrum to Christians' belief in God as a very real presence in their lives.

classification of women by function which completely contradicts Second and Third Wave feminist thought. Gilead's ban on literacy for women lies in the regime's insecurity concerning educated women who would exercise the intellectual capacity to expose Gilead's hypocrisies and foment rebellion among all of the oppressed classes. The irony of *The Handmaid's Tale* being one of the most frequently banned or challenged books in the last twenty years is surely not lost on Margaret Atwood. The deployment of power through control of women's reproductive capacities, redefining the terms of motherhood, and the use of mechanisms for silencing women's voices in literal and figurative senses through censorship and restrictions on literacy and speech, all function to relegate the status of women to objects.

Placing women in controlled positions of inferiority and categorizing them by usefulness to the state reduces all women in Gilead to commodified objects—the Handmaids in particular. In “Women on the Market,” Luce Irigaray theorizes that “*Woman thus has value only in that she can be exchanged. . . . Women-as-commodities are thus subject to a schism that divides them into categories of usefulness and exchange value; into matter-body and an envelope that is precious but impenetrable, ungraspable, and not susceptible to appropriation by women themselves; into private use and social use*” (176, emphasis in original). Gilead parallels Irigaray's theorization of the commodification of women by dividing women into various functions dictated by the perceived needs of men. Gilead goes so far as to justify the underlying sexism and kyriocentrism of this process with the Handmaids' slogan: “*From each . . . according to her ability, to each according to his need*” (151). Gilead has changed the universal “he” in both clauses in Marx's original statement to lay the burden of (re)production on women while men are the sole recipients of the benefits and yield of that (re)production. Concomitantly, the Handmaids' assignments to Commanders' households confer a certain amount of status to the

Commanders because of the Handmaids' exchange value while simultaneously causing conflict and strife with the Wives. The Handmaids do nothing for the status of the Wives, but could confer greater status on a household as a whole were a Handmaid to bear a healthy child. In this respect, the Wives can appropriate a benefit of the Handmaids' labor to themselves. However, the Handmaids' cannot appropriate their own labor and parlay that into motherhood or tangible social status; they gain nothing other than an alleged Get-Out-of-the-Colonies-Free card for their role in (re)production, or as Amin Malak eloquently states in "Margaret Atwood's 'The Handmaid's Tale' and the Dystopian Tradition": "The dictates of state policy in Gilead thus relegate sex to a saleable commodity exchanged for mere minimal survival" (9).

Gilead carries fundamentalist complementarianism and the concept of separate, distinct gender roles to its most reactionary limits. The idea that women's individual survival in Gilead is tied to motherhood⁹³ and the suppression of erotic desire is indicated in the visual cues of their dress and the functional meanings of women's titles. Men's survival seems more closely related to the continued existence of the state than to paternity resulting in functional titles based on their work in the public sphere.⁹⁴ Janet J. Montelaro points out that "[b]y contrasting men's activity to women's passivity as strictly organized around the reproductive and maternal functions, Atwood constructs sexual difference in this novel in much the same way that Irigaray's theory would

⁹³ For the Handmaids, survival through motherhood has a distinctly personal tone; for Gilead, survival through forced rape and motherhood takes on the aura of preservation of the regime and its culture. The Quiverfull movement among fundamentalists in the United States valorizes what they believe is obedience to God through abstaining from birth control and accepting the resulting pregnancies as gifts of children (but only in heterosexual marriage). Based on the literal interpretation of biblical verses (Genesis 1:22, "God blessed them and said, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth'"; and Genesis 9:7, "As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it" (NIV)), the Quiverfull ideology includes populating the Earth with Christian children so as to eventually overwhelm the electorate with like-minded (Religious Right) voters who will usher in a Christian theocracy. Perhaps more disturbingly children are "an army they're building for God" (Joyce), suggesting a more militant threat to the existing social order. The Quiverfull movement has an undercurrent of "race suicide" in its efforts to reverse the decline in the births of white children (Joyce). Yet in both situations, women must surrender control of their bodies and suppress their own desires—either to the theocratic state in the text or to "God" in Quiverfull communities.

⁹⁴ Commanders (leadership), Eyes (spies), Angels (military), and Guardians (police).

articulate it: women's identities and desires are suppressed by a discourse and social system that forces them to wear femininity as a mask" (244). Montelaro posits that the visual differentiation in the colors of women's dresses emphasizes the class differences "based on their affiliation with corresponding male hierarchies of power" but also accentuates Irigaray's "reproductive-maternal function" through coercive, female-only roles. Montelaro contends that Atwood expands Irigaray's hypothesis "by dividing the reproductive-maternal function into three separate categories [Wives/Econowives, Handmaids, and Marthas]," determined by a woman's fertility or lack thereof (244). Fundamentalists perform a similar task through their insistence upon women's segregation in the domestic sphere as well as endorsing only heterosexual marriage and exercising an anti-choice agenda that would force all heterosexually active women to carry any resulting pregnancies to term.

Although the Marthas, Econowives, and the Guardians are the only classes who engage in visible labor production, the Marthas and Econowives merely fill the unpaid labor role of housewives. Their labor is necessary but presumably only paid for through the exchange of work for room, board, and clothing. Montelaro insists that "[t]he primarily domestic 'Marthas' nevertheless assist in the reproduction of patriarchy through their practical support of Handmaids and Wives, enacting the roles of Housewife whose value has always been ignored in traditional analysis of wage labor" (244) while Econowives seem to fill this role for lower classes of men. Presumably Econowives are somewhat of a luxury in the middle-to-lower classes that would have followed a dual-income earner model before the Gileadean coup. Irigaray argues:

all the systems of exchange that organize patriarchal societies and all the modalities of productive work that are recognized, valued, and rewarded in these societies are men's business. The production of women, signs, and commodities

is always referred back to men (when a man buys a girl, he “pays” the father or the brother, not the mother . . .), and they always pass from one man to another, from one group of men to another. The work force is thus always assumed to be masculine, and “products” are objects to be used, objects of transaction among men alone. (171)

Gilead’s version of a mass wedding ceremony of teenaged Commanders’ daughters to Angels would seem to undermine, at least on a symbolic level, the physical exchange of women between men: “It’s mothers, not fathers, who give away daughters these days and help with the arrangement of the marriages” (283). However, mothers “help” with arranging marriages for their daughters, indicating that another entity—perhaps the state itself, perhaps the Commanders or the Aunts—exercises decision-making authority over marriage, once again returning marriage to a business exchange between two or more men or their agents. The exchange of women is executed through “issuing” Econowives, “assigning” Marthas, and “posting” Handmaids, indicating that the households to which they belong are decided for them.

Most insidious, perhaps, as Maria Varsam posits in “Concrete Dystopia and Its Others,” are the ways in which the ISAs coerce the Handmaids into desiring (biological) motherhood as an outcome of institutionalized rape. Based on Althusser’s assertion that ISAs “guarantee the conditions of exploitation and its reproduction” (qtd in Varsam 216), Varsam argues that “the enforced motherhood of Gilead constitutes the Handmaids as the most exploited class and thus the most alienated,” similar to female slaves in the plantation system during the Antebellum period (216). The Handmaid is “not the owner of this commodity [her womb] but instead the laborer who must provide the goods to those who will benefit directly from her services” (216). Despite their exploitation at the hands of the Commanders and their Wives’ who will keep any

healthy children, the Handmaids actively desire pregnancy as a guarantee, though a tenuous one, of their own survival. This seems to parallel, to a lesser degree, the status of women in fundamentalist faiths, such as the Quiverfull movement and Mormonism, where giving birth to numerous children equates to higher status in the religious community and/or in the afterlife.

Gilead's commodification of women and their reduction to objects by the state explicitly demonstrate that control of women rests in ideological frameworks. Atwood skillfully parallels the commodification of women for their reproductive capacities with the objectification of (Westernized) women for their youth and beauty and adherence to fashion dictates aimed toward inciting desire in heterosexual men. When Offred and Ofglen encounter Japanese tourists, Offred is overwhelmed and fascinated by the apparent freedom of the women, "teeter[ing] on their spiked feet as if on stilts . . . their backs arch at the waist, thrusting the buttocks out" (37), confusing the women's outward appearance with basic human rights; she thinks: "That was freedom" (38). In "The World as It Will Be? Female Satire and the Technology of Power in *The Handmaid's Tale*," Stephanie Barbe Hammer notes that "[h]er misguided equation of western fashion with feminine liberation—already signaled stylistically through Atwood's description of the high-heels which emphasizes how very much this clothing imprisons rather than frees—is especially ironic" (43-44). Atwood is well aware that conforming to different rules of dress and outward appearance has little to do with one's culture's underlying attitudes toward women and equality. The women's garments in Gilead tend to resemble voluminous sacks; the veils and headdresses the Handmaids wear to block the sight of others, in turn, blinds them to the periphery—the entire ensemble imprisons the wearer. Through this scene, however, Atwood demonstrates the equally imprisoning aspects of Western styles of dress that may result in shortened calf muscles and other physical ailments, but that women still engage in these

practices in order to make their legs and way of walking attract the male gaze. Western women's clothing is physically as well as mentally imprisoning and demonstrates that cultural attitudes about women as objects and commodities are the same in the fundamentalist theocracy of Gilead as in contemporary Western society as a whole. Tova Hartman points out that "[u]nknowingly, it seems, religious and secular women of all stripes have finally managed to carve out some cultural common ground: all are languishing under the same disfiguring cultural gaze. Their ideologies may seem disparate, but their bodies are all suffering the same plight" (60).

Attracting male desire is the goal of the ISA governing current modes of women's appearance in Western cultures while repressing sexual desire is one of the goals of the Gileadean religious ISA/RSA and fundamentalist faiths. Either way, these goals are male-centered and legitimate the male gaze. And, to reiterate an earlier point, the ISA of religion when conjoined to the state makes the melded institution monolithically unchallengeable: to do so is to risk spiritual and material death or exile; in Gilead, exile and death amount to the same thing.

The use of technology as the means through which Gilead establishes its kyriarchal stranglehold on what used to be the United States presents a way for the text to interrogate science and progress and the selective application of technology. Offred describes to the reader how the end of paper money and move to a credit-only system was an enabling device for the Gileadean regime since the bank accounts of women, marked by an "F" code for female, were suspended, immediately forcing all women into dependence on male relatives or friends for access to their own money. The regime simultaneously coerced employers to fire all of their female employees to ensure that what money some women did have in their accounts would dwindle until they were fully dependent on a husband, father, brother or male friend to feed and house them and conduct business transactions on their behalf. Reingard M. Nischik observes

that the re-implementation of a coverture system through a little technological tinkering, “shows how modern technology may be put to use for systematic gender discrimination” (141). In this respect, a religious group working through an economic system to enforce its standards presents the most overt moment of Atwood’s critique of technology and rationalist science fiction: it demonstrates the use of technology not to level the playing field between women and men, as it is generally visualized when thinking of physical difference, but to impose gendered and kyriarchal standards unilaterally. Atwood’s use of technology—and its results—in a science fiction text demonstrates that technology and progress may not be inherently good or bad, but humans bring their biases into their utilization of technological progress. Furthermore, a theocratic state’s gendered use of technology resonates with fundamentalist appropriations of modern technology in conjunction with a rejection of modernity and women’s equality. Gilead’s application of technology to roll back the status of women in society to pre-twentieth-century (Western) norms exposes a selection bias that primarily reserves power for an elite group and disadvantages others to greater and lesser degrees.

The (infertile) elite men of Gilead eschew the use of reproductive technologies of any sort. Although reproductive aids like fertility treatments or artificial insemination would seem to work to their advantage to further their goal of halting the Caucasian “race suicide” that they perceive as prevalent in the latter half of the twentieth century due to the availability of birth control and abortion, this stance echoes some anti-choice positions regarding various birth control methods and in vitro fertilization.⁹⁵ One could argue that babies are needed for the next generation of soldiers in Gilead’s on-going, though seemingly distant, wars with other nations

⁹⁵ The text offers no additional information about the use of medical technology. With Gilead fighting a war and facing a population crisis, much of which seems self-inflicted given the regularity of executions, one could speculate that Gilead’s selective use of medical technology is not so rigidly applied to those who serve on the battlefield. However, in addition to the lack of information about the medical care for injured Angels, the absence of maimed or disabled men may indicate that Gilead does not avail itself of healing and surgical technologies either.

and resistance groups; however, growing babies into adults, or at least teenagers, is a long and resource-intensive process. Rather, Montelaro posits that “[a]lthough a variety of reproductive technologies have long been available to the society represented in the novel, these innovations have now been repudiated in favor of a policy of enforced biological maternity without recourse to technological intervention, suggesting that the ultimate goal of Gilead’s male leaders is not the increase of population but rather the social control of women” (233). At a minimum, it would seem that concerns about the number of white babies born each year is of lower priority to the regime than preserving the power of elite men by subordinating women and enslaving them through their reproductive capacities, similar to the anti-choice planks in the Religious Right’s political platform. What is more puzzling is that the “rejection of modern medicine includes the rejection of pre-natal tests with which they ‘could tell at once, with machines’ that a child is imperfect ‘but that is now outlawed’” (Kaler 45). In this selective use, or rather non-use of technology, the motivation is more difficult to discern. Amniocentesis, ultrasounds, and pre-natal blood tests could, obviously, alert a woman to fetal anomalies. Presumably, without the option of abortion, women pregnant with damaged children might try to abort them unsafely with a coat hanger or a knitting needle, possibly killing the fetus and damaging their reproductive organs in the process. Instead, as part of the social control of women, this type of technology is withheld, and women have no choice but to carry all children to term (or as long as they can in the event that the fetus spontaneously aborts), thus making pre-natal tests moot, and reinforcing the biblical punishment of Eve having to endure the pangs of childbirth for her “sin.” It most likely goes without saying that painkillers or other medical interventions are not allowed during delivery unless a Caesarean is deemed medically necessary. Furthermore, when Janine’s baby, from a visual check alone, is judged a “keeper” by the Aunts, and then is later regarded as a

“shredder,” medical technology could have aided in a prenatal diagnosis or, if advanced enough in the time of Gilead, gone some way toward healing the baby.⁹⁶

The regime’s goal of the social control of women through technology is also evident in the Salvagings and Particutions because of the transfer of responsibility for the regime’s bloodthirstiness from the elite men to powerless women and presents yet another paradox in the exercise of theocratic power. The Gileadean leadership releases itself from guilt over its purges and executions, and shifts the guilt for murder onto women, making the women complicit with the theocratic regime’s twisted values. In “The Dynamics of Domination,” Ronald P. Glasberg argues that, like the Nazi and Soviet systems, the use of technology in Gilead is a means of absolving the elite from responsibility for the violence they perpetuate against others. Glasberg links the inherent misogyny of the Gileadean system, in which the women pull on the ropes used to hang other women during Salvagings or kill a man in the frenzied mob of a Particution, with the Commanders’ “escape from personal responsibility” (681). Additionally, Glasberg writes, “the illusion of personal responsibility is fostered by the patriarchal dominators to the extent that they have taken responsibility for the lives of fertile women, whose objectification into breeding animals renders any expression of personal responsibility on their parts as inappropriate” (681-82). The Commanders’ transferral of “personal responsibility” for executions onto the same women who cannot be trusted to manage their own bodies thus creates a paradox and exposes the regime’s hypocrisy in their selective use of technology and resulting anti-modernism.

⁹⁶ The term “shredder” itself raises technological issues: the text implies that the baby is murdered outright, which goes against Christian tenets, and leaves to the imagination how that murder is carried out. Is the baby a “shredder” because it is fed into some sort of shredding machine in order to kill it for its imperfections, or is the name “shredder” merely an appellation Atwood uses in contrast to “keeper”?

Ideology and Hypocrisy

Gilead's fundamentalist ideology is inherently hypocritical. The elimination of compassionate qualities in Gilead's regime challenges the basis of the theocracy as a "Christian" state and plays up its hypocritical departure from the regime's professed tenets. In her analysis of the Particutions, Mohr argues that the regime uses these events as instruments to channel the frustration and anger of the Handmaids over their oppression and rape by (male) Commanders into the violent, mass killing of political prisoners, decried by the state as "rapists" or "baby killers." She writes that in addition to these murderous acts for which the regime tells the Handmaids they are "willing" participants, the Handmaids' "[k]illing the other also affects the self, because this violence first requires the self to eliminate feelings of empathy, sympathy, compassion, and respect for life" (248). Gilead forsakes Christian, and feminist, values for "ruthless and repressive" manipulations (Rubenstein 104). The violence of the Gileadean regime and its manipulation of women's participation and complicity in it underscore the hypocrisy of a fundamentalist-envisioned theocracy while simultaneously underscoring the misogynist manipulations of contemporary American society. Hammer observes that, "[s]uch a view of Gilead explains why for all its freakishness, the social order of *The Handmaid's Tale* seems weirdly familiar, and in this familiarity lies the ultimate political thrust of Atwood's satiric argument" (46). Gilead's hypocrisy as a faith-based government points toward the inherent hypocrisy of contemporary Western societies.

Atwood also problematizes the gynocentric essentialist messages in some Second Wave utopian texts. She dialogically engages the lesbian separatist utopias of the 1970s when Offred recognizes the correlation between the women's communal activities of Gilead and the feminist community for which her mother advocated, and the lesbian separatism that Moira practiced on a

small scale (164). The perversion of women's community as envisioned in Gilead displays another instance in which some Second Wave feminists' biological essentialism and idealization of "feminine" values over non-gendered "human" values could be appropriated by the Religious Right in order to confine women and men in different roles and areas of public and private life.

The ideology of fundamentalism purports to protect women, yet, hypocritically, the thorough suppression of women's agency does not reduce women's vulnerability to violence. One such avenue is evident in the broad appeal that some fundamentalist faiths offer to women. In Linda Woodhead's sociological research on gender and Christianity, she argues that women tend to turn to religion as a relational system for maintaining relationships and that religious communities may offer more "conceptual and institutional space" in which to pursue relationships beyond one's immediate family. Similarly, in *Gender and Nation*, Nira Yuval-Davis contends that "[o]ne of the paradoxes associated with fundamentalism is the fact that women collude, seek comfort and even gain at times a sense of empowerment within the spaces allocated to them by fundamentalist movements" (63). For women in fundamentalist religious sects where they are relegated to the domestic sphere, the public/private space of their church serves as an acceptable, though also limited, space in which to form the friendships and other relationships that religion increasingly offers in the contemporary society (Woodhead 77-78). Additionally, Andrea Dworkin argued in 1979 that women in fundamentalist sects support the Religious Right in its anti-feminist campaigns, specifically the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment, due to specious "promises to women that both exploit and quiet some of women's deepest fears" (62). She goes on to write, "These fears originate in the perception that male violence against women is uncontrollable and unpredictable. Dependent on and subservient to men, women are always subject to this violence. The Right promises to put enforceable

restraints on male aggression, thus simplifying survival for women—to make the world slightly more habitable” (62).⁹⁷ Part of this promise to restrain male aggression lies in confining women to the domestic sphere and isolating them from establishing other relationships that would have been possible in public arenas. Yet, when viewing the position of women in a theocracy such as Gilead, the purposeful isolation of women through segregating them by class (function) when nearly all of them are also confined to the domestic sphere serves to undermine the relational space that religion can provide since women are still very much in danger of losing their lives. Furthermore, the text exposes the specious nature of fundamentalist promises of protection, which actually leave women vulnerable through lack of access to external resources, and can be remedied in contemporary society through widespread access to the financial and social means for women to live safely as they choose. Feminists and other groups could thwart the security and freedom from fear that fundamentalism offers women through other methods of empowering women as well as continuing to seek legal and cultural changes on women’s behalf that make both the public and private spheres safer for women to move about freely without fear of violence, victim-blaming, or social opprobrium.

The suppression of women’s agency to support each other across class lines even within the domestic space is an ominous harbinger of the hypocrisy latent in fundamentalism and its goals for a theocratically controlled state. By segregating women in the same household by class

⁹⁷ Charlene Spretnak concisely summarizes Dworkin’s main points as follows: “Promising to place enforceable restraints on male aggression and abandonment, [the Religious Right] offer[s] *form* (a simple fixed, predetermined social, biological, and sexual order that banishes the confusion and mystification with which women experience the world since they are kept ignorant of most practical knowledge and skills necessary to function autonomously), *shelter* (exploiting the belief that women without men are homeless, they claim to offer protection from that fearsome state), *safety* (they acknowledge the reality of danger—assault, shame, disgrace—and promise that if a woman is obedient, harm will not befall her), *rules* (living in a world she has not made and does not understand, a woman needs to know what she is supposed to do next), and *love* (a concept of love based on formal areas of accountability: If a woman is pleasing and obedient to God and her husband, she will be provided for)” (476). Women being obedient and submissive to their husbands and God is also a significant part of Quiverfull ideology in that God will provide a properly submissive woman’s large family with the resources it needs to survive.

(function), Gilead perpetuates a divisiveness among women, who might otherwise develop friendships and supportive relationships with each other, and forecloses the idea of a shared religion providing this relational space. This extreme depiction of fundamentalism demonstrates how the circles in which women can move shrink into imprisonment and preclude the women's communities that women may find meaningful in fundamentalist communities. While the enclosure of women in the domestic space in the text is depicted as "unequivocally negative" (Wolmark 100), Mohr notes that this is made possible through the regime's suppression of "contact between the women of different classes. . . . Each class either considers the other morally inferior . . . or begrudges the alleged power, privileges, and possessions of the other class. . . . To maintain this rigid compartmentalized system, Gilead oppresses the autonomy of the individual and makes social life uniform" (246). That uniformity is policed through surveillance as well as the threat of "abduction, torture, deportation, and execution," and thus ensures obedience (246). To the Handmaids, the Wives are "failed women"; to the Wives and Marthas, the Handmaids are sluts, and the Wives deny the Handmaids any sort of cosmetic or comfort item to demonstrate their power.

The Aunts exemplify the group of women most conspiratorially implicated in Gilead's ideological system of hypocrisy. The Aunts' hypocrisy lies in their use of the power that they do have: their goal, at the behest of the regime, is to convince the Handmaids to submit to institutionalized rape (72), and to convince the Handmaids' that their "service" is a freely-made choice. They are the most rigid in enforcing the regime's strictures about women's behavior, language, and thoughts, similar to women in fundamentalist communities who appear to be in league with misogynist religious leaders against their own best interests. While the Aunts may be, to some extent, victims of a kyriarchal apparatus that appropriates their labor for ideological

purposes, their work for the regime resonates with Dworkin's description of fundamentalist women in the Religious Right and the motivations underlying their loyalty to a religious system that systematically disadvantages them as individuals and as women as a class. The Aunts take full advantage of the protections that Gilead offers them, and they repay the regime, as it were, by indoctrinating the Handmaids at the Rachel and Leah Reeducation (Red) Centers and by playing visibly prominent roles in the women's public ceremonies and communal rituals (Johnson 70-71). In the Red Centers, the Aunts stress the devotion of the Handmaids to the state as producers of the next generation, emphasizing their roles as repositories of culture rather than autonomous human agents. Furthermore, the Aunts plant the seeds of suspicion in the Handmaids so that they spy on their shopping partners and believe that other Handmaids are spying on them, thus maintaining a degree of divisiveness among Handmaids as a class.

The Aunts' apparent excusing of the Commanders' "boys will be boys" conduct, indicated by the existence of a brothel like Jezebel's, makes evident their hypocrisy as well.⁹⁸ Tara J. Johnson's observation that "[w]hile the Commanders are undermining the Gileadan theocracy with their behavior, the Aunts are promoting the future of Gilead" (75) supports my hypothesis of Gilead's neglect of real women and their material lives and experiences in favor of the regime's vision of women as symbols and, therefore, as objects that must be controlled. In that respect, the Aunts are better examples of Gilead's values than the Commanders themselves. However, considering that the Aunts' power is contingent upon their active propagandizing of Gileadean ideals rather than the mere complicity expected of the Handmaids, the Commanders'

⁹⁸ Although the Aunts do the majority of the "heavy" work concerning the Handmaids and the policing of all women in general in their roles in public ceremonies and even their presence and aid of Janine and her Commander's Wife during the birthing ritual, Johnson interprets the Aunts' weighty responsibilities as allotting them more power than the Commanders, who by contrast have lighter (observable) duties (71). I disagree that lighter ceremonial duties, at least of what is related to the reader by the text, indicates a lesser degree of power. Although the Aunts are in collusion with the regime, the Commanders seem to exercise the prerogative of their elite status of shifting the heavier, and more mundane, responsibilities to others in less powerful positions.

abuses of their elite positions exhibits a less conditional retention of power. Furthermore, because the Aunts also police the Jezebels, regulate their breaks, and supervise their “on-duty” activities, the Aunts’ complicity with the Commanders’ behavior contradicts the publicly acknowledged values of the regime—the values the Aunts inculcate in the Handmaids. The more salient indicators of the Aunts’ power are the exception for them to read and write (73), their leeway to use torture and to physically punish recalcitrant Handmaids in more damaging ways than the Wives (73), and the apparent freedom with which they can move in public and between surveillance checkpoints (74). Although their power does not match the Commanders’, the Aunts’ roles are necessary to the sustainment of Gilead’s public image and to the reinforcement of the Handmaids’ “re-education” through victim-blaming.

In fundamentalist discourse, the promise of safety and protection from violence requires women’s confinement to the domestic sphere and withdrawal from public space as much as possible. Women are also required to follow rules governing modesty in dress and behavior; as a result of women’s obedience to these rules, God will take care of them. The text exposes this fallacy through the weekly Testifying sessions in the Red Centers. Testifying forces the future Handmaids into positions that victimize other women: each woman must take a turn confessing and being shamed by the others for past “crimes.” T. Johnson contends that Testifying, and the use of Janine’s gang rape and subsequent abortion in particular, “is a pivotal element in teaching the Handmaids that ritualistic rape at the hands of their Commanders will not only be tolerated but also encouraged” (72). In victim-blaming, rape is the fault of the victim for “leading on” the rapist through her dress, her behavior, or other factors that may or may not be within the victim’s control but are attributed to her as facilitating a sexual temptation that the (male) rapist cannot resist. The future Handmaids are also desensitized to the violence that will be perpetrated

against them by the porn and snuff films that the Aunts force them to watch: the message is that unromantic, purely procreative sex with a Commander is not rape compared to the torturous violence of the snuff films. The presence of the Wives during the Ceremony and the Handmaids' protection from street violence and harassment lend legitimacy to the idea that they are not victims of rape—the Ceremony isn't rape, goes the theory, and if it is, it's the Handmaid's fault anyway. Unlike Janine, for whom "God allow[ed] such a terrible thing to happen" because she "led [her attackers] on" (93), fundamentalist women and Handmaids who adhere to the rules will not be punished in such horrifying ways—a blatantly empty promise.

In a different victim-blaming maneuver, Commanders project their sterility onto the Wives and Handmaids. Those in power hide their misogyny and fear of women's sexuality behind biblical ideology and specious theories about women's "nature" in order to keep women out of positions of power and to strategically preserve their own power and privileges, including sexual access to fertile women despite their own probable infertility. The hypocrisy of this position also manifests itself through the Jezebels with whom illicit sex is still condoned, albeit secretly because the very existence of the brothel undermines the puritanical sexual mores of the official religion that prides itself on having gotten rid of Pornomarts and the street harassment of women. Mohr's analysis of the Birth Day brings into sharp relief another means of victim-blaming to gain the Handmaids' submission to rape: "Subtly, Gilead uses the Birth Days—the mental and physical participation in the birthing, the sharing of the birth pangs, and the anticipation of motherhood—to remind the Handmaids of their own 'failure' of childlessness" (249). The Handmaids' positions are contingent upon pregnancy through rape. Linking the Gileadean penchant for victim-blaming to biological essentialism, Michael states, "That biology determines women's but not men's lives indicates that biology is a source of oppression only if

manipulated as such. . . . As a male-dominated regime, Gilead cannot admit that men have any biological deficiencies; instead, the regime blames women for all failures at reproduction” (145). Janine has a mental breakdown after her baby is deemed a “shredder” because she blames herself entirely for the baby’s less-than-perfectness. Additionally, Offred relates, “[t]here is no such thing as a sterile man anymore, not officially. There are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that’s the law” (79), an ideology which expresses the misogyny of the theocratic state through blaming women even when they may not be at fault; of course, the earlier discussed repudiation of reproductive technologies makes determining “fault” in cases of sterility or infertility entirely moot. What matters is not an actual determination of fault but the continued undermining of women’s self-esteem with the idea that they deserve their own subjugation because they are female and physically vulnerable to “men’s lusts.”

The hypocrisy of victim-blaming as instilled by the Aunts and “synthesized” into Gilead’s culture by the Commanders serves not only to expose the underlying misogyny of Western culture that continues to indulge in victim-blaming—for rape, lack of insurance coverage for birth control pills or maternity, for abortion, for a host of gendered issues—but to also to render the anti-feminism of fundamentalist institutions and the Religious Right obvious and to demonstrate its insidious violence. Ironically, Montelaro observes that the regime “depict[s] men as slaves to their sexuality while women are asked to ignore the sexual power relations that enforce a culture of male dominance” (235). Fundamentalist institutions assume an anti-feminist stance in reaction to feminist challenges to their kyriocentric ideologies. Hammer extends the victim-blaming of women for their own rapes to the fundamentalist victim-blaming of feminism for all the ills of society and, ultimately, for the advent of a Christian theocracy that oppresses them: “[t]he seemingly mild-mannered commander Fred cheats on his wife with

alacrity and calmly justifies the oppressive regime which he partly masterminded with the observation that in the old society men felt they were no longer needed by women; he thereby suggests that women's liberation forced American men to take this drastic action; ergo the present regime is ultimately the women's 'fault'" (40). The sense of besetment that fundamentalists exhibit is, for the Commander, a perception that men are somehow the victims when women venture into the public sphere. The victim-blaming is no less absent in fundamentalism and, because of literal interpretations that attribute "original sin" in Christianity to a woman, all women must go through life in a state of perpetual punishment and violence rather than a state of grace and forgiveness.

Through Luke and the Commander, Atwood shows that the hypocritical attitudes toward women in her science fiction fundamentalist theocracy are already present, if somewhat masked, in contemporary Western society. In a comparison of the Commander and Luke, the resemblances between fundamentalist and mainstream attitudes demonstrate far too much overlap.⁹⁹ The Commander's hypocrisy lies not only in his espousing of Gilead's misogynist values but in his subversions of the regime he helped to establish. Luke's hypocrisy, however, lies in his lip service to equality, forced by Second Wave legal advancements in women's rights, that belies his attitudes and behavior toward Offred, especially after the Gileadean coup. Rather than help circumvent the loss of Offred's job and the limitations to her freedom and independence, Luke seems to relish Offred's enforced domesticity and her financial dependence upon him. Michael argues: "The ease with which Luke assumes dominance and ownership

⁹⁹ Madonne Miner argues in "'Trust Me': Reading the Romance Plot in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," that the text accomplishes this through doubling of the Commander and Luke. Some of the things that Luke and the Commander have in common are an affinity for "old things" and antiques (202, 224); knowledge of Latin, which both men "[use] in a subtle reaffirmation of classical gender roles and inequalities" (Miner 155); remarks that show they think women are incapable of abstract thought (156, 240); and citing of "arguments from authority" by using phrases such as "studies have been done" or "we have stats" (83, 273). Interestingly, Offred's affairs with both men when they are married to other women reproduces with the Commander and Serena Joy the love triangle she had previously formed with Luke and his unnamed ex-wife.

indicates the male-centered modes of thought which still undergird late twentieth-century Western cultures, even if legal reforms veil their sexism. Offred views the Commander as paternalistic, daddyish, and relatively harmless: “I sense in him none of the animosity I used to sense in men, even in Luke sometimes. He’s not saying *bitch* in his head” (238), but she seems to forget that she is already in the position of degradation in relation to the Commander’s status. The Commander does not need to further reinforce Offred’s inferiority because he has already internalized it. Furthermore, in ““The University of Denay, Nunavit”” Ken Norris reminds us that if the Commander “was either Waterford or Judd, he was the equal of a Goebbels or an Eichmann” (361) and far from the harmless daddy-role into which Offred seems, at times, to cast him. Both Luke and the Commander are hypocritical in their attitudes and actions toward women, though on the surface of things, the Commander’s behavior seems much more straightforward since he is carrying out regime-dictated activities like raping a Handmaid every month. However, the Commander’s hypocrisy lies in scorning the rules for women that he may have helped to develop, approved of, and is involved in enforcing.¹⁰⁰ Michael argues that “[i]n short, the Gileadean regime does not have to restructure established thought systems—these are already male-centered—but merely has to enact legal changes” (142-43). The commonalities between Luke and the Commander make apparent the hypocrisy of both men in their attitudes toward women and assumption of male privilege. Atwood seems to ask if it is possible for romantic love to be genuine and flourish if relationships between women and men are not predicated on equality, and how can they be when such misogyny underlies all of Western culture.

¹⁰⁰ The Commander violates Gileadean policy in many ways: his evening trysts with Offred are as forbidden as their Scrabble games; he allows Offred to read and write; he presents her with cosmetics and skin care items; he engineers their jaunt to Jezebel’s for non-Ceremonial sex to which Offred submits in the same way some rape survivors do: not fighting back in order to end their ordeal with the utmost expedience.

The hypocritical way in which elite men exercise power in Gilead is perhaps most obviously exemplified by the existence of Jezebel's, a brothel stocked with sterilized¹⁰¹ prostitutes for the after hours entertainment of the Commanders, visiting trade or political delegations from other sovereign states, or even sex-tourists. Montelaro posits that "women in *The Handmaid's Tale* become victims of masculine eroticization which finds its fullest expression in the socially marginalized sub-class of women prostitutes who are detained at Jezebel's" (245), one of the most closely guarded secrets in Gilead.¹⁰² Offred's Commander claims that "Nature demands variety, for men. It stands to reason, it's part of the procreational strategy. It's Nature's plan" (308), yet in this new variety, the sterilized Jezebels are not part of the regime's procreative strategy but rather completely commodified for male pleasure, a practice which undermines the Commander's justification for the system he helped to establish and subsequently undermines. Offred ironically points out that the Gileadean system involves men "trying on" different women rather than women changing their outfits to meet this alleged male need for variety; this links clothing and women's fashions in contemporary Western society to kyriarchal expectations, and condoning, of male promiscuity. Additionally, David Coad asserts, "[i]n presenting the Jezebel episode, Atwood points to men's blatant hypocrisy and their control over women's fashion, appearance and clothes" (66). The clothes the women at Jezebel's wear, leftovers of myriad male fantasies about women and young girls, compared to the uniforms of the Handmaids meant to conceal and show modesty, provide a striking contrast in the regime's rhetoric about the expectations of idealized "good" women and the idealized

¹⁰¹ One wonders how Moira, whom the text does not reveal as having had a child, was selected as a Handmaid in the first place when the others are "fallen" women who have demonstrated their fertility but were unmarried (Janine) or married to "adulterous" men whose second or third marriages had been invalidated (Offred).

¹⁰² The Handmaids seem to have no knowledge of it when exchanging tidbits of information with each other, and I would hazard that the Marthas are also ignorant of such an establishment; Serena Joy, on the other hand, might have some idea of the existence of Jezebel's because of the Commander's past peccadilloes with his assigned Handmaids.

“bad” women; the text shows both sides of the virgin/whore binary and its strictures. However, we should not neglect to recall the Japanese tourists in high heels, nylons, and short skirts, who ostensibly present a middle ground but whose mode of dress and made-up appearance seems no less dictated but part of the kyriocentric system that privileges the exercise of male desire.

While the existence of Jezebel’s and its prostitutes is one of the most blatant displays of Gilead’s hypocrisy, one of the more subtle is the treatment of the Handmaids and their precarious positions in society. For example, Handmaids first enter a new household posting through the front door, like Wives or guests, and thereafter come and go through the kitchen back door, like Marthas and Guardians assigned as domestic help, except when specially summoned for Birth Days. It would seem that the position of the Handmaids has not been fully negotiated since the Aunts are “lobbying for the front” door for all of the Handmaids’ entrances and exits from their households (18). Furthermore, the Red Centers, officially named after Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob, are not training Wives but Handmaids. The original Handmaids, Bilhah and Zilpah, have no voice in the Christian Old Testament; they merely produce sons. In Gilead, their names are not the ones chosen to commemorate the Red Centers. The Aunts contend that the Handmaids should occupy a “place of honor” (18), and Offred rather ironically calls herself “a national resource” (85). The rhetoric surrounding the Handmaids in which they are told they are performing a valued and patriotic service to the state indicates the conflation of Handmaids into Woman-as-symbol, a concept which functions to elide their individual experiences and simultaneously subvert their autonomy as human beings. Despite the chauvinistic rhetoric, the Marthas and Econowives express their distaste for the Handmaids, and they, along with the Wives, view these ostensibly fertile women as whores rather than exalt them as mother-

figures.¹⁰³ The positioning of women as the symbolic Woman exposes the underlying hypocrisy in the regime's treatment of all women, but particularly of the Handmaids: they are mothers who do not raise their children and "whores" performing a "vital" function to meet the needs of the state.

Fundamentalist ideology expresses a reverence for women, particularly as mothers, on the one hand, while on the other hand also casting women in the role of originators of sin and evil whose wantonness must be strictly controlled. In contemporary society, a great deal of rhetoric surrounds the "choice" of the stay-at-home-mother. Men and women frequently allude to stay-at-home-moms as performing the most valuable work in the family by raising children, and by implication, passing on the family's cultural traditions and ethnic heritage to the next generation. This also parallels the fundamentalists' veneration of wives and mothers and disparagement of women who want to be and do anything else. While non-fundamentalists may not demonize women in the same way or to the same degree, they also do not seem to place much value beyond lip service to the unpaid labor women contribute to the domestic sphere.

Ostensibly Gilead is a Christian theocracy for which "*God Is a National Resource*" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* 276, emphasis in original), yet Gilead has none of the expected trappings of religious practice, such as church attendance and consecrated buildings. The communal events, while including readings passed off as taken from the Christian Bible, take place in unconsecrated arenas, similar to the football stadium services of mega churches in metropolitan areas; nor do Prayvaganzas or Salvagings seem linked to the traditional Christian

¹⁰³ In "Future Tense: Making History in *The Handmaid's Tale*," Arnold E. Davidson examines the dichotomy of the Handmaids' positioning in Gileadean society: "Women who could bear children were therefore vital (literally) to the survival of the regime. But prospective mothers were nevertheless the most controlled, powerless, and demeaned members of that society. In short, there is no necessary relationship between one's importance to the perpetuation of society and one's privilege within that society. Significance and status are both constructs manipulated by those in power. Just as the conference chair in 2195 is peripheral to the proceedings themselves, so is Offred merely a marginal (and ultimately disposable) tool of the patriarchy that cannot exist without her" (119-20).

day of church attendance, Sunday. Prayers are paid for and recited by the Soul Scroll machines in a strange echo of the electronic church where the faithful need not leave the comfort of their own homes to “worship.” The former church building mentioned in the text has become a Puritan museum paying homage to the forerunners of Gileadean theocracy, although the Eyes’ headquarters, a former college library, is described as a “temple” (215). Thompson declares these elements an “absence of a religious apparatus” (62), which I am more inclined to envision as a transformation of the religious apparatus rather than an absence entirely. Rather, the religious manifestations of Gilead permeate every area of life from the names of shops adapted from Bible verses (*Lilies of the Field*, *All Flesh*), to the Christian-styled “God is always watching” surveillance that is perverted into denizens of Gilead spying on and suspecting each other. As an ideology that masks power, the religious aspect is most dangerous in its execution of social control: similar to negotiating with terrorists, challenges to fundamentalist beliefs are viewed as asking adherents to compromise their version of (God’s) truth and must be quashed. One would be correct in concluding that the religion of Gilead possesses an apparatus but lacks an “inward search” for meaning and meaningfulness in life. In this way, Atwood resoundingly critiques fundamentalist sects that clearly employ a religious apparatus as a power structure, but lack a genuine spiritual or ethical aspect in their practice of faith, and most assuredly lack an acceptance of and tolerance for alternate belief systems. Similar to other feminist dystopian writers who condemn religious fundamentalism, Atwood does so through exposing its extremes and paralleling this ideology to the underpinnings of kyriarchal Western culture. The novel is also a warning, as Peter G. Stillman and S. Anne Johnson assert, against seeming complacency like Offred’s (81), though the actions of Moira and Offred’s mother, while not complacent, were not sufficient to prevent the advent of the oppressive regime of Gilead.

In addition to the warnings against the mindset of fundamentalism and the underlying attitudes that situate a theocratic coup within the realm of possibility in the US, Atwood criticizes the ISAs that coerce a population into thinking that theocracy is a viable alternative to the messiness of representative democracy. Dodson contends that Atwood's argument also criticizes the colonial Puritan theocracy and its violent reaction to dissent of any sort and that the novel "challenges any former reading of the Puritan story as a Utopian mission dedicated to divine justice for all and exposes the domestic imperialism that has long been denied by such traditional American Studies' intellectuals as Perry Miller" ("We Lived in the Blank White Spaces," 70).¹⁰⁴ Atwood may well be speaking directly to the Religious Right, and various subsets of it, in their nostalgic idealization of the United States' Puritan past—a past that was not particularly pleasant for those who lived it and is not commensurate with the rights granted to individuals by the Constitution concerning freedom of religion and expression specifically.

In a regime that purports to establish a Christian theocracy, Gilead's systematic surveillance, deportation, torture, execution, and oppression of its own citizenry does not uphold the Christian New Testament covenant of Christ-like compassion and love for one's neighbor. Atwood centralizes the oppressions experienced by women in a theocratic regime and demonstrates that the uses of kyriarchal power remain largely unaffected by religious tenets of love and equality, especially given the traditional kyriocentrism of Abrahamic religions that privileges men and subordinates women. This subordination of women in Christianity is predicated upon the "original sin" of Eve when she disobeyed God to satisfy her own curiosity as well as one creation story that claims Adam was formed by God first and, when Adam was

¹⁰⁴ Atwood dedicates *The Handmaid's Tale* to her former professor, Perry Miller, and her ancestor, Mary Webster, who was hanged by the Puritans as a witch and survived the ordeal.

lonely, Eve was formed from his rib.¹⁰⁵ As the subjugated Other, the Christian Old Testament is rife with injunctions regarding women's sexual and procreative purity having to do with menstruation and childbirth, demonstrating a lack of scientific knowledge about natural bodily functions leading to a dearth of understanding of women's sexuality and fertility.¹⁰⁶ As a result, ancient men exhibited an anxiety over female desire and women's unexplainable fecundity in the face of men's lack of the primary reproductive organs. Moreover, in "The Play of Irony: Theatricality and Utopian Transformation in Contemporary Women's Speculative Fiction," Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor links the anxiety over women's sexuality and reproductive capacity to Gilead's public rituals and exposes the underlying misogyny: "the Aunts and Commanders . . . have masterfully created dramatic scenarios in which the apparent centrality of the woman, of the ideology of femininity as sacred and powerful, actually conceals the extreme degree to which a woman's body is commodified in Gilead" (123). Additionally Glasberg argues that these communal "women's" activities extend beyond the physical control of women's bodies and their fertility to "the control of behaviour . . . designed to create solidarity with the ideals of the oppressors" (691). Gilead has created false rituals and ceremonies that they have also naturalized through literal biblical examples, thus "[d]ominators could indulge their passions via misogyny while transcending them by reducing their victims to the status of inferior reproductive objects (i.e., things)" (691). This demonstrates a selective bias in indulging in the most damaging

¹⁰⁵ The first creation story in Genesis merely states that God created man and woman simultaneously and both metaphoric and literal interpretations would indicate a degree of equality between men and women. Fundamentalists and many mainstream Christians tend to selectively ignore this creation story in favor of the "Adam's bone" narrative. The Talmud addresses this gap between the two creation stories by claiming the first woman was actually named Lilith. Lilith insisted upon her equality and left the Garden of Eden when Adam refused to recognize her as his equal. After Lilith's departure, God made Adam another woman, Eve, out of his rib, in accordance with the second creation story.

¹⁰⁶ Some Jewish feminist theologians speculate that the hot-house, frat-boy environment in which male Jews studied the Torah and formulated the Talmud (commentaries) exhibits fixations on women's bodies, natural bodily functions, and ritual purity arising out of gender segregation and the mystification of sexual activity.

of their religion's tenets rather than concentrating on the messages of peace and love within Christian sacred texts. Moreover, Malak contends that the "portrayal of a state that in theory claims to be founded on Christian principles, yet in practice miserably lacks spirituality and benevolence . . . prescribes a pattern of life based on frugality, conformity, censorship, corruption, fear, and terror—in short, the usual terms of existence enforced by totalitarian states" (9-10). Totalitarian states, by definition, preclude humane or "Christian" values. In Gilead, however, the rejection of the utopic values of a religious faith and the adoption of solely dystopic characteristics indicates a lack of compassion for its adherents that, in Christianity, could also be categorized as a spiritual death.

As for spiritual death and the continuing theme of hypocrisy, the regime seems to care more for performances of piety than actually creating pious, devoted human beings. Religious services no longer take place in churches but in living rooms for the Ceremony, and in stadia for Prayvaganzas. While a designated house of worship is not necessary in Christianity, the absence of regular church attendance, a mainstay of fundamentalism, points to the perversions that can develop in theocratic regimes. For example, the Soul Scrolls and their use by the upper echelons of Gileadean society exhibit that the religion actually lacks a supernatural component or the possibility for moments of existential transcendence. Instead, the text tells us:

What the machines print is prayers, roll upon roll, prayers going out endlessly. They're ordered by Compuphone, I've overheard the Commander's Wife doing it. Ordering prayers from Soul Scrolls is supposed to be a sign of piety and faithfulness to the regime, so of course the Commanders' Wives do it a lot. It helps their husbands' careers. . . . Once the prayers have been printed out and said, the paper rolls back through another slot and is recycled into fresh paper

again. There are no people inside the building: the machines run by themselves.

(216)

The display of “faithfulness,” of course, is not for a god but for “the regime” of Gilead and comes with a literal price. In *The Gospel According to Science Fiction*, McKee observes that, in science fiction, “faith is an empty exercise . . . conducted for the sake of appearances rather than for a true desire for a relationship with God” (172). The cobbled-together nature of Gilead’s fundamentalist ideology, “from male traditions of Utopian writing, fascist ideology, the sacred books of American Puritanism, St. Paul’s patriarchal prescriptions for the early Christian churches, and the religious rhetoric of the Chosen Nation” (Larson 39) precludes the Gileadean elite from an exercise of true spirituality. Furthermore, everyone in Gilead seems foreclosed from engaging in genuine spiritual piety, especially for the Handmaids since the appearance of piety has life-or-death implications. As a dystopian warning of what a Christian theocracy in the United States might mean to contemporary society, this text shows the absolute abandonment of “Christian” principles when power is used to reinforce kyriarchal norms that oppress women and subaltern Others and the subsequent exclusion of genuine spirituality—the ultimate departure from Christian tenets. Hammer summarizes the hypocrisy of Gilead thusly: “This is, of course, the supreme irony of Atwood’s fictional future world; this is a theocracy where not one person is devout and where such notions as faith and morality simply have no meaning” (40).

Resistance

On the surface, Offred seems, for the most part, to passively accept her position as a Handmaid rather than become actively involved with the May Day resistance movement or to stand up directly to the Commander or the regime. However, a blatant act of resistance would most likely be an act of suicide given the surveillance and repression of the state toward its

citizens, and Offred tells us that “I intend to last” (10); she is more interested in self-preservation and survival than in destroying the regime that oppresses her. Stillman and Johnson view Offred’s loss of identity and fear of connecting more closely with the rumored resistance as leaving her with “no modes of resistance against Gilead, at least none that threaten Gilead in any way—and, equally, they seem not to threaten the smug self-satisfaction, self-aggrandizement, and sexism of the academic conferees in 2195” (75). Stillman and Johnson also point out that Offred’s small resistances—teasing the guards at checkpoints with her provocatively swinging dress, furtive meetings with Moira in the Red Center, seeing the Commander in the evenings, accompanying him to Jezebel’s, her affair with Nick initially arranged by Serena Joy but then continued on her own—are indeed transgressions against the regime. However, they contend that “those transgressions directly enmesh her into the system of sex, power, and corruption that characterizes the actual workings of Gilead and powerfully construct her as a being who defines herself by her body” (75), and ultimately undermines her resistance entirely. In the beginning of the novel, Offred is observant and paying careful attention to what goes on around her in order to guarantee her own survival. Offred’s watchfulness wanes once she becomes involved with Nick—once she begins to exercise her own agency after years of circumspect behavior and yielding to the regime. Some critics read Offred’s agency negatively;¹⁰⁷ however, such a reading presumes that Offred has fallen in love with Nick, which, I would argue, is not entirely certain in the text. Her relationship seems to be based more on an exchange of human contact and intimacy that satisfies some of Offred’s physical and emotional desires, but also, in this act of subversion, restores Offred’s agency and her freedom to choose something—anything—for herself and to choose how her body is shared with or withheld from others. Offred seems to engage in this affair because it is something that she can choose to do freely, though at great risk.

