



Rendering Our Familiar Human Nature in a Strange World: Tactics for Speculative Fiction

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Citation	Pitts, Amy Lapwing. 2019. Rendering Our Familiar Human Nature in a Strange World: Tactics for Speculative Fiction. Master's thesis, Harvard Extension School.
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Rendering Our Familiar Human Nature in a Strange World: Tactics for Speculative Fiction

A Critical Essay

and Three Linked Short Stories

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A Thesis in the Field of Literature & Creative Writing

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

March 2019

Abstract

This thesis is made up of two parts: a critical essay (I) and (II) three original linked short stories. (The short stories are not included in this online version.) The critical essay looks at two types of challenges I faced in writing the stories: tactics used by writers of speculative fiction to bring the reader into a strange world and at the same time maintain the focus on the characters whose struggles against this new environment belie their eternal human nature; and which futuristic aspects to develop of this speculative world.

The short stories are the first in a collection in progress called *A Passing Breeze*. They are set in mid-twenty-second century Massachusetts in a United States that has evolved into a matriarchy whose government and industries are led by female majorities. While some men make up a minority working in the public realm, their primary focus is the home and family. Gender-based social expectations have shifted places, changing the social dynamic between men and women. Women expect men to take care of the home and children, while men rely on women to be the primary breadwinners and to be the family's resident expert and champion in any conflicts with the outside world. The subordination of men to women is enabled and perpetuated in part by an ongoing social campaign that persuades men to take a medication that lowers their testosterone levels, rendering that half of the populace less aggressive and less prone to violence. Women's dominating role in business and industry is made possible by the off-loading of pregnancy to an artificial womb which has the secondary effect of making men equally

able to care for babies and children as their wives, neither party being favored with the hormonal surge that a woman experiences when she gives birth.

The stories in this work examine the relationships of women to men in a few specific situations, including courtship, first year of a committed relationship, as well as a work place conflict between a male employee and his female boss.

Frontispiece



A [fa]ther's arms are made of tenderness and children sleep soundly in them.

—Victor Hugo

Author's Biographical Sketch

I pursued my education at Duke University (A.B. in French Literature, *magna cum laude*) and at the University of Mississippi (M.A. in French Literature). After finishing my thesis on Chrétien de Troyes' Old French romance *Yvain, ou le chevalier au lion*, I taught French for two years at Grace-St. Luke's Episcopal School in Memphis, Tennessee. After earning an M.S. in Information and Computer Science from the Georgia Institute of Technology, I began my career as a software engineer at IBM Corporation. I have two children and live in Londonderry, New Hampshire.

Rurban towns of New York, Connecticut, and Western Massachusetts are where I grew up. The smell of tar softening on the long driveway up to my family's house in Croton Falls, New York, combines with that of fallen leaves, their undersides moist and white-spotted with mold, to form an early olfactory memory. Along with kids from next door and up the hill, mostly boys except for our tomboy leader and me, I would join in raking leaves into long low mounds to outline rooms of my own custom-designed house, deciding who to let in and who, like my collision-prone little brother or stuck-to-me-like-glue sister, to keep out. With a sudden yell from our leader we would drop our rakes and brooms and run behind trees and bushes to become cowboys and Indians in a battle to the death. The cleverness of an Indian's stealthy silent progress through a leaf-strewn woods drew me to that side, so I pulled off my shirt with the rest of my tribe and practiced sneaking up on the cowboys who, naturally, kept their shirts on. You whooped when you had mimed shooting an arrow into one of them and you loudly argued they had missed

when one of them bang-banged you dead. This was in the days of mothers at home looking after things, so within a minute or two, I heard my name called. Annoyed at the interruption I ran into the house, found my mother in an upstairs bedroom where she had chanced to look out at us, and explained. “Well,” she said, in a tone that was matter-of-fact and well-practiced, “you’ll just have to be a brave who wears a shirt.”

Free now of that particular interruption, I have written these stories because I am still not persuaded about that shirt. What’s gender got to do with it?

Dedication

To all the students, past and future, in my family I dedicate this work, completed in my seventh decade. It really is true what they say about “you’re never too old.” Nor are you ever too young to pivot toward the shout of an idea.

Acknowledgments

It was their enthusiastic permission to leave my software testing job early one afternoon a week to drive down to Cambridge for the past five years that made this work at all possible, and so I thank Viktoria Vegger at EBSCO, and Tim Kaldewey and Razeyah Stephen at IBM.

My first night at Harvard Extension I knew I was in the right place when we began discussing John Updike's "A & P" in Maxine Rodberg's short fiction class. At the end of that term when the Editors at *Agni* sent me an encouraging note declining a short story of mine, I was thankful to Maxine for her warm-hearted "Don't give up." Many thanks also to Chris Gleason for encouraging me to simplify and better structure a short story that contained a character that the protagonist loved but that my classmates hated. Chris' reminder, "That's just their opinion," has terrific staying power, good in that moment as well as many times since. What a relief it is not to have to please everyone all the time. And yet, Jan Schütte has an unusual gift for finding the good in every student's work, no matter how far it still has to go, which can only be tremendously pleasing to all those who take his screenwriting course. I am thankful to Jan for showing me how to build a script that brings the reader in and moves them.

I am grateful to Stephen Shoemaker whose Pro-Seminar taught me how to put together and defend a thesis in the Humanities. The application of those skills to a thesis in Creative Writing, though, was not entirely clear to me. I put that worry on the back burner and proceeded to take courses, since that was really what I was here for. Then the

courses were done and the thesis was all that remained. For a few months I could easily see myself ditching the program. Enter Talaya Delaney.

To my petulance—I did not enjoy reading criticism and I sure as heck had no desire to inflict it on anyone else!—Talaya responded with patience. When she suggested we meet to talk more about it, I had a hunch that 1) I would find out that this thesis was not what I thought it would be; and 2) it would be a pleasure to talk to her. For our several energizing talks on the proposal I am grateful to Talaya.

How glad I was to be assigned Lindsay Mitchell as my thesis director. It was in Lindsay's short fiction class that I workshopped early drafts of two of the stories in this thesis, so her familiarity with what I was trying to do was helpful. Wonderfully helpful also is a suggestion received just when you're ready for it. Again and again Lindsay suggested other authors' work and research at precisely the moment I was casting about for other voices on the questions I was exploring. Many thanks to Lindsay for her good intellectual company as I developed the thought experiment that is *A Passing Breeze*.

And finally, to my classmates at Harvard Extension School, thanks for your thoughts on my work and your generous encouragement. And just for being there, since it was really to meet creative people like you that I made that first frigid walk on a January evening in 2013 from the Law School parking garage across two dark quads to the friendly light of a Brattle Street seminar room.

