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Breaking the Promise of Perfection: Imperfect Utopias in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*

ABSTRACT

Abstract: In an era still plagued by popularized skepticism toward utopian thought, Marge Piercy's 1976 novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* remains a compelling exploration of potential futures. This essay juxtaposes anti-utopian critiques of perfection, violence, and instrumental rationalism with Piercy's portrayal of both utopian and dystopian worlds. By examining these critiques alongside the novel, this essay argues for a reinterpretation of utopia beyond the assumptions of promised perfection. Rather, this essay embraces the flawed nature of the human condition and claims imperfection as a central feature of utopia itself.

Keywords: utopia, science fiction, perfection, technology, hope.

"The story—from *Rumpelstiltskin* to *War and Peace*—is one of the basic tools invented by the human mind, for the purpose of gaining understanding. There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories."

(Le Guin 27)

Amidst the bleakness of late-stage capitalism, environmental degradation, and global violence, the possibility of hopeful futures seems to fade. One study finds that, while over half of the American public is "extremely worried" about what lies ahead, one in four Americans explicitly say that "nothing made them hopeful" (Clary). Outside of the United States, when reflecting on a world post-coronavirus, French writer and provocateur Michel Houellebecq remarks: "We will not wake up after the lockdown in a new world. It will be the same, just a bit worse" (Paris (AFP)). Yet, it is not only a world worsened by a global pandemic that causes such despair, for climate change continues to remain one of the greatest perceived threats expressed by many Europeans (Poushter and Huang). Beyond the research data, these grave concerns take narrative form in various dystopian science fiction or climate fiction novels such as Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* or Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves*.

However, although those educated in the United States have been "primed by such [anti-utopian] propaganda to reject utopian thinking . . . such thinking doesn't die easily" (Featherstone). In fact, what we find in these novels is not merely a grim look at what lies ahead, but a commitment to hope for more. Whether that hope is for better things to come or the hope that things do not get any worse, many of these novels can be characterized as "surprisingly utopian" (Rothman). Thus, for all the growing despair outlined above there also exists much hopeful discourse about utopian possibilities. Consider how explicitly utopian thought has made its way into the popular press with Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone's *Active Hope: How to Face this Mess We're in without Going Crazy* or Rutger Bregman's *Utopia for Realists: How We Can Build the Ideal World*. Even more, Kristen R. Ghodsee's 2023 publication *Everyday Utopia: What 2,000 Years of Wild Experiments Can Teach Us About the Good Life* reminds us of those who—throughout history and continents—have experimented with alternative worldbuilding and how we might persist today.

Following the spirit of these texts, this essay argues against mainstreamed anti-utopian worldviews and claims that imperfection belongs to utopia itself. The essay focuses on Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* as an exemplary utopian science fiction novel that both celebrates possible futures and critiques contemporary US society. I will

first outline arguments against utopia (which are as popular or more so than the claims of Bregman, May and Johnstone, and Ghodsee who admit in their own writing the existence of such backlash). I will then explore Piercy's world of Mattapoisett and its relation to suffering, violence, and technology. Finally, I will conclude by asserting the importance of embracing imperfect futures to confront present challenges and incite action.

ANTI-UTOPIAN ARGUMENTS: VIOLENCE AND INSTRUMENTAL RATIONALISM

"More blood has been shed in the twentieth century on behalf of bureaucratic calculation, racial purity, ethnic solidarity, nationalism, religious sectarianism and revenge than utopia."

