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Motherhood in *Herland*
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Zásady pro vypracování

Závěrečná bakalářská práce se zabývá tématem mateřství románu *Herland* Charlotte Perkins Gilmanové. Studentka v úvodu nastíní historicko-kulturní kontext románu (především postavení žen a pohledy na mateřství) a také představí feminismus (vč. relevantních pojmů, které vysvětlí) a vybrané feministické přístupy k mateřství a ženství, se kterými bude pracovat. Autorku dále studentka představí v literárním kontextu a zmíní použité literární prvky. V analytické části se studentka zaměří na zobrazení mateřství a postavení žen. Své analýzy bude studentka opírat o vhodné feministické zdroje, další sekundární literaturu (vč. literárních kritik) a také použije úryvky z primární literatury k ilustraci svých tvrzení. V závěru práce studentka vyvodí obecnější závěry o zobrazení postavení žen a jejich pohled na mateřství.

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Annotation

This thesis deals with different feminist perceptions of motherhood and its reflection in the novel *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The first part offers a brief historical overview of American women writers, and it outlines feminism with a special emphasis on motherhood. The second part examines the selected novel and explores specific issues connected to motherhood and their close relation to feminism.

Keywords

Feminism, motherhood, women, the USA, patriarchy, utopia

Název

Motherhood in *Herland*

Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá rozličnými vnímáními mateřství z pohledu feminismu a jejich vyobrazením v románu *Herland* od Charlotte Perkins Gilmanové. První část nastiňuje historii literatury amerických autorek a poskytuje přehled feminismu s důrazem na mateřství jako jedno z feministických témat. Druhá část se věnuje rozboru vybraného románu a pojednává o problematice mateřství ve vztahu k feminismu.

Klíčová slova

Feminismus, mateřství, ženy, USA, patriarchát, utopie

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INTRODUCTION

“I am sure that if the mothers of various nations could meet, there would be no wars.”
- E. M. Foster

Women have historically faced many challenges stemming from gender discrimination and when attempting to speak up, their voices have often been silenced. While feminist thinkers and activists managed to address a lot of these issues (and successfully solve some), certain topics may be seen as a feminist grey area, for instance motherhood. The term motherhood has a different meaning for every person based on their childhood, education, society they live in and several other aspects, but there is one thing common for all mothers – motherhood significantly impacts their life in some way, negatively or positively. The major purpose of this thesis is to examine two main opposing feminist stances on motherhood in history. One has traditionally been supporting motherhood to empower women and ensure all their needs are met, whereas the other has been trying to revolt against motherhood as a method of controlling women used by a patriarchal society. The former stance was closely connected to matricentric feminism, while the latter one was mainly prominent in radical feminism in the 20th century.

The first chapter aims to examine the history of female writers in American literature from the colonial period to the 20th century. It starts by introducing Anne Bradstreet, one of the first female voices in American literature whose poem “Before the Birth of One of Her Children” expresses her concern about the dangers of pregnancy and labour. When exploring further across history, more female authors are introduced in this chapter. Many of them covered social issues in their works (a tendency common for female writers), whilst some wrote about other areas of interest. There is a special emphasis on Charlotte Perkins Gilman and not only her interest in women’s rights and the impact of motherhood on women, but also the techniques she used to convey her thoughts as accurately and effectively as possible. In addition, there is an overview of Gilman’s personal life in this part to put things into perspective and provide context for the topics discussed in her literary works. Later, this chapter introduces other women authors writing mainly in the 20th century and examines the impact of feminism, gender discrimination and common negative experiences of women on the literature produced by them.

The second chapter thoroughly investigates feminism and the issues addressed by American feminists in the 20th century. It briefly outlines the feminist waves and mentions their possible pitfalls, focuses on patriarchy and the rigours of it and explores gender inequality and the concept of femininity. Moreover, it explains some specific feminist theories, such as

humanist feminism and gynocentric feminism. Lastly, this chapter deals with motherhood, examining the way society, intentionally or not, affects motherhood and mothers, the importance of biological differences when it comes to nurturing children, and the compatibility of motherhood with employment. It shall provide sufficient context for a better understanding of the last part focused specifically on the examined novel.

The main aim of this thesis is to analyse motherhood in *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. This book is the focus piece since, for a feminist novel, it presents motherhood from quite an unusual point of view. As it is a utopian novel, it offers insight into a fictional world that presents the author's image of a fictitious society that hinges on motherhood. Furthermore, its tendency to glorify a purely matriarchal society also makes this novel slightly controversial, as it insinuates the stereotype of feminists being men-haters. The final chapter attempts to scrutinise the matriarchal society composed of the female characters, and also the dynamics between them and the male characters visiting their land. Most importantly, it shows different interpretations, understandings and the importance of motherhood for the inhabitants versus the visitors. It looks at femininity, motherhood and maternity, fatherhood, virginity, childrearing, education, and how all that affects not only one's life, but the entire society and its future.

1. WOMEN IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

When exploring the beginnings of American literature, one cannot deny that the most renowned authors are men. Considering the predominant gender of the first settlers in America, it is easy to see why. Although female voices in American literature were to appear soon, it is possible to say that both the role and the importance of women writers are still to this day often omitted and ignored.

