

# Reshaping the Balance: How Gilman Critiques and Constructs a Feminist Utopia in *Herland*

*Dengeyi Yeniden Şekillendirmek: Gilman, Herland'da  
Feminist Ütopyayı Nasıl Eleřtiriyor ve İnřa Ediyor?*

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## Reshaping the Balance: How Gilman Critiques and Constructs a Feminist Utopia in *Herland*

### Abstract

Based on the perspective of utopian fiction, this article examines Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* from three critical angles: social systems, gender consciousness, and ecological environment. In terms of social institutions, this article contends that Gilman uses *Herland* to criticise social Darwinism; in terms of gender consciousness, the article contends that Gilman designs the ideal characteristics of an independent woman by describing the duality of her characters; finally, in terms of the ecological environment, Gilman consciously connects women to Mother Earth, thus completing a critique of the industrial model of patriarchal reality and the problem of environmental protection. However, *Herland* also has some limitations. In some ways, the characterisation of women of purely Aryan descent reflects Gilman's ethnocentric tendencies. Gilman combines eugenics and feminism, and her sense of racial superiority arises from the interplay of the specific historical circumstances of the time. In any case, as a female utopian novel, its critique of the social reality of the time is profound, and its exploration of an ideal society is positive.

### Keywords

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*, feminism, utopian fiction, feminist fiction

### Öz

Ütopik türün bakış açısına dayanan bu makale, *Herland*'ı üç perspektiften incelemektedir: toplumsal yapı, cinsiyet bilinci ve ekolojik çevre. Makale, sosyal kurumlar açısından Gilman'ın *Herland*'ı sosyal Darwinizm eleştirisinde bulunmak için kullandığını, cinsiyet bilinci açısından bağımsız bir kadının ideal özelliklerini karakterlerin ikililiklerini çizerek tasarladığını ileri sürer. Son olarak, ekolojik çevre açısından Gilman kadınları bilinçli olarak Toprak Ana ile ilişkilendirerek endüstriyel ataerkil gerçeklik modelini ve çevreyi koruma sorununun eleştirisini tamamlamış olur. Bununla birlikte, *Herland*'ın da bazı kısıtlılıkları vardır. Bazı yönlerden, saf Aryan soydan gelme kadınların karakterizasyonu Gilman'ın etnomerkezci eğilimlerini yansıtmaktadır. Gilman soy ıslahı ve feminizmi birleştirir, yazarın üstün ırk algısı ise dönemin belirli tarihsel koşullarının etkileşiminden doğar. Her halükarda, feminist bir ütopya romanı olarak, *Herland*'ın toplumsal gerçeklik eleştirisi derin, ideal toplum incelemesi ise yapıcıdır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland*, feminizm, ütopik kurmaca, feminist kurmaca

## Introduction

Since the Renaissance author Thomas More first used the term “utopia” in his novels, it has become a symbol of a better society and has given rise to a new genre of fiction known as the utopian novel. The most important function of this genre is “social critique and the positive description of a new social system.”<sup>1</sup> The most important aspect of “utopia” is not that “it stands in for a coherent or fully realised ‘perfect’ world”; instead, “it represents the potential outcome of *fantasising as a creative practice*.”<sup>2</sup> However, utopian fiction is based on and has served patriarchal societies, both in its critique of current society and in its conception of the future society. A fundamental gender mindset is created by phallogocentric culture: women are always associated with ignorance, stupidity, and sin. Even positive images of women are always soft, naive, sensual, dependent, and in need of male protection, as Shakespeare exclaims in *Hamlet*, “Frailty, thy name is woman!”<sup>3</sup> In traditional utopian fiction, such gender mindsets and stereotypes have not been drastically altered. With the further awakening of women’s self-awareness and the flourishing of the feminist movement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, some female writers became aware of the patriarchal consciousness and the distortion and omission of women’s images in mainstream male utopian novels. As a result, they began to write feminist utopian novels, exposing and criticising women’s oppression in patriarchal societies and imagining a harmonious society with gender equality. As Lucy Sargisson points out, “feminism too has radically subversive potential, and for this reason, it finds utopia a comfortable position from which to critique. Writing from or towards a good place that is no place, glancing over her shoulder at the place whence she came, the utopian feminist escapes the restrictions of patriarchal scholarship.”<sup>4</sup>

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935), a well-known American feminist, is an outstanding representative author of feminist utopian works, and her utopian creations have had a profound social impact and drawn widespread academic interest. This body of research mainly takes a holistic approach to examine the relationship

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1 Gregory Claeys, *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 141.

