Herland—An All-female Women's Utopia

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Charlotte Gilman's utopian masterpiece *Herland* (1915) dramatizes a confrontation between three men and an all-female society. Gilman not only creates a political vacuum, where the whole patriarchal civilization, including patriarchal system, superstructure, ideology, influence, and consciousness have ceased to exist, but also men are done away with all together. Most reviews claim that *Herland* criticizes the patriarchal tradition and manifests concern for humanity and some even regard *Herland* as the first truly feminist work in the American tradition. But this supposedly utopian world is actually static, without possibilities of growth and even inhuman, gothic, and nightmarish. And this is because Gilman constructs the women's utopia out of the conviction in women's superiority over men. *Herland* is a little paradise that is designed too perfect. Women's utopias still need to promote social change in the real world.

Keywords: separation tactic, angels in the house, parthenogenesis, reproductive function, motherhood, selective breeding, dystopia

If the beehive produced literature, the bee's fiction would be rich and broad, full of the complex tasks of comb-building and filling, the care and feeding of the young, the guardian-service of the queen; and far beyond that it would spread to the blue glory of the summer sky, the fresh winds, the endless beauty and sweetness of a thousand thousand flowers. It would treat of the vast fecundity of motherhood, the educative and selective processes of the group-mothers, and the passion of loyalty, of social service, which holds the hive together.

From *The Man-Made World, or Our Androcentric Culture* (Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1914)

Introduction

In American author Charlotte Perkins Gilman's epigraph above, the image of the beehive serves as an isolated environment in which the bees live and work. Female bees are individuals, but they work together, under the leadership of a Queen. The epigraph written in 1911 predicts the society presented in Gilman's utopian masterpiece, *Herland* (1915). In the book three American guys discover an all-female society, which is like a beehive without drone bees.

She wrote two utopian novels: *Moving the Mountain* (1911), *Herland* (1915), and one dystopian novel, *Herland's* sequel *With Her in Ourland* (1916). *Herland* is a mildly humorous or seriocomic story. It is generally agreed to be the most full-fledged of Gilman's three utopian or dystopian novels. In *Herland*, three American young men Van, Jeff, and Terry, stumble onto a small hidden country in primitive jungles. This country has existed for 2,000 years without men. The country is made up of only women and girl children. Everything in this country is beauty, perfect clearness, order, and peace. It is also free from war, crime, civil unrest, disease, poverty,

pollution, and overpopulation. The men decide to stay and explore. The book thus dramatizes a confrontation between these three men and the all-female society. One of the three guys names the female land "Herland".

The Herlanders find the three men as an intriguing and possibly complementary "other". They also want to experiment with fatherhood to round out what motherhood has been unable to accomplish (Doskow, 1999, p. 21). In other words, they want to hazard the bi-sexual procreation. So Van, Jeff, and Terry are each paired with a Herlander woman to marry: Van to Ellador; Jeff to Celis; and Terry to Alima. However, out of the three marriages, Terry and Alima's marriage does not progress smoothly. The book ends with the banishment of Terry, when he attempts to rape Alima. The book also ends with the country of women entrusts Ellador a mission to investigate the outer two-sexed world with her man Van, for possible communication between the two-sexed world and the all-female realm in the future.

Herland's sequel is thus called *With Her in Ourland*, with "her" referring to Ellador. Gilman reverses the viewpoint and looks at our world through the eyes of Ellador. *With Her in Ourland* reinforces Gilman's indictment against all the social evils produced by patriarchy and further illuminates the values of Herland. Disgusted by our social evils, both Ellador and Van return to Herland. By the end of the novel, convinced of the superiority of women, Van is converted to feminism.

Static Utopia

Herland is a landmark feminist utopia in American literature. The contrast between Herland and our land raises essential questions in Gilman's mind: What would human civilization be and what women would have done if the entire world had been in women's hands for the past 2000 years? To answer the questions, Gilman uses a radical separation tactic. She not only creates a political vacuum, where the whole patriarchal civilization, including patriarchal system, superstructure, ideology, influence, and consciousness have ceased to exist, but also men are done away with all together.

Herland was little known in Gilman's time. Since its discovery or rediscovery in the 1970s, *Herland* has received sustained critical attention. Most reviews claim that *Herland* criticizes the patriarchal tradition and manifests concern for humanity. These critics regard *Herland* as a classic text that depicts women's utopian worlds. For instance, Nan Albinski (1988) recognized Gilman as "the best-known feminist utopist of the early twentieth century, largely because of the strength of *Herland*" (p. 68). Freibert (1983) even regarded *Herland* as "the first truly feminist work in the American tradition" (p. 67).

