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**TOWARDS A FEMINIST COLLECTIVISM:
CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN AND
THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT**

MARGUÉRITE CORPORAAL

Edward Bellamy's utopian novel *Looking Backward* (1887) was an American bestseller in its time. It has been translated into twenty different languages and inspired many reactions from authors who have condemned and celebrated Bellamy's visions of the future. Moreover, the novel led to the emergence of the utopian movement of Nationalism.¹ By late 1888, the first Bellamy Nationalist Club was established: an organization dedicated to promoting Bellamy's ideals of nationalized industry, equal distribution of wealth and the elimination of class boundaries. A short-lived Nationalist Party was called into being and secured the movement's place on the American political agenda. The publication of two journals, *The Nationalist* (1889-1894) and *The New Nation* (1891-1894), led to the rapid spread of the movement's influence through the country in the form of a hundred and fifty Nationalist or Bellamy clubs that attracted authors such as William Dean Howells and Edward Everett Hale. Furthermore, particularly in the American West – the regional space that Bellamy envisioned as the site where he could realize his Utopian dream of a deracialized and depoliticized America² – several

¹ Bellamy coined the term “Nationalism”, and never used the term “socialism”, although his ideas are clearly related to socialist ideologies. Bellamy felt that the term “socialism” was too European, hence not representative of the different American context. See Martin Gardner, “Looking Backward at Edward Bellamy's Utopia”, *New Criterion*, XIX/1 (2000), 22.

² See Nicholas M. Williams, “The Limits of Spatialized Form: Visibility and Obscurity in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*”, *Utopian Studies*, X/2 (1999), 27.

Nationalist colonies were founded,³ such as the Equality Colony in Washington State.⁴

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who had been crusading for female economic independence and the rights of wage-earning women and who had helped found the National Household Economics Association,⁵ was introduced to the movement by her uncle, the earlier mentioned Nationalist associate Edward Everett Hale. As becomes clear from, for instance, her correspondence with her childhood friend Martha Lane, Gilman was attracted by the egalitarian ideas of Nationalism, which were aligned to her own dissatisfaction with gender and class inequalities. She praised Bellamy for “put[ting] in popular form the truth of ages ... at a time when the whole world was aching for such help”.⁶ She embraced Bellamy’s vision of peaceful and co-operative humanity which “has such a great tap root in striking at our business system. The root of the struggle between man and man”,⁷ and she supported his call for state-supported domestic services as a way to restructure society.⁸

Soon Gilman actively engaged with the Nationalist Groups in California, of which there were sixty-five: she gave lectures and published her poem “Similar Cases” in *The Nationalist* in April 1890.⁹ She contributed three other poems to the magazine and ten poems to the *New Nation*, and other writings appeared in Californian Nationalist publications.¹⁰ Furthermore, Gilman followed in Bellamy’s footsteps

³ See the resourceful publications of Charles P. LeWarne, for example, “Equality Colony: The Plan to Socialize Washington”, *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, LIX (July 1968), 135-56.

⁴ Ya cov Oved, *Two Hundred Years of American Communes*, New Brunswick: NJ, 1988, 262.

⁵ See Polly Wynn Allen, *Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Architectural Feminism*, Amherst: MA, 1988, 44.

⁶ See MS dated 15 April 1890: *Charlotte Gilman’s Correspondence with Martha Luther (Lane)*, Rhode Island Historical Society, MSS437, 4 leaves, 8 pp.

⁷ See MS dated 15 June 1890: *Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Unpublished Lectures*, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library, Charlotte Perkins Gilman Papers, Part IV, A/G487.

⁸ See Allen, *Building Domestic Liberty*, 86.

⁹ See also Mary A. Hill, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the Making of a Radical Feminist, 1860-1896*, Philadelphia, 1980, 170.