2 Ramzi Fawaz, Justin Hall and Helen M. Kinsella, “Discovering Paradise Islands: the Politics and Pleasures of Feminist Utopias, A Conversation,” *Feminist Review* 116 (2017): 2. Emphasis in the original.

3 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Cedric Watts (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1992), 16.

4 Lucy Sargisson, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (London: Routledge, 1996), 41.

between Gilman's utopian concept and the entire feminist utopia, as well as its relationship with the social reality and feminist movement of the time. For example, Karen F. Stein focuses on "inclusion and exclusion" in feminist utopian fiction, arguing that the complete exclusion of males from *Herland* and the establishment of a single female utopian society allows Gilman to "depict a society where women could flourish and attain their potential as fully developed humans rather than as limited beings constrained by their dependence on men and their relegation to the burdensome obligations of the private home."<sup>5</sup> Second, the study of Gilman's feminist thought concentrates on the analysis of ecofeminism in two of her works, *Herland* and *The Yellow Wallpaper*. However, there is little scholarly research on how *Herland* constructs a comprehensive utopian society and thus completes the critique of social conditions at the time, in the context of the utopian genre. Therefore, in order to enrich the concrete interpretation of feminist utopian works, this article examines the feminist utopian novel *Herland*, exploring how it criticizes patriarchal society by focusing on the treatment of social systems, gender consciousness and ecological environment, and how it actively constructs an ideal society free of gender oppression. This article will also examine the image of "the other" in *Herland* in order to investigate how Gilman employs eugenics to achieve the "purity" of a feminist utopia.

### **The Critique and Construction of Social Systems in *Herland***

Gilman lived during "a time of great intellectual speculation and creativity in American thought."<sup>6</sup> This was a period when urbanisation, industrialization, and the secularisation process in the United States resulted in rapid material development and a slew of social problems and conflicts. Gilman witnessed the issues, trends, and movements of the American transition, and her thinking was influenced by feminism, Darwinism, Fabian socialism, and populism. Recognising that American society was plagued by problems in all areas, including religious beliefs, economic institutions, democracy, and women's status, she set out to write a utopian novel that would critique social reality and explore ways to overcome the problems to create a better society. As Robert C. Elliott notes, utopian fiction has a double function: "it establishes a

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5 Karen F. Stein, "Inclusion and Exclusion in Some Feminist Utopian Fictions," in *Women's Utopian and Dystopian Fiction*, ed. Sharon R. Wilson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2013), 123.

6 Ann J. Lane, *To Herland and beyond: the life and work of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (London: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 10.

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standard, a goal; and by virtue of its existence alone it casts a critical light on society as presently constituted.”<sup>7</sup>

Gilman starts by exploring a suitable political system in *Herland*. Since the Enlightenment, man has aimed to build a democratic, egalitarian and free social system, but this goal has never been fully realised in real society. Class, gender, racial and other inequalities have always existed. However, in *Herland*, true equality is achieved for all members of society. They enjoy the best possible upbringing and education from birth, grow up in a loving environment, obtain the necessary general and professional education in an enjoyable learning environment, and pursue their favourite and best work in their field of interest. There is no elaborate power structure, and everyone works equally in various positions based on their age and characteristics. What binds all members of society together is the sacred “mother-love.” “Mother-love with them was not a brute passion, a mere ‘instinct,’ a wholly personal feeling; it was - A Religion. It included that limitless feeling of sisterhood, that wide unity in service which was so difficult for us to grasp. And it was National, Racial, Human.”<sup>8</sup> In *Herland*, they worship only the motherhood, and the mother-love is “a Loving Power.”<sup>9</sup> It is both a religious and an administrative relationship. Under the banner of mother-love, *Herland* has achieved the most harmonious and fraternal political system of religion and state.

*Herland* has a prosperous and stable economy, and its citizens are well-off. When confronted with demographic pressures that may result in a decline in people’s standard of living, their solution is “not by a ‘struggle for existence’ which would result in an everlasting writhing mass. Neither did they 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.”<sup>10</sup> We can see Gilman’s sharp critique of the plundering of colonialist capital and social Darwinism, which believed in the law of the jungle. Gilman goes on to investigate peaceful solutions to development issues. In *Herland*, women negotiate an effective solution to population growth by having some members of society give up childbearing. They are not only effective in controlling population size, but also in improving population quality, and thus in this country, “the untroubled peace, the unmeasured plenty, the steady health, the large goodwill and smooth management which ordered everything, left nothing to overcome.”<sup>11</sup> In this way, *Herland* has eradicated poverty, ignorance, and crime, as well as achieved

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7 Robert C. Elliott, *The Shape of Utopia: Studies in a Literary Genre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 22.

