6. A World of One's Own: Separatist Utopias

If the patriarchal character of the traditional utopian narrative paradigm is reflected not only in the social and political provisions of the Renaissance utopia, but also in the distinctively masculine character of the fantasy which underlies them, it is scarcely surprising that where the influence of this paradigm persists, its doubly patriarchal bias should be so hard to escape. As we have seen, the conscious attempts of writers such as Bellamy, Wells, and Huxley to provide for a greater degree of sexual equality are undermined by the contradictions that emerge within the narrative—which perhaps indicates the extent to which the paradigm itself serves to potentiate the latent assumptions of male dominance rooted in the culture which utopia seeks to transcend. Even dystopian attacks on the premises of the traditional utopia rarely avoid a reinscription of the utopian suppression of the female: except in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, dystopian narrative enacts an erasure of the feminine no less striking than that embodied in Bacon's *The New Atlantis*.

It would seem to follow, therefore, that a successful challenge to the inherently patriarchal assumptions of the traditional utopia might be likely to have more far-reaching narrative repercussions than those produced by Wells's primarily narrative experimentation, by libertarian reworkings of the traditional utopia's authoritarian premises, or even dystopian parody. Such a challenge is clearly the goal of a number of writers who have envisaged societies not merely no longer dominated by men, but wholly exclusive of them. And while some of these (those of Monique Wittig, Joanna Russ, or Suzy McKee Charnas, for example) are only tangentially utopian,[1] others—notably Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) and Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979)—offer fully developed accounts of a more perfect society whose most fundamental premise is the absence of men.

Herland

Of the two, *Herland* seems, at least at first sight, far closer to the traditional paradigm. Whereas Bellamy, Morris, and Wells had already acknowledged the implications of the end of the age of discovery by either projecting their utopias into the future, or else positing such science fictional scenarios as the existence of a parallel universe, Gilman adheres to the time-honoured convention of the geographical utopia, lying in some unspecified

southland, inaccessible and undiscovered. Like More's Utopia and Bacon's Bensalem, it once had links to the outside world, but these were decisively severed—although not, in this instance, by the conscious decision of a male authority figure. Where King Utopus decreed the cutting of the isthmus connecting Utopia to the mainland, and King Solamona took the political decision to isolate his kingdom from the rest of the world, Herland's isolation came about as the result of a natural catastrophe. At one time, we learn, the plateau on which Herland is located was inhabited by what is referred to as 'a bi-sexual race' (p.54), which formerly possessed all the accoutrements of a patriarchal society: 'ships, commerce, an army, a king' (p.54)—not to mention slaves. However, like Campanella's Solarians, they are forced by the depredations of more warlike races to retreat to the security of an impregnable stronghold—in this case, a mountain fastness connected to the outside world only by a single pass. It is while their army is off defending the pass that a volcanic eruption takes place, completely blocking it—and leaving the army on the wrong side of the impenetrable obstruction. Very few men are left behind, and those who are are promptly wiped out by a slave uprising, followed in turn by a desperate struggle in the course of which the surviving women kill all the male slaves. In the end, we learn, 'There was literally no one left on this beautiful high garden land but a bunch of hysterical girls and some older slave women' (p.55).

With the closure of the pass it would appear that the women are doomed not merely to isolation, but to inevitable extinction, deprived both symbolically and literally of access by the impregnating male presence. It is at this point, however, that they are rescued from racial oblivion by one of their number (described as a 'wonder-woman') developing the capacity for parthenogenesis. This proves to be an inherited trait: each of the five daughters she bears produces five daughters in her turn, and they, with characteristically utopian symmetry, give birth to a further five daughters each, and so on. From the first 'Queen-Priestess-Mother' a new race of 'ultra-women' (p.57) is born. In what is almost a precise mirror-inversion of the male utopian fantasy of masculine appropriation of the womb, Gilman imagines a womb-like environment from which the male is forever excluded. In contrast to the Baconian dream (and Huxleian nightmare) of rendering women superfluous to the reproductive process, Gilman posits a scenario where it is men who are redundant.

In most other respects, however, Gilman's all-female society conforms closely to the traditional utopian pattern. There is the familiar emphasis on peace and security: Herland's inhabitants are notable for their confidence and self-assurance, which is born of their having nothing to fear. Nature has been domesticated with an almost Wellsian single-mindedness: wild animals have been eliminated, and while there is a

profusion of cats (which have been trained not to eat birds), there are no dogs to foul the pathways of what is repeatedly described as like a gigantic park or garden—even the trees are 'under as careful cultivation as so many cabbages' (p.14). Indeed, at times it almost seems that it is *only* in the gender of its inhabitants that Gilman's utopia differs significantly from the traditional norm. It, too, provides the womb-like security and untroubled, innocent happiness of the typical rational Eden—although it is significant that Gilman does depart from the island location so beloved of male authors of utopian fiction, isolating her utopia instead by perching it on top of a 'piece of geography [which] stands up like a basalt column' (p.38).

Gilman's major innovation, in fact, has less to do with the structure of her utopia as such, than with her handling of that most traditional feature of utopian narrative, the visit (with its attendant guided tour). Here the issue of gender becomes crucial, for Gilman chooses to problematize the relationship between visitor and utopia by making the visitors (three in number) to her all-female utopia male. This, in its turn, has a number of consequences. As we have seen, in its traditional formulation, the visit to utopia tends to impose passivity on the visitor: inevitably ignorant of how things work, of the basic facts concerning utopian society—its customs, its history, and so forth—he has therefore to be told or shown everything of importance by the more knowledgeable inhabitants. What results is a scenario which, while ostensibly dialogic in format, is actually monologic in effect: the visitor fills the role of passive and acquiescent audience, whose primary function is to elicit and be persuaded by the authoritative utterance of his utopian mentor. In *Herland*, however, the situation is radically different: the interactions between Gilman's explorers and the utopians who act as their captors, instructors, and even partners have little in common with the cosy camaraderie which exists between Julian West and Dr Leete, or William Guest and Old Hammond; nor, for that matter, is there much sign of the schoolmasterly indulgence with which Dr Robert treats Will Farnaby, let alone the self-abasing reverence of Bacon's narrator in the presence of the representative of the House of Salomon. There is, to begin with, a marked difference in emphasis. Gilman devotes far less space than usual to direct disquisitions on the wonders of utopia, and far more to the reactions of the visitors to what they experience, while at the same time exploiting the difference in gender to sharpen the contrast between their perspective and that of the inhabitants. Although the *dynamic* of the relations between visitors and utopians remains in keeping with utopian tradition, the effect could hardly be more dissimilar: in *Herland*, it is women who have the knowledge and power, the men who have to adjust to the values and expectations of the society in which they find themselves—and by enacting this reversal of conventional gender roles, Gilman calls

attention to the *situation* of the visitor in a way that most utopian fictions do not. In place of the uncritical transmission of information which the visitor normally provides, as if his sole purpose were to provide the reader with the most faithful and unmediated account possible of the merits of utopia, Gilman's visitors respond to their new situation in a manner which is often confused, reluctant, or even frankly hostile. Rather than trying to close the gap in perception between the utopians and their visitor/s as fast as possible, Gilman stresses its existence, at the same time encouraging the reader to judge the judgements of the visitors. *Herland*, in other words, encourages what most utopian fictions seek to suppress: an active critical participation on the part of the reader.

