Myths and Blueprints: Enacting Utopia through Fiction

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ABSTRACT

The study of utopia generally takes place in isolation from empirical social science based on its classification as either political theory or literary genre. While both approaches are well-suited to the academic study of a concept that does not exist in reality, each on its own also lacks the kind of efficacy that could be offered by an integrated situation of utopia in the "real" world. This paper seeks to incorporate utopian thinking into contemporary social and political context by utilizing both fiction and critical theory as a lens for the "real" world. It also considers both blueprint and myth as authorial choices for enacting fiction into reality.

This paper begins with an introduction to and justification for the study of literature as political theory, suggesting various mechanisms for the translation of one into the other. Next, it examines contemporary political theories of utopia and their applicability to fiction-as-motivator. Furthermore, it establishes the practical nature of an impractical genre by proposing two methods for enacting social change through utopian fiction, namely, the use of myth and blueprint as vehicles for theory. These methods are further investigated through case study examples of each, with Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward as an example of utopian blueprint and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland as a model of utopian myth.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Utopian Imagination as Political Possibility

The study of utopia generally takes place in isolation from empirical social science based on its classification as either political theory or literary genre. While both approaches are well-suited to the academic study for the concept of a place that does not exist in reality, each on its own also lacks the kind of efficacy that could be offered by an integrated situation of utopia in the "real" world. This paper seeks to incorporate utopian thinking into contemporary social and political context by utilizing both fiction and critical theory as a lens for the "real" world. Looking at literary utopias as politicized reflections of a future reality will result in a more meaningful definition of utopianism today and lend insight into the ways that literature can inform the study of politics.

The argument for utopia is imperative to the critical theories of Marcuse (2004), Jameson (2005), Jacoby (1999, 2005), Agger (1989, 2004), Bloch (2000), Kateb (1963), Manuel (1979) and others who believe that the capacity for critical thinking is imperative to a better reality. Agger (1989) argues that in times and places of what he calls "fast capitalism," texts and commodities are meant to be consumed immediately, leaving no room for critical space or private consideration. Utopian literature, with its situation in fiction, enjoys just enough critical distance apart from the "real" world that it can act as a reflection of the world as it is or imagine a space that is better. Because fiction exists outside of the realm of the practical, it can offer pictures of possibilities that the speed of capitalism does not allow time to consider. Because today's consumers believe they are satisfied by the fulfillment of false needs and repressive desublimation (Marcuse 2004), they often lack the motivation to imagine alternatives to the status quo. Alternative

critical thinking, expressed in an accessible way through literary fiction, provides an excellent form of political theory for the masses in its definition of the "good life," critique of the way things are, and situation at a critical distance from reality.

The integration of the often conflicting epistemologies represented in literature and political theory first depends on a foundational understanding of both individually. This paper begins with an introduction to and justification for the study of literature as political theory, suggesting various mechanisms for the translation of one into the other. Next, it examines contemporary political theories of utopia and their applicability to fiction-as-motivator. Furthermore, it establishes the practical nature of an impractical genre by proposing two methods for enacting social change through utopian fiction, namely, the use of myth and blueprint as vehicles for theory. These methods are further investigated through case study examples of each, with Edward Bellamy's <u>Looking Backward</u> as an instance of utopian blueprint and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's <u>Herland</u> as a model of utopian myth. Both novels were able to achieve political reaction through different strategies of narration, situation, and expectations for actualization. The intent is that this overview of utopian thinking in literature and its relation to reality will challenge the belief that the "no place" of utopia is irrelevant in the current context and further validate the classification of speculative fiction as effective political theory by demonstrating instances of utopia in practice.

Fiction as a Mechanism for Social Change

How can an impractical work of fiction have any reasonable impact on the contemporary political reality? This is the question that divides utopians: some believe that utopian fiction does contribute in a beneficial way to the "real" world; others believe

that utopian imaginings are only useful inasmuch as they are limited to the realistic.

Literature can provide a home for writers on both sides of the debate. In fact, it is an especially good site for the contemplation of utopia because it offers unlimited space and potentialities that are not burdened by practical limitations of existing technology and power relations. Because it provides a "space" for experimentation where utopian ideas may be tested in theory before practice, literature may be the best approach to the political idea of utopia. Although the definition of utopia itself is complex (and often contradictory), its influence on real-world politics demonstrates that it is an inherently powerful genre. The demonstrable effects of fiction on reality—and of reality on fiction—argue for the viability of literary fiction as not only a critical lens for political and civil society, but also as a springboard for more innovative ways of thinking about the future that bridge the theoretical and the practical in the space of the aesthetic. I propose that utopian visions, properly situated as blueprint or myth, act to de-stabilize contemporary perceptions about reality, prompt reconsideration of the distance between imagination and the "real," and encourage the incorporation of one into the other.

This is not to suggest that political change occurs through osmosis. Simply writing a text—or reading it—does not directly translate into measurable real-world political action. The first problem with such an assumption is that not all readers will interpret a text in the same way—neither will they necessarily interpret it in the way the author intended. Reading is automatically an act of re-constructing because meaning is tied to context more than to the text itself (Derrida, 1978; Agger, 2000). As readers contextualize writing, they re-write it. This is why, for example, Plato's Republic or

More's Utopia remain relevant texts today: their meaning, while created in a place and time that cannot be recalled, is not strictly limited in applicability to the past.

In order for utopian fiction to become political action, some means must be employed to enact and enable the narrative discourse. Mechanisms for enacting fiction are authorial choices. Sorel (1999) suggests a mechanism whereby myth becomes reality. He believes that myth is a "historical force" which "cannot be refuted since it is, at bottom, …the expression of [a group's] convictions in the language of movement" and so is different than merely "historical descriptions" (20,29). According to Sorel, the myth has a transformative power that other forms of narration lack. As he sees it, because a myth does not pretend to be reality, readers understand that it is only representative of certain values that perhaps ought to be idealized though they may never be realized.

Sorel offers as examples of myths with actionable force religious myths of Satan and the constant battle between good and evil and national myths of patriotism. Narrative myths in literature serve a similar purpose. For example, the African American myth of the flying African, in which a group of slaves refuse to work and instead fly back to Africa on their own wings, is not meant to inspire literal flight.[1] Instead, it is a vehicle for a more hopeful possibility of freedom. Similarly, Aesop's fables were not written to convince children that animals could talk and reason, but to teach them social norms and values such as honesty, moderation, and humility. As mythic vehicles like these, utopian fictions have the same mechanisms for enacting and inspiring change. Gilman's Herland

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[1] For a written text of the oral traditional myth of the flying Africans, see Brewer, J. Mason. American Negro Folklore (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968) and Virgina Hamilton's The People Could Fly: American Black Folktales (New York : Knopf, 1985).

is an example of the transformative power of myth. Because the story (of an all-female, reproductive society) is fully impractical, readers are drawn to focus on the overarching themes more than on the details which suspend belief. The result is a more reliable transmission of substantive meaning—in this case, that women are powerful and capable of independence.

Not all utopian fictions make use of this mechanism, however. Others rely on the hope that "believing makes it so" or simply rely on narration to transmit complicated ideas (rather than *ideals*), meant for direct instruction and immediate implementation (as opposed to *inspiration*). An example of this kind of fiction-as-futurology is Bellamy's Looking Backward. In it, Bellamy details a blueprint for a society based on national socialism, which is a planned economy on a national scale, and which he believes can/will be immediately transformed into reality. Jacoby specifically cites Bellamy as a blueprint utopian—one too caught up with the details of his own vision to be inspired toward a more iconoclastic dream.

Jacoby makes an important distinction between what he calls blueprint utopians and iconoclast utopians. While "blueprint utopians map out the future in inches and minutes," he says, "[b]y contrast, the iconoclastic utopians offer little concrete to grab onto; they provide neither tales nor pictures of the morrow" (Picture Imperfect, xiv, xvi). Examples of utopian blueprints specifically stated by Jacoby are those described by More and Bellamy—they detail the practices of everyday living down to the clothing and chamber pots. For Jacoby, it is this kind of attention to detail that is partly responsible for the contemporary conflation of utopia with totalitarianism. On the other hand, he believes that iconoclastic visions of utopia are more concerned with the integrity of the

vision itself. As he describes them, iconoclastic utopians seek to inspire readers with their descriptions of the ideal as a possibility, rather than focus on the minutiae of detail.

What, if any, difference does choice of narrative mechanism make for a utopia's enactment or political efficacy? How, specifically, do myth and blueprint translate fiction into political action? These questions and others relating to blueprints and myths as mobilizations of utopia are explored more fully in chapter two, and the differences between Bellamy's blueprint approach and the mythic style of Gilman are the subject of chapters three and four of this work.

Practical Theory in an Impractical Genre

No matter their intended method for implementation, political theories of utopia all too often get caught up in the quest for the practical, limiting themselves to a close relationship with reality and the way things already are. But it is against the very nature of utopia (literally "no place") to be limited by rational concerns. Imaginations of a model society cannot be bound by contemporary social or political context and still maintain the integrity of the ideal. Visions of utopia, then, must remain impractical in order to maintain their power as alternatives to the status quo.

Still, impractical fiction also enjoys little respect from academic empiricists. Because positivism is linked to "fact" and places a high value on what can be considered empirically, fiction is often dismissed in the sciences (and social sciences) and banished to the heterotopia of the humanities. However, fiction is read by and influential for more than just English majors. Whether practical or not, it can and does have the potential to produce material effects through various mechanisms such as myth and blueprint. In light of this understanding, it would be wise for members of the social science academic

community to take a more inter-disciplinary approach to the study of literature, especially speculative fiction, as it relates to utopia and its association with politics and society in the "real" world.

There are many who would disagree that impractical fictions can have practical effect. Immanuel Wallerstein (1998), for example, believes that utopian visions ought to be limited to what is practical in order to have meaningful effect on reality. His idea of utopistics focuses on "the sober, rational, and realistic evaluation of human social systems, the constraints on what they can be, and the zones open to human creativity" (Wallerstein, 1-2), and directly contradicts the purpose of the emancipated imaginations of speculative fiction. According to Wallerstein, this is a generation obsessed with progress and the belief that progress is inevitable and inevitably good (65).

However, despite his imagination-squelching quest for practicality, Wallerstein agrees that "still, it should be intrinsically possible to envisage a social world in which [real world problems] had become almost minor, instead of continuing to be fundamental to the operation of the historical system as they currently are" (78). Even a realist like Wallerstein understands the transcendent capacity of imagination and innovation to overcome real-world social evils. Speculation, in fiction or elsewhere, can and must conquer the obstacles of politics and ideology that would keep it from being productive. It can accomplish this through a number of ways with varying results, as will be seen through the comparison of blueprint and myth mechanizations explored in this study.

Wallerstein is correct in his emphasis that, like political theory, utopian literature cannot be fully separated from the political or historical reality. However, in artistic representation of this reality, readers may gain a critical perspective of the kind of social

and political normalization that effectively blinds the imagination by filling it with distracting images and sounds which constantly vie for attention. Utopian fiction is inherently political because it is always more than an objective snapshot of life-as-usual—it cannot be separated from the perspective of the author/dreamer/theorist. This puts the creator in a precarious situation between idealism on the one hand and realism on the other. Science fiction writer Philip K. Dick believes that authors like himself are caught between utopian idealism and political pessimism because they can only imagine a different space in "no place" or the aesthetic. As he explains it, the author of utopia can only hope to influence the politics of the "real" world indirectly through his writing because the "real" world is too hostile to accept it. He says the science fiction writer

> is stuck with discontent; he must improve or change what he sees, not by going out and politically agitating but by looking deep into other possibilities and alternatives manufactured within his own head. He does not say, "we should pass laws regarding air pollution" and hence join in ecology groups; his wish is the same…but his manner of approaching the problem is acutely different. (qtd. in Sutin, 74)

The utopian imagineers that Dick describes understand that they are not political activists in the normal sense. Ironically, they can be most influential to politics through writing in the style and using the mechanism that will best influence the future. For utopians, then, writing is active participation in political struggles—not by direct agitation, but by changing perceptions and motivations of individual readers in imaginative ways that do not involve accepting the world as it is and instead venture to hope for something better. Speculative fiction is a place for "Imagineering" a future in a

world where anything is possible. However, in order for Imagineering to become engineering, the right scaffolding must be in place. With regard to Dick's analysis, this study will analyze the various approaches of both Bellamy and Gilman to determine the efficacy of their narrative styles as scaffolds for the practical implementation of their impractical visions.

Contrary to Wallerstein's belief, fiction specifically is an ideal home for the imaginings of utopia. Literature is arguably the most accessible form of art because literacy rates are high and paperbacks are cheap. The textuality of fictive writing also invites deconstruction and reflexive creativity on the part of the reader. Like political theory, it is "authored"—speculative fiction is not judged on its adherence to fact. Rather, it presents a vision of the future based solely on thoughtful imagination. In Public Sociology (2000), Agger expresses his own desire that more academic texts would admit their human authorship, and, like literary fiction, embrace the uncertainty of speculation and imagination. Furthermore, while a person can learn to understand the language of visual art, literacy and (to some extent) literary critique are already taught in public schools and are more widespread. Because every person who can read is already equipped to be a literary critic and to think creatively about a text, fiction—specifically fiction that speculates—is a solid foundation for the political force of utopian imaginings. Additionally, because utopia itself as an ideal is elevated above the kinds of concerns today's consumers cannot seem to look past (satisfying false needs, appropriating power, etc.), the lens of a utopian aesthetic, like fiction, allows for a more critical view of the current social-political everydayness of life than readers could otherwise accomplish.

