

THE FEMINIST APPROPRIATION OF DYSTOPIA:
A STUDY OF ATWOOD, ELGIN, FAIRBAIRNS, AND TEPPER

by

Sobia Zaman

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A STUDY OF ATWOOD, ELGIN, FAIRBAIRNS AND TEPPER**

BY

SOBIA ZAMAN

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an exploratory study of the feminist dystopia--a genre that has become an increasingly popular mode of discourse for the female writer. I look at those issues collectively foregrounded by four feminist dystopias: Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, Suzette Elgin's Native Tongue, Zoe Fairbairns's Benefits, and Sheri Tepper's The Gate to Women's Country, in attempts to define the genre. In addition, I reject the traditional subsumption of the female by male classification systems in positing that the feminist dystopia is a distinct generic category from the dystopia--a genre still defined by reference to a male lineage.

In keeping with the feminist dystopia's concerns with women's issues, and presenting the "constraints" of usually totalitarianistic worlds, I approach these texts from a feminist multidisciplinary stance.

My thesis concludes with the assertion that the feminist dystopia is an ultimately empowering mode of discourse for the female writer in that it allows her to appropriate the three traditionally male roles of politician, prophet, and science fiction writer.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter	
I. Woman as Body	5
II. Woman as Guard and Prisoner	30
III. Woman as Rebel	48
Conclusion	77
Works Cited	82

INTRODUCTION

Science Fiction has long been a male-dominated genre. Although it has been argued that Mary Shelley's Frankenstein is one of the earliest works of science fiction, it was not until the late 1960's--with the arrival of Ursula Le Guin and Marion Zimmer Bradley--that the female writer of science fiction was deemed a competent spokesperson for the genre. Because the dystopia is a sub-genre of science fiction (Suvin 144), it is not surprising that here too the male voice has predominated. Most scholars, in defining the genre, make reference to its male progenitors and lineage: Orwell, Huxley, Zamiatin, Bradbury and Vonnegut. My general purpose in this thesis is to draw attention to the fact that there are female writers who have used this mode of discourse, and my specific purpose is to highlight the distinctive nature of their contribution.

The dystopia, as defined by Lyman Tower Sargent in his Introduction to British and American Utopian Literature, 1516-1985: An Annotated Chronological Bibliography, presents "a non-existent society described in considerable detail that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (xii). Certainly, feminist dystopias--and by this I mean those dystopias which foreground the horrors inherent in the female plight of subservience--deal with many of the same issues that traditionally characterize the genre: the plight of the individual in the face of the dystopic collective, the corrupting

influences of totalitarianism, and the relationship between the world-view presented in the dystopia to the society in which the author lives. Feminist writers of dystopia, however, deal with these issues from a more "realistic" slant and with a greater sense of urgency.

In her extensive study of feminist speculative fiction, Marleen Barr has shown that both the utopia and dystopia are conducive to the feminist cause in the sense that they are visionary and empowering genres. These genres allow otherwise silenced female voices to envision and create their own futures. Feminist utopian writers transcend current patriarchal restrictions by presenting visions of sexual equality and freedom, while feminist dystopian writers act as prophets of doom, reminding their readers of the need for change by presenting patriarchy in its most repressive manifestations. Not surprisingly, then, we see an increasingly large number of speculative fictions during times of overt commitment to the tenets of feminism, as in the twentieth century. The feminist utopia, however, has received much more scholarly attention than its "nightmare cousin" (Walsh 15). Numerous critics have focused on feminist utopian fiction, while no study, to my knowledge, focuses exclusively or substantially on the concerns of the feminist dystopia.

This thesis looks at four dystopias written by women: Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, Suzette Elgin's Native Tongue, Zoe Fairbairns's Benefits, and Sheri Tepper's The Gate to

Women's Country. All these texts with the exception of Benefits, published in 1979, were published during the 1980s, at a time of increasing interest in women's rights issues.

My critical approach to these texts reflects both the political focus that generally characterizes the dystopia and what I see as the major agenda of the feminist dystopia: to give voice to the marginalized and to promote a sense of solidarity. Because the marginalized in the feminist dystopia is gendered as woman, my way of reading these texts mainly involves showing how the issues they address accord with and concretely dramatize feminist theory.

Because a related concern of the feminist dystopia is to counteract the idea that woman can be reduced to a single function, my critical methodology also has a multidisciplinary character. In interpreting these texts, I draw upon research from a variety of disciplines including psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology, and biology.

My choice of feminist dystopias also accords with these concerns, in that the authors come from three different countries: Canada (Atwood), United States (Tepper and Elgin), and Britain (Fairbairns). Due to a lack of resources, I was unable to include an eastern, or third world, representative of the genre. In minor compensation for this exclusion, I have chosen two authors not well-known in literary circles: few readers--especially in North America--are familiar with the work of Zoe Fairbairns, while Suzette Haden Elgin is known more for her

contributions to linguistics than to literature.

The thesis is divided into three chapters, each of which deals with an issue that the four authors collectively seem to foreground. In determining the order of priority of these issues, my method has been to begin with the most basic and then to move to the progressively more complex. Thus in Chapter 1 my focus is on women's reduction to procreative vessel; in Chapter 2 I focus on women's policing of one another; and in Chapter 3, I look at the means used by women to cope with and rebel against oppressive circumstances. These chapters are followed by a conclusion in which I attempt to address some of the larger cultural implications of women's contribution to the dystopic genre and of the greater attention given to the utopia.

CHAPTER 1: WOMAN AS BODY

I entered the laboratory I saw rabbits, mice, rats, monkeys in stainless steel cages. I felt like an imposter. The biologist and the technician spoke to me as though I were one of them. But I was one of the animals.

Genoveffa Corea
 "Egg Snatchers"
 (qtd. in Barr 132)

One of the defining characteristics of the dystopia is that genre's emphasis on depersonalization. Authors of dystopia rely on various tactics in their presentation of worlds where individual will is sacrificed to accommodate the common good. Often, for example, dystopian writers replace their characters' names with numbers. For instance, in Eugene Zamiatin's dystopia We, the narrator is identified only as "D-503"; the pivotal agent in the unification plot of the two artificial intelligences in William Gibson's Neuromancer is "Lady 3Jane," and Gibson's male protagonist retains the generic name of "Case." The forced repression and denial of individuality in dystopic societies results in people being viewed as "interchangeable parts in the functioning of society" (Walsh 144).

Feminist writers of dystopia rely on similar strategies to express the dangers of a world where individuality is sacrificed for the good of the state. They differ, however, in one significant aspect: for feminist writers of dystopia, depersonalization becomes fundamentally linked to the patriarchal reduction of women to a mere body with "uterus and breasts"

(Rich, On Lies 77). Accordingly, woman's reduction to "breeding vessel" in these narratives is presented less as extrapolation and more as a highlighting and condemnation of existent patriarchal practice. Rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, the practice dates back to Genesis and God's infliction of "great pain" or *peona magna* on womankind as a result of Eve's disobedience: "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee" (Gen. 3:16).

Elgin's Native Tongue, Fairbairns's Benefits, Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, and Tepper's The Gate to Women's Country all foreground the politics of reproduction in an attempt to explore both aspects of the curse: the view of woman as "breeding vessel" and as domestic servant. In each of these texts the multiple ramifications of patriarchal control over women's bodies is explored.

* * *

Elgin's Native Tongue, set in the late twenty-second and early twenty-third Century U.S.A., is a story about a future society ruled by Linguist families who believe in, as well as promote, the inherent inferiority of women. Even though the Lingoe women's skills as interpreters and translators of alien languages are perceived as necessary for the continuance of a thriving Terran economy, their contributions to that economy are never properly recognized. In "Your Word is my Command: The

Structures of Language and Power in Women's Science Fiction," Lucie Armitt notes that in Elgin's novel the "ability to pick up multiple languages and translate information between cultures . . . is not considered to be a powerful or creative ability by the male linguists" (131). The women's careers are tolerated only insofar as they are necessary for the economic and political advancement of Terran, and because in their roles as translators and interpreters, they do not contradict the female "norm"--that is, they still occupy the passive role of listener or scribe, as opposed to the active role of speaker, historically ascribed to the male. The linkage here between linguistic positioning and reproduction derives from the way that "passive" and "active" is traditionally perceived with respect to male and female biology. Commenting on the perceived difference between male and female sex organs, Susan Griffin points to the notion "that the ovum is passive and the sperm is adventurous" (29).

Even though the Lingoe women in Native Tongue have demanding careers and spend the majority of their time engaged in extraterrestrial communication, they are also required to mass produce because the Lingoes value children for their ability to absorb and learn alien languages at an accelerated rate. According to the excerpt from the "Department of Analysis and Translation" that opens Chapter 3 of Native Tongue, "The infant human being has the most perfect language-learning mechanism on Earth, and no one has ever been able to duplicate that mechanism or even to analyze it very well" (34). In the interest of the

future economy, therefore, Linguist women are required to produce, on average, eight children each before they reach the age of forty, unless disease renders them ineffective breeding vessels. Thomas Chornyak explains to his wife Rachel the structuring of the breeding quota: "The present system, with marriage at sixteen, allows the husband to space his children three years apart and still see that the woman bears eight infants before the age of forty" (146). In keeping with the theme of dehumanization that lies at the core of dystopian texts, in Native Tongue the production of offspring becomes woman's primary value; similarly, marriage becomes solely an agreement to be entered upon for reasons of "politics and genetics" (149).

When a Linguist woman becomes ineffective in her role as offspring producer by reason of age or illness, or simply because she "gets beyond" (109) her husband"--that is shows that she is more than body and has a mind and voice--she is sent to Barren House, a community of women no longer biologically able to conceive. By the time a Lingoe woman takes up residence at Barren House she is worn and exhausted from constantly "labouring." Menopause then becomes a salvation for her, allowing her worn and tired body a break from the exhaustion brought on by juggling both pregnancy and career; it becomes a break from the demands and strains of a life devoid of idle hours. Even so the women must spend their time on the so-called lesser pursuits of babysitting, practicing languages with the children, cooking, and knitting. In other words, in Native

Tongue once woman can no longer partake in her biological destiny, she must fulfil that other half of the female paradigm, namely her domestic obligations.

The Lingoe men's attitude toward menopausal women validates Emily Martin's assertion that menopausal women quite often stand as the "public image of atrophy and failure" (116). Equally, the name Barren House, which is coined by the Lingoe men, suggests that the males also practice what Helene Cixous terms "patriarchal binary thought" or the oppositions encoded within language where woman is always associated with the lesser or negative half. Not only are the women of Barren House seen as inferior, furthermore; this binarism also involves grouping the Lingoe women into one of two opposing categories: fertile or barren. As such, it is doubly woman's ability to reproduce, or lack thereof, that defines her.

If women are fundamentally reduced to breeders, moreover, it is also not for themselves but for the state that they must reproduce. Reproduction in Native Tongue becomes a political and economic tool used to accelerate extraterrestrial communication and economic expansion. A woman's womb becomes valuable because bearing children renews the "life" of the state, and not because it is a form of "giving life". Thomas's treatment and response toward his daughter Nazareth is indicative of his prioritization of Terran over his daughter, of politics over family. Rachel realizes the extent to which Thomas's plans for their daughter discount her personhood: "you're willing to bind your own

daughter to him [Aaron] for life when the very sight of him is repulsive to her?" (151).

At the end of Native Tongue, the desire of the Lingoe wives to have a colony of their own, separate and apart from the males, is partly realized when the males begin to find the women intolerable because they have become "fucking *saints*" (291): the women "do not nag any more. Do not whine. Do not complain. Do not demand things. Do not make idiot objections to everything a man proposes. Do not argue. Do not get sick No more headaches, no more monthlies, no more hysterics" (275).

According to Adam, Nazareth's ex-husband, the women's new-found "angelic" behaviour suggests that they are "recovering at last from the effects of the effing feminist corruption" (275); that is, they have learned to become "well-bred rubber doll[s]" (291).