8 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Herland* (Lisle: Project Gutenberg, 1992), 69.

9 Gilman, *Herland*, 114.

10 Gilman, *Herland*, 69.

11 Gilman, *Herland*, 100.

full development and common prosperity for all, serving as a model for the ideal society.

A complete society must be supported by three pillars: politics, economy, and culture. And *Herland* also presents a critique and construction of culture, focusing primarily on education, science, and the arts, among other things. The comparison of education between the two reflects the critique of education in real societies in *Herland*. First of all, Gilman completes her critique of education in real society with just one sentence – “I’m sick and tired of being educated.”<sup>12</sup> The fact that three male invaders, including the man who is so sick of education, learn their language and understand their history and culture in a very short period of time is the best indication of Herland’s educational success. Second, from birth, every child receives the best possible care. Children can obtain the necessary and best education in a loving environment while engaging in joyful play with their partners. Gilman exclaims, through the mouth of the male narrator, “they never knew they were being educated. They did not dream that in this association of hilarious experiment and achievement they were laying the foundation for that close beautiful group feeling into which they grew so firmly with the years. This was an education for citizenship.”<sup>13</sup> Gilman’s vision of education is the ultimate goal of education, a playful and invisible education in a fun and friendly environment rather than competition and oppression.

In the male-dominated real world, “the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office, and finance – in short, every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands.”<sup>14</sup> *Herland*, on the other hand, throws out all the men and gives all the power to women, giving them a platform to demonstrate their abilities and wisdom while constructing a beautiful home that is politically equal, economically prosperous, and culturally harmonious.

### **The Critique and Construction of Gender Consciousness in *Herland***

*Herland*’s critique and construction of gender consciousness is the most prominent theme in this feminist utopian novel. Through the portrayal of new female images, Gilman rethinks gender consciousness.

The forces of constraint within and outside of society have combined over the centuries to create gender stereotypes of men and women. Three men from a realistic patriarchal society enter this daughterhood with these stereotypes in *Herland*.

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12 Gilman, *Herland*, 34.

13 Gilman, *Herland*, 108.

14 Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 13.

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“Jeff, with his gentle romantic old-fashioned notions of women as clinging vines”<sup>15</sup>; obviously in Jeff’s eyes, women are soft and protected objects, dependent on men. Terry, on the other hand, categorises women as “those he wanted and those he didn’t; Desirable and Undesirable was his demarcation,”<sup>16</sup> implying that Terry views women as objects of men’s desire and instruments to satisfy it and that women are completely objectified. They believe that women are incapable of unity and that together they “scrap like anything-are frightfully jealous.”<sup>17</sup> However, as they learn more about Herland, they find that the women there are very different from their perceptions. “The independent women confound the three explorers’ expectations of ‘femininity.’”<sup>18</sup> Even when pitted against three little girls, they discover that they simply cannot win in terms of strength, speed, or intelligence, and eventually get caught by women. The women there can both climb trees and build houses, are generous, rational and tough, and can both protect and rule the country. They are in no way inferior to men in terms of physical strength and intellect, and have created a highly developed civilisation that is far superior to that of the real male society. It is clear that the women there have intersex characteristics and that female stereotypes were deconstructed and subverted. Finally, the male narrator has to consider the possibility that “those ‘feminine charms’ we are so fond of are not feminine at all, but mere reflected masculinity – developed to please us because they had to please us, and in no way essential to the real fulfilment of their great process.”<sup>19</sup> This reveals a patriarchal society’s construction of gender roles by culturally cementing so-called feminine gender characteristics through various means of discipline based on its needs. These feminine charms are even internalised by women as a sense of self. Women in *Herland* defy gender stereotypes and emerge as independent, free, and rational women. With a new gender ethos, they can have a new gender role. In a patriarchal society, women are always confined to the private sphere, such as the home, and even when they do leave the home, there are very few professions available to them, usually teachers, nurses, assembly line workers, and other relatively elementary jobs, while men often hold important sectors related to power. However, in *Herland*, women hold every position, from the president to judge, from architect to bricklayer. They do not have to accept the social construction of gender from birth in a single-gender society, but rather develop into a fully free person in their own right, not only a woman.