The broad reach and easy accessibility of political theory through utopian literature makes it especially efficacious in practical politics. The examples of <u>Looking Backward</u> and <u>Herland</u> provided in this discussion will demonstrate the extent to which this is possible. Each of these works of fiction continue to inspire political thought and action today, albeit through different means, which will be analyzed. Their narrative style and familiar format make them accessible to a wide audience, especially women.[2] Furthermore, utopian literature generally enjoys a critical distance from the everydayness of the current social-political context. From this privileged vantage point, it is able to offer critique and to instruct the practical through an impractical means. Because the nature of utopia is such that it is unattainable in reality (as even Bellamy's example demonstrates), any substantive discussion of it must necessarily take place in a realm apart from reality. The fitness of the marriage of political theory and utopian fiction— their similarities and what each has to offer the other—is the subject of the next chapter.

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[2] Novels in English were originally written to be instructive moralist texts for women. Bellamy admits that he wrote his political theory in fiction in order to win over the wives first, and through them, their husbands. For further discussion of the distinctive role utopian novels played as moralizing fictions aimed at women, see Kenneth Roemer's <u>The Obsolete Necessity: America in Utopian Writings 1888-1900</u>. (Kent State UP, 1976).

Chapter Two

Utopian Fiction as Actionable Political Theory

Political Theory: Writing Utopia

Political theory and utopian fiction are alike in that both look for the good life, through aspiring to the golden mean, the golden rule, or anything in-between. Necessarily embedded in this search for the good life is a critique of actual life. Political theory is often critical of the status quo because it has a hope for something better. Sometimes, as in the case of Marx (1967), critique turns to prescription or prediction. Conversely, sometimes political theory, motivated by whatever means, acts to stabilize contemporary ideology. Other times it stops short at foretelling of the possibilities of the future and instead focuses on the problems of the present. In any case, political theory separates itself from reality with a distance that allows it to be critical.

According to Wolin (1960), political philosophy is interested in "the power relationships between ruler and ruled, the nature of authority, the problems posed by social conflict, the status of certain goals or purposes as objectives of political action, and the character of political action" (3). The examples of utopian literature provided by Bellamy and Gilman answer to all of these purposes. Furthermore, they are "not so much interested in political practices, or how they operate, but rather in their meaning," as Wolin says political theory must not be (5). Even in Bellamy's blueprint utopia, with its heavy focus on implementation and practical change, each of the narrator's discourses are oriented toward explaining the deeper intent and effects of an ideal society.

Wolin further recognizes imagination as critical to political theory. As he sees it,

most political thinkers have believed in imagination to be a necessary

element in theorizing… The impossibility of direct observation compels

the theorist to epitomize a society by abstracting certain phenomena and

providing interconnections where none can be seen. Imagination is the

theorist's means for understanding a world he can never 'know' in an

intimate way. (Wolin, 19)

Reality can never truly be "known" or fully understood. Because of this inherent

shortcoming in the social sciences, "practical" utopian theorizing is virtually impossible

and particularly troublesome when attempted.[3] But literature does create a world

intimately known to the author. In the scope of fiction, the author's imagination dictates

every detail of society and politics, allowing for a kind of familiarity in introspection that

is impossible in the "real" world.

While Wolin believes that imagination allows the author to transcend history (19),

at the same time, "it [is] committed to lessening the gap between the possibilities grasped

through political imagination and the actualities of political existence" (20). For him, the

practical and the impractical are closely connected. He says, "[p]recisely because

political theory pictured society in an exaggerated, 'unreal' way, it [is] a necessary

compliment to action. Precisely because action involved intervention into existing

affairs, it sorely needed a perspective of tantalizing possibilities" (Wolin, 20-21). As he

sees it, the "tantalizing possibilities" offered by political theory encourage real world

social change. Furthermore, Wolin believes that "the essential element in political

philosophy" is "the ideal of an order subject to human control and one that could be

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[3] In fact, Jacoby (2005) that this kind of "utopia" is especially subject to becoming authoritarian and totalitarian.

transfigured through a combination of thought and action" (21). In political theory as Wolin describes it, the practical world is reconsidered in light of an ideal. Reality is thereby "transfigured" through the active process of reconciling the two.

Much like Wolin's political theory, utopian fictions maintain a vision of the good life held at a critical distance from reality. It makes sense to think that, like any invention, a perfect society can never exist in the realm of the rational until it is first invented in the mind's eye. As a representation of imagination, the aesthetic is able to capture human creativity and emotion in its purity. Works of speculative fiction are able to speak a simple language that can be uncomplicated (although often inspired) by political concerns. This makes them ideal carriers for utopia—a concept of future time and other space which may involve "politics," but is mainly concerned with the structure of everyday living and the search for the good life.

Political theory as Social Critique: Jameson, Jacoby, Marcuse, and Bloch

Despite the obstacles inherent to the practical/impractical dichotomy, a number of political and critical social theorists understand the potential for the relationship between utopian fiction and politics in the real world. Their ideas about utopia today—current perceptions and iterations of it, as well as possibilities for it—inform a more specific study of the mechanization of utopia through fiction. For Jameson (2005), "[u]topias seem to be the by-products of western modernity" (11), the politics of which aim at "imagining, and sometimes even at realizing, a system radically different from this one" (xii). As he sees it, lack of imagination is not just a political crisis, but also "a more general crisis of representation attributed to the advent of postmodernity" (212). Although he believes in the power of literary fiction (specifically, science fiction) to

transcend current context and envision a better world, he is worried that the normalizing effects of the culture industry and the flattening of the imagination in recent decades have wounded creativity and limited the scope of the imagination as foreseen for by Adorno and Horkheimer (1979), and Marcuse (2004). However, Jameson is not the only utopian who is pessimistic about the future of the imagination. Jacoby similarly believes that "[u]topia expires on impoverished wishes" such as those existent in the wake of world wars and a general distrust of socialism (148).

Part of the problem in talking about utopia is that it is both a political and a literary fascination, as Jameson notes. But it cannot be fully the realm of either. Utopian visions bring together the political with the aesthetic for a formative purpose. On close reading, Jameson's <u>Archaeologies of the Future</u>: <u>The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions</u> (2005) reveals the transformative power of science fiction, which often addresses political fears and concerns in a fictive realm. Utopian literature, as he sees it, is the past of our future. Jameson believes that utopia as it exists in literature today can only be the product of neo-capitalism. In this social context, the utopian imagination finds itself "mired in the all-too-familiar" as it contemplates "its own absolute limits" (288-289). As Jameson sees it, people today have a "constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself…as the result of the systemic, cultural, and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoners" (289). According to him, individuals are prisoners to the extent that they cannot escape—physically or psychologically—from the influence of technological and cultural mediation. This pessimism is contradictory to his proclaimed belief in utopia which, as an impractical dream, cannot be bound by "absolute limits."

In <u>The Spirit of Utopia</u>, Ernst Bloch emphasizes the power of utopia to inspire despite the kinds of obstacles named by Jameson. Of its power to transcend reality, he says,

> what rises above all the masquerades and the expired civilizations is the one, the eternal goal, the one presentiment, the one conscience, the one salvation: rises from our hearts, unbroken in spite of everything, from the deepest part, that is, the realest part of our waking dreams: that is, from the last thing remaining to us, the only thing worthy to remain. (Bloch, 3)

For Bloch, the "only thing worthy to remain" is that which inspires one to "seek the true, the real, where the merely factual disappears" (3). Like Jameson, Bloch does believe that the utopian imagination is disadvantaged today because it is working with "depleted soil" (Bloch, 13). However, as he sees it, even "depleted" soil is not necessarily barren, and utopian thinking has a habit of growing itself in hostile environments.

Like Bloch, Jacoby (1999, 2005) demonstrates a reverence for utopia in his writings about it. The connection he seeks to make between "the image of God" and utopia creates a view of utopianism as not only a temporal, but a sacred longing. Jacoby himself is Jewish by heritage, and although Orthodox believers are likely to be offended by his analogy of utopia with God (both are too important to be discussed in detail, both defy attempts at explanation, etc.), his use of religious texts (scripture and mention of the spoken Torah) is well-informed and consistent with his broader object of iconoclastic visions of the future.

As a utopian, Jacoby is strictly against the use of pragmatic blueprints of utopia as a readily obtainable end. Unlike Wallerstein, who argues that utopia is most useful as

what he calls "utopistics," Jacoby believes that practical and realistic versions of utopia are simply unimaginative imagination (After Utopia, xii). However, like Jameson, Jacoby understands that the "force of the modern imagination" is "dwindling" because it is either weakened by disuse or discouraged by apathy (After Utopia, xiii). Of the effects of reality on imagination, he says, "[h]istory affects not only elections and wars, but the way we think and imagine" (After Utopia, xiii). The result of generations of a dystopian reality is that "[a] utopian spirit—a sense that the future could transcend the present—has vanished" (After Utopian, xi). He reasons that, without inspiration, imagination dwindles. Furthermore, Jacoby worries, like Jameson, that "[t]he conviction that the future will replicate the present stifles utopian longings" (After Utopia, 158). In other words, people often believe that the future can only follow the trajectory of the recent past and so believe that there is little reason to hope for the future—and why bother to dream of what is impossible? Without hope for the future, utopian visions are ignored, berated, and ultimately stifled. For Jacoby, the deficiencies of reality might possibly be cured by the possibilities of the impractical imagination—not in the kind of futurology Wallerstein appears to advocate.

As Jacoby sees it, not only does reality effect the imagination, but the imagination ought to be reflected in reality. He says that "[t]o connect a utopian passion with practical politics is an art and a necessity," but leaves the "how" of practical application out of his discussion (Picture Imperfect, 148). This appears to be contradictory to his earlier assertions that utopian visions are somehow above reality, and ought to be reverenced as a religion of their own. However, Jacoby does remain true to his larger argument. In the end, he says that the "utopian passion"—the iconoclastic vision, not the

pragmatic blueprint—ought to inform politics in the real world. He seems to be arguing

that if every person could catch a glimpse of the utopian vision as iconoclasts see it—in

big ideas—then change would follow. He believes that the sort of change brought about

by iconoclastic utopianism would be creative and idealistic, whereas any changes

inspired by blueprint utopian visions would necessarily be totalizing and alienating

because blueprint utopians begin with standards and patterns of everyday living that are

often incompatible with reality. This point of view applied to Bellamy's Looking

Backward is troublesome, however, because, as the next chapter suggests, Bellamy's

blueprint was an effective (although perhaps limited) approach to enacting change in

material politics. Jacoby's strict definition of blueprints and their possibilities needs to be

reconsidered in light of not only their moral justification (which is arguably his larger

point) but their undeniable ability to inspire and implement change.

Unfortunately, fast capitalism today keeps people living life at such a speed that

what Jacoby calls iconoclastic visions (as opposed to blueprints) are nearly impossible[4].

Commodities are meant to for immediate consumption—fast food, quick solutions, and

high speed internet access to information all deprive consumers of the time needed for

meaningful reflection and thoughtful consumption. Without the time to stop and reflect

on the reality around them, would-be utopians today are deprived of the mental space

necessary for critique.   Furthermore, technological mediation and electronic distraction

have a flattening effect that replaces diversity of thought and expression into cookie-

cutter versions of themselves. As noted by Horkheimer and Adorno (1981), as well as

Marcuse (2004) and others who follow the Frankfurt School of thought, by inundating its

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[4] For a discussion of "fast capitalism" as a distraction from critical thought, see Ben Agger's Speeding Up
Fast Capitalism (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2004).

subjects with the same sights, sounds, and themes, the culture industry has created

generations that not only share a media background, but are *formed* by it. While this

sameness may be useful in industry and education, it is problematic for creativity, which

is imperative to utopia, especially in its iconoclastic or mythic variations. Furthermore,

creativity requires freedom of thought and the time and space to create. This is

increasingly difficult to come by as the culture industry has taken over leisure time by

filling it with advertising and false needs.

For Marcuse, the only strategy for breaking this cycle of repressive needs and

domination involves critical thought, which cannot be found in positivist methods.

Instead, Marcuse argues for a negative (rather than positivist) way of thinking, such as

can be found in speculative utopian fiction. He believes that questioning why is just as

important as asking how the world works. Positivist methods ignore context in the quest

for objectivity and so sacrifice rationality—Marcuse argues that only the interaction of

positivism and negation will create the kind of objectivity that is capable of shattering the

false consciousness that oppresses a one-dimensional society.