¹⁰⁷ See Bouson and Loudermilk.

On the surface, Nick does not have the elite status and power of the Commander, or even Serena Joy's limited power over Offred, and could be executed along with Offred if they are caught. Nick's position as a subaltern man does not give him a hold over Offred, and their relationship, unlike her clandestine relationship with the Commander, is not a coercive one.

Offred is complicit to a great degree as a defense mechanism but also as a result of the environment in which she was raised, the environment of Western society that we currently inhabit, where various institutions and RSAs and ISAs work to "keep women in their places." Her complicity in the regime and her complacency prior to and during the Gileadean coup suggests what we could expect from most of American society in a similar theocratic take over. In "Offred's Complicity and the Dystopian Tradition in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*," Allan Weiss argues that Atwood's greater point about Offred's complicity with the Gileadean state is that "totalitarian regimes arise because people are too complacent or afraid to resist them, or actually welcome them. Our own cowardice or selfishness does not excuse Offred's; instead, her cowardice and complicity convict us all, because we share it" (137-38); in judging Offred negatively, he argues, we judge ourselves as well. In Offred's case, she is not oppressed in the same way as Serena Joy, who is confined to the home after publicly advocating for it (60) and "furious . . . now that she's been taken at her word" (61), nor as the Marthas, who seem to fly under the radar in their menial tasks with not much else demanded of them on an ideological level. They have all been subjected to the vicissitudes of kyriarchal culture that encourages women's passivity. I would also posit that Offred's small resistances, and perhaps lack of resistance to any significant effect, serves as part of the warning that a dystopian text presents to the reader and a way to recognize the gestures that fundamentalist faiths make toward theocratic governance.

Offred's central and defining act of defiance and subversion of the regime is the telling of her story. She transgresses the label of passivity especially with her various "reconstructions" and differing versions of the sequence of events that cue the reader to her unreliableness as a narrator and subvert dominant Western narratives and their demand for coherence. Her unreliability as a narrator also casts doubt on the reliability of Gilead's master narratives of women's inferiority and shows that "all narratives are . . . liable to slippage" (Raschke 263). Perhaps the most salient issue regarding Offred's passivity or resistance is that Atwood purposefully makes this determination complex and messy. Baccolini posits that Offred is "full of unsolved contradictions and selfish fears. However, Offred's reflections on the past, her family, and her lack of future prospects constitute a site of resistance and struggle against the obliteration of individuality the regime enforces" ("Gender and Genre" 22). One could speculate that Offred could be considered more of a hero if she had joined or more actively supported the May Day group, but would we have thought so if Offred's end was a suicide like Ofglen's or consignment to Jezebel's like Moira? Furthermore, Offred's story would not have been preserved, however much it was altered or skewed by two pompous historians, if she had not first preserved her own life. Freibert concludes from her analysis of the Sufi proverb¹⁰⁸ in the novel's framing material that the epigram "epitomizes Atwood's view of social control. It implies that on the most basic level of survival human beings instinctively know what to do and what to avoid; it suggests the corollary that authorities should avoid unnecessary regulation. Sufi simplicity counterpoints the outrageous legalism of Gilead's political structure and pleads for human freedom and survival" (285). Having personally contemplated being held captive as a prisoner of war when I served in a combat zone, I do not think any one person can distinctly say, prior to being in a hostage or enslaved circumstance, how they would react. Offred tells the

¹⁰⁸ "In the desert there is no sign that says, Thou shalt not eat stones."

reader outright that she means to survive; it should not be surprising that she does that and no more—anything else is a projection of the reader’s horror and wishes to facilitate Gilead’s downfall onto Offred. She is honest about the reconstructed nature of her narrative; that she has imagined some things because she has no way of knowing for sure what happened to Luke or the whereabouts of her daughter, her mother, and Moira; that her memory is faulty; that some things are too painful to tell in their entirety. In addition to breaking a silence enforced on fundamentalist women, she also subverts the absolute truth claims required of fundamentalist religions, their literal interpretations that are impossible to actually put into practice as well as selective in their biases and inclusion in any sort of religious practice.

One of the primary themes of the novel is Atwood’s argument that Gilead—and the Religious Right in contemporary politics and culture which Gilead represents—is so successful in rolling back the legal protections of women’s rights because the underlying kyriarchal culture that reinforces the subjugation of women and others did not change as a result of the Second Wave legal gains. Legal protections are fragile and can be repealed by new laws or new court rulings that re-interpret the laws in favor of limiting women’s human rights and autonomy (Michael 135), as the thousands of legal challenges to the availability and accessibility of abortion and contraception in recent state and national legislative sessions confirm. Furthermore, Wolmark writes that “the narrative suggests that most of the features of the masculine hegemony were already in place. The main difference between ‘then’ and ‘now’ [of the text’s timeline] is that this hegemony has become overtly repressive” (101). Atwood also projects the lack of change in underlying attitudes toward women into the future of 2195. Rule surmises that “Pieixoto’s address, with its puns about women as sexual objects and its demeaning of women’s bodies, reflects the rhetoric that the Gileadean Commanders used to underwrite their reduction of

women to reproductive parts. The professor's talk in the 'Historical Notes' suggests that, although Gilead no longer exists, the misogynistic impulse to belittle women because of their bodies persists even in academic and intellectual circles" (629-30). Pieixoto fails to give his audience any sort of analysis as to how the regime was able to stage a successful coup. This implies that Pieixoto is incapable of identifying the sexism of his own society and therefore equally incapable of identifying how the Commanders were able to seize power in the first place.

The parallel provided by the "Historical Notes," implicated in the contemporary society of the reader, is that covert cultural sexism—that legal gains have not proven effective at changing underlying kyriarchal attitudes toward women—is not so easily resisted without women who do resist being pilloried in gender-specific ways. Kauffman surmises,

Atwood depicts what "woman" has been in the Judeo-Christian tradition, from biblical times through the 1980s to the end of the next century. From Medusa to Virgin Mary, from the biblical handmaid Bilhah to Hester Prynne, from Mary Webster to Maryann Crescent Moon in 2195, the novel assembles the constructions of "woman": monster, madonna, witch, womb, whore, revolutionary, heretic, prostitute, servant, mother. Atwood's purpose is to show that revolutions come and go, but women's fates remain wholly unchanged (232-33).

For example, the sexism inherent in Offred's relationship with Luke prior to the coup is not due to religious beliefs at all, but from historical, naturalized, underlying attitudes of women's inferiority to men. In light of the many ways in which women's rights have been eroded since the publication of *The Handmaid's Tale*, not due to (only) complacency but to the rigid, ideological intentions of the Religious Right to restore the United States to a theocracy, the text's

predictions continue to resonate with current audiences.¹⁰⁹ Offred's seeming complacency may be problematic from a feminist standpoint, but, as Wolmark observes, "the hegemonic structures of patriarchy both repress women and invite them to collude in their own repression" (101).¹¹⁰ Indicting women for complacency in the face of ISAs, especially a relational one like religion, is somewhat akin to victim-blaming and enables a perception that women are endowed with more agency than they actually possess as individuals or a collective class. Furthermore, the focus on Third Wave complacency of women elides the backlash composed of men and non-feminist women who felt materially threatened by women's progress. Rather, Wolmark asserts that "[t]he novel constitutes an intervention into those discourses of the [Religious Right] which are organised so powerfully around the family, heterosexuality and gender identity, and which are constituted in dystopian terms in the imagined state of Gilead" (106). One would suppose that the overt sexism and racism of Gilead would be easier to resist than in contemporary society, but *The Handmaid's Tale* seems to argue that totalitarianism and the ISAs it employs are not so easily resisted, especially not by single, powerless actors who are shown to have been relatively powerless even before the totalitarian take over of society.¹¹¹ In the face of the motivations and

¹⁰⁹ Writing in 1990, Banerjee places much more confidence in the gains of the Second Wave and argues that the Third Wave's complacency and simple acceptance of Second Wave gains should be the source of blame for Gilead, and by extension in reality, for the threat the Religious Right poses to women and that the text does not function as a dystopian warning. I view this as a misreading of the political milieu of the 1980s and into the twenty-first century which underestimates the rise and influence of the Religious Right. Banerjee also claims that Atwood underestimates Wall Street and economic conditions; however, *Oryx and Crake* (2004) published after this article would belie that claim. Rather, I would argue that in telling *The Handmaid's Tale* from Offred's point of view, offering an economic analysis would have seemed beyond Offred's knowledge and understanding.

¹¹⁰ Wolmark claims the text belies her point, stating in the same paragraph, "The narrative suggests that [Offred's] passivity is only partly the result of the brutal 're-education' process she has undergone in the new regime, and that in a generalised fashion, it may have been a contributory factor in the rise of extreme fundamentalism" (101).

¹¹¹ Jamie Dopp questions the potential of a theocratic takeover of the United States, arguing that a military coup is unrealistic and whether a religious regime that professes to be "pro-life" would so cavalierly dispose of "shredders." Dopp, writing in 1994, finds the "answer offered by the text is that the Gileadean revolution was motivated almost entirely by a desire to (re)oppress women" (n.p.) unrealistic. Dopp may be correct about the possibility of a military coup, but in the wake of recent political events, this observation neglects the underlying cultural attitudes and the fragility of Second Wave legal gains.

political activities of the Religious Right, constituted in part by fundamentalists who desire a Christian theocratic state, women's (and men's) complacency is not wholly to blame.

Some critics would argue that the "Historical Notes" section at the end of the novel reframes not only the utopian impulse within and outside the text but undermines Atwood's cautions about religious fundamentalism running amok if not checked. In her latest book, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, Atwood writes:

dystopia contains within itself a little utopia, and vice versa. What, then, is the little utopia concealed in the dystopic *Handmaid's Tale*? There are two: one is in the past—the past that is our own present. The second is placed in a future beyond the main story by the Afterword at the end of the book, which describes a future in which Gilead—the tyrannical republic of *The Handmaid's Tale*—has ended. . . . (90-91)

The future envisioned in the "Historical Notes," however, seems just as chilling since it reinscribes kyriarchal norms of the present on the future; unlike Atwood, I don't find the institutional sexism of the academics discussing Offred's narrative about her experiences in Gilead utopian at all but rather a dystopia that most of its inhabitants don't recognize as such, and very similar to contemporary reality. The sexism is subtle, couched in jokes, double entendres, and the scholars' disregard for Offred's lived experience, instead of the overt misogyny of Gilead's allegedly short-lived, fundamentalist republic; as Bergmann observes, "Challenge this as sexism, and one is immediately accused of having no sense of humor" (853). In this respect, it would seem that the "Historical Notes" destabilizes Atwood's overarching critique of fundamentalist religious ideologies.

However, Atwood manages to thoroughly skewer academia in the process and warns against an alternate society, alternate to totalitarianism at any rate, with the trappings of equality, yet I would also contend that sacred texts written by male authors, interpreted and filtered by male translators and interpreters, and preached as (selective) literal truths by male leadership in religious institutions have and continue to appropriate and/or elide women's histories and experiences. Pieixoto's "guesswork" and his arrogant assumption of the validity of his conclusions "exposes all histories as strategic reconstructions of events from specific perspectives" (Michael 165), which in sacred religious texts, are nearly always male viewpoints, encoded with male biases. In destabilizing "The Handmaid's Tale" assembled by Pieixoto and his colleagues, the text also destabilizes the attitudes still prevalent in Western society through its close association with Pieixoto's 2195 milieu. Furthermore, the descent into cultural relativism of the academic speaker as well as his desire to study the Commanders of Gilead rather than a lowly Handmaid point to the lack of underlying changes in gender attitudes in present-day and future institutions and ideologies. Malak maintains that "Atwood soberly demonstrates that when a critic or scholar (and by extension a reader) avoids, under the guise of scholarly objectivity, taking a moral or political stand about an issue of crucial magnitude such as totalitarianism, he or she will necessarily become an apologist for evil; more significantly, the applause the speaker receives gives us a further compelling glimpse into a distant future that still harbours strong misogynous tendencies" (15).

Offred's questioning through her storytelling is, finally, another site of resistance to a totalitarian regime and the fundamentalist beliefs that buttress it. The cultural relativism and lack of questioning in 2195 indicates a failure in our own society to resist oppression and the naturalized attitudes that underlie its advent. Michael also argues that the parallels the text draws

between Gilead, 2195, and contemporary society cause the thoughtful reader to question his or her own underlying attitudes and the values they espouse. The “Historical Notes,” then, function as a warning as well: here we are and here we will stay unless we begin to question and to resist the kyriarchal institutions that oppress women and Others and insist on an ideology that preserves power in the hands of a few elite, heterosexual, white men.

Conclusion

While a coup by a fundamentalist Christian regime may not be quite as remote currently as it was nearly thirty years ago when Atwood wrote *The Handmaid's Tale*, her message is still clear: underlying sexism preserves kyriarchal institutions and ultimately disadvantages all but a few elite power-mongers while leaving open the potential for religious fundamentalism to take over society and transform government into a theocracy. Fundamentalist religions resist equality of all kinds, and Atwood's critique indicates that even in an absence of fundamentalism, gendered and other negative attitudes toward difference still exist and exhibit their own resistance to equality in subtle, yet damaging ways. The question of whether human rights will stand in the face of a small group's narrow interpretation of gender and sexuality remains an important one.

Atwood's condemnation of fundamentalism as kyriarchal and inherently hypocritical is neither new nor uncommon; but what becomes abundantly unambiguous is Atwood's critique of the flimsiness of legal gains for women and minorities without change in cultural attitudes and the systemic inequalities of kyriarchal institutions in the preservation of power for the elite. *The Handmaid's Tale* exposes fundamentalism as misogynistic despite its purported reverence for women's “special” roles as wives and mothers. Part of the novel's enduring power, I think, is that the threat of the United States becoming a Christian theocracy through the political control

of reactionary zealots seems even closer in the present historical moment with legislative rollbacks in abortion and women's access to contraception and preventive health care. We have not, perhaps, taken the warning seriously enough.

In conclusion, Atwood's first foray into dystopian science fiction presents the reader with a Christian fundamentalist regime that controls women and subaltern men through ritual and policing of behavior and dress, and is inherently hypocritical in its preservation of socioeconomic class and naturalized ideologies of gender and difference. Atwood exposes the hypocrisy of a fundamentalist theocracy, based on its flawed ideology, rooted in preservation of kyriarchal privilege despite the "family values" rhetoric it purports to exemplify. Moreover, the text demonstrates that the technology and progress that science produces may contribute to the degradation of certain groups of people as much as it advances and enhances the lives of those who have access to it. Rather than a personal search for what religion could mean in her own life, Atwood uses the genre of science fiction to interrogate misogynistic and gendered attitudes in kyriarchal religious fundamentalism as well as in the existing attitudes of Western society. Without an examination of kyriocentric ideologies and the attitudes they engender in society, contemporary society, like Offred, has little hope of undermining those attitudes, revisioning or reclaiming religion and embracing equality. Atwood's dystopia challenges her readers to recognize the dangers of fundamentalism allied with political influence and to resist complacency in the face of the Religious Right's war on women.

Chapter 3

“Their Fear Was Their Weakness”: Fundamentalism, Power, and Terror in Louise Marley’s *The Terrorists of Irustan*

Prior to Al Qaeda’s September 2001 terrorist bombings of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the resulting US invasion of Afghanistan, Louise Marley published *The Terrorists of Irustan* in 1999 as a protest against the brutalities of the Taliban regime. On one level, perhaps one could argue that the full implications of Marley’s protest against the Taliban were realized, in the United States, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the still on-going efforts, more than a decade later, to dismantle the Taliban regime and the Al Qaeda terrorist network that the Taliban sheltered. On another level, I would argue that if we read the novel as a protest against religious fundamentalism overall, only then can the implications of *The Terrorists of Irustan* be fully realized for American society in the twenty-first century. Because this novel predates the “Global War on Terror” and much of the demonizing of Islam that has occurred in American culture since 9/11, its critique of religious fundamentalism responds directly to the oppression of women and the denial of their rights in theocratic societies in the name of religion.

Because of the political nature of the text as a protest novel, the direct links between Islamic fundamentalism and the text are unmistakable. Marley intersectionally engages Islamic fundamentalism in narrative form by addressing the strictures that such a society poses to women and subaltern Others. She writes on her website that her novel was “inspired by the takeover in Afghanistan by the Taliban and the subsequent appalling treatment of women and girls” (Home page). However, while the actions of the Taliban provided the inspiration for the novel, and there are definite parallels between the strict *shariah*¹¹² interpretations prevalent under the

¹¹² “Shariah,” when translated from Arabic is variously spelled sharia, shariah, shari’ah. *Shariah* is a religious-based legal system used in some Muslim countries.

Taliban in Afghanistan, other types of Islamic fundamentalism provided material for Irustani society. Marley's website calls Irustan an "analog of a Middle Eastern society," and a review posted on the same webpage by Sharon Shinn, a science fiction writer, describes the novel as having an "Arab-like milieu" ("Irustan [review]"). In my own reading of the novel, the Islamist¹¹³ society of Irustan more closely resembles Saudi Arabia: the Wahhabism practiced in Saudi Arabia is yet another example of a society engaging in religious fundamentalism; the monopoly Irustan enjoys in rhodium mining and the tremendous wealth generated as a result resembles the oil wealth of Saudi Arabia; the aristocratic elements of Saudi society seem more closely paralleled by Irustan than Afghanistan under the Taliban which was a relatively poor nation in 1999 when the novel was published. Via email, Marley stated, "I do think the society of Irustan more closely resembles Saudi Arabia than Afghanistan, but it is, after all, a work of pure fiction" (6 Nov 2010). Fiction or not, the critique of Islamic fundamentalism and its intersection with gender, sexuality, and colonialism are at the forefront of the text. However, the implications for fundamentalism are much broader than for Islamic fundamentalism alone.

Through the fundamentalist culture depicted in *The Terrorists of Irustan*, Marley engages not only Islamic fundamentalism, but the rise of the Religious Right in the United States and its gestures toward legislating a Christian theocracy upon a religiously diverse population. Through a science fiction text, Marley portrays the parallels between how Islamic fundamentalists treat women and how American culture reproduces some of the same restrictions on women's agency and bodily autonomy through fundamentalist rhetoric and activism. Her text's argument incorporates intersectional views of gender, ability, sexuality, and class as well as accounts for

¹¹³ I use the term "Islamist" to differentiate fundamentalist sects from mainstream Islam. I also use the terms "Islamic fundamentalism" or "Islamic extremism" interchangeably with "Islamist." When not describing fundamentalism or extremism, "Islamic" as an adjective indicates mainstream Islam, such as "Islamic jurists" or "Islamic religious leaders."

different uses of power in a fundamentalist theocracy and a capitalist conglomerate. The novel focuses on the dangers of fundamentalism to society, the violence fundamentalism perpetuates against women and subaltern Others, and how violence may spawn additional violence as resistance to kyriarchal systems.

Marley never uses the words Islam or Muslim or any term that can be directly attributed to an Abrahamic Earth religion; after all, Irustan's single religion could resemble any theocratic, fundamentalist regime in its practices. The outer trappings of Irustan's society are patterned after fundamentalist Islam: the women live highly circumscribed lives, physically segregated from men who do not live in their households to whom they cannot even speak without a male intermediary, and are absolutely dependent upon the men of their household and subject to their whims. Although Marley maintains that she "deliberately chose to invent an offshoot of Islam for a variety of reasons," including not wanting to offend Muslims who might read the novel or to "attack the faith directly, or the people who practice it" (6 Nov 2010), she does run the risk of promulgating negative stereotypes about Islam. Nevertheless, Marley wrote her novel in English and published it for an English-speaking audience; the resemblance to Islamist regimes is not at all coincidental but rather a means of producing estrangement in the reader: the society depicted and the social commentary inherent in the text are at once familiar to a Western audience and simultaneously distant in time and space. The estranging quality of *The Terrorists of Irustan* also serves as commentary on contemporary Western society: what conditions in the reader's own society are similar to Irustan?¹¹⁴ How would the reader feel to live in that society? What actions, including violent ones, would the reader take or not take to correct those conditions?

¹¹⁴ One of the on-going debates among science fiction theorists is whether in employing the estrangement technique, the text runs the risk of the reader *not* recognizing her own society and its flaws. In my view, science fiction provokes thoughtfulness in the same ways as mainstream literature; this ameliorates the risk considerably, and discerning readers will recognize their own societies' flaws in the text regardless.

The Terrorists of Irustan takes place on an Earth colony, at least three hundred years in the future, removed from the contemporary reader's planet in time and space, yet still recognizable in many ways. The narrative follows the actions of approximately eight years in the life of Zahra IbSada, a "medicant," or doctor, and the wife of one of the economic directors, Qadir IbSada, of the colony of Irustan. The colony is economically controlled by the ExtraSolar Corporation (ESC), which imports consumer goods for the inhabitants and for its own Port Force, and exports the precious rhodium needed for communications networks across space and mined on Irustan—the only known space colony with an unexhausted supply of the critical mineral. Primarily through Zahra's eyes and her work as a medicant, the text narrates the brutal treatment of women at the hands of men who have absolute control over them in a religious theocracy. Anyone who deviates from Irustan's Draconian laws, who protests its laws and customs as cruel, is sent to the cells to die of exposure. The cells, mentioned on the third page of the text—"a row of white cylinders punctuated the near horizon, blistering in the blue-white light . . . stubby digits of stone, admonishing fingers pointing eternally up into the relentless light of the star" (3)—hang over the settled portion of the colony and serve as a symbol to the reader and constant reminder to the Irustani population of what happens to anyone who challenges what the religious leaders have declared to be the truth or the "right" way of living. Most importantly, the line between state and religion is hopelessly blurred, if it even exists at all; other than Pi Force, the Irustani police directorate, no government seems in existence and community matters are mediated through the Simah, a religious leader, and occasionally through the economic directors who seem ineffectual at enforcing policies that would benefit women and children. The religion, and the pseudo-government subsumed under it, function primarily through fear and the threat of the cells looming on the physical horizon.

I designate Louise Marley's *The Terrorists of Irustan* as a feminist dystopia because the text critiques religiously fundamentalist societies and cultures that overtly oppress women. Less explicitly, the text simultaneously critiques contemporary American society and its lack of gender equality, as well as the rise of conglomerate, neo-imperialist capitalism. What makes this particular text science fiction is the author's placement of her narrative on the invented planet of Irustan, inhabited by a, presumably, divergent Islamist tribe that came from Earth and colonized the planet under the auspices of ESC. ESC is a conglomerate that functions as the economic hegemon in *The Terrorists of Irustan* and in *The Child Goddess*, a later novel that takes place in the same reality and timeframe. *The Terrorists of Irustan* is a dystopia because the greater part of this kyriarchal society (women, children, the disabled, queer persons, and young men) are oppressed by elite older men who have paid their dues, as it were, by working in the mines for twenty-five years. As a result, power and control of Irustani society is consolidated among a few religious and economic leaders. The moneyed older men repress the rest of Irustani society through religious apparatuses and through the economic imperatives imposed by ESC. The thrust of the text is the protagonist's recognition of the oppressiveness of her society, its inherent unfairness to women and subaltern men, and her resolve to bring about change. The text is feminist by virtue of its critique of kyriarchy, primarily the intersection of patriarchy and religion and its violent effects on women, particularly wives and mothers, though some focus is given to other issues of kyriarchy such as class status, repression of queer sexual orientations, marginalization of the visibly disabled, and the oppression of young men for the most naturally healthy and physically strong portions of their lives. Unlike traditional dystopias which end without change to the society, the utopian impulse of hope for change emerges in the text when the novel ends ambiguously in an act of collective rebellion. Therefore, *The Terrorists of Irustan*

falls into Moylan and Baccolini's category of "critical" dystopia, similar to Burdekin's *Swastika Night* or Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, because the culture and society depicted are not so totalitarian as to be forever stagnant, forever static—the utopian impulse may be faint, but it is present.¹¹⁵

Religious Views and Critical Reception

As an adult convert to Roman Catholicism, Marley acknowledged in an interview that her writing is "deeply influenced by [her] faith" ("Catholic Mom") even when the setting or plot of a narrative does not ostensibly deal with Catholicism or other religious traditions. Marley's first career, before turning to writing, was performing as a concert and opera singer. She became interested in Catholicism as a result of her position as alto soloist in the St. James Cathedral Choir in Seattle; after her own conversion, her husband and son also converted to Roman Catholicism ("Catholic Mom"). Her first novel trilogy, *The Singers of Nevya* (1995-1997)¹¹⁶ and follow-up novel, *Singer in the Snow* (2005), are set on an alien planet in which humans with psionic powers develop musical abilities to provide the heat and light needed for survival in an extremely cold climate. In drawing on Marley's musical background, these novels combine science fiction, in the form of an alien planet colonized by humans, with fantasy, in the form of non-technological and near-magic powers of the mind. Later novels, such as *The Glass Harmonica* (2000), *Mozart's Blood* (2010), and *The Brahams' Deception* (2011), combine the genres of the historical novel with time travel, magical realism, and other elements of the

¹¹⁵ Additionally, Marley has indicated the possibility of writing a sequel in which one of the main characters, Ishi IbSada, returns to Irustan to continue Zahra's mission of change (6 Nov 2010) which, upon publication, would firmly locate *The Terrorists of Irustan* as a site of utopian impulse.

¹¹⁶ *The Singers of Nevya* (2009) is the omnibus edition of *Sing the Light* (1995), *Sing the Warmth* (1996), and *Receive the Gift* (1997).

supernatural, while *The Horsemistress Saga* (2006-2008),¹¹⁷ published under the pseudonym of Toby Bishop, concerns a human-colonized planet on which horses can fly, mixing futuristic science fiction with the purely fantastical. *The Maquisarde* (2002), which takes place on Earth set at the end of the twenty-first century, is more of a straight-forward science fiction feminist dystopia than some of her previous work but also incorporates Marley's affinity for musicians as main characters. In a departure from her musical roots, *The Terrorists of Irustan*, written as a science fiction, feminist dystopia, with no magical or supernatural elements, and published between *The Singers of Nevya* trilogy and *The Glass Harmonica*, is the first of Marley's novels to abandon musical themes and overtly address religion.

Marley does not criticize only Islamic fundamentalism; in *The Child Goddess* (2005), which opens on Earth a few years after Zahra's life on Irustan ends,¹¹⁸ Marley turns her pen toward the patriarchal practice of the Roman Catholic Church refusing to accept women into the priesthood. The main character of *The Child Goddess*, Isabel Burke, is an ordained priest in the all-female Order of Mary Magdalene,¹¹⁹ based on the Gospel of Mary Magdalene, a sacred text that is discovered in the twentieth century but not "authenticated for two more centuries" (8). The Order's mission, like Mary Magdalene, is to question and investigate, to "ask the hard questions" (8) about society and its institutions. The Magdalenes are viewed with suspicion by some in the Catholic Church, three centuries in the future, and are frequently barred from administering the sacraments based entirely on kyriarchal traditions that claim the priesthood for men only. In this novel, Marley engages in what many Muslim feminists are doing in their own

¹¹⁷ *The Horsemistress Saga* is a trilogy: *Airs Beneath the Moon* (2006); *Airs and Graces* (2007); and *Airs of Night and Sea* (2008).

¹¹⁸ Jin-Li is a minor character in *The Child Goddess*; she returns to Earth as punishment for her participation in the terrorist activities on Irustan, but still works for ExtraSolar Corporation and maintains a male identity.

¹¹⁹ Incidentally, or not, eschewing veils of any sort, the Magdalenes shave their heads bald instead.

religious denominations: recognizing the shortcomings of and negotiating equality and a place for women within their particular religious faiths.

Other than a handful of brief reviews when *The Terrorists of Irustan* was published, no critical study has been devoted to this novel—neither its explorations of a Taliban-inspired, Islamist society and the social ramifications of its implications for religious fundamentalism nor the oppressed characters' turn to vigilantism and murder. Although reviewers at the time recognized Marley's critique of Islamic fundamentalism¹²⁰ and James Schellenberg draws a parallel between the Taliban in Afghanistan and the fictional Irustan, *The Terrorists of Irustan* did not stir up the kinds of reverberations that Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* accomplished, despite being generally well-received in science fiction circles. Its significance for scholarly work, however, rests in the novel's implications of all fundamentalist theocracies as kyriarchally oppressive and the parallels between what is ostensibly an Islamist regime and the similar gestures of the Religious Right toward establishing a Christian theocracy in the United States.

As articulated in my first chapter, neither has the use of religion in science fiction, specifically in feminist science fiction, been fully addressed nor a theory of its use circulated in science fiction studies. Marley's protest against the dangers of fundamentalism and theocratic regimes enters the political arena in narrative form. By exploring this gap in scholarship and offering some insights as to religion's use in constructing identity and society in a specific dystopic text, like *The Terrorists of Irustan*, which is simultaneously non-Christian but still depicts a totalitarian theocracy and hegemonic religious faith, we can open the field to further exploration of religious themes in science fiction and why dystopia may be the model genre for future explorations of authorial employment of religion in science fiction texts and the commentary this creates of our present cultural moment.

¹²⁰ See reviews by Shinn, Zaleski, Simonetti, and Seidman.

Genre

Feminist utopian and dystopian writing have many characteristics in common and have crossed genre boundaries in a variety of ways. However, the central theme is frequently the same. In *Feminism and Science Fiction*, Sarah Lefanu argues that “[w]omen's utopias foreground . . . the denial of women’s sexual autonomy. They show women trapped by their sex, by their femaleness, and reduced from subjecthood to function” (71). Utopic writing “foregrounds” women’s agency and sexual autonomy through depictions of women as fully realized human beings with complete control of themselves, living in sexually and ideologically permissive societies. Dystopias foreground women’s agency and sexual autonomy by depicting women as enslaved, imprisoned, or so tightly controlled by men and a kyriocentric society that they are metaphysically enslaved as well as physically restricted and policed for their behavior. *The Terrorists of Irustan* demonstrates this foregrounding through a Muslim-based fundamentalist theocracy in which women lead silent, circumscribed lives that are completely dependent upon, and therefore subjugated to, male relatives for economic resources and mobility outside of their homes. They have no control over the sexual use of their bodies or over their fertility and no recourse or escape if the men in their lives treat them violently. Furthermore, in foregrounding women’s agency, or lack thereof, feminist dystopias reveal the misogyny still rampant in American society and its perpetuation through kyriarchal institutions. Varsam contends that “what female-authored slave narratives and dystopias highlight is a theme often neglected or understated in their male-authored counterparts: that of the gendered nature of oppression and its repercussions on women's subjectivity, agency, and relationship to their children” (217). While subaltern men also suffer marginalization and oppression from kyriarchal institutions and anti-feminist attitudes and some women have power over some men, the majority

of individuals at the bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid are women, particularly women of color, QUILTBAG persons, and the poor and disabled.

As discussed in Chapter 1, religious ideologies tend to create the Other (women and queer persons especially) within their own religious communities and frequently abuse the Other-within brutally because of their position of powerlessness and the absolute tyranny of (male) religious leadership. The estranging qualities in *The Terrorists of Irustan* work to simultaneously critique fundamentalist Islam as well as religious fundamentalism, of any type, in the United States. The segregated Other-within in the Islamist-modeled society of Irustan parallels the Other-within in all fundamentalist denominations. In this respect, Marley critiques Western fundamentalism just as fully as Islamic fundamentalism and questions whether human expansion into space colonies would result in equality for women and subaltern men as commonly envisioned, at least on a surface level, in many science fiction texts, particularly space opera. If a community is transplanted whole to another environment, it would seem that they would cling even more tightly to their cultural traditions when religion is part of the equation.

Unlike *The Handmaid's Tale* and its transgression of multiple genres, *The Terrorists of Irustan* reads as a more straight-forward and easily identifiable totalitarian dystopia, similar to Burdekin's *Swastika Night* and Orwell's *1984*. The novel does resemble slave narratives thematically through Zahra's use of medical knowledge and self-sought control of her fertility for liberatory purposes. What differentiates the totalitarian state in Irustan from the totalitarian governments of traditional dystopias is the element of theocracy rather than secular totalitarianism, and the collapse of Repressive State Apparatuses and Ideological State Apparatuses into a singular, monolithic entity. The ideological outcomes of theocratic and secular totalitarianism might be the same, but their motivating factors are decidedly dissimilar.

Both preserve hierarchies of privilege, though secular totalitarian states are more likely to deny the existence of any hierarchy at all. Unlike secular ideologies that could, theoretically, apply repression and violence evenly, religious ideologies immediately privilege their own adherents over other religions' and instantaneously create an Other. Yet fundamentalist religious communities seem compelled to police and control the Other-within even more strictly than outside Others. *The Terrorists of Irustan* also expands on traditional, anti-fascist dystopias in that it takes into account religion as an aspect of identity and the dystopic potential of religious faiths when fundamentalist sects break away from the mainstream of their religious tradition.

The female experience of religion and feminist stance of the novel also function as challenges to the kyriarchal norms underlying Western (and Middle Eastern) thought. Marley interrogates the idea that Muslim women are so oppressed that they have no opportunities or sites of rebellion whatsoever. Marley flips the violence of terrorism, when perpetrated by the subaltern Other, into something with which the reader can more readily, but maybe not entirely, identify. Furthermore, Zahra's terrorism poses an additional confrontation of Western ideas of heroism and perhaps Orientalism, through a woman assuming a role that most expect to not only be filled by a man, but by a religious fanatic as well. Zahra is not a religious zealot, but rather a hero for the downtrodden. A Western audience would consider her motivations for murder—to protect women and children—admirable; this type of protection is a trait frequently categorized as “masculine.” The femininity of Zahra's enforced, highly performative style of dress which parallels required *hijab* in Islamic fundamentalism, her resistance to it, and her “feminine” physical appearance create tension with her “masculine” activities (murder). Yet she enacts her terrorist activities on behalf of others, which one could consider “feminine” behavior, and her sexual orientation as a lesbian defies “masculine” or “feminine” coding altogether. The gender-

bending of a queer woman trapped in a fundamentalist society challenges genre expectations in a feminist manner. This gender-bending also disputes Western ideas of “oppressed Muslim women” that eerily resemble the women in fundamentalist denominations in American society who must conform to an idealized Woman-as-symbol persona or face repercussions from their religious communities. Marley’s critique of Islamic fundamentalism results in exhibiting the resemblance of fundamentalist traits in US culture to Irustan—a comparison that stereotypes of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism would not normally enable.

The utopian impulse in *The Terrorists of Irustan* rests with Ishi’s attempts to continue Zahra’s critique of Irustani society and to bring about additional changes in order for the religion/state to recognize women as human beings entitled to the same rights and privileges as men. Likewise, in her discussion of reclaiming and revisioning Islam, Amina Wadud¹²¹ states, “One of my objectives here is to demonstrate part of how to transform Islam through its own egalitarian tendencies, principles, articulations, and implications into a dynamic system with practices that fulfill its goals of justice, by first admitting that concepts of Islam and concepts of Justice have always been relative to actual historical and cultural situations” (2). In the contemporary moment, fundamentalist manifestations of Islam on Earth suppress these egalitarian tendencies. Unfortunately, in Irustan, they are entirely absent, and Ishi will need to effect a much more radical change in her society and its tenets for women’s autonomy to be fully recognized. However, the text does not seem to discount the utopic potential in religion entirely. Because the novel makes clear that Irustan’s sacred text, *The Book of the Second Prophet*, was written based upon the society’s need for specialized guidance after migration to a new planet with new economic factors, space for revision is present. Irustan’s religious inflexibility on health matters from the time of the founding of the colony demonstrates that a complete overhaul

¹²¹ Amina Wadud publishes under this name and under her married name of Amina Wadud-Muhsin.

is needed in this area in order to protect the (male) population from disease. It follows, then, that change in the area of health, intertwined as it is with bodily functions and a (male) fear of the female and the female body's difference, may present an opening for changing the underlying tenets of Irustani faith. Furthermore, the act of collective resistance in the novel's final scene gestures toward a need for change that would be more widely supported than Ishi, or even Zahra, would have surmised.

Given the conflict of religion on a global scale and the relationship of this conflict to myriad geopolitical dominations, an intersectional feminist analysis that includes religion as intertwined with other aspects of identity seems abundantly necessary. Religion intersects with gender as well as race, class, sexual orientation, ability and disability, age and other factors in many ways; fundamentalist religion intersects with gender and sexual orientation in especially damaging and oppressive ways. In "Future/Present: The End of Science Fiction," Hollinger maintains that science fiction writing "is a present which perceives itself *as already extending into the future*" (217, emphasis in original). Her remarks are particularly applicable to feminist dystopias: most feminist dystopian writing contains a warning about change if the reader wants to avoid the horrific outcomes in dystopian texts coming to pass. I would expand this observation, however, to argue that feminist dystopias which acknowledge the importance of religion as an aspect of identity also make obvious the dystopic elements of religion that are already in existence, and how easily these elements can be perverted further to disadvantage women. Because women have been traditionally marginalized in sacred texts, and their viewpoints dismissed, and have been excluded from religious leadership based solely on gender, to continue the status quo, in any religious tradition, is to continually realize and make evident religion's dystopic potential. Rather than creating space for realizing the utopic, egalitarian

possibilities of any faith, resistance to change, such as fundamentalist sects exhibit, renders equality in those denominations unattainable.

Veils, Bodies, and the Control of Women

The kyriarchal nature of the Muslim-modeled culture of *The Terrorists of Irustan* offers a critique of religion as fixed in male-dominated discourse, and religious fundamentalism and its inherent deleterious effects on women in particular and a society in general. On a surface level, Marley's text may seem to assert a Muslim/Christian binary; however, this sort of frame is entirely lacking in the book—no mention of any other type of religion, invented or extant in reality is mentioned. *The Terrorists of Irustan*'s primary mode for invoking comparison with other cultures is a negative depiction of lower socio-economic class life on Earth that is entirely secular. Readers may independently choose to frame the novel in terms of a Christian (or other religious faith)/Muslim binary based upon their own religious experience and knowledge. However, Marley seems to write against such binaries. Instead, I would argue that if the text does set up a binary comparison, that comparative system would be modernity vs. traditionalism, given Irustan's resistance to change in the treatment and social positioning of women and subaltern Others in its cultural environment. Nevertheless, since anti-modernity, or at least selective anti-modernity as well as anti-feminism and anti-democracy are characteristics of fundamentalism, Marley's Irustan serves as an exemplar of how societies set up artificial binaries as part of the social order. Meanwhile, the text itself critiques fundamentalist Islam in particular and religious fundamentalism in any form more generally.

The most obvious parallel between Irustani society and Islamic fundamentalism is the practice of veiling women. Like religious ideas surrounding modesty and the control of sexual desire in fundamentalist faiths, veiling in this text functions very much as a means of gender

performance: women are immediately identifiable as Other in public space because of their complicated system of veils, as well as the requirement for male escorts. The veiling practices of Irustani women also keep them separate from men who do not belong to their households and, to a certain extent, separate from other women as well. The head-to-foot veiling and conservative clothing of Irustani women exacts its own costs in freedom, movement, and even mundane practical matters. Women cannot eat more than morsels at a time while fully veiled, nor do other women, even in private homes, see each other's head and hair entirely since only parts of the veil can be unfastened in the homes of others, and then only in the absence of men. The veils restrict physical movement, not only foreclosing women's participation in types of labor that would require freedom of movement of their arms but also restricting figurative mobility in the public sphere: the veils and long dresses mark women as immediately recognizable for their gender, and by extension of their position in society, as inferior, circumscribed beings. Although Marley's description of Irustani women's dress is quite long, I reproduce it below to show the complex expectations of "properly veiled" women:

[Her dress] was long, to cover her long legs, and its hem swirled softly against her ankles. The matching veil was made of three fabrics in descending weights, the lightest hardly more than gauze. . . . The layers of the veil were pale, shining like silver in the morning light. The drape fell in narrow unpressed pleats to her waist, framing her chin and enveloping her shoulders. The verge was lighter, just heavy enough to be opaque. For now Zahra left it open. After she had drunk her coffee, she would attach it to the tiny button at the left side of the cap, and it would hang smooth and straight, a blank panel covering her mouth and nose. The rill was the lightest layer of all. When it was fastened, she would be able to see just enough

to walk, but her eyes would be almost invisible. Only in her clinic, properly escorted, could she leave the rill unbuttoned. In all other situations she must hide her features from any man not of her household. She had put on the veil, like all Irustani girls, at the age of eight, never to take it off again in any male presence but her husband's. Only prostitutes were unveiled. (4)

In her bedroom, Zahra can remove all parts of her veil; when visiting the homes of her friends or in her own house and clinic, just the rill and verge may be unbuttoned so that she can talk, eat, and see her patients unencumbered, though the verge remains fastened over her mouth and nose when seeing male patients. Zahra's "anah," Lili, a governess and servant of sorts who was "ceded"¹²² to Qadir at the same time as Zahra, never wears her rill and verge unbuttoned in the house even though Qadir technically "owns" her too and could direct her to do so (4).¹²³

Portraying the hypocrisy of theocratic states toward women and sexuality, prostitutes occupy the most tenuous of positions in Irustani society. The prostitutes that appear in the narrative do wear the drape and verge; they are called "the unveiled ones" merely because the rill is missing over their eyes. Combined with the absence of a male escort in public, the lack of a rill signals a woman's availability for the sex trade. In some ways, the prostitutes have more freedom of movement in that they can come and go in the marketplace, though they are restricted to the fringes; however, they are also vulnerable to assault and to being cheated of their fees for services rendered since their trade is considered illegal. Although the prostitutes could be prosecuted for their "crimes" of appearing unveiled and unescorted in public, because of the

¹²² Women are "ceded" from their fathers or other male guardian to other men in ceremonies called "cessions." Cessions are used for marriage or for the adoption of female children. Cessions mark the transfer of women, as property, from one man to another.

¹²³ In a rather humorous moment, Zahra dourly speculates that Lili sleeps fully veiled. Marley writes this character, among others, as resigned to her position and collaborating with the kyriarchal regime even though she too is clearly oppressed by it.

lower population ratios of women to men and resulting scarcity of women available for marriage as well as the large amount of required service in the mines prior to marriage, “every man knew they were here, counted on their presence, relied on their services” (183). The hypocrisy of criminalizing prostitution for sex workers yet keeping a male populace dependent upon the sex trade by restricting their access to romantic relationship in all other ways demonstrates the kyriarchal positioning of men as privileged due to their freedom to solicit prostitutes with impunity while punishing women who have no other means to support themselves.

Veiled Irustani women bear the burden of managing men’s desire and are thus always already positioned, in fundamentalist doctrine, as wanton temptresses who must be policed through strict dress codes. In some ways, the veiling and dress practices of Irustani women resemble the conservative dress for Handmaids in Atwood’s religious dystopia: the handmaids wear long enveloping dresses and encompassing headdresses with white wings “to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen” (*The Handmaid’s Tale* 11) because the female body causes desire in men. Of course, in a kyriocentric culture, men are not expected to control their desire, or control what they look upon if their desire is so uncontrollable; rather, the culture shifts the burden for (not) generating male sexual desire to women and how they dress. In Irustan, as well as other fundamentalist societies, religious ideology about women’s sexuality and “nature” affect this shift by making all women into potential seducers.

While this phenomenon is not exclusive to fundamentalist cultures, it remains circular logic in any context: dictating women’s dress in order to externally control male desire preserves victim-blaming in cases of rape or assault in which a (male) perpetrator is not blamed for his actions because his (female) victim’s “provocative” style of dress incites his desire past the point of his self-control. This logical fallacy around dress and modesty discards the idea that women

select their dress for themselves and may not wish to engage male desire, or to incite desire in specific men, since objects/women in this line of thinking are not entitled to agency and opinions. It simultaneously imbues men with insatiable desire and a lack of self-control toward women and creates the image of all men as potential rapists. In effect, these restrictions rob women of their autonomy over their bodies and grant men impunity for actions that violate the bodily integrity and agency of women.

Furthermore, fundamentalist sects frequently privilege the authority of men in the domestic space as well as the public space so that men can maintain kyriarchal control over the women in their households. Because women in Irustan are dressed in a style that hampers their movement and does make them vulnerable to assault anyway, they are only mobile outside their own homes with male escorts. If a woman can only appear in public in enveloping clothes with a headpiece that does not allow her to see clearly and restricts peripheral vision, she is less likely to be able to flee from a sexual or other assault, or even navigate across a busy street safely. This forced reliance upon male escorts fosters a dependency on male approval of their activities in the public sphere and further erodes women's agency. In this respect, the male authority figure in a woman's household can isolate her entirely from the outside world by refusing to escort her in public and confining her to the home.

To further male control of women, fundamentalist regimes seem to encourage the silencing of women's voices in literal and figurative ways, as well as their isolation from outside support groups and information. Irustani women are effectively isolated and silenced behind their veils in public, since they cannot speak directly to any man not of their household. Even though their voices can be heard aloud in limited situations, a male relative or servant must repeat a woman's words when she wishes to address another man from outside of the household.

Besides resulting in inefficient conversations, the male “interpreter” is at liberty to revise the woman’s statements to suit his own whims, taking away the woman’s right to freedom of expression and undermining her agency. Zahra, unlike nurses in Saudi Arabia upon whom Marley based her research, is not allowed to be alone with a man in a medical capacity. When treating male patients, she has a male escort present in the room, usually sitting behind a screen to ensure the patient’s privacy but also to maintain social propriety and to repeat Zahra’s questions to the patient with whom she cannot directly communicate. Zahra chafes at these restrictions, and the reader is meant to chafe at them too because of the absurdity of a female character with authority, a doctor, giving directions for taking medication to a male patient that must be repeated by Zahra’s male escort because the patient cannot “hear” the woman standing less than three feet away from him.

Religious segregation by gender can provide (limited) space for women to form friendships and support each other. The one exception to such societal isolation is Zahra’s “circle” of friends who meet on religious holidays when the men have duties at the Doma. In this respect, Marley does represent the richness of a women’s community in a gender-segregated society, especially as their support for each other spurs Zahra’s terrorist activities and her friends become accomplices. However, Zahra’s “circle” seems dependent, in many ways, on class status: she and her friends have known each other from childhood, and all married men who were or became highly placed in Irustan’s economic organization. Women whose households do not have servants to chauffeur them to others’ homes on Doma days may very well not have such opportunities for friendship and the cultivation of the support of other women in Irustani society. While I would argue that Marley does not fully represent the complexity of women’s positioning in Islamist cultures or what (few) opportunities women might have, especially through

fundamentalist women's auxiliary organizations, her text does demonstrate how socioeconomic class may be used as a means to isolate women from each other.

Zahra's forays into terrorism, executed through her knowledge of a horrendous, untraceable poison, seems largely about control in reaction to a fundamentalist religious tradition and the society it begets that oppresses women—in other words, a society that so rigidly controls women's lives that one woman feels she must wrest some control from it in any way that she can. While Zahra and two of her friends, Idora and Laila, have relatively happy marriages to decent men, this seems merely happenstance since the women had no choice to whom their fathers, or in Zahra's case the husband of her teacher, ceded them; Camilla and Kalen are not so fortunate. Zahra's first impulse toward taking control is seeking mastery of her fertility. As an apprentice to the medicant Nura, Zahra witnesses the result of Kalen's wedding night: her friend is brutalized to the point that she hemorrhages blood from her vagina (91). When Zahra's friend Camilla, at the age of fourteen, is ceded in marriage to Leman Bezay, who is forty-nine and subsequently does not prove to be a loving or kind husband, Zahra uses her access to medical knowledge to manufacture and implant a birth control device in herself, several years in advance of being ceded in marriage to Qadir: "Over her own body, at least, she would have some control. Zahra remembered that night with great clarity, despite the intervening twenty years. She had been a young girl making a momentous decision, implementing it in secret. She had never regretted it" (53). This one small act of control keeps Zahra from becoming a mother through pregnancy and childbirth and affords her a modicum of physical autonomy; yet Zahra later becomes an adoptive mother to Ishi, apprenticed at the age of eight to study as a medicant.