¹⁰ See Gary Scharnhorst, “Making Her Fame: Charlotte Perkins Gilman in California”, *California History*, LXIV (1985), 192-201. Also see Carol Farley

by taking up utopian fiction. In 1911 Gilman completed *Moving the Mountain*, in which she followed Bellamy's plot idea of a man waking up in a different era: her fifty-five-year-old protagonist falls asleep in 1911 to wake up in an entirely transformed society in 1945. She subsequently wrote three other utopian texts: "Bee Wise", published in *The Forerunner* in July 1913; *Herland* (1915) and *With Her in Ourland* (1916). As critics have also argued, in writing all four works, Gilman appears to have been influenced by Jane Addams' Chicago settlement Hull House, which she had visited in the 1880s: the texts depict environments of utopian urban society, in variation on the settlements houses, where each individual's service to the communal good is emphasized, and where, moreover, female cooperation plays a central role.¹¹

This essay will focus on *Herland*, which appeared in serialized form in *The Forerunner* in 1915-1916. The novel, written in the form of a travel account that depicts three young men who enter the unexplored gynocentric world of Herland, shares several characteristics with Bellamy's *Looking Backward*. The narrative perspective in both texts is male; both novels present protagonists who enter a spatially or temporally unfamiliar world, but in the end return to their own societies. Both literary utopias represent societies in which class distinctions have disappeared and in which we find the Nationalists ideals of non-competition and collectiveness with regard to property, labour and government. Furthermore, the two novels promote women's break out of the domestic sphere and their economic independence.

There are also significant differences, however, between Bellamy's and Gilman's utopian visions of women's position. While Bellamy merely suggests the importance of women's participation in a public sphere, Gilman interweaves the ideologies of Nationalism and feminism, implying that the Nationalist ideal of collectiveness which will lead to social equality is a specifically feminine virtue. In her women's land the success for erasing inequality depends largely on a

Kessler, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress toward Utopia with Selected Writings*, Syracuse: NY, 1995, 23.

¹¹ See, for instance, Lois Rudnick, "Feminist Utopian Visions in the Early 20th Century USA", in *Gender, Ideology; Essays on Theory, Fiction and Film*, eds Chantal D'Arcy and José Landa, Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1996, 181-93.

matriarchal order, hence, a powerful political and economic position of women. Nationalist ideals can only be achieved in a society where the traditional gender roles have been subverted, and where women equally contribute to a collectivism. In addition, in Bellamy's utopian world, women still work in and inhabit a sphere that is distinctly different from men's. Gilman appears to revise Bellamy's socialism which still relegates women to marginality and 'otherness'.

Looking Backward and *Herland* have similar plotlines: in both texts the male narrators come from a world which is marked by competitive individualism, and enter a utopian society which is rooted in communality. Bellamy's Julian West – a name which refers to the author's commitment to the pioneering spirit of the American West – is a young Bostonian of good fortune who lapses into a deep sleep in the year 1887 to wake up in the year 2000. West is unsettled by the enormous contrasts between his individualistic "old world" and the new, communal Boston. The well-to-do West was used to a society dominated by unequal distribution of toil and leisure, in which "many pulled at the rope and the few rode"; to an industrial climate steeped in "excessive individualism", which resulted in businesses managed for private profit and general poverty; and to a world where "interests of every individual" were made "antagonistic to those of every other" – in his own words, a "horrible babel of shameless self-assertion and mutual depreciation".¹² In twenty-first-century Boston, by contrast, surplus wealth is not used for "private luxury", but for the common benefit of all citizens "in equal degree". Commerce and industry have been transformed from private enterprise into public business, supervised by a brotherhood army, in the form of a "national organization of labor under one direction".¹³

Herland shares many characteristics with Bellamy's new Boston: the exclusively female inhabitants have worked together for the common good when their nation was destroyed by warfare and natural disaster and when they were left without a male population: "For five or ten years they worked together, growing stronger and wiser and

¹² Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, New York, 1917, 11, 42, 91 and 313.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 42 and 61.

more and more mutually attached.”¹⁴ The current women of Herland do not wage wars, have neither kings, nor priests, nor aristocracies, refuting the idea of social hierarchy. They value social duty and they reject egotism and rivalry: “They were sisters, and as they grew, they grew together – not by competition, but by united action” (66). According to the Nationalist ideology, political and economic issues are under public control, and are resolved by communal assent:

They sat down in council together and thought it out. Very clear, strong thinkers they were. They said: “With our best endeavors this country will support about so many people, with the standard of peace, comfort, health, beauty, and progress we demand. Very well. That is all the people we will make.” (68)

