
Christianopolis: A Woman's Dystopia?

Jennifer L. Creech

[W]omen's issues are absorbed into the overriding concerns of traditional utopias Because the problem of female subjectivity has not been addressed, women remain merely objects within the utopian space. (Burwell 63,65)

Johann Valentin Andreae's *Christianopolis* is an attempt to depict a Christian utopia. Because every utopia "relies upon and fosters the creation of a 'devalued other' against which Utopia defines itself," it is important to understand what that "devalued other" is (Burwell 51). For Andreae, the "other" may be defined most generally as early-modern society. More specifically, the "other" includes, but is not limited to the nonchristian, i.e. nonpatriarchal aspects of monarchy, pre-capitalist economy, and education. However honest Andreae's attempt may be to produce a utopian Christian community, it is clear that *Christianopolis* more closely resembles a dystopia than a utopia when examined from the position of the early-modern woman. Respectfully recognizing woman as western civilization's quintessential "other," the educated reader must take into consideration woman's role in this new society which attempts to champion early-modern Europe.

In analyzing *Christianopolis*, the reader must begin with the most obvious: the concept of religion, namely, Christianity. Within the confines of Christianity, man and woman's secular and religious roles are clearly defined, most commonly assigning precedence to the male and a secondary status to the female. It is important to stress the words "most commonly," however, because this hierarchical system of male and female roles was and still is often debated in relation to the Genesis creation myth:

Genesis in fact recounts two distinct creation stories, distinguished by Biblical scholars since the late nineteenth century, as belonging to the separate source traditions which lie

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D. J. Creech
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behind the writings which came to form the Pentateuch The *P* (or Priestly) narrative . . . is a good deal less discriminatory than the second . . . *J* (Jahvist or Yahvist . . .) narrative. Like their predecessors, however, seventeenth-century commentators paid far more attention to the creation of Eve from Adams's rib in the latter than they did to the simultaneous creation of male and female in the former ("male and female he created *them*") which grants apparently equal authority to man and to woman ("let *them* have dominion over the fish of the sea . . ."). (Keeble 1)

It is clear to the reader of *Christianopolis* that Andreae, similar to many seventeenth-century Christians,¹ supports the Jahvist narrative. Andreae alludes to this adherence in the chapter entitled "Die Frauen:"

Was die Tatsache betrifft, daß es viele herrschsüchtige Frauen gibt, so muß bemerkt werden, daß es allein die Schuld der Männer ist Nichts ist gefährlicher, als wenn die Frauen insgeheim regieren und die Männer offensichtlich gehorchen; nicht ist dagegen mehr geraten, als wenn jenes Geschlecht das Seine tut. (125)

Clearly, Andreae supports the creation story of the Jahvist narrative, in which the woman is assigned a lesser, secondary status to the man. This version of the Genesis, most commonly accepted by Christians in western civilization, supports man's subjugation of woman. Understanding Andreae's traditional, patriarchal view of woman, one may begin examining how *Christianopolis* presents itself as a dystopia for the early-modern woman.

Beginning with the form of government, one may draw some conclusions as to the dystopian nature of Andreae's text. By considering the concept of the female monarch, one takes the most extreme and exceptional example of female empowerment. Doing so, however, best illustrates how little *Christianopolis* offered the early-modern woman along the lines of equality. "Woman was naturally subject, but not all females were subject to all males. No one thought Elizabeth I was subject to her stable-boy" (Sommerville 51). The tradition of the female monarch in England is something that challenges

the Christian patriarchal position. But because the queen is believed to possess divine right to rule, is it possible for a Christian to question her right as a woman to hold such a position of authority, i.e. authority over every male in the kingdom?

Theorists mounted various arguments in defense of queens' rights to accede and rule. One was that God in His providence disposed of kingdoms and if He saw fit to place a woman on the throne it was not for mere mortals to resist His ruling It was by "God's will and order" that a woman was rightful heir, for "He could have provided other." (Sommerville 54)

More than likely, Andreae was well aware of the difficulties a Christian patriarch would have when coming to terms with the notion of the female ruler. His choice of government "von acht Männern regiert" (40) allows him to avoid any such problems and remain true to his traditional interpretation of status hierarchy. Indeed, women do not even have the ability to voice their religious or secular concerns in *Christianopolis*: "In Kirche und Ratsversammlung haben sie zu schweigen" (125). Should a woman gain the prestige to be the spouse of an important religious or secular official, she is portrayed as the ideal woman after which every Christianopolitan woman should model herself. The Judge's wife, Reason, is blessed with a husband who

. . . scheut sich nicht, mit ihr über schwerwiegende Angelegenheiten zu sprechen, und hört sie auch gern, behält sich aber die Entscheidung vor. Wenn sie [Reason] mit ihrer Wißbegier zu hoch hinaus will, weist er sie in ihre Schranken zurück, gemahnt sie an den Himmel und empfiehlt ihr, ihren Verstand besser beim Spinnen zu gebrauchen. So leben beide unter seiner Herrschaft . . . ein ausgezeichnetes Beispiel für diejenigen, die entweder alles oder nichts ihren Frauen mitteilen. (58)

In fact, some of these "first-ladies," "lieb[en] . . . das Schweigen" (55). Even women in seemingly influential positions are unable to truly speak out, and is not "Reason" the closest a woman may get to achiev-

ing the ideal of maleness and empowerment in a patriarchal society? Andreae creates a male utopia where even the most virtuous and powerful women are silenced by their husbands. He leaves no room for female empowerment. Without a voice, the woman has no say; she is politically and religiously impotent. Of course, the female monarch is the most radical example of female strength apparent in early-modern Europe, and it is clearly the exception to the rule. However, the average early-modern woman was not completely without voice, and this was partly due to the fact that Europe showed the characteristics of a capitalistic society. Women were realized either as married or to be married. Though this type of characterization does not provide room for the concept of the woman alone, there were ways in which a woman could exercise certain forms of independence. An upper class girl's dowry often consisted of money, furniture, and some form of estate. Although these kinds of material wealth immediately became the property of her husband upon marriage, she regained the use thereof should he pass away:

In countries of both Roman and customary law the widow had a right to whatever she brought into marriage (the dowry) or, by agreement, she had a right to the income or usufruct of this sum. She could also claim the clothes, jewels and furniture she brought with her and whatever her husband had settled on her at marriage, a third or a half of what they had communally owned . . . and anything else the husband cared to bestow upon her in his will. . . .(Hufton 227-8)

A husband's death, though certainly not anticipated, was ultimately empowering in that the woman, becoming a widow, was then liberated from her husband both in the physical and economic sense. She became autonomous and self-sufficient. If she had already borne children, her "natural" and religious duty as a woman, she was no longer burdened, should she so choose, by the expectation of procreating. She almost always remained the natural guardian of the children until they were of age, "after which she was usually guaranteed houseroom and a small acreage of land on which to support herself, which should be tilled by the son" (Hufton 230-1). Such provisions were often considered null and void should she remarry, but she was at will to decide

her fate. Free from the mandate to procreate, free from economic dependence on a man, the widow is liberated almost completely from patriarchal subjugation.

For the middle and lower class girls whose families could not provide them with a dowry for marriage, this meant the opportunity to seek employment and earn money, one very important form of freedom. These girls were often taken on as servants of some sort, be it on a farm, in a tradesman's shop or in a private residence. They learned various duties and acquired qualities which would also add to their worth as wives: sobriety, industriousness, thrift and obedience. Of course, a woman in this position could always choose not to marry. But, as a product of a patriarchal society which values women according to their fertility, she more than likely would seek a mate or be sought after.

Women who married a merchant often had other duties besides those of running the household. The woman was most often responsible for the bookkeeping of her husband's business. Doctors and veterinarians also left debt paying and the management of credit to their wives and daughters. "When merchants had to travel on business far from home, then local transactions, including new business, were left in the hands of the wife . . ." (Hufton 153). Similarly, farmers left the running of the dairy, including the overseeing of male dairy workers, as well as the sale of dairy products to their wives. The guild masters' wives were also given a great deal of responsibility: "Deciding who ran errands, delivered orders to the back doors of substantial houses, fetched new supplies of raw materials when they ran out, could all be aspects of a wife's working day" (Hufton 166). Women also played an important role as market traders: "A glance around the markets of western Europe might reveal some interesting variations on the range of goods on sale, but the preponderance of women as sellers is everywhere remarkable" (Hufton 167). Some textile industries involved a purely female workforce. "A lace-maker . . . could continue her work after marriage, if only part-time, as long as the husband's business did not make too many demands on her" (Hufton 169). The lower and middle class women of the early-modern period also "enjoyed" the same aforementioned rights upon widowhood, but during their marriages they were able to practice a great deal of autonomy and personal responsibility outside of the tradi-

tional maternal role.

This variety of roles is not something offered to women in Andreae's *Christianopolis*. The absence of the early modern market system with its capitalistic characteristics removes the possibility for women to become financially and therefore physically independent of men. Similarly, because there is no market system, women are confined to their homes within the traditional female role of homemaker; there are no male dairy workers or guild apprentices for these women to order about. The women in this dystopia "haben keine Verfügungsgewalt als über den Hausrat . . ." (125). The idea that a woman would expect or desire to do something else is barely hinted at: "Keine schämt sich der weiblichen Pflichten oder wird müde darin, ihrem Mann zu dienen" (126). Because Andreae uses the verb "sich schämen," however, it is clear that this tension between the patriarchal Christian view of the woman's role and the various role possibilities of the early-modern woman is a concern for him. True Christian women are not ashamed to stay within their "natural" female role; that is, a true Christian woman should and would do only that which is deemed womanly: "Der Frauen rühmlichste Eigenschaft ist ihre Fruchtbarkeit . . ." (126). Deeming fruitfulness to be woman's most worthy characteristic insures her physical dependence on her husband, and conditions in her a burning desire to become a "true" instrument of God: a mother. Does this not doubly detract from her worth, being a person who may define herself through numerous other functions in early-modern Europe?

However, once a woman living in Christianopolis has learned to define herself only through her position in the home, should her husband die, "verläßt [sie] das Haus und begibt sich zu den Wohnsitzen der Witwen, wo sie dem Staat durch irgendeine Arbeit dient" (128). A widow in early-modern Europe more than likely would receive some form of estate in her husband's will; if not, at least she was guaranteed house and some acres of land that her son would till for her. Furthermore, Christianopolitan widows are then given the responsibility of raising and educating the youth; their greatest duty being, "Ruf und Ruhm des Fleisches bei den Unerfahrenen zu mindern und bei seinen unreinen Genießern die Leidenschaft zu strafen" (128). In Christianopolis, a woman loses all sense of liberty and becomes, upon the death of her husband, a slave to the state. Having lost the man

through whom she was defined, she being the "other," she is only able to retain a sense of identity within society by continuing her maternal role outside of the familial home. She, who must ignore any passions she might have to fulfill a role other than that of virtuous wife and mother, is then asked to punish those who come after her, those who attempt to achieve those passions that fall outside of acceptable behavior. Ultimately, *Christianopolis* removes all possibilities for the woman to define herself as autonomous, and then calls upon her to exact the same punishment on further generations; this, one asks, is utopia?

Of course, a woman during the early-modern period, no matter how much she sought autonomy, was usually connected to a man in some way. Because marriage was almost always considered the goal, the actual wedding ceremony was very important. Just as the wedding ceremony in contemporary American society focuses on the bride, so did the nuptial celebrations of the early-modern period see the woman as its focal point. In England, the wedding "was preceded by a bidding, or brideswain, wherein the wife-to-be sat spinning in a wagon which was dragged round the village" (Hufton 138). This tradition physically raises the woman above the rest of the town, which one may see as rather telling of her importance in the ceremonial procedures. Although it is quite clear that she may be seen by the members of the town as the groom's "prize," "gift," or "catch," her role in the ceremony itself is still emphasized and she enjoys her own "fifteen minutes of fame." Certainly, her spinning indicates performance of wifely duties, and signifies her biblically supported secondary status as man's helpmate. But it also illustrates her skill, which she more than likely used at her place of employment before and, perhaps after, her marriage. Similarly,

In Lutheran Germany a bridal cart, in which the bride sat wreathed in flowers, circulated the village or small town bearing all the wedding gifts and crowned by the linen prepared collectively for the marriage by the unmarried women in her age cohort and by the bride herself. The linen was a symbol . . . of the bride's industry. . . (Hufton 139)

In this German conjugal tradition, once again the bride is carted around

the village in an exalted physical position, and her skills "crown" her carriage. Although her role as the lesser, subjugated member of the marriage is generally accepted, her importance as a productive member of the married couple is strongly emphasized and publicly glorified.

For the woman marrying in Christianopolis, however, this is not the case. Although Andreae continuously refers to needle working skills as "Bereich and Gegenstand weiblicher Kunst" (124), the woman in this dystopia is never publicly lauded as an individual, or in regards to her own particular abilities. "Die Hochzeiten gehen ganz ohne Aufwand und Lärm ab," and the woman is given over to her partner without the conventional fanfare afforded the early-modern bride (123). For a woman about to be annexed to a man, it seems she would choose the traditional marriage celebration over Andreae's, for though the former be but brief, it grants her adoration and recognition in light of her talents as an individual.

A woman, no matter how much she may buy into the patriarchal concept of "female," will always be aware not only of her physical talents, but also of her mental capabilities. During the early-modern period, many women began expressing their dissatisfaction with their educational exclusion, social marginalization, and political impotence. Many critical, dissident female voices openly repudiated the "childish things" prescribed for women, including ignorance and the "slavery" of marriage. One woman wrote:

Shall none but the insulting sex be wise?
 Shall they be blest with intellectual light?
 Whilst we drudge on in ignorance's night?
 We've souls as noble, and as fine a clay,
 And parts as well compos'd to please as they.
 Men think perhaps we best obey,
 And best their servile business do,

 We seem design'd alone for useful fools,
 And foils for their ill shapen sense, condemn'd to prize
 And think 'em truly wise,
 Being not allow'd their follies to despise.
 (*Triumphs* I 6-12, II 9-13)

It is clear that man's continual insistence on the ignorance of women was slowly being questioned. Even Andreae seems to address this societal fault saying, "Ich weiß auch nicht, warum dieses Geschlecht [der Frauen], daß von Natur aus nicht ungelehriger ist, anderswo vom Unterricht ausgeschlossen wird" (80). Andreae does not address this problem to its fullest, however, and females are rarely mentioned except for in his first vague description of the style of education a Christianopolitan receives: "Erste und höchste Aufgabe ist es für sie [alle Schüler], Gott mit reinem und demütigem Sinn zu verehren; die zweite, die besten und keuschesten Sitten zu erlangen; die dritte, den Geist zu schulen" (79). Here, education does not step outside the realm of traditional religious instruction, an education that all early-modern Christians were sure to receive at home from their parents.

The early-modern woman was most concerned with her academic education:

'Tis hard we should be by the men despised,
 Yet kept from knowing what would make us prized;
 Debarred from knowledge, banished from the schools,
 And with the utmost industry bred fools;
 Laughed out of reason, jested out of sense,
 And nothing left but native innocence;
 Then told we are incapable of wit,
 And only for the meanest drudgeries fit;
 Made slaves to serve their luxury and pride. . . .
 (Chudleigh 1-9)

Women spoke out about the ignorance inflicted upon them by the patriarchal society, and they used their talents to protest against such treatment. Mary Astell, in her *Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, points to the fact that a woman's cerebral incapacity, "if there be any, is acquired and not natural. . . . Women are from their very infancy debarred those advantages with the want of which they are afterward reproached, and nursed up in those vices which will hereafter be upbraided them" (286). In her proposal, she further argues for the establishment of residential female academies, which would give women a chance to study and meditate without hindrance.

In *Christianopolis*, however, there is no room for women to

receive any such scholastic training. After religious education has been provided them, "besteht die Aufgabe der Knabenstufe darin, die Vielfalt der Dinge und Handlungen in den drei Sprachen Hebräisch, Griechisch und Lateinisch zu benennen" (81). In the auditorium of Dialectic, it is "die Knaben, die schon fortgeschritten sind" who are the ones to increase their academic knowledge (84). Ultimately, "was sie [die Frauen] an Bildung erlangt haben, sofern sie begabt sind, pflegen sie sorgfältig, und zwar nicht so sehr um des Wissens selbst willen, sondern vielmehr, um es eines Tages anderen mitteilen zu können" (125). Andreae, surely aware of the mounting criticism directed at the lack of educational opportunities for women, creates a society in which the women are content in their traditional role as the uneducated "other." In *Christianopolis*, a woman's desire to learn for the sake of learning, simply to acquire knowledge, is not even recognized as feasible. If this desire does not exist as a possibility, it follows that the academic education of women would never become a reality. In Andreae's dystopia, the concerns voiced by writers such as Mary Astell would never be heard, let alone answered, because such expectations are completely eradicated from conceivability.

Any attempt to create a utopia recognizes the need to define "otherness" in order to form a basis for its existence and a model against which it can interpret itself. But because woman has been and continues to be seen as the "other" in all of western civilization, it also holds true that a utopia is created using the same guidelines as those of the patriarchy which attempts to set woman apart as the "non-ideal." In essence, a utopia cannot really include woman as an equal because she is the archetypal "other." Though this theory may be difficult to prove with some feminist texts, Andreae's *Christianopolis* lends itself as the perfect paradigm. In comparing the woman's position in *Christianopolis* to her role in early-modern European society, one can most easily demonstrate that utopia, for the woman, perpetually proves itself a dystopia.

University of Cincinnati

Notes

¹The common support of the Jahvist narrative is demonstrated in Turner as well as in Philips.

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