

The Utopian Promise and the Dystopian Premise: Body Transgressions in *Gather the Daughters* by Jennie Melamed

الوعد الطوباوي والمقدمة البائسة: تجاوزات جسدية في جمع البنات بقلم جيني ميلاميد

La promesse utopique et la prémisse dystopique : les transgressions corporelles dans *Gather the Daughters* par Jennie Melamed

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Introduction

Our age is characterized by rapid scientific advancements, innovative technologies and unsettling socio-political trends that are the direct outcome of this progress. Authors of dystopian fiction were concerned with depicting the unfavourable effects of scientific progress on modern day society. Unsurprisingly, dystopian fiction with its themes presents the readers with “a picture of fear, a picture of a society which we would prefer to avoid, a warning” (Nikolajeva 2009:74). Feminist authors resorted to dystopian setting and features to accentuate the effects of patriarchy on women and to expose the underlying socio-political mechanisms that oppress the “other” sex. *Gather the Daughters* (2017) is a dystopian narrative that engages with feminist criticism to portray worlds in which women “lose all civil rights” (Mohr 2005:37). Hence, feminist writers borrow the dystopian themes of “slavery, exploitation, extreme collectivism, and oppressed individualism and present them from a feminist angle” (36) to condemn women’s oppression. Writers of this genre are “fueled by, namely the dissatisfaction with the sociopolitical status quo and the desire for a change” (8). They urge for a revision of the present and warn against “what the flaws of our own society may lead to for the next generations unless we try to eradicate these flaws today”. (Gottlieb 2001:4)

According to the German scholar Wolfgang Kayser, fictional works rely on three focal elements: “protagonists, action and the space(s) the plot unfolds in” (qtd. in Reuschel & Hurni: 293). Therefore, the present work focuses on providing a rigorous examination of the setting, and the protagonists and how

the actions evolve to create a world in which women are subdued and objectified. The present paper engages in three endeavors to locate, expose and criticize transgressions on women's bodies and freedom to bend them under the laws of patriarchy. First, the utopian dream or impulse that underlies every dystopian nightmare is identified to help understand the drift from the paradise towards the nightmare. Second, the characteristics and features of the dystopian world are highlighted to help recognize the implications and the impact of the genre on the feminist tradition. Third, the exposure of the sexual abuse is paramount to address the feminist's preoccupations regarding women's bodies and their appropriation as depicted in the novel in question; therefore, the present paper tackles the incest taboo and examines the impact of this pejorative act on prepubescent girls in the novel. The work hypothesizes that contemporary female writers take the issue of female oppression to further lengths by fusing themes of sexual exploitation, suppression of free will, and rape with dystopian themes of dictatorship, isolation, and environmental destruction. The alliance between feminism and dystopia creates a fictive space that could influence facts in society. Narratives belonging to this trend "may induce transformational paradigm shifts in the present or a momentarily altered perception of our present reality" (Mohr 2005:8). To the present day there exist no critical works on *Gather the Daughters*, hence, this work will contribute to the growing debate on feminist themes present in speculative fiction; mainly in dystopia.

1. Utopia: The Perfect Illusion

Utopia, as a term, was coined by Thomas More as a title of his book published in 1516. The word utopia descended from two Greek words *ou-topos* meaning no place and *eu-topos* meaning a good place. Therefore, utopia could be understood as an ideal place existing nowhere. In his *Utopia*, More depicts the ideal society and asserts:

Not only the best country in the world, but the only one that has any right to call itself a republic... The Utopian way of life provides ... the happiest basis for a civilized community... They've eliminated the root-causes of ambition, political conflict and everything like that. (1965: 128-31)

More provides a view about what constitutes a perfect life. The latter refers to the ideal community regulated and designed to abolish all forms of evil. It is a society that favours communal life and shuns individuality for the sake of the group. In "Three faces of Utopianism Revisited," Lyman Tower Sargent provides a comprehensive definition of utopia which he considers as an

imaginary society “described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space” (1994: 9) in other words utopia refers to a fictional society that exists within a spatial and temporal framework. The definition seems to focus on the aspects of ‘detail, time, and space. Therefore, for a work to be considered as utopia, it needs to engulf a detailed description of the setting, and to provide a time frame. Sargent further considers another term which is eutopia or positive utopia to denote “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived” (9). To avoid confusion, many critics still refer to eutopia as utopia. For instance, Sargent in his article “Utopia—the Problem of Definition,” considers utopia and eutopia as synonymous: “Topia comes from the word topos or place. “U” is the equivalent of ‘ou’ meaning no or not; or we can follow Mumford and say that ‘u’ is to include both ‘ou’ and ‘eu’ (1975: 137-8). Sargent claims that despite the variations found at the level of the prefix (u, eu, and dys) that are inflicted to the word topos, the latter is of a great importance. Hence, “Topos implies that the Utopia must be located spatially and temporally; even though nowhere, it must have some place” (138). The topos serves as a device that convinces the readers about the possibility of the proposed reality. In view of that, it is paramount to locate the setting of *Gather the Daughters* which will illuminate various motivations behind the search for a utopia and the tragic metamorphosis into a dystopia. The novel is set in an isolated island separated from the mainland which is, allegedly, destroyed and inhabitable. A group of people escaped the mainland and found shelter in an island. It is worth noting that many critics and authors consider islands as places of refuge “where survivors withdraw to re-establish their way of life” (Westfahl 2005:473). Accordingly, *Gather the Daughters* depicts a voyage through the sea in which the ‘founding fathers’ of this ‘utopia’ sailed away from the destructions in the mainland and founded a sanctuary in the shores of the island. The outside world is described as apocalyptic ; it is a barren land infested by “a disease that rotted the flesh and killed people where they stood” (Melamed 2017:25), or probably, it is a land where dead people roamed “and shambled around, setting things on fire with their eyes until their corpses rotted” (25). Also, Amanda, one of the main protagonists in the story, tells how she “heard there are defectives and freaks that walk the wastelands” (89). Hence, the need to escape the hell and seek a haven is born. The Pastor Saul, the leader of the church in the island, describes the ordeals that led the ancestors to depart the wastelands and embark in their journey to establish a better world in the island. He shouts:

“They [the ancestors] came from a land where the family had been divided, where father and daughter were set asunder, where sons abandoned their mothers to die alone. Our forefathers had a vision, a vision that could not be satisfied in a world of flame, war, and ignorance. The fire and pestilence that spread across the land were second only to the fire and pestilence of thought and deed hovering like a black smoke’ (24).

It is thus possible to locate the utopian dream within the story which was sparked by the need to escape and be reborn within the realm of a new and safe land. The unsettling atmosphere in the wastelands had led the ancestors, who “came with ten families,” (264) to venture into the sea and create what they perceived as the perfect society. Philip Adam, one of the first ancestor’s, had a vision in his mind which would grant the community’s survival. His descendent Vanessa Adams narrates how: “He gathered the other ancestors and urged them to the island before the apocalypse he foretold. He was the first pastor too and planned the first church” (29). Melamed skillfully draws a dying world and pushes her characters to seek escape and salvation from the nightmare in a faraway island. Since islands, as claimed by Westfahl, are “places of desire; it is no coincidence that the first utopia was set upon a man-made island” (2005 :436). According to this statement, islands constitute the perfect premise to establish, and to some extent, recreate a similar version of the original *Utopia* written by More.

In an attempt to mimic the original utopia, domestic, social and economic life in the island is organized, determined and regulated by the wanderers who assign individuals particular duties to perform. Each family occupies a specific profession which will be inherited in the family as a tradition. Each house in the island venerates the original founder to whom they pray (normally they bear the same name of the ancestor). *Gather the Daughters* portrays a medieval-like mode of life with professions like farming, sewing, carving, and blacksmithing. The small community relies on the wanderer’s regular trips to the wastelands for essential supplies. The planned life in the island takes many forms; names in the island are attributed by the wanderers, Vanessa thinks: “On the island, everyone bears the family name of an ancestor. First names are approved by the wanderers, the names of someone on the island who is already dead” (Melamed 2017: 20). Moreover, marriages are decided by the wanderers who follow ardently the teachings of the ancestors. Summer of fruition is a ceremony held before marriage wherein pubescent girls are matched with husbands. After this matching process ends, they become wives and mothers. Melamed details how the summer of fruition affects girls who are often forced

to undergo this tradition. For instance, Mrs. Solomon, the responsible for the summer of fruition, tries to appease Janice who seems distressed by the process and explains: “You’re a woman now. This is what women do. This is how you get married, and have babies” (67). In addition to social and conjugal structures, the wanderers dictate the conditions of death for inhabitants of the island. After accomplishing their duties, residents are urged to end their lives, thus allowing their descendants to occupy their place. Vanessa explains: “Grady and Karen Gideon took their final draft, as Grady couldn’t walk well since the accident. Their son Byron took over the house with his wife and child” (119). This mode of planned, wherein collectivism and communal life thrive, is what George Kateb in his book *Utopia and Its Enemies* describes as a utopian society and a peaceful community, where human beings indulge in richness and bounty. He refers to More’s description of the perfect state that he pictures as a kingdom: “in which all conflicts of conscience and conflicts of interest are abolished ... all the obstacles to a decent life for all men had been removed, all hindrances hindered”. (1975:17) Hence, Melamed, through the institution of a highly regimented socio-political order governed by the ancestors, follows More’s lead and attempts to establish the ideal society on the island that relies on communality and organized labour. However, the author addresses the double edged nature of these hierarchical systems that control human activity and negates the existence of a utopia mode of life. Since, the dream of a perfect life engulfs an excessive desire to control and govern which leads to the birth of authoritarian ideologies or in the light of this work, the tragic transformation of utopia to dystopia.