As Anne Cranny-Francis has observed, however, the women's decision to assume such a pose is strategically motivated: "the women of the Linguist households have learned that the only way to live with the men without being destroyed . . . is not to refuse to play their gender games, but to play them too well" (52). Playing the "gender game," the women become robotic, unthinking, and silent beings, submissive to the degree that they bore the males. Consequently, the men evolve a plan whereby they can live apart from the women, but where, nevertheless, the women will be close by to fill the roles of translator, interpreter, and breeder. At the end of Native Tongue, although the Lingoe men find the women intolerable, their bodies are still

necessary. It is precisely for this reason that they decide to build "Women's Houses" (292) where according to James Nathan, the new Head of the Lines after Thomas's murder, "it will be convenient when we need to see a woman for some reason, sexual or otherwise, but where the women will be *out of our way*" (292). As Andrea Dworkin observes in Woman-Hating, "That women have not been exterminated, and will not be (at least until the technology of creating life in the laboratory is perfected) can be attributed to our presumed ability to bear children"--and to give pleasure (93).

Another way that Elgin exposes the abuse of women is through the kind of care they are given. In the excerpt framing Chapter 19 of Native Tongue we are told that "gynecology" is not "health care for the female human being" but rather "health care for your fellow *man*"; "By keeping women healthy, the gynecologist serves *man*" (225-26). By using the term "fellow *man*" to refer generically to the human race, Elgin exposes the sexual biases encoded within language. The excerpt indicates, too, that woman's body is not valued in its own right. Her body is kept "unpolluted" in order to protect the men's health, as well as to safeguard their interests. Woman is kept healthy for man, just as an animal is kept fit and healthy for human service.

The concept of eugenics, defined by Patricia Spallone in Beyond Conception as "the science of improving the human 'stock'" (15), is a popular concern in the dystopia where totalitarian regimes are intent on fostering populations that correspond to

their warped or perverted senses of "rightness." Originally, indeed, Galton relied on the term *viriculture*--"From the Latin roots, to cultivate the masculine"--to express his theories of "improving the human stock": "the word *eugenics*...is at least a neuter word and a more generalized one than *viriculture*" (Spallone 139). In the feminist dystopia, the philosophy of eugenics acquires additional importance because it is here that the roots of female infanticide lie.

In Native Tongue, although the Lingoies do not practice female infanticide they do engage in selective breeding. When Thomas Chornyak arranges for his daughter Nazareth to marry Aaron he is not concerned with any bond of love, but rather wants to see what the genetic combination of their "abilities will produce" (152). Like animals who are selectively bred in order to produce attractive and desirable species, the Lingoies selectively choose mates for their women that will give their households the greatest political and genetic advantages. As a result, not only are women used as reproductive tools for the state; selective breeding also commodifies children in that it "promotes the pursuit of the 'perfect baby' . . . as if . . . children were products and the standards of production have to be maintained" (Spallone 113).

Barren House can thus be seen as a kind of "reproductive brothel"--a term defined by Andrea Dworkin in Right-Wing Women as a place where "women are collected together and held, unable to come and go freely. Sold as sexual commodities to men, the women

are interchangeable. They are not seen as human beings with individuality and spiritual worth" (177). As Gena Corea notes, Dvorkin bases her brothel model on a farm one: "Many farm animals live in what are essentially reproductive brothels. On such a farm, the animal is seen as having no individuality, no spiritual worth" (39). Authors like Elizabeth Fisher and Susan Griffin have compared "Man's use, abuse and objectification of animals" with "men's treatment of women" (Cornell 97). According to Fisher, it was "the domestication of animals which provided the model for human slavery and led to male control of female reproductive capacity" (97), while Griffin asserts that "the sexual subjugation of women as it is practiced in all the known civilizations of the world, was modelled after the domestication of animals" (190).

In the feminist dystopia the reduction of women to animal status is a major means of illustrating patriarchy's tendencies towards dehumanizing women. In only one of many references to woman as animal in Native Tongue, Ned Landry refers to his wife Michaela as a "thoroughbred . . . superbly trained" (36). The mass reproductive rates to which the Lingoe women are expected to conform, along with their communal living arrangements in Barren House, similarly presents women as creatures functioning in a type of barnyard scenario.

* * *

In Zoe Fairbairns's Benefits reproduction is equally a major

issue and used to expose the dehumanization of women. Set in twentieth-century Britain, this novel depicts a government that hopes to offset declining birth rates and a worsening economy through the introduction of a "weekly payment" or "benefit" given to "all mothers" who "stayed at home and looked after children under sixteen" (56). "Benefit"--the project of a patriarchal government devoted to the belief that motherhood is woman's fate --is sexist in at least two ways: it encourages women to play traditional biological and domestic roles, and it protects the employment situation of males. By removing women from the work force, it "would ensure that no man need be unemployed" (56).

The novel immediately sets up disparate viewpoints concerning women's reproductive status by beginning with an exchange between Lynn Byers and her husband Derek. Derek, ironically viewed by Lynn and her friends to be a feminist due to his professed support for the cause, maintains that Lynn, after a succession of failed attempts at pregnancy, "ought to see the doctor about her infertility" (27). Derek's suggestion places Lynn, the woman, in the role of reproductive scapegoat. Just as he refuses to acknowledge any responsibility for his wife's failure to conceive, so at the end of the novel patriarchy similarly exonerates itself from all blame regarding the occurrence of a string of massive infant deformities. According to the government, the prevalence of infant deformities results either from "Undetected factors in the women's history" or from the "eating habits of expectant mothers" (196); actually,

however, the situation is the result of contraceptive pellets, inserted by men, into London's water supply with the intent of eradicating any control woman has over her body. On both a familial and political plane, then, the patriarchy finds it necessary to absolve itself from any reproductive aberrations, while Fairbairns's point is that it is not the woman but male manipulation of women's biology that leads to disaster.

The males' unshakable faith in their virility is distinctly "phallogentric," a term that Jeremy Hawthorn defines as "interlocking social and ideological systems which accept and advance a patriarchal power symbolically represented by the phallus" (129). Because the phallus stands "as a symbol of masculine power, authority, and potency within the patriarchy" (Schor 114), any questioning of male virility represents a questioning of phallogentric ideology; individuals who question are labelled subversive and dealt with accordingly.

Fairbairns's dystopia, like Elgin's, shows how the reduction of woman to reproductive vessel and animal is related to the issue of selective breeding. If in Elgin, the "Lingoes bre[e]d like rats" (47), in Fairbairns, the FAMILY advocate David Laing concludes that "The wrong rats are breeding" (48). Laing's "wrong rats" speech sets up a hierarchy of women breeders, as well as presenting a society intent on "weeding out" certain groups due to their inferiority. The "wrong rats" according to Laing are women who come from "immigrant stock, -- lower class whites, single mothers" or "the stupid and inept" (38). The

Professor at the Europea conference in Chapter 6 sums up the selective breeding practices of the government when he observes that the London government "pay[s] women whom . . . [they] wish to have babies [and] sterilize[s] those who are unsuitable" (111). Lynn's daughter, Jane, becomes the victim of eugenist doctrine when she is discouraged from bearing children because of her genetic predisposition towards Cystic Fibrosis. She is told by a FAMILY representative: "They're trying to wipe out these illnesses, you see" (152). In addition, David Laing's "wrong rats" speech becomes indicative of how much Benefits reflects an actual reality in that it becomes frighteningly suggestive of the ideology expressed by Hitler in his 1933 eugenics program which attempted to eliminate "Jews . . . gypsies, lesbians, and gay men, and [the] . . . racially inferior" (Spallone 135).

Women and animals are interchangeable in Benefits: both are remorselessly used as the subjects of experimentation. In an attempt to evaluate the performance of new birth control mechanisms the government relies equally on rats and black women as guinea pigs. The feminists in Fairbairns novel realize the extent to which patriarchy fails to differentiate between "beagle bitches and black women" (205).

* * *

Women's reduction to breeder status is also what constitutes dystopia for Sheri Tepper in The Gate to Women's Country. "Women's Country" refers to a community that professes to be

dedicated to the eradication of patriarchal ideology; in contrast to it are the Holylanders, a patriarchally-based community that practices a perverse sexism towards women based on scriptural precedents. Using the Genesis view of Eve--as "the spout and wellspring of error and sin"--to justify their mistreatment of women, the Holylander men believe pain to be "women's lot," her punishment for her "mother's" initial transgression in the Garden of Eden (210).

Like the wives of the Lingoers--who in between their roles as translators, interpreters, and "baby factories" become exhausted by the time they reach their menopausal years--the Holylander women's energies are depleted at an early age due to bodily strain incurred by numerous births and the physical torment suffered at the hands of their husbands. During a moment of introspection Susannah Brome, Thirdwife of Resolution Brome, realizes: "She couldn't bear to be pregnant again right away. Maybe not ever. She'd been pregnant almost all the time since she was fourteen. She'd had eleven pregnancies and had six living children" (202). Ironically, the Holylander men justify their reduction of women to reproductive vehicles on the grounds that "a woman need[s] . . . a baby in the house to keep her working right" (204). A woman who "works right" is a woman who fulfils her procreative and domestic obligations silently and diligently..

The breeding rates that the Holyland women are expected to maintain, like the required eight children before the age of 40 prescribed to the Lingoe women, becomes reminiscent of animal

mating habits. Like the sow which is "almost continually pregnant or nursing throughout her adult life" (Corea 41), the Holyland women are constantly breeding to the point where Susannah Brome sees suicide as her only vehicle of escape from a life where she is constantly in "labour." Representing the patriarchal voice, Resolution Brome notes how "Ewe sheep and women, both of em' worked the same" (204). The women breed and breed to appease the wishes of their patriarchal God, "All Father," who demands that they fulfil their role as procreative vessel both faithfully and diligently. In private moments, however, they ponder their victimization by the men and wish for a female deity, like Great Mother in Women's Country. Rejoice Brome, listening to her son Firstborn complain about his wife's crying when he does his "duty" on her, longs for a female God to acknowledge and validate female experience: "I wish there was some female in heaven a woman could pray to" (200).

Despite the female liberation in Women's Country, and what initially appear to be utopic conditions, the "warriors"--men ostensibly trained to guard and protect the community--regard women not much differently than the Holylanders do: as essentially bodies allocated for the purposes of breeding. Just as the Holylanders see breeding as "woman's lot," so the warriors feel that a woman earns her right to life and warrior protection by the production of male offspring: "It was honourable to protect women because warriors needed them to breed sons and--so dogma had it--they were incapable of protecting themselves"

(142). Like most dystopic tenets, this attitude has its roots in our present. Thus in their article "Prenatal and Preconception Sex Choice Technologies: a path to Femicide?" Helen Holmes and Betty Hoskins document how "the need to bear a son in order to have worth as a person" may be seen "in many countries over the globe, [where] a woman's status and her treatment by those around her are determined by the number of sons she has produced" (22). Similarly in Of Woman Born, in discussing the topic of female infanticide, Rich notes how often fathers see themselves as "twice-born" (227) in their sons. This sentiment she sees expressed in the Upanishads: "[The Woman] nourishes her husband's self, the son, within her" (226). As Susan Griffin notes, the Judeo-Christian tradition too elevates the male offspring over the female in its pronouncement that "'not the woman but the man is the image of God'" (14). The view of woman as valuable only insofar as she produces sons represents the dictates of a phallogocentric universe. While in Fairbairns, phallogocentricity is represented by the males' unquestioning faith in their virility, in Tepper such "penis worship" takes the form of the erection of a phallic monument on the parade ground which, according to the warrior Chernon, stands as "a symbol of shared manhood" (79).

The warriors also connect offspring with ownership; as Tepper's protagonist Stavia states: "Whoever impregnates me, owns me" (260). Likewise, Chernon's rape of Stavia demonstrates the Warrior conception of woman as a mere body or receptacle. Stavia's rage and disgust at Chernon's rape, along with her

explanation to him that "pleasure is supposed to be mutual" (239), falls on deaf ears.

While the Warriors and the Holyland men believe that breeding is "woman's lot," they nevertheless want to have knowledge of this dimension. Helen Holmes and Betty Hoskins suggest that "Men are especially interested in solving and appropriating the mysteries that belong to women" (20). This rings true in *Tepper* who bases the sub-plot of her narrative on such an attempt. Thus, the Warrior Commander, Michael, sets up young Warriors with Councilwomen's daughters for the purposes of gaining access to the Councilwomen's knowledge. Historically, reproductive issues have been perceived to be female territory, as evidenced by the way women were in charge of childbirth and the prevalence of the midwife up to the seventeenth century (Oakley 35). In *Tepper*, there is continual reference to "Women's Studies" or "management, administration, [and] sexual skills" (23), and in a confrontation with the Holylanders, Stavia , specifically refers to "healing and childbirth" as "women's things" (254).

