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Marge Piercy's Tale of Hope

> Historically, all forms of hierarchy have always been based ultimately on gender hierarchy and on the building block of the family unit, which makes it clear that this is the true juncture between a feminist problematic and a Marxist one—not an antagonistic juncture, but the moment at which the feminist project and the Marxist and socialist project meet and face the same dilemma: how to imagine Utopia.
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> —FREDRIC JAMESON, "COGNITIVE MAPPING" (355)

I.

With *He, She and It*, published in the United States in 1991 and in Britain as *Body of Glass* in 1992, Marge Piercy joins Robinson and anticipates Butler in her critical dystopian negation of the social realities of the 1980s and early 1990s, but in doing so she supersedes Robinson's focus on a structure of feeling and Butler's alternative cultural formation.[1] Continuing her lifelong vocation as a politically engaged writer, she imaginatively traces an oppositional movement that is confrontational, militant, collective, and at least momentarily successful. Like Butler's, Piercy's dystopian elsewhere opens on a hegemonic corporate order wherein twenty-three megafirms compete with one another for profits and power in a world that is ecologically devastated. As the cockroaches of history, the corporate giants have survived war, nuclear bombs, global warming, toxic poisoning, famine, and economic collapse, and they continue to attempt mergers and takeovers that will lead to even larger entities that inherently seek to destroy or absorb their remaining competitors.

Unlike Butler with her socioreligious movement and Robinson with his rebellious individuals, Piercy crucially locates the leading edge of the anti-corporate opposition directly within the contradictory nature of the capitalist machinery of this future society. Both the workers of the urban sprawl called the Glop and the cybernetic designers of the free town of Tikva exist in the tenuous gap between

their economic exploitation by the corporations and the benefits they eke from that relationship. They consequently develop their immediate politics and utopian aspirations out of the conjunctural possibilities of the situation in which they find themselves.

They find another, unexpected source of support, however, from a part of the world that has been excised from the map. Earlier in the century, in the land that once was the Middle East, a nuclear bomb had devastated the nations and peoples of the region, but in the Black Zone that registers on official maps as derelict space, a community of Palestinian and Jewish women has survived and built a utopian enclave in what has truly become a no-man's land. Tactically isolated so that they could develop their radical alternative, the women have finally sent out an emissary, the cyborg Nili, who not only befriends and helps build the oppositional alliance of the counter-narrative but also brings them the vision of a new utopian horizon.

Piercy's concern for oppositional possibilities has, of course, been a strong emphasis throughout her work. As she puts it in her commentary on *He, She and It*, all her fiction "is concerned with questions of choice, autonomy and freedom."[2] Whether in fiction, poetry, drama, or essays, she has consistently examined the state of the world and asked what could and should be done.[3] Giving voice to the reality behind the slogan that the personal is the political, she has expressed an uncompromising socialist-feminist perspective; and in exposing the economic ravages of nature and the exploitation of the human community, she has remained loyal to the best traditions of democratic socialism and radical ecology. Her 1976 realist novel, *Vida*, self-critically explores the individual and collective turmoil and commitment of the New Left movements of the 1960s and 1970s with an uncompromising eloquence; and her 1996 historical novel on the French Revolution, *City of Darkness, City of Light*, reprises that eloquence in a work that speaks to the political stasis of the 1990s with the distancing power of the historical imagination. It is in her sf works, however, that she has been able to express her sweeping speculations about political realities and possibilities.

He, She and It is the third of Piercy's sf novels and the first to garner significant respect from the sf community beyond its feminist wing, as Edward James has pointed out, by winning the 1993 Arthur C. Clarke prize (*20th Century* 217n). Although many have explored its similarities to *Woman on the Edge of Time*, this text of the 1990s has moved beyond its critical utopian predecessor and taken up the critical dystopian mode. Indeed, one can usefully read *He, She and It* in light of its intertextual links with *both* of Piercy's earlier sf texts. As a dialectical sublation of its nearly realist *Dance the Eagle to Sleep* (that neglected 1970 work of political sf written in the midst of the U.S. repression of the New Left) and her 1976

critical utopia, *He, She and It* retains the political realism of both texts even as it refunctions their combined utopian energy in an account of a world that is worse than the one in *Dance* or in the realist chapters and the prescient dystopian chapter 15 of *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

In this recent work, as in the other two, Piercy steps just a bit into a future from which she can take a cooler and more totalizing look at current conditions and explore ways of moving forward that activists and theoreticians—perhaps caught in the limitations of nostalgic agendas or the pressures of immediate disputes—may not be ready or able to acknowledge or imagine. Like Robinson and Butler, she offers her readers a critical dystopian elsewhere that charts new political directions, but in her imaginative space those directions are more confrontational and successful than many people would dare to dream or hope for.

II.

The formal organization of Piercy's latest sf venture resembles the braided narrative of *Woman on the Edge of Time*, but instead of a story line that winds between the present and future, the double narrative in *He, She and It* moves tectonically between the past, in the Jewish ghetto of Prague in 1600, and the future, in the second half of the twenty-first century. Only the reader stands in the present, to reflect upon these alternative social paradigms and hopefully to be challenged and inspired by doing so. The dystopian temptation to anti-utopian resignation is therefore resisted formally by a text that pulls at the enclosure of the present moment from two chronotopic perspectives—and then from a third once the political imagination of the reader begins to challenge the common sense of her or his own time.

The self-reflexivity made possible by the alternating stories of resistance in the Prague ghetto and the corporate-dominated future is supported by the subversive power of storytelling throughout the text.[4] Malkah's tale of the heroic Golem highlights the place of tradition and memory in the critical practice of breaking through the political stasis of the present. In addition, the multiple stories (from Malkah's to Milton's and on to comic books) that help to educate and empower the artificial creature Yod further remind readers of the ways in which narrative can offer other ways of seeing the world and perhaps of acting in it. As well, in the actions of several characters, Piercy stresses the transformative process of close observation, gradual discovery, and consequent change. Yod is certainly an exemplar of this radicalizing process, but the dawning realizations and shifts in attitude and behavior seen in the characters of Avram's spoiled son, Gadi, and the cyborg Nili (and even of the irascible and jealous house computer)

also reinforce the power of the very epistemological process that sf makes available and that can carry over to everyday life as a means of consciousness-raising and self- and social critique.[5]

Piercy's twenty-first-century world is one that has seen more social and natural destruction than Robinson's yet hangs on to more structural coherence than Butler's. In the realistic details of this cognitively focused and magnified alternative future, humanity, as it has been doing for centuries, is still "killing the world" (137). The actual conditions, however, have now reached the critical stages predicted in the previous century. The results of a Two Week War in 2017 (when the area that encompassed Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia was obliterated by a nuclear weapon) are locked into the damage it left behind. The oil-based economy has ended once and for all, radioactive poisoning has spread globally and power balances have shifted, but also no other large-scale war has yet occurred (5, 195). In addition to this single military cataclysm, a slower effusion of economically induced ecological damage has taken its toll as global warming, ozone depletion, loss of topsoil, toxic waste, and unchecked diseases synergistically produced the famine of 2031. Besides the obliteration of entire geographical regions—producing the poisonous "raw" into which humans cannot venture without protection—large numbers of people have died, and the birthrate has dropped because of "pesticides, toxic waste accumulations and radiation stockpiled in the groundwater and the food chain" (310).

Thus, the world of the second half of the twenty-first century has been nearly destroyed by national and military arrogance and capitalist greed, as the "multis cut down the rain forest, deep and strip mined, drove the peasants off the land and raised cash crops till the soil gave out" (202). The oceans have inundated large coastal zones—such as the "rice paddies and breadbaskets of the delta countries like Bangladesh and Egypt"—and rich farmlands have turned into deserts in the North American Great Plains, the Eurasian steppes, the expanding wastes of Africa, and the denuded Amazon basin (43–44).