On this topic, Erika Gottlieb in her book *Dystopian Fiction East and West: Universe of Terror and Trial* delineates the contours of dystopian fiction and believes that within each dystopian community there exists a “seed of a utopian dream.” (2001:8) In *Gather the Daughters* this seed or vision of a better world is embodied in the ancestor’s ‘original promise when its new system was implemented, a promise that then miscarried ... was betrayed ... or was fulfilled in ways that show up the unexpected shortcomings of the dream (8). Interestingly, Melamed’s vision aligns with that of Gottlieb’s. Through Pastor Saul, she details the forefather’s journey and mission. He recites: “From the wastelands of want came the hardworking men of industry and promise. From the war-stricken terror came our forefathers to keep us safe from harm... With the ancestors to guide us, we will grow and prosper on a straight and narrow path” (2017: 17). Following this statement, the reader is able to spot the utopian promise that will be later betrayed by the ruling elite.

Gather the Daughters aligns with Gottlieb's view and represents the ancestor's longing for a utopia in which life is regimented, regulated and dreams are fulfilled. Gary Westfahl notices that despite the fact that islands are "places of desire ... within such conceivable bounds, the ideal is achievable" (2005: 436). Islands could also be places where freedom is limited; like "prisons, or fortresses surrounded by water, so precious ways of life can be protected or, as in *petri dish* experiments safely carried out (436). It is worth noting that the ancestor's longing for a perfectly ordered and controlled society; in short a utopia, is in fact akin to the dystopian feature of the authoritarian state which was sometimes stimulated by the claim of a better future. Ruth Levitas in the *Concept Utopia* sees that utopias are perceived as totalitarian "because they visibly shape needs and match them with available satisfaction, thus moulding the individual to the system" (2010:213). Virginia Richter comments that the majority of classical utopian and dystopian texts are located in distant or sealed off "societies through, be it topographically, by their setting in the future ..., or by a system of rigid surveillance and mind-control" (2015:269) which contribute to the alienation of the individual. It paramount to consider that *Gather the Daughters* uses the concept of utopia to shun the idea of the existence of perfectly "regimented and hierarchical" (Ferns 1999:112) communities, thus, proving what Cavalcanti in *Dark Horizons* believes to be the paradox of the "'good place/no place'" embedded in the term utopia (2003:50). Jennie Melamed, in her novel, proves that the perfect and the ideal are unattainable. By the death of the utopian dream and the rise of the dystopian nightmare, Melamed stresses the fact that "Utopia's noble dream of creating a better world is seen as arrogant and presumptuous" (Ferns 1999:109). For, according to Sargent, utopia is unrealizable and "people do not 'live happily ever after' even in More's *Utopia*. Perfection is not a characteristic of Utopias, and it is doubtful if it ever has been". (1975:140)

2. The Drift Towards Hell

Gottlieb notes that "fear of the emergence of a totalitarian regime is the major component of the dystopian impulse" (2001:8), unsurprisingly, *Gather the Daughters* captures the shift of vision (especially after Second World War) and the predominant anxieties regarding the abuse of the utopian project which may result in the erection of an authoritarian state that relies on religion to enforce and validate its power thus producing disciplined individuals. While utopia denotes a "good place," dystopia "refers to presentation of bad places" (Sargent 1975:138). Dystopian narratives portray images of nightmares that

could transform into reality. For Keith Booker, the “dystopian warnings of impending nightmares are ultimately necessary to preserve any possible dream of a better future” (1994:177). Dystopia as a distinct literary genre appeared in the turn of the twentieth century. It acquired a feminist twist and witnessed a great development in the late 1960 (Cavalcanti 2003:49). In *Gather the Daughters* the transaction from utopia to dystopia is achieved through the authoritarian state’s enforcement of rules that were aimed to better the lives of citizens on the island. Gottlieb notices that the “dystopian novel itself demonstrates the push and pull between utopian and dystopian perspectives” (2001:8) she adds that these novels often depict how the noble dream of a utopian life was betrayed which would bring about calamities for humanity. Henceforth, the mechanisms of oppression that herald dystopia in the narrative will be illustrated. First, through the manipulation of history and the present, the wanderers engage in creating a nightmarish version of the real world thus convincing the citizens about the futility of considering a better version of the existent world which leads them to embrace their utopian life willingly. Second, the establishment of false religious beliefs that promise salvation becomes a means of control in the island. Gottlieb contends that the solution, which enables the citizens to escape their hell to attain the perfect life ‘becomes a modified system of a quasi-utopian ideology expressed through a limited number of slogans of the state religion’ (9). Pastor Saul reminds the community of the ancestor’s teachings. He says:

“Men, we are not without task in this,” warns the pastor. “We must treat our daughters with kindness and sensitivity. We must not hurt them at a whim, or damage them, but engage with them as the ancestors contracted when they left a forbidding land. We must deliver them safe, wise, and loved to their husbands. We must allow our wives to feel cared for, as cared for as they felt in the arms of their fathers as young children”. (Melamed 2017 :26)

The Pastor stresses the importance of adhering to the ancestor’s teachings since their sole motivation is to deliver the community to safety. Gottlieb presents several characteristics that could help locate the dystopian impulse within the narrative. She first recognizes dystopia as a representation of an “unjust society, a degraded mob ruled by a power-crazed elite ... the worst of all possible worlds” (2001:3). The definition of Gottlieb, although not capturing the entirety of the genre’s essence, is probably the most straightforward. Third, the community of *Gather the Daughters* is kept under control and manipulated through constant surveillance, and a designed distortion of knowledge which leads to isolation and the inability to discern the reality of the community.

