

Ecological Utopia: A Study of Three Literary Utopias in the 1970s

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Abstract

Ecological utopia is a subgenre in the sphere of utopian literature. Its study demonstrates a new and significant dimension in utopian scholarship. The three 1970s ecological utopias under scrutiny Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia* (1975), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), and Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979) share the insight of ecological critics who are centrally concerned with corporate and technological exploitation of nature and the ensuing environmental degradation and extinction of species. These utopian texts swerve from the ideal of affluence and anthropocentric assumptions and turn to embrace an alternative vision, emphasizing the interconnectedness among humans and nature and the balance between economic pursuit and ecological concern. Nevertheless, in terms of their gender / class / racial politics, some ecological utopias tend to ignore or erase cultural inscriptions. *Ecotopia* expresses the 1970s environmental concern as filtered through the lens of a white patriarchy. *The Wanderground* endorses biological essentialism, envisioning a narrow, biological linkage between women and nature and celebrating 'women' at the expense of their intrinsic differences in terms of race and class. *Woman on the Edge of Time*, on the other hand, is unique in its problematization of the celebration of women *per se* and its understanding of the interconnectedness of gender / race / class / ecology. Against the myth of white / patriarchal / middle-class environmentalism, the work demonstrates how environmental justice may involve considerations along the axes of gender / race / class.

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The rise of ecological utopia, “[i]nspired in part by the ascendancy of the New Left and the emergence of the counterculture in the sixties, and the ecological and alternative technology movements in the seventies” (Yanarella 5), testifies to the emergence of a new sub-genre in the sphere of utopian literature and a radical departure from the path of canonical utopia. Ecological utopia, or ‘ecotopia’ coined by Ernest Callenbach in 1975,¹ witnesses the interplay of literature and ecology on the one hand and the swerving from the ideal of affluence as embraced by canonical utopia on the other. While the significance of ecological utopia is yet to be fully recognized, there is no doubt that the issues it raises have contemporary relevance and warrant scrutiny. This paper attempts to study three literary utopias of the 1970s

Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1975), Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), and Sally Miller Gearhart’s *The Wanderground* (1979) with an aim to probing their diverse perspectives on ecological issues followed by a critique of possible loopholes in their pronounced visions.

I

Examined in the context of utopian literary history, literary utopias of the 1970s are unique in two ways. As a contrast to canonical utopias such as Thomas More’s *Utopia* and Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, which often embrace the ideal of affluence and advocate the pursuit of material wealth, literary utopias of the 1970s, sharing the insight of ecological critics who are centrally concerned with corporate and technological exploitation of nature² and the ensuing environmental degradation and extinction of species, turn to embrace an alternative vision, emphasizing the interconnectedness among humans and nature, the balance between economic pursuit and ecological concern and, in some cases,³ even the value of

1 Ernest Callenbach, *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975). Subsequent references to the novel are from this edition.

2 In the sphere of ecocriticism, there is an ongoing debate regarding ‘nature’ as a conceptual term. While for some ‘nature’ denotes ‘an inhuman order,’ ‘an ontological presence resisting human intervention,’ for others ‘nature’ is a socially constructed concept. In this paper I attempt to draw on the insights of these two camps. While discussions of ‘anthropocentric arrogance’ inevitably assume an inhuman order out there, subsequent discussions regarding ‘nature’ and ‘technology’ as not incompatible with each other belie a poststructuralist understanding of ‘nature’ as a semiotic sign.

3 Ursula Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* is an apt example.

scarcity. These literary utopias, elsewhere called “critical utopias”⁴ (Moylan 10-12), are also unique in their drastic difference from pastoral utopias of the nineteenth century. While pastoral utopias of the nineteenth century suffer from anthropocentrism,⁵ the 1970s utopias deliberately distance themselves from any assertion of human values at the expense of the ecosystem. The three utopias under discussion all bear eloquent testimony to this endorsement of ecological wisdom. Callenbach’s *Ecotopia*, a country breaking away from America and composed of Washington, Oregon, and Northern California, is a case in point. Its divergence from the gospel of affluence may be pinpointed in an observation by William Weston, an American reporter dispatched by the *Times-Post* to report on the current affairs of *Ecotopia*: “[M]ankind, the *Ecotopians* assumed, was not meant for production, as the 19th and early 20th centuries had believed. Instead, humans were meant to take their modest place in a seamless, stable-state web of living organisms, disturbing that web as little as possible” (47). Earlier in the novel Weston especially targets America as a negative example: “*Ecotopia* still poses a nagging challenge to the underlying national philosophy of America: ever-continuing progress, the fruits of industrialization for all, a rising Gross National Product” (4). Contrary to what is being practiced in America, *Ecotopia* endorses the idea of ‘ecological economics’ or ‘sustainable economics’ and adopts several measures to reduce the harm done to the environment under capitalism. All these changes indeed cause havoc in the transitional period and bring discomfort to the general public,⁶ and yet gradually a new era is ushered in, marked by “the aspiration to live in balance with nature” and “treat the earth as a mother” (32).