Perhaps more estranging to the reader is that despite Zahra's small rebellion against fundamentalism to control her fertility, she has little control over her own body. Despite his

thoughtfulness and gentleness, despite never battering her, despite only making occasional demands for her company in the bedroom, Qadir exercises absolute control over Zahra's sexual activities and where her body is allowed to go (3). Irustani society's values, like Gilead's in *The Handmaid's Tale*, also foreclose any non-heterosexual or non-procreative form of sexuality: young men, with no hope of marrying until they are much older, who engage in homosexual sex¹²⁴ are left to die in the cells because "the Book calls it sin" (129), with presumably the same punishment for women. As the text moves forward, the reader comes to understand quite clearly that Zahra is a lesbian who can never act on her sexual desire. When in bed with Qadir who does engage in foreplay and tries to make the experience pleasant for Zahra, she experiences a degree of detachment and sometimes downright disgust: "Zahra tried. She forced herself. She pretended. But she felt nothing" (84). Rather than feeling sexual attraction for a husband who adores her, Zahra finds herself attracted to the female Jin-Li, a Port Force "longshoreman" posing as male, who delivers Zahra's medical supplies when they arrive from Earth. Because expressions of homosexuality are heavily policed and reacted against, Irustani society forecloses any non-heterosexual romantic relationship as well as any romantic relationship among Irustani women and ESC personnel. The violence visited upon expressions of queerness, in which those caught engaging in homosexual activities are sent to die in the cells, echoes Suzanne Pharr's observations about homosexuality being used to ensure control of women's behavior through a need for male "protection" from other men (14).

Although not subject to Irustan's theocracy, ESC bows to Irustani religious sensibilities and demonstrates how fundamentalist faiths can influence other institutions through cultural relativism. Female employees of ExtraSolar Corporation are restricted to the Port Force

¹²⁴ In Gilead, auto-eroticism is also a "sacrilege" (Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale* 30); Marley does not address masturbation in Irustani culture.

compound “for their own protection” from a male population of young Irustani miners that are not allowed to see, touch, or speak to women. Unveiled and, to Irustani eyes, barely-clothed Earth women would cause riots, harassment, and assault of the women who ventured beyond the ESC compound (138). Jin-Li is a subaltern woman from Hong Kong who masquerades as a man to escape the very real physical dangers of intersecting poverty and gender on Earth; her male identity circumvents Irustan’s prohibitions against unescorted/unveiled women in public spaces and affords her a relative degree of freedom on Irustan. Jin-Li’s positioning as subaltern—racially, biologically, economically, sexually—brings in other elements of intersecting identities explored in the text. Fundamentalist religious institutions do not oppress Jin-Li on Earth; however, she immediately recognizes Irustani women’s position as non-citizens as similar to her own and Irustani society’s justification of its treatment of women, through religious and concomitant ideological apparatuses, as “protection” when it is in fact “slavery” (266). But Jin-Li also recognizes that slight though they seem, she has options—in her case, the option to assume a male identity—that Zahra and other Irustani women do not have (214).

One of the greatest threats to fundamentalism is women in romantic relationships who undermine male head-of-household authority through relationships that have the potential for equality and no need for male protection. Jin-Li and Zahra’s friendship develops through small moments of contact and Zahra’s realization that Jin-Li is not a man as she portrays herself (122). Although the two women are attracted to each other, Zahra tells Jin-Li that a romantic relationship “isn’t possible for me. . . . My life is not my own. My decisions are not my own” (267). Any sort of sexual fulfillment is impossible for Zahra given the criminalizing of same-sex eroticism by her religion; an adulterous relationship with a “man,” much less a non-Irustani, is also far too risky for Zahra to undertake and would have the same result. Furthermore, despite

the advantages of Jin-Li's appropriation of a male-gendered identity, her deception places her in a vulnerable position: an ESC official who has discovered Jin-Li's biological gender has the power to fire her under charges of falsifying her work contract unless she cooperates with him and his investigation into the deaths of Irustani men from the leptokis virus. Without her job and the "male" protection that it offers, Jin-Li would be forced to return to the "deadly" slums of Hong Kong where the cycle of impoverished conditions and female vulnerability would continue in a society that committed infanticide of girls for many generations. Finding a husband as a male protector, for Jin-Li, is equally out of the question given her sexual orientation as well as her personal preference to be independent. In this respect, not only does Irustan's misogyny and homophobia seem obvious, so does the misogyny and homophobia of China, on Earth, and ESC, as representative of the West, also become manifest.

Jin-Li defies religious fundamentalism by posing as a man, resisting the role of wife and mother, and refusing confinement in the domestic sphere—but her defiance has a cost. Because of her façade as a man, Jin-Li is just as veiled as Zahra and other Irustani women. Jin-Li "veils" herself in a male identity to keep people at a distance, so that they treat her in a certain way and not in another. Yet this self-imposed façade leads to a "wearying" degree of isolation for Jin-Li: she feels alone, surrounded by crowds of people to whom she cannot reveal her true self (126). However, what surprises Jin-Li the most about her situation is how much she identifies with Irustani women to whom, in her role as a man, she cannot even speak directly: "But she hadn't known, leaving Earth for Irustan, how much she would have in common with those who wore the veil" (127). The extreme isolation that Jin-Li experiences, a not uncommon feeling for anyone who "passes" for another gender, race, etc., is only relieved when Zahra deduces that Jin-Li is female and they are able to become friends. The isolation that women experience due to

their “veiling” creates an atmosphere in which women become dependent on men for protection from the violence of other men and also precludes developing many and varied relationships with other women. Their “veils” also serve to keep women silent and, therefore, their expressed thoughts are subject to the interpretation and editing of men.

In line with fundamentalist anti-modernity and selective adoption of technology, Irustani women are not allowed to use available technology, like “wavephones,” to communicate outside of their own households; to drive cars, which restricts their mobility and capacity to communicate with others; or in the case of battered women, to escape from their abusers. The restrictions fundamentalist religions place on women’s behaviors and limitations to their movement in society turns women into abject dependents and, as such, inferior beings, all in service of exemplifying the “good” Woman rather than allowing for women to realize their subjectivity as autonomous individuals. This exercise of “religious machismo” and its subjugation of women in Irustan functions in the text as a critique of religiosity run rampant in fundamentalist sects.

Marley’s critique of Islamic fundamentalism, based on the Taliban’s theocratic regime, resonates with critiques made by some, though not all, Muslim feminists, and at the time of her writing, seemed very much warranted. In *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis*, Haideh Moghissi, a secular feminist, reports, “the persecution of women under various versions of Islamic fundamentalism, be it the former rulers of ‘liberated’ Afghanistan, the Mujahedin or the Taliban, is nothing but wretchedly tragic. . . . In effect, women are kept under house arrest. They are banned from attending schools. They cannot work outside the home. They cannot leave their homes, except in the company of a male relative” (2). While the author sets her novel in a similar context, Marley is exceedingly clear that she is not

critiquing mainstream Islam but only an extremist denomination of it by taking the society in her text to its “logical extremes,” or, for the women of Afghanistan under the Taliban, a suggestion of lived reality (6 Nov 2010). In a July 2006 article titled “Perverting Islam: Taliban Social Policy Toward Women,” Larry P. Goodson calls the Taliban’s re-institution of *shariah* in Afghanistan “gender apartheid” because of its segregation of women from society in general and from men who are not of their immediate family. While Goodson did not originate the term,¹²⁵ it may seem relevant when applied to Islamist or other religious denominations such as ultra-Orthodox Judaism and some fundamentalist Protestant Christian sects which restrict women’s movements in and outside their homes, limit casual contact with men beyond a close circle of family and friends, segregate religious services and/or duties, and insist upon various forms of conservative dress for women, to include head coverings or veils, long sleeves and hemlines, high collars, and no trousers, only dresses. One might accurately apply the term “gender apartheid” to the Islamist-based society depicted in Louise Marley’s *The Terrorists of Irustan*.

By contrast, one could also argue that the “terrorists” in the novel engage in a “gender *jihad*”¹²⁶ in response to the conditions of “gender apartheid” in Irustani society. Zahra and her friends struggle against their arbitrarily-determined subordinate positions and (relative) lack of privilege, yet their *jihad* is a violent one. In *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*, Wadud, an observant Muslim feminist, writes, “The gender *jihad* is a struggle to establish gender justice in Muslim thought and practice. At it[s] simplest level, gender justice is gender

¹²⁵ Goodson does not give any citation or reference for this term, but I found an article titled “Fighting Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan” by Noreen Shanahan that appeared in *Horizons* in 1999 in his bibliography. Since an online search yielded many results for “gender apartheid” and “sex segregation” simultaneously, I was unable to determine whether Shanahan or someone else was the originator of the term.

¹²⁶ *Jihad* means, most simply, “struggle.” In Islam, *jihad* is a religious duty and frequently notes a personal struggle to submit to the will of Allah. *Jihad* also has military connotations for engaging in a “holy war” to advance or defend Islam and convert (or kill) non-believers and apostate Muslims. Wadud uses *jihad* in personal and communal senses, but not in a militaristic sense.

mainstreaming—the inclusion of women in *all* aspects of Muslim practice, performance, policy construction, and in both political and religious leadership” (10). Certainly, Islam has a tradition of *ijtihad*, or intellectual and critical consideration or interpretation of the Qur’an and *hadith*, that Muslim feminists are incorporating into their gender *jihad* in order to reform Islam. This implies, however, that some Muslim women are educated to such a level that they can critically engage in *ijtihad* and debate with other Muslim scholars over proper interpretation. For the women of Irustan, no such avenue to challenge the constraints of their religion, and by extension their society, exists. Because of the extreme limits of their society, Zahra and the other women of Irustan have very little power over any aspect of their lives and, therefore, ultimately use what power they do possess to deadly ends.

Although the head coverings and veils that women in Islamist-controlled areas wear are normally not so complicated to don as Irustani veils, they serve similar functions: to restrict movement, hide individuality, and immediately indicate gender identity. Many Muslim feminists do not consider veiling as a symbol of oppression, the way that veiling is frequently alluded to in non-Muslim countries. In various Muslim cultures, women wear some form of *hijab*, either voluntarily as part of their religious and family traditions, or merely as a nod to social conventions in their communities. Furthermore, in mainstream Islam and Islamic fundamentalist denominations, Muslim women do not necessarily view veiling in a negative way, and Muslim feminists may not prioritize veiling in their attempts to rectify some of the inequalities in their religious tradition(s). According to Western academic and Muslim convert, Anne Sofie Roald,

The acceptance of the nun's veil seems unaffected by such complaints against the Muslim woman's veil, even although both share the same visibility. Why?

Because the nun represents commitment to the prevailing religious tradition. She is an “insider.” The Muslim woman [in the West], on the other hand, symbolises the intrusion of alien beliefs contrary to the prevailing religious tradition. This response is further reinforced by negative media reports about Muslim immigrants or Muslims in other countries. (254)

Roald quite deftly makes the point that identifies a swathe of hypocrisy in Western views of veiling in Muslim culture. We must also consider that most Western brides also wear veils, whether as an actual symbol of purity, for the sake of tradition, or just because they want to do so as a matter of individual choice. While far too much negative press is devoted to headscarf issues in Muslim communities, in Turkey, where the headscarf was banned during Ataturk’s reforms and has produced much recent controversy, no one seems to advocate bringing back the fez for men which Ataturk banned at the same time. In this respect, a double standard does seem to be in play where religious and cultural identity is marked on women’s bodies. Nira Yuval-Davis asserts that “[w]omen especially are often required to carry this ‘burden of representation’, as they are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity’s identity and honour, both personally and collectively. . . . The ‘burden of representation’ on women of the collectivity’s identity and future destiny has also brought about the construction of women as the bearers of the collectivity’s honour” (45). Fundamentalist adherents frequently tout this “burden of representation” as a return to cultural or religious “tradition.” This return to “tradition” is, time and again, played out on women’s bodies rather than on men’s bodies or on society as a whole. The anti-modern stance of fundamentalism for women and the selective adoption of modern technology, as simple as denim jeans for men, lays bare the double standard of returns to religious “tradition” that are unequally applied.

Not only are Islamists and other religious fundamentalists or traditionalists implicated in using women's bodies as "burdens of representation." Kyriarchally-structured societies are inherently unequal and discriminatory against women. Joan Wallach Scott, in her exploration of European legislation and attitudes surrounding veiling in immigrant Muslim communities, argues that,

veils are not the only visible sign of difference that attaches to religious Muslims, not the only way a religious/political identity can be declared. Men often have distinctive appearances (beards, loose clothing), and behavior (prayers, food preferences, aggressive assertions of religious identity tied to activist politics), yet these are not considered to be as threatening as the veil and so are not addressed by legal prohibition. The laws do not go on to challenge the structures of gender inequality in codes of Muslim family law; these codes have been allowed to stand in some Western European countries, and are left to religious authorities to enforce, even if they are not the law of the host country. Even more confounding, concern with gender inequality seems limited to Muslims and does not extend to French or German or Dutch practices that also permit the subordination of women. It is as if patriarchy were a uniquely Islamic phenomenon! (4)

Scott's point is that the West neglects to change its own kyriocentric posture and kyriarchal systems for women to realize full equality while it engages in rhetoric and activities that reveal an attitude of "saving brown women from brown men" or other imperialistic "civilizing missions." The double standards of the West for its own kyriarchal practices and demonization of similar practices in other societies sets up a false dichotomy that Western women are not necessarily oppressed since their oppression may not have visible symbols, like *hijab*.

While the veil for Muslim women may not be inherently oppressive and, from my perspective it should be a matter of personal choice in the exercise of one's faith, Irustan presents an example of a culture using women's bodies as a repository of "tradition" that satisfies a kyriarchal requirement for control. If women cannot exercise their own agency in wearing a headscarf (or not) or the more enveloping *burka/chador/abayah* of various Muslim societies, particularly to uphold family honor, then, yes, it is an oppressive practice—just as oppressive as the Turkish or French governments telling women that they *cannot* wear headscarves in government buildings which violates their right to freely practice their religion. In many areas, veiling remains a contentious issue: certain social conditions may preclude the exercise of individual agency entirely because veiling becomes a political act rather than an expression of individuality. However, what is salient when considering Marley's text is that veiling, to the Western culture that comprises Marley's intended audience, does function as an overarching symbol of Islam and as a symbol of the oppression of women, especially in the Islamist branches of that religious tradition. In "The Muslim Religious Right ('Fundamentalists') and Sexuality," Ayesha M. Imam argues that "there is instead a preoccupation with women. It is women's dress and behavior that are frequently made symbols of new 'Islamic' orders. . . . When women refuse to conform, by violating the movements' prescribed dress code or by continuing to go to work or to school, they are the subjects of threats and violent attacks" (22-23). The West is fixated on the veil as a symbol of Islam as a whole, but it seems that Islamists are no less fixated on women as symbols in their dress and behavior. It is, however, incumbent upon the West, and the Western audience reading this text, to recognize the differences between veiling among women in Islamic fundamentalist communities and among women who practice mainstream Islam and what veiling might actually signify in discrete instances. In "Women in Islam," L. Clarke maintains that

“[t]he focus, in any case, on hijab and on preoccupation of the West with the supposed ‘oppression’ of Muslim women by their religion have tended to obscure the fact that the tendency in the Muslim world today is actually one of gradual but steady progress. This progress is led by the individual efforts and accomplishments of Muslim women themselves, and it is unlikely that fundamentalist reaction will be able to reverse it” (213). As such, the West’s fixation on the veil seems to be misdirected and should be limited to Islamic fundamentalist sects or theocratic states that violently enforce *hijab* and the segregation of women. Instead, the West should focus on the dangers of Christian fundamentalist dogma regarding modesty and chastity. Additionally, the West needs to acknowledge the progress made by mainstream Islamic communities toward women’s equality and that *hijab* is not necessarily a unilateral symbol of oppression in Islam.

As discussed in Chapter 1, fundamentalist sects tend to police borders, often violently, in order to retain control of women and subaltern Others. Because veiling in Islamist countries and cultures is depicted in the West as a matter of collective honor or social pressure rather than personal preference, Yuval-Davis’s conclusions about women as responsible for upholding a society’s traditions seem particularly applicable. In addition to marking gender and burdening women with its representation, veiling may also operate as a “border guard,” in accordance with Yuval-Davis’s concept of how gender functions in national or other “imagined communities.” She writes:

[what] divides the world between “us” and “them” is maintained and ideologically reproduced by a whole system of what Armstrong calls symbolic “border guards”. These “border guards” can identify people as members or non-members of a specific collectivity. They are closely linked to specific cultural

codes of style of dress and behavior as well as to more elaborate bodies of customs, religion, literary and artistic modes of production, and, of course, language. Gender symbols play a particularly significant role in this, and thus constructions of manhood and womanhood, as well as sexuality and gendered relations of power need to be explored in relation to these processes. (*Gender & Nation* 23)

While veiling is not necessarily a priority for Muslim feminists, because of its symbolism for Western audiences and the extreme nature of the veils the women of Irustan must wear, Marley uses veiling and its inherent gender performance in her text to make some critical points about the oppression of women in Irustani culture and, by extension, about Islamist and other fundamentalist cultures as well. First, fundamentalist religious “tradition” is primarily played out on women’s bodies as the repositories and transmitters of social and cultural values. Second, men’s apparent lack of control of their own desire is projected onto women’s bodies through dress and behavioral codes that circumscribe women’s freedom of expression and mobility, literally and figuratively, in the public sphere with no regard to women’s autonomy or agency as fully-realized human beings. Unfortunately, perhaps, in playing to the sensibilities of a Western audience, Marley’s emphasis on the veil seems relatively simplistic and contrasts with the complexity with which a range of feminists, Muslim and non-Muslim, theorize about veiling and the social conditions behind it.

It is not just veiling or “gender apartheid” that results in oppression of women in any culture. While a Western reader may distance herself from the veiling issue, she cannot maintain the same distance from how choices about dress can be used against women, such as the “she was asking for it by dressing provocatively” defense of rapists, nor from the idea of women as

chattel traded by men as shown by the “cession” of young girls in Irustan and by the symbolism used in Western weddings of the father “giving away” the bride to another man. Another issue of import, beyond veiling and segregation of women yet inseparable from control of women’s bodies, is the management of fertility and sexuality. In Islamist countries, Imam notes that,

Most typically, all practices that relate to managing fertility are removed from women’s control and handed over to men and the state. These range from decisions over whether or when to have intercourse, to decisions over knowledge of and access to different types of contraception, to the permissibility or impermissibility of pregnancy termination. . . . Muslim religious-right groups also frequently at first refuse to permit any form of birth prevention (whether pregnancy prevention or abortion). This stance ignores the fact that there are different positions on permissibility within Sharia over fertility management; even concerning abortion, there the decision often hinges on when the soul is infused into the fetus and hence at what stage of development abortion is permissible. Muslim religious-right groups instead postulate the most restrictive conditions for abortion—a complete ban or abortion only to save the mother’s life. (25)

Imam’s summary of the anti-choice positioning of Islamic fundamentalists regarding women’s bodily autonomy and fertility resonates with the anti-choice stance of the Religious Right in the United States as yet another manifestation of anti-feminism. The recent spate of legislative attacks on access to abortion and birth control betray the fundamentalist-controlled Religious Right’s ideology in which the control of women through the external control of their bodies by men and/or the state is paramount. In light of these restrictions in both Islamist countries and liberal democracies, Marley’s text effectively critiques religious fundamentalism of any type.

Kyriarchal Power as an Extension of Religious Fundamentalism

One of the primary ways that religion becomes an oppressive force regarding gender and sexuality is the (selective) literal interpretation of sacred texts, written hundreds of years in the (idealized) past. Irustan's fictional religious doctrine is largely the result of *The Book of the Second Prophet*; this prophet is never named and his homilies appear as epigraphs for each chapter that focuses on Zahra's experiences.¹²⁷ The homilies are sheer invention on Marley's part, but she writes them in such a manner as to evoke passages from the Qur'an (in English translation) or other religious works such as Proverbs in the Jewish Tanakh/Christian Old Testament; yet the homilies are explicitly kyriarchally-gendered in nature, more so, in some cases, than actual passages from the Qur'an or other sacred texts. Since the Irustani colony is an "off-shoot" of a Middle Eastern Arab tribe or nation, the Second Prophet and his book seem to be inventions by the adherents of the religion in order to adapt to their new conditions in a foreign place, many light years' travel from Earth, while still preserving their religious and cultural traditions—Islamic traditions that are expressed in Islamist fashion. For example, the epigraph to Chapter 20 states: "The Maker has assigned us differing tasks according to our abilities. On men it is laid to worship, to labor in the mines, and to discipline their households. Women are required to bear sons and raise them, and to be obedient in all things. This is the perfect order of the One, Order erases conflict" (144). This homily smacks of biological essentialism and complementarianism that justifies dividing Irustani society into public and private spheres, confining women to the private one as wives and mothers while allowing men to move freely in both the public and the private arenas. The physical restriction of women

¹²⁷ The narrative voices throughout the novel are in the third person. In the chapters headed by homilies, the point of view of the narrator primarily deals with Zahra but occasionally shifts to other members of her household (Ishi, Zahra's apprentice medicant, and Asa, a crippled man who habitually acts as Zahra's escort and intermediary with other men). The chapters told from Jin-Li's point of view are headed by epigraphs from the Port Force Employment Contract to underscore the severity of her punishment if her deception is uncovered.

produces a semblance of maintaining this binary, but due to the ideological collapse of the Repressive State Apparatus/Ideological State Apparatus (RSA/ISA) into one entity, the public/private binary does not exist metaphysically, creating a shame and honor culture in which the actions of women in the domestic realm affect the public reputation and honor of the male members of the household. The homilies in *The Book of the Second Prophet* seem to address women and men in general and are not limited to specific situations, though the homilies may have been intended as metaphorical rather than literal truths. Furthermore, the homily quoted above, taken as the divine words of the Maker through the Prophet and therefore indisputable, precludes moderation: as a holy and divinely-inspired text that is interpreted literally by religious leaders, the words “perfect order” elude challenge; to do so would be heresy. Literal and metaphorical interpretation notwithstanding, *The Book of the Second Prophet* has the feel of being completely invented to serve the needs of ESC in order start the colony as a mining interest (56, 79, 198). As a result, the text does call into question the idea of what is divinely-inspired in religion and what is manufactured to serve the needs of the community (or other powers acting on the community) at a certain time, or in a certain place. In other words, this idea calls for historicizing and contextualizing of sacred texts rather than literal interpretation.

Unlike the flexibility present in Qur’anic interpretation as well as work done by feminist Jewish and Christian theologians in re-interpreting the Torah and Christian Bible that demonstrates similar plasticity, the gendered and hierarchical nature of the homilies attributed to the Second Prophet in the novel are clearly misogynist and leave no room for ambiguity. One can assume that in the three centuries since *The Book of the Second Prophet* was written, Irustan’s language has changed as well, leaving space open for error and/or a multiplicity of meanings in any interpretation, literal or otherwise. For example, the epigraph to Chapter 4

reads: “The Maker chose to make man larger, stronger, and wiser than woman. Husbands must be responsible for their wives, for their sustenance, their clothing, their shelter, their well-being, and their discipline, according to the guidance of the One” (24). By comparison, one of the most controversial verses of the Qur’an, 4:34, states:

Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah hath guarded. As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. Lo! Allah is ever High, Exalted, Great. (“Understanding”)¹²⁸

The debate about whether this verse from the Qur’an establishes men as superior and/or entitled to spousal battery is an on-going one among Islamic jurists and Muslim feminists. Furthermore, Wadud-Muhsin contends that “Some of the greatest restrictions on women, causing them much harm, have resulted from interpreting Qur’anic solutions for particular problems as if they were universal principles” (99), such as Muhammad’s wives speaking to men from behind a screen,¹²⁹ an instance in the Qur’an that has been used to justify the seclusion and veiling of all “modest” Muslim women.

Working against Islamic fundamentalism, many Muslim feminists are engaged in re-interpreting the original language of the Qur’an, through *ijtihad*, rather than merely accepting

¹²⁸ See also Ammar’s “Wife Battery in Islam: A Comprehensive Understanding of Interpretations” and others.

¹²⁹ Veiling and seclusion of women was already practiced in Middle Eastern societies as well as in the Greco-Roman cultures, at least among the upper classes, of the Mediterranean before the advent of Islam (Keddie 14). Veiling was not widely practiced in Islam until the second Islamic century, a practice adopted by Arab tribes from the Byzantine Empire. The practice of veiling and segregating women may be an example of a non-religious tradition that has become so intertwined with religious values that its origin as a tribal custom is indistinguishable from religious tenets. In this respect, religious faith seems to resemble a palimpsest super-imposed on existing cultures and their practices.

hadith, or interpretations, that have been passed down as definitive, in order to remain true to their faith in Islam but also to offer new interpretations that are not as severely patriarchal or hostile toward women.¹³⁰ Wadud-Muhsin warns that when interpreting the Qur'an, one needs to keep in mind language changes over time and that the specific vocabulary words and constructions in Arabic may have different meanings now than when the Qur'an was "revealed" to Muhammad, and that a "reader must understand the implications of the Qur'anic expressions during the time in which they were expressed in order to determine their proper meaning" (4), which might be well nigh impossible without intensive study in medieval Arabic. Similarly, Moghissi argues that "[t]here are *legally sanctioned* gender crimes, even though they are not so considered by Muslim rulers and community leaders" in the Qur'an due to the essentialist differentiations that interpretations of the Qur'an make between women and men (83).

Additionally, Muslim feminists point out the verses in the Qur'an that indicate a spiritual equality between men and women and maintain the primacy of this point of view over the centuries-old gendered interpretations made by men with no input from or regard for women's experiences and opinions. Devout Muslim feminist, Aysha Hidayatullah argues that in kyriocentric interpretations of *shariah* law, "The judge assumes that the Qur'an, the most holy and authoritative book for Muslims worldwide, unequivocally provides justification for domestic violence, specifically wife battery [based on 4:34. The judge] fails to understand that the Qur'an is a living and dynamic book for Muslims rather than a static source" (12). Here lies one intersection of anti-modernity and anti-feminism: the insistence of fundamentalist sects on literal or traditional interpretations of sacred texts rather than on metaphorical interpretations that can be adapted in order to create meaningfulness in modern life.

¹³⁰ See Wadud, Mernissi, Shirazi, and other Muslim feminists.

While Marley's critique of a fundamentalist kyriarchal system foregrounds gender, the text also examines how men with power oppress men without it. A prime example of the novel's questioning of the "divinely-inspired" nature of sacred texts is *The Book of the Second Prophet's* charge to Irustani men to work in the rhodium mines, normally about twenty-five years, beginning as teenagers. This is, perhaps, an economic requisite for the survival of the colony under ESC's fiscal stranglehold and thus appears to be a completely manufactured edict based on circumstances when the colony was founded rather than arising from divine inspiration (54). The demand for physical labor in the mines to meet production quotas and the lack of (marriageable) women among the original colonists (129) results in men not being able to marry until they've served their twenty-five years in the mines and are usually in their forties before marrying women who are in their teens.¹³¹ Men who are not physically suited to working in the mines have no future on Irustan; they cannot marry and have families or enter any profession other than servitude. For wealthy families, like Camilla's, their sons can be (expensively) spirited away to Earth for another kind of life; for poor families, escape may not be an option. The control exerted over women, concentrated in the hands of older men who have completed their service in the mines is concurrently used to control young men and force them into the mines, foreclosing any sort of marriage between young people of comparable ages. The May-December pairings of Irustani men with young girls merely strengthens the social standing and power of older men.

¹³¹ This condition also sidesteps any question of polygamy which is not present in the novel, but is a subject of some debate in (and about) Islam and, coincidentally, in fundamentalist Mormonism. A system of polyandry would have alleviated the social problem of too few women in Irustan, but Abrahamic religions specifically forbid polyandry. Interestingly, if we accept the premise that Irustani society was an Islamist or Muslim denomination on Earth, the sanction for polygyny seems to have faded as a result of necessity: the early colonists did not have an equivalent population of men and women, though the reason for the dearth of marriageable women is never explained. There seem to be plenty of women available to the upper classes to perform duties as servants and anahs (governesses), however, and neither polygyny nor monogamy is mentioned in the homilies provided to the reader.

Yet this power in the hands of older men in a theocratic society is shored up by ESC's policies and practices which seem to function symbiotically in conjunction with Irustan's fundamentalist culture. ESC has some input, perhaps unwitting, into the work/marriage timeline since Zahra's husband, Qadir, was able to marry when he was thirty-five and Zahra was eighteen, by virtue of ESC selecting Qadir for a directorship and ending his more physically intensive service in the mines ten years earlier than average. Zahra is an older bride primarily because the mentor to whom she was apprenticed for medical training, Nura, delayed Zahra's cession in order to allow her more time for finishing her studies.¹³² Furthermore, marriage to "a jewel of Irustan" is regarded as a reward for a man's service in the mines and ESC's continued profits from rhodium (56). In effect, young women are treated as idealized commodities awarded to middle-aged men in compensation for their service and the loss of their youth and vigor¹³³ in the mines based on the irrefutability of a sacred text. Yet this sacred text is strangely coincident with ESC's priorities and economic quotas, which belies its "divine inspiration."

Portraying the fundamentalist characteristic of complementary gender roles, over the course of the colony's development, the men relinquished one, semi-public area to women: medicants on Irustan are all female. This consignment of health and medical matters to the sole domain of women effectively makes medical care into a women's ghetto, albeit a women's ghetto that requires a certain level of education and seems to be the only way for women to develop themselves intellectually, especially if they are from poorer economic classes. Zahra's apprentice, Ishi, for example, is "the only female of her family to receive an education" (6). The

¹³² Zahra was actually ceded to Qadir by Nura's husband, Isak Issim, after Nura's execution for disobedience—she gave medical care to prostitutes against her husband's wishes (174-75).

¹³³ Although the text does not discuss family size specifically, most families depicted have one to three children; this seems artificially low in a culture where birth control is not readily available or practiced in any way. One could surmise that the apparent low birth rate is a result of loss of fertility among an aged population of husbands.

abdication of the medical field to women results from the Second Prophet's injunctions about health, all written prior to general knowledge about the leptokis disease and the outbreak of a plague early in Irustan's history, but apparently necessary to keep men working in the mines. As a result, the homilies regarding health have been interpreted to produce men's extreme aversion to anything remotely medical, even an occasional preventive treatment against the leptokis virus that could protect their lives. In this sense, the text again functions as a critique of literal interpretation of religious doctrine: it raises the question as to whether holy books should be read literally or metaphorically in the modern era when the mode of living has changed dramatically and ethical considerations arise that the religion's divinely-inspired writings do not address specifically, an issue still debated in all Abrahamic religions on Earth today. On Irustan, hardly anyone, male or female, endures the teaching of the Second Prophet unscathed.

In critiquing fundamentalism, Marley's text also invokes how economic factors also contribute to the formulation of the kyriarchal pyramid and how individuals are positioned within it. Like ESC's function in *The Child Goddess*, the corporation's presence on Irustan is strictly an economic one, which its personnel repeatedly stress to themselves (195). Moreover, ESC executives claim that they practice a policy of non-interference in colonial matters so as not to "[violate] Irustani sovereignty"—as long as the rhodium production from the mines remains stable (142); however, ESC's duplicity¹³⁴ and the corporation's protection of its own interests are evident in the company's behaviors in the text. For instance, when Qadir is convicted of Zahra's crimes due to his responsibility for the behavior of a member of his household and Irustan's anti-democratic practice of denying full citizenship and personhood to women, an ESC executive pressures Jin-Li to locate the fugitive Zahra. ESC's Administrator General threatens to expose

¹³⁴ Marley also shows ESC's duplicity in its policy of not interfering with indigenous populations, a topic taken up in *The Child Goddess* in which ESC and its corporate machinations are a major part of the plot.

Jin-Li as a woman and send her back to Earth with nothing in order to protect (male, upper-class, heterosexual, privileged) Qadir, whom ESC singled out years before for directorship. The Administrator General also wishes to avert a crisis at ESC headquarters on Earth over Irustani affairs which would threaten the security of his own position in the corporation. Furthermore, when Qadir attempts to resign his directorship, the Administrator General refuses to accept it—twice (319). It seems that ESC executives hold in abeyance their policy of non-interference when keeping their protégé, albeit an innocent man, in his position as part of a symbiotic relationship that is lucrative for ESC and the Irustani elite. As Robert Young postulates about neocolonialism and economic imperialism, “the ruling class constitutes an elite that operates in complicity with the needs of international capital for its own benefit” (45), and part of the benefit in remaining the ruling class on Irustan is the subjugation of women in order to control younger men and exploit them for their labor capital. Despite his complicity in this system, however, Qadir resents ESC’s power over him, even though it *appears* to be a strictly economic relationship and is really about kyriarchal privilege. When ESC summons him to their compound at the beginning of the spate of murders, Qadir relates to Zahra that, ““This was very difficult for me today. I hate being summoned to the Port Authority like . . . like a servant, like a . . .’ Like a woman, Zahra thought” (261), finishing a sentence that Qadir finds too distasteful, or too discourteous, to complete aloud in the presence of someone who is in a subordinate position to him. When a person accustomed to exercising power over others is suddenly subjected to a subordinate role, it provides a space for one to think about privilege and entitlement and how they are used by oneself and by others. The underpinnings of kyriarchal control in Irustani culture become more evident to Qadir when ESC treats him as occupying the subordinated position of the colonized in thrall to the more powerful colonizer. He then begins to understand

the exploitation of women and subaltern men that has been perpetuated in his and other elites' favor. To his credit, Qadir learns to embrace change. ESC, however, continues in its imperialist activities of extracting the rhodium from Irustan without changing its own policies or acknowledging its complicity in upholding Irustan's totalitarian theocracy. The colonizers are just as implicated in Irustan's kyriarchal structure as the fundamentalist theocracy itself: they perpetuate hierarchical and interlocking axes of domination.

As we have seen, gender and sexuality and the control of women's bodies, physically and ideologically, are crucial to perpetuating fundamentalist religions' power. Religious fundamentalism enables the preservation of kyriarchal power relations through the difficulty in challenging its naturalized anti-modernity and anti-feminism. Yuval-Davis contends that,

Although analytically the discourse of religion and culture is distinct from that of power relations, concretely and historically it is always embedded in them. This is true not only in relation to hierarchies of power within the religious and cultural institutions and their relations to more general structures of class and power within society, but also in relation to the religious and cultural imaginations and their hierarchies of desirability as well as constructions of inclusions and exclusions. (*Gender and Nation* 42-43)

In this respect, religion is an oppressive force in perpetuating naturalized social constructions of gender that are nearly always disadvantageous toward women. The particular nature of this oppression, when based in religion, relies on ideologies that, as discussed in Chapter 1, reduce women to symbols and police their behavior through unattainable standards while simultaneously venerating women as the bearers of culture for subsequent generations. Neither (symbolic) position accounts for the needs, experiences, and agency of material women.

In a colony governed by religious authorities, the theocratic state converges Althusser's Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA) into a monolithic religious, political, and social apparatus that allows no other influences on society and culture, except economic factors. Althusser very clearly distinguishes between the RSA that operates primarily by violence and secondarily by ideology, and the ISA that operates primarily by ideology and secondarily by repression that "is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic" (98). However, when a theocratic regime comes to power and infuses every aspect of life¹³⁵ with religious ideology, the public/private binary collapses and the RSAs and ISAs collapse into each other as well. The collapse of Althusser's delineation between the public and private binary, governed respectively by RSAs and ISAs, into a single, hegemonic RSA/ISA functions to preserve the authority as well as the ideology of a totalitarian theocracy. Before Zahra begins her terrorist activities, Irustani society, ruled by fear of the death sentences in the cells, does not seem to present sites of resistance to this monolithic RSA/ISA. It is, perhaps, easier to convince women and men that they must conform to social norms that are against their own best interests by invoking "God" or a "Maker" in order to naturalize men's and women's roles and police them through social constructions of traditional and cultural values backed by repression and violence on individual, community, and state levels. Kimball's observations of Islam indicate attempts to infuse religion into all parts of life: "Traditionally, Muslims have understood Islam as more than a religion. It is a comprehensive way of life including spiritual, social, economic, political, and military dimensions. . . . Muslims in various settings throughout the centuries have sought to fashion governmental, social, legal, and economic systems with reference to a theoretical ideal" (106). However, while this description of theocracy sounds innocuously utopic and perhaps

¹³⁵ Althusser's list of possible ISAs include: religion, education, the family, legal system, political system, trade unions, communications and media, and cultural activities (i.e., sports, literature, art, etc.) (96).

even inviting in that respect, Kimball also contends that “[i]t is difficult, however, to find sustained situations in which this ideal worked well. Strong disagreements, conflicts, and even civil war among the first generations of Muslims highlight the distance separating the ideal from the lived reality” (106). While mainstream Islam may strive for a utopic infusion of religion into daily life on a personal level, Islamic fundamentalism’s utopic ideal would force anti-modernity and anti-feminism on everyone at individual, communal, and national levels. The Religious Right is actively engaged in making the same attempts to imbue all aspects of life with religious doctrine and/or belief.

The utopic potential of religion has not, thus far, been effected in a substantial way in any religious faith at significant communal or state levels. The actual collapse of RSAs and ISAs into a hegemonic, theocratic state RSA/ISA, which fundamentalist sects strive for in order to realize their version of utopia, automatically excludes other types of religious practices and the freedom to be areligious. While this would be true of any totalitarian theocracy, Imam also recognizes another shift:

In general terms, one might say that the Muslim religious-right (like Christian and Hindu religious-right groups) has been reconstructing patriarchal control over women and their sexuality. The locus of control has been shifting from the patriarch proper (the father as household or family head, with control over the women and men of his household/family) to the state (control of women and men), to state-sanctioned control of all women by all men (i.e., any man, anywhere). (26)

Therein lies one of the most extreme dangers of fundamentalist-controlled theocracies. While human beings may not be consistent in their application of religious tenets, when the state is also

involved in behavioral policing, the more lenient or less observant (male) individuals are forced into exercising stricter controls over their own behavior and women in their households in order to uphold an image to the community of their faithfulness and avoid being accused of heresy or unfaithfulness themselves.

Additionally, religious fundamentalism serves to preserve the status quo of kyriarchal institutions by invoking “tradition” in a community that has experienced the upheaval of immigration and lives at a distance from the religious mainstream. Yuval-Davis observes that “cultural traditions and the (re)invention of traditions are often used as ways of legitimizing the control and oppression of women. . . . This is but one facet of a more general rigidity and ‘freezing’ of cultures which takes place in diasporic communities” (*Gender and Nation* 46). The transplanted nature of an ostensibly Muslim society and its adaptation to the circumstances and environment on Irustan, on the one hand, necessitated change for survival and met the conditions of ESC’s economic contract with the colony. These conditions preserve a sense of besetment: the Irustani perceive themselves as having been persecuted on Earth, necessitating their migration to Irustan, and as persecuted by ESC in an economic sense because of ESC’s control of off-world shipping and access to information. On the other hand, transplantation seems to have created a tendency for the population to cling even more tightly to “traditions” in areas where it was already possible, and acceptable in their society, to control women. Instead of the Second Prophet writing a sacred text that elevated or revised the position of women in Irustani society toward equality, or challenged the status quo in other ways, this mythical religious leader reinforced and perhaps tightened restrictions on women.

In fundamentalist sects, Islamic, Christian or Jewish, the policing of gender through “tradition” based on literal interpretations of sacred texts renders change particularly complex to

effect because of the rigidity of literal doctrines. Moghissi observes that these conditions also limit sites of resistance against theocratic regimes, especially for “women, religious minorities, and progressive secular forces” (30). She accounts for these limits by citing the position of religion that makes it difficult to challenge: “Religious leaders and political leaders—except when their interests clash—equally benefit from the convergence of politics and religion and from a stifled civil society. By giving a divine character to political commands they try to protect themselves against progressive radical challenges” (30). In discussing Muslim societies specifically, Moghissi contends that “the combined impact of socio-historical economic and political retardation of Islamic societies and its articulation with indigenous customs and patriarchal cultural values . . . conspire to sustain the authority of misogynist religious commands over the lives of women. The non-separation of religion and politics, the unclear divide in Islamic societies between law- and policy-makers and religious-spiritual leaders, have smothered the already weak civil society” (29-30). However, as we have seen in my examination of Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, totalitarianism seems to be no respecter of religions; furthermore, the impulse for a theocratic Christian nation runs very strong in the Religious Right in the United States, indicating the weaknesses of American “civil” society and its vulnerability to a theocratic takeover. Marley implicitly argues against this susceptibility in American culture as much as explicitly against the theocratic oppression of Afghani women by the Taliban or Saudi women by Wahhabism. Moreover, in *The Idea of Women in Fundamentalist Islam*, Lamia Rustum Shehadeh asserts the following:

Three common elements can be identified in the fundamentalist discourse on women: domesticity as women's primary role; gender differences where the physical, physiological, biological, and psychological differences between the

sexes are viewed as universal and immutable in the social and intellectual domains, dictating parallel differences in the respective roles of husband and wife, both, however, remaining spiritually equal; and the element of danger inherent in women's nature. . . . All these ideologues share the belief that men are totally helpless and highly susceptible to female lures and seductive powers, such that the mere presence of a woman can undermine a man's better judgment, concentration, productivity, and rationality. Women thus encapsulate at once the qualities of the benevolent, nurturing mother and wife and the destructive sexual carnivore. (219)

These characteristics of fundamentalist Islamic regimes are all present in Marley's construction of Irustan, just as they are present in Atwood's formulation of the Christian-totalitarian Gilead. As a theocracy, Irustan demonstrates the convergence of RSAs and multiple ISAs functioning in that society to keep women subjugated and separated from the public domain through the veiling and isolation of women in the domestic sphere. Yet these characteristics are also present in some Christian fundamentalist and Jewish Orthodox denominations and their theocratic utopian visions and are not limited to Islamic fundamentalism.

Resistance through Terror

The violence that fundamentalism and its boundary policing exerts against women, their agency, and their bodily autonomy seems to spawn a cycle of multiplying abuses. The text raises the question of who are the real terrorists: women who act to protect themselves, their children, and subaltern Others, or the men whose cruelty and privilege keep women living in terror on a daily basis? After years of patching up battered women and sending them back to their husbands and feeling constricted by the rigid laws of her society that restrict her movement and even how

she dresses in the privacy of her home, Zahra takes action: she uses her medical knowledge to manufacture a poison that will be virtually undetected in order to kill to kill men who abuse women and children. As Zahra relates, “the women of Irustan have tolerated the abuses of such men. No matter how many sons we bear, how much work we do, how faithful we are in our prayers, we have no power, no control over our lives, no way to protect ourselves or our children or our sisters” (180). Yet Zahra and her friends do not embark on the path of murder and terrorism for themselves; like battered women who finally leave their batterers, they do so for the sake of their children (Pharr 9). First, Zahra and Kalen poison Kalen’s husband to prevent Kalen’s 12-year-old daughter’s “cession” (marriage) to the sadistic Binya Maris. Next, Kalen and Camilla poison Camilla’s husband to prevent Camilla’s physically fragile son’s service in the mines after the boy’s suicide attempt produces no empathy in his father. The women then systematically begin to select men who harm women and children for their victims: Zahra targets Binya Maris personally; though his engagement to Kalen’s daughter has been averted, he participates in the gang-rape of a widow who appears unescorted in public to seek assistance from religious leaders to feed and care for her family (157). As the reader later learns, Maris is not only a wife-beater but a sadist who needs to hurt his partner in order to reach sexual arousal and has assaulted many prostitutes as well (170). Zahra poisons the husband of her patient, Maya B’Neeli, after he kills his wife through repeated battering and then proceeds to regularly abuse his young daughter. Finally, Zahra poisons Diya, Qadir’s secretary, after Diya threatens to expose her and her circle of friends’ terrorist actions unless Zahra’s apprentice and adopted daughter, Ishi, who despises him and needs more time to complete her medical training, is “ceded” to him in marriage. Knowing that she can no longer hide her activities, Zahra’s last act of terrorism is also one of selfless sacrifice to protect her own daughter.

The women's ghetto created by Irustani society works to Zahra's advantage in perpetrating her terrorist activities. The plot of the *Terrorists of Irustan* hinges on Zahra's knowledge and status as a medicant, or doctor, and the idea that one site of resistance to kyriarchal oppression may arise from a women's ghetto. Zahra's circle of friends, as her poisoning activities continue and escalate to terrorism, uses medical excuses to provide cover for the time Zahra needs to assemble the poison as well as to account for Zahra's whereabouts when she ventures into the Medah, a central marketplace, disguised as a prostitute in order to administer poison to one of their targets.

Irustani women, it would seem, have enough to fear in their daily lives from the fundamentalist structure of their society; thus Zahra spares women from further terror. Significantly, Zahra chooses a malady that only affects men: she wants men to be fearful because "their fear was their weakness" (153), and she fully manipulates male fear to produce terror in the general populace. Zahra uses a poison manufactured from a leptokis, a lizard-like animal indigenous to Irustan, which carries a virus that affects Irustani miners: their work in the rhodium mines produces a genetic mutation in the miners that becomes fatal when the miners are exposed to the leptokis virus. As a preventative, the miners are supposed to receive yearly treatments for the genetic mutation so that the virus, if contracted, will not affect them; however, because of the homilies in *The Book of the Second Prophet*, Irustani men's distaste for anything to do with disease, or even normal bodily functions, is so extreme that many do not take their treatments nor have anything to do with medicants. Irustani women have no such aversions to health care or discussion of medical conditions, and, restricted from working in the mines or any public space, women do not develop the genetic mutation which would make them vulnerable to the virus. As a result, the terror occasioned by the leptokis virus for Irustani men lies not only in the

excruciatingly embarrassing manner of death in which they lose control of their bowels and repeatedly vomit, visually signaling their lack of physical fitness, but also in the idea that women are unaffected by the disease and may be in a position to assert their own rights with fewer men around to preserve the status quo.

Schellenberg maintains that a society with such absolute control, and he draws a parallel with the Taliban regime under which the number of women in the medical professions declined,¹³⁶ would deny women any education, even a medical one. Schellenberg finds Irustani men's utter aversion for bodily functions implausible, calling it "a gaping inconsistency that nearly scuttles the book altogether" (Rev. of "*Terrorists*"). Since many religious traditions require temporary segregation of women when they are menstruating, various purification rituals at the end of a menstrual cycle or after childbirth, and/or other purification rituals for brides immediately before, presumably, their initiation to sexual activities, Marley's magnification of this fear of the female body and its secretions did not strike me as illogical or implausible in the novel. When I asked Marley whether the medical aversion for the Irustani men in her text was an outgrowth of the usual fear of women's bodies that many religions treat as taboo, she replied:

I read that only nurses in Saudi Arabia were allowed to be alone with a man to whom they did not belong. As I'm always interested in medical matters, it became a useful device to have Zahra IbSada as a physician. It also, in my mind, pointed out the essential childlike nature of many males, with a fear of the basic bodily functions, including the sexual one. . . . The one thing that has always

¹³⁶ Schellenberg mistakenly states in his review that women were not allowed to work as medical professionals at all under the Taliban, information that is not corroborated by statistics on the Women for Afghan Women website that claim women currently make up 28 percent of medical professionals, though from a population that is only about 3000 people total and results in a largely medically underserved population. The Women for Afghan Women website cites their statistics from reputable sources: the World Health Organization, UNIFEM, Physicians for Human Rights, a study of Afghan maternal mortality and a study by the Afghan Ministry of Health. Schellenberg does not cite any sources for his conjecture.

struck me about Muslim male thought is this fear of the power the feminine has over the masculine. They're hardly alone in that, of course! (6 Nov 2010)

From a feminist point of view, Irustani men's distaste for bodily functions and anything to do with ill health or injury demonstrates Marley's deft understanding of some of the ramifications of specifically kyriocentric practices meant to shame women or imply that they are somehow impure and therefore lesser beings in the eyes of God.