The view that men are intent on trying to appropriate women's mysteries, in fact, explains why many feminists are suspicious of the motivations behind current reproductive technologies. As Holmes and Hoskins observe, while reproductive technologies may be beneficial to women, they also reflect patriarchy's desire to access and ultimately control the female territory of giving birth: "Because women bear the child and

'labour' at birth, they have the certainty of their essential participation in the genetic continuity men have always annulled their alienation from reproduction Thus by law or by force, men appropriate and control women and children. This is intended to eliminate their 'uncertainty' in the reproductive process" (18). New reproductive technologies, then, can be seen as an attempt by patriarchy to reclaim what is biologically female territory. According to Patricia Spallone, the male's inability to come to terms with his exclusion from the birth process, as well as his desire to appropriate women's reproductive mysteries often manifests itself in "medical textbooks [which] inevitably speak in terms of body parts, such as 'man's eggs', or 'human placenta' or 'human reproduction when expressly describing distinctly female physiology and biochemistry." Such seemingly "neutral" diction focuses on non-gendered parts and "masks" the fact that women are the central subjects of 'human' reproduction "(16). Selective breeding has also been interpreted by Fisher as a male attempt to recoup his sense of importance by appropriating the role of creator: "Through animal breeding man discovered that he played a role in creation, albeit a minor one, and his sense of superfluity was partially relieved" (192).

This male desire to access the realm of "giving birth" has long been a feature of science fiction. Although Victor Frankenstein's creation of the monster in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein may be seen as sacrilegious in that it represents

his desire to breathe life into dead matter, in a feminist interpretation of this pivotal science-fiction text, Anne Cranny-Francis interprets Frankenstein's project as his desire to "give birth." According to Cranny-Francis, in Frankenstein "Maternity is . . . placed not in relation to women, but men" (39).

Elizabeth Fisher has termed such desires as "womb envy"--an inversion of Freud's notion of penis envy--and she notes that if males have tried to appropriate woman's womb to compensate for their exclusion from "giving birth," they have tried to simulate women's menstrual cycles. Thus Fisher documents the way that the Australian Wogeo "men simulate women's monthly function by cutting their penises with a shell, and allowing some blood to flow out" (154).

If one way of asserting control over another is to appropriate their "mysteries," another way is to demean and objectify them. In Native Tongue and Benefits women are depersonalized and objectified by being reduced to animal status through explicit analogies, the brothel model of communal living, and the theme of selective breeding. Tepper also foregrounds selective breeding in A Gate to Women's Country, but here ironically, it is the women and not the men who selectively breed. At the novel's close, one discovers how Women's Country has been practicing genocide on the Warriors for years, using as their blueprint the preconvulsion society, the Laplanders, who "selected the bulls that were cooperative and gentle . . . [and] castrated the rest" (293). Like the preconvulsion Laplanders, the

women in Women's Country breed out those qualities they find unworthy or undesirable in the Warriors, substituting instead stereotypically female virtues like intuition and passivity. In Tepper's novel, males are the objects of reproductive experimentation, and the females are the ones in charge of the experimenting. Such a situation constitutes a very subtle critique of the patriarchy by suggesting that feminism fails when it strays from its aims of equality and promotes the very exclusion and repression that is characteristic of the patriarchal.

* * *

In The Handmaid's Tale, Atwood's use of reproduction issues for dystopic purposes is equally sophisticated. Declining birthrates brought on by a combination of ecological disasters and disease provide a seeming logic for the sexual politics of the Gilead regime. Headed by a group of religious extremists in the twenty-second century, the Gilead regime attempts to correct its national crises by exercising complete control over women's bodies and sexuality.

The major premise of The Handmaid's Tale is surrogacy, a type of substitute mothering today related to technological advances, but rooted in the biblical past, as indicated by the first epigraph of The Handmaid's Tale which recalls the Genesis story of the barren Rachel and her Handmaid, Bilah. Because surrogacy is simultaneously an ancient and modern phenomenon, it becomes an appropriate area of focus in a genre which relies on

the intermingling of past and present to achieve its desired effects of warning and enlightenment.

According to Rita Arditti, "Surrogacy reinforces the patriarchal view that the woman is just a container, an incubator of the man's sperm. She receives it and gives it back as his baby" (23). In "Contract Motherhood: Social Practice in Social Context," Mary Gibson notes how in our present, surrogate mothers are most often working-class women who end up bearing children for the more affluent (25). Monetary compensation for surrogate services suggests that women's bodies are blatantly commodified, with any surrogate situation being disrespectful to the women involved: the surrogate mother is denied access to her child, and the nurturing mother is denied the fulfilment that comes from biological motherhood. Within the context of The Handmaid's Tale, the Handmaids are only incubators, while the Wives, lacking the fulfilment that comes from biological motherhood grow lavish gardens in what can only be construed as their attempt to "give life." Thus women of both kinds lose in a surrogate situation, whereas the man is doubly privileged; he remains both biological father and owner of the offspring.

The Handmaids' lives are centred on their procreative function. At each posting, Handmaids are required to produce a child within two years of their initial arrival at a Commander's home. If a Handmaid fails in her procreative function, she is transported to another Commander's home to be similarly employed as a breeding vessel. After three postings, if she still fails to

conceive, she is declared an Unwoman and sent to the Colonies, a place where sterile women clean out toxic waste, and where the narrator's mother currently resides. As such, giving birth becomes a career for the Handmaids in Atwood's dystopia. Like nannies, Handmaids go from house to house offering their services, albeit sexual as opposed to domestic.

As in Benefits, where women are blamed for the high infant deformity rates which in reality are the fault of male reproductive engineers, Atwood's Handmaids are similarly used as scapegoats: Offred realizes that "There is no such thing as a sterile man any more, not officially" (57), and that there are "only women who can't, who remain stubbornly closed, damaged, defective" (192). A Handmaid who fails to conceive awaits the terrible fate of being sent to the Colonies, while her Commander simply reapplies for another "vessel." As in Benefits and The Gate to Women's Country, the "phallus" in Atwood similarly stands for power and infallibility, whereas the woman becomes the sign of failure and inadequacy.

Like Elgin in Native Tongue, Atwood dramatizes Cixous's notion of "patriarchal binary thought," and uses language to suggest the prevailing sexism in Gilead. Because a male's virility is never suspect in The Handmaid's Tale, he automatically assumes a superior pose in his identification with the fertile half of the fertile/barren dichotomy. Women in The Handmaid's Tale are similarly defined in accordance with a reproductive polarity: "There are only women who are fruitful and

women who are barren, that's the law" (57); those women who are barren are referred to as "defeated."

A Handmaid is essentially a "two-legged womb" (128) and all attempts are made to reduce her to her biological function. She must go for daily walks, partake in pelvic exercises, and not shower immediately after sex with her Commander, in order to increase her chances of conception. Similarly, any punishment bestowed upon a Handmaid is inflicted only on her hands and feet, that is those parts of her body not required to fulfil her biological duties. As Andrea Dworkin has observed, footbinding amongst the Chinese "cemented women to a certain sphere, with a certain function" (Woman-Hating 96), by making it both physically impossible for them to stray far from home, as well as insuring that they were available to accommodate the males' sexual desires. The Regime's restriction of punishment to a Handmaid's hands or feet similarly assures her availability to accommodate male goals, and allows for the bestowal of punishment while keeping woman's reproductive capacities intact: "They didn't care what they did to your feet and hands Remember, said Aunt Lydia. For our purposes your feet and your hands are not essential" (87).

As in Elgin, where gynecology becomes health care for the man, in Atwood women's healthcare too becomes a sexist form of socialized medicine. A Handmaid is provided with healthy food and given regular doctor examinations, not to maintain her own health, but rather to increase her chances of being a viable and

healthy receptacle for the elite. Indeed, a Handmaid is defined by her public function to such a degree that Offred comes to feel that "the expectation of others, have become my own" (18). Offred thus becomes a classic example of what Adrienne Rich has articulated as the loss of self-hood commonly felt by women: "we have no familiar, ready-made name for a woman who defines herself, by choice, neither in relation to children nor to men, who is self-identified, who has chosen herself" (Of Woman 249).

A major means used by the Gilead regime to reinforce the Handmaids' identities as breeders is through the excessive employment of the colour red, designed to betoken a women's fertility. As Offred explains: "Everything except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood, which defines us" (8). Not only are the Handmaids cloaked in red; the Rachel and Leah Centre (where the Handmaids learn how to be proper and pure breeding vessels), is called the Red Centre amongst the Handmaid's "because there was so much red" (91). In addition to suggesting fertility, red suggests menstrual blood and thus also reminds the Handmaids of their failure as "women" each month. Overt messages, like Gilead's colour scheme, are effective in reducing the Handmaids to biological devices, and Offred defines herself accordingly: "We are for breeding purposes We are two-legged wombs, that's all: sacred vessels, ambulatory chalices" (128).

Just how successful the regime has been in indoctrinating the Handmaids into their role is indicated by Offred's use of

fertility symbols to describe her surroundings: pears evoke the shape of the uterus, and eggs evoke ovaries. Even an elevator resembles a "glass half-egg" (235), while a dandelion takes on "the colour of egg yolk" (258).

When a Handmaid gives birth, the house of the "lucky" commander takes on a carnivalesque atmosphere, with drinks, merriment, and food. All Handmaids are given special privileges and become exempt from their regular duties on a Birth Day, the broken up term highlighting the regime's obsession with reproduction. When a "sister" gives birth, the other Handmaids are not only present as spectators, but participate in the woman's labour as if they themselves are giving birth, engaging in what becomes a type of communal labour. As they watch, their groans and grunts parallel those made by the delivering woman, and their muscles and breasts ache. As the Handmaid's watch one of their "sisters" giving birth, they all participate in the delivery process: "we think we will burst"; as such, a birth for one Handmaid becomes "a victory, for all" (118-19). A perversion of the ancient custom of women being the attendants at a birth, the communal nature of the delivery process is evocative of the reproductive brothel and in turn of the barnyard model.

This reduction of women to animal status is even more explicit. The Handmaids resemble branded cattle as they walk around with obligatory ankle tattoos, and are herded like cattle at the Rachel and Leah Centre where they learn to be good "breeders" (238). Significantly, too, the Aunts use cattle prods

to inflict punishment on the Handmaids. Reduced to animals, the Handmaid's in Atwood's text have no option but to breed.

* * *

In the feminist dystopia, then, the generic theme of dehumanization is grounded in the physical and explored at the most basic level: reproduction. To dramatize women's position in the patriarchy, these writers present characters who are reduced to merely procreative functions; if such women display other capabilities it is still only their procreative or "female" virtues that are recognized. Because fertility occupies so much of the woman's time, space, and energies, her other gifts are given no chance for "pure fruition" (Rich, "Snapshots" 4.4). In presenting the reduction of women to animal status, these texts also illustrate the way that patriarchal attitudes accord with De Sade's belief that "the flesh of women, as the flesh of all female animals is necessarily very inferior to that of the male species" (qtd. in Ellman 66). It is not surprising, then, that at the core of what constitutes the feminist dystopia lies woman's lack of control over her own reproductive capacities. As Ann Oakley notes in The Rights and Wrongs of Women: "in order fully to take command over their destinies, women must have the prior right of determining when (or if) and how, they become mothers" (55). The Handmaids in The Handmaid's Tale, the Lingo's wives in Native Tongue, the women in Fairbairns's Benefits, and the Holylander women in The Gate to Women's Country lack this vital, necessary "prior right."

CHAPTER II: WOMAN AS GUARD AND PRISONER

"all the old knives that have
rusted in my back, I drive in yours
ma semblable, ma soeur!"

(Rich, "Snapshots of a
Daughter-in Law")

In a dystopic society, citizens are constantly monitored, a practice designed to eradicate individuality as well as prevent the emergence of subversive activity. Constant surveillance necessarily undermines individuality, since under "watchful eyes" "private space" becomes "state space." In 1984, for example, Big Brother, head of the Party, exercises an omnipresence evocative of traditional notions of deity. Even more frightening, in the dystopia We, Eugene Zamiatin depicts a society where state-control is not limited to the surveillance of individuals but extends to nature: "The sky is always clear and blue; there is never any thunder and lightning" (Walsh 99). In Zamiatin's text, streets are bugged and individuals live in rooms of glass supervised by the ruler Well-Doer and his spies.

