



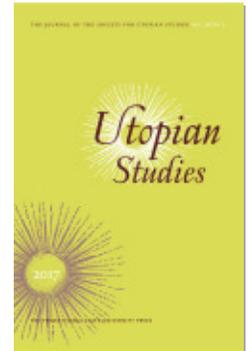
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ABSTRACT

This article considers Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1915 novel Herland in the larger utopian tradition and argues that it can be classified as a scientific utopia, in the tradition of Bacon's New Atlantis. Herland is frequently mischaracterized as "Arcadian" and "pastoral." In reality, the novel presents an advanced industrialized society that uses radical environmental engineering. The article challenges a number of critical readings from ecofeminism and feminist science studies in characterizing the novel, which has been abundantly studied in terms of gender politics but far less so in terms of the scientific utopia. Also covered are the novel's engagements with the population principle and eugenics—controversial issues in the novel's time and in our own but familiar territory in the utopian tradition. Though the Herlanders' mastery of their environment and population is impressive on one level, on another it is disconcerting, and the novel, from our point of view, can be said to have a place in another tradition—the technological dystopia. Last, brief consideration is given to the question of whether science can be a legitimate basis of utopia and what Herland contributes to this ongoing debate.

KEYWORDS: *Herland, scientific utopia, eugenics, dystopia, ecofeminism*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was a prominent and effective figure for social change in her prime, yet, despite her prodigious literary output, she had little direct influence on the generations immediately following her. Even before her death, all of her works were out of print. She has been the subject of increasingly widespread attention since her rediscovery, yet, although she was a stalwart advocate for women's rights, many of Gilman's views make hers a problematic revival. That Gilman has a place in the history of feminism is undeniable, but how to situate her, and especially *Herland*, in relation to contemporary feminist thought remains a matter of debate. Feminist scholars have long been engaged in the question of how to situate Gilman's nationalist, racist, and eugenic views, but these are complex issues that require multiple perspectives. Her place in the tradition of the scientific utopia has received less attention, and it is time that we bring this into the discussion around the revival of her work. In this article I look at Gilman's novel in the larger utopian tradition and argue that its place there is in the scientific line. In doing so, I consider critical readings that link Gilman to a feminist critique of science and to ecofeminism and examine the novel's concern with eugenics and the population principle, which also suggests a place for *Herland* in the history of the scientific dystopia.

Herland as a Scientific Utopia

Utopia was originally the realm of philosopher-kings concerned primarily with how abstract principles of truth, virtue, and harmony could bring about the good life. Plato laid the groundwork, but, as a genre, utopia really gained momentum in the Renaissance, particularly after the growth of the new sciences. Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) is largely animated by a spirit of scholasticism, and his society, as Nell Eurich notes, "did not in any way emphasize the investigation of nature, nor did it suggest any particular method for the advancement of knowledge."¹ Francis Bacon established a new type of utopia with his unfinished *New Atlantis*, published posthumously in 1624. At the heart of Bacon's fictional society is Salomon's House, a scientific institution "for the finding out of the true nature of all things."² A similar emphasis on the new learning and on progress rather than tradition can be seen in other utopian works of the time, including Johann Andreae's *Christianopolis*, Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, and Tommaso Campanella's

City of the Sun. That the scientific utopia became a dominant genre in the utopian tradition is easily accounted for, given the affinities between science and utopianism. Both seek to improve the human condition, to render the universe comprehensible, and to provide a sense of order. As J. C. Davis explains, “The one depicted the society in which the other would flourish, or, to reverse the equation, science provided the material and technological base upon which the ideal society could be built.”³ Just as in the sixteenth century, we see another exponential increase in utopian works in the nineteenth century, and contemporary advances in science account for much of these, or at least their heavily scientific content. Gilman’s *Herland*, like Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and H. G. Wells’s *A Modern Utopia*, is very much a part of this phenomenon.

Published in 1915, *Herland* follows three amateur male explorers on a journey to confirm rumors of an isolated, all-female society. Contrary to their sexist expectations, they find an advanced, efficient, harmonious civilization of women who reproduce through parthenogenesis. *Herland* takes on scientific themes in several ways. The most obvious is Gilman’s decision to make her male explorers amateur scientists in pursuit of “some nice little discovery.”⁴ More interesting is the way Gilman engages science and literature at a metacritical level in setting up a sort of experiment in Émile Zola’s sense (following Claude Bernard) of “provoked observation.” The idea goes back to the origins of the novel, found nowhere more conspicuously than in *Robinson Crusoe*, in which Defoe embeds experiment and observation in his narrative at multiple levels. With the island his laboratory and *Crusoe* his subject, he sets out to find out what might happen if you took a Puritan, middle-class merchant and stranded him on a desert island with a limited set of tools and supplies. Gilman does something similar in her thought experiment designed to “test” the range of female capability against contemporary gender stereotypes: If a geographically isolated group of women somehow managed to reproduce without men, what sort of civilization might result? What results, as Van notes, is “a mechanical and scientific development fully equal to ours” (82), and the means by which this is achieved are what, in part, make *Herland* a classical scientific utopia.