Table of Contents

Frontispiece.....	v
Author’s Biographical Sketch.....	vi
Dedication.....	viii
Acknowledgments.....	ix
I. Keeping it Real in an Unreal World.....	13
Craft	15
A Relatable Character	17
Show, Don’t Tell?.....	17
Experiencing the Clones as Human Beings	20
Technology Is the Writer’s Tool.....	22
Technology Serves to Define the Characters.....	22
An Alternate World to Our Own.....	24
Content.....	28
Technology	28
Either Sex Can Care for the Baby	29
Control Men’s Behavior by Lowering Testosterone Levels.....	30
Today’s World Evolves to a Matriarchy	33
Utopia Is Not MyTopia.....	34
Sex Act As an Expression of Female Dominance.....	40
Bibliography.....	46

II. Collection of Linked Short Stories: *A Passing Breeze* 48

I.

Keeping it Real in an Unreal World

When I was nine years old I found on my parents' bookshelf an old hardback copy of Felix Salten's *Bambi*. It had line drawings every zillion pages, or so it seemed to me, and while I loved encountering them, they ended up being just an afterthought since I already had a picture of Bambi, his friend Faline, and his mother and the Stag who might have been his father. Salten created a world that no human lives in and made it a place where any reader could go and feel the warmth and fragile safety of the deer's home in the underbrush, the terror at the sound of the hunter's gun, the happy companionship of other gentle creatures, and the awe at the sight of the Stag. Salten could not interview deer, nor could he go undercover and live like a fawn. The problem of emotional distance he solved through empathy, imagination, and literary skill. Using logic as well as art the author built a world that is familiar, where the consequences of the characters' actions make sense, and whose characters evoke emotions that are readily understood and engender empathy in the reader. And yet the world of his story is a forest where the inhabitants live rough and eat what they find in a day's walking, a world far in experience from that in which the readers live. I read *Bambi* three times that year.

In my work I seek to bring the reader into my characters' lives, into their thoughts about what they are experiencing, and into their feelings about how life is treating them and how they are treating others. The old adage, "show, don't tell," only takes me so far. In my early efforts I gave no internal monologue for the character, relying instead on the character's actions to convey their thoughts and even their feelings. One of my stories

about a woman dealing with a solo visit to her in-laws received such a dressing-down at a workshop that I realized that while my depiction of her might have been realistic, she got no credit for the struggle she was under. What she did and said was exactly what this character, as I understood her, would do and say. The character's husband was not with her on this visit, a fact that left her with no shield between her upbringing and his, forcing her to leave her familiar expectations and plunge into the uncomfortably unfamiliar setting of her in-laws. The reader did not know that the character was resentful of her husband for a neglectful streak whose genesis she was now seeing clearly in the interplay between her in-laws over the course of a dinner and overnight stay. The bitch brought out in her by having to endure these people and try to accept their obsession with food preferences, their scolding of the grandchildren for speaking while at the table, and the parents' complete neglect of the children once the dinner was over I had drawn well, according to my readers. They hated her. In the rewrite I would have to find a way to open this character up to the reader and bring them closer.

Emotional distance is an even greater problem in speculative fiction where characters interact in a setting that is unfamiliar to the reader in at least some aspects. Human characters retain their human nature but the environment in a speculative world may pose difficulties that are novel to the reader. When I write speculative fiction the difficulty of depicting characters that the reader can readily step into and see the strange world I am describing requires careful selection of situations. While the environment is different from ours and makes somewhat different demands on people, the characters will respond to those demands in a recognizable way. No magic, no interactions with spirits,

just human-to-human actions and words are the palette I will work with to bridge the emotional distance from reader to character.

Craft

My project for this thesis is a set of stories called *A Passing Breeze*, set in 2144 New England. A particular problem with speculative fiction, or any story set in a future or alternate world, is how much technology to introduce. Rather than plot-driven or technology-centered, I want to write a story that is character-driven. Since the setting is the future, the environment in which the characters live will include, or indeed in some ways be defined by, that time's technology. Some technology is part of setting the stage, such as means of transportation, while things like wearable tech are ubiquitous and the way in which characters must deal with them helps to define who they are. In the speculative fiction works I most admire, the focus on character has been maintained by including only that technology that the author needs to write the characters. Kazuo Ishiguro describes an England very like the one we know in *Never Let Me Go*. It is the biomedical technology of human cloning that creates his characters and the environment they live in, apart from the normal citizens of the country. Although the reader perceives this world as a possible alternate England, it does not seem important that everything about this world, apart from cloning, is just as it is today. The cloning is enough to separate out this world from our shared experience and set it up as a world apart. So, too, in John Updike's *Toward the End of Time*, we are given just those clues as to how the world has changed to set us firmly in a terrifying Massachusetts North Shore after a devastating war where the federal government is kaput, local police have scattered, and personal security is only available to those who can pay for protection services.

My critical essay will look at two tactics used by Updike and Ishiguro to bring the reader into a strange world and at the same time maintain the focus on the characters whose struggles against this new environment belie their eternal human nature. These tactics are 1) describe objects and people in the world as the character sees and feels them; and 2) bring in only those future technologies needed to reveal character. In my work I am experimenting with drawing the reader into New England in 2144 by illuminating the relationships between my protagonist and other characters so that once the timeframe is made explicit, the reader has already come to know the characters and has a liking for some of them. If we could travel 100 years into the future and find ourselves plopped down amidst people, even if in the same physical coordinates we came from, I daresay we would know instantly that the times have changed. In one of my stories a car ride with the protagonist and her spouse is an apt way to begin the reader's time travel and provides ample opportunities to describe the state of their clothing, how their hair came out that morning, the working of their vehicle and the sights of other travelers around them, both driving and driven. What the reader sees is familiar, as they feel the annoyance at the wet rat look the character's hair is gracing him with that day despite what his wife says, the tightness of her new trousers that she wishes she had swapped for stretch pants for the car ride, and the car that just cut her off as it changed lanes, the back of the driver's head giving no clue that they are aware of their rudeness. The head actually belongs to the passenger, although the reader does not yet really know that some of the cars are autonomous. The reader is getting to know a couple of characters on an ordinary car ride in a world that has gradually turned the tables between the sexes.