Male Irustani fears about the body and its secretions suggest the same fears in fundamentalists more generally and demonstrate why the control of women's bodies is so central to fundamentalist doctrine. To perpetuate the fundamentalist faith, women's reproductive role is necessary, and as such, controlling women's bodies allows control of their reproductive functions. K. Brown notes that "[t]he moral code of fundamentalists tends to emphasize control of the body and its appetites, and particularly control of sexuality" (188), and argues that the fear of bodily functions results from the degree of stress or besetment various fundamentalist movements perceive—in Brown's opinion, the (perceived) stress frequently occasions the breaking away of the fundamentalist sect from the mainstream religious tradition in the first place. In attempting to control this stress, "[f]undamentalists' fear of mortality, and of the flesh in general, also directly fuels the need to control women" (188). Brown links this fear of mortality to latent Freudian tendencies; however, I would argue that this fear lies less in a fear of physical death than in insecurity over being able to perpetuate the fundamentalist community's beliefs in future generations. Fundamentalist religions have established (marital) sex as necessary for begetting the next generation of believers but have also imposed a system where women are primarily responsible for transmitting the cultural values to children, making women indispensable to their fundamentalist sects on two counts. However, limitations to women's

agency, such as control of their fertility and potential to refuse to have children at all, as well as possible refusal to transmit fundamentalist values to their children, is essential to ensure a long-term perpetuation of the specific faith.

In view of the agency denied women by the fundamentalism in Irustani society, Zahra and her accomplices in terrorism certainly exercise their agency—an agency bred to violence from violence and which they view as the only means of resistance open to them. Moreover, Zahra insists on more murders after the first three, intentionally leaving a trail for ESC to connect the murders and to trace them to her. She wants the incredible risks she and other women have taken to be noticed and to incite fear in Irustani men; she wants their terrorist actions to mean something and not be dismissed as coincidence or just a run of bad luck (207). As Wadud observes, “[p]atriarchal control over what it means to be human robs females of their God-given agency and full humanity” (255). However, this reclamation of agency from a kyriarchal system cultivates emotional costs. Zahra has her doubts about her actions and experiences bouts of numbness, further anger and frustration, even guilt and despair. She questions her motives: “Was it, as she had once said, to change Irustan for the better, for the women and the children who would come after her? Or was it--she had to face the possibility--was it only that she could? No. If she did this, it would be because it needed doing” (210). In *Women and Madness*, Phyllis Chesler observes that “[w]omen who succeed at suicide are, tragically, outwitting or rejecting their ‘feminine’ roles, and at the only price possible: their death[s]” (109). Ultimately, Zahra does become a martyr, sacrificing herself in order to protect the complicity of her circle friends, Asa, Jin-Li, and even Qadir. Although she initially flees upon ESC’s discovery and notification to Irustan’s police directorate of her participation in each of the murders, when Zahra learns that Qadir will be executed in her stead as the man responsible

for her actions, she turns herself over to Irustani religious authorities and dies the horrible death of exposure in the cells. In effect, she commits suicide by turning herself in to spare Qadir, though her execution is mandated by the state/religious authorities for her rebellion; the text makes abundantly clear that a life in hiding or work as a prostitute is an untenable one for Zahra, just as her rage over the treatment of women in her society had become untenable and led her to terrorism. She rejects the “feminine” role dictated by her society and chooses what she views as a meaningful death instead.

It is, after all, on behalf of one of Zahra’s circle friends and her daughter that Zahra embarks upon her career as a terrorist in protest and rage against the oppression of a fundamentalist regime. Perhaps Zahra would have endured many more years of unexpressed rage over brutalized patients without feeling compelled to act if the next victim were not someone she knew and loved. Yuval-Davis observes that “[o]ne of the paradoxes associated with fundamentalism is the fact that women collude, seek comfort and even gain at times a sense of empowerment within the spaces allocated to them by fundamentalist movements” (*Gender and Nation* 63). Yuval-Davis is referring to women’s organizations or auxiliaries within fundamentalist movements, such as women’s groups in the Muslim Brotherhood, that provide a community of women who support each other. This seems to parallel Zahra’s “circle” of friends with whom she spends the Doma days when the men are away for religious observances, but with a twist. I read Yuval-Davis’s remarks concerning women’s empowerment within fundamentalist movements to also indicate a space for resistance to the fundamentalist movement itself. By way of comparison, the “women’s community” in *The Handmaid’s Tale* gave the Handmaids occasional opportunities to talk to each other covertly, yet the surveillance in Gilead severely tamps down potential resistance. In Irustan, where surveillance is less

pervasive and behavioral mandates depend, instead, on preserving men's honor, the space for the empowerment of women and subaltern men is perhaps not only more evident but potentially more efficacious. Zahra, at least, exploits this space as fully as she can, combining not only the support of her friends, a disabled man, and prostitutes, but also her rare medical knowledge.

Additionally, Marley critiques the kyriarchal nature of fundamentalism by focusing, to some degree, on its effects on subaltern Others, such as the disabled. Zahra's escort is a man of her household, a servant named Asa, who has a severely twisted ankle resulting in lameness.¹³⁷ Because he was not the picture of health as a teenager, Asa was released from service in the mines, by all respects a very draining and demanding service; however, though his life as a servant in a rich household is physically much easier, Asa is frequently the target of discrimination by other men who cannot stand to look at someone who is not normal and healthy, by Irustani standards. He is, by turns, ignored and viewed with disgust or barely tolerated by other men, since male patients must address him and cannot address Zahra directly. Similar to the women in Irustani society, Asa is silenced and precluded from assuming positions of religious leadership or sites of authority in other institutions based on his disability alone rather than on his spirituality or his competence. Asa becomes a willing participant in Zahra's terrorist activities: he can move more freely in society than she can, and his lameness provides him with unique cover for procuring some of the materials Zahra needs to carry out her terrorist activities. More importantly, he feels no loyalty to a culture that continually marginalizes him based on circumstances outside of his control. The treatment of Asa in the text provides estranging commentary for readers about the invisibility of disabled people in American society: ignorance about the conditions of the lives of the disabled and underestimation of their abilities,

¹³⁷ Whether Asa just happened to be lame or was purposely damaged by his mother to keep him out of the mines is a question raised in the text of the novel but left unanswered and allows the reader to speculate.

even in some cases, the lack of full recognition of their humanity and entitlement to equality. It also emphasizes the idea that subaltern men may be the allies of women and not potential oppressors, only waiting to step into the master's role. Asa's role in the text can also be read metaphorically in relation to fundamentalism. He is visually disfigured and made an outcast by his religion, a status that raises the question of what kinds of metaphysical or intangible disfigurement fundamentalist religions also shun. The "disfigurement" of being female is an obvious answer, but perhaps the less obvious answer is lower classes of people, people of color, immigrants, or QUILTBAG persons. Regardless, the text's depiction of Asa as a sympathetic character reveals yet another facet of how religion intersects with other aspects of identity and elucidates the idea that not all men hold positions at the top of the kyriarchal pyramid.

In a shame culture, perpetuated by fundamentalist doctrine and boundary policing, Zahra's execution for her crimes would restore honor to Qadir and his household. Marley very clearly writes Qadir as a decent human being and thoughtful husband but a product of his culture and ignorant of the unfairness of his society until Zahra's death makes the misogyny of Irustani society personal. To his credit, Qadir uses his position as a director to hold a public funeral for Zahra after her execution instead of burying her quietly as if she had affronted his honor. Irustani funerals are cathartic experiences for women: the women are expected to wail loudly in rare public appearances in which they are seen, though fully veiled,¹³⁸ heard, and acknowledged, unlike "cessions" where the women are completely silent or the Doma services from which women are entirely absent. Funerals are the only place where the women can "let themselves go," even though doing so may result from the death of a man no one would miss (156).

¹³⁸ The women wear scarlet gowns and veils to funerals which echo curiously with the outfits of Gilead's Handmaids. Irustani men wear white tunics and trousers with red boutonnieres.

It is not surprising, then, that Marley, through Ishi and Qadir, employs Zahra's funeral as a site of resistance for the women of Irustan and as the most obvious site of the utopian impulse in an otherwise very dreary depiction of women's oppression. Qadir and Ishi write Zahra's eulogy that Qadir will deliver to everyone assembled in the Doma for the well-publicized funeral of an apparent traitor to the Second Prophet. In the course of the eulogy, when Qadir speaks directly to "the women of Irustan" (321), the men drown out his voice until Ishi ascends to the dais next to him. In the shocked silence that follows Ishi's temerity, Qadir resumes his eulogy and calls for changes in their society and traditions—tellingly, Qadir says, "But Irustan is not new. It's the same Irustan it was on Earth, and it hasn't changed in all its years on this new world" (322). Clearly, this is a message about the resistance of Islamist fundamentalism to change the status of women, a status that has not improved measurably in centuries. However, if the reader recalls Jin-Li's descriptions of her life on Earth and ESC's behavior toward its employees, Irustan and its parallel in Islamist fundamentalism are not the only societies guilty of the oppression of women and not the only religious, cultural, or social institutions resistant to progressive change. Yet, Qadir's words seem to not have the effect for which he and Ishi had hoped, since the men's faces are "sullen and unmoved" (322). Realizing that one small speech is not enough, Ishi impulsively fixes upon what she knows will be the most memorable moment of the funeral no matter what punishment might follow: she removes her veil and stands bareheaded before the crowd. Not only does this incense the great majority of the men, it foment rebellion among the women: many, but not all, rise off their knees and remove their veils too.

Ishi's unveiling is, of course, symbolic on several levels, not the least of which is a Western audience's perspective of all veiling in Islam as oppressive toward women. Her unveiling is also symbolic of the ways in which gender performance has operated in the narrative

and operates in Western society. Additionally, other women's participation in this collective act of rebellion echoes the idea of standing on one's feet rather than kneeling as if to a master. In "The Crusade Over Women's Bodies," Sonya Fernandez convincingly argues:

Muslim women's identity is then never more than the experience of their oppression, and their (perceived eternal) victimhood acts as a double-edged sword with which to deny recognition of both sexes' agency and autonomy, so placing the (de)sexualized body centre stage. Within this prism, Muslim men are framed as forever denying Muslim women the freedom to explore and exercise their agency (read: sexuality) and, in so doing, are forever posited as the barbaric controlling Other. Three themes emerge as inextricably intertwined in this gendered construction of race: the equation of sexuality with agency, which, in turn, bolsters the savage construct with which Muslim men find themselves inescapably identified, and the consequent positing of Muslim women as unfree and in need of saving. (275)

While this may be true of how Western audiences categorize Islamist fundamentalism in general, Marley skillfully navigates her depiction of a Muslim-based society to avoid this pitfall in more than one way.

First, although men are controlling women through religion and women are shown to be in need of saving, ESC, the symbol of Western colonial power, will not engage in a saving mission to free Irustani women which subverts the idea of the colonizer, or in this case, of the economic imperialist, on an evangelizing mission to "save brown women from brown men"

(278).¹³⁹ Rather, ESC follows the exploitation model of economic imperialism and has no interest in changing Irustani society to meet democratic Earth norms, as questionable as those norms may be in practice. However, ESC also falls into the trap of cultural relativism by refusing to become more than economically involved in the colony and by imposing restrictions on their own female employees in order to placate Irustani sensibilities.

Second, Marley has constructed the narrative to show that the saving must come from within the society itself as demonstrated in the culminating scene of the novel in which Qadir and Ishi *together* plan a public statement urging change and some women take an active first step toward their own liberation. Not insignificantly, some of the men and some of the still-veiled women stand between the unveiled women and the men who would try to apprehend and assault them for their audacity and disobedience as the women follow Zahra's coffin in the customary procession out of the Doma (323); some women will still choose the veil when they have the option to do so, and some men will support women's choices even when they are revolutionary and undermine the kyriarchal order. In this scene and the last sentences of the novel in which Ishi contemplates the heat of the sun, for the first time, on her exposed head, the utopian impulse of the text is the most prevalent: Ishi recognizes that change will be difficult, dangerous, and incremental, but that Zahra has set change in motion and Ishi resolves to continue it (323). The real hope should be, then, not just that change occurs, but that it occurs in ways that benefits the women and children of Irustan and enables gender equality in their society. Most of all, change must come from within Irustani society rather than be imposed from outside of it.

From the title of the novel alone, one can conclude that on one level, Marley disapproves of Zahra's activities: no matter how well-deserved their deaths, she commits multiple, pre-

¹³⁹ Fernandez uses this phrase without quotations or reference, which may indicate that it has become widely used in colonial and postcolonial theory; Gayatri Spivak claims she "constructed" the line "White men are saving brown women from brown men" in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (92).

meditated murders and is punished for her crimes. Yet, on another level, one can view Zahra's engagement in terrorism as a form of civil disobedience and religious protest, especially since other avenues are closed to her and would have only resulted in her death without having any effect on society. I would also argue that this text interrogates whether individually-motivated and executed terrorism or resistance is an acceptable defense against state terrorism, in the form of violence and repression, perpetrated on a class or group of citizens. Because Zahra's terrorism is effective to a certain degree, she causes others to examine their own feelings about Irustani society and its religious edicts and how their society might be made better through changing the religion and the nature of the theocratic state. She also causes a privileged group to know fear, the kind of constant, underlying fear that battered women have of their batterers or that American women experience when walking alone at night: the knowledge that no matter what sorts of precautions they take, they may not be safe from attack. For battered women and women who insist upon their freedom of movement despite the risks to their safety, they fear the sexist weapon of violence (Pharr 9). For Irustani men, their fear is also one regarding safety but of an unnatural, excruciatingly painful, and disgusting death. Teresa De Lauretis, quoting Breines and Gordon, would argue that violence toward women is "a power struggle for the *maintenance* of a certain kind of social order" rather than a "'breakdown in the social order'" (*Technologies of Gender* 34, emphasis in original). Zahra's violence, perpetrated against men and a violent system alternatively signals such a breakdown. In one sense, the text's portrayal of Zahra as someone who kills on behalf of children and battered women gives Zahra the status of a hero, a rebel, a freedom fighter—all labels that, in various situations, could be applied to terrorists, depending on one's point of view. In effect, Zahra challenges the binary of West/Other as a *woman* who engages in terrorist activity but does so for the greater good and for

the protection of the innocent and vulnerable. While Marley does not go so far as to justify the murder of batterers, sexual sadists, and privileged men, she does indicate that the overall effect of creating terror in order to foment change is sometimes the only means available to those a society has rendered nearly powerless through religious fundamentalism.

Conclusion

As we have seen in *The Terrorists of Irustan* and its critique of religious fundamentalism generally and Islamic fundamentalism specifically, religion can be appropriated as an ideological apparatus to reinforce the androcentric norms that dominate the kyriarchies in which we live. The text graphically demonstrates gender oppression by means of Irustani segregation of women through limiting women's entrance into the public domain on a collective level and coercively limiting them on an individual level through their behavior and dress. Shehadeh asserts that:

[For Islamic fundamentalists, the] ideal order of freedom, lawfulness, social equality, economic justice, affluence, unit, and victory is constructed on the basis of patriarchy where women are veiled and excluded from the public sphere. Yet, they perceive women as the embodiment of cultural identity and the custodians of cultural values. Despite the vast differences in their religio-political and economic ideologies, they agree with conservative Muslim thinkers and ulema in emphasizing woman's natural and God-given domesticity, the special status awarded her in Islam, and the calamity that may befall Muslim society should she give up her traditional role as loving wife and nurturing mother whose jihad is the survival of the Islamic way of life without which culture, religion, and morality will crumble. (218-19)

Women's behavior in Irustan and in Islamist denominations is policed through violence and fear for themselves and for their families and demonstrates that the underpinnings of Althusser's ISA in religious fundamentalism are intertwined with gender oppression.

Marley's use of a dystopian milieu, temporally and spatially removed from the reader, examines religious fundamentalism and its various means of gender oppression, which it also roundly condemns as untenable for women and subaltern men. The text critiques kyriarchal norms, public/private sphere binaries, and gender segregation that severely limit the inalienable rights of women. The thoughtful reader is at once estranged from Irustani culture and called upon to recognize gender oppression in her own cultural and religious milieu. ESC's economic exploitation that follows a colonial model and its symbiotic relationship with Irustan's fundamentalist religion parallels the abuses of capitalism in colonial (and other) situations. Furthermore, the text makes apparent that veiling comes in many forms and is not limited to physical dress but also encompasses the masks that the Other might assume in order to circumvent kyriarchal prejudices. The genre transgressions of *The Terrorists of Irustan* posit that hegemonic theocracies have cracks that may be exploited as sites of resistance and change. One hopes that recognition of these exploitable cracks leads to praxis and enables rebellion against the oppression of the Other through religion or other ideological or repressive apparatuses. Moreover, the text makes obvious that meaningful, lasting change should come from within the culture itself rather than be imposed from outside. Lastly, the text does not rule out a reclaiming of a religious tradition in order to realize equality for everyone, but understands the importance of taking religious belief into account and warns against fundamentalism and its tendency to run amok.

Chapter 4

“We Are People of the Book”: Motherhood, Knowledge, and Hope in Marge Piercy’s *He, She and It*

Writing from within the Jewish tradition, Marge Piercy published *He, She and It*¹⁴⁰ in 1991 as a modern *midrash*¹⁴¹ that critiques religious fundamentalism and explores the possibility of building religious utopian communities. Piercy’s novel contributes to the on-going debate regarding gender equality and religious fundamentalism’s active involvement in the political arena through challenging the inclusion, or exclusion, of the subaltern Other in social institutions. Rather than projecting the Other as an alien being, like many science fiction texts, Piercy’s Other takes the form of a cyborg¹⁴² that, while having some biologically derived body parts, is a synthesized machine. Piercy’s engagement with the backlash against feminism and the rise of the Religious Right from the perspective of an adherent of a minority religious faith adds to the nuances that feminist science fiction writers bring to their narrative warnings about fundamentalism. In Piercy’s case, she critiques her own religious tradition and its history from inside it while linking the characteristics of fundamentalism to other religious faiths and to

¹⁴⁰ The British edition of *He, She and It* is titled *Body of Glass*. I will use *He, She and It* since I employ an American edition of the novel. However, many critics refer to the British title and pagination; I will preserve *Body of Glass* as the text’s title when directly quoting. Additionally, Lucy Armitt argues that the title refers to Gadi (he-male), Shira (she-female) and Yod (it-machine) (58). Given the British title of *Body of Glass* that very specifically refers to Yod entirely as a manufactured creation, the American title seems to capture the ambiguity of Yod’s identity: Yod is simultaneously male (appearance, genitalia, and some masculine personality characteristics), female (some feminine personality characteristics), and androgynous (resisting definitive categorization as a social/biological being).

¹⁴¹ Traditional *midrashim* are commentaries on the Tanakh that interpret the stories and, in many cases, fill in gaps or reconcile inconsistencies in Jewish sacred texts. In a more modern sense, a *midrash* is a retelling of a story or legend from a contemporary viewpoint that updates the lesson or moral and/or presents alternative views, such as women’s experiences, in order to enable a contemporary audience to engage in more meaningful contemplation or interrogation of the story and its purpose.

¹⁴² In “Beyond the Wasteland: A Feminist in Cyberspace,” Peter Fitting identifies Yod more accurately as an android, or human-like robot, than as a cyborg, which is a modified human being (5). While I understand Fitting’s categorization and agree that Yod is an android, Piercy’s narrative names Yod a “cyborg” to blur and question the distinction between what is human and what is machine.

secular institutions through the similarities in their treatment of and attitudes toward women and subaltern Others.

In many respects, this text is primarily an interrogation of what it means to be human interpellated into an implicit critique of Judaic tradition. However, Yod's humanity as a cyborg will not be the primary focus of this chapter; I am willing to accept Malkah's estimation of Yod as a person: "Not a human person, but still a person" (Piercy, *He, She and It* 76).¹⁴³ Rather, the text's depiction of religious faith critiques various aspects of religious faith and theology and their relation to or incorporation of ontology. Moreover, the novel obliquely critiques Orthodox Judaism¹⁴⁴ as a fundamentalist institution within a spectrum of Judaisms. The text interrogates the links between technology and withholding of knowledge and information from the masses and its parallels in fundamentalist faiths that discourage alternative interpretations of sacred texts. The text foregrounds gender as a site of societal contention through Yod's socialization to "pass" as human as well as a range of depictions of motherhood that defy fundamentalist tenets of complementarianism. More explicitly than *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Terrorists of Irustan*, *He, She and It* presents blueprints that gesture toward forming religious—yet egalitarian—utopian spaces through both the reclamation of a specific religious faith (Judaism)

¹⁴³ See, Fitting's "Beyond the Wasteland," Anolik, Deery's "The Biopolitics of Cyberspace" and "Ectopic and Utopic Reproduction," Wolmark, Hicks, and others for discussion of Yod's humanity or lack thereof.

¹⁴⁴ Orthodox Judaism, like different Christian fundamentalist sects, is not a monolithic entity and the term applies to a variety of subsets such as the Haredim (also known as ultra-Orthodox), Chabad, and Chassidic Jews. Orthodox Jews believe in literal interpretations of the Torah, with supplemental interpretations from the Talmud, including following traditional formulations of *halakah* (Jewish law), such as *kashrut* (kosher diet), *tefilah* (prayer), *niddah* (purity rituals), Shabbat (day of worship with special restrictions), and *kavod hatzibur* (public modesty, in style of dress and behavior). Orthodox Jews believe the Torah is the direct word of God, that the Torah is divine, and do not allow for the fallibility of human interpretation, unlike the Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative branches of Judaism. For the purposes of this project, I exclude Modern Orthodox from my categorizations of Orthodox Judaism as fundamentalist since Modern Orthodox adherents combine traditional Jewish values and observance of Jewish law with modern lifestyles. Modern Orthodoxy insists upon educating both men and women and is more open to ideas of gender equality than other sects of Orthodox Judaism.

from traditional, paternalistic orthodoxy and the preservation of different faiths (Judaism and Islam) in an integrated community.

The storyline follows Shira¹⁴⁵ Shipman as she helps to socialize the cyborg Yod, and is paralleled in the text by Malkah's retelling of the legend of the golem of Prague that saved the Jewish ghetto from genocide in the late sixteenth century. *He, She and It* opens in 2059 with Shira losing custody of her son Ari to her ex-husband Josh due to a company adjudication system that privileges corporate rank, level of assimilation to corporate culture, and male control of genetic offspring. Shira returns to the Jewish free town of Tikva, where she grew up and her grandmother Malkah still lives, and accepts a job offer from Avram to socialize Yod, Avram's illegally built cyborg. Yod was partially programmed by Malkah in order to overcome the violent tendencies of Avram's nine previous cyborg attempts, all of which had to be destroyed due to their threat to human beings. Meanwhile, Shira's absentee mother, Riva, reveals herself as an information pirate that steals information from the multi-national conglomerates and is becoming a union organizer in the Glop. Riva also brings her lover, Nili, a cloned human modified into a cyborg, to Tikva from Safed,¹⁴⁶ a hidden, technologically advanced community of Israeli and Palestinian women who survived the 2017 Two-Week War that turned the Middle East into the decimated "Black Zone."

Piercy draws upon Jewish legend in *He, She and It* to interrogate the human condition and its implications for the future. The futuristic cyborg storyline runs alongside a mythological cyborg narrative: in order to give Yod his own creation story and sense of heritage, Malkah writes a *midrash* of the Golem of Prague legend. In the actual legend in Jewish folklore, Rabbi

¹⁴⁵ In Hebrew, Shira means "song" or "poetry."

¹⁴⁶ Pronounced "Tz'fat."

Jedah Loew Ben Bezalel, who was called the Maharal¹⁴⁷ and was the most prominent rabbi in Prague, fashioned the golem from clay and animated it by using Kabbalah. Rabbi Loew intended for the golem to defend Jews in the Prague ghetto from an anti-Semitic pogrom over Blood Libel. After the ghetto survived the attack and the golem served its purpose, the Maharal neutralized the golem, who turned back into a clay statue and, some claim, is still stored in the attic of the New Synagogue in Prague. While Jewish *midrashim* boast a plethora of golem figures that tend to show up when an outnumbered Jewish community needs defending from bloodthirsty Christians, the Golem of Prague legend is the most prominent and considered a classic part of Jewish folklore. Piercy's *midrash* within a *midrash* engages with Orthodox Judaism and its resistance to progressive change that would recognize the Other, including women, as Jews.

In order to properly contextualize *He, She and It*, we must first turn to Piercy's earlier text that combines the utopian and the dystopian in one volume: *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976).¹⁴⁸ The utopic community of Mattapoissett in *Woman on the Edge of Time* is located in a future New England town, like Tikva, where its denizens have achieved equality and practice a robust feminism that has freed women from the tyranny of biological reproduction and domesticity and freed everyone from menial labor in order to pursue higher levels of learning and enjoyment in their work and social lives. In "The Politics of Incorporation and Embodiment: *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *He, She and It* as Feminist Epistemologies of Resistance," Vara Neverow calls *He, She and It* "virtually a sequel" to *Woman on the Edge of Time*: "Both novels

¹⁴⁷ Maharal is an acronym for Moreinu ha-Rav Loew, "our teacher the Rabbi Loew." *He, She and It* gives the Maharal's name as: "Judah Loew ben Bezalel, Judah the Lion. A lion among the Jews" (21). Interestingly, Shira's son Ari's name also means lion in Hebrew. Perhaps the choice of Ari's name and its attendant meaning indicates that he might be the next person to save Tikva from whatever threatens it.

¹⁴⁸ For a nearly side-by-side comparison of the two texts, see Kuryllo.

stress the legitimacy of violent resistance to systems of domination, and both are premised on a feminist epistemology” (16). Specifically, Piercy implements the ideology of Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (1970) into *Woman on the Edge of Time*, ideology that elaborates on the concept of freeing women from biological reproduction. Piercy borrows from Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985) for *He, She and It* in order to explore questions of what makes us human.¹⁴⁹ In the interim between the publication of *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *He, She and It*, however, Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” uses quotations from *Woman on the Edge of Time* as epigraphs to her piece, and Haraway acknowledges the influence of *Woman on the Edge of Time* on her thought process in “Cyborg Manifesto” (Calvert 52). While my analysis and discussion of *He, She and It* does not focus primarily on the questions Piercy (or Haraway) raises in her text regarding the melding of human and machine and how to then account for humanity, I find an exploration of Piercy’s equation of the cyborg with the (female) Other more salient to my discussion in view of the text’s critique of religious fundamentalism framed in a science fiction narrative.

It is also important to note issues and themes surrounding utopia and how Piercy’s vision of utopia developed from Mattapoisett to Tikva and Safed. For example, in *Living Beyond the Gender Trap: Concepts of Gender and Sexual Expression Envisioned by Marge Piercy, Cherrie Moraga and Leslie Feinberg*, Heitke Gerds observes that Piercy makes the argument in *Woman on the Edge of Time* that underlying sexual difference is based in biology and solving gender inequalities depends on releasing women from reproductive processes; in *He, She and It*, this argument changes to one of questioning how to socialize human beings in order to achieve gender equality (204-5). It is, perhaps, no surprise to observe such development in the

¹⁴⁹ See Glover, Kuryllo, Calvert, Yi, and Deery for discussion of the “feedback loop” (Calvert 52) between Piercy’s novels and Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto.” Additionally, Haraway engages *He, She and It* in her introduction to *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium.FemaleMan©_Meets_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience* (1997).

philosophies with which Piercy engages in her science fiction novels. In “Active in Time and History,” she writes: “If we can’t imagine alternative futures—new and multitudinously exciting and soothing ways to give birth, care for and socialize our young, educate each other, heal each other, marry, separate, grow old, mourn, die and be buried, communicate with fellow humans and other beings, grow food, eat, dispose of our wastes, deal with disagreements, amuse ourselves—then we shall be stuck in boredom . . .” (107). In a way, the two texts work in tandem to explore and interrogate different aspects of the nature vs. nurture debate.

While *Woman on the Edge of Time*, which won a National Endowment for the Arts award (1978), and *He, She and It* combine both dystopian and utopian societies, it is entirely possible to categorize *Woman on the Edge of Time* as a critical utopia¹⁵⁰ whose utopic community is one of the most rigorously developed in all of feminist utopian writing from the 1970s forward. I would disagree with Peter Fitting, however, in categorizing *He, She and It* as a critical utopia as well. Fitting observes that *He, She and It*’s Tikva “presents us with the rudiments of a utopian society, however threatened, and . . . is the central driving force of the novel” (“Unmasking the Real” 155), and for that reason categorizes the text as a critical utopia rather than a critical dystopia. I agree wholeheartedly that the utopic potential of Tikva is the “driving force” of the novel. However, Tikva—and the less explored Safed—seem more like communities moving toward utopia than like the established utopia of Mattapoissett. While anyone can choose to live in Mattapoissett, Tikva and Safed are closed communities: Safed has remained isolated in its caves for over forty years and is in the process of sending out emissaries and attempting to establish ties with other communities; Tikva will not let just anyone from the Glop or the multis move

¹⁵⁰ According to Moylan, a critical utopia is a text that may depict both dystopic and utopic communities in order to demonstrate not only the flaws in dystopic community but also makes apparent the flaws in utopic community (*Demand the Impossible* 11). In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Mattapoissett is a utopic community and, by way of contrast, the protagonist’s 1970s reality and the alternate futures she briefly visits are dystopic.

in—rather, people must apply and have specialized skills that can contribute to the defense, creativity, and maintenance of the free town in order to gain acceptance into the community. Although non-Jewish people live in Tikva, Piercy’s text limits them to “greeners,” or environmentalists, and does not delve into the experience of non-Jews living in a predominantly Jewish community (*He, She and It* 404). As much as utopia is an on-going process, and while Tikva and Safed are certainly more utopic communities and possess more utopic potential than Gilead or Irustan, especially from a religious standpoint, they are not, within the confines of the text, fully realized utopian communities.

The text itself seems to argue for the reformation of fundamentalist religious faiths through envisioning a reclamation of Judaism specifically, and of other mainstream religious traditions, provided they embrace feminism and equality. How does Piercy’s blueprint for religious utopia explore the literal or figurative possibilities of realizing the utopic potential of religious faith? How does Piercy interrogate the intersection of religion and gender, and, to a limited degree, class issues? How does Piercy deploy the dystopian genre of science fiction as commentary on the reader’s contemporary social and cultural milieu? While transgressing generic boundaries, how does this text trouble science fiction through examining the utopic/dystopic potential of religious faith?

Religious Views and Critical Reception

In the introduction to *Connections and Collisions: Identities in Contemporary Jewish-American Women’s Writing*, Lois E. Rubin provides a laundry list of traits of Jewish-American writers who are also women. Although Rubin intends for her list to be applied to all of the authors in the volume, the traits Rubin identifies as particular to Jewish women writers resonate specifically with Marge Piercy and her identity as a Jewish-American writer. In Rubin’s

estimation, Jewish women writers: “feel excluded from Jewish observance and spirituality; struggle to be both feminists and practicing Jews; are motivated by their Jewish and female identities to make social change; recreate rituals and rewrite texts to enable women to be full participants in Jewish life; resolve their tensions as outsiders by recreating legendary figures like the golem; incorporate Jewish and feminist elements in fiction and poetry” (10). I would also hazard that Piercy would meet all of Rubin’s criteria for Jewish women writers through just one book: *He, She and It*. The text acts as a *midrash* of the golem legend in dual storylines that incorporates women’s experiences; integrates Jewish practice and identity into the daily and seasonal life cycles of the people living in Tikva; explores exclusion from Jewish ritual through a Jewish character’s time in a multi enclave and through golem and cyborg figures; and presents a feminist argument for social change.

Piercy was raised Jewish by her mother and grandmother, over her atheist, anti-Semitic father’s objections, in a working-class neighborhood of Detroit during the 1940s and early 1950s. Piercy began writing as a teenager and published poetry during her years as a political activist in the Civil Rights and emerging feminist movements of the 1960s and into the 1970s; writing was initially something she fit in around her political and social activism (McManus). After the collapse of her health in the early 1970s, Piercy focused less on organizing and more on advocating for social change and advancing philosophies of social justice through her writing, especially once she turned to writing as a full-time career. In her essay “Active in Time and History,” Piercy writes, “I consider fiction one way of persuading people to cross those borders of alienation and mistrust into the existence of someone in whose mind and body a reader may find it enlightening to spend some time” (114). As Dawn Gifford writes, Piercy wanted to “validate people and to create empathy” (n.p.). Piercy’s Jewish identity was not overtly present

in her writing until the 1980s and, Kerstin W. Shands argues, was an aspect of her identity that Piercy had previously stifled in her writing. This changed when Piercy researched and wrote *Gone to Soldiers* (1987), an historical novel that traces various Jewish experiences during World War II. As a result, Piercy became “more actively engaged in Judaism” (Shands 7). In her personal life, Piercy had become involved in a women-led, egalitarian *chavurah* in her Cape Cod community. In “An Interview with Marge Piercy,” Piercy discusses her affiliation with the Reconstructionist branch of Judaism: “that's the movement of Judaism I feel most at home with. There's a lot of tradition, but there is also sexual equality. Reconstructionists were the first to ordain lesbians and gay men. The basis of the Reconstructionist movement is that you must re-experience every aspect of Judaism that you accept. You have to make it meaningful to you. For some Reconstructionists, God is a very important concept; for others, it is not” (Lyons 332). Reconstructionists are vehemently anti-anthropomorphic in their concept of God, thus refusing a gendered concept of a deity. Some Reconstructionists are atheistic as well. A major component of Reconstructionist theology is that Judaism must evolve progressively while still valuing tradition but in ways that are meaningful in—and can be incorporated into—the conditions of modern life; honoring the spirit of religious tradition is more important than replicating specific rituals in certain ways. Furthermore, Reconstructionist Judaism views Judaism as a continuously developing civilization through individual experience and discovery rather than a religion that clings to traditions or a set of “divine” laws and edicts. For Reconstructionists, no single religious faith exercises a monopoly over religious truth. Piercy’s grounding in Reconstructionist Judaism, a denomination of Judaism¹⁵¹ that she chose to follow as an adult, enables her critical perspective on Orthodox Judaism.

¹⁵¹ Reconstructionism is one of the smallest branches of Judaism in the United States and was developed between the 1920s and 1940s.

One way that Piercy's Jewish identity permeates *He, She and It* is through the names of the characters. Nearly all of the Jewish names have symbolic meanings or refer to Jewish historical figures which increases their significance as well as adds depth to each character's personality. For example, Malkah means "queen" in Hebrew. Additionally, Debra Shaw notes that Malkah is a derivative of the *Sephirot Malkhut*, one of the ten aspects of the divine, "which is equated with femininity and justice and the biblical tree of knowledge, and is also called Shekhinah" (163). The *Shekinah* is a feminine facet of God that represents dwelling or divine presence (particularly in the Temple), as well as the Sabbath Bride whom Jews welcome during Friday evening Shabbat services in Jewish synagogues. It is interesting, and perhaps a little tongue-in-cheek on Piercy's part, that many of the other characters in the novel "dwell" in Malkah's house in Tikva at one time or another during the course of the narrative.

As a result of no longer repressing her Jewishness in her writing, Jewish themes and characters infuse Piercy's poetry, fiction, and non-fiction work. In addition to *Gone to Soldiers* (1987) and *He, She and It* (1991), other works heavily influenced by Piercy's Judaism include several volumes of poetry, *My Mother's Body* (1985), *Available Light* (1988), *Mars and Her Children* (1992), *What Are Big Girls Made Of?* (1997), *The Art of Blessing the Day: Poems with a Jewish Theme* (1999); the non-fiction *Pesach for the Rest of Us: Making the Passover Seder Your Own* (2007); her memoir *Sleeping with Cats* (2003); and various essays. In "A Feminist Interpretation of Jewish History and Spirituality: Collision and Fusion in Marge Piercy's Later Poetry and Fiction," S. Lillian Kremer argues that,

He, She and It exemplifies Piercy's increasing literary incorporation of Jewish cultural and linguistic sources not only in its focus on and transformation of the golem legend, but pervasively in its organic use of Hebrew words and liturgical

references (unitalicized and often without the benefit of parenthetical explanation or definition), suggestive of the Jewish ambiance of the Tikvah community that is as Jewishly literate as was the older Prague Jewish community. The text is rich in references to Jewish life and customs, the well known and the esoteric, from Yom Kippur and Shabbat allusions that one expects literate American readers to understand to less well-known references to religious life, texts, and Hebrew and Yiddish diction. . . . The degree of Piercy's integration of Judaic matter and Hebrew terminology for this utopian text not only indicates clearly her comfort with the material, but also reflects the growing Jewish spirituality marking her work. (173-74)

However, from her first published volume, Piercy's novels and poetry heavily feature the experiences of women and the affects of kyriarchal oppression on their lives. Piercy's writing style easily transitions between volumes of poetry and fiction; her novels move from science fiction to historical fiction to realism and back again. The sheer variety of her writing demonstrates her comfort level with myriad genres and styles, and while her works of the past twenty-five years tend to feature Jewish subject matter, her entire oeuvre is resolutely feminist.

Although *He, She and It* was generally well-received, won the Arthur C. Clarke Award for Best Science Fiction Novel (UK, 1993), and has been a modest commercial success, the text has received its share of negative criticism. In "Mythology of the Future," Julie Wilson argues that Piercy has a "heterosexual bias" in this and other novels, primarily because the lesbian Nili, following the behest of her mission to explore and report back to her insular community, takes a male lover. Piercy writes Nili's dalliance with Gadi, however, as an affair in a limited time and place in the spirit of experimentation rather than a "conversion" of a lesbian to heterosexuality.

Wilson's argument discounts Riva, whom Piercy portrays as lesbian throughout the novel. Several reviewers criticize the heterosexual romance between Shira and Yod, which Joan Haran refutes in "Theorizing (Hetero)Sexuality and (Fe)Male Dominance," contending that the women of Safed made stunning technological advances in cybernetics and cloning in the absence of heterosexual relationships; this undermines the idea that Piercy valorizes heterosexual romance as a (sole) source of creativity and technological advancement. Other critics argue that *He, She and It* reproduces gender binaries and traditional gender roles, such as those encouraged and/or coerced by fundamentalist sects, a contention that I will refute in depth in this chapter. Positive or negative, like *The Handmaid's Tale*, *He, She and It* has provided extensive material for critics and scholars to analyze and interpret and for readers to gain meaningful insights into contemporary society through the science fiction mode.

Genre

Like most of the feminist utopian writing produced during and after the Second Wave era, *He, She and It* is a dystopian/utopian hybrid. While Piercy acknowledges the text's heritage in cyberpunk and the influence of Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" on the main narrative thread, the retelling of the Golem of Prague legend serves as an historical novel of Jewish oppression in sixteenth-century Prague and as a *midrash*.¹⁵² Brook Brayman notes the "use of cyberpunk tropes like post-national corporate world-domination, human-machine interfaces, post-human bodies, and maverick computer hackers" (29) that are then challenged in a feminist manner for their "rampant heterosexuality" (Cadora 361) by the introduction of lesbian relationships and an entire community of lesbian women (Safed), and by Malkah's active sex life that does not seem to diminish appreciably as she grows older. In *The Repair of the*

¹⁵² See Rosenzweig, Anolik "Appropriating the Golem, Possessing the Dybbuk," Grauer, Gurman, and Graetz for fuller discussion of *He, She and It* as *midrash*.

World: The Novels of Marge Piercy, Shands notes that *He, She and It* may also be classified as a “picaresque tale,” an inverted Mary-Joseph-Jesus story, a polemic of the “anarcho- or ecofeminist persuasion, . . . an adventure story, a quest novel, a detective novel, and a highly unusual love story, as well as a kind of inverted travel guide” (138). Through Nili’s stressing the importance of literacy and Riva’s political motivations for “liberating” information in order to return it to the masses, Calvert views *He, She and It* and the importance the text places on literacy as echoing elements of slave narratives: “for without literacy it is impossible to understand how a society works and how it might be changed” (57). Furthermore, Arthur Waskow argues that Piercy writes Jewish science fiction that is “[n]ot just casually Jewish, but rooted in the sardonic Jewish mysticism of the Kabbalah and the profoundly Jewish spiritual wrestle about what social justice means in a world where the Messiah is ever-coming, ever-vanishing” (72), and the repair of the world seems like an impossibility but no less worth striving for. As such, the novel is rife with the genre-bending and blending which seems to have an established pattern among feminist dystopian and utopian writing as a means of transgression against male-dominated narrative styles and the underpinnings of Western thought and culture. Moreover, in “A Cyborg Manifesto,” Haraway states that “[i]n retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture” (175), which indicates that Piercy is not only telling two parallel stories about cyborg/golem figures, but assumes the position of a cyborg herself and launches her own contestation, through the text, to Western ideology. I would expand this argument to contend that Piercy’s use of a modern *midrash* in science fiction also challenges traditional Western, master narratives. Piercy writes boundary transgressions into the text as well: the characters’ creation of chimeras and misleading files, staged deaths,

disguises in the Net, and the loaded meanings behind character and place names, may well indicate “a utopian strategy for our times” (Kuryllo 50).

Furthering the counterclaims that feminist science fiction presents to kyriarchal Western cultural traditions, the cyborg storyline in *He, She and It* blurs the boundaries of many binary categorizations such as male/female, mind/body, human/machine. The golem storyline performs this same blurring to a lesser extent. In Christine Cornea’s estimation, this challenge to Western thought and culture “can not only be understood to mark a possible shift in the very structures that underlie the science fiction genre, but can also be seen as a potent threat to much of Western philosophy’s reliance upon Cartesian-inspired dualisms” (275). The golem and the cyborg figures serve as transgressive defiance of gender and self/Other binaries; the diversity of approaches to motherhood presented in the text and women’s self-determination defy traditional gender roles as well as flout the fundamentalist and societal coercion of women as reproducers of culture. Together, these elements undermine thousands of years of kyriarchal abuse of power and marginalization of the non-white, the non-wealthy, the non-heterosexual, and the non-male. Additionally, the positive estimation of a specific religious faith in tandem with the novel’s negative estimation of the fundamentalist branch of the same faith, and the peaceful integration of two previously opposed religious faiths into one community, questions science fiction’s marginalization of religious faith and opens up the possibility of religion’s utopic potential.

Like *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *The Terrorists of Irustan*, the narrative is told from women’s points of view. In this respect alone, the exploration of women’s experiences and reactions to events in the text confront the exclusions of master narratives told from a male point of view. However, the text also shifts between multiple points of view: the first person narrative of Malkah with her personal observations about her life and the people in it in the future

timeline; Malkah's first person narrative mixes with the historical golem storyline that shifts, in third person narration, between Joseph and Chava; and a third person limited point of view focuses on Shira, the protagonist, in the futuristic, cyborg storyline. Piercy's concentration on the female/Other view point of the three women and a golem reclaims not only a piece of Jewish history but also creates space for the voices of women, from the past and into the future. In "Reviving the Golem, Revisiting *Frankenstein*: Cultural Negotiations in Ozick's *The Puttermessa Papers* and Piercy's *He, She and It*," Ruth Beinstock Anolik contends that not only do the two storylines create space for women's experiences but that "the presence of the female informs and transforms the structures of intellectual power" (149-50). With women in the text appropriating knowledge, technology, and science on equal footing with men, they undermine traditional kyriarchal authority figures—from a male-likened concept of God to male religious leaders to male scientists with inherent kyriocentric biases—in order to create space for women in areas of the public sphere that have been traditionally closed to them. Anolik writes, "In moving her golem narrative out of the realm of the mysterious, magical, and gendered world inhabited by the original folk tales . . . into the bright world of accessible science, Piercy redefines the patriarchal paradigms that support these texts" (150). In other words, humans can use science to demystify the natural world and demonstrate that gender, race, and other sites of marginalization and oppression are social constructs with no concrete basis for subordinating any groups within the kyriarchal pyramid.

Piercy's *midrash-within-a-midrash* of an old legend—updated with not only a woman's point of view (Chava) but the point of view of the Other itself (Joseph, the Golem), and the parallel golem-as-cyborg storyline—serves to bring religion into science fiction without religion acting as a destructive force or being antithetical to science and rational thought. Rather, Susan

Kray contends that science and religion can form a “creative unison” (88). While I would not argue that Piercy is performing Reilly’s “inward search” about religion through her writing, especially since her memoir exhibits Piercy’s comfort level with Reconstructionist Judaism, I would assert that, instead, she normalizes not only Judaism in science fiction, but also normalizes the figure of the historically much-maligned Jew and generates space for a Jewish feminist identity.

The very idea of a *midrash* as science fiction subverts generic conventions for science fiction as well as utopian and dystopian writing. However, Piercy’s *midrash* does not only update the golem tale in two distinct storylines for contemporary audiences. As Anolik observes, Piercy also “reworks the story, appropriating and rewriting the traditional narrative to include the possibilities of female power suppressed by the originals. While the golem legends work to repress the power of female sexuality and deny the power of female creation, Piercy’s narrative valorizes these female possibilities” (“Appropriating the Golem” 27). Piercy’s depictions of female sexuality from Nili’s experimentation with bisexuality, to Malkah’s active sex life as an older woman, to Shira’s discovery of sexual pleasure, all undermine the Western narrative that women are sex objects to be used for the pleasure of men or as merely procreative vessels. Furthermore, the plethora of ways in which the female characters engage in motherhood that suits their personal needs subverts fundamentalist insistence upon male heads of household and the control of women that arises from such subordination.

Beyond Jewish tradition, Piercy’s *midrash* strikes at the underlying tenets of Western thought and culture which historically leave out women’s voices and experiences as well as exclude religion from “creative unison” with science in modern life. Moreover, this *midrash* overtly defies the heavily Christian aspect of Western religious and philosophical traditions that

has marginalized Jews and other non-Christians for centuries. Historically, there is nothing new with religious denominations associating feminism with heresy; this so-called threat is not singularly problematic for Orthodox Judaism. In “Feminism and Heresy: The Construction of a Jewish Metanarrative,” Adam S. Ferziger contends that “the rise of feminism within contemporary religious life has engendered original theological responses and strategies not only among its supporters and ideologues, but among the ‘guardians’ of the various religious traditions as well” (494). The fundamentalist aspects of religious faiths often find purchase as reactions against feminist movements within their religious traditions which Piercy actively condemns in *He, She and It* through the text’s advocacy of equality and exploration of the utopic potential of religion.

Using the *midrash* technique, Piercy writes against fundamentalist Orthodox Judaism while staying within and yet expanding upon Jewish tradition to bring to the forefront the experiences of women in that tradition and project how women’s experiences might take shape when a religious faith’s utopic potential is in the process of being realized. In “Introduction: Looking at Jewish Women’s Writing Through Dual Lenses,” Rubin contends that “female characters [in some Jewish women’s writing] reconstruct gender roles as they appropriate traditional texts, language, and ritual and reshape them for their own needs and purposes. In so doing, they are creating new roles and behaviors for Jewish women” (9-10). Within Piercy’s *midrash*, Malkah writes a *midrash* for Yod to give him a history and a creation story. This demonstrates how the female experience, through the character of Chava, has been suppressed and can now be given voice, in effect, writing Jewish women “back into tradition, appropriating the tradition and making it truly their own” (Anolik, “Appropriating the Golem” 24). Malkah’s own behaviors as an intellectually and sexually active older woman who has not been reduced to

spending her later years as a cleaning lady in support of a husband's retirement stand out as a way for women to age yet still remain vital and enjoy their lives. Nili's feminine looks and androgynous behaviors, along with her melding of motherhood and service to her community, Riva's militancy and disregard for her appearance except to make herself as non-descript as possible, and Shira's balancing of conventional attitudes with retaining her Jewish identity serve as examples of different ways for Jewish women, and all women, to approach how they live their own lives. Furthermore, Malkah and Shira's changes in attitude toward Yod¹⁵³—recognizing him as a person and their own culpability in the creation of a potential slave race—demonstrate openness to change in the fluctuating conditions of modern life.

