

## Femmutopia: The Rise of Feminist Utopianism as a Counter-Hegemonic Space

### Femmutopya: Feminist Ütopyacılığın Karşı Hegemonik Bir Alan Olarak Yükselişi

*Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article*

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#### ABSTRACT

Feminist utopianism is a speculative and transformative genre that aims to challenge the established patriarchal utopian tradition and the dominant discourses surrounding gender issues. To this end, feminist utopian literature has served as a crucial instrument for both male and female authors who advocate for the importance of achieving gender equality in society. Furthermore, at its heart, utopian writing relies on the act of dreaming as the fundamental component for envisioning and building the future, thereby increasing awareness and participating in a cognitive process called defamiliarization. In addition, the inclusion of women's alternative perspectives has had a significant impact on the overall understanding of gender roles. This article, therefore, aims to provide an overview of the characteristics of a feminist utopian novel and a critique of the dominant masculine perspective in society in order to bring about the essential social transformation needed to create the desired and yet unrealized needs.

**Keywords:** Utopianism, Femmutopia, Social Transformation, Literary Activism

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#### ÖZET

Feminist ütopyacılık, yerleşik ataerkil ütopyacı geleneğe ve toplumsal cinsiyet meselelerini çevreleyen baskın söylemlere meydan okumayı amaçlayan spekülâtif ve dönüştürücü bir türdür. Bu amaçla feminist ütopya edebiyatı, toplumda cinsiyet eşitliğinin sağlanmasının önemini savunan hem erkek hem de kadın yazarlar için önemli bir araç olarak hizmet etmiştir. Dahası, ütopyik yazın özünde, geleceği tasavvur etmenin ve inşa etmenin temel bileşeni olarak hayal kurma eylemine dayanır, böylece farkındalığı artırır ve yabancılaştırma adı verilen bilişsel bir sürece katılır. Buna ek olarak, kadınların alternatif bakış açılarının dahil edilmesi, toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin genel olarak anlaşılması üzerinde önemli bir etkiye sahip olmuştur. Buna bağlı olarak bu makale, feminist ütopyik bir romanın özelliklerine genel bir bakış sunmayı ve arzulanan ve henüz gerçekleşmemiş ihtiyaçları yaratmak için gereken temel toplumsal dönüşümü sağlamak amacıyla toplumdaki egemen eril bakış açısının bir eleştirisini sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Ütopyacılık, Femmutopya, Toplumsal Dönüşüm, Edebi Aktivizm

## 1. Introduction

Utopia is a phenomenon that is focused on the process rather than perfection, and development in utopian fiction is certainly inevitable. Hence, achieving a state of absolute perfection is unattainable, which is why the terms *better* and *worse* can be used to characterise utopian and dystopian notions, respectively. Given that the female voice has been suppressed for generations, it is unsurprising that women have slowly begun to improve their roles in society. As Lorde (2007) argues, the future of our planet may hinge on women's capacity to recognise and cultivate novel definitions of power and innovative modes of interaction across differences. The previous definitions have proven inadequate for both us and the planet that sustains us. The antiquated patterns, regardless of their skilful reconfiguration to simulate advancement, continue to confine us to superficially modified iterations of the same exchanges, encompassing guilt, animosity, reproach, mourning, and distrust (p. 123). This is precisely why utopianism has been at the heart of female literature. According to Johns (2010), gender equality has never been fully realised, hence it is necessary to consider and discuss it consciously (p. 175). Therefore, both female writers and male authors who advocate for the importance of achieving gender equality in society have created several utopian literary works that present various viewpoints on gender roles. The purpose of these works is to convince both men and women of the validity of alternate worldviews. Nevertheless, it has consistently been a complex endeavour, as utopian landscapes have traditionally been dominated by men. Paradoxically, women, who could have gained the most from a restructuring of social systems, had a negligible part in their creation (Lewes, 1989, p. 29). Contrarily, utopian writings present the perspectives of the authors, mostly men, on the ideal or notably improved community, including their opinions on the roles and status that women should hold in a desirable society (Sargent, 1973, p. 302). In simple terms, women in utopian literary works are shown with specific roles and are expected to conform to these representations. Due to the male monopoly in all spheres of society, including politics, education, and law, women have been denied their basic human rights. Moreover, the prevailing societal norms have defined the expectations and behaviours associated with being male or female. These norms have established a standardised way of life that dictates how men and women should behave and where they should position themselves within their societies. Consequently, the audience was unable to perceive any alternative options. Correspondingly, due to the constrained political, financial, and social influence of feminists, feminist writers have pursued cultural avenues, particularly aesthetic and literary portrayals, as the most effective means of rendering an alternative future intelligible to as many individuals as possible. The utopian narrative approach, characterised by its capacity for visionary construction and unrestricted theorising, has consistently proven advantageous for feminist writers (Johns, 2010, p. 175). Thus, utopianism has been a crucial tool for feminist writers to promote awareness, particularly among women, and inspire them to envision a more desirable future, for at its heart, utopian writing relies on the act of dreaming as the fundamental component for envisioning and building the future. Utopian works effectively raise consciousness by creating an alienation effect in the minds of readers. As a result, people engage in a cognitive process known as defamiliarization, during which they begin to query the peculiarity of the routines and practices they endure on a daily basis. This inquiry serves as an

