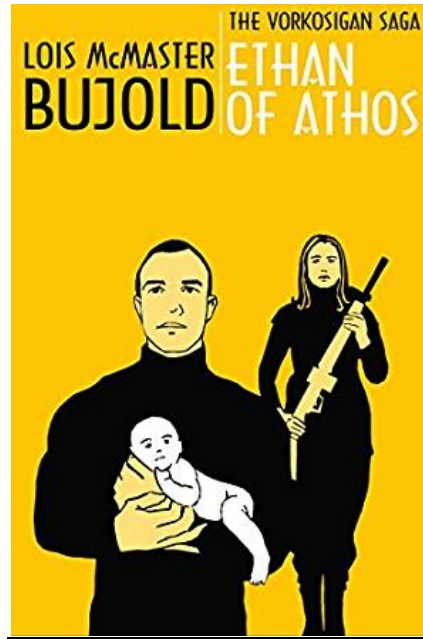

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**An (Un)feasible Gay Planet:
The Vital Intercession of Women
in the Continuity of Athos
in Lois McMaster Bujold's *Ethan of Athos***

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“It takes no compromise to give people their rights... it takes no money to respect the individual. It takes no political deal to give people freedom. It takes no survey to remove repression.”

Harvey Milk

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Abstract

Lois McMaster Bujold's *Ethan of Athos* (1986) portrays a planet only habitable by men in which homosexuality is the norm rather than celibacy, also contemplated. Nevertheless, women are not permitted to participate in this gay society since they are seen by Athosians as creatures that only bring misfortunes and jeopardize the system that governs the planet. Regardless of the fact that the author does provide a number of eutopian elements that can be found in Athos, its exacerbated misogynistic doctrine highlights its dystopian aspects. By analysing both the eutopian and dystopian features of Athos, I argue, that the author is not concerned with portraying either an eutopia or a dystopia as much as she is concerned with leading an Athosian, the protagonist Ethan, to acknowledge that Athos' existence cannot occur without women. As a tool to destroy Ethan's unfounded misogyny, Bujold utilises the friendship between Ethan and female mercenary Elli Quinn. In this process, Elli Quinn arises as the real hero of the novel since she not only helps and protects Ethan but also provides Athos with a priceless gift, her own ova.

Key words: Lois McMaster Bujold, *Ethan of Athos*, gay utopia, misogyny, fag-hag friendship

Introduction

Lois McMaster Bujold's *Ethan of Athos* (1986) is a novel included in her famous science fiction *Vorkosigan Saga*, which consists of 22 volumes.¹ The work to be studied in this dissertation occupies position number 10 chronologically although it can be read independently since it does not follow Miles Vorkosigan, the protagonist of the saga, who is mentioned occasionally. In *Ethan of Athos*, Bujold depicts a male-only planet with monastic connotations similar to the Monastic Autonomous State of Athos in Greece² but where homosexuality is the norm, rather than the strongly imposed celibacy in the self-governed Greek region. The survival of this womenless society is guaranteed by means of ovarian cultures imported from off-planet that together with male sperm can recreate the miracle of life in outstanding and innovative uterine replicators. This gay utopian planet Athos becomes a surprisingly stable society that even controls successfully who is more suitable to be a father by following a social duty credit-system that seeks to avoid deficient parenting. Nonetheless, this all-gay-men planet is jeopardized by the scarcity of new ovarian cultures that ensure continuity. A continuity only achievable with the involvement of the gender feared and abhorred in Athos, women.

It is crucial to remark that the majority of single-gendered worlds in utopian fiction portray mainly female societies. In contrast, according to Brian Attebery,

¹Complete list and overview of the *Vorkosigan Saga*, http://vorkosigan.wikia.com/wiki/Vorkosigan_Saga
Miles Naismith Vorkosigan' overview in http://vorkosigan.wikia.com/wiki/Miles_Naismith_Vorkosigan

² Mount Athos has enjoyed a self-administered status since Byzantine times. Its first constitution was signed in 972 by the emperor John I Tzimiskes. The "Holy Mountain" [...] is forbidden to women and children. Source: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/454>

“whereas female-only societies are often presented as eutopias, necessarily good, male-only societies are almost always presented as dystopias, necessarily bad” (2002: 114). Mariano Martín Rodríguez goes further in presenting an overview of gay utopian works and claiming that “only-gay-men societies have been also regularly depicted as dystopian societies unlike lesbian utopian works” (2016: 202-203). Moreover, it is also remarkable that many of the gay utopian societies in fiction have been written by feminist women, a fact to bear in mind when analysing Bujold’s work. In particular, Martín Rodríguez summarises several SF gay utopian societies’ works, such as *Spartan Planet* (1969) or *The Forever War* series (1974-1997), and qualifies them as dystopian rather than utopian. In the case of the gay society in *Ethan of Athos*, he considers it as not fully utopic since misogyny is the commonly held belief. Nevertheless, Bujold is not as interested in portraying the plausibility of a gay utopian world as much as in portraying the indispensable intercession of women in the survival of the planet and in the destruction of misogyny.