This communal female world is essentially different from the American society in which the three explorers – Jeff, Terry and Vandyck – grew up. Travelling into Herland, the three men expect armed resistance by the natives, but are surprised to find that the women carry no weapons, acting “not so much as a drilled force but as a multitude actuated by a common impulse” (42). Instead, the Herlanders aim to exchange ideas about politics and economy with the men, in a cooperative spirit. Terry, Jeff and Vandyck have been taught the “laws of nature” which “require a struggle for existence, and that in the struggle the fittest survive, and the unfit perish” (62). Their social Darwinist perspective clashes with the communal mentality of the Herlanders, and, consequently, they are unable to convince the Herlanders of the American value of competition: “We rather spread ourselves, telling of the advantages of competition: how it developed fine qualities; that without it there would be ‘no stimulus to industry.’ Terry was very strong on that point” (60). To the Herlanders, work is enjoyable precisely because it contributes to shared rather than personal happiness.

The difference between the men’s American values and the women’s norms is reflected in their relationships within their respective groups. The Herlanders cling together as sisters. Vandyck, the narrator, acknowledges the need for him and his two friends to

¹⁴ Charlotte Gilman, *Herland and Other Writings*, New York, 2000, 56 (all subsequent references are to this edition).

work together, since the qualities of one complement those of the other: while he himself is a sociologist, Jeff “was born to be a poet, a botanist”, and Terry “was strong on facts – geography and meteorology”. The exploration would never have succeeded without this united effort by complementary talents: “We never could have done the thing at all without Terry” (2). However, while Vandyck clearly admires the Herlanders’ strong sense of community, he and his friends fail to achieve a similar bonding. As Vandyck’s remarks reveal, there is a lot of tension, intolerance and even competition between the three men. He often has to “keep the peace” between Jeff and Terry whose ideas “were so far apart”, while he himself gets “out of patience” with Jeff for his rose-colored perspective on women as well as annoyed by Terry’s disrespectful, domineering treatment of the female sex: “I don’t think any of us in college days was quite pleased to have him with our sisters” (9). While the qualities of all the three young men are valuable according to the narrator, Terry always takes the lead of their group, and does not appear to be able to live without “Love, Combat ... Danger to employ his superabundant energies” (59).

An important difference between Bellamy’s and Gilman’s literary utopias lies in the fact that Bellamy’s new Boston is still governed by a hierarchical principle, while Herland is not. While Bellamy dismisses class as the demarcator of social difference, his new Boston is nevertheless divided up in strata categorized by social merit and talent. As Dr Leete explains to Julian, they make use of “a system of preferment” for those who display the strongest commitment, thus encouraging “the weaker as well as the stronger with the hope of rising” in social esteem or rank”.¹⁵ Furthermore, the industrial army which is to vouchsafe common economical interest is divided up in ranks, with a presidency at its head: “the most important function of the presidency is the headship of the industrial army”, who deserves his position through promotion “through three grades to the officer’s grade, and thence up through the lieutenantcies to the captaincy or foremanship, and superintendency or colonel’s rank”.¹⁶ The existence of different social levels or ranks is symbolized by the fact that Julian

¹⁵ Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, 130.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

can literally look down upon the city of Boston from Dr Leete's rooftop:

At my feet lay a great city. Miles of broad streets, shaded by trees and lined with fine buildings, for the most part not in continuous blocks but set in larger or smaller inclosures, stretched in every direction.¹⁷

At first glance, Herland also seems to have a hierarchical social system. Terry, annoyed at the elderly Herlanders who appear to keep him and his two friends captive, refers to the women as “a regiment of old Colonels” (20). Readers may soon be aware, however, that this suggestion of a female army with ranks governing the nation is a perspective distorted by Terry's competitive mindset, set on winning from the Herlanders in the gym and getting the better of “cocky old professors” (5) who also seek to discover, conquer and colonize the mysterious female nation. Rather, Herland's social structure is based on the principle of sisterhood, in that the women see one another as descending from one mother figure whose memory they venerate: “One family, all descended from one mother!” (57). In contrast with Terry's biased view that there can be no bonding among women, since “where there's motherhood you don't find sisterhood – not much” (8), the women of Herland “care for one another” (55) and make important decisions together.