initial stride towards altering their ingrained thought patterns. Consequently, they believe that it is necessary to modify their current circumstances by reshaping and rebuilding their understanding of the society to which they belong.

As such, the objective of this article is to present a comprehensive analysis of the attributes that define a feminist utopian novel and to offer a critical evaluation of the prevailing masculine viewpoint in society. Such an endeavour seeks to facilitate the critical social change that is required to actualize the aspirational yet unfulfilled necessities. This article will further examine the significance of feminist utopian literature in presenting novel conceptualisations of society by dwelling on how fragmented texts, varied protagonists, and unconventional narrative techniques in feminist utopian literature disrupt traditional gender narratives. Furthermore, it will also analyse the function of feminist utopias in enabling readers to reclaim autonomy over their lives, confront the psychological and physical abuses women have historically faced, and redefine their perceptions of gender and power, as well as its vital role in the continuous effort to dismantle patriarchy and establish a more equitable world for everyone. Utilising the creative potential of utopian fiction, feminist authors and theorists endeavour to reconfigure possibilities, illuminating the concealed frameworks of oppression and presenting alternative futures where gender equality transcends mere idealism to become a tangible reality. The article also aims to critically examine feminist utopian literature to elucidate the genre's function, transformative potential, and ongoing significance in the quest for gender equality.

## **2. The Femmutopian Challenge**

Kelly-Gadol (1977) argues that examining the liberation of women reveals that events promoting the historical advancement of men, freeing them from natural, communal, or ideological limitations, yield markedly different, often contrary, consequences for women (p. 139). Therefore, examining examples of utopian tradition can effectively demonstrate how males perceive women and their responsibilities in envisioned improved societies since it is important to emphasise the reasons behind the urgent need to increase awareness and create a collective effort against these unbalanced portrayals. Regarding Plato's *Republic*, it is evident that he presents a compelling critique of the prevailing notions of gender roles in Ancient Greece. Unsurprisingly, women are assigned responsibilities such as spouses, mothers, and carers. Furthermore, they are systematically denied access to both education and political participation. Plato's rejection of these conventional positions can be clearly illustrated by his thought-provoking questioning, which goes as follows:

Do we think that the females of watch-dogs ought to guard the flock along with the males, and hunt with them, and share in all their other duties; or that the females ought to stay at home, because they are disabled by having to breed and rear the cubs, while the males are to labour and be charged with all the care of the flocks? (Plato, 1997, p. 150)

While there is ongoing debate about whether Plato's work can be considered eutopian, it is certainly conceivable to argue that the issues mentioned above are eutopian characteristics that are intricately woven into the work. He vehemently rejects the idea that there is an inherent distinction between the male and the female. While acknowledging the existence of biological

and physical distinctions between the two genders, he strongly rejects the notion that women should be confined to home roles and excluded from participation in government and public affairs. Plato, however, believes that women are absent in works produced by men due to the unequal opportunities they receive in schooling compared to men. He suggests “[i]f then we are to employ women in the same duties as men, we must give them the same instructions” (Plato, 1997, p. 150). According to Plato, these lessons encompass the domains of music, gymnastics, and military education. Just like the example of watch-dogs, any responsibility or profession can be entrusted and distributed among people as a whole provided that they receive the appropriate education. Anything that does not exist naturally is considered artificial. Therefore, the domestication of women is not inherent but rather contrived since “we treat the females as the weaker, and the males as stronger” (Plato, 1997, p. 150).