Wu-Qing-yun did a very good summary of *Herland's* criticism since 1977. He put the criticism into three categories: the politically positive, the politically negative, and the aesthetic. The positive group regards *Herland* as a classic text for its depiction of ideal utopian worlds. Within this group some critics have linked *Herland* with contemporary feminist utopias. Carol Pearson was the first critic to note the "surprisingly numerous areas of consensus" between contemporary feminist utopias and *Herland* (as cited in Wu, 1995, p. 150). Pearson listed the consensus areas including the absence of men, de-urbanized and decentralized anarchy, a nurturing ethic, relationships based on the love between mother and daughter, worship of a mother goddess and mothering as a social function (as cited in Wu, 1995, p. 150). In 1981, Joanna Russ, in her "Recent Feminist Utopias" insisted on separating contemporary feminist utopias from *Herland* on the ground that Herland was "responding to the women's movement of its time" while contemporary feminist utopias are "not only contemporaneous with the

modern feminist movement but made possible by it" (p. 72). However, except for sexual permissiveness, Russ did not really demonstrate any difference in principle between *Herland* and its modern sisters. In 1990, Libby Jones still declared: "Sixty years later [from 1915], the thesis of *Herland* is still current" (p. 119).

The negative group, however, points out that *Herland* reveals the restriction of Gilman's age, such as, according to Wu, Victorian women's moral superiority, a prudish attitude toward sex, and a blind optimism in the marriage of feminism with socialism (Wu, 1995, pp. 150-151). This group also criticizes the society of *Herland* for being, like most Western utopias, "limited incomplete, inhuman, static" (Keyser, 1983, pp. 40-45) and finds in it a potential totalitarian nightmare.

The aesthetic group stresses its narrative structure and design. Most critics feel that *Herland* has little aesthetic value, with its monotonous structure and didacticism: "Gilman gave little attention to her writing as literature, and neither did the reader, I'm afraid. She wrote quickly, carelessly to make a point" (Lane, "Introduction to *The Gilman's Reader*", 1999, p. xvi). However, the author think *Herland* gives full play to satirical humor and verbal wittiness, even though this is in line with classical Western utopian traditions. And Gilman successfully creates dramatic conflicts and fully developed characters as well.

The author's contribution to the study on the book is that she would stress that Gilman creates an all-female utopian *Herland* that is superior to the man-made world. The author agrees with the positive critical attention and see Gilman as radically challenging the patriarchal ideology of marriage, sex, motherhood, love, work, and education. But the author argues that what is often ignored in the novel's study is that this supposedly utopian world is actually static, without possibilities of growth and even inhuman, gothic, and nightmarish. And this is because Gilman constructs the women's utopia out of the conviction in women's superiority over men. In the end, to establish female superiority in a marginal utopia settled by women alone is an escape from the real world.

Sexual Love or Reproductive Function

Gilman arranged three men and three Herlanders to marry. Through their marriages, Gilman brought into question the unequal monogamy, sexual subordination, femininity, the role of a wife, and the role of a husband. Herlanders are an all-female society before the three male travelers arrive. Herlanders have no idea about sexual difference. Accordingly, before the appearance of three male travelers, the word "sex" never appears in *Herland* as a signifier for sexual intercourse. Herlanders have no sexual life, sexual feeling, sexual needs or desires. *Herland* women not only live without men, but also need no men to reproduce. The nation uses parthenogenesis, asexual reproduction, as some plants and insects do.

Herland is a utopia constructed out of the aftermath of some natural disasters and social holocausts. Two thousand years ago *Herland* was still a polygamous, slaveholding, and heterosexual society. But the original population was reduced by war. The remaining population is driven up from their coastline to settle in hinterland. A volcanic eruption later on fills in the pass, their only outlet. Instead, a new ridge, sheer and high, stands between them and the sea they are walled in. The majority of the remaining male population is composed of slaves. In a slave revolt, these slaves kill all their male masters, boys, along with old women, mothers. The slaves seize the remaining young women and girls and turn them into their slaves. Later on, the infuriated virgins rise up to resist their oppressed fate by successively killing off all the conquerors. However, having done so, they are left without a choice: all men in the country are literally killed off, the women go on to build an exclusively female world.