The novel of Bujold, despite being a space opera, conveys a great conceptual importance and can be analysed in terms of Feminism, Gender Studies, Utopianism and Queer Theory. Brian Attebery (2002), Francesca Gaiba (2007) and Chad Andrews (2016) have indeed mentioned the novel in their journal articles and dissertations but *Ethan of Athos* is not the central novel they study.

The aim of this dissertation is thus to explore first the existing utopian elements introduced in Bujold’s work, second the elements that make Athos be not so desirable for other homosexuals both within and outside Athos, and third, the appreciable sympathy which author shows towards Athos at the end of the novel. Furthermore, I argue that the necessary linking between Ethan and the female protagonist Elli Quinn in

order to ensure the future of Athos suggests that who actually may be the hero in the eyes of Athos' inhabitants, Ethan, is not the real hero of the novel. The fact that he questions the unsustainability of the misogyny inculcated in his male-only planet and the fallacies he has been told about the counterpart gender thanks precisely to Elli Quinn determines that she is the real hero. In fact, Ethan transforms into a transgressor or even into an anti-hero in relation to his home planet. His relationship with the mutant Terrence Cee, whether romantic or not, makes Ethan subvert the standards of his own planet. He returns to Athos not only with the ovarian cultures he was asked for initially but also with the ovarian culture of the deceased sister/wife of Terrence Cee, Janine, which will create a completely new generation of post-humans with telepathic powers that might put at risk the planet's harmony.

Ultimately, through the friendship which the hero Elli Quinn and Ethan develop for each other Bujold conveys the real meaning of her novel, which is the importance of the genetic legacy of the mothers forgotten by Athos. In other words, the author transmits an anti-misogynistic statement even though she deliberately expresses a look of complicity with regard to gay Athos. Furthermore and finally, I will consider the friendship between Ethan Urquhart and Elli Quinn since it appears to be a positive representation of a so-called "fag-hag"³ friendship between gay men and straight women where a heterosexual woman seems to particularly enjoy the company of a male homosexual. In order to do this, the mutual help along with the complicit hints that they

³ Term originated in the 40s and 50s. It has had throughout its brief history almost always a negative connotation as it referred to a pathetic figure, deserving of both pity and scorn. In the 60s and 70s, the meaning meant a woman who was in love with an openly gay man and knew that her feelings would never be requited. In the 80s though, people subverted the meaning and transformed it into something positive and defiant". Source: http://www.joelderner.com/blog/2010/11/post_512.html

share throughout the story will be taken into account since these elements comprise the basic ingredients in leading Ethan and Elli to an unavoidable friendship and affection.

1. Utopian narratives: From Thomas More's *Utopia* to genre blending

To begin with, if one seeks to understand the origins of utopia as a literary genre, as a motif or even as a sub-genre of other literary trends, it is almost inconceivable not to mention the father of utopian fiction. The Renaissance humanist Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) was the first person to introduce the term utopia in the English Language when he published his most acclaimed work, *Utopia*, in 1516. According to The British Library, “he coined the word from the Greek *ou-topos* meaning no place or nowhere”⁴. Centuries passed by, and utopia increasingly became a recurrent element in both literature and philosophy. Focusing on literature, endless studies have analysed the concept as well as presented detailed accounts of utopian works.

Lyman Tower Sargent and Darko Survin are two scholars that have immensely contributed to the field of Utopian Studies.⁵ The former defines utopia as “a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space” (Sargent, 2005: 9). Utopian narrative, thus, can be defined as “a type of descriptive fiction” (Martín Rodríguez, 2016: 202). Sargent also presents a highly

⁴ See the excerpt from The British Library at <http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/21cc/utopia/utopia.html>.

⁵ Tower Sargent, Lyman. *British and American Utopian Literature, 1516-985: An Annotated, Chronological Bibliography*. New York, 1988: Garland.

Survin, Darko. *Defined By A Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction and Political Epistemology*. Bern, 2010: Peter Lang AG International Academic Publishers.

Website of The Utopian Studies Society: <http://utopian-studies-europe.org>

accepted sub categorisation of utopia into eutopia, dystopia, anti-utopia and critical utopia that are essential to understand the terms that will be used throughout the study:

Eutopia or positive utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived.

