What Else Is Out There? American Women's Progressive Era Utopian Societies in Outer Space

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Utopian and dystopian texts typically fall under the larger umbrella of science fiction and fantasy, as they create alternative worlds that could include various governmental structures, environmental situations, technological advancements, and more. Many American utopian texts written in the Progressive Era explore a revision of current or future American culture, a remote society on Earth, a depiction of the afterlife, or a discovered society on another planet. For Progressive Era women writers, revisions to gendered norms in their utopian literary works were common as many fought for greater equality with men in their own world. Setting the society on another planet can interestingly pose gender equality as an otherworldly, alien phenomenon; however, outside of not only American but potentially also human constructs, this framework allows authors to imagine entirely new systems that promote gender equality. When the setting is on another planet, authors are not bound by any cultural, legal, or religious boundaries, other than those that permeate their minds while constructing these new worlds.

Contributing to the foundation for later works of science fiction, especially utopic and dystopic texts, several Progressive Era utopian novels by American women utilize the outer space setting. For instance, Alice Ilgenfritz Jones and Ella Merchant's *Unveiling a Parallel: A Romance* (1893) emphasizes the common humanity amongst men and women by depicting two different societies on Mars, Caskia and Paleveria, that consider the community-wide adoptions of stereotypically male or female behaviors, respectively. Similarly, Nettie Parrish Martin's *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds: Recounting the Wonderful Adventures of Ulyssum Storries and His Discovery of the Lost Star "Eden"* (1908) depicts Ulyssum Storries's exploration of

planetary worlds with varying relationships between men and women that elevate women's status when compared to earthly relations. Both novels push the religious frameworks of their authors but assert that gender equality is compatible with traditional Christian beliefs. By depicting diverse societal constructions, and comparing them with American gender norms, the authors present new ways for their readers to imagine gender relations within spiritually-focused societies.

The scholarship on *Unveiling a Parallel* is limited, and for *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds*, it is virtually nonexistent though it appears in some annotated bibliographies of women's utopic works.[21] The conversation regarding *Unveiling a Parallel* focuses largely on the contrasting societies of Palaveria and Caskia. In their reviews, Rogers, Holyoke, Hollinger, and Saksung comment on the critique of bodily pleasures (correlated with men) and the celebration of spirituality and service (correlated with women). Robert Crossley places *Unveiling a Parallel* within the literary tradition focusing on Mars, and in "Middle-Class Edens," Darby Lewes explores the "rococo" decor of *Unveiling a Parallel* (16), the "bumbling fool" narrator (22), and the surprise of the Martian guide, Severnius, that Earth women do not rebel against their (mis)treatment. Christina Jane Lake explores *Unveiling a Parallel* within the history of utopian texts that include eugenics, an obviously problematic but popularly held perspective on social improvement in the Progressive Era. Lake argues that the differences between hedonistic Palaveria and ethical Caskia "represent the negotiation between the views of the two writers" (114), while Roemer suggests that it signifies a negotiation between the authors' "implied attitudes and expected responses by nineteenth-century readers" (Kolmerten, Introduction, xxxvii). In contrast with Lake and Roemer, I see the authors of *Unveiling a Parallel* reconciling their own spiritual beliefs with their desire for

[21] Examples include Jane Donawerth and Carol Kolmerten's *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference* (1994) and Carol Farley Kessler's *Daring to Dream: Utopian Fiction by United States Women Before 1950* (1995).

a more gender-equitable world. While they point out some advantages to Palaveria, the overarching narrative clearly favors Caskia, and they pose this latter community as successfully moral and egalitarian. Similarly, the even lesser-discussed *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds*[22] creates visions of spiritually grounded societies with various roles and relationships for men and women, highlighting alternative possibilities for their readers. Pairing these novels together provides an opportunity to explore the negotiation of gender equality and spirituality for women writers at the turn of the twentieth century. Additionally, this article adds to existing scholarship by emphasizing the role of the outer space setting, allowing authors to explore numerous (via the plethora of available moons, planets, suns, etc.) and varied societal constructions. Implicitly, this setting argues that not only could there be other societal arrangements, but there may already be, on other planets. These authors use interplanetary adventures to take their readers on a cognitive journey to consider the potential compatibility between Christian perspectives and gender equality.