Nor is this the only change in emphasis. Inaccessible though Herland is—to the extent that it has gone undiscovered for two thousand years—one of the most striking features of the opening sequence is the relative ease with which the visitors get there. While the physical barriers—unscalable cliffs, waterfalls, mountain ranges, and so forth—which isolate Herland from the rest of the world may seem formidable enough at first sight, surmounting the challenge which they represent involves none of the pain, hardship, or trauma so apparent in works such as *Looking Backward* or *Island*. Faced by such apparently insuperable geographical obstacles, Gilman's narrator and his companions avoid the normal arduous rite of transition by resorting to the aid of modern technology: they simply fly there. The enormous wealth of Terry (the most traditionally male of the three) provides a steam yacht to cover the first part of the journey, a motorboat to enable them to penetrate the upper reaches of the river above which Herland rises, and an aeroplane to ferry them to the plateau itself. Of all journeys to utopia, it is by far the most comfortable and best-equipped; in marked contrast to the normal utopian pattern, the visitors' problems begin only after they get there.

Almost from the moment of their arrival, Gilman's visitors encounter difficulties—which in itself distinguishes them from the majority of their fellow explorers, for whom acceptance into utopia is normally a relatively uncomplicated process. At most, there may be a few minor bureaucratic problems, as in *A Modern Utopia*, or a seeking of preliminary assurances, as in Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, but in general utopian societies are notable for the trust and hospitality with which they welcome strangers. While Julian West may initially be somewhat overwhelmed by the shock of finding himself in a new world, his utopian hosts are quick to put him at his ease, offering him wine, food, tobacco, and the hand of their daughter in marriage; and the periodic unease of Morris's William Guest or Wells's Mr Barnstaple is largely attributable to their sense that utopia is almost too good to be true. Even in *Men Like Gods*, where almost the first action of the

visitors is to kill someone with their motor car, the first reaction of the god-like utopians is one of benevolent curiosity: the visitors actually have to shoot two of them before they finally take action.

In *Herland*, however, the situation is markedly different. Not only are the inhabitants considerably more wary of strangers, but the visitors also show themselves to be more than usually aggressive: almost their first action on arriving is to attempt to take one of the inhabitants captive. As a direct consequence, they find themselves forcibly confined—and while they are well treated, things are by no means made easy for them. It is they who have to learn the local language, there being no comfortable fiction that utopia is naturally English-speaking, and it is their masculine assumptions that have to be radically revised in the face of an exclusively female society that evidently works considerably better than their own. (It takes them some time, in fact, finally to abandon their conviction that there must be *some* men in charge, somewhere, given that everything runs so smoothly.) In response to such unaccustomed hardships, the three make an early attempt to escape, to reassert their freedom of action—only to find themselves recaptured with humiliating ease. Nor is this by any means the only humiliation they experience: in many fields of endeavour which they have been conditioned to view as exclusively male preserves, the utopian women prove themselves to be decisively superior; in a world where the 'natural' superiority of the male is not assumed, their attempts somehow to demonstrate it are repeatedly frustrated. The result is a growing sense of unease: even as early as their first confrontation with the women of utopia, the narrator confesses to

> … the funniest feeling—a very early feeling—a feeling that I traced back and back in memory until I caught up with it at last. It was that sense of being hopelessly in the wrong that I had so often felt in early youth when my short legs' utmost effort failed to overcome the fact that I was late to school … We felt like small boys, very small boys, caught doing mischief in same gracious lady's house. [p.19]

It is an image which recurs—and one which highlights one of the most traditionally utopian aspects of the narrative, namely, the state of childlike dependence to which the visitors are reduced. While the narrative starts out with all the trappings of a tale of conventional male derring-do, in the tradition of Rider Haggard's *She* or Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, it soon takes a very different direction. On their arrival they are physically overpowered:

> Each of us was seized by five women, each holding arm or leg or head; we were lifted like children, straddling helpless children, and borne onward, wriggling indeed, but most ineffectually. [p.23]

'Struggling manfully, but held secure most womanfully' (p.23), they are carried inside, anaesthetized, undressed, washed, and put to bed, as even the macho Terry ruefully acknowledges, 'like so many yearling babies' (p.25)—and whereas in most utopian fictions such imposed passivity seems to constitute an important part of utopia's appeal, in Gilman's case it is exploited for comic and satiric effect. While for Julian West or Will Farnaby being tucked up in bed and put to sleep may be an unmixed blessing—a welcome return to the blissful security of childhood—for Gilman's intrepid explorers it is an unending source of embarrassment. Their evident resentment at their subordinate status in a world run by women becomes a consistent source of humour. A rarity among utopias, *Herland* is (among other things) genuinely funny.

Part of the humour, of course, lies in the conspicuous gap between the visitors' expectations and the reality they encounter. Terry, we are told, has 'visions of a sort of sublimated summer resort—just Girls and Girls and Girls' (p.7) and talks—only half-jokingly—of becoming a latter-day King Solomon. The situation in which he in fact finds himself—a prisoner, guarded and watched over by the all-too-capable women of Herland—is a source of acute discomfiture. In addition to finding it hard to come to terms with the nature of the society in which they find themselves, however, the visitors find equally unnerving the utopians' sharp eye for the gaps and contradictions that emerge from their own somewhat selective account of the world they have come from. Despite what Van, the narrator, describes as 'a tacit endeavour to conceal much of the social status at home' (p.80) the visitors frequently find themselves revealing the most discreditable features of their own society as they struggle to answer the awkward questions they are so often posed: 'such ... questions as might have intimidated a university professor' (p.65). Much to the visitors' alarm, Herland's women prove singularly adept at drawing deductions not only from what they are told, but also from 'the things we palpably avoided saying' (p.80) and reveal a disconcerting ability to put two and two together in such a way as to expose the falsity of many of their claims. Terry's comforting fiction that women enjoy a privileged position in a male-dominated society, for example, soon falls apart in the face of questioning:

> 'Tell us—what is the work of the world, that men do—which we have not here?'
>
> 'Oh, everything,' Terry said grandly. 'The men do everything, with us.' He squared his broad shoulders and lifted his chest. 'We do not allow women to work. Women are loved—idolized—honored—kept in the home to care for the children.'
>
> … Zava begged: 'Tell me first, do *no* women work, really?'

> 'Why, yes,' Terry admitted. 'Some have to, of the poorer sort.'
> 'About how many—in your country?'
> 'About seven or eight million,' said Jeff … [pp.60–1]

Even from quite minor details—casual remarks about the treatment of cats and dogs in the visitors' world—the utopians are able to draw much larger inferences as to the questionable nature of the assumptions informing their society as a whole. Innocent though they may be in many respects, the utopians are far from naïve. As the narrator comments:

> … just as a clear-eyed, intelligent, perfectly honest, and well-meaning child will frequently jar one's self-esteem by innocent questions, so did these women, without the slightest appearance of malice or satire, continually bring up points of discussion which we spent our best efforts in evading. [p.62]

As a satiric device, of course, this is hardly new: Swift achieves much the same kind of effect in *Gulliver's Travels*, when the King of Brobdingnag interrogates the boastful Gulliver, and accurately intuits from his replies the unsavoury reality underlying his guest's account of European society.[2] Gilman's focus is rather narrower, her main concern being to expose the inherent contradictions of her own society's sexual politics, rather than to offer Swift's blanket condemnation of hypocrisy, injustice, cruelty, corruption—of all that renders civilization, in his view, an organized lie—yet the device itself is similar. Where the real difference lies is in the presence of such satire in a utopian context—for Gilman's purpose is not merely satiric. Damaging though her critique of male values undoubtedly is, there is nevertheless a sense of genuine dialogue at places in the text: not only do the visitors undergo a painful process of learning to acknowledge the virtues of utopia (as opposed to accepting them uncritically from the outset, as is so often the case), the utopians themselves reveal an unusual degree of openness to change. Although only too aware of the shortcomings of the visitors' world, they remain eager not only to learn about it, but to learn, if possible, from it. While Gilman's intent is no less didactic than that of earlier utopian writers, there are far fewer of the ponderous, one-sided set pieces that characterize traditional utopian narrative: dialogue, instead, becomes an interaction in which actual communication takes place, rather than merely serving to mask the unidirectional and monologic transmission of information.

