*Hypatia* (2022), **37**, 76–96
doi:10.1017/hyp.2021.69

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

# Pragmatist Feminist Utopias: Gilman, Mead, and the Problem of Choice

Aleksandra Hernandez

Department of English, University of Miami, 1252 Memorial Drive, Ashe Bldg # 709, Coral Gables, FL, 33146, USA
Corresponding author. aleksandra.hernandez@miami.edu

(Received 15 December 2019; revised 23 December 2020; accepted 17 January 2021;
first published online 24 January 2022)

**Abstract**

This article focuses on the pragmatist feminist theories of social reformer Charlotte Perkins Gilman and cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead. It begins by delineating Gilman's understanding of how the material-cultural environment affects the lives of women. Believing the American way of life to be too individualistic, Gilman developed a theory of social change aimed at generating more collectivist ways of living and promoting the economic independence of women. To achieve these ends, Gilman advocated for the reconstruction of the Victorian nursery, which she believed would afford women the choice to pursue a professional career outside of the home, and promote the health of the community. Gilman's social theory is contrasted with that of Margaret Mead, who believed that plans for social reform are best left to readers. Rather than advocate for the adoption of an entirely new cultural practice, Mead sought to acquaint her culturally diverse American readership with the Samoan way of life, so that they might collectively decide how to best address the problem of choice facing young women in the 1920s.

Readers familiar with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) know all too well that the story is about the experience of a woman who crawls around a wallpaper-covered nursery while enduring a nervous breakdown. Told from the point of view of the hysteric, the story is striking in its compelling presentation of what it feels like to weather psychological distress. But we must not overlook the fact that the story is also a critique of cutting-edge medical treatments of hysteria, indicated by the narrator's repudiation of the rest cure with which the story opens: "John is a physician, and *perhaps*—(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)—*perhaps* that is one reason why I do not get well faster" (Gilman 1999, 3).

Described as "practical in the extreme" and constitutionally opposed to anything that cannot be empirically authenticated by the senses and "put down in figures" (3), John, the woman's husband-physician, obviously means well and does what he believes will help his wife recover from a "temporary nervous depression" (3). And yet, while everyone agrees with his diagnosis—even the woman's brother, "also a physician, and also of

© The Author(s), 2022. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of Hypatia, a Nonprofit Corporation

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

high standing" (3)—John's failure to appreciate that "some of the . . . evils long supposed to be inherent and ineradicable in our natures, are but the result of certain arbitrary conditions of our own adoption" (Preface, 16) suggests that he—along with the medical establishment—has accepted the dismal conditions of Victorian motherhood. As we will see, Gilman argues here and elsewhere that the rest cure merely treats the symptoms of hysteria and not the arbitrary conditions that cause it.

Confined to a nursery with peeling wallpaper, "scratched," "gouged," and "splintered" floors, and a "great heavy bed" that looked "as if it had been through the wars" (8), the hysteric conspires with the shadowy woman (a mirror image of herself) to remove the wallpaper, signaling her commitment to destroy the Victorian nursery and the arbitrary conditions that it reinforces. At the same time, however, her additional efforts to relocate the "great bedstead nailed down, with the canvas mattress we found on it" (17) also suggests an intuitive grasp of the need not to destroy but rather to reassemble the Victorian home and its corresponding ideals. In other words, although the apparent immobility of the bed indicates the extent to which the Victorian nursery is entrenched in the cultural imaginary, the bed is only nailed down, suggesting the possibility of relocation with some collective effort.

As this reading indicates, Gilman sought to persuade readers that Victorian motherhood and the material conditions that support it must be reassembled. But Gilman's aim was not merely to improve the plight of the many mothers who were confined to the private sphere; it was also to alter the nature of our social relations and promote more collectivist values. Gilman thus believed, like her contemporary John Dewey, that only by modifying the material-cultural environment would we be able to enact meaningful social changes, but she also insisted on the importance of replacing the standard of the nuclear family with a new standard that reflects a more progressive ideal of motherhood—one that she believed would afford women the choice of whether to have children, get married, and pursue a profession. A more progressive ideal of motherhood, Gilman asserted, would also promote women's economic independence by shifting their focus from their immediate families to their broader social network. This would have the effect of altering family dynamics such that the nation's children would be raised to become socially conscious citizens.[1]

As commentators have noted, Gilman seeks to reform the most foundational institution of the nineteenth century—the Victorian home—in her writing, but, except for Jane Upin and Erin McKenna, not much critical attention has been devoted to the pragmatist character of Gilman's utopian social theory (Upin 1993; McKenna 2001).[2] Moreover, though Gilman's feminist commitments have been widely documented, only McKenna and Charlene Haddock Seigfried place Gilman within a pragmatist *feminist* tradition (Seigfried 2001).[3] Here I elaborate McKenna's insight that an alternative to end-of-state utopias emerges in pragmatist feminism that is problem-oriented and that collapses the "individual–society split" (McKenna 2001, 111). In this "process-model" of utopia, there is thus no realizable state of perfection, but rather a set of problems to solve under the assumption that over time, new problems will arise that will need to be addressed in a similar, experimental fashion.

I also situate Gilman in relation to Margaret Mead, not only to highlight Mead's contribution to pragmatist feminist utopian thought, but also to elucidate the more significant role that readers might play in process-oriented utopias. Whereas Gilman's social theory recommends to readers a singular way of life, Mead's representation of American Samoa operates as an instrument intended to prompt readers to imagine what the future of their society might look like. Rather than advocate for a dominant

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

cultural pattern, Mead suggests an alternative to Gilman's socialist vision for the United States—one that leaves the machinery of the nuclear family intact, and that instead promotes a multiplicity of approaches for solving the problems of human experience. This suggests that, for Mead, a dominant cultural pattern is not a blueprint for social change but rather an instrument with which to promote tolerance and aid citizens in generating a culture that embraces a diversity of solutions to the problems of everyday life.

A few consequences follow from my argument. Although much critical attention has been devoted to "The Yellow Wallpaper" at the expense of the utopian Gilman in *Herland* (1915, in Gilman 2012), in what follows, we see that even "The Yellow Wallpaper" is caught up in the building of Gilman's project of theorizing a pragmatist feminist utopia. Moreover, though scholarship focuses largely on the relationship between pragmatism and Gilman, or utopia and Gilman, I see Gilman as doing both. The Gilman who thus emerges here is a pragmatist feminist who shares a set of philosophical commitments that, as Upin, Siegfried, and McKenna have argued, are compatible with those of her contemporary, John Dewey. Rather than merely trace connections between Dewey and Gilman, however, my aim in this article is ultimately to extend Upin's and McKenna's insights concerning Gilman's "enriched" instrumentalism, by homing in on Gilman's critique of the spatial dimension of the Victorian home. As I will argue, Gilman shifts the focus of utopian reform from schools (as Dewey does[4]) to the home, and in doing so, radically rethinks the social structure of everyday living.

Finally, by comparing Gilman to Mead, we will see that though both share a set of pragmatist feminist assumptions about the importance of the reader in imagining utopia, key differences emerge that render Gilman's social theory much more prescriptive than Mead's. As we see below, Mead's diagnosis of the problem of choice differs from Gilman's, insofar as Mead is less certain than Gilman that constructing a material environment modeled after socialist values is the best solution to the problem of choice in an America that she believes is not dominated by one but by many cultural patterns. Aware that when we adopt a singular approach to life, we inevitably alienate those whose personalities are not conducive to it, Mead proposes instead a reader-centered utopia that promotes democratic deliberation among citizens about the problems of human experience and how to best solve them.