The Progressive Era: Politics, Utopia, and Religion

The Progressive Era, stretching from approximately 1890 to 1920, saw a shift in women's engagement with political and public debates and spaces. Lynn Gorden defines the Progressive Era as a period of "optimism and energy" that "pervaded middle-class America" (qtd. in Aldridge 423). Eager to build on the decades of work since the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, women were engaged in the fight for suffrage, but their work was much more expansive. Many white middle-class women were growing their sphere of influence beyond the home to try to improve, or uplift,

[22] This novel is included in Kessler's annotated bibliography as well as Lewes' in *Dream Revisionaries* (1995). Lewes also mentions the novel as an example of "vindication," a characteristic of nineteenth-century women's utopias in which "women in these narratives are assured of their innate worth and inherent right-mindedness" ("Middle-Class Edens," 21).

the conditions of others[23] by advocating for labor reform, providing resources to low-income mothers and children, arguing for temperance, and more. Often, women saw this work as an extension of their motherly role in the home applied to society more broadly. As Schneider and Schneider aptly write, “Women in the Progressive Era flexed their moral and organizational muscles and did their effective best to make society behave” (243). Women stepped into areas historically operated by men and promoted change through speeches, marches, fundraisers, and more. Literature allowed women to process their experiences or advocate for changes through narratives, and utopian literature uniquely allowed writers to imagine more progressive worlds untethered to our current systems.

Though the utopian texts discussed here were fairly obscure in their time and remain so today, they demonstrate the Progressive Era desire for improvement, albeit in a less concrete fashion, by providing thought experiments of other societal systems in outer space. As such, they depart from Ida Tarbell’s investigative writing that exposes real-world corruption in the oil industry or Margaret Sanger’s pamphlets providing practical contraception information directly to individual women. These utopian novels are more subtly arguing for change by opening their readers’ minds to other societal possibilities. Utopian texts often allow writers to point out “the unfulfilled needs and wants of specific classes, groups, and individuals in their unique historical contexts" (Moylan 1) and to express a “desire for a better way of being and living” (Levitas 8). To these aims, many Progressive Era utopian writers created revised versions of the United States. For instance, in *Salome Shepard, Reformer* (1893) by Helen Maria Winslow, the titular character

[23] This effort to uplift others is notable through its intention to help improve the conditions of others’ lives but problematic in its suggestion that others are lower or beneath the individual assisting them. Antoniazzi argues, “the middle-class activists who swept a symbolic broom over the country claimed moral authority over all kinds of regulation and worked to impart restrictive precepts to the lower classes, which were deemed incapable of self-government. In this way, the emergence of women in the public sphere during the Progressive Era corresponded to a re-articulation of the frictions between women of different classes” (83-84).

improves a mill that she operates, and in *What Diantha Did* (1909-1910) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Diantha explores alternative systems for women's domestic work. Both depict relatively realistic versions of Progressive Era communities, and individual women create substantial change for others. In contrast, the societies in *Unveiling a Parallel* and *Pilgrim's Progress* already exist on other planets, and the visitors, and by extension the readers, learn about and consider their radically different societal systems. Like the most well-known utopian text published shortly after these novels, Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), they depict more gender-equal societies outside of our reality; however, unlike Gilman's novel, *Unveiling a Parallel* and *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds* more prominently demonstrate the tension or balance between progressive gender ideologies and traditional Christian beliefs of the time.

For some individuals of the Progressive Era, the reform efforts in the public sphere marked a shift away from the more conservative ideas of religious tradition, while for others, it was an application of their religious beliefs through tangible work aimed at societal improvement. The Progressive Era disrupted Victorian ideas through women's participation in public reform efforts, but it still maintained many of the ideals of Christianity and morality (Aldridge). The social gospel, or what was known as social Christianity around 1900, sometimes "designate[d] a movement within Protestantism, but other times it is contrasted to individual salvation or it identifies a faith commitment to and responsibility for the social order" (Gorrell 4).[24] Some Christians began to see themselves as caretakers for the material wellbeing of other humans, rather than, or not only of, their spiritual transformation. Jones and Merchant, along with Parrish, somewhat apply this notion of the social gospel in their utopian novels by creating worlds that are more gender equitable,

[24] Gorrell explains that the five denominations most engaged in social gospel were Congregationalists, Epsicopalians, Bapitsts, Methodists, and Presbyterians. While in 1900 there were only a few supporters, the movement was fairly mainstream within these denominations by 1920. These novels were published during the time when this ideology was emerging and growing.

which has a material impact on all of its citizens. It changes the jobs women can access, and thus, their socioeconomic status and capacity for independence. However, while exploring gender equality, the authors also integrate traditional Christian ideas into their works. For instance, the narrator of *Unveiling a Parallel* remarks on the citizens of Caskia, "These people have never had a Christ—in flesh and blood—but they have put into effect every precept of our Great Teacher" (127-28). Extraterrestrial beings in *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds* quote scripture, display images of Jesus, and frequently mention God, the Devil, and Christian stories. Though details about the authors' specific religious beliefs are difficult to determine, their alignment with traditional Christian beliefs emerges through these worlds. Interestingly, the writers all argue that increased gender equality and Christian belief were compatible ideologies, arguing for a middle ground for individuals who saw these as opposing values.