Dystopia or negative utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable detail normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived.

Anti-utopia - a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as criticism of utopianism or of some particular eutopia.

Critical utopia – a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as better than contemporary society but with difficult problems that the described society may or may not be able to solve and which takes a critical view of the utopian genre.

(Sargent, 1994: 9)

This description will be the foundation for my study since I will try to seek the most suitable category for the work analysed, Lois McMaster Bujold's *Ethan of Athos*. Since this novel is science fiction as well as utopian narrative, the relation between utopia and SF must be briefly explored. Darko Suvin has argued that "SF is a literary genre whose [...] conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment" (Suvin, 1979: 8-9). In that sense, *Ethan of Athos* does present an alternative environment for a sexual minority, based on the novum (or invention) of the uterine replicator. Thus, utopia and SF are highly related to each other. Nevertheless, establishing clear definite lines between the two is an arduous task. Regardless of the fact that some scholars have questioned the degree of contribution that SF has had on utopian fiction, it is "impossible to study the utopias [...] of the past fifty

years or more without acknowledging the central role of science fiction” (Fitting, 2010: 1). For that reason, Suvin considers utopia as a sub-genre of SF. Scholars such as Jane Donawerth (2003) have also studied this blending and has claimed that “the blend of genre created in the critical dystopia as matrix [...] opens opportunities for a radical vision” (Donawerth, 2003: 30). Therefore, what we should primarily understand is that the intersection between both genres lies on the fact that they “reflect or express our hopes and fears about the future, and more specifically to link those hopes and fears to science and technology” (Fitting, 2010: 138). Furthermore, utopias within the SF tradition highly differ somehow from those utopias written by outside science fiction because technology arises as one determining “factor that facilitates and [...] makes these worlds possible” (Fitting, 2010: 147).

2. Separatist Utopias in SF: Feminist and Masculinist Traditions and the Case of *Ethan of Athos*.

The relationship between utopia and science fiction is an old one and it reached its zenith when women writers, influenced by the second-wave feminists, saw in SF an opportunity to imagine alternative worlds and societies that allowed them to break with the fierce bindings of patriarchy and create fictional liberated worlds. This liberation gave birth to a new feminist utopian tradition in SF, also called separatist utopia, in the 1970s. Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) can be considered the embryo in this new tradition, even though it is not a “feminist utopia, since it does not portray a utopian state, nor are any female characters, [...] [it] is an experiment on gender imagining a world without sexual difference” (Attebery, 2002: 92). Le Guin’s

novel was followed by the great feminist utopias: Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), Suzy McKee Charna's *Walk to the End of The World* (1974) and *Motherlines* (1978), and Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). All these latter four works do portray a female-only apparently utopian society but they have been repeatedly qualified as dystopian since they eliminate men from the new created world.

The debate of whether these works present eutopian or dystopian elements is an extense field with plenty of research conducted within Utopian Studies. Many scholars, such as Attebery, have criticised the fact that these feminist SF writers portray all-women worlds leaving men out of the scene because "separatism cannot provide a final solution to the problem" (Relf, 2002: 80). Besides, Peter Fitting asserts that one should not read the absence of men in earnest since:

[...]the absence of men functions not as a call for a world without men, but as metaphor for the elimination of male values. [...] It is my contention that the description of a future without men is a more effective way of urging the reader to realize that the construction of a better society can only be accomplished through the complete of patriarchy. [...] A world without domination and exploitation involves the rejection of gender – of any predetermined limits on a person's activities according to biological sex. (Fitting, 1987: 108)

Nevertheless, the absence of men in the worlds portrayed by Russ, McKee Charnas and Piercy has led to the general belief that "the all-female or female dominated society is necessarily all good, and [...] that all-male or male-dominated society is dystopia, or hell on earth" (Attebery, 202: 114). In order to have a broader insight to this statement made by Attebery, it must be said that one of the few masculinist utopias, is rightly dystopian. *Spartan Planet* (1969) by the English author A. Bertram Chandler portrays, precisely, a "pseudo Spartan planet [...] where females are literally unknown among the warrior elite, which is composed of hyper-masculine

males, usually coupled with effeminate and less powerful men” (Martín Rodríguez, 2016: 209).