Marcuse (2006) would agree that the subversive political power of the

imagination found in literature is great. While art cannot be completely removed from its

history, Marcuse argues that social determinants do not affect the substance of the work.[5]

Because art is beautiful in on its own merits according to Marcuse, and can stand apart

from its social/historical context, fiction transcends historical and cultural boundaries. As

Marcuse sees it, art ought to represent not merely an ideal of hope, but a reality of it.

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[5] See Hartwick's interview of Marcuse, "On the Aesthetic Dimension: A Conversation with Herbert
Marcuse" [*Contemporary Literature,* 22 (1981), 417-424].

It is the subjectivity of art that makes it free. Marcuse says, "[i]nwardness and subjectivity may well become the inner and outer space for the subversion of experience, for the emergence of another universe" (Aesthetic Dimension, 38). Because art is able to be reflexive and subjective, it is useful as a tool of liberation (Aesthetic Dimension, 36). But Marcuse does say that art in itself is powerless to have "an effective, direct impact on the praxis of society" (Hartwick, 417). Still, art is powerful because in it, people encounter the appearance of autonomy that is denied them in society (Aesthetic Dimension, 72). For Marcuse, art is a tool of reflection, that, while powerless in itself, is empowering to all of humanity, regardless of social class or condition.

Leo Tolstoy (1996) similarly describes art's potential both as personal and universal. He says that art is intercourse—which connotes both communication and intimacy (Tolstoy, para. 1). Art has the unique opportunity for intimate conversation with each of its viewers on a personal level. Tolstoy describes art as the transfer of emotion—in this way, it is a pure form of communication. Linguists readily admit that language is fraught with problems of definitions, words are defined only as not being everything else, and meanings and sounds are arbitrarily connected (Derrida, 1978). There are a number of factors that can interfere with verbal communication enough so as to make it nearly impossible to guarantee a pure transfer of ideas through language. Art, then, represents a beautiful opportunity for communication on the emotional level—from the heart of the artist directly to the heart of the viewer.

As Bloch sees it, utopia is "the *a priori* latent theme of all the plastic arts" (3). Marcuse also recognizes this power and so rightly sets aesthetics apart as worthy of separate and careful consideration. Despite all of his writings about the appropriation of

the private by the public through technology, [6] the aesthetic dimension remains almost

sacred, resistant to the kinds of commodification and appropriation rampant elsewhere.

This is not so say that art is incorruptible, but that it is made up of something different

that is not easily put off. For Marcuse, this makes art the perfect voice for rebellion and

revolution. The voices of Marcuse, Jacoby, Jameson, Bloch and others together present a

call for greater integration of utopianism into political theory. Each of them understands

that the creative capacity is imperative to critical thinking, and that integration is an

indispensable tool in the fight for liberty. The next sections examine specific frameworks

for the exchange of these ideals.

M*echanisms for Change: Jacoby and Sorel on Blueprints and Myths*

Enacting real change from fictional narratives must necessarily involve

mechanisms to translate belief to action. Utopian fictions employ various forms of these

mechanisms with correspondingly variant outcomes. Seemingly successful political

enactment of utopian fiction has been achieved through both blueprint and mythic

methods. For the purposes of this discussion, blueprint and myth will be examined *as*

mechanisms for change. Both are also descriptions of subgenres of utopian fiction, and

as such are not necessarily exclusive of one another. However, as mechanisms for

enacting change they are distinct. This discussion will describe the significance of

blueprint and myth as forces for social and political action.

Like Jameson, Jacoby believes that imaginings of iconoclastic utopias present a

real political force that can be as powerful as the imagination allows. As he sees it,

however, utopian writers cannot achieve this through blueprint mechanisms. Philosopher

Bertrand de Jouvenal similarly says, "a dream, while less than reality, is much more than

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[6] In <u>One-Dimensional Man</u>, for example.

a blueprint" (qtd. in Sargent 568). These men argue that while a blueprint merely sketches out a plan for producing an outcome, mythic castles-in-the-air have the ability to actually shape the future of reality. For them, a blueprint is dead, decided, while a dream is alive, an active (perhaps behind-the-scenes) participant in the creation of the future.

The belief that unrealistic icons can be true lode stars for utopian imaginings is not unique to Jacoby. According to Mumford (1962), impractical visions are imperative to utopia. He says, "We can never reach the points of the compass; and so no doubt we shall never live in utopia; but without the magnetic needle we should not be able to travel intelligently at all" (104). To inspire the new imagination of everyday living is the purpose of iconoclastic utopians, what Sorel describes as "myth."

As described by Jacoby, blueprints of utopia are little more than maps of/to the future. As he sees it, they are often prey to becoming authoritarian and totalitarian. However, this disfavor on his part does not negate the social and political force of a blueprint. In fact, the examples he mentions of blueprints gone awry (including Hitler's vision of a better place) are notorious for their almost inexplicable and certainly undeniable political strength. Jacoby's notion of blueprint is not unlike Sorel's idea of utopias. When he uses the term "utopia" Sorel does so in a strictly critical sense—as he defines them, utopias are incapable of long-term, sustainable change. Instead, they provide images that "would have led the world to disasters, tyrannies and stupidity if they had been listened to" (129). As Sorel sees them, what Jacoby calls blueprints may be capable of effecting momentary surface-level change, but their dedication to the detail of a specific ideal limit their ability to enact sustainable change.

Bellamy's <u>Looking Backward</u> exemplifies the kind of blueprint utopianism decried by both Jacoby and Sorel. However, this does not mean that his work was without political effect. On the contrary, the real-world political effect of <u>Looking Backward</u> was almost immediate, as Nationalist Clubs formed around the country and Bellamyism became a politics of its own in reaction to its publication. This is precisely the sort of reaction Bellamy intended. His fiction-as-blueprint was a prescription for social change which he believed ought to occur right away. Bellamyism left little room for imagination, however, and its tightly detailed construction ultimately proved to be a roadblock to its wholesale acceptance and realization. Because the blueprint as method of implementation left no room for compromise in the plans, Bellamy's political theory was unable to meet it ultimate goal of creating Bellamy's society of the year 2000 in the America of the late nineteenth century. Still, the material effects of Bellamy's blueprint has left footprints of the politics of today. This case stands as an interesting example of the material effects and limitations of blueprint utopian visions. While Jacoby might argue that Bellamy's theory in fiction is muddied by too much attention to and insistence on detail, it was these very facets which originally inspired quick political reaction which have left footprints on the political landscape today.

As a contemporary of Bellamy's, Sorel was also skeptical of his politics, and especially of his version of utopia as the proposed enactment of them. He suggests that (blueprints of) utopia are so weak that they have never attracted much heated attention (118). As a footnote to this comment, Sorel notes an exception. He says, "I do not remember the official socialists have ever shown up all the ridicoulousness of the novels of [Edward] Bellamy, which have had so great a success" (118-119). Clearly, Sorel was

no fan of Bellamy's blueprint, and neither did he believe that it deserved the attention it enjoyed. Bellamy's fictive utopia is specifically criticized by both Jacoby and Sorel as being an example of the kind of utopian vision that is ineffective and improper. Still, in its moment Looking Backward inspired a large and spirited following (arguably larger than Sorel's), creating real political change both nationally and internationally. The chapter on Bellamy will examine more specifically how his blueprint approach was manifest in real social and political action.

While blueprints are derided by both Jacoby and Sorel, Sorel's idea of myth appears to be closely related to what Jacoby would call an iconoclast vision of utopia. For Sorel,

> The revolutionary myths which exist at the present time are almost pure; they allow us to understand the activity, the sentiments and the ideas of the masses as they prepare themselves to enter a decisive struggle; they are *not descriptions of things* but *expressions of a will to act*. (28, emphasis added)

As Sorel sees it, it is fully possible that nothing in the myth will come to pass, that it will never see direct realization. However, this is not important to him. For the myth, action is secondary to the "pure" essence of a belief that Sorel describes as kin to religious faith—both are unable to be understood or fully appreciated by intellectual philosophy. Instead, they must be *felt* to be understood.

Because myth is beyond science, it cannot be refuted or proven wrong. For Sorel, this makes them all the more powerful. Quoting from Georges Clemenceau, Sorel says,

Politicians have nothing to fear from the [blueprint] utopias which present a deceptive image of the future to the people and turn 'men towards immediate realizations of terrestrial felicity which anyone who looks at these matters scientifically knows can only be very partially realized after long efforts.' (118-119)

By contrast, mythic visions of the ideal aim at something higher than "terrestrial felicity." Furthermore, they are not deceptive images because they remain, like the iconoclastic visions Jacoby describes, unformed or unnamed. As an example of the myth as mechanism for material change, Gilman's Herland uses an impractical setting to focus on what is for her more than a terrestrial cause. While she uses detail in her narration, her focus is always on the larger picture of the contrast between the reality for women at the beginnings of the twentieth century and their inherent potential to be defined differently.

This chapter has established that utopian literature is itself a form of political theory and an especially insightful reflection of a reality that is always already political. In the pursuit of the good life, political theorists insist that the preservation of imagination—in fiction and in politics—is key to progress toward a better world. Jameson, Jacoby, Sorel, Marcuse and Bloch are only a few of the many contemporary political theorists who claim inspiration by utopian longings. While they uphold utopianism as a quest for the "good life," they also recognize that real life can get in the way of the desire for utopia. This is where literary speculation steps in. As an aesthetic representation of a political (even spiritual, according to Jacoby) ideal, fiction can spark the imagination of readers and motivate real-world political action. Popular mechanisms

for the translation of theory-in-fiction into action include myth and blueprint styles of narration, which are implemented by Gilman and Bellamy, respectively.

The next chapters include in-depth analyses of specific works of utopian fiction and their effects on politics and political theory. Chapter three considers Bellamy's <u>Looking Backward</u> in light of Jacoby's description of blueprint utopias, which proves to be somewhat inappropriate in its quick condemnation, especially considering the undeniable material effects of its vision.   It also reflects on Bellamy's role as political theorist, and the operation of blueprint as mechanism for social change. The fourth chapter looks at Gilman's <u>Herland</u> as a model of a mythic utopia, also investigating Gilman's own identity as political theorist as well as the efficacy of her mode of narration as method for enacting social change. Finally, Chapter Five concludes the discussion of utopian literature as political theory with a comparison of myth and blueprint as political positions themselves and implications for the study of literature in social science disciplines.

Chapter Three

Blueprint for Action: Bellamy's <u>Looking Backward</u>

Modern utopian fiction, as a critique of society today, has taken on different frameworks, utilized various methodologies, and incorporated several genres in the attempt to provide a window to the "good place." In the late nineteenth century, after one hundred years of unprecedented innovation in industry and technology, utopian writers seemed to be preoccupied with the idea of progress toward an ideal end. Texts like <u>Looking Backward</u> (1888) and others rely on technological progress as the facilitator of social change. As a means to an end, these texts emphasize technological innovation as the key to solving the real-world problems they address, especially those involving economic inequality. Generally speaking, they took the form of blueprints or detailed proposals for the construction of "no place" in this space (Roemer 1976).

By the turn of the twentieth century, however, utopian literature saw a stylistic transition from blueprint critique to ideological standard. This is evidenced at the same time in not only the real-world grounding of the immanent critique involved, but also in the increase of creativity and literary effect. While Bellamy's <u>Looking Backward</u> is heavy on prescription and low on literary flair, decades later books like Gilman's <u>Herland</u> supplied an abundance of fiction while at the same time maintaining a strong connection to real-world problems through creative critique and the essence of what Sorel refers to as myth. The power of the former is in its ability to persuade readers by its thoughtful, often intellectual or scientific critique of the status quo. Later utopian fictions in the early decades of the twentieth century, however, were powerful in that they offered more

obviously fictional suggestions—motivations for the reader to *imagine* what utopia might look like in contradistinction to reality.

This chapter will begin to explore the differences inherent in these various approaches to utopia, including differences in reception and in effect. I have chosen Bellamy's Looking Backward for the focus of this stage of comparison because in many ways it is representative of the proliferation of utopian literatures produced in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Notably, it is chosen by both Jacoby and Sorel as an example of the type of an undesirable utopian mechanism. Furthermore, evidence strongly supports the assumption that Bellamy meant for it to be enacted as a blueprint plan for engineering the future. Despite critical disdain for its method, Looking Backward is a text that inspired not only a plethora of copy-cat utopias in fiction, but also political debate in actionable forums. This critique will consider both how and why Looking Backward as a blueprint was effective. This chapter will focus specifically on Looking Backward as an (improbable) political blueprint for economic equality that had measurable effect on material politics, Bellamy's situation as political theorist, and the processes and complications of enacting this blueprint into reality.

Looking Backward: A Précis

Bellamy's story of an ideal world is told through the eyes of Julian West, a man who was mesmerized to sleep in 1887 and woke up to find himself in the home of a stranger in the year 2000. West is cared for graciously by Dr. Leete and his family (who discovered and revived him), with special attention paid by Edith Leete, his only daughter. The pages of the book describe West's introduction to life in the twenty-first century, with explanation by Dr. Leete and Edith. Without their help, West would not

have recognized the Boston he had lived in all of his life. When he wanders out for the first time on his own, West is shocked that instead of pompous wealth surrounded by abject poverty, he sees before him a clean, organized, cooperative city in which every person appears to be of the same economic station. The transformation to him is so drastic as to nearly send him into physical shock (which he is romantically saved from by his angel-in-the-house, Edith), and his sensibility is slow to understand how any system other than what he had known could not only be functional, but preferable to Americans.