Perhaps one of the most discussed dystopian treat is the monitoring of citizens. In church Vanessa contemplates upon the work of the ancestors and recalls:

It is the ancestors, those godly men of yore, who watch over the mortals on the island. It is their strong, capable arms that greet the dead into heaven or strike them into the darkness below. Any prayer is passed from their lips to God's ear, as well as any lapse or blasphemy. "The ancestors see everything, everywhere on the island," says Our Book. (Melamed 2017 :29)

French philosopher Michel Foucault addresses the notion of disciplinary methods in his seminal work *Discipline and Punish*. He states that an obedient, or a docile body is one which may be produced; it "may be subjected, used, transformed and improved. The celebrated automata, on the other hand, were not only a way of illustrating an organism, they were also political puppets, small-scale models of power" (1979 :136). Hence regulations imposed upon the body and its subjection to monitoring render it body obedient. It also serves the purpose of demonstrating the power of the wanderers. In their course of life, women meet in little get-togethers, however never exceeding the number of three women in one room without the presence of a male: "Come to Mrs. Betty Balthazar's. Chaperoned by Mr. Balthazar," (Melamed 2017 :99) an invitation says. Surveillance and monitoring exist as a disciplinary method and constitute "formulas of domination" (Foucault 1979 :137). For Foucault, to achieve total obedience, there must be an art of distribution of individuals that functions in enclosed space. This designed confinement is aimed at increasing advantages for the powerful and disallowing any kind of interruptions. Amanda explains the duty of a chaperon and says:

Chaperones usually act in one of two ways. The first kind circles like a gull, immediately sliding over to bursts of laughter or enthusiasm in the hopes of catching something improper or blasphemous. The other kind can't stand being surrounded by a flock of women and often dozes off in self-defense. Mr. Balthazar is already blinking heavily. (Melamed 2017 :101)

Being visible and distributed in regulated spaces, women are confined and their movements are being watched by the alert gaze that catches every move. Hence, the partitioning of individuals and spaces wherein "each individual has his own place; and each place its individual" (Foucault 1979:143) will forbid any unnecessary communication and will enable the monitoring and supervision of each individual. Vikki Bell in her book *Interrogating Incest: Feminism, Foucault and the Law* explains that "The power of the disciplinary technique of surveillance requires that the individual be aware that s/he is being watched, ensured in the

Panopticon by the observation tower constantly before the inmate's eyes. This visibility of power should not be forgotten in emphasising the visibility of the observed" (1993:64). The constant supervision of individuals (mainly women) ensures the control over the thoughts and actions of the subject, Foucault argues that "the prisoner should be constantly observed by an inspector: too little, for what matters is that he knows himself to be observed". (1979:201)

In addition to the aforementioned, the populace in the island lives in a total "ignorance about the ways and habits outside their own community" (Nikolajeva 2009:75). Information is censored, reality and truth about the wastelands is distorted to discourage any attempt to flee the island. The existence of history and the past demonstrates that "things were once different", consequently "change is at least *possible*" (Ferns 1999:119). Therefore, wanderer Adam scratches the dates in the books of his library because "wasteland years are meaningless" (Melamed 2017:20). Erika Gottlieb in analyzing the characteristics of the dystopian state recognizes the vitality of history and historical records to the mental health of any society:

Living in a nightmare world of mythical thought approaching the logic of a mental disorder that no longer differentiates between present and past, cause and effect, or lies and truth, each protagonist is eager to obtain and hold on to a genuine record of the past, a past the totalitarian regime would like to distort or deny completely. (2001 :12)

Therefore, books as a record of the past could help break in breaking the isolation imposed by the dictatorship. Hence, these books with the past they hold need to be regulated so that they do not convey any temporal or spatial significance. Vanessa explains that : "they have books at school, huge ones that students share during class time. At school they don't scratch out the dates, but that doesn't mean much because nobody knows what year it was when the ancestors touched shore" (Melamed 2017 :20). On this note, the dystopian state strives to maintain the order achieved, and through suppression of the past, these societies "uniformly go out of their way to obliterate its memory". (Ferns 1999 :119)

Closely related to limitation of knowledge, *Gather the Daughters* depicts a primitive society or what Mohr recognizes as "a retrogressive dystopia" (2005:37) designed to mimic "prehistoric barbaric times" (37). Actually, the novel is not the first of this kind to portray a technology-free society, Ayn Rand's *Anthem* written in 1938 features "a primitive future society of literally self-less humans where the very concept of identity and any sense of an ego has

been erased” (34). In fact, Gorman Beauchamp in his article “Technology in the Dystopian Novel” claims that by denying access to technology in societies wherein the inhabitants experience “the chronic shortages, the dilapidated housing, the pervasive atmosphere of grimness and grime” (1986:55) the state keeps the citizens obedient. He explains that this tendency is driven by “sheer sadism, the desire to make others suffer” (56).