The worlds of feminist dystopias are equally heavily patrolled. Feminist authors of dystopia, however, foreground one particular surveillance strategy not traditionally focused on by male writers of the genre: they are concerned with the way women police or monitor each other. In doing so, these writers explore what Mary Daly, in Beyond God the Father, describes as a further outcome of the "myth of feminine evil": "The myth has provided legitimation not only for the direction of the self-hatred of the male outward against women, but also for the direction of self-

hatred inward on the part of women" (48).

In fact, in the feminist dystopia patriarchy's success in subjugating women resides to a great extent in the way that the women have been enlisted in its cause. Elgin, Fairbairns, Tepper, and Atwood, have all written dystopias in which the questioning of sexism and the emergence of an organized women's movement are thwarted by a lack of female camaraderie. Ultimately all four authors create worlds which lack a strong and unified female voice, a situation that is brought on by a combination of one or more of the following: women police or monitor each other; there exists a strongly established hierarchy not just between male and female, but one which similarly works to separate and prioritize types of women; discord and disagreement amongst the women themselves work to hamper any movement towards positive change.

* * *

In The Handmaid's Tale, women's policing of one another lies at the core of Gilead's successful subordination of women. In "The Historical Notes" section of The Handmaid's Tale, during the mock academic conference where historians attempt to reconstruct the now dead Gilead society, Professor Pieixoto states that "from the outset" it was believed in Gilead "that the best and most cost-effective way to control women for reproductive and other purposes was through women themselves. For this there were many historical precedents; in fact, no empire

imposed by force or otherwise has ever been without this feature: control of the indigenous by members of their own group" (290). Pieixoto's statement is doubly telling, for it serves to emphasize the factuality of the political foundation of Gilead and simultaneously identifies one of the defining characteristics of the dystopian genre: its preoccupation with the past as a commentary on the present and future.

Historically, at least two major wars have relied on the "division" tactics used by Gilead and expressed by Pieixoto. Both The Second World War and the American Civil War strategically pitted "brother" against "brother." In the former war, the establishment of the *judischer ordnungsdienst*--or "Jewish Police"--played a role in collecting the Jews for mass deportations during the Holocaust. Likewise, as Randall M. Miller observes, in the American Civil War a key figure is the black slave driver of the American South who was "all de time whipin', and stropppin' de niggers to make dem work harder" (42). As such, Professor Pieixoto's statement that "there was little that was truly original with or indigenous to Gilead: its genius was synthesis" (289) becomes horrific in its dystopic suggestion that Gilead is not "new," but rooted in existent thought patterns. That is, part of what constitutes the "nightmare" of Gilead is that it is a world based on a political model which has concretely been put into practice in our present.

In The Handmaid's Tale, "control of the indigenous by members of their own group" translates into women controlling or

monitoring each other. The Wives, for example, are in charge of all the women in their households, including their Handmaid. Any transgression made by a Handmaid is handled by the "woman" of the house, such that Offred realizes that "If I'm caught, it's to Serena's tender mercies I'll be delivered" (128). The "tenderness" derives from the fact that no "implements" may be used, and the irony of this feminist advance over masculinist methods is underscored by Serena Joy's explanation: "It's [hitting] one of the things we fought for" (16). The Wives view their assigned authority over the Handmaids as just compensation for their humiliation suffered on nights of the Ceremony, where they watch their husbands and their Handmaid's having sex, in a perverted *menage a trois*.

Another example of how women exploit each other in The Handmaid's Tale is evidenced in the way that Serena uses her knowledge of the whereabouts of Offred's daughter to manipulate her. By bribing Offred with information concerning her daughter, Serena Joy is able to set up a rendezvous between Offred and the Guardian Nick for the purposes of impregnating Offred and effecting her consequent removal from a home where she has become more than "breeder"--at least to the Commander who has grown "fond" of her.

While the Handmaids are carefully monitored by the Wives at their postings, at the Red Centre Handmaids are also under constant surveillance by the Aunts--a term that is especially appropriate for suggesting matrilinear policing. The brutality

the Aunts inflict on the Handmaids--their would-be kin-- demonstrates just how much women in Gilead are involved in a kind of sado-masochism. Offred recalls watching her friend Moira, "limping from what they'd done to her feet" (203), in punishment for attempted escape from the Red Centre.

Something which many critics of The Handmaid's Tale fail to explore fully is the psychological motivation behind the Aunts's brutalization of the Handmaids. It is significant that the majority of the Aunts, like the Wives, are childless or infertile older women. The conflict, then, is not just one of women against women, but more specifically barren women against fertile women. Barren women in Atwood's novel attempt to deal with and compensate for their biological "lack" by brutalizing the fertile body, or Handmaid.

Atwood also reminds us that the Aunts diligently monitor and punish the Handmaids in order to prevent themselves from being shipped "to the infamous Colonies" (290). In the case of Gilead, there are many women willing to serve as Aunts, either because of a genuine belief in what they called "traditional values" or for the benefits they might thereby acquire. The Aunts's abuse of the Handmaids, then, is motivated by a need for self-preservation. It was a similar need for self-preservation--the keeping of "privileges [or] . . . offers of freedom" (Miller 44)--that motivated the black slave-driver of the American South to abuse his own race.

In a manner similar to what Helene Cixous does later, in

The Second Sex Simone de Beauvoir establishes columns of binary oppositions showing how women are located in a right-hand column and associated with terms like "object" and "inessential" in contrast with the left-hand, or male, column which includes "subject" and "essential." In her evaluation of patriarchal binary thought, Beauvoir concludes that "One reason why women consent to being pushed into the right-hand column is that this enables them to go on enjoying certain privileges or securities that male dominance affords them" (Keefe 149). In The Handmaid's Tale, Atwood presents women selling each other out for the sake of "privileges," choosing that most beneficial to themselves, thereby compromising "sisterhood" in the process. In Inessential Women, Elizabeth Spelman illustrates how the desire to keep "privileges" hinders the Feminist movement: "the unwillingness of women with race or class privileges to give them up is the main obstacle to women's all doing something together to resist the domination of men" (63).

The pairing up of Handmaids is another way in which women are monitored or policed by each other in The Handmaid's Tale. Offred recognizes the real reason why she is provided a walking, and shopping partner: "We . . . go . . . in two's. This is supposed to be for our protection, though the notion is absurd. . . . The truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers" (19). Offred continually watches and tests her second partner in an attempt to uncover her political sympathies or leanings: whether, she is "of the regime" or whether she is allied with the Underground that is

working towards egalitarianism or at least "bettering things."

Part of Gilead's strategy for successfully subordinating women relies on eradicating or banning any growths of friendship between the Handmaids. In fact, one of the major commandments of Handmaidenship is articulated by Offred when she attempts to find out from her "new" partner what happened to the first Ofglen: "We aren't supposed to form friendship, loyalties, among one another" (265). The ingenuity behind the regime's control of friendships gives validity to Madonna Kolbenschlag's assertion, in Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-Bye, that "when female relationships are inconsequential, women are all the more vulnerable to male exploitation" (42). The discouragement of friendships among women is not an innovative strategy on Gilead's part for fostering female oppression; as Kolbenschlag observes, Early American Conduct manuals also promoted the banning of female friendships to secure the male ego: the manuals "cautioned men against allowing their wives to associate too much with their female peers lest the 'neighbourhood squadrons of she-commanders' "might encroach on their 'natural sovereignty' as husbands" (52).

In The Handmaid's Tale the ritual of Testifying also illustrates how women antagonize and deride one another. During this ritual, women are mercilessly given "guilt trips" by other women for things that are not their fault, including rape. Listening to Janine's tale of gang-rape, the Handmaid's respond with the vicious chanting "her fault, her fault" (67).

The continual surveillance that the Handmaids are subjected

to from the Wives, Aunts, and each other, extends even beyond the grave and manifests itself in Offred's room, where she continually feels the ghostly presence of its former tenant:

"How could I have believed I was alone in here? There were always two of us" (275). In The Handmaid's Tale woman is always watched in a manner reminiscent of the prisoner in Foucault's panoptic model who is "always . . . seen but . . . does not see . . . is the object of information, never a subject in communication (107). Woman is both guard and prisoner in The Handmaid's Tale.

Women are also divided in Gilead due to the existence of a clearly demarcated hierarchy. By Lucy Friebert's calculation, the women in The Handmaid's Tale "find themselves relegated to one of eight categories: Aunts, Wives, Handmaids, Martha's, Econowives, Widows, Unwomen, and "the unnamed women... [who] a few hours each day...serve the pleasure of the Commanders and visiting business-men" (282). The Aunts and Wives exist at the top of the hierarchy by virtue of the privileges--like reading and writing--that they are given. They are privileged, in short, by virtue of privileges associated with the male.

* * *

Although in Elgin's Native Tongue there exists a spirit of female camaraderie in Barren House, women in that text also hinder their own advancement. The non-Lingoe women are antagonistic toward Lingo Wives, despising them for their dominance, power, and lifestyle, and calling them "bitch

linguists" (212). The non-Linguist women's animosity towards the Wives of the Lingoos extends further than simply name-calling, however, as suggested by the nurse who handles Nazareth Chornyak in the hospital: "it hurt her that they must add to their usual unpleasant behaviour still one more dose of viciousness, just because she was a linguist. It hurt her not just physically-- although that did hurt, because they were needlessly rough as they tended her--it hurt her simply because they were women. Women hurting other women. . . that was ugly" (227).

In fact, one of the main forces plotting against the Lingoos women turns out to be, ironically, another woman. The protagonist of the sub-plot, Michaela, believing that the Lingoos are responsible for her child's death, is on a personal mission, a vendetta, against all Lingoos, and when she moves into Chornyak household her annihilistic stance becomes focused specifically on the Women of the Lines: "The position they'd contacted her about, at Chornyak household, sounded like a murderer's most beloved fantasy. Forty-three linguist women, all under one roof, and without any men to guard them!" (170). With the revelation that the government and not the Lingoos were responsible for her child's death, along with her emerging affection for the women at Barren House, Michaela goes from being the potential destroyer of the women of the Lines to being their saviour when she "kills Thomas, the one male who suspects the female plan to evolve a 'native tongue'" (Bray 50).

The role that women play in their own and each other's

demise is also illustrated explicitly when several of Elgin's female characters express concerns regarding their mistreatment at the hands of their "sisters." On various occasions both Susannah and Nazareth feel that women are against them: "Susannah clucked her tongueShe could not understand why it never stopped hurting, having all the other women set against her" (31); and one of the few times Nazareth tried to open up to a "sister," "that woman had called her stupid" (177). If Nazareth occasionally feels demeaned by her "sisters," she too is guilty of demeaning her own sex, as when in a moment of anger her "tongue" becomes indistinguishable from the "male tongue": "the men are right, you're a pack of silly ignorant *fools* over here Dear heaven, it makes me almost willing to go back to Chornyak Household, not to have to look at you" (246).

Along with the display of animosity towards each other, women contribute to their own division in Native Tongue by keeping secrets from one another. The women in Barren House shield their liberating project, to create a women's language, from other women. Nazareth, for example, remains ignorant of the proposal to create a woman's language until her sickness and ensuing divorce from her husband lands her in Barren House, and when her translating skills are deemed necessary for the project's completion. Paul Tournier, in his study Secrets, notes how "A certain feeling of power is always attached to the keeping of a secret" (11). In evaluating who is capable of keeping a secret and who is not, the women of Barren House evidence a

similar kind of power hierarchy. That is, those women "in" on the project assume a superior pose over those ignorant.

Also hindering women's progression, or their desire to subvert the patriarchal codes and ideology that surround them, is women's lack of organization when it comes to using the information, or spreading the language they are creating. Nazareth is angered by the number of years the revolutionary language has been left stagnant: "what is inexcusable is the language isn't already being used" (245).