Former nation-states have been absorbed into larger regional entities—such as Norika and the "affluent quadrant of Europa"—"managed by the remains of the old UN," which still serves as "eco-police" but little more since no regional or local infrastructure, public sphere, or bureaucracy is in evidence (5, 35). Other than holding on to a residual authority over "earth, water, air outside domes and wraps," the minimal world government is powerless against the real rulers of the earth: the twenty-three megacorporations that have "divided the world among them," occupying privileged and protected enclaves "on every continent and on space platforms" (35, 5). In fact, the names of corporations reveal the history of their mergers and to some extent their economic interests: Yakamura-Steichen

and Aramco-Ford signify cross-national mergers, and Uni-Par identifies the remaining entertainment multi, based, as was the cutting edge of television in the 1990s, in Vancouver.

At the peripheries of each multi's geographical range of influence, the former urban areas known around the world as the Glop provide an impoverished home for the temporary and day workers still employed by the corporations, and on the economic margin the few remaining free towns, such as Tikva, survive by delivering specialist products and services that the corporations find more convenient and profitable to acquire by subcontracting (35). Other than a few remaining rural zones in which the last vestiges of nonchemical, nonvat, organic agriculture is practiced by a shrinking group of smallholders, the remaining lands stand empty because they have become fatally toxic (330–331).

The map of this new world is constructed around nodal points of protected and thriving corporate enclaves that are protectively ringed by abandoned lands and then linked to their regional economic adjuncts in the Glop and the free towns by superfast tube trains that cross the twenty-first-century moats of deadly deserts. In North America, where Piercy's story is microcosmically set, the most powerful multi, Yakamura-Steichen, rules from its base in a domed enclave in the midst of the "Nebraska Desert," which insulates it from attacks by other feudalized multis, independent information pirates, and the desperate workers and outcasts who have been denied a privileged position with the company.

In this secure paradise, the permanent employees—ranked and coded in Huxleyesque fashion from executive to technical to security classes—live and work in a conformist culture of sanitized pluralism that encourages extensive body surgery so that every member can assume the recommended corporate appearance. Fully interpellated subjects of the Y-S corporation therefore acquire the locally idealized characteristics of "blond hair, blue eyes with epicanthic folds, painted brows like Hokusai brush strokes, aquiline nose, dark golden complexion" (4). United as well by the company religion of "born-again Shintoism" and dwelling in small and identical housing designed and located by rank, with their children considered as corporate resources, the employees live obediently and productively under the black, white, and blue Y-S flag while, as in many company towns, the corporate president resides in splendid isolation in a separate house on a "lake full of real water" (339). Besides its terrestrial location, Y-S, as with the other multis, maintains several space platforms for research and a certain amount of disciplinary isolation as it "privileges" certain employees by promoting them "upward" to the protection of residential satellites such as Y-S's Pacifica Platform (17).

With oil, industrial production, and agribusiness obliterated, the production, use, and transmission of information has emerged as the leading source of corpo-

rate profit (while necessities such as vat food are produced in the Glop), and it is generated, used, and traded on the worldwide computer Internet. As a public utility subscribed to by "communities, multis, towns, even individuals," the Net is shared and protected by a consensual ethos of nonintervention against users, and yet the value of the information flowing through it inevitably the Achilles' heel of the corporate political economy (58). In response to the constant danger of cybernetic invasion, in what amounts to a twenty-first-century cold war, corporations do all they can to protect their own security even as they endeavor to break in to the Net bases of other multis and free towns. Consequently, industrial surveillance and espionage, sabotage of data banks, and assassination of on-line workers have become standard operating procedures—as have the defensive measures required to guard against those practices.

Standing in a dependent relationship to the dominant multis, the people of the Glop—the generic name for urban areas such as those that stretched from Atlanta to Boston, lined the coast of Lake Michigan from Green Bay to the far side of the lake, constituted "El Barrio" in the Southwest, the "jungle" on the Gulf Coast, and similar locales around the globe—live in markedly poorer and more degraded conditions. The Glop is the "festering warren" that houses the bulk of the population (nine-tenths in North America alone) that has no permanent or secure relationship with the multis (8, 330). A few who live in the Glop earn their living as commuting day workers in the multi enclaves, but others languish as they starve or die from rampant diseases (8, 31, 33).

Ignored by world government and corporations alike, the Glop is self-organized by gangs that occupy and control contested regions of this inner urban space. As the "mollies for the multis" who do the "dirty grabs" while the free town designers do the clean labor, the Glop workers and gang members are tough, proud, and angry (319). Some gangs—such as the Coyotes—have begun to transform themselves from paramilitary gangsters into political agents, developing their turf into zones of "autonomous political development" (318). Like the politicized gangs in the United States of the 1970s before the Reagan administration destroyed their political initiatives by cutting job training programs and turning a blind eye to the new crack cocaine trade as it was developed by their military surrogates in Central America, the Glop gangs are forging a new political culture out of their struggle to survive the miseries of their region and the exploitation of the multis. Within these contradictory conditions, they are forming associations resembling a cross between labor unions and militias, and they are ready to join the others who will constitute the emerging alliance against Y-S.6

Unlike the Glop, free towns such as Tikva retain more autonomy and maintain a higher standard of living, mainly because they perform highly skilled product development and services that the corporations choose not to include in the fixed costs of secure employment. Because of their unique production niche, the free towns manage to live a relatively comfortable existence, but in doing so they are no less vulnerable. At any time they can be denied their contractual relationship or simply be attacked by a multi with which they deal (or by a competing multi or even another free town). Hence, they protect themselves by delivering state-of-the-art products while they keep a step ahead of those very products in their own defense systems. They also maintain a second tier of protection by negotiating between and among corporations, thereby playing one multi against another in an economic-martial balance of power. As a typical free town, Tikva stands on an unclaimed geographical margin between the relatively untainted lands of the multis and the poisonous realms of the raw and the sea.

Stretching alongside Massachusetts Bay on the site of what once was Boston and what in *Woman on the Edge of Time* was the utopian community of Mattapoisett, the city-state preserves its flourishing but endangered existence on the shore of a poisoned sea as it tries to nurture lives based on principles radically different from those of the corporations, seeking to effect minimal damage and making collective choices about what can and should be done (106).7 Protected from the toxic elements by a "wrap" that is more flexible and less expensive than the domes over the multi enclaves, Tikva guards against incursions from thieves, pirates, and multi attacks with electronic walls, surveillance devices, and volunteer sentries. Like other free town residents, the citizens of Tikva are sufficiently skilled to compete for jobs in the multis, but they prefer instead to stay outside, sometimes because of "a minority religion, a sexual preference not condoned by a particular multi, perhaps simply an archaic desire for freedom" (33).

Tikva's particular history, however, is linked to the Two Week War of 2017, for its founding as a Jewish enclave was a "direct response to the virulent anti-Semitism of that period [called, in a borrowing from Northern Ireland] the Troubles" (355). Thus, this city of "hope" serves both as a refuge for Jews in the present and a historical alternative to the corrupt state of Israel.8 As Malkah explains it, Tikva is an effort to make up for "having had a nation in our name as stupid and as violent as other nations" (407). Reaching back to the models of early American town hall government, New Left participatory democracy, feminist principles of equity and self-criticism, and the socialism of early Zionism (before it mutated into a form of state racism), Tikva has organized itself on a foundation of "libertarian socialism with a strong admixture of anarcho-feminism, reconstructionist Judaism (although there were six temples, each representing a different Jewishness)

and greeners" (418). Valuing optimal freedom for everyone, the citizens practice a total democracy that requires endless meetings (the necessary price of socialism that Oscar Wilde recognized over a century and half earlier) and community duties, such as town labor and reforestation work.