As in the case of information, freedom of expression is stifled in the island. Ildney Cavalcanti in her article “Utopias of/f Language in Contemporary Feminist Literary Dystopias” claims that contemporary feminist dystopias concretize the effects and the mechanisms of gender domination by providing stories in which language is used as a means of domination (if used by men) and a medium of liberation for women. She further stresses the fact that suppressing women’s speech has taken three forms: first, by imposing “strongly regulated forms of address and turn-taking; enforced use of formulaic or contrived speech (sometimes reaching the extreme circumstance in which the female protagonist has to communicate by following a script)” (2000 :152), second by forbidding access to public speech and means of comprehension and expression like reading and writing and last through “denial of representation in political forums; or, more effectively, the cutting out of women’s tongues” (152). All of these elements account for the feminist ideology related to the denunciation of women’s silencing and linguistic manipulation. it is worth noting that, when Amanda finds she is carrying a girl in her womb she curses the ancestors, Mrs. Saul shrugs and says: “May they forgive you ... punctuating each word” (Melamed 2017 :34). Moreover, women who spoke against the state were eliminated. In the story the girls discuss how “Jill Abraham bled out and died, she “wanted the summer of fruition changed. So the men and women were the same age. ... She wanted to wait until the girls were older” (139). Following this statement, the reader is able to perceive the limitations at the level of expression and the violent outcome of opposition.

Chris Ferns in addressing the characteristics of the dystopian society believes that dystopia, like utopia, favours “static stability,” (1999 :119) for this reason, once the ideal is achieved, any attempt to destabilize and alter the status quo is frowned upon. Janey Solomon’s realization of the flaws of her society encouraged her to seek an alternative reality which could be achieved through rebellion. She says: “I want something to change ... and I’m not even sure what could or would change. But I want things to change for us. Maybe a big change, like going to the wastelands. Maybe a small change, like we have a little more freedom, not just in summer” (Melamed 2017 :198). In fact, the wanderers

made sure that the rebellion is extinguished as they revived the community and sworn on imposing stricter rules. One wanderer professes: “We will cleanse ourselves. Our wanderers will show us the way. Discipline will be sharp, harsh, and yet what are we doing but cutting away the mangled, rotting fruit of a harvest and letting the healthy fruit live and flourish? What are we doing but following the will of the ancestors?” (289). Gottlieb discusses the notion of miscarrying justice wherein the utopian promise upheld by the dictator state is betrayed and replaced by injustice. Hence, the protagonist in dystopian fiction faces a trial followed by ‘a harsh punishment ... aimed at the elimination of the individual (2001 :10).

3. Perverse Sexual Relations

Dunja Mohr in *Worlds Apart* claims that feminist dystopias depict women as “conquered sex/species” (2005:36). She recognizes that an “important topic in feminist dystopia is rape, enforced sexual intercourse in marriage, the disrupted relationship between the sexes and misogynist religion” (37). Indeed, *Gather the Daughters* focuses its attention on the small community ruled by the wanderers who stress the vitality of following the teachings of the ancestors. The doctrine that prevails with its principles that govern life, death and marriages on the island favours male supremacy and privileges masculine superiority and female’s subordination. Sexual politics in the small community attributes roles that enforce male dominion over women. It is paramount for the study to indicate that *Gather the Daughters* adheres to the “traditional sexual division of labour,” (Herman & Hirschman 2000:72) in which women are the housewives who carry out their shores obediently, whereas men assume various jobs and remain the sole providers within the household. Vikki Bell recognizes that “Feminist analyses have approached the topic of incest as one of many abuses which can be grouped under the rubric “violence against women”” (1993:58). On the other hand, Herman and Hirschman recognize incest as an act of rape; for them, “it is a rape in the sense that it is a coerced sexual relationship” (2000:27). The narrative presents women from two angles: defeated mothers and conquered little girls. The latter, before they reach puberty, live with their parents until they menstruate. When they reach puberty they are sent to their summer of fruition, which is an initiation camp wherein these little girls are exchanged between men to determine which one will be suitable for marriage. Mrs. Aaron discusses with the girls the inevitability of going through the summer of fruition and the reality that in this endeavor: “Every girl who goes through her summer of fruition finds a husband” (Melamed 2017:64). However, the focal point for this

paper is to address the perverse sexual relationship imposed on prepubescent girls in the narrative and its physical and psychological effects. Furthermore, the position of the mother and the concept of incest tolerance need to be addressed and assessed to provide a further understanding of the impact of patriarchal thought on the family and society in general. In his speech, Pastor Paul reminds the community about its duty and says: "When a daughter submits to her father's will, when a wife submits to her husband, when a woman is a helper to a man, we are worshiping the ancestors and their vision" (25). Hence, the act of submission is crucial for the continuity of the society. It is a means to control the population. In *Father-Daughter Incest*, Herman and Hirschman recognize incest as any sexual relationship that occurs "between a child and an adult. From the psychological point of view, it does not matter if the father and child are blood relatives. What matters is the relationship that exists by virtue of the adult's parental power and the child's dependency" (2000 :70). They add that a sexual relationship between a child and an adult is recognized when a parent compels a child to fulfill his sexual needs (4). Incestuous relationships grant the continuity of the community, it is a natural act that grants a father the right to exploit his daughter whereas it deprives their mothers from their natural right. In fact, in the story, incest is viewed as an act of submission to the will of the ancestors and "Only when these acts of submission are done with an open heart and a willing mind," the pastor continues, "only when this is done with a spirit of righteousness, can we reach true salvation" (Melamed 2017 :20).