This aversion to capitalism on the part of *Ecotopia* may best be detected in its severe criticism of capitalist consumer culture. As Weston makes it clear, in *Ecotopia*

many consumer items are considered ecologically offensive and are simply not available, so nobody had them: thus electric can openers, hair curlers, frying pans, and carving knives are unknown. And to curb industrial proliferation the variety which is so delightful in our department

4 Moylan refers to them as a “subversive utopianism” upholding, among others, “ecological wisdom” (10).

5 See, for example, Glen A. Love’s analysis of the “anthropocentric assumptions” inherent in pastoral in general and especially in William Dean Howells’s *Altrurian romances* (65-88; 157-162).

6 As Weston reports, “Certainly many citizens were deprived of hard-earned comforts they had been used to: their cars, their prepared and luxury foods, their habitual new clothes and appliances, their many efficient service industries.” (49)

stores is much restricted here. Many basic necessities are utterly standardized. Bath towels, for instance, can be bought in only one color, white so people have to dye their own in attractive patterns (using gentle natural hues from plant and mineral sources, I am told.) (44)

Furthermore, Ecotopians are sick of “lunatic advertising” (51) the epitome of capitalist commercialism. Although commercials still appear on TV, they “are limited to mere announcements, without impersonated housewives or other consumers, and virtually without adjectives” (43). This apparent hostility to business transactions infuriates businessmen in Ecotopia, who regard the policies adopted by the Ecotopian government as “ecological craziness” (52) and even go so far as asking Weston and the U.S. government to help them overthrow the current government (52-54).

The grudge that these businessmen have against Ecotopia “The economy... has been going downhill steadily. It’s terrible, what we have lost” (52) is indicative of how remote ecological utopia is from the gospel of affluence embraced by canonical utopia. The rejection of affluence, moreover, is a deliberate refusal of any assertion of human values at the expense of the ecosystem. “Comradeship”⁷ is the term Weston uses to describe the relationship between humans and “materials” (51); it may be an equally apt term to describe generally human attitude to nature in ecological utopia. This departure from “anthropocentric arrogance” and “dominating attitude toward nature” (Glotfelty xxvii) is also what characterizes the world of the hill women depicted in Sally Miller Gearhart’s *The Wanderground*.⁸ The book, a moving tale of a near-future all-female society in the mountain area, away from the Dangerland of men exploiting both women and the earth, is a collection of stories narrated by diverse hill women who have acquired ‘supernatural’ abilities like telepathy and parthenogenesis. One central theme running through all these stories is the communion with nature, a relationship drastically different from what is practiced in Dangerland. The chapter entitled “Alaka’s Journey” may serve as an example. At one point in her journey, Alaka has to swim in an underground river. Though she encounters difficulty and even great perils there, nature offers help, guiding her to her destination and soothing her. That in the world of the hill women human relationship with nature is divested of any anthropocentric tinge may be

7 “But they treat materials in the same spirit of respect, comradeship. The other day I stopped to watch some carpenters working on a building. They marked and sawed the wood lovingly.” (*Ecotopia* 51).

8 Sally Miller Gearhart, *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* (Boston, Mass: Alyson Publications, 1979). Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition.

ascertained by the feeling of congeniality that Alaka harbors toward the river:

“Earthsister,” she said aloud to the water, “I want to join you.”

The word seemed to come from all around her. “Join.” A simple response. (11)

Instead of a mute Other, Nature here assumes the identity of a partner and is articulate. Further in the journey, Alaka encounters some fish, which likewise join her in the spirit of comradeship:

In one strong and wide stroke her hand encountered a fish. Just the brisk touch of a mutual greeting. There were other touches, too. She particularly welcomed the river dwellers bold enough to swim with and about her. (11)

What is even more remarkable, in this depiction of the union of humans and nature, is how nature can offer a succoring hand to those in need. The following description of how Alaka is helped by fish may suffice:

With only tacit awareness now of her swimming, she shortstretched to the companions who swam with her.