Otherworldly Gender Relations

By the time Alice Ilgenfritz Jones, Ella Merchant, and Nettie Parrish Martin were writing their novels, telescopes that provided a window into outer space had been around for centuries, and theories about how to access spaces beyond the Earth's atmosphere were emerging.[25] Scientists and others were interested in what was located in outer space and how they could reach it, which informed the creative work of the time. What the vast, unexplored terrain of outer space contained was uncertain, though. For instance, an 1895 article published in *Harper's Bazaar* explains that

Science has not been able to tell us yet whether or not the stars and planets are inhabited.

[25] For instance, Scottish astronomer William Leitch published "A Journey Through Space" in 1861 that proposed the use of rockets for space flight, and in 1895, Russian Konstantin Tsiolkovsky offered the idea of a space elevator that would transport individuals into outer space. In 1903, Tsiolkovsky expanded his theoretical basis for space exploration, highlighting it as a real possibility.

> It conjectures that the dense cloud atmosphere in Venus which occasions her brilliancy may also protect and shield animal life on certain portions of her surface; it sees no reason to suppose that the conditions of Mars are very different from her own, and that it may not be peopled. ("Letters from Space" 625)

The scientific perspectives of the time allowed for the possibility of life in outer space, even within our solar system. Nettie Parrish Martin herself writes in her preface to *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds*, "That there are other worlds besides the one on which we live, where human intelligence dwells, I sincerely and honestly believe." Martin's perspective allows her to earnestly consider other ways of being. The uncertainty of outer space, combined with the possibility, allows individuals to imagine alternative worlds where different social arrangements are the norm. For women, this often included a culture in which women had more rights and respect beyond their domestic sphere.

In Alice Ilgenfritz Jones and Ella Merchant's *Unveiling a Parallel*, an unnamed male protagonist journeys alone to Mars[26] where he discovers alternative societies that highlight Earth's shortcomings, particularly related to gender roles. A group of astronomers greets him upon his landing, and Severnius becomes his guide to the new city, Thursia, in the country called Paleveria. The narrator's aversion to "womanish things" (8) quickly becomes apparent, as does his disdain for the equal respect and honor shown for men and women on the red planet. He prefers, instead, Earthly gender relations, which he explains to Severnius. His Martian companion is confused by the described gender arrangements, highlighting the absurdity that Earthly women are capable of

[26] In *Imagining Mars: A Literary History* (2011), Crossley explores the novel's setting on the planet Mars: "In *Unveiling a Parallel*, Jones and Merchant, while displaying almost no interest in the scientific controversies of their day about Mars, inaugurated a tradition of using Mars as a utopian experiment in criticism and simulation, a model for terrestrial contemplation and action. Their romance is the ancestor to the later utopias of Alexander Bogdanov and Kim Stanley Robinson and not unlike the antiscientific critical romances of C. S. Lewis and Ray Bradbury. Of all the utopian romances of Mars from the 1890s, *Unveiling a Parallel* is the one that still has the most residual energy" (97).

many tasks but discouraged from doing them and that they must pay taxes but are blocked from voting. The Earth man, in an attempt to justify these inconsistencies, states, "Our women are very superior; we treat them more as princesses than as inferiors, —they are angels" (29). Here, the narrator evokes Coventry Patmore's estimation of "The Angel in the House," a view that women were best suited or divinely charged to remain in the domestic sphere, a notion that aligned with True Womanhood. In *Disorderly Conduct*, Caroll Smith-Rosenberg explains that True Womanhood "prescribed a female role bounded by kitchen and nursery, overlaid with piety and purity, and crowned with subservience" (13). The male narrator is familiar and comfortable with this view of the docile, pure woman, and the longer he spends in Thursia, the more shocked he becomes by its female citizens who sharply contrast with the figure of the angelic, true woman.

In Paleveria's version of a gender-equal society, women participate in activities typically affiliated with men, which increasingly appalls the Earthman and encourages readers' disgust as well. Especially amongst elite circles, women have an affinity for drinking, vaporizing (an alternative to smoking), and associating with male lovers and prostitutes. Severnius's sister Elodia, a banker whom the narrator initially finds incredibly enchanting, eventually evokes "pain" and even "a kind of helpless rage" because she participates in such practices (146). This physical and emotional response highlights the depths of the narrator's discomfort with gender equality in this form. Hollinger aptly articulates that Elodia is "the embodiment of the woman who enjoys traditional male privileges and is as unlike an angel in the house as it is possible to be" (233). The protagonist is appalled that the father rather than Elodia cares for their child, highlighting the double standard of women being judged much more harshly for a common practice of terrestrial men. Despite the narrator's discomfort, Elodia is memorable, and through her character "the authors argue that women and men are similar in nature, even in their erotic and sexual needs, and

that women should be free to experiment and express themselves in all the ways previously reserved for men" (Suksang 143). However, the narrator does not take this positive view of the society. Elodia's actions sharply conflict with his perspective of women as angelic, and the Paleverian society showcases the authors' view of gender equality without spirituality.