The construction of this new image of women is based on the following points: First, the author invents a society with only one gender. Women have no economic or personal attachment to men in a society where there are no men, and thus can

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15 Gilman, *Herland*, 23.

16 Gilman, *Herland*, 23.

17 Gilman, *Herland*, 59.

18 Karen F. Stein, “Inclusion and Exclusion in Some Feminist Utopian Fictions,” 120.

19 Gilman, *Herland*, 60.

only develop into independent women. By excluding men, the possibility of a gender dichotomy is fundamentally dissolved. Second, Herland socialises the reproductive function of “motherhood,” so that every child born is cared for by someone who is skilled at parenting, thereby freeing women from the burden of childbirth and parenting. Furthermore, in Herland, there is no strict separation between the public and private spheres, and the social upbringing of children dissolves the concept of the family, turning the entire society into one big family. Every job, including domestic work, is performed by professionals, relieving women of the burden of household chores. Furthermore, because of Herland’s single-sex reproduction, women there never know what sex is, and even after marrying a foreign man, they still have no understanding of it. In this way, women are neither slaves to their own desires nor objects of male desire, freeing them from sexual desire. Finally, each woman in Herland is able to receive the best education, find the field she is best suited to, and do the work she is most passionate about, ensuring that each woman can develop intellectually, physically, and psychologically fully and freely. If freeing women from childbearing, domesticity, and sexuality is a means of relieving them of their development, then receiving full, good, and fortunate love and education is a fundamental way of developing women. This is both Gilman’s vehement critique of constructed gender roles in patriarchal society and her hopeful exploration and construction of a viable path to women’s full development. Regardless of the controversy surrounding Gilman’s ascetic ideas, there is no denying that the path she proposes to liberate women is highly relevant.

### **The Critique and Construction of Ecology in *Herland***

Gilman is concerned not only with the fate of women, but also with the fate of nature. A patriarchal society not only oppresses women by gender, but also controls and plunders nature. Male-dominated societies’ anthropocentrism has caused a global ecological crisis that threatens not only the survival of humanity as a whole, but also the survival of the planet and all living things on it. According to ecofeminist Susan Griffin, “we no longer feel that we are part of this earth. We see other creations as enemies. The forests are disappearing, the air is polluted, the water is polluted - long ago we gave up on ourselves. Our way of life is destroying our environment, our flesh, even our genes.”<sup>20</sup> In this light, Gilman’s critique of patriarchal society must be accompanied by an ecological construction in order to create a perfect utopia from social to natural ecology.

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20 Judith Plant, *Healing the wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1989), 91.



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The construction of an ecological utopia in *Herland* is reflected above all in the author's conscious linking of women with Mother Earth. As ecofeminists claim, "women are closer to nature, whereas the tone of the male ethic is one of hatred of nature - women are better placed than men to fight for its preservation, and have a greater responsibility and hope to end the status quo of man ruling nature - to heal the alienation between man and non-man nature."<sup>21</sup> In fact, *Herland* provides a good example, "here was Mother Earth, bearing fruit. All that they ate was fruit of motherhood, from seed or egg or their product. By motherhood they were born and by motherhood they lived - life was, to them, just the long cycle of motherhood."<sup>22</sup> The author purposefully obscures the specific reference to "mother" to demonstrate that Mother Earth and human motherhood are all one, and that both are the source of life that feeds humanity. As a result, they extend the reverence and worship of motherhood to Mother Earth and take the initiative to control the population so that nature's original beauty and abundance are not overburdened. Furthermore, they are frugal, plan their homes and cities wisely, and place a high value on forests and other natural resources. Agriculture in *Herland* is far superior to industry, and agriculture has advanced "to the highest point."<sup>23</sup> Agriculture is inherently less harmful to the environment than industry, and it is a more harmonious way of producing with nature, "these careful culturists had worked out 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."<sup>24</sup> As a result, their farmland becomes as fertile as any healthy forest, with ever-increasing soil productivity. This farming model maximises crop characteristics in relation to seasons and cultivation methods, resulting in maximum production output and minimal resource consumption. In this way, they can eradicate poverty and disease while also living a healthy and prosperous life that does not pollute the environment. This contrasts with the over-cultivation and pollution that are so common in true patriarchal societies, and reflects Gilman's critique of the patriarchal approach to capitalist development and her search for an ideal model of development.