A whole school responded as if one fish. “You are in trouble?”

“Yes,” she sent back. “I need air and light.”

“Not far away,” assured the fish. “A few more of your strokes.”

Alaka almost exploded the remainder of her air in relief. Instead she forced herself to release it slowly. “Thank you, waterones. May you go well and come again!”

“And again. And again. And again,” sang the fish. The refrain seemed to echo forward and back in the surrounding water. (12)

By the end of the journey, we again witness another case of nature offering succor and shelter to humans. Only this time it is a tree:

A large tree root helped her out of the water. She did not shake the drops from her hair or her body. It might be too soon. Quietly she stood by the giant who had helped her up. Was it a cypress? Too big. A kind of willow maybe. Its roots were almost completely undercut now by a swift bend in the river.

“Thank you,” she said in mindstretch to the tree.

“Again if you need me,” responded the tree.

“Stay well,” she chanted inside.

“Go well,” said the tree. (12-13)

This intimacy between humans and nature also characterizes the utopian world in Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*.⁹ In this compelling story of a Chicana woman Connie (Consuelo) Ramos who is underprivileged, labeled insane, and committed to a mental hospital, the author allows us a glimpse of hope by depicting how Connie, through telepathy, is able to visit Mattapoissett, a utopian world in the year 2137 which is egalitarian, agrarian, and exemplifies ecological wisdom.¹⁰ Indeed Mattapoissett appears to be so ‘backward’ that Connie is not sure whether she travels in the right direction into the future when first going to Mattapoissett with her guide, Luciente:

She looked slowly around. She saw... a river, little no account buildings, strange structures like long-legged birds with sails that turned in the wind, a few large terracotta, and yellow buildings and one blue dome, irregular buildings, none bigger than a supermarket of her day, an ordinary supermarket in any shopping plaza. The bird objects were the tallest things around and they were scarcely higher than some of the pine trees she could see. A few lumpy free-form structures overrun with green vines. No skyscrapers, no spaceports, no traffic jam in the sky. “You sure we went in the right direction? Into the future?”

“This is my time, yes! Fasure, look how pretty it is!”

“You live in a village, you said. Way out in the sticks. Like if we went to a city, it’d... more modern?”

“We don’t have *big* cities they didn’t work. You seem disappointed, Connie?” (68)

What further perplexes Connie is that in Mattapoissett humans can communicate with animals cats for example by using sign languages. Asked about the subject of her ‘conversation’ with her cat Tilia, Luciente responds:

“Much is simply expressing affection, anger, disappointment. I want, Tilia wants. Fish, milk, yogurt, to go out, peace and quiet, catch the mouse, don’t touch that bird. Groom me. Let me work. Tilia does have a

⁹ Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1976). Subsequent references to this novel are from this edition.

¹⁰ In her “‘Intermediate’ Technology, Ecology and a ‘Becoming’ Life: Marge Piercy’s Fiction and Schumacher’s *Small Is Beautiful*,” Sally A. Jacobsen points out how the depiction of Mattapoissett is indebted to Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful*.

strong aesthetic sense and comments freely on flimsies and even on costumes...” (98)

The apparent ‘backwardness’ of Mattapoisett, nevertheless, should not blind us to the fact that in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and also in the other two ecological utopias under discussion the ecological and the technological are not mutually exclusive. In fact “the recuperation of the utopian possibility of realizing the pastoral ideal within a level of higher technological development” (Yanarella 112) is characteristic of the genre. In Ecotopia, although ecology is always the prime concern, it nevertheless is still a high-tech society:

Ecotopians claim to have sifted through modern technology and rejected huge tracts of it, because of its ecological harmfulness. However, despite this general technological austerity, they employ video devices even more extensively than we do... they seldom travel “on business” in our manner. Instead, they tend to transact business by using their picturephones. These employ the same cables that provide television connections; the whole country, except for a few isolated rural spots, is wired with cable. (42)

Similarly, for all its pastoral façade, *Wanderground* does not shy away from the technological. The hill women, besides their supernatural abilities, are also equipped with high-tech devices. In the very first chapter, a woman named Jacqua resorts to “her extended ear not like the more deliberate fanlike spread, but nevertheless a field sensitive to unusual noises” (2) to check the progress of a person in armor. Again, in the second chapter, women patrolling the borders of *Wanderground* are equipped with monitors.