At first, there is a period of despair, since no men are available for procreative processes. In spite of this, the women decide to wait for miracles. Parthenogenesis, as a divine intervention, solves the problem five or ten years later. A woman miraculously gives birth to a child. The mother bears four more children in four consecutive years. These female children (Parthenogenic births produce only girl children) in turn, at the age of twenty five are able to reproduce in the same manner their mother did, each giving birth to five baby girls. Thus Herlanders are saved from extinction. It is also worthy to note Herland becomes a nation of mothers and daughters, all of whom have descended from one ancestral mother.

Just because women construct their own world, or even an all-female world, where they achieve utmost autonomy, does not mean that this supposedly improved society is a feminist one. Because Herlanders have not seen men for 2,000 years, they have no way of relating to men as romantic sexual lovers. To them, love is not sexual; love is comradely, warm, sisterly, and motherly instead. So even after the heterosexual marriages, friendship and mutual respect should come before sexual expression. The girls also demand the men to be compassionate to the female country's values before they make the great change from parthenogenesis to bisexuality.

Quite reasonably, the three men try to educate their Herlander-wives the pleasures of non-procreative sex. In their hearts, they believe that the Herland girls marry them for sexual love that the men are used to. The sexual intercourse is not romantic sex love but purely a reproductive function. Herlanders permit sex only for procreation purposes. The 1999 Penguin classis edition of Gilman's *Herland* uses a front cover that highlights the reproductive functions that dominate the female country. Thus the wives mate only in the mating season. Sex for pleasure's sake alone or for its own sake does not exist. Herlanders don't understand why men want to have sex "in season and out of season". Van describes Ellador at the consummation of their marriage as unmistakably aloof and cool. After marriage, Ellador refuses to give in and have sex with Van as often as he would like. Another couple, Jeff and Celis also engage in intercourse for purposes of procreation only.

But not all men are patient enough to put sexual consummation second to mutual understanding and affectionate friendship. Among the three couples, one couple does not succeed. Terry, the "man's man" (Gilman, 1992, p. 11) of the three, does not change his patriarchal attitude. Terry insists that his wife learn to be submissive. Throughout the entire text, he has been interested in only one thing—women, who are sexual objects to him. Therefore, when Terry cannot persuade his wife Alima for sexual love, he tries to rape her. He is first arrested and later expelled from the all-female country.

When the three Herlanders marry the three male travelers, the men are valued initially for their reproductive capabilities. In contrast, in Huxley's and Orwell's worlds sex is what keeps humans from becoming machines, and women are the symbols of men's sexuality. The Herland practice of employing sex only for reproductive purposes links utopian *Herland* to two famous dystopian novels: *1984* and *The Handmaid's Tale*.

George Orwell's *1984* (1950) was written as an extrapolation of life in 1948. It imagines life of Winston Smith, an intellectual worker at the Ministry of Truth, living in a modern totalitarian government of Oceania. The novel recounts his illicit romance with Julia, his intellectual rebellion from The Party, his imprisonment, interrogation, torture, and reeducation. The story portrays the dictator government's total domination over the individual's family feelings, sexuality, thoughts, and emotions.

In this horrifying society that is "founded on hatred", there is no links "between child and parent, and between man and man, and between man and woman" (Orwell, 1950, p. 267). Like in Herland, the sex instinct

has been eradicated. The Party tries to kill the sex instinct. If failed, then to distort it and dirty it.

Its real, undeclared purpose was to remove all pleasure from the sexual act. ... All marriages between Party members had to be approved by a committee appointed for the purpose, and—though the principle was never clearly stated—permission was always refused if the couple concerned gave the impression of being physically attracted to one another. The only recognized purpose of marriage was to beget children for the service of the Party. Sexual intercourse was to be looked on as a slightly disgusting minor operation, liking having an enema. ... There were even organizations such as the Junior Anti-Sex League which advocated complete celibacy for both sexes. (Orwell, 1950, pp. 65-66)

Procreation is “an animal formality like the renewal of a ration card” (Orwell, 1950, p. 267). So Winston and his estranged wife Katharine only have sex for loyalty to the party and for procreation for the nation. Winston could have endured living with Katharine if it had not been for just one thing—sex. As soon as he touches her, she seems to wince and stiffen. To embrace her is like embracing a jointed wooden image. She tells Winston that they must produce a child if they could. She reminds him of it in the morning, as something which has to be done that evening and which must not be forgotten. She has two names for it: one is “making the baby”, and the other is “our duty to the Party” (yes, she actually uses that phrase). Quite soon, he grows to have a feeling of positive dread when the appointed day comes around (Orwell, 1950, pp. 66-67). In Orwell’s world, non procreative sex is what keeps humans from becoming machines, and women are the symbols of men’s sexuality. After all, in this dystopian land, there is no loyalty, except loyalty toward the Party; there is no love, except the love of Big Brother (Orwell, 1950, p. 267).

Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1986) is set in a society called The Republic of Gilead in North America in the year of 2050. Gilead is a dystopian world for women. Women have lost their very names. Companies dismiss their female employees. Women cannot access their own bank accounts and credit cards. Moreover, the country experiences excessive use of chemicals and radiation released from an earthquake. The ecological disasters have left many women sterile. Men have also been affected. Those women who remain fertile are made property of the state. They are called “Handmaids”. They are forcibly enlisted by the totalitarian regime. And their job is to mate with male Commanders regularly and ritually for the purpose of reproducing Commanders’ lines and accordingly reversing the precipitous decline in the birthrate.

In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Handmaids are reduced to their biological function and their entire social identity is built upon it. *The Handmaid’s Tale* goes in line with most feminist writings which argue that women’s reproductive functions are seen as the basis for women’s lack of power. The Republic of Gilead is obsessed with female body and its reproductive system. Gilead defines women as “two legged wombs” (Atwood, 1986, p. 136) and judges women by their potential fertility (or its absence). Handmaids are a valuable property because of their “viable ovaries” (Atwood, 1986, p. 143). But this does not make their role superior in whatsoever way. They are “the most controlled, powerless, and demeaned members of that society” (Davidson, 1988, p. 119). They are the sexual object for male consumption. They are also marginalized, shunned, and despised by other women. They are both good and bad women, the saintly prostitutes. Atwood delineates in chilling details the virtual enslavement of Handmaids, and their reduction to mere reproductive functions. Their sexuality is naturally suppressed. Their sexual intercourse with commanders is for procreation only. The procreation activities are called ceremony, which sounds holy, but is supremely monitored, regulated, regimented, ritualized, programmed and even dehumanized. The depiction of procreation scenes in the novel has very intensely gothic touches.

The author links *Herland* to 1984 and *The Handmaid's Tale* for two reasons. First, Herland intertwines utopia and dystopia. The three works all underscore celibacy, chastity, eradication of sex instinct, sex for reproductive purposes, and collective and technological control of reproduction; Second, by making sex intercourse a ritual only for reproductive purposes, Herlanders fail to grow. Among the three explorers, Van represents the average or moderate type; Jeff is romantic, genteel, and chivalric; and Terry is a wealthy, macho, patriarchal playboy and womanizer. So through their marriages Gilman illustrated three types of male-female relationships. Her purpose was to explore men's development as the novel progresses. These three men are an example of an ascending order of development. Terry is at the bottom of the scale because he is incorrigibly chauvinistic; Van is at the top because he is able to free himself from the prejudices. Van and Ellador are best friends as well as lovers after Van accepts the arrangement that Ellador proposes about their sexual relationship; Jeff is in the middle because he considers the wife an element of worship. Although harmonious, Jeff's relationship with Celis seems to lack depth.

But Gilman never addresses women's development. As wives, Herlanders have not changed. They marry the three male travelers initially because they value the men for their reproductive capabilities. Men are placed in this society only on a limited scale and only to prove the author's point. Throughout marriages, Van and Jeff begin to appreciate Herland women and their culture. But the marriages fail to aid women in developing a sense of sexual intimacy, a romantic view of marriage, a view such as couples stay together out of respect as well as love and passion, instead of out of one and a supposedly higher purpose—procreation.

In fact, even after Van sees Ellador as an equal and their marriage incorporates both passion and friendship, Van discovers a new definition of home and feels about staying with Ellador is like coming home to mother. Van converts sexual love to what is called "loving up" in loving Ellador. In other words, he transforms ideas about sexuality to motherhood. He feels like a child in front of the women of Herland. Even in the field of heterosexuality, three male explorers become awestruck beneath the power of a culture that consists of superior mothers.

Gilman's belief in women's superiority contributes to her denying sexuality in *Herland*. But the restrictions of her time also contribute to her denying sexuality in the novel. Mid 19th century was a time when there was not reliable or easily accessible birth control. Women got pregnant very easily. As middle class women's social roles narrowed to childrearing, they lost the prestige and the productive role they had enjoyed in an earlier agrarian economy. They recovered their lost genteel status by promoting the angel in the house images and women's domesticity, and purging sexual associations. In contrast, the early 1920s emphasizes sexual liberation and sexual pleasure. *Herland* was written in 1915. Women's utopian representation in *Herland* is caught precisely between these two ideological moments or two distinct periods of feminism. It breaks with the cult of angels in the house sphere on one hand, and yet forecloses and eliminates sexual pleasure on the other.