Although the male visitors are the alleged scientists, Van’s description of the women of *Herland* makes them seem even more scientific in their disposition and habits. He notes that they are “marvelously keen on inference and deduction” and “the most salient quality in all their institutions was

reasonableness" (65, 77). They are also portrayed as levelheaded and objective, "never express[ing] horror or disapproval, nor indeed much surprise—just a keen interest," and as having "keen scientific eyes" (52, 126). They treat the visitors preeminently as sources of information and are methodologically well prepared for their study: "What they were doing with us was like . . . Napoleon extracting military information from a few illiterate peasants. They knew just what to ask, and just what use to make of it; they had mechanical appliances for disseminating information almost equal to ours at home; and by the time we were led forth to lecture, our audiences had thoroughly mastered a well-arranged digest of all we had previously given to our teachers, and were prepared with such notes and questions as might have intimidated a university professor" (66). Like good philosophes, they compile encyclopedia-like texts of their own knowledge and quickly create new volumes to disseminate what they learn from the men. Terry's jewels, rather than arousing admiration and gratitude, as he had intended, go straight into a museum. Also in line with Enlightenment practice, their religion "gave to the searching mind a rational basis in life . . . clear, simple, rational directions as to how we should live—and why" (115).

We might also note the experimental nature of their involvement with the men. In their failed escape, the men are unknowingly observed all along by the Herlanders, only to be briefly humored when they reach their airplane and whisked back to their place of captivity. The marriages are also conceived of as a great experiment, as is Ellador's eventual fact-finding journey back to "Ourland" in the sequel. As Michael Bryson correctly notes, "Gilman's envisioned approach is no less than the scientific management of all human labor, be it industrial, agricultural, or reproductive."⁵ We learn that the Herlanders are ignorant in geology, geography, and anthropology due to their isolation, but they are competent in astronomy, physiology, chemistry, botany, and physics and excel in mathematics and psychology. The field of medicine is conspicuously absent in *Herland* (the men note the lack of medicinal plants), especially given its prominence in most scientific utopias. Van suggests, however, that the absence is actually a triumph, medicine having been rendered obsolete thanks to their success in ecology, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, and eugenics.

The narrative's focus on the cultivated forests and overall "cleanliness" of *Herland* has tended to distract critics, who often mischaracterize the country as "preindustrial," but industry is there indeed.⁶ Among the men's first pieces

of tangible evidence of the existence of Herland is a piece of cloth that “no savage tribe” could have made—“they spin and weave and dye as well as we do” (7). The Herlanders have textile, agricultural, and publishing industries on the same scale as the contemporary United States. (Preindustrial societies also tend not to have average population densities of 250–300 people per square mile, as Herland does.) We may not see the factories themselves, but the products betray their existence, and the *attitude* of industry is pervasive. Van notes: “They loved their country because it was their nursery, their playground, and workshop. . . . [T]hey were proud of it as a workshop, proud of their record of ever-increasing efficiency” (95). Gilman’s method of feminism is not to release women from the domestic sphere but to expand the domestic sphere to encompass everything and apply industrial methods and domestic economy across the spectrum.

Science and Feminism

When we put this characterization of *Herland* as a scientific utopia next to its standard reception as a feminist utopia, we come to the topic of feminist science studies. Hilary Rose suggests that the plot of *Herland* allows Gilman to “poke fun at masculinist scientific rationality,”⁷ and Bryson writes that Gilman “exposes the inherent weaknesses in any practice of science that casts itself in androcentric terms.”⁸ More specifically, Jane Donawerth says that in the novel, “genetics is applied not through the traditionally masculine values of hunting, competition, and individuality, but through the traditionally feminine values of nurturing and, more generally, creating an environment where no one will be hurt.”⁹ The field of feminist science studies is by no means homogeneous, but one fundamental charge is that women have been systematically excluded from scientific professions and have been assumed naturally unfit for such intellectual activity. That the women of Herland have made the advances they have is certainly a feminist statement by which Gilman contradicts millennia of gender stereotypes expressed explicitly both in the mainstream scientific thought of her own day and in the utopian tradition. So far as the utopian tradition began with Plato, it began on a note of gender equality, as Plato stipulates that women will have the same educational and professional opportunities in his Republic: “Natural gifts are to be found here and there in both creatures alike; and every occupation is open to both, so

far as their natures are concerned."¹⁰ This equality, however, is political, not natural, as Plato also asks, "Do you know of any human occupation in which the male sex is not superior to the female. . . ?"¹¹

One of the most common feminist critiques of science is that it seeks to "dominate" nature and has an inherently exploitative function. As Vandana Shiva puts it, "The dominant science system emerged as a liberating force not for humanity as a whole . . . but as a masculine and patriarchal project which necessarily entailed the subjugation of both nature and women."¹² Among the most vocal critics in this line is Sandra Harding, who has compared science with "marital rape, the husband as scientist forcing nature to his wishes,"¹³ and who has famously, and unfortunately, asked: "Why is it not as illuminating and honest to refer to Newton's laws as 'Newton's rape manual' as it is to call them 'Newton's mechanics'?"¹⁴ Harding and others target Bacon in particular, suggesting that the metaphors he uses are indicative of the misogyny at the heart of science.