In their interrogation of gender roles, Jones and Merchant return to the Christian creation story, often used to justify women's oppression, and present a Martian alternative. Though the authors clearly value morality and spirituality, they also interrogate religious views that can demean women. In the Christian creation story, as interpreted by some, God designates Adam as the leader, and Eve is susceptible to mistakes when left to her own devices. The narrator from Earth explains, "We humor [women], patronize them, tyrannize over them. And they defer to, and exalt us, and usually acknowledge our superiority" (Jones and Merchant 35). The Christian perception of man's dominion over Earth, including their human counterpart, clearly emerges in the narrator's view. However, in this novel, the Martian creation myth "eliminates the complications of ribs, apples, and serpents in favor of simple equality: two beautiful and innocent animals" (Lewes, *Dream Revisionaries*, 148). After asking about the theory of humans' creation from the narrator's culture, Severnius explains, "Ours is different . . . A pair of creatures, male and female, sprang simultaneously from an enchanted lake . . . They were only animals, but they were beautiful and innocent. God breathed a Soul into them and they were Man and Woman, equal in all things" (32). Beautiful in its nature imagery, this creation story is even more striking in its equal treatment of the origins of men and women. This story is unlike the Christian version, in which man is created first, and then one of his ribs is used to create woman, making the latter essentially a byproduct of men; instead, the Martians imagine a concurrent and equivalent starting point for both sexes. While the Martian story still emphasizes a binary that we may critique in the twenty-

first century, it makes great strides in creating a more equal origin for men and women, which undoubtedly informs their society's treatment of women. In turn, this reimaging encourages the novel's readers to consider how this religious human origin story impacts their views on man and woman.

Caskia presents a radically different societal construction from Paleveria, demonstrating the compatibility of spirituality and gender equality and how the combination positively impacts personal happiness and societal good. Donawerth and Kolmerten argue that Caskia is "an alternative to the nineteenth-century dilemma—to be either a passive, chaste female, or a greedy, lustful male" (112). Rather than women taking on vices typically associated with men on Earth, all citizens of Caskia are gentle and giving, adopting traits aligned with Earthly women. The country is clean and has plenty of space for its citizens, and everyone works joyfully to provide service for others. Another reviewer writes about Caskia: "moral behavior is so ingrained that civil laws are unnecessary, no one ever does anything that could adversely affect another, and sin is simply unthinkable" (Holyoke 587). It is clear that for Jones and Merchant, this society that highlights both equality and spirituality is a utopia. On the one hand, the ending of *Unveiling a Parallel* celebrates the strengths of women's stereotypical characteristics. On the other hand, it dismisses the value of material pleasures, including even sex outside of procreational purposes, and advances the moralistic binary of perceived womanly characteristics as good or angelic and stereotypical male behaviors as base or vile. While Kolmerten "question[s] why utopia must be linked with traditional Christian values" (xxxvii). I think this is Jones and Merchant's main argument: progressive gender equality is compatible with a Christian society.

A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds similarly draws attention to the problematic and limiting status of women in the turn-of-the-twentieth-century United States. Before he departs on

his interplanetary adventure, the reader becomes familiar with Ulyssum Storries's earthly situation. He is more interested in experimenting with projects, such as his skycycle, than he is in laboring in ways that benefit his family, leaving nearly all the work to his wife Henriette. Initially, he sees this as an asset: "Henriette listened to all my notions and entered into all my plans (and you bet I had enough of them) and did my work and her own round the house, bringing water, splitting kindling, and making fires, letting me study out my inventions" (3). Henriette performs the labor typical of both men and women, providing Ulyssum, a Rip Van Winkle-esque character, with ample leisure time that he uses to build his skycycle that accidentally transports him out of the Earth's atmosphere. Ulyssum does not see his lack of contribution as a problem, and he does not oppose Henriette taking on the responsibilities of a stereotypical husband in addition to those of a wife. However, unlike the women of Paleveria in *Unveiling a Parallel*, Henriette does not partake in the vices of men that would be seen as unbecoming for a woman.