A Relatable Character

Show, Don't Tell? Since writing the story about the woman who visits her in-laws and after many years of reading contemporary literary fiction I've come to see that the writers' adage might be better put as, "Show as well as tell." In *Rabbit, Run* John Updike creates a character whose actions are mostly despicable. He insults his pregnant wife and her family, he takes to seeing a prostitute, he neglects his wife and their new baby, and while he reunites with her after the accidental drowning of the baby, I don't have confidence that he will stay the course with this marriage. He's a pretty miserable excuse for a human being. His failure to be a faithful husband has set him up for a lifetime of woe, despite his promising beginning as a star basketball player in high school. Updike writes this character in such a way that despite these outlines of his life and actions, I feel sympathy for Rabbit as an object that people push and pull according to the social expectations of 1950s America. Maybe Rabbit was not doing his "best" as he understood from them what that should be, but I knew he wanted to. And I wanted him to, too. Updike planted this emotion in me by sharing his character's inner life as his physical life was playing itself out, as he battered those who came close to him and was himself battered by the consequences of his own cruel self-regard. Revealing the thoughts and hesitations of a character as he engages in deplorable acts so that the reader feels a shared and knowing sorrow with him is something Updike does well in all his fiction, but is especially effective in his speculative fiction, where the strange setting stretches the emotional distance. There, we need vibrant, captivating characters who at the same time milk our sympathy to draw us into the unfamiliar world.

To spur the reader into giving his heart to the protagonist, Updike, in his one foray into speculative fiction, writes a character with angles and clefts, who seeks safety one moment and courts disaster the next, letting the reader in on the progression of his motivating inner logic. We become acquainted gradually with this strange world as the character wrestles with it, one antagonist at a time. Updike's *Toward the End of Time* is set in 2020, some twenty-three years after the book's publication, a near future that is familiar but frighteningly different from our day. He begins by acquainting the reader with the main character and his wife in their late twentieth-century home, leaving until later the signs that they exist in a much-changed near-future world. It is through the relationships with the women in his life that the protagonist, Ben Turnbull, understands and feels his power as a human being, as a man. He is a man who marries, who values deeply the connection he can make with a woman, with Gloria, his wife. The story opens with a view of his ineptitude, the first-person narration giving us access to his self-assessment, as he tries to duck his husbandly duty to kill or somehow get rid of a deer that has once again shown up to eat the flowers in his wife's garden.

“Outside we went, she in her righteous fury and shimmering mink coat, me in my pajamas and boots and old parka spouting goose down through its broken seams” (Updike 7). She is Gloria, a woman of the affluent class whose identity and, more importantly, whose personal power hums on in spite of a devastating war between the U.S. and China, the collapse of the federal government, and the near-total breakdown of local law and order. She is the second wife to Ben, a retired investments consultant who is losing out in the new world order. He does not please Gloria who is frustrated that he allows a deer to ravage her garden. He permits himself to be extorted by the local

protection squad now that the town police have dissolved. He cannot protect the teenagers camping out in his woods who attempt to usurp the protection squad's racket and end up murdered. With a long history of infidelity, he cannot resist a young prostitute. Toward the end of the story Ben develops prostate cancer which makes him impotent and so diminishes his relationships to women in a way that makes him feel useless to them, and acutely so to himself. That sentence, "Outside we went . . .," shows Updike's power at depicting these two characters, singly and in the dynamic of their couplehood, as the reader will come to know them over the course of the story. As we watch and listen to the character Ben, we recognize him and begin to understand him: a man frustrated that he cannot please his wife by eliminating the deer, a deer that morphs into the prostitute Deirdre, or so it seems to him in his confusion, a muddled state of mind brought on by his aging body and the now ground-shifting circumstances of living in this once-affluent and sheltered town. These late life struggles are known to us, so that when we see them play out in the life of a person living in the future, we sympathize even as we wonder, naturally, at the plausibility of the New England of 2020 that Updike has created. There is more to this world than the author has let on, but what we do see are those aspects that affect the character. This kind of character-based filter, revealing only those aspects of the world that the protagonist pits himself against, allows us to gradually familiarize ourselves with the time and place of the story while building a detailed and layered picture of the character.

In that sentence, the phrase "old parka spouting goose down through its broken seams" is the kind of writing I love and is an example of the author's skill at bringing the reader into his character's world. He describes the parka as the character sees it, and as a

part of the character. We do not know its color, how long it is, whether it has a hood, whether it has a zipper or snaps, but we know that it is old not just because he uses the word, but because of its condition, the seams stressed over time so that the down inside is working its way out. Anyone who has owned this kind of coat for some number of years has seen this for themselves and is instantly brought to the character of Ben by this sentence fragment: he likes this old coat. We do not yet know that the story takes place in the future, as the first hint will come two pages later with the mention of “welders” as the currency (8). By the time we are certain of the timeframe, twenty-three pages into the book, we have been brought close to Ben by writing like this so that we feel acclimated to the frightening novelty of the circumstances of his life.

Experiencing the Clones as Human Beings. As Updike opens up the internal life of his characters to bring the reader close to them, in *Never Let Me Go* Ishiguro places the focus on the children—their behavior in the school and their interactions with and feelings for each other—so that we might identify with them. He is gradually revealing that they are clones and a material resource to the rest of the population via hints in the protagonist Kathy’s narration. By the time we are sure of this cloning business, Ishiguro has ensured that we feel these characters as human beings. Emily Johansen also notes Ishiguro’s interesting achievement of having the reader identify with someone who is alien to their acquaintance. In the story there are clones and everyone else, with the reader being a member of the everyone else tribe. It is, of course, usual to identify with the underdog, because we have all been one in some context or time in our lives. We have never been clones, not as of this writing at least, hence it is something of an achievement to create an alien protagonist that works as a hero that incites in readers “new forms of sympathy,

crafting new narratives of responsibility and connection” (Johansen 425). My own characters are normally-engendered human beings, but their circumstances, their upbringing, and the evolution in sex-based role expectations are different from ours. They will seem strange, but my readers will be able to access their world if they can recognize the characters’ difficulties and sympathize with them by way of narration that shows all that goes wrong for a person in spite of trying to do what would seem to be right. To bring the reader close to my characters I will use the tactics of opening up their inner lives and showing their interactions in everyday situations.

Over the space of the first thirty-odd pages of *Never Let Me Go* Ishiguro tells us about the Gallery, a selection of the Hailsham children’s artwork adjudicated by Madame. She is a shadowy figure who comes and goes in the children’s lives and is identified with the children’s artistic endeavors. The word “Gallery” is never used by the adults, only the children, and so Kathy presumes it is something that has been passed down from generation to generation of children. This reminds me of children’s games whose existence and rules are passed from older child to younger and are only vaguely remembered by adults. Spud, Red Rover, Statue, Mother May I all seem at this distance like simple games, until you have a few children to entertain and suggest playing one of these games, and you realize you do not remember how. Kathy muses about how they as children came to know their artwork would, some of it, be chosen for the Gallery. “There was an unspoken rule that we should never even raise the subject in [the adults’] presence,” yet she recalls at the age of five or six sitting with a friend Amanda, making clay figures, when Amanda tells her excitedly, ““That’s so good! I bet that’ll get in the Gallery!”” (Ishiguro 31). This is one of the ways that Ishiguro builds a children’s world

that seems familiar to us while at the same time obliquely revealing a strange element that will feed the plotline that leads to the final cruel dehumanization of Kathy and her lover Tommy after a lifetime of giving, first to this lightless Gallery, then to other people in dire need of new organs.

