

## Feminist Future: Time Travel in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*

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**Abstract:** After H.G. Wells' publication of *The Time Machine*, not as the first of its kind but as a seminal text, the popularity of time travel narratives saw a drastic increase during the twentieth century. Despite the prevalence of time travel in popular culture, it is a genre that Marge Piercy rightfully described as one that is hogged by "affluent white males" both as authors and characters—a group she termed as one that would not be "the sort of visitors" she would prefer if she were part of "a future good society" (2013, x). By contrast, *Woman on the Edge of Time* serves as an intersectional feminist intervention in a genre saturated with homogeneity. Countering this lack of diversity, Piercy provides readers with an alternative time traveler: Consuelo Ramos, a thirty-seven-year-old Mexican-American Woman incarcerated in a mental hospital, who journeys between the possibilities of futures both better and worse than the present. Unlike time travelers in many post-Wellsian time travel narratives written and propagated by white men, who relate to time travel purely as an entropic disruption of what they consider to be progress, Piercy's feminist classic reverses the polarity of those discussions by framing time traveling as a politically mobilizing and agency-creating mechanism. Time travel often exposes the future's grim determinism and reinforces pre-set structures of oppression. This paper argues that Piercy's novel, instead, provides a scenario in which time traveling is productive, enabling, and inspiring because minoritized, underprivileged individuals are granted the power to change the future.

**Keywords:** time travel, speculative fiction, Utopian studies, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, intersectionality

Building from H.G. Wells' *The Time Machine*, not as the first of its kind but as a seminal text, the popularity of time travel narratives saw a drastic increase during the twentieth century. Despite the prevalence of time travel in popular culture, it is a genre that Marge Piercy rightfully described as one that is hogged by "affluent white males" both as authors and characters—a group she termed as one that would not be "the sort of visitors" she would prefer if she were part of "a future good society" (2016, p.x). By contrast, *Woman on the Edge of Time* serves as an intersectional feminist intervention in a genre saturated with homogeneity. Countering this lack of diversity, Piercy provides readers with an alternative time traveler: Consuela Ramos, a thirty-seven-year-old Mexican-American Woman incarcerated in a New York Mental hospital, who journeys between the possibilities of futures both better and worse than her present. Because of her social position, Ramos is incited to act against the oppressive power structures of the present.

Consequently, Piercy's novel creates a time traveler

imbued with the ability to change the course of history.

Time travel stories following the Wellsian tradition are based on pre-existing hierarchies relating to gender, race, and class that benefit the white male time traveler. Conversely, in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Ramos' experiences of discrimination as a poor Latina woman with a history of institutionalization shift the rules commonly associated with time travel; in this novel, varying degrees of discrimination toward marginalized people creates a motivation to change the course of the future that socially privileged (white, male, heterosexual, wealthy, and healthy) time travelers do not have. *Woman on the Edge of Time* challenges the moralities and conventions of the present, thus provoking community and solidarity across temporal divides. Unlike time travelers in so many popular time travel narratives written and propagated by white men, who relate to time travel purely as an as an entropic disruption of capitalist progress, which disproportionately benefits Caucasian males

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who have some degree of economic security, Piercy's feminist classic reverses the polarity of those discussions by framing time traveling as a politically mobilizing and agency-creating mechanism. Time travel often exposes the grim determinism of the future and reinforces structures of oppression embodied by contemporary society. Piercy's novel, instead, provides a scenario in which time traveling is productive, enabling, and inspiring because minoritized, underprivileged individuals are presented with the power to change the future.

As a seminal text in the cultural revival of the Utopian imagination that occurred toward the latter half of the twentieth century, *Woman on the Edge of Time* has received a large amount of critical attention (Moylan, 1986, p.15). And yet, the focus of much of this research primarily looks at the space of Piercy's text as an example of a feminist utopia—highlighting the ways that the imagined future functions as a space where individuals can confront issues of gender which are embedded in the patriarchal present. Despite her popularity, there has been little scholarly focus on the use of time travel in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, and consequently much of the critical work that has been done does not discuss the implications of Ramos as a female time traveler at the intersections of many forms of discrimination.