(Jacoby, *The End of Utopia* 167)

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In popular conversations about utopias, it is common to hear such projects linked to the dream of a perfect society. There exists a commonly held belief that utopian societies are flawless, complete, and in no way lacking —as if they exist without labor, pain, or conflict. Although these notions might appear encouraging on the surface, when the idea of perfection becomes linked to utopianism it risks becoming a political weapon that provides fuel for opposition. The anti-utopian argument claims, as utopian scholar Lyman Tower Sargent recounts, that "a perfect society can only be achieved by force; thus, utopianism is said to lead to totalitarianism and the use of force and violence against people" (9). If perfection becomes the goal of utopianism, it requires a perfect blueprint from which a perfect people would not be allowed to deviate for fear of lowering or weakening its quality. Finally, the criticism goes, one must use the force of a strong, centralized government (and eventual dictatorship) to uphold the plans, manage the people, and achieve the perfected utopia (Sargent 24).

Drawing on the legacy of liberal anti-utopians from Karl Popper to Isaiah Berlin, Russell Jacoby puts it this way: "Utopia has lost its ties with alluring visions of harmony and has turned into a threat. Conventional and scholarly wisdom associates utopian ideas with violence and dictatorship. The historical validity of this linkage, however, is dubious" (*Picture Imperfect* 66). The anti-utopian critique of inevitable violence starts from a misunderstanding of utopia as the pursuit and promise of perfection and should remain suspect. For as Sargent notes, "[p]eople do not 'live happily ever after'; even in More's *Utopia*" (6). When we loosen the expectation

of perfection from utopianism, we allow more room for complex sociality and alternatives to the mundane. As we will see in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy's approach to and depiction of a utopian future is not one that strives toward perfection as there exist many of the same conflicts that will always arise with being human: disagreement, suffering, and death. Distancing utopianism from the assumption of promised perfection invites the truth of the human condition into its design.

Alongside the critique of perfection and violence, claims of instrumental rationalist thinking come into view. In her essay "Rehabilitating Utopia: Feminist Science Fiction and Finding the Ideal," Claire P. Curtis examines Michael Oakeshott's claim that utopianism "outlines the type of thinking that understands the problems of the world as solvable, and the blueprint for the best society as simply another problem to be solved" (151). At the crux of his argument is the view that although instrumental rationalism may be helpful in some areas of work, it has no place in politics. When such thinking does show up in politics, it too often becomes hyper focused on technique, outcome, and achieving perfection. As such, this approach is flawed as it denies the fluid, non-productive aspects of humanity in politics. Curtis puts it this way: "The perfection here is not even the abstract and perhaps laudable Form of the Good but rather a perfection of a puzzle with every piece in its place. It is a perfection where problems are solved solely for the purpose of being able to provide closure to a project" (151).

Hermeneutically, this critique of utopianism echoes Martin Heidegger's critique of calculative thinking. In the "Memorial Address," Heidegger warns of a flight from such thinking so that everything now falls into the clutches of calculation and automation. He writes: "Calculative thinking computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities. Calculative thinking races from one prospect to the next . . . [it is] not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is" (*Discourse* 46). If we place this understanding alongside the danger of instrumentalism, we recognize technology as a bind between both concepts. Where calculative thinking mirrors and influences technology, instrumentalism fuels science's belief that all problems are measurable and solvable with technology, including the technique of trying to organize sociality.

Although science fiction has often been thought of as giving voice to the fears and desires of modernity, it remains at risk of instrumentalist critiques because such works often imagine lofty technological advances such as space travel or artificial intelligence as unmatched solutions. However, *Woman on the Edge of Time* avoids this very dependency on calculative automation by showcasing a tempered, non-anxious relationship to technology. Thus, although the utopian world of Mattapoisett has

made important scientific and technological advances, their relationship to technology is such that they "use technical devices as they ought to be used, and also let them alone as something which does not affect [their] inner and real core," as Heidegger writes (*Discourse* 54). With this, Piercy has imagined a world where our relation to technology opens up more meaningful ways of relating to one another without becoming bound to fixed solutions and devices.

UTOPIAN POSSIBILITY AS CONSTANT STRUGGLE

"The situation is bad, yes, okay, enough of that; we know that already. Dystopia has done its job, it's old news now, perhaps it's self-indulgence to stay stuck in that place any more. Next thought: utopia. Realistic or not, and perhaps especially if not."