However, there are exceptions to male exclusiveness in early American literature, such as Anne Bradstreet. Stanford highlights that the uniqueness of this author lay in her deliberate desire to be a poet. Despite the fact that she was highly religious, and religion is one of her cardinal themes, her poetry covers various topics from social and domestic subjects to intellectual and political issues. Her works reflect the gradual development of American literature and the drift away from British literature.¹ Bradstreet was a progressive poet. In the first part of her poem “Before the Birth of One of Her Children”, she writes:

All things within this fading world hath end,
Adversity doth still our joyes attend;
No ties so strong, no friends so dear and sweet,
But with death’s parting blow is sure to meet.
The sentence past is most irrevocable,
A common thing, yet oh inevitable.²

Not only is the poem concerned with the inevitability and acceptance of death, but also, as the title suggests, it is Anne Bradstreet’s reaction to the interconnection of death and giving birth. Pregnancy at that time was already perilous, but it is the high risk of dying during labour or afterwards that Bradstreet accentuates. However, this poem is not strongly emotional, but rather neutrally depicts death as something to be accepted, as it cannot be escaped anyway. The mentioned connection of labour to death can be interpreted in different ways. It could be speculated whether labour that could result in the death of a mother was something the author has personally made peace with, as she accepted dying as something ultimately inevitable, or if she was so used to seeing such an occurrence everywhere that she became indifferent to this matter. Either way, Bradstreet still found it important to vocalise her concerns with this matter. The topic of social issues has always been a mutual topic for women writers throughout history. Women frequently faced challenges and discrimination based on gender. It is therefore understandable why they were generally more likely to address issues of social injustice

¹ Ann Stanford, “Anne Bradstreet,” in *Major Writers of Early American Literature*, ed. Everett H. Emerson (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1972), 33.

² Anne Bradstreet, *The Poems of Mrs. Anne Bradstreet*, ed. By Charles Eliot Norton, (New York: The Duodecimos, 1897), 269.

concerning not only the role of women in society, but also other social issues outside this realm. Focusing on readership at the end of the 18th century, Gray claims that the novel was a highly popular literary genre among female readers. The reason is that it allowed women to find an appreciation of the way they lived by comparing their own life stories to the worse ones they read about in fictional novels, which reflected their problems in a more dramatic way.³ It could be assumed that another reason was simply the comfort these books offered women by providing them with a way of escape from the daily struggles in their usually quite ordinary lives.

Although successful female writers such as Anne Bradstreet existed, most women still struggled with integrated feelings of inferiority reflected in their confidence when it came to producing literary works. According to Gray, hiding behind pen names and deprecating their books was still a common shared experience for women in the 19th century, even though the authors of some of the most renowned works of that time, namely *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *The Wide, Wide World*, were women.⁴ The novel was not the only literary genre that women focused on and successfully wrote in the 19th century. As Procházka observes, Margaret Fuller was the most intellectual female writer during the antebellum period. She also became the first female journalist in the United States who managed to live on her salary. Although she was a feminist who fought for equality in personal relationships, she accepted the division of work based on gender and did not feel the need to fight against it.⁵ This shows the possibility of potential dissimilarities in each feminist's interpretation of feminism, which is a topic that will be further explored later in this thesis.

To describe the life of the selected author of this thesis, it is crucial to understand the period in which she lived and wrote. Charlotte Perkins Gilman, who was born in 1860 and died in 1935, lived through an era significant not only for women's social rights but also for women writers. According to Procházka, the period between 1890 and 1920 was extremely important for female writers. Different genres, especially in prose were affected by the remarkable changes happening in women's literature at that time. One example might be the purpose of using special literary techniques, such as emotionally restrained style or stream of consciousness, to precisely convey thoughts as intended. A brilliant example would be *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman published in 1892. This short story depicts the

³ Richard Gray, *A History of American Literature* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 93.

⁴ Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 104.

⁵ Martin Procházka, Justin Quinn, Hana Ulmanová, and Erik S. Roraback, *Lectures on American Literature* (Prague: Nakladatelství Karolinum, 2002), 150–151.

effects of an actual treatment of depression that Gilman herself underwent, consisting of absolute isolation and prohibition of almost any physical and mental activity, almost driving her to insanity and resulting in a divorce from her husband.⁶ Using the aforementioned techniques in the story helps readers truly understand the frustration and feelings of helplessness of a woman trapped in a terrifying life situation who's dominated by a male authority figure, as illustrated here:

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes. [...] At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be.

I didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind, that dim subpattern, but now I am quite sure it is a woman.

By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hours.

I lie down ever so much now. John says it is good for me, and to sleep all I can.⁷

This excerpt is a telling example of using stream of consciousness to not only observe but almost adopt the narrator's thoughts almost as if they were the reader's own. Here, she observes the yellow wallpaper and starts seeing it as a metaphor for, presumably, her own life. The narrator describes the pattern of the wallpaper as some bars that keep the imaginary woman, whom she sees behind them, in prison. By then swiftly moving on to talking about her husband John, the reader is led to the assumption that it is the narrator herself who is held prisoner in her marriage and life. This is a fantastic example of using stream of consciousness to accurately depict the struggles and emotions of a character. Furthermore, the short story reflecting Gilman's own life experience only makes the story more authentic and relatable to readers. While *The Yellow Wallpaper* offers a very raw, actual and sometimes nerve-wracking insight into Gilman's life at one particular point, the tone of her novel *Herland*, published in 1915, is quite different and more light-hearted. As Smith points out, feminists have always tended to look at the past and present and propose their ideas for a better future for women. One of the ways women found escape from their daily life, in which they felt oppressed by men, was by fictionally writing about the opposite of what they knew as a norm. *Ladyland* by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is an excellent example of such a work, which describes women using advanced technology and living in perfect order. Similarly, Gilman in her novel *Herland*, also visualised how the world run by women could be orderly and beautiful.⁸ These ideas did not

⁶ Procházka et al., *Lectures on American Literature*, 151.

⁷ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland* (London: William Collins, 2022), 12–13.

⁸ Bonnie G. Smith, "Temporality," in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory*, ed. Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 986.

come from a place of frustration but rather hope and love, which is reflected in the atmosphere of this timeless novel. Unlike *The Yellow Wallpaper*, *Herland* does not feel as a projection of Gilman's negative experiences, but rather as her hopeful vision of what she imagines to be a better world. It might be assumed that after Gilman divorced her husband in 1894, two years after publishing *The Yellow Wallpaper*, and found a perhaps happier romantic relationship, such a change impacted not only her personal life but also the professional one since the tone of her latter literary pieces was notably distinct.