Vikki Bell discusses the incest taboo and believes that "incest is the abuse of power/authority" (1993:62). Herman and Hirschman note that the child is unable to refuse sexual advances because the child is powerless and since these children are totally depended on their parents "they strive to maintain this bond and if an adult insists upon a sexual relationship with a dependent child, the child will comply" (2000:28). Unsurprisingly, for the daughters, submission to their father's will is unquestionable. Caitlin in her conversation with Rosie reminds her about the vitality of the relationship, she says: "Daughters submit to their father's will, it's in *Our Book*. It's what the ancestors wanted" (Melamed 2017:49). For Herman and Hirschman violence is not the determining factor in incestuous relationships for "The parent's authority over the child is usually sufficient to compel obedience" (2000:27). Caitlin does not believe that her father's approaches cause any harm, the narrator asserts: "It embarrasses her that everyone thinks Father beats her, but she knows that it's just because she bruises so very easily" (Melamed 2017:37). Herman and Hirschman address the issue of harm and consider that "Although the great majority of children

find sexual contacts with adults disagreeable, many do not perceive themselves to be permanently harmed by the experience” (2000:28).

The isolation of the community contributes in the survival of the perverse sexual relations in the island. Herman and Hirschman quote Herbert Maisch in *Incest* who notes that “*these fathers ... tend toward abuses of authority of every conceivable kind, and they not infrequently endeavour to secure their dominant position by socially isolating the family from the outside world*” (2000:67). The impact of this form of sexual violence engenders emotional damage in the girls. Amanda narrates to Janey how she feels burdened and ashamed: “I can’t even look at little girls sometimes, knowing what’s happening to them. I’m so tired of what they do to us” (Melamed 2017:69). Herman and Hirschman note that victims of incest exhibit signs of distress and emotional disorders: “Symptoms included guilt, shame, feelings of inferiority and low self-esteem, anxiety” (2000:30). Indeed, little girls are depicted as fragile and emotionally unstable. Amanda experiences several episodes of mental disassociation from the present:

Amanda goes into one of her staring spells in the root cellar, while she is examining carrots. She’s holding a bunch in her hand, deciding which to use in a salad for supper, and then suddenly something shifts. There’s a quiet weight to her shoulders, lost hours settling over her like a mantle. Walking slowly upstairs, she checks the clock. About two hours this time. She hesitates, then sighs and goes back down into the cool dimness. (Melamed 2017 :39)

Herman and Hirschman conclude that the residual effects of incest may not disappear and continue to follow the victim until adulthood. Apart from these episodes Amanda seems emotionally unbalanced; in the story, the reader is shocked at how Amanda’s mental health deteriorates, for instance, in the root cellar at her house, she “starts to gnaw at a carrot. Then she thrusts her nails into the muddy floor, scrapes up a handful of dirt, and tosses it into her mouth” (90). Herman and Hirschman report that many victims suffered from shame, guilt and depression. They believe that for any child, “sexual contact with an adult, especially a trusted relative, is a significant trauma which may have long-lasting deleterious effects” (2000 :33). In addition to the mentioned symptoms, incest victims entertained severe psychological problems mainly “fear, disgust and shame” (86). Daughters, generally manage their feelings by “dissociating themselves from them. They “froze up” or pretended that ‘it wasn’t really happening”” (86). The narrator, through Caitlin’s story, explains the experience and says:

At dinner, Father will be drunk and Mother and Caitlin will be careful. That night, she will lie awake in bed, half dreaming of muddy races and bare legs in the sand. When Father comes in and lays his hands on her, she will get up and walk over to the

other side of the room. Crouching there, she'll watch the girl on the bed and feel sorry for her. (Melamed 2017 :112)

Mothers in *Gather the Daughters* are represented as passive and complicit in the sexual abuse inflicted upon their daughters. Herman and Hirschman argue that "It has frequently been observed that the mother in incestuous families is ill, incapacitated, or for some reason emotionally unavailable to her husband and children" (2000:45). Families in which mothers are not participants in the household or family life exhibit a role reversal. In these situations, "The family may come to rely on this daughter for emotional support and comfort," (45) this may lead to the transference of the role of the mother to the daughter including 'the duty to fulfill her father's sexual demands may evolve almost as an extension of her role as "little mother" in the family' (45). Vanessa's father is distressed after Janey Solomon's rebellion; he is preoccupied and therefore reaches out for Vanessa to appease his stress. The reader captures the role reversal in the following conversation: 'Who is my little wife?' asks Father in a sweet tone. "I am," whispers Vanessa. 'And what do wives do?' Vanessa hesitates ... 'Do wives stay with their husbands?' She sighs. 'Yes, wives stay with their husbands,' she echoes dully. 'Be a good girl' (Melamed 2017:189). The freedom of appropriating their daughter's bodies to fulfill sexual and emotional needs derives from the conviction that a father in a patriarchal family is supposed to be cared for. In fact, his needs actually had to be fulfilled and if a mother fails in providing "the accustomed attentions, it is taken for granted that some other female must be found to take her place. The oldest daughter is a frequent choice ... The father's wish, indeed his right, to continue to receive female nurturance, whatever the circumstances, is accepted without question" (Herman & Hirschman 2000:46).