One side-effect of this is that the actual *character* of the visitor takes on a significance seldom encountered in the traditional utopia. While Gilman's visitors often make fools of themselves, what they say actually *matters*, in a way that is rarely the case in narratives where the visitor's main function

is merely to be persuaded by what he is told, and to act as a medium for the communication of the utopian message. Normally, as we have seen, such individualizing traits as the visitor may possess—the impatience of Campanella's sea-captain, the weariness of Morris's narrator, or the mawkish sentimentality of Julian West—are rarely more than vestigial. Even the Botanist in *A Modern Utopia*, whose main function appears to be to provide some variety in terms of characterization, rapidly becomes a rather tiresome distraction from what is clearly Wells's main concern—the theorizing of a more perfect form of social organization. In Gilman's hands, however, the characterization of the visitors, although certainly schematized, has a genuine function. Whereas the character traits of most visitors to utopia are more or less interchangeable—it would make little difference to the actual narrative if it were Will Farnaby who arrived in Bellamy's future Boston, or Julian West who landed in Pala—in *Herland* they make a difference, representing as they do radically different possible interactions between the values of utopia and those of the outside world. Thus, while the narrator himself may be seen as conforming fairly closely to the traditional norm, inasmuch as he is quickly persuaded of the superiority of the utopian way, he is flanked by two companions whose long-held assumptions prove less susceptible to alteration by exposure to the utopian ideal.

The more immediately striking example of this, of course, is Terry, the ultra-masculine leader of the expedition, whose only real interest in women is as objects of sexual desire. When the reality proves to be conspicuously different than his anticipations, it is he who prompts their unsuccessful escape bid, who shows the clearest frustration at the constraints imposed upon them, and who is most consistently critical of utopian society. Yet here again Gilman's focus is less on the perfections of utopia, than on the glaring inadequacies of the visitor's response. Brave, resourceful, charismatic, 'a man's man' (p.9), Terry seems at first sight the archetypal explorer of (male-authored) romance. Yet in the context of Herland's value system his 'manliness' often seems indistinguishable from childish petulance. His evident resentment of women who do not conform to his expectations regarding appropriate female behaviour expresses itself at first in rather schoolboyish attempts at humour: he makes digs at the 'Colonels' or 'Grandmas', as he characterizes their captors, and contrives extremely forced puns on the names of the tutors assigned to them. But his hostility does not end there: instead, his frustration at the 'old-maid impudence' (p.33) that prevents him mixing with the 'real girls,' together with his conviction that 'There never was a woman yet that did not enjoy being *mastered*' (p.131), culminates in an attempted rape. Despite the example of an entire society of women controlling their own destiny and

being happy doing so, he continues to cling to his fixed belief that what a woman 'really' wants is to be forced to submit to the 'superior' power of the man. Not even the dismal failure of his attempt at a practical demonstration seems to move him: while the response of his intended victim (a powerful kick in the testicles) would seem to constitute a convincing refutation of his thesis, he remains unpersuaded: '"I'd give a year of my life to have her alone again," he said slowly, his hands clenched till the knuckles were white' (p.143).

By itself, this might seem perilously close to caricature—which is not to say that a great deal of conventional male behaviour might not also be described in the same terms—but Terry's crude attempts at asserting male superiority are only one aspect of Gilman's representation of male responses to the threatening reversal of gender expectations which Herland represents. In addition to Terry and the narrator, the party has a third member—Jeff, the doctor—whose views differ markedly from those of either of his companions. Jeff, we are told, 'idealized women in the best Southern style. He was full of chivalry and sentiment, and all that. And he was a good boy; he lived up to his ideals' (p.9). As a result, it is Jeff who is by far the most enthusiastic about the matriarchal society they encounter—to the extent, indeed, that his companions begin to regard him as 'something of a traitor—he so often flopped over and took their side of things' (p.51). Yet Jeff also has his limitations: while he displays none of the closed-minded opposition which Terry exhibits, neither does he seem in any way *changed* by his experiences, as the narrator is. Where the narrator is shown as *becoming* increasingly sympathetic to the society in which he finds himself, Jeff seems almost a parody of the passive, uncritical observer of the traditional utopia (a device which has the side-effect of making the actual narrator seem more objective, and hence reliable). He has always idealized women, and seen them as other than they are—the narrator complains of his tendency to put 'rose-colored halos' (p.9) on them—with the result that when he encounters women who differ markedly from those he is used to, his attitude remains virtually unchanged: the irony that in Herland women's superiority is practical rather than theoretical is one that appears to elude him. Significantly, Jeff is the only one of the three who appears unperturbed when the 'marriages' they contract in Herland turn out not to include sexual relations other than for strictly procreational purposes. Unlike Terry, who attempts to rape his 'wife,' or the narrator, whose resultant emotional difficulties are rendered in some detail, Jeff apparently finds the absence of sex quite as natural as do the utopians—for whom sexuality had ceased to be an issue some two thousand years before.

In seeking to illustrate the gap between the expectations of the male

visitors, which are rooted in the sexual politics of their own society, and those of their utopian wives, Gilman provides a curious analogy:

> … imagine a devoted and impassioned man trying to set up housekeeping with a lady angel, a real wings-and-harp-and-halo angel, accustomed to fulfilling divine missions all over interstellar space. This angel might love the man with an affection quite beyond his power of return or even of appreciation, but her ideas of service and duty would be on a very different scale from his. Of course, if she was a stray angel in a country of men, he might have had his way with her; but if he was a stray man among angels—! [p.123]

While hardly the most fortunate of comparisons, it does serve to suggest the extent of what Gilman terms 'the gulfs of difference' (p.94) between the utopians and their visitors. Of course, given the absence not only of sexual relations, but of any equivalent to either home or family in Herland, the fact that the utopians should consider contracting marriages with their visitors at all remains something of an unresolved contradiction. Nevertheless, the marriages do highlight what in many utopias is passed over—the fact that the inhabitants of a society radically different from our own are themselves liable to be radically different. Unlike Bellamy's Leete family, who differ hardly at all from the middle-class norms of the late nineteenth century, Gilman's utopians *are* different—despite which Jeff accepts their unorthodox views on marriage without as much as a flicker of surprise:

> He accepted the angel theory, swallowed it whole, tried to force it on us—with varying effect. He so worshipped… not only Celis, but what she represented; he had become so deeply convinced of the almost supernatural advantages of this country and people, that he took his medicine like a—I cannot say 'like a man,' but more as if he wasn't one. [p.123]

As with so many visitors to utopia, Jeff, while uncritically approving of utopia's superiority, seems oddly immune to any sense of its otherness. Utopia is better—but it is not *strange*. Like Julian West, William Guest, Mr Barnstaple, Jeff is already a convert: no process of persuasion is necessary for him.