I would also argue that Piercy turns on its head the Galatea-Pygmalion trope of a man creating his ideal woman. In *He, She and It*, women, rather than men, create the perfect man through his socialization, and then choose not to remake him because they recognize their own selfishness in creating others as potential slaves. Avram cannot make a successful cyborg on his own because he is unable to humanize his creations to a socially acceptable degree and neglects certain aspects of their programming. Thus, the question arises: is this what men also do when they create ideal women? In fashioning the ideal woman, would men neglect to give them reason and compassion or the intellect to understand that they are being used as sex toys and servants? Furthermore, women are not let off the hook. Piercy expands this idea of creating sentient beings as slaves to the creation of children who are enslaved to their parents' expectations: "As it is wrong to give birth to a child believing that child will fulfill your own inner aspirations, will have a particular talent or career, so is it equally wrong to create a being

¹⁵³ Interestingly, Joan Haran finds this transformation of attitudes analogous to feminist philosophical development: "The mental and emotional journey which Malkah and Shira make in moving from pleasure at their part in the creation of Yod, to remorse at their understanding it was wrong, could be read as a journey from feminist empiricism to feminist standpoint theory. As Harding makes clear, a feminist standpoint must be achieved through struggle. It is not inherent" (163).

subject to your will and control” (*He, She and It* 433). As Tresa L. Grauer notes, “women provide a counterperspective to the ‘original’ narrative—in this case, one that accords free will and full personhood to the created being” (56) whether they are children, cyborgs, or Galateas, when individuals recognize their power over the beings they have created and behave ethically toward their children and/or other created beings. By parodying the creation of an ideal woman and fundamentalism’s symbolic “good” Woman, Piercy undermines kyriarchal Western culture and the expectations of the privileged elite that subordinated Others’ purpose is merely to provide services and pleasure to those wield power within the kyriarchal system. Piercy’s model critiques existing paradigms in literature and Western culture in order to argue for the humanity and equality of everyone and an end to the abuse of the Other by the more powerful, especially as perpetuated through fundamentalist tenets.

Critiquing Fundamentalism

The fundamentalism presented and critiqued in *He, She and It* does not so easily fit the critical patterns established by *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *The Terrorists of Irustan*, and, as we will explore in Chapter 5, *Raising the Stones*. In addition to engaging in what Anca Vlasopolos calls an “unrelenting critique” of capitalism (60), *He, She and It* appears to critique and respond to fundamentalism outside the text: Orthodox Judaism. Yet, in many ways, Piercy draws parallels between how the multis act like fundamentalist religions in the multis’ suppression of difference and cultural demands for certain conventions in dress and behavior. The multis display some of the same characteristics of fundamentalism such as anti-feminism and anti-democracy, as well as exhibit ideologies of gender and extreme boundary-policing (literal and figurative). Where the multis depart from some of the characteristics of fundamentalist faiths lies in the multis’ lack of a sense of nostalgia for an idealized, non-existent past as well as a sense of anti-modernity—quite

the opposite. The multis are, after all, ruthless in their pursuit of technological advances for their own benefit and profit. Their attitudes toward human beings, however, are decidedly anti-modern and resemble an advocacy of indentured servitude.

More significantly, Piercy engages in a critique of Orthodox Judaism. Her portrayal of Jewish life and custom in *Tikva* has a distinct Reconstructionist flavor that challenges the regressive, fundamentalist aspects of Orthodox Judaism. The very nature of the text and the questions it poses in and of itself, however, challenge fundamentalist anti-modernity. In “Cyborg Hierarchies: Ecological Philosophy and Cyberculture in Marge Piercy’s *Body of Glass*,” J. Glover contends that, “[i]n the future Piercy imagines, the boundary between natural and artificial, between human and machine, has become so blurred that it is very difficult to say that a cyborg is not a person any more than it is possible to say that humans are still part of nature” (144). At the very least, this blurring of what is natural and what is not transgresses a few boundaries that violate fundamentalists’ skewed sense of creation, based on Intelligent Design or creation stories based on literal interpretations of sacred texts rather than theories of evolution and other scientifically derived evidence, and the impetus to control women in order to control reproduction and the socialization of future generations.

Writing from within the Reconstructionist Jewish tradition, Piercy engages in a meta-conversation with Orthodox Judaism through Yod’s identity as a Jew. Piercy mentions Orthodox Judaism directly only two times in *He, She and It*, once in an argument and once in passing.¹⁵⁴ First, to establish the fundamentalist nature of Orthodox Judaism, I turn to a portrayal by Nora L. Rubel from *Doubting the Devout: The Ultra-Orthodox in the Jewish American Imagination*:

¹⁵⁴ The “in passing” reference: “[Malkah’s] part was to read the poem by Mara Schliemann that everybody but the Orthodox use these days, about the heritage we share now of having had a nation in our name as stupid and violent as other nations: a lament for a lost chance, a botched redemption, a great repair of the world, tikkun olam, gone amiss” (393).

even though the haredim¹⁵⁵ profess an unbroken lineage from Sinai, historians of Orthodoxy have pointed out that even ultra-Orthodoxy in its current incarnation is a modern movement, dating back no further than the turn of the twentieth century. Like Modern Orthodoxy, it, too, is a reactionary movement, responding to the increasing liberalization of Judaism. The historian Haym Soloveitchik describes parallels between the emergence of Protestant fundamentalists and ultra-Orthodox Jews: “Both ultra-Orthodoxy and fundamentalism are responses to the challenges posed by modernity to traditional religion, and therefore both are most likely to exist ‘where tradition is meeting modernity rather than where modernity is more remote.’ Both also engage in a struggle with their own coreligionists who are perceived as ‘agents of assault on all that is held dear.’” (12)

Rubel’s description lays bare the anti-modern stance of Orthodox Judaism and fundamentalist nostalgia for a by-gone golden age that never really existed. Orthodox Judaism also engages ideologies of gender such as a daily prayer for men thanking God that they were not born as women, the segregation of women and men and the silencing of women’s voices inside the synagogue, and the exclusion of women from many, if not all, positions of religious leadership to include performance of rituals such as reading from the Torah.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, Orthodox Judaism imposes dress and behavior codes on both men and women, but the codes for women aim to prevent women from sexually tempting men into losing their self-control and are used to

¹⁵⁵ Haredim find the term “ultra-Orthodox” offensive. Their concept of themselves is as “authentic” Jews while people who follow more liberal denominations of Judaism, like Reconstructionism, are “inauthentic” Jews.

¹⁵⁶ Reading from the Torah is called *aliyah*, to ascend. Presumably women cannot “ascend” in position over men. Additionally women reading aloud may distract men from focusing on the words being read; this is a violation of *kavod hatzibur*, or public dignity or modesty (Shapiro 7). Most Orthodox congregations ban women from reading the weekly Torah portion in front of the congregation, a central element in Jewish Shabbat services, because of these concerns. Some Orthodox congregations allow women’s prayer groups to read the Torah in their women-only services.

enforce certain standards of “modesty.” Expectations vary from one community to another; for example, some Orthodox women cover their hair; other women shave their heads and wear wigs. Either way, men must not see Orthodox Jewish women’s hair; otherwise, women’s “crowning glory” might spark men’s sexual desire. The problem of men’s apparent lack of self-control in the face of desire presents an interesting dilemma, especially since men have historically projected their own shortcomings and fears onto women and categorized women as sultry temptresses and whores. In “Theorizing (Hetero)Sexuality and (Fe)Male Dominance,” Joan Haran argues an alternative view: “[i]t seems more probable that men really fear not that they will have women’s sexual appetites forced on them or that women want to smother and devour them, but that women could be indifferent to them altogether, that men could be allowed sexual and emotional—therefore economic—access to women—*only* on women’s terms otherwise being left on the periphery of the matrix” (90, emphasis in original). For fundamentalist religious faiths, including Orthodox Judaism, the policing of women’s bodies through dress and behavior and the restriction of women’s roles to wife and mother serve to keep women economically dependent on men as well as responsible for managing men’s sexual desire. Whether the root of kyriarchal oppression of women is based on men’s fear of women’s sexuality or men’s fear of women’s indifference may not be resolvable, but the unwillingness of fundamentalist denominations to accept women’s full equality and their continual reinforcement of such oppression based on tradition or “divine” law serves to perpetuate systems of power that disadvantage all but the elite, heterosexual, usually white men at the top of the kyriarchal system.

Unlike most fundamentalist sects, Orthodox Judaism, as practiced in the United States, does not seek converts nor impose its practices on non-Jews; in this respect, Orthodox Judaism cannot be categorized as anti-democratic. The prevailing view is that the rules of Orthodox

Judaism apply to the Orthodox community, and in some cases extend to non-Orthodox Jews; the strictures and beliefs of Orthodox Judaism are not meant to be forced on Christians, persons of other religious persuasions, or atheists. Haredim, however, live in very insular communities and have attempted to impose their views on other Jews who do not practice Judaism in its strictest incarnation. Thus far, Haredim attempts to police the behavior of non-Haredim have included forced gender segregation, street harassment, and assault of women in public spaces.

Yod's existence as a cyborg, however, like his ancestor of legend, the Golem of Prague, creates a difficulty for Orthodox Judaism in that Yod is sub- or non-human. For example, in Jewish law, fetuses are considered sub-human until birth and therapeutic abortion to preserve the life of the mother takes precedence over protection of the fetus.¹⁵⁷ Kremer argues that Yod's status as a Jew brings up the debate among Orthodox Judaism and more liberal denominations regarding heritage and conversion: for Orthodox Jews, to be considered Jewish one must be born of a Jewish mother¹⁵⁸ or undergo Orthodox conversion.¹⁵⁹ The Reconstructionist and Reform branches of Judaism accept anyone as Jewish whose mother or father was Jewish or who undergoes the conversion process within any Jewish denomination. Kremer writes,

While Yod regards himself as Jewish by virtue of Avram's "paternity" and by his own choice, Avram rejects the cyborg's claim because Yod is of a nonhuman

¹⁵⁷ Unlike Christian theological arguments, at what point the fetus has a soul—conception, quickening, or birth—is considered irrelevant to abortion in Jewish theology and commentary. There is commentary surrounding protection of the fetus; for example, causing a pregnant woman to miscarry is grounds for limited retribution or remuneration but not considered murder because the fetus is treated as an appendage of the mother based on Exodus 21:22-23 (Eisenberg).

¹⁵⁸ Conservative and Orthodox denominations only recognize matrilineal inheritance of Jewish identity or conversion. Determination of matrilineal descent is based on Deuteronomy 7:1-5 and Leviticus 24:10 in the Torah, and Ezra 10:2-3 in the Ketuvim.

¹⁵⁹ The Orthodox rabbinate does not recognize the validity of conversions to Judaism from other branches, nor when any of the *beit din* members are women. A *beit din* is a rabbinical court convened to test the convert on Jewish knowledge and conviction. The *beit din* and a *mikveh*, or purifying bath, are the final steps in the Jewish conversion process, common to all branches of Judaism.

species. . . . The narrator's sympathetic response to Yod's desire for citizenship within the Jewish community is related to her feminist inclusive goals recognizing that the meaning of Jewish identity has religious and social components, an understanding of Jewish history, commitment to Jewish community, and a significant aspect of personal choice and self-definition. (174)

Yod's status as nonhuman facilitates his rejection as a Jew by Orthodox Judaism and means his exclusion from fully participating in Jewish life in an Orthodox congregation. In Malkah's retelling of the Golem of Prague legend, Joseph is similarly excluded from Orthodox religious rituals based on his nonhuman status.

Furthermore, Piercy's positioning of Yod as Other resembles the status of women in Orthodox Judaism: women are excluded from fully participating in Jewish life because women are not counted as part of the required *minyan*¹⁶⁰ for communal prayer; cannot make *aliyah* to read the Torah; cannot lead religious services in the synagogue; and cannot become religious leaders.¹⁶¹ Cynthia Ozick once stated that "[t]he only place I am not a Jew is in my synagogue" (qtd in Joseph 48). Her statement succinctly captures the status of Orthodox Jewish women and casts into stark relief Orthodox Judaism's refusal to accept women as men's equals in religious settings in the name of "tradition." Avram and Shira echo this debate, in the course of the narrative, over Yod's status as a Jew with Avram appealing to the position of Orthodox Judaism and Shira relying on the egalitarianism of the more progressive Jewish branches. Avram argues, "How can a machine make a minyan? Malkah can tell you that in sixteenth century Poland, it

¹⁶⁰ A *minyan*, alternatively spelled *minyon*, is the ten Jewish adults required for communal prayer.

¹⁶¹ To date, one woman has been ordained as an Orthodox rabbi, but her title is rabba or maharat (an acronym for legal and religious leader and Talmudic scholar), and she is not recognized by all Orthodox congregations as a rabbi (Pogrebin). Some Orthodox congregations have modified the other strictures on women's participation in Jewish traditions and rituals, but the denomination as a whole has not made many changes toward establishing egalitarian policies toward men and women.

was ruled that a golem cannot be counted in a minyon.” Shira echoes Ozick’s lament when she tells Avram, “For centuries, *I* wouldn’t have been included [in a *minyan*]. The Orthodox still don’t count half the Jews as Jews. You made him a Jew as my foremothers made me. But he chooses to practice it as I do. Don’t you think Yod is sincere?” (Piercy, *He, She and It* 276, emphasis in original). Ironically, for many Orthodox rabbis, the only reason needed for conversion is the personal conviction of the convert. If Yod were recognized as human by an Orthodox rabbi, he would be eligible for conversion. In the Reconstructionist and Reform traditions, Yod’s Jewish “father” and his socialization as a Jew, like the socialization of children from interfaith marriages, is enough proof of his Jewishness. Avram’s casting of Yod into the same position as women under Orthodox Judaism excludes Yod from full religious experience and acceptance by his community. In effect, Avram polices the Other-within through denying Yod’s Jewish identity.

Fundamentalist faiths are not the only organizations implicated in limitations on women’s rights and misogynist aspects of culture. The parallel Piercy draws between the multis and fundamentalism shows how the fundamentalist attitudes that underlie Western thought and culture also permeate non-religious institutions. In creating the multis as ostensibly the organizing structure of the future, Piercy invokes what Brayman identifies as a cyberpunk trope, though one that is also used in some mainstream science fiction depictions of the future. *He, She and It* presents a future in which twenty-three affluent multi-national conglomerates have divided the world and control large areas of land under domes, excluding vast areas of environmental decay with no ozone layer protection from the sun, and populated by teeming masses with no arable farmland. Furthermore, because of the environmental devastation, the fertility of human beings has drastically declined to the point that most heterosexual couples cannot conceive

without technological and medical assistance—primarily available only to those in the multis' enclaves. Of course, the free towns and the teeming masses of the Glop belie the multis' image as having control over most of the world and its population.

However, for the people who live in the enclaves, the “rule of the corporation” is paramount, as demonstrated by the multi Y-S's adjudication of custody of Shira and her ex-husband Josh's son, Ari. Shira thinks “[s]he should not be as frightened as she was. She was a techie like Josh, not a day laborer; she had rights” (2), yet Shira's rights do not come under equal consideration when Y-S determines the case in favor of Josh because of his presumed higher value through his higher pay grade and work rating. Brayman points out that “the late 1980s and early 1990s [was] an era in which the federal government of the United States was retreating into a laissez-faire approach to social justice and welfare policies. The natural result of these policies for cyberpunk was the development of corporate-controlled enclaves that represent end-stage privatization” (31). Even if a civil justice system outside of the multis existed, it seems unlikely that Shira could have appealed to it in order to obtain a fair hearing for the custody of her son since the United Nations had devolved into ineffective “eco-police” and elections were more like “sporting events” than any form of effective government (33).

With no outside entities to restrict the multis' activities and policies for their employees, the multis are free to impose whatever system of governance and culture that they choose. As a result, Y-S, the only multi described in any detail, is completely kyriarchal in nature. Although to some extent Y-S seems to be a meritocracy, or at least purports to reward excellence in a merit-based system, its class structure is firmly hierarchical and gives automatic advantages to children born to higher ranked individuals through money, education, and perhaps, as Shira suspects, through conditioning of infants to assimilate them into corporate culture (192). One

example of the consequences of such a rigid class structure is the unknown fate of Shira's assistant, Rosario. When Rosario's marriage contract of ten years comes to a close and is not renewed by her higher-ranking, executive husband who wishes to find a younger wife for his next contract, she is fired from her position and forced out of her (husband's) home. Rosario must go back to the Glop and obtain a job as a day-laborer to survive (6). While Shira acknowledges that female executives are entitled to the same privileges in forming temporary marriage contracts and finding younger and younger husbands, the ageism of the system seems unfairly exercised toward women over the age of forty. If male executives, who set such policies, dominate Y-S then women's voices are less likely to be heard and their concerns considered valid when determining corporate policy and culture. Furthermore, if the few women executives do have the same privileges as the male execs—Piercy uses the phrase “supposed to” (6) which leaves room for doubt—then the women execs are just as implicated in the kyriarchal system and their use of it for their own advantage.

In addition to the disadvantages that a rigid class structure imposes on Y-S employees, from more modest housing to no chance of winning any sort of hearing against a higher-ranking employee, and the ancillary ageism shown toward the lower ranks, perhaps some of the more disturbing aspects of Y-S culture and its harmful effects are demonstrated in the dress and behavior codes that the multi demands its employees follow that are as nonsensical as fundamentalist standards of modesty. Y-S dress codes are a strange combination of exhibitionism and modesty: standards include backless suits in order to show off the muscle tone and fitness of one's physique and the display of one's breasts at formal dinners; however, women must cover the napes of their necks, their ears, and their legs to mid-calf.¹⁶² It does seem that the

¹⁶² Although Y-S's ideal has some Japanese traits, covering the nape and ears and the legs to mid-calf is in contradiction with the traditional Japanese erotic aesthetic that emphasizes women in kimono exposing the nape of

provisions for women's dress are not only more numerous, but less logically consistent as well. Furthermore, if one can afford it, Y-S encourages cosmetic surgery in order to attain the multi's ideal facial features, even though the ideal does not match any (natural) living person and implies that everyone would need surgical enhancement to meet it: "blond hair, blue eyes with epicanthic folds, painted brows like Hokusai brush strokes, aquiline nose, dark golden complexion" (1-2).¹⁶³ Eyebrows do not grow naturally above the supraorbital ridge on, and while there may be exceptions, nor do blonde hair and blue eyes commonly occur alongside epicanthic folds. While this ideal may not be possible to meet without cosmetic surgery and continual maintenance of hair and skin color, its attainment is a further class distinction because of the time, effort, and money involved to achieve it. Like Y-S, fundamentalist religious groups tend to demand higher standards of modesty, in behavior and dress, from women than from men. As discussed above, the suppression of women's bodily autonomy through such policing attempts to turn real women into Woman-as-symbol, and this mindset absolves men of violent behavior when material women cannot maintain the façade of the symbol. Y-S's ideal of dress and physical appearance is an attempt to move all employees into the realm of the symbolic who can then be punished for deviating from the corporate ideal.

Additionally, the higher classes lavish their greater disposable income on enhancements for children: "[Shira] could tell they were children of management rather than of techies, because they had already been worked on surgically to resemble the Y-S ideal face and body" (13). In

the neck, in some eras most of the back, and covering their legs to the floor in order to hide "daikon legs." Daikon is a cylindrical-shaped radish; the slang usage of "daikon legs" indicates a calf that does not taper in toward the ankle. This trait may have influenced the length of kimono in Japanese culture; however, younger generations of Japanese women seem less and less likely to have this genetic trait.

¹⁶³ Some Japanese consider noses with a visible bridge more aesthetically pleasing than noses that have a flat bridge; some consider eyes that lack epicanthic folds and light skin tones aesthetically pleasing as well. Y-S's ideal is a mishmash of Western and Japanese standards of beauty.

“Active in Time and History,” Piercy writes that “the corporations are all-powerful Molochs; we cannot oppose what they do; we shall inevitably perish of nuclear war, so why bother?” (106).

Moloch was a Canaanite god who demanded child sacrifice¹⁶⁴ and was particularly detested by the ancient Hebrews, who highly valued their children. In *He, She and It*, Moloch represents the multis that demand great sacrifices from their employees in order for them to enjoy the protection of the enclave, rather than be subjected to famine, lack of resources, and the gang violence of the Glop. While the suggestion that Y-S corporate culture is so pervasive and totalitarian as to lead to the physical mutilation of children may be sickening in mainstream American culture, it is doubly so to a Jew like Shira. The ways in which fundamentalist religions demand conformity from their members and those members’ children differs from the multis primarily in a perceived lack of choice.

Y-S marginalizes Shira through their policing of dress and behavior. They use her Jewish identity against her by purposely withholding promotions for which she qualifies and her innovative performance of her job merits (281). Such policing of Shira’s inability to fit into Y-S culture and her refusal to alter her physical appearance to meet the Y-S-approved ideal results in economic and social disadvantages as well as the emotional cost of losing custody of Ari, not to mention the emotional and economic costs of divorce. Shira categorizes Y-S corporate culture as having “fierce injunctions” over behavior (100) that she is neither equipped nor inclined to meet: “She had been lonely, unused to the strict and protocol-hedged hierarchy of Y-S . . . and constantly in minor trouble. Often she wondered if her troubles were caused by the particular corporate culture of Y-S, or if it would be the same in any multi enclave” (3). Like the Jews who faked conversion to Catholicism to escape persecution during the Inquisition, Shira is a marrano

¹⁶⁴ Gehenna, the site at which children were sacrificed to Moloch, became a metonym for the Jewish concept of “hell.”

in Y-S culture in that she attempts to hide or downplay her Jewish identity in order to avoid social opprobrium (2). Yet, despite her efforts, Shira's unwillingness to compromise her core identity leads to her feelings of isolation and inability to fit in: "She always felt too physical here, too loud, too female, too Jewish, too dark, too exuberant, too emotional" (5). If Shira had been an Orthodox Jewish woman, she could not have initiated the action with a rabbinical court in order to obtain a *gett*,¹⁶⁵ or divorce, from Josh, and would be legally tied to him but effectively abandoned physically and financially, and prevented from seeing her child or marrying someone else. Although Y-S polices boundaries through economic sanctions and the emotional toll of social disapproval and ostracism, the dependence of Y-S employees on the corporate adjudication system that extends privilege on the basis of financial class resembles the dependence of women in religious traditions who have no recourse but to rely on religious court systems that extend privilege to men on the basis of biological happenstance. Both Y-S's court system and religious courts under Orthodox Judaism preserve and concentrate power in the hands of those who already wield the bulk of it in the kyriarchal system.

Shira identifies the cultural taboos concerning dress and behavior as resulting from "rigid sex roles—not at work, of course, for no one could afford such nonsense, but in every other sector of living" (100). In other words, the multis can and do freely exploit women's labor in the marketplace, but in the private and social spheres, kyriocentric treatment of women has not appreciably changed. For example, on the surface, the multi enclaves seem sexually liberated: "In the zone of expensive shops, every window promised sex, every message crooned desire"; however, due to the temporary nature of marriage contracts "sex was a regimented commodity in the enclave. Which persons you might make love to was defined by your place in the hierarchy

¹⁶⁵ To avoid confusion with the English verb, I use the alternative spelling of "*gett*" instead of the more traditional transliteration of "*get*."

as the people to whom you bowed and the people who bowed to you. Sexual privileges depended upon your place and rank” (329). Given that Y-S seems to routinely place male employees in higher positions than female employees and to encourage pairings of unequal rank in order to cast off lower-class employees as they grow older, gender and class form interlocking axes of oppression in Y-S culture and unequally foster dependency of women upon men, despite women working for wages which would, under more egalitarian circumstances, generate a degree of economic independence. For Shira personally, Y-S ignores her stated preference that Ari use Shira’s last name and insists on identifying him patronymically by Josh’s surname (4). Additionally, Josh avails himself of the patriarchal dividend in their home, expecting Shira to respond to his needs like a servant with no reciprocal obligation to serve her needs or to ascertain what her needs might be (322-23). It is worth noting that Gadi, coming from a different corporate culture, also regards women paternalistically: “I’ve never managed to be without women since [the death of his mother]. Women are necessary. Necessary” (355). Gadi’s statement, following a discussion about indulging children, demonstrates that his need for women seems to be a desire for women as servants and caregivers, not as partners. Women are necessary to fill Gadi’s needs regardless of how his needs might conflict with their own. While the multis wholly commodify their employees’ labor, the multis further objectify women and treat them as property in all aspects of their lives through the behaviors that the multis’ corporate culture encourages and imposes.

Like Atwood’s portrayal of theocracy in *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Y-S places a religious veneer, in this case “born-again Shintoism,” over engines of power. Y-S “followed a form of revivalist Shinto, Shinto grafted with Christian practices such as baptism and confession. . . . All

multis had their official religion as part of the corporate culture, and all gruds¹⁶⁶ had to go through the motions” (2). The insistence upon religious adherence results in non-believers, like Shira, paying lip service to the official religion and practicing their own faith in secret or not at all and also results in the existence of religious trappings that are void of belief or faith. While Y-S does not justify its policies as based on religion or divine law, its insistence on unquestioning obedience resembles fundamenatlism in nature: in effect, Y-S forces its employees to pretend to engage in a religious faith in which they may not believe through social and professional pressures. In this respect, as William S. Haney contends in “Cyborg Revelation,” the multis “program their human employees like machines” (165). It is intriguing to note that some fundamentalist organizations, especially ones that are also characterized as cults, also “program” their adherents to believe what religious leaders dictate as the “truth,” to abandon critical thinking skills that could lead to challenging such “truths,” and to accept male religious leaders’ privileged interpretations of sacred texts. The parallels Piercy draws between multis and fundamentalist sects makes evident some of the similar techniques of coercion that both types of institutions utilize to reinforce kyriarchal positioning and privilege based on identifiers such as gender, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic class, and appearance.

Fundamentalism, when perpetrated through the auspices of religion, exhibits certain traits, especially ideologies of gender that restrict or erase women’s autonomy and agency. One can draw similar parallels to multi-national conglomerates and their kyriarchal oppression of their employees that demonstrates the pervasiveness of such ideologies in Western thought and culture. In fundamentalist faiths or outside of them, one of the primary means employed throughout history to keep women in circumscribed roles is the withholding of knowledge, and specifically literacy, so that the men in power can maintain control without others as educated

¹⁶⁶ Multi slang for “executives.”

and knowledgeable as themselves being able to challenge their edicts, policies, and position at the top of the kyriarchal pyramid.

Technology, Knowledge, and Power

Knowledge, inside and outside of religious institutions, has long been associated with power. In religious institutions, literacy, particularly in a non-vernacular language like Hebrew for Jewish rabbis, Latin for Catholic priests, or Arabic for Muslim imams and ayatollahs,¹⁶⁷ can create special groups with access to knowledge that the remainder of a community, and nearly always women who were traditionally less likely to be literate, cannot read and interpret for themselves. In the future world of *He, She and It*, land may be divided between multis' enclaves, free towns, and the Glop zones of teeming masses, but the Net is supposed to be a safe space where everyone has access to the compiled and preserved knowledge of humankind:

The Net was a public utility to which communities, multis, towns, even individuals subscribed. It contained the mutual information of the world, living languages and many dead ones. It indexed available libraries and offered either the complete text or précis of books and articles. It was the standard way people communicated, accepting visuals, code or voice. It was also a playing field, a maze of games and nodes of special interest, a great clubhouse with thousands of rooms. . . . (55-56)

The environs of the Net, for those who have access to it, are presumed to be inviolable. Yet this access may well be out of reach for denizens of the Glop who lack the financial means to pay for entry. Furthermore, it is through the Net that the multis occasionally launch assassination or other attacks or engage in espionage in order to steal technological advances from other multis or

¹⁶⁷ Some Protestant seminaries also require divinity students to learn reading knowledge of Hebrew and Greek so that they can study the Christian Bible in its original languages. However, in most Protestant faiths, literacy in these languages, or even a seminary degree, is not a requirement for ordination as a pastor.

the free towns for their own use, belying the supposed security of the Net. Perhaps, in this respect, knowledge, or at least access to it, can be considered dangerous.

Tikva occupies a middle space similar to the insecure status of religiously segregated Jews in Europe and the Middle East during ancient and medieval times: the community's existence, like Jewish ghettos, is contingent upon providing something of value to powerful people in the outside community. While each multi and free town has its own Base, or closed mini-net, through which inhabitants access the world-wide Net, in Tikva, all children are implanted with a device that allows them to interface with the town's Base and, from there, to access the rest of the Net, subsequently making them "heir to all the knowledge of the ages" (55). Furthermore, the free towns, populated by those with special skills, tend to have a vested interest in preserving their autonomy from the multis, as well as guaranteeing the ability of their children to access the Net: "Most people who lived in free towns like the one she had grown up in could have sold themselves to a multi directly, instead of contracting for specific jobs, but elected to stay outside the enclaves because of some personal choice: a minority religion, a sexual preference not condoned by a particular multi, perhaps simply an archaic desire for freedom" (31). Tikva is uniquely positioned as a free town because it sells to the multis something that no other town produces and the multis find too onerous to produce from themselves: chimeras, or fake programs, used to protect a Base from infiltrations by other users in the Net. Additionally, the free towns "needed to [sell] to several rival multis, as Tikva did, to maintain that fragile independence, so that one multi would not let another commandeer it" (143). Only by playing the multis off against each other could free towns such as Tikva create environments where the inhabitants were not ruled by corporate culture or, as shown by the provocative language Piercy uses throughout the text, enslaved to a multi. However, living in

either a multi, with the risk of termination of contracts, or a free town, with the risk of multi encroachment, seems exceedingly insecure.

In light of fundamentalist faiths' eschewing of modernity, their co-optation of technology may well have a more sinister purpose: keeping knowledge and certain types of technology from women makes women dependent upon male relatives. Men cannot get rid of women entirely, since they are needed for reproduction of the next generation, but with selective uses of technology and even partial control of the conception and birth processes, they can control women. Rather than only a liberatory tool, Piercy explores how technology, and the knowledge that makes new developments possible, can be used to enslave human beings. Despite laws preventing the assembling of human-like robots, Avram¹⁶⁸ works in secret for years to build a viable cyborg that can "pass" as human but can also enter the Net to defend Tikva's Base from cyber attacks. The Maharal of Prague used Kabbalistic language and dirt to create a defender for the ghetto; Avram uses computer programs and hardware to create his defender for Tikva. Malkah points out that computer programming turns language into numbers (binary code) in the same way that Kabbalah uses numerical values for Hebrew letters (*gematria*) to derive additional meaning and nuance (258). Avram's methods are more sophisticated, but the creation of a cyborg to defend Jews who are threatened by forces outside their control closely parallels the golem legend. Furthermore, Deery argues that the hubristic motivation of men to create life in the absence of women is neither new nor surprising: "Avram's project is clearly the latest version of an old male desire to procreate independently of women. For millennia and across numerous cultures, men have sought to minimize women's reproductive role through both intellectual and technological means. In scientific accounts, male authors depict women as mere vessels or receptacles. Technology now enables men to gain increasing control over the actual

¹⁶⁸ Avram means "high father." Avram invokes Abraham, the father of the Jewish people.

birth process” (97). The Maharal’s creation of a golem reflects Avram’s hubris with one significant exception: the Maharal at least realizes that his actions in creating a golem, while buttressed by good intentions, still have negative consequences. At the end of the narrative, when Yod programs Avram’s lab to explode and kill Avram and when Shira destroys the memory crystal containing Yod’s programming and thus negates any possibility of Yod being recreated, one could argue that the text makes clear that such procreative hubris is ultimately punished. That argument, however, does not account for the cloning practiced by the women of Safed who reproduce themselves in the absence of men. Rather, Piercy’s message has less to do with punishing men trying to reproduce without women than making a case against creating beings, like Yod, who are automatically in thrall to others. *He, She and It* condemns the enslavement of sentient beings to bolster an argument that the use of knowledge without ethical accompaniment is a dangerous activity.

Most fundamentalist religious faiths would concur that cloning human beings also exercises a kind of hubris that seeks to alter the “natural” process of reproduction which Piercy turns on its head through the dual-religious community of Safed. The all-women, Israeli-Palestinian community of Safed¹⁶⁹ in the Black Zone has preserved and expanded upon its own knowledge sources after the area was devastated in the Two-Week War. Their technological advances in cloning and modifying human beings, both genetically as embryos and physically once they are born, seem much more advanced than the cyborgian enhancements already available to inhabitants of free towns and the multis. However, Safed is not a part of the Net and is therefore limited in sharing knowledge as well as in accessing knowledge available universally

¹⁶⁹ Safed is an actual city—a city that Piercy “clones” through her fiction—and has the highest elevation of any city in present-day Israel. Safed remains one of the four Holy Cities in Israel (the other three are: Jerusalem, Hebron, and Tiberias). With the fictional Safed’s cloning of women, i.e., another kind of golem, Piercy may be ironically playing on Safed’s sixteenth-century status as the center of Kabbalah.

to others who are “plugged in.” The Safed community, secure in its own amalgamation of culture and scientific knowledge, is drawing closer to rejoining the world community through entering the Net and through establishing direct contact with other groups.

Ironically, Safed combines the heritage of Israelis with Palestinians, whose homeland was destroyed by the 1948 founding of the theocratic Israeli state¹⁷⁰—a state which has, in the text, been destroyed in turn. As a result, the women of Safed have preserved two distinct religious traditions, Islam and Judaism, an act which demonstrates the potential for differing religious groups to live together harmoniously. Haran views “[t]he feminist scientists of Safed . . . as standpoint epistemologists who have learned some of the lessons offered by postmodernism. Their tolerance, indeed celebration, of each other’s differences offers the possibility of the formulation of different kinds of scientific questions. Their desire to learn from others outside Safed supports this reading” (“[Re]Productive Fictions” 166). To facilitate this contact with outsiders, Safed sends Nili, which means “success” in Hebrew, as their emissary. In “Marge Piercy’s Jewish Feminism: A Paradigm Shift,” Rosie Rosenzweig identifies Nili’s name as “a reference to Ne’ilah, the final prayer of Yom Kippur, that final plea to open the gates and let us in for another year of life” (86). Additionally, Neverow argues that “Nili’s name is similarly powerful since . . . it is an acronym of a Hebrew phrase, ‘Netzrah Israel Lo Y’shaker.’ The phrase, meaning ‘the glory of Israel will not fail’ (I Samuel 15:29), is also the name of a ‘Jewish underground intelligence group organized during World War I . . . to help the British forces conquer Palestine from the Turks’” (23). Nili’s name indicates that not only will she be successful in her information-seeking mission for Safed, but that Safed itself, in line with the redemptive overtones of Nili’s name, will also be successful in its emergence from “underground.” Presumably, Safed has more to share with the free towns, Jewish like Tikva or

¹⁷⁰ Israel is a democracy in theory if not entirely in practice.

not, than with the multīs, as well as with the Glop zones, and must reserve some of its technological advances for itself in order to avoid being gobbled up by one or more of the multīs. Safed also presents a successfully integrated community in which two religious traditions co-exist without conflict and thus is a source of knowledge and lessons for other groups seeking harmony across religious faiths.

Because of their reliance on women for reproduction and limitation of women's roles to wife and mother, fundamentalist religions tend to make heterosexuality compulsory, which would foreclose the possibility of lesbian separatist enclaves like Safed. The text, however, offers alternatives to compulsory heterosexuality as envisioned by fundamentalists and their strict adherence to traditional gender roles. Although Haran refutes the idea of heterosexual romance as the underlying trope of the text, she does argue that perhaps Malkah and Shira would have achieved more in their work lives without the distraction of male-female relationships. Both women seem fairly successful in my view—heterosexual relationships notwithstanding: Malkah is one of the best programmers in Tikva and runs and maintains the Base; Shira, though held back by Y-S, comes into her own as a programmer when she returns to Tikva and assumes Malkah's position as a Base overseer for the community. More saliently, Haran contends that “[l]esbian separatism therefore offers a necessary space in which to experiment with social transformation and in which women can empower themselves without the personal and political distraction of compulsory heterosexuality, but it is unclear how these empowered women will be able to export their transformed social relations to communities still heavily invested in masculine domination” (94-95). The Safed women do offer an alternative model of community that embraces equality for women as well as religious equality; however, Piercy suggests that

eventually men, too, can integrate into Safed culture and demonstrate what a realized egalitarian community looks like, forming a model for gender-integrated communities.

While fundamentalist institutions may try to withhold information or reinterpret information in specific ways in order to enforce unquestioning obedience among their followers, Piercy applies the lack of access to knowledge to a much greater population: the Glop. Orthodox Judaism, that excludes women from the same depth and breadth of knowledge of the Torah that men wield effectively excludes half of its adherents from full-fledged membership. Without the information available through the Net, the Glop zones are disabled and isolated, not only from the rest of the world, but from each other. Neverow maintains that, “Piercy suggests that informed choice is the only effective weapon against coercion and control. Consequently, . . . the control of information is depicted as a means of coercive manipulation” (29). In a world, much like the reader’s contemporary milieu, where humans find most of their information through the internet and communicate with others via technological devices that aggregate a variety of means of contact, to be permanently blocked from information and the power that such knowledge accrues would be devastating. Furthermore, the multis use their superior technology and ability to access the Net as a means of segregating themselves from the Glop as well as keeping the denizens of the Glop in relative ignorance. Without information, the Glop cannot maneuver effectively against the multis; similarly, women without knowledge of the Torah, or Christian Bible, or Qur’an, cannot effectively examine their religious faith and engage in its interpretation. Riva considers herself an “information liberator” rather than a data pirate or thief, as Shira characterizes her (193). Rather than hoarding information like the multis, Riva governs her pirating activities with a set of ethics surrounding the availability of information, especially information that can be used to benefit everyone and not just the multis (194).

Additionally, Nili further connects knowledge and access to information not only to power and a means of curbing the influence of the multis but to Jewish (and Catholic) tradition: “The ability to access information is power. . . . The ability to read and write belonged to the Church except for heretics and Jews. We are people of the book. We have always considered getting knowledge part of being human. With the invention of the printing press, literacy spread. With mass literacy, any person no matter how poor could learn how the society operated, could share visions of how things might be different. Now few read” (194). With knowledge and access to information, Jews were able to preserve their religion and sometimes their very lives during thousands of years of diaspora and unwelcoming political and social conditions. Calvert argues that Tikva, populated by Jews, gangs from the Glop, and the women of Safed form a “reading resistance” to the multis that “links with . . . [the] written language and reading practice of Jews. The Hebrew language, a language without [written] vowels subject to inference and reinterpretation, is seen to have an effect upon the way people themselves are resistant to authority and are willing to formulate their own ideas about the world, rather than simply to be fed information” (58). In addition to the “reading resistance,” Calvert contends that the text underscores another form of resistance: unionizing, and that both “are connected to the ideas of knowledge, reading and power” (58). Access to information is not enough on its own; knowledge born of comprehension and ability to synthesize information into creative solutions is necessary for effective political action against and claiming power from the multis as well as reinterpreting a sacred text in Orthodox Judaism and other religious traditions.

Like religious groups, literacy and access to knowledge enable the formation of exclusive groups which have larger social implications. For religious groups, this knowledge tends to indicate a greater access to God; for the citizens of the Glop, this knowledge enables class

exclusions. In “‘Dare to Struggle, Dare to Win’: On Science Fiction, Totality and Agency in the 1990s,” Moylan notes the importance of the alliances forming between gangs of the Glop, Tikva, and Safed, with the help of information pirates like Riva: these alliances bring together a massed number of workers from the Glop, technological and weapons capabilities from the free towns, and, most importantly, the historical perspective that information from the Net can provide for the coming conflict with the multis. He concludes that “armed struggle, covert activities, collective organising and mass action, the maintenance of the liberated zones, as well as negotiation, combine in a complex strategy of alliance politics employing a mixture of mutually-supporting tactics . . . [that] is already a step beyond survival” (61-62). Without a concept of how workers can organize unions and leverage their own power against the multis in order to improve working conditions for day-laborers, the Glop gangs are vulnerable to continued exploitation by the multis. Once the Glop gangs can access historical information about union organizing and avail themselves of the technological advances of the free towns, especially those pertaining to the Net, they take a vital first step toward circumscribing the influence and power of the multis and establishing organizations that protect the interests of Glop workers.

Furthermore, those who do have access to the Net may not necessarily use it to expand their knowledge but mainly for entertainment purposes. Riva observes that “Most folks press the diodes of stimmys¹⁷¹ against their temples and experience some twit’s tears and orgasms, while the few plug in and access information on a scale never before available. The many know less and less and the few more and more” (194). In other words, even with access to the Net, knowledge is becoming concentrated in the hands of a very few while the multis encourage mindless consumerism, if the popularity of Gadi’s “stimmys” are any indication. In *Women, Science, and Fiction: The Frankenstein Inheritance*, Shaw argues that “the meaning of literacy

¹⁷¹ “Stimmies” are virtual-reality scenarios available to Net subscribers for entertainment purposes.

may have changed to incorporate the reading and writing practices which characterise techno-proficiency but that, politically, the stakes are the same” (176). The implication is that those persons organizing in the Glop will not only need entry to the Net but must also access available information and accrete what is useful. In the narrative of the future dystopia of the Glop, multis, and free towns, literacy and access to knowledge function as a class issue. Shira realizes that her own dismissiveness of the Glop has grown out of her exposure to corporate culture which treated the Glop “as an unimportant place where nothing consequential happened. Nothing that mattered to the real, the significant, people could originate there” (361). Nili’s respect for the people of the Glop and her valuing of their ideas helps Shira to comprehend and overcome her class snobbishness.

Concurrently in the novel, by engaging with literacy and access to knowledge, Malkah’s retelling of the golem legend draws a parallel to gender oppression in fundamentalist groups. The golem Joseph asks Chava, the Maharal’s granddaughter and secretary, to teach him to read, a request to which she assents. Chava understands her own unusually privileged position and, by extension, the importance of literacy: “She is moved by his desire. Most women were illiterate then, although less often among the Jews than among the Christians. Frequently, learned men taught their daughters. But Chava is aware that to be able to read and write sets her off from the great majority of women, who are blind to the words and the knowledge of books. A terrible blindness” (113). In the Orthodox Jewish tradition practiced in sixteenth-century Prague, women were not permitted to study the Torah, and Chava represents an unlikely exception springing from Malkah’s imagination. Daniel Boyarin maintains that the idea that women were excluded from Torah study due to female impurity is actually the reverse: women were first excluded from Torah study and the belief in women’s impurity then resulted from the original exclusion. He

states, “it is thus nonetheless certain that women have been made in historical Judaism to experience themselves as impure, dangerous and devalued through these exclusions. It is virtually impossible to overemphasize the intensity of affliction and humiliation that this systematic ritual expression of inferiority has caused for many Jewish women” (182). Although progressive branches of Judaism have dispensed with such exclusions of women from studying and reading the Torah publicly, Rachel Siegel’s observations in “‘I Don’t Know Enough:’ Jewish Women’s Learned Ignorance,” bears out the negative effects that historical exclusions from literacy and knowledge have had upon Jewish women, across all denominations, and is “central to understanding certain element[s] in the lives of Jewish women today” (1). Furthermore, many Orthodox congregations continue to exclude women from studying the Torah and/or the Talmud, although a few women have been able to achieve advanced religious education in the Orthodox tradition. The Haredim in particular continue to exclude women from Torah study—thus excluding women from the very heart¹⁷² of their own religious faith. As a result, the gendered implications of literacy and access to knowledge extend long after sixteenth-century Prague and into current fundamentalist Jewish practices. In her text, Piercy transforms an oppression based historically on gender into an oppression based upon class—a different incarnation of the Other. In the dominant worldview of the multis, economics take precedence and dictates exclusion from knowledge; in the worldview of Orthodox Judaism, gender performs the distinction and necessitates the exclusion. Piercy takes issue with both.

¹⁷² I use “heart” to describe the Torah on a metaphoric level in English. The *Binat-ha-lev*, a *midrash*, conveys a much stronger metaphoric connection in Hebrew: in the cyclical, continuous reading of the Torah, the ending *Yisrael* (the last letter *lamed*) blends into the beginning *Breishit* (the first letter *bet*). Blended together, *lamed* and *bet* form the word *lev* which means heart or inner being. For this reason, some Jews refer to the Torah as the heart of the Jewish people.

Control of Motherhood

Central to this narrative are Piercy's conceptions of motherhood, most of which would violate fundamentalist precepts and the control of women that the traditional family structure seems to necessitate. As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, many critics have analyzed the text's argument in light of humans becoming cyborgs in order to prevent a class of people—robots with sentience—from being developed as a slave class. This “thrust” of *He, She and It* toward humans that are augmented with machine parts and created artificially works on another level as well: the text defies the fundamentalist insistence on procreation the “old-fashioned” way between one man and one woman and the idea of family as strictly nuclear, headed by an adult male. Furthermore, it subverts the kyriarchal ideology of fatherhood and SNAF through undermining the need for fathers in the family more broadly. Through a plethora of different ways women engage in motherhood in the text, Piercy clearly argues for women to be able to choose how, if, and what type of mothers they become. She also asserts that the separation of sexual pleasure from fertility is necessary for women's equality—an argument against the fundamentalist notion that women should be chained to their fertility as a punishment/reward for sexual activity.

Fundamentalist institutions tend to insist upon SNAF as the ideal family, even when such a family archetype is not effective, or possible, for every family. The fathers in the novel, when identified at all, are Avram and Josh, though I would also add Yod as a stepfather to Ari. Yod, as a feminist ideal of fatherhood, presents the only positive father figure in the text. Avram is a traditional patriarch who will not acknowledge Yod as his child despite having created Yod and programmed him to be Tikva's defender in physical and cyberspace. Furthermore, Avram's

biological son, Gadi,¹⁷³ is a disappointment to him. Gadi is wildly successful in his chosen career field, creating “stimmies”; it would seem that Avram had expectations for Gadi to become a scientist like himself instead of pursuing a career in the arts. In a way, their situation seems to parallel the stereotype of the disappointed American father who wants his son to take over the family business, or the Jewish father who wants his son to become a doctor, while the rebellious son runs off to New York to work on Broadway or to be an artist. Gadi seems to have no inclination toward fatherhood himself, biological or otherwise. Josh, as Ari’s biological father, does not recognize that Ari would have a better life with Shira in Tikva than remaining with Josh in the Y-S enclave. Arguably, Ari would have a higher quality of life in Tikva not because of money but because of the richness of the community and its diversity. Josh’s unwillingness to relinquish custody of Ari is partly due to his own kyriarchal presumptions; these presumptions, however, are reinforced by Y-S’s corporate culture and Y-S’s using Josh as a pawn in their manipulation of Shira. Yod is sterile and incapable of fathering biological children as a result of the sex act. Although Yod and Shira attempt to form a family group for Ari, Yod sacrifices himself in order to defeat Y-S, protect Tikva, and enact his own revenge against Avram for his enslavement, thus truncating Yod’s role as a father figure. Shira was conceived through artificial insemination and never knew her father, though Riva later reveals his name;¹⁷⁴ Malkah had an affair with Riva’s father, a much older man than she, and never told him of his offspring. Taken altogether, however, the novel’s fathers end up dead and, other than Avram’s ultimate act of will over Yod, negligible.

¹⁷³ Gadi, a variant of Gad, means luck or fortune in Hebrew. Gad was one of the sons of Jacob that made up the twelve tribes of Israel.

¹⁷⁴ Shira’s father, the fictional Yosef Golinken, a renowned physicist, died in 2013; Shira was conceived in 2031 through a sperm bank. Nili’s grandfather is Yosef Golinken, making Shira Nili’s aunt and the half-sister of Nili’s mother. Whether Nili’s mother was cloned or resulted from artificial or natural insemination is unclear. Nili is described as having “no father” because she is a clone of her mother (191).

Mothers, however, dominate *He, She and It* with their diversity and significance and form a continuous protest against women being forced into the traditional wife and mother role that fundamentalist complementarianism dictates. Piercy's examples of motherhood range from absentee to communal to traditional to other-mothering. While examining the varieties of motherhood is important in and of itself, the approaches to motherhood that the female characters take may be particularly noteworthy: the mothers in *He, She and It* come to motherhood on their own terms. In "Acts of Genesis: A Feminist Look at the Changing Face of the Mother in Selected Works of Science Fiction by Women," Donna L. Harris contends that "[i]n addition to depicting a range of societal options, Piercy also questions traditional notions of motherhood by divorcing procreation from 'mothering'—suggesting that the two *can* be mutually exclusive" (62). I would argue that Piercy does not merely "suggest" a divergence between biological procreation and parenting, but emphasizes such a divorce as well as valorizes the idea that women can become mothers, biological or not, by choosing the conditions under which they become parents (or not).