By enclosing the community in the island, the wanderers enforce their laws which are based on the imposition of patriarchal dominance over women. By invading the girl's bodies, fathers exhibit a behaviour typical in incestuous families which is depicted in the work of Herman and Hirschman who believe that : "The tendency in men toward sexually exploitative behavior of all sorts, including rape, child molestation, and incest, thus becomes comprehensible as a consequence of male socialization within the patriarchal family" (2000 :56). For them, the patriarchal family is a father dominated family that embraces rigid division of roles in which mothers take care of children and fathers do not:

On this note, Caitlin describes her life within her male-dominated family; she notes how her mother strives to keep the house immaculate, despite its deteriorating state, while undertaking these chores silently for fear to disturb her

father. She says: “The house chores must be performed quietly, unobtrusively, never bothering or annoying Father” (Melamed 2017 :36). Such description aligns with what Herman and Hirschman explained while describing the sex-oriented division of labour embedded in the patriarchal thought and the behaviour of incestuous fathers who often seek “to dominate their families by the use of force (2000 :73). For Caitlin, “life must be lived this way because of Father, who does not like to be disturbed. He takes the instructions of the ancestors to keep patriarchal order in his home very seriously”. (Melamed 2017: 36-7)

In addition, incestuous families exhibit an “extreme failure of maternal protectiveness” (Herman & Hirschman 2000:47). Caitlin ponders what would happen to her mother if she leaves “if she is not there to stand in front of Mother and absorb Father’s violence, what will happen to Mother? But another voice, one that has been driven down even deeper, suddenly sings forth. *She should be standing in front of me*” (Melamed 2017:191). Herman and Hirschman believe that powerless mothers who submit to the rule of the patriarchs in the family “often tolerate many forms of abuse, including sexual abuse of their children” (2000:47). These mothers are often criticized in literature and thought of as either complicit or participants. The claim rests on three factors: first, failure in performing marital duties, second, “she, not the father, forced the daughter to take her rightful place; and third, she knew about, tolerated, or in some cases actively enjoyed the incest” (Herman and Hirschman 2000:42). However, the claim cannot be validated because in patriarchal families mothers are often oppressed: ‘more than the average wife and mother, she is extremely dependent upon and subservient to her husband. She may have a physical or emotional disability which makes the prospect of independent survival quite impractical (49). Because of labour division in patriarchal societies wherein women nurture and man do not, ‘the concept of the father’s right to use female members of his family—especially his daughters—as he sees fit is implicit even in the structure of the incest taboo’ (49). Herman and Hirschman explain that:

A patriarchal family structure secures to fathers immense powers over their wives and children. Traditionally, these powers include an unrestricted right of physical control, unrestricted sexual rights to wives (hence rape has no legal meaning within marriage), and extensive sexual rights in children (54).

Hence it is not reasonable to confirm the complicity of the mothers or even their willingness in tolerating the incest because in the patriarchal standards, mothers are oppressed and hence as a wife, ‘Her first loyalty is to her husband,

regardless of his behavior. She sees no other choice. Maternal collusion in incest, when it occurs, is a measure of maternal powerlessness' (49). Mothers in incestuous families were described as entertaining disabilities more likely 'depression, alcoholism, and psychosis' (77). These ailments contributed in distancing mothers from their families. It is worth noting that in incestuous families the relationship between mother-daughter is imbued with lack of sympathy. The relationship between the mother and the daughter was marked by 'active hostility' (81). Amanda narrates to Janey about the ordeals of the 'The love, the love that felt ... wrong. It made me sick. Mother hating me, blaming me like it was my fault! The first time it happened, I hurt so badly I thought I was going to die. I thought he was killing me, that I'd done something terrible and was being punished for it' (Melamed 2017 :96). So often, mothers blame their daughters for participating in the sexual relationship while disregarding their husbands' crimes.