Yet while Gilman's often satiric presentation of the interactions between the utopians and their visitors effects an unsettling reversal and defamiliarization of conventional sexual assumptions, the actual picture of utopian society that emerges mirrors many of the most familiar features of the conventional utopia. The cult of supreme male authority, implicit in the traditional utopia, seized upon and made explicit in its dystopian

inversion, is here replaced by an idealization of the feminine no less pronounced. With its Altar of Motherhood, its great ruling Over Mother, its repeated references to 'super-', 'ultra-', and 'wonder-women', *Herland* offers merely a reversal, rather than any radical transcendence of the conventional narrative paradigm.[3] Although at first sight its matriarchal society could hardly seem further removed from the patriarchal norms of utopian tradition, this reversal of one of utopian narrative's major premises in fact leaves many of its dynamics unaffected. As Susan Gubar points out, 'Gilman's strategy of reversal [often] threatens to invalidate her feminism by defining it in precisely the terms set up by the misogynists it would repudiate' (p.198). While the feminine values which *Herland* endorses are represented as a positive alternative to the abuses of the patriarchal society of the three explorers, they nevertheless reflect a conception of femininity which is very much the creation of precisely that male-dominated society whose values Gilman rejects. In what amounts to its fetishization of the virtues of Motherhood, its emphasis on the sacred duties of child care, and its repeated stress on the purity and virtue of the utopian women, *Herland* reveals what Bammer terms an 'unsettling convergence between a vision of what women, under utopian conditions, *could* be, and the normative definition of what a woman, according to the prevailing ideology *should* be' (p.31).[4] As has often been pointed out, *Herland* is a utopia in which woman's sphere remains the home; the only difference is that here the home has expanded to embrace the entire community. When Terry sneers that '[t]here isn't a home in the whole pitiful place' (p.98), Jeff retorts that '[t]here isn't anything else, and you know it' (p.98). Herland is a country which has been entirely domesticated: there are no wild areas—even the forests have been groomed and 'petted' (p.13) to be useful as well as beautiful; the entire country has been purged of pests and mess-creating animals; and overall, we learn, 'their country was as neat as a Dutch kitchen' (p.53). Despite two thousand years of separate development, Herland's women manifest precisely those idealized qualities ascribed to them by the patriarchal ideology of early twentieth-century North America.

In thus effectively naturalizing her own society's socially constructed gender roles, Gilman endorses a view of 'woman' which, as Bammer argues, is 'revalued, but not redefined' (p.93), and which ultimately serves to reaffirm 'the very ideology of separate gender spheres on which the suppression of women had been based' (p.35).[5] Nevertheless, while Gilman's vision of a utopia which is essentially the private sphere writ large enshrines the concept of domestic virtues prevailing at the time, its emphasis on order is also wholly in keeping with the visions of utopia offered by male writers. From More's *Utopia*, where even the cities are both

identical and equidistant, to Wells's *Men Like Gods*, which shares Gilman's passion for cleanliness to the point of eliminating not only all pavement-fouling animals, but even 'the untidier sorts of small birds' (p.122), utopian narratives repeatedly represent worlds where everything is in its place, known and accounted for. As in the best run homes, utopia provides an environment where nothing ever goes wrong—indeed, where nothing ever *happens*. Process and change—anything that is liable to disturb order—are normally conspicuous in utopia only by their absence.

Herland is no exception in this regard. As in so many utopias, the actual course of utopian history is vague and in places even contradictory: from a developmental level described as being equivalent to 'that of Ancient Egypt or Greece' (p.67) they have apparently advanced to the point where electric cars travel along their modern roadways, but very little appears to have *happened* in the interim. The utopians, we are told, are 'agreed on most of the basic principles of their life; and not only agreed in principle, but accustomed for these sixty-odd generations to act on those principles' (p.122), yet despite this continuity, they exhibit little interest in the past. When the narrator asks his wife-to-be 'Have you no respect for the past? For what was thought and believed by your foremothers?' she replies simply: 'Why, no… Why should we? They are all gone. They knew less than we do.' The women of Herland, he reflects, 'had ignored their past and built daringly for the future' (p.111). And this characteristically utopian vagueness concerning history has its counterpart, at the level of narrative, in a consistent vagueness with regard to the passage of time: 'the weeks ran into months' (p.33) is a typical formulation, and while we learn at the end that the visitors' stay has lasted 'more than a year' (p.137) there is virtually no specific indication of *when* anything takes place during that period. Given the opening words of the book—'This is written from memory, unfortunately' (p.1)—it would appear that this is a deliberate narrative strategy.

Yet what is perhaps most problematic in *Herland* is not so much the lack of action as (as a number of critics have pointed out) the absence of *desire*, which has apparently disappeared along with the men: the sexual tensions which trouble even so idyllic a world as that of *News from Nowhere* have simply vanished. Herland's citizens are women whose 'great life-view had no shady places; they had a high sense of personal decorum, but no shame—no knowledge of anything to be ashamed of' (p.101). As Van, the narrator, later remarks: 'No wonder this whole nation of women was peaceful and sweet in expression—they had no horrible ideas' (p.111). Free from even such 'pleasant vices' (p.98) as drinking and smoking, it is a world which, in the more acid words of Terry, is 'like a perpetual Sunday school' (p.99). Yet while this clearly reflects contemporary stereotypes of

'feminine' virtue, it is—once again—also very much in keeping with utopian tradition. Like its Renaissance predecessors, *Herland* exhibits the characteristic utopian impulse towards simplification: problems are not so much resolved, as avoided by the elimination of their source. As in More's *Utopia*, it is difficult to get into trouble, primarily because there is so little trouble to get into—but in some ways Gilman goes even farther. Where earlier utopias sought the restoration of innocence through the *control* of desire (as for example in *The City of the Sun*, where intercourse is supervised by a team of gym instructors, matrons, doctors, and astrologers), Gilman eliminates it altogether.

One of the resultant problems, however, is that in doing so Gilman ends up reinstating the infantilization of the visitor which she began by satirizing. Whereas the reduction of the explorers on their arrival to the state of helpless children, undressed and put to bed, offers an effective parody of the customary passivity of the traditional visitor to utopia, it is harder to discern any such complicating irony in Gilman's later representation of the 'marriages' contracted between the explorers and three of the inhabitants. Part of Gilman's purpose, of course, in putting forward the notion of marriages which include neither cohabitation nor sexual relations, is to focus attention on the assumptions of the male explorers, whose horror at the absence of what they had hitherto taken for granted is rendered in some detail. (Or rather, to be more precise, the horror of two of them: as we have seen, the idealistic Jeff does not appear to notice that there is anything unusual about the arrangements.) Yet while this serves to expose the realities underlying so much male rhetoric regarding the sanctity of marriage, Gilman's actual descriptions of Herland's unconventional marital arrangements contain some curiously revealing analogies. When his wife refuses to accept sexual relations as a 'natural' part of marriage, Van first tries to rationalize this by quite literally, and apparently uncritically comparing her to an 'angel' (p.123), and then praises her success—'great superwoman that she was' (p.130)—in distracting him from his sexual preoccupations:

> … no child, stormily demanding a cookie 'between meals,' was ever more subtly diverted into an interest in house-building than was I when I found an apparently imperative demand had disappeared without my noticing it. [p.128]