* * *

In The Gate to Women's Country women's division is especially ironical because Women's Country is a society organized and run by women. Even though Women's Country purports to be stamping out patriarchal or preconvulsion attitudes, it nevertheless participates in the hierarchical classification of women, with the result of consequently undercutting the very female camaraderie that it is trying to maintain. Women's Country, for example, is not even democratic. It is run by a tyrannical few who "are not elected by the people...[but] are chosen by other members of the Council (132).

While the mandate of Women's Country is to eradicate the sexist ideology of preconvulsion times, as the narrative progresses it becomes apparent that the women still continue to "think" patriarchally. After Chernon forcibly copulates with her, Stavia compares the situation to rape: "He had said nothing!

Nothing loving, nothing sentimental. He had done no wooing. He had taken her as though she had been one of the Gypsies" (238). Thus while she protests his treatment of her, she nonetheless patriarchally assumes that it is permissible to rape "certain" women, women like the gypsies. In this way, Stavia's response confirms one of feminism's major claims that "women themselves...internalize the reigning patriarchal ideology and so are conditioned to derogate their own sex and to cooperate in their own subordination" (Abrams 208). While characters like Stavia fail to acknowledge or recognize that they promote much of the sexism they are trying to eradicate, the servitor Joshua makes the situation clear when he observes that in Women's Country: "there are women and women, aren't there?" (13).

Not only does Women's Country support a female hierarchy with the gypsies ranking at the bottom, it also positions women like Myra, Stavia's sister, close to the bottom. Myra is not privileged with the "secrets" of the Council, for she belongs to the category of women "who talk too much who drink a lot during carnival are young and silly [and] who fall in love with warriors" (294). If Women's Country is striving towards a common sisterhood, that goal is perverted in a vein similar to the Seventh Commandment in George Orwell's Animal Farm: "All Animals are Equal But Some Animals are more equal than others" (83).

Amongst the Holylander society in Tepper's novel, women's abuse of each other takes a physical turn. It is a custom,

established by the male Holylanders, that before marriage women beat the bride so that she will "know ahead of time. That's what your husband will do to you if you fail in duty to him" (261). Stavia, in fact, is subjected to such an initiation when she is beaten by Holyland women in order to prepare for her marriage to Chernon. Katherine Barry has equally documented how males often set women against each other in order to achieve their own goals. In Female Sexual Slavery, Barry uses the example of mail-order brides to illustrate how men pit women against each other. In Barry's example, "liberated American women" are pitted against "'docile'" and "submissive" women from the Third World, in competing for male affection (xiii).

Similar to the Holylander's practice of turning women against women is the way that the males instigate division between mother and daughter in Women's Country. The warriors make a practice of seducing daughters of Councilwomen in order to acquire information that could potentially aid them in their attempt at reclaiming power from the women. Chernon courts Stavia for this end, and similarly Barten courts Myra. Their strategy involves "smooth-talking" Councilwomen's daughters to a point where they become beset with divided loyalties: they must choose between passion, and the rules of their mother's household. The warriors, therefore, recognize and use to their full advantage, the potentiality for destruction inherent in the mother/daughter bond that Rich articulates in Of Women Born. In discussing the mother/daughter bond, Rich notes how "the

materials are here for the deepest mutuality and the most painful estrangement" (226).

While in The Gate to Women's Country the estrangement of daughter from mother becomes politically dangerous, Andrea Dworkin in Woman-Hating illustrates how, historically, mothers have abused daughters in order to protect their own placement in the domestic sphere. Discussing chinese foot-binding practices, Dworkin observes how: "Millions of mothers, over a period of 1000 years, brutally crippled and mutilated their daughters for the sake of a secure marriage" (112).

As in Elgin, the keeping of secrets also becomes one of the ways women are divided in The Gate to Women's Country. In Tepper, the keeping of secrets works to illustrate the hierarchical make-up of Women's Country. Like the Barren House women who hide their linguistic project from "some" women, the Councilwomen in Tepper's novel similarly hide facts from women they deem unworthy or ignorant. In order to prevent the resurgence of patriarchy the Councillors conceal many truths: that it is not vitamin implants that women are given before Carnival but contraceptive pellets and that it is servitors and not warriors who father their children. Instead of giving their "sisters" access to the truth, the Councilwomen promote a fiction. Under the guise of maintaining unity and order in Women's Country, the "Damned Few," as the Councilwomen are called, sacrifice the very honesty and openness required for a healthy unity. The degree to which the "Damned Few" are able to "bite their tongues," subverts both the

stereotype that women have "loose tongues," and "the folk myth that gossip belongs mainly to women" (Spacks 38).

* * *

In Zoe Fairbairns's Benefits, it is not the keeping of secrets that causes fragmentation but rather the disparate and antagonistic views of the women themselves. Although there is a strong desire by the Feminists to allow woman her full potential, the political movement known as FAMILY, ironically spearheaded by two women, tries to guide women into accepting their "traditional role and biological destiny" (39). FAMILY advocates maintain that "FAMILY and the women's liberation movement...[are] both on the same side" because "the true liberation of women will never come about until proper respect and value is placed upon their role as nurturers (39). The Hindley family of Seyer Street, reworked and reformed by FAMILY members, is manipulated and bribed by the FAMILY Party to the point of mechanically functioning as their mouthpiece and parading as their "success story." They become the FAMILY's representatives at the Seyer Street Exhibition: "Mrs Hindley's head nodded up and down, up and down, till Mrs. Travers gave her a prod" (52). By promoting and advocating women's biological and maternal role, the FAMILY group denies women movement, liberation, and experimentation. Women like Isabel Travers and Rashida Patel, spokeswomen of FAMILY, promote the conception of women as "womb" and in doing so reinforce centuries of objectification.

In contrast to the FAMILY group are the feminists who inhabit Collindeane tower. They insist that "'family values' were a euphemism for women doing the housework" and that "family enslaves women" (40). Elizabeth Spelman has noted the paradox surrounding discussion of female sameness and difference: on the one hand, "differences among women seem threatening to the possibility of a coherent women's movement" (161); on the other hand, "Any attempt to talk about all women in terms of something we have in common undermines attempts to talk about the differences among us" (3). In Fairbairns's world, the antithetical platforms of Feminists and FAMILY reflect this situation. On the one hand there are women who serve as liberating examples like the feminist crusader Posy, on the other hand there are women who advocate women's restriction, like Rashida Patel, and Isabel Travers. In a public confrontation with Lynn over FAMILY's policies, Isabel Travers articulates the contradictory voices women assume in Benefits: "Right wing, left wing--you know that women belong to all wings and none!" (54).

In addition to the failure of agreement between FAMILY and the Feminists, however, there is also an internal discord amongst the Feminists themselves. Within the Feminists there are moderates and radicals. While Lynn constantly struggles between loyalty and disillusionment towards feminism, for the radical Posy, "the only hope for . . . women . . . lay in an international female revolution" (9). The overall implication thus again seems to be it is not just patriarchy that hinders

women's progression, but women themselves.

* * *

As illustrated in The Handmaid's Tale, Native Tongue, Benefits, and The Gate to Women's Country, then, part of what constitutes the "nightmare" conditions of feminist dystopic worlds is that women in these texts seem to be at odds with each other. Although the disharmony amongst women in these worlds can largely be attributed to patriarchal indoctrination, often too it derives from women's own ideology and practices. In the feminist dystopia the presence of female hierarchies, the policing of women by each other, along with the disparate and antagonistic viewpoints of the women themselves, makes the subversion of patriarchal ideology an impossibility.

At the same time, however, these writers do not seem to ascribe to the notion that women lack the mind-set required for effective decision-making, and that this is what proves disadvantageous to them in their desire to effect positive change. Rather, it can be argued that the disparate voices in the feminist dystopia become a narrative strategy for rebellion against the totalitarianism of "one voice" and "one mind." So what appears to be the presentation of what Mary Ellman refers to as "soft mind" (74)--women's lack of decision-making capacity--is in reality a kind of affirmation of the power of the individual in the face of the collective, of women's heterogeneity in societies where she is essentially homogenous, a celebration of

difference that is denied women when they are stereotypically perceived as being all of the same mind or body.

CHAPTER III: WOMAN AS REBEL

"To a woman who owns a telescope it is suggested that she rid herself of it, that she 'stop trying to find out what's happening on the moon.' "

(Griffin 14)

In a world where individuals are monitored to the point of losing themselves to the collective whole, maintaining self-integrity is a revolutionary act. Chad Walsh has commented on the prevalence of the theme of rebellion in the dystopia, noting how the central focus of these texts is usually the "attempted rebellion against the all-powerful state" (100). Due to the constraining circumstances of dystopic societies rebellion is rarely physical; instead, it often manifests itself in the form of "thought." In George Orwell's 1984, for example, Winston Smith's questioning of Big Brother is viewed by the Party as a criminal violation and labelled "thought crime." Similarly, in Zamiatin's We, "disloyal thought or action" becomes a "sacrilege against the sacred state and its holy ruler" (Walsh 99).

In the feminist dystopia, "thought" is also discouraged by rulers intent on reducing women to "body." The protagonists in these texts, however, do "think"--they desire "escape" and consequently refuse to accept their subordinate positions passively. Because women in these texts are physically, sexually, and emotionally restricted, their avenues of escape are, likewise, minimal. Regardless of method, however, the

motivation for "escape" is the same: it stems from a desperate attempt to salvage a sense of self-hood. Among the avenues of rebellion and coping strategies available to women in the feminist dystopia, the most frequent are madness, suicide, creativity, love, and language.

* * *

The long-standing connection between madness and social conditions has been documented by literary scholars like Shoshana Felman. More specifically, feminists like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and psychologists like Phyllis Chesler, have focused on the relationship between women and madness. Supporting this idea of a distinct relationship between the two is the etymology of the word hysteria, which originates from the greek *hystera*, or womb. Among the ancient Greeks, hysteria was thought to be caused by a disorder or "rising" of the womb, and was therefore considered a woman's disease (Ellman 12). Given the emphasis upon reproduction in a patriarchal world order, it is not surprising to see feminist authors of dystopian texts exploiting this association for their own ends. The connection they see correlates with Barbara Rigney's observation in Madness and Sexual Politics in the Feminist Novel that female insanity "can in a majority of cases be explained by the oppression of women in a power-structured male supremacist society" (6). In the feminist dystopia, however, madness functions not merely as a symptom of oppression, but paradoxically as women's means of escape from a

"mad" world.

In Elgin's Native Tongue, Belle Anne Chornyak is a woman who upon turning "twenty and eminently beddable" (128) had ended up divorced and a resident at Chornyak Barren House because she failed in her procreative function. The reason she provides to explain her lack of fertility seems whimsical and nonsensical to the men of Chornyak house: "there are women whose bodies are not intended for the usage of human men. I am one such woman We are . . . the brides of Christ, and reserved to Him only" (132). The men believe that they are listening to a madwoman, when in actuality Belle Anne has cunningly outwitted them. Her resistance to becoming pregnant has a practical as opposed to a spiritual or biological explanation: the taking of contraceptive tablets secretly lodged in Barren House. By convincing them that she can "by the force of her own will kill the lustiest little wiggling of a sperm that any man could produce" (127), Belle Anne frightens the men: her body refuses their "seeds." Belle-Anne, then, stands as a twofold symbol of rebellion: her madness allows her to escape procreative quotas imposed on her body--the required eight children before the age of forty--and it allows her access into "another space or world" (DuPlessis 195) where as the "bride of Christ" her body is sacred and not merely physical.

Unlike their male counterparts, the women do not hastily label Belle-Anne as insane. While they acknowledge her "uniqueness," they see it as strength and ultimately rely on her

madness and ability to fabricate stories to keep the men from searching Barren House, after the poisoning of Nazareth. The madwoman becomes the saviour of Barren House when she misleadingly confesses to the poisoning of Nazareth in order to circumvent the investigation of Barren House by the men. It is only after Belle-Anne has been incarcerated for the crime that other women speak of her as a woman who has been driven mad: "Belle Anne has been in the mental hospital for months and you know what she's become. . . . she has no mind left at all, she's a husk" (146).