Each of West's concerns are thoughtfully answered by a patient and knowledgable Leete. He explains that citizens in Bellamy's Boston of 2000 are partakers in a vast nationalist system, in which the nation controls all wealth, employment, and education. This was, to the "revolutionary" generation, the obvious alternative to the degrading system of monopoly capitalism which West is used to. Interestingly, this revolutionary change came about without violence or even reluctance on the part of its citizenry. Instead, Leete describes the transformation as if the solution to the problems of late nineteenth-century industrial capitalism was part of a natural process in which all parties agreed that there ought to no longer be any private wealth or selfish interest.

In addition to being a blueprint for nationalist socialism, Looking Backward is also a love story between West and Edith. Although Bellamy admits that the purpose of the romance is to sugarcoat his (scarcely veiled) political theory, its inclusion marks some important social issues still existent in the otherwise enlightened society of the year 2000. When West went to sleep in 1887, he had a fiancé named Edith. Upon learning that his house was burned down, she thought he had been killed in the fire. Still, she pined for him, leaving as a legacy a love story that touched and inspired generations of her family.

Eventually, Edith reluctantly married and had a child, of whom Edith Leete is a direct descendant. Having known West's identity and connection to the family all along (recognizing him from an old photograph), Edith Leete felt an inexplicable romantic attraction for him based on the story of the legendary love of her great-grandmother. Given this odd relation, West's courtship of her is awkward, to say the least. He first describes her as being "in the first blush of womanhood," likely much younger than his own thirty years. In West's eyes,

> she was the most beautiful girl [he] had ever seen. Her face was as bewitching as deep blue eyes, delicately tinted complexion, and perfect features could make it, but even had her countenance lacked special charms, the faultless luxuriance of her figure would have given her place as a beauty among the women of the nineteenth century (Bellamy, 43)

This description is no different than one might expect to find in a Victorian romance. Clearly, while Bellamy's standards for the world have changed, his standards for women have not.

While West is at first reluctant to show his affections, when he decides to make his feelings for Edith known, the romance takes an odd turn. The force of his attraction and quickness of his admission of it seems to be anachronistic to the Boston of 2000 and more at place in the patriarchal nineteenth century that West has left behind. However, if this is unusual courtship behavior for the twenty-first century, the Leete family doesn't seem to take notice. In fact, Edith's reaction is anything but surprised. West recounts that at his admission of love, "she blushed deeply and her eyes fell before mine… for some moments she stood so, panting a little. Then blushing deeper than ever, but with a

smile, she looked up" (Bellamy, 298). This seems a very Victorian reaction to a Victorian proposal. Even more so when Edith explains to West how she sees it as her "duty" to fall in love with him (299), and begs him to not love her too much for her own sake, but more for the blood of his lost fiancé which runs through her veins (303). The result of this saccharine romance is that it appears as exactly what Bellamy mean it to be: a sugarcoating for his theory, and nothing more. However, it may also be symbolic of a broader point. In his own love story, West effectively submits to the past in a future present to make the past's future (utopia) ideal and material.

Bellamy's <u>Looking Backward</u> as Political Blueprint

Interestingly, Bellamy readily admits that plot is not the driving force of <u>Looking Backward</u>. Instead, its intended purpose is to lead men to utopia through their wives and mothers who read fiction (Roemer, 142). While encased in fiction, Bellamy's nationalist theory is intentionally blueprint. He felt that his specific ideal needed specific definition. Bellamy believes that blueprints like his are necessary because "until we have a clear idea of what we want and are sure we want it,…it would be a waste of time to discuss how we get it" (qtd. in Roemer, 180). For this express purpose, literary fiction provides an especially appropriate space for the Imagineering of an idea that was intended for construction in reality. Blueprint was not only a narrative style for Bellamy, it was an intentional authorial choice for prescribed implementation. This choice of a mechanism of enactment which aims at direct enforcement of specific ideals lends insight into a deeper discussion of Bellamy's broader political theory.

With all of its attention to detail rather than plot, <u>Looking Backward</u>, by the author's own admission, is not primarily a book for entertainment. Rather, it was written

for a political purpose, to educate the minds of his readers of the possible efficacy of a system in which there was no class system and no selfish economic desires. Plattler (1972) argues that although Bellamy wrote of changes to human behavior, he had not addressed the seeming change in human nature. This is consistent with Sorel's belief that (blueprint) utopias are incapable of considering more than surface-level change. A reading of <u>Looking Backward</u>, its style, and method of intended implementation as a pronouncement of Bellamy's own political theory demonstrates an emphasis on economic equality, an underlying and unacknowledged paternalism, and an ironic sense of totalitarianism.

Jacoby describes utopian blueprints as absolutizing and authoritarian theories that "map out the future in inches and minutes," and leave no space for imagination, interaction, or even contextual adaptation (Jacoby, xiv). For him, blueprints are inherently ideological and authoritarian because they prescribe a specific vision of perfection. Under such a regime, if one person's imagination of the ideal did not fit the blueprint, problems could easily arise. Still, Jacoby admits that "the blueprint utopians have attracted the lion's share of attention—both scholarly and popular" (<u>Picture Imperfect</u>, xv). This is certainly the case for Bellamy. This is why, as Jacoby sees it, Bellamy's <u>Looking Backward</u> is "a classic of blueprint utopianism" (xv) which exemplifies a high level of detailed description.

However, a description of Bellamy's vision as absolute and authoritarian may be an unfair representation of his imagination and political theory. As this chapter describes, Bellamy's blueprint utopia was not bereft of material actualization. In fact, in attracting the "lion's share" of attention, Bellamy's <u>Looking Backward</u> inspired an equal

portion of political action that left its mark on individuals, political factions, and even the American landscape (literally). While it does "map out the future in inches and minutes" and so remains distinct from a more iconoclastic or mythic approach like Gilman's, Bellamy's blueprint did enjoy measurable success of its own. While Bellamy's efforts fall short of his explicit intention of immediate and wholesale actualization, his blueprint did effect material change that challenges Jacoby's description of such visions as moot points.

Bellamy's blueprint approach to utopia is perhaps best demonstrated through an acknowledgement of his attention to detail. Bellamy leaves almost no detail to the imagination of his readers. Instead, he describes for them at length precisely what kind of home, entertainment, and social life can be expected in utopia. For example, West expounds on the detail of the interior of the shopping center Edith takes him to. Of it, he says,

> It was the first interior of a twentieth-century public building that I [West] had ever beheld, and the spectacle naturally impressed me deeply. I was in a vast hall full of light, received not alone from the windows on all sides, but from the dome, the point of which was a hundred feet above. Beneath it, in the centre of the hall, a magnificent fountain played, cooling the atmosphere to a delicious freshness with its spray. The walls and ceilings were frescoed in mellow tints, calculated to soften without absorbing the light which flooded the interior. Around the fountain was a space occupied with chairs and sofas, on which many persons were

> seated conversing. Legends on the walls all about the hall indicated to
> what classes of commodities the counters below were devoted. (Bellamy,
> 102)

This partial excerpt is an example of the level of detail in description that is characteristic of Bellamy's writing. Jacoby's critique is that specific descriptions of one man's perception of the ideal—and they don't get much more specific than Bellamy's—don't allow ideological space for discussion or critique. Instead, they merely lay down the literal/literary foundations for a very particular conception of what ought to be. While this approach can be tedious and tiresome for the reader, as is the case with Bellamy's novel, it seems to have had little adverse effect on its implementation.

Not only did Bellamy see fit to examine the detail of the store as the fruit of his economic system, he also writes at length about seeming trivialities such as coverings that keep the sidewalks dry in case of rain, etc. His level of detail leaves no unnecessary stone unturned. Of the umbrella system, he goes on for more than two pages describing the workings of the mechanisms that keep the people dry and comfortable in inclement weather. In the end, this system becomes an analogy for the cooperative of the new social system. Edith tells West, "There is a nineteenth century painting at the Art Gallery representing a crowd of people in the rain, each one holding his umbrella over himself and his wife, and giving the neighbors the drippings," which her father believes must have been a satire of the times (Bellamy, 152).

Bellamy's tunnel vision for socialism may have contributed to his blindness to patriarchy. His version of utopia is like what Sorel classifies as unable to accomplish more than surface level change. Comparing (blueprint) utopias to myth, he says:

seated. Whilst contemporary myths lead men to prepare themselves for a combat which will destroy the existing state of things, the effect of utopias has always been to direct men's minds towards reforms which can be brought about by patching up the system… (28-29)

Sorel continues this critical comparison by saying that unlike myth,

A (blueprint) utopia, on the other hand, can be discussed like any other social constitution; the spontaneous movements it presupposes can be compared with those actually observed in the course of history, and we can in this way evaluate their verisimilitude; it is possible to refute it by showing that the economic system on which it has been made to rest is incompatible with the necessary conditions of modern production. (29)

Bellamy uses careful logic to create an economy and socialization of verisimilitude, one that is therefore subject to the same kinds of critiques and intellectual scrutiny as any existing regime.

Bellamy's Political Theory

In his political theory, Bellamy appears to value economic equality as the hallmark of the good life above all else. The economic theory laid out by Bellamy in Looking Backward is simple: every citizen of the confederation of nations is entitled to an equal measure of the economic prosperity of the whole. In Bellamy's fictional world, scarcity no longer exists because each person contributes in the most efficient way. With their basic needs provided for and no need to worry about saving for tomorrow, the public becomes altruistic, interested in the good of the whole and also in bettering themselves. In this world, a person spends only 20 years of his or her life as an employee

of the nation. Before that, the emphasis is on education, ensuring that the workers of tomorrow will be well-trained and well-informed. For example, after Leete retired from the "industrial army," he, like anyone else, continued to be provided for in the same manner and proportion as the rest of the population. Bellamy's obvious sentiment is that if self-interest were quashed, work would be evenly distributed and would not represent a burden to anyone.

In Bellamy's description of the year 2000, subservient classes and menial labor no longer exist. In fact, Edith Leete does not even know the meaning of the word "menial" because it has become obsolete. When the family goes out to eat at a dining hall, West is stunned by the relationship of the family to the waiter, who in his own time would have been seen as a subservient figure. However, Leete reminds West that

> nowadays it is an axiom of ethics that to accept a service from another which we would be unwilling to return in kind, if need were, is like borrowing with the intention of not repaying, while to enforce such a service by taking advantage of the poverty or necessity of a person would be an outrage like forcible robbery. It is the worst thing about any system which divides men, or allows that men to be divided, into classes and castes, that it weakens the sense of a common humanity. …The equal wealth and equal opportunities of culture which all persons now enjoy has simply made us all members of one class … (Bellamy,156)

While Bellamy's vision relies on the transformation of capitalism into a more egalitarian way of living in which material abundance equals human freedom and every individual contributes to and a non-alienated labor force, this is no communist manifesto.

In fact, Bellamy is specifically targeted by Sorel because his utopian vision lacks nuance. Rather than addressing the issue of class directly, Bellamy's vision is of a strictly middle class utopia. This ignorance (intentional or otherwise) of what perhaps may be deeper issues of class or racial and sexual hierarchy is evidence of the same kind of underlying totalitarianism that is implicit in his choice of blueprint as mechanism for enactment.

Ironically, but perhaps not surprisingly, Bellamy's perfect world appears to carry over traces of female subjugation that was rampant in West's Victorian America. His lack of feeling for feminism is not his only oversight, however. As noted by Hansot (1974) in Perfection and Progress: Two Modes of Utopian Thought, "[d]espite the detail with which Bellamy describes Boston in the year 2000, that society appears oversimplified. Its organization is based entirely on the ideal of economic equality, which is fully expressed in utopian institutions" (134). Obviously, there ought to be more to life than the economy, and Bellamy's fiction is guilty of glossing over relevant social issues that may have strengthened the efficacy of his theory. Against his attention to detail, Bellamy's ignorance of social and political nuance appears as a glaring omission.

Perhaps Bellamy's propensity toward oversimplification is not contradictory to his theory, however. As he understood it, some points naturally need to be glossed over. Asked once to explain how the perfect society would be created, Bellamy said, "When a man is shown the beauty of the woman he is going to marry, the problems of the marriage are not discussed" (qtd. in Courtney and Courant, 2000). While that may not be the best prescriptive advice for marriage, nevertheless, Bellamy's utopia is able to inspire. Essayist Stephen Leacock wrote in the 1920s:

I am one of the many people to whom <u>Looking Backward</u> became a sort of

illumination of a world that might be. I know now that humanity is not as

yet fit to live in a Bellamy commonwealth, that old age is not as wise as he

thought or the instinct of work for all as strong as he imagined it. But even

if his Commonwealth is a soap bubble, at least it had in it those iridescent

colors which will in some long day light up the world. (qtd. in Courtney

and Courant, 2000).

Despite its blueprint form, Bellamy's fiction was able to inspire generations of

imaginations and political action.