Here the process of infantilization, elsewhere reinforced by his wife's use of such epithets as 'you blessed child' (p.110), is represented in a largely positive light—as is also the case when Van finally renounces his sexual desires in favour of his wife's purer ideal of gender relations. Indeed, the abject submissiveness with which he acknowledges her superior

judgement, in addition to reproducing the blurring of the distinction between wife and mother so strikingly apparent in the utopias of Wells and Bellamy, almost seems to prefigure the dystopian abasement of D-503 and Winston Smith in the face of the larger-than-life representative of the dominant ideology:

> After I got over the jar to my pride … I found that loving 'up' was a very good sensation after all. It gave me a queer feeling, way down deep, as of the stirring of some ancient prehistoric consciousness, a feeling that they were right somehow—that this was the way to feel. It was like—coming home to mother. [pp.141–2]

While the power relations envisaged in *Herland* may differ radically from those of the traditional male utopian fantasy, inasmuch as what is imagined is not the male recovery of prenatal security, but rather the restoration of some lost world of prehistoric matriarchy, the regressive character of the utopian dream remains very much in evidence.

One of *Herland*'s most puzzling features, however, involves what would seem at first sight to be a clear departure from the utopian norm. Given that the traditional utopia so often represents a state of perfection or near-perfection, it follows that any change is likely to be for the worse, and the majority of male-authored utopias, as we have seen, include provisions to prevent such an eventuality—whether by the maintenance of formidable armies (although only, of course, for purposes of self-defence), keeping its location concealed, or extending its compass to include the entire world, thereby eliminating external enemies. In *Herland*, however, despite its inhabitants' evident satisfaction with things as they are, and in the face of all they have been able to deduce regarding the evils of the world outside, the women seem astonishingly open to the possibility of renewed relations with men—and in an attempt to render this plausible, Gilman stresses the possibility that the interaction of the male visitors with the strong, independent women of Herland may lead not only to the re-education of the former, but also to a fuller range of experience for the latter. Van's future wife, for example, declares:

> 'We are only half a people. We have our woman-ways and they have their man-ways and their both-ways. We have worked out a system of living which is, of course, limited. They must have a broader, richer, better one.' [pp.97–8]

Yet despite repeated assertions that a 'bi-sexual' society must necessarily be 'much more stirring' with 'new possibilities of growth' (p.135), their effect is undercut by the force of Gilman's own satire. Such optimism hardly seems compatible with the bleak picture which the utopians have deduced

from their visitors' account of the outside world—and while this does, of course, open the way for a sequel (duly provided in *With Her in Ourland*, in which Van and his wife undertake a tour of his world), one of the least convincing features of *Herland*'s decidedly abrupt conclusion is the utopians' apparent readiness to accept their visitors' word of honour as gentlemen 'not in any way to betray the location of this country' (p.145). Although Terry, angry and humiliated following his unsuccessful rape attempt, immediately protests (in language strongly reminiscent of colonialist fantasies of the land as a female body awaiting penetration) that '[t]he first thing I'll do is to get an expedition fixed up to force an entrance into Maland' (p.146), the women are apparently quite content to rely on the entirely alien concept of a gentleman's word[6]—to the extent that a mere six lines later his promise has been accepted, and their departure ensues.[7]

This tacit acceptance of the values of the society to which *Herland* offers an alternative, however, is hard to reconcile with Gilman's repeated emphasis on the incompatibility between Herland and its visitors (a relationship which differs radically from that obtaining in the traditional utopia). Simply by reason of their being male, they represent both a threat and a challenge to the utopian order in a way that the traditional visitor does not. Although Morris's narrator may be unable to sustain his utopian dream, and while Wells's Mr Barnstaple may consent to return to his own world, there is normally no *inherent* incompatibility between the visitor and utopia. Once converted to the utopian way, there is no reason why the visitor should not be co-opted and absorbed by the more perfect society (as is Julian West, for example). In *Herland*, by contrast, the visitors impose on utopia the imperative to change: unless the visitors are deported, imprisoned, or done away with,[8] their mere presence implies that utopia will ultimately have to adapt to new and potentially disruptive forms of human relationship. While the focus is primarily on the ways in which the visitors are forced to adjust, it is clear that utopia, too, will be changed by their continued residence. This, in its turn, is a reflection of the fact that Gilman's utopian society is one whose basis is biologically, as well as socially determined—and while this is in part responsible for the more dynamic character of the relations between utopia and its visitors, it is clear that it also creates certain problems.

Whereas the traditional utopia posits a society structured in such a way as to promote more desirable conduct on its members' part, Gilman's makes inherited characteristics—namely sexual difference—equally, if not more fundamental: the basis of her more perfect society is genetic as well as environmental. As a result, the male visitor becomes an alien, differing from the utopians not merely in terms of values, but in terms of his very being. The superiority of the utopians is, implicitly, innate, rather than

being something to which the visitor, given sufficient exposure to a utopian environment, might aspire. While in theory, Gilman's separatist utopia may be seen as offering a model from which the rest of the world might well learn, the problems inherent in the notion of a society whose superiority has, even in part, a genetic basis remain unresolved. If sexual difference can provide such a basis, one might well ask, then why not race? Gilman's own racist tendencies have been commented on,[9] and it is scarcely reassuring to learn that Herland's inhabitants are most likely 'of Aryan stock, and were once in contact with the best civilization of the old world' (p.54). We are also informed that 'They were 'white,' but somewhat darker than our northern races because of their constant exposure to sun and air' (p.54). And while such overt statements are very much the exception in *Herland*,[10] the unsettling implications remain: Gilman's is yet another in which some of the least appealing features of the dominant ideology of the time are still more starkly reproduced.

The Wanderground

Where such implications can lead may be seen more clearly in Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground*, in which women's superiority, rather than emerging from the confrontation of a female utopian society with the crass assumptions of males from the outside world, becomes a given—a fact to be celebrated. Written from the perspective of a feminism far more radical than Gilman's, it portrays a world in which sexual difference is likewise far more polarized. While the women of the Wanderground possess (as we shall see) quite literally supernatural powers, which are used not only for their own protection, but for that of the planet, the men of the City are described as 'Driven in their own madness to destroy themselves and us and any living thing' (p.3). Men and women are adversaries, between whom the dialogue which is so striking a feature of *Herland* is no longer even an option:[11] 'We once had hope for them, but even that hope they snuffed out' (p.2), laments one of the Hill Women. Even with the 'gentles'—the small minority of men 'who, knowing that maleness touched women only with the accumulated hatred of centuries, touched no women at all' (p.2)—communication is a precarious affair, fraught with hostility and suspicion.

Yet it is not merely the patriarchal ideology of the traditional utopia that Gearhart challenges: *The Wanderground* also represents—at least at first sight—an equally radical break with the traditional narrative paradigm. It is a utopia without visitors (the only contacts with outsiders take place beyond its borders), without compensatory metaphors of transition, and without even any real linear, connected narrative. In its place are a series

of loosely overlapping episodes concerning the lives of the Hill Women, in which only a handful of characters recur, yet from which there nevertheless emerges a comprehensive picture of how Gearhart's utopians deal with the realities of love, death, danger, religious experience, and interaction with the natural world. They are portrayed in conference on questions of policy, engaging in defence duty, and—most unusually—making concerted efforts to preserve the memory of the past from which their utopia emerged: as in *News from Nowhere*, the section dealing with the past is by far the longest in the book. In addition, *The Wanderground* is a work in which the element of fantasy is far more crucial than in any of the utopias so far discussed.

