



**Parthenogenesis, Eugenic Motherhood, and the Erasure of Men in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Herland and Mary E. Bradley Lane's Mizora
A Comparative Study in Feminist Utopian Fiction**

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Abstract

This article interprets two classic utopian novels written entirely by women, Herland (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Mizora (1890) by Mary E. Bradley Lane, as biopolitical imaginings, instead of merely feminist fantasies of liberation. This study claims that both novels uphold an idealized picture of societies where women have replaced men in reproductive, educational, and social control functions, but the utopian images rely on the ability to transform reproduction into a political system that can be controlled. Through extensive samples from the novels themselves, comparative close textual analysis, and the incorporation of feminist utopian theory, the account of the history of eugenics, Michel Foucault's notions of biopower and the politics of reproduction, this article demonstrates how parthenogenesis, scientific reproduction, idealized motherhood, and the absence of men serve as tools for the production of ideal citizens. Herland's idea of reproduction is sacralized, disciplined in a collective manner and exclusionary to the races considered less desirable, whereas Mizora's is a truly eugenic and racially exclusive perfection of the female body. The comparison highlights the dual nature of the reproductive utopia, one that frees women from the control of the patriarchy, and another that creates new regimes of bodily management. The article ends with a discussion of the moral boundaries of women-only reproductive utopias and why such concepts remain relevant when discussing reproduction, race and politics of life.

Keywords: *feminist utopia, biopolitics, parthenogenesis, eugenics, motherhood, reproductive politics, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Mary E. Bradley Lane*

التكاثر العذري، والأمومة المحسنة للنسل، ومحو دور الرجل في روايتي "هيرلاند" لشارلوت بيركنز

جيلمان و"ميزورا" لماري إي. برادلي لين
دراسة مقارنة في أدب الخيال اليوتوبي النسوي

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ملخص



تتناول هذه المقالة روايتين يوتوبيتين كلاسيكيتين كتبتهما كاتبتان بالكامل، وهما "هيرلاند" (1915) لشارلوت بيركنز جيلمان و"ميزورا" (1890) لماري إي. برادلي لين، باعتبارهما تصورات بيوسياسية، بدلاً من كونهما مجرد خيالات نسوية للتحرر. وترجم هذه الدراسة أن كلتا الروائيتين تدعمان صورة مثالية لمجتمعات حلت فيها النساء محل الرجال في وظائف الإنجاب والتعليم والرقابة الاجتماعية، إلا أن هذه الصور اليوتوبية تعتمد على القدرة على تحويل الإنجاب إلى نظام سياسي قابل للسيطرة. من خلال عينات واسعة من الروايات نفسها، وتحليل نصي مقارن دقيق، ودمج نظرية اليوتوبيا النسوية، وسرد تاريخ تحسين النسل، ومفاهيم ميشيل فوكو عن السلطة البيولوجية وسياسات الإنجاب، تُبين هذه المقالة كيف تُستخدم التكاثر العذري، والتكاثر العلمي، والأمومة المثالية، وغياب الرجال كأدوات لإنتاج مواطنين مثاليين. إن فكرة هيرلاند عن الإنجاب مقدسة، ومنضبطة بشكل جماعي، وتستبعد الأعراق التي تُعتبر أقل استحساناً، بينما تمثل فكرة ميزورا كملاً حقيقياً لتحسين النسل وحصرياً عرقياً لجسد الأنثى. تُبرز المقارنة الطبيعية المزدوجة ليوتوبيا الإنجاب، إحداها تُحرر المرأة من سيطرة النظام الأبوي، والأخرى تُنشئ أنظمة جديدة لإدارة الجسد. تختتم المقالة بمناقشة الحدود الأخلاقية ليوتوبيا الإنجاب الخاصة بالنساء فقط، ولماذا تظل هذه المفاهيم ذات صلة عند مناقشة الإنجاب والعرق وسياسات الحياة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: يوتوبيا نسوية، السياسة الحيوية، التوالد العذري، تحسين النسل، الأمومة، سياسات الإنجاب، شارلوت بيركنز جيلمان، ماري إي. برادلي لين

1. Introduction

Feminist Utopias of the late 19th and early 20th centuries depict over and over again the possibility of alternative societies where women, liberated from patriarchal marriage and from male authorities, control reproduction, education, morality, and the structuring of social life. In this tradition, the all-female commonwealth transforms into a thought experiment: "What sort of citizen could a society be if it excluded men, deciding on who is born, how they were raised, and what kind of citizen the community would be? The concept is both liberating and disturbing: freedom, which it envisions, goes hand-in-hand with the complete grasp of life itself (Bartkowski, 1989; Sargisson, 1996).