Blueprint Enacted: The Political Efficacy of <u>Looking Backward</u>

While it is often difficult to measure the direct effects of a work of fiction on

political reality, <u>Looking Backward</u> presents a unique case. Many of the social and

political effects of this novel are clear: it elicited a strong response from readers, as

judged by its popularity, praise and criticism recorded in contemporary media; it inspired

a number of utopian and anti-utopian novels that would be written in the next decade; and

it led to the formation of formal political organizations, including the Nationalist Club,

which inspired politics through local organizations throughout the country. This section

will focus on the political efficacy of the blueprint mechanism for enacting <u>Looking</u>

<u>Backward</u> as judged by these measures.

First published in 1888, <u>Looking Backward</u> was the second best-seller of the

nineteenth century, selling 100,000 copies in its first year (Lipow 30; Roemer, 2). Less

than two years later, it had inspired responses enough to fill entire issues of magazines.

For example, Roemer, author of <u>The Obsolete Necessity: America in Utopian Writings</u>

1888-1900 (1972), explains that "[t]he entire June 1890 issue of *Overland Monthly* was devoted to responses to Bellamy, and one unpublished study estimates that eleven magazines besides *The Nationalist* and *The New Nation* (edited by Bellamy) were reactions to Looking Backward" (2). But the influence of Looking Backward extended well into the twentieth century. In fact, Roemer notes that

> as late as 1935 John Dewey, the philosopher, Charles Beard, the historian, and Edward Weeks, the editor of *Atlantic* felt that of the books published since 1885, only Marx's Das Kapital had done more to shape the though and action of the world. (Roemer, 3)

According to the socialist and psychologist Erich Fromm, the book "is one of the few books ever published that created almost immediately on its appearance a political mass movement" (Fromm, vi). Political scientist Franklin H. Giddings said of Looking Backward in 1891 that "there has been no more curious phenomenon in recent times than the wholesale hypnotizing of clever literary people by Mr. Bellamy's dazzling vision" (qtd. in Lipow, 4).

Furthermore, American socialist Eugene V. Debs wrote in his 1904 "The American Movement," that the publication of Looking Backward

> Had a most wonderful effect upon the people. [Bellamy] struck a responsive chord and his name was upon every tongue. The editions ran into the hundreds of thousands and the people were profoundly stirred by what was called the vision of a poetic dreamer. … Bellamy's social romance, Looking Backward, and its sequel, Equality, were valuable and timely contributions to the literature of Socialism and not only aroused the

people but started many on the road to the revolutionary movement. …

Thousands were moved to study the question by the books of Bellamy and

thus became Socialists and found their way into the Socialist movement.

(qtd. in Lipow, 23)

Debs was himself a follwer of Bellamy. During the Great Strikes of 1877, Debs, though

already a union member, opposed the strikes and argued that there was no essential

necessity for the conflict between capital and labor. Soon after, however, Debs was

persuaded by Looking Backward to turn to a more socialist form of politics. He later

helped to form the American Railway Union and was an instrumental figure in what

came to be known as the Pullman Strike. He was also a frequent socialist candidate for

the presidency of the United States in the early 1900s. Involvement like Debs' represents

precisely the kind of reaction Bellamy's blueprint was intended to elicit.

Arthur Lipow, author of Authoritarian Socialism in America: Edward Bellamy

and the Nationalist Movement (1982), believes that

Bellamy's genius lay in his ability to respond to the rapid disintegration of

established patterns of American life in the 1880s and to foresee in the

breakdown of the old order one potential line of development and thus to

fashion a utopia that celebrated the inevitable triumph of statist socialism.

(3)

He also believes that Bellamy's theory found resonance with the people because it was "a

genuine part of the American reform political tradition" (12). Lipow goes on to say that

"Bellamyism emerged as a new distinctive political strain—an American variant within a

broader species of middle-class anti-capitalist collectivist ideologies" (14-15). Bellamy's

writing responded directly to the problems and concerns of his generation, and his imagineered resolutions were widely accepted as blueprints for the engineering of a better future.

Some of this influence continues into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In 1962, Slyvia Bowman traced the international pattern of influence of <u>Looking Backward</u>. Her findings led her to believe that Bellamy was "if not the greatest literary artist the United States produced, certainly its most influential one from the ideological standpoint" (436). Furthermore, she argues that "Although <u>Looking Backward</u> has been condemned and praised as a work of art, its artistry was sufficient to present a message about the future which inspired and moved the hearts and minds of men" (Bowman, 436). Perhaps Bellamy's direct influence is most clear in the formation of Nationalist clubs, based on Bellamy's fictional system of nationalism as explained in <u>Looking Backward</u>, and on political parties that bore his name. In the years after the publication of <u>Looking Backward</u>, over 160 Nationalist clubs had appeared. These "Nationalists" both dabbled in progressive thought and asserted themselves in electoral politics. Bellamy wrote in the *New Nation* in February 1894 that

> the Nationalists have become the advance guard of a national party which has accepted our immediate program as its platform and a large part of whose million voters, with the vast populations behind them, cherish our social ideal as their own. Never before in the history of the nationalist movement did the work so glow as now, never has the promise, the opportunity and the appeal to workers been so great. (qtd. in Lipow, 253).

While obviously overstated, Bellamy's enthusiasm was not unfounded.

Although the Nationalists were soon fractured in the United States and dystopian responses in literature as well as totalitarian worries brought an end to Nationalist clubs, outside of the US the power of Bellamy's vision power only strengthened. For example, in 1927 a Bellamy movement sprung up in the Netherlands, leading to the creation of the International Bellamy Association in 1933. With membership over 10,000, the association was banned by German occupation authorities during WWII. Soon after, the National Bellamy Party was founded. The party ran in the 1946 parliamentary elections with the slogan: "gradual yet consequent socialization of the means of production." However, after managing to secure less than one percent of the vote, the party soon disbanded.

According to Manas (1949), Bellamy was "a great reformer" despite the fact that his vision was never completely realized. Quoting from Arthur Morgan, they say:

> While the Nationalist movement did not succeed in establishing Bellamy's brand of socialism, its program of "first steps" is almost "a catalogue of social legislation of the past halfcentury." These reforms included municipal ownership of utilities, direct election of Senators, the merit system in civil service, the inheritance tax, parcel post, woman suffrage, a longer school year for children, better child labor laws, juster wages and hours for workmen, elimination of industrial abuses, public ownership of irrigation systems, and soil conservation. ("Great Reformers," 1)

Furthermore, they suggest that, on both theoretical and practical grounds, "Bellamy qualifies as a social engineer" ("Great Reformers," 1).

Morgan (1944), in fact, wrote his own study of Bellamy's life and works, published in 1944. In it, he ties Bellamyism to New Deal legislation and political success. Specifically, he credits Bellamy's Nationalism for

> the surprisingly large part of its "first steps" that already has been achieved includes much of the advanced "New Deal" legislation which has been accepted by both political parties. Some of the men directly responsible for that legislation are in direct line of descent from the First National Club of Boston, or received their first social stimulus from *Looking Backward*. Other elements of social legislation now looming on the horizon were substantially parts of the Nationalist program. (qtd. in "Great Reformers," 1)

Bellamy's social Imagineering turned engineering also had more specific effects. William Dean Howells (1902) said that Bellamy "virtually founded the populist party" (294). Of the populist platform, Elizabeth Sadler (1944) says,

> This platform, which certainly owed much to Bellamy's ideas, made a definite impression on American politics. It called for nationalization of the issue of money; nationalization of banking by means of postal savings banks; national ownership and operation of telegraphs, telephones, and railroads; direct election of senators; an eight-hour working day; pensions; and graduated income tax. (538)

Sadler also credits Bellamy with the victory his Boston Nationalist Club won over the state legislature, resulting in a bill allowing cities to build their own gas and electric plants. She says, "[b]efore the passage of that bill fewer than a dozen towns and cities in

the entire country had municipal lighting; in the following year sixteen towns and cities in Massachusetts alone took steps toward municipal ownership" (Sadler, 540).

Other political organizations claimed influence from Bellamy. Specifically, his narrative social engineering garnered the praise of the American Fabians. Of him, they said:

> It is doubtful if any man, in his own lifetime, ever exerted so great an influence upon the social beliefs of his fellow-beings as did Edward Bellamy. Marx, at the time of his death, had won but slight recognition from the mass; and though his influence in the progressive struggle has become paramount, it is through his interpreters, and not in his own voice, that he speaks to the multitude. But Bellamy spoke simply and directly; his imagination conceived, and his art pictured, the framework of the future in such clear and bold outlines that the commonest mind could understand and appreciate. ("Edward Bellamy"1898)

According to the American Fabians, it was Bellamy's clear blueprint style that allowed his work to be accessible and influential to so many readers. In fact, they call his imaginations "bold outlines" dictating a specific and (in their minds) wholly probable and possible solution to the problems of their day.

Some claim that Bellamy's fiction attracted attention and garnered followers higher up the political chain, including Presidents of the United States who dictated policy and legislation that impacted the history of the nation. As Sadler astutely notes:

> It is a striking coincidence that the two Roosevelts, presidents who have done much to break up the abuses of big business, each published a book

on national affairs whose title is suggestive of a term given national

significance by Edward Rellamy---<u>The New Nationalism</u>, 1910, by

Theodore Roosevelt; and <u>Looking Forward</u>, 1933, by Franklin D.

Roosevelt.

Sadler also reported a widespread belief that Bellamy's novel had inspired New Deal

legislation. She says,

> The *Christian Science Monitor* for May 4, 1934, carried a leading article
>
> entitled "Bellamy Went to Year 2000 for New Deal, Part of Which Is
>
> Being Put into Use Today." The article ends: "It is a planned economy by
>
> a social pioneer who, though now somewhat out-of-date, has one
>
> fundamental likeness to President Roosevelt's New Deal-National
>
> Planning." Several days later the *Kansas City Star* carried a half-page
>
> article entitled "A Famous Utopian Dreamer of Fifty Years Ago and His
>
> <u>Equality</u> World." The *Kansas City Journal-Post* for October 5, 1937,
>
> carried a feature article under the caption "Current Economic Issues
>
> Raised by Edward Bellamy Back in 1887."

Ida Tarbell (1934) describes the influence of Bellamy (along with William Morris) on the

politics of the Great Depression. Specifically, she believes that "Bellamy's new nation is

woven into the thinking of this people" because "as a product of the depression of the

1870s [Bellamy] lived and labored, even to death, to convince [his] fellows … that

poverty is no legitimate child of progress, [and] that a happier world awaits our making"

(Tarbell, 139).

Interestingly, some ciritics of Bellamy's political theory go so far as to speculate that the nationalism in <u>Looking Backward</u> directly inspired Nazism. These groups hold Bellamy responsible for the Jewish Holocaust, and blame him for 65 million dead under the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics; 49 million under the Peoples' Republic of China; 21 million under the National Socialist German Workers' Party (rexcurry.net). A leader of this anti-Bellamy movement is Rex Curry, a professor of law who has studied and published highly controversial connections between the Bellamys (Edward and Francis) and the German Nazi party. While his evidence often lacks the depth and context that would lend it credulity, Curry's work has given him an active and outspoken following who believe Bellamy to be the deadliest villain in history.

Questionable as some of these connections may be, it is true that Bellamy intended for his work to have immediate political consequences. Roemer says that, "[n]umerous prefaces, afterwards, and articles (e.g., Bellamy's "How I Came to Write <u>Looking Backward</u> essays) stressed that the fictional form was only a sugarcoating for the author's realistic blueprints for the future" (3). Furthermore, Bellamy also argued that his utopian fiction must be implemented quickly through the nationalization of railroads, telegraphs, and similar means of movement and control. He meant for the change to be immediate. In the post-script to <u>Looking Backward</u>, Bellamy suggests that he believed that maybe his generation, certainly the next, would live to see the realization of a utopian America. Indeed, there is a clear sense of urgency expressed in his writing that was not ignored by an eager public.

While Bellamy obviously meant for his words in fiction to inspire political action, they also inspired reaction in literature. Soon after the publication of <u>Looking Backward</u>,

a flood of similar utopian and anti-utopian novels followed. In fact, many authors brandished their connection to Bellamy by making use of his title, politics, and characters. For example, <u>Looking Ahead</u>, <u>Looking Beyond</u>, <u>Looking Within</u>, <u>Looking Forward</u>, <u>Looking Further Backward</u>, <u>A.D. 2000</u>, and <u>Young West</u> (Roemer, 6). Most famous among these was <u>News from Nowhere</u>, written by William Morris in 1890 as a reaction against Bellamy's brand of socialism. Morris himself was a Marxist socialist.