The role technology plays in ecological utopias is elaborately treated in *Woman on the Edge of Time*. At first sight, technology seems menacing. Connie and the other inmates of the mental hospital are in danger of having electrodes implanted into their brains to control their behavior:

Above the general uproar of the war Connie spoke to Sybil. “They’re going to put a machine in our heads?”

“Poor Alice!” Sybil shook her head. “She must be humiliated! Imagine playing up to that fascist because he presses a button.”

“I don’t want that done to me!” Connie’s voice scooted up with fear. (205)

This intrusion of the technological into the human sees further elaboration in another episode where Connie mistakenly contacts another future, a dystopian world

characterized by technological exploitation of women. There Connie meets a girl by the name of Gildina 547-921-45-822-KBJ, whose technologically altered body, the very embodiment of femininity, is the end product of intricate cosmetic surgery, her *raison d'être* being to please and to serve high-level males in her world. Nevertheless, in the utopian Mattapoisett Connie witnesses how technology can in fact be employed positively. One instance may be the way genetic engineering is adopted to help diversify genetic profiles of the population. In Mattapoisett, as Connie gradually learns, people are all born from brooders where genetic material is stored. With deliberate effort to mix the genes, there is eventually “no chance of racism” (104); with women no longer “biologically enchained” (105), all become mothers, and there is equality among all. The utopian potential that *Woman on the Edge of Time* unfolds, then, is where the ecological intersects with the technological. Ecological utopia, in other words, is not a primitive wilderness. It is rather a well-tended garden enjoying the simplicity of nature and the beauty of technology.

Some ecofeminists, notably Cathleen McGuire and Colleen McGuire, have nevertheless criticized *Woman on the Edge of Time* for its endorsement of biotechnology and genetic engineering. Acknowledging the work as “essentially ecofeminist” (195), whose “nature-based utopia” (194) exemplifies “an earth-based biophilic spirituality, grounded in a corporeal oneness with nature” (197), the McGuires nevertheless find the book problematic in “the nexus between nature and technology” (196):

Biotechnology as depicted in *Woman on the Edge of Time* holds many contemporary feminists in thrall. While establishment feminists are to be applauded for their activism on behalf of women’s health and reproductive rights, ecofeminists are aghast that they tether themselves to the pharmaceutical industrial complex for “solutions.” Genetic engineering is another area rife with contestation between feminists and ecofeminists. Perhaps feminism’s aforementioned tendency to keep spirituality (especially earth-based spirituality) at arm’s length explains its abiding relationship with technology. Ecofeminists are keenly opposed to the corporate hegemony of allopathic medicine, and for reasons much deeper than its notorious history of misogyny. (197-198)

Despite the legitimacy of the ecofeminist suspicion over technology,¹¹ we may

11 The “criticism of reproductive technologies” (Gaard 154) is a persistent concern of ecofeminists and is what many ecofeminists believe to be deliberately neglected by the Greens. See, for example, Greta Gaard’s discussion in a chapter entitled “Ecofeminists in the Greens” in her *Ecological Politics* (140-176).

nevertheless wonder whether the “abiding relationship with technology” would really mean total surrender to “the corporate hegemony of allopathic medicine.” It is certainly true, as the McGuires argue, that there are “discernible differences between the nascent ecofeminism of the seventies and the more mature ecofeminism of the nineties” (195). As illustration, the McGuires cite Starhawk’s 1993 *The Fifth Sacred Thing* for its upholding of the ecofeminist cause by “relegate[ing] biotechnology to the dystopic realm” (196). Nevertheless, in the nineties Piercy continues to illustrate persuasively through her 1991 novel *He, She, and It* that feminist incursion into technology does have contestative potential. Nili the woman warrior serves as an eloquent example. Genetically altered and technologically enhanced, Nili is instrumental in warding off the invasion from corporate megapowers and protecting the integrity of a free town Tikva where feminist and ecological values have been kept intact. Nili, moreover, is from a community of women whose babies are produced through cloning. It is apparent, then, that in the nineties Piercy continues to affirm the strategic value of an alliance with technology and that in fact the nexus between nature and technology may contribute significantly to the ecofeminist cause.