Another major distinction between *Herland* and *Looking Backward* is that Gilman consciously links the Nationalist ideal of social equality to issues of sexuality and motherhood – thus giving a feminist twist to Nationalist ideology. She suggests that the ideals of public welfare and social equality in Herland have their root in its maternal culture. The co-operative sisterhood in Herland has developed from the sense of family that belongs to the nation's history; motherhood in the sense of advancing and caring for children communally is the main point on the political agenda that all women are actively concerned with. The selfless nurturance of children together as a society of mothers that marks Herland's economics stems from the fact that this caring spirit is a central aspect of motherhood: ““You see, we are *Mothers*,” she repeated, as if in that she had said it all” (66).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

Although Terry, Jeff and Vandyck have the opportunity to adapt to the communal social system of Herland, they are not always successful in doing so. Vandyck struggles with his desire to possess Ellador sexually and make her his wife in the American sense, in response to her chaste, sisterly comradeship and with Ellador's ability as a Herlander to produce offspring without sexual consummation: "Then that deep ancient chill of male jealousy of even his own progeny touched my heart" (141). The masculine Terry fails to assimilate into the Herland climate, for even after a long sojourn he is not capable of understanding the Herlanders' abhorrence of power struggles: "he put in practice his pet conviction that a woman loves to be mastered, and by sheer brute force" (132). Furthermore, Terry can deal neither with the Herlanders' ability to procreate independently nor with their absence of sexual desire, showing his determination to assert his masculine fatherhood: "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'!" (59).

By demonstrating that the communality that ensues from motherhood is natural to the Herlanders, while the three men remain too much attached to values of power and possessiveness, Gilman creates the impression that a utopian society that incorporates social equity cannot be achieved without women's influence. This impression is confirmed when one looks at Gilman's earlier treatise *The Man-Made World; or Our Androcentric Culture* (1911), where Gilman argues that men are by nature prone to a "coersive attitude", to a "desire to overcome, which is always stimulated by resistance" (Chapter I) and an inclination to dominance and mastery.¹⁸ Gilman even compares the masculine process of combat with the Darwinist principle of the survival of the fittest, intended to "improve species by the elimination of the unfit" (Chapter II). Gilman asserts that social equity can only be attained by allowing women more influence in the public sphere, since by nature women's "governing principle" is "growth and not combat; her main tendency being to give and not to get" (Chapter XIV).

¹⁸ All references are to the Gutenberg project electronic text of this work: <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/3015> (last consulted 9 June 2008).

While Bellamy includes an improved position of women in a public field in his description of new Boston, he does not suggest an immediate connection between eradicating social class hierarchies and gender. Bellamy pictures a society in which women in general are liberated from the burden of domestic work, however, which confines them to the household, imagining a society where domestic tasks are carried out by public services: as becomes clear from Julian's discussion with Mrs Leete, the "washing is all done at public laundries at excessively cheap rates, and our cooking at public kitchens".¹⁹ Thus Bellamy appears to take up August Bebel's proposal from *Woman under Socialism* (1879) for a removal of domestic industries from the family quarters by the introduction of apartment complexes with state-serviced eating facilities and child care.²⁰

Gilman envisions a similar solution to women's exclusion from public life, for in Herland the women do not distinguish between private and public spheres, are unfamiliar with the concept of a private home and live together, sharing all tasks. The women are astonished by Terry's report that American women mostly stay at home, only going out to work when forced by economic necessity: "'What is 'the home?'" asked Somel a little wistfully. But Zava begged: 'Tell me first, do *no* women work, really?'"(61). The Herlanders cannot be convinced by Terry that it is usual for a man to own a private home where his wife stays all day without any public occupations: "Then Terry patiently explained again that our women did not work – with reservations. 'But what do they do – if they have no work?' she persisted" (97). Through the discussion between the Herland women and the three Americans, Gilman points out what she perceived, and discussed, as one of the wrongs of American society, in *Women and Economics* (1898): the fact that women "are economically dependent", work "under another will; and what they receive depends not on their labor, but on the power and will of another",²¹ their

¹⁹ Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, 118.