Romantic relationships and love were an important topic in the life of Charlotte Perkins Gilman for multiple reasons. According to Davis, Gilman's decision to get married was quite complicated. In her time, being someone's wife still meant being economically dependent on the other person, especially with the prospect of having children and having to provide for them, which only deepened the woman's dependence on her husband. Double standards based on one's gender led Gilman to seriously consider marriage for two consecutive years. She believed that the above-mentioned double standards could only be fully avoided by eluding marriage as such.⁹ It was not only on a personal level that Gilman was concerned about the economic dependence of women and its interconnection with social topics like marriage and motherhood. In *Women and Economics*, Gilman observed marriage as almost a business exchange, where the potential husband is said to be the demand, while the girl he chooses to marry can be seen as the supply. Marrying based on this imaginary business exchange was further enhanced by mothers who kept their daughters in the dark about sex relations. This kind of secrecy could have simply been caused by the feelings of shame associated with talking about the topic of sex. Alternatively, it could be understood as a mother's attempt to give her daughter a certain advantage on the imaginary marriage market by ensuring that she would remain innocent and pure and, therefore, more attractive to her potential husband. The former paradox of mothers feeling ashamed to talk about motherhood was not to be blamed on mothers individually, but could once again be reasoned by their economic statuses and the related pressure, as they wanted to make sure their daughters would be provided for. To protect their daughters, mothers also tended to keep a certain emotional distance from them.¹⁰ All this coercion and mixed signals from their mothers only further enhanced women's submission and resignation in marriages, so it could be speculated whether their intentionally emotionally unavailable

⁹ Cynthia J. Davis, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Biography* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 58.

¹⁰ Charlotte Perkins Gilman and American Council of Learned Societies, *Women and Economics: A Study of the Economic Relation Between Men and Women as a Factor in Social Evolution* (California: University of California Press, 1998), 49–50.

mothers actually protected their daughters or not. Concerning the intimacy between a mother and a daughter, Gilman observed that her mother would never caress her as a little child unless she was asleep. The common motive for denying one's children any form of affection was so that they did not get used to it, which would protect them later in life. Mary (Gilman's mother) applied this method of raising children after experiencing her own dissatisfaction with marriage and a lack of love from her husband. It should not be mistaken for intentionally neglecting her children caused by any detestation since Mary always took care of them and Gilman even denominated her as "baby-worshiper".¹¹ This leads to an assumption that trying to protect her children was in fact Gilman's mother's motive for denying her daughter affection and not allowing her to get used to any level of endearment. Additionally, it would not be fair to only mention Gilman's unaffectionate mother and not to talk about the importance of her father's role in this matter. As Hill points out, her father's absence had a crucial influence on Gilman's childhood when she longed for independence, self-assertion and self-respect but did not get this needed validation from either of her parents. Despite this, she showed a lively and strong personality in her journals and found passion in lecture clubs, language classes and books, which led to her physical and mental agility.¹² It cannot be denied that such forms of entertainment served Gilman as a form of escapism since she was able to forget about her daily struggles and focus her attention on other matters. A similar tendency to find an avocation, for instance reading, and use it to figuratively escape their life obstacles can be observed in many other women writers.

Numerous topics common in American literature produced by women in the 19th century persisted until the 20th century, but there were several new challenges and issues – a lot of them still stemming from gender discrimination – challenged by many female authors. One of them was Sylvia Plath, who, as Wagner-Martin points out, was just like Gilman affected by her parents trying to keep a certain emotional distance from their children. Although both she and her brother Warren felt the urge to earn the validation of their parents, Plath's was stronger than that of her brother as their parents noticeably preferred him. Not only was he a man but in addition, he was also sickly and therefore required more attention. This led Sylvia to find herself in books and trying to educate herself.¹³ As mentioned previously in this thesis, one may observe this tendency of women to seek escapism together with the common propensity of

¹¹ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1935), 10.

¹² Mary A. Hill, "A Feminist's Struggle with Womanhood," *The Massachusetts Review* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1980): 504.

¹³ Linda Wagner-Martin, *Sylvia Plath: A Literary Life*, 2nd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 4–5.

female authors to reflect traumatic childhood experiences in their literary works. As Bojan and Muthukumar observe, regarding literature as a self-help tool, it was mainly poetry that has always helped people cope with their personal or behavioural problems. In 1980, poetry therapy was officially standardised with the establishment of the National Association of Poetry Therapy. The main importance of using poetry was to release suppressed feelings and consequently to be able to cope with their issues with the help of doctors more effectively.¹⁴ Such inclinations were perhaps more prominent in women due to their inner frustration coming from their experience of having to always work slightly harder to try and achieve the same social admiration as their male counterparts. However, as Gray observes, feminist topics were not the only interest of American women writers at that time. Quite a lot of them had ardour for regional writing, namely Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, or Willa Cather. Nevertheless, these three authors still focused on writing about the social and moral transformations they saw in particular areas of the United States and explored social issues which stereotypically female writers frequently did. Wharton, Glasgow and Cather used the societies of different examined areas as a paradigm for what was happening in the nation at large. Additionally, they observed the tension between change and tradition.¹⁵ Curiosity about such a tension and observing how society accepts change is similarly popular with exclusively feminist female authors too. While it is important to acknowledge that just like male authors, female writers played a crucial role in various genres and areas of literature but in the context of this thesis, the importance of their emphatic concern with feminist topics was more fundamental.

¹⁴ Rajesh Bojan, and Dr. M. Muthukumar, "Poetry as Therapy in Anne Sexton," *The Dawn Journal* 8, no. 2 (July–December 2019): 1415.

¹⁵ Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 355.

2. FEMINISM

Before examining the topic of motherhood from a feminist perspective, it is important to define the overarching concept of feminism. This chapter gives the general definition of feminism as well as an insight into specific issues that were dealt with in the United States of America in the 20th century, mainly during the first and the second feminist waves. It also explains the intersection of social status and social perception of women and the way these two can be affected by motherhood.