Technology Is the Writer's Tool

Technology Serves to Define the Characters. Updike builds his near-future world with the mention of a number of recent events as well as the new local realities mentioned above. A devastating war with China left the Midwest uninhabitable due to radiation, and Mexico has seized the border states as well as southern California. These facts of the novel's setting come out when they are needed, often when Ben is contemplating just how wrong everything in his life has become. As John G. Parks notes, these "post-apocalyptic events ... really do not play a crucial role in the narrative, except to displace or dislocate the story from contemporary history to an essentially post-historical situation ... of a disintegrated future" (Parks 152). This is not Rabbit's world. We learn of its contours gradually, when we need to learn about the character as a human being living in this environment, and our first need is to know about money. Ben's life's work was, after all, to make money for his clients, and it is money that keeps him and his wife on this side of life, as he pays a packet each month to his protection squad in "'welders,' the Massachusetts unit of currency named after a fabled pre-war governor" (Updike 8). In this first of the need-to-know revelations about this new world we recognize and cheer Ben's pragmatism as he finds a way to ensure some level of security for his wife and himself.

There is a mysterious physical development in this world that is attributed to recent cataclysmic events that although never fully explained nevertheless becomes meaningful to Ben and gives us a chance to ponder, through him, human beings' relationship with God. In the sky is a "dim," "giant," "slender" torus, a second moon much larger than the moon, which makes its first appearance in the novel at about the half-way point. It appears four more times and to David Leigh comes to be a symbol to Ben, "a sort of ethereal power that promises transcendent hope" (Leigh 59). In the novel's second half so many developments pile up in his life—the death of the teenagers, of one half of the Phil and Spin protection squad, the usurping of his role by a hunter that Gloria hires to get rid of the deer, Ben's neutering by prostate cancer—that the torus' appearance is welcomed by Ben, its beauty, even at a great distance, something he can feel like faith. The last appearance of the torus occurs after a long absence during which the society around Ben has broken down into disfiguring disorder and violence. The anarchy recedes at the torus' last appearance and Ben's mind is soothed, although he understands that if there is a causal relationship between the torus and people's behavior toward one another, it is cyclical and today's order will not be tomorrow's. It occurs to Ben that the torus might not in fact exist, that it is a physical trick of atmospheric lighting, yet the torus is the mirror that reflects his thoughts on love, goodness and eternity. The torus becomes real, is in a sense substantiated by its agency in laying bare Ben's spirit, embodied in his thoughts. The reality of the torus has a value to the extent that a human being conveys his hopes for himself and all people in that object. It is an example of Updike's use of an element of the world to reveal character.

In my stories, religion is all but replaced by regimen, the men's daily dose of Me-T to lower testosterone, which keeps the female-driven engines of government and business humming. I say "all but" since I believe religion is a human activity that springs from our psyche and has taken different forms over the millennia, alongside secularism, because people want to believe that death is not the end. Keeping the world in balance while in life is the value that is worshipped by the characters of *A Passing Breeze*, a value readers will recognize who sympathize with hard-fought efforts to curb global warming, pollution, and population. Today's virtuous living is tomorrow's eternal life and has a formula, courtesy of Big Pharma. To reject Me-T is to reject maintenance of a balanced world, yet people are free to do so, and do, for reasons that my fiction would explore. It would be interesting to think of an element to place in my stories that reminds people of the prior order, of men's dominance in a differently ordered world, that generates hope for a return to a perfection that never existed, a nostalgia for a place never inhabited. An element like this would provide a means to link the future world of the story with our known history and experience.

An Alternate World to Our Own. The gradual revelation of the contours of an alternate world is made in an offhand matter-of-fact way by Kazuo Ishiguro's narrator Kathy in *Never Let Me Go*. As with any tale set in an unfamiliar world the reader wants to understand how Kathy's world might have got that way. Like Updike in his speculative novel, Ishiguro chooses the first person voice for his protagonist, her thoughts' bona fides established by her own words. It is through conversations she has with the donors she cares for and giving her own backstory that we come to learn what is typical for people like her, the clones that the society cultivates for organ-harvesting. The strangeness of

seeing life through a clone's eyes is grounded in a shared humanity by the well-drawn sense Ishiguro gives us of Kathy's longing for her simpler past (Ishiguro 5). At Hailsham, the boarding school and orphanage where she was raised, we feel the kinds of struggles that children schooled together feel: the jealousy, vying for favorite teachers' praise and affection, and the puzzlement over and hostility toward the social outliers (11). Through Kathy's own words we recognize her and her friends and sympathize with them, having had similar experiences as children, so that later when we become aware that they are clones, their lives of captivity in the open awaken in us an urgent protective impulse. As they care for each other, we care for them.

The reader spends most of Ishiguro's novel wondering how Kathy and her friends came to be donors and carers, not finding out for sure till the novel's end that they are indeed clones. It is only once we know this that we can distinguish this work from Ishiguro's other novels as speculative fiction. We begin the book and come almost to its end understanding it as a novel set in our times. Patrick R. Query expresses the grounding of the novel's truth in our present day-to-day lives: "It is far less a novel about what we do not know or what might be, a speculative fiction, than about our acceptance of what we already know and are" (Query 161). The degree to which the author can postpone revealing the novel's world as apart from the reader's relies upon his skill in building characters whose actions cannot be attributed to anything but their humanity: unfamiliar bureaucracy or technology or social structure may put the characters into novel situations whose instigation the reader does not quite grasp, but the characters' response to those situations is recognizable and human and draws the reader in. Not merely a witness to a fantasy or futuristic concoction, the reader is as though a party to

the character's decisions and feels the effect of his actions. *Never Let Me Go* is a novel, says Query, that "relates to living a life" (168). When future technology is part of a character's life, I will keep the focus on deepening the character by showing the utility of the technology, or the harm it inflicts. The technology only matters insofar as human beings use it—just as with contemporary character-driven stories, it is the who that is at the heart of the situation, not the what.