If Belle-Anne Chornyak is the madwoman in Native Tongue, in the sub-text of The Gate to Women's Country Tepper also introduces a woman who was thought to be mad: the Classical Greek prophetess Cassandra. According to the Classical myth, Cassandra was cursed to a life of "not being believed" when she would not return Apollo's love. In Madness in Literature, Lillian Feder has commented on the Classical connection between prophecy and madness: "Prophecy was regarded as a special form of madness, a perception of reality unavailable to the rational mind" (85). Tepper, however, ironically subverts the patriarchy's view of this conception in her main text by presenting males--the servitors--as the ones bearing a capacity for foresight. In addition, Tepper's use of role reversal demonstrates that perceived gender differences often have a mythical as opposed to factual basis. Equally ironic is the way that each year at The Iphigenia at Ilium performance, Women's

Country gives "voice" to the "mad" Cassandra, only to discourage bouts of irrationality like love because it contradicts with their mandate of being a society of "thinking women."

In The Handmaid's Tale, Janine becomes the noticeable or obvious embodiment of an increasing insanity or madness. Janine is Aunt Lydia's "pet" by virtue of her professed dedication to the regime, as illustrated by both word and deed. Janine's commitment to the regime, however, proves overwhelming and eventually causes her mind to regress to a time before Gilead. As the narrative progresses, Janine increasingly regresses. Ultimately, she becomes unable to distinguish past from present; she becomes unable to "snap out of it." Janine's regressions give way to a progressive madness.

In discussing women's relationship to memory, Judith Kegan Gardiner has observed that the "representation of memory" is one of the "typical narrative strategies of women writers (179), and she suggests that one of the reasons is that "women remember what men choose to forget" (188). Janine thus escapes her dystopic condition through the sanctuary of memory. She tries to remember what the regime wants her to forget in an effort to relocate and find validation in a past self, because the regime has effectively worked to eradicate any semblance of a present self. Rigney has noted how memory often contributes to women's mental illness because women are "constantly torn between male society's prescription for female behaviour, their own tendencies toward the internalization of these roles, and a nostalgia for some lost

more authentic self" (119). Commenting on Anna in Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook, Gardiner observes that "memory keeps...her personality intact and saves her from madness" (189). Atwood's Janine, like Anna, similarly tries to cope through memory but is not as successful, as her resultant insanity suggests. Regarding Janine's madness, Moira knows "That stuff is catching" (204), and to avoid being "caught" she later escapes the Red Centre to become a "Bunny" in a brothel. As such madness--the route taken by Janine--and prostitution--the route taken by Moira--are two desperate alternatives offered women in The Handmaid's Tale.

Madness has a devastating price in Atwood, as does anything that attempts transcendence from a patriarchally controlled world: "You go too far away and they just take you up to the Chemistry Lab and shoot you. Then they burn you up with the garbage" (204). Insanity in the dystopic world must be contained or destroyed because it suggests an anarchic mind, loose in a tightly ordered world. Madness in the feminist dystopia translates into rebellion because it is a search for "change," a "rupture with the rules of the world" (DuPlessis 195). The Wall in The Handmaid's Tale, where "criminals" are hung, makes it clear how Gilead responds to subversives.

One of the most comprehensive and indepth portraits of madness and its relationship to dystopic rebellion appears in Fairbairns's Benefits. Through the character of Judy, Fairbairns demonstrates what Marilyn Yalom in her study Maternity, Mortality and Madness perceives to be a link between these three things.

Among other things, Yalom posits "maternity as a catalyst for mental breakdown" (5). Clearly, motherhood plays a role in Judy's psychoses, who periodically denies mothering to her son Jim. Judy had "to leave her baby for awhile and wander and dream and meditate; to proclaim that she had no baby and to be coaxed patiently back into accepting that she had" (27). She takes responsibility for her son only when his dependence on her allows her extra dollars in the form of welfare checks, or when motherhood "pays off."

Like Judy, Janine in The Handmaid's Tale also seems to have been traumatized by childbirth. Childbirth likely plays a role in her progressive insanity, since it is after the loss of her second child--the first lost through miscarriage--that she begins more seriously to "lose it." Both Judy Matthews and Janine embody the sentiments expressed by the unknown woman in Atwood's short story "Giving Birth," which Yalom uses to demonstrate the, often ignored, traumatic effects that childbirth can have on women. In Atwood's story, contrary responses to childbirth, both positive and negative, are set up through the character of Jeanie and an unknown woman, or shadow, who represents Jeanie's double: "Jeanie goes through pregnancy enthusiastically, knowledgeably, with the requisite sympathetic male, [and] prenatal classes" (Yalom 90), while the unknown woman lies "screaming and crying, screaming and crying saying over and over, 'It hurts. It hurts'" (Atwood, Dancing 250). Jeanie's shadow becomes an Everywoman of sorts, absorbing the pain and trauma of childbirth in the place

of her "sisters." Fairbairns's Judy Matthews is like Jeanie's double: a woman, according to Atwood, "Who did not wish to become pregnant, who did not choose to divide herself like this, who did not choose any of these ordeals, these initiations" (qtd. in Yalom 90).

Because Judy does not conform to the maternal stereotype of the mother who adores her child, she stands as a rebellious figure in Benefits. Madonna Kolbenschlag comments how mental illness in women is most often a rebellion, stemming from a sex-role conflict and "the acting out of the devalued female role or the total or partial rejection of one's sex-role stereotype" (179). In accordance with Kolbenschlag's observations, Judy's madness is motivated by a need to undo patriarchal classifications and stereotypes. The FAMILY advocate, David Laing, relates the events of Judy's confrontation with a Social Worker to Lynn, noting how Judy: "Made them take the baby away, kept shrieking that he wasn't hers, there wasn't a baby and she wouldn't be any man's prisoner" (30).

Judy, like Janine, also seeks solace in the past in order to escape the horrific present, although her obsession is with the remote past of goddesses and ancient religions. In a rigidly patriarchal world, Judy has no female deity to pray to, so she imagines one. Like Belle-Anne, she retreats into the world of her imagination where things are better, where there is a female who protects and guides her. Madness for Judy becomes "another space or world" which is better than the existent one.

Ironically, religion, while usually used as the basis for intense repression in the dystopia, as in The Handmaid's Tale, and the Holyland society in The Gate to Women's Country, can also stand as a means of salvation. In Benefits, Judy escapes into a world of goddesses, rituals, and ancient rites; in Elgin and Tepper, repressed women desire a female deity, finding a male God to be both inadequate and irresponsible to their needs and desires: according to Nazareth Chornyak, "Only a male god could have created this repulsive, abominable world" (198). The women in these texts look for solace at the bosom of a Goddess, receiving only wounds at the hands of a God.

Significantly at the end of Benefits, Judy's suicide sets in motion Marsha's own madness. Fairbairns makes a connection between Judy Matthews and Marsha when Marsha begins to wind Judy's "warm red bandages" (161) around herself. After she murders David Laing, Marsha is imprisoned in an asylum where she receives shock treatment. Marsha is a woman "driven mad" (170), becoming a new body for Judy's madness in her proclamation that "I am the goddess" (171).

Madness, of course, results in suicide for Judy Matthews, and similarly serves as a vehicle of rebellion in the feminist dystopia. For Judy, however, madness becomes only a temporary escape, for a woman requiring a permanent one. In Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory, Marleen Barr has posited that death is women's only alternative to patriarchal oppression in feminist science fiction: "death provides the only

true, human answer to the following question: how do women preserve their individual humanity and power in the face of patriarchal biological tyranny?" (135). In accordance with Barr's observation, Sylvia Plath argued that "suicide is an assertion of power of the strength--not the weakness--of the personality" (qtd. in Roller 18), and Judy's final words make her suicide an act of rebellion, rather than futility: "They will never take me. The goddess will raise me to herself" (160). While the motivation for Judy's act is rebellion, the goddess's failure to raise her "to herself" bleakly stands as an emblem of patriarchal victory.

In The Handmaid's Tale, suicide becomes the third of three desperate alternatives offered women--along with madness and prostitution. In The Handmaid's Tale both the first Ofglen and the former tenant of Offred's room take their own lives, finding their reduction to "breeder" status intolerable.

In an article on "La Princesse de Cleves," Anne Leone has argued that the Princess's flight from "the court to the seclusion of her properties in Paris and Coulommiers and finally to a convent and a country house in the Pyrenees"--is an "assertion of her self, and of her story, a refusal of the court's seemingly implacable processes" (36). Her withdrawals and silences are construed by Leone as a rebellion from expectation, as an assertion of self. If women respond to enforced behaviour with "flight" in Lafayette's 17th-century novel, in the feminist dystopia suicide stands as a similar act of assertion and self-

definition.

It is not surprising to see so many examples of women driven mad in the feminist dystopia. Madness is a retreat for characters like Belle-Anne Chornyak, Judy Matthews and Janine, allowing them to inhabit a "kinder place" away from the "nightmare" they live daily. Madness in the feminist dystopia corresponds to Yalom's definition: "Madness is a tragic necessity, a boundary of experience through which the sufferer passes, clutching the hope that a new life will be found on the other side" (89).

* * *

In addition to madness and suicide, artistic creation also affords a means of escape in the feminist dystopia, and its rebelliousness lies precisely in the fact that emphasis is on procreation, as opposed to imaginative or artistic output. Yalom has demonstrated how patriarchal society pressures women "to reproduce one's biological rather than one's imaginative self" (9). In the patriarchal societies of feminist dystopias, not only are women's creative faculties limited to their procreative function, but even here they are often denied "authorship": children continue to take their father's surnames, as in Native Tongue, and in the extreme case of The Handmaid's Tale, women give birth only to provide offspring for infertile and impotent members of the elite. Conception, too, is not solely a female enterprise, and as such "authorship" is shared.

In The Handmaid's Tale, "The stains on the mattress" (49) that Offred uncovers in her room must substitute for art. Here, woman's "blood" substitutes for "paint," as it does in Isak Dinesen's "The Blank Page," a story where virginal blood excretions are mounted, framed and displayed like works of art by a group of nuns in a convent. What lies behind such practices is the way that the male gaze perceives a woman's body as an esthetic object, which Adrienne Rich sees reflected in the words of a male editor: "Young girls are poems; they shouldn't write them" (Kalstone 57). In Woman-Hating, Andrea Dworkin visually represents the conception of "woman as art" in a diagram entitled "Beauty Hurts" that depicts the extremities of a cosmetically made-up woman. To highlight how "woman is art," at the bottom of the diagram Dworkin includes the following riddle:

Q: Why haven't women made great works of art?

A: Because they are great works of art" (116).

In the feminist dystopia outwardly suppressed creativity most often hides an inward longing and desire to create. Even those women given access to art and literature--the Wives, for example, who are allowed to read and write--nevertheless express the desire to participate in creative expression. The infertile Wives in The Handmaid's Tale are presented as needing to exercise their creative and procreative energies; as Offred notes, the knitting of scarves and the nurturing of gardens becomes the Wives "form of procreation" (144).

In particular, feminist dystopias focus on the need of women

to tell their own story, to write "herstory" as opposed to having history written about them--as well as being excluded entirely. As Sally McConnell-Ginet notes: "The . . . traditional approach to history [is]. . . the story. . . of. . . great men and their great deeds" (10). Both Offred and the Barren House women eventually tell their tales, and in doing so rebel from worlds in which the role of woman does not include that of chronicling their times. In telling their tales they also pursue what Julia Penelope in Speaking Freely calls "active" activities--speaking and writing--which contrast with listening which she dubs "passive" (xxxii).

In doing so, furthermore, they reclaim part of their ancestral legacy. That is, story-telling has often been regarded as a female activity or genre. As Deborah Cameron notes in The Feminist Critique of Language: "some forms of linguistic activity . . . are popularly associated with women . . . (for example... storytelling...)" (4). In the patriarchal set-up of the feminist dystopia, however, storytelling becomes a male enterprise. Elgin effectively dramatizes this patriarchal expropriation in the relationship between Michaela and her husband Ned Landry. Ned is a raconteur and values Michaela for her listening capacity. After the birth of their child, however, Ned loses his "captive" audience, as Michaela's energies become focused on the newborn. Consequently, to maintain his place at centre stage, as well as to "reclaim" his audience, he hands his child over to the government for experimentation purposes. Thus Elgin puts him in

the position of having to choose one female stereotype over another; that he chooses woman as listener over woman as mother, suggests a preoccupation with his own centrality.

The desire to tell or create is also subversive in the feminist dystopia because it facilitates self-expression and is at odds with the controlling mandate of a totalitarian state. Furthermore, since artistic creation has an imaginative component, it is at odds with a patriarchal emphasis on logic and reason. As a means of expression, it is potentially anarchic in societies where how and what one expresses is monitored and given.