II

If our inquiries so far have unraveled traits typical of ecological utopias, there is nevertheless the suspicion over whether the ‘bright’ visions upheld by ecological utopias may in fact harbor some loopholes. One advance in recent ecocriticism¹² has been the attempt at a politicized reading of environmental literature, with an aim to bringing ‘materiality’ to ecocriticism. Louis H. Palmer and Gretchen Legler may be two cases in point. Resorting to “Haraway’s distinction between goddesses and cyborgs... as a useful frame for thinking about the body politics of American nature writing” (Legler 72), both Palmer and Legler attempt to counter the transcendental model prevalent in American nature writing. As Legler explains, “while the cyborg image depends upon the politicization of bodies, the recognition of the ‘marks’ of gender, race, sexuality and class, the goddess image erases difference in an attempt to unify” (72). Palmer especially points out that the Thoreau-Muir-Leopold tradition is “undergirded by sexist and racist assumptions” (167), and Legler argues for the

12 According to Cheryl Glotfelty, “[t]he term *eco-criticism* was possibly first coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay ‘Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism’... Other terms currently in circulation include *ecopoetics*, *environmental literary criticism*, and *green cultural studies*.” (xix-xx)

adoption of a perspective that would make “race, class, gender and sexuality explicit” (73). For them, in most American nature writing ‘nature’ is constructed as “innocent and unpoliticized – it is raceless (white), genderless (male), sexless (heterosexual) and classless (middle class)” (Legler 72). Another critic David Mazel also argues for the need to stop “treating environmentalism as a conceptually ‘pure’ and unproblematic *resistance* to power” (144). For him, “the construction of the environment is itself an exercise of cultural power” (142) and “American literary environmentalism [should] be approached as a form of domestic Orientalism” (144). In fact a politicized reading of ecological utopias may also help unravel how, in their romantic celebration of nature and endorsement of ecological wisdom, some ecological utopias tend to ignore or erase cultural inscriptions. These traits of materiality – be they gender, race, or class – are what cannot be ignored if we want to look at the other side of the coin and explore what has been silenced or hidden. In the following discussion, therefore, we will conduct a scrutiny of the three ecological utopias under discussion in terms of their gender / class / racial politics.

Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* yields fruitful reading when examined from the axes of race and gender. It reflects the 1970s environmental concern as filtered through the lens of a white patriarchy. In the chapter entitled “Race in Ecotopia: Apartheid or Equality,” first of all, we can see how the construction of Ecotopia relies heavily on the paradigm of white centrality and black otherness. Weston reports that at first he finds it strange that “[t]here are surprisingly few dark-skinned faces on San Francisco streets” (107). Later he learns that it is because most blacks choose to live in areas separate from the whites:

After a long and bitter political struggle, the black areas (and also Chinatown in San Francisco) were officially designated as city-states within Ecotopia. They had their own city governments, levied the usual taxes, had their own police and courts, their own industries, and owned farms in the nearby countryside. In fact they possessed all the attributes of tiny independent countries – even including the issuance of postage stamps and currency – except for the carrying on of foreign relations. (107)

Given Weston’s concession at the end of this chapter that “this admission that the races cannot live in harmony is surely one of the most disheartening developments in all of Ecotopia” (110), it remains clear that Weston’s narrative of Soul City – black areas within Ecotopia – is from the gaze of the whites which objectifies the blacks, allowing them no genuine autonomy. In Weston’s condescending description of the ‘independence’ Soul City enjoys, the latter half of the last sentence – “except

for the carrying on of foreign relations” belies the fact that Soul City is in fact far from autonomous, its relation to Ecotopia revolving around the axis of dominance / submission. Ecotopian discourse on race may further be examined through its ‘eulogy’ of Indians. “Many Ecotopians,” we are told, are “sentimental about Indians” (31). In Ecotopia people “keep hearing references to what Indians would or wouldn’t do in a given situation” (32). It almost seems as if Indians have become the spiritual mentors of Ecotopians. Yet this is more apparent than real, since what is presented is just a romantic and stereotyped image of the natives. As Legler’s study of American nature writing indicates, “American Indian spirituality and ways of knowing are turning into *the* fashionable solution to environmental crises”¹³ (79).