By getting to know the rebellious Tommy, wondering what the Gallery really is, and why all the emphasis by the teachers on the children's creative efforts, the reader is distracted from the appalling truth of these children. We might pursue a line of thought about what these donations are that Kathy says the children know from a young age they are destined to make except that Tommy is throwing a tantrum. Then we learn about the special rapport many of the children have with Miss Lucy who seems to try very hard not to pity them. We are puzzled and a little sick at the scene where they test a theory one of them has that Madame is afraid of them. When she arrives at the school one day, a group of the children go out and pass very close to her, causing her to halt and hug her briefcase close like a shield until they have passed. Kathy recalls feeling the woman's shudder as she stood there, "and though we just kept on walking, we all felt it; it was like we'd walked from the sun right into a chilly shade" (Ishiguro 35). The reader still does not know the children are clones, but from this scene we know something is wrong. We are being prepped for bad news.

The word "clone" is first used in the second half of the novel, when Kathy, her friend Ruth, Tommy and a few others, now adults, have met up in a town where they spy someone who resembles Ruth. They follow the woman into an art museum and after

talking with her, Chrissie states what they are all thinking: ““Well, I think we’re agreed, aren’t we? That *isn’t* Ruth”” (164). To mask her disappointment Ruth declares that a woman like that, educated and respectable, couldn’t possibly be her “model,” and rubs her friends’ nose in it with, ““We’re modelled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps”” (166). The place to find their “clone models” is ““in the gutter, ... in rubbish bins, ... down the toilet”” (166). Unless the reader is aware of the novel’s premise before taking up the book, it is possible to take this language as vitriol, as Ruth venting her spleen as she realizes what Johansen calls the clones’ “limited horizons” impressed on them from earliest consciousness by the “bureaucratic inevitability” of their lives at Hailsham (Johansen 422). It’s not until 95 pages later that we have an authoritative assertion, from Madame, that indeed the children, “all clones—or students, as we preferred to call you—existed only to supply medical science” (Ishiguro 261). We have been reading a story of the lives of Kathy H. and her friends whose adult lives are spent either donating organs or caring for those who are, with only a dim grasp of who is behind this exploitation of the children. Ishiguro uses Kathy’s intimate and detailed relating of events and her feelings toward the people she has grown up with to make us want to know about these characters. We can put off knowing for certain that they are clones, that this is not our world but an alternate one that harvests organs from specially created human beings, until the climax when Kathy and Tommy finally understand that there is no way to avoid their death sentence. Despite all of the childhood lore around the Gallery, the importance of self-expression through art, and the shared innuendo that love can make you truly human and exempt you from serving your pre-determined function,

these two will make their four planned donations—with many more swift hacked removals in their last moments of life—just like all of their friends.

Content

In this section I discuss a few aspects of building the world of *A Passing Breeze* that have presented some interesting challenges and questions. The most distinctive aspect of this world is its domination by women over men. Women hold the majority of positions in government and in industry while men hold sway in the home and take helper roles outside it. In deciding how to depict this world the first question is: is it a simple matter of flipping the gender-based roles? So little about human beings being simple, the answer depends on the situation. My thoughts have centered on how to describe a convincing matriarchy that might evolve from today's social order, what technology is necessary for its maintenance, and how men and women woo each other.

Technology

Technology in the mid-twenty-second-century world of *A Passing Breeze* has evolved from today's state of the art. The matriarchy I imagine is indeed dependent for its sustainability on at least two technologies that level the power dynamic between the sexes. The use of pharmacology to control men and bio-engineering to free women from childcare are constant elements in the characters' lives which I bring into focus as a story's situation demands. As a consequence of not including all, or even most, of the new technologies that are likely to exist in the 2140s, some readers may find the world of my stories to be less technologically advanced than some futurists are predicting. I

choose to finesse my admittedly wanting performance in this guessing game by filtering out unneeded tech and shining a light on only those innovations that are needed in the story at hand.

Either Sex Can Care for the Baby. Ectogenesis, or gestating babies in artificial wombs, is a technology under development today. In 2017 researchers at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia transferred premature lambs to artificial wombs and successfully brought them to term within two to four weeks. For human babies the challenge has been to bring to term infants whose lungs are not fully developed. If the treatment in use today to speed up breathing ability is not successful, a preterm baby will die. The artificial womb obviates the need for working lungs, as the umbilical blood supply, which is renewed and cleansed by the mother’s body, is simulated. To prove this new technology is safe for human beings, the first step will be to reliably bring to term a fetus so premature that the lungs cannot be treated to breathe in an incubator. Such trials could begin as soon as 2020 (Warmflash). The eventual goal is to refine the technology to permit an embryo to develop from conception to full term in an artificial womb, an accomplishment which could be reached as early as 2074 (Warmflash).

How this technology might be used in the future is, of course, not known, but its possibilities are provocative. The artificial womb could remedy fertility problems for women unable to carry a child to term, as well as permit same-sex couples to have a baby without requiring a surrogate. Susan Cooper, a psychologist who counsels infertile couples, notes that many parents have “an intense desire to be pregnant but it’s hard to know whether that’s a biological urge or a cultural urge” (Klass). It is not hard to imagine that once the technology is available a woman’s thinking might go something

like this: natural gestation for the first baby just to have the experience, then artificial womb for the ones after that.

My stories are set in a time when artificial wombs or “baby bags” are an established, reliable technology. Even women with no fertility problems welcome the option of off-loading pregnancy to an artificial womb. The artificial womb is kept in the house of the parents-to-be, and sometimes even taken with them when they go out. When the birth occurs the woman has long since “gotten her body back” and is not subject to the hormonal surge a new mother experiences, so that she and her husband or partner are equally equipped to become the baby’s primary caregiver. The baby bag, this one technology, levels the childcare playing field for women and men in my stories. Men find that they are not only able but eager to care for their children full-time, and women encourage this desire—which is reinforced on social media—since having men taking the reins of childcare allows women to focus primarily on their jobs in the public sphere of government and business where many people rely on them and where they can work uninterrupted by demands of household and children. Many men in the world of my stories do work outside the home, but in helper roles as their primary responsibility is to their children and home.

Control Men’s Behavior by Lowering Testosterone Levels. Both women’s and men’s bodies produce testosterone (T), but the difference in levels is striking. A study of the effect of T levels on athletic performance found that testosterone in healthy men’s blood serum measures in a wide range from 7.7 nanomoles/Liter to 29.4 nmol/L; in women the levels are considerably lower and in a much narrower band, from 0.12 to 1.7 nmol/L (Handelsman). Men’s sexual desire and arousal are unaffected by increasing or

decreasing their T level, as long as it is within the normal male range (Maggi).

Aggressive behavior in men, however, is associated with higher T levels (Eisenegger). A study of mice shows that lower T levels in males result in quicker responsiveness to their young, as measured by the promptness with which they retrieve pups that have wandered from the nest (Okabe). From this data comes my hypothesis that men's widespread use of a drug that brings their T levels into the lower range of normal will decrease men's aggressive behavior and make their child-caring behaviors more effective and consistent without affecting sexual behavior. The world of my stories needs this kind of control over men, otherwise there would be no obstacle to their banding together and storming the woman-occupied citadel. A testosterone-lowering drug is just what a woman-dominated society needs if it is to be sustainable.