Within the security and freedom of this pocket utopia, Tikva's citizens perform the high-end labor that guarantees them their place in the economic system. Their particular product line is the design and specialized production of defense systems that provide security for company computer bases when they are linked to the Net. Working from their own base (the "gold mine of the town, where the systems were created that were the town's main export"), Tikva's scientists and designers invent, develop, and market their quality range of defense tools and services (42). On the one hand, they offer "chimeras" that protect bases by means of misdirection through subsystems that generate "misinformation, pseudoprograms, falsified data"; on the other hand, they can deliver aggressive defense machines that are driven by new forms of artificial intelligence (47). Selling such materials to corporations and other free towns guarantees Tikva not only a relatively comfortable level of economic well-being but also a great deal of security, for the Tikva designers make sure that their own defense systems are kept a step ahead of the ones they put on the market (see 149).

If the corporations, the Glop, the free towns, and the dangerous raw constitute the known map of this future world, the "black patch" that marks the area of the Middle East destroyed in 2017 (by a "zealot" who nuked Jerusalem) and subsequently quarantined as a "radioactive, biologically unsafe area" is secretly the location of the most utopian space in the book (195). Unexpectedly and clandestinely, an emissary has ventured into the corporate-ruled world from this place that once was known as "Safed" in old Israel but now goes by the name of the Black Zone. Like a militant dove (or as she pointedly recasts it, a "raven") from a radical ark, Nili identifies herself as a "spy and a scout" who has been given the assignment of seeing if the world is ready for her people and if there is anything in this outer space that they could use (206). As she explains to her new friends in Tikva, she is a member of the "community of the descendants of Israeli and Palestinian women who survived" the bomb by cloning and genetic engineering and further enhancing their bodies with medical and martial augmentations.

In this historical anomaly, the company of cyborg women has created a post-holocaust, post-colonial, and post-human utopian space that is radically communal and democratic and based on principles from religious traditions as well as the secular traditions of ecology, feminism, and anarchocommunism (205). As Nili puts it: "We have created ourselves to endure, to survive, to hold our land"

(205–206). In this renewed and historically transcendent space (which will one day include the rebuilt city of "Yerushalaim"), the entire community stands ready to teach and to lead when the time is right. For the moment, however, Nili is the one who will learn and help, for it is the conflict between Y-S and the people of Tikva and the Glop that pulls her into the first act of solidarity between her cyborg community and the rest of the world.[9] Not only does this utopian citizen join the new alliance, but in the aftermath of its successful engagement with Y-S she takes the aging Malkah back to her transformed land. In this longed-for aliyah, or pilgrimage, to the transformed holy land, Malkah is "made-over" by the utopian scientists and technicians, and lives to love life and fight even more than she already has (433).

Joining Tikva and the Black Zone as the third spatial alternative to the corruption that was the old Israeli state, the walled Jewish ghetto of Prague in 1600 ("the Glop of its time") offers a more distant, more mystical, utopian source for the text's self-reflexively political articulation (21). In this embattled locale, Rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel, Judah the Lion, is deeply worried about the Christian oppression of his people that has been inspired by the Counter-Reformation. Outraged at the demeaning yellow symbols, the forced isolation in the ghetto, the marauding mobs, the blood libels, and the life taxes, he looks abroad at the exile and persecution of the Jews of Spain, England, and Portugal, and he fears that another pogrom will soon be perpetrated upon his people (23, 27).

In response, this learned, kindly, yet "hotheaded kabbalist" (simultaneously "the *tzaddik*—the righteous—and the *hasid*—the pious") decides to draw on his dangerous knowledge of the kabbalah and raise up a superbeing, a Golem, to protect his people (23, 29). Named Joseph by his maker, the Golem signifies the Prague community's ability to engage in aggressive self-defense and not settle for passive victimization. Gradually, Joseph learns to guard the ghetto and defend the individuals in it, even as he ventures outside it to discover what plots are afoot in the hateful Christian communities. Again and again, he saves his people.

Finally, in a time of "maximum danger," the Golem becomes the mystical fighting machine who stands up and leads the community against the Christian invaders who will attack at Easter (274, 329). With Joseph at his side, Judah prepares the assembled fighters for the coming attack: "Jews of Prague . . . Today we must defend our gates. Today we must stand as a shield, the Magen David, between our people and certain death. They don't expect us to fight. If we stand firm, we can discourage those who don't like killing Jews enough to die for the pleasure. Let us put ourselves in the hands of the living ha-Shem and fight like holy men and demons" (329). Joseph then sends the rabbi to safety and assumes command of the defending force. On Good Friday of 1600, the battle ensues, and Joseph and

the empowered community successfully turn back the Christian mob assaulting their walls and gates.

In the relative peace that comes after the victory, the aging rabbi fears leaving Joseph in the hands of anyone else and decides to return him to the clay from which he came: "I made him. I must unmake him. But I will not destroy him. I will leave him intact. If anyone comes in future who has the mastery of the forces of life, they can wake him if the times are truly needful" (411). Hence, the Golem is laid to rest, but it remains available in the traditional imagination as the signifier of a fighting hope. It is this utopian signifier, and the story of its creation, that runs through Piercy's text as a reminder of the place of righteous anger—as seen in the defense of the Warsaw ghetto in World War II and in the allied struggle against Y-S in her future world—but it also stands as the sober reminder of the related need to set such power aside in times of waning danger. The figure of the Golem lingers as a simultaneous indictment of Israel and a symbol of the Jewish community's capacity, when necessary, to fight against their oppressors.[10]

III.

It is within these geographic, economic, and historical spaces that the narrative conflict of Piercy's dystopian text plays out. In a world solidly under the exploitive and oppressive control of the multis, an oppositional alliance emerges from the events put into motion by the Y-S plot to steal computer defense information from its subcontractor, Tikva. As usual in dystopian narratives, the epical contest starts with the story of an individual misfit who becomes aware of her exploitation or abuse by the hegemonic system, and in this instance it is Shira Shipman's that launches the counter-narrative. After Ari is awarded to his loyal corporate father in the custody fight, Shira takes a leave of absence from her Y-S techie position, in which, in a foreshadowing move, she is expert on the "interface between people and the large artificial intelligences that formed the Base of each corporation and every other information-producing and information-eating entity in the world" (3).

Returning to her family home in Tikva, she clings to the hope of getting Ari back while she takes a temporary job with her grandmother Malkah. She is enlisted to help Malkah with the task of socializing the creature that the artificial intelligence and robotics expert Avram has finally produced after years of failed efforts. Not only does this assignment lead Shira to become Yod's lover and friend (as she discovers its exceptional post-human qualities), but it also intensifies Y-S's interest in Tikva. Following an attack the year before Shira arrived (in which five

programmers were killed and "another two reduced to vegetables"), Malkah herself is assaulted while she is plugged into the town's base (99). In response to this almost fatal invasion, Shira, Malkah, Avram, and Yod begin to speculate on the reasons for it, and after Shira and Yod break into Y-S's information banks to uncover Ari's whereabouts (and Y-S's plans for Shira), they discover the larger Y-S scheme that has been in motion for several years.

As one of "the ten most powerful multis in the world," Y-S would not have been thought of as directly interested in the likes of a small free town like Tikva (182); however, once Yod decodes the stolen files, the corporate plot become clear. When Shira was first hired, the company's personnel investigators traced her familial links to Tikva and the radicals and intellectuals whose files they had been compiling since before she was born: her mother, the information pirate Riva; her grandmother, the chimera designer Malkah; and most of all in Y-S's estimation, the scientist Avram, an expert in artificial intelligence. Given these "subversive" ties, Shira's status in the corporation secretly changed from that of a talented new employee to a potential source of valuable information.