(Robinson par. 9)

Although Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* is considered a classic of utopian science fiction, the novel's utopian world of Mattapoisett is always at risk of being overtaken by dystopian possibilities. Set in the late 20th century, the narrative follows the life of Consuelo (Connie) Ramos, a Hispanic woman living in a world of poverty, sexism, and institutional violence. As Connie struggles to survive in a mental hospital, she discovers her ability to communicate with Luciente, a woman from the future who lives in the utopian society of Mattapoisett. As the novel unfolds, the reader joins Connie on her time-warping journey between her present world, the at-risk utopian future, and ever-looming dystopian threat. *Woman on the Edge of Time* acts not only as a mirror of our contemporary world but also responds to many of the critiques outlined above by examining perfection, violence, and technology.

At first glance, Mattapoisett seems perfect: everyone has shelter, food, and water which are maintained through environmentally conscious and sustainable means. Children are respected, cared for, and autonomous. There is an emphasis on wellness through community resources and mental support. People choose meaningful, uplifting work and no one suffers in monotonous jobs. Holidays are frequent, as are cultural festivals celebrating art and creativity. Thus, in many ways, Mattapoisett appears idealistic and flawless. But appearances can be deceptive and Piercy knows perfection is neither the promise nor possibility of utopianism as it cannot be separated from the deeply imperfect (which is to say human) beings.

In sharing her confusion over the lack of perfection in Mattapoisett, Connie and Luciente sketch some of the irresolvable tensions between humanity and the desire for a perfect society:

> "Yeah, and you still go crazy. You still get sick. You grow old. You die. I thought in a hundred and fifty years some of these problems would be solved, anyhow!"

> "But, Connie, some problems you *solve* only if you stop being human, become metal, plastic, robot computer." (Piercy 118)

Despite Connie's expectations of a utopian society, the community is still bound by the universal human experiences of aging, illness, and mortality. As in our own communities, jealousy, conflict, and hurt exist because these experiences are part of what it means to try and live well with others, even if that means it is painful. Thus, although our conceptions of utopia can be erroneously equated to a perfected, completed state, Mattapoisett showcases the possibility of better futures without erasing humanity's inevitable flaws and irresolvable tensions. In the passage above, Piercy reminds readers that misunderstanding utopia as perfect means misunderstanding the nature of our own becoming. Put differently, the world of Mattapoisett exists not because humans have overcome their humanity, but because they have learned to dwell together better through the hermeneutic endeavor of learning from history and caring for one another.

Still, although Mattapoisett appears serene, the journey was anything but peaceful. This is difficult because as the arguments outlined earlier show, critics argue that utopia can only be brought about through violent means. However, this argument obscures how critics use the fear of violence to halt utopian worldbuilding and distract from present-day violence. In *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Connie's present world is inundated with violence as she suffers under capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. For example, when Connie attacks a pimp for beating and abusing her sister, Connie is forcibly locked away in a mental hospital. Her story is neither taken into consideration nor believed. Instead, "[a] bargain had been struck. Some truce had been negotiated between the two men over the bodies of their women. . . . She was human garbage carried to the dump" (Piercy 25). What Connie names here is the violence of institutional power partnered with men's decision-making, lack of autonomy, and denigration from personhood to objecthood. In Luciente's world, although the existence of Mattapoisett is relatively peaceful, the road was lined with war and death. Moreover, Mattapoisett is presently engaged in battle against

those who wish to bring about an altogether dystopian future. Thus, the existence of Mattapoisett must be defended violently against violence. "Power *is* violence. When did it get destroyed peacefully? We all fight when we're back to the wall . . ." Luciente states (Piercy 359). Despite Mattapoisett's desire for peace, the citizens also understand that violence is always a human possibility (and at times a necessity) in defending its existence. Thus, Piercy moves away from condemning violence outright and argues that it is justified when trying to bring about a better world. In this way, Mattapoisett's history and potentiality challenge simplistic notions of building more harmonious worlds without confronting the oppressive realities of power structures.