## Progressive Motherhood

Gilman writes in *Women and Economics* that the Victorian nursery is a symbol of the "primitive" material conditions of women, who are forced to conform to the "arbitrary condition" of generalized motherhood (Gilman 1898, 16).[5] This explains why the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is portrayed as less than human, that is, as literally occupying the condition of animality. Not merely a conventional metaphor that signifies Victorian motherhood, however, the nursery is also a material-semiotic form that, in Gilman's view, embodies and *produces* Victorian ideals of domesticity.[6] Depicted in an overall state of disrepair and decay, the Victorian nursery is deemed unsuitable for promoting the economic independence of women, which explains why Gilman ultimately calls for its material recomposition. Gilman speculates that by decentering the nuclear family in favor of a more progressive ideal of motherhood, the reassembled nursery will collapse the public–private sphere split that has kept women imprisoned in the condition of generalized motherhood—a condition detrimental not only to women's psychological health, but also to the overall health of the nation.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Significantly, Gilman's emphasis on the material-semiotic form as the means to achieve meaningful social change resonates with Dewey's pragmatism. In *Experience and Nature* (1925), Dewey writes that experience is "double-barreled" in that "it recognizes in its primary integrity no division between act and material, subject and object, but contains them in an analyzed totality" (Dewey 1958, 8). To put it in context, Dewey's concept of experience does not denote *personal* experience. Instead, it denotes *cultural* experience (see Torres Colón and Hobbs 2015), or a dynamic process involving the acts of a collection of people, or a society, in the built environment. Dewey argues that this machinery of social association is a network consisting of material and semiotic forms that not only reflect but *generate* certain cultural ideals.

Like Dewey, Gilman implicitly assumes the double-barreled nature of cultural experience in her writing, both in her emphasis on the constructed nature of our cultural ideals and their intertwinement in the built environment. It is not surprising, then, that she leans on architectural figures in *Women and Economics* to emphasize the material composition of the home as the site of reform. Gilman insists that we need not stubbornly "defend" and attempt to "repair" that "castle keep of vanishing traditions" (Gilman 1898, 160), especially when it no longer works for us, that there are other alternatives of sociability that might potentially be realized when we inhabit a different material-cultural environment. But, she insists in "A Woman's Utopia," we need to "make plans" before we build, for "utopian dreams are to life what an architect's plans are to a house—we may build it—if we can" (Gilman 1907, 215). Here Gilman intimates that our plans need to be realizable, and focuses on reconstructing the idea of the home to begin solving the problems that arise when we hold women to the standard of Victorian motherhood.

Gilman concedes in *Women and Economics* that it is difficult to alter the places we inhabit because they support our social habits. For this reason, we often fail to discern that our cultural ideals are arbitrary and of our own making. Moreover, she believes that if we persist in naturalizing what amount to habits and the material environments that support them, such as the habit of thinking about motherhood in such generalized terms or persisting in organizing our lives around a single, unchanging design and ideal of the nursery, we will be sensitive to those who criticize our institutions, even when they are shown to cause more social harm than good (Gilman 1898, 73). Thus, since we have adopted the Victorian nursery as the only acceptable design of the American home, we have in effect naturalized the nuclear family and its corresponding ideas about motherhood as the most suitable pattern of social relations.

Adopting the nuclear family as the American standard, Gilman insists, compounds our tendency to put our individual, personal needs above the needs of the community (76), and the "resultant evils" are felt more intensely by women and their children. "The spirit of 'me and my wife, my son and his wife, us four, and no more,'" writes Gilman, confines "half the world . . . absolutely to the personal" (75–76), producing an "atmosphere of concentrated personality" (76) in which children are raised, and ensuring that the pattern of putting the individual or "animal" instincts above the collective or social ones will continue to be the norm. The cure that Gilman proposes consists of reassembling our social life to mirror her collectivist ideals (253). In Gilman's words:

> There is no ethics for the individual. Taken by himself, man is but an animal; and his conduct bears relation only to the needs of the animal—self-preservation and race-preservation. Every virtue, and the power to see and strive for it, is a social quality. The highest virtues are those wherein we best serve the most people,

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> and their development in us keeps pace with the development of society. It is the social relation which calls for our virtues, and which maintains them. (241)

Following Charles Darwin, who argues in *The Descent of Man* (1871) that the "higher" moral rules "are founded on the social instincts, and relate to the welfare of others" (Darwin 2004, 147), Gilman holds that these social instincts are suppressed when we inhabit material conditions that are inhumane—that is, conditions not conducive to the continuing unfolding and development of our inherent humanity, conditions that go against the principles of cooperation and social sympathy.[7]

That is not to deny that explicit in Darwin and Gilman is also a deeply problematic chronopolitics[8] that holds that exclusive concern for one's kin is a moral feature of the less advanced "savage" tribes. And yet Darwin himself writes that as man becomes more "civilized," he extends sympathy beyond the members of his own kin to "all the members of his own nation, though personally unknown to him," and that "this point once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races" (147). Implicit here is a critique of so-called "civilized" nations that uphold the vice of racism. Gilman levels a similar critique and argues that the social and economic condition of women is evidence that so-called "civilized" nations have not yet advanced beyond their baser, animal instincts. Even so, Gilman overlooks the further implication that her social theory upholds a homogeneously white, racialized conception of the nation (Newman 1998; Weinbaum 2001).[9]

The glaring contradiction in Gilman's theory need not prevent us from extracting what's useful in her thought: a process-model of utopia that arms us with the tools to tackle the problems that arise even in Gilman's own writing. To be sure, Gilman's concern is how to raise white, middle-class women to the condition of humanity, which she associates with the maturation and cultivation of the sense of self.[10] This raises the problem of how to make available these modes of expression to all women, that is, how to further modify the material-cultural environment to address racial inequality. Gilman's process-model of utopia allows for the possibility of making further adjustments to reflect values that go beyond Gilman's racialized conception of progressive motherhood.

Although Gilman will only get us so far on the path toward social progress, her belief that by making modifications in the social environment, motherhood would be recognized as labor for which women would be compensated is an important step forward.[11] Significantly, the kind of professional specialization that Gilman envisions depends on people cultivating their innate aptitudes and talents. This suggests that collectivist modes of association are not incompatible with the cultivation and development of citizens' personalities. In other words, Gilman envisions that these avenues for self-expression are to be pursued not for their own sake but for the benefit of the community. Thus, when she argues in *Women and Economics* that "the growing individualization of democratic life" draws women outside of the home where they have access to professional choices more consistent with their "personalities" (Gilman 1898, 125), she decouples "personality" from the "individualism" of the Victorian nursery. By cultivating women's personality, in other words, future citizens will have less difficulty putting the needs of the community above their own, individual ones—but if and only if we replace the standard of the nuclear family with a more collectivist mode of association. If, conversely, the machinery of social intercourse remains intact (as it clearly has remained in the time since Gilman wrote *Women and Economics*) "personality" and "individualism" will overlap to the point of being indistinguishable.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In this context, "The Yellow Wallpaper" exemplifies the social disease that Gilman refers to in *Women and Economics* as "Americanitis." Contrary to the latest trends in medicine, Gilman believed hysteria is a symptom of the "nervous strain in family relations" and not the disease, which is why, in her view, the rest cure is doomed to fail. If Gilman is right, the issue is not a lack of willpower on women's part to resist their passions and desires, but rather the nature of the social environment itself, which damages women's psyches and the entire fabric of social relations. In this social environment, children also do not get the education that they need to become socially conscious citizens. Instead, children are raised in a social system governed by chance, leaving the future of the nation to the whims of a free-market economy. Compounding the problem are the many mothers—including, one presumes, Gilman—who suffer "doubly from not being able to do what [they] want to do, and from being forced to do what [they do not] want to do" (126).

When we avoid treating the real cause of the problem, Gilman avers, we ensure the survival of a national pattern in which women are devoted "to individuals and their personal needs" and "the intensification of their bodily tastes and pleasure" rather than "to the understanding and development of their higher natures" (101). As the mother searches for an outlet of self-expression, her personal affections put pressure on her to prioritize the home and her children above her own higher, intellectual calling, producing behaviors and habits of mind that make her emotionally dependent on her husband rather than responsive to the collective needs of society at large.[12] Victorian motherhood also reinforces itself as a standard by emphasizing individual above collective needs, which causes us to attribute "the pain we feel to the evil behavior of some individual," rather than to "a condition common to us all" (76).

John's too-personal relationship with his wife captures just what is so damaging to women about Victorian ideals of domesticity. Both a helpless "little girl" in need of loving protection and a grown woman who is expected to use her will and self-control to recover from her illness—for the sake of her children—the hysteric-narrator must endure the tyranny of a loving husband, conform to the generalized condition of motherhood that she may or may not want for herself, and sacrifice her own intellectual pursuits. If Gilman is emphatic that John's affections and attentions, in part, are driving her narrator mad, it is not, after all, just the hysteric whose animalistic impulse to destroy is on full display here: "I never saw such ravages as the children have made here," the narrator remarks. "The wallpaper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred" (Gilman 1999, 8). Gilman's criticism of female domesticity as producing a family structure in which women are shackled to the home reinforces the view that no one benefits from confining woman to the nursery, especially not her children: "Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impassionate little thing, live in such a room for worlds" (11).

Somewhat counterintuitively, then, the all-too-personal affections produced by a traditional nuclear family structure hinders women's ability to make choices consistent with their personalities. Aware of the "new [social] forces which tend toward better things," Gilman intuits that they call on women to work "for the sake of personal expression" (Gilman 1898, 127). As we see in *Women and Economics*, Gilman understands the value of work not only as the means of earning money but as "an exercise of faculty without which we should cease to be human" because "to do and to make not only gives deep pleasure, but it is indispensable to healthy growth" (127). But, as we have seen so far, we must not assume that work benefits only women individually. The whole point of reassembling the nursery is to cultivate individuals' social instinct

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for the healthy growth of the community, as exemplified in *Herland*, whose inhabitants work, always, with the health of the community in mind. In *Herland*'s narrator Vandyck Jennings's words: "All the surrendering and devotion our women have put into their private families, these women put into their country and race. All the loyalty and service men expect of wives, they gave, not singly to men, but collectively to one another" (Gilman 2012, 118).

Even though "The Yellow Wallpaper" does not explicitly address the wider world of choices, it gestures toward a possible utopian future vis-à-vis the narrator's active imagination and passion for writing. Moreover, that these desires and ambitions manifest in the narrator's efforts to alter the material composition of the nursery is ultimately telling of Gilman's pragmatist commitment to writing that is aimed at imagining social environments that better serve not only women but the community at large. Together, "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *Herland* cast the material conditions of Victorian motherhood as a relic of the past and pave the way for a future-oriented motherhood. Based on the application of experimental, empirical methods, Gilman's utopian vision implicit in "The Yellow Wallpaper" thereby materializes in Herland, where the care of the children is left not to the mother but to the most seasoned professionals, whose goal is to develop "a clear, far-reaching judgement, and a strong, well-used will" (128).

Similar to Maria Montessori's pioneering schools in Rome, each child in Herland is given the choice to discover and develop her natural gifts and aptitudes: "as early as possible, going very carefully, not to tax the mind, we provide choices, simple choices, with very obvious consequences" (128). Moreover, Herlanders use games because it is of utmost importance that children *like* what they are learning (129). And finally, though there are women whose special gifts and talents are applied to the care and education of the children, the whole nation is "planned for babies." There is no "nursery" or "home" in Herland, no place that is exclusively the domain of children; rather, the entire land is "a babies' paradise" with nothing to hurt or otherwise prevent the healthy physical and mental development of the Herlander children (129).[13]

Given Gilman's interest in the home as the site of nation-building, it is not altogether surprising that, in Deweyan fashion, education is foregrounded in Herland as the key ingredient in the progressive character of their civilization. The crucial difference, however, is that for Gilman, utopian education is not confined to the school, which is why new spatial arrangements of the home must be implemented. Gilman thus emphasizes the nature of Herlander modes of dwelling in the absence of conventional homes as we know them. Seeking to strike a balance between the personal needs of its inhabitants and the collective needs of the community, Herlanders live in apartment suites, which gives them the ability to retreat into their private bedrooms. Otherwise, their lives are arranged in such a way that they do everything else together. Without a "home" to look after, the Herlanders have plenty of time to work. The nature of the work itself is personally fulfilling, good for the community, and without the "competitive element," a fact that surprises the Ourlander men, particularly Terry O. Nicholson, who cannot imagine a world operating under anything other than the principle of competition (Gilman 2012, 87). Moreover, though the Herlanders specialize in a particular line of work, "all of them knew more about everything—that is about everything the country was acquainted with—than is the case with us" (90).

Indeed, the Herlanders live by what Dewey in *Experience and Nature* will later deem an experimental approach to solving the problems of human experience. What matters is not work for its own sake but how it meets the needs of the community. To meet our

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

collective needs, Dewey suggests that we try out different approaches until the desired results are achieved. A crucial aspect of Dewey's empirical method is that we must think holistically about what kinds of consequences or ends we ultimately hope to achieve in our chosen lines of work. For this reason, Dewey emphasizes the need to foreground both our chosen methods (Dewey 1958, 29), or the means, and the applications of our theories (162), that is, the ends we seek to accomplish. Along the same lines, as Vandyck Jennings tells us, everything the Herlanders do shows "the action of a practical intelligence, coupled with fine artistic feeling, and, apparently, untrammeled by any injurious influences" (Gilman 2012, 99). The Herlanders seek always to promote positive consequences in the nature of Herlander experience, without starting off in "predatory excursions to get more land from somebody else" or by "a struggle for existence" that forecloses the "possibility for [cultivating] really noble qualities among the people at large" (94).

Gilman decided to present her alternative motherhood using the tools of fiction, for as Dewey will write of the function of art in *Experience and Nature*, "while poetry is not a criticism of life in intent, it is in effect, and so is all art. For art fixes those standards of enjoyment and appreciation with which other things are compared; it selects the objects of future desires; it stimulates effort" (Dewey 1958, 204). Though Dewey does not explicitly think about these objects of future desires as utopian longings, it is clear nonetheless that he believes in the meliorative function of art, insofar as one of its effects is to stimulate "critical evaluation of the life" of the community (204). In "A Woman's Utopia," Gilman similarly emphasizes the uses to which fiction might be put by articulating two different kinds of utopian expression: "We need not only general Utopias, world schemes, necessarily laid far in the future, and involving so many preliminary stages undescribed; but we need particular Utopias, plans of betterment so plainly desirable that a majority will want them, and as workable and profitable as the other new inventions with which we are advancing our condition" (Gilman 1907, 216). From this we can infer that Gilman sees herself in *Herland* as intervening in a tradition of utopian experimental writing that has dealt largely in generalities, and that has stoked our hopes for a better world without providing a concrete "road" that "ends in a glorious future, but begins here and now" (216).[14]

Meant to provide practical solutions to present problems, Gilman's *Herland* deploys the plot structure of the exploration narrative, a tactic that gives her maximum control over which cultural patterns to emphasize to achieve her desired effect on her readers. To this end, Gilman depicts three male explorers, each of whom offers the reader one possible response to the Herlander cultural pattern. Terry represents the predatory masculine response: he is horrified by the Herlanders' lack of gender differentiation, their short hair, and their complete indifference to his objectifying gaze. Terry's particular talents lie in mechanical engineering and spatial navigation, skills that he associates throughout with manliness, so that when faced with the technological and architectural advancement of the Herlanders, he assumes that "no women built it—I can tell you that" (Gilman 2012, 58).

Accustomed to female attention, Terry also proves to be not a very good catch in the estimation of the Herlanders, who prefer Jeff Margrave and Vandyck. Jeff's response represents the opposite extreme from Terry's: a medical doctor by trade, his imagination is characterized as poetic. Jeff is quite expert in the botanical arts, and idealizes women with his "Southern chivalry" to a fault. Being the idealist of the three, Jeff is also drawn to the Herlanders' way of life and ultimately rejects his own cultural practices by adopting the Herlander cultural standard as his own. Jeff not only marries and bears a child

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with one of Herland's inhabitants, Celis, but he also does not return to Ourland. The story, however, is narrated by Vandyck, whose own response represents the middle ground between total acceptance and rejection of the Herlander cultural pattern. Vandyck functions as the reader's guide, yielding insights into how we ought to respond to the Herlanders.

Possessing the more "scientific imagination" of the three, Vandyck, a sociologist by training, learns what he can from the Herlanders, whose cultural practices and civilization he deeply admires. He also develops a relationship with Ellador, which he at first experiences as romantic love, but that over time evolves into a less personal and intense relationship to accommodate Ellador's own preference for how to relate to him: "I had not been in love many times," Vandyck tells us, "but such as I had was no different from this that I was perplexed, and full of mixed feelings; partly a growing sense of common ground between us, a pleasant rested calm feeling, which I had imagined could only be attained in one way; and partly a bewildered resentment because what I had found was not what I had looked for" (146). This moment of insight on Vandyck's part comes after an exchange with Ellador about the nature of romantic love. Aimed at concretizing the earlier conversations between the group of men and the Herlanders about Ourland's conception of "wife" and "home," Vandyck and Ellador's exchange serves as a critique of the Ourlander approach to love.

That women, for example, should have to trade their father's name for their husband's has the negative connotation of ownership. And worse yet, that women are confined to the home without the opportunity to pursue a different line of work looks like, from the perspective of the Herlanders, an unhealthy prospect both for the mothers and the many children who are raised by them. Romantic love, Vandyck tells Ellador, entails devotion to another person for "as long as they live" (146), an idea that Ellador entertains for the moment as "a beautiful idea" to be tested before she can determine if it is a good idea. And instead of a passionate embrace, Ellador strokes his hair in "motherly" fashion (146), which, while feeding Vandyck's growing frustration at the Herlander ways, eventually grows into "friendship and happiness" (149).

Ellador and Vandyck's relationship is sharply contrasted with Terry and Alima's relationship. Terri's attempt to rape Alima is a case in point, insofar as the belligerent, domineering male cannot let go of his Ourlander conception of the home and a woman's place within it—both of which Gilman associates with the social Darwinist principles of conquest and competition (122, 150). Terry has naturalized his cultural biases to the point that he believes all women—including Herlander women—want to be pursued and mastered, and he, more than the two other male characters, wants to fit the Herlanders into his mold of human relations: "Terry put in practice his pet conviction that a woman loves to be mastered, and by sheer brute force, in all the pride and passion of his intense masculinity, he tried to master this woman" (151). Terry's theory is of course quickly proven to be false when Alima rejects him, and the Herlander women restrain and anesthetize him (151). In the cultural context of Herland, Terry is now the hysteric, unable to express his deviant, encultured masculinity, because of his unwillingness to remain open to the possibility that the relations between men and women might be governed by a different set of principles from his own. Vandyck, on the other hand, though not entirely happy about Ellador's wish to put off consummating the marriage, alters his overall conceptions of women and love, and comes to regard Ellador as more than a sex object.

Vandyck and Ellador's relationship models for readers a method for arriving at what McKenna conceives of as a process-oriented pragmatist utopia, which is characterized

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

by a practical orientation toward the problems that we face in our everyday lives. In this conception of utopia, new methods are devised to address problems as they arise. We have seen the Herlander approach realized in their childhood education methods. But the Herlanders themselves, always open to new methods of experimentation, are aware of the limitations of their own culture, and respond with curiosity about what they imagine are the superior cultural practices of Ourland, on account of their not being cut off from the rest of the world and having access to the many solutions developed across the globe to the common problems of human experience. Ellador and Vandyck's relationship is also the most intriguing of the three couplings because it involves conceptual adjustments on both sides for the relationship work. To be with Ellador, Vandyck must be open to the cultural practices of Herlanders, and to be willing to change his own ways, especially where the Herlander methods prove to be more effective. To be with Vandyck, Ellador must go back to Ourland and test the Ourlander methods against those devised by her own people—especially, one presumes, their different conception of love.

Even as the pragmatist utopia offers a concrete solution to a problem of experience, the possibility of ever realizing the ideal, perfect society is undermined by the Herlanders themselves who understand that historical conditions change, and that what might have worked for one generation may not work for the next. For this reason, as Moadine tells Terry, "We have no laws over a hundred years old, and most of them are under twenty." Moreover, when discussing Christianity with Vandyck, Ellador confesses that she cannot understand "your preservation of such a very ancient state of mind" (134). The Herlanders adapt their religious practices and laws to suit their ends; instead of being devoted to "revealed religion" as in Ourland, hers is an "applied religion" that though not ritualized into "divine service" is reflected in everything they do: "their cleanliness, their health, their exquisite order, the rich peaceful beauty of the whole land, the happiness of the children, and above all the constant progress they made—this was their religion" (135).

In her efforts to change culture by shifting the emphasis from what is to what might be using the mode of fiction, Gilman can be seen to partake in a literary tradition that Gabriele Schwab describes as "imaginary ethnography." Imaginary ethnographies, Schwab argues, "resemble Rheinberger's 'experimental systems' in the sense that they use language and artistic form to reshape iconic figurations in order to generate emergent forms of subjectivity, culture, and life" (Schwab 2012, 18). Schwab is particularly interested in elucidating the signifying practice of the literary ethnography in which cultural icons are "creatively misread" or reconfigured as "iconotropes."[15] Like other imaginary ethnographers, Gilman is invested in the question of how to change cultural icons and of utilizing iconotropes to enact social changes.

Yet Gilman diverges from the imaginary ethnography as described by Schwab, as Gilman is not interested in making culture merely by writing it.[16] Reshaping contemporary notions of motherhood, in other words, is not enough for her. As we have seen so far, we must work toward changing the material conditions of women to fundamentally alter our social ideals and habits. In other words, we must change the nature of the built environment so that the imagined iconotrope can become the new (yet provisional) norm. But first, we must correctly diagnose the problem, which is what Gilman aims to do in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *Women and Economics*. Serving as the social realist backdrop of her science fiction, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is foundational to Gilman's future iconotropic figurations in *Herland*.[17] At her most dogmatic, Gilman believed that she had uncovered the solution to all the problems of early

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

twentieth-century America, but her science fiction novel, *Herland*, suggests that we take a more provisional, problem-oriented approach to utopia. In other words, Gilman's imaginary utopia is ultimately not offered as a final solution to the problem of choice. Consistent in her pragmatist inclinations, Gilman believes that iconotropes do not exist outside of history or are "inevitable," in Jean Pfaelzer's sense (Pfaelzer 1988); rather, she suggests that they are embedded in it.

Gilman's Herlander utopia is thus a controlled thought experiment intended to denaturalize the cultural norms that Americans take to be the only way of organizing human experience. The experiment involves accepting the possibility of an all-woman nation economically organized as a socialist state against which readers might assess the comparative failures and virtues of their own material-cultural environment.[18] The key here is Gilman's use of abstraction to generate a fiction that is so concrete that it becomes portable—an instrument intended to interact with different communities of readers across time. Yet, as Herlanders know all too well, utopia is never final, for once we solve one problem of experience, inevitably new problems arise. The Herlander iconotrope is merely a plan Gilman devises in response to the social problems afflicting American society in that particular historical moment.

Far from being presented as a final, utopian state to strive for, *Herland* is instead intended to be held up as an idealized cultural pattern whose features were specifically selected to invite comparison and trigger solutions to the problem of choice in the United States.[19] Gilman thus gestures toward a more reader-centered utopia, which locates utopia not in the text itself but in the reader's mind. As we will see, Margaret Mead develops this line of thinking by focusing more explicitly on the role readers might play in devising plans for reforming a United States that, in her estimation, embodies not one but a multiplicity of cultural patterns.

## The Reader

Not a place or an ideal, but rather a *method* (McKenna 2001; Suvin 2016), Gilman's pragmatist feminist utopia calls on readers to imagine a progressive America modeled after the Herlander cultural pattern. In *Herland*, Gilman thus anticipates the theoretical and methodological commitments of the cultural anthropologists. Indeed, travel to Herland is across space and not through time, linking her to Margaret Mead, who, in *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), articulates a spatialized concept of culture (Mead 2001). Unlike Gilman, however, Mead extracts the dominant Samoan cultural pattern as one among many possible solutions to the problems of human experience, offering it to readers as a cultural icon rather than as an iconotrope. In doing so, she shifts the site of iconotrope-making to readers, thereby authorizing them to devise their own plans for social reform.[20]

A decade after the publication of *Herland*, Mead also focused on the psychological toll more traditional conceptions of the home took on girls and young women, and sought to engage the reading public in formulating possible solutions to the problem of choice in the 1920s.[21] In *Coming of Age in Samoa*, Mead describes an exotic, isolated Polynesian island as a "laboratory" for experimentation (Mead 2001, 6), claiming that its geographical isolation enabled Samoan society to develop one dominant cultural pattern. Mead thus offers readers the Samoan icon as an instrument with which they might contrast American ways of life with those of Samoa. She begins, much like Gilman, by diagnosing the problem and selecting details with a view to determining whether it is the "nature of adolescence itself" or "civilization" that causes "disturbances which vex"

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

contemporary American girls (10). But more than shedding light on this problem, Mead's aim is ultimately to expose her readers to other ways of life so that they might educate their children differently:

> [B]ecause of the particular problem which we set out to answer, this tale of another way of life is mainly concerned with education, with the process by which the baby, arrived cultureless upon the human scene, became a full-fledged adult of his or her society. The strongest light will fall upon the ways in which Samoan education, in its broadest sense, differs from our own. And from this contrast we may be able to turn, made newly and vividly self-conscious and self-critical, to judge anew and perhaps fashion differently the education we give our children. (11)

In contrast to Gilman, who constructs an iconotrope for how society should be reformed, Mead abstracts a Samoan pattern and transforms it into a cultural icon, thereby shifting the site of culture-making to readers, who, by being exposed to other ways of life, are intended to generate their own iconotropes. Mead, in other words, is less certain than Gilman that the solution to the problem of choice lies in national consolidation around a singular cultural pattern given the multicultural nature of the United States. Instead, Mead decides to acquaint her readers with different approaches to solving the problem of choice.

Mead's diagnosis of the problem differs from Gilman's, then, inasmuch as Mead believes that the challenges facing girls and young women are not merely a function of the private–public sphere split, but also of the many approaches to life available outside of the home. For example, according to Mead, there is not one standard of morality in the United States but a multitude of standards and a media landscape that undermines them:

> Our children are faced with half a dozen standards of morality: a double sex standard for men and women, a single standard for men and women, and groups which advocate that the single standard should be freedom while others argue that the single standard should be absolute monogamy. Trial marriage, companionate marriage, contract marriage—all these possible solutions of a social impasse are paraded before the growing children while the actual conditions in their own communities and the moving pictures and magazines inform them of mass violations of every code, violations which march under no banners of social reform. (139)

By contrast, Samoan girls do not have to navigate so many choices because there's one moral standard to adhere to and no media landscape that encourages young people to break the rules. In Samoan society, the rules are set such that "the freedom with which [sex] may be indulged in is limited by just one consideration, social status." Thus, "Chief's daughters and chief's wives should indulge in no extra-marital experiments" (139). Similarly, any responsible head of household is expected to be too busy with their affairs to indulge in "casual amorous adventures" (139). The attitude toward sex is laid back yet constrained by rules.[22]

Another source of conflict for young people in the United States, according to Mead, is exposure to individuals with different social, political, and religious beliefs and practices within their own families. Thus, a young person may have a father, mother, and aunt with different religious beliefs, a wide array of humanitarian causes that they care about, and widely divergent political views. In this environment, it's impossible

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to subscribe to a way of life without upsetting a member of the family (140). Samoan girls, by contrast, face very few choices in this regard. Mead observes that the members of the family belong to one church, and that they each live in their chosen village where they can develop their own trades and skills (140–41). The only problem a young girl faces in Samoa is where to live, which is by no means an "ethical" choice but a "practical" one, insofar as her decision will not be taken personally by the members of her family. In other words, unlike American girls, whose beliefs, if showing allegiance to one member of the family, will alienate the other members, the Samoan girl has only practical considerations to contend with: to live in a village, for example, where her lover lives (141). "In each case," writes Mead, "she was making concrete choices within one recognized pattern of behaviour. She was never called upon to make choices involving actual rejection of the standards of her social group, such as the daughter of Puritan parents, who permits indiscriminate caresses, must make in society" (141).

Even when the American girl has made her religious, social, and political choices, she still faces contradictions within them. By embracing the tenets of the Declaration of Independence, for example, the girl will have to come to terms with America's treatment of minority groups. Or if she were to embrace Christianity, she will have to contend with various contradictory views with regard to how scripture might be interpreted (142). A diversity of standards in the United States are internally incoherent and afflict young women and prevent them from living at peace (142). The US, a "motley, diverse, heterogeneous modern civilisation" stands in stark contrast to the "simple, homogenous, primitive civilisation . . . which changes so slowly that to each generation it appears static" (142). Given the almost "static" nature of Samoan society, the relative lack of choice accounts for "the absence of psychological maladjustment," in contrast to the psychological distress facing young women in the US. In Mead's words:

> Just as a low-grade moron would not be hopelessly handicapped in Samoa, although he would be a public charge in a large American city, so individuals with slight nervous instability have a much more favourable chance in Samoa than in America. Furthermore the amount of individualisation, the range of variation, is much smaller in Samoa. Within our wider limits of deviation there are inevitably found weak and non-resistant temperaments. And just as our society shows greater development of personality, so also it shows a larger proportion of individuals who have succumbed before the complicated exactions of modern life. (143)

Significantly, Samoan children are not burdened by close, personal relationships with their parents: "that submission to the parent or defiance of the parent . . . is not found in Samoa. Children reared in households where there are half a dozen adult women to care for them and dry their tears, and half a dozen adult males, all of whom represent constituted authority, do not distinguish their parents as sharply as our children do" (144). Indeed, the distributed network of familial relations means that the parent has a less controlling relationship with his daughter. Children still have rules to follow and must defer to the adults, but affections are more "diffuse" (145). Finally, in the matter of the relationship between the sexes, Samoan girls learn "to subordinate their choices in the selection of friends or lovers to an observance of certain categories. Friends must be relatives of one's own sex; lovers, non-relatives" (145). The diffuse nature of familial relationships in Samoa contrasts greatly with the nuclear family standard dominant in the United States, where a girl becomes

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

"dependent on a few individuals" and "to expect rewards of life from certain kinds of personalities." Instead of thinking of boys as a "class," she relates to them as "individuals," and this in turn results in romantic relationships that, Mead contends, are unknown to Samoan girls (145–46).

In a culture that overwhelms children, and, in particular, young girls with choice, Mead believes that we must eliminate the strong role that parents play in a girl's life and the "plea" made to children "in terms of personal affection" (148). We must, in other words, stop emotionally blackmailing children and forcing them to submit to the demands of loyalty from the parents: "In our ideal of freedom of the individual and the dignity of human relations it is not pleasant to realise that we have developed a form of family organization which often cripples the emotional life, and warps and confuses the growth of many individuals' power to consciously live their own lives" (148). Like Gilman, Mead concludes that it is the nature of our social relations that causes mental and emotional anguish. Mead believes, however, that we can generate a more diffuse family structure that promotes individuality without reassembling the material-cultural environment to emphasize one cultural pattern over others. Cultivating the value of tolerance for other ways of life proves to be advantageous over Gilman's utopian plans, insofar as people are free to choose the kind of life they want to live in accordance with their temperaments and personalities: "be he mystic or soldier, business man or artist, a civilization in which there are many standards offers a possibility of satisfactory adjustment to individuals of many different temperamental types, of diverse gifts and varying interests" (170).

Writing ten or so years after the publication of Gilman's *Herland*, Mead tells us there is not one standard (that is, not one generalized condition of motherhood and hence not one individualistic mode of experience, as Gilman diagnoses the problem), but many standards because of a plurality of cultural attitudes among modern American families. In her estimation, the issue appears to be that American families do not recognize the extent to which we should be teaching our children not what but how to think. Parents, in other words, are not preparing their kids for the range of choices they will face outside of the home (169–70). True to her aim, Mead presents a Samoan contrast to persuade her American readership of the idea that there is no one "correct" cultural practice or solution to the problems of human experience, and that what they consider to be the absolute, immutable norm is but one among many possible cultural attitudes and practices: "At the present time we live in a period of transition. We have many standards but we still believe that only one standard can be the right one" (170). According to Mead, it would be advantageous for parents to recognize this fact, as it will make the lives of their children easier in the long run; for, in the end, it is psychologically healthier for children not to be forced to make the choice between what they want to do and what their parents say they ought to do, since the latter may or may not be consistent with their personalities, passions, and interests.

Mead understood that what is at stake is the mental health of American adolescents, and that it is the conflict of choices that might have contributed to the problem of teen suicide in the 1920s. Thus, whereas Gilman was concerned solely with enabling women to choose by changing their material environment, Mead seems to have inhabited a very different sense of the problem, which could not be addressed merely by modifying the material environment. What looked to Gilman as one dominant, generalized pattern looks to Mead as a plurality of patterns that require a gradual shift in cultural attitudes. "When no one group," writes Mead, "claims ethical sanction for its customs, and each group welcomes to its midst only those who are temperamentally fitted for

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

membership, then we shall have realized the high point of individual choice and universal toleration which a heterogeneous culture and a heterogeneous culture alone can attain" (170). Mead's belief in the cultivation of tolerance as a value was meant to prompt her American readership to embrace a wider range of social attitudes and cultural practices.

Mead's assumptions about cultural progress thus differ from Gilman's in a key way: whereas Gilman believes that cultural progress must be attained by leaving an outdated cultural practice behind in favor of a new, dominant one, Mead is less sure about how progress might be achieved, relying more explicitly on readers to decide the course of cultural change. Set against Mead's example, in other words, Gilman comes across as much more dogmatic in her theoretical commitments, believing her method to be most effective for enacting social change. Mead, by contrast, is less sure that the solution to the problem of choice lies in national consolidation around a single iconotrope. Instead, she gives readers the freedom to generate their own iconotropes with which to mold their social lives. Mead's strategy indicates a more reader-centered, process-oriented utopia guided by values that she believes are more compatible with a multicultural and ethnically diverse nation.

Even so, though Gilman and Mead diverge in their strategic approach to making culture, they share the joint pragmatist feminist concern of enacting cultural change as opposed to merely yielding objective facts about the present. Thus, like Gilman, Mead ultimately devises a method for denaturalizing the cultural norms of the United States and equipping readers with the conceptual tools that they need to deal with the problem of choice facing young women outside of the home. Mead's goal was ultimately to instrumentalize the text of *Coming of Age in Samoa* by also making it portable and imaginatively transposing it to a different geographical context altogether where it will afford extracontextual meanings to be derived by its intended audience. Transformed into an icon, the Samoan cultural pattern, Mead avers, might serve uses other than the mere production of accurate anthropological knowledge about other cultures.

Shifting the focus from the meaning of the text to its uses, both Gilman and Mead intended to elicit participatory reading practices with a view to generating solutions to a problem. In Gilman, however, the reader is not authorized to judge which cultural pattern might be most appropriate, but is instead offered an argument for a social reform agenda. As we have seen so far, Mead offers a different sort of argument that leans on cultural values that are familiar to her readership, and that assumes we need not revolutionary social reform but a change in attitude toward other ways of life—the very same change in attitude that Mead wishes to cultivate in her own readers:

> At the present time we live in a period of transition. We have many standards but we still believe that only one standard can be the right one. We present our children the picture of a battle-field where each group is fully armoured in a conviction of the righteousness of its cause. And each of these groups make forays among the next generation. But it is unthinkable that a final recognition of the great number of ways in which man, during the course of history and at the present time, is solving the problems of life, should not bring with it in turn the downfall of our belief in a single standard. . . Samoa knows but one way of life and it teaches it to her children. Will we, who have the knowledge of many ways, leave our children free to choose among them? (Mead 2001, 170)

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Indeed, by rejecting a single standard and cultivating knowledge about other ways of life, Mead intends to open up the minds of her own readers to the idea that there are many ways to solve the problems of human experience, and that there is no one correct standard, in contrast to Gilman. By articulating a solution that's less prescriptive, Mead underscores the lack of choice Gilman offers her readers.

Mead's approach is finally more gradualist, then, and less revolutionary, relying on the education of her readers so that they can make informed choices. In contrast to Gilman, who was focused on impressing on readers the content of her theory, Mead was more interested in modeling for readers how to think about the problem of choice, that is, how to impress on them a form of thinking intended to be passed down to future generations:

> Education, in home more than at school, instead of being a special pleading for one régime, a desperate attempt to form one particular habit of mind which will withstand all outside influences, must be prepared for those very influences . . . this child of the future must have an open mind. The home must cease to plead an ethical cause of a religious belief with smiles or frowns, caresses or threats. The children must be taught how to think, not what to think. And because old errors die slowly, they must be taught tolerance, just as to-day they are taught intolerance. They must be taught that many ways are open to them, no one sanctioned above its alternative, and that upon them and upon them alone lies the burden of a choice. Unhampered by prejudices, unvexed by too early conditioning to any one standard, they must come clear-eyed to the choices which lie before them. (169)

Readers too must come clear-eyed to the choices that lie before them, and they must be free of prejudice and dogmatism if the kind of society that Mead envisions is to be realized. This can be achieved only when readers expose themselves to other ways of thinking and living. Although it is thus true that Gilman's solution to the problem of choice is open to revision, Mead underscores that utopia lies not in the realization of one (even if provisional) plan but in the negotiation of multiple possibilities for social reform in the minds of readers. Mead recommends not one way of life, in other words, but collective negotiation of many possible solutions to problems that will inevitably arise as historical conditions change.

In the end, the purpose of presenting an icon of Samoan experience is to take what is useful to solve what Mead believes is the source of many social ills: cultural intolerance. Surprisingly, like Gilman, Mead recognized the harm caused by the way girls are raised. Neutral on the question of whether to eliminate the nuclear family standard, however, Mead asserts that we must cultivate relationships with our children that are not too personal and that prevent young women from becoming emotionally and economically dependent on a few individuals. More significantly, Mead emphasizes the importance of teaching our children not what to think but how to think.

**Acknowledgments.** I'd like to thank Robert Caserio for commenting on an earlier draft of this article. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewers and *Hypatia*'s editorial team.

## Notes

1 See Evans 2014 for an account of Gilman's heteronormative gender politics and Upin 1993 for an account of the convergences and divergences of Dewey's and Gilman's thought. Upin's essay discusses

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Gilman's thought in relation to Melusina Fay Peirce and Mary Hill, but Hayden 1981 gives the most thorough account of the material feminists and Gilman's place within this movement.

Gilman concedes that "changing the machinery of social intercourse" is extremely difficult, for "it is far easier to prove present evil than future good" (Gilman 1999, 224). Gilman thus tells us that bringing about systemic change requires "not only that he convince the contented followers of the present system of its wrong, but that he prove to their satisfaction the superiority of some other system" (161).

**2** See, for example, Allen 1988; Kessler 1995 for accounts of Gilman's feminist utopian theory.

**3** See, for example, Love 1983; Allen 2009. Gilman's relationship to the suffrage movement was ambivalent because of its ideological underpinnings, which didn't address the material-cultural environment that imprisoned women in the home. According to Cynthia Davis, Gilman supported the suffrage cause but viewed the movement "as too myopic in its focus and too prosaic in its goals." Gilman also objected on account of its "individualistic strain" which "troubled her." Even so, Gilman campaigned on behalf of the movement nationally and internationally (Davis 2010, 266). See Dolgin 2015 for an account of the transatlantic feminist theater milieu, which featured well-known artists such as Ibsen, Wilde, Pinero, and Granville Barker, and lesser known women playwrights who more explicitly advocated for suffrage, such as Clothilde Graves, Edith Lyttleton, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Cicely Hamilton, among others. See also Hayden 1981, whose influential study details the goals of the suffrage movement and its relationship to the material feminist movement.

**4** See McKenna 2001; Deweese-Boyd 2015. Dewey also wrote an article concerning the utopian school in *The New York Times* (Dewey 1933).

**5** The Victorian nursery is depicted in the story as a decomposing body on the brink of extinction, indicating the malleability of our cultural practices, which unfold at the intersection of nature and culture in our built environments.

**6** The nursery, in other words, is what N. Katherine Hayles has referred to as a material metaphor (Hayles 2002). Laura Walls identifies a related concept, "the radical metaphor" (Walls 1993).

**7** Gilman's interest in Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and evolutionary sociology is well documented, but, with the exception of Brian Lloyd, the theoretical implications of Darwin's emphasis on the principle of social cooperation in *The Descent of Man* in connection with Gilman have yet to be explored more fully (Lloyd 1998). For the former, see, for example, Egan 1989; Hudak 2003. See Allen 2015 for an account of Gilman and Olive Schreiner as feminist social Darwinists.

**8** See Weinstein 2012 for a discussion of "chronopolitics" in Poe's aesthetic treatment of time. A specialized concept of culture emerges in the Boasian school of anthropology as the means to correct the problematic progressivist vision of Darwinian accounts of cultural evolution. See Hegeman 1999; Aronoff 2013.

**9** And yet, using Darwin's own insights, we can call into question Gilman's upholding of an artificial barrier that prevents her from including in her vision of the nation all citizens, regardless of their ethnicity. Alternatively, we might apply a process-model of utopia, whereby as one problem is solved (the problem of the Victorian nursery), other problems will arise that will require us to make new plans, as Gilman intimates in *Herland*.

**10** Gilman's concern that women be raised to the condition of humanity is elucidated by Seigfried 2001.

**11** Gilman was very interested in developing a business model in which women specialize in different branches of domestic labor, including professional cooks, cleaners, and shoppers. *What Diantha Did* (1910) is Gilman's fictional rendering of how housework might be monetized (Gilman 2005).

**12** See Gilman 1898, 88–89 for a discussion of the collective nature of human labor, and the need to subordinate the interests of the individual for the greater good. For a discussion of how the oversexed condition of woman contributes to our subordination of the collective good to our individual needs, see page 76.

**13** Vandyck initially admits his fear of "the effects of a too intensive system of culture," but that fear is assuaged when he sees the overall happy state of Herlander children: "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 education for citizenship" (Gilman 2012, 130). Gilman's method of education also echoes Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. Both insist that too much professional/disciplinary specialization must be avoided, and that a good education gives students "common knowledge" and "special knowledge" (Dewey 1922, 127). For accounts of Gilman's views about education, see De Simone 1995; Cannon and De La Rosa 2001.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

**14** According to Michael Robertson, Gilman was one of the four "last utopians" (which included Edward Bellamy, William Morris, and Edward Carpenter) before the twentieth century took a dystopian turn (Robertson 2018). For an overview of the broader literary and intellectual currents running through Gilman's work (which includes connections to figures as varied as William Dean Howells, Ambrose Bierce, Lester Frank Ward, and George Bernard Shaw), see Davis and Knight 2004.

**15** Schwab 2012 develops Robert Graves's definition of iconotropy, which he discusses in *The Greek Myths*.

**16** See Watson 2012 for an account of the linguistic turn in anthropology in the 1950s and 60s.

**17** In casting "The Yellow Wallpaper" as social realism, I bypass the whole realism/naturalism debate. It is my view that how we define a generic category and the label we choose to apply to a particular novel tells us more about the ontological commitments of the literary critic than about the novel itself. Thus, if one argues that naturalism is really another form of realism, it is because of the critic's commitment to an ontological framework in which there is no extratextual reality, no world outside of the market, and no self outside of language. If, on the other hand, one argues that naturalism is a different genre from realism, one in effect draws a distinction between works that emphasize the constructed nature of the text (including reality when understood as text), and works that affirm the existence of an extratextual world, and the possibility of representing our extratextual experience of it. For a discussion of how certain methods of literary criticism foreground the critic rather than the literary works, see Tallis 1998, 120–26. For those interested in the connections among realism, feminism, and social reform, see Andrade 2004. Scholarship on the question of reference and utopian fiction is vast, but I am especially indebted to Pfaelzer 1988 and Moylan 2014.

Although I don't have room to elaborate on Gilman's relationship to modernism, I also note that I see her as anticipating what Lisi Schoenbach has recently called "pragmatic modernism" (Schoenbach 2012). See George Cotkin for an account of Gilman as a "reluctant modernist" in her close intellectual alliance with current Darwinian intellectual trends. "Reluctant modernist intellectuals," writes Cotkin, "were, in essence, engaged in what might conveniently be referred to as a 'search for order' in the domain of thought and culture" (Cotkin 1992, xiv). Reluctant modernists, according to Cotkin, rejected the "chaos" and "destruction of values associated with modernity"; instead, they sought to "reconcile . . . the values of an earlier period with the ideals of a new era" (xiv). In this reading, reluctant modernism is implicitly pragmatist in its nature, inasmuch as social change is achieved in a gradualist (reconstructivist: working within pre-existing institutions and improving them) rather than in a revolutionary manner.

**18** See Chang 2010 for a conception of utopia as anti-utopia.

**19** See Hayden 1981, 189–95 for Gilman's promotion of the apartment hotel. Significantly, one hundred years later we have not moved away from the single-family home as the American standard, and for this reason alone, Gilman's message is still relevant. To be sure, work is available to women, and various aspects of childrearing that fell under the umbrella of generalized motherhood at the time Gilman wrote her novel are distributed across a broader network of social relations. We now have daycares, kindergartens, summer camps, and babysitters to help raise today's children, but they are available only to the economically affluent. Moreover, the machinery of social intercourse remains intact, and one cannot help but wonder what would have happened if the United States had adopted more widely the apartment house about which Gilman writes in *Women and Economics*:

> The apartments would be without kitchens; but there would be a kitchen belonging to the house from which meals could be served to the families in their rooms or in a common dining-room, as preferred. It would be a home where the cleaning was done by efficient workers, not hired separately by the families, but engaged by the manager of the establishment; and a roof-garden, day nursery, and kindergarten, under well-trained nurses and teachers, would insure proper care of the children. (186)
>
> It is also worth noting that assisted living facilities, aimed at the affluent retired adult, and hotels, are modeled after the apartment house. We must also not forget that, as Hayden 1981 and Upin 1993 have argued, Jane Addams's Hull House designed and tested many of these ideas. See Upin 1993, 55. Finally, it is worth noting that John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, Ida B. Wells, Ella Flagg Young, W. E. B. DuBois, and Gilman were frequent visitors at Hull house, and were connected through their friendship with Jane Addams. See Crocco and Hendry 1999, 33.