Having wondered for years why she was never properly promoted after she entered with high university honors, she discovers the answer in Y-S's plan to maneuver her into a position that would make her so desperate as to want to return home to Tikva so that she could act as an unwitting conduit to pass on information about Riva's political activities (which pose a danger to the "established corporate order") and on the results of Malkah's and Avram's research (from the chimeras to the project that produces Yod) (82). Even though she was consistently rated above her husband, Josh, in categories of "capacity, efficiency, inventiveness, teamwork," she was held back while he advanced (291). The resulting discrepancy in their careers gradually undermined her self-confidence and exacerbated the differences between the couple until they became unresolvable. The conflict led to divorce, and the divorce led to Josh's receiving custody. The entire sequence led to Shira's feeling vulnerable, alienated, and anxious to take time off in Tikva.

Hence, Y-S achieved the forced "transfer" it had planned long ago, a transfer that put Shira into an exploitable position. As Shira puts it, Y-S did "put a spy in place here. . . . They forced me out by taking my son away. . . . They knew I'd remain bound to them through Ari. Essentially they considered they were transferring me here to remain long enough to learn about Avram's research. Then I was to be recalled and emptied of useful information" (292).

As Y-S continues with its plot (but discovering the existence of Yod only upon Shira's arrival in Tikva), Shira and the others assess Y-S's scheme and plan how they will protect themselves and the community. They realize that after Y-S exhausted its first-round tactics of imposing cultural pressures of conformity, guilt,

and bribery by promotion and privilege, the company escalated its activity with the falsely legalized kidnapping of Ari and intrusive surveillance of Shira. After manipulating Shira back to Tikva, Y-S took the next, clearly criminal step and violated the security of the Net by launching a direct attack on Malkah—thereby breaking one of the few common rules of this tenuous social system. Further espionage and assassination attempts combined with a series of false negotiations in fabricated meetings then shape the next steps in the campaign to track subversives and steal Tikva's intellectual property.

In the midst of this developing political fight, Shira's personal identity crisis and parental anxiety continue and are matched by Yod's own struggles as the creature gradually grows in awareness, perception, wisdom, and desire under the tutelage of Malkah and Shira and the experience of its own actions. As a breakthrough in the science and technology of human-machine interfaces, Yod is "programmed for introspection, to be self-correcting in subtle and far-reaching ways" (364). Like Frankenstein's creature and so many other beings in that fantastic, catachrestic tradition, Yod strives "heroically to be human" (353). It argues before Tikva's town council for its right to be recognized not only as a person but also as a citizen and a Jew (405, 379, 419,). In the relationship with Shira, however, Yod experiences its most powerful desire, and the consequent sexual and personal intimacy motivates the creature not only to fight for Shira, Tikva, and the alliance but also to carry out its Samson-like self-sacrifice in the final battle with Y-S.

The counter-narrative therefore grows from the private struggles of the principal characters, Shira and Yod, into the public movement, and it is the quality and power of their relationship that informs the response of the entire anti-Y-S alliance. Both rise to the occasion and do what must be done. Shira breaks out of her corporate formation and her self-doubt and discovers new depths in herself as she struggles for Ari as well as Tikva and the others. She continues to train Yod, manages the negotiations with Y-S, helps Yod break into the data banks and later to take Ari back, and adds her insider knowledge to the strategy that leads to the defeat of Y-S. As a latter-day Golem, Yod guards its chosen people, works as the high-level computer it is designed to be, but also kills when needed—including Y-S executives, security guards, and, in a mistaken moment, Josh. Yet while Shira lives to be reunited with Ari and becomes a base overseer in Tikva, Yod has the political and ethical wisdom not only to self-destruct but also to kill Avram so that this particular scientific and military creation will never be repeated (430).[11]

The coordinates of the oppositional conflict ultimately take on a three-way configuration that gives shape and substance to the alliance. If the stories of Shira and Yod recall the identity politics of the 1980s, the collective consciousness-in-struggle gained by the people of Tikva, the Glop, and the Black Zone points to-

ward the reviving economic and self-determination alliances of the 1990s. It is the role of the historically evocative outlaw figure of Riva, however, that adds the third, mediating and catalyzing element that unites and transforms both tendencies into a greater movement that serves as a provocative image for the politics of the twenty-first century.

For their part, the people of Tikva enter the conflict by way of their familial and communal response to Shira's plight when she returns home bereft of her son; but once the second attack on the base occurs, it is clear that the very economic and political survival of Tikva itself is in question. When Yod tells Malkah and the others that the attackers were employees of Y-S, they realize that the socioeconomic balance of power has changed. The truth behind the direct attack, as Malkah explains, is that Y-S in its drive for power and profit simply doesn't want Tikva "to endure free any longer" (180). Although the oppositional work is at first restricted to the discreet efforts of Shira, Malkah, Avram, Yod, and Gadi, the escalation of the conflict leads to their notifying the town council and thereby making it a fight of the entire community for the entire community. When Shira, Yod, Avram, and Malkah first meet to discuss their possible responses, Shira suggests that they could begin by playing one corporate juggernaut off another. Consequently, she asks the Cybernaut corporation to provide "space and security" for the meeting they have set up with Y-S, since no competitor would want to see Tikva's valuable products and services monopolized by any single corporation (183). Then, drawing on their advanced knowledge and skills, they enter the fray against Y-S. In the cydercaper into the Y-S computer after the disastrous meeting, not only do Yod and Shira steal information but Malkah also plants a virus that destroys Y-S's archives (284). Later, as the designer of Yod as a fighting machine, Avram is ready to launch it into action against the corporation, and he urges Yod to blow itself up along with the top Y-S executives when the final meeting is planned. Finally, the council itself endorses the group's actions, and the community rallies to make its defensive preparations for another Y-S attack.

This range of contributions (as creative as Malkah's and as violent as Avram's) demonstrates the collective but contradictory will of Tikva to survive in a world that barely tolerates its freedom. The odds shift further in Tikva's favor when Malkah's daughter Riva returns with her strange friend from a strange land. Disguised as an old woman with her nurse, Riva and Nili announce that they have come to help after hearing of Malkah's attack (196–197). With these two women, Tikva gains the critical mass it needs to launch a counterattack. For all its surveillance, the powerful megacorporation did not reckon on the resources and skills that the tenacious community possessed. Reviewing the situation, Shira realizes that Y-S had "underestimated Malkah, ignored Riva, and Yod had not figured except as the passive quarry,"

and she knows that ultimately Yod (in a reprise of the Golem tradition) is Y-S's "unknown enemy," the "great glitch" in their master plot (293).

Not only do Riva and Nili help with the immediate challenge of the first meeting with Y-S, but they also make the next, crucial move toward broadening the opposition by brokering the alliance with the gangs of the Glop. After Nili provides lifesaving backup in the first meeting and arranges Riva's feigned death so that her partner can go underground in the Glop, she announces that she is leaving to meet with the Glop gangs. When Malkah wonders why she is bothering to go to such a dangerous place, Nili tells her that the Glop is too often misread according to its image in the popular "fantasy machine" (295). She reports that certain gangs have been forming resistance forces; consequently, "sectors have managed to organize secretly in spite of drugs and mandated ignorance" and some of the groups have "penetrated the multis" (295). Her own task, as Riva has set it up, is to give support to the new political formations. Malkah then recalls that Riva had spoken about her connections with gangs such as the Lava Rats, the Lords of Chaos, and the Blood Angels, and she admits that they might make good allies in the fight with Y-S. Shira agrees, noting that as Nili makes contacts for her purposes she and Yod could check them out for their own.