As we have seen, despite such episodes as the miraculous apparition of an advance copy of the Bible in *The New Atlantis*, it is noteworthy that the majority of traditionally conceived utopias content themselves with relatively modest extrapolations from the realities of their time. The contrast between Wells's exuberant exploration of the possibilities of weightlessness, invisibility, time travel, and interplanetary travel in his science fiction, for example, and the modesty of invention evident in his utopias could scarcely be more marked. Gearhart, by contrast, shows little regard for the constraints of relative plausibility, which lay something of a dead hand on the inventiveness of so many earlier utopian works. Whereas the traditional utopia tends to rely as little as possible on exceeding the limits of existing human or technological possibilities (leaving aside whatever bizarre elaborations may surround the process of getting there), *The Wanderground* makes no pretence at realism. Like *News from Nowhere*, only to a far greater degree, Gearhart's utopia offers, not so much a potential blueprint for a more perfect society, as a prefigurative vision of future possibilities—presumably designed, like those of Morris and Bogdanov, to energize and inspire a readership already engaged in various forms of political and personal struggle towards goals to which utopian fiction is able to give a more concrete image than any provided by contemporary society.

Set at an unspecified point in the future, *The Wanderground* posits a world in which the total destruction of the environment by a male-dominated society has only been forestalled by what is termed the 'Revolt of the Mother' (p.158)—the Earth's refusal to consent any longer to its violation. No explanation is offered as to the cause of this, but its effects are dramatic. Machines and weapons suddenly cease to function; animals refuse to be ridden by males; and men lose their sexual potency outside the urban enclaves within which most of them live. Nevertheless, the threat that men may one day recover both their sexual and technological power remains, and it is the prevention of such a disaster that constitutes one of the main priorities of the Hill Women, who represent Gearhart's vision of an all-

female utopian society. Like the inhabitants of Herland, the Hill Women have developed the capacity for parthenogenesis, but whereas that was virtually the sole element of the marvellous in Gilman's utopia, in Gearhart's it is merely one wonder among many. Over the years, the Hill Women have developed their psychic powers to the point where their abilities are, quite literally, supernatural—a premise which also allows Gearhart to bypass some of the more problematic aspects of women's situation in existing society. Thus, in response to the growing feminist awareness during the 1970s that women were the prisoners (or even the creation) of linguistic as well as social structures, Gearhart fantasizes a world beyond language altogether: although the 'discipline' of speaking aloud is sometimes practiced 'for the refining of present images and the generation of new ones' (p.60), communication between the Hill Women is otherwise almost exclusively telepathic.[12] In addition, having learned to channel their mental energies, they have developed the capacity to fly ('windriding'), lift enormous weights ('toting'), swim for long distances underwater, engage in psychic healing, and participate in energy exchanges with trees. As well as being able to communicate with cats, dogs, birds, snakes, horses, and fish, they enjoy empathic communion not only with the Earth and the Moon, but even with such unlikely objects as holes in the ground and cakes of dried tuna. Indeed, in one scene, a pair of lovers even use their combined psychic powers for the rather prosaic purpose of making tea:

> The early morning ritual of beginning together proceeded that day along familiar lines: in mutual mind effort from across the room they enfolded the tea water, requesting it to boil, aiding it, with its consent, in doing so. [p.20]

More commonly, however, their powers are employed for less mundane ends: as well as maintaining a constant telepathic watch along the border that separates the Wanderground from the Dangerland—beyond which lies the male-dominated City—the Hill Women also maintain a presence in the City itself. Disguised as men, and assisted by the 'gentles,' a network of strong, psychically powerful women use their powers to prevent the male energy of the City extending beyond its confines. The necessity for this is confirmed by the consequences reported when the rotation of the Hill Women in the City is temporarily disrupted:

> 'Several years ago when three hill women were caught and killed in the City whole parties of celebrating men and their women poured into the countryside. They revved up deserted farm machinery and hauled truckloads of copulating couples around a field all night long.

> Things stopped rather suddenly, a cessation that corresponded precisely to the arrival in the City of the hill women's replacements … Last year when some crisis called four … women home without warning, some would-be hunters holding rifles that had not fired for generations found that live ammunition worked. There were several rapes at that time, too—country men of their wives or of women living alone who thought they were safe. When the hill women returned or were replaced the effect took hold again. No shots. No rapes.' [p.175]

Except for the gentles, who are accorded a distinctly wary and qualified respect, men are presented exclusively as would-be rapists, wholly responsible for the ills that have befallen the planet. In contrast to the flat rage that often surfaces, expressing itself in 'visions of manslaying, of man-mangling' (p.128), Gilman's satire seems positively genial.[13]

Like Gilman's, however, Gearhart's is a utopia of which the fundamental premise is basically a *reversal* of the traditional utopian pattern: patriarchal authority is once again replaced by an exclusively female system of social organization. Yet while Gearhart makes this the starting point for a far more radical imagining of the resultant possibilities, a curiously familiar picture begins to appear when one examines the work in detail. Again, as in *Herland*, what emerges is less a departure from the utopian norm, than its mirror inversion—in which many of the same contradictions are apparent. For all its narrative innovation, in fact, *The Wanderground* shares a surprising number of the characteristic features of the traditional utopia. While the existence of the Hill Women is anything but the comfortable, problem-free idyll depicted in *Looking Backward* or *News from Nowhere*, their almost obsessive (though understandable) defensive precautions have much in common with those of More's Utopians or Campanella's Solarians. As in *Utopia* and *The City of the Sun*, the more perfect society is only made possible by the exclusion of the outside world. Likewise, although Gearhart's emphasis on the virtue of privacy (violation of another's privacy is referred to as 'man's crime') may seem something of an anomaly in a utopian context, the pervasiveness of telepathic communication among the Hill Women creates an atmosphere as oppressively public as anything to be found in the work of More or Wells. As in *A Modern Utopia* and *Men Like Gods*, everyone's location is known, and while the intent of the following passage is presumably to suggest the power of women's solidarity, its portrayal of the submersion of individual identity in that of the group conjures up echoes of the dystopian visions of Zamyatin and Huxley:

> Hot bodies surrounded her: Juda's head to her left at waist level, Tolatilita's to her right; Yva and Rhoda prone on each of her legs;

> Lyssa and Phtha hovering over her own head. They wiped her face, her body, with sharp-smelling leaves. The incantations swirled around and over her, words circling her head, her body, words sliding over her skin, drooping around her ribs and over her brow, under her fingernails and through the curling forest of the mountain slopes and planes; words leapt and pounded in the sockets of her spine; words bent and broke in the crevice of her brain. A thousand hands now moved on her flesh, a thousand eyes now peered at the window of her soul, a thousand lips caressed at the door of her deepest self. [p.51]

Elsewhere, following the 'Gatherstretch'—a telepathic conference involving most of the Hill Women—one of the children awakens and comes downstairs to find the exhausted adults lying in a tangle which she describes as 'like a kitten pile' (p.132), and this is merely one of many scenes in which security is provided by physical contact. Womb imagery abounds, here overt and explicit, rather than oblique and indirect, as is so often the case in male-authored utopias: indeed, the image of organic, nurturing enclosure is central to the work itself, reflected in the Hill Women's nest-like dwellings; in the subterranean passages of the Remember Rooms, where they recall the past; in the tunnels of the 'Deep Cella', where the rite of impregnation is enacted; and even in their characteristic mode of telepathic communication, often referred to as 'enfoldment.'