The attitude toward other non-human life forms also reflects the critique and construction of ecology in *Herland*. *Herland* is a large garden in and of itself, full of lovely flowers and trees of all kinds. The food on which the people rely is derived from tall fruit trees, which not only produce enough food but also sustain and maintain *Herland*'s ecological balance. Special forest rangers cherish and protect the trees. *Herland* not only treats its plants as if they were its own countrymen, but it also treats

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21 Li Yinhe, *Feminism* (Shanghai: Shanghai Culture Press, 2018), 140.

22 Gilman, *Herland*, 61.

23 Gilman, *Herland*, 79.

24 Gilman, *Herland*, 80.

its animals as if they were sisters. Except for birds and insects, there are not too many animals there, and only cats that do not meow live with them as human companions and friends. In other words, there is no hunting and almost no animal cruelty in Herland. All of them are vegetarians. When the women in Herland hear the foreign men talk about raising cows for meat and milk, especially about how they take the milk from the cows for their own consumption, people “heard it out, looking very white, and presently begged to be excused.”<sup>25</sup> They are also uncomfortable with the fact that dogs are chained and deprived of their freedom. Humans cruelly enslave and exploit animals for their own benefit, and industrialisation, urbanisation, and over-consumption have all resulted in pollution of forests, water, and air, which are all examples of anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism not only destroys biodiversity and the ecological balance of the planet, but also leads to disaster for humanity. However, Herland’s way of life and production is the polar opposite of this, resulting in the harmonious development of mankind and the environment.

What is especially noteworthy is that Gilman does not go to the extreme of opposing technology and development and advocating a return to primitive agriculture. She, on the other hand, values scientific progress and advocates for the rational application of science and technology to the creation of a harmonious ecology. Technology, civilisation, and nature coexist and reinforce each other in Herland. They use technology to create nutritious fruits and animals that are best suited for human companionship. Rather than destroying nature, technological advancements in this area alleviate its burden and benefit it. Furthermore, a good natural and social ecology keeps people physically and mentally healthy, allowing more advanced technology to be developed to serve both mankind and nature, resulting in a virtuous cycle of mutual promotion of technology and nature.

In sum, while criticising the anthropocentrism of patriarchal society, Gilman also constructs a new type of ecological holism in which humans live in harmony with nature. Gilman contends that the development of intensive agriculture can help to conserve nature; that population control and frugality can effectively improve natural ecology; that love for plants and animals, moderate development, and rational use of technology can help to achieve sustainable development; and that fostering a social atmosphere of solidarity, love, freedom, and equality can help to build a good social ecology, thus achieving the highest state of equality and harmony between human and human, and human and nature under the leadership of ecological holism.

But, after all, *Herland* is a utopian novel, and there is something to question and investigate in the construction of a gender-equal society. According to Ramzi, the segregationist idea of total exclusion of men from society is “no longer tenable within the framework of a postmodern left politics that embraces difference and where a range of liberal values like inclusion and diversity stand at the core of our

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25 Gilman, *Herland*, 50.

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programme.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, do conflicts vanish in a female-only society? In fact, there are still various interest groups of women with varying status, abilities, views, and so on, as well as the resulting social conflicts. It is also clear that the author lacks a detailed and concrete vision of how a social system should be built, instead implying that love and education can produce people with high moral qualities and a cooperative spirit, thereby avoiding all types of social conflicts. In addition, *Herland* has far too few animal species, which appears to contradict the benign ecological laws of biodiversity. In short, *Herland* has some problems and regrets as a result of its time and limitations, which leave room for further investigation. In any case, as a female utopian novel, its critique of the social reality of the time is profound, and its exploration of an ideal society is positive.

### Purification of Bloodline and Feminist Utopia

It is worth noting that racial purity is one of the marks of *Herland*. Even though there are only women in *Herland*, Gilman emphasises that they are Aryans, attempting to highlight that the ancestors of “herlanders” are white Europeans. “There was no doubt in my mind that these people were of Aryan stock, and were once in contact with the best civilization of the old world. They were ‘white’, but somewhat darker than our northern races.”<sup>27</sup> As evident from this passage, not only are the “herlanders” interested in eugenics, but the men also appear to be interested in racial superiority. There are only brilliant Aryans in *Herland*, which may reflect Gilman’s racism and ethnocentrism.

Furthermore, this feminist utopia has colonial overtones. Jennifer Burwell contends that the story of *Herland*’s origins retains the conventional characteristics of traditional utopian narratives, demonstrating that utopia is compatible with colonial impulses.<sup>28</sup> At the end of the novel, Ellador serves as *Herland*’s ambassador, accompanying Van on his journey through “hisland” to learn more about his homeland. This journey demonstrates the ambition of herlanders to explore and conquer the world. Herlanders are fascinated by the social civilization of “hisland.” Every time they hear Van speak about the culture of “hisland,” they carefully take notes from the observation and conversation in order to discard the dross and select the essence. “[W]hat 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 to use to make of

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26 Fawaz, Hall, and Kinsella, “Discovering Paradise Islands,” 9.