The critical attention that Piercy's time traveler has received, specifically as a time traveler, is embodied by Elaine Orr's 1993 article, "Mothering as Good Fiction: Instances from Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*," which briefly draws attention to the protagonist, Ramos, as being chosen specifically as the "most likely candidate for time travel" because of her role as a mother (p. 61). Orr argues that the significance of choosing Ramos as the individual most suitable to time travel is underpinned by the fact that she has been deemed an unfit parent despite her nurturing disposition. And yet, the novel problematizes the role of the mother as one that is imposed on the female characters of the present and works to broaden the definition so that in the future, mothering is a communal activity. Ramos is

initially disgusted by the new concept of motherhood, because it disrupts the emotional connection that only occurs between a mother and her biological children. However, the future presents an opportunity for Ramos to regain her role as a mother which was denied to her in the present. I agree with Orr that Ramos is depicted as the ideal time traveler who "recommends herself to the future," (1993, p. 63) and broaden her argument to add that Ramos is presented as the ideal time traveler because her role in the revolution is built from the intersecting layers of discrimination that provide her with motivation to fight for a better future. As a result, the future represents a chance for Ramos to fulfill her personal desires as well as the desires of the community. Thus, the introduction of a minority time traveler shifts the way that time travel functions in the novel by portraying it as an instigator of united revolutionary action that delivers motivation to change the trajectory of the present—something vastly dissimilar to the traditional time travel narrative.

These intersections of discrimination are related to the fact that, because it was originally published in 1976, *Woman on the Edge of Time* is a literary artifact of American cultural concerns regarding minority groups that were percolating in contemporary discourse. *Woman on the Edge of Time* therefore epitomizes the shift from second wave feminism to intersectional feminism. In her 2019 collection, *The Global 1970s: Radicalism, Reform, and Crisis*, Duco Hellema argues that "there is, perhaps, no other decade that has evoked such divergent and even contradictory images" as the 1970s (ix). Piercy describes this period as a "time of great political ferment and optimism" amongst those who "longed for a more egalitarian society with more opportunities for all people, not just some of them" (2016, p. vii). In *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, Dan Berger writes that historically, the 1970s was a decade "rife with contingency," filled with a sense of hope to break down systemic hierarchies of oppression (2010 p. 2). The decade has been characterized as a space of "fierce contestation" brought forward by "radical

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social movements” that have been traditionally cast off as “irrelevant” (Berger, 2010, p. 3). Significantly, Rebecca L. Clark Mane notes that the women of colour involved in the development of intersectional feminism sought to expose the fact that the “ideas of middle-class white women,” upon which the first and second wave were founded, “were masquerading as concerns of the universal woman in feminism” (2012, p. 71). As such, white, liberal, second wave feminism moved towards the more inclusive form of intersectional feminism, meaning American women, particularly women of colour, witnessed “an array of revelations and changes in social, political, and public thought and policy” throughout the 1970s (Berger, 2010, p. 4). These initial social transformations inspired minority groups to fight against the discriminatory “limits of American government” (Berger, 2010, p. 9). Confronting vast social inequality, activists worked to use radical political action in order to build a society on the pillars of “insurgency, solidarity, and community” (Berger, 2010, p. 12). Significantly, the revolutionary responses to oppression in the 1970s seems “to inform the current era” while also “reappearing in it,” marking the fact that equality has not yet been achieved (Berger, 2010, p. 1).

Given this context, revisiting Piercy’s classic novel in this time of extreme political division is especially important. Built out of the revolutionary social movements of the 1970s, *Woman on the Edge of Time* serves as a critical analysis of the intersections of inequality affecting minority populations. Throughout the novel, Piercy depicts numerous forms of discrimination, representing the inherent systemic inequalities embedded in the present. Ramos’ social standing forces her to live in a “dirty world” that has determined her fate from birth (Piercy, 2016, p. 15). The space of the novel’s present is saturated with varying levels of inequality so as to ensure that the perceived social hierarchy will be maintained. Ramos recognizes that one of the ways for her to move up in society would be to apply for a job, but as a typist, the hiring agencies “liked to use the younger women” and as somebody “with a police

record and a psychiatric record,” she is trapped in her current position of oppression (2016, p. 26). In this example of intersectional discrimination, Piercy uses Ramos as a conduit to examine problems entrenched in American culture, exemplifying the experiences of some of the most marginalized members of society. The narrative thus evaluates the position of the minority figure embodied by Ramos: “a fat Chicana aged thirty-seven without a man” and “without her own child” (2016, p. 26). In doing so, *Woman on the Edge of Time* critically investigates intersections of discrimination in relation to gender, race, physical appearance, and age put into place by contemporary power structures.

While the present is characterized by broad social inequality, the future exposes the potential for a better world, free from discrimination. Ramos travels into the future world of Mattapoissett which is characterized by complete equality—each layer of discrimination that Ramos faces in the present is confronted and broken down in the future. Within the present, the English language is shown as lacking gender-neutral terms to refer to people, which ensures that gender is always considered with the categories of male and female represented in binary opposition to each other. Mattapoissett, by contrast, has removed language based in gendered terms. Pronouns such as her and him have been replaced with the all-encompassing “per,” creating a sense of equality between the genders. Likewise, in Ramos’ present, issues of race are still prevalent, and the social structure privileges individuals of Caucasian descent over people of colour. Mattapoissett’s social structure works to value racial diversity, ensuring that the children are born “multicolored like a litter of puppies without the stigmata of race and sex” (2016, p. 111). As a result, people are represented with many skin tones that do not necessarily have any connotation to race and in turn they are presented as equal, despite their physical differences. The world is structured to ensure there is “no chance of racism again” (2016, p. 108-109). Finally, the society of Ramos’ present favors youth over age, particularly in relation to women. By contrast,

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in Mattapoissett, the elderly are treated with a deep respect. Instead of being considered feeble and a burden on the rest of society, “old people” retain “an ongoing strength” because they are “useful” (2016, p. 145). Throughout Mattapoissett there is a sense of harmony, the residents are shown in social situations debating “heatedly, laughing and telling jokes” in a space where everyone is accepted (2010, p. 78). The relationships between members of the population are often shown as pleasant, but more importantly they are given equal opportunity to speak—eliminating the forced voicelessness of the past’s minority population. And so, in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, time travel exposes a future defined by its potential to become better than the world of the present, which pushes forward the idea that equality is possible, and discrimination is not a natural occurrence that must be put up with.

However, this future is not represented as inevitable, placing the eventuality of Mattapoissett in jeopardy. Alternative futures in *Woman on the Edge of Time* are shown as “equally or almost equally probable,” which presents a malleability inherent to the timeline that “affects the shape of time” (2016, p. 212). The world of the future that Ramos is initially drawn into is “struggling to exist” against the possibilities of other futures (2016, p. 213). In other words, the future has the possibility to become better than the present, but it is also probable that it may become far worse. Piercy contrasts Mattapoissett with an alternative future shown to Ramos later in the novel as a means to expose the risks of inaction. Women in this alternative future are “cosmetically fixed for sex use” to be sold in businesses called “knockshop[s]” (2016, p. 327). In other words, females are reduced to mere bodies to please men in power—they are commodities rather than people. When Ramos arrives in this version of the future, Gildina, one of the women she first meets, is scanned and determined to have the “mental capacity” of a “genetically improved ape” (2016, p. 326). Women are thus represented as naturally inferior to men, lacking the intellect to be treated as human; any female figure willing to speak for herself is considered a “dud”

who is not “functional” enough to be used in society as a sex slave, although she is owned by the overarching “corporate body” either way (p. 327). Ramos is therefore exposed to the consequences of allowing the power structures of the present to continue, as they are set to be exaggerated into the future.

Given that time travel has provided Ramos with a new perspective on the future’s certainty, she understands the risks of allowing societal hierarchies to continue. Building on what Sam McBean calls a “connection to her contemporary moment,” Piercy offers a “critical distance on the present’s inevitability,” which I argue demonstrates the significance in the role of the individual in changing their society (2016, p. 42). Similar to 1970s activist groups, the characters in the novel are imbued with the ability to modify their living conditions and change the course of the future accordingly. The comparison between temporal spaces in Piercy’s novel exposes the fact that the hierarchal constructs of the present are not naturally occurring and there is always the potential for change. And while time travel offers a possible answer to the problems of the text’s present, the solution does not rest only in the unattainable future. Rather, *Woman on the Edge of Time* works to argue that in order to ensure the world becomes better rather than worse, people must actively rebel against what is considered to be unjust. Ramos’ identity as a minority places her in a position where her experiences of discrimination serve as a form of provocation to change the trajectory of the present in order to ensure a better future.

Therefore, a knowledge of the potential that rests in the future is not enough to guarantee change will occur. Rather, Piercy’s novel emphasizes the importance of the individual in determining the timeline’s trajectory. The present is shown to be a temporal space that is on the crux of determining whether the future will be better or worse—pivoting on the figure of Ramos. The risks of inaction ensure that the future will become worse than the present within the novel, placing the lives of minority figures

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in jeopardy, which makes achieving the utopian society of Mattapoisett a critical venture. Ramos' exposure to "the other world that might come to be" solidifies her place in the revolution because it allows her to question the principles that inform the makeup of the present (Piercy, 2016, p.328). Through the act of describing a new design and shared practices in the space of social institutions, Piercy offers the potential to apply revolutionary ideas to the real world—a dangerous but crucial venture. Building on the risks of revolution, Claire P. Curtis argues that the quest for utopia often "justifies violence," presenting fighting as a necessary tool in ensuring that a better future will occur, and in line with this, Ramos is incited to violent revolution in order to change the world for the better (2005, p. 148). As a result, time travel allows for Ramos to find her place in the "war" for Mattapoisett that she considers herself to be "enlisted in" through a moral duty (Piercy, 2016, p. 328). Therefore, Ramos is represented as a pinnacle figure in the revolt against the social structures of the present, working to "deny" her "oppressor" her "allegiance" in the continued discrimination against minority groups (Piercy, 2016, p. 357). In other words, time travel presents an "opening to fight back" against the current conditions to ensure that they will not get worse (Piercy, 2016, p. 357).

*Woman on the Edge of Time* is imbued with the language of violence—presenting opportunities for those "without power" to find "ways to fight" (Piercy, 2016, p. 357). Within the novel, power is equated with violence. As such, in order for Ramos to ensure that the future becomes better, she is presented with the only option being that she must fight against her oppressors. Inspired by the rules of Mattapoisett, where the population elects to "kill people who choose twice to hurt others," Ramos revolts against the oppressors of the present who continue to allow social injustices to occur (2016, p. 405). Thus, violence is presented to Ramos as the only means to ensure that the future will become a better world than the present. This can be seen in the mental

hospital when Ramos prevents the implantation of a mind-control device in her brain by poisoning the coffee pot with parathion: a chemical so potent that it was illegal to "possess" without "a license" (2016, p. 396). Ramos justifies killing six people because they "are the violence-prone" and "theirs is the money and power," making them the first casualties of the enemy side in the war (p. 410). Although Ramos recognizes that it is not "right to kill them," their murder is represented as an essential act in order to push for the future existence of Mattapoisett (p. 405). In other words, Ramos acknowledges that murder is morally wrong, but considers it a necessary act, which, from her perspective, makes it the most righteous decision. Hence, Ramos is incited to action by the risks of her current layers of oppression continuing into the future, which makes it necessary for her to face the violent dangers of revolutionary change in order to achieve a better world. Thus, time travel in the hands of a minority figure disrupts conventional moralities that, if adhered to, will perpetuate a status quo of oppression.

Piercy's novel demonstrates the fact that violence is often necessary in order for revolution to occur, despite the fact that Ramos' violent revolt against the systemic injustices of her time ultimately end in her demise. Nevertheless, the novel places emphasis on the decision to fight against society's tyrants as being the true success of Ramos' actions. After killing her oppressors, Ramos recognizes that she is a "dead woman now too" because she knows that she will be caught, despite her attempts to hide her crime (2016, p. 410). Although Ramos will likely be imprisoned and potentially given the death sentence, her actions are represented as heroic because she has pushed against the power structures of her time. The beginning of a revolution is inherently linked to Ramos' actions because she "tried," which presents the possibility of change occurring in the future (2016, p. 410). As such, Ramos' attempt allows her to play a fundamental role in the possibility of

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inciting change by revolting against the society of the present as a means to ensure a better future.

Throughout *Woman on the Edge of Time*, revolution is represented as a communal activity inspired by the oppressed. Within Mattapoissett, the population is still fighting a war for the continued existence of their utopia. The world of the future is formulated around an idea of strength that spurs from working toward a similar goal, reinforcing “how good” it is “to fight beside” other members of the community (2016, p. 202). This statement implies a sense of connection between individuals who stand for the same cause. Furthermore, joining the struggle is not merely represented as a moral choice, but rather a shared responsibility in fighting against inequality to ensure that the future continues to be better than the world of the past. Every able member of the population is conscripted into the army to fulfil “defense” in order to fight an ongoing battle to sustain their existence (2016, p. 290). And although war prevents the people of Mattapoissett from living in a world of peace in which they are able to “push all energies into what people need and want,” this violence is considered a necessary task in order to prevent their extermination—showing that a world of equality is something that must be continually fought for (2016, p. 292). Revolution is represented as a community-based action that pushes forward hope for a better future. Consequently, by centering a poor Mexican woman as time traveler, the novel positions time travel as more than an entropic disruption of what the most privileged members of society consider to be positive advancement. Ramos’ experience—both in the futures she encounters and in her own present—challenge the concept of progress as necessarily positive and different from the past. More simply, by exposing Ramos to both possible futures, the science fictional aspects of the text therefore enable a critique of progress by exposing its inherent subjectivity.

Through time travel, Ramos is drawn in as a member of Mattapoissett’s community, which

makes her actions in the present a necessary continuation of the war of the future. Time travel thus creates possibilities for the formation of unlikely communities. As such, the rebellion does not end with Ramos’ eventual death, because the knowledge of the future’s potential has been passed on to other characters, therefore enlisting minority populations in the fight to build a better world where they will not be discriminated against. Piercy’s novel incites revolution through time travel because it is within the vision of future potential that humanity can be inspired to change. During her stay in the hospital, Ramos speaks to Sybil, another patient who is also set up for brain surgery. With a similar spirit, Sybil is willing to do “anything to stop them” (2016, p. 399). Building on this inner yearning for revolt, Ramos informs Sybil that the present is a “war” that she has to “fight” in, reminding her to “hate” her oppressor “more than” she hates herself so that she will “stay free” (2016, p. 400). The idea of freedom has dual meaning in this passage, referring to an ensured freedom in the present but also to an extended freedom in the future that has been built on revolution. Nadia Khouri argues that “the desire for utopia,” no matter how many times it is “reiterated and emphasized” within the novel, may not “lead to a utopian outcome” (1980, p. 49). This is reflected in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, which concludes with Ramos waiting on death row. Despite the fact that Ramos tried to ensure a better future, she could only lay the foundation for others to continue the revolution. As such, while Ramos may not have succeeded in achieving a better world within the confines of the novel, her actions lay the groundwork for rebellion to continue. Through an emphasis on the human power to shift the trajectory of the timeline, Piercy reasons that knowing the future is not inevitable can incite change in both the reality of the novel as well as for readers. The importance of community activism within the text therefore functions as a commentary on the importance of community activism in the time in which the book was written and published. Several new social movements, including the

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women's movement, the gay movement, and racial equality movements converged to dominate the 1970s "political arena" with left-wing radicalism and activism in a way that would not have been possible without cross-cause collaboration (Hellema, 2019, ix). *Woman on the Edge of Time* is a product of these movements' combined efforts to change the lives of minoritized individuals within the United States.

Notwithstanding the fact that Ramos, as a minority time traveler, finds that the future's potential establishes the cause for revolution, there is a large amount of doubt within the text about the reality of the events. Donna Fancourt's 2002 article, "Accessing Utopia through Altered States of Consciousness: Three Feminist Utopian Novels," takes on the concept of changed consciousness as providing access to utopian visions, while also "creating a new" form of "consciousness" (2002, p. 94). The concept of utopia is relatively inaccessible; in order to properly imagine the concept of a perfect society, there must be an altered state of consciousness (Fancourt, 2002, p. 94). Fancourt asserts that the utopia depicted in *Woman on the Edge of Time* is constructed in Ramos' mind and is thus represented as a state of mental "temporality" (p. 95). She notes that the novel places Ramos in a mental hospital, which ultimately links "utopian vision" to "madness" (2002, p. 100). This is significant because the novel is represented from Ramos' perspective and, as such, the events seem to occur within the perceivable reality of the text.

While I concede that the reliability of the narrative is placed into question due to the fact that Ramos has been admitted into the mental hospital because of her "deteriorating" mental state, I argue that labeling her as mad works as another layer of discrimination, especially since the history of mental illness is deeply intertwined with the social position of minority figures (Piercy, 2016, 412). Kim Hewitt argues that people already

experiencing issues of inequality related to "race, class, and gender" are further marginalized by the diagnoses of mental illness (2006, p. 156).

Often, the forced institutionalization of those diagnosed with mental illness leads to imprisonment within the asylum system that denies the individual power to make decisions pertaining to their own lives. Women in particular have been "oppressively categorized, socialized, and pathologized" by mental institutions, which often labeled women as mad when they did not adhere to the gender roles imposed on them by society (Hewitt, 2006, p. 156). In other words, there has been a longstanding legacy of diagnosing, or even misdiagnosing women as a means of controlling dissent. Furthermore, the American Psychiatric Association has acknowledged that "racism and racial discrimination" have led to "mental health care disparities" within the context of the psychiatric hospital (De Young, 2010, p. 17). Class likewise plays an important factor in relation to mental health, with a "historic overrepresentation" of impoverished people "institutionalized" in United States asylums (2010, p. 17). Frank Furedi argues that the majority population, including health care professionals, "will shift the line between sanity and madness" to "medicalize the social expressions" in minority groups (qtd. in De Young, 2010, p. 17). As a result, those who are already discriminated against by intersecting layers of injustice, such as Ramos, are often diagnosed with mental illness and institutionalized as means of controlling those who endanger current social hierarchies.

Within the "excerpts from the official history of Consuelo Camacho Ramos" provided at the end of novel, the clinical summary states that Ramos has been diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia (Piercy, 2016, p. 412). Ramos' perception of reality is described as impaired, which presents time travel within the novel as possibly mere hallucination. This is supported by the fact that it is unclear if her time travelling companion from Mattapoisett, Luciente, can be seen in the present, while Ramos is fully visible

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to the people of the future. The implication of this difference is that it rationalizes why only Ramos can perceive the instances of time travel, which points to the fact that it may be occurring due to mental illness. In addition, throughout Ramos' stay in the mental hospital she is administered a cocktail of drugs, including "Thorazine," "Prolixin," and "Artane," meant to manage her mental state (2016, p. 412). When Ramos first receives visits from Luciente, even she seems to be uncertain as to whether the events are truly occurring or if they are linked to the "dope" which she claimed was "really powerful" (2016, p. 38). As such, the worlds of the future are depicted as potentially existing only within Ramos' imagination.