Nor is the geography of *The Wanderground*, for all its inversion of the traditional utopian pattern, any less suggestive. Whereas the majority of utopias are located in the mythical southland of male fantasy, the territory of the Hill Women is in the north, *above* the regions inhabited by men. (Herland, likewise, is portrayed as rising above the surrounding region.) The Hill Women themselves live mainly in the twin 'ensconcements,' the breast-like curves of whose borders overlook the 'Dangerland'—a disputed area over which neither women nor men have established hegemony—beyond which lies the City, the enclave where male sexuality still functions. In the map which prefaces the text, the implications are still harder to ignore: within a geographical configuration that strikingly resembles a woman's body, the male-dominated City occupies the space where the genitalia would be. What Gearhart's utopia unquestioningly accepts, in other words, is the traditional utopian identification of the land as female—the difference being that it is no longer territory available to be colonized by the male, but rather a domain to be reclaimed by the formerly colonized female.[14] In effect, *The Wanderground* embodies a fantasy of returning to a state of being that formerly existed, before the damage was done. As Bammer argues:

> … the unpredictable and contradictory dynamics of change are finally

> collapsed into an almost mystical vision of harmony defined as the restoration of natural order. Gearhart's utopian vision … is in the end based not on an estranged view of history, but on the attempt to transcend it. [p.89]

While the *kind* of past that Gearhart seeks to recover may differ radically from that imagined in the traditional, male-authored utopia, the regressive character of the underlying fantasy is no less apparent.

The principle of reversal extends still further, however: where the traditional utopia seeks to re-establish the security of the womb by the imposition of a distinctively masculine order, *The Wanderground* depicts a world in which many aspects of that order are recreated—only by means which Gearhart represents as essentially female. While the Hill Women are, for example, adamantly opposed to any form of technology (which they see as merely a tool of male domination), it is clear that their refusal of technology goes hand-in-hand with a conscious decision to pursue many of its goals by other means. And here again contradictions begin to emerge. On the one hand, we are told that 'women could have built what's been called "western civilization"; we knew how to do all of it but rejected most such ideas as unnecessary or destructive' (p.145). Yet at the same time it becomes apparent that, by pursuing the development of their own psychic powers, the Hill Women have in fact become capable of achieving everything that technology once made possible: 'We can do anything that the old machines could do. And with a good deal less effort' (p.145). With their rituals, incantations, telepathy, intuition, and psychic strength, the Hill Women have effectively realized virtually the entire technological programme first adumbrated in Bacon's *The New Atlantis*: flight, underwater exploration, long-range communications—not to mention the ability to create life without resorting to conventional methods of reproduction—all are there. Bacon's longstanding dream of regaining the 'dominion over creation' lost by the Fall has all but come true: although the Hill Women would no doubt reject the terms in which it is expressed as overly suggestive of the male desire for mastery over nature, the Wanderground is nevertheless a world where nature does their bidding. Indeed, as Bammer points out, the science-fictional neologisms that Gearhart coins to describe the Hill Women's powers evoke 'an image of power more congruent with the high-tech potential of an age of radars, lasers, and micro-computers than with the forces of nature [they are] meant to signify' (pp.91–2); although she attempts to go outside existing language to find terminology to describe the Hill Women's utopian reality, the result ultimately subverts the binary opposition she seeks to establish between woman/nature on the one hand and man/power on the other.[15] While the Hill Women are,

of course, justifiably proud of their refusal to reproduce many of the negative features of technology, such as bombs, nerve gas, and so forth—this satisfaction begins to seem more than a little complacent when it becomes apparent that what they *have* developed is a potentially genocidal superweapon of their own. In the Gatherstretch, it would appear, the combined psychic energies of hundreds of Hill Women generate a channeled power which could prove literally lethal—and it is a power which a sizeable faction seem eager to use for destructive ends: 'Let us wipe the City out now. One directed gatherstretch …' (p.129)

The implications are, to put it mildly, alarming—not least in that the enemy is genetically determined. Men, it is claimed, 'are no longer of the same species' (p.115), while the Hill Women, for their part, disclaim all responsibility for the evils that have befallen the Earth. In their incantations in the concluding section, all blame is laid squarely at the door of Man:

> *The Crown of Creation.*
> *He is the slayer.*
> *His is the litany.*
> *We are the slain* … [p.193]

His crimes are enumerated, women's freedom from complicity in them is celebrated, and after the briefest possible expression of remorse for such part as women might have played in aiding Man's enormities, the ceremony moves on to imagine the final death of Man through his own destructive impulses, leading to the affirmation: '*With water and blood we can wash away the slayer. / With water and blood we can wash away the race.*' It is in many respects a characteristic utopian fantasy—one of being able to remain as one is (in this case, true to an ahistorically conceived essential femininity), but without guilt.[16] There are some qualifications, certainly: that women have occasionally collaborated with the male oppressor is reluctantly conceded, while elsewhere it is even acknowledged that 'It is too simple … to condemn them all or to praise all of us' (p.2). Yet this concession is promptly undermined by the qualification that immediately follows it: 'But for the sake of earth and all she holds, that simplicity must be our creed' (p.2). There may be men—the gentles, for instance—who are not all bad, but for the sake of a higher cause the simplifying fiction must be upheld, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. It is a logic with which Goebbels would certainly have been familiar.

An unfair comparison? Perhaps—although it is hardly one that *The Wanderground* does a great deal to discourage. As Bammer points out, the uncomplicated ascription of woman to the realm of nature was also a central feature of Nazi ideology—as was the appeal to a glorified mythic past (although not, as in Gearhart's case, a matriarchal one) whose recovery

becomes a central goal. If More's and Campanella's visions of a rational social order have been seen (whether justifiably or not) as prefiguring the communist dream of an end to human exploitation, Gearhart's emphasis on the mystic properties of the blood, the unlimited powers of the human will, the appeal of group ritual, and above all the simplistic attribution of all ills to a genetically determined Other, suggests a rather different parallel. Part of the appeal of fascism, as Bloch has argued, lies in its awareness of the utopian allure of the simple solution. To blame economic crisis on the Jews, or mass unemployment on foreign immigrants is *simpler* than seeking the source of such problems in the complexities of modern capitalism; at the same time, by identifying the Other as responsible for whatever has gone wrong, fascist ideology absolves of guilt all those to whom it appeals. And, so long as problems persist, it takes only a small step to identify the simple, not to mention the final solution—the elimination of those who *are* to blame: Jews, immigrants, or, in Gearhart's case, men—taking care first, of course, to deny their essential humanity. Once the other has been identified as an 'inferior race,' or 'no longer of the same species' (p.115) there is likely to be only one outcome: to return once more to Wells's declaration in *A Modern Utopia*—'[t]here is only one sane and logical thing to be done with a really inferior race, and that is to exterminate it' (p.337). What lies beyond the final solution is, of course, utopia: a world where the 'natural' order has been restored, and where guilt and evil have been banished along with those who were their source. Even as it seeks to challenge and subvert the norms of the traditional male utopia, *The Wanderground* shows all too clearly how the utopian impulse to pursue premises to their logical conclusion often serves to unmask their more alarming implications.