To give a straightforward definition and timeline of feminism is not an easy task. In theory, the history of feminism is divided into waves. Reger describes them as follows: “[T]he so-called first wave of the women’s movement occurred in the mid-1800s and lasted into the 1920s; second wave feminism started in the early 1960s until the 1980s; and third wave feminism is generally marked as beginning in the mid-1990s through to the present.”¹⁶ Each of these waves was concerned with some characteristic feminist issues addressed at that time. However, Reger highlights that the metaphor of waves can be problematic. It suggests that since each feminist wave conquered a certain set goal, the next generation should feel no need to revisit the already addressed problems, which is simply not true. Having found solutions to such problems should not be understood as the end goal; quite the contrary. There is also a tendency to simplify feminist waves and their theories; for example, the first wave is generally defined as a time of suffrage.¹⁷ Harnois similarly comments on the problematic metaphor of feminist waves, as this rhetoric limits the growth and revisions of feminist theories. The most problematic dynamics is said to be between perceived whitewashed, privileged second-wave feminism and more diverse third-wave feminism. Third-wave feminists typically draw on second-wave works from the 1960s and 1970s, omitting the more inclusive second-wave feminist works of the 1990s.¹⁸ It could be inferred that first- and second-wave feminism was mainly concerned with issues of white middle-class women. However, the feminist waves and their main concerns should only be approached as certain frames, but it is necessary to leave some space for the development and progress of feminist theories. As demonstrated in some examples in this thesis, there is an immense variety of opinions even on an individual level among feminist thinkers from different eras, geographical areas, and social spheres. As Lois Tyson states, many individuals tend to reduce feminism to one specific feminist opinion that is

¹⁶ Jo Reger, “Finding a Place in History: The Discursive Legacy of the Wave Metaphor and Contemporary Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 43, no. 1 (2017): 194.

¹⁷ Reger, “Finding a Place,” 202.

¹⁸ Catherine Harnois, “Re-presenting Feminisms: Past, Present, and Future,” *NWSA Journal* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 122.

perceived as most prominent by them. On that basis, if they do not agree with it, they quickly reject the whole feminist theory as such.¹⁹ Many negative stereotypes are connected to feminism, which can result in people refusing to call themselves feminists, even if their actions speak otherwise. Broadly speaking, feminism can be understood as a constant effort to achieve equal rights and opportunities for all genders by challenging the mainstream social theory. According to Beasley, the link between all feminist representatives lies in their critique of misogyny, the presumption of male domination, superiority, and centrality.²⁰ Therefore, it is possible to see feminist theory as a way of fighting any oppression on a gender basis. However, it should not be mistaken for the hatred of men (misandry), who are stereotypically seen as the superior gender. Hooks comments on this issue:

When contemporary feminist movement first began there was a fierce anti-male faction. Individual heterosexual women came to the movement from relationships where men were cruel, unkind, violent, unfaithful. Many of these men were radical thinkers who participated in movements for social justice, speaking out on behalf of the workers, the poor, speaking out on racial justice. But when it came to the issue of gender they were as sexist as their conservative cohorts. Individual women came from these relationships angry. And they used that anger as a catalyst for women's liberation. As the movement progressed, as feminist thinking advanced, enlightened feminist activists saw that men were not the problem, that the problem was patriarchy, sexism, and male domination.²¹

When interpreting certain earlier texts by radical feminists, one might observe some form of anti-male bias. However, feminists later reconsidered this and saw the rationale behind gender discrimination in the patriarchal system as a whole. Tyson also points out that feminists should, in fact, include and acknowledge men's issues as feminist issues because they are closely related to women's issues and vice versa. An excellent example of this interconnection is the common occurrence of placing men in a socially inferior position in the eyes of others eyes by assigning them typically feminine features and calling them corresponding names, such as "sissies".²² Assigning men nicknames that describe the social roles of women to insult them and figuratively suggest their lower position in society adequately illustrates how normalised gender inequality is, as well as shows the clear distinction between superiority and inferiority based on their gender. This issue is rooted deep in the history of the Western patriarchal society and is distinct from biological superiority. As De Beauvoir points out, the muscular inferiority

¹⁹ Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today* (Hoboken: Routledge, 2006), 83.

²⁰ Chris Beasley, *What is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory* (Australia: Sage Publications, 1999), 4.

²¹ Bell Hooks, *Feminism Is for Everybody* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), 67.

²² Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 88.

of women is psychologically given, but this objective biological difference only becomes a woman's weakness when trying to meet the goals set by men for men.²³

Probably all feminist thinkers are aware of the two distinct positions of men and women in society, but some of them even challenge the closely related concept of femininity as such. According to Young, humanist feminism is an example of a theory that perceives femininity as a social construct excluding women from the important spheres of society, including science, politics or industry, and therefore revolts against it.²⁴ It can be said that excluding women from important spheres of society is another means of keeping them in a position where they depend on men economically and socially. Young further observes that, unlike humanist feminism, gynocentric feminism finds traditional femininity positive and valuable and acknowledges the paramount link between women and human reproduction. Therefore, it does not see femininity as a problem but instead believes that women's oppression lies in patriarchal culture that suppresses the nature of women. While humanist feminism was prominent in the US until the late 1970s, there was a shift toward gynocentrism in the mid and late 1970s.²⁵ The importance of these two different feminist approaches and the periods of their dominance will be emphasised later.

As mentioned above, femininity is closely connected to the topic of motherhood. According to De Beauvoir, the conversation cannot stop simply by affirming that motherhood is the physiological destiny of a woman. Although it is true that women's bodies are directed toward perpetuation of species, it is essential not to forget the overall context. Reproductive function can be controlled and restricted in several ways, such as using methods of birth control or having an abortion when conceived. Nevertheless, a strong judgemental attitude towards abortions can lead to forced motherhood, which is when this physiological destiny of a woman becomes her burden. It is so because such mothers might get into complicated life situations when they cannot provide for their children. The society that fights against abortions and tries to defend the rights of the fetus is the same one that does not show any interest in unwanted children once they are born and become the responsibility of each mother.²⁶ Making the decision on behalf of women and indirectly forcing them to avoid abortions once pregnant can potentially hurt not only them but also their children in the future, as their mothers may not be able to sufficiently provide them with everything they might need. One of the potential causes

²³ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2010), 69.