Superior and Distinct

After all, women are superior to men, men are wanted for reproductive purposes principally, and women are first and foremost mothers in Herland. Anyone who cannot keep up with this all-female country's supposedly superior values needs to be got rid of. In this case, Terry, In fact, eliminating the unwanted is a strategy for achieving perfection in many classical utopias. In *Looking Backward* (1888), Edward Bellamy eliminates poor from the dichotomy rich vs. poor while preserving the notion rich to accomplish a world of economic equality

and well-being for everyone. But female superiority has a high cost. These all-female utopias fail to satisfy women who do not want to do away with men altogether, but who would like to see a world in which women and men live together with dignity and equality. Women's utopias need to promote social change in the real world.

Overall, Gilman did not consider men and women equal. She held the idea that women are superior to men, at least with regard to the human race as a whole. Gilman belongs to those feminist utopian writers who underscore gender difference, biological determinism, and women's superiority over men when they seek the tumultuous reform in gender issues. Gilman posited men as the main, if not the only source of women's problems. Men also cause social ills. The absence of men from Herland therefore results in the absence of their characteristic traits. That is why Herland does not witness wars, conflicts, violence (except in Terry's case), competition, and misery. It is a calm, rational, harmonious, peaceful world inhabited by equally pleasant women. It is too perfect a utopia that is completely isolated from outside influences. Alcohol or drugs do not exist in Herland. There are no dangerous animals. Cats are bred to destroy mice but not birds. All plants produce nutritious nuts or fruits. This utopian system seems obviously quite naïve from today's standards.

The female body is a recurrent presence throughout the productions of world culture over thousands of years and is still the focus of different and multifarious schools of criticism. Plato differentiates between the world of appearances, which is unstable and untrue, and the intelligible world which is stable and true. The physical body, as an element pertaining to the former, can and does change over time. The soul, on the other hand is an element pertaining to the latter because of its inherent permanency (McEachern, 1997, pp. 86-87). Therefore body in Plato is negatively constructed. It is gendered "female" and rendered weak, passive, silent, and self-denying. This is also generally the Western configuration of the body. More's *Utopia*, however, is an exception because the utopians do not disdain the importance of physical attributes. They believe the endowments of the body makes one esteem the virtues of the mind more. Men and women see each other naked before deciding to marry (p. 110).

If we look at late nineteenth and first half of twentieth century American realistic writers such as William Howells, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, they all dramatized a gross and brutal relationship between capital and the female body. These writers maintained or reproduced patriarchy through commodifying the female body. If we cast our eyes to modern mass media, in advertisements there is basically only one female body type preferred—the waif look or the waif-made-voluptuous-look. In video games, the female body is unreal as that of a Barbie doll. And she is scantily dressed as well. In action movies, female cop outfits are just like stripper costumes, except with much more fabric.

Beauty in definition is supposed to be a subjective thing. But our society dictates what is beautiful and everyone falls for it. Yet societal norms also make people insecure. What if you don't get an ideally normal or natural beauty? You need to go get change yourself. For the sake of women's autonomy and superiority, Gilman, in contrast, evades the myths of femininity and physical attractiveness. Van realizes femininity is a creation meant to satisfy men's wishes and pleasure:

Those feminine charms we are so fond of are not feminine at all, but are artificial and are mere reflected masculinity—developed to please us because they had to please us, and in no way essential to the real fulfillment of their great process. (Gilman, 1992, p. 60)

Readers realize, along with Van, how sex-oriented human behavior and culture are; how socially constructed the patriarchal assumptions about women are. What Gilman expounded in here is that femininity is part of our primarily cultural, not biological, package. This does not sound so new to today's readers because social constructionism became entrenched in the 1960s and 1970s and postulates that a concept may appear to be natural, but in reality is an invention of a culture or society. Yet we also need to notice that constructionism became prominent in the U.S. with Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's 1966 book, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 50 years after Gilman expounded that idea in *Herland*.

Gilman radically revamps in *Herland* economic structures, home organization, and gender roles and expands women's sphere to encompass all of human endeavor. In *Women and Economics*, Gilman wrote about the role of economics as a crucial factor influencing male-female relationships. She contended that the way a living is earned is the most influential factor in life. Human beings are the only animal species in which women depend on men for food, the only animal species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation (p. 5). Therefore she made Herland women not economically dependent upon men.