At the same time, it is clear that much of the dynamism of Gearhart's narrative—the sense it communicates (highly unusual in utopian fiction) of people having experiences that actually matter—is dependent on the very fact of the existence of the hated Other. The violent and disturbing struggle between the two lovers, Seja and Alaka, stems from Seja's uncontrollable rage over another woman's rape; the anxiety, tension, anger that surfaces during the Gatherstretch are occasioned by the proposal that the Hill Women meet with men officially (only 'gentle,' but men none the less); even the Hill Women's highly un-utopian preoccupation with the past is rooted in their need to maintain awareness of the dangers they have escaped. However much they may deny their connection with the men of the City, it is against the men that they define themselves; from the Other that they derive part of their own identity.[17] In this it is hard not to see both a reflection of the political realities of Gearhart's own society, and at the same time yet another example of the curious utopian tendency

to displace those realities into the realm of sexual politics. In *Looking Backward*, as we have seen, Bellamy replaces the economic incentives of the late nineteenth century free market by sexual ones, while not even Morris, who envisages a far more radical transcendence of the realities of contemporary society, can imagine the total disappearance of the desire for possession, which translates itself into the violent sexual jealousy which constitutes the lone disruptive element in his idyllic future. Likewise, in the polarized oppositions of *The Wanderground*, what we encounter is surely a reinscription of the simplistic dualism of the Cold War: In God We Trust versus The Evil Empire; us versus them; women versus men. Gearhart's is yet another utopia which reproduces, albeit on a different plane, the limitations of the reality which it seeks to transcend.

Gender and Utopian Narrative (part two)

While both *The Wanderground* and *Herland* offer a direct challenge to the patriarchal assumptions of the traditional utopia, what becomes clear is the extent to which even this leaves some familiar problems unresolved. Although Gearhart and Gilman avoid some of the narrative pitfalls inherent in the traditional paradigm, their strategy of simply reversing the terms of the conventional utopia results—as is so often the case in dystopian narrative—in the reproduction, rather than resolution of many of its most problematic features. What is perhaps most striking, however, is the degree to which both writers share the traditional utopian tendency to accept as natural a conception of essential femininity that itself derives from the gender relations of their own society. Clearly, neither Gilman nor Gearhart share Campanella's assumption of women's weakness, which undermines the apparently enlightened vision of gender equality which his utopia proposes, or Bellamy's conviction that women's true role is to provide the incentive for male industrial productivity. Nevertheless, their ahistorical ascription to women of precisely those qualities traditionally associated with them by patriarchal society creates problems which are by no means resolved simply by presenting such qualities in a more positive light. Gilman's utopians may well be stronger and more athletic than their counterparts in the real world, but they continue to manifest the virtues of purity, goodness, and maternal kindness to children which constitute the ideal of femininity in the patriarchal society of her own era; and while the Hill Women are still more spectacularly accomplished, they are again represented as loving, nurturing, spiritually aware, and closely associated with Nature.

What this fails to conceal, however, is the extent to which these 'essential' qualities are in fact relational. Although Gilman's fantasy of a

'natural' femininity grown strong enough to withstand male oppression differs in emphasis from Gearhart's vision of out-and-out separatism, each depends on the existence of an Other to which such essentialized femininity can be opposed. Both, in effect, are fantasies of redemption: the one a liberal feminist vision of bringing peace and harmony to existing society through the influence of values which are themselves a product of that society; the other a radical feminist dream of rescuing the Earth from the demonized Other, and being rewarded by the restoration of an untroubled symbiotic union with Nature. Nevertheless, as Thürmer-Rohr argues:

> We cannot simply say: Patriarchy has turned out to be a form of society whose predominant members, men, saw as valuable something that turned out not to be valuable. Therefore we women are finally taking our different morality out of the closet, setting the priorities ourselves, replacing and occupying the empty spaces. I see this fine challenge as an ahistorical illusion. We are not bounding into unoccupied territory; such territory doesn't exist. Besides, we have nothing in our possession, or not enough, with which to occupy this no place in our own way—a completely different, brand-new way. [p.104]

Although the gender basis of Gilman's and Gearhart's utopias serves to heighten the sense of their difference from existing society, they are in many ways as hampered by the baggage of the past as their male-authored counterparts. Once again, the connection between utopia and real world may be obscured, but it cannot be altogether concealed.

In another sense, however, the separation between reality and utopia becomes more pronounced. While it may be argued that the narrative premises of *Herland* and *The Wanderground* are not in themselves any more fantastic than the positing of hundred-year sleeps, parallel universes, or life on Mars by earlier authors, there is a crucial difference in terms of what Levitas terms the 'perceived possibility' (*Concept of Utopia*, p.194) of the utopian society envisaged. While none of the utopias so far discussed are concerned with the actual *prediction* of the nature of a future society, there can be little doubt that works such as *Looking Backward*, *A Modern Utopia*, or *Red Star* are based on the assumption that a society something like that imagined by the writer would be both possible and desirable. With *Herland* and *The Wanderground*, however, this is clearly not the case. For all her emphasis on women's strength, and on the inequities of existing society, there is never a sense that Gilman is actually *advocating* separatism as a solution—as is clear from the rather unsatisfactory conclusion; and while Gearhart might well see her imaginary society as *desirable*, it is clearly not her intent to represent features such as human flight, parthenogenesis, or

telepathic tea-making as possible in the same sense as, say, Bogdanov's representation of Martian child care arrangements.

There are, of course, certain benefits in such an approach, particularly in narrative terms. As Levitas remarks, '[w]here utopia is not expected to be realised, one is constrained only by what it is possible to imagine, not by what it is possible to imagine as possible' (*Concept of Utopia*, p.193): one side-effect of the greater imaginative freedom made possible by the abandonment of the criterion of 'perceived possibility' is that both *Herland* and *The Wanderground* exhibit a narrative dynamism far removed from that of the traditional ponderous utopian guided tour. At the same time, however, there is a cost involved. While, as we have seen, the traditional utopia is often evasive about the process whereby a more desirable society might be created, the retreat from the notion of utopia as at least possible results in a still further diminished sense of agency. In the case of *The Wanderground* in particular, the reliance on quasi-divine intervention—the 'Revolt of the Mother'—as the premise for the establishment of a utopian society has a decidedly millennialist flavour, somewhat reminiscent of the native American Ghost Dancers' belief in the great wave of earth that would cross the continent, obliterating the white man as it passed. Yet, as Levitas goes on to argue, millennial fantasies of divine intervention are most frequent among 'groups which perceive themselves, often correctly, as unable to exert control over the course of history' (p.194). While they may provide the incentive to acts of opposition (usually doomed), they may equally reflect a fatalism which she suggests is 'the key issue' (p.195) when it comes to the writing of utopias:

> Where it is no longer assumed that social organisation is inherently controllable by human agents, or where it is no longer believed that the agents who are in control can themselves be made accountable to the rest of us, much of the motive for the construction of utopias as goals is lost. They cease to be images of a hoped-for future and become again expressions of desire. The role of fantasy increases and utopia is less and less intended as a literal goal, and less bound by constraints of literal plausibility. [pp.195–6]

In the case of *The Wanderground* in particular, for all its undeniable narrative benefits, this removal of hope to 'the realm of fantasy and myth,' as Bammer puts it, leads inevitably to a utopia which presents 'a separation from reality rather than a process of intervention' (p.89). Whether this represents a step forward is a question that will be addressed in the final chapter.

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