The understanding of violence as a survival tool of the oppressed to bring about a utopian future is both aligned with and counter to anti-utopian critiques. It is in alignment insofar as it agrees that working toward a better future can often become violent. However, it runs counter to critiques because it points out the present violence of systems of power and marks them as the initiator of violence and an obstacle on the path toward utopianism. From Piercy we learn to identify the violence already at hand and not become immobilized by the threat of violence of a different shape. By situating Mattapoisett between Connie's violent world and the threat of a dystopian future, we learn that utopian societies are not immune to or above violence but are shaped and informed by it. To be clear, this is not to make light of violence and suffering. Rather, it is to say that a violent world still holds the possibility of a utopian future, even if the path is bloody.

POSSIBILITY AND PROMISE

> "So utopianism involves a certain distance from the political institutions which encourages an endless play of fantasy around their possible reconstructions and restructurations."
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> (Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia" 46)

Piercy's depiction of Mattapoisett simultaneously sets into relief the growing horror of Connie's 1970s and the barely-restrained terror of an alternative future: a hyper-capitalist patriarchal society where the wealthy elite live in space and exploit the (polluted) Earth-bound populations through total technological control of minds and bodies. Although Connie spends most of her time jumping between New York City and Mattapoisett in a fanciful literary time travel, Piercy suggests the utopian future is never guaranteed. Luciente tells Connie: "Those of your time who fought hard for change, often

they had myths that a revolution was inevitable. But nothing is! All things interlock. We are only one possible future" (Piercy 169). While Mattapoisett represents one potential outcome—a world shaped by solidarity and hope— the dystopian future serves as a chilling possible alternative.

Moreover, the distinction between possibility and promise is worth considering, as both the utopian and dystopian futures remain possible but only one has kept its promise. Because of Mattapoisett's imperfections, it is possible (and necessary) to prioritize human relationships and communal well-being over material wealth and power. In contrast, the dystopian future promises perfection through the relentless pursuit of capital, technological domination, and environmental destruction. By keeping its promise, the dystopian future exploits individuals, destroys communities, and plunders the environment for the sake of the immense production of capital and reinforcement of hierarchies.

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In chapter 15, during a time traveling episode, Connie accidently lands in a dystopian future where she meets Gildina: "a contracty . . . cosmetically fixed for sex use" (Piercy 290). In this world, middle-class women survive on short-term sex contracts, processed food, and forced confinement. However, Gildina notes this life is privileged in comparison to the poor classes. In speaking of them she says: "It's not like they're people. They're diseased, all of them, just walking organ banks. . . . It isn't like they have any use" (282). This portrayal showcases capitalism's promise to focus on markets and profits above human dignity and wellbeing. In Gildina's world, the poor have been reduced to a commodity in the form of being an organ bank, valued only as useable fragments for the wealthy. Fredric Jameson puts it this way: "[B]y its transformation into a commodity a thing, of whatever type, has been reduced to a means for its own consumption. It no longer has any qualitative value in itself, but only insofar as it can be 'used'" ("Reification" 131). Thus, any sense of self, being, or value becomes swallowed up by the world of capitalism and transformed into a commodity. As such, capitalism keeps what we might call its "structural promise" to value humans only as commodities—as objects that must be made to produce for the owning classes.[1]

This promise is further reinforced through corporate ownership of people. Gildina tells Connie: "Now we all belong to a corporate body. . . . I belong to Chase-World-TT" (Piercy 290). With this, readers are invited to examine the less explicit but equally pervasive ways in which we presently belong to corporations under capitalism. Not only does the reach of corporate influence extend across economic, political, and cultural

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[1] This idea parallels and intensifies Connie's experience in the mental hospital where she was "human garbage carried to the dump" as stated in the previous section (Piercy 25).