And yet, building from the knowledge that Ramos is a minority figure, the mental hospital functions as a continuation of forced voicelessness. The mental hospital in the novel works as a prison that contains women who are not necessarily mentally ill, but rather who do not conform to the social roles thrust upon them. For this reason, labeling Ramos as schizophrenic is a continuation of society's oppression of minority groups. It is meaningful that Ramos' time travel remains real to her despite any doubt on the part of the reader. Hence, Ramos' utopian vision manifests from an altered state of consciousness, or a form of mental time traveling, but I would argue that this does not mean that the experience is insignificant. Time travel, whether real or imagined, inspires Ramos to rebel against her oppressors in order to achieve a better world and ensure that the problems of the present do not get worse. Different temporal spaces within *Woman on the Edge of Time* are accessed through altered states of consciousness, which implies that the mind works as the time machine through which visions of the future provoke violent resistance. Throughout the text, time travel exposes the role of human action in affecting the timeline even as the hope for a better future is left only as a possibility. As such, I argue that Ramos' time travel is real, or at least, significant.

Furthermore, when writing, Piercy spent a large

amount of time doing research inside mental hospitals. Within the acknowledgments Piercy references the individuals that she "cannot thank by name who risked their jobs to sneak" her "into places," such as mental hospitals so that she could get an inside perspective (2016, p. 419). Piercy also acknowledges the fact that there were a number of "past and present inmates of mental institutions who shared their experiences" with her (2016, p. 419). This engagement with the stories of those within the asylum demonstrates the fact that Piercy acknowledged that there was value in the narratives of those diagnosed with mental illness—something that is often overlooked. According to Sandra Harding, feminist standpoint theory posits the notion that feminist issues cannot be restricted to "what are usually regarded as only social and political issues, but instead must be focused on every aspect of natural and social order, including the very standards for what counts as objectivity" and "rationality" (2004, p. 2). As such, it is imperative that readers see what is represented as madness in the novel as perhaps merely another way of producing and receiving valuable knowledge. So, while the book, like society, places the validity of Ramos' time travel in question, I argue that we too are meant to find value in the narrative. Whether or not the events actually transpire as Ramos describes, readers are meant to listen, as Piercy did, and learn from the story being told that the future has the potential to improve if we act collectively against systems of oppression.

In conclusion, within Piercy's novel, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, time travel in the hands of a minority figure incites an awareness of the potential for a better future, and draws attention to the fact that social forces are denying their citizens access to this better world. The sense of urgency within the text rests in the fact the future is not represented as static, but is instead malleable—containing both utopian and dystopian potential. As an intersectional feminist text, temporal spaces



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work to examine the overlapping layers of discrimination in the present and situate this discrimination as fuel to inspire minority figures to push back against oppression. As such, the novel parallels two versions of the future as potential outcomes to the present, situating hope for the future in a state of reliance on human action. Designating multiple possibilities for the individual to construct a better future thus constitutes a call to united revolutionary action.

The representation of time travel in the form of mental transportation between timelines works as lens through which the present can be compared to the future. *Woman on the Edge of Time* argues that the individual has the potential to modify the future by inciting collective resistance. Therefore, in following the experiences of a minority figure, Piercy's novel provokes revolution through time travel; it is through the vision of future potential that humanity can be inspired to change. Piercy argued that the point of "creating futures" works as a means to allow people to imagine a better world and "maybe do something about it" (2016, p. vii). Yet, despite the call to action embedded in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, Piercy claims in a 2016 introduction to the novel, that from the time the text was written "inequality has greatly increased"—

more people are poor, more people are working two or three jobs just to get by, more people have seen their savings and their future wiped out by bad health or lost jobs. The homeless are everywhere, not just the single man or woman down on their luck or the shuffling bag lady but whole families with their children. There are fewer chances for the children of ordinary people to go to an ordinary college; if they can go, they will then have to drag huge debt through much of their adult lives. Many working-class jobs that paid people enough to buy and pay for a house and to hope for an even better life for their children have been shipped overseas. There, people even poorer will do the work for pennies. Unions that protected workers have lost much of their clout and represent fewer workers each year. (p. vii)

In other words, there are still many things that people should be fighting for in order to ensure there is a future better than the present. We are all on the edge of time.

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