According to the preface to Native Tongue, the narrative that follows is group-authored: it is a work of fiction written by "the women of Chornyak House." Moreover it is "the only work of fiction ever written by a member of the Lines" (5). Although the women of Barren House are permitted to write, they are restricted to academic, scholarly pieces, in which their contributions are not sufficiently recognized. The "authors" of Native Tongue overcome this problem by the insertion of "chapter epigraphs which quote twentieth-century feminist poetry" (Bray 51). These women, therefore, although they live in a world denied Gilbert and Gubar's "metaphorical penis," or pen, nevertheless manage to express themselves.

In Atwood's text, Offred's tale is equally subversive. Offred makes reference throughout The Handmaid's Tale to both her intense desire and need to relay "herstory": to have listeners,

as opposed to being the one "listening." As a Handmaid, however, Offred is denied both writing and reading material in the regime's attempt to prevent women from obtaining knowledge that might lead to a questioning of the present order of things. Knowledge is forbidden Offred, as it was forbidden Eve in the Garden of Eden; and like Eve, Offred is similarly tempted by knowledge--here in the form of magazines and books stored in the Commander's office. Offred's eventual taste of "forbidden fruit" leads to sins of "thought": the contemplation of the extent of her subjugation. Offred's being denied a pen results in her production of an oral narrative, as opposed to a written one; it is only later that her experiences are presented in a written format. She is forced to "Tell, rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden" (37). Not "written in stone," oral narrative is easily subjected to "erasure" and foreshadows the symbolic "erasure" of Offred's experience when male transcribers edit "her" story.

Offred's reaction, when she first comes in contact with a pen again, is erotic: "The pen between my fingers is sensuous, alive almost, I can feel its power, the power of the words it contains. Pen is Envy And they were right. . . . It's one more thing I would like to steal" (174). Here, Atwood mocks Freud's theory of "penis envy" by suggesting that writing is a form of autoeroticism. While Freud sees "penis envy" as motivated by a female lack, Offred's coveting of the pen is motivated by a feeling that words are more powerful than the

phallus and that she is the one who holds this power in her hands. In this way Atwood suggests the connection between women's repressed sexuality and her repressed creativity in the dystopic world. Both are attempts by patriarchy to undermine and keep woman from becoming "whole."

Story also becomes a means by which Offred rebels from her oppressors constant monitoring, symbolically represented by the "eye" on the ceiling of her room; like autobiography, story enables her to gain control over her own psyche, in an attempt to access herself and validate her own experience. Story provides Offred with the opportunity to communicate that is denied her by the Regime's intolerance of sharing, bonding, or friendship (49). She is like Scheherazade, in The Arabian Nights, who must tell stories to remain alive.

Story also allows Offred a means of determining her future in a world where she is veritably controlled by others: "If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending" (37). Helene Cixous has commented on the need of women to "write themselves" in order to "reclaim" themselves. In both "The Laugh of the Medusa" and The Newly Born Woman Cixous emphasizes writing as a prerequisite for women's "wholeness": "To write--the act that will 'realize' the uncensored relationship of woman to her sexuality, to her woman-being giving her back access to her own forces" (Newly Born 97). Offred tells her tale in the first person, asserting her authority, professing her status as speaker and author.

Unfortunately, "herstory" ultimately becomes "his story," since it is male academics who end up editing and transcribing Offred's tapes. Patriarchy once again interprets woman's experience for her, thinks for her, feels for her. The transcribers of Offred's tapes refer to her tapes as "crumbs" and lament that she lacked the "instincts of a reporter or a spy" (292). The reference to "crumbs" relegates her escape to that of folktale children and puts the transcribers in the position of tracking her down. In turn, by describing her performance by reference to two typically male professions--the reporter and spy--the male academics reveal their masculinist bias. Because Offred's tale "has a whiff of emotion recollected, if not in tranquility, at least *post facto*" (285), it does not correspond to patriarchal thought which "represent[s] itself as "emotionless[,] objective, detached and bodiless" (Griffin xv). In keeping with the satiric edge of the dystopia, however, Atwood here also subverts the stereotype of woman as transcriber or secretary because it is now males who must transcribe a female "text." Equally satiric is the way these male detectives overlook the nature of Offred's subversiveness.

Graffiti in The Handmaid's Tale also functions as a subtle expression of rebellion. Inspecting the floor of her closet Offred comes upon the phrase, "*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*" (49) "Don't let the bastards get you down." Like the expression, "*Aunt Lydia Sucks*" that Offred finds later in the washroom at the Red Centre, "It was like a flag waved from a hilltop in

rebellion" (208-09). Graffiti in Atwood's text is subversive in several ways. First, it carries a message to eyes denied reading material; secondly, it functions as an artistic or creative expression. Graffiti expert Paul Reiser has studied the relationship between graffiti and art, and he notes how the American artist Burhan Dogancay spoke of graffiti as "Drawings, colors, harmony, composition, poems" (96). Similarly in The Handwriting on the Wall Ernest Abel and Barbara Buckley suggest that "Every graffito can . . . be seen and/or read as a miniature autobiography" (13). Applying their insights to the feminist dystopia, one might say that graffiti becomes women's "announcements of . . . identity, a kind of testimonial to . . . [their] existence in a world of anonymity" (16).

Graffiti is also subversive in that it violates taboos of sexual purity; by featuring obscenities like "sucks" and "bastards" it subverts the expectations of women as "chaste vessels" that the regime is intent on fostering. Graffiti is also often thought to be a typically male form of release. In becoming graffiti artists, then, the Handmaid's express their desire to access male territory, as well as to create.

To the same effect, in The Gate to Women's Country Tepper offers what Judith Fetterley in The Resisting Reader calls a "revision" (viii) of Euripides's The Trojan Women. Tepper rewrites the classic text from the woman's, or Iphigenia's view, for the purposes of giving credence to the female voice and to "counter the covert sexual biases" within the Classical text

(Abrams 209). Euripides's drama depicts a group of Trojan women grieving over the losses of their homes and loved ones, after the destruction of Troy by the Greeks. Tepper's motive in rewriting Euripides is expressed in the voice of her Iphigenia, who quite violently proclaims the ineptitude of the male poet who undertakes to articulate female psychology: "The words the poets poured into my mouth were the prideful boasts of Argive battalions! They say I offered to die for Hellas! What did I know of Hellas?! ... Men like to think well of themselves, and poets help them do it" (56). In Iphigenia in Aulis, Euripides presents Iphigenia as ultimately reconciled to the demand for her own sacrifice in the hope that "never more will/ Barbarians wrong and ravish Greek women,/ Drag them from happiness and their homes/In Hellas" (370). Invested with a new voice provided by Tepper, Iphigenia speaks of hatred towards the father who sanctioned her sacrifice, subverting the response which Euripides has her voice in Iphigenia in Tauris: "I bear him [Agamemnon] no further ill will" (82). The myth retold from the female perspective allows Iphigenia to hate her male prosecutor; indeed, her ascent from the realms of Hades, in Tepper's text, is precisely for the reasons of cursing and avenging her father's slaughter of her. If in Atwood and Elgin women must "write themselves" in order to maintain their sanity, in Tepper women must "rewrite themselves" in order to voice female truths.

Romantic love also becomes a means of rebellion in the feminist dystopia because, like art, it threatens the dedication to the collective required of a totalitarian regime. As Martha Wolfenstein has noted, the general absence of romantic love in utopia stems from: "the constant surveillance and deception practised by authorities, regimentation of all aspects of life, proscription of art and adornment, the cultivation of diffuse *esprit de corps* in place of intense personal attachment" (536). Similarly, dystopic worlds forbid the blossoming of romantic love, preferring instead to arrange marriages based on the genetic qualities of the partners. As such, when romantic love does flourish in the feminist dystopia it is necessarily brought to fruition behind closed doors. For women in the feminist dystopia, romantic love reflects a desire for personal fulfilment and an enactment of choice denied them by virtue of their gender.

In these texts, the angst felt by intense conformity and repression gives way to rebellion via illicit or unconventional love. While love itself is subversive in the feminist dystopia, since it produces alliances and devotion to an individual and because it facilitates erotic expression in worlds where sexuality has a procreative function, homosexual or lesbian love is doubly subversive in societies that are intensely focused on reproduction. In Tepper's world, there is a deliberate attempt to breed out homosexuality: "the women doctors now identified the condition as hormonal reproductive maladaptation, and corrected it before birth" (76); in Fairbairns's world homosexuals go through

intensive rehabilitation programs, a type of "corrective surgery"; in Atwood's world homosexuals are criminals whose crime is "gender treachery," and whose punishment is death.

According to Rich, lesbians are "seen as embodiments... of the great threat to male hegemony: the woman who is not tied to the family, who is disloyal to the law of the heterosexual pairing and bearing" (Of Woman 252). In the light of Rich's comment, then, it is not surprising to see such a prevalence of lesbian relationships in a genre which attempts to highlight patriarchy's control over women.

In Fairbairns's text, lesbian love is perhaps most prevalent; the majority of the Feminists who inhabit Collindeane tower openly profess their lesbianism. Lynn at the end of the novel explores her lesbian tendencies, upon the realization that she loves Marsha, just as earlier Marsha rebels from the conventional heterosexual relationship in choosing Posy over David Laing. Marsha's choice of a lesbian relationship is partially motivated by the belief that a same-sex relationship means equality, whereas heterosexual pairing leads to dominance and subservience. Ironically, however, the end result of Marsha and Posy's relationship, as expressed by Marsha, is inequality: "I've got to find something for myself. I've got to stop being your bloody wife" (64). In adopting the heterosexual relationship model of dominant and subservient, Marsha and Posy's lesbian union provides no solution.

A similar theme of lesbianism in Native Tongue is dramatized

in the attraction of Michaela to Nazareth: "She loved Nazareth Chornyak, whose face she'd begun to seek out first whenever she went into a room where linguists were; she knew she made excuses to touch Nazareth as she passed her" (258). Michaela's lesbianism is spurred on by a distrust of males: "Loving someone who considered you only one small notch above a cleverly trained domestic animal . . . that is, loving any adult male--was not possible for her. It would be a perversion, loving your masters while their boots were on your neck" (258). Michaela's love for Nazareth, like Marsha's love for Posy, then, stems in part from a desire for equality.

If Michaela embodies lesbian tendencies in a world where the only acceptable relationships are heterosexual ones, and where gender roles are specifically outlined, Nazareth's romantic leanings are illicit in another way. She envisions an adulterous relationship with Jordon Shannontry--which, however, is thwarted when he publicly condemns her. Nazareth's attempt to rebel against a loveless marriage, and to engage in a relationship of feeling and desire, ends with her Father threatening to move her to Barren House. It also results in the men's vicious mocking and denigration of her feelings. In conversation with Thomas, Adam Chornyak mimics a woman in love: " 'I can just see it' " he . . . did his version of the blushing maiden on tiptoe whispering tender confidence into the bashful lover's ear. 'Oh JORDon,' he bleated in falsetto, 'I LUUV you . . . very . . . very . . . much . . . ' its funny. Its so damn funny'" (199). In his mockery

of Nazareth, Adam does two things: he suggests that women lack the capacity to interpret their own experiences, and he expresses the view that love is an adolescent emotion.

In *Tepper*, too, love involves rebellion. Stavia's love for Chernon causes her to break ordinances for him. Likewise, she remains committed to her rendezvous with him in the Southlands, despite being warned by the magician Septimus and his nieces through divination of an approaching tragedy. Perceived love, then, causes Stavia to turn a blind spot towards individuals she trusts, like Septimus, as well as her mother who discourages her affiliation with Chernon. Rebellious love turns into tragedy with Stavia's rape, and her consequent beating and abuse in the hands of the Holylanders. By going against her mother's wishes in choosing to have a relationship with Chernon, Stavia becomes an example of the way that love can be a rebellion from matriarchal as much as patriarchal restrictions. Such an irony is in keeping with *Tepper's* concern with revealing the extent to which feminism has adopted destructive patriarchal models.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, romantic love by its very essence constitutes rebellion in Gilead, a society in which even extramarital sex is prescribed as duty. When Offred tries to explain the meaning of "falling in love," her Commander dismisses it as magazine hype and states: "Arranged marriages have always worked out just as well, if not better" (206). Erotic desire consequently becomes a crime for Offred, who continually "hunger[s] to commit the act of touch" (11), and who is being

indoctrinated into the belief that mutual attraction is irrelevant: "But you aren't expected to love him. You'll find that out soon enough. Just do your duty in silence" (208). At the Red Centre, Aunt Lydia articulates Gilead's taboo against romantic love: "Love, said Aunt Lydia with distaste Don't let me catch you at it . . . Love is not the point" (206).