It is not my purpose here to defend Bacon against the charge that misogyny informed his scientific method or to contest that the goal of science is, or has traditionally been, the domination of nature.¹⁵ With qualification, the latter proposition is obviously true; agriculture, architecture, medicine, engineering—all could be said to exert control over nature. My purpose is, rather, to introduce the feminist critique of science as seeking dominion over nature, and the common scapegoating of Bacon, in order to further examine *Herland* in the dual contexts of feminist science studies and the utopian tradition. As far as the latter is concerned, the control of nature has traditionally, and unapologetically, been a *sine qua non*. As Davis explains, there are two primary advantages of science to utopia: "First, the establishment of human dominion over the natural environment, and, secondly, the reduction of nature to a realm of law and therefore predictability."¹⁶ Far from protesting this utopian tradition as masculine aberrance, Gilman firmly embraces it, raising her ideal society on the twin pillars of ecological engineering and eugenics. Bryson is incorrect in suggesting that Gilman "implicitly rejects the nineteenth-century explorer-scientist's goal of conquering nature."¹⁷ Gilbert and Gubar, on the other hand, are certainly right in saying that "the crucial difference between *Herland* and our land is the feeling Gilman strives to give us that culture in her feminist utopia is no longer opposed to nature, in part because of the intercession of the female."¹⁸ More accurately, though, it is because of the intercession of science. Culture is no longer opposed to nature because nature has been thoroughly brought under the control of culture.

Ecology and Environmental Engineering

The physical *land* of *Herland* is one of the novel's most interesting features—and, I will argue, one of its most troubling. *Herland* is regularly referred to as “Arcadian” and “pastoral” in the critical literature,¹⁹ and the male explorers respond with admiration to the landscape, which they say is “too pretty to be true”: “A land in a state of perfect cultivation, where even the forests looked as if they were cared for; a land that looked like an enormous park, only it was even more evidently an enormous garden” (13). Gilman has been praised for her environmentalist thinking in *Herland*, and in certain aspects, praise is justified. Her awareness of the environmental impact of the meat and dairy industries is forward-thinking, although it is limited here only to land usage and does not relate to the larger problem of pollution. More laudable is the *Herlander* custom of composting and fertilizing: “A perfect scheme of refeeding the soil with all that came out of it. All the scraps and leavings of their food, plant waste from lumber work or textile industry, all the solid matter from the sewage, properly treated and combined—everything which came from the earth went back to it” (80). Bryson praises the *Herlanders*’ “conservation-minded agriculture” and writes that “Gilman’s views on the importance of nutrient and resource recycling are highly progressive.”²⁰ The practice is admirable and, while “progressive” from a limited perspective, is in fact a concept to be found among the earliest scientific utopias. In the 1660 “continuation” of *New Atlantis*, we find the practice of “meliorating the Earth with several composts; as the dry with marle, the lean and hungry with dung of pigeons, man’s, or horse’s, soot, seasand or owse, chalk; the sandy with mud, the cold with ashes; the rich with brakes, straw, sea-weeds, folding of sheep; all which, as we find the ground, we use and apply to it.”²¹

Critics have also wanted to see *Herland* more specifically as an ecofeminist text. Ecofeminism is not a unified field, and a variety of perspectives, sometimes conflicting, are grouped under the heading. A foundational principle is the suggestion that the subjugation of women and the subjugation of the natural world share certain affinities and may be part of a single phenomenon or logic of domination and ought to be examined together. Many argue that the science, industry, and technology that brought about the level of environmental destruction we see today are characteristically masculine and that women may have an inherently closer connection to nature; others, however, reject such positions based on essentialist views of gender. Other common principles

include the rejection of mechanistic views of nature, rationalism, the nature/culture dichotomy, and systems of natural hierarchies. Ecofeminism also stresses the continuity between humans and the natural world, pays heed to the knowledge and experience of indigenous peoples, and, at its fringe, advocates various forms of goddess worship and mysticism.²² A careful reading of the novel reveals that *Herland* violates these values in so many particulars that it is puzzling how critics can suggest that “Gilman is adopting, in ecofeminist terms, what is identifiable as a social ecofeminist position.”²³