These are the two most important English-language experiments of this sort. Herland, a secluded community of women that has been discovered by a woman heroine, a novel by feminist writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1915/1979), was published serially in 1915 and rediscovered for modern readers by Ann J. Lane in the late 1970s, and describes a civilization of women that does not need a man. Mary E. Bradley Lane's earlier work, Mizora (1880/1881, 1890/2000), envisions a hidden underground kingdom of fairy haired women who have acquired the chemical formula of life, and men have disappeared. In both, men simply do not appear as a by-product of the narrative, but rather as the precondition for allowing the reproduction of men to be reconfigured as the pivot point of social order. In both, men simply do not appear as a by-product of the narrative, but rather as the



precondition that allows the reproduction of men to be reconfigured as the pivot point of social order.

They are typically read as feminist Utopias, and for good reason; they remove the concept of women's body being owned by men, give intellectual and physical capabilities to women and do not impose the sexual availability to women with the notion of womanhood. However, there are troubling systems of control upon which these better worlds are built when you read a bit closer. The utopias rely on disciplining, regulating bodies, and reproduction, motherhood, education, and social difference, which are intensified to liberate women, rather than to relax them (Seitler, 2003; Broad, 2009).

While there have been many studies on Herland and Mizora as feminist utopias, relatively little has been written on the manner in which they redefine reproduction as a biopolitical system, and current biopolitical or eugenic readings focus on each novel individually (Christensen, 2017; Tavera, 2018; Broad, 2009). This article fills this space by comparing the roles of parthenogenesis, motherhood, education and the exclusion of men as means to social design across both texts and by posing the question of what moral architecture this social design suggests?

The following 5 questions are used to analyze. In what ways are Herland and Mizora a political system of reproduction? What is the impact of parthenogenesis on the traditional roles of men and women and the heterosexual family model? How can motherhood and education be used to make “ideal citizens”? How do these Utopias bring together feminist emancipation and biopolitical control? So what are the moral boundaries of women's reproductive utopia?

The article suggests that Herland and Mizora build reproductive utopia as a “biopolitical design.” But in both novels, the decontracting of the male is not just a liberating of the female; it is a reorganisation of the processes of reproduction, motherhood, education, and citizenship into controlled systems that create ideal subjects. Herland attempts to achieve this goal through a motherhood that is sacralized and disciplined collectively; Mizora through a scientific and racially exclusive body-perfection. Comparatively, the two texts reveal the liberating promise and the biopolitical price of the feminist utopia that is created by the same gesture (Foucault, 1978; Weinbaum, 2004).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Feminist Utopian Fiction

The feminist utopian fiction can be described as the representation of alternative societies in order to make the present one seem contingent. Key themes of the genre



are women-only or woman-centered societies, the criticism of patriarchy, the reorganisation of the family, increasing female education and wide programmes of social reform, as identified by critics like Bartkowski (1989), Bammer (1991) and Sargisson (1996). Kessler (1995) shows that there is much more than an eccentric in Herland and Mizora, as it is part of a sustained project of American women's writing before 1950. Lewes (1995) and Pfaelzer (1984) examine these stories as they present utopia as a critique to the reader's world through the discovery plot, which is an outsider who encounters a hidden society. The novel's feminist credentials were confirmed for Gilman by Ann J. Lane (1990) and subsequent critics, who also raised the issues of essentialism and racial hierarchy that would be further explored by later critics.