In contrast with *Unveiling a Parallel* which focuses on one planet, *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds* explores many planets and therefore a multitude of societal arrangements, all with religion playing a central role, thus resisting the popular Christian view of the roles of men and women as ordained and static. Once he departs from Earth and his wife Henriette, Ulyssum becomes familiar with many different societies, "each exhibiting a different arrangement between the sexes, a blend of innovation and conservatism" (Kessler 265). The universe of *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds* is a Christian, English-speaking interplanetary system in which individuals can be reincarnated on continually higher planes (with Earth being at the low end of that spectrum). An immortal angel guide named Trust leads Ulyssum Storries on a tour of various planets. On a moon of Mars, individuals are punished for wrongdoings such as murder and suicide, and one of Saturn's moons, Annamanda, contains parents who did not care for their children while

on Earth and must work for a heathen king. Most of their stops highlight more progressive societies. For example, on Jupiter men hold political power but the sexes are perceived as equal in their capacities, and everyone has enough resources. On Neptune, citizens live in happiness as one family and have an opposite-sex companion who balances them in every way; they live mostly on air and see meat consumption as part of the cause of Earth dwellers' negative thoughts. Ulyssum and Trust also make stops on Saturn and Mercury before landing on the Sun, or Heaven, which is a perfected world of beauty. More than the narrator of *Unveiling a Parallel*, Ulyssum comes to view the status of women on Earth as a problem because of his exposure to these more perfected worlds, which encourages readers to do the same.

Some of the societies point out Earth's flaws by inverting the roles and rights of men and women and highlighting the capabilities of the latter. Ulyssum's stop on Mars is of particular note, as Ulyssum is greeted by a society that prizes women's maternity as they are also politically powerful landowners. They land on Urbana Goodheart's land; she is a "tall," "stately," "graceful" woman (93) who has recently been elected "Burgomistress . . . the highest office in the city" (96). Her husband, Bensuvie, tends to their twenty-two children, prepares dinner, and takes on other tasks around their home (93). Rather than being cultural leaders, men are trained to do the majority of the labor, and upon learning about earthly relations from Ulyssum, some of the men grow discontent. One Martian citizen, Uspurrshum, argues that the men unjustly "shoulder . . . every bit of labor" on Mars besides maternity (176). He advocates that men are as capable of leadership as women, and "if the sisters did part of the labor" on Mars, the men would have more time for leisure, inventions, and studying (176). In many ways, the status of men on Mars reflects that of women on Earth, as they are barred from many social and government roles and restricted to the types of labor they can perform. Through this role reversal, readers are encouraged to consider the

absurdity of barring half the population from public roles. The men on Mars collaborate, trying to overthrow the monarchy to change their societal arrangements to be more like Earth's.[27] Through his relationships with the restricted, dissatisfied men on the red planet, Ulyssum is given new insight into the perspectives of many Earthly women.

The universe of *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds* emphasizes that there are many better ways for men and women to coexist, even within societies that ascribe to traditional Christian belief, than can be seen on planet Earth at the turn of the twentieth century. In fact, Earth is essentially the least evolved planet in the solar system. As Cyrvissa of Saturn explains to Ulyssum, "the Earth-born are the missing link between the higher life and the lowest plane, or animal. They are mortal animals in a material progressive state, in the plane of evolution. They are slowly developing into a higher plane and will some day reach the shores of immortality" (370). From a hierarchical perspective that places humans above animals, Earthlings are on the precipice of this boundary, more focused on the material than the spiritual. Evolutionarily less advanced than other planets, Earthlings have a long journey to improve their perspectives and treatment of others, especially women. Framed this way, Martin suggests that Earth does not need slight revisions but rather large restructurings to move them up the spiritual ladder toward, in the frame of this universe, immortality. For Martin, Earthlings need deeper spirituality and more equitable gender relations to progress. Notably, in her view, it is not despite religion but because of it, and that gender equity should exist for humans to evolve in their spirituality.

These lessons regarding women's status are reinforced on the Sun, the most idyllic, equitable, and spiritual setting that Martin hopes the reader will see as utopian. Ulyssum reunites

[27] Because of his involvement, Ulyssum goes before the queen who sees him as the "instigator" who "evidently wished to make the men dissatisfied with the present harmonious condition of affairs" (208). Though he explains he was only answering questions about earthly circumstances, the queen forces him to leave in his skycycle, leaving the woman he had fallen in love with, Laomeline.

with some of the individuals he has met on other planets who had risen to a higher plane and, because of knowing Ulyssum, they desire to visit Earth to elevate its societies. Heleftus explains to Ulyssum, "I shall bear the olive branch of redemption to woman who has groaned so long beneath a yoke so heavy that her tears and prayers have reached the portals of heaven. I am to go with my helpers and teach her the true knowledge of life; how to lift her burden and free herself. I shall assist woman in that world to regain her lost sphere" (405). Heleftus hopes to empower the women of Earth through education. Numa, a previous shepherdess on Neptune, says that she "shall try to lead the sisters of Earth, by their sweet, gentle influence, to draw lost manhood back to the perfection it had before the fall . . . For six thousand years man has controlled the Earth and woman has had little voice in its government. She has seen her sons and daughters go down in Error and could only weep and pray" (453-54). Numa thinks women have potential, if given the opportunity with more power and status, to improve the wellbeing of all. Martin applies the religious ideology of original sin, suggesting that women's societal involvement could return humanity to this perfected state. Laomeline of Mars similarly tells Ulyssum, "My mission will be the uplifting[28] of woman. Oh, what delight it will give me to see them advancing under my influence through God's