In Plato's *Republic*, the Guardians lead an ideal life away from the masses. Labor is despised as an obstacle to the higher life of the mind. Therefore the Guardians do not work and they depend on the masses' labor. By contrast, More's utopia espouses communism and a community of work. In this community, men and women alike have an obligation to labor. All must work on the farms and in the fields, as well as specialize in a craft.

The egalitarianism of More's communism is repeated in *Herland*. Herland citizens have a common duty and opportunity to work. There is no division of labor but each Herlander specializes in a particular profession according to their interest and ability. *Herland* portrays women as completely self sufficient and independent. Herland functions without the need for men to provide sustenance. Besides being mothers, educators, and nurses, Herlanders are largely food producers, foresters, spinners, weavers, gardeners, carpenters, masons, social workers, doctors, judges, and priestesses. It was the opportunity to work that Gilman championed, not the type of work relegated to women. She was more interested in the working opportunities. Everything in the country is clearly women's work: the thriving farms, park-like cities, "lovely views of streets" (p. 3), "gorgeous gardens" (p. 3), "endless line of trees" (p. 45), well-built roads, as dustless as a swept floor (pp. 13, 45), "attractive architecture" (p. 13), and technological innovations such as swift moving vehicles (p. 31). The countryside and towns also reflect what Gilman saw as the female traits of order, cleanliness, and care. Their country becomes self sufficient as they adapt harmoniously to their natural habitat. Herlanders have their domestic work recognized as a contribution by society, and can "broaden the cult of domesticity to give women opportunities to move their maternal capabilities and piety outside the home" (Golden, 1996, p. 138).

In Plato's *Republic*, the roles of women are elevated. Because they no longer have to be the children's primary caregivers, they are freed up to fully participate in broader societal pursuits such as protecting or even ruling the city. In chapter four, we mentioned the use of industrial-domestic utopias in Freeman, Bellamy, and Fuller and the use of work-home utopias in Jewett. Gilman shared with the contemporary era's women's desire to have their domestic work recognized as a contribution by society, to "broaden the cult of domesticity to give women opportunities to move their maternal capabilities and piety outside the home" (Golden, 1996, p. 138).

Hausman noticed the centrality of parthenogenesis in Gilman's prescription for gender inequality. Gilman saw that women's liberation from what we would now consider "gender expectations" was inextricably linked to their

role in biological reproduction: how much control they exerted in sexual matters, how society organized childcare, how the social world accommodated maternity and its practices. At the core of Gilman's analysis is the female body as a product of both biological and social evolution. This is why parthenogenesis is crucial to the scheme of Herland, even if it is its most fantastical element (Hausman, 1998, p. 506).

Motherhood

Carol Pearson identifies work and the family unit (child, mothering, marriage), sex, and community spirit as major content areas in feminist utopian literature. Issues addressed in these areas include: communal childcare, dissolution of the nuclear family, de-emphasis on biological link between mother and child, redefinition of parent-child link and retention of individual rather than family surnames (as cited in Dobris, 1989, pp. 83-84). All these traits are represented in *Herland*.

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, maternity is a wish because a Handmaid will be discarded to deadly colonies after three unsuccessful attempts at pregnancy. But maternity is also a fear because if she gives birth to a healthy baby, the baby will become the property of the Handmaid's Commander and his wife. The Handmaid's mothering function ceases after a brief lactation period. In contrast, Gilman's utopian Herland has reversed the value system. In this all-female world, "women are the world and maternal activities become social norms" (Wu, 1995, p. 179). Herland's culture is not only women oriented but also mother oriented. The society is organized around principles of motherhood and the care of children.

Gilman figured women's power and superiority chiefly in their ability to bear children. She believed that women are equal to men in intellect and ability to do work, but are superior to men in their chastity, forbearance, and their roles in the parenting process. Tie to this cultural ideal, the most important role share by Herlanders is that of being a mother. Motherhood is everything for Herlanders. It is the dominant culture. Virtually all Herland women are mothers (if not biologically, then through helping raising children).

Even though Herland women specialize in different areas, their most valued specialization is the education and care of children. All individuals in society assume and share the responsibilities for the growth, development, and education of children. Children are raised by a community of women. The biological bond between mother and child is deemphasized. Most feminist utopias champion a collective motherhood. Plato believes that both men and women should live communally and share property and sexual partners. After the birth of a child, state officers (male or female) take over the raising of the child whose identity is concealed from the parents. This makes men and women to continue with their guardianship training, although Guardian women are expected to nurse the child. Mothers in Herland do live closely with their children for up to three years, where they nurse them and care for them (in conjunction with the teachers). But after the "baby years" are over, they resume their regular work duties.