**20** For a study that elaborates the connections among the cultural anthropologists, the American pragmatists, and Darwin, see Torres Colón and Hobbs 2015.

**21** Mead used her highly idealized representation of Samoans as a mirror for the American cultural imaginary. Mead's stereotyped depiction of Samoa is problematic, especially given that she does not reference US

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

occupation. For this and other reasons, her famous study of American Samoa as a young anthropologist in training has enjoyed a mixed reception history. For a critique of Mead's work, see Freeman 1983, and for a historical account of the reception of her work, see Shankman 2009. See also Newman 1996 for an account of Mead's feminism within the context of white identity politics.

22 Mead predicts that when Samoan society is exposed to "European standard[s] of sex behaviors, the need for choice, the forerunner of conflict, will enter into Samoan society" (Mead 2001, 139–40).

## References


Allen, Judith A. 2009. *The feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Sexualities, histories, progressivism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Allen, Judith A. 2015. Progressive portraits: Literature in feminisms of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Olive Schreiner. In *Literature and the development of feminist theory*, ed. Robin Truth Goodman. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Allen, Polly Wynn. 1988. *Building domestic liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's architectural feminism*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Andrade, Brandi Hoffman. 2004. Hedda and her sisters: Realism, feminism, and social reform on the American stage (Henrik Ibsen, Norway, George Bernard Shaw, Rachel Crothers, Edith Wharton). PhD diss., University of Texas at Dallas.

Aronoff, Eric. 2013. *Composing cultures: Modernism, American literary studies, and the problem of culture*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.

Cannon, Julie Ann Harms and Adrian De La Rosa. 2001. Utopian feminism and feminist pedagogy: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the everyday classroom. *Quarterly Journal of Ideology* 24 (1/2): 1–22.

Chang, Li-Wen. 2010. Economics, evolution, and feminism in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian fiction. *Women's Studies* 39 (1): 319–48.

Cotkin, George. 1992. *Reluctant modernism: American thought and culture, 1880–1900*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Crocco, Margaret and Petra Munro Hendry. 1999. *Pedagogies of resistance: Women educator activists, 1880–1960*. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Darwin, Charles. 2004. *The descent of man*, ed. James Moore and Adrian Desmond. London: Penguin Books.

Davis, Cynthia J. 2010. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A biography*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Davis, Cynthia J. and Denise D. Knight. 2004. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman and her contemporaries: Literary and intellectual contexts*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

De Simone, Deborah M. 1995. Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the feminization of education. *The Women in Literature and Life Assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English* 4.

Deweese-Boyd, Ian T. E. 2015. There are no schools in utopia: John Dewey's democratic education. *Education and Culture* 31 (2): 69–80.

Dewey, John. 1922. *Democracy and education*. New York: The MacMillan Company.

Dewey, John. 1933. Dewey outlines utopian schools. Totally unlike ours, they would let youth learn by following gifted elders. *Sunday*, April 23.

Dewey, John. 1958. *Experience and nature*. New York: Dover Publications.

Dolgin, Ellen Ecker. 2015. *Shaw and the actresses franchise league: Staging equality*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co.

Egan, Maureen L. 1989. Evolutionary theory in the social philosophy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman. *Hypatia* 4 (1): 102–19.

Evans, Lynne. 2014. "You see, children were the—the raison d'être": The reproductive futurism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*. *Canadian Review of American Studies* 44 (2): 302–19.

Freeman, Derek. 1983. *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The making and unmaking of an anthropological myth*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. 1898. *Women and economics: A study of the economic relation between men and women as a factor in social evolution*. Boston: Small, Maynard & Company.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. 1907. A woman's utopia. *The Times Magazine* 1, January-March.


https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. 1999. The yellow wallpaper. In *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman reader*, ed. Ann J. Lane. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. 2005. *What Diantha did*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. 2012. *Herland and related writings*, ed. Beth Sutton-Ramspeck. Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press.
Hayden, Deloris. 1981. *The grand domestic revolution: A history of feminist designs for American homes, neighborhoods, and cities*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
Hayles, N. Katherine. 2002. *Writing machines*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
Hegeman, Susan. 1999. *Patterns for America: Modernism and the concept of culture*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
Hudak, Jennifer. 2003. The social inventor: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the (re)production of perfection. *Women's Studies* 32 (4): 455–77.
Kessler, Carol Farley. 1995. *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her progress toward utopia with selected writings*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press.
Lloyd, Brian. 1998. Feminism, utopian and scientific: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the prison of the familiar. *American Studies* 39 (1): 93–113.
Love, Rosaleen. 1983. Darwinism and feminism: The "woman question" in the life and work of Olive Schreiner and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. In *The wider domain of evolutionary thought*, ed. David Oldroyd and Ian Langham. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
McKenna, Erin. 2001. *The task of utopia: A pragmatist and feminist perspective*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001.
Mead, Margaret. 2001. *Coming of age in Samoa: A psychological study of primitive youth for western civilization*. New York: Perennial.
Moylan, Tom. 2014. *Demand the impossible: Science fiction and the utopian imagination*. Oxford: Peter Lang.
Newman, Louise Michele. 1996. Coming of age but not in Samoa: Reflections on Margaret Mead's legacy for western liberal feminism. *American Quarterly* 48 (2): 233–72.
Newman, Louise Michele. 1998. *White women's rights: The racial origins of feminism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Pfaelzer, Jean. 1988. *The utopian novel in America, 1886–1896: The politics of form*. Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press.
Robertson, Michael. 2018. *The last utopians: Four late nineteenth-century visionaries and their legacy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
Schoenbach, Lisi. 2012. *Pragmatic modernism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Schwab, Gabrielle. 2012. *Literary ethnographies: Literature, culture, and subjectivity*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Shankman, Paul. 2009. *The thrashing of Margaret Mead: Anatomy of an anthropological controversy*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
Seigfried, Charlene Haddock. 2001. Can a "man-hating" feminist also be a pragmatist? On Charlotte Perkins Gilman. *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 15 (2): 74–85.
Suvin, Darko. 2016. *Metamorphoses of science fiction: On the poetics and history of a literary genre*, ed. Gerry Canavan. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang.
Tallis, Raymond. 1998. *In defense of realism*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
Torres Colón, Gabriel Alejandro, and Charles A. Hobbs. 2015. The intertwining of culture and nature: Franz Boas, John Dewey, and Deweyan strands of American anthropology. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 76 (1): 139–62.
Upin, Jane S. 1993. Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Instrumentalism beyond Dewey. *Hypatia* 8 (2): 38–63.
Walls, Laura Dassow. 1993. *Seeing new worlds: Henry David Thoreau and nineteenth-century natural science*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
Watson, Timothy. 2012. *Culture writing: Literature and anthropology in the midcentury Atlantic world*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Weinbaum, Alys Eve. 2001. Writing feminist genealogy: Charlotte Perkins Gilman, racial nationalism, and the reproduction of maternalist feminism. *Feminist Studies* 27 (2): 271–302.
Weinstein, Cindy. 2012. When is now? Poe's aesthetics of temporality. In *American literature's aesthetic dimensions*, ed. Cindy Weinstein and Christopher Looby. New York: Columbia University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press

**Aleksandra Hernandez** is a postdoctoral associate in the Department of English and an affiliated faculty member in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Miami. Her research interests include American feminist pragmatism, philosophy of emotions, and the environmental humanities. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment*, *Journal of Modern Literature*, and *Arizona Quarterly*.

**Cite this article:** Hernandez A (2022). Pragmatist Feminist Utopias: Gilman, Mead, and the Problem of Choice. *Hypatia* **37**, 76–96. https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69

https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2021.69 Published online by Cambridge University Press