Thomas More’s *Utopia* and Plato’s *Republic* differ significantly in their treatment of women and the portrayal of gender roles inside their respective ideal societies. More seemingly held the belief that men’s intrinsic superiority over women was so self-evident and ingrained that he never considered the notion of gender equality as one of the social hierarchies to be abolished in his utopian society (Booker, 1994, p. 338). Regarding the patriarchal society, it is evident that it is prominently observable and very robust. As More (1965) illustrates, the eldest male in each household has authority over the others. Children are subservient to their elders, and wives are subservient to their husbands (p. 80). Evidently, despite the passage of almost two millennia since Plato’s *Republic*, there has been little progress in terms of women’s status, as they continue to remain submissive to males in More’s utopian society. Furthermore, the allocation of authority to the eldest male implies the concept of wisdom is not gender-neutral. This subjugation becomes apparent more intensely along with More’s (More, 1965) description of the household authority before feasts: During an Ending Feast, wives kneel before their husbands and kids before their parents at home to confess their sins, both omitted and committed, and to ask for forgiveness before attending worship. This eliminates any minor grievances that might have tainted the home environment, allowing everyone to participate in divine service with complete clarity (p. 126). All these practices contribute to the perpetuation of the patriarchal hierarchy in society and facilitate the marginalisation of women. Men are traditionally regarded as the founders or leaders of the church, allowing women to receive forgiveness. Otherwise, the female will be unable to join the feast. In addition, husbands are accountable for disciplining their wives, and adults for disciplining youngsters, unless the violation is sufficiently grave to necessitate intervention by officials for the sake of public order. (More, 1965, p. 104). In More’s eutopia, therefore, male potency is given prominence while female individuality is inhibited.

Another characteristic of More’s eutopian society is the domestication of women. Although women are involved in various tasks such as priesthood, agriculture, making yarn, and weaving, they are predominantly assigned milder duties, while males are tasked with the more demanding physical labour (More, 1965, p. 75). Moreover, the prevailing notion that “in countries where the women *do* work, the men tend to lounge about” (More, 1965, p. 77) is well entrenched. This is an increasingly common issue in today’s world since there are ongoing

arguments in many nations highlighting the significant presence of women in the workforce as the primary cause of high male unemployment rates. Thus, it can be inferred that More actually favours women in their traditional roles at home to prevent males from being idle, which, in turn, poses a threat to women's independence. Moreover, women are assigned additional obligations. "The actual business of preparing and cooking the food, and planning the menus is left entirely to the women of the household on duty" (More, 1965, p. 82). Women are not only responsible for domestic work, but they are also obligated to care for their infants. Considering all these portrayals of women's societal and household responsibilities, it is significantly challenging to argue that there is sufficient space for gender equality in More's utopian society. In addition, prior to marriage, a highly nonsensical and bizarre organisation is held: The potential bride, regardless of her status as a spinster or widow, is presented completely unclothed to the intended bridegroom by a reputable married woman, while an appropriate male chaperon displays the bridegroom in a similar state to the bride (More, 1965, p. 103). The reciprocity of this rite does not contradict the notion that its purpose is to provide the bridegroom with a physically attractive wife since "this practice deal[s] with the possible deformity of the woman" (Sargent, 1973, p. 304). Given the prevailing male-centric nature of society, it would be unreasonable to expect future husbands to be introduced to women. Inevitably, these presentations aimed at improving society ultimately reinforce the process of women's subordination, while simultaneously bolstering the existing patriarchal system, which already holds significant influence within the envisioned ideal society. While it may not be feasible to categorise all utopian works as exclusively belonging to the traditions of Plato or More, most other utopias, aside from those of Plato and More, depict societies that either closely resemble Plato or More, featuring the abolition of the family and relative equality for women, as seen in Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1623), or retain the family structure with women positioned as decidedly inferior, as illustrated in Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1621). Cabet in *Voyage en Icarie* (1840) attempts to reconcile the family as the foundation of the system while advocating for women's equality, although his emphasis on equality is exclusively political and economic. In the community he founded in Nauvoo, women were prohibited from voting (Sargent, 1973, p. 304). It is important to emphasise that while some utopian works were written with the intention of improving society at the time, they did not lead to a noticeable improvement for women. This is because the authors were mostly men who were unable to comprehend and fully embrace the concept of equality within society in all aspects. Therefore, their instinctive impulses consistently came before those of women. However, Sargent's assertion does not imply that there are two distinct utopian traditions that address women's problems in two distinct manners. Instead, he clearly states that while women are included in utopian works, in their view, we currently inhabit the optimal worlds, or that women ought to be more submissive (Sargent, 1973, p. 314). Consequently, this led to women adjusting to the prevailing circumstances. The majority of literary utopias in the subsequent four centuries following More likewise flopped to achieve the imaginative leap necessary to conceive genuinely equal opportunities for women, despite the fact that utopian thought is fundamentally focused on envisioning alternative societies that transcend the biases and norms of the prevailing order (Booker, 1994, p. 338). Due to their belief that the societal norms established