realms, but workers must sell their labor in exchange for a chance at survival, while corporations prioritize shareholder and executive interests. Ultimately, Gildina is "only a cog in the corporate machine . . . she will be dismantled and recycled into the organ bank as a consequence of her illegal conversation with Connie" (Neverow 25). This grim outcome shines a harsh, telling light onto capitalism's relentless pursuit of profit and its disregard for human dignity and autonomy. In the end, capitalism keeps its promise of continued exploitation and dehumanization of workers for the benefit of the wealthy classes.[2]

"So that was the other world that might come to be," Connie thinks to herself after leaving Gildina (Piercy 291). While the "might" in her phrase may invite a moment of hope, it should also act as a cautionary possibility. Until this point, Connie does not fully understand the concept of many possible futures. However, after this chapter, it is clear to both Connie and the reader that there are no promises for a utopian future. There is neither a promise of its arrival nor its perfection. Instead, all that is offered is the possibility. On the other hand, it is painfully clear if the reign of an unrestricted free market continues to organize the whole of human behavior, it will do nothing but guarantee the prioritization of profit over humans, relationships, and land. Chapter 15 acts as a lynchpin of the novel that, although brief, reorients us to the promised uncertainty of the future. It serves as a stark reminder that under this kind of working logic, although the public promise suggests everyone has a chance at the best of a quasi-utopian future, capitalism's hidden guarantee is that there is not room for everyone in this picture.

TEMPERING TECHNOLOGY

> "Yet, in its addiction to scientific-technological solutions for human progress, modern culture remains stubbornly blind to accumulated human wisdom and the need for articulating the good life."
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> (Zimmermann 18)

When considering a utopian novel with a futuristic society, it is no stretch to assume a technologically advanced landscape full of space travel and robots. However, when Connie mysteriously time travels from her life in

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[2] This chapter's portrait of environmental degradation due to capitalism is also worthy of investigation. The poor classes are forced to live outside on Earth where the air is so polluted that one cannot see but a few feet in front of them through the yellowed fog. On the other hand, the middle class lives their entire life indoors and the wealthy classes are living on platforms in space. This novel offers much in terms of an environmental- or climate-focused approach to fiction and nature's role in utopian and dystopian landscapes.

1970 and arrives in Mattapoisett in 2137, she looks around and stammers: "[I]t's not like I imagined" (Piercy 62). Instead of a chrome cities and skywalks, she finds a serene, pastoral space filled with small buildings, green gardens, and lazy cows. She notices bicycles and people on foot as clothes line-dry in the distance. Thus, in Connie's mind, things seem to have regressed to a time of peasantry. But as the story unfolds, we learn that Mattapoisett is not technologically primitive. Rather, it learned from past technologically primitive, socially advanced societies in order to develop a non-anxious attachment to technology. Thus, Mattapoisett approaches technology as a means to reduce power hierarchies and increase connection without obscuring our interpretive, contemplative way of being.

Of the technologies present in Mattapoisett, many machines exist to remove tedious, menial jobs from society such as mining or sewing comforters. When asked why, Luciente responds: "Who wants to go deep into the earth and crawl through tunnels breathing rock dust and never seeing the sun? Who wants to sit in a factory sewing the same four or five comforter patterns?" (122). Through this, we learn that Mattapoisett strives to prioritize life-giving, creative vocations. Thus, residents use technology not to remove labor, but to allow for more satisfying opportunities. Put differently, Mattapoisett understands that we must limit technology, so it does not smother our human desire for meaningful pursuits and creative work.