To begin, consider the “savages” who surround *Herland*. Although the women are aware of the indigenous tribes in their vicinity, they ignore them, at best, assuming them to have no valuable knowledge, ecological or otherwise. Many critics have engaged with the racism inherent in the novel, but I have yet to see anyone consider the grim possibility that the explorers’ indigenous guides might be telling the truth when they say that “a good many” had gone to *Herland* “but they never came back” (4). When the guides tell the male explorers of a mysterious “Woman Land,” they say that a river that comes from there runs “red and blue.” Terry and Jeff suggest that it might be cinnabar and indigo. Alas, when they find smears of coloring along the river, it turns out to be “chemicals of some sort.” The guide says that it varies: “One day blue—one day red—one day green” (6). Water pollution is obviously not of concern to Gilman’s utopians—at least not downstream.

From their airplane, the men observe that the “land looked like an enormous park, only it was evidently more an enormous garden” (13). Entering the forest, they find only fruit-bearing trees “under as careful cultivation as so many cabbages” (15). Despite the tone of this observation, the men remain generally impressed with the *Herland* landscape, as are most readers. From a fairy-tale perspective, one could agree with Gilbert and Gubar that Gilman presents an “earthly paradise,”²⁴ but from any sort of realistic point of view, and certainly an eco-critical/ecofeminist one, it is difficult to look past many features. We should note what, at this early stage, the men do *not* see: “All we found moving in those woods . . . were birds” (16). Van confirms later that “there were no wild beasts in the country and very few tame ones” (51). *Herland* comes up short against another ecofeminist concern. When Van questions Zava about animals, the conversation reveals an attitude far from a concern for animal rights:

“Have you NO animals?”

“We have cats,” she said. “The father is not very useful.”

“Have you no cattle—sheep—horses?” I drew some rough outlines of these beasts and showed them to her.

“We had, in the very old days, these,” said Somel, and sketched with swift sure touches a sort of sheep or llama, “and these”—dogs, of two or three kinds, “and that”—pointing to my absurd but recognizable horse.

“What became of them?” asked Jeff.

“We do not want them anymore.” (49)

Even the famous cats, the “big, handsome silky things, friendly with everyone and devotedly attached to their special owners,” tell a mixed story (52). It is considered very humane and tasteful that the cats have been bred not to kill birds, yet they have also, apart from purring and squeaking, been devoiced, presumably because it annoyed the women. Far from finding intrinsic value in nonhuman species, the Herlanders see only their use value. Discussing dogs, for example, Moadine wonders that “in most civilized countries a kind of animal is kept which is no longer useful” (54). Donna Haraway writes that “ecofeminists have perhaps been most insistent on some version of the world as active subject, not as resource to be mapped and appropriated in bourgeois, Marxist, or masculinist projects.”²⁵ Far from the ecofeminist ideal, Herlanders view nature as precisely such a resource to be appropriated, putting them squarely in line with the (masculine) Renaissance utopian tradition. The inhabitants of Thomas More’s *Utopia*, for example, “consider it a most just cause for war when a people which does not use its soil but keeps it idle and waste nevertheless forbids the use and possession of it to others who by rule of nature ought to be maintained by it.”²⁶

Ecofeminism holds that “a healthy, balanced ecosystem, including human and nonhuman inhabitants, must maintain diversity” and that “ecologically, environmental simplification is as significant a problem as environmental pollution.” It therefore abhors “biological simplification, i.e., the wiping out of whole species.”²⁷ Again, this is the opposite of what we see in *Herland*, where the forests have been “reset.” From a realistic perspective, Gilman’s knowledge of ecology is undeniably limited. She may introduce cats that do not kill birds, but in reality, such a pervasive destruction of plant and insect species would wipe out most bird species as well. I am not suggesting that we ought to look at *Herland* realistically, but any claims for Gilman’s ecofeminism or “proto-environmentalism”²⁸ require that we do. Given that in South America,

where the novel is usually presumed to be set, a single hectare of forest can have up to 250–300 species of trees, and a single tree can contain hundreds of species of insects, the environmental engineering of the Herlanders involves not just the removal of dogs, cows, horses, sheep, and pigs but the wholesale extermination of many thousands of species. This realization firmly invalidates claims such as Bryson's that "Gilman expands our notion of community by linking bird, tree, insect, water, earth, and human in close and apparently benevolent association."²⁹ Far from an ecotopia, *Herland*, if read realistically, represents *ecocide*.