This brief overview of the utopian narrative tradition particularly within SF is indispensable in order to fully understand the role, which Lois McMaster Bujold plays in this current. Before going into deeper analysis, the concept of “Intaglio effect”, or reverse effect in engravings, must be introduced, since many utopian SF works are developed around this principle by which two works “do not contradict but reverse the values presented [in one work or another], while retaining the basic configuration” (Attebery, 2002: 106). Along these lines, Brian Attebery claims that Bujold reverses Chandler:

Lois McMaster Bujold, in *Ethan of Athos* (1986), suggests that a world of men might be structured along the lines of a feminist utopia, with an emphasis on child-rearing, kinship, and pair-bonding rather than on military prowess and rank. Bujold’s novel may be an intaglio version of a A. Betram Chadler’s *Spartan Planet* (1969), which portrays an all-male dystopia of hypermasculine soldiers and effeminate nurses. (Attebery: 2002: 123)

Not only is *Ethan of Athos* an intaglio counterpart of a masculinist dystopia but also a total twist away from the tradition of feminist women SF writers which portray worlds in which men have no place. Nevertheless, McMaster Bujold seems not to be interested in following the utopian lines of her feminist SF colleagues because she wants, above all, to remark that a exclusion of either sex, the commonly used strategy, cannot succeed if a truly utopian space is to be created. *Ethan of Athos* is then a *critical* utopia following Sargeant’s sub-categorisation since Bujold creates a utopian space for gay men but she criticises it as dystopian for women. Athos is better than our society, at least for gay men, but in some others aspects this idealised society still continues struggling with misogyny – hence, it cannot be entirely eutopian. By raising the point,

Bujold is, unconsciously or consciously, critical of the utopian genre. Utopian Athos cannot solve the question of misogyny regardless of the fact that women are essential for Athos. Precisely, that is what Bujold seeks to remark.

As a summary, Bujold portrays a gay planet where women are unknown and feared. Athos cannot be called a happy gay utopia due to this aspect that may also suggest that we are in front of a questionable masculinist dystopia. Nevertheless, towards the end of the novel, one can glimpse that Bujold's actual aim is a vindication for an understanding and a plausible future cohabitation without taking into account the fact that little seems to have changed in Athos in terms of its mysogyny, at least at surface, when something has indeed changed.

3. Athos as eutopian and dystopian planet

The name provided by Lois McMaster Bujold to the all-gay-men planet Athos is not accidental. The Autonomous Monastic State of the Holy Mountain of Athos in present-day Greece is located in a north-eastern peninsula and enjoys a special status in terms of self-ruling from the Greek Republic. The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, one of the jurisdictions that encompass the Eastern Orthodox Church, governs this autonomous and jurisdictional regional.⁶ The link between this region of Greece and the science-fictional planet Athos depends on the fact that both share a solid misogynistic policy that does not allow the entrance of women in their territories. In that sense, Athos follows the typical misogynistic connotations that the few masculinist utopias have in common, as it occurs with the mentioned case of Chandler's *Spartan Planet*. Furthermore, these two intaglio versions of the same science-fictional pattern have the peculiarity that homosexuality is the norm even though celibacy is also

⁶ Source: http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mount_Athos

contemplated. As it has been argued before, masculinist utopias are few and not varied at all. The necessity of an existing homosexuality in masculinist utopias explains the lack of only-men-worlds in heterosexual masculinist utopia because “men, or at least heterosexual men, cannot or do not want to imagine a better world without women” (Fitting, 1987: 108). For that reason, heterosexual men are not interested in imagining a world without women and they do not need a womenless utopian society since they enjoy power enormously and they are not oppressed. In contrast, women, lesbians and gay men do need to imagine a space, system or world where it is possible to be freed from the oppressive system. Interestingly, it must be said that the utopian narrative field had a previous stage-evolution where “male writers invented the repressive patriarchy, and then women responded with portraits of more attractive female-dominated societies” (Attebery, 2002: 114). Examples of this previous stage where patriarchal dystopias were common are John Wyndham’s *Consider Her Ways* (1956) and Poul Anderson’s *Virgin Planet* (1959).

Despite the fact that women and homosexual minorities have been the ones to be more often represented in their own utopian narrative, a subdivision must be introduced between female homosexuals or lesbians and male homosexuals or gay men. Feminist writers of SF have played with the idea of homosexuality as the norm when they have imagined a world without men in order to escape from the patriarchy. This proposed homosexuality is also problematic since it leaves out of the spectrum heterosexual women. Nevertheless, “due to their sexual orientation, there is an entire group of men that would seem little interested in oppressing women, at least sexually: homosexual men, usually called gays” (Martín Rodríguez, 2016: 201). Gay men have been misrepresented or simply not represented in utopian narratives. If feminist women long

for a space where patriarchy is no longer repressing them, gay men long for a space where a heteronormative system no longer repress them and in that sense “unlike females in feminist modern utopias, gays have often been abused in this literary mode as well” (Martín Rodríguez, 2016: 202) In other words, an appealing utopia in SF for gay men has been difficult to create.⁷