by men, both in their own society and in utopian literature, were the standard for women in indigenous societies, women were unable to generate alternative solutions to improve their unfair circumstances. According to Lewes (1989), even the limited number of utopian works written by women followed the typical androcentric perspective, which portrays females as secondary beings who rely on dominant males for leadership and protection (p. 29). Women cannot be regarded as having the option to choose to be liberated from societal constraints. To put it concisely, they were destined to be the frogs in boiling water, which caused their social standing to steadily decline.

The alternative perspectives offered by women have been highly influential, as it is well recognised that altering collective awareness is a fundamental prerequisite for transforming cultures. Correspondingly, women writers have begun capitalising on the boundless potential of utopian literature, for it “portray[s] women as the creators of a new consciousness and a new vision” (Pearson, 1981, p. 64). One of the main objectives of promoting and maintaining egalitarian societies is to raise awareness and provide individuals new perspectives. In parallel, utopianism can instigate shifts in paradigms in consciousness, allowing us to reconfigure our thinking, to interpret language in novel ways, and to anticipate what was once inconceivable (Sargisson, 2003, p. 229). The shifts in consciousness are made accessible to both women and men in order to challenge established conventions and liberate society from the constraints of patriarchy. To clarify, feminist utopias grant individuals the liberty to rule their own lives in every circumstance. Women are liberated from both mental and physical rape. Nobody can be possessed by others (Pearson, 1981, p. 64). Given that equalitarianism relies on societal cooperation, it is imperative for all members of society to embrace alternate assumptions put out by female authors. This is precisely why the indoctrination of notions regarding the female identity is emphasised in almost all feminist utopian literature. Feminist utopian literature employs a range of approaches to effectively stimulate the process of awakening in individuals. According to Pfaelzer (1990), a considerable number of female authors disaggregate their texts through the use of several protagonists, various narrators, interpolated timelines, and frequent transitions among past, present, and future, as well as shifts between aspirations, awakenings, and anaesthetised consciousness. Embedded discourses, frequently derived from practices of verisimilitude—such as recipes, maps, cartoons, personal narratives, histories, slogans, and graphics—enhance a dislocated experience of reading and compel readers to navigate between the text and external references. Thus, it compels the audience to examine the interplay between imagination and empirical reasoning, as well as between utopia and history (p. 194). Through the utilisation of these many strategies, the reader becomes involuntarily alienated from their own experience. By being detached from their true nature, readers are immersed in a multitude of questions, ultimately challenging traditional gender stereotypes such as vulnerability versus resilience, sentimentality vs rationalism, domestication vs potency, and others that are commonly used to make generalisations. These stereotypes not only disempower women but also men. Thus, feminist eutopian works serve as a reminder to women of their equal capabilities to men. Simply stated, as Delany (1980, as cited in Pfaelzer, 1990) suggests, there is a mutual interaction between the text and the reader: The readers engage in a more agile and speculative form of exploration. For each sentence, we must enquire what aspects of the

narrative's world must be distinct from our own for such an expression to be articulated; consequently, as the sentence develops, we construct a world that engages specifically with our current understanding of reality (p. 198). By engaging in this process, the reader is prompted to challenge and transform their own perception of reality, ultimately creating an alternative universe, albeit one that exists only in fiction for the present moment. Therefore, feminist utopian fiction aims to question and rectify misconceptions regarding inherent female 'nature'. Novels challenge preconceptions by highlighting the strength, courage, and intelligence of women (Pearson, 1981, p. 64). Accordingly, by "speaking to each other through history, forming a specific literary tradition, seen in continuities and intertextual references that spur new utopian visions" (Wångren, 2024, p. 327), feminist utopian works serve as a reminder to women of their equal capabilities to men.