Blurring the biological link between mother and child leads to a redefinition of the parent-child relationship. Each Herlander has a first name, but she has no family name. Every member of the community regards every child, not just her own biological child, as her own responsibility. Gilman thus transforms the private world of mother and child into a community of mothers and children. Gilman believes that mothering should be collective to ensure that children will learn comradeship, community interest. Moreover, specialists, who are not necessarily biological mothers, take over the role of educating children. Somel tells Van that Herlanders believe

that childrearing is the highest art. So Herlanders gladly entrust it only to those who are the most skilled. But the communal care disrupts family intimacy and autonomy.

Plato compares nurture to the eye which can turn to the light or obscurity. Its rightful task is to guide the eye towards the light. Education is like a nurturing eye. It can bring the best which is latent in the soul by directing the soul to the right objects. Because the soul is imitative, it will assimilate itself to its surroundings. Therefore, its surroundings should be conducive to the soul's enhancement (Nettleship, 1962, p. 262). Thus, infant education must be undertaken through controlling the environment, by creating a healthy atmosphere and exposing children to desired objects.

Likewise, Gilman's perfect motherhood also involves "utilizing a controlled educational environment to facilitate children's development and ensure their optimum functioning in her utopian society" (McEachern, 1997, p. 81). Plato believes that negative emotions such as anger and jealousy undermine virtue, happiness, and social harmony. Similarly Gilman does not believe that negative experiences hold potential for growth (McEachern, 1997, pp. 59, 81-82). She shelters her children from these negative emotions and feelings. Every function Herlanders perform is geared towards providing an ideal environment for their children. They make Herland as safe as possible by removing all possible dangers from nurseries and dwellings. They cultivate the forest to make it safe and attractive for the infants. Industry develops highest quality of health care and hygiene, so the raising of infants and toddlers is disease free. The Herland babies are surrounded by waterfalls, grasses, trees, sandy areas, birds, frogs, cats, and exotic flowers. By modern society's values, this education method may be too much strict control and intervention.

As Cornford has summarized, in Plato's *Republic*, mating occurs during annual marriage festivals, and Philosopher Kings are in charge of pairing individuals for the sole intention of superior breeding. In other words, the best specimens are selected and put to perform their reproductive functions. The Guardians themselves are not aware of his manipulation and are led to believe the unions happen by chance. In between festivals, Guardians practice celibacy (Plato, 1945, pp. 155-167).

Herlanders practice selective breeding as well. In the discussion with Somel, Van learns that any woman with bad qualities would be asked not to give birth, so that these qualities are not passed on to later generations. The quality of children becomes Herlanders' utmost national concern. Gilman divides Herland women into two main groups or classes: mothers and non-mothers. Those who are suitable for motherhood exhibit qualities of wisdom and physical strength appropriate to life in the community. Non-mothers are "the physically, mentally, and morally weak women" (Wu, 1995, p. 180). However, non-mothers have access to communal mothering, so this role is not completely removed.

Gilman's tendency to deify motherhood is linked to her tendency to deny sexuality. And both tendencies can find resources in her middle class consciousness. Nineteenth century was a time when there was not reliable or easily accessible birth control. Women got pregnant very fast. As middle class women's social roles narrowed to childrearing, they lost the prestige and the productive role they had enjoyed in an earlier agrarian economy. They recovered their lost genteel status by moralizing motherhood, purging its sexual associations, and promoting the conventional Mary image.

Herlanders not only use selective breeding, they also commit racism by populating the country exclusively with blond, fair women of one pure genealogy. The ancestors of the Herlanders have travelled to their land "at

about the time of the Christian era" via "a free passage to the sea" (Gilman, 1992, p. 55). Van tells us, "there is no doubt in my mind that there people were of Aryan stock and were once in contact with the best civilization of the old world" (Gilman, 1992, p. 55). Van at once establishes the whiteness of the Herlanders as well as their roots within Western, Christian culture. More problematic is that Gilman deposits this nation of white women in the Amazonian rainforest surrounded by Indians, the "savages" (Gilman, 1992, p. 52). Gilman's understanding of race involves the idea of differential development, and she opposes mixing racial groups that she perceives to be at different stages of development.