Although there are examples of gay utopias, they are considered dystopias. Regarding SF, works such as the mentioned *Spartan Planet*, a militaristic society of gay men that sees women as abhorrent individuals and Katherine Burdekin’s *Swastika Night* (1937)⁸, in which a futuristic gay nazi society segregates women, have contributed to the belief that all gay men are actually misogynistic in SF. Nevertheless, it does not seem fair to place *Ethan of Athos* among these works regardless of the misogynistic stereotype that it does contain. Indeed, Ethan’s misguided ideas about women start vanishing when he meets Elli Quinn. We must, then, clearly distinguish novels such as *Swastika Night* from *Ethan of Athos* as gay dystopias. Both *Swastika Night* and *Spartan Planet* represent a violent society. In contrast, *Ethan of Athos* may be dystopian in the sense that it is misogynistic but the Athosian society is extremely peaceful and avoids conflicts at all costs. Besides, Ethan and Elli do depict a re-conciliatory aspect unlike the other two novels.

Another fundamental idea that should be mentioned is the concept of “homotopia”, which in “its current use, as attested on a number of internet sites, [seems] to indicate some sort of a queer utopia” (Pearson, 2003: 81). Homotopia can also be applied to Athos since it exemplifies what Pearson herself considers as homotopian. In

⁷ Mariano Martín Rodríguez (2006) argues that *Rainbow Republic. Romanzo distopico gay* (2016) is a rare appealing gay eutopia regardless of the fact that it includes the term dystopian in its title.

⁸ First published in 1937. Republished again in the 80s.

some sense, she agrees with Martín Rodríguez on the lack of gay male equivalents to the lesbian separatist utopia. In fact, she argues that “eliminating women would not, *pace* Lois McMaster Bujold, automatically improve the social and political position of gay men” (Pearson, 2003: 93) but, by eliminating women from Athos, Bujold does not improve either the position of gay men despite the eutopian elements she creates in the planet. Pearson mentions Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) since she identified the American gay utopian in opposition to a “overarching, relatively unchallenged aegis of a culture’s desire that gay people not be, unthreatening a conceptual home for a concept of gay origins” (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1990: 41). Pearson also states that “it is really rather ironic that it is gay men who, as a group, fail to be seduced, even as though experiment, by the temptation to kill in order to put an end to all killing” (Pearson, 2003: 93), signalling that gay men have not reproduced an appealing separatist utopia as SF feminist utopian writers. Notwithstanding, Bujold does use misogyny as a tool for gay men to kill, also metaphorically, the heteronormative oppressive system by leaving women out of their planet. Nevertheless, for Bujold this is not a successful or valid strategy, as she will prove throughout *Ethan of Athos*.

The fact that it is a feminist woman who imagines a plausible and to a certain extent eutopian all-gay-men planet makes Athos be a place that values peace above everything. As Attebery notes, unlike in “Chandler’s [*Spartan Planet*] scenario [Bujold] has freed the colonists of Athos from the need to prove their rejection of femininity. Thereby men are authorized to demonstrate a full range of personality types and interests” (Attebery, 2002: 124). In other words, Bujold transmits to Athos a feminist heritage that provides a peaceful atmosphere in spite of the planet’s misogyny. Athos, as Bujold describes it, was colonized by the Founding Fathers who, in an attempt to avoid

endless conflicts between planets and galaxies, decided to emigrate and create a new state with its own societal structure. They were not only escaping from conflicts per se but also from a “contaminated culture” (McMaster Bujold: 1983: 15) where women do exist. In order to do so, they exported a whole lot of ovarian tissues, the CJB-9, which allowed them to start and consolidate various future generations of male inhabitants thanks to genetic manipulation. Prosperity, a non-violent and stable atmosphere as well as a highly viable society away from other planetary affairs are three basic pillars in Athos that have enabled the planet to have “no military enemies in 200 years” (27). Bujold proves the viability of this eutopian gay society since “redirecting desire toward members of one’s one sex and replacing sexual reproduction with cloning have led to an era of peace” (Attebery, 202: 110).