Ultimately, it is feasible to provide specific definitions for a feminist utopian novel. Gearhart (1984) provides a concise definition of the genre:

A feminist utopian novel is one a. contrasts the present with an envisioned idealized society (separated from the present by time or space), b. offers a comprehensive critique of present values/conditions, c. sees men or male institutions as a major cause of present social ills, and d. presents women not only as at least the equals of men but also as the sole arbiters of their reproductive forces. (p. 296)

While Gearhart suggests that this definition is a functional representation of the genre, it remains insufficient to fully encompass all aspects of the feminist utopian novel. As Sargisson (2003) argues, "the first [a] concerns utopian content and is fairly straightforward" (p. 40). In other words, the definition does not imply that terms like feminist dystopia, feminist utopian satire, or feminist critical utopia are also considered as distinct forms of feminist utopian literature. Gearhart's definition solely focuses on eutopia, indicating that it only allows for the existence of an idealised society. "Moreover, there is no room in this definition for the open-ended utopia. In this reading, Gearhart's understanding of utopia is over-restrictive" (Sargisson, 2003, p. 40). A feminist utopian novel, to Gearhart, is deemed successful when it effectively constructs an ideal society that aligns exclusively with a limited group of feminist individuals. All other works that fail to achieve this idealised femininity fall outside the scope of the feminist utopian novel which is not literally accurate. Moreover, her definition also impedes readers from engaging in discussions about future projections. Due to the lack of a future-oriented vision in the definition, readers can only conceive an unattainable image from the outset. Gearhart's limitation fails to adequately acknowledge the significant elements of feminist utopias, such as the envisioning of a future society that is improved from a feminist perspective, depicting its evolution, and examining methods for achieving social transformation (Teslenko, 2005, p. 82). Therefore, it is highly unlikely to witness readers engaging with the future. Establishing connections between the present and future is impossible because the presented image is resistant to criticism. Furthermore, Gearhart's definition includes a significantly risky domain as she utilises biological entities instead of relying on cultural designations such as masculine and masculinity. In other words, the area becomes highly perilous due to the direct targeting of individuals who identify as men or possess male biological characteristics through the use of biological tags. In contrast, the concepts of masculine and masculinity are inclusive of all individuals regardless of their biological sex. In Gearhart's perspective, gender and sex

are inherently intertwined within a single physical body. Nevertheless, it is feasible for an individual to identify as male while exhibiting feminine traits, or for a woman to display masculine characteristics while simultaneously conforming to patriarchal norms. Sargisson (2003) also discusses this particular issue and asserts that point (c) is unduly exclusive, as it depends on a universal interpretation of the narrative aspects of utopias. Gearhart's comprehension of feminism is evidently devoid of the nuances present in French analyses (p. 31). Thus, it is evident that Gearhart's definition of a feminist utopian novel is both devoid of gender bias and implies a division based on biological characteristics. While it is undeniable that patriarchy is the root cause of societal inequality, it is evident that targeting one gender leads to widespread animosity. Lastly, Gearhart's definition is particularly perilous as it disregards feminist utopian novels that do not focus on women's authority over their reproductive capabilities. As an alternative definition based on content, it specifically excludes not only the function of utopian literature, but also the various additional feminist utopian sub-genres stated earlier. Therefore, Gearhart is once again centred on feminist eutopia. Sargisson (2003) provides an explanation of the consequences that arise from accepting Gearhart's definition as accurate: First, a novel cannot be classified as feminist unless it portrays women as not less than equal to men and possessing autonomy over their reproduction; subsequently, a feminist narrative, as defined, cannot be regarded as utopian unless it features an idealised society where such a scenario is acknowledged (p. 31). It is extremely concerning that Gearhart uses sexual reproduction in an absurd manner, as it is one of several normative referents that should be questioned since it represents another imposition of societal norms. Furthermore, the feminist tradition regards criticism as a highly important instrument in the battle against patriarchy. However, Gearhart's definition does not challenge societal norms; instead, it reinforces patriarchy by reducing women's activities to their reproductive function and giving this function a primary defining status (Teslenko, 2005, p. 82).