"Race animates Gilman's thinking". Gilman's sole purpose is not to "water down the pure national genealogy" (Weinbaum, 2001, pp. 273, 281). If in *Herland*, Gilman links Herland to whiteness and Christian culture, in *With Her in Ourland*, she makes *Herland* as a mother superior. In this fiction, Ellador goes to America with Herland's narrator, Van. During her stay, she formulates her diagnosis of America's ills and issues a prescription. The central message of the fiction is that America is compared to a bloated infant; other nations are figured as its quarreling siblings. Fortunately, the Herland mother can still manage them. Indeed, "juxtaposition of *Herland* and *With Her in Ourland* makes it strikingly apparent" that Gilman conceives Herlanders as "a separate and superior" mother-race while the outer world is her savage children (Weinbaum, 2001, p. 295).

Gilman's ideas about reproduction reflect her concerns about national building.

Gilman's belief in women's reproductive role in crafting the proper (white) national genealogy was an enduring component of her feminism.... In Gilman's fiction, utopian reproductive scenarios and alternative visions of maternity (selective pregnancy) are offered as blueprints for social change. Women's work is not solely in the home, Gilman argued, but also in building a better society and ultimately reproducing a racially "pure" nation (Weinbaum, 2001, p. 272).

While we charge against her genealogical thinking, we should not forget that it may have been difficult for Gilman, "writing at the turn of the century, to think about genealogy without binding it to biological notions of descent, racial purity, and pedigree" (Weinbaum, 2001, p. 297). The racism towards minorities and immigrants was rampant during 1890-1920 in America.

Besides, Gilman herself asserted that motherhood is not always magnificent and may need to be transformed. Different from her depictions of motherhood in her theoretical works and her utopian fiction, Gilman's short stories "collectively emphasize the plight of mother rather than her potential. Her short fiction offers chilling images of mothers driven to suicide, madness, illness, and at best, self reproach" (Golden, 1996, p. 144). In 1899, she published "The Yellow Wallpaper", a short fictional piece whose autobiographical heroine undergoes the infamous rest cure of S. Weir Mitchell, a nerve specialist in the era of neurasthenia and hysteria. "With its fictional documentation of Gilman's actual nervous breakdown after the birth of her daughter, 'The Yellow Wallpaper' might be placed in Gilman's body of work as the inverse of the world of fulfilled and exalted motherhood portrayed in *Herland*" (Bartkowski, 1989, p. 25). In her short stories Gilman boldly suggests that domestic life imposes restraint on women and home is more like a prison than a private sanctuary. As Upin (1993) suggests, this devaluation of space resembles a similar assessment of space in the writings of post modern philosopher Michel Foucault (pp. 56-57).

Herland ends with a feminist triumph in the expulsion of Terry, the incorrigible patriarchal tyrant. With Ellador following Van to our world to open up her horizon, *Herland* also ends on an optimistic note about

reestablishing a bisexual community and making social changes accordingly. The conclusion of *Herland* reflects Gilman's continuing optimism, despite significant resistance to her radical ideas. She believes that Herland will progress without hindrance and has tremendous potential. Gilman's fantastic imagination of an all-female world, parthenogenesis, isolated, happy, contented and independent working women, and a superior female collective power have proved their strength since the novel was discovered. Gilman also sows the seed for modern and more radical feminism and even lesbian separatism. In 1999, Lane claims:

No one would deny that the world has changed in regard to issues of women and gender in the last sixty to one hundred years, yet when we look at what Gilman said about her world and realize how many of those observations apply to ours, we put it in perspective the reality and significance of those changes. (*Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Rights of Women*, p. 4)

Conclusions

Yet, after all, Herland is a little paradise that is designed too perfect. Gilman basically deals with any potential areas of conflict or evil by simply getting rid of them (McEachern, 1997, p. 120). Alcohol or drugs do not exist in Herland. There are no dangerous animals. Cats are bred to destroy mice but not birds. All plants produce nutritious nuts or fruits. Johnson-Bogart observes that this eliminating the unwanted is a strategy for achieving perfection in utopias:

As in other literary utopias, the strategy for achieving perfection in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* appears to be based primarily on eliminating one partner in various pairs of terms where the excluded partner is seen to be the locus of the ills of society. In *Looking Backward*, Edward Bellamy eliminates "poor" from the dichotomy rich v. poor while preserving the notion "rich" to accomplish a world of economic equality and well-being for everyone. As well, in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, Hank Morgan attempts to eliminate what he perceives to be superstitious and irrationality in the Arthurian world to make his notion of reason ubiquitous. (Johnson-Bogart, 1992, p. 85)

Robert C. Elliot claims in *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre* (1970) that because utopian projects eliminate conflict and opposition, they also eliminate the process by which history occurs, and instead achieve stasis. Feminist utopias need to intensify conflicts for a stronger contact with reality.

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