The Population Council is the highest governmental institution of Athos and it regulates a duty-credit system applied to all the inhabitants, by which they can accumulate credits through work, volunteering programmes as well as good behaviour. These elements are no-doubt eutopian and have the ultimate goal of preventing irresponsible individuals from parenting since a number of credits is required when one wants to become a father. Athos in these terms is efficient, sustainable, prosperous and peaceful, a similar feature shared with many women-only worlds portrayed by SF women writers. Despite frequent pseudo-monastic celibacy, most men pair with other men in order to create an environment where to properly nurture their children, whether within a romantic relationship or just companionship. In fact, every man in Athos must designate an individual with whom to raise his child(ren), a Designate Alternate:

Janos was the son of Ethan’s own father’s D.A (Designed Alternate); the two had raised all their sons together, as they had run their business together, an

experimental and ultimately successful fish farm on the South Province coast, as they had melded their lives together, seamlessly. Between son and foster-son no line was ever drawn. Ethan the eldest, bookish and inquisitive, destined from birth to higher education and higher service; Steve and Stanislaus, born each within a week of the other, each flatteringly bred from their father's partner's ovarian culture stock; Janos, boundlessly energetic, witty as quicksilver; Bret, the baby, the musical one. Ethan's family. (24)

McMaster Bujolds creates, at first sight, a totally desirable world for gay men where male homosexuality is not only celebrated but also praised. A gay state that has no turmoil and based on a credit-duty-system that is successful and with a society where familiar bonds are essential and necessary in the newly-borns' nurture. Along these lines, "Bujold denaturalises the hetero-normative masculine ideal that is left unquestioned in much separatist SF, since the men of Athos are largely homogenous and committed to their society's compulsory homosexual identity and gender beliefs" (Wight, 2009: 48). Nevertheless, the author does introduce someone not very supportive of Athos's standards, Ethan's brother, Janos. He repeatedly manifests his apathy or indifference about having the necessary credits to become a father, which seems to be the only possible aspiration in life for Athos' inhabitants. He is unable to find his place in society and decides to go away, together with his friend/lover Nick (Lois McMaster Bujold is ambiguous when defining this relationship) to a place where none of the strict rules of the planet apply. He prefers to sacrifice his future rather than to live in a society that lacks full freedom. Once Ethan comes back from Kline Station, he asks his father where is Janos:

[...] "What *happened*?" [Ethan asks]

"Well – Janos ran off to the Outlands with his friend Nick about two months after you. He says he's not coming back – no rules or restrictions out there, he says, nobody keeping score on you" Ethan's face snorted. "No future, either, but he doesn't seem to care about that. Though give him ten years, and he may find he's

had a bellyful of freedom. Others have. I calculate it'll take him at least that long, though. He always was the thickest of you boys.

“Oh”, said Ethan in a very small voice. He tried to look properly grieved. He tried very hard, twitching the corners of his mouth back down by main force. “Well – “ he cleared his throat, “perhaps it’s for the best. Some men just aren’t cut out for paternity. Better they should realize it before and not after they becoming responsible for a son”(McMaster Bujold, 1983: 234)

This represents one of the factors that make Athos dystopian since “forcing all members of either sex (or sexuality) into a single pattern will inevitable result in dystopia” (Attebery, 2002: 116) and explains why Athos has problems when attracting new inhabitants from off-planet.

However, Athos’s educational doctrine based on an exacerbated misogyny is the element that makes the whole utopian system falls down. Martín Rodríguez accurately qualifies the world of Athos as dystopian precisely due to this shortcoming. A gay utopian world cannot be successful because “utopia consists of living in a world where acceptance of alternative sexual orientations [and gender equality], thus ruling out the need to create a fully isolated place of utopian gay normativity” (Martín Rodríguez, 2016: 222) and this confirms “the fallacy of this dream that is revealed (as well) by the men’s unwilling dependence on the women who have donated their eggs to Athos to allow the men to reproduce” (Wight, 2009: 47). This all changes, though, when Ethan is sent off-planet to get new ovarian tissues and meets Elli Quinn. Bujold “explores the limits of Ethan’s socially constructed phobia as he undergoes a series of moral and sexual epiphanies and eventually finds himself in awe of Elli Quinn” (Andrews, 2016: 154). This personal transformation makes his systems fall apart. Ethan’s journey to Kline Station “undermines his sexist assumption, and shows him that separatism can breed fear and ignorance” (Wight, 2009: 36) and this accurately explains why Bujold uses the device of a gay planet to teach her feminist lesson. Furthermore, the author not

only sees misogyny as a problem for male individuals but also homophobia for heterosexual individuals, which is why she shows a more than clear complicity with Athos. In fact, Ethan has to face insults from men that cannot understand the model Athos provides. Few hours after having landed in Kline Station, Ethan explores the diverse areas and decides to enter a bar where he meets a group of homophobic men. One of them asks Ethan: “Athos? The Planet of the Fags? You on the level?” (44). Right after this incident, another heterosexual man from the group approaches Ethan when he discovers he is actually from Athos and tells him: “Let me tell you what you’re doing wrong, buddy” (McMaster Bujold 1983, 45) in a mocking way.