Gather the Daughters is a narrative that deals with the birth of monstrousities. Jennie Melamed discusses the theme of inbreeding and portrays the outcomes of incestuous intercourses. A wanderer claims: 'We need to replenish our stock anyhow. More and more defectives each year, women bleed out—have freaks—and sometimes they die of it. The ancestors warned us of this, and we've ignored the warnings. Remember what Philip Adam wrote about diseases, how they flatten a herd' (Melamed 2017: 265). According to Herman and Hirschman the taboo incest is shunned by my many cultures, and they believe that incestuous copulations may lead to 'high incidence of stillbirths, early infant deaths, congenital anomalies, and mental retardation in children born of incestuous unions within the nuclear family' (2000:51). Amanda recalls how 'Denise got pregnant almost immediately and was exhausted and puking the whole time. That baby, born in the depths of winter, was a defective. Amanda can't remember exactly what was wrong with it, but it was something like no head or no face' (Melamed 2017:101). Defectives are the direct outcome of inter-copulation and limitations in the genetic pool in the island. For Herman and Hirschman, the birth of defectives is an inevitable outcome of incestuous mating which results, frequently, in 'high incidence of abortion, stillbirth, and complications of all sorts attends the pregnancies of immature females' (2000:52). In short, *Gather the Daughters* exposes and condemns transgressions on women's body and denounces perverse sexual behaviours justified by male supremacy. The narrative exposes the mechanisms of sexual violence which is justified by the ancestor's teachings that are depicted as biased and male-centered.

Conclusion

Gather the Daughters opens a window on the issue of sexual dominion and patriarchal oppression. The novel follows the lives of prepubescent girls who endure severe depravation of free will and individuality. Indeed, the novel showcases the influence of the utopian impulse and its abuses by the 'barbaric state religion' (Gottlieb 2001:10) that oppresses the masses and imposes its doctrines through rigorous control and severe punishment. The narrative divulges the various dynamics of women's subjugation fueled by unjust role division within the patriarchal thought and tradition. The author succeeds in depicting the impact of isolation and eradication of past to control the present and the future. Furthermore, Melamed, through her honest description of reality in the imagined society, captures the imbalance of power which leads to its abuse. *Gather the Daughters*, as many feminist dystopias, depicts a world hostile towards women, and through her story about isolation, surveillance and suppression of individuality, the author urges the readers to re-consider their present to better their future.

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to establish a comprehensive analysis of the mechanisms of female domination in patriarchal communities. The paper takes *Gather the Daughters* (2017) by Jennie Melamed as its corpus of study. The aims of this work are three folds: First, to delineate the utopian 'dream' that stimulated the quest for a distinct premise, or a sanctuary from unfavourable social or political trends that perpetuate the imaginary society. Second, to locate, analyze and illuminate circumstances that lead to the drift towards the dystopian nightmare which is characterized by excessive control, depravation, isolation, manipulation of history, perverse sexual relations and female exploitation. Third, to unravel the causes and the consequences of incestuous relationships that pervade the narrative. The present work has shown that writers of feminist dystopias succeed in communicating the atrocities imposed upon women which are sanctified by the patriarchal rules that govern the dystopian communities

Keywords

Dystopia, utopia, isolation, patriarchy, sexual abuse, Melamed

مستخلص

تحاول هذه المقالة إنشاء تحليل شامل لآليات الهيمنة في المجتمعات الأبوية. تأخذ الورقة جمع البنات (2017) من قبل جيني ميلامد كموضوع للدراسة. تتمثل أهداف هذا العمل في ثلاثة نقاط : أولاً،

تحديد «الحلم» المثالي الذي حفز البحث عن واقع مختلف أو ملجأ من الأحداث الاجتماعية أو السياسية التي تسود المجتمع الخيالي. ثانيًا، تحديد الظروف وتحليلها وإلقاء الضوء على الانجراف نحو الكابوس البائس الذي يتسم بالسيطرة المفرطة والحرمان والعزلة والتلاعب بالتاريخ والعلاقات الجنسية الضارة واستغلال الإناث. ثالثًا، الكشف عن أسباب وعواقب العلاقات المحرمة التي تعم السرد. وقد أظهر العمل الحالي أن كتاب الديستوبيا والنظرية النسوية ينجحون في إيصال نتائج الأعمال الوحشية المفروضة على النساء والتي تقدسها القواعد الأبوية التي تحكم مجتمعات الديستوبيا.

كلمات مفتاحية

ديستوبيا ، اليوتوبيا ، العزلة ، النظام الأبوي ، العنف الجنسي ، ميلامد

Résumé

Le présent article tente d'établir une analyse complète des mécanismes de domination féminine dans les communautés patriarcales. L'article prend Gather the Daughters (2017) de Jennie Melamed comme corpus d'étude. Les objectifs de ce travail sont de trois ordres : premièrement, délimiter le « rêve » utopique qui a stimulé la recherche d'une prémisses distincte ou d'un sanctuaire contre les tendances sociales ou politiques défavorables qui perpétuent la société imaginaire. Deuxièmement, localiser, analyser et éclairer les circonstances qui mènent à la dérive vers le cauchemar dystopique qui se caractérise par un contrôle excessif, la déprivation, l'isolement, la manipulation de l'histoire, des relations sexuelles perverses et l'exploitation féminine. Troisièmement, démêler les causes et les conséquences des relations incestueuses qui imprègnent le récit. Le présent travail a montré que les auteurs de dystopies féministes réussissent à communiquer les atrocités imposées aux femmes qui sont sanctifiées par les règles patriarcales qui régissent les communautés dystopiques.

Mots-clés

Dystopie, utopie, isolement, patriarcat, abus sexuel, Melamed