Some reviewers and critics¹⁷⁵ of *He, She and It* censure the novel for what they deem Piercy's apparent approval and re-inscription of traditional motherhood, citing Shira's conventionalism as their example, or the male-female "parenting" of Yod by Malkah (who is also Yod's lover) and Avram (a role which Avram rejects) and the creation of a cyborg/golem as a cautionary tale against male presumption of reproductive power. First, these ideas gloss over Malkah's conviction, and a major theme of the text, that creating a sentient being who is then enslaved to its makers is morally corrupt. Second, when taking into account the different types of motherhood depicted in the text as well as Piercy's choices in her own life to eschew

¹⁷⁵ See Gurman, Stockton, Miles, Deery's "Biopolitics" and "Ecotopic and Utopic Reproduction," Mohr's "We Are All Cyborgs," and Brayman. Haran's "Theorizing (Hetero)Sexuality and (Fe)Male Dominance," Booker, Badmington, and Neverow offer counters to this critique.

motherhood entirely, this view seems somewhat limited in its scope. In her memoir, *Sleeping with Cats*, Piercy relates that she never wanted children and underwent a tubal ligation as soon as she could convince a doctor to undertake the procedure; she would have done so much earlier in her life if afforded the opportunity to do so. She writes:

I never regretted taking charge of my body. I did not want children. I never felt I would be less of a woman, but I feared I would be less of a writer if I reproduced. I didn't feel anything special about my genetic composition warranted replicating it. . . . I could very well understand why other women wanted children, but it was not for me. I had the ability to put everything out of my mind except work, and I did not think that would lead to responsible and loving motherhood. I knew if I had a baby, I would feel trapped and resent my situation. (216)

In light of Piercy's personal feelings about motherhood, it is difficult to reconcile the critical view that Piercy necessarily valorizes Shira's natural motherhood. Rather, Piercy seems to use the positioning of Shira's character as somewhat of a traditionalist, and fairly conventional by contemporary standards though archaic by Y-S standards, to demonstrate how outmoded the concept of the nuclear family is. After all, Shira's "traditional" marriage is a dismal failure, and she then enters into a familial and sexual relationship with a machine. When critics confuse Shira's own conventional feelings about motherhood and the seemingly conventional way in which she pursued marriage and family with Josh for the argument the narrative makes, they do so through ignoring the other parenting scenarios that the novel presents and miss the actual point: all sorts of families are possible and plausible but the most important factor is that women decide to become mothers (or not) in the ways that best suit their circumstances, desires, and personalities. Piercy's novel does present seemingly traditional roles or choices for her

characters, but she more than supplements them with other alternatives that altogether subvert SNAF.

Symbiotically combined with the choices women make about motherhood and how they pursue it in the novel is the idea of the flexibility of what constitutes a family—a flexibility missing from Orthodox Judaism and other fundamentalist faiths. Neil Badmington offers that the nuclear concept of a male-headed family household is, instead, “thrown open to contingency” (94) by the novel. He points to Malkah’s household consisting of Malkah, Shira, Yod, Ari, and Nili,¹⁷⁶ as not only more fulfilling for each of its members, but also a direct challenge to traditional families primarily established through marriage and biological ties. Moreover, Badmington contends that the nuclear family established by Shira, Josh, and Ari “is represented, from the opening page, as a site of pain, trauma and oppression” (94) that serves mainly as a foil to later examples of more flexible familial models. The flexibility, here, is as salient as the contingent meaning of family: the family in Malkah’s household expands from Malkah alone to include Shira, Ari, and the others, then contracts again, leaving Shira as a single parent alone with Ari. At various moments in the text, individual needs of the family members as well as greater communal needs may take precedence over the family remaining static: Malkah’s trip to the Black Zone to improve her vision; Riva’s retreat into the Glop to foment revolution; Yod’s suicide mission to Y-S; Nili’s return to the Black Zone to report on her progress in establishing outside links—all of these needs supersede maintaining an unchanging familial environment.

¹⁷⁶ Badmington also includes Avram in this extended family; however, since Avram does not contribute materially to the household other than the creation of Yod and the occasional exertion of his will, and does not live in Malkah’s house, he seems to me less a part of the family and more a part of the “formidable defense” against Y-S (94). The two should not be confused nor convoluted. Badmington also includes Riva, but in this sense, Riva is a minor member of the extended family due to her absence and lack of contribution other than a biological one. She also is more accurately categorized as part of the defense of Tikva than as part of Shira and Malkah’s family formation.

Unlike the oppression of Shira's "family" with Josh, the fluidity of her family life in Malkah's household is a site of love and caring regardless of who is present at any given moment.

The narrative undercuts fundamentalist complementarian ideologies through its insistence that women do work beyond the domestic sphere for economic reasons but also for their own creative outlet and sense of making contributions to society beyond reproduction of the next generation. When Malkah and Shira are in single-parent situations, they have community support in the form of the community day care center and in the form of the house computer, which can act as a babysitter and safety mechanism when the only adult in the household needs to run down the street for a carton of milk. When Shira becomes a Base overseer for Tikva, she works at home but Ari does not remain with her during her working hours, demanding her attention and drawing her focus from her work: "it was customary in Tikva to send children to day care to learn to be with other children. The strong social character of the local upbringing began early. Children must be taught cooperation. They must learn to work and solve problems together" (380). For working parents, available daycare presents a more socializing environment for young children and realistically addresses the parents' need to pursue their work without the encumbrances of constantly caring for others. Given the complementarian ideologies of gender roles among fundamentalist religions, where women are expected to stay home and take care of the children and men are expected to work for a paycheck, working women, especially single mothers, present a conundrum: if a woman's place is in the home, she should be taking care of children but then must rely on outside support, like the government, for her livelihood.

On the surface, as Riva and some readers may see it, Shira follows the traditional and expected route of SNAF as valorized by fundamentalist faiths: "Pretty girl, got married, worked for a multi, had a baby. Conventional and timid choices" (194). However, I would argue that

Shira's choice of a "traditional" marriage and birth experience was in actuality one example of a woman choosing maternity through her own agency and bodily autonomy. The corporate expectation is for Shira to avail herself of any and all technologies available to her pay grade in order to conceive and to reduce the physical burden of pregnancy. Similar to her refusal of cosmetic alteration, Shira refuses any assistive technologies, conceives naturally, and carries Ari to term. Rather than expose Ari to manipulation and childhood brainwashing, she says: "I didn't want to give my child up to Y-S so early. I'm suspicious about the conditioning they use on preemies" (192). Shira's "primitive" choice seems the best in guaranteeing that her child's psyche will not be tampered with at the behest of Y-S's machinations, which are exposed over the course of the novel. Moreover, other than Malkah's pregnancy with Riva, Shira's pregnancy is the only other "natural" conception and birth process presented in the text—one that Shira chooses in resistance to cultural pressures and at the expense of her social standing. Viewed from this perspective, Piercy valorizes women choosing motherhood on their own terms and what best works for their values and circumstances, even if those terms may seem conventional to the reader.

In addition to Shira's resistance to the social pressures of a kyriarchal institution concerning pregnancy, Shira's character offers other sites of resistance to the religious fundamentalism implicit but not directly represented in the text. Shira changes in several ways over the course of the novel: she begins to think of Yod as a person and someone whom she is capable of loving rather than as a machine; she discovers her own sexual nature and learns to revel in it as something apart from procreative sex. Leaving aside whether fundamentalist faiths would characterize sex with a machine as an abomination, Shira's sexual awakening, in which she learns to enjoy sex for its own sake and to recognize that she can take the lead in bed,

separates sex from procreation entirely. Furthermore, this and the idea that all of the pubescent children in Tikva receive birth control implants so that they may pursue sexual relationships without the specter of pregnancy (42) are perhaps the greatest affronts to the fundamentalist mindset that would keep women shackled to their fertility and fearful of non-marital sex.

Along with being a lesbian, Riva¹⁷⁷ flies in the face of fundamentalist expectations of women and motherhood. Riva does produce a child in her early twenties, but seems to do so as a means of making amends to Malkah for their fraught mother-daughter relationship and acts almost as a surrogate would, with no presumed claim to the child. Malkah seems to appreciate having Shira to raise: Malkah has matured as a person and as a parent and forges a deep bond with her granddaughter. Riva, for her part, uses technology for conception and hints that she also used some sort of artificial womb: “I used every bit of technology. Couldn’t afford to hang around swollen up like a bilious elephant” (192). She leaves the “delivered” baby with Malkah and resumes her own activities with nary a pause nor evidence of regret. In another example of Piercy’s subversion of traditional notions of motherhood, Badmington points out that “Shira’s belief in a natural bond between mother and child is quite clearly contradicted by her relationship with Riva—her ‘biological’ mother—for what the novel actually shows is a *lack* of innate connection between the two characters” (94, emphasis in original). As much as Shira is intimately connected to her son, she is also intimately connected to her other-mother, Malkah, and feels distant from Riva despite their biological tie.

Malkah flies in the face of fundamentalist expectations of motherhood as well. Malkah is a working, single mother twice-over, refusing to marry or invite a long-term sexual partner into her home on a permanent basis: “No man had ever lived in this house. Malkah never married. If you married and a man hurt you, Shira realized, you had no place to run home to, no place to

¹⁷⁷ In Hebrew, Riva means “to bind.”

hide and nurse your pain” (54). Malkah values her independence and relishes her sex life well past her child-bearing years. It is not merely a fundamentalist taboo that Piercy aims to subvert by making Malkah into the most complex character in the narrative—the only character whose story is told through a first person viewpoint—who is sexually active outside of marriage, into her later years, and does not have an accurate count of the number of lovers she’s taken over the course of her life. Likewise, modern American society generally consigns older women to some sort of asexual, celibacy colony, as if women’s sexuality dessicates as they age rather than begins to unfold in new ways after menopause permanently dismantles the need to manage one’s fertility. Malkah labels these societal limitations to older women’s sexuality “human male prejudices” (353), which they can be; yet, Shira reacts badly to the discovery of Malkah’s sexual affair with Yod, no less than Avram does. This also drives home the point that women can be trapped by their conservative ideologies about womanhood and sexuality as much as men can.

Safed’s cloning technologies perform one of the most subversive thrusts against fundamentalist ideals of motherhood: unlike Avram who cannot produce a viable machine without a woman, the women of Safed produce generation after generation without men. Nili, the genetically altered and surgically modified woman from the Black Zone, is also a mother, which surprises Shira and works as yet another of Piercy’s traps for the undiscerning reader. Despite Nili’s feminized appearance, Shira has difficulty seeing past what she determines are Nili’s masculine qualities—a high level of alertness, physical prowess with martial arts and self-defense, upper body strength, androgynous manners—to the idea of Nili being a mother and nurturing a child. Nili reveals that not only can she get pregnant, she has “borne a daughter already” (361). Like Chava from the golem storyline and unlike Riva, Nili expresses her devotion to her daughter and says that she misses her child. The Safed community teams

together biological mothers with other-mothers to parent children. In this way, no one is a single mother, all the mothers have a support system, and individual mothers can leave, like Nili, for work undertaken on behalf of the larger community; no one person is indispensable to a child's upbringing. Safed's methods of cloning remove men from the procreation process entirely which, again, subverts the idea that procreation is only possible between men and women and that families must follow the nuclear model. Nili additionally subverts gender roles in her relationship with Gadi. Although Nili is a lesbian, having never known any other sexual possibility, she seems to undertake a sexual relationship with Gadi as part of an experiment to gather data for Safed rather than as some sort of conversion to heterosexuality. Nili's relationship with Gadi reads as a straight-across gender-role reversal, a not uncommon trope in science fiction, but, ironically, matches a man who "needs" women with a woman who does not need him at all and insists on pursuing her own agenda that frequently does not include him.

For centuries and in the absence of effective forms of birth control, religious views of male-headed households with female wives and mothers dominated the social concept of the family. Last among Piercy's depictions of motherhood, barring the other-mothering of Yod, I turn to Chava. Chava is the Hebrew name for Eve; as a midwife who oversees births, having her namesake as the "original" mother of humanity resonates with the idea of women as having power over life through birth, a power that, as Piercy points out in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, men do not share. Furthermore, when the Maharal creates the golem, Joseph, the Maharal keeps his activities secret from Chava because he senses that she would disapprove: "Why does he suspect that Chava will see the creation of the golem, supposing he really were to risk it, as usurping not only the power of the Eternal but the power of women, to give birth, to give life" (60). Anolik contends that Chava's inclusion in Malkah's golem legend acts as another site of

subversion because her name “evokes the female source of all human life and recalls that Eve’s transgressive hunger for knowledge has been long associated with the dangers of the female. Chava’s introduction into the golem tale emblemizes Piercy’s appropriation of the traditional text to introduce the figure of the powerful, knowledgeable, and sexual woman” (“Reviving the Golem” 149). In addition to being a midwife, Chava is a scholar who gives up her child in order to pursue her own interests. She tells Joseph that in becoming a wife she had lost a part of her self—namely, the utilization of her intellect—because marriage in sixteenth-century Prague (Jewish or Christian) meant circumscribing women into the rigid role of wife and mother (Piercy, *He, She and It* 290). Chava’s desire to engage in the “life of the mind” after her husband’s death most closely echoes Piercy’s own decision to not have children in order to pursue her writing. Although Chava expresses concern for her son and says “she misses him,” she realizes that “[g]iving him over to [her in-laws] was the price of her escape” (315), and she adeptly resists the Maharal’s plans to marry her off again. Chava’s non-traditional choices in an era when most women had no choices at all hardly serves as an endorsement of traditional motherhood since Chava spends the remaining decades of her life pursuing her own interests.

As demonstrated above, Piercy depicts myriad alternative families in the novel and places the most emphasis on women coming to motherhood through their own agency and autonomous decisions—in direct conflict with fundamentalists’ traditional gender roles. All of the mothers in the text make conscious choices about becoming mothers, the types of pregnancy they are willing to undergo, and whether they will actively participate in their children’s lives as mother figures or leave the mothering of their offspring to others. The variety of types of motherhood undermines the idea of a traditional, nuclear family which largely demands that women give up their own interests and suppress their own needs in order to care for children and male heads of

households. The rhetoric surrounding the contributions of mothers, particularly mothers who do not work outside the home, is rarely backed, if at all, by an economic valuing of such work. Considering that fundamentalist religious faiths frequently laud traditional gender roles and the importance of women as the reproducers of the next generation, literally and culturally, the lack of a connection of (re)production to any sort of tangible reward,¹⁷⁸ especially a monetary one that would give women a modicum of economic independence, exposes the rhetoric as hypocritical in its treatment of women who are mothers. Furthermore, fundamentalist religious traditions position women as “good” or “bad” depending upon whether women employ their sexuality solely for procreative purposes, or for their own pleasure, and/or outside of marriage. Piercy’s mothers resist this sort of categorization. Additionally, Vlasopolos contends that “the transgression of boundaries between man and machine and the covert participation of women in the programming or ‘socialisation’ of cyborgs makes the eroticism in *Body of Glass* highly subversive of the New Right’s heterosexist ideal of not only what constitutes manhood but of the role of ‘true motherhood’ in the formation of masculinity” (60). In other words, the ability of religious fundamentalists’ to control their offspring depends on the “proper” socialization of children into specific gender roles based solely on biological sex characteristics and outdated ideas of what is appropriate behavior in a dichotomous gender system. The socialization of Yod through other-mothering also serves to challenge fundamentalist complementarianism through Yod’s integration of “masculine” and “feminine” characteristics.

¹⁷⁸ Mormon women are awarded higher places in the Celestial Kingdom based on the number of children that they bear. Additionally, Mormon wives will spend eternity with their husband’s additional wives populating their husband’s planet with spiritual children. I am not aware of other fundamentalist religious faiths having such specific “rewards” for mothers in their projected versions of the afterlife.

The Masculine/Feminine Binary

Piercy's text smashes through the masculine/feminine binary perpetuated in Western thought and culture and supported by fundamentalist faiths' insistence upon "natural" gender roles for men and women. Yod's unrelenting egalitarianism and resistance to exemplifying a masculine gender role and Nili's resistance to a feminine gender role challenge basic fundamentalist tenets: when men and women refuse to fill these roles, the roles themselves break down and show themselves to be arbitrary rather than based on biological imperatives. This challenge to "tradition" and "God's plan" for men and women's roles in society also undermines the necessity for controlling women, and by extension, undermines justification for kyriarchal systems of power.

Avram enlists Malkah to assist with the software for his cyborg project after nine previous failures, one of which resulted in the death of Avram's assistant due to the cyborg's programmed violence. Malkah is responsible for about a third of Yod's programming, producing character traits that most critics label as "feminine" qualities. Malkah herself says, "Avram made him male—entirely so. Avram thought that was the ideal: pure reason, pure logic, pure violence. The world has barely survived the males we have running around. I gave him a gentler side, starting with emphasizing his love for knowledge and extending it to emotional and personal knowledge, a need for connection . . ." (142). The critics seem to think that Malkah gives Yod "feminine" traits, but I would argue that, like some critics' perception of Shira as living a conventional lifestyle, this idea is a trap that perpetuates a masculine-feminine binary. While the characters may think in gendered terms, that does not necessarily mean that Piercy's text operates in the same manner. Rather, I contend that Malkah does not merely give Yod

traditionally “feminine” qualities: she gives him the “feminine” traits that feminists have long argued are also the best “human” qualities.

Yod is the tenth letter of the Hebrew alphabet and follows Avram’s naming convention for his cyborgs. However, as Neverow observes, Yod is also “the sacred first letter of the tetragrammaton, the four Hebrew letters that form the name of God (YHWH or Yahweh [but written as Yod-Yod])” (23). Waskow points out that the pronunciation of Yod, in which the vowel sound is a schwa, sounds closer to “Yid” than YHWH, and that Yid is a generic label for Jews. Furthermore, Waskow writes, “Note the wonderful linguistic problem that Piercy introduces. Yod is the newest model of a cyborg, like the latest car, clearly an invention, a machine. Yet Yod has overtones of the ultra-human, much more fully in the Divine Image than anyone since the original Adam, who was made in Our Image, said God, in the Image of God, male and female, androgynous as God is Androgynous. He, She and It” (72). In this respect, Piercy continues the argument she advanced in *Woman on the Edge of Time* that favors androgyny—in personality, if not appearance. In the 1980s, Second and Third Wave feminism distanced themselves from 1970s advocacy of androgyny, yet Piercy persists in celebrating difference but also valuing human beings who integrate both traditionally masculine and feminine traits into their behaviors and characters. Perhaps the more salient argument of these texts lies in Piercy’s valorization of gender mainstreaming and neutrality, and the fact that all humans are capable of taking on both traditional masculine and feminine traits, rather than putting forward an argument for androgyny: every character in both texts is readily identifiable as biologically female or male apart from their gender identity.

Like most human beings, and unlike the gender binaries enforced and naturalized by fundamentalist faiths, Yod presents a mixture of both “masculine” and “feminine” traits. Unlike

most human beings, Yod's qualities skew toward exhibiting the more desirable traits in both "masculine" and "feminine" categories.¹⁷⁹ Yod is at once strong, confident, firm and forceful, but not, once programmed and socialized by Malkah and Shira, aggressive; neither does he ever exhibit rudeness, bossiness or feel that he is in some way superior to humans.¹⁸⁰ His aggressiveness, and the aggressiveness of the previous failed cyborgs, is alleviated by Malkah's programming. Yod demonstrates patience, loyalty and sensitivity to the needs of others; he is also responsible and appreciative. Yet he is never timid, weak, needing approval (not to be mistaken for his need to connect with others), dependent, or nervous. One could easily argue that Yod's personality is androgynous; his body type, however, appears male by design. In "Cyborg and Cyb(hu)man: The Fine Line of Difference," Mohr argues the following:

While Avram constructs the masculine technological body components, Malkah programs Yod's mind and his psyche. Clandestinely, she integrates a moral consciousness as well as ethical norms into Yod's mind. Subversively, she undermines Avram's totalitarian claim to power over Yod by integrating playful human elements, such as the freedom of decision-making, self-determination, and the endeavour for autonomy. It is this innate ability to "re-program himself" that allows Yod to experience a post-human development. Yod's programmed ability for self-correction is, indeed, not dissimilar from human education. (126)

¹⁷⁹ For their research into gender stereotypes, Ricciardelli and Williams divided "masculine" and "feminine" traits into positive and negative categories based on survey responses as to how both men and women viewed these qualities. Some of the positive "masculine" traits were: strong, confident, firm, forceful, and carefree; while some of the negative "masculine" traits were: aggressive, bossy, sarcastic, rude, and feels superior. Some of the positive "feminine" traits were: patient, sensitive, loyal, responsible, and appreciative; while some of the negative "feminine" traits were: timid, weak, needs approval, dependent, and nervous (644, 645).

¹⁸⁰ Yod actually is superior to many humans in strength, physical endurance, mental endurance, and intellect. However, he does not act in an egotistical way about his advantages over humans and fully understands his status, in Avram's eyes, as an enslaved machine.

Some critics think that Piercy reinscribes a gender binary with Malkah's "feminine principles" in Yod's programming; however, having a "moral consciousness" and "ethical norms" have not always been classified as strictly "feminine" traits. In most of Western culture and Abrahamic religious traditions, with perhaps the exception of the Victorians, women as a group were less likely to be considered purveyors of ethical behavior; men, and particularly male religious leaders, provided the ethical frameworks according to which people should conduct themselves.

Furthermore, keeping in mind that Malkah does only some of Yod's programming,¹⁸¹ I would agree with Mohr's point that Yod's joint creation by male and female scientists disassociates the "feminine" from the body, since Malkah does not work on any of Yod's hardware, and creates a new association between the "feminine" and the mind, thus breaking down the male-mind/female-body dichotomy. This is a more meaningful way of looking at the novel. However, Yod's personality traits are not "feminine" so much as exemplifying the best human qualities such as compassion for and connection to others. While these traits may have been, to some degree, traditionally associated with women, they are not only "feminine" or even exemplary of the "feminine" but of the "human." Yod never acts in a way that I would categorize as strictly "feminine" but he frequently acts in a feminist manner in that he completely accepts women's and men's equality as well as considers himself—the Other—equal to humans. Mohr notes that "[i]t is Shira who categorizes Yod according to the gender roles she has been conditioned to perceive as such: Sometimes Yod's behavior was what she thought of as feminine; sometimes it seemed neutral, mechanical, and purely logical; sometimes he did things that struck her as indistinguishable from every other male she had been with would have acted"

¹⁸¹ I disagree with Mohr, and other critics, that Yod's psyche is entirely "feminine" ("Cyborg and Cyb[hu]man: The Fine Line of Difference" 129). The text is quite clear that Yod feels a sense of pleasure when he does something violent or physically defensive (Piercy, *He, She and It* 106). His original programming by Avram may not ultimately control his entire personality with Malkah's modifications to promote ethical reasoning, but Avram's programming is still present.

(128). Although Shira responds to her own socialization in trying to categorize Yod, the text does not engage in the same facile categorizations or promulgate gender binaries. Moreover, Yod's feminism, seen in his disregard for physical appearance (Piercy, *He, She and It* 245), his ability to communicate and develop intimacy (103-4, 322), his inability to discriminate against women or the elderly (162), and his refusal to benefit from the patriarchal dividend (236-37), does not leach anything away from his masculinity. Yod's feminism challenges the gender binary, as much as Nili's mix of "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics and female-gendered body does. Both characters interrogate fundamentalist ideologies of gender, perhaps more effectively so while inhabiting biologically-gendered bodies.

Fundamentalist religious faiths are more likely to view Yod's feminist egalitarianism as a "feminization" and threat to their ideal of masculinity, which is intimately linked to the concept that God and the divine are coded as male. Likewise, Nili also challenges fundamentalist ideologies of gender in that while she may look feminine, exceedingly so, her behavior, sexual orientation, and communal approach to parenthood which frees her to pursue other agendas, are not conventionally "feminine"; the hybrid nature of Nili's "feminine" and "masculine" traits subverts the complementary gender roles espoused by fundamentalist sects. In "'We're All Cyborgs': Cyberfeminism and the Cyborg as the Transgressive Metaphor of the Future in Marge Piercy's *Body of Glass*," Mohr argues that "[b]ehaviour and emotions, Piercy stresses, are originally human and not tied to gender roles, but only to our conditioned *perception*" (313, emphasis in original). As K. Brown and Armstrong have noted, if, for fundamentalists, gender roles are based on perception rather than a God-given determination of the "proper roles" for men and women, their concept of the divine as "masculine" is unsupportable, as are their justifications for maintaining control over women's bodies and women's autonomy as human

beings. Hence, when feminism and equality threaten to erode traditional gender roles, fundamentalists will increase their policing of women and children in order to preserve the status quo and preserve the coherence of the faith's master narrative (K. Brown 189). *He, She and It's* subversion of the masculine/feminine binary and traditional gender roles confronts the misogyny in fundamentalist concepts of complementary roles for men and women.

The Utopian Impulse

The Handmaid's Tale and *The Terrorists of Irustan* both critique religious fundamentalism, yet, despite their dystopian settings, reveal underlying utopian impulses. *He, She and It* also critiques religious fundamentalism, but more so for its manifestations concerning gender and class than for its religiosity. It also presents two semi-realized religious utopias that are neither theocratic nor completely egalitarian. Piercy's first utopia, Mattapoisett in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, is one of the most fully-realized feminist utopias in literature; Tikva and Safed in *He, She and It* are more ambiguous and have not progressed toward equality as wholly as the denizens of Mattapoisett. However, *He, She and It* exhibits a stronger utopian impulse than the texts I have analyzed in detail in the previous chapters and not only focuses on fundamentalism's dystopic potential but represents a turn toward the utopic potential of religious faiths.

In Shira's escape from Y-S and return to Tikva, the word for hope in Hebrew, the utopic potential of a religious community that practices gender equality becomes starkly evident. Tikva as a community lacks the age and class distinctions, as well as the isolating factors that are prevalent in the multis, and lacks some of the prejudices that tend to accompany such segregation. The gender segregation and subordination of women in Orthodox Judaism is also absent. Although presumably not as racially diverse as the Glop, Tikva is predominantly Jewish, which includes myriad racial and ethnic groups as well as denominations, but seems open to non-

Jews as well; however, the text gives the impression that the non-Jews are mostly environmentalists who have sought out residency in Tikva. Considering Tikva's relatively small population, a purely democratic town government, rather than representative democracy, is still possible to some degree through town meetings—similar to some New England towns today, such as Piercy's beloved Wellfleet on Cape Cod where she has made her home for the past forty years. The text describes Tikva's government as "libertarian socialism with a strong admixture of anarcho-feminism, reconstructionist Judaism (although there were six temples, each representing a different Jewishness) and greeners" (404). In cases like Yod's, where the citizens must grapple with determinations of rights or potential limitations to the activities of the citizenry, "[t]hey would almost always choose the option that seemed to offer the largest degree of freedom" (404). In this respect, I agree with Harris's estimation that Tikva is a "descendent of the utopian Mattapoissett" (65), though Tikva is less developed as a utopic space. Like Mattapoissett, Tikva demonstrates a "tolerance of human variety, of age, size, sexual typology" (247) that does not exist in either fundamentalist religious denominations or in multis' kyriarchal system. Both fundamentalist religious sects and multis demand a great degree of conformity to their ideals and standards of behavior that preclude expressions of difference or dissent from the tenets of the organization, a degree of conformity that is entirely absent in Tikva.

In dialogue with Orthodox Judaism, Piercy reproduces the traditional social positioning of Jews as Other through her depiction of Tikva and its precarious relationship with the multis but with greater utopic potential than historical Jewish ghettos. As alluded to above, Tikva maintains its status as a free town through its development of software technology that the town sells to the multis. An ongoing requirement of citizenship in Tikva is eight hours of community service per week (107), primarily to defend the town's Base in virtual space or to provide

security in physical space; unlike Mattapoisett where war is a distant conflict, Tikva is very much besieged and vulnerable to virtual and physical attacks from the multis, and possibly from Glop gangs as well. Morehouse notes that Tikva's positioning echoes the contingent posture that most Jewish communities held in Europe and the Middle East well into the twentieth century:

Its independence is contingent upon its betweenness: the ability of its highly skilled citizens to continue providing essential services to competing corporate enclaves, none of whom want the community to be absorbed by one of its competitors. This "middle person" role is, of course, one that Jews held for centuries, just as their ghettos historically represented in-between places walled off from, but intimately linked to, the dominant community in which they had to struggle for survival. In contrast, Piercy's construction of Tikva is that of a propertied community, and a privileged, if embattled, garden in the midst of a post-apocalypse world. (81)

This positioning as a semi-ghetto—akin to a voluntarily populated kibbutz in a hostile region—requires constant vigilance on the part of the community in order to preserve its independence from the multis, which would prefer to place Tikva's skilled personnel under contract, and from the encroachment of the Glop with its vast needs for basic survival resources. Because Tikva must play one multi off of another as well as maintain physical security for its citizens, any misstep could greatly jeopardize the town's way of life and its ability to continue to function as a go-between. Under such contingent conditions, Tikva's status as "free" is quite fragile. As Sherry Linkon observes, Tikva's precarious positioning as a "middle person" also means its inhabitants "cannot escape the role of 'other'" (101). For this reason, Tikva's status as a utopian community is more ambiguous than Mattapoisett and, as we will explore in the next chapter,

Hobbs Land in *Raising the Stones*, but its potential as a religious utopia remains evident in the ingenuity of its citizens and the richness of their quality of life.

A less utopic aspect of Tikva is its (necessary) exclusiveness, a trait that keeps it from reaching its full potential as a religious utopia that can and does welcome all comers. Although Shira comes to appreciate Tikva's lack of class distinctions, the town does seem to have an entry-level requirement for at least one adult in a family group to have highly technical computer skills—skills that, presumably, the person develops through a privileged upbringing in another free town, a multi, or through formal education at a European university. I find it unlikely that people from the Glop would have the access to the Net needed in order to educate themselves to the degree required for residency in Tikva. While Tikva does have need of other types of labor that may be less specialized, such as daycare workers for the community creche or cooks for the communal kitchen, the novel does not indicate whether these types of positions are filled by people from the Glop who apply, by less-skilled or less-educated family members of the highly-skilled technicians, or through community service requirements. Of course, children raised in Tikva seem to retain their citizenship into perpetuity, like Shira, who returns after contracting with a multi, and Hannah, who remains after adolescence as a paramedic (144). Leaving aside the issue that Tikva does not have the capacity to accept everyone who might want to live there, the closed nature of Tikva as a community saps legitimacy from classifying it as a realized utopia. Part of the process for Tikva to realize its full utopic potential would be to throw open its gates to anyone who wished to live there. Similarly, Safed, in the Black Zone, must also engage in ending its isolation from the rest of the world and appears in the text to be doing so in a careful, measured manner so as to not destroy the community that the Palestinian and Israeli women independently developed during their forty-two years of covert existence. At the end of

the narrative Tikva is engaging with groups from the Glop for trade and other mutually beneficial relationships, activities which indicate that Tikva may in time welcome other groups as citizens to the town, lessening qualifications for entry that seem based upon class privilege. Certainly, non-Jews might also seek citizenship, possibly diluting the communal identity, but religious affiliation does not seem to be a pre-condition for applying to Tikva. Rather, Tikva has a Jewish population as a result of Jews seeking community and acceptance among other Jews. Safed, with its preservation of two religious traditions, does offer a way forward toward a religious utopia that honors multiple traditions without having them blend into each other to the point of unrecognizability and inspires respect for the religious beliefs, traditions, and rituals of others.

Indeed, Tikva's and Safed's continued existence as communities moving toward religious utopia may well depend upon establishing ties with other communities, especially in the Glop, for their continued security and for trade and economic purposes. Malkah recognizes that "[o]ur Base is our independence, our strength. We cannot survive free without economic integrity" (160), but maintaining Tikva's "economic integrity," when the town has come under escalating pressure of being gobbled up by the multis and the theft of their software products by independent data pirates, like Riva, will prove increasingly difficult without allies. In "'A Way of Being Jewish That Is Mine': Gender and Ethnicity in the Jewish Novels of Marge Piercy," Linkon argues, "Like ghettoized Jews throughout history, [the inhabitants of Tikva] must find a way to make themselves useful without giving up their separate identity. That this 'ghetto' has been created and chosen by a Jewish community rather than imposed by the dominant culture gives it a more positive atmosphere, but, as the comparisons Piercy makes with the sixteenth-century Prague ghetto suggest, maintaining difference and separation without engendering

hostility is never easy” (100). Tikva cannot afford to cut itself off from the rest of the world completely, neither geographically nor economically, nor at the expense of losing access to the knowledge available through the Net. Rather, Tikva and Safed are “ghetto[s] with a mission” that, unlike the European ghettos of the past, possess some power that they can utilize to transform themselves and the world outside their communities (Waskow 74) by providing a metaphorical blueprint of what an ideal community might look like and how it might function if religious denominations recognized and actively pursued their utopic potential.

Tikva’s religious identity is suffused with Piercy’s own Reconstructionist Judaism that, in its progressive stance toward women, ethnic minorities, QUILTBAG persons, and any oppressed Other, is already positioned as a religious faith with enormous utopic possibility. Elissa Gurman contends that, “[w]ithin the framework of reconstructionism, Tikva is not at all a reworking of Judaism” (472). I would argue that Reconstructionism and other progressive denominations of Judaism do not necessarily need to “rework” Judaism so much as to realize their own utopic potential in active ways through *tikkun olam*¹⁸² and to ensure the egalitarianism in their own congregations.¹⁸³ Reconstructionism represents a fairly young (and modern) departure from Orthodox Judaism—the most traditional and fundamentalist branch of the Judaism. Through

¹⁸² *Tikkun olam* means “repair of the world.” In Reconstructionist, Reform and Conservative Judaism, *tikkun olam* is the human responsibility to pursue social justice for oppressed groups and individuals. In Orthodox Judaism (Modern and Haredi), *tikkun olam* deals more with repair of the world through keeping individual *mitzvot* (the 613 obligations and rules for living in the Torah) that will lead to others following the Orthodox Jewish example and hasten the advent of the Messianic age.

¹⁸³ In one possible example of “reworking” of Reconstructionism that we might glean from the text, Shands argues that, “Piercy seems to suggest that we need a balanced, double-gendered concept of God, a balanced gender dynamics: we need good works *and* faith, justice *and* mercy, a reconciliation and linking of the larger panorama of collective political action with the compassionate caring of a maternal impulse” (153, emphasis in original). I find Shands’s imagining of a double-gendered concept somewhat limited—there are more than two genders and God, in the Jewish iconoclastic tradition that reviles representations of God as idolatry, would thus encompass all genders and all aspects of gender. Leaving aside Shands’s reversion to a dichotomy, “balanced gender dynamics” rather than a heavily weighted masculine/heteronormative image of God is more inclusive. Plaskow also endorses this sentiment without reverting to a gender binary: “If all are created in the divine image, then our images of God must be fluid and multifarious” (“Spirituality and Politics: Lessons from B’not Esh” 31).

Tikva's Reconstructionism, Piercy showcases a religious denomination that has already struck a balance between the value of tradition and the value of progress; however, like the present-day reality of mainstream religious faiths in American society, Reconstructionism and other branches of Judaism that espouse the principle of egalitarianism have yet to fully realize their utopic potential. Tikva and Safed seem somewhat closer to utopia than the contemporary world out of which Piercy writes.

In *The Coming of Lilith*, Judith Plaskow enumerates five stages to equality for Judaism that, in my estimation, are applicable to nearly any community or organization: *hearing silence*; *making a space to name silence*; *creating the structures that allow [the Other]¹⁸⁴ to speak*; *taking the authority to fill in silence*; and *checking back*" (129-33, emphasis in original). The last stage, "checking back," is necessary to perpetuate a continuous process of identifying the Other and then incorporating the voices of the Other into the community in order to reach equality for everyone. When the town council learns of Yod's unpaid labor, the town must first determine his status as a citizen, and by extension, as a person, but also as a Jew: "The rabbis all brightened considerably and went off together, two men and four women ranging in age from twenty-nine to eighty-three, arguing, gesticulating, quoting. Zipporah had just made six people extremely happy" (405). This incident, which raises the question of Yod's Jewishness is, on the one hand, humorously portrayed as Piercy pokes gentle fun at the political fights and querulousness of small town politics and of the rabbinate. On the other hand, one of the central underpinnings of Judaism as a whole is debate and questioning, on matters of interpretation, language, and intent in sacred texts which goes back to Talmudic tradition; this propensity for debate and questioning has a long tradition of permeating all facets of Jewish life, well beyond the finer points of Torah

¹⁸⁴ Plaskow focuses on attaining equality for Jewish women and uses the word "women" where I have substituted "the Other." While my focus necessarily includes women since we are still systematically denied equality, I also include any kyriarchally oppressed group.

study and demonstrates an openness to reasoned debate and revisiting questions of the status of other human beings as daily life and cultural values change and adapt to fluctuating social and political conditions. Through the committees that review Yod's status as a person and as a Jew, Tikva demonstrates the town's willingness to hear silence and begin a process to name it and create room for the Other to begin speaking. Although the outcomes of the committees' deliberations become moot with Yod's suicide in Tikva's defense, the town's process for establishing and maintaining equality seems to follow Plaskow's methodology. Tikva, with its six synagogues, town council meetings, and negation of housework and childcare through technology (156), has taken some steps toward establishing equality in all its facets. Although Safed may have reached a level of egalitarianism for women, and certainly created a safe space for women to realize their potential as fully autonomous human beings, its lack of men is a site of exclusion and inequality (Calvert 55). On the other hand, Tikva seems to have reached a level of gender equality; yet Tikva's town council finds it necessary to address the question of whether Yod is a full-fledged citizen or in possession of no more rights than a toaster. In respect to cyborgs, sentience, and personhood, Safed has already reached a level of equality. By establishing ties and exchanging mutually beneficial "information, knowledge, and technical skill" (59) with each other, Tikva and Safed's sharing of ideas can lead both groups closer toward achieving equality across all identities, and thus becoming communities that fully realize the utopic potential of religious faith(s). Perhaps Safed's integration of Islam and Judaism hints that it is closer to such a realization. For both communities and progress toward utopia, however, feminism is crucial.

Perhaps Piercy implies an analogy between her characters in *He, She and It* and the "waves" of the feminist movement in the US. One can draw this parallel between feminism's

development and the three generations of Shipman women. Malkah is secure in herself and the gains feminism made for her like the First Wave of feminism whose activism died down after they secured women's enfranchisement. Riva, like feminism's Second Wave, is politically engaged and actively goes against standard expectations for women; she leaves her daughter to her mother's care, is a lesbian, does not take any care with her appearance, and the like. Shira, representing feminism's Third Wave, wants to have it all and learns that this is still not possible for women because not enough cultural gains toward equality have been made. If we accept this analogy, Ari becomes the next generation of feminism—to effect change, men must be part of the vanguard of the Fourth Wave.

Unlike the limited gender role into which fundamentalist faiths coerce women, in the multis and free towns, women do work outside the domestic sphere due to a combination of economic necessity and the availability of robots for unskilled domestic labor (100, 238). Without onerous housework sapping their time and energy, women should be better positioned in their communities and in the work force to demand fair treatment as well as access to all aspects of public life. In the multis, however, the hierarchical rigidity demands a harsh conformity to gender roles that undermines women's economic independence. In Tikva, every adult works (156), but without the kyriarchal inequalities, I read the communal ethos and the Reconstructionist adherence to social justice as egalitarian for women and Others. Waskow argues that the connection between feminism and liberal Judaism's ideals creates a feedback loop of “earthy spirituality that has itself been infused with feminism” (73). Furthermore, the utopic community of Tikva is built upon both feminism and Reconstructionist Jewish values in a way that is mutually beneficial. Waskow writes,

[Piercy's] Jewishness and her feminism fuse into a new vision. The Jews are too few to shake the world; women are many. Women are too diffuse and too diverse to make a counter-community; Jews know how. Counting noses on the face of the earth, the Jews are just about the tiniest imaginable community with a transformative vision; women could be the largest. But they cannot transform it if they work alone, as individuals. Piercy is saying that women must create communities of women and men in conscious connection with the earth, communities that are intimate and participatory, that so thoroughly share an approach to work, sexuality, money, and spirituality that they can stand together against the powers that be. (74)

In Piercy's vision of a town striving toward utopia, religion and feminism work together toward equality for everyone. Piercy demonstrates how the utopic qualities of religion can be leveraged to overcome religion's dystopic potential, especially when matched with feminism's active rejection of oppressive and marginalizing kyriarchal ideologies and openness to change.

Conclusion

In her article, "On the Necessity of Conceiving Utopia in a Feminist Fashion," Frigga Haug writes:

My claim, but also my hope, is that when both sexes begin to view critically the relations in which they live, they will also realize that not only their own, but that all social relations, need to be urgently changed. This sentence assumes the following: (1) that in the dynamic of gender relations lies the possibility of change breaking out; (2) that changes in the relations of production and in the relations

between the sexes are worth striving for from the point of view of both sexes; (3)

that a revolt in the societal and political landscape is, after all, imaginable. (62)

Marge Piercy's *Tikva and Safed*, ambiguous utopias striving toward fuller realization within religious contexts, demonstrate that such constructs are "imaginable" and possible, if not yet realizable in contemporary American society; *He, She and It* invites just such a critical view of gender relations. Furthermore, the myriad depictions of women choosing motherhood and the resulting familial groups valorizes women's autonomy and agency in a way that subverts traditional ideas of motherhood and refuses to compel women into singular roles as wives and mothers under the auspices of religion and "divine" law. The text contests masculine/feminine binaries, among others, that would limit individuals' ability to demonstrate qualities based on biological sex. The novel also challenges how fundamentalist entities police the boundaries of such dichotomous constructions. Rather, the text explores the utopic potential of religious faith when a religious denomination already espouses progressive and egalitarian values.

He, She and It subverts genre conventions, integrating genres and then transgressing their boundaries with dizzying frequency, while simultaneously interrogating the position of women and subaltern men in the kyriarchal power structures that make up Western culture and political and social thought. Additionally, the text exhibits an embrace of science and technology, which does not exclude religious observance, as part of the ever-present need for knowledge and literacy in order for oppressed peoples to understand their subordination and seek to overcome it in ways that dismantle the kyriarchal pyramid without reproducing its marginalizations of others. Although Piercy's novel exhibits one positive estimation of religious faith in particular and the peaceful intertwining of two distinct religious traditions, the novel does not privilege Reconstructionist Judaism as the only source of utopic religious potential and encourages readers

to engage with any religion, or lack thereof, which refuses to perpetuate the misogyny and hypocrisy of fundamentalist faiths. Furthermore, her *midrash* of the golem legend hybridized into a science fiction text not only engages the religious tradition within which Piercy is located, but also challenges Orthodox Judaism and its lack of progressive change while simultaneously reclaiming the utopic potential of non-fundamentalist Judaism.

Chapter 5

“A Way, A Convenience, A Kindness”: Fundamentalism and Ecofeminist Utopia in Sheri S. Pepper’s *Raising the Stones*

In *Raising the Stones*, Sheri S. Pepper connects the rise of the Religious Right with theocratic aspirations through her negative appraisal of religious fundamentalism. Pepper posits that religion, violent or benign, can and does have a great effect on individual and communal identities, especially when religious faith intersects with gender. She primarily explores this intersection through depictions of fundamentalist faith’s anti-modernity, anti-feminism, and dogmatic interpretation of sacred texts. Perhaps most saliently, *Raising the Stones* suggests that as long as religious faiths are oppressive to women and neglect feminist tenets, utopia is not possible in a religious—or any—community.

Pepper critiques religious fundamentalism while simultaneously evaluating restrictions to religious freedom. Pepper argues for religious freedom, provided the practice of one religion does not interfere with or demand annihilation of the adherents of other faiths, a condition that many fundamentalist sects and some mainstream faiths do not meet. Throughout the narrative, Pepper contrasts the religious practices and philosophies of three societies—Hobbs Land, Voorstod, and the High Baidee—in order to expose the underpinnings of fundamentalism and to advocate for religious freedom and tolerance. Unlike the ambiguous utopian religious communities depicted in *He, She and It*, *Raising the Stones* offers a metaphorical blueprint through its portrayal of Hobbs Land and its gods and how people can change as a result of focusing on the potentially utopian aspects of religion. The novel interrogates religious fundamentalism and condemns it unilaterally, demonstrating that fundamentalist religions are inherently dystopic and that a utopic impulse in religion can only be sustained when the religion

itself is reasonable and does not place ritualized obligations on its adherents as well as feminist and non-kyriarchal in its philosophy.

Second, she re-invents the utopian visions of the 1970s feminist utopian texts through a developed ecofeminist lens. Like some of the 1970s feminist utopias, Tepper's advocacy of an ecological consciousness highlights the ecofeminist tenet that human beings are connected to their environment and their actions have consequences for nature and themselves. Rather than inventing (or returning to) a goddess-centered religion that tends to reproduce biological essentialism in the 1970s texts, Tepper's text posits the ecofeminist concept of interconnection as a kind of animism devoid of tribal culture, and perhaps, divorced from ideas of religious divinity.

Raising the Stones' negative assessment of fundamentalism and its turn toward utopic possibility raises the following questions: how does Tepper envision religion manufacturing identity in individual and communal ways? What critique does Tepper offer of the role of violence in religion and in policing cultures based on fundamentalist faiths? What is the interplay between culture and religion and how does Tepper deploy it in a fictional setting in order to comment on present-day issues? Finally, how can *Raising the Stones'* metaphorical blueprint for religion, estranged from Abrahamic and possibly other Earth religions, translate into an impetus for social change?

In *Raising the Stones*, a presumed supernatural presence on a human-colonized farming planet results in the settlers founding a new religion; the new gods of the settlers begin to change Hobbs Land in various ways, but primarily through creating a utopia populated by kind, hard-working, generous people who have achieved a decent level of social justice and equality. However, existing faiths, which Tepper gives the characteristics of corresponding extant world-wide Earth religions, react violently and negatively to this "new" faith and perceive it as a threat

to the spheres of influence the religions had carved out for themselves. *Raising the Stones* features societies on several different planets in a galactic system far removed from originary Earth (or, as they call it, “Manhome”). The planet Ahabar is home to a non-religious, matrilineal society which takes up the bulk of the planet. Also on Ahabar are the Voorstod,¹⁸⁵ a kyriarchal culture that is a combination of Abrahamic religions but most closely resembles fundamentalist Islam, with national sovereignty over its geographic region of Ahabar. The planet Thyker is home to the Low and High Baidee, who share a similar religion based loosely on Sikhism, or perhaps Orthodox Judaism.¹⁸⁶ The Scrutators, a council that resembles the Orthodox rabbinate of Israel and/or the Sikh Sarbat Khalsa,¹⁸⁷ theocratically rule the High Baidee. The planet Phansure has a religiously tolerant culture with a plethora of gods and seems to produce a quantity of intelligent people who work as engineers around the galaxy.

Despite the diversity of religions available, these faiths are frequently in conflict with each other based upon varying types of exclusivity and each faith’s perception of its own tenets as the single, unquestionable truth and path to the divine. When the Hobbs Land gods come into being, one religion sees the new gods as a catalyst for fulfilling its own eschatological prophecies; another sees the new gods as violating the most sacred tenet of its faith. The dystopic elements of this text lie in how some of the other religions attack the planet, its new gods, and its inhabitants, and in how the world religions oppress and subordinate women, lower-

¹⁸⁵ In the text, “Voorstod” refers to both a geographical region on Ahabar and to the religious culture of the people who live in Voorstod. In most cases, though not all, my use of “Voorstod” and “Voorstoders” will refer to the religion and the people who practice it rather than the physical place.

¹⁸⁶ Kelso claims the Baidee resemble militant Hinduism. However, the Indian names are a red herring. The trappings of the High Baidee religion are not Hindu at all but based on Sikhism: particularly the wearing of turbans and the long, uncut hair hidden underneath them. Sikhism itself is an amalgamation of Hinduism and Islam that, initially, was highly accretive.

¹⁸⁷ The Sarbat Khalsa is a representative body that holds religious authority and issues *gurmata*, or gurus’ intentions, that govern issues concerning the Sikh religion and its practice as a whole.

classes and/or certain cultural groups. Despite the dystopic depictions of some cultures within the novel, I categorize this text as a critical utopia: the colonized farming planet, though not without its problems, is primarily peaceful and in some ways represents an ideal community, especially after the advent of the Hobbs Land gods. While not set on Earth at all, *Raising the Stones* does depict a Holy War, as it were, growing out of Earth's history and questions whether violence in the name of one's god is ever justified.