²⁰ For Bebel's ideas on this topic, see Chapter XXVII, "Free Development of Individuality", *Woman under Socialism*, trans. Meta L. Stern, New York, 1910. Bebel's text was originally published in Germany in 1879. See also Allen, *Building Domestic Liberty*, 83.

²¹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics*, Boston: MA, 1898, 7.

husband. In her “immortal on the status of women”²² Gilman hints that the under-valuation and repression of women is setting an example which furthers class inequality.

In addition, in her representation of the Herlanders, who communally care for the children, and who view motherhood as a public, shared duty “which dominated society, which influenced every art and industry” (73), Gilman not only emphasizes the absence of a distinctly private, domestic sphere in her utopian nation. She also appears to play with the idea of “Republican Motherhood” that was so popular from the 1790s to well into the nineteenth century, according to which women should cultivate an understanding of politics, so they could pass on their knowledge as mothers.²³ While “Republican Motherhood” could be seen as a recognition of women as political subjects, this political duty of creating national awareness was at the same time clearly envisioned in a separate, domestic sphere. Gilman also translates motherhood in terms of national consciousness in *Herland*: “All the surrendering devotion our women have put into their private families, these women put into their country and race” (95). However, the Herlanders are not the makers of new citizens within private homes – rather, motherhood is a public task to which all Herlanders contribute, in the form of public nurseries, where new generations are bred and trained. Thus, Gilman imagines a “Republican Motherhood” that is not located in a private, feminine sphere.

Gilman’s and Bellamy’s utopian novels are also similar in that they imply criticism of the consumer culture as a system that not only increases class distinctions, but also confines women to their dependent position. In his description of nineteenth-century lady’s fashion, Bellamy’s Julian West claims that the headdresses and “incredible extension of the skirt behind by means of artificial contrivances”²⁴ are dehumanizing, impeding women in all their movements. By contrast, the twenty-first-century Edith Leete wears more comfortable clothing and hence, has a physical vigour that

²² Cynthia J. Davis, “Love and Economics: Charlotte Perkins Gilman on ‘The Woman Question’”, *ATQ*, XIX/4 (2005), 243.

²³ See, for instance, Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, Chapel Hill: NC, 1997, 53.

²⁴ Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, 14.

enables her to display a lot of active energy: “Feminine softness and delicacy were in this lovely creature deliciously combined with an appearance of health and abounding physical vitality too often lacking in the maidens with whom alone I could compare her.”²⁵

Bellamy’s statement about the confining aspects of nineteenth-century women’s fashion is similar to Gilman’s discussion of the convention of corsets in *Women and Economics*. According to Gilman, corsets weaken the vigorous body: “the action of the whole body is checked in the middle, the stomach is choked, the process of digestion interfered with.”²⁶ As a result, they have a debilitating effect on women’s energy and keep them in a state of passivity; or rather, in check according to patriarchal norms. Interestingly, Gilman’s Herlanders are also dressed up in simple, comfortable attire, wear their hair short and refuse any clothing that has a merely decorative function. In response to Terry who would like to see the women put on headgear “for decorative purposes” to look more becoming, the Herlanders state that “they only wore hats for shade when working in the sun; and those were big light straw hats, something like those used in China and Japan. In cold weather they wore caps or hoods” (50). Therefore, for women in Herland, dress has primarily a practical function that should enable them to work better, which is very much in contrast with the function of female dress in turn of the century America which served to enhance the woman’s beauty and to emphasize the material wealth of the man – whether father or husband – who “owned” her. As Thorstein Veblen put it in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899):

... women’s dress ... the high heel, the skirt, the impracticable bonnet, the corset, and the general disregard of the wearer’s comfort which is an obvious feature of all civilized women’s apparel, are so many items of evidence to the effect that in the modern civilized scheme of life the woman is still, in theory, the economic dependent of the man – that, perhaps in a highly idealized sense, she still is the man’s chattel ... putting in evidence their master’s ability to pay.²⁷

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁶ Gilman, *Women and Economics*, 76.

²⁷ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*, New York, 1899, 182.