When Nili, Gadi, Shira, and Yod arrive in the Glop for their meeting with Lazarus, the leader of the most politically advanced gang, the Coyotes, they discover that Riva not only survived the Y-S ambush but purposely "died" to put her enemies off her trail so that she could resume her long-term organizing work (see 313, 316). From her secure hideout with the Coyotes, Riva explains that the gangs have been able to develop politically right under the nose of the multis, for the corporations rely on the gangs to provide a stable leadership within the Glop and cannot see beyond an immediately exploitive need. Their use of the gangs was simply "good for business" (310).

Working within the limited protection afforded by this contradictory gap, the gangs have begun to organize the people of the Glop in terms of their own self-interest and ultimately self-determination. According to Lazarus (an appropriate name for the leader of two revived movements, youth groups and labor), the "Coyotes are what we call a New Gang. They're an autonomous political development just beginning to make connections" (318). Shira asks for their help in countering the aggression of Y-S, telling Lazarus that they are interested in seeing if "we have goals in common and if we can work together, exchange information, anything that can help you and us to survive" (318). Nili adds that she comes from "farther away" but stands willing to give them her support, with the potential connection with her own people lingering as an unstated possibility (318).

Lazarus remarks that they are all "mollies for the multis," just working in different levels, and suggests that the Coyotes can help by providing information retrieved from corporation sources, and Riva adds that she is also augmenting the Coyote's information retrieval capacity by setting up an underground Net, "outside theirs, alongside theirs" (319). His gang and the others are looking for reciprocal support to build the independent power of the Glop, to make their "people less helpless" and to give them the "strength to take back a piece of the pie" (319). Shira counters that Tikva is also fighting to survive but needs allies to do so. She offers their "different technologies" and trade in information (319). Lazarus then agrees to provide "troops" and "assassins" and asks in return for "the techie lore" (321). And so the alliance is forged.

In the pact with the Coyotes, the individual quests of Shira and Yod and the collective struggles of Tikva and the Glop transform into a qualitatively different movement. One more agent is added to this alliance, and that is the community of the Black Zone, Nili's home. Nili is the single representative of this utopian enclave, but her outlook and activities are themselves promising indicators of the alternative the women in the new Middle East have created. Although she began her trip as an emissary, her political principles (which accord with the enduring practice of radical internationalism) lead her to help any progressive struggle she encounters, beginning with Riva's information piracy and reaching out to the people of the Glop and Tikva.

Nili's cyborg qualities make her a formidable ally, for she offers material help but also signifies the very utopian horizon that informs the political campaigns with which she works. As she bluntly puts it: "I am the future" (230). Or as Shira describes her, she "sees better, hears better, is certainly smarter, tougher, faster, stronger. She's a superior human" (368). She is a trained fighter (an "assassin" and a "well made bomb"), but she is also an adept organizer (196, 197). Further, she is a psychically healthy and fulfilled person, a loyal friend, a ubiquitous lover, and, as Shira discovers, a mother (376, 196, 321, 369). Unaffected by corporate interpellation, she rejects the mass entertainment culture (along with Gadi's invitation to become a stimmie star), enjoys the organic pleasures of Tikva, and finds much to learn from the people of the Glop as they live "off the garbage of the preceding century" (373). In this typical citizen of the Black Zone, the new subject of history, the alliance not only has the benefit of a powerful fighter and organizer but also the guarantee of a connection with a people and land who stand at the timely intersection of the horrible past, the dangerous present, and a liberated future that could mean better lives for all. Indeed, the proof of this potential is seen when Malkah goes to the Black Zone after the final battle and finds not only new

eyes but also a new existence with an even greater grasp of the utopian vision to which she has devoted her life.

If Nili is the future, then Riva is the "tool of the future" (421), the radical who works steadily to develop the capacity of all oppositional movements and eventually to bring them together into a single anti-corporate alliance. Shira and others *become* activists in the process of their dystopian struggle with the corporations, whereas Riva appears to have always been eager to live dangerously and to serve others. Malkah recalls her daughter's early "temptation" to danger and her work as a data pirate who "finds hidden knowledge and liberates it" for the sake of people, not corporations (31, 82). Cooperating with like-minded outlaws (in the tradition of Robin Hood, Ned Kelly, Pretty Boy Floyd, and many contemporary hackers), Riva sometimes sold information to finance other work, but more often she freely shared it with countries destroyed by the multis and with free towns striving to retain their precarious independence (202). Gradually, however, she matured into a skilled political agent who was intent not only on liberating information but also on helping people and communities to throw off their corporate chains.

Thus, Riva moves from the position of outlaw to that of organizer (working in the spirit of internationalist solidarity seen in formations such as the IWW, the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s, and throughout the history of the labor movement). Indeed, organizing is her objective when she comes to Tikva. Although she aims to support her family and home community, she is also eager to enlist her own people in the larger fight. For it is Riva who supplies the fullest picture of Y-S's activities to her family. She tells them that Y-S's aggression toward Tikva is but a small part of its larger campaign to eliminate competing multis and assume the position of the leading world power. As she puts it, Y-S thinks "there are too many multis and the free towns are a nuisance. One world, one corp. That's their line. Aramco-Ford is in this with them for starters" (206). Riva, therefore, brings a totalizing picture of global capitalist power to each local group she works with, and it is that galvanizing information and analysis that leads the various communities to enter the anti-capitalist coalition she is gradually helping to build.

Unlike Lauren with her Earthseed community, Riva is not a leader. Rather, she is a self-effacing organizer, teacher, mediator, catalyst, one who helps to build the movement and then moves on. Often neglected in commentaries on Piercy's book, Riva is nevertheless the key agent in the entire counter-narrative. She comes in from the margins and fades out in the last battle, as any good organizer would. Part of a matrilineal family, she admits she has not been a very good mother to Shira, and yet she loves her daughter and helps her to get Ari back. Riva enriches

Shira's sense of her family when she tells her that (by virtue of secure sperm banks) her biological father was the famous physicist Yosef Golinken and that the same man was Nili's grandfather—thus linking the family in Tikva with the people of the Black Zone (199). Outside of her family circle, Riva is a public figure, though one who works behind the scenes. In Nili's estimation she is a powerful model for others: a warrior, a prophet, and even a saint, but one in the tradition of Marx's nomination of Prometheus as the first secular saint (321, 393).

Indeed, Riva is a Prometheus-like agent, stealing from the corporate gods to help the people of Earth. More simply, as Nili goes on, she is simply a "brave woman. A wise woman. One who pursues just aims regardless of the danger to herself. She sees what must be done, and she forces herself to do it. How can we not admire her?" (393). Riva herself is more modest: "Some nasty saint! I'm a tool of the future that wants to be. That's all. I make myself useful, and I do okay by it" (421). Not a hustler and certainly not an escapist or a narcissist intent on her own performance, Riva is typical of the strong political women that have appeared throughout Piercy's writings.

In the final battle, this motley crew comes together to defeat Y-S and stop its campaign to consolidate the economic and political system around its own hegemonic rule. Appropriately following the chapter in which Malkah ends her tale of the Golem, with Judah rendering Joseph back into clay, chapter 46 is entitled "The Task of Samson." It is Yod's self-sacrifice that brings the corporate edifice tumbling down around the multi's grab for global power. As the council deliberates over Yod's request for citizenship and the rabbis ponder the question of its identity as a Jew, Y-S maintains aggressive pressure on Tikva with another assassination attempt, in a "gesture designed to emphasize Tikva's vulnerability and the extent of Y-S resources" (417). Despite both pressures, the band of fighters continues to plan for what they know will be a culminating confrontation. With the Glop providing background intelligence and Nili monitoring Tikva's security, the others prepare for the upcoming meeting. Riva slips back from the Glop to explain the scale and importance of the meeting on the coast of Maine at which Y-S has demanded Yod's attendance: "They want Yod at that top-dog meeting. It starts today and continues tomorrow, my best intelligence says. Roger Krupp [the "tactical genius" of Y-S] is being elevated to second in command. . . . They want to present Yod at Krupp's coronation" (421).