In a larger debate about religion, fundamentalism, and religious freedom, *Raising the Stones* (1990) is the second in a loosely connected trilogy: *Grass* (1990) and *Sideshow* (1992) serve as a frame for *Raising the Stones* in Tepper's Arbai trilogy. *Grass* follows Marjorie Westriding, a devout "Old Catholic," and her family to the planet Grass where they act as ambassadors for the Sanctity, the religious theocracy on an overpopulated Earth. The Sanctity seems based on Mormonism because of its focus on genealogy and baptizing the dead, but may also resemble Puritan concepts of "the elect." The Sanctity keeps DNA records in order to one day reincarnate all of the Sanctified—in effect, the Sanctity holds out the promise of giving immortality to the Sanctified. Birth control and abortion are illegal under Sanctity rule, while population controls dictate that women are not allowed to have more than two children each. As a result of these contradictions in the law, the inevitable extra children are shipped to colony planets as slave labor; abortions take place in back alleys; and only rich women can afford black market contraceptives. In the meantime, a plague is decimating human populations on many planets, and the Sanctity seems content to let those who are not among the Sanctified die while attempting to secure an antidote to the plague for themselves. On the planet Grass, untouched by the plague, Marjorie searches for a cure but also discovers the foxen species, best described in appearance as "dragons." In *Grass*, Marjorie struggles to retain her Roman Catholic faith despite

the Vatican's marginalization of women and the curtailment of women's autonomy over their own bodies through its traditionally kyriarchal dogma and doctrine. The novel ends with Marjorie and her foxen lover leaving Grass to travel the universe in search of the presumed-extinct Arbai race.

In *Raising the Stones*, Marjorie briefly appears as "Morgori Oestrydingh," a prophetess riding a "dragon" that precipitates the founding and influences the tenets of the High and Low Baidee faiths. In this second novel of the trilogy, Tepper's focus shifts from a polemic against the kyriocentric nature of hegemonic religions like Roman Catholicism and the Mormon-modeled Sanctity in *Grass*, to a more general indictment of religious fundamentalism and an argument in favor of religious freedom and acceptance. *Raising the Stones* also endorses the idea of the interconnectedness of intelligent species with each other and with their environment.

The third novel in the trilogy, *Sideshow*, also features Marjorie Westriding as an older woman, Jory, and Samasnier (Sam) Girat from *Raising the Stones*, called Asner, as major characters. *Sideshow* takes place on the planet Elsewhere, the only planet left in the universe, or so the rumor says, that has not been infected by the Hobbs Land gods. All kinds of religions are practiced on Elsewhere, with Enforcers, a specially trained police force, to legally protect religious freedom even when the religions practice barbarous customs such as child sacrifice or ritual rape of young women. The remaining few Arbai live in the unexplored central wilds of one of the planet's continents and continue to withdraw from human beings whose evil tendencies they do not understand. While Tepper brushes against the issue of free will¹⁸⁸ in *Raising the Stones*, she had a more strategic plan in mind: *Sideshow* explores free will and

¹⁸⁸ In his critique of *Raising the Stones*, Gerald Jonas writes: "You might also think that the author of the philosophically complex *Grass* would find time in a 454-page book to consider the question posed by even the most benign mind control: Are welcomed chains any less an insult to free will than enforced obedience?" (35). *Sideshow*'s exploration of free will resolves this issue.

whether society should impose limitations on the exercise of free will and freedom of religion in order to preserve social justice. Also linking the trilogy, though each novel can be read as a stand-alone book, are the Arbai devices, such as the Doors that allow travel through space and, in some cases, time. As *Sideshow* reveals, however, the Hobbs Land fungus that interconnects human beings with each other and other intelligent species as well as with their environments is an organic Arbai communications device and though amazing, not supernatural. Naturally, the people on Hobbs Land have no inkling that their gods are an organic communications device.

Religious Views and Critical Reception

Raising the Stones has neither received the popular and scholarly attention of *The Handmaid's Tale* or *He, She and It*, nor is the novel as obscure as *The Terrorists of Irustan*. *Raising the Stones* seems to occupy a middle ground, compared to the other novels I examine in this project, in its critical reception and its popularity. The novel generated mixed reviews; some critics dislike Tepper's polemical writing style, but most reviewers find her ideas, presented through the medium of science fiction, fascinating and worth further exploration. Some critical scholarship on *Raising the Stones* exists, but mainly in conjunction with consideration of Tepper's oeuvre as a whole.

One could argue that Tepper's repeated indictments of Roman Catholicism, in her novels *Grass* (1990) and *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* (1996), may indicate a personal struggle with religion; she attacks Roman Catholicism specifically in these texts and does not refer to any other Earth religion by its actual name in any of her books. Yet I would hesitate to claim that Tepper has a Roman Catholic background because I have been unable to find any mention of the religious tradition in which Tepper was raised or may currently practice in her online biography, reviews of her work, or in interviews. However, religious beliefs or, maybe more specifically,

the religious beliefs that she finds abhorrent, abound not only in the polemical moments in Tepper's novels but in her (few) interviews. During an interview with Neal Szpatura for *Strange Horizons*, Tepper said:

all systems that discourage intelligence, language, and a continuing search for information are anti-existence, death-dealing, and evil. Any religion that says, "This is the creed, you have to believe this, you have to accept it regardless of the fact it makes no sense, or you are a heretic!" is an evil religion that commits evil things like overpopulating the planet, groping little boys, torturing people to make them confess, and marrying thirteen-year-old girls off to men old enough to be their grandfathers.

Her views are decidedly anti-fundamentalist as well as critical of cultural relativism that excuses violent or oppressive tendencies of religious faiths in the name of cultural tolerance.

Furthermore, Gwyneth Jones identifies exposing "the evils of fundamentalist religion" as a prevalent theme across her novels ("Sheri S[tewart] Tepper" 225). In Tepper's books that do not deal directly with religion, the anti-fundamentalist screed manages to enter her texts on a smaller scale. For example, the scenes involving a Protestant fundamentalist sect that kidnaps Stavia, the protagonist of *The Gate to Women's Country*, in order to make her one of the Elders' wives, amply demonstrate how religion can be used to oppress women.

Additionally, Tepper roots her views of religion in a pragmatic skepticism, similar in some respects to Atwood. Tepper criticizes Mother Theresa for not giving out birth control to the poor of Calcutta and using preventative measures that could have eased the impoverished conditions of many rather than praising Mother Theresa's work ministering to the poor and sickly (Szpatura). Like Atwood, Tepper embraces science and scientific theory rather than

placing her “faith” in any one religious tradition, though she gives the impression of doing so more militantly than Atwood’s gentle disclaimers. In “Of Preachers and Storytellers,” Szpatura quotes Tepper as saying:

Any regime that defines truth as a set of beliefs and occurrences that cannot be questioned, that can neither be demonstrated nor proven is not only evil but ridiculous. This includes all mythologies, miracles, etc.[,] because, if creation happened for a reason, if it was done by God, you'd better believe every part of it, including intelligence, was done for a reason ascertainable, eventually, by intelligence. We would not follow and adore a ruler who lied and tortured. Why would we worship a God who did either? God doesn't lie and he/she/it doesn't fool around!

Tepper does not seem to rule out the possibility of God altogether and expresses an agnosticism that is open to challenge. She critiques religion and the concept of God because human beings, though more specifically men, in Abrahamic religions tend to fashion God in their own image: “I say the entities that are named as gods by Earthians are imagined into being by Earthians as personal helper-buddies, justifiers, threateners (my god can beat up your god). They don't ‘run on’ anything any more than a mirror image ‘runs on’ anything. They merely reflect what people want them to be. . . . *The real God*, who may really exist, is outside all that” (Szpatura, emphasis in original). Her skepticism in the creation of gods that resemble the people who then use their creations to oppress others and claim a relation to the divine exclusively for themselves seems well-founded in this regard. The sticking point for Tepper, like Atwood, seems to lie in the unprovable qualities of religious belief and in the idea that God requires a leap of faith as well as specific types of demonstrated devotion:

books written by theologians concerning various points of doctrine . . . govern the lives of real people but they have absolutely nothing to do with reality. . . .

Staying in balance with our environment is real. Holiness isn't real. Theology isn't real. Being required to believe that the founder of your religion had a revelation about having plural wives isn't real. Screwing virgins in paradise isn't real. Eating or not eating shrimp isn't real. Marrying or not marrying someone of another religion or color isn't real. Fossils are real. Stars are real. The red shift is real. Planets around other stars are real. This Earth dying beneath us is real. And God, if God is real, may well have turned away from us for choosing to believe in self-serving revelations about sex instead of using the eyes, ears, and minds we were given to learn about reality. (Szpatura)

At a minimum, Tepper believes that theology is speculation without empirical evidence and that doctrine is the invention of fallible human beings, no matter how well-intentioned. Her injunction, however, to use critical thinking skills to understand our reality is pragmatic but does not foreclose the possibility, for her at least, that God and/or the divine do exist. It seems unlikely, however, that Tepper would be willing to commit herself to any sort of leap of faith.

Tepper's politics are decidedly feminist and were no doubt shaped and/or affirmed by her twenty-four-year career at the Rocky Mountain Planned Parenthood in Colorado, where she eventually became the clinic's executive director. Having seen firsthand the untenable circumstances in which women seeking abortions find themselves and the importance of women's choice for their bodies, her views of kyriarchal religions that would threaten women's autonomy are hardly surprising. Yet, like Atwood, Tepper is not interested in making God into a matriarch that perpetuates a reverse hierarchy of power and oppression. Although Atwood leans

toward the science fiction imaginary as a replacement, of sorts, for religion, Tepper seems interested in re-making religious faiths into ecofeminist organizations that recognize the value and equality of all people, and quite possibly the more intelligent animal species as well:

I personally detest authoritarianism, which means there are some religions I find abhorrent, particularly those in which the authorities are almost invariably old men. They all have certain things in common: they rule women and children; they tend to sequester women; they focus to a great degree upon 'purity' of womenfolk, which really means that they have the sole right to grant women's sexuality to whomever they choose; they have a nasty habit of killing women who become 'impure,' even through no fault of their own; they treat women as livestock and children not much better; they are sex obsessed and procreation obsessed; *and*, they are tribal. Tribal religions, languages, and cultures are bad news. (Szpatura, emphasis in original)

For example, in her novel *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, which exposes the misogyny in both Roman Catholicism and a Protestant fundamentalist cult, the narrative closes with the main character deciding whether nothing about the world would change; reproduction would happen through parthenogenesis with men becoming rare; humans would mate for life but not procreate more than once a decade; humans would no longer go through an adolescent phase but have prolonged childhoods and rapid maturation to adulthood; or women would only conceive by choice and not by force. Although the main character's decision is not revealed to the reader, the poll results on Tepper's website demonstrate that an overwhelming majority of her readers favor the latter option. However, Tepper's desired ecofeminist outcome for religious faith is perhaps

most apparent in *Raising the Stones* itself and the utopic community created on Hobbs Land; it is, by far, the most egalitarian and utopian imaginary that Tepper has penned.

Another prominent theme running through Tepper's fiction is her ecofeminism, a label to which she unabashedly lays claims. Her novels warn her reading audience about the destruction of the Earth if humans continue to pollute and damage the natural world. Tepper links her ecofeminism with what she calls "shamanism,"¹⁸⁹ and what I would describe more broadly as animism due to her espousal of ecofeminist principles of symbiotic, non-destructive ways of living that preserve and enhance the natural environment. Animism is not an organized religion at all; its adherents believe that everything has a spiritual essence, including plants, animals, and any naturally occurring substance like rocks or the wind, and that this spiritual essence must be respected rather than dominated. In animism, no distinction exists between the spiritual world and the physical world; the spiritual and material are part of the same reality. Tepper says:

Shamanism connects nature, animals of all kinds, trees, rivers, everything. It has its rituals. It is as valid as any religion is valid, being any rite or form that allows us to calm down and take a deep breath and resolve against wounding others of whatever shape, size, or kind. Shamanism would not espouse destruction of living beings except within a natural framework in which all living things eat and are eaten by others. I approve of that: both the eating (without cruelty) and the being eaten (without cruelty). (Szpatura)

Perhaps the previous statement is as close to Tepper's religious philosophy as we may come beyond agnosticism and the need for egalitarian religious faiths. In *Raising the Stones*, the fungus/gods/communication device that interconnects people, cats, and the gods themselves, is

¹⁸⁹ Shamanism actually involves mentorship traditions as well as rites that require practitioners to enter altered states of consciousness in order to contact spirits on different planes of existence. Shamanism does occur, as a religious component, in some indigenous tribes that adhere to animism.

organic material that has grown underneath all of the soil on Hobbs Land and networked the planet so that the environment is also part of a sense of communal knowledge—and a communal sense of ethics. For example, harming the environment is more difficult when doing so feels as though one also harms an extension oneself and one's consciousness as well as other people. Furthermore, Tepper bears out the idea of interconnection of people to their environments and each other producing gods or godliness when she says, "The expression of divinity is the universe . . . in infinite variety. No subset of that variety is complete. Only the infinite entirety expresses the 'everything' that is possible. No divinity could be limited, could it? Infinity would have to encompass even evil, but divinity might choose to make it impotent" (Szpatura). Acknowledgement of human beings' interconnection with each other and with their environment would seem to be the first step, in Tepper's blueprint for religion and utopia, toward finding God or the divine within ourselves.

Genre

Like the other texts considered in this project, *Raising the Stones* crosses the boundaries between the dystopian and utopian sub-genres by mixing elements from several genres into a coherent whole. Tepper herself acknowledges that she blends science fiction, "the genre of ideas," with fantasy, "the genre of escape," in order to produce a satisfying "mix" of a novel ("Sheri S. Tepper"). *Kirkus Reviews* identifies the satirical as well as the polemical in *Raising the Stones*, stating, "Tepper effectively combines satire, inventive social engineering, strong main characters, and a plot that works on both internal and external levels in what may be her best novel to date" (qtd in Lee 113). Szpatura prefaces his interview with Tepper with his praise of her genre-bending as "elegant blends of science fiction, fantasy, ecological alarm, and feminist fable." *Raising the Stones* particularly fits this description since I would categorize it as

part science fiction, taking place in a future and a galaxy far, far away; part fantasy, communicating with cats while a fungus takes over planets; part satire, making fun of fundamentalist Islam, fundamentalist Christianity, Sikhism, and Orthodox Judaism; part eco-feminist screed, warning against destruction of the planet and advocating the interconnectedness of all kinds of life; part feminist fable, offering a moral lesson against literal interpretation of sacred texts and militant imperialism; part quest narrative, tracing the main character's search for his long-lost father-king; and part polemic, arguing against the oppression of women by religious fundamentalism and anti-choice positions that deny women's autonomy and can lead to overpopulation and the depletion of the environment. All of these elements mix with the non-traditional elements of the *Bildungsroman*, through Sam's quest for a coherent identity, and *roman à clef*, through the fictional disguising of fundamentalist faiths.

In some respects, Tepper's damning critique of religious fundamentalism follows science fiction genre norms, which is especially true of feminist science fiction and dystopian writing as discussed in Chapter 1. She spares little quarter for a spiritual aspect of God and views organized religious institutions as inherently oppressive. In *The Gospel According to Science Fiction*, Gabriel McKee argues that, "most SF writers seem to view organized religions as corrupt tyrannies that attempt to govern or suppress that spirituality. There are certainly numerous exceptions to this rule in SF, but a clear majority of writers in the genre are distrustful of organized religion. Where churches appear in SF, they are frequently the center of authoritarian corruption" (206-7). Concomitantly, Catherine Keller argues that the utopic potential of world religions is not only waning but being actively supplanted by a kyriarchal backlash from within religious traditions: "From this mournful vantage point the religion that is returning across much of the planet appears to be pretty much what it appears to be: the return of

patriarchy with a vengeance” (59). For Tepper, the kyriarchal cannot be spiritual since any manifestation of the divine rests in a recognition of ecofeminist connections between people, (somewhat intelligent) animals, and environments. She condemns religious fundamentalism but, unlike most science fiction authors, allows for benign religious practice, through a realization of religion’s utopic potential, because a belief in the divine fills some sort of human need.

Unlike Marley, Piercy, and Atwood’s transgression of the science fiction genre by offering a woman’s point of view in the face of greater societal valuation of male voices, Tepper employs a male point of view in her text. Sam Girat’s narrative is that of an emergent feminist who develops a feminist consciousness. Sam’s transformation from an entitled man with sexist tendencies, unaware of his own privilege, into a more compassionate person with a feminist consciousness gives a nod to, but also turns on its head, Second Wave women’s consciousness-raising practices. Sam does not discover the ways in which he is marginalized, but rather realizes how he and misogynistic cultures oppress and Other women. Sam’s feminist consciousness-raising is not an intentional undertaking on his part, but results in changes in his attitudes toward women and in his greater capacity for empathy for all human beings.

As discussed in conjunction with Atwood, Marley, and Piercy, Reilly’s “inward search” for meaning exhibited by some (male) science fiction writers does not apply well to Tepper’s work either. Rather, *Raising the Stones* presents an inward/outward search among human beings for a religion, of sorts, more specifically, for gods or a divine being that fosters interconnection and relationships rather than exclusivity and fear. Like Atwood, Marley, and Piercy, Tepper critiques the lack of spiritual authenticity among fundamentalist sects that hide behind their structures of power and control. Instead of an ideology that masks power, the religion of the Hobbs Land gods gives the power of knowledge to anyone who wants to link to it. In this

respect, Tepper and *Raising the Stones* exemplify Lee's theory of science fiction as symbiotic with the reader and her society: "Authors I see as symbiotic clearly question rather than play with our cultural norms, gender biases and existence and the heroic, power-related base from which they are derived. In creating an alternative reality they attempt completeness—exploring the implications for maintenance of that society, its procreation and its interrelationships" (116). Tepper's utopian community, while attempting completeness, is not monolithic; as we learn in *Sideshow*, although the Arbai device spreads to most of the universe, the Hobbs Land gods take on different characteristics in different places based on the needs of the community in question, such as the restoration of the Gharm's "Tchenka," or spirit animals.¹⁹⁰ Utopia and the religion that makes it possible in *Raising the Stones* can and does encompass difference, adding even more dimensions to the body of communal knowledge and interconnection.

Tepper also transgresses genre by challenging the foundations of kyriocentric Western thought and culture. The two fundamentalist religions and Tepper's ecofeminist vision of religious utopia demonstrate the conflict between kyriarchal institutions kept in power through oppression and feminist visions of equality and egalitarianism. The dystopic potential of religion is fully realized in Tepper's depictions of fundamentalism—all too recognizable as representative of extant world religions—and then countered by the combined utopic potential of religion, feminism, and environmentalism. Like Piercy, and unlike some feminist utopian and dystopian writers, Tepper does not eschew technological or scientific advancement and seems to consider technology neutral in and of itself. Rather, by reinforcing ecofeminist sensibilities and the interconnection of people and their surroundings, *Raising the Stones* makes a strong argument against the primacy of machines and technological advancement at the cost of the

¹⁹⁰ The Gharm, enslaved by Voorstod, seem more closely aligned with a tribal, shamanistic animism than the Hobbs Land settlers and their gods. The same fungus produces the Tchenka, who roam about, and the Hobbs Landian rock-gods, who are physically fixed on their plinths in the temples.

devastation of natural environment, destruction of plant and animal species, and degraded quality of human life.

Fundamentalist Dystopias: Voorstod and High Baidee Societies

Because Tepper's writing tends to be polemical, her critique of religious fundamentalism is by no means subtle, though she does recognize the complexity of religious faiths and people's motivations for following a particular religious tradition. Although she tends to restrict various imagined religious faiths to specific planets or geographic areas, Tepper's visions echo distinctive elements of Earth religions to produce estrangement in the reader. Yet Tepper's mixing of various characteristics across specific world religions in her imagined ones causes readers to recognize the shortcomings of their own religious faiths in their cultural and social milieus and also serves to indict fundamentalist manifestations of religious faiths, in any form, more generally.

Tepper's most obvious depiction of fundamentalism is Voorstod. Although the region on Ahabar where the Voorstoders live has highlands and the people have Scots and Irish-sounding names, *Raising the Stones* asserts that Voorstod resulted from the combination of three Manhome religions, presumably Protestantism, Catholicism, and Islam (91-92). Interestingly, Voorstod appears to have three simultaneously operating tiers in its religious system. Men, who are the "Faithful" and believers in "the Cause" of Voorstod's eschatology, are led by "prophets," and their activities and doctrine resemble fundamentalist Islam. "Priests" are the religious leaders for women and children; one character, Maire Manone Girat, makes an appeal to "Oh, Holy Mother . . . the words coming from her childhood among the priests, long forgotten" (317). This invocation of a Holy Mother suggests the Virgin Mary and that the religious faith for women in Voorstod is, in some respects, similar to Catholicism. "Pastors" serve as religious

leaders of the enslaved, humanoid Gharm—for a religion in which the Gharm do not believe.

The use of “pastor” is a Protestant indicator. Since the pastors also serve as disciplinarians who whip the Gharm slaves when they are accused of wrong-doing, this branch of the religion veers not only into fundamentalism but into sadism as well, though the prophets’ bloodthirstiness on a grander scale is also noteworthy. Unsurprisingly, the word “Voorstod” is supposed to mean “whip-death” (337), which is not an uncommon outcome for individual Gharm. Tepper describes Voorstod’s history as less an amalgamation of three different religious traditions and more of a loose confederation with the men at the top of the kyriarchal pyramid, controlling the other branches of religious practice: “Ire and Iron and Voorstod, the three peoples who had followed Voorstod the prophet away from Manhome. Voorstod with its pastors, Ire with its priests, and Iron with its prophets: the first to rule the slaves, the second to rule the women, the last to rule the men—to rule the men, or to be used by the men, to rule. That had always been the way of men’s Gods, old men’s Gods. To use the Gods to rule” (431). It would seem that Voorstod practices a form of gender apartheid that separates religious observance by gender and race/species and reproduces the kyriarchal pyramid through religious justification.

The overarching religious trappings of Voorstod most resemble fundamentalist Islam: the women are veiled,¹⁹¹ mostly confined to the domestic sphere and have no rights to any of their earnings; only men can be counted as the Faithful and can fully participate in the religious rites and practices; the prophets are constantly advocating a holy war against everyone else and plot terrorist acts against the Ahabaran government and generations of escaped Gharm; dying in this

¹⁹¹ The women wear voluminous robes and veils, similar to *abayah* or *burka*, which are enveloping garments and only reveal women’s eyes. To be fair, the Faithful men also wear large caps under which they bundle their hair; however, the men remove the caps during religious ceremonies and celebrations with the prophets and decorate their hair with coup markers that enumerate the number of people each individual has killed either by their own hand or through terrorist activities like bombing or ambushes. Women, on the other hand, are forced inside during religious parades lest one of the prophets sees their eyes and becomes enflamed with lust.

holy war is the greatest achievement for one of the Faithful, and the rewards are perpetual virgins in paradise. While other religions also require forms of veiling for women,¹⁹² segregate religious services based on gender,¹⁹³ restrict women from positions of religious leadership and authority,¹⁹⁴ and believe in an apocalyptic eschatology,¹⁹⁵ the combination of all of these factors and their extremism, along with the vision of heaven filled with perpetual virgins (332), similar to Islam's *houri*, suggests fundamentalist Islam as the model for Voorstod's religion, more so than other extant religious faiths.

In various ways, Voorstod society exemplifies all of the traits of fundamentalist religions theorized by Hawley and Proudfoot in *Fundamentalism and Gender*: a sense of besetment (21); ideologies of gender (25) including Othering of women (27); nostalgia for a "golden" age (30); and religious machismo (32). Voorstoders Other the physically diminutive Gharm and fail to recognize their humanity, having enslaved them by use of superior force before emigrating to Ahabar. In addition to women, Voorstod Others all non-Faithful peoples and seeks the annihilation of all non-Voorstoders, ending eventually in the slaughter of their own women—the Faithful will no longer need human women when they reach "paradise." Judith Butler writes, "On the level of discourse, certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized; they fit no dominant frame for the human, and their dehumanization occurs first, at this level.

¹⁹² Catholic nuns in some orders, and women who are Orthodox Jews, Sikhs, and in some Protestant denominations such as Mennonites, Amish, and Anabaptists, routinely wear head coverings. Some denominations insist on head coverings for women during religious services and ceremonies.

¹⁹³ Orthodox Judaism and the Amish have separate seating for men and women during religious services.

¹⁹⁴ Orthodox Judaism, Catholicism, and many Protestant denominations do not allow women as religious leaders or restrict their leadership to specific functions.

¹⁹⁵ Many Christian denominations to greater and lesser degrees believe in an apocalypse that will signal the "end of days" and the second coming of their Messiah. Some Christian denominations believe in executing actions or facilitating events that will hasten the advent of their eschatology. By way of contrast, some Jews believe in creating events to hasten their eschatological Messiah, but their vision of the end of days is utopic and lacks apocalyptic elements.

This level then gives rise to a physical violence that in some sense delivers the message of dehumanization which is already at work in the culture” (“Beside Oneself” 25). For Voorstod men, women and Gharm fit this description exactly. In Voorstod’s doctrine, the “*desire of the One God*” is for recognition by “*all living things*” and that this will be accomplished by the Faithful “*teaching those who will learn and by killing all others*” (421, italics in original).¹⁹⁶ Their own deaths in the execution of their God’s plan are acceptable because “*If there is one of the Faithful, and that one the only living one, one is enough*” (422). Additionally, women “*have no place*” in their God’s paradise and are “*merely processes by which followers may be created*” (422). Women are reduced to their reproductive capacities as a necessary evil of their culture: “*kept private, kept quiet, kept healthy until they have borne children, and then they may be disposed of*” (422). In Othering the Gharm and keeping them as slaves, Voorstod demonstrates its anti-modernism; in Othering women and treating them as property, useful only as incubators, Voorstod demonstrates its anti-feminism. All of this points to the irredeemable nature of Voorstod’s fundamentalist doctrine.

Voorstoders demonstrate a sense of besetment in their dealings with the Ahabaran government when demanding the return of escaped Gharm slaves as if Ahabar, where slavery is illegal and viewed as barbaric, is trying to punish Voorstod by refusing to comply with their demands. Voorstod routinely demands the return of all Gharm, even the subsequent generations of Gharm who were born in freedom after their ancestors escaped from Voorstod. Voorstoders perceive Ahabar (and everyone else) as trying to oppress them and prevent them from practicing their religion in the manner they see fit. Of course, it seems far more reasonable to the reader that Ahabar would object to Voorstoders trying to perpetuate genocide against them.

¹⁹⁶ All quotations from Voorstod doctrine are italicized in the text; henceforth, I will not indicate as such in the parenthetical references for the sake of brevity.

In some ways, this sense of besetment resembles Wendy Brown's theory of "wounded attachments." While Brown applies this terminology to marginalized groups whose identity is at least in part constituted by a past of discriminatory treatment or persecution, Voorstoders are not so much persecuted in actuality but perceive themselves as targets of opprobrium and maltreatment, and therefore fixate on past "wrongs" done to them. Like religiously motivated terrorists, Voorstoders are unable to compromise their principles because that would mean violating their religious precepts—even when everyone else recognizes those precepts as destructive of human life and untenable in a modern civilization of liberalism and religious and cultural diversity. As Tepper notes, "Elsewhere negotiation might have worked. With other religions, it could have worked. Voorstod's God, however, was a jealous and vindictive deity who ruled by murder, terrorism, and malediction. How did one negotiate with that?" (71). Mark Juergensmeyer's observation in "The Global Rise of Nationalism," that religious ideologies tend to "religionize" politics (69) is relevant to Voorstod. What is acceptable on a political level in a theocracy must also be acceptable within the constraints of religious doctrine. In Voorstod, the prophets are political as well as religious leaders and their vision of "God's plan" for their society to reach paradise after destroying the non-faithful dictates their actions. Voorstod's politics are inseparable from its religious doctrine and practice.

Furthermore, Voorstod exhibits religious machismo in their exclusion of women from religious leadership and from sacred religious practice (albeit, their rites mostly include whipping Gharm and women to death for perceived infractions or for pleasure, or prancing around with coup markers in their hair to build up their egos). For a while, the prophets allow women to leave Voorstod, but when many women emigrate elsewhere and the birth rate declines, no longer producing enough male children to replace the Faithful as they go about annihilating

themselves, the prophets have a revelation that the women must stay (31). Susan Starr Sered observes that, “Men in fundamentalist groups feel that they cannot control the outside forces that increasingly determine their lives, so they turn their attention to controlling the ‘Other’ in their midst—Woman” (203). This is typical of kyriarchal societies which value women merely for their reproductive capacities and in which the birth of sons is more important than daughters, who are treated as a drain on the family’s resources until they can be handed off to other men. Once again, Christine E. Gudorf’s litany of violence perpetuated against women¹⁹⁷ is evident in Voorstod’s culture that keeps women and the Gharm segregated religiously, allows men to beat or whip women and Gharm to death with impunity, and reduces both to objects, their full humanity unrealized. The Voorstoders employ all of these forms of violence against women and the Gharm in extremely draconian ways; in this respect, Tepper portrays the traits of religious fundamentalism at their logical extreme. Unlike many fundamentalist sects, Voorstod avoids simultaneously placing women on a pedestal and demonizing them as evil; they systematically dehumanize women instead. The one exception to this lies with Maire Manone Girat, the “Sweet Singer of Scaery.” Maire’s voice and her soulful songs were extremely popular in Voorstod before she emigrated to Hobbs Land. The prophets plot Maire’s return, hoping to use her as a positive symbol and lure back to Voorstod other women who have emigrated elsewhere. However, the prophets’ use of Maire as a positive symbol falls by the wayside once she returns to Voorstod, and she is executed as punishment for her disloyalty, becoming a symbol of the “bad” Woman instead.

Voorstod’s nostalgia for a golden age may be better categorized as an assumption of its own superiority in order to decimate environments and enslave or annihilate other people before

¹⁹⁷ To reiterate, the types of violence Gudorf categorizes as lawful and/or justified by various religions are: marital rape; enforced pregnancy; wife beating; limitations on or exclusion from property ownership; sexual harassment; restriction of women to domestic space; religious exclusion; spiritual inferiority (10-12).

moving on to the next world to destroy. Rather, the Voortsoders' nostalgia seems less for an idealized past than for an imagined future, awarded exclusively to Faithful men: "Then might the Faithful lie about on the greensward sucking grapes and fucking virgins, so the prophets promised" (71). Yet this future can be achieved only after destroying all other religions and civilizations that are not the "true" faith of Voorstod. The unreasonableness of this position that would violate the religious freedom of everyone who does not believe as Voorstoders do should be self-evident. Voorstod, of course, does not recognize its genocidal stance as unethical.

The Voorstoders have made a practice of using up planets and moving on to the next to impose their will by force while plotting the next step toward realizing their eschatology. When forced off Ahabar by the spread of the Hobbs Land gods, the Voorstod simultaneously attack Authority, a moon that is the interplanetary center of governance for the system, and Hobbs Land itself in order to destroy the gods and prevent them from spreading further around the galaxy. Killing or enslaving the settlers in the process is a fringe benefit for the Voorstod. As one character on Hobbs Land observes, "It seems to me . . . that when a race of man becomes so anthropocentric it regards other living beings as lesser consumables, it could get to be a habit. It might become easy to include other living creatures with the Gharm. Animals. Children. Women. Entire planets. Perhaps they, too, become consumables, to be used up and thrown away" (241). Voorstod's "apocalyptic vision of purification through bloodshed" (Tax 23) means the destruction of everyone but the "Faithful" men. Ultimately, Voorstod is a slave-owning, kyriocentric death-cult that demonstrates the worst traits of Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam in their fundamentalist and orthodox manifestations; the culture of Voorstod acts as a warning to the contemporary reader about the dangers of religious fundamentalism, especially

for women and subaltern Others and shows how fundamentalist attitudes might also be linked to a disregard for the environment and conservation of its resources.

Voorstod's fundamentalism is quite easy to identify, but Tepper also examines a different form of fundamentalism through the High Baidee religion. When I first read *Raising the Stones* several years ago, I found echoes of Orthodox Judaism in the dietary restrictions, wearing of special articles of clothing, and matrilineal lines of descent of the Baidee. Some of the surface trappings of the High Baidee, such as a religious command against cutting one's hair and wearing turbans, however, more closely resemble Sikhism.¹⁹⁸ The segregation of Low and High Baidee may represent the split between Orthodox Jewish closed communities and other, less conservative, Jewish denominations.¹⁹⁹ Like Sikhism and unlike Orthodox Judaism, the High Baidee are somewhat egalitarian concerning gender. Either way, Tepper is using religious dogmatism to demonstrate the ridiculousness of certain practices, such as literal interpretation of sacred texts and dietary restrictions based on ideas of bodily purity.

A distinct facet of fundamentalism is literal interpretation of sacred texts and how (male) religious leaders imprint their own biases on these interpretations. The rigidity of such ideological positioning enables the punishment and policing of Others, within and outside of a

¹⁹⁸ The High Baidee "zettle" is a small, fine scarf worn tucked into a sash with the words "Stuff happens" on one side and "Not guilty" on the other (Tepper, *Raising the Stones* 133). Sikhs also traditionally wear a bracelet (*kara*), carry a short sword (*kirpan*), have special underwear, and carry a small comb. The wearing of zettle by the High Baidee also resembles *tallit*, the special scarves worn by Orthodox Jewish men underneath their shirts with the ends hanging out, which stands as a public declaration of their faith. The High Baidee turbans should not be confused with Hinduism since Hindus do not generally, though there are exceptions, wear turbans. Sikhs wear turbans to show respect to God by covering their heads and hair; wearing a turban is also a symbol of Sikh identity and equality. Sikh women may also wear *chuni*, or a type of veil, over their turban. Orthodox Jewish men wear either hats or *kippot* (*yarmulke* in Yiddish) on their heads as signs of respect for God and their membership in a devout community; Orthodox Jewish women shave their heads and wear wigs. The High Baidee do not cut their hair, which may be analogous to the *payot/peyot*, or uncut side curls, of Orthodox Jewish men or the custom of Sikhs of never cutting their hair. Sikhs follow vegetarian diets and Orthodox Jews keep the laws of *kashrut*.

¹⁹⁹ The segregation of Low and High Baidee may resemble Hindu caste, though reduced to Brahmin and pariah and much less complicated than the actual Hindu caste system of four castes and the out-caste. Sikhism, on the other hand, was founded as a reaction against the Hindu caste system, and instead promulgates the belief that everyone has access to God directly and does not need a Brahmin (Hindu priest class) as an intermediary.

religious faith. Juergensmeyer argues that an ideological religious movement “follows a process that begins with a disaffection with secular nationalism, then moves to perceiving politics in a religious way, identifying mortal enemies as satanic foes, and envisioning the world as caught up in cosmic confrontation, one that will ultimately lead to a peaceful world order constructed by religious nations” (80). While we can see that Voorstod easily fits this paradigm, I would argue that the High Baidee also resemble this type of ideological movement. The overarching tenets of the Baidee, before the religion split into “Low” and “High,” were the words of the “prophetess” Morgori Oestrydingh, who “magically” appears through a Door in the midst of a religious ceremony. She tells them not to let anyone “fool with your heads” and “When our minds are gone, our purpose is gone, and we are only meat, whether living or dead. Personhood resides only in the mind . . .” (132). Morgori, to the reader familiar with twentieth- and early twenty-first-century English slang and speech patterns, is clearly speaking metaphorically; the Baidee take her words somewhat literally, and thus begins a new religion based on no psychiatric or physical interference with people’s minds.

Morgori’s recorded sayings advocate for the use of reason and for acceptance of other sentient beings instead of privileging humans (especially male humans) over other species in the universe. The split between Low and High Baidee occurs when the Low Baidee “[claim] that Morgori had never meant to prohibit brain surgery and the techniques to cure mental illness, but only psychological manipulation, particularly religious cultism” (132), and the High Baidee insist on more and more literal interpretations such as not cutting one’s hair.²⁰⁰ The High Baidee endow “Scrutators” as a kind of priesthood who study Morgori’s teachings and who “had carried the word forward, through generations of theological disputation and political manipulation.

²⁰⁰ This split between literal and metaphorical interpretation of sacred texts is also characteristic of major differences between Orthodox and Chassidic Judaism versus Reform, Reconstructionist, and Conservative sects of Judaism.

Over the centuries they had defined meaning and eliminated heresies, and had set up a canon against which future innovations might be judged” (132). Morgori’s mission was to destroy gender discrimination against women, and her first words to the Baidee reflect this undertaking: “This I say unto you, be not sexist pigs” (132). However, “the male Scrutators of the High Baidee found a warning against bestial behavior (‘be not pigs’). It was not long until bestial behavior was defined as consorting with the other kind, that is, the Low Baidee. Though the Low Baidee were at first the only people shunned, as a practical matter, the prohibition was soon extended to everyone else as well” (133), demonstrating the possible manipulation of literal interpretations of sacred texts. Furthermore, the edict against not being “pigs” eventually extended to strict dietary laws to include not eating pork, then not eating anything that has four legs or any animal products.

Feminist theological critiques of rabbinic commentaries on the Torah, Christian theological treatises, and explanations of Muhammed’s *hadith* argue that (male) religious leaders’ interpretations reproduce their own prejudices against women. Similarly, the High Baidee Scrutators insist upon interpretations that may reflect their own biases more than any “divine” revelation. This results in not only literalized interpretations of Morgori’s words but also religious hypocrisy, as the text rather scathingly remarks: “The prophetess had declared it a sin to believe in absolute truths, but the Scrutators claimed that didn’t apply to religious truths, of which they had manufactured a good supply over the centuries” (156). The Scrutators thus justify their own rule-breaking within their religious faith and can continue to dictate religious doctrine based on literal interpretation with no input from dissenting groups, such as women, with impunity.

High Baidee culture is matrilineal and apparently egalitarian toward gender; women are equally involved in the public sphere and certainly a part of the military;²⁰¹ however, like fundamentalist and some mainstream religious faiths on Earth, High Baidee religious leadership seems to exclude women. One could argue that Tepper's message is that the exclusion of women from religious leadership results in prejudicial interpretations that privilege patriarchal and kyriarchal norms. While this may be plausible, I would also argue that Tepper's purpose is to make a more salient point about sacred writings: no matter how well-intentioned, they are fallible, subject to distortion and illustrate "a far commoner consequence of religious fervor: religious bigotry" (Kelso 22). Furthermore, the High Baidee's inclusion of women in the public sphere but exclusion from religious leadership most closely resembles contemporary American society. The estranging qualities of the High Baidee with their turbans, dietary restrictions, and caste-like disregard for other human beings reveal a society that excludes others based on class markers and still resists progressive change in its religious doctrine and leadership that would account for and suggest women's experiences of the world—a society many readers could readily identify as analogous to their own, flawed reality.

The High Baidee's literal interpretation of their sacred text is so ingrained in their culture that they cannot make exceptions to "messing with heads" for those who need psychological help. A High Baidee researcher, Shan Damzel, suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from a previous xenological survey of a primitive yet hostile alien culture, realizes that "new" gods had risen, as it were, on Hobbs Land. Shan seems paranoid after his experiences documenting the Porsa, glob-like creatures who swallow humans, but since his religion forbids psychiatry and psychological counseling, his PTSD is ineffectively treated. Eventually, a group

²⁰¹ The High Baidee have compulsory military service for all citizens which echoes Israel's similar requirement. Until recently, Haredim were exempt from the draft, but the Israeli government has not definitively settled this issue.

of High Baidee militarists invade Hobbs Land, destroying the Arbai Door, or portal, that makes interplanetary travel and shipping possible, and killing over three hundred settlers in their (failed) attempt to destroy the eleven Hobbs Landian gods by burning the pulsating rocks in which the gods have manifested themselves. Shan is right that the Hobbs Land gods seem to deploy a type of “mind control” on the settlers. Shan’s error, however, is his automatic assumption that “mind control” of any sort is evil, especially since everyone has the power to withdraw from the gods’ influence.

Literal interpretation of a sacred text provides justification for fundamentalist faiths to police boundaries and punish those who transgress the “rules” by demonizing the transgressor. The attack on Hobbs Land goes terribly awry as a result of the High Baidee paramilitary group’s leader, Churry’s “portray[al of] the Hobbs Landians as monsters, possessed by terrible things” (376). Despite orders not to kill anyone, Churry’s dehumanization of the settlers leads to his troops’ fear and overreaction during their attack on the temples: the first soldier to see a settler running “didn’t think of anything when he shot her except that this was one of the possessed, possibly a monster” (377). What neither Shan nor Churry realize in their religious zealotry based on literal interpretation of a sacred text is that the “mind control” in which the Hobbs Land gods engage is merely a benign form of communal knowledge. Significantly, the High Baidee believe in an Overmind, but Shan and Churry do not realize that the Hobbs Land gods are the realization of an Overmind that connects people and environments with each other in ways that the Baidee had never imagined.²⁰² They do not realize that the Hobbs Land gods have no rules or boundaries because the gods have no sacred texts or premise for demonizing the Other.

²⁰² The High Baidee concept of the Overmind is also similar to Sikhism’s concept of God, yet Sikhs tend to be tolerant of other religious dominations and less exclusionary than the High Baidee.

The High Baidee and Voorstod remain linked through their literal interpretation of sacred texts and through male religious leadership that is either actively hostile toward or, at a minimum, willfully disregards women's autonomy. Rosemary Radford Ruether observes that this anti-feminism is widespread among fundamentalist and, more broadly, right-wing groups (3). Moreover, Ruether accounts for the misogyny of fundamentalist religious tradition due to the insecurities of (white, male, wealthy, heterosexual) men over retaining their power: "Why this war on women in the name of true religion? Women seem to have become the scapegoats for male fears of loss of control in society" (4). As a matter of course, the more insecure the people at the top of the kyriarchal pyramid are, the more harshly they will attempt to enforce control through the kyriarchal institutions that they already dominate. Religious institutions happen to be the ones in which this kyriarchal control is less likely to be openly challenged and can be more easily defended in the name of tradition and their God.

Utopic New Religion: Hobbs Land

While dystopian literature is frequently based in reality, sometimes painfully so, utopia is more likely a "presentation of irreality" (Wu 241) that offers space for imagining what might be possible "if"—if only our societies practiced equality for all; if only diversity was not only present but valued; if only religious faith realized its utopic potential. Dingbo Wu contends in "Understanding Utopian Literature": "[o]nly in the realm of nonexistence do freedom and necessity meet. This feature of nonexistence in Utopian literature offers great advantages for the authors. They can transcend time and space to reshape the past and the present and project future possibilities. This definitional element of content makes the Utopian genre unique in the great varieties of literature" (241). In other words, Wu recognizes the imaginary force of creating an ideal world and the effects such an ideal might have on the reading audience. Regarding

Tepper's imagined religious utopia in *Raising the Stones*, I would contend that the intersection of non-existence and necessity makes evident that no religious faith has fully or widely realized its utopic potential. However, Tepper's text still holds out the possibility of religion—specifically, a kind of ecofeminist animism—fulfilling a utopic role. Gudorf contends that religious faiths can only fulfill this utopic role when they also uphold feminist tenets of equality. In “Violence Against Women in World Religions,” she writes:

Across the world religions, feminists are clear that the dignity and welfare of women within religions and within their larger communities requires the development of women clergy, judges, and religious scholars. Religion should be more than simply a source of comfort for women resisting degradation and violence aimed at them; it should be, and could be, a support for women liberating themselves from all kinds of violence against [them]. (27)

Through Tepper's thorough skewering of Sam's pretensions to be the hero of legends and to find his long-lost father-king, *Raising the Stones* demonstrates how religion must move past the narratives of human history, recited primarily by male voices, and accept the intrinsic value of each human being. As Kelso asserts, Tepper strikes at the very root, if you will, of religiosity and the pretensions of extant religious traditions to superior knowledge and as the gatekeepers to a singular pathway to God:

Such literal rising and raising from the dead, the reversal of the Eucharist and of “man created in god's image,” the “not very impressive” concept of a god that “just grew in the dirt like a turnip” is Tepper's most daring religious extrapolation. It interrogates central Christian myths, using the SF tradition of the superior alien to extrapolate a God that would do what “gods are supposed to do

. . . [give people] the things we're always praying for . . .—peace and hope and tranquility.” (21)

Reverse Eucharist aside, I would exchange “Christian myths” for “Abrahamic myths,” since Islam, Judaism, and Christianity share a common creation narrative, and much of the polemic commentary of *Raising the Stones* specifically takes fundamentalist Islam, Judaism, and Christianity to task for their literal interpretations of sacred texts and/or relegation of women to reproductive objects. Tepper’s ecofeminist depiction of gods as a fungus that interconnects human beings and their environments intertwines feminist tenets of communion with and care for the Earth as well as the inherent worth of individuals regardless of gender or other components of identity. Furthermore, Gudorf asserts that “in order for religion to be a source of liberation, it must develop the ability to critically examine its history and development and the impact that it has had on the lives of girls and women” (27). By imagining a new religion, or perhaps reframing animism as ecofeminist, Tepper does not sidestep an examination of religious history so much as formulate an argument for abandoning the aspects of religious faith and spiritual practice that no longer make sense in modern society. In the end, whether God “grew in the dirt like a turnip,” encompasses all of time, space, and existence, or does not exist at all is unprovable; one religion or religious theory, therefore, cannot claim superiority or validity over any other.

Raising the Stones seems to argue that the strongest utopian impulse in religion may lie in a faith’s ability to unite a community and create connections among its members. When Hobbs Land was founded, the few remaining, turnip-like Departed Ones, without interference from the first human settlers, die off within a few years of settlement but leave behind the ruins of their temples and their god, Bondru Dharm. When the narrative opens, Bondru Dharm, ostensibly

some sort of rock with electric impulses that pulsate through it, dies. The humans in Settlement One, where Bondru Dharm is located, mysteriously find themselves incapacitated for about ten days—unable to summon help or notify Central Management, unable to eat or drink. The only activity that occurs during this time period is when some of the settlers bury Birribat Shum, Bondru Dharm’s human caretaker and interpreter who dies within moments of the god and is covered with a black dust from the exploded god-rock. The ten days of incapacity, though the settlers do not realize it until later, may be a period of mourning for the death of the god.

However, the settlers’ ten days of incapacity may signify something more important: the collapse of a network that had previously interconnected them with each other, though not very strongly and limited to their geographic settlement, and had resulted in Settlement One’s consistent exceeding of productivity quotas through their efficiency and general teamwork.

As the god/fungus begins to grow underneath the surface, it exerts a gentle influence over the children of Settlement One, who are perhaps the most receptive to its as yet immature influence. Thirty days after the death of the god, some of the children in Settlement One feel a gentle compulsion to restore one of the temples and dig up the corpse of Birribat Shum. The corpse has hardened into a rock-like form, with light pulsating through it, and the kids establish it on a plinth in the temple. The children save some of the filaments and fibers that had encased the corpse-cum-rock-cum-god like a shroud; they soon form an intersettlement committee that performs graveside services in order to bury parts of this shroud with new corpses at each settlement that then become gods as well. In each case, children begin restoring the temples scattered across the planet with adults “coincidentally” showing up to pitch in when superior strength or farming equipment is needed. Cats bring ferfs, rodent vermin containing some sort of chemical needed by the gods to function, to the temples and the gods ingest them. Eventually,

the fibrous shrouds left in the ground after the “raising of the stones” form an underground network of a kind of fungus that links the entire planet, radiating out from each of the gods and their temples and eventually linking all of Hobbs Land through its underground stratum.

In the tradition of pastoral utopia, the infestation, as it were, of the gods on Hobbs Land results in people who are more productive and peaceful, while contentious issues and hostilities seem to fade into unimportance; this happens across the planet and is no longer confined to the geographic area underneath Settlement One. Violent people either leave Hobbs Land or, in one case, a violent settler becomes a rabid animal that attacks a human and is subsequently killed. The landscape of Hobbs Land, previously flattish countryside broken only by the occasional creek and a single escarpment, begins to change as the settlers dream about places they have seen or would like to visit. The new landscape contains naturally occurring features such as a forest of trees that grows overnight or lakes and canyons that suddenly appear. Other than the donations of ferfs from the settlement cats—the need for which the gods communicate directly to the cats, the gods require no rituals or observances other than occasional maintenance on the temples and a yearly whitewashing of the temple walls (228). People are free to visit the gods in their temples, but the gods do not compel anyone to do so or to establish a schedule for worship or even meditation. Most significantly, the gods impart a communal knowledge to the settlers; what the settlers know and understand, the gods know too and the settlers can access this by just thinking about what they want to know.