Although Connie experiences these technologies as generally pleasant (albeit confusing), when she learns of the technology that allows babies to be born without pregnancy (the brooder), she feels particularly terrified. "Mother the machine," she thinks to herself in fear (95). Until this point, technology and machines seem to have been used to improve human lives, but Connie sees the brooder as something that interferes with and constricts life. Luciente explains that during the long revolution, in order for there to be no power for anyone, women needed to relinquish their power to give birth.[3] "Cause as long as we were biologically enchained," she explains, "we'd never be equal. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender" (98). Not only is this technology employed to dismantle power, but the brooder also breaks the bonds between culture and physical appearance to remove racism. Luciente notes: "We want diversity, for strangeness breeds richness" (97). Thus, residents have employed technology in an attempt to dismantle power hierarchies in all areas of life.

Surely, the impulse to solve such problems makes rational sense; however, it also risks falling into the anti-utopian critique of instrumentalism as outlined in the second section of the essay. For in each

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[3] We can infer this idea stems from Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*.

of these examples, Piercy approaches tedious jobs and power structures as problems to be solved with technology. Yet, to be clear, problem-solving is not the issue. Part of utopianism is recognizing issues and trying to create better solutions. But when the reign of rationalism becomes paired with technology, it can quickly slip into a compulsion of endless automation without regard for humanity. Jameson writes, "[U]nder capitalism, the older traditional forms of human activity are instrumentally reorganized and 'taylorized,' analytically fragmented and reconstructed according to various rational models of efficiency" ("Reification" 130). In this dynamic, instrumentalism and endless technological expansion suffocate human flourishing by restructuring it along the lines of means and ends. Turning to Heidegger, instrumental rationalism is thoughtless because it encourages a flight from contemplation and meaning and instead, opts for the quickest, most efficient ways to fix problems (*Discourse* 46). Thus, without closer attention, *Woman on the Edge of Time* risks falling prey to such critiques.

However, because Piercy embraces the transformative possibilities of technology, this novel acts as an imaginative space to sort through problems while keeping humans and communities at the forefront. By attending to real power imbalances in society and attempting to re-envision relations to work and family outside the traditional structure, Piercy advocates, as Curtis writes, that "technology can and should be harnessed to improve the conditions of human life in such a way that allow the business of human life to continue" (158). In the same vein, even though Heidegger condemns calculative thinking, he does not naively dismiss all technology. He writes: "It would be foolish to attack technology blindly. It would be shortsighted to condemn it as the work of the devil" (*Discourse* 53). Heidegger continues to advocate for saying both "yes" and "no" to technology so that we recognize its use but "deny [it] the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and lay waste our nature" (54). Such laying waste to human nature would be to obscure us from our poetic, meditative existence and unleash a world where calculation and rationalism become not only the best, but the only way of being.

Piercy carries this warning close as her depictions of technological advancements in Mattapoisett seek never to maim the nature of humans. Rather, she invokes a tempered approach to technology as a way to preserve our essential nature. Technology in Mattapoisett seeks to address issues of tedious work and power hierarchies so that residents might be released from these things and liberated toward themselves and their community. Released from demoralizing jobs, residents are free to find meaningful work. Released from biology and the nuclear family, both men and women are unrestrained in their ability to choose parenthood and connection. As

such, humans' relation to technology in the novel is an attempt to solve problems while simultaneously facilitating more meaningful ways of being.

Because Piercy is not oblivious to the dangers of technology and rationalism unchecked, she also presents the reader with a threatening look at rampant technological advancements outside Mattapoisett. In Connie's world of 1970, she has been selected as a test subject for a brain procedure that will control emotions and violence. As the doctors test the new procedure on patients, they hold the control device and proclaim: "You see, we can electrically trigger almost every mood and emotion— the fight-or-flight reaction, euphoria, clam, pleasure, pain, terror!" (Piercy 196). What is seen as exciting new technology to doctors and investors is experienced as invasion, loss of autonomy, and exploitation to patients.