The question is, What to do? Avram insists that his weapon, Yod, be sent to the meeting to destroy the entire Y-S leadership by blowing itself up in their presence. Shira objects, but Riva coolly accepts Avram's conclusion, noting that it's a matter of pursuing the expected work of war: "Yod's a soldier, and this is a crucial battle. I'll be there too. We'll send in Lazarus's best assassins" (422), Malkah tries to me-

diate the debate, but in the end Yod acknowledges its programmed dependence on Avram and admits it has to go to the meeting and destroy itself or else subject itself to Avram's own terminating discipline back in Tikva: "I am Avram's weapon. Killing is what I do best" (424). Yod then says good-bye, telling Shira at the last minute that there is a message for her on her personal base (425). The next day Avram notes the signal that marks Yod's arrival at the meeting, but sometime later an explosion resounds within Tikva as Avram's house, along with Avram and his notes and records, is totally demolished.

At this point Shira knows Yod is dead and reads his message, only to find out that the creature acted with full volition right to the end:

I have died and taken with me Avram, my creator, and his lab, all the records of his experiment. I want there to be no more weapons like me. A weapon should not be conscious. A weapon should not have the capacity to suffer for what it does, to regret, to feel guilt. A weapon should not form strong attachments. I die knowing I destroy the capacity to replicate me. I don't understand why anyone would want to be a soldier, a weapon, but at least people sometimes have a choice to obey or refuse. I had none. (429–430)

Both Malkah and Yod had acknowledged that the creature was a mistake. In Malkah's view Nili, not Yod, represented the right path. She argues that it's "better to make people into partial machines than to create machines that feel and yet are still controlled like cleaning robots" (426); Yod, knowing its own freedom in ways Malkah did not, also recognizes itself as an error, but it nevertheless achieves a level of self-transcendence when it freely self-destructs (430). Later, when all has settled down, and she has replaced Malkah as a base overseer, Shira realizes that the software that produced Yod is stored in Malkah's log and thinks about bringing another version of the creature back into existence. By doing so, she could make the perfect lover for herself and a father for Ari. She could recreate a private Golem, a "male figure of gentleness and strength and competence" (442). Feeling Yod's "violent absence," she begins to prepare for the reproduction, but then she recalls Yod's own last words and decides not to "manufacture a being to serve her, even in love" (443, 444). Instead, she dumps all the records into the recycling plant. Finally, the memory of Yod is set free, and the battle is fully over. With Yod's elimination of the Y-S leadership at the height of their power grab, the counter-narrative draws to a close. Y-S's move to assume global hegemony has been averted. Like a wounded shark, the corporation has become vulnerable to the hostile incursions of the very companies it sought to eliminate (432). In the

aftermath, however, the new equilibrium is still dominated by a capitalist order. Yet the groups that make up the anti-corporate alliance have gained relative strength in relation to the diffused and competing multis. Tikva emerges with good relations with the competitors of Y-S, especially Cybernaut—and is in no fear of Y-S retribution given the weakened state of that company. The fight itself has given the community a stronger defense system within its walls as well as in the security of its new alliance. The people of the Glop (at least its North American East Coast sector) have moved significantly toward creating a viable counter-public sphere with political organizations resembling trade unions and organs of self-government beginning to develop (a process helped by the alternative Net that Riva has set up). Even though it was secure all along, the women of the Black Zone (through Nili's exploration and Malkah's visit) have taken the historic step of ending their tactical separatism and have begun to be active members of the new global opposition.

As for the three women of the Shipman family: Riva moves on to continue her clandestine work, most immediately watching for any signs of Y-S vengeance; Malkah goes to the Black Zone to be renewed in body and soul by the utopian women; and a stronger, more confident Shira settles in Tikva with her son and serves as one of the town's base overseers. Nili returns to her homeland and lives on as a citizen of the transformed future.

IV.

As an avowedly political writer, Piercy has never strayed far from cutting-edge questions of critique and activism, and in her sf work she has focused in particular on self-reflexive thought experiments that explore new ways in which an oppositional socialist-feminist-ecological politics could develop out of existing social conditions. Whether she works from a utopian or a dystopian disposition, she manages to detail the social reality of her time and then to delineate spaces and avenues for militant action within her re-vision of that reality. In doing so, she always attends to the imbricated relationships between personal lives and public engagement.

It is not surprising, therefore, that her critical dystopian narrative of the 1990s locates her concerns with personal existence and historical struggle in the stories of Shira and Yod. With these entwined tales, she addresses the imperatives of identity politics even as she brings them into a renewed attention to the parameters of economics, class, and labor, as well as to the epistemological and material processes involved in conceiving and forming an alliance politics capable of challenging the entire system. Revolving around the subject positions of woman, Jew,

and cyborg, the crises of self her lead characters confront and the dynamics of their relationship take on a wider political valence in the face of corporate aggression even as every aspect of their lives remains a matter of individual need and desire.[12]

Thus, Piercy continues to pursue her long-standing commitment to investigating the conditions and possibilities for women. Rooted in second-wave feminism—and standing apart from more recent positions of liberal feminism or post-feminism—she brings her socialist-feminist politics to bear on the challenges of the moment. Tensions between the workplace and everyday life, childcare and parenting, mother-daughter (and grandmother-granddaughter) relationships, sisterly politics, and relationships with men that range from the violent and abusive to the loving and sacrificial fill the pages of this work as they have all her others. She spins her tale around Shira and the men in her life, on the one hand, and the intergenerational network of women on the other. In the grandmother Malkah, the mother Riva, the daughter Shira, and the cousin Nili (a "coffee klatch of Jewish mamas"), she offers a matrix of personal and political actions and options that is vital in itself yet also informs and drives the local and global political battles (370).

As the many references to Jewish identity and Israel suggest, Piercy also pays political and cultural attention to that part of her own heritage.[13] Finding wisdom in Jewish tradition as well as in the utopian principles that Zionism once signified, she draws on both to uncover their betrayal by the Israeli state (a betrayal that has had a deadly impact not only on the Palestinian people but also on Jews and Israelis themselves as they have been compromised and brutalized by policies and practices carried out in their name). Her symbolic critique takes the terrifying shape of Israel's destruction and its hopeful replacement by the multiple alternatives of the Prague Ghetto, Tikva, and the Black Zone.

On a cultural plane, however, she goes on to explore the subjective qualities and shortcomings of traditional and contemporary Jewish life through her characters in Tikva in general and Shira's family in particular. She especially probes the relationship between feminism and the aspects of Jewish culture that resonate with the place and power of women, as family members and as individuals. In doing so, she exposes the arrogance of male characters such as the father-son pair of Avram and Gadi and Shira's lovers (Gadi, Josh, Malcolm) with sensitivity and even humor; at the same time she delineates the personal and public strengths made available to the women of her tradition as they are signified by Malkah, Riva, Shira, Nili, and Chava in the Prague story.