As the story progresses, the readers learn who has sabotaged the shipment of ovarian cultures that was destined for Athos. It was Helda, a woman who cannot accept the homosexuality of her own son and his decision to leave Kline Station and go to Athos. She embodies the intrinsic homophobia present in our society in her rejection of the sexuality of her own son. Homophobia and misogyny converge, thus, as tools to oppress both women and gay men, which is what the author wants to highlight. When Ethan asks why she has sabotaged the ovaries, Helda replies:

“Why? You even need to ask why? It was to cut you motherless unnatural bastards off, that’s why. I meant to get the next shipment too, if there was one, and the next, and the next, until [...] Until I’d hooked Simmi out of there, and he came to his senses and came home and got a real woman. I swear I wouldn’t criticize a hair on his head this time, I’ll never be allowed to even see my own grandchildren on that dreadful dirty planet...” (McMaster Bujold, 1983: 177)

4. Resolution and reconciliation: Ethan and Elli Quinn friendship

Homophobia and misogyny are central in the novel. Helda actually represents the kind of homophobic women that Bujold would never support but also Athos represents a misogynistic system that she wants to shatter. In exploring the relationship between Elli Quinn and Ethan Urquhart, Bujold makes possible reconciliation between women and Athos since Ethan acknowledges that his planet has no future without recognising the participation of women as the biological mothers of all Athos' inhabitants. The author attacks misogyny, thus, by visibilizing the deleted Athosian's mothers: "Athos ends with a faint gesture towards reconciliation: Ethan acknowledges that his society depends on the women who donate their ovaries, and he promises to send Elli pictures of the sons that her donation will produce" (Wight, 2009: 36). This makes Elli emerge as the real hero of the work. Not only does Bujold make Ethan embrace the fact that women are not monsters, as he was told, but also she permits the planet's survival thanks to Elli. Throughout the story, Elli Quinn deliberately helps Ethan in the Kline Station and protects him from Colonel Millisor, in part because she might be interested too in what Millisor is after. He is trying to capture the telepathic DNA material present in the ovules of Terrence Cee's deceased sister in order to clone and instruct soldiers that would become heirs of this post-human feature. In the end, this telepathic material travels to Athos together with Terrence with whom Ethan has fallen in love and will produce a whole generation of post-humans with telepathic attitudes. As a consequence, Ethan betrays his planet's standards and becomes an anti-hero for Athos since this transgression might endanger Athos' future. This is seen by some readers as, actually, an attempt by Lois McMaster Bujold to destroy Athos' future since "it is possible to think of [...] telepathy bring[ing] political control and the end of

privacy, [...] it might bring boredom, mental instability or dangerous over-population” (James, 2006: 228); this may entail the end of the planet because we need to ask “what kind of society might emerge with a post-human generation if all thoughts were open to all” (James, 2006: 228). This subversion of rules may question Bujold’s expressed complicity with Athos but it would be not accurate to accuse in this way an author that has provided one the most eutopian gay worlds in SF so far. Although “the possibility of a society-wide reconciliation is not addressed, signalling once again the difficulty with which women writer have sought to imagine alternatives to the dominant narratives of masculinity” (Wight, 2009: 35), Bujold does introduce a hint for it with the ultimate friendship between Elli Quinn and Ethan. My argument for this reconciliation takes form in the friendship that both share since it is a glimpse of a “fag-hag”⁹ relationship in which a heterosexual woman seems to particularly enjoy the company of a gay male, a widespread notion within the gay community regardless of the fact that this may represent a cliché. “Situated at the cusp of gender and sexual identities, fag hags not only permit consideration of straight women-gay male relationships, but more broadly serve as an entry point to debate over the relationship of Feminist Studies to its alleged successor, Queer Theory” (Evans, 1999: 23), something that the author exemplifies in the work. Evans also examines the “fag hag” as an implicit figure in Sedgwick’s work even though “the fag hag was explicitly invoked during a theoretical exchange between and David Van Leer” (Evans, 1999: 36).¹⁰ She argues that Van Leer accuses Sedgwick herself of being “a fag hag, and in this way impugn any woman who

⁹ This is an informal term. Fag hag: A woman who enjoys hanging out with gay men. Source: <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=fag%20hag>. See also 6 Offensive humorous. <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fag-hag>

¹⁰ Evans refers to the article by David Van Leer, “The Beast of the Closet: Homosociality and the Pathology of Manhood”, *Critical Inquiry*, 15.3, 1989: 587-605.