Population and Eugenics

William Leiss writes that "in the context of modern utopian thought, 'mastery of nature' is a shorthand expression for the guarantee of an adequate material provision for human wants."³⁰ Though Gilman's vision of restructuring the landscape in *Herland* may be distasteful from a current ecological perspective, it both follows and develops common aspects of the utopian tradition. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates says that he would "aim at keeping the number of the citizens as constant as possible, having regard to losses caused by war, epidemics, and so on; and they must do their best to see that our state does not become either great or small."³¹ We find the same concern in More's *Utopia*: "But that the city neither be depopulated nor grow beyond measure, provision is made that no household shall have fewer than ten or more than sixteen adults." What happens when these limits are exceeded marks a crucial difference between More and Gilman: "If the population throughout the island should happen to swell above the fixed quotas, they enroll citizens out of every city and, on the mainland nearest them, wherever the natives have much unoccupied and uncultivated land, they found a colony under their own laws. . . . If they resist, they wage war against them."³² In contrast, Van notes that the Herlanders did not "start off on predatory excursions to get more land from somebody else, or to get more food from somebody else, to maintain their struggling mass" (69). This is a key element in the scientific utopia, which usually draws attention to its pacific nature. We find the same sentiment in *New Atlantis Continued*: "Our study here is to improve a little ground well with little pains and charges. For we conceive the well improving of a small island better than the conquering of a new large kingdom."³³

Any modern discussion of the population principle eventually comes round to Thomas Malthus, who wrote his *Essay on the Principle of Population* in response to the utopian writings of William Godwin and the Marquis de Condorcet. He contends that “all the writers on the perfectibility of man and society, who have noticed the argument of the principle of population, treat it always very slightly, and invariably represent the difficulties arising from it as at a great and almost immeasurable distance.” “Even Mr. [Robert] Wallace,” he continues, “who thought the argument itself of so much weight as to destroy his whole system of equality, did not seem to be aware that any difficulty would arise from this cause till the whole earth had been cultivated like a garden, and was incapable of any further increase of produce.”³⁴ The famous Malthusian checks—disease, hunger, and war—have all been eliminated in *Herland*, and given the geographic limitations, the population problem becomes all the greater. Gilman’s solution, beyond that of cultivating the whole land like a garden, reveals the tendencies in the scientific utopia that would soon become bases for the modern dystopia.

Gilman, like many progressive social thinkers of her time, was an enthusiastic advocate of eugenics. As she herself put it, “Negative eugenics, . . . the legal sterilization of the unfit . . . is now accepted as wise and just in many communities. . . . That society has a right to thus arrest its own decay is questioned only by a few extreme individualists.”³⁵ Although Gilman is not overly explicit about its place in *Herland*, Van’s characterization of the women as “Conscious Makers of People” accurately conveys the centrality of eugenics in their society. Eugenics was a popular theme in literature from the 1880s to World War II and especially so in utopian works, where we find it throughout the writings of Wells, Bellamy, and Morris. Francis Galton actually wrote, but did not publish, two works of utopian fiction, “Kantsaywhere” and “The Donoghues of Dunno Weir.”³⁶ Once again, this theme is not unique to modern utopias. Thomas More’s Utopians have a custom in which “the woman, whether maiden or widow, is shown naked to the suitor by a worthy and respectable matron, and similarly the suitor is presented naked before the maiden by a discreet man.”³⁷ More explains that this is so there will be no wedding-night surprises that may inhibit sexual attraction, but the eugenic purposes are implied (Bacon gives a more modest version in *New Atlantis* by having the bridal couple shown to mutual friends, who then report their findings). In Campanella’s *City of the Sun*, couples must get approval from the priests before procreating. Like Gilman, he considers children less a natural

right of individuals and more the foundation of the ideal society's future. In this, he echoes the first utopian and original eugenicist. Plato introduces his controversial idea through the analogy of artificial selection in domestic animals. Observing Glaucon's sporting dogs and game birds, Plato asks, "Do you breed from all indiscriminately? Are you not careful to breed from the best so far as you can?"³⁸ It should be the same for people, he continues, and therefore he proposes mating festivals at which couples are paired off by a lottery that has been rigged by the guardians in order that "there should be as many unions of the best of both sexes, and as few of the inferior as possible."³⁹

Malthus gave renewed expression to eugenics well before Galton, suggesting that "by an attention to breed, a certain degree of improvement similar to that among animals might take place among men." However, he also expressed the infeasible nature of this possibility: "As the human race, however, could not be improved in this way, without condemning all the bad specimens to celibacy, it is not probable that an attention to breed should ever become general."⁴⁰ This is just what Gilman does in *Herland*, following Plato not only in the communal rearing of children but also in the eugenic program in which the unfit are not allowed to reproduce and the best are allowed to reproduce more frequently.