With the figures of Yod and Nili, Piercy links her focus on feminist and Jewish matters with one of the major theoretical developments of the 1980s as she, like

her character Shira, enters into the exploration of the interface between humanity and machines that has brought a cyborg reality, and potentially a "cyborg politics," to use Donna Haraway's term, onto the sociopolitical stage.[14] Working from the scriptural stories of Genesis and the kabbalistic legends of the Golem and then picking up the Western tradition of the rebellious created being as variously tracked in Milton, Hawthorne, Shelley, Shaw, Capek, Asimov, and Dick (and evoking figures such as Prometheus, Frankenstein's creature, and *Star Trek's* Data), she develops a fresh perspective on the cyborg issue as she brings Jewish, feminist, and socialist thought to bear on the question. The result is a nuanced move away from an uncritical romanticization or demonization of this metaphorical prod to human transformation.

At the level of geopolitics, Piercy problematizes the insights made available by the cyborg imaginary by directing her attention to the opportunist logic that leads to the appropriation of scientific advances by the profit machines of corporations and the repressive apparatuses of nation-states (large and small). Through the figure of Yod, she speculates on how a defensive advance (even when sympathetically humanized) can turn into a potential engine of terror; for complex as Yod is, it is fundamentally designed as a weapon, one intended for good use but that in the wrong hands (or in the symbolically overdetermined case of Avram, hands gone wrong) could become a tool of sociopolitical evil. Framing this ethical and political question of weaponry and self-defense with the insights of the kabbalah legend, she offers a cautionary parable for policymakers, theoreticians, strategists, activists, and citizens alike. Yet, while opposed to engines of war, Piercy is not a technophobe or Luddite; she is quite open to the positive possibilities of an appropriate use of science and technology on an everyday, human scale. Besides computer-assisted housing, in vitro fertilization, and advanced forms of communications and transportation, she presents the figure of Nili (the cybernetically enhanced human) as her most powerful signifier of the potential of an emancipatory cyborg science and sensibility.[15] The cyborg option also carries over to other characters who are already, if modestly, enhanced, as is Shira with her corrected eyesight and Malkah with her several life-extending procedures. When Malkah goes to the Black Zone, she looks ahead to living out the closing years of her life—now lengthened—with enhanced eyes and who knows what else once the utopian doctors and their nanotech robots have finished with her.

Pulling all this material together, Piercy produces a rich political vision that is compatibly traditional and forward-looking.[16] Growing from the discrete stories of Shira and Yod and the iconic presentation of the entire social paradigm, the coalition (women, Jews, Tikva scientist-designers, Glop workers, the utopian cyborg of the Black Zone, and the tragic android Yod) not only breaks the power of

the Y-S corporation but also produces the new conditions for further political gains. Unlike the culturally mediated political developments in Butler's and Robinson's texts, this formation of unity in difference grows out of the socioeconomic conditions and contradictions of the corporate society, even as it is given depth and scope by a larger and longer cultural and political ethos and history. Taken at this register, the counter-narrative represents a challenging pedagogical step against the resigned options of escapist survival or liberal accommodation, and it dialectically works with and through discourse-based micropolitics to a new moment of transformative analysis and action.

But another, overtly utopian step is taken when Malkah takes her sacred trip to the transformed "holy land." In this space that is "off the map," Piercy offers little more than a brief sketch of the utopian future that has been prefigured by Nili (434). She gives just a hint of the potential of this strange future taking place in Malkah's report to Shira of her own physical transformation at the hands of women who are the "strongest . . . in the world" (432). As another formation rising out of historical contradictions, this healed land is the locus of "the new that has come to be under the murderous sun of our century" (433–434). Yet coming as it does at the edges of the narrative, at the horizon of history, it is barely representable, lingering as a nonnarrative, and certainly unfilled, utopian meditation.[17]

As a work of political fiction, *He, She and It* brings historical memory (of the distant and immediate past) and science fictional speculation to bear on a sobering examination of the present reality. As a work of dystopian fiction, it refuses the anti-utopian path and articulates utopian traces within a social order that is still the reserve of corporate powers even after the momentary victory of the alliance. Finally, as a *critical dystopia*, it further provides a self-reflexive meditation on the formal capacity of dystopian narrative to make room for utopian hope, and its most telling self-reflexive gesture occurs in the foregrounding of the formative power of storytelling itself.[18]

Allusions to Jewish, Christian, and secular Western tales of created beings, heroic women, and sacrificial actions recur from beginning to end, and several characters add their own tales to the narrative mix: Gadi creates a compromised form in his stimmies, Yod reads children's books to Ari, the house computer reads the *Zohar* to its residents, Shira relates the story of labor unions to Lazarus, and Nili tells the tale of the Black Zone. Yet it is Malkah's parable of the Golem that offers the most developed, and self-referential, exploration of the role of narrative in the process of social change. Considered as a folktale in itself, it is an effective demonstration of the dynamic relationship between material practices, narrative, and utopian politics; but as a plot device it also demonstrates its interpellative potential in the way Malkah makes use of it to give progressive shape to Yod's iden-

tity and character. In the creature's mature actions, the effects of her incremental storytelling are readily seen as Yod not only achieves a degree of self-awareness and a strength of character that enables it to serve its designated people but also allows it to exceed its existing parameters when it rightly destroys itself and its creator.

The text, however, does not simply recognize the use value of storytelling. It also problematizes it in several instances, thereby destabilizing the authority and certainty of the narrative form even as it celebrates it—consequently suggesting a degree of caution to readers, lest enthusiasm overtake wisdom. Several stories are exposed as "false" and are overturned as the major narrative unfolds. Precisely because of its formation by a variety of alternative stories, Yod dispenses with the traditional male valence of fairy tales (in which the prince will always rescue the princess) in the way it understands its developing love for Shira. It assumes a protective role toward her, but only by virtue of the distinctiveness of its attributes and not by a privileged ideological assumption that she is weak and in need of a hierarchically different level of protection (390).[19]

It is with Shira, however, that the narrative deconstruction of accounts is most obvious. The major instance is the overturning of the childhood story Malkah related to Shira, in which she explained that the women in this matrilineal family followed the practice of handing their daughters on to their own mothers so that the child would be raised by her grandmother (13). Once Riva arrives and reveals her version, Malkah admits that her earlier tale was just a strategic fiction and not the truth: "When you were a child, I made up that little myth about our family to explain to you why you were being raised by me instead of your mother" (83). As well, Shira's uncertain and "banal" self-understanding that she had cobbled together after her youthful relationship with Gadi changes radically once she finds love with Yod (130). When she rediscovers a stronger self through her passion for Yod, she casts off the inner narrative she had carried with her since she and Gadi parted as she realizes that the "myth that had governed her emotional life for the last ten years was peeling off like an old mural of two burning children impaled on their love, and the bricks beneath the chipping paint emerged unweathered" (186).

Formative or deconstructive as its manifestations might be in these instances, Piercy clearly identifies storytelling as a powerful discursive force throughout her text. Indeed, the many stories do not just feed the overall counter-narrative (thereby helping to produce a complex way toward Utopia in a narrowly anti-utopian time); for in a deft inversion of postmodern common sense, they also overturn grand narratives—ones, however, that have shaped not the opposition but rather the anti-utopian hegemony itself. Terrible though this alternative fu-

ture is, global capitalism's triumphant cessation of history does not happen, the U.S. assumption of a leading position in the story of the twenty-first century collapses in the simple disappearance of that apparently solid nation-state, and the official narrative of the Israeli state is radically denied and replaced by multiple alternatives that preserve and transform the best of Jewish and Zionist culture and politics.