A search for articles on testosterone-lowering therapies reveals two applications today: 1) to treat prostate cancer; and 2) to decrease the chance of re-offending among male sex offenders. I found no evidence of demand today to lower T in healthy men in order to live a more satisfying life. For the adoption of a Me-T drug to become a reality in the early twenty-second century world of *A Passing Breeze* would require research into a drug that lowers testosterone to achieve the outcome of a better life with no loss of sexual desire, followed by a strenuous effort on the part of women and men to encourage men to take the drug regularly and faithfully. The science part of this two-pronged effort seems straightforward, based on current pharmacology. Drugs that bring T levels down to near zero by inhibiting the body's natural production of the hormone exist today; the remaining challenge would be to calibrate to a customized level desired by the patient

(Turner). Once the drug therapy is available, it is up to the women of my stories to convince men to use it.

The world of *A Passing Breeze* places women in dominant positions over other people, much as today's world sees men in those positions. This new order is not a result of a cataclysm or invasion, but rather is a gradual social progression from today's order. Some decades prior to the year 2144 when the stories take place, in answer to a "feeling in the air" that male aggressive behavior has undermined national security and the economic well-being of most Americans, a new testosterone-lowering drug called Me-T is introduced. Through a vigorous social media campaign Me-T is adopted voluntarily by more and more men until, by the time of these stories, a rate of 80% has been achieved. The argument made by the social media campaign is simple: men who lower their testosterone level to a value in the lower half of average experience a better life. They feel less aggression when thrust into conflict, they are more accepting of adversities that they have no control over, and they can more easily focus on childcare and other nurturing activities. All of these outcomes, while maintaining the same level of sexual interest and arousal, make the decision to adopt Me-T easy, or so goes the ad campaign.

What effect, if any, does lowering testosterone actually have on men's behavior in the world of my stories? Does the social media campaign advocating adoption of Me-T rely on rigorous peer-reviewed research on the effect of the drug on men's behavior? Or have women, eager to conduct the experiment on the male society at large, faked the research? While development of the drug might well be possible even today, its adoption by the men living 100 years from now will be harder and, I imagine, experience setbacks

on the way to the drug becoming a daily part of life for the vast majority of twenty-second century American men.

Today's World Evolves to a Matriarchy

My aim in writing these stories is to argue that human beings' capabilities are only slightly determined by their gender and that those limitations are physical. Men have more testosterone than women, giving them more size and muscle strength than women and perhaps a greater tendency to meet opposition with violence. Only women can bear children. It is possible that there are no other innate differences between men and women. Our society believes there are behavioral differences, as expressed in truisms such as men are more aggressive and violent, women are more cooperative and nurturing. Are these differences inevitably tied to gender? Or might they be learned or otherwise come about when individuals' actions and choices are restricted by our society's widely-held expectations of the genders?

In my stories the characters, women and men, have the same mental and emotional capabilities but, as in our society today, their behaviors are prescribed by their gender. Men are expected to be empathic and submissive, while women are assertive and even aggressive. Yet because our essential human nature will not have changed, these are equal opportunity traits in the world of my stories and so are expressed by members of both sexes, sometimes evoking people's disapproval. When a person's actions hurt others, gender will enter into people's opinion of the person, just as in such judgments today. A director of a corporation faced with falling profits solves the problem by telling 15% of the employees to clear out their desks. If the director is a woman some will call her cruel, but most will shrug and say she is acting like a woman is expected to act, with

strength and responsibility to the shareholders. If the director is a man he will be vilified as inhuman and monstrous, since his actions violate the expectation of nurturing of and compassion for others. Each of the stories in *A Passing Breeze* is an opportunity to put men and women in situations familiar to the reader but where the male and female roles are reversed. If the characters' behavior, their actions and responses, seem provocative, it may be because the situation I describe challenges our ideas of what is a man and what is a woman. These women and men bring to bear their human nature in all situations they experience; it is only in sexual or reproductive situations that their gender makes a difference.

Utopia Is Not MyTopia. Works of utopian fiction by feminist writers of the 1970s typically describe a world controlled by women where war, violence, and poverty are rare simply because women wield power (Mohr). To be a woman is sufficiently different from being a man that social woe experienced by today's societies does not occur in these feminist utopias because the conditions for those kinds of conflict do not exist. Women, goes the argument, are better at organizing and leading a society. Since that decade speculative fiction by feminist writers has evolved to describe dystopian worlds—Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a popular example—and often weaves in a thread of utopia, a hope for a better world, expressed by the hero's rebellion against the established order (Milroy and Whittaker).

The world of my stories is not a utopia. Nor is it an egalitarian social order; it retains gender-based roles. While the behavior expectations assigned to each gender are different in the world I am creating, the set of expectations themselves is the same. The gender that is placed in charge of raising children and managing a household for their

own family develops skills of empathy as that is an ability the job demands. The gender charged with building a government learns to formulate and advocate for policy using skills of compromise, quid pro quo, and, all too often, blackmail. The same gender, raised to work with people in the wider world, i.e., non-relatives, builds commerce and manufacturing industries, and in so doing learns how to identify the bottom line of their business and work to increase it, no matter who might lose their property or job. Put men in charge of raising children and they will become nurturing. Put women in charge of government and business and they will risk becoming ruthless in their disregard for the welfare of their citizens or employees, as long as profits grow. When the reader looks at the world of *A Passing Breeze* from a distance and squints, the women and men and the social structures they have built for themselves to live and work in look a lot like the world we live in today. They would have to take off their clothes for the reader to see how it is different.

The imperfect world I am building is not a utopia, but neither is it a dystopian place where all people lead wretched lives. My experience convinces me that men and women are the same in their cognitive, psychological, and social abilities, so that a female-directed society would experience the same stresses that our male-directed society does today. The difficulties of our modern life for women and men become somewhat different sets of difficulties in the future that I imagine. If they so choose, both genders can fulfill their roles with honesty and honor, morality and generosity. Without fail, there will be many individuals, men and women, who choose to put themselves first and commit immoral acts and even crimes for as long as they can get away with it to increase their bottom line. The actions and relationships between the characters I describe in this

imagined future will be plausible to the extent that I faithfully express what it means to be human.

An early thought experiment in what a woman-directed society would look like is a dystopic novel by Walter Besant called *The Revolt of Man*, published anonymously in 1882. His work is worth noting here because Besant takes a position in this novel that a nation governed by women will suffer regressions in government, technology and art, that men are by their essential nature better suited to make laws, run businesses, and create. The view that inspires my stories is that women and men are equally capable of these pursuits and that men and women would struggle equally against corruption as their power increases.