As indicated, relying solely on a content-based approach to define the feminist utopian literary tradition is insufficient. Hence, the inevitable issue at hand is to determine the optimal method, if one exists, for defining a feminist utopian novel. As previously suggested, one of the most appropriate approaches is to utilise an eclectic method that encompasses form, content, and function concurrently. There is no doubt that the use of form, content, and function is helpful in distinguishing utopian novels from other genres, as they also define the boundaries of each work. However, if one utilises merely one or two of the above approaches, literary works will likely be highly exclusive, ignoring other works from the utopian tradition. Yet, when analysed through an eclectic approach, these works should be classified within the same category. However, it is also indisputable that implementing such an approach may not always be feasible, as the purpose of a work constitutes one of the most important factors in determining its identification. Therefore, the paradox complicates the task of defining a feminist utopian novel. It is crucial to focus on the primary goal of the feminist ideology, which is to completely dismantle patriarchy in order to achieve equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of their sex or gender, in all aspects of life. Feminist utopianism considers utopianism to be the primary means of combating patriarchy in order to accomplish its goal. To Moylan (2014), utopian literature, in its various forms, is intricate and paradoxical. It fundamentally stems from the



unmet needs and desires of particular classes, communities, and people within their distinct historical contexts. Utopia, conceived through the imaginative faculties, stands in opposition to the prevailing culture upheld by hegemonic ideology. Utopia resolves conflicts within the structure of society by creating visions of what has yet to be actualised in either theory or practice. By producing such symbols of hope, utopia fosters an environment conducive to dissent (p. 1). Evidently, Moylan regards challenging conventional perspectives, opinions, political governance, and social regulations as the primary means of breaking down boundaries, which ultimately serves as the central purpose of utopianism. Feminist utopian novels directly challenge the established patriarchal utopian tradition and the dominant discourses surrounding gender issues. Simply stated, the feminist utopian novel can be defined more conveniently by examining Moylan's concept of utopian function. This meta-genre aims to critique the dominant masculine perspective in society and challenge it in order to bring about the essential social transformation needed to create the desired and yet unrealized needs. Sargisson (2003) also examines the fundamental characteristics of feminist utopianism albeit minor alterations: From socialist and feminist perspectives, he has derived a conception of utopianism as possessing contradictory and transformative dynamic capacities. He has contested the uncomplicated dualistic notion of opposition and has theoretically substituted it with a multi-sourced and multifaceted framework. This establishes novel perspectives. Utopianism serves a hypothetical purpose, partly through its practices of criticism, estrangement, and speculative writing; thus, utopias are frequently interpreted as metaphors rather than as blueprints (p. 59). According to Sargisson's perspective, it is possible to argue that a feminist utopian novel does not aim to depict a future society. Conversely, it forges a link between the audience and the written work, thereby introducing various inquiries, reactions, perspectives, and insights through the modification of consciousness. In other words, the feminist utopian tradition does not propose a singular future outcome since "in the absence of blueprints the future is open-ended" (Sargisson, 2003, p. 59). Hence, speculative thinking backlash, and metamorphosis are important elements of the genre. Moreover, it is worth contemplating Sargisson's assertion that the feminist utopian tradition can be viewed as metaphors. She argues that by engaging in a metaphorical interpretation of a utopian novel, one can challenge the prevailing discourse, foster a shift in consciousness, and facilitate social transformation. This approach allows for multiple interpretations, leading readers to a range of findings and alternatives. Sargisson (2003) clarifies that the metaphor can articulate the substance of etc. Similar to etc., the metaphor suggests an additional element: a surplus. We must acknowledge a 'truth' in the metaphor so that it can be effective. Feminist utopian thought and fiction propose alternative facts, realities, and norms through metaphor and myth, thereby challenging and creating by provoking enquiries and potentially discord in the audience's mind. In this manner, remetaphorization operates akin to a fragmented narrative approach, disrupting and interrupting the conventional sequence of associative reasoning. Tradition is denaturalised, the symbolic order is disrupted, and new avenues for exploration are created (p. 219). Yet again, the feminist utopian tradition aims to subvert hegemonic ideologies. To achieve the required societal transformation, it is necessary to reform formerly set standards, references, and notions through the use of alternative views. Simultaneously, "[t]he necessary utopian moment in feminism lies

precisely in our opening the possible through metaphoric transformation” (Cornell, 1999, p. 169). Similarly, the metaphorical change will be moulded and modified in line with the passage of time and its inherent consequences as it advances. Referencing Burke’s understanding of metaphors, Teslenko (2005) proposes that metaphors associate the moral with the aesthetic, serving as tools to create a ‘corrective literature’ that inspires the readers to adopt a different social perspective (p. 81). Undoubtedly, achieving this purpose is challenging due to people’s ingrained tendency to adhere to their established thought patterns, which heavily influence their daily routines. Hence, it is crucial to sever connections with the current lifestyle. Once individuals begin examining and envisioning multiple possible futures through questioning, change becomes unavoidable, for utopian thought necessitates the ongoing investigation and re-evaluation of both the feasible and the ineffable (Cornell, 1999, p. 169). Cornell’s explanation mostly centres around utopian thinking, but it is also applicable to feminist utopian thought. This is because feminist ideology fundamentally aims to dismantle existing constructs. Thus, the central focus of the feminist utopian tradition is an ongoing quest for new conceptualizations since “[w]ithout utopian thinking, [...] feminism is inevitably ensnared in the system of gender identity that devalues the feminine” (Cornell, 1999, p. 169). In other words, “if utopian thought can change the shape and scope of our consciousness, then the unthinkable can be thought and desired” (Sargisson, 2003, p. 59). As an unbreakable cycle, it is inevitable to return to the point where these discussions originated - altering perspectives and consciousness by means of imaginations.

### **3. Conclusion**

In summary, utopian literature has served as a crucial instrument for both male and female authors who promote gender equality in society. Utopian works explore different perspectives on gender roles, with the intention of persuading both men and women to consider other worldviews. However, historically, men have predominantly shaped utopian landscapes, while women have played a minimal role in their development. Feminist writers have regarded utopianism as the most suitable approach to make a distinct future understandable to a wide audience. Furthermore, utopian writing relies on the act of dreaming as the essential element for envisioning and constructing the future, thereby increasing awareness and participating in a cognitive process called defamiliarization. Although several utopian works were produced with the aim of enhancing society, they failed to bring about a significant change for women. This may be attributed to the fact that the majority of these works were authored by men who lacked the ability to completely understand and embrace the idea of equality in all parts of society. Nevertheless, the inclusion of women’s alternative perspectives has had a significant impact, as changing the overall understanding is a crucial requirement for cultural transformation. In addition, feminist utopias empower people to exercise autonomy over their life in all situations, freeing themselves from both psychological and physical violation.

Feminist utopian literature also utilises diverse techniques to provoke enlightenment, including the fragmentation of texts through the use of different protagonists, narrators, time frames, and transitions between past, present, and future. Discourses that are integrated within other forms, such as recipes, maps, cartoons, autobiographies, histories, slogans, and visuals,

compel readers to directly consider the connection between imagination and observation, between an ideal world and actual events in the past. Feminist utopian literature also functions as a means of reminding women about their equal capacities to males, by questioning conventional gender norms and emphasising the power, bravery, and intellect of women. Through active participation in this process, readers are encouraged to question and reshape their own understanding of reality, ultimately constructing an alternate realm. A feminist utopian fiction is characterised by its juxtaposition of the current society with an idealised one, its critical examination of prevailing norms, its attribution of social problems to men, and its portrayal of women as equal to men and influential in reproduction. The feminist utopian literary tradition seeks to deconstruct the social system of patriarchy and establish equal chances for individuals, irrespective of their biological sex or gender identity. In order to establish the parameters of a feminist utopian book, it is advisable to employ an inclusive approach that considers the novel's structure, subject matter, and purpose. Utopianism originates from the unmet desires and requirements of particular social classes, groups, and individuals within their own historical circumstances. It stands in opposition to the prevailing culture upheld by the dominant ideology. They directly confront the established patriarchal utopian tradition and dominating discourses around gender issues. They also critique the prevailing masculine worldview in society and challenge it to bring about significant social change. Furthermore, feminist utopian novels have the objective of establishing a connection between the readers and the written piece, rather than simply portraying a future society. They achieve this by providing a range of questions, reactions, viewpoints, and insights through the alteration of consciousness. Essentially, the feminist utopian tradition is around the continuous pursuit of new ideas and concepts. Without utopian thought, feminism becomes trapped in a system that diminishes the worth of femininity. By manipulating perceptions and transforming consciousness through the power of imagination, it becomes possible to conceive and want for what was previously unimaginable.

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### EXPANDED SUMMARY

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Utopian literature has traditionally functioned as a vital medium for examining and contesting social structures, especially concerning gender roles. Although both male and female authors have participated in utopian literature to advocate for social reform, conventional utopian narratives have predominantly been influenced by male viewpoints, frequently sidelining women's voices. Feminist utopian literature arises as a reaction to this disparity, presenting alternative visions that critique patriarchal systems and envision societies founded on gender equality. This article rigorously analyses the essential traits of feminist utopian novels, assesses current definitions in the discipline, and suggests a more inclusive framework for classifying feminist utopian literature.

The analysis initiates by examining Sally Miller Gearhart's characterisation of the feminist utopian novel. Gearhart (1984) delineates four fundamental criteria: (a) the juxtaposition of the current state with a conceptualised ideal society, (b) a critique of existing societal values and conditions, (c) the attribution of social issues primarily to men or male institutions, and (d) the depiction of women as equals to men and as the exclusive determinants of reproductive agency. Although Gearhart's definition offers a functional framework, it faces criticism for its excessively restrictive scope. Sargisson (2003) contends that Gearhart's conceptualisation omits various feminist utopian subgenres, including feminist dystopias, feminist utopian satires, and feminist critical utopias. By exclusively concentrating on eutopia—a society regarded as perfect—Gearhart's framework constrains the possibilities for expansive feminist utopian discourse, which is typically more adaptable and resistant to strict categorisation.

A primary critique of Gearhart's definition is its dependence on biological essentialism, as it associates men and male institutions with the fundamental origins of societal problems. This approach may reinforce gender binaries and marginalise individuals who do not adhere to

conventional biological classifications. Moreover, by prioritising women's reproductive autonomy as a fundamental aspect of feminist utopias, Gearhart's framework unintentionally establishes an additional normative limitation, diminishing feminist agency to mere reproductive functions. This limited interpretation omits feminist utopian literature that contests patriarchal systems through means not associated with reproductive regulation. Furthermore, Gearhart's definition does not promote a dynamic interplay between current realities and future possibilities. By resisting critique and future-oriented discourse, it constrains readers' capacity for speculative thinking, a fundamental aspect of utopian literature.

Unlike Gearhart's restrictive framework, the article promotes an eclectic approach that integrates form, content, and function as essential criteria for defining feminist utopian novels. This broader perspective facilitates a more comprehensive categorisation of works within the feminist utopian literary tradition. Moylan (2014) contends that utopian literature is intrinsically paradoxical, arising from the unfulfilled aspirations of particular social groups and serving as a counterbalance to dominant ideologies. Feminist utopian novels contest prevailing patriarchal narratives and offer alternative models of social organisation. Instead of simply illustrating idealised societies, these narratives function as tools for critique, alienation, and transformation, promoting speculative thought and providing novel perspectives on gender relations.

Sargisson (2003) further elucidates this viewpoint by highlighting the significance of metaphor in feminist utopian literature. Feminist utopias serve as metaphors that disrupt traditional narratives, challenge prevailing discourses, and stimulate innovative thought, rather than offering specific blueprints for an ideal future. Through the use of metaphorical and fragmented narrative techniques, feminist utopian novels establish a dynamic interaction between imagination and reality, encouraging readers to interrogate entrenched societal norms. This corresponds with Cornell's (1999) assertion that utopian thought is vital to feminism as it broadens the scope of what is imaginable, thus challenging the constraints established by current gender frameworks.

The article concludes by emphasising the significance of feminist utopian literature in contesting patriarchal ideologies and promoting social change. In contrast to conventional utopian narratives that typically depict static idealised societies, feminist utopias promote ongoing inquiry, critique, and transformation. They serve as instruments for defamiliarization, urging readers to reevaluate their beliefs regarding gender roles and social frameworks. Feminist utopian literature expands the realm of speculative fiction by employing various narrative techniques, including fragmented storytelling, diverse perspectives, and intertextual elements, thereby underscoring the importance of alternative viewpoints in imagining a more just society.

The article contends that a stringent content-based framework, exemplified by Gearhart's definition, fails to encompass the complete intricacy of feminist utopian literature. A more adaptable, multifaceted framework—considering the interaction between form, content, and function—facilitates a more thorough comprehension of feminist utopian narratives. From this perspective, feminist utopian literature serves not only as a depiction of idealised gender relations but also as a continuous endeavour to interrogate, reimagine, and oppose prevailing

ideological frameworks. In the absence of utopian thought, feminism may become restricted by the gender paradigms it aims to deconstruct. The feminist utopian tradition serves as a vital arena for ideological conflict and transformative possibilities, persistently expanding the limits of what can be envisioned in the quest for gender equality.