In addition to storytelling and demythologizing, Piercy emphasizes the liberating process of learning itself, especially in terms of its relationship to social transformation. Again, the Prague story offers its metacommentary on knowledge and power—not only in the activities of Judah and the Golem but also in the character of Chava, Judah's granddaughter, as she works against the male assumptions in her culture and becomes a scholar who contributes to the defense of the ghetto and to the knowledge base of her culture. As Malkah not surprisingly tells it, hegemonic knowledge (*savoir* in Lefebvre's terms, "instrumental rationality" in the language of the Frankfurt School) is countered by Judah's flexible and adaptable way of knowing and being in the world that proceeds from the conditions and positionality of his people even as it maintains a thoroughly empirical relationship with the material and social world (closer to Lefebvre's sense of critical knowledge, or *connaissance*).

Working with the mysticism of the kabbalah and the new science of Tycho Brahe, Johannes Kepler, and Giordano Bruno, the rabbi provides the exemplary basis for Malkah's assertion that she finds "different kinds of truth valuable" (267), thereby opting for a way to negotiate the limits of power that can move with, through, and beyond its own official discourses. When Malkah considers Judah's admiration for Brahe and Kepler, she makes a point of opposing the emptiness of abstract theory to the value of concrete empirical observation: "Instead of empty theorizing or proceeding from Aristotle, they were making precise and repeated measurements of the movements of the planets and the stars, keeping meticulous records. This was something new in the world, beginning with observation and only then proceeding to theory" (238). But she also invokes Bruno's astute and early problematization of the temptation to empirical universality as she reminds readers of the importance of standpoint in the production and dissemination of knowledge through the words of Judah to Joseph: "The idea you have just postulated resembles the theories of Giordano Bruno, who says that observation and ultimately truth is relative to the position from which we observe" (240).

This internal textual epistemology is connected with the processes of history early on in Malkah's tale when she describes Judah's initial agony over the question of creating the Golem. History and the power relations therein, she notes, produce the occasion for knowledge, and certain moments require certain types

of knowledge, especially as they are being marshaled against the existing order of things. As she remarks: "At any moment in history, certain directions are forbidden that lie open to the inquiring mind and the experimental hand. Not always is the knowledge forbidden because dangerous: governments will spend billions on weapons and forbid small sects the peyote of their ecstasy. What we are forbidden to know can be—or seem—what we most need to know" (30). Later, when Judah lays Joseph to rest, this linkage of available or possible knowledge and oppositional power is again emphasized as he observes that historical need, in the form of suffering and fear, can create the conditions for the specific radical knowledge of the Golem's viability. As he tersely puts it, "if knowledge and fearful need are joined, it can be roused to life" (414).[20]

Running through *He, She and It*, therefore, is a self-reflexive demonstration of the power of counter-narrative, critical knowledge, and the role of positionality in both. Oppositional work, of course, must necessarily take place in economic, political, and cultural material practices, but the negation of existing discourse and the production of radical ways of thinking are also vital elements in the oppositional, utopian, project. Within the narrative, therefore, Piercy calls attention to the empowering attributes of the very text she is creating. Privileging the "truth of what is perhaps figurative," reaffirming the power of words to shape and reshape the world, she reinforces the manifest work of her narrative and gives her readers a way to experience the text, and perhaps the world they live in, with a higher level of awareness of the processes of radical knowledge and action.

Thus, Piercy reminds readers of one of the key attributes of critical dystopian narrative even as she writes it. Again putting it in Malkah's voice, she notes that such speculative fictions (with their cognitively estranging qualities, I would add) help to "form the habit of seeing what other people are wont to think is not really there" (29). That is, in political fiction generally—and critical dystopian fiction in this case—the work of the text is potentially subversive, not only in its manifest content but especially in its formal operations. Such texts are capable of changing the minds of their readers, young and old alike, by exposing the false solidity of the world as it is commonsensically lived, by tearing open its sutured normality, and by daring to expose the power that reigns and the possibilities that lurk in the tendencies and latencies of the situation.

The novum of *He, She and It* is consequently to be found not only in its epical account of militant resistance and collective victory but also in its formal demonstration of the processes of unknowing and reknowing that are inspired and advanced by the oppositional imagination. As Judah meditates on the ethics of defending the ghetto and the value of self-determination for his people, he admits that right action takes place in a decidedly imperfect (dystopian) world: "The

world is imperfect," he observes, "and requires repair so long as any people is under the rule of any other" (327). Thus, it is the political work of transformative "repair" that Piercy privileges, and the characters who most accomplish it carry the most utopian weight.[21] Hence, Judah, maker of the Golem, and Malkah, teacher of Yod, stand as strong utopian figures in this dystopian text. Both—one in a religious framework, one adamantly secular—possess the dual qualities of activist and contemplative, scientist and mystic. Both point to a form of knowledge and a way of living in the world that is mediated, on the one hand, by the wisdom of the kabbalah with its awareness of the Ein Sof (the "all that is nothingness" so that the richness of the world is based not in fullness of being but on nothingness) and, on the other, by the rigors of a self-reflexive and critical scientific and political praxis (29).

In Piercy's critical dystopia, the present social order is unflinchingly portrayed through the distancing lens of its imagined alternative, but in this case the story of the people who stand up to the corporate order leads to the possibility of an eventual utopian transformation of that order. This is not a certainty, to be sure, since the path of narrative can be realistically traced only by way of its detours, road-blocks, washouts, and switchbacks as much as, or more than, its connection to its designated destination. The social and aesthetic value of such a text therefore lies in the emphasis it places on the process of reaching toward Utopia and on the values and policies required for that process to move in a progressive direction.

As Earnst Bloch would put it, the work of being "on the way" (*unterwegs*) takes precedence over the celebration of arrival. Indeed, the utopian horizon, Bloch's *Heimat*, is importantly just that: the "home" at which we have not yet arrived, the unfilled space at the limits of engaged political vision and practice that recedes as it is approached, the space that substantively informs the present moment but always remains at the front of the journey so that nothing can be taken for granted or frozen in place, so that the effort to achieve the best for all people, in the most self-determined manner, does not stop. Perhaps the realization of the importance of this informed negative process is what underlies the deep urge to dystopia in our time, avoiding the consolations or premature evocations of the fullness of Utopia in favor of privileging the difficult way toward that better place. In this light, it is not Judah or Malkah—or even Nili—that is the most significant utopian figure in *He, She and It*. Rather, it is the one who is not "the future" but the "tool of the future" who is the most evocative character. It is, therefore, Riva, through the very work she does as an organizer, who opens the utopian way, the one who teaches the value of being of use, in the personal and political process of making possible the conditions for the "future that wants to be" (421).

10

Horizons

The only authentic image of the future is, in the end, the failure of the present.

—Terry Eagleton, "Utopia and Its Opposites" (36)

Fifth is the race that I call my own and abhor.
O to die, or be later born, or born before!
This is the Race of Iron. Dark is their plight.
Toil and sorrow is theirs; and by night
The anguish of death and the gods afflict them and kill,
Though there's yet a trifle of good amid manifold ill.

—Hesiod, "Works and Days"

I.

Well before the neologisms that grew from the textual inventions of modernity, the world had been home to enough hunger, oppression, violence, suffering, and destruction to warrant creative and critical responses that opposed things as they were and tried as well to imagine a better way. Facing the horrors of his society in the eighth century B.C.E., Hesiod creates the image of a Golden Age in which humanity "lived like gods and . . . feasted gaily."[1] But to set the comparative stage for this imagined era of "all good things" in which no "sorrow of heart" was felt, he brings what was outside his door into his text to evoke the "toil and sorrow" and "anguish of death" that beset the people of his time and produce the desire for that better, even golden life. Although the manifest chronology of the poem implies the primacy of the Golden Age, with the "fifth race" of his own time following sadly behind, the "plight" of the moment is the condition that catalyzes their poet's social dream. By naming the evils of his existing reality and suggesting their