[28] This mission of uplift aligns with historical women of the Progressive Era who sought to lift up their fellow citizens materially and/or spiritually. The emphasis on social uplift pervades the discourse and motivated much of the political action of the time, including settlement houses and working women's clubs. As historian Nancy Woloch explains, the "special mission" of progressive middle and upper-class women "was to purify, uplift, control, and reform; to improve men, children, and society; to extend the values of the home" into other realms (270). Thus, Laomeline's language and mission would likely resonate with many readers, and Ulyssum does not object to her plans. However, in this scenario, all women, including those aforementioned middle- and upper-class women, would be the recipients of this uplift work, turning the tables on their typical role as interplanetary women enter the atmosphere. *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds* makes Earth one society amongst many, and notably, frames the society as less advanced and ideal than other alternatives, especially regarding its gender norms. Ulyssum's home society clearly needs change, and individuals from the other planets are happy to make Earth into a mission project. Martin turns a Christian paradigm on its head, pointing out that in the realm of gender roles, white, middle-class Americans (who would often be conducting the uplift or mission work) are in need of aid. For these writers, changing gender roles was imperative and compatible with a Christian worldview, and the lack of that equality necessitated missionary intervention in Martin's fictional tale.

help" (453). The citizens of the Sun agree about aiding Earth's women, though their approaches differ somewhat. Heleftus describes herself as a teacher, Numa sees herself as a guide, and Laomeline views her role more as the rescuer of women (with God's assistance). All, however, see the women of Earth as capable beings in need, and they are committed to aiding them for the sake of the women and Earth's society as a whole. This giving disposition displays their spiritual development and their self-belief as women, which are both critical aspects of the utopia readers are encouraged to accept.

Narrators of The Otherworldly Utopias

The narrators in both novels play a critical role in how readers might interpret the other societies. Often in utopian texts, an outsider narrator guides the reader through the new society and eventually comes to acknowledge the strengths of the new world, frequently accepting them as superior to their own. In *Dream Revisionaries* (1995), Darby Lewes names this common structure the hero-locale-guide model. She argues that "a protagonist encounters a strange new world and is led through its political, social, and ethical complexities by a knowledge guide (and frequently comes to reevaluate his own society in the process)" (12). Lewes explains that this formula creates the plot and conflict, as the narrator must assess the new society in comparison to their own. As one review of *Unveiling a Parallel* bluntly states, "The authors use this stranger-in-a-strange-land approach to point out the stupidity of [Earth's] society" (Rogers 204). The reader can explore the new world through the narrator's eyes, as they are also an outsider; however, depending on a reader's positionality, the narrator's views may or may not resonate with them. Both narrators of the novels discussed here are likely white, middle-class men, which highlights the mainstream

patriarchal perspective and the possibility that it can change. However, responses from individuals with other positionalities are not depicted.

The narrator of *Unveiling a Parallel* does not fully perform this hero-locale-guide function for readers while he is in Paleveria; his acceptance occurs later in Caskia. While he learns about the Martian society from his astute companion Severnius, he does not fully reassess American society, instead clinging to his existing views. The authors guide readers away from Paleveria's construction through the narrator's response, encouraging them to see the flaws of a society without a spiritual focus. Readers' responses could vary widely—some would celebrate the freedom women experience in Paleveria while others could interpret this alternative culture as a warning against giving women more rights, especially suffrage. Kessler explains, "The parallel unveiled is the common human nature of women and men" (259). However, rather than focusing on the strengths of women, the narrator fixates on the possibility of women partaking in stereotypically male behaviors. One can only wonder how a more progressive man or woman would respond to the more liberating and equal roles for women displayed in Paleveria. Though the society still has flaws, especially through its socioeconomic differentiation, men and women both participate in worldly pleasures, and the narrator cannot accept that possibility. This response seems indicative of Jones and Merchant's moralistic viewpoint as they implicitly advocate instead for an equal, spiritual society. They aim to find a middle ground between traditional Christians adhering to strict gendered codes and radical reformers arguing for a society focused on materialistic pleasure. They argue for a gender-equal society grounded in spiritual and ethical practices, signified through the narrator's acceptance of Caskia.

Unveiling a Parallel's narrator accepts the more spiritual and nature-focused Martian nation of Caskia, lauding the society's characteristics that are typically associated with women.