A second tradition considers reproduction and motherhood as political institutions instead of facts of nature. Rich (1976) makes an important distinction between motherhood as an experience and motherhood as an institution, which enables mothering to be simultaneously a power and a place of discipline. Firestone (1970) says that the subordination of women is grounded in their biological reproduction and suggests its technological replacement—the idea that rings particularly true for these utopias, which are part of the parthenogenetic and laboratory reproductive histories of women. Beauvoir (1949/2011) discusses how woman is made into Other and restricted to immanence by her reproductive function, and Butler (1990) challenges the naturalness of sex and gender categories. These theorists collectively shape reproduction as a political battleground where the body of a woman is used and regulated.

2.2 Biopolitics and the Management of Life

The theoretical pivot of this article is the notion of biopolitics. What Foucault (1978) has called "biopower" is a form of power that does not cease to be exercised, but rather to emerge through history 'managing populations, health, sexuality, reproduction' with the aim of 'fostering certain forms of existence' and allowing others wither. It is in his lectures that Foucault (2003) associates this logic with state racism, the process by which people who are worth living are separated from those who can be killed. In a radicalizing twist, Agamben (1998) uses the concept of "bare life", the body that is shorn of rights and consequently made subject to the sovereign power; on the other hand, Esposito (2008) presents a new understanding of biopolitics as an immunitary operation through which the community is safeguarded by excluding what endangers it. Rose (2007) carries this discussion forward into the biomedicine era and politics of life itself. These frameworks provide the vocabulary to read the utopian management of reproduction as an idealizing technology of politics.



2.4 Eugenics and Utopian Social Design

the body of scholarship on eugenics is of necessity addressed here, as both novels envision an improvement in the human species that has a moral downside to it. The term was coined by Galton 1883 and the deliberate improvement of human stock was presented as a social good by historians like Kevles 1985, Paul 1995, Stern 2005 and Ordoover 2003, who document the influence of eugenic thinking selective reproduction, biological betterment, social purification, and excluding the “unfit” on Progressive Era reform in the United States. Kline (2001), for his part, demonstrates the ways in which eugenics integrated the control of women's sexuality with a new “reproductive morality” and Weinbaum (2004) reveals the existence of a “race/reproduction bind” in contemporary thinking. In literary studies, Seidler (2003) discusses Gilman's eugenic feminism, Tavera (2018) illuminates the disabled body as the “genealogy of Herland's parthenogenesis,” Class (2024) explores anesthetic utopianism and eugenic feminism in Gilman, Christensen (2017) redefines Herland as a scientific utopia whose control over population tips over into technological dystopia, and Broad (2009) investigates the impossibility of eugenic feminism in Mizora because of the racist ideology of eliminating difference. Gilman's broader thought is described as eugenic and evolutionary in Allen (2009), Davis (2010) and Egan (1989).

Feminism is typically associated with existing scholarship, which often lauds Herland and Mizora as feminine American alternatives to patriarchal society, or else condemns a single novel's eugenic logic. What is relatively underdeveloped, however, is a sustained side by side biopolitical reading that considers the two texts as variations of the same design, a design that transforms the process of reproductive control, social discipline, and production of ideal citizens into the very material of utopia. This article provides that comparison.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The analysis is based on four interwoven strands of theory. Feminist utopian theory (Bartkowski, 1989; Sargisson, 1996; Kessler, 1995) offers a means to analyse women-only societies and their alternative notions of gender, family, education, power etc., and challenges the notion of utopia as a positive ideal template. The core of this lens is provided by biopolitics (Foucault, 1978, 2003; Agamben, 1998; Esposito, 2008; Rose, 2007) which discusses how reproduction, motherhood, and population can be managed as a technology for promoting certain lives and excluding others. Reproductive politics (Rich, 1976; Firestone, 1970) explains how each novel liberates reproduction from the male sexuality and from the patriarchal



marriage and how it is at the same time liberating and disciplining. Eugenics studies (Galton, 1883; Kevles, 1985; Stern, 2005; Weinbaum, 2004) sheds light on the darker side of the eugenics hopes of creating the perfect citizen and purging weakness, disorder, or difference from the social body.

Feminist utopian theory points to the emancipatory project, reproductive politics to the mechanism, biopolitics to the form of power that the mechanism unleashes, and eugenics studies to the exclusions through which the resultant “perfection” is realized: these strands are not antithetical to one another, but complementary to the other.

3.2 Methodology

The study uses comparative close textual analysis. It examines how *Herland* and *Mizora* represent parthenogenesis, scientific reproduction, motherhood, education, social discipline, male absence, and the production of ideal citizens, attending to narrative framing, the perspective of the outsider-narrator, and the rhetoric through which each society explains itself. Interpretive claims are anchored in numerous direct samples from the two primary works, each set in a distinct typeface and followed by an APA citation, and these samples are read against the theoretical and historical scholarship outlined above. Because the recovered editions are not consistently paginated, quotations are located by chapter (and, for *Mizora*, by part and chapter), following common practice for classic works (American Psychological Association, 2020).

4. Parthenogenesis and the End of Patriarchal Reproduction in *Herland*

The founding event of *Herland* is reproductive, and the novel stages its central revelation as a moment of comic incomprehension. When the three male explorers finally ask the question that has obsessed them, the answer dismantles every assumption they have carried into the valley:

“No,” she answered quietly. “There are no men in this country. There has not been a man among us for two thousand years.” (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 4)

The calm of Somel’s reply is itself an argument. Where the men expect mystery, danger, or hidden husbands, the women treat the absence of men as an ordinary fact of two millennia’s standing. The mechanism that makes this possible is then named in the deliberately deflating idiom of natural science, as the sociologist-narrator Vandyck reaches for an analogy from entomology:



“Well—there are some rather high forms of insect life in which it occurs. Parthenogenesis, we call it—that means virgin birth.” (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 4)

Glossing the founding miracle as “virgin births”, Gilman is doing a double gesture, using the language of insect biology. She makes reproduction secular (non-divine, non-sexual), and she makes it natural (biological, not mythical). Tavera (2018) interprets that same entomological perspective as a satirical reversal of fin-de-siècle sex education that inverts parthenogenesis as an argument for the mother's choice and her body's autonomy. The effect is emancipatory, dismantling the linkage between sexuality, marriage, and reproduction that is the foundation of patriarchal society; Firestone's (1970) thesis about the material basis of women's subordination their reproductive dependence on men is fulfilled in an uncanny way in the fiction.

Gilman makes the men's patriarchal expectations her chief satirical target, and nowhere more sharply than in Terry, who cannot conceive of women defined by anything other than their relation to men:

“What does a man care for motherhood when he hasn't a ghost of a chance at fatherhood? ... What a man wants of women is a good deal more than all this ‘motherhood’!” (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 5)

Terry's reaction reveals the notion that women's femininity is for men to desire; he doesn't value a femininity that isn't about sexual availability, but it is about the nurturing of children. Terry's reaction exposes the assumption that there is femininity for women only in order to satisfy male desire; that there is a femininity associated with motherhood that is not about sexual availability, and isn't about him. In his repeated confusion the reader is led to understand that the feminine charms of which he is missing are not natural to women, but to the male demand, which makes the denaturalisation of the gender close to what Butler (1990) calls denaturalisation. Thus self-possession in the women becomes a critique, revealing as cultural what the visitors consider to be biological (Lewes, 1995).

But the freeing parthenogenesis is not individual, it is absorbed into a collective system from the first birth. The novel's story of its inception elevates the first mother to sacred status and makes of a natural event a national religion of birth:

... then the miracle happened one of these young women bore a child. ... they decided it must be a direct gift from the gods, and placed the proud mother in the Temple of Maaia their Goddess of Motherhood under strict watch. (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 5)

It is telling that the “strict watch” is no longer in use. Whether it is the creation of a baby or the birth of a child, in the case of the reproduction of Herlander, it is



constantly supervised, sacralized, and oriented towards the survival of the group, and not the individual. Motherhood is never a private possession, but it is the organizing principle of citizenship, hence the break with the patriarchal reproduction doesn't dissolve the authority over the body but it moves it out from the patriarchal family and to the collective (Rich, 1976). Herland is truly about the liberation of women from the role of reproduction as defined by the patriarchy, and at the same time, overcoming the need for men to reproduce in an organizationally structured fashion. For Gilman, Liberation and reorganization are two terms that refer to the same act (Christensen, 2017). The next section looks at what happens when that "collective order" evolves from founding the population to improving it.

5. Eugenic Motherhood and Social Perfection in Herland

If parthenogenesis founds Herland, deliberate selection sustains it. The novel's most striking move is to recast mothering not as instinct but as conscious manufacture, and Vandyck records the distinction in language that should give the reader pause even as it admires:

... they were Mothers ... in the sense of Conscious Makers of People. Mother-love with them was not a brute passion, a mere "instinct," a wholly personal feeling; it was a religion. (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 6)

A "Conscious Maker of People" is someone who sees reproduction as a conscious social production project and elevates mother-love to the status of a religion, which is almost as sacred as the law, and therefore unquestionable. Rich's (1976) concept of motherhood as experience and as institution is informative: Here Rich's distinction between motherhood as experience and motherhood as institution is enlightening; Herland seems to eliminate the paternalistic institution of motherhood, but it creates a new institution, one that regulates who can be a mother, how often, and to what national purpose. This is the "eugenic feminism" Seineteller calls it (2003), a feminism where women's power is seen in the conscious collective control of reproduction.

That management becomes explicit when population pressure forces a reckoning. The novel does not flinch from the vocabulary of the eugenic movement contemporary with its writing:

There followed a period of "negative eugenics" which must have been an appalling sacrifice. ... they had to forego motherhood for their country and it was precisely the hardest thing for them to do. (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 6)

Gilman frames the restriction of births as patriotic self-denial, the renunciation of one's deepest desire for the good of the nation; the rhetoric of sacrifice masks the underlying fact that some women will simply not be permitted to reproduce. The



selective principle is then stated with disarming directness, as Vandyck summarizes the system to the reader:

... you make Motherhood the highest social service a sacrament, really; that it is only undertaken once, by the majority of the population; that those held unfit are not allowed even that ... (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 6)

“Those that are considered unfit are not to be allowed that.” The hinge of the entire utopia is the clause. Being judged unfit is to be ruled unfit for reproduction and the judgement of fitness is made by the collective population and not the individual. This is biopower, as Foucault (1978) accurately describes it: a power that encourages certain types of life while tacitly excluding others and it is this eugenics of historical power that Herland can be compared to, one that was pervasive in Progressive period reform and one that Gilman herself affirmed in her non-fiction (Kline, 2001; Allen, 2009; Davis, 2010). This passage is textually incontrovertible because, as Tavera (2018) claims, the novel hides behind its protection of reproductive autonomy a positive eugenic urge to get rid of bodies that are impaired or disabled in the utopia.

Having limited reproduction in quantity, the women turn to its improvement in quality, and the timescale of the project reveals its systematic ambition:

And then they set to work to improve that population in quality since they were restricted in quantity. This they had been at work on, uninterruptedly, for some fifteen hundred years. (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 6)

Fifteen centuries of uninterrupted selective improvement describe not a garden tended with love but a breeding program pursued with patience, and Christensen (2017) is right to note that the Herlanders' mastery of their population, impressive on one level, edges the novel toward the technological dystopia it appears to disavow. The treatment of children completes the design, for in Herland the child is not private property but public responsibility, raised in the open rather than secluded in the isolated household:

... whereas our children grow up in private homes and families ... here they grew up in a wide, friendly world, and knew it for theirs, from the first. (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 9)

This communal rearing is truly progressive, as it is a rejection of the rights of men to children and a valorization of the rearing of children as a highly skilled collective enterprise, but it is also a biopolitical, in which the child is treated as one of the parts of a planned social system, an object of cultivation for the good of the population (Foucault, 1978). The other way of saying reproduction, is education: not only is an ideal citizen born, but he's made. Herland's maternal utopia, therefore, relies on a paradox: women are free of the oppression of men, but reproduction is not free of



social control, and the love that fuels the matrix is the force through which it rules (Seitler, 2003).

6. Mizora and the Eugenic Fantasy of the Perfect Female Citizen

Where *Herland* veils its biopolitics in maternal religion, *Mizora* states it openly. The narrator, a dark-haired Russian noblewoman named Vera Zarovitch, registers the society's defining feature at her first encounter with its people, and the detail she records is not their kindness or wealth but their uniformity of type:

We entered a magnificent salon, where a large assembly of ladies regarded me with unmistakable astonishment. Every one of them was a blonde. (Lane, 1890/2000, Part 1, Chapter 2)

The directness of the "every one of them was a blonde" puts, before any explanation, the idea that this perfection is not due to the random meeting of two people, but to selection. Vera, who twice refers to herself as a brunette, is a dark figure against which Mizoran whiteness is defined and Broad (2009) maintains that the novel's feminist utopia relies on a racist fantasy of eradicating difference through science. When the explanation finally comes from the Preceptress, the suspicion of the moral hierarchy is confirmed:

"We believe that the highest excellence of moral and mental character is alone attainable by a fair race. The elements of evil belong to the dark race." (Lane, 1890/2000, Part 2, Chapter 1)

This is eugenic doctrine in its baldest form: moral worth is mapped onto complexion, and virtue is racialized. When Vera asks what became of the dark-complexioned people visible in the old portraits that line the gallery, the Preceptress answers with a brevity whose calm is more chilling than any cruelty:

"And what became of the dark complexions?" ... "We eliminated them." (Lane, 1890/2000, Part 2, Chapter 1)

"We eliminated them." The two words refer to a founding action of racial purity, on which the entire utopia is based, and Lane has a quiet hesitation claiming that the beauty of Mizoran is rooted in education, but not in the elimination of complexion the narrative structure itself has already made racial engineering a prerequisite for the ideal world (Broad, 2009; Weinbaum, 2004). This sentence very clearly aligns with Foucault's (2003) description of state racism, which involves splitting a population into two groups: 'life worth fostering' and 'life that may be let die'. Reproduction in *Mizora* is the means of that division, and a laboratory science: before the possibility of men being restored to the vote and regaining their former dominance, the Mizorans chose extinction rather than subjugation.



... a prominent scientist proposed to let the race die out. Science had revealed the Secret of Life. (Lane, 1890/2000, Part 2, Chapter 3)

The "Secret of Life" is the discovery that men are reproductively unnecessary, and the Preceptress unveils it to Vera in the Chemist's Laboratory, before a microscope, with the gravity of a sacred mystery rendered in scientific terms:

... you are now looking upon the germ of all Life ... Know that the MOTHER is the only important part of all life. In the lowest organisms no other sex is apparent. (Lane, 1890/2000, Part 2, Chapter 3)

The maternal germ is the only necessary precondition for life, and Lane gives the idea of Mizoran separatism more of a scientific basis than a mythic, the opposite of Gilman's religious basis for the same concept. The "race/reproduction bind" was coined by Weinbaum (2004), who talks about his society of Mizrahs as a society where to control reproduction is to control race. The Preceptress takes great pains to emphasize that science is not the source of life, but it is "magic" that forces nature to do her bidding, and her justification is expressed with directness which Herland never allows.

... we can control Nature's processes of development as we will. ... Would not your own land be happier without idiots, without lunatics, without deformity and disease? (Lane, 1890/2000, Part 2, Chapter 3)

The rhetorical question assumes its own answer: a happier world is one cleansed of idiocy, lunacy, deformity, and disease, and the means of cleansing is the regulation of reproduction. Here the eugenic impulse that *Herland* clothes in maternal devotion stands fully exposed as the prevention of unwanted life (Stern, 2005; Kevles, 1985). Education completes the design, extending the laboratory's logic into the nursery on the principle that environment can perfect even unfavorable inheritance:

... the child of a Mizora mother is always an improvement upon herself. ... a being environed from its birth with none but elevating influences, will grow up amiable and intelligent though inheriting unfavorable tendencies. (Lane, 1890/2000, Part 2, Chapter 3)

Education in Mizora is therefore a continuation of reproductive engineering: both school and laboratory aim to produce the ideal citizen; and the outcome is a society devoid of crime, conflict or want, but also of difference, dissent and the dark-skinned ancestors whose portraits the Preceptress can't stop thinking about (Broad, 2009). The analytic question that must be answered in order to make this utopia possible is which must be eliminated men, the dark race, deformity, disease, and finally variation itself. In contrast, maternal organization as outlined in *Herland* is construed as ethical progress, while in Mizora, the movement towards female utopia is closer



to a eugenic fantasy, one in which social difference is eliminated, social bodies are perfected through science, and bodies are regulated. (Seitler, 2003, Christensen, 2017)

7. The Erasure of Men: Liberation, Anxiety, and Social Redesign

But in both novels the lack of male presence is not merely a story element, it is what makes it possible for each society to be rethought in a truly novel way. But the two books argue that absence in two different ways, and that difference is informative. In *Herland*, the men disappear from history, by war and sealing of the valley; the desolate women acquire a parthenogenetic potential that creates a new race; the men do not exist but are remembered: a prelude to the beginning, as it were (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 5). Whereas in *Mizora* men are deliberately let die out once they are no longer needed by science, and the narrator feels their absence first as an anomaly, a freedom from being watched:

I noticed with greater surprise than anything else had excited in me, the marked absence of men. ... There was not a lock or bolt on any door in it. (Lane, 1890/2000, Part 1, Chapter 3)

The fact that there isn't a lock or bolt on any door suggests that one can be removed from the world only in tandem with the other: in *Mizora*, the disappearance of men is the disappearance of danger. The novel is also a historically and architecturally masculine, because the elimination of men equates with the elimination of social pathology (Lane, 1890/2000, Part 2, Chapter 2). The Preceptress makes her point in terms of biological purity, explaining the long process of the elimination of the male stock:

It was long years I should say centuries—before the influence of the coarser nature of men was eliminated from the present race. (Lane, 1890/2000, Part 2, Chapter 3)

To talk about removing “the coarser nature of men” is to talk about making them pure, removing something that is not them and to talk about removing the finer nature of women is to talk about removing an element that is not part of them, which is to say a contaminant which is to be purged. And Esposito does well to remind us that the immunitary account of biopolitics (2008) has it that the community secures its life by walling out what it sees as foreign, but that walling out what is “foreign” closes off the possibility of growing through difference. In these utopias, the analysis of woman as the Other is precisely inverted, however: It is now the man who is the threatening difference that marks off the harmonious community.



However, the men are erased as well and reflect a utopian fear. A society that has to expel an entire sex to become harmonious shows that it is not really harmonious, it is only not in conflict. This anxiety is expressed in the fear of the male return: when three men appear, the balance is upset, and the tension of the novel, climaxing in a moment when Terry attempts to assault his wife Alima and the men are sent away, is directly linked to the intruding males and their lack of a place in the novel's society (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 12). Society, difference, sexuality, gender difference and antagonism have been simplified, and then erased this order can imagine no way to include sexual difference except by excluding it, making utopia possible, but brittle (Sargisson, 1996).

The central question that this section poses is whether absence of men leads to equality or simply to the replacement of one system of control with another. The evidence points to the latter. The erasure of men sets free women from patriarchal domination, which is a good thing, but it does so by replacing it with another regime, one collective in Herland, one scientific and racial in Mizora, that is equally all-encompassing of bodies and reproduction. Thus male absence is a sort of liberation and design strategy, it breaks one hierarchy, and simultaneously creates another. The utopias are not free of the management of life, they move the management of life elsewhere and they sharpen the methods of managing life (Foucault, 2003; Rose, 2007).

8. Comparative Discussion: Feminist Liberation or Biopolitical Control?

The two novels' side-by-side reading shows they are not two experiments, but variations on a single design. They are both of them about the redesign of society and both of them about the transformation of the female body into the basis for a planned future: but in different languages, and to different extents, each is a threat. The samples collected above permit a comparison of the contrast between the Gilman's "Conscious Makers of People" and a motherhood that "was a religion" (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 6) and Lane's scientist who proposed to "let the race die out" and her Preceptress who replied "We eliminated them" (Lane, 1890/2000, Part 2, Chapters 1, 3). **A comparison of the above is summarized below.**

Element	<i>Herland</i>	<i>Mizora</i>
Reproductive system	Parthenogenesis ("virgin birth")	Scientific reproduction from the "Secret of Life"
Role of men	Absent but remembered in the origin story	Deliberately "eliminated" from the social order



Element	<i>Herland</i>	<i>Mizora</i>
Motherhood	Collective, sacralized “a religion”	Scientific and perfectionist
Education	Communal social responsibility	Explicit social engineering
Selection	“Negative eugenics”; the “unfit” barred	Racial purification of “the dark race”
Utopian goal	Peaceful maternal civilization	Perfect, conflict-free female society
Principal danger	Collective discipline of the body	Eugenic and racial exclusion
Political meaning	Feminist reform	Biopolitical perfection

Table 1. Comparative structure of reproductive design in Herland and Mizora.

The common structure is exposed in the table. Both societies have a policy of eliminating men, both policies of centralizing the reproduction, both policies of using education to produce an ideal citizen. The differences are in emphasis and limitation. It is collective motherhood and ethical social reform that is emphasized, and the reproduction is figured as a sacrament, its danger as a soft coercion of a discipline experienced as love, and its political meaning as a feminist reform accomplished to the point of self-regulation (Seitler, 2003; Tavera, 2018). Mizora is about scientific perfection, eugenic improvement; its reproduction is a laboratory process, its risk is the hard rejection of entire groups of individuals, its political implication is biopolitical perfection up to racial annihilation (Broad, 2009; Weinbaum, 2004).

In Foucaultian perspective, both novels embody the biopolitical call to strive for a privileged kind of life, but they vary in terms of their visibility in exercising the correlative power to allow for the death of other life forms (Foucault, 1978, 2003). Herland has that power in its subtle machinery of voluntary deferral and collective judgment, and those "held unfit" are passively denied the right to be mothers (Gilman, 1915/1979, Chapter 6). The elimination of men, and of the dark-complexioned, are the first of its perfections named by Mizora (Lane, 1890/2000, Part 2, Chapters 1, 3). The comparison thus results in a range from a maternal biopolitics disciplining by devotion to a scientific biopolitics disciplining by exclusion (Christensen, 2017).



The comparison in the end exposes the two sides of feminist utopia. The same fantasy that frees women from the structure of patriarchy the empowerment of women, has the potential to create new types of discipline working in the management of life itself. The idea of liberation and control is not opposed in these texts; taking command of reproduction means taking command of who is born and what they will be, and that is power over life in the fullest sense of the term, according to Foucault (1978) and Esposito (2008).

9. Conclusion

This article has theorized Herland and Mizora as the design of reproductive utopia in the context of biopolitics. In each, the extinction of men is merely the means to a more structured and controlled reproduction, a better motherhood, an education adequate to their needs, and a citizenship which is more manageable, more manipulable. Herland strives for this type of design in a group, sacralised motherhood, disciplining the body in the name of love and the betterment of the nation; Mizora strives for this type of design through a scientific reproduction explicitly connected to racial purification and the elimination of difference. Read comparatively, and based on the above sample readings, the two novels reveal a range of biopolitical technique, from discipline to devotion to perfection to exclusion, and the cost of the emancipatory promise of the feminist utopia is the act of exclusion (Seitler, 2003; Broad, 2009).

Bringing the subject of the study full circle, both novels are about the reproduction of the ideal citizen as a political system, both have parthenogenesis or its scientific equivalent as a way to break down the patriarchal family and denaturalize gender, both replace the notion of motherhood with one of manufacturing, and both entangle genuine feminist liberation within biopolitical control so that these two are inseparable. The texts thus bring to light the moral boundaries of women-only reproductive utopias. A society that makes its harmony possible by killing an entire sex, a complexion or merely the “unfit” has not gone beyond the management of life, it is perfection. The risk is neither that these utopias do not liberate women, but rather that they free women via a power over birth, difference, and the future, not less total because it is wielded by women than by men (Weinbaum, 2004; Foucault, 2003).

These discoveries have significance not just for this era, but for all time. Questions such as who is advancing and who is being left behind (Rose, 2007) in the reproduction process and the issues of who is fostering and who is forfeiting such opportunities, as well as how a desire for a better society can become a desire for a purified one persist in the contemporary debates regarding reproductive technology, disability, and race. Together reading Herland and Mizora does not reduce the



importance of both as feminist classics; it enhances it, because it reminds us that their visionary courage and their entanglements in biopolitics must be juxtaposed at the same time. The reproductive utopia these texts finally propose is never innocent: it is always a utopia of who will not be allowed to be included in the perfect society.

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