Harking back to the potential dystopian future discussed in the previous section, Piercy hints at a trajectory from this procedure to the dystopian world dominated by technology, control, and capital. In the dystopian future, the mind-control technology being tested on Connie has made way for "sharpened control" where people of poorer classes have been technologically modified to "turn off fear and pain and fatigue and sleep, like [they've] got a switch. . . . [They] can control the fibers in [their] spinal cord, control [their] body temperature" (Piercy 288). When Gildina (the cosmetically modified and contracted sex slave) introduces her pimp she says: "He's a fighting machine . . . he's real improved. He has those superneurotransmitters ready to be released in his brain that turn him into just about an Assassin" (289). In both passages, the relationship to technology is one of control and instrumentality. In an attempt to do away with the imperfect elements of human nature (i.e. emotion, physical responses, sexuality), technology and a commitment to instrumentality becomes the means by which to dominate human physiology and consciousness. In this way, Piercy exposes the violence of a thoughtless, technology-crazed society in which the desire for perfection strips humans of their sensitivity and replaces it with cold automation.

Thus, Connie's charge is to fight against a world that bends toward technological domination and instrumental rationalism. If we agree with Heidegger, then we know this charge is not unlike our own. He writes: "[T]he attack of the technological language on what is peculiar to language is at the same time the threat to the human being's own most essence" ("Traditional" 141). For as the relentless grip of technology tightens, we must fight to break free as its attack threatens not just our material world but also our very being. In her own critique of technology and instrumentalism Luciente notes: "[W]hy try to control everything? . . . we think control interferes with pleasure and with communing—and we care about both" (Piercy 110). Because Piercy cares about human flourishing, she

uses the novel as a place to practice thinking through a non-anxious, non-dominating relationship to technology to improve lives in Mattapoisett. In this way, the constant struggle of utopia also includes a constant fight against technical domination and ceaseless negotiation of our relationship to technology as problem-solving.

CONCLUSION

"Yet we all hope to resist . . . But we must do that by leaving behind the cruel, dystopian system in which we live. It is worth noting that we already possess all the necessary tools to achieve this."

(Taşkale 357)

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Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* still serves as a timely narrative and testament to the struggle between utopian possibility and the looming promise of violence and technological domination if we continue current ways of living. Although popularized ideas and anti-utopian arguments equate utopia with flawless perfection, Piercy challenges these notions by sketching Mattapoisett and its citizens as imperfect (and fully human) in their approach to relationships, politics, and world-building. And yet, we find that such utopian projects can still be guided by principles of solidarity, community, and flourishing without demanding complete perfection.

Furthermore, Piercy anticipates the reign of technology and the pull of instrumental rationalism in shaping our relationship to violence and control. Although Mattapoisett enacts a tempered relationship to technology, the dystopian future depicted in chapter 15 showcases the detriment on our horizon were technology and systems of power to continue unchecked and unrestrained. As Piercy places Connie's present, the utopian future, and the dystopian threat in conversation with one another, readers are encouraged to develop a critical understanding of how each of these three worlds showcase threats and possibilities on our horizon.

In considering our present reality, it becomes increasingly clear that we may be closer to the dystopian future depicted in chapter 15 than we are to the utopian future of Mattapoisett. As our own world careens toward climate crises, economic collapse, and relational exhaustion, holding fast to an empty promise of perfection only closes us off from better futures. When escaping the mental hospital Connie thinks to herself: "[I]f she didn't seize what chance she has, if she didn't leap into the darkness, if . . . she awaited the perfect moment, the perfect moment never came" (Piercy 224). As Connie notes, those who forgo utopian

thinking often do so by mistakenly expecting perfection and hoping for something that will never arrive.

After reading *Woman on the Edge of Time*, it is difficult to imagine one leaving with a reading that equates utopia with perfection. For if we hope for perfection, we also risk ridding ourselves of our own imperfect becoming. The hopeful heart of the novel lies in its embrace of imperfection as inherent to the human condition. Thus, breaking the promise of perfection means understanding imperfection not as a hindrance to utopia but as one of its central features.

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