The narrator serves as the example of Earthly (more specifically, American) ideologies through which the reader can consider and critique both Caskia and their reality. In contrast to the narrator's home planet, Caskia seems much more ideal.[29] He finds not only their society but also some of the women appealing because of their calm, confident, and productive demeanor. The narrator quickly falls in love with Ariadne, an heiress and teacher, whom he tells, "when I return to Earth again, and lift my eyes toward heaven, it will not be Mars that I shall see, but only—Ariadne" (158). Their romantic attachment seems possible because Ariadne aligns much more with the "angels" of Earth in their purest, most idealized state. However, Ariadne is not oppressed or subservient, instead she "is as active and articulate as Elodia: she is independently wealthy, holds a respected position as an educator, and is the central speaker during the final section of the book" (*Dream Revisionaries*, 17). As such, the narrator's love of Ariadne represents a slight shift in his perception of women, as he is endeared to this kind and confident female leader. In Caskia, both men *and* women adopt stereotypically and hyperbolically ideal female qualities, and the genders are equal, which proves beneficial for men, women, and children in the society. Even the narrator sees these benefits, suggesting to readers that men could be persuaded to adapt to this type of gender-equitable, spiritually robust society.

Like the narrator of *Unveiling a Parallel*, Ulyssum of *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds* initially does not take issue with the subservient status of Earthly women. However, he becomes aware of the injustice of sexism as individuals on other planets are shocked by the treatment of women on Earth, encouraging skeptical readers to also be more open to equality. In a conversation on Mars, Ulyssum overhears his immortal angel guide, Trust, tell a Martian named

[29] Lake importantly emphasizes that Caskia's centuries-long "conscious programme of self-directed evolution" (111) pulled from eugenic ideologies, as it "counteract[ed]" and eventually "eradicate[d] hereditary evils" (Jones and Merchant 53). Thus, troubling Progressive Era beliefs find their way into the writer's utopias, and the narrator does not seem to take notice because the authors likely accept these beliefs themselves.

Onnodeen, "women's life on Earth with a very few exceptions, is not an enviable one. Her mission is wholly misunderstood, and being the weaker vessel brute force has placed her where she is to-day" (98). Ulyssum occupies an interesting position, as he learns about outsiders' perceptions of women on his home planet. Trust highlights women's sometimes physically weaker status that has contributed to their broader oppression. Another Martian, Arbazellon, asks Ulyssum directly about their treatment of women on Earth and whether they care for members of the sex as well as Martians do. He responds,

> "I'm afraid we do not," then reflects, "I thought of Henriette splitting wood, and mother working in the field, when an extra man was needed, and of my running away to go fishing and letting her do it. But I answered, truthfully, by saying, 'Woman, on Earth, takes her place beside man and helps in all kinds of labor,' and I felt a conscious pride in saying it." (105)

Ulyssum excuses his laziness by reframing it as gender equality to appeal to the Martians. Ulyssum and Henriette's marital arrangement persists during the span of the novel, as Ulyssum is off on a grand space adventure while Henriette cares for their son at home, though Ulyssum is powerless to return to Earth on his own accord. The repeated conversations about women's status during his interplanetary journey draw Ulyssum's attention to the shortcomings of Earth's gender constructions, including within his own home. The visit to Mars is early in his space exploration, and the continuous exposure to elevated societies over an extended period makes him see the need to alter women's position on Earth and treat his wife with more dignity. By joining him on this journey, readers may also consider their status or treatment of women in their homes and societies more broadly, slowly inching readers toward a more gender-equitable society.

A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds allows readers to consider transformation on an individual level through Ulyssum. Upon returning to Earth after ten years, Ulyssum describes his relationship with Henriette as a partnership with a common goal: "We both are striving, with the light given us, to enter into the true circle of harmony, loving all, having charity for all, and lending a helping hand to all who need it" (480-81). Through his experiences in space, their marital relationship shifts from an unbalanced share of work and leisure to a common vision of love and service as they work towards a higher plane. As Lewes writes, "His unsuccessful flirtations with a variety of extra-terrestrial females open his eyes to his own failings; he finally returns to Earth, rejoins his ever-patient spouse, and lives as a good Christian and loyal husband" (*Dream Revisionaries*, 158). While I agree that their rejection illuminates his flaws, his observation of women, marriages, and societies that support all citizens compels him to change his ways more than his failed romantic dalliances. Ulyssum is persuaded by living within other societal arrangements to change his outlook on marriage and life, viewing his wife as a partner in the pursuit of aiding others. The example of Ulyssum could empower readers to change their own beliefs and actions or to encourage others to do so.