virtues about gay studies” (Evans, 1999: 37). Although the concept “fag hag” has had pejorative connotations⁶ (David Van Leer certainly uses the term in this way), when I argue that the relationship between Ethan and Elli Quinn may resemble a fag-hag-gay-men friendship, I refer to the common affection between gay male individuals and female heterosexual friends in which they rely on each other by developing a friendship based on trust, affection and mutual comprehension. Despite the fact that Galba states that “[...] these friendships in fact reify and essentialize the boundary separating gay and straight identities and gay and straight communities” (Galba, 2007: 40), Bujold uses the concept in order to enable a reconciliation between gay men and women against the oppressing heteronormative patriarchal system that governs our present-day society. Indeed, one can find an example in the novel as it occurs when Ethan must face homophobic comments by heterosexual men at the bar in Kline Station, comments that reinforce the idea that both gay men and women must fight against patriarchal values. When Elli enters the bar to help Ethan and tell them to stop, one of them replies: “Fag-loving women [...] are worse than fags themselves” (46). Nevertheless, Elli responds by saying: “All drunks are a pain”, – drawled the woman to the air – “but aggressive drunks are just plain disgusting.” (47) This response is what actually leads Bujold to explore that relationship between Ethan as a gay male and Ellie as a straight woman in order to fight against patriarchy and to collapse the unsustainable misogyny of Athos.

In that sense, since a friendship between a straight woman and a gay man is based on mutual comprehension and support, Ethan looks for these elements and he finds them in Elli. This is the kind of resemblance about a fag-hag and gay male friend I intend to remark. Bujold also uses this concept in order to show us, as readers, to what extent the preconceived assumptions about women that Ethan had absolutely fall apart.

As a result, once again, Elli emerges as the real hero since she makes the misogyny of Ethan, and therefore Athos' as well, disappear. After all, Ethan finds in Elli, the Dendarii Mercenary Commander officer, an ultimate friend and someone he can rely on. At the very end of the novel, Ethan returns to Athos with Terrence Cee and the telepathic material but also with an ovary donated by Elli Quinn herself. The last lines summarise Bujold's aim to lend a voice to the forgotten mothers of Athos: "Ethan thought of Elli Quinn [...]. In a woman, one saw (finally) not charts and graphs and numbers, but the genes of one's own children personified and made flesh. So, every ovarian culture on Athos cast a woman's shadow, unacknowledged, ineradicably there" (236). Finally, Ethan closes the novel saying to himself in the mirror: "Salute, Mother!", Ethan whispered, and turned away to bed. "Tomorrow began the new world, and the work thereof" (McMaster Bujold, 1983: 237)

Conclusions

This dissertation has analysed the tradition of SF utopian narratives, in particular those dealing with masculinist and feminist approaches. In particular, *Ethan of Athos* by McMaster Bujold, the central work studied here, has been qualified, following Sargeant, as a critical dystopia since it presents both eutopian and dystopian elements in the all-gay-male planet Athos. Nevertheless, I have also explained how Bujold, a feminist SF woman writer, has distanced herself from the long tradition of other feminist SF writers portraying female-only-societies from which men are excluded. Interestingly, it is a woman who is capable of imagining a world where women are not allowed presenting one of the few gay utopias with eutopian shades written within the genre of SF.

Notwithstanding, Bujold is not concerned in creating an eutopian gay society as much as she is interested in highlighting the features that make Athos and its rampant misogyny be dystopian. Regardless of the fact that she transmits a feminist statement in terms of a peaceful and harmonious environment in Athos as other SF writers did in the feminist tradition, she manages to dismantle Athos's extreme masculinist beliefs against women when Ethan meets a woman. By means of a process of discovery, Ethan successfully unmask the manipulative misogynistic doctrine he grew up with. The novel is incomprehensible without the role of Elli Quinn who serves Bujold in her particular dismantling of misogyny in the novel. Not only does Elli Quinn help Ethan in an altruistic manner but she also provides him an ovary that will permit Athos' continuity. Both finally profess each other mutual affection and friendship that lead Ethan to appreciate the indispensable contribution to Athos by the women who donated their ovarian tissues and to recognise the non-viability of the planet without them. Although, Bujold does not provide a total reconciliation between Athos and women, the fact that Ethan is able to acknowledge this fact makes the author be indulgent and suggest a possible eutopian gay planet. Athos cannot be considered entirely eutopian, there is no doubt, but Bujold positively winks at the planet's viability once Ethan sees in himself the mother that permitted his very existence.

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