Ecotopia also exemplifies latent dilemma in its discourse on gender and sexuality. Although it is clear that Callenbach tries very hard to advocate the feminist cause, there are nevertheless loopholes in his narrative. Naomi Jacobs attributes this to Callenbach’s “failures of the imagination,” that in *Ecotopia* there is a conflict of “regressive fictive elements with progressive analysis” (par. 2). In other words, Callenbach has trouble dramatizing his radical ideas.¹⁴ I would rather argue that Callenbach is also problematic with the ideas he puts forth; his apparent feminist ideas turn out to reinscribe gender stereotypes. One clear illustration may be found very early in the novel when Weston’s Ecotopian friend talks to him about “the changes in man-woman relationships that have occurred in Ecotopia” (35):

According to him, women in Ecotopia have totally escaped the dependent roles they still tend to play with us. Not that they domineer over men but they exercise power in work and in relationships just as men do.... Thus people can be just people, without our symbolic loading on sex roles. (36)

The parenthetical remarks right after the above assertion, however, belie the fact that gender dichotomy still looms large in this apparently egalitarian world:

(I notice, however, that Ecotopian women still seem to me feminine, with a relaxed air of their biological attractiveness, even fertility, though I don’t see how they combine this with their heavy responsibilities and hard work. And men, though they express feelings more openly than

13 This is Legler’s paraphrase of Gerald Vizenor’s remarks in an interview by Maryann Grossman.

14 Naomi Jacobs regards this as a “form of utopian inconsistency... one that occurs when an issue has been brought to consciousness within a culture and a writer has consciously adopted clear, consistent views on the issue but creates a fictional world incongruent with the transformed reality he or she advocates” (par. 2).

American men even feelings of weakness still seem masculine.) (36)

This endorsement of traditional stereotypes again appears in Weston's description of Ecotopian families. We are told in the first place that "Ecotopian life is strikingly equalitarian in general women hold responsible jobs, receive equal pay, and of course they also control the Survivalist party" (70). But then in terms of family duties gender difference is in fact strictly observed. Mothers, as Weston reports, "have the final say" "in the nurturing of children while they are under two" (70), while fathers "evidently feel that their time of greater influence on the young will come later, and that that is the way it should be" (70). Little wonder that this patriarchal designation of women should lead to very traditional treatment of sexuality, as we see in the next page that Weston is eager to dismiss "rumors of sexual depravity in Ecotopia" (71) and happily asserts that "[g]enerally there are more or less permanent heterosexual couples involved.... Monogamy is not an officially proclaimed value, but the couples are generally monogamous" (71).

If the gender discourse of *Ecotopia* leaves much to be desired, that of *The Wanderground* seems to fare better. Depicting a separatist, lesbian utopian world of the hill women whose "close connection to nature is part of their sexuality" (Barr 43), *The Wanderground* foregrounds ecofeminist concern over the dual oppression of women and nature.¹⁵ Years after the hill women flee the men's zone, as the story goes, "[n]atural-grown food was still a luxury, the chemical substitutes still the standard" (128). Men are "driven," as one hill woman comments, "in their own madness to destroy themselves and us and any living thing" (3). One common practice among the hill women has been the "call[ing] up and re-play[ing]" (23) of memories of their past oppression by men "thousands of rapes, thousands of killings and tortures,... scenes of the most sordid and grotesque nature" (23). It is therefore but natural to see frequent descriptions of the bonding of women with nature against the common enemy man. For example, in one 'Gatherstretch' scene the hill women gathering together to ponder on important matters there is "the observation of the birds that angry men were abroad again outside the City" (127). And these omens are supported by "[w]omen who scanned the heavens and those who read raindrops or the bottoms of tea cups" (127).

The 'Gatherstretch' scene, however, may also invite us to ponder how *The*

15 As Glynis Carr explains, "Ecofeminism, or the fusion of the ecological and feminist movements, is concerned with the intertwined cultural and political issues that arise in consequence of 'the woman / nature analogy,' defined by Warren as 'the connection historical, empirical, conceptual, theoretical, symbolic, and experiential between the dominance of women and the domination of nature.'" (16)

Wanderground, although arguing for an alternative construction of women's space that subverts patriarchal designation of women, may fall into an essentialist trap: biological essentialism that envisions a narrow, biological linkage between women and nature and celebration of 'women' at the expense of their intrinsic differences in terms of race and class. As Andrea Blair points out, "The determinist bind between women and the natural world," or "the discursive equation of land and the feminine," in fact, "reduces women and nature to biological functions and fosters infantile, masculinist relations that are harmful to women and land alike"¹⁶ (111). If the endorsement of ecological awareness and social justice turns out to be merely an inversion of the claim that 'biology is destiny,' then the political message Gearhart wants to convey becomes dubious. Furthermore, although in the 'Gatherstretch' scene Gearhart takes pains to reveal some elements of discord among the hill women,¹⁷ still the overall picture remains an assertion of the solidarity of women, who are united in their grudge against their common enemy men. Indeed the ritualistic celebration of the "power of women" (122) in the 'Gatherstretch' scene has become so vehement as to silence all other voices, erasing all differences. Toward the end of the scene we have a typical portrayal of the consolidation of all women:

Gradually the presencing grew strong again. Some unity, some bonding on a fundamental level struck an ultimate sense in every gatherstretching woman. It went as deep as their female nature and spread as wide as their infinitely varied temperaments. All leaned together toward the image of woman-on-woman, women-on-women, toward the sameness and toward the differences that mark any two or any two thousand women. All moved toward the gentle holding of two calm lakes, each one of the other. (129)

One exception to this exclusive attention to sexual difference may well be *Woman on the Edge of Time*, which, among utopias of the 1970s, is unique in its

16 This attitude represents recent critics' reassessment of early ecofeminist emphasis on the woman / nature analogy. It also indicates the "apprehension" of socialist feminism over the association of women with nature, an association which it sees as "fundamental to patriarchal thought" (Gaard 50). Recent ecofeminists, however, asserts that "ecofeminism is based not only on the recognition of connections between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women across patriarchal societies. It is also based on the recognition that these two forms of domination are bound up with class exploitation, racism, colonialism, and neocolonialism" (Gaard and Murphy 3).

17 The dispute has to do with whether the hill women should meet some gentles [gays] for their mutual benefit.

problematization of the celebration of women *per se* and its understanding of the interconnectedness of gender / race / class / ecology. Against the myth of white / patriarchal / middle-class environmentalism, Piercy demonstrates how environmental justice may involve considerations along the axes of gender / race / class. One prominent feature of Mattapoissett is its destabilizing of gender stereotypes, its articulation of gender fluidity. In her first visit to Mattapoissett Connie is again and again troubled by her own stereotypical perception of gender. On her way to the ‘fooder’ (a common dining room) she encounters people whom she thinks “*must be women* [emphasis mine] because they carried babies on their backs” (74). In the ‘fooder’ a person’s behavior shocks her because that is “a man with a mustache” who is “weeping openly into his soup” (74). There she also meets another person who welcomes her and extends “his? / her?” (76) arms to her. Later she meets still another person whose gender Connie cannot be sure of either “The old brown-skinned... woman? it confused Connie to be so unsure” (77). In fact even her guide Luciente has been initially taken as a male by Connie (66-67). This destabilizing of gender, furthermore, is what is behind the social restructuring that is so crucial to the utopian vision of Mattapoissett. To avoid the exploitation of women and to shatter any illusion of the traditional nuclear family, as the story goes, women have given up their reproductive function and instead babies are born artificially through brooders. Each baby, moreover, has three ‘co-mothers’ to take care of it, and the ‘co-mothers’ may be either male or female.¹⁸

Besides enlisting man into her ecological utopia, Piercy further demonstrates her nuanced understanding of the woman question. While other utopias like *The Wanderground* tend to highlight the radical differences between man and woman and ignore the intrinsic differences among women themselves, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, through its compelling story of Connie’s victimization and heroic rebellion, pinpoints that one woman’s utopia may be another’s dystopia. In the story Piercy makes it crystal clear that women of different ethnicities, cultures, and classes may be under different levels of exploitation. One example may be found in the following scene which articulates the drastic difference between Connie and her welfare worker, a white woman named Mrs. Polcari:

Today Mrs. Polcari was pushing a training program that sounded like

18 As Luciente explains, “It was part of women’s long revolution. When we were breaking all the old hierarchies. Finally there was that one thing we had to give up too. The only power we ever had, in return for no more power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth. Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we’d never be equal. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender. So we all became mothers. Every child has three. To break the nuclear bonding.” (105)

someone's idea for producing real cheap domestic labor without importing women from Haiti. "Ah, I don't know," she said to Mrs. Polcari. "When you been out of a job so long, who'll take you back?" Cleaning some white woman's kitchen was about the last item on her list of what she'd do to survive.

"You're too... negative, Mrs. Ramos. Look at me. I went back to work after my children started school. I didn't work all those years."

"How come you had children so young? You got married in high school?" How unusual for a white woman to have children before she was eighteen.

Mrs. Polcari made face. "Don't butter me up, Mrs. Ramos. I didn't get married until I was twenty-six..."

.....

So she had to be at least thirty-six. (35)

This dialogue effectively unravels the radical differences between white women and Chicana women. Connie is doubly exploited, both as a woman and as a Chicana woman: she does not enjoy the same prospect for jobs as her 'sister' the white woman, and as a corollary her beauty that which the patriarchal system lays so much emphasis on fades soon due to the harsh conditions under which she suffers. Connie's shock of recognition does unravel the racial, cultural, and class differences submerged in other utopias:

After Mrs. Polcari left she stared in the mirror over the sink, touching her cheeks. How did they stay so young? Did they take pills? Something kept them intact years longer, the women with clean hair smelling of Arpege. The women went on through college and got the clean jobs and married professional men and lived in houses filled with machines and lapped by grass. She had not looked that young since since before Angelina was born. (35)

Indeed one reason why many feel *Woman on the Edge of Time* to be more successful in its utopian vision may exactly be that it explores the issue of 'difference' to an unprecedented degree.¹⁹ Its vision of utopia, a world characterized by cultural

19 As Bee, a man in Mattapoissett, proudly explains, "At grandcil - grand council - decisions were made forty years back to breed a high proportion of darker-skinned people and to mix the genes well through the population. At the same time, we decided to hold on to separate cultural identities. But we broke the bond between genes and culture, broke it

androgyny, freedom from racism, respect for diversity, and ecological wisdom, may, in the final analysis, be a more viable alternative since it attempts to tackle every difference.

In retrospect, this paper has been an attempt to study ecological utopia as a sub-genre in the sphere of utopian literature. The three 1970s utopian texts under scrutiny all swerve from the ideal of affluence and anthropocentric assumptions and turn to embrace an alternative vision, emphasizing the interconnectedness among humans and nature and the balance between economic pursuit and ecological concern. Nevertheless, in terms of their gender / class / racial politics, there are potential blind spots and loopholes. Given the centrality of ecological concern in various contemporary discourses, the study of ecological utopia indeed demonstrates a new and significant dimension in utopian scholarship.

forever. We want there to be no chance of racism again. But we don't want the melting pot where everybody ends up with thin gruel. We want diversity, for strangeness breeds richness." (103-104)

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生態烏托邦

試論七〇年代三本美國烏托邦小說*

張 惠 娟**

摘 要

生態議題是當代備受關懷的議題，也是諸多烏托邦作品著力甚深的課題。本文探討三本七十年代攸關生態議題的烏托邦小說：一九七五年克倫巴（Ernest Callenbach）的《生態烏托邦》（*Ecotopia*）、一九七六年皮兒西（Marge Piercy）的《時間邊際的女子》（*Woman on the Edge of Time*），以及一九七九年吉兒哈特（Sally Miller Gearhart）的《流浪地》（*The Wanderground*），以剖析生態烏托邦的關懷、策略與盲點，並比較三本作品間立場和觀點的歧異。相較於長久以來經典烏托邦所強調的「人定勝天」與「豐饒理想」，七十年代生態烏托邦轉而鋪陳人與自然和諧共處的重要性，並呈現對於生態浩劫／自然／科技／人類定位等議題的多元思考。克倫巴的《生態烏托邦》為白種／中產階級男性生態運動的縮影，探究層面廣泛，舉凡社會架構／城鄉發展／政治組織／工業／科技／醫藥等議題皆有涉獵。皮兒西的《時間邊際的女子》與吉兒哈特的《流浪地》則彰顯生態議題與女性主義觀點的互動，強調「壓迫自然」與「壓迫女性」二大主軸的緊密關連。但皮兒西與吉兒哈特間亦有甚大歧異。吉兒哈特的《流浪地》是一分離式的女性烏托邦，試圖建構一女性與自然親密對話的另類空間，以顛覆父權架構。皮兒西則認為此等劃地自限的女性空間可能蹈入「本質主義」（essentialism）的泥沼，其《時間邊際的女子》所勾勒的是一個兩性平等、階級泯滅與族群多元的烏托邦，鋪陳性別／族群／階級流動的可能性，以及性別／族群／階級議題和生態議題的互動。

關鍵詞：生態烏托邦 生態論述

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