During the late twentieth century in the England of Besant's novel the constitutional monarchy has been replaced by a matriarchal theocracy whose god is an entity called The Perfect Woman. The action begins in the late twenty-first century, after one hundred years of this system, when a marriage proposal incites an existential crisis for the woman-led government. The powerful Duchess of Dunstanburgh claims the hand of the emphatically unwilling Edward, Earl of Chester, in marriage. The duchess is 65, while Lord Chester is 22 and also happens to be the heir to the defunct throne of England; he would have no legitimate heir if he marries Dunstanburgh, whom he does not love. He is championed by the elderly Professor Ingleby who pines for the order of the old England she has spent her career studying. With her husband Ingleby has raised their two daughters to know the times of nineteenth century Britain and to respect men as more capable leaders than women, and to recognize in themselves their great womanly capacity to organize their household around the love for family. Professor Ingleby re-

educates Lord Chester who then organizes a small group of his friends to evangelize the men of the country to take back their dominance, a birthright due them by virtue of men's inherent creative abilities, powers that women simply do not possess. With a short, non-violent yet effective revolution, Lord Chester and his army re-establish democracy and Christianity in England. The young women as well as some of the older, apart from the Duchess of Dunstanburgh who will not enjoy the favors of the handsome young Lord Chester, breathe a collective sigh of relief that they no longer need pursue careers made impossible by high unemployment—the mediocre talents of just a small number of argumentative women are adequate to run the government and static, innovation-less economy—and instead may turn their energies toward their homes, husbands, and children, a field of endeavor most natural to women, by Besant's lights.

Since this story relates the overthrow of an imagined, brief one hundred years' stretch of women's dominance, Besant is not a champion of women's equality. Indeed, this work may have been his way of "poking very ingenious fun at a movement of the day," i.e., women's suffrage, as suggested in a short book review appearing just after the book's publication in 1882 when much was afoot in England by advocates of women's political enfranchisement (*THE READER*). I do not see a lot of evidence in this work, however, that opposition to women's suffrage motivated Besant. The author does not describe a society where both men and women have an equal vote. Rather, women, exclusively, have the vote in the world of this story, just as men do at the time of its writing. Besant seems most concerned with how the women, without collaborating with men, have created a social system that stymies men's natural creativity and, even more important, makes marrying for love impossible. Backstory comes via a biased narrator,

the Dean of Westminster, who gives a sermon reminding her congregants how the matriarchy came about. Men lost their Christian faith, plunging the nation into anarchy, and found only fear of the unknown to take its place, a fear they fought “like children with weapons” by fighting each other (Besant 68). With no male leaders in sight, women stepped in to pick up the pieces smashed by the men. They filled the faith void with a new religion that prescribed new places for women and men and a new relationship between them. The cult of the Perfect Woman permitted marriage only when a woman was well-enough established in the community, either financially or by virtue of an important position, to support a spouse. Marriageable women chose the men they pleased, usually much younger, as trophy husbands. By this practice, Professor Ingleby instructs Lord Chester, women “destroyed love—love the consoler, love the leveller” (Besant 13). To restore love matches, as well as to revive the stagnant economy, is the vision that inspires the men to revolt against the all-woman government. The theme of frustrated love felt so strong to me as I read the novel that I could not help wondering whether Besant had suffered a broken heart, losing a woman he loved to an older but much wealthier man. Which is the more powerful motivator to an artist, a personal loss or the threat of change in his society at large? Perhaps in Besant’s case the motivation was multi-valent, with men’s relationship to women the common thread.

The men and women of Besant’s novel are fundamentally different and so their contributions overlap but little. More than the vote, Besant believes men owe women better conditions for doing women’s work. Two of his novels championed better working conditions for seamstresses, and clean, safe, affordable housing for women of the upper classes who found themselves forced to earn a living (Knies). In *The Revolt of*

Man the women finesse the problem of poor working conditions by seizing the power, and jobs, they desire. The division of labor along gender lines means that the men perform the hard labor. Although there are some factories where men work, innovation has ceased under the women's leadership and technology has actually regressed—decline of the railways has resulted in horse-drawn carriages as the primary mode of transportation—so that manufacturing work takes a distant second to farming, the primary male occupation outside the home; men are also the primary caregivers to their children. Men are barely, if at all, educated and are not expected to think, leaving them no way in which to develop their minds. Young men have been indoctrinated with the value that being chosen by a prominent woman is their highest hope. Deprived of a choice of mate, in fact the men live dull lives of frustration as they long for love. Lord Chester's own predicament—his engagement to a “woman old enough to be his grandmother”—makes him the ideal leader of a movement in favor of restoring love matches (Besant 116). He finds that men in all walks of life have had enough of having to trade the fresh faces of their sweethearts for age spots in sunken cheeks. The revolt would seem to be in response to men's desire to choose their own work and their own wives. By flipping the genders Besant shows the reader that the work of raising the family cannot be imposed on men without fallout, and that love cannot be suppressed for long. Return men to their natural state of leaders and protectors of all, especially women, and Christian faith and love will flourish.

In my own work one of my aims of shifting work to the other gender is to try to show what happens to the individual fettered by social expectations. What it means to be a human being today starts with asking first which gender one belongs to. The old saw of

women are nurturing, men are aggressive does not ring true and it only takes looking around to feel this. Female athletes, women wanting a full combat role, women working in the sciences, men wearing those pink shorts and not caring if some say they look homosexual, men taking on childcare when their partner's career means more to them than their own—the attitudes of maleness and femaleness are changing. My own attitude toward myself is changing as I have come to a time of life where the mate question has been settled, the children have been borne and raised, and so I feel I am not so much a woman anymore. Just as when I was a child, up to about the age of twelve, I am simply a human being once again. I have abilities, even gifts, and I will choose whether to use them and where. A shirt may be required and I am all right with that, but I am making alterations to make it fit who I am now.

Sex Act As an Expression of Female Dominance. The women in my stories are in a dominant position with respect to men. How do they treat men in the workplace and at home? Do they belittle their abilities, underestimating their capacity to work? Do they reduce men, treating their sons as perpetual juveniles, giving them names that encompass ideal traits? Names like Oak, Generous, Fidelity tell the world what boys should grow up to be like, just as today girls are named after flowers or virtues. Today's names for girls like Lily, Dolly, Chastity, give way in my stories to Deborah, Sally, Cynthia, recurrent names among today's female CEOs, names that inspire respect and imbue the bearer with leadership powers (Rogati). First names are a minor product of this thought experiment. A more fruitful area is the intimate relationships between men and women that produce the need for naming progeny.