Moreover, as he claimed: “The corset is, in economic theory, substantially a mutilation, undergone for the purpose of lowering the subject’s vitality and rendering her permanently and obviously unfit for work.”²⁸ Gilman’s emphasis on the Herlanders’ comfortable dress which enables them to work appears closely aligned to Veblen’s viewpoint that was popular at the time.

Gilman’s and Bellamy’s utopian worlds are quite similar in that women are released from the restrictive domestic space, and enter the public arena of politics and economics. It can be argued, however, that Bellamy still models his society on the concept of two separate spheres for men and women. For one thing, women can only do jobs that are reserved for the female sex, on the basis of her physical strength or lack of it: “The heavier sorts of work are everywhere reserved for men, the lighter occupations for women. Under no circumstances is a woman permitted to follow any employment not perfectly adapted, both as to kind and degree of labor, to her sex.”²⁹ Furthermore, women are not under the same system of ranking with men in the industrial army, having a “woman general-in-chief” of their own, and being “under exclusively feminine regime”.³⁰ Thus, according to Dr Leete, rivalry between the sexes, and with this, the competition element could be removed. The result is a society which is organized “as a sort of imperium in imperio”³¹ – a state within a nation – as Julian West notices.³²

One could argue that Gilman also keeps the distinction between spheres intact, since Herland is only populated by women who collectively manage the administration of their nation and childcare. In this respect, we can speak of a feminine utopian society of its own in which the issue of gender and distribution of work does not seem to matter. The terms of sisterhood and motherhood that the Herlanders employ moreover suggest a hierarchical society in that it excludes

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

²⁹ Bellamy, *Looking Backward: 2000-1887*, 257.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 259.

³² As Matthew Hartman also observes: “Although Bellamy grants women economic independence, he does so in order to preserve their traditional roles as wives and mothers.” See “Utopian Evolution: The Sentimental Critique of Social Darwinism in Bellamy and Peirce”, *Utopian Studies*, X/1 (1999), 30.

men from any social roles, and denies men the role of husbands who possess their wives sexually, as Terry finds out after his marriage to Alima:

Poor old Terry! The things he'd learned didn't help him a heap in Herland. His idea was to take – he thought that the way. He thought, he honestly believed, that women like it. Not the women of Herland! Not Alima! (131)

The situation is more complex, however, as once the three men enter the all-female Herland, they are involved in discourse about the country's management rather than pushed to its margins: the text explores the interaction and clashes between men with a competitive, possessive spirit and women who live according to concepts of communality and selflessness.

Furthermore, as we have seen, the Herlanders and the three men engage in debates about politics, the position of women and work. In this respect, one could claim that in Gilman's text both sexes jointly participate in a political debate, whereas in *Looking Backward* political discussions only take place between Julian and Dr Leete, Edith and Mrs Leete performing more nurturing tasks in relation to the time traveller. Furthermore, while at the end of Gilman's novel Terry, Vandyck and Ellador depart from Herland, Jeff feels so assimilated in that country that he decides to stay on: "Why should I want to go back to all our noise and dirt, our vice and crime, our disease and degeneracy?" (126) The novel therefore ends with a mixed society where a man and a group of women will co-exist politically and economically.

The frames of *Looking Backward* and *Herland* are very different: Julian West's vision of a New Boston governed by public care and more emancipated women is presented as a dream from which he wakes up to the nightmare of nineteenth-century Boston. This frame makes his utopian vision more of a fantasy, a flight into a far off future. Gilman's text suggests the existence of a reality, an Other world, parallel to turn of the century America. As Vandyck remarks, he will not betray directions to Herland, fearing that "some self-appointed missionaries, or traders, or land-greedy expansionists, will take it upon themselves to push in" (1). Thus, the utopian world of

Gilman is presented as a more contemporary reality to turn of the century readers than Bellamy's text; a phenomenon which may be accounted for by the progress that had been made on "The Woman Question" in the interval between 1887 and 1915 or by Gilman's active role within women's movements. It is perhaps also Gilman's strong affiliation with the gender issues of her age that can explain her translation of Nationalist concerns into feminist politics in *Herland*. In contrast with Bellamy who assigns women to only specific jobs and an Other sphere, hence still to some sort of marginal status, Gilman places her women centre stage in a political debate with the male sex.