In falling in love with Nick, Offred rebels against her role as a "walking womb" or as a woman who has intercourse only out of duty, and asserts herself as a woman for whom touch and intercourse is both desired and pleasurable. Her relationship with Nick is also adulterous and subversive of patriarchal ideology in the sense that she belongs to Luke, the father of her daughter. Eventually, too, it is love that allows for her ultimate act of rebellion, her at least temporary escape from Gilead.

* * *

From the earliest stages of the Women's Movement, feminists have pointed out what they perceive to be patriarchal biases in the way language is used and coded. Robin Lakoff, in her pioneering study, Language and Women's Place, deals with the power inequities inherent in the English language: "I think, that women experience linguistic discrimination in two ways: in the way they are taught to use language, and in the way general language use treats them. Both tend . . . to relegate women to certain subservient functions" (4). Most feminists, in fact,

argue that language aids the patriarchal cause as effectively as it ruptures the Feminist desire for equality. Deborah Cameron has noted how in "feminist Utopias... there is often some attempt at a modified language" (13); this, holds equally true for the feminist dystopia, as illustrated by the linguistic dilemmas posed in both The Handmaid's Tale and Native Tongue.

In The Handmaid's Tale, Offred comes to realize the importance of many things she took for granted before the birth of the existent regime--towels in hotel rooms, hand lotion--, but especially linguistic exchange: "I used to despise . . . talk. Now I long for it" (11). The power of language in The Handmaid's Tale is most immediately apparent in the regime's symbolic erasure of the Handmaid's identity through name change. Critics have usually discussed or interpreted Offred's name in one of two ways--both focusing on the way that her name, like that of the other Handmaids, is designed to emphasize her inferiority. First, as "of fred" she becomes not "of" herself but a possession. Second, the play on "red" highlights her reproductive role, her duty as breeder. Thirdly, her name links her to "offering" and suggests that she is a body to be sacrificed in the interests of the patriarchy.

The regime's re-naming tactics constitutes a subtle commentary on the Judeo-Christian tradition and the biblical precedents on which Gilead is modelled. In Genesis, Adam names animals, "thereby, asserting authority over them and subjecting them to the service of humanity" (Miller and Swift 19). When the

regime renames the Handmaids they are similarly viewed as "chattel" to be dominated, and subjected to a fate of "service."

Offred's name, however, also suggests rebellion or deviance, her desire to cast "off" the restrictive "red" garments that are proscribed her. As such, she simultaneously stands as a symbol of repression and rebellion, and her name functions as a container of the contradictions within her. On the one hand she must parade obediently as "breeder"; on the other hand she wants to think, and write, or be more than body.

In her attempt to rebel against both her object and procreative status, Offred continually gains strength by thinking of her former name, and in the process suggests the connection between identity and name: "I repeat my former name, remind myself of what I once could do, how others saw me" (91). Statements like "My name isn't Offred" (79) express on the surface the desire to reclaim a "lost" name, but symbolically they represent a desire to reclaim a "lost" self. Like the graffiti found in the closet, or on the bathroom walls, Offred's "thought crimes" of reclaiming her name, speak a silent rebellion.

Atwood also uses Offred's *tete a tete's* with the Commander to highlight the connection between sexual and linguistic issues. In the privacy of the Commander's study, Offred plays the word game Scrabble. As she holds the wooden letters of the board game she feels "voluptuous. This is freedom, an eyeblink of it" (131). Offred's erotic reaction while playing Scrabble echoes her

earlier feelings about holding a pen. Yet when the word she chooses is "zygote"--i.e., fertilized egg--her indoctrination as a reproductive vessel becomes clear.

Offred's fascination with language stems from her recognition that a control over language offers her an escape from her current oppression. The connection between language and freedom made by Helen Keller, and articulated by Casey Miller and Kate Swift in Words and Women, can be equally applied to Offred:

When Helen Keller made the connection between the word water and the cool substance flowing from a pump across her hand, she ceased to be a little animal, trapped in the prison of a deaf, mute, and sightless body, and became again a being capable of human growth and comprehension. "That living word awakened my soul," she wrote in her autobiography, "gave it light, hope, joy, set it free!"

(149)

The wooden Scrabble blocks provide Offred with a similar "light, hope, [and] joy."

If oppressed women like Offred recognize the power of language, so do her oppressors, as their denial of reading and writing material to the Handmaids suggests. Commenting on the historical promotion of illiteracy in women, and minority groups like the black's during the Civil War, Deborah Cameron identifies the political agenda: "Powerful groups have quite specific fears that the ability to read and write, should it spread among the powerless, will facilitate opposition and eventually mass revolt" (5).

As the title of her novel suggests, Elgin is particularly concerned with the relationship between women, patriarchy, and

language. Indeed, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, as echoed by Nazareth Chornyak, becomes the premise for Elgin's text: "as more and more little girls acquire Laadan and begin to speak a language that expresses the perceptions of women rather than those of men, reality will begin to change" (250). This sentiment is equally expressed by present-day Feminists who expose the way that language conventions encode sexism--the use of "he" to represent humankind, for example--and who perceive the re-making of language to be a fundamental step towards an egalitarian reality. Like Offred, the women in Elgin recognize that they must exercise control over language in order to exercise control over themselves.

It is under the guise of working on Langlish--i.e., a nonsense language--that the women are able to work on Laadan, a uniquely "woman's language." Langlish, the nonsense language, retains the same suffix as English, and as such Elgin implies that English is a type of patriarchal nonsense. The Barren House women's desire for a "woman's language" stems from the recognition that current language conventions exclude women: "These women . . . had taken on the task of constructing a language that would be just for women. A language to say the things that women wanted to say, and about which men always said 'Why would anybody want to talk about *that*'" (215). The women's linguistic plot remains undetected until the end of the novel--the men believing the women are too silly and inept to come up with anything subversive and revolutionary. Although ultimately

however the plot is discovered by Thomas Chornyak, Michaela's strategic murder of him before he reveals the plot to the other men ironically subverts the males' conception of the women as inept.

In the feminist dystopia, it seems that "the medium of language [is] . . . the medium of salvation" (Yalom 101) for patriarchally oppressed women. Language, like madness, art, suicide, and love, becomes a means of rebellion for woman who are restricted emotionally, physically, creatively, and sexually. In these worlds, women interested in "finding out what's happening on the moon" (Griffin 14) are crudely restricted by the parameters of a patriarchal earth. Indeed, women and earth, or nature, quite often become synonymous in the way that both are recurringly presented as material for men to "tame." It can thus be said that women in these texts assume the "rebellious" stance taken by nature in the Margaret Atwood poem "Progressive Insanities of a Pioneer," where man's desires to dominate nature are continually thwarted by nature's resistance: "Things refused to name themselves; refused/to let him name them" (464). While in Atwood's poem nature proves victorious over man, in the bleak worlds of feminist dystopias the firmness of the patriarchal stamp prevents complete victory.

CONCLUSION

In From Utopia to Nightmare (1962), Chad Walsh has documented the way that the utopian novel has been supplanted by the dystopian novel, positing that the nineteenth-century dreams of progress have been replaced by twentieth-century visions of horror (17). More recently, in a 1987 article entitled "The Best and Worst of Times," Warren Wagar describes the dystopia as "the peculiarly 20th-century form of utopia" and he notes how "since the 1920's, dystopias have replaced utopias on the best seller lists and in the favour of literary critics" (102). By drawing attention to the way that four contemporary women writers have turned their attention to this genre, my thesis lends further support to such claims.

In turn, my thesis poses the question of why a growing number of women are writing dystopias, and here a final difference between the traditional dystopia and the feminist dystopia begins to emerge. I have already noted that what distinguishes the feminist dystopia is not merely its use of a female protagonist but also its indepth treatment of women's issues--in particular, woman's lack of control over her own body and the limited modes of rebellion. Internally, the feminist dystopia accords with Eugen Weber's observation that the dystopic writer "is defeated before he [sic] starts to write" (445). In the very act of writing a dystopia, however, the woman writer is not "defeated" but empowered. Specifically, she ironically

challenges or subverts the "defeatist" posture of the women presented in the narrative by appropriating two traditionally male roles: that of social critic and prophet.

Glen Negley has noted that the dystopia has been a "continuing form of social, political, and literary criticism (xviii) and in The Politics of the Feminist Novel Judi Roller asserts that feminist texts are necessarily political in that "they suggest a need for basic change and restructuring in . . . government, culture, and society" (6). The writer of a feminist dystopia, then, engages in a doubly political act: she writes in a genre that is overtly recognized as a vehicle for social criticism and thus advances into the very political arena from which she has traditionally been excluded.

To the extent that the feminist writer of dystopia focuses on the "facts" of the present, she also subverts the cultural notion that women tell "stories" rather than the "truths" and the biblical association of women and duplicity: "And it is said that women are the fountain, the flood and the very root of deception, falsity and lies" (Griffin 12).

Conversely, given the futurist nature of speculative fiction, the feminist writer of dystopia assumes a prophetic stance, and in doing so she challenges the Judeo-Christian tradition which reserves this role for males. To the extent that "life imitates art," in envisioning the future she also takes control of her own fate, just as in revisioning the past she rewrites her own history. In turn, in forecasting the future on

the basis of the present, and by grounding the future in the historical past, she also subverts the idea that women's fiction is escapist and takes the form of wishfulfilment fantasy.

In this context, another current literary phenomenon requires attention: namely, the fact that there is a considerable amount of generic scholarship devoted to feminist utopias but hardly any to the feminist dystopia. One explanation might simply be that there seems to be more of the former. Thus critics like Marleen Barr and Nicholas Smith, along with Carol Kessler, have noted the presence of a feminist utopic lineage "that would develop from Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward and Louisa May Alcott through Bradley and Gilman to Le Guin, Russ, and Charnas" (Gubar 80).

There is also the possibility that this recognition of the utopic element in feminist speculative fiction is due to the ironically optimistic nature of the feminist dystopia--that is, its ultimately empowering nature. Because this seems to be a basic difference between dystopias by men and women, then here we could also evoke the political notion that it is hegemony of the male model and the failure of the feminist dystopia to conform that is the cause of its lack of critical recognition.

Another explanation that must be entertained, however, can be found by considering the nature of the critique that operates in the feminist dystopia. If women's victimization by the patriarchy is one of the genre's major concerns, another is the way that women may have internalized such power politics in their

own agendas. As much as it ascribes to the basic ideology of feminism, in short, the feminist dystopia also questions simplistic ideals of its implementation and identifies potential dangers. If one overlooked this element of self-criticism, it would be very easy to see the dystopia as promising a "utopic feminist" future; if one did notice this element of self-criticism, one might well prefer to ignore the feminist dystopia in favor of the more "sisterly" feminist utopia.

It may also be this desire to "see the clouds from both sides" that explains why feminists like Elgin, Fairbarins, Tepper and Atwood have chosen fiction rather than a political platform to advance the "cause." Not only are they utilizing the traditional association of the novel and political protest--the rise of the novel as a middle-class art form that critiqued the upper classes--but also adapting this association to the present, where the upper-classes are not merely the patriarchy but also the dictates of feminist correctness. In appropriating male-dominated genres like science fiction, they doubly fulfil the function that Anne Cranny-Francis associates with such transgressiveness: to "give the traditional readership . . . a new and stimulating perspective (2). In the case of the feminist dystopia, the "traditional readership" includes not only a male audience but also an ideologically-biased feminist readership.

The value of the feminist dystopia, therefore, lies in its ability to provoke "thought crimes" of all kinds and to encourage "freedom of speech" in the broadest sense of the term. In this

way, the feminist dystopia does more than simply complement or correct male perspectives with female ones; it can also provide the ground base for a genuine revision of the dynamics and potential of the genre.

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