²⁴ Iris Marion Young, "Humanism, gynocentrism and feminist politics," *Women's Studies International Forum* 8, no. 3 (1985): 173.

²⁵ Young, "Humanism," 176–177.

²⁶ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 597–598.

is the automatic assignment of the role of a caregiver to women, merely due to their gender. As Tyson observes, taking care of children is not a role biologically linked to sex. The issue is even deeper because gender as such could be explained purely as a social construct rather than a biological difference. The fact that most women and men conform to gender roles is not because they naturally feel the urge to, but because they are socially programmed to do so.²⁷ It could be argued that mothers have a bond with their children and therefore naturally know how to take care of them. On the other hand, the abilities to perform different activities around children are still acquired and learned, so any mature adult person should be able to learn them regardless of their gender. The whole topic of maternal instinct is worth paying attention to as well. Brannon comments on research conducted on gender differences in responsiveness to babies: “These findings indicate that girls and women show more responsiveness to babies because they believe they should, and that boys and men show less responsiveness for the same reason.”²⁸ As women have been the ones responsible for raising children for a long time, it is not surprising that they have learned to accept this role as their duty, while, on the contrary, the expectations of society of men when it comes to rearing children have lowered to a minimum. However, Brannon observes that men involved in caregiving can demonstrate the ability, and even interest, in nurturing. However, she emphasises that fathering may not offer children the same intimacy as mothering. Nevertheless, the emotions related to raising children proved to be the same for both genders and are not exclusive for women.²⁹ It might be speculated whether children primarily nurtured by fathers suffer from a lack of intimacy as suggested by Brannon, or whether it is fully avoidable by being cautious enough. If Brannon’s statement proved true, it could mean the absolute need for at least partial involvement of mothers in the nurturing of children to ensure that their (mainly) emotional needs are met. Finding a compromise consisting of male participation in childcare could be a satisfactory solution when men could form better relationships with their children and women could find other interests outside of their family life and fulfil their potential. Tyson accentuates this issue with her personal experience: “My parents nevertheless believed that it would be to my best advantage to be trained as a schoolteacher because the hours and the nature of the work would not interfere with my future duties as a wife and mother should I choose to marry.”³⁰ While the phrasing of the sentence presents the choice to get married as a woman’s free option, the important fact is that young

²⁷ Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 110.

²⁸ Linda Brannon, *Gender: Psychological Perspectives* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2005), 214.

²⁹ Brannon, *Psychological Perspectives*, 214.

³⁰ Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 129.

girls are raised differently. Unlike young boys, they are subconsciously getting prepared for marriage and having children from an early age, regardless of their individual desires, which normalises gender double standards in society. The same notion is not commonly present in raising boys who generally tend to be more supported in other areas they are passionate about, they are not taught to be good husbands and fathers for their wives and children, which goes back to the prevalent conviction that women are the ones expected to take care of children. According to Firestone, the origin of dualism lies in biology. The natural reproductive difference between men and women initially caused a division of labour at the origins of class for many reasons, such as human infants taking longer to grow up than animals, or the biological specifics of women (menstruation, wet-nursing or childbirth), all of which could be seen as the cause of their historical dependence on men for a physical survivor. However, as humanity began to outgrow nature and people's values changed, it would no longer be appropriate to justify maintaining a sex class system based on biological differences.³¹ It seems that women have gradually been put in an inconvenient position due to their natural differences connected to procreation, and it reached a point where women became dependent on men and their willingness to make space in the world for them. This established notion should not be seen as certitude. Firestone elaborates on this topic:

[T]he elimination of sexual classes requires the revolt of the underclass (women) and the seizure of control of *reproduction*: not only the full restoration to women of ownership of their bodies, but also their (temporary) seizure of control of human fertility—the new population biology as well as all the social institutions of childbearing and childrearing [...] The end goal of feminist revolution must be, unlike that of the first feminist movement, not just the elimination of male *privilege* but of the *sex distinction* itself: genital differences between human beings would no longer matter culturally.³²

Again, Firestone here acknowledges the differences between men and women, but it is then a matter of whether society decides to base one's worth on these gender distinctions. Her stance also highlights the importance of women being able to control their bodies, especially when it comes to the question of reproductive rights. That is concluded to be the best way to ensure equality between the genders. Restricting women of reproductive rights could be seen as a male statement confirming their authority and power. As Chesney-Lind and Hadi observe: "Legal and cultural norms often label women's actions as 'deviant,' 'not respectable,' even 'criminal' when they are seeking medical services that allow them to control their sexuality and

³¹ Sulamith Firestone, *The dialectic of sex: the case for feminist revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 8–10.

³² Firestone, *The dialectic of sex*, 10–11.

reproduction.”³³ When the whole atmosphere in society suggests a judgemental attitude towards women who decide to control their reproduction, it is obvious that such actions will often relate to feelings of shame and fear of being judged. Being in such a position can make women feel powerless and their reproductive rights become merely men’s and the whole society’s interest. On the other hand, Gilman in her novel *Herland* describes a society consisting of women who, despite having their reproductive rights controlled too, are accepting of that:

Then came the filling up of the place. When a population multiplies by five every thirty years it soon reaches the limits of a country, especially a small one like this. [...] Do what they would, however, there soon came a time when they were confronted with the problem of “the pressure of population” in an acute form. There was really crowding, and with it, unavoidably, a decline in standards.

And how did those women meet it?

Not by a “struggle for existence” which would result in an everlasting writhing mass of underbred people trying to get ahead of one another—some few on top, temporarily, many constantly crushed out underneath, a hopeless substratum of paupers and degenerates, and no serenity or peace for anyone—no possibility for really noble qualities among the people at large.