Women, Outer Space, and The Possibility of Equality

Despite the novels' focus on gender norms, both depict a male protagonist, rather than a female one, traveling into space. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, men and sometimes women were flying in hot-air balloons and dirigible balloons. French brothers Joseph Michel and Jacques Etienne Montgolfier created the hot air balloon in 1783, and German Wilhelmine Reichard was the first woman to make a solo flight in a balloon in 1811. French engineer Jules Henri Giffard built the first airship, or dirigible balloon, in 1852, and the first

woman to pilot such an aircraft was Aida de Acosta of the United States in 1903. While airplanes and space shuttles were invented after these novels were written, the novelists would have been no stranger to the idea that women were sometimes flying, using the existing forms of air travel. Utopian texts offer critiques of current culture and thought experiments for possible futures. While the male protagonist provides a skeptical, masculine view of the other worlds, and he must be persuaded of the worth of new cultural arrangements, potentially convincing the reader alongside him, it does not allow the reader to fully consider how an Earthly woman might perceive and perhaps even thrive in these alternative cultures. As such, it seems unfortunate that these authors—and essentially all other authors of utopian works in this time period—were unable to depict, or decided against depicting, a female astronaut explorer.[30]

Though these novels lack female narrators, women have now of course traveled beyond the limits of the Earth's atmosphere. Soviet Valentina Tereshkova became the first woman in space in 1963 when she orbited the Earth for two days in Vostok 6. Now, sixty-five women have made the journey, making up approximately 11.5% of the total number of astronauts (Gorman). While women still make up a relatively small percentage of astronauts, women flying into outer space seems like an apt metaphor for how women's roles have changed over time. We are flying to new heights and exploring new spaces, often alongside male counterparts. Though increases to women's rights have improved slowly over time, and we have had some setbacks, we have seen improvements and expect to see more. Whether we are flying through outer space or we are firmly planted on planet Earth, it seems to be the hope of these authors and many readers that women will soar.

[30] Exceptions might include Randall Richberg's *Reinstern* (1900), which includes a female protagonist who accesses a new planet through a dream vision, or Oldfield Pettersen's *Venus* (1924), which depicts two women arriving from Venus to educate women in Chicago. However, in neither of these texts does an Earth woman travel into space.

Not only did these novels contribute to conversations regarding women's rights and how societies could be constructed differently, but they also added to a body of work that laid the foundation for later utopic and dystopic texts.[31] More precisely, these novels contributed to the foundation of work in which women authors imagine alternative worlds with distinct gender relationships to highlight better alternatives and offer critiques of their own time and place.[32] Alice Ilgenfritz Jones, Ella Merchant, and Nettie Parrish Martin present readers with various worlds that consider diverse arrangements between men and women, ranging from the society-wide adoption of traditionally masculine behaviors to a perfected world of equality and harmony. In turn, this allows readers to reflect on the gender constructions in their own culture and consider whether changes are warranted, and if so, how they could come to be. Though we have made much progress on women's rights and gender equality since the publication of *Unveiling a Parallel* and *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds*, there is still work to be done. As Hollinger writes, "One hundred years after its first publication, the vast majority of North American women are still far from achieving even the less than completely desirable success enjoyed by Elodia in Thursia. The

[31] As one reviewer states, "These long-forgotten authors beat H. G. Wells to the gate with their 1893 novel that was a combination of Utopian literature and science fiction" (Rogers 204). If the umbrella of utopian/dystopian fiction is defined broadly, nearly any work that takes place in outer space could fall within the genre, as each would likely present an alternative world that could be seen as more or less ideal than our own. Many of these novels share similarities with the Progressive Era utopian texts. For instance, like Ulyssum, Arthur Dent of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979) similarly travels through outer space, interacting with other characters and learning more about Earth. Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) highlights interplanetary relationships, exploring cultural characteristics such as politics and religion, as we see in *A Pilgrim's Progress in Other Worlds*.

[32] For example, Hollinger points out the similarities between *Unveiling a Parallel* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's well-known *Herland*, published nearly two decades later: "as in Herland, the narrator is a young male explorer who encounters a new world and a new world order, and whose naive questions and reactions provide the excuse for various of its inhabitants to explain this new world's social systems and values to him and to the reader" (233). The parallels with *Herland* are undeniable, and more recent works also seem informed by this literary legacy. For instance, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) features a planet called Gethen whose inhabitants are ambisexual, with no fixed sex. Similarly, in Elizabeth Bear's *Carnival* (2006), an all-female, primarily lesbian society on the lush planet of New Amazonia defends themselves from the male-dominated Old Earth Colonial Coalition. Utopian and dystopian texts present thought experiments that allow authors and readers to ask questions and imagine alternatives. Authors like Jones, Merchant, and Martin helped lay the groundwork for writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to build thought-provoking worlds.

realm of universal peace and love represented by Caskia seems as out of reach as it ever was" (234). Thus, these novels are still relevant for us to read and study, both to deepen our understanding of cultural dynamics at the turn of the twentieth century and as a reminder that progress is slow but persistent. Whether in our world or another, may we work towards a just and equitable society for all.

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