The interconnectedness that the Hobbs Land gods offer breaks down barriers in between human beings and fosters understanding without forcing humans to conform to a single pattern. Tepper recognizes how isolated human beings can be from each other, which results in an inability to communicate clearly or to see another person’s point of view. In the text, Maire

observes, “We’re so separate. Each of us, always. So separate. I first knew that when I had babies. They’d cry, and I’d try to help, try to figure out what was wrong. But they were separate, as though there was a wall between them and me. Even when they learned to talk, the wall was still there. What they said and what I heard were always different things” (329). Yet this inadequacy in human (and feline) communication and interaction is mediated by the fungus-like network that the gods have established on Hobbs Land and linked to the settlers. Some of the settlers, such as Sam, take a nap in the temple and awaken not realizing the fungus has penetrated their skin and become an organic part of them. This accounts for Sam’s visions of Theseus appearing to him, an extreme manifestation that other settlers, whose skin is not directly penetrated, do not experience;²⁰³ unlike Sam, perhaps the other settlers do not need such direct contact or manipulation by the gods to become empathetically linked to others.

More importantly, the gods can respond to reason; people themselves can influence how the gods react in various situations. Rather than turning everyone into a calm, happy, and completely boring group, the gods learn that a full range of human emotions is better than forcing panaceas on individuals. No individual develops by going through life in a tranquilized haze void of emotion stronger than a continual sense of pleasant security. After Africa Wilm says goodbye to her daughter Saturday, who leaves for Voorstod to rescue her kidnapped cousin Jep, Africa begins to cry because of the danger she knows Saturday may face: “She was not being silly, she told herself. She was just . . . just missing her daughter, that was all. Inside her, calm and peace were urged on her, but she fought against being consoled. It was proper to feel this way. Proper to be lonely. Proper and human to grieve. The consolation withdrew as though

²⁰³ Spiggy Fettle, an apostate High Baidee on the Central Management Staff, is also directly “infected” by the gods in order for him to deal with the High Baidee Team of Shan Damzel and his siblings who survey the old temple sites. Spiggy does not lie so much as omit information when directly questioned. Presumably, the Hobbs Land gods, at an early stage in their fungal development could not risk the High Baidee team discovering them quite yet.

considering the matter. Perhaps, it agreed, it was more proper to grieve. Consolation was proper, but grieving, too, had its time and place” (238). The gods of Hobbs Land are interactive and can change to fit human needs rather than always compelling humans to change to fit their needs, which they had seemed to do, however beneficently, thus far in the narrative.

In *Raising the Stones*, Tepper presents the Hobbs Land gods at face value: they are a fungus that enables communication between people, animals, and the environment without coercion or divinity or promises of immortality. In *Sideshow*, Tepper more fully explains the Arbai communications device that becomes the Hobbs Land gods when Jory (Marjorie Westriding) explains how to become “unpossessed” by the communication device:

The device will help you do it. It won’t cheat. It has no desire for power. It has no ego to assert. It is simply what it was designed to be, a communication device. Because most people like to think of themselves as better than they are—kinder and more generous—the usual net effect of the device is an improvement in people’s ability to get along with one another. There is more trust, more faith, as Asner [Sam] could tell you. Nonetheless, if you spend some time remembering incidents from your life and how you felt and reacted toward them, you’ll become more and more what you were. The Arbai Device has no use for grieving, rebellious participants. (435)

This insight into the device’s workings also demonstrates that anyone who did not want to be subjected to its “mind control” could withdraw from the communications network the fungus has established. In this respect, the Hobbs Land gods, such as they are, make obvious that humans can exercise free will, even to the point of rejecting the benefits of the communications device and its aid in fulfilling a society’s utopic potential.

This utopic potential, however, is realized on Hobbs Land and the other planets in the system through the spread of the fungus/gods so that every living thing on a particular planet connects with every other living thing. Once the gods “infect” Voorstod through Saturday taking a patch of fibers to the Gharm, the growth of the fungus underground forces the violent Voorstoders to leave Ahabar and subsequently launch their apocalyptic attacks on the central planetary Authority and Hobbs Land. The gods also facilitate the freeing of the Gharm and the return of their Tchenka. Like the changed landscape of Hobbs Land, the Gharm dream the Tchenka into being. The people left in the Voorstod region, and later the whole of Ahabar, build some temples, raise their own stones, and become generally peaceable: “people seem to turn cooperative and kind and virtually incapable of hurting others” (287). The fungus also spreads to the High Baidee on the planet Thyker after the paramilitary strike coats the participants, and their eleven fatalities, with the black dust from the burned rock-gods. The changes begin to multiply:

It was not long after the net reached its outermost limits that revelations came to the Circle of Scrutators in an almost continuous sequence. It was revealed that Baidee might cut their hair, might do without turbans and kamracs and zettles, might eat eggs, might be friends with people of other opinions. Various Baidee began reassessing the words of the prophetess in the light of current understanding. Surprisingly, once stripped of the millennial old accretions added by generations of old men on the Circle of Scrutators, the words of the prophetess seemed quite sensible. (449)

Additionally, the Voorstoders who invade Hobbs Land with a stolen, programmed army of pseudo-flesh, weaponized cyborg soldiers are combated by organic rockets²⁰⁴ propelled out of

²⁰⁴ A type of mushroom, commonly called “false/early morels,” produces monomethylhydrazine, a component of rocket fuel (Reehil).

the temples on Hobbs Land. Ironically, after being coated with fungus spores released from the rockets, the Voorstoders and their cyborg army are transformed into trees dotted over the landscape (450). This outcome integrates quite well with Tepper's ecofeminism and the text's argument for the interconnectedness of intelligent species with each other as well as their environment.

For the Hobbs Land settlers, their religious identity presents no conflicts with other aspects of their identities and positively reinforces authentic self-images. The Hobbs Land gods themselves reconcile the need for secure social structures—to the point that the gods produce their own defenses against invasion—and enable the people to meet their own social, spiritual, and emotional needs through their interrelationships with each other and with their environment. By contrast, when a religion attempts to be hegemonic, like Voorstod and its death-cult leanings, the monolithic RSA/ISA nature of the fundamentalist faith in a theocracy also merges all aspects of the self into one's religious identity. This apparent collapse of identity is problematic when religious tenets interfere with an individual's own critical analysis and/or desire. Yet the hegemonic nature of fundamentalist control leaves no room for dissent: individuals either submit to fundamentalist doctrine or face being cast out of or punished by the community. For people outside of hegemonic fundamentalist influence, a reconciliation between religious identity and other aspects of identity may not be so clearly delineated. In *Ethnic Conflict: Religion, Identity, and Politics*, S.A. Giannakos speculates that “individuals tend to identify with religious beliefs or spiritual security structures the same way they identify with social security structures. Parallel to a social identity an individual maintains a spiritual identity and, as a result, the individual is constantly struggling to reconcile the two—physical needs and spiritual needs are not always compatible and threats to one are not necessarily threats to the other” (13). The Hobbs Land

settlers, connected as they are to their environment and each other, no longer face such a struggle for reconciliation of physical and spiritual needs.

The communal identity of the settlers on Hobbs Land is multi-cultural, and Tepper includes a variety of skin colors in the narrative's character descriptions; as a result, race is a non-issue for the settlers and a welcomed difference. Likewise, class status, since most of the settlers start out as socio-economic equals, does not produce tensions among the settlers, though it is possible to advance as a Team Leader or Topman for the more talented and/or ambitious. In equalizing other facets of identity that might otherwise have proven problematic among her characters, Tepper brings the reader's focus to culture and its by-product, religion: "Of course, men had never been primitives on Hobbs Land. They had come through the Door already stuffed with histories and memories and technologies from other places. . . . They had arrived as civilized peoples—though not as *a* civilized people, which might have given them the sense of common identity Sam thought he wanted" (14). Yet a common identity does evolve among the settlers after the gods have spread across Hobbs Land. One settler claims, "The Gods here on Hobbs Land have not changed us," but Africa calmly disagrees: "Well it did. . . . It's just that it didn't need to change us much. Most of us were already fairly peaceable people, fairly kind, decent to our families and friends. Mostly what it changed was our response to surprise and fear, I think. In my experience, and from what I've read in learning management, most of human nastiness comes out of shock or fear" (371). The communal knowledge gained from the Arbai device alleviates many of the settlers' fears. Moreover, the settlers recognize the benefits that their gods give them and that they have not been subjected to the overwhelming mind-control by which the High Baidee had felt so threatened: "I get no sense that my autonomy has been destroyed. I believe I still have free will. I don't think the God is directing us, except in a few

specifics, and even those seem designed merely to increase our general welfare and freedom of choice” (398). The settlers on Hobbs Land have the gods’ protection as well as shared knowledge which releases them from much of what they fear and allows them to live in a nearly utopic setting in stark contrast to the violence of the Voorstod and the dogmatism of the High Baidee. Perhaps, as Tepper argues in *Sideshow*, some limitations to free will are necessary for the good of a society or community as a whole in order for everyone to exercise free will to the greatest, yet an equal or equalizing, extent.

For all three of the religious cultures in *Raising the Stones*, as well as the Gharm, religion constitutes a significant part of their communal identities. For the Voorstod and the High Baidee, the terms of the religion—how it is practiced, what is acceptable and what is not, who matters to the god and who does not—are dictated by groups of men seemingly more concerned with preserving their status and power and reinforcing kyriarchal norms than with empowering everyone and helping people to live spiritually meaningful lives. The Voorstod and High Baidee mindset produce separations and divisions between individuals and between people and their environment; women and Others suffer the most as a result. Although as Elizabeth Ozorak argues, “Women conceptualize religion in terms of relationship rather than individuation” (24), any religious practice, even fundamentalist ones that marginalize and severely circumscribe women’s participation, can be a source of empowerment that holds out the promise of a “rising tide of gender enlightenment” (25)—a promise which rarely reaches fulfillment among fundamentalist faiths. Conversely, the Hobbs Land religion offers a space of gender neutrality and egalitarianism that disrupts the kyriarchal narrative of patrilineal descent and inheritance as well as religiosity that becomes extreme in nature. It is an alternative means, “a way, a convenience, a kindness” (147), of establishing religion that does not make demands on its

adherents, benefits the settlers whether they believe or not, and enhances the idea of an underlying goodness in human nature through empathy and interconnection.

The utopia of Hobbs land may not prove utopic for everyone in every way. Hobbs Land is an agrarian/pastoral ideal which harkens back to some of the classic nineteenth-century utopias as well as the ecofeminist utopias from the 1970s. While the settlers seem to lead productive work lives with time to pursue hobbies of artisanal and/or skilled nature, farming and homegrown entertainment are not for everyone. I would argue that the sense of community imbued by the Arbai device/gods is the essential element of utopia and the rest is mere window dressing. The text does not offer more than glimpses of the utopian communities that later develop on other planets in the system; perhaps someone who enjoys city life more than country living would thrive on Thyker or Ahabar instead. While Hobbs Land occupies primacy as a utopia, the text does not foreclose the possibility of other utopian settings that allows for individual preferences and the infinite varieties of Tepper's ecofeminist vision.

Hobbs Land, at the beginning of the novel, appears to have residual kyriarchal issues, including gender, that may not be completely resolved by the end of the narrative despite Hobbs Land's utopian qualities. In *A Glance from Nowhere: Sheri S. Tepper's Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Sylvia Kelso calls *Raising the Stones* "a remarkable SF extrapolation, in Tepper's most wide-ranging social commentary" (20). However, Kelso also criticizes what she views as "some inadvertent endorsements of gender and economic status quos" (24) in that much of the Hobbs Land settlement leadership and Central Management, outside of Africa Wilm, are male—a condition that does not change over the course of the novel. While it is possible that some of the Topmen are women, the use of a gendered job title hides this possibility. Additionally, Mysore Hobbs, the titular owner of Hobbs Land, is also male and, in Kelso's estimation, "takes a heroic

role” (24). I disagree with Kelso’s assessment of Mysore as a hero. When news of the High Baidee attack reaches Mysore through an antiquated and redundant message system after the attackers disable the Door normally used for messages, Mysore cuts off the food supply to Thyker; or rather, he informs the High Baidee that they will only receive food stuffs from Hobbs Land and not through any other Hobbs Corporation subsidiary. Considering that two-thirds of Thyker’s food is purchased through Hobbs Corporation sources, the paramilitary group’s actions have serious repercussions for the entire population of Thyker, raising the specter of enforced food rationing for a starving populace. Repairing the destroyed Door on Hobbs Land becomes the highest priority of the High Baidee in order to resume their food supply from Hobbs Corporation and prevent mass starvation. Once the Door and food shipping capability are restored, Dern Blass, the (male) head of Central Management exercises his own sense of revenge and only sends meat and other animal products to the religiously vegan High Baidee on Thyker. While I would agree with Kelso that Tepper does preserve some of the economic status quo, I do not necessarily agree that it is an “endorsement” to have male characters who sometimes do the right thing. The larger issue is religious freedom: “It wasn’t that Mysore Hobbs cared about the Hobbs Land Gods. Mysore Hobbs had no interest in the Gods one way or the other; . . . However, he was also a conscientious man whose self-image demanded very high standards of conduct, and if Gods meant something to the settlers, then their Gods should not be interfered with. The settlers had been guaranteed that courtesy under the terms of the contract” (391). I would be more inclined to argue that Tepper is making an “inadvertent endorsement” of capitalism and that capitalism, in Tepper’s estimation, can be compatible with religious tolerance so long as the contract stipulates to that effect and all parties comply with the agreed upon terms; this condition insists on a certain degree of honor in capitalist transactions that may not always

be present in the reader's current economic system. In this instance, the relationship of the settlers to their "government" in the form of a corporate controlling interest is an economic one while in most cases, the relationship of citizens to their government is legal in nature; both types of relationships can be problematic for the individual and for a society. Because Mysore upholds the contract and takes steps to protect his settlers' interest, and by extension the productivity of his investment, I do not see him as a hero swooping to the rescue, but as a conscientious person. That Mysore is a man seems incidental rather than an endorsement of kyriocentric norms.

On the other hand, Dern Blass's positioning as the head of Hobbs Land's Central Management presents more of a kyriocentric standard; however, Tepper also interrogates this standard. Since most of Central Management is run by his executive assistant, Tandle, a woman, Dern Blass initially comes across as yet another man with power and a title taking advantage of the labor of female subordinates. However, the text makes obvious that many of the settlement leaders suspect, and the executive staff of Central Management know, Tandle actually runs Central Management, and Dern Blass, while not incompetent nor entirely a figurehead, accumulates more credit than he deserves. He certainly does not appear heroic other than pitching in with everyone else and doing his job during a crisis; while he may have sloughed a lot of work onto Tandle, he does take a leadership role during the High Baidee attack on the colony and in the aftermath of recovery—at least partly out of necessity since Tandle is one of the first settlers gunned down by the High Baidee. Regardless, Mysore's and Dern Blass's reactions to the attack on Hobbs Land and their ironic sense of justice for the perpetrators are vastly satisfying to the reader.

More nebulous, perhaps, is Tepper's utopic vision of the family because it can be read in at least two different ways in the text. First, as depicted in *Raising the Stones*, a matrilineal

society that saddles women with sole responsibility for the care of their children with no expected support from their fathers seems similar to the stereotype of the 1950s housewife. However, the women on Hobbs Land appear to work in agricultural production in some capacity. Each settlement has a community crèche staffed by retired workers, such as Maire, that frees up women with children who have not yet reached school age to do work outside of the home. With no predators on Hobbs Land, the school-age kids seem to exercise free range around their settlements—as long as they do their homework. Neither does the state of motherhood seem to hold women back from pursuing their career goals. For example, Africa Wilm has five children, ranging from a toddler through age fourteen, and being a mother seems to have had no negative effect on her advancement to Team Leader or Central Management’s recognition that she is the best Team Leader in the ten settlements. Africa is obviously “Topman” material and should be leading her own settlement, indicating the location of the glass ceiling at the very top tier of settlement career opportunities. On Hobbs Land, while women have sole responsibility for their children, they have communal and societal support—to a point—that allows for some semblance of balance with work outside the home, the kind of support feminists have called for in American society for generations. Second, China Wilm calls her third child,²⁰⁵ delivered during the Voorstod invasion and the gods’ fungal retaliation, “Sam’s baby,” much to her sister Africa’s disapproval: “The baby could not be called Sam’s baby, not in any well-managed society, but Africa did not take time to argue” (429). Herein lie the two different ways of reading Tepper’s argument about families: on the one hand, it seems that Tepper might be re-inscribing the paradigm of the nuclear family—a paradigm that Hobbs Land had gotten away from—by China naming Sam as the father of her child and indicating an expectation that Sam will be an

²⁰⁵ In addition to Jep, China has a younger daughter who is mentioned but remains unnamed. Presumably, this second child’s father is not Sam Girat since no father is mentioned in conjunction with her, unlike Jep or China’s third child who is conceived and born during the course of the narrative.

acknowledged part of her baby daughter's life. On the other hand, however, given the intense nature of the text's argument against patriarchal inheritance and critique of the father-son relationship, Tepper seems to argue for a new definition of what constitutes a family. The model of the nuclear family as well as Hobbs Land's custom of women bearing sole responsibility for their children both have their disadvantages. Ultimately, the text seems to subtly call for a new pattern of family, or perhaps just a more flexible way of constituting who makes up a family. The text does not offer a model of what such a flexible pattern would look like, and this absence is perhaps the most compelling argument: each family should define itself in whatever ways suit its members' needs.

Despite her ecofeminism and unwavering defense of women's rights and equal value as human beings, some critics take issue with Tepper's lack of inclusion of gays and lesbians in her novels. In her summary and evaluation of Tepper's work in *Fifty Key Figures in Science Fiction*, Gwyneth Jones roundly criticizes Tepper's "negative position on both male and female homosexuality" ("Sheri S[tewart] Tepper" 226) in *The Gate to Women's Country*. In that novel, homosexuality is "cured" by genetic manipulation while a fetus is in utero and fits with the women's society's plan to keep both men and women heterosexual for breeding and population purposes. In *Raising the Stones*, and the other novels in the Arbai trilogy, queer relationships are simply absent. The women on Hobbs Land live in "sisterhouses" with their children and other female relatives; male children usually move out around age fifteen. The men on Hobbs Land live in "brotherhouses," sometimes alone and sometimes together with other male relatives or unrelated men. However, Tepper does not address the possibility that some of the brother and sisterhouses might host same sex couples. To be fair, heterosexual couples do not live together either, and there is no such institution as marriage for anyone on Hobbs Land. Gudorf asserts

that “[t]oday the most serious sexual challenge to religions comes from those groups pressing to end the narrow dimorphism in traditional religious views of sexuality. Gay, lesbian, transgender, and sexually ambiguous persons question the division of all humans into male and female, behaviors into masculine and feminine, and sexual orientation into homosexual and heterosexual” (27). Although feminist theory robustly dealt with lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues in the 1980s and queer theory continues to do so since the 1990s, Tepper seems to ignore how non-heterosexual identity intersects with religion and contests religious traditions of homosexual exclusion.

Tepper uses gendered language in *Raising the Stones*, which can indicate less than utopic conditions of equality. The head person for each settlement is called “Topman,” and, as far as the reader knows, all the heads of settlements are men, though Africa steps in for Sam Girat while he is off-planet. Tepper uses “man” and “mankind” as universal references to human beings, but as universals are known to do, such usage leaves out non-male genders entirely. Many feminist theologians lament what Judith Plaskow calls “God language” that is gendered male and perpetuates the idea of a god-figure as male and therefore human men as more closely resembling God. In “Returning God: The Gift of Feminist Theology,” Catherine Keller writes:

We feminists in theology have tried our best to feminize, womanize, neuter, or queer God; we have fought with each other and with the lords of patriarchy to open a space for the fullness of women within theology. But, as both sisters and patriarchs sneered knowingly from the start, no matter how much we adjust and supplement and deconstruct and reconstruct God, He will remain pretty much a *he*. Even when there is a liberal willingness to use only inclusive language about the deity in newly written texts, prayers, liturgies—and that is a huge and rare

concession—still God brings with him/her/itself the archive: the historical trove of scriptures, prayers, creeds, songs theologies. And that archive is punctuated percussively, in relentless elegance, with its He's, Lords, and Fathers. (58, emphasis in original)

Tepper very carefully eschews use of pronouns when characters refer to the Hobbs Land gods, most of whom are a specific gender before their fungus-transformed corpses are “raised” as gods. Yet, in a matrilineal society, the characters frequently resort to gendered language that is androcentric. Considering Tepper’s loathing for warping the divine into images of human beings, particularly men, her continued use of male pronouns and gendered language presents a confusing conundrum in her text. One could argue that Tepper uses this gendered language in order to show that even a developing utopia has its challenges and need for improvement. Gendered language sends subtle but constant messages to women that they are less than equal and may indicate that while Hobbs Land is more fully realized than other utopian visions, it is still in the process of realizing its full potential. In the feminist tradition, utopia is, after all, a process rather than a static state.

Most importantly, the text establishes a feminist basis as being of paramount importance in religious faith and the realization of a utopian society: every intelligent species and each individual has value and should be treated with respect, dignity, and equality. In some respects, *Raising the Stones* condemns extant religious traditions, particularly Abrahamic ones, as useless and unredeemable in their present mainstream and fundamentalist forms. Ruether maintains that, “[f]or the moment a key way to combat the claim that religiousness is authentically represented by patriarchal, misogynist religious traditions is to vindicate the progressive, egalitarian principles within religious traditions themselves” (8). Yet in Tepper’s estimation, religious

traditions have lost what utopic potential they originally had. Furthermore, because extant religious faiths continue to manifest themselves in fundamentalist forms based in misogyny, they are hypocritical, oppressive, and spiritually inauthentic. In effect, the utopic potential of religion has been suborned under fundamentalist oppression of women and other subaltern groups that renders the utopic potential of religion unrealizable. Rather, *Raising the Stones* argues for ecofeminist tenets as the basis of religious faith. These tenets, which value everyone equally and are centered on deconstructing kyriarchal privilege in order to realize equality for humans and beyond, must be present, upheld, and practiced in religious faiths for those faiths to be valid as well as accessible to all.

The Roots of Misogyny

The main plotline of the narrative follows Sam Girat as representative of the move from religious fundamentalism and its misogyny to the more egalitarian mindset of the Hobbs Land gods. Sam, more than any other Hobbs Land character, has not embraced equality for everyone because of his sense of entitlement as a man. Sam's concept of patriarchal inheritance most closely resembles SNAF and he resents Hobbs Land's societal norm of female-headed households and their lack of adult male leadership. Sam's transformation into an individual who embraces equality, simultaneously occurring as the gods transform Hobbs Land and other planets, exemplifies Tepper's theme of the need to move away from the dystopic elements of religious faith and to embrace the utopic elements of ecofeminist animism. Additionally, Tepper utilizes Sam's quest for a father and his subsequent transformation to portray the institution of the family in both positive and negative formations in the novel.

At the beginning of the narrative, Sam is obsessed with legends in the settlement's computer Archives; he uses them as a means of establishing a one-sided connection with his

father, Phaed, and as a way of making himself into the hero of his own story. He migrated with his mother Maire and younger sister Sal from Voorstod at the age of six. Maire had made the decision to leave Voorstod after the accidental shooting death of her younger son, a toddler, during a terrorist attack that her husband, one of the “Faithful,” had engineered. Phaed had shown no remorse for the death of his younger son at the hands of one of his troops, cementing Maire’s decision to leave him. Despite his tender age, Maire had given Sam the choice to leave with her or to remain with his father: “it’s the only choice I can give you Sam. Sal and I can’t stay here. Voorstod is no place for womenfolk and children” (12). When they came through the Door onto Hobbs Land, Maire had thanked her god that “There are no legends here” (12), seemingly indicating an escape from a kyriocentric history of human beings. This incident, however, sparks Sam’s fascination with legends and stories, especially narratives about fathers and sons, and his fixation on the father that he no longer knows and perhaps never knew in a realistic, meaningful way. Sam’s obsession with legends and his father leads him to manufacture Phaed as a father-king with a birthright to pass on to Sam once he completes a quest and reunites with his father, similar to the myth of Theseus.²⁰⁶ Sam’s obsession also seems to be a search for a unified self, a legend of his own making, rather than an acceptance of the complexity of people and their identities. Sam may very well be delusional since he has conversations with the Greek hero Theseus, but the text also hints that Theseus appears to Sam as a manifestation of the Hobbs Land gods who ultimately have their own purposes for Sam’s “destiny” and yearned-for birthright.

²⁰⁶ Aegeus, the king of Athens, buried his sword and sandals under a rock when he left Aethra, who was pregnant with Theseus, to go back to Athens. Aegeus told Aethra that when Theseus became an adult, he should move the rock and take the tokens Aegeus left for him as symbols of his royal parentage and his heroism. When Theseus moved the rock, Aethra told him to take the sword and sandals back to Aegeus to claim his birthright. He could go either by sea or by land past the six entrances to the Underworld and their fierce guardians. Theseus took the land route.

Tepper interrogates the idea of a unified self through her main character's development from an ego-centric misogynist to a fully-developed human being capable of understanding multiple points of view and valuing others for their difference. Hobbs Land initially appears in Tepper's text as a place where some of the weight of human history has been overcome by its inhabitants. Even before the advent of the Hobbs Land gods, Hobbs Land society is fairly egalitarian for all of its diverse inhabitants. Hobbs Land has, in some ways, redefined the concept of what constitutes a family away from the kyriarchal norm of the male-headed nuclear household through matrilineal family constructions. However, even as a matrilineal society, Hobbs Land does not seem to present much of a departure from Earth's past of kyriarchal institutions before the advent of the gods. Hobbs Land's Archives are readily available for anyone wishing to access them, and the stories go back in time to when humans lived only on Earth; yet the bulk of this recorded human history tends to filter knowledge through a male interpretative lens that discounts women's experiences and importance. In "Text, Gender, and Future Realities," Monica Lee distinguishes between the sorts of stories women writers tell and the sorts that male writers tell. She writes:

the recurrence of topics, themes, images and metaphors in the literary works of women is linked to the search for an emancipated self by individuals who react in a collective manner to a common social reality. If the central focus in heroic literature is the preservation of the unified self, then in contrast, the focus is upon acceptance of the many sides of the non-unified self. Given that history and myths are recounted by the winners and the women are traditionally the non-winners, we live with a cultural heritage that supports the archetype of the patriarchal hero and preservation of the unified self. (119)

What happens, then, to the stories men tell themselves based on the preserved stories of kyriarchal heroes and their quests for a unified sense of self? For Sam, the stories he reads locate a universal male as the hero and enable his view of himself in the same light.

As the hero of his own story, Sam's sense of ethics and doing the right thing is perhaps well-intentioned, but he ultimately neglects to recognize the autonomy and value of other human beings, particularly women. His display of gendered bias, despite a lack of malicious intent, still exhibits how even well-meaning people actively participate in kyriarchal structures. In "Sheri S. Tepper: Avenging Angels and Worlds of Wonder," G. Jones observes that "the focus is on fathers and sons, the sons of human society in its original matrilineal state: who re-invent their absent fathers as gods and found abusive belief systems on a myth of fatherhood. . . . Sam Girat, anti-hero, is Tepper's most effective human male character: sympathetic yet recalcitrant, hell-bent on ruining everyone's life, yet full of goodwill" (77). I find Jones' assessment of Sam as a character fairly accurate, though I would quibble with whether Sam is "hell-bent" about anything other than his "quest" to find his father and become a hero. He is not purposeful in "ruining everyone's life," where "everyone" mainly pertains to his mother and his on-again-off-again lover, China Wilm. Instead, Sam's inability to recognize that others' interests are as important to them as his interests are to him severely limits his capacity for empathy. Sam's own focus on the father-son relationship precludes him from developing meaningful relationships with the women who are the most important in his life. Rather, Sam seems to ruin others' lives by blindly clinging to a myth of his own making and denigrating the value of others' opinions.

Moreover, Sam appears to have his own "wounded attachment" to a myth of kyriarchal patrimony: "I guess I've always been angry that my father let me leave that way. He didn't try to stop Mam from taking me. He just let me go" (79). Yet in the matrilineal society on Hobbs

Land, fathers are not named as such; grown men are either uncles or brothers, and occasionally referred to as “progenitors” if a genetic link is relevant to a romantic relationship in order to prevent incestuous liaisons. Thus, in addition to missing a connection with (the idea of) his father, Sam cannot acknowledge or lay any sort of claim to his biological son Jeopardy (Jep) Wilm, adding to Sam’s sense of being an outsider on Hobbs Land, despite his social and career success. Furthermore, Sam recognizes that Jep is “so completely a Wilm clanmember” (18) that the kind of father-son relationship he envisions with Jep is an impossibility. In *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Religion, Paternity and Sacrifice*, Nancy B. Jay posits that:

The social and religious continuity of the patrilineal family gives males an attenuated form of immortality in the institutionalized succession of fathers and sons. . . . It is only mothers, bearing mortal children, who dim this glorious vision of eternal and perfect patriliney. . . . Women (who fail in such glaring ways to resemble the father) do not contribute to the continuity of their own family line. . . . Women marry outside their own family and bear children for the continuity of a different family. Children are born not just of women, but of outsiders. For any boy, “all that his mother gave him” pollutes the purity of the paternal line. (31)

Sam finds the denial of fatherhood on Hobbs Land painful because of his own sense of father-loss and attachment to a patrilineal ideal—an ideal he learned not from the culture around him but through studying human history and its legends. Rather than this being an instance in which a subordinated or marginalized individual has been persecuted or descended from a persecuted group, Sam is a privileged, heterosexual, white male with a considerable amount of power, at least within his settlement as the Topman, a position he achieved through his own merit. In some respects, Sam resembles the Men’s Rights Movement advocates in his sense of persecution

even though he has all the advantages and all of the power routinely denied to other groups. He resents the power women have over children, linked to their reproductive capacity, that he feels is denied him.²⁰⁷ In W. Brown's logic of pain, identity is not only produced but multiplied at the site of trauma; it follows, then, that the distortions of self-understanding that ensue limit and hurt Sam's ability to conduct healthy, romantic relationships, in particular with China Wilm, Jep's mother, and hinder his relationships with other women in his life.

Sam fantasizes about recognition from his father, a desire that conflicts with the social norms on Hobbs Land in which fathers are not acknowledged as such but are merely sperm donors. Sam's forays into fantasy, talking to Theseus and imagining his father as some sort of king and himself on a quest to recover his father and the kingdom, eventually move Sam into the realm of possibility: he does go to Voorstod with the intent to find Phaed. However, his fantasy of his father-king and the relationship he envisions is nothing like reality, as he learns to his chagrin. The only kind of fantasy not completely foreclosed by Voorstod's culture of death and apocalyptic annihilation is the fantasy of the Faithful and their kyriarchal Cause, which Sam does not share.

At the beginning of the novel, Sam's disregard for women as equals is palpable. Sam thinks, "It was almost always the men who went [on quests], not the women, and that told Sam something too, confirming in him a former opinion about Maire and China, that it did no good to ask women some kinds of questions because they weren't interested in the answers. Women just didn't understand these things!" (19). Despite Maire's honesty with him about conditions in Voorstod culture and Phaed's questionable values, Sam repeatedly ignores her or disbelieves what she tells him—disbelieves, that is, until he seeks out Phaed, only to become Phaed's

²⁰⁷ Sam, of course, also ignores the fact that women on Hobbs Land bear the unequal responsibility of raising and caring for their children with no help or support from the children's progenitors.

prisoner and endure Phaed's torturing of him. Yet Sam's sexism, enabled by indulging in cultural relativism, persists for a while: "Even when he had believed her, he had told himself it wasn't as bad as she said. . . . Innocent bystanders sometimes got killed, but never on purpose. Now he knew that they did get killed, purposely, for no military or strategic reason, purely for terror and hatred. Still he kept telling himself his own dad would not be part of this" (266). Sam finds it easier to excuse Phaed's abuse of Maire during their marriage as a "cultural" trait because recognizing that his father is a monster would destroy the legend of Phaed Sam has built in his own mind. More significantly, the destruction of Phaed as the father-king would compromise Sam's self-identity. Sam has invested so much in his androcentric attitudes and belief in his own specialness that to believe otherwise threatens the stability of his sense of self. In "Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy," J. Butler writes:

how might we encounter difference that calls our grids of intelligibility into question without trying to foreclose the challenge that the difference delivers? What might it mean to learn to live in the anxiety of that challenge, to feel the surety of one's epistemological and ontological anchor go, but to be willing, in the name of the human, to allow the human to become something other than what it is traditionally assumed to be? This means we must learn to live and to embrace the destruction and rearticulation of the human in the name of a more capacious and, finally, less violent world, not knowing in advance what precise form our humanness does and will take. (35)

Sam's refusal to "live in the anxiety" fostered by an understanding of and appreciation for difference limits his maturation and full emotional development as a human being. Only when Sam escapes his captivity and finds Maire's body hung on a gibbet, put there by the prophets

who punish her for leaving and use her as a symbol to intimidate other women, does Sam realize Phaed's complicity in Maire's death. Only then can Sam discard his excusing of cultural relativism and begin to formulate a proto-feminist consciousness that recognizes the violence and futility of kyriarchal systems of power.

Because of his experiences on Hobbs Land with the new gods, his fantasies finally allow him the capacity to imagine difference, particularly gender difference and women's value as human beings. His first step is to acknowledge the reality of his father's personality and skewed values and the implications for women: "Phaed: wife-murderer, woman-killer, culprit of the Cause, one of the Faithful, faithful indeed, to the most ancient and bloody of all religions. Me-worship. My-sex worship. My tribe-worship. My kind-worship. Vowing rage and destruction against all else" (429-30). Sam's recognition of the self-centeredness and presumption of superiority by men like Phaed allows him to recognize those presumptions, though less extreme, in himself. Before his feminist conscience develops, Sam closely resembles many men in American society who are not overtly sexist but have underlying attitudes toward women that would deny women's equality.

Sam's search for an identity, which he wrongly envisioned he would find through a relationship with his father, yields to a growing awareness of his own failings and a sense that he is not the center of the universe, not a god, but merely a part of a network that touches and encompasses all living beings. He reflects that it was "So much easier that way, to put them in boxes and consider that the lids would keep them safe and away from other suitors, other sons, other brothers. Particularly easy when they had no other sons, no other brothers" (333) rather than to recognize the full autonomy of other human beings, particularly women. At one point in the narrative, China wonders why Sam, with his sexist attitudes and inability to connect

emotionally with the women in his life, had not left Hobbs Land when others had fled the uncomfortable presence of the gods (176). The Hobbs Land gods, however, had their own destiny in mind for Sam—not as the hero who saves the settlers from the Voorstoders and their invading army, but as a person who can delay the advance of the invaders by infiltrating their ranks and giving misinformation to the prophets. During this reprieve, the gods prepare to launch their spores that stop the Voorstoders before they can kill a single human being. Sam is just one of many settlers who do some small thing that ultimately keeps Hobbs Land safe from its enemies. His identity, then, becomes more fully invested in his connections to others rather than in his own (male) importance, and he burns the books of legends he had made, symbolically releasing his own past, weighted with the history of gender oppression, in order to build a different future.

Conclusion

Ultimately, Tepper's text posits the interweaving of religion with connection to others and the environment as the path to utopia. G. Jones asks, "What if our gods were living beings, dependent on our worship? What if God's presence in the world made us good?" (76-77), and a reviewer for *Locus* opines, what if "people had a god that really worked?" (qtd in Kelso 20). Jones and the *Locus* reviewer would hazard that Tepper has created just such a religion with benignly involved, undemanding gods and she contrasts it with religious practices that are more familiar to the reader. Thus, Tepper demonstrates the problematic aspects of religious interpretation, dogmatism, and how fundamentalism operates while she makes a case for ecofeminism and for recognition of the interconnection of people, animals, and their habitats. For Tepper, equality must also encompass equal regard for the environment as well as for people.

Tepper's transgression of science fiction genre conventions includes not only an ecofeminist outlook that displaces the concept of the human being as the central character in a master narrative of its own making, but also doubles back on the idea of the universal male protagonist as the hero. Sam is not only an anti-hero, but his quest ends in the discovery that his efforts to find the father figure he envisioned were futile; his redemption and the real outcome of his questing lies, instead, in the development of his feminist consciousness and valuing of others, especially women. Similar to Atwood, Piercy, and Marley, Tepper continues the feminist dystopian/utopian challenge to Western kyriarchal norms and their continued justifications through the auspices of religious fundamentalism, frequently masked as "tradition." Tepper's ecofeminist stance also subverts the science fiction penchant for aligning societal progress with technology and argues for equality beyond the narrow scope of only human equality.

In *Raising the Stones*, Tepper evinces how religion manufactures identity through several communities. For the Voorstod, based on extremes of Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam, their communal identity is predicated on violence and Othering; identity for individuals is enforced through compliance with religious observance, to include dress as well as behavior, in order for a select few to gain a "deserved" or promised future. The Voorstod leaders encourage terrorist acts as well as refuse to compromise with other governments in protecting their power and their religious dogma. This communal identity does not tolerate dissent in any form and seeks to eradicate it. For the High Baidee, their communal identity seems most predicated upon outward signs of religious piety as well as stringent dietary rules and, more significantly, the creation of insider/outsider binaries. The High Baidee religious identity relies solely on inheritance, as does Orthodox Judaism and the Hindu caste system, and the High Baidee use this biological tie to think of themselves as elite and different from other human beings. They insist

upon their own specialness, yet cannot accept difference in other groups of people. By contrast, Hobbs Land's religion, such as it is, fosters difference and acceptance among people and, like the Gharm's Tchenka, encourages good stewardship of the natural environment for the overall benefit of all species living within it. The communal identity of the Hobbs Land settlers is not found in the exclusion of others but in communicating with others, living peaceably, doing productive work, and enriching oneself and one's community. On an individual level, the Hobbs Land gods enhance who the people already are, or who they want to be, instead of demanding that individuals change to meet arbitrary conditions for membership in a religious (or other) group.

Raising the Stones exhibits how culture intersects with religion through the text's negative critique of cultural relativism: when a religion is violent toward non-believers of that faith, we should not excuse the religious adherents' behavior as merely a product of their culture. Tepper argues that violent, exclusionary—that is, fundamentalist—religions cannot be negotiated with and, therefore, should be abandoned in favor of religions that allow everyone to follow their own faith and practices, or lack thereof, as long as no one else comes to harm—physical or social—as a result. Furthermore, each of the thinly masked religious traditions put forward in the text were once existing tribal cultures that had religion grafted onto them in some way. For example, Islam was grafted onto a tribal culture in the Middle East, and Christianity was grafted onto a pagan culture in Europe. Similarly, Voorstod is an amalgam of Abrahamic religions, and the Baidee adopted a “prophetess” whose words they twisted to meet their own existing conceptions of gender. The palimpsestic nature of these grafts demonstrates that religion is not always the originator of specific cultural practices, but separating religion from culture proves nearly impossible once they become intertwined. Additionally, once religion has been grafted

onto cultural norms, it can serve, and does in fundamentalist sects, as an excuse for resisting progress and acceptance of the values of modernity, such as the equality of all people, as well as a means of justifying the oppression of women and subaltern Others.

Religion, as Tepper imagines the Hobbs Land gods and their influence, seems utopic and filled with promise to create ideal societies in many ways, provided that a single society does not become hegemonic and rigid in its practices and expectations. The decidedly ecofeminist and perhaps animist religious faith of the Hobbs Land gods hinges upon the interconnection of people with each other and their environments and creates conditions for empathy and equality. In Tepper's vision of ecofeminist animism, the utopic impulse of religion provides a way to overcome primitive human fears concerning difference rather than fundamentalist practices and beliefs which twist religious faith into weapons for persecuting the Other. *Raising the Stones*, then, is an argument for realizing the utopic potential of religion in order to overcome baser human tendencies of Othering and simultaneously questions the epistemological underpinnings of Western societies that established the kyriarchal pyramid in the first place. In Tepper's estimation, instead of a means of sowing strife between groups or justifying outdated attitudes toward subaltern persons, religion should ultimately be "a way, a convenience, a kindness," and nothing more.

Conclusion

Science fiction and utopian and dystopian writers have much to draw on from their social and political realities in exploring the nature of oppression, especially of women and QUILTBAG persons. Brian McHale argues that science fiction is “the ontological genre par excellence” (qtd in Lee 113). I am willing to accept McHale’s claim given science fiction’s nature as a genre of ever-shifting borders and “rules.” Science fiction negotiates the shifting nature of reality and existence and presents a continually renewed impetus to explore these shifts. Science fiction imagines the future—a future that could be any way we want it to be. Yet, it seems exceedingly difficult for science fiction as a genre to imagine truly egalitarian societies and cultures. For feminist science fiction, its depiction of women’s experiences, and of feminist resistance to the oppression of subaltern groups, I would like to expand McHale’s premise to argue that feminist science fiction adds many more dimensions to ontological exploration and imagined futures through its transgression of the universal male viewpoint and the male-centric narrative. Furthermore, feminist science fiction, especially as exhibited through the utopian and dystopian sub-genres with its subversion of Western thought and culture and the myths and assumptions that underpin them, is also the epistemological genre par excellence. Feminist science fiction’s explorations of the misogynistic foundations of Western philosophy and religious faiths’ justification of continuing misogyny exposes those foundations as arbitrary and socially constructed rather than natural or even God-given.

Feminist dystopian writing that depicts religious fundamentalism actively engages the Religious Right in the United States. These texts formulate a direct response to the erosion and continued denial of women’s and subaltern Others’ universal human rights. Feminist writers of dystopian texts interrogate fundamentalism and its gestures toward theocracy as hypocritical in

its preservation of the kyriarchal order and naturalized ideologies of gender. They find fundamentalism inherently misogynistic and corrupt and thus warn against the theocratic leanings of fundamentalism and its political manifestations in the rise of the Religious Right. The continued relevance of these texts is predicated on the failure of US culture to move toward feminism and equality for all, and, in many respects, US culture has regressed in its treatment of women and queer persons since the legal gains of the Second Wave of the feminist movement.

Feminist dystopian writing is engaged in transgressing the sub-genre of dystopian and utopian writing and the male-dominated genre of science fiction in myriad ways. Traditional utopian and dystopian texts have largely acted as vehicles for political protests of governmental entities, activities and institutions. However, feminist dystopian authors also write against Western master narratives and science fiction's marginalization of religion. They do this through a female or feminist viewpoint that displaces the universal male narrator and exposes the social construction of gender. Furthermore, the genre-bending and hybrid nature of their texts also unbalances linear master narratives. Feminist dystopian writers produce hybrid texts that question the validity of science fiction's marginalization of religion and instead appropriate science fiction, as a genre, and science fiction conventions to distill feminist theory to a mass audience. As a result, feminist authors and their texts undermine religious justifications for maintaining the kyriarchal system in Western societies.

The most "subversive feminist thrust" of dystopian and utopian writing that overtly attacks fundamentalism and its oppression of women thoroughly undermines the dogma of Western thought and culture in ways that non-feminist science fiction does not, even when it troubles or engages with gender. Feminist dystopian writing that critiques religious fundamentalism does so through a transgression of the sacred. Critiquing fundamentalism

strikes at the very roots of Western cultural values and demonstrates how religion, grafted onto culture, allows for the justification and perpetuation of kyriarchal cultural norms in the name of God. In effect, these critical novels profane what fundamentalists hold sacred and evince the unwillingness of fundamentalists to compromise their version of divine “truth.”

While simultaneously serving as vehicles of political protest against oppressive governments or other entities, the utopian impulses in *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Terrorists of Irustan*, *He, She and It*, and other feminist texts that examine religious fundamentalism all gesture toward the heretical idea that when religious faith loses sight of its utopic potential and devolves into a system of control, then religion and the God it purports to reveal are hoaxes of the most heinous kind. Moreover, the fledgling utopian communities in *He, She and It* and the more fully realized utopian community in *Raising the Stones* advance this heretical gesture into a repudiation of kyriarchal institutions that must, as some feminist theologians argue, be either revisioned or completely reinvented. In addition to committing heresy in many fundamentalist faiths, the genre of feminist dystopian and utopian writing interrogates the principles upon which Western philosophy and culture were built and questions their legitimacy. The message of feminist dystopian and utopian texts emerges, again and again: only with the destruction of fundamentalist faith and the revisioning of mainstream religious faiths into entities that embrace feminism will American, or perhaps any, society begin to achieve equality. This idea directly challenges the dogma of Western thought and its perpetuation through Abrahamic religious traditions that marginalize women and subaltern persons in order to preserve the kyriarchal pyramid and the position of white, wealthy, able-bodied, heterosexual, upper-class men at the top. Monica Lee argues:

Power is the search for betterment over others, the creation of in-groups and out-groups, structures of control and reward, and the inevitability of existence.

Empowerment is about equality for all things, a realization and acceptance of the dark side, an appreciation of interconnectedness, freedom of choice, responsibility for that choice, and a belief in the openness of the future. Instead of heroes and villains, good and evil, all is patterns—interconnected patterns of love and hate, life and death. The problem is that far-reaching empowerment would have profound effect and would lead to a society that eschews much of which we hold dear. (121)

It would seem that nothing is more transgressive in the utopian/dystopian sub-genre than subverting kyriarchal Western epistemology and cultural norms and exposing the entrenched power relations as based on nothing more than made-up stories and a fear of change. The empowerment of women, QUILTBAG persons, people of color, and other subaltern groups would present overwhelming (for some) change, as Lee suggests, and as such, severely threatens fundamentalist faiths that seek to resist change at all costs and keep power in the hands of a privileged few.

Feminist dystopian writers argue lasting and meaningful change must come through the culture itself rather than being effected through the law—without genuine cultural change, laws lack permanency and can be repealed. To effect this cultural shift, feminist dystopian writers recognize that men must be actively involved in feminism. Here, feminist dystopian writers enter into a dialogue with the 1970s lesbian separatist utopias: while the lesbian separatist utopias imagined societies without men, feminist dystopian writing re-engages with the question

of how women and men can work and live together in egalitarian communities and work toward equality for everyone.

Additionally, I would argue that most Earth religions have a utopic impulse; the Golden Rule of treating others as one wishes to be treated is extant in some form in all the major Earth religions (and quite a few minor ones). Yet in practice, religion seems inherently dystopic because its adherents have used it throughout history, and continue to use it, to justify the killing, hurting, enslaving, and Othering of people from other faiths and people from within the religious community. Feminism, and its advocacy of equality for everyone, is therefore crucial to utopian projects and for religious faiths to realize their utopic potential.

This project contributes several new aspects to critical studies of feminist science fiction and how feminists shape and change the genre. First, since most science fiction either marginalizes religion or treats it as an inward search for a transcendent truth, there is a lacuna in critical studies that address how feminist science fiction authors handle religion in their texts. Although this lacuna exists across other disciplines, such as sociological studies, this project is one attempt to remedy the gap in literary scholarship and to contribute to a more robust conversation about religion in science fiction.

Second, feminist science fiction authors reject science fiction's re-inscription of kyriarchal gender roles. Despite science fiction's convention of futuristic and technological progress, science fiction texts' treatment of gender is not necessarily egalitarian or progressive. Rather, feminist science fiction writers who address religion through science fiction are contesting both the genre and religious narratives; this results in deeper, more provocative aspects in science fiction.

Third, feminist dystopian writers also connect to the 1970s utopian texts in a dialogue concerning religion. Rather than moving to a goddess religion as suggested in many of the 1970s feminist utopias, the dystopian turn is more concerned with examining the religious traditions people already espouse and function within. The feminist dystopian texts that critique religious fundamentalism make utopic arguments, and sometimes provide notional blueprints, that account for religion as a part of people's lives and a meaningful aspect of identity.

Lastly, the significance of my exploration of feminist dystopian writing lies in the ways in which it evaluates religious fundamentalism. First, science fiction's marginalization of religion ignores religion's force in politics, culture and identity. Feminist dystopian writing takes religion into account and provides social commentary on the negative aspects of fundamentalism and its characteristics—particularly anti-modernity, anti-democracy, and anti-feminism. It critiques fundamentalism's resistance to change, especially regarding the full equality of women and subaltern Others. Such commentary warns against theocratic impulses among fundamentalists and their political vehicles, like the Religious Right in the United States, and examines the implications allows theocratic governments to oppress women and subaltern Others. Subsequently, feminist dystopian writing lays bare the underpinnings of Western thought and culture and its religious justifications that allow oppression of the Other to continue. Through their texts, feminist authors trouble the dominance of kyriarchal systems of power for women and subaltern Others.

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