As many writers have noted, "control over nature" has a tendency to extend to "control over man"—hence the scientific utopia as the basis for the modern dystopia. As Leiss notes, "The same scientific and technological order which promises to liberate mankind from its universal enemies (hunger, disease, and exhausting labor) also enables ruling elites to increase their ability to control individual behavior."⁴¹ *Herland* differs from most utopias in that it gives little attention to the theme of government, and in what clues it does give as to power structures, it differs again. Karl Popper criticized utopianism on the basis that its "attempt to realize an ideal state, using a blueprint of society as a whole, is one which demands a strong centralized rule of a few, and which therefore is likely to lead to a dictatorship."⁴² In scientific utopias, power is usually wielded by the scientists, exemplified in modern versions by Wells's "samurai." In *New Atlantis*, Bacon's scholars dress like priests and kings on formal occasions and hold councils to decide which of their discoveries and inventions will be made public in order to maintain stability. But in *Herland*, the situation is not clear. Moadine mentions the "Land Mother," and there are a few mentions of "councils," but generally the women of *Herland* seem to be in such agreement on everything that they are in no need

of government. The professional educators/child rearers presumably have the most influence, suggesting a sort of scientocracy. In explaining to the visitors how they approached the problem of “how to make the best kind of people,” Van says that “first this was merely the hope of bearing better ones, and then they recognized that however the children differed at birth, the real growth lay later—through education” (61). Yet he also notes that theirs was a “highly developed system of education so bred into them that even if they were not teachers by profession they all had a general proficiency in it—it was second nature to them” (126). They have something approaching an aristocracy in their “Over Mothers,” who are allowed to reproduce more frequently; as one would expect, this is a hereditary aristocracy, as we see exemplified in Ellador’s line.

Alys Eve Weinbaum notes that “the ‘pure’ national genealogy and the unpolluted pedigree of each citizen render genetic filiation the dominant ideology in Herland,”⁴³ and it is here that we see the dystopian (from our perspective) shades of the novel. Gilman has a very narrow conception of the ideal citizen, in both her fiction and nonfiction. Her nativist and restrictionist tendencies are suggested from the beginning with Van’s repeated observations that the Herlanders are “Aryan” and “white.” If they had wanted to reintroduce sexual reproduction and build a “bi-sexual” society, they could have done so anytime with the surrounding native men, but they had waited all this time for someone like Jeff, with his “high-bred face” (86). In an article titled “Is America Too Hospitable?” Gilman writes: “Since genus homo is one species, it is physically possible for all races to interbreed, but not therefore desirable. . . . We are perfectly familiar in this country with the various blends of black and white, and the wisest of both races prefer the pure stock.”⁴⁴ For Gilman, miscegenation was the very image of dystopia: “Internationalists, of the sort who wish to belong to none, but mix all racial ingredients into a smooth paste, should select an uninhabited island for their experiment.”⁴⁵

Herlander eugenics do not stop at race, however. Van observes that “they were a clean-bred, vigorous lot” and “lacked all morbid or excessive types”—“tall, strong, healthy, and beautiful as a race” (72, 78). The “lowest types” who are to be bred out obviously include the physically inferior and, perhaps more frighteningly, may also include those with a difference of opinion. As Jennifer Hudak suggests, “The fact that the Herlanders are ‘moved by precisely the same feelings, to the same end’ is best explained by their eugenic method of eliminating dissidents by refusing to allow them to bear and/or raise their

own children."⁴⁶ Gilman repeated a good deal of material from Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, but, though both employ eugenics as key aspects of their utopias, there are differences to be noted as well. When the Herlanders do not understand what "the poor" are, it does not reflect a commitment on Gilman's part to elevate and equalize society—rather, she wants, again, to "breed out . . . the lowest types" (83). Even next to other eugenic utopias of its day, *Herland* looks less humanitarian and more racist, nationalist, classist, and even totalitarian. In the end, biological reproduction and social education in *Herland* are no less "mechanical" than in that most famous of scientific dystopias—*Brave New World*.

Science Versus Utopia

Davis suggests that although both modern science and the genre of utopia share a common origin, common development, and many internal similarities, their relationship is not complementary. The problem is that whereas utopia requires stability, science is continually producing new knowledge and invalidating old theories. A paradox results wherein "either science will jeopardize the good society or . . . it will be corrupted unless society is good."⁴⁷ Huxley was well aware of this problem and thus has his reformed scientist, Mustapha Mond, elucidate the matter: "Every discovery in pure science is potentially subversive; even science must sometimes be treated as a possible enemy."⁴⁸ In a concise summation of this complex problem, Davis writes: "If science can continuously and endlessly alter the conditions of social life, can the utopian imagination conceive of a continuous and endless sequence of legal, institutional and administrative devices not only capable of adapting to successive changes in social life but also capable of guaranteeing their own transformation while maintaining harmony and stability in societies where resources are presumed to be limited and everyone, including the administrators, is assumed to be wicked? It is a tall order and I am not aware of a serious attempt that has been made at it."⁴⁹ It might be argued that *Herland* comes close. Hilary Rose writes of the novel that "there is one problem with this heaven: it is static."⁵⁰ Rose is mistaken, as Gilman makes it abundantly clear that her society is a dynamic one. Continual improvement is foremost on the mind of the Herlanders, whose "standard of perfection seems to get farther and farther away" (83). Van learns how their religion has evolved

from polytheism to monotheism to pantheism and how, in their system of education, they have “been working for some sixteen hundred years, devising better and better games for children” (107). He notes how an ethos of progress has been built into the society: “In each generation there was sure to arrive some new mind to detect faults and show need of alterations; and the whole corps of inventors was at hand to apply their special faculty at the point criticized, and offer suggestions” (77). Most of all, the very presence of the male explorers demonstrates the adaptability of the Herlanders, who agree to the marriages and are considering the reintroduction of a “bi-sexual” society.

The Herlander systems of education and religion resemble the institutional devices that Davis says a viable utopia would require. The “resources” problem has been solved by environmental engineering and population control, and the issue of “wickedness” has been, or, rather, is being, dealt with by their eugenics program. The legal and administrative requirements bring me to the detail in *Herland* that I find most intriguing: their laws. Lyman Tower Sargent notes that in the history of utopian fiction, “the most constant theme, one that can be found as early as More and that became central in the eighteenth century, is a distrust of lawyers and the whole system of laws.”⁵¹ Indeed, we find this very thing in *Looking Backward*: “We have no legislation. . . . If you will consider a moment . . . you will see that we have nothing to make laws about.”⁵² Yet, in *Herland*, as Moadine explains, unlike our legal systems, which go back thousands of years, they “have no laws over a hundred years old, and most of them are under twenty” (64). Why have the Herlanders introduced new laws? One possibility is that they are experiencing a “devolution” of some sort—a glitch in their eugenics program, an unexpected rise in the occurrence of “atavisms.” Moving from science fiction to scientific utopia, however, a more likely and theoretically interesting possibility is that the new laws relate to new knowledge and technology—precisely the sort of thing Davis suggests would be necessary.

In the end, Davis may be vindicated, rather than challenged, by the case of *Herland*. For one, it presents a unique case, given its population of parthenogenetic sisters—too removed from reality to be a “serious attempt.” Examining the dystopian dimension of *Herland* suggests other reasons that it does not realize the elusive “dynamic utopia.” It does, however, provide a wealth of conceptual interaction with previous scientific utopias that is not often dealt with in its critical reception. The attempts to enlist Gilman as a

forerunner of ecofeminism or a feminist critic of science, I have argued, are unfounded as well as unnecessary. It requires fewer interpretive leaps and provides deeper contextualization to read *Herland* in its position looking backward to the Baconian scientific utopia and forward to the technological dystopia.

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Notes

1. Nell Eurich, *Science in Utopia: A Mighty Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 79.
2. Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*, in *Three Early Modern Utopias*, ed. Susan Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 167.
3. J. C. Davis, "Science and Utopia: The History of a Dilemma," in *Nineteen Eighty-Four: Science Between Utopia and Dystopia*, ed. Everett Mendelsohn and Helga Nowotny (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1984), 21.
4. Charlotte Gilman Perkins, *Herland, The Yellow Wall-Paper, and Selected Writings*, ed. Denise Knight (New York: Penguin, 1999), 5; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page number.
5. Michael A. Bryson, *Visions of the Land: Science, Literature, and the American Environment from the Era of Exploration to the Age of Ecology* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 74.
6. E.g., Polly Wynn Allen, *Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 96; Dorothy Berkson, "'So We All Became Mothers': Harriet Beecher Stowe, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and the New World of Women's Culture," in *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*, ed. Libby Falk Jones and Sarah Webster Goodwin (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 103. Alex Shishin notes the unseen presence of industry in *Herland* and offers a comparison with Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Morris's *News from Nowhere* in "Gender and Industry in *Herland*: Trees as a Means of Production and Metaphor," in *A Very Different Story: Studies on the Fiction of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Val Gough and Jill Rudd (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), 101.
7. Hilary Rose, *Love, Power, and Knowledge: Towards a Feminist Transformation of the Sciences* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 219.