However, as Gail Collins (1991) has noted, "far more American workers read Looking Backward than ever made it through Marx," and so his greater influence in this country is understandable (2001). Merritt Abrash (1991) called Bellamy's philosophy Marxism Americanized (Abrash, 6). Mark Twain called <u>Looking Backward</u> "this latest and best of all our Bibles" and had Bellamy to visit at his house in Hartford, Conn (Twain, 303). In addition to direct political inspiration, Bellamy's influence shows up in other, less obviously political ways. According to Peter Batchelor (1969), Bellamy's ideas were the origin of the garden city concept of urban form. In fact, Batchelor suggests that Bellamy's vision of Boston of the year 2000 was an actual blueprint for the development of the British New Towns and Garden Suburb movements, which in turn influenced American city planning and development. This is seen the United States today in the New Deal town of Greenbelt, Maryland, as well as in the privately built towns of Reston, Virginia, and Columbia, Maryland. While these locations suggest that the implementation of Bellamy's vision strayed from his intention of application for/by the industrial army, they nonetheless demonstrate that the social influence of Bellamy's <u>Looking Backward</u> has left a lasting impression on the physical landscape.

Still, Peron believes that Edward Bellamy's most lasting impact on American society came through his cousin, Franscis Bellamy, author of the Pledge of Allegiance—which can also be interpreted as an oath of nationalism. He says,

> Francis Bellamy acknowledged that his Pledge put forth the ideas of cousin Edward. Francis originally toyed with the idea of making the Pledge more openly socialistic, but decided that if he did so it would never be accepted. … the reason that Francis Bellamy wrote his pledge is … clear. Bellamy's goal was not to inculcate the values of Jefferson and Adams. Instead, his desire was to promote the socialist utopianism of his cousin Edward. (para. 24)

The political theory of Edward Bellamy was influential to John Dewey, who, as director of the NEA, appointed Francis Bellamy to write the Pledge of Allegiance in 1892. In fact, in 1934 Dewey wrote an essay expressing his veneration of Bellamy called "A Great American Prophet." In it, he said

> The worth of Bellamy's books in effecting a translation of the ideas of democracy into economic terms is I incalculable. What Uncle Tom's Cabin was to the anti-slavery movement Bellamy's book may well be to the shaping of popular opinion for a new social order. Moreover there is one difference. Bellamy's work is definitely constructive. . . . It accords with American psychology in breathing the atmosphere of hope. (qtd. in Sadler, 546)

Bellamy's lack of literary flair in Looking Backward was more than compensated by its real effects on the politics of his day. In fact, much of the politics Bellamy is

credited with helped to form the foundations of political beliefs that still influence politics today. As a blueprint for what Bellamy and his followers believed to be a fully attainable utopia, <u>Looking Backward</u> acted as a sugarcoated vessel for the political theory of a man who saw no better way to influence the people than through fiction. Bellamy set the standard for modern American utopianism in literature. His political theory as expressed in <u>Looking Backward</u> not only inspired a generation of political activists, but stimulated more than a century of utopian thinking to follow.

Despite this evidence for a wide acceptance of Bellamy's ideals and their effects on reality, it must be noted that Bellamy's vision has never been fully realized. In that sense, his blueprint has failed to be a valid prescription for action in reality. Because Bellamy's utopian ideals were exhaustively detailed and specific, it is little wonder that his dream was not accepted carte blanche by either a national or international public. Bellamy's lasting effect is in the debates his work continues to spark, and in his utopianism as critique of the capitalist system. While his politics did find a large audience, his narrative mechanism for the implementation of his ideals was ultimately unable to achieve his desired result.

Chapter 4

Utopia in Myth: Gilman's <u>Herland</u>

Gilman's <u>Herland</u> presents a striking contrast to Bellamy's <u>Looking Backward</u> in both its narrative style and purpose. While Bellamy is intent on blueprinting a future he hopes to immediately enact, Gilman's utopian theory in fiction is much more mythical in its approach. Because Gilman relies on iconoclastic visions of the future, her effect is to invite readers to see things differently rather than to tell them plainly how things are or ought to be. Her authorial choices were dependent in part on her own situation as both a woman and a feminist socialist. Like Bellamy, Gilman was able to achieve some real world political effect from her fictive theory. However, unlike Bellamy, Gilman's theories remain relevant to critical arguments today. Because she chose to use myth as both a narrative style and method for enacting her utopian ideals, Gilman freed herself from any need to be justified by science or intellectual philosophy. Her utopia as myth continues as an enduring force for change.

This chapter begins by situating Gilman's <u>Herland</u> in the broader context of the women's movement in the early twentieth century, with special consideration for the role of fiction in this movement. Next, it argues for a reading of <u>Herland</u> as mythic utopia, meant for enaction as such. The discussion will then move to include Gilman's own political theory, especially as demonstrated through her utopian fiction. Finally, it will consider the social efficacy of Gilman's political theory enacted as myth and suggest the benefits and shortcomings of myth as mechanism for action.

The Women's Movement in Fiction

The women's movement was, in part, dependent on fiction as its medium of choice. Before there was a network devoted entirely to "television for women," there were novels—romances, mostly, that offered not only entertainment, but education for women. Of course, fiction as a mode of information is inherently problematic, as Francis Burney reminds us in the unnecessarily tragic <u>Evelina</u>, the story of a girl acquainted with the real world only through romance, and unable to understand or appreciate the society of anyone but a knight in shining armor. Early English novels were often no more than thinly-veiled attempts at moral instruction, advising girls and women regarding social and personal standards of behavior. It is important to remember who was writing this educational fiction: before the twentieth-century, most fiction read by women was written by men. Surely, not all of them had ulterior motives for designing novels that would teach morals to young ladies; nevertheless, the prevailing mischaracterization of women and unattainable ideal of women as angels-in-the-house could only provide a one-dimensional education, and a skewed one at that.

However, through feminist writers, like Gilman, women readers could find an alternative to real-world patriarchy recycled in fiction. The three most popular books of the nineteenth-century were <u>Uncle Tom's Cabin</u>, <u>Ben-Hur</u>, and <u>Looking Backward</u>—representing an interesting mix of traditional and revolutionary ideas—each of which is arguably utopian. Two of these were written by men and reinforced Victorian paternalism. In 1900, the top ten best seller's list, according to Publisher's Weekly, included the works of two women authors. By 1916, the year <u>Herland</u> first saw publication, half of the year's top ten best-sellers were written by women. In less than

two decades a space had opened up that allowed writers like Gilman, who stood in contradistinction to the patriarchal status quo, an opportunity to let their voices be heard. An increasing number of readers, men and women alike, were also being exposed to new forms of fiction offered by voices that had previously been left out of the conversation.

Literary fiction, then, became an ideal home for the growing women's movement at the turn of the nineteenth century. Because it offered "education" and information to women on their own terms, with literary devices and forms they were already familiar with, the feminist novel represented a subversion of the usual power structure through which women were taught how to live a moral life via fiction. These feminist fictions were often curiously fashioned for enaction in a situation where their influence was often counteracted by predominant practice. Some authors, like Gilman, chose myth as a vehicle to launch their ideas into the hearts, minds, and actions of their readers. The story of Herland is exemplary of the myth in fiction as political mechanism.

Herland: A Précis

The power of utopian fiction is in its critique in contrast to the reality of today. When it was written In 1916, Herland was especially relevant to contemporaneous debates about women's suffrage and nationalist socialism. As a critique of the patriarchal American society of the early twentieth century, the novel provided specific contrasts between the ideal life and the real life. Most notably, Herland was a place with no men. By posing the imaginative question "what if there were no men, no essentialist gender distinction?" Gilman is able to get at the root of the problems that she saw as stemming from the remnants of Victorian patriarchy. Without men to be dependent on or subjugated to, the women in utopia can and must do everything. They are empowered,

but don't feel as if this is any different from a woman's natural state. And, as Gilman reminds us, it isn't: as demonstrated in <u>Herland</u>, the only difference from the happy, care-free, capable women of utopia and the depressed, demoralized housewives of America is their perception of themselves and of what is expected of them.

Gilman's <u>Herland</u> is the tale of a heretofore undiscovered country populated by women only. Three men, Terry, Van, and Jeff hear rumor of it when they are part of an exploratory expedition in an undisclosed part of the world. Intrigued by the evidence they find of civilization coupled with the stories the natives tell of its manlessness, the men decide to return as soon as possible to explore what they call "Herland" for themselves. Terry is the financial backer of the return mission, and within a few years the three of them are again in familiar territory. They use a small plane to get at the place where they believe this civilization must exist. On the way to their destination, the men demonstrate various attitudes toward women and their place in society, generally expressing unbelief of the possibility that women may be capable of running a stable society of their own.

When the men first heard of Herland, they were unwilling to believe that women were capable of governing themselves—that a land of only women could exist and continue over any period of time. As their arrival drew nearer, however, they began to speculate ("[a]dmitting the improbability") about what kind of country they might find.

> "They would fight among themselves," Terry insisted. "Women always do. We mustn't look to find any sort of order and organization."
>
> "You're dead wrong," Jeff told him. "It will be like a nunnery under an abbess—a peaceful, harmonious sisterhood." (Gilman, 8)

At this suggestion, the narrator scoffs and adds, "These are just women, and mothers, and where there's motherhood you don't find sisterhood, not much." Terry agrees and says:

> No sir—they'll scrap … Also we mustn't look for inventions and
> progress; it'll be awfully primitive. … You'll see… I'll get solid with
> them all—and play one bunch against another. I'll get myself elected king
> in no time—whew! (Gilman, 8)

The men had envisioned a land peopled by the kind of women they had created: those interested in their looks, and stereotypically jealous and weak. But the reality proved to be much different from what they had expected.

After they land in Herland, the men are apprehended by a group of "matriarchs" and taught the language and history of the people. The history of Herland, as told to them, is of mythic proportions. According to the matriarchs, over 2,000 years ago the land they lived in was involved in war, to which all of their men were called away. While the women were left caring for their land and families, a volcano and a number of local tremors closed the pass, their only outlet to the world. For a while, there was panic. Then one woman, Maaia, spontaneously conceived and gave birth to a daughter. Eventually, she bore four others, each of whom were able to bear five daughters of their own. Maaia became the Goddess of Motherhood—the mother of them all. The men quickly learn how the women of Herland believe that motherhood is the pinnacle of existence.

Later, in their travels around the country, the men discover that the women's world is much more advanced than they had been willing to give them credit for. For example, the women of Herland are careful planners and managers of their resources.

Some time after the descendants of the first Mother were each able to have five children of their own, the geographical boundaries and physical limitations of the country began to be an issue in light of a population that grew by five times every generation. Anticipating problems centuries in advance, the women did all that they could to cultivate their space in the most efficient means. It was only when all other alternatives had been exhausted that they began to limit reproduction. Family planning in Herland is entirely incredible, but as Gilman explains it, the women were able to limit themselves to one child each (more or less to those who were worthy/unworthy of them).

Like Bellamy's Looking Backward, Gilman's Herland also sets up marked contrasts in standards of living. In Gilman's utopia, population is controlled, criminality is bred out (much like in Looking Backward), animals are not used for food, and people take care of one another as part of one great "sisterhood." Like the people in Bellamy's Boston of 2000, the residents of Gilman's Herland are almost completely free of the kinds of moral and social problems that plague dystopian societies. After generations of unnatural selection, "atavism" has simple been bred out of the residents of both utopias. In the case of Herland, the system of selection appears to be less subjective: women who are not "ideal" simply do not/cannot reproduce. After two thousand years of such behavior, criminals and the mentally and physically disabled are almost non-existant. This detail indicates a kind of social Darwinism that believes that to be criminally-minded is a genetic disorder. Furthermore, it equates physical and mental variations from the "ideal" as intolerable and in the same category as moral depravity. Such a point of view is obviously less than politically correct today. Still, it was not much different from Bellamy's solution to similar problems: criminally minded people in his utopia were

treated as mentally insane, for when all needs are taken care of and all property belongs to the state, there is not need for the self-interestedness that would cause a person to commit a crime.

Another similarity between the social critiques of Bellamy and Gilman can be found in their resolutions to the industrialized economic system in place in America at the time of their writing. Gilman is clearly influenced by the nationalist ideology she shares with Bellamy in her treatment of property in Herland. In this utopia, the women are forced by circumstance to have a decided interest in the limited space and resources they have and they all work together to make the most of them. While there is always enough to eat, there is no overabundance in the land without men. There is no scarcity, either, because each woman does her part to provide for the rest. Every woman is educated and able to choose her own occupation. While all would prefer to be caretakers of children, all concede that only the best and most capable should be employed in any calling. For example, one character with a love of nature and a talent for care is an arborist, caring for the trees in Herland.

Interestingly, most of the food in Herland is produced by trees, which take the least amount of space and require the least amount of care in respect to the amount of fruit they produce. The women of Herland no longer rely on animals for their food or clothing—they simply do not have the space to care for them, and they have proven to be inefficient sources of goods. These examples in industry and agriculture are typical of the priority in Herland for efficiency of labor and resources in all things. This is not the efficiency of industrialization or of Fordism, however. In Herland, the women plan their work centuries in advance in order to ensure that their modes of production are natural

and sustainable, and their work, like their education and their mothering, is non-alienating.

The women in Herland are not alienated from their labor because they work for one another as any person would work to sustain her own family. Indeed, the women of Herland are all direct descendents of one Mother, the first to have the gift of virgin birth and the ability to pass it on to her children. They consider themselves to be sisters, and what is done in their utopia is done for the good of all. While Gilman does not provide much discussion of government in her fictional narration, she does give a lot of detail about the society of the women.