27 Gilman, *Herland*, 55.

28 Jennifer Burwell, *Notes on Nowhere: Feminism, Utopian Logic, and Social Transformation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 214.

it,” Van writes. They knew exactly what to ask and what to make of it.”<sup>29</sup> Perhaps this type of learning civilization behaviour is merely to learn from the “civilised world,” but it is consistent with the colonial thought that “knowledge is power” and “know first and then conquer.”<sup>30</sup>

Violence always follows the colonial process. In *Herland*, Gilman eliminates the coloured race with violence through the fictitious function of the novel. During the nation’s early struggles, “Herland” was devastated by a series of historic disasters and wars, such as volcanic eruptions, and many men died in battles and disasters. Except for slaves, only a small number of men survived, and slaves revolted. Male slaves were executed after the slave rebellion was put down, while young female slaves were allowed to live. “The remaining female slaves rendered invaluable services, teaching the skills they knew to the white people.”<sup>31</sup> Later, “herlanders” started to work, ploughed the fields, took care of each other, and developed a matriarchal society together. Their history is similar to the coexistence of Americans and Indians during the colonial period. In general, *Herland* is a survivor of foreign wars and civil wars, with a bloody history of conquest. After *Herland* gradually develops, the magical power of parthenogenesis causes the race to grow indefinitely, but female slaves do not have this sublime right. Gilman only grants the Aryans the privilege of parthenogenesis and turns them into “super mothers” in *Herland* in order to preserve the race’s purity. In Gilman’s view, white women are the “ethnic protectors” who could guarantee the stability of the race and ensure the racial progress of the country, so the coloured races are eliminated as “the other.”

In fact, the concept of superior race coincides with the last decade of 19th-century expansionism and becomes a strong reason for imperial expansionism. Gilman’s notion of racial superiority arose from specific historical interactions with the environment at the time. Although there was some cooperation between races from 1870 to 1920, the female movement essentially followed the apartheid method. Overall, the feminist movements of the late 19th century were campaigns for white women to fight for equality. There were two types of feminist movements during this period: black women and white women. Ann J. Lane finds that black women’s attention mainly focused on ethnic issues that united them with black men; white women’s reform focused on the prohibition of alcohol and purification of society in order to generate a sense of autonomy.<sup>32</sup> At the beginning of the 20th century, white women were good at applying the theory of evolution and formed a set of vocabulary that

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29 Gilman, *Herland*, 60.

30 Michel Foucault, “The Eye of Power,” in *The Impossible Prison: A Foucault Reader*, ed. Alex Farquharson (Nottingham: Nottingham Contemporary, 2004), 10.

31 Gilman, *Herland*, 57.

32 Ann J. Lane, *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader: The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Fiction* (New York: Patheon Books, 1980), 16.

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implicitly expressed the low status of non-western and coloured women. With this influence, Gilman excludes non-white women from her feminist utopia, reflecting racial prejudice, the relativity of the utopia, and her ideology.

### Conclusion

*Herland*, written in the style of a utopian novel, reflects Gilman's feminist advocacy through brilliant ideas, fantastic imagery, and vivid language. It is a comprehensive critique of patriarchal society through social forms, gender consciousness, and ecological environment, as well as a meticulous construction of an ideal society in which women's values are manifested without gender oppression. Certainly, the work has some shortcomings due to the limitations of her time. For example, Gilman incorporates eugenic ideas into feminism while also expanding the scientific discourse of eugenics into the literary imagination. At the same time, some of *Herland*'s plot settings show colonial ideas. The real world is far more complex than Gilman's small, isolated imaginary utopia, and her vision is unlikely to be a panacea for women's immediate emancipation and the crises confronting humanity. However, "we nonetheless must not give up on our efforts to imagine a better society," Erin McKenna insists, "and to do so in ways that will lead to actions to make that better society a reality."<sup>33</sup> It is undeniable that her critique and construction of a patriarchal society are conducive to enhancing women's sense of autonomy, constructing women's values and promoting women's awakening, thereby contributing to their true emancipation. And "the advancement of women around the world will result in more harmonious gender relations and less conflict, making the world a better place."<sup>34</sup>

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