8. Bryson, *Visions of the Land*, 58.
9. Jane Donawerth, *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 28.
10. Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 153.
11. *Ibid.*, 152.
12. Vandana Shiva, "Science, Nature, and Gender," in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality*, ed. A. Garry and M. Pearsall (New York: Routledge, 1996), 268.
13. Sandra G. Harding, "Value-Free Research Is a Delusion," in "Does Ideology Stop at the Laboratory Door? A Debate on Science and the Real World," *New York Times*, October 22, 1989, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/22/weekinreview/ideas-trends-does-ideology-stop-laboratory-door-debate-science-real-world.html>.
14. Sandra G. Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 113.
15. Bacon deserves some defense on this front, if for no other reason than the frequency with which he is misquoted. Despite hundreds of printed attributions, nowhere does he write about "putting nature on the rack and forcing her to reveal her secrets"—this came from later commentators and editors. He did, on the other hand, write that "one does not have empire over nature except by obeying her." Francis Bacon, *The New Organon*, ed. Jisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 100.
16. Davis, "Science and Utopia," 22.
17. Bryson, *Visions of the Land*, 70.
18. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 2: *Sexchanges* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 75.
19. E.g., Rose, *Love, Power, and Knowledge*, 219; Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literature* (New York: Facts on File, 2006), 202; Angelika Bammer, *Partial Visions: Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s* (London: Routledge, 1991), 39; Birte Christ, "'If I Were a Man': Functions of the Counterfactual in Feminist Fiction," in *Counterfactual Thinking/Counterfactual Writing*, ed. Dorothee Birke, Michael Butter, and Tilman Köppe (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 195; Libby Falk Jones, "Gilman, Bradley, Piercy, and the Evolving Rhetoric of Feminist Utopias," in *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*, ed. Libby Falk Jones and Sarah Webster Goodwin (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 118; Janet Fiskio, "Apocalypse and Ecotopia: Narratives in Global Climate Change Discourse," *Race, Gender, and Class* 19, nos. 1–2 (2012): 20.
20. Bryson, *Visions of the Land*, 76.
21. *New Atlantis. Begun by the Lord Verulam, Viscount St. Albans: and Continued by R. H. Esquire*, in *Restoration and Augustan British Utopias*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 42. Robert Hooke and Richard Hawkins are the most commonly suggested authors.
22. My sources for this overview are primarily Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993); Karen J. Warren and Jim Cheney, "Ecological Feminism and Ecosystem Ecology," *Hypatia* 6 (1991): 179–97; Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 23–27; and John H. Zammito, Philip J. Ivanhoe, Helen

Longino, and Phillip R. Sloan, "Philosophical Approaches to Nature," *Philosophy and Medicine* 97 (2008): 63–136.

23. Amanda Graham, "Herland: Definitive Ecofeminist Fiction?" in *A Very Different Story: Studies on the Fiction of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, ed. Val Gough and Jill Rudd (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1998), 118.

24. Gilbert and Gubar, *No Man's Land*, 75.

25. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *The Gender and Science Reader*, ed. Muriel Lederman and Ingrid Bartsch (London: Routledge, 2001), 182.

26. Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. Edward Surtz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 76.

27. Ynestra King, "The Ecology of Feminism and the Feminism of Ecology," in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, ed. Mary H. MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre (Kansas City, Mo.: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 151–52.

28. Shishin, for example, claims that *Herland* is a "'green' utopian novel, embracing what would subsequently be called the Conservation Ethic and which evolved into the current ecological consciousness." Shishin, "Gender and Industry in Herland," 111.

29. Bryson, *Visions of the Land*, 78.

30. William Leiss, *The Domination of Nature* (Boston: Beacon, 1974), 16.

31. Plato, *Republic*, 159.

32. More, *Utopia*, 75–76.

33. *New Atlantis*, ed. Claeys, 42.

34. Thomas Robert Malthus, *An essay on the principle of population, as it affects the future improvement of society. With remarks on the speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and other writers* (London, 1798), 142–43.

35. Qtd. in Cynthia J. Davis, "His and Herland: Charlotte Perkins Gilman 'Represents' Lester F. Ward," in *Evolution and Eugenics in American Literature and Culture, 1880–1940*, ed. L. A. Cuddy and C. M. Roche (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2003), 84.

36. Manuscripts of these, edited by Lyman Tower Sargent, were published in *Utopian Studies*. Francis Galton, "The Eugenic College of Kantsaywhere," ed. Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopian Studies* 12, no. 2 (2001): 191–209; Francis Galton, "The Donoghues of Dunno Weir," ed. Lyman Tower Sargent, *Utopian Studies* 12, no. 2 (2001): 210–33.

37. More, *Utopia*, 110.

38. Plato, *Republic*, 158.

39. *Ibid.*, 159.

40. Malthus, *Essay on the principle of population*, 170–71.

41. Leiss, *Domination of Nature*, 17.

42. Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 169.

43. Alys Eve Weinbaum, "Writing Feminist Genealogy: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Racial Nationalism, and the Reproduction of Maternalist Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 2 (2001): 284.

44. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Is America Too Hospitable?" in *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Nonfiction Reader*, ed. Larry Ceplair (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 291.

45. *Ibid.*, 294.

46. Jennifer Hudak, "The Social Inventor: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the (Re)Production of Perfection," *Women's Studies* 32 (2003): 472.
47. Davis, "Science and Utopia," 25.
48. Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper, 1989), 231.
49. Davis, "Science and Utopia," 35.
50. Rose, *Love, Power, and Knowledge*, 219.
51. Lyman Tower Sargent, "Themes in Utopian Fiction in English Before Wells," *Science Fiction Studies* 10, no. 3 (1976): 277.
52. Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, ed. Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 123.