I understand the #MeToo phenomenon of the last two years as the consequences of mistakes that men make when attempting sex with women. Wooing and romancing are a couple of the names given to the often-misunderstood overtures men and women make to each other. Courting behavior varies from culture to culture and from generation to generation. The trait that holds steady in our twenty-first century America is that men initiate the sex act and direct its performance. Women give cues meant to signal readiness or disinterest, and men are tasked with detecting and then interpreting those signals. Does she or doesn't she is a simple enough question and on any given occasion a man has a 50-50% chance of getting the right answer. Some men, over-confident or just tired of being wrong too often, skip the opening exercises and proceed straight to the main event. With so much desire to cope with and a mostly non-verbal language of gestures to interpret, it is no wonder that men often get wrong the consent part of the preamble to sex. There are, of course, egregious acts of sexual harassment that the #MeToo moment is bringing into focus, but a good chunk of the complaints aired in the press, e.g., Aziz Ansari's disastrous date with a young woman whose disinterest he repeatedly mistook for "not now but give me a minute," come across as the result of good intentions badly communicated (Way). The situation is exacerbated by the expectation that men will take charge and women will consent to being acted upon, mirroring the gender dynamic at the work place where it is mostly men who are in charge of the women who work for them. In the world of *A Passing Breeze* it is the women who are in charge in the public realm of corporate and government workplaces. In the private realm their domination of men extends to the sex act.

What does a female initiated and directed sex act look like in my stories? To imagine this shift from passive female to active, I start with asking, what does today's woman want out of sex? Women as a whole in a society might give one set of answers; privately women might respond differently. Judging by how sex is portrayed in films today we believe that men want, and get, an orgasm from every sex act. In reality individual men may want something more nuanced from the act, reassurance that their mate loves them and only them, a feeling of trust, that "she has my back." In certain situations men brag to each other about their sexual experiences, focusing on the performance of their ejaculations, their intensity and their repeatability after a short rest. This kind of boasting tells men that what their peers value is performance alone, that emotions are not part of the discussion of what makes sex good. When not in a group male setting, a man might share that the best sex is what he experiences with a loving partner, that frequency of orgasm is not the goal, but communication of emotion. Despite these private thoughts, the value our society places on the ability of a man to perform frequently affects his self-concept, his own estimation of his manliness.

When it comes to their own orgasms women today are hobbyists while men are experts. Women have been in the dark for centuries, relying in vain for their information on a tight-lipped culture that eschews talking about female sexuality. Medical writings on this subject from the early nineteenth century acknowledge the female orgasm exists but fail to identify the organ involved (Deweese, 155). Just as the male orgasm serves to deliver sperm into the woman's body, the female counterpart of this moment in the sex act must serve some procreative purpose, according to these male researchers of the early 1800s. Its reason for being cannot simply be for pleasure, so they ascribe a progenerative

function to it, with some doctors claiming the “venereal orgasm” must occur in order for conception to take place. While Hollick asserts in his 1850 *Marriage Guide* that the clitoris is “exquisitely sensitive” he does not attribute the female orgasm to this organ (Hollick 40). In his 1808 letter to Dr. Harrison, Dr. Dewees argues that the moment of female climax is centered at the cervix, a confusion that is remarkable when one considers that the average African of the time knew that it was the clitoris and reasoned that to control women’s sexual behavior it needed to be cut out of girls (*Article 1 – No Title* 155). Perhaps the expert of this time who astonishes most from this distance is Mary Gove Nichols, a self-taught women’s health care expert and advocate who confesses that it was not until eight years before the publication of her 1842 *Lectures to Ladies on Anatomy and Physiology*, well into her medical career, that she first learned that as do boys and men, girls and women practiced masturbation (Nichols 228). Nichols is in the mainstream with other physicians of her time when she warns that “solitary vice” causes the familiar “impaired vision” as well as a whole host of ailments including epilepsy and heart disease and “ranks next to alcohol in producing insanity” (220).

As power in the world of my stories has shifted to women, I imagine that they naturally take the initiative in the sex act to ensure a sensual experience they are now often left out of. To a sexually competent woman in my stories, reliable, orgasmic sex is not a hit-or-miss proposition. Women in small groups in this future world that I imagine crow about their sexual experiences in terms of frequency and intensity of orgasm. Women’s focus on practicing behaviors to ensure a climax could result in a fetishizing of their orgasms, mirroring today’s men who send pictures of their erections around to friends. To find that pleasurable sex with climax is there for the asking would be

something to talk about. Young women growing up in a culture that over-values female climax may find it difficult to judge how satisfied they are with their intimate partners. Integrating sexual desire with love for their partner becomes just as hard for the sexually-empowered women in my stories as it seems to be for men today. A man in my imagined future who shows up for a first date with a woman who found him online is likely to feel dismay or even disgust as he reads frank sexual desire in the woman's quick assessment of him.

I can think of two ways to depict a female-directed sex act. Just as the missionary position, or the current implausibly popular up-against-a-wall position, is routinely used in today's mainstream cinema and television to depict the sex act, I could use a novel position in my sex scenes as a signal that this is a female-directed sex act. Rather than take that short cut, effective though it might be, it would be more interesting to me and, I hope, to my readers to describe what is going on from the woman's point of view. That might be novel enough.

Given that the testosterone levels of normal, healthy women are so much lower than those of men, it might seem unlikely that there would be enough woman-initiated sex in the future world I describe to guarantee a robust next generation. At the same time, is it not just as implausible that until about the 1960s when the birth control pill made its debut, women's sexual appetite and knowledge were suppressed by social expectations and teachings? Up until the last century women had no names for their sexual organs whose pleasurable usefulness some of them discovered while others, forbidden by shame from self-exploration, did not. The same forces that worked for centuries to keep women in the dark about their capacity for sexual enjoyment and to

limit their sexual behavior to their husbands while men's appetites existed not be denied but to be sated, can work in the other direction. Once unlocked the female libido may reveal a stronger sexual appetite than women have ever been permitted to indulge. The social expectations of the characters in *A Passing Breeze* have evolved so that men are expected to be the gatekeepers of sex, limiting their availability to a very few partners over their lifetime, while women are free to respond to whatever sexual impulse takes them. The challenge for this writer is to make the case that sexually adventurous women will succeed in subjugating men such that men expect themselves to be comparatively chaste while their women will no doubt wander, and that together, they will nonetheless achieve a kind of tense equilibrium.

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II.

Collection of Linked Short Stories: *A Passing Breeze*

The three original short stories, “So the Next Generation Would Know,” “After the Leaning In,” and “A Table in the Wilderness,” are not included in this document. To read these and other stories, feel free to contact the author at amlpitts@hotmail.com.

