

□Women, Science and Technology: the Genealogy of Women Writing Utopian Science Fiction□

Submitted by Michelle Parslow to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* in English, June 2010.

This *thesis* is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this *thesis* which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Michelle Parslow

Abstract

For centuries utopian and science fiction has allowed women to engage with dominant discourses, especially those which have been defined as the “domain” of men. Feminist scholars have often characterized this genealogy as one which begins with the destabilization of Enlightenment ideals of the rational subject in the Romantic Revolution, with the publication of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) in particular. This thesis demonstrates that there has in fact been an enduring history of women’s cognitive and rational attempts to explore key discourses such as science, technology and architecture through Reason, as opposed to rage. This is a genealogy of women writing utopian science fiction that is best illuminated through Darko Suvin’s of the novum. Chapter One reveals how the innovative utopian visions of Margaret Cavendish (1626-1673) proffer a highly rational and feminist critique of seventeenth-century experimental science. Chapter Two demonstrates how Sarah Scott’s *Millenium Hall* (1762) explored the socio-political significance of the monstrous-looking “human” body some fifty years before Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. Following this, Chapter Three re-reads *Frankenstein* in light of the early nineteenth century *zeitgeist* of *laissez-faire* economics, technological advancement and global imperialism and argues that these were also the concerns of other utopian science fiction works by women, such as Jane Loudon’s *The Mummy!* (1827). Chapter Four analyses how the function of the novum is integral to L.T. Meade’s (1854-1915)

depictions of male/female interaction in the scientific field. Chapter Five considers how important it is to acknowledge the materialist concern with popular science that informs texts such as Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) and Pat Cadigan's cyberpunk novel *Symers* (1991). This is the history of how women have used the form of utopian science fiction as a means with which to present a rational female voice. In addition to the historical works by women, it employs a range of utopian and science fiction theory from Suvin and Fredric Jameson to historical and contemporary feminism.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....5

1. “In her Eyes, new Worlds, you there might see”: Margaret Cavendish’s voyage towards “a World of [her] own”34

2. “My way of thinking”: Sarah Scott’s Social Engineers and the Utopian Architecture of the Body.....64

3. Monstrous (Re)production: Women Writing Imperialist Technology.....101

4. “Where we men of science would have been afraid to tread”: L.T. Meade’s fin-de-siecle Eye/I of Reason.....150

5. Science in the Fiction of Pat Cadigan’s *Symers* and Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man*.....193

Conclusion.....240