After several months, the men are allowed more freedom, and each of the protagonists settles on a woman to woo. This situation gives rise to much confusion on both sides, as the men attempt to define their role in a kind of relationship that the women of Herland have never known. In the end, Terry allows his passion to get the better of him, and attempts to rape his yet-unyielding wife. The matriarchs come to her rescue, and the perpetrator is banished from the place forever. The novel ends with Terry leaving Herland accompanied by Van and his wife, who is anxious to see what things are like in the outside world. Jeff and his wife remain behind, supposedly to reintroduce a society of men and women.

Herland as Utopian Myth

Unlike Bellamy's Looking Backward, Herland is not a blueprint. Instead, it is more representative of the iconoclastic vision that Jacoby describes. For him, iconoclastic visions of utopia "offer little concrete to grab onto; they provide neither tales nor pictures of the morrow" (Picture Imperfect, xvi). For Gilman and other iconoclast

utopians, utopia is not simply a reaction to the present or a quick fix for what ails society today. Instead, it is a truly ideal state of being—ideal in both its isolation from the reality of everydayness and for its applicability to it.   One reader describes it this way: "Instead of pointing to a well-defined hermetic solution as many utopias do, Herland points to the process that initiates our own explorations into a re-thinking whose end is not specified and therefore not contained" (Johnson-Bogart, 91).

As far as Jacoby is concerned, iconoclastic utopian visions like Gilman's are the way to go. He says, "[i]n an image-obsessed society such as our own,…the traditional blueprint utopianism may be exhausted and the iconoclastic utopianism indispensable" (Picture Imperfect, xvi). Because iconoclastic visions do not concern themselves with detail that might be construed as totalitarian or prophetic (and so subject to validity claims after the test of time proves them inaccurate), they are often the most influential and provide visions of the future that remain valid through time. Herland is precisely such a vision of utopia: it is situated in a world that is impossible, and so is able to offer a subjective critique of reality without proposing a "mater plan" to fix it.

 Gilman's fiction is also an example of the power of the aesthetic that Marcuse (2006) has observed. In this case, the Gilman was able to imagine the emancipation of women as possible in a space where men did not interact with them. Such a thought experiment would be impossible in any realm other than the aesthetic, and the novel is an ideal medium for the audience she wished to inspire. In her own "space," free from the constraints of patriarchy or politics, Gilman was able to imagine something better and inspire others in the process. When she was disenfranchised and enjoyed only limited direct political influence, the world of fiction was open to her, and in it she created an

ideal space where women were strong, capable, and independent. For her, the aesthetic dimension was a dimension of power—perhaps the only one to which she had full access.

Herland is also representative of the kind of influence pure imagination can have. Looking Backward is at best a shallow attempt to "sugarcoat" Bellamy's political theory of National Socialism for consumption by women, and through women to a wider audience (Roemer, 142). To appreciate Looking Backward requires a stretch of the imagination and some amount of sympathy for the author's politics. Herland, however, is the story of a completely improbable situation and the fiction of the story is itself enough to entertain readers. Its objective and consequence is quite the opposite of Bellamy's approach: it informs almost unconsciously. By weaving a convincing (albeit impractical) storyline with multi-dimensional characters, Gilman encourages readers to more fully enter her world and explore the possibilities it offers. It is fiction with the lingering aftertaste of politics, a pleasing combination that can be appreciated by readers who don't initially agree with the idea of the independent woman. Furthermore, where Looking Backward requires a reader to already be knowledgeable about American government and economy to some extent, Herland makes overt reference only to the issues that would be most intimately recognizable to a woman: herself and her mother-love. [7]

Of this approach, Minna Doskow says:

> For Gilman, the means of accomplishing social change is always
> intellectual, a change of mind that is projected outward to its logical
> consequences in the beneficient actions and institutions of utopia and its

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[7] But Gilman says of herself: "I have never made any pretense of being literary. As far as I had any method in mind, it was to express the idea with clearness and vivacity, so that it might be apprehended with pleasure" (Living, 284-5).

inhabitants. In this Gilman differs from the other Utopian writers in whose tradition she places her work and whom she mentions in the preface to <u>Moving the Mountain</u>: Plato, More, Bellamy, and Wells. These writers create models in which utopian social institutions shape the character and actions of the inhabitants. Gilman reverses figure and ground by relying on her inhabitants' renewed consciousness to change institutions appropriately. She grounds her vision of change in people and their ideas, but first and foremost, in women. All else follows from this mental awakening. (16)

Gilman's utopian vision in fiction is typical of what Jameson describes as the power of the imagination to transcend reality. As a work of fanciful fiction, not many of the social institutions of Herland can be directly translated into American life. Obviously, although <u>Herland</u> is a utopia without men, Gilman is not arguing for a women's only society or for reproduction through parthenogenesis. Because Gilman did not intend for her utopia to be taken literally, it relies on its impracticality for its power to inspire. This is another characteristic that distinguishes Gilman's utopia from Bellamy's: one was meant to inspire on a broad and general level, the other was meant to guide and direct specific and immediate action. Arguably, because Gilman's work is more "fanciful,"[8] it is better able to transcend time and changing circumstance and retain its relevance today. Ironically, in this case it seems that the more improbable a vision of utopia, the more lasting it will be.

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[8] It ought to be noted that Jameson (2005) doesn't like the term "fanciful" because he equates it with uselessness and irrelevance.

As Sorel describes it, myth is "almost pure" as an "essence" of a social or political movement. Like Jacoby, he likens myth to religion, explaining that it is also based on faith rather than on positivism. The force of myth, he says, cannot be explained by intellectual philosophy, but must be *felt*. While Christians rely on the myth of an ongoing war against Satan to inspire the actions of their everyday living, utopians who believe in myth are continually motivated by it. In the same way, a myth is not a blueprint with a determinate end point—it is always already understood that perfection (by whatever definition) is impossible. For followers of myth, the effort moves incrementally forward, motivated by constant and unassailable inspiration.

Gilman's Herland presents a tale of mythic proportions. As fiction, of course, it stretches the limits of the imagination. But Gilman's story may be especially unbelievable because it is based on a society of women who have lived in isolation from the world for nearly two thousand years, able to procreate through parthenogenesis. Unlike Bellamy's world of 2000, Gilman offers a "no place" that could never be enacted. It relies on myth rather than on science in its very conception, and so from the start it is "secure from all refutation" (Sorel, xiv).

Gilman as Feminist Theorist

Gilman was no stranger to politics. With aunts like Harriet Beecher Stowe, an avid abolitionist and author, Catherine Beecher and Isabella Beecher Hooker, both suffragists, Charlotte's home and family environment was essentially progressive, allowing her the freedom to imagine a better world. This she eventually did through the avenues most available to her as a woman: writing in fiction, non-fiction, and poetry.

Despite her strong streak of independence, Charlotte married young to escape the poverty of her mother's house and soon bore a child. Despite (or perhaps because of) her husband's close care and efforts at medical treatment, Charlotte grew melancholy[9]. Most infamously, she was subjected to bed rest, and banned from reading or writing at all, because those habits seemed to have such a strong effect on her. Charlotte soon realized, however, that this prescription really would drive her crazy, and only a few years after saying "I do," she took her daughter and left her husband, fleeing to freedom in California. Eventually, her daughter returned to live with her estranged husband, but the marriage was never reconciled. They divorced in 1888 in a process that seemed "scandalous" because it was amicable. Charlotte and her first husband, Stetson (along with his second wife, who had been Charlotte's best friend), remained friends and were often together as one oddly extended family.

After her divorce, Gilman lived with Adeline Knapp, a San Francisco newspaper reporter who shared her interests in social reform and the Nationalist Club. The nature of their relationship is not clear, although it is presumed to have been sexual. However, for Charlotte, to live independently with a woman and without child was also a demonstration of the fact that a household could be run without a husband.

In 1900, when she was 40 years old, Charlotte married George Gilman, a New York lawyer. This was to be her longest relationship, lasting until his death in 1934. Although once again "traditionally" settled in marriage, Charlotte became increasingly involved in her social and political causes, specifically nationalism and feminism. From 1909 to 1916 she ran the monthly magazine, *The Forerunner*, writing every word herself.

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[9] This treatment inspired Gilman to write her powerful short story, "The Yellow Wallpaper." (Project Gutenberg, 1999).

Writings in the magazine constituted some of her best-known fiction and non-fiction writings, including the feminist utopia <u>Herland</u>. Charlotte was a prodigious writer, actively speaking to women through the forms they were comfortable with and perhaps knew best. It was her desire to combine the efforts of the women's movement and the socialist movement into one great cause.

Gilman had considered herself a nationalist since reading Bellamy's <u>Looking Backward</u>. In fact, she often contributed to *The American Fabian,* a Boston journal founded in an effort to move the British socialist movement to America. That journal was unsuccessful, but Gilman's unique blend of nationalism and feminism had staying power. For Gilman, feminism alone was not enough to motivate her. In a letter to her husband George, she described a dissatisfactory night on the lecture circuit. "You see I was to speak on Woman Suffrage pure and simple," she said, "and that never did interest me. I can only fire up on that subject when I apply it to other things in life. And this was a cold stiff unsatisfactory speech" (qtd. in Van Weinen, 603). As she saw it, feminism alone was incomplete. In fact, although Gilman is best remembered today for her feminism, "her most active political affiliations up until 1900 were not with women's organizations but with groups advocating gradualist, or reform, socialism: [including] Nationalism, a movement for national ownership of industry catalyzed by Edward Bellamy's novel <u>Looking Backward</u>" (Van Weinen, 603).

Gilman was successfully able to combine her twin causes in several of her later works, including <u>Herland</u>. In fact, <u>Herland</u> may be seen as the culmination of Gilman's social and political theory. In it, she visualizes the "good life," and offers careful criticism of the status quo from the distance of imagination. As a critique, <u>Herland</u> is

arguably less severe than <u>Looking Backward</u>. Rather than speaking out directly against the blunders of "bi-sexual" society, Gilman instead has the protagonists feel privately ashamed of the world they have come from.

Gilman is also different from Bellamy in that her utopia relies more heavily on the positive hope of the imagination, rather than on the cutting criticism of the way things are. While Bellamy is quick to point out the faults of capitalism and to cover them with nationalist solutions, life in his world somehow seems no more free than it had been in 1887. In contrast, Gilman's land of women appears ideal in a very freeing sense of the word: perhaps life in <u>Herland</u> is no less structured than it is in <u>Looking Backward</u>, but the approach of the novels—one with overt critique and demands for change, and one more subtle in its judgments, though nonetheless powerful—could be no more different.

Gilman's utopian theory is ultimately one of emancipation. While it is true that she believes in nationalist socialism, her shared focus on feminism and the rights of women makes utopia seem like an emancipatory space. In <u>Herland</u>, women are free from any strain of the patriarchal ideals that limit their action in so many other societies. Because they have never compared themselves to men, or defined themselves as the "other" of man, they have necessarily believed that women are capable of any and all work: physical, intellectual, or even spiritual. At the end of the Victorian age, where women were considered the property men and often enjoyed few rights on their own account, such an independent vision of women was almost revolutionary. Gilman's voice joined with others who resisted strongly at many sites.

The cover image of the first edition of Gilman's *The Forerunner* is demonstrative of her broader social politics. The image is of a man and woman literally holding

together a family and supporting a young child who stands between them. The woman

looks up toward the child, while the man appears to be looking at the woman. The

woman, then, is the central image in this figure because she supports the child and

(apparently) advises/supports the man. This is indicative of the kind of family politics

Gilman advocated—although she believed that a family could exist without a father at the

head, she also believed that motherhood was the center of all human life. In Herland, the

women understand that being a mother, and mothering other children, is the highest

calling one might aspire to. In fact, they value parenting so much as to believe that not

every person is qualified to raise a child. In Herland, children are raised in groups, often

by caretakers other than their own biological mothers. These caretakers and educators

are entrusted with a great responsibility, because the women of Herland value nothing

more than their children.

The power of Gilman's social and political theory is such that it not only provided

a critical alternative to early twentieth-century social practice, but also remains relevant

to continuing conversations about women's roles and governance today. Gilman's

writing, including Herland, enjoyed a success that lasted as long as her life. Shortly after

her death, however, her works were almost forgotten, only to be resurrected in the 1960s

and 1970s women's liberation movement. In 1956, Carl N. Degler refered to Gilman as

"the prophet of the modern American marriage" (Degler, 35). While today this may not

seem like an accomplishment to be proud of (when approximately half of all marriages

are ending in divorce), in contrast to the patriarchal Victorian standard that prevailed in

the early twentieth century, Gilman's vision of family life was a breath of fresh air.

Degler goes on to say, "[i]f, as most would agree, America in the last 50 years has basically altered its attitude toward the working woman, then Charlotte Perkins Gilman must be assigned a significant part in the accomplishment of that change" (39). The following sections focus on the continuing relevance and influence of Gilman's nationalist-socialist-feminism as exemplified in her utopian fiction.

Myth Enacted: the Political Efficacy of Herland

Despite bordering imagination into the realm of "fancy," Gilman's impractical imagination of a world without gender, only "people," stands as an iconoclastic vision of possibility. Shortly after it was written, Charles and Mary Beard noted that her analysis of the home was so stirring, "and so clarion was her call for freedom in mind and labor that a new school of feminist thinkers was raised up in America and Europe which sent reverberations as far afield as awakening Japan" (qtd. in Degler, 39). Gilman's fictions were read and studied by early twentieth-century feminists and awakened readers to a sense of their own limiting domestic situation and inherent ability for independence. In no other place but "no place" was it possible to talk about women in the terms Gilman used. Still, aspects of her utopian vision quickly found application in reality.

The influence of Herland did not end with the achievement of women's suffrage. Its effects still echo in feminist action today, 90 years later. Feminist theorists continue to find Gilman and her fiction relevant to contemporary debates regarding the role of a woman in the home as well as in society. This is the power of an iconoclastic utopian vision. While Bellamy's Looking Backward produced an immediate political following, it has ceased to be the standard for nationalist socialism because the books' reliance on technology has become outmoded—making all of Bellamy's argument seem out of date

and somehow irrelevant. However, <u>Herland</u>, with its less stringent ties to reality and its

more iconoclastic call for change remains relevant to contemporary context, despite the

relative improvement in the status of women that has occurred between 1916 and the

present.

Recently, Gilman's political theory has garnered a lot of attention. Gilman was

named the sixth most influential woman of the twentieth century in a poll commissioned

by the Siena Research Institute (1993). In 1994, she was inducted into the National

Women's Hall of Fame in Seneca Falls, New York. After a respite of several decades,

feminists and literary theorists have expressed a renewed interest in Gilman.

Specifically, De Simone argues that Gilman remains relevant to feminists because

> [her] writings about these tensions and struggles between marriage and
>
> career, social expectations, and personal goals continue to impact women's
>
> decisions to day, while illuminating her arguments for abating them has
>
> greatly heightened our understanding of the power of social norms on the
>
> individual. More importantly, Gilman's life and works provided us a role
>
> model. (14)

Not only do modern feminists value Gilman for her fiction, but for her own life, as well.

De Simone explains that by

> Using her extraordinary life experiences as a female within a patriarchal
>
> system, Gilman redefined womanhood, declaring women the equal of men
>
> in all spheres of life. This "new woman" was to be an intelligent, well-
>
> informed, and well-educated free thinker, the creator and expresser of her
>
> own ideas. She was to be economically self-sufficient, socially

independent, and politically active. She would share the opportunities,

duties, and responsibilities of the workplace with men, and together they

would share the solitude of the hearth. Finally, the new woman was to be

as informed, assertive, confident, and influential as she was

compassionate, nurturing, loving, sensitive--a woman of the world as well

as of the home. (15)

Each of these qualities is every bit as valued today as it was in Gilman's time. The "new

woman" exemplified in Gilman remains the ideal for the woman of the twenty-first

century. Gilman's life and writing remain relevant today because many of the issues she

dealt with have not been resolved. Women today still struggle for the kind of equality,

independence, and autonomy exemplified in Herland as well as in Gilman's own life.

This is evidenced by continued reference to Gilman as "foremother" of contemporary

feminisms.

For example, feminist scholar Susan Stratton (2001) traces Gilman's influence to

contemporary writers, suggesting that her literary influence continues. Some

contemporary feminists see Gilman's fiction as a valuable counter-argument to the post-

feminism of today (see for example Robinson 1991, Kiskis 2003). In fact, Gilman's

theory may be more closely related to second- and third-wave feminism (thought to be

occurring during the 1960s-1980s and 1990s to present, respectively). This is true

because Gilman was more concerned with social equality than with suffrage specifically.

Furthermore, Herland represents a theory much like contemporary ecofeminism, which

argues that a relationship exists between the oppression of women and the degradation of

nature. In Herland, for example, the women care for the land with the same respect and

consideration as they treat one another—a striking contradiction to the way that Terry attempts to dominate by force. In fact, Deegan and Podeschi (2001) cast Gilman as a foremother of contemporary ecofeminism based on her theory as outlined in <u>Herland</u>. Others claim that Gilman is a prototypical cultural feminist, because in Herland she describes women acting strongly and possessing "feminine concerns" (Humm 1990). This idea is contradictory to the claim that Gilman is non-essentialist (because cultural feminists believe that there are inherent differences between men and women, and that women are superior). Still, both camps claim Gilman as their own.

It is interesting to note that Gilman's fiction is today more relevant to social and political debates than is her non-fiction, including tracks, speeches, and letters, likely because of their abstract relation to reality. While these artifacts remain useful for the contextualization of her other work, they have lost some of their efficacy through time. The more strictly her emphasis is defined to a certain narrow problem, the less applicable it is after that problem has been forgotten. For example, her speeches and rallies dealing with women's suffrage or with the promotion of nationalist socialism have lost their relevance, their strong and motivating connection to the women of today. However, Gilman's <u>Herland</u> embodies a utopian vision of the emancipation of women that ironically enough, though perhaps never fully achievable in reality, remains relevant to not only feminists, but to both men and women on a broad scale today.

Conclusion: Practical Applications for Utopia

The relationship between utopian fiction and political theory is clear. In fact, utopian visions cannot be separated from the political theories they represent. As criticism of predominant ideology, utopian fictions are inherently political. Furthermore, through various mechanisms they are capable of enacting material social and political change, often on a wide scale and with enduring effects.

As political theory, utopian fictions can take a number of narrative forms. In the interest of being efficacious, Bellamy and Gilman each chose the narrative style which best fit their theoretical ideals and practical expectations. In the case of Bellamy, Looking Backward served as a narrative blueprint of a reality he genuinely believed would be immediately enacted. Herland, conversely, relies precisely on its disassociation from reality and probability as its appeal, allowing myth to act as the vehicle to the greater truth of (Gilman's iteration of) an ideal life. In these cases, each approach demonstrated the ability to effect change in social and political reality. However, the deeper significance of the authorial choice of method in constructing utopia are worthy of some consideration. The vehicle for enacting can say as much about the authorial ideology as the content of the narrative itself. The interpretations of myth and blueprint as stated here are consistent with the broader political theories espoused by Bellamy and Gilman, respectively. This concluding chapter revisits the original argument for utopian fiction as political theory and proposes that the mode of mechanization or mobilization of utopia through fiction is also suggestive of distinctive political ideologies. A close analysis of these various modes of enactment may provide further insight into the political theories of the authors who utilize them.

Totalizing Utopia through Blueprints

Bellamy's use of blueprint as narrative style and enacting mechanism is not accidental. In writing Looking Backward, his stated purpose was to instigate social and political change. His choice of blueprint as the vehicle for that change is indicative of his broader political theory. Specifically, Bellamy's form of national socialism was a totalizing system. Although it promoted ideals of equality and freedom, readers must ask themselves: at what cost? Dissonant voices in the United States of the year 2000 in Bellamy's vision are not only kept silent, but they are also "rehabilitated" as if they were mental patients. Leete's explanation for this strange treatment of criminals and others who do not fit into society is that under the conditions of perfection in which the people live, anyone who would want to change the system or go against it *must* be crazy. For him, there is no other explanation for disobedience, disloyalty, lack of patriotism, or apathy for work. This attempt at re-socialization of those who attempt to "opt out" of the socialist system is eerily similar to Winston Smith's experience in Orwell's 1984. In Orwell's obviously dystopic novel, civil disobedience is also answered with government attempts at rehabilitation—only in the Orwellian scene, rehab looks a lot more like brainwashing or torture. Bellamy, on the other hand, in an uncharacteristic move chooses to leave out the details of the kind of re-socialization offered to deviants.

This is not to say that Bellamy would advocate Orwellian measures of conversion. Regardless of his means, his intention is the same: to force socialization into a system over which the individual has little or no control. For all of the good that Bellamy and his form of national socialism promotes, one ought not to overlook the message sent by the blueprint style of his writing. In the end, Looking Backward intentionally leaves little

to the imagination. Ironically, as a work of fiction, it acts to stifle creative thinking insomuch that in its critique it only offers one static alternative to the status quo. Bellamy's utopianism is ultimately non-emancipatory, then, because through it he would only exchange one faulty system for another. Furthermore, this harsh criticism of Bellamy's political ideals is only possible because of the system he himself set up: because he presents his fiction as if it were fact—or as if it very well could be fact—he automatically makes it subject to the same kinds of intellectual and moral reasoning involved in any political debate. As it turned out, Bellamy's own followers did not believe that there was enough room in his theory to allow for multiple interpretations, and so Nationalist clubs quickly splintered and disintegrated in response to various iterations of Bellamyism within them. Through his intention to engineer an imagined future in reality and by presenting a wholesale package of criticism inseparable form solution, Bellamy ultimately limits the efficacy of his utopia.

Ironically, perhaps some of the later effect of Bellamy's Looking Backward may be attributable to its misinterpretation as myth. It is possible that his carefully engineered text escapes authorial intent and inspires readers in unintended ways. After all, readers are free to re-construct the meaning of a text, even if it is a blueprint. Furthermore, apart from the social political context for which Bellamy wrote Looking Backward, meaning is necessarily complicated and intent becomes subject to re-interpretation and application to the current context. This confusion could make Bellamy's blueprint appear as myth to readers who are unfamiliar with the time and place for which he was specifically engineering the future.

Myth as Vehicle for Interpretation

In the case of Gilman, a mythic approach to utopia allows greater freedom in interpretation and increased possibilities for enaction. Her approach may be partly attributable to her own social position as woman and feminist. While it could be argued that Bellamy's experience as a male in patriarchal society contributed to his authoritarian stance on socialism, in the same way, Gilman's more sensitive approach may stem from her own experience as a woman fighting for her place in the world. Because she understood what it meant to be the victim of authoritarian paternalism, Gilman wrote an iconoclastic version of utopia that did not depend on a single solution. Instead, her mythic style of writing serves to inspire readers to contemplate their own personal mechanisms for change. Furthermore, Gilman supported the idea of incremental change. While she fully believed that women could achieve successes in her own lifetime, Gilman believed that her purpose would require changing individuals before changing practice. In this way, her approach is the opposite of Bellamy's –his fiction presents the solution as "natural" evolution (although he wishes to enact it as immediate *r*evolution), and does not describe changes in human nature.

It is also fitting that Gilman makes use of the mythic form of fiction to narrate and enact her utopia because it is a departure from the kind of moralizing fictions that had been historically written for a female audience. By using what had previously been largely a masculine tool of domination as a subversion of those effects, Gilman makes an implicit statement of her feminist politics. Like the women of Herland, Gilman cannot be bound by essentialist descriptions of womanhood or even of feminists—in her eyes, feminism without socialism is lackluster. Gilman's approach to fiction, like her approach

to motherhood and sexual relationships, is a departure from the norms of her day. While others around her had been busy writing blueprints, Gilman dared to imagine a more iconoclastic, less essentialist vision of the "good place."

Furthermore, Gilman's mythic approach—while efficacious on a number of levels—remains a relevant part of the feminist conversations today in its advocacy for non-essentialist views of the roles of men and women. This is only possible because Gilman did not write a prescription for change, but sought rather to inform and inspire internal consciousness. While Bellamy was criticized for his lack of consideration for the kinds of personal transformation necessary for his "revolution" to take place, Gilman chose to focus on the individual perception, questioning essentialism as personal outlook. Through the eyes of the male protagonists, Gilman demonstrated the kinds of internal change she saw as a necessary precursor to the gradual evolutionary change she supported. For two of them, visiting Herland was a life-changing experience—they were ashamed of the ways they had thought about and acted toward women in the past, and anxious to change. For Terry, no internal change was effected, and his final attempt to impress his feelings on the women of Herland proved him unfit to live their anymore.

Implications and Suggestions for Further Study

The implications of the realization of utopian fiction as active political theory are great for the social sciences. Literature, especially the utopian genres, cannot be ignored as sources of political inspiration or motivation. In fact, their situation as fiction does in some ways make them ideal carriers for the aesthetic, intangible hopes of a better place. Academics in the social and political sciences, then, would do well to be more open to the exploration of what may seem an unfamiliar source of politics in everyday life. Even

without specific training in literary theory, social scientists can find value in what their own disciplinary expertise can lend to a reading (deconstruction, re-construction) of a work of fiction. An understanding of fiction as a cultural product of a political reality or as a vehicle for political theory justifies its position in the social sciences.

While this study has attempted to argue for the validity of fiction in social science study and analyzed mechanisms by which it is transformed into material politics, many questions remain. Further study might look more in depth into the material political effects of either Bellamy's (populism, New Deal) or Gilman's (feminism, ecofeminsism) utopian fiction. Other mechanisms for the conveyance of fiction to reality might be considered. Also, this study has left room for a more detailed argument for utopian theory as critical theory. Utopia as a literary genre, as a spiritual hope, and as a political inspiration cannot be overvalued, especially in light of its real ability to enact material social and political change in "our place." As a vision of a better life, iterations of utopia affect not only the way people see the world they live in, but the ways in which they actively shape reality as well.

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