Neither did they start off on predatory excursions to get more land from somebody else, or to get more food from somebody else, to maintain their struggling mass.

Not at all. 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.”³⁴

Judging from this excerpt, the reproductive rights of the female characters were limited to stop overpopulation on the island. However, since the decision was made calmly and collectively by all the women involved, there seems to be zero rebellion against the decision because the characters think about their society more broadly and want what is best for all of them. They tranquilly accept the responsibility to control their reproduction to ensure that their whole race will thrive in the future. The situation would probably be markedly different if there were a male figure in charge of their country and if he tried to regulate their reproduction with the same goal of avoiding overpopulation in mind since they would get a sense that they are starting to lose their bodily autonomy. Such an instance could probably lead to some form of an uprising against the country system, but that is not the case in the novel. Moreover, controlling reproduction on an individual level was present in *Herland* as well:

“We have, of course, made it our first business to train out, to breed out, when possible, the lowest types.”

“Breed out?” I asked. “How could you—with parthenogenesis?”

³³ Meda Chesney-Lind, and Syeda Tonima Hadi, “Patriarchy, Abortion, and the Criminal System: Policing Female Bodies,” *Women & Criminal Justice* 27, no. 1 (January 2017): 74.

³⁴ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 101.

“If the girl showing the bad qualities had still the power to appreciate social duty, we appealed to her, by that, to renounce motherhood. Some of the few worst types were, fortunately, unable to reproduce. But if the fault was in a disproportionate egotism—then the girl was sure she had the right to have children, even that hers would be better than others.”³⁵

Interestingly, the female characters on the island are aware that not all of them have desired personal qualities to enrich their race and there appears to be no shame or ignominy in controlling other women’s reproductive rights to breed out some unwanted attributes. Historically, not only has the quality of life of children often been seen as a responsibility of their mothers but, as Davin highlights, there was also a close connection between motherhood and eugenics in history. Mothers were seen as liable for racial health and purity and raising children became a concern of the whole nation and not just a moral decision of an individual.³⁶ Valverde observes that radical feminists such as Swiney or Pankhurst tried to use this eugenic panic about racial degeneration to feminist advantage. They saw the male heterosexual advantage to be the initial cause of it, as men were through their innate lust expediting the presumed downfall of the race.³⁷ On the other hand, there is a subcategory of a feminist theory called matricentric (mother-focused) feminism which sees the whole issue from a different perspective and brings the individuality of mothers back into the conversation. According to O’Reilly, matricentric feminism tried to emphasise women’s empowerment by making motherhood a concern of feminism. She believed that the category of mothers was different from that of women and that mothers faced specific challenges distinct from those of childless women. In the end, the oppression that mothers had to suffer was double – as mothers and as women.³⁸ Takševa comments similarly on this issue: “It [second-wave feminism] is concerned with women’s right to full control over reproduction, and its theoretical and activist efforts are often focused on the analysis of the exploitation of women not only sexually and psychologically but also as housewives and mothers.”³⁹ Her statement also highlighted the double oppression mothers had to face in a patriarchal society. Moreover, it is interesting that motherhood was often only ever discussed by feminists as a means of controlling women by patriarchy, not as something women could find empowerment in. Gynocentric feminism did

³⁵ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 118.

³⁶ Anna Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood,” *History Workshop*, no. 5 (Spring 1978): 12–13.

³⁷ Mariana Valverde, “‘When the Mother of the Race Is Free’: Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism,” in *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women’s History*, ed. Franca Iacovetta, and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 13.

³⁸ Andrea O’Reilly, “Matricentric Feminism: A Feminism for Mothers,” *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* 10, no. 1 & 2 (December 2019): 14–15.

³⁹ Tatjana Takševa, “Motherhood Studies and Feminist Theory: Elisions and Intersections,” *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement* 9, no. 1 (July 2018): 181.

the opposite and emphasised the importance of women being supported in finding power and strength in their innate mother role. Nonetheless, the important conclusion is that including motherhood in feminist theory enables women to achieve true freedom. According to Takševa, incorporating motherhood studies into dominant feminist theory and women and gender studies programs could be highly beneficial because it would make the public see how motherhood can be compatible with paid work and women's empowerment. Furthermore, it would emphasise the success of feminists in deconstructing the public-private divide. The latter has been challenged by feminists who have tried to accentuate the political, moral and social relevance of all unpaid and unvalued work (traditionally called domestic or feminine).⁴⁰

Some critics see the downfall of the whole discussion about women and work in the need for maternity leave to take care of children, a role traditionally assigned to women, and combining that with performing in the workplace. Allen explains that this issue was addressed during a conference in Berlin in 1890. The proposed solution was to cover the essentially short period, which was necessary for pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding, by maternity leave and for the government to support it. To reinforce this proposal, French physicians such as Adolphe Pinard and Blanche Edwards-Pilliet shifted public concern about childbirth to the health of the child, rather than of the woman. As they expounded, economically pressing women to return to work as soon as possible after birth could mean the need to artificially feed the child, who could consequently die of malnutrition or digestive diseases. This rhetoric happened to be more effective and influential in society.⁴¹ The journey of women to finding empowerment in their roles as mothers was clearly not an easy one, as they were trying to freely perform that role and simultaneously work equally as well as their counterparts, while being disadvantaged by their physical hardships such as pregnancy and childbirth, or expected social duties, as they were traditionally the ones who cared for children. All these factors have, unsurprisingly, influenced women's ability to perform at work as effectively as men.

⁴⁰ Takševa, "Motherhood Studies," 192.

⁴¹ Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890–1970* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 70–71.

3. MOTHERHOOD IN *HERLAND*

In the following part of the thesis, the focus shifts to *Herland*, a feminist utopian novel. The focal point will be mainly on its approach to motherhood but also on other important examples of other feminist features.

In *Herland*, written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and first published in 1915, the male feelings of superiority are clear from the very beginning of the book. When the three male characters come to an island only inhabited by women (which they are not aware of at first), they struggle even to imagine how there could possibly be no men present since the land appears to be highly civilised. Their shock and refusal to believe such a discovery is reflected in their conversation: “‘Only women there—and children,’ Jeff urged excitedly. ‘But they look—why, this is a *civilised* country!’ I [Vandyck] protested. ‘There must be men.’”⁴² Their doubts are prevalent in the first part of the book. It takes them a while to accept the truth that no men live there, which underlines the general social bias against the ability of women to function independently of men. Aside from this doubt, most parts of the book also contain double standards and false expectations of the desired qualities women should have. To illustrate this notion:

In all our discussions and speculations we [the male characters] had always unconsciously assumed that the women, whatever else they might be, would be young. Most men do think that way, I fancy.

“Woman” in the abstract is young, and, we assume, charming. As they get older they pass off the stage, somehow, into private ownership mostly, or out of it altogether. But these good ladies were very much on the stage, and yet any one of them might have been a grandmother.⁴³

This preconception evinces a strong belief in the correlation between a woman’s appearance and her worth in society. The male characters seem to have a preconceived belief that all older women accept that together with their youth, they also symbolically lose their worth and hide out, which is not the case on this women-only island. It might be speculated whether the element of non-existent male presence led to women gaining more confidence and not trying to succumb or lie low when their appearance no longer meets the beauty standards. After removing the aforesaid pressure to adhere to beauty ideals, the female characters in the novel appear to be at peace with themselves. Even the male characters start to observe this: “They were not young. They were not old. They were not, in the girl sense, beautiful; they were not in the least ferocious; and yet, as I looked from face to face, calm, grave, wise, wholly unafraid, evidently

⁴² Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 35.

⁴³ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 46.

assured and determined[.]”⁴⁴ The confidence emanating from the female characters eventually enables the male characters to overcome their instinctive urge to focus only on the visual aspect of the female existence and truly learn about the original inhabitants of the island and look beyond their looks:

I [Vandyck] find I succeed very poorly in conveying the impression I would like to of these women. So far from being ignorant, they were deeply wise—that we realized more and more; and for clear reasoning, for real brain scope and power they were A No. 1, but there were a lot of things they did not know.

They had the evenest tempers, the most perfect patience and good nature—one of the things most impressive about them all was the absence of irritability. So far we had only this group to study, but afterward I found it a common trait.⁴⁵

Ironically, while one of the male characters expresses an interesting sense of admiration for these women, whether it is their calm nature or their wisdom, his preconception suggested by the line “but there were a lot of things they did not know” still influences his ability to respect them. However, the speaker never points out any specific areas, where the female characters lacked knowledge, so his vague remark could imply his subconscious belief in male supremacy at any rate. As Tyson observes, society tends to categorize people into two groups: rational (men) or emotional (women).⁴⁶ Such a distinction leaves very little to no space for women to explore their intellect and for men to express themselves emotionally, which can lead to clashes and feelings of frustration on both sides. In *Herland*, the male characters are often surprised by the learning abilities of the female characters: “We learned their language pretty thoroughly—had to; and they learned ours much more quickly and used it to hasten our own studies.”⁴⁷ The aforementioned attitude suggests that albeit the male characters manage to learn the new language, it is only because they find it necessary in order to be able to communicate effectively, while the female characters not only learn their counterparts’ language more quickly, but also use it more productively to speed up the process of educating the newcomers, which makes this language acquisition enriching for both parties.

Furthermore, the desire of the female characters for self-improvement leads them to gain knowledge about the world outside their island. A perfect example would be when the female characters first learn about the concept of virginity:

[“]Parthenogenesis, we call it—that means virgin birth.”
She [Zava] could not follow him.
“*Birth*, we know, of course; but what is *virgin*?”

⁴⁴ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 44–45.

⁴⁵ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 76.

⁴⁶ Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 94.

⁴⁷ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 84.

Terry looked uncomfortable, but Jeff met the question quite calmly. “Among mating animals, the term *virgin* is applied to female who has not mated,” he answered. “Oh, I see. And does it apply to the male also? Or is there a different term for him?” He passed this over rather hurriedly, saying that the same term would apply, but was seldom used.⁴⁸

Due to the present nature of mothers giving birth to children without the need for male involvement on the island, the concept of virginity is completely new to them. Not being familiar with it allows one of the female characters to critically think about it based purely on the information provided by the newcomers. After learning that the term *virgin* is reserved primarily for labelling females who have not mated, Zava seems baffled. Moreover, even Jeff hesitates when questioned about where the males stand in this matter. His hesitation suggests that virginity can be seen as a purely social construct and not something connected to the nature or biology of people. For this reason, it could be said that virginity was adjusted to apply to women only and the conviction has never concerned men the same way as women. Chen points out that female virginity is often understood to be identical to purity and innocence; hence, in historical literature, it is commonly referred to using the symbol of a flower, such as a (white) rose or a lily. The term defloration used as a metaphor for losing the virginity of a woman expresses the contrast between masculine dominance and feminine subjection.⁴⁹ This expression represents the dynamics between a female virgin in a passive role and a male dominant figure taking her virginity away and consequently changing her social status, as her worth in society after losing her virginity is seen as significantly lower. Understanding virginity as a construct based on male dominance explains why it was an unknown concept for the female characters living on the women-only island in *Herland*, and why they were perplexed after learning of the male characters’ definition of it.

Similarly, the male characters struggle to grasp procreation on the island when there are no men to be found anywhere. Due to their nature, they try to find a rational explanation for this phenomenon and the only one they can naturally come up with is the aforementioned parthenogenesis. For a while, it seems like a good enough explanation for them, but they quite soon start questioning it: “Terry had insisted that if they were parthenogenetic they’d be as alike as so many ants or aphids; he urged their visible differences as proof that there must be men—somewhere.”⁵⁰ Although they could only find parthenogenesis as a possible reason for female-

⁴⁸ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 75.

⁴⁹ Kuo-jung Chen, “The Concept of Virginity and Its Representations in Eighteenth-Century English Literature,” *Wenshan Review of Literature and Culture* 3, no. 2 (June 2010): 84.

⁵⁰ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 112.

only reproduction, it is still an occurrence they only know from the insect world, as illustrated here: “Well—there are some rather high forms of insect life in which it occurs. Parthenogenesis, we call it—that means virgin birth.”⁵¹ However, in this case, the female characters do not look identical to each other, which confuses Terry because it denies the basic principle of parthenogenesis. There is a desire of the male characters to try and understand it more, as shown here:

But when we asked them, in our later, more intimate conversations, how they accounted for so much divergence without cross-fertilization, they attributed it partly to the careful education, which followed each slight tendency to differ, and partly to the law of mutation. This they had found in their work with plants, and fully proven in their own case.

Physically, they were more alike than we, as they lacked all morbid or excessive types. They were tall, strong, healthy, and beautiful as a race, but differed individually in a wide range of feature, coloring, and expression.

“But surely the most important growth is in mind—and in the things we make,” urged Somel. “Do you find your physical variation accompanied by a proportionate variation in ideas, feelings, and products? Or, among people who look more alike, do you find their internal life and their work as similar?”⁵²

The more the male characters try to unravel the mystery of parthenogenesis on the island, the more they begin to encounter their own prejudice which negatively influences their ability to view the world as it is, without bias. They want to find the cause of the individuality of the female characters somewhere in the procreation process, but it is one of the female characters who suggests it might simply be due to their careful education. This point is interesting as it presents the male characters with something they are probably not familiar with. Suddenly, they can witness how instead of intentionally changing their appearance to set themselves apart, women use education to explore themselves and grow as independent human beings. That said, the female characters generally do not evince any tendency to try and become different from others, as they seem to have no aspiration to impress anyone, let alone to compete with one another. They appear to be more enthusiastic about intellectual growth rather than their physical appearance and it is the male characters who always try to shift the focus to the physical qualities and differences of females. Somel in the above excerpt challenges their opinions by putting physical and intellectual attributions on the same level in a way that substantial physical variations should be reflected in intellectual ones, and monotony in people’s intellect should correspond to their physical sameness. She does not deny the fact that there could be physical distinctions between them caused by mutation or other laws of nature, but she additionally

⁵¹ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 75.

⁵² Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 112–113.

brings into the conversation the importance of education for everyone, regardless of their gender, and emphasises the way that can also influence each one of them, maybe even more than the physical attributes ever could.

The extremely strong interest that the male characters show in female appearances is interconnected with their astonishment at the lack of femininity or its different manifestation on this women-only island. To demonstrate this notion:

[“]These women aren’t *womanly*. You know they aren’t.”

That kind of talk always set Jeff going; and I gradually grew to side with him. “Then you don’t call a breed of women whose one concern is motherhood—*womanly*?” he asked.

“Indeed I don’t,” snapped Terry. “What does a man care for motherhood—when he hasn’t a ghost of a chance at fatherhood? And besides—what’s the good of talking sentiment when we are just men together? What a man wants of women is a good deal more than all this ‘motherhood’!”⁵³

As shown here, even the three male characters start to diverge a few months after arriving on the island and living in close contact with the original inhabitants of the island. Terry seems to struggle to accept the liberty of women to express their own femininity just as they wish. Initially, the male characters expressed frustration with the lack of naturalness after discovering the virgin birth of the island mothers, but once Terry realises these female characters no longer need men to express their femininity, which they do through their motherhood instead, he starts to act defensive. Some factors that could account for his behaviour might be sudden feelings of uselessness as an unneeded father, but also frustration stemming from being a man who no longer has any control over a woman – her femininity, self-perception and consequently her whole persona. Such a realisation is hard to handle for a man from a patriarchal society, which was designed to keep women under the direct influence of men. Concerning femininity, its meaning is actually quite disputable. When the male characters do not seem to find any signs of femininity on the island, they soon start questioning what femininity means and what are the marks they are actually looking for, as illustrated here:

These women, whose essential distinction of motherhood was the dominant note of their whole culture, were strikingly deficient in what we call “femininity.” This led me [Vandyck] very promptly to the conviction that those “feminine charms” we are so fond of are not feminine at all, but mere reflected masculinity—developed to please us because they had to please us, and in no way essential to the real fulfilment of their great process. But Terry came to no such conclusion.⁵⁴

⁵³ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 90.

⁵⁴ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 90.

Quite ironically, it seems that the male characters see a connection between the non-feminine energy on the island and the fact that motherhood dominates their culture. This only further reveals the aforesaid paradox of the male characters who want to find feminine qualities in the female characters, but simultaneously struggle to accept something very closely connected to female physiology, like motherhood, as innately feminine. This could be blamed on their inability to see things in perspective, and even on their obstinate assumption that the world as they know is flawless and that their knowledge of social norms is factual. Vandyck, unlike Terry, seems to be able to start changing some of his opinions after he starts discovering more about the female characters and the nature of their world. He concludes that their perception of femininity was never genuinely related to women but was shaped by society and men's desire for women to behave, look and act in a certain way so that they please the opposite gender. Essentially, back in their home country, the male characters were perhaps used to men superintending not only themselves but the opposite gender too. One of the means to keep women dependent on men is by making them stay at home to look after children – something conventional for the male characters, as demonstrated here:

“The men do everything, with us.” He [Terry] squared his broad shoulders and lifted his chest. “We do not allow our women to work. Women are loved–idolized–honored–kept in the home to care for the children.”

“What is ‘the home’?” asked Somel a little wistfully.

But Zava begged: “Tell me first, do *no* women work, really?”

“Why yes,” Terry admitted. “Some have to, of the poorer sort.”⁵⁵

In this paragraph, Terry expresses a certain admiration of the women in their home country verbally, stating that they are loved, but it is immediately followed by the revelation that they are also kept at home. It could be disputed how one can coincide with the other, as it seems restrictive to be kept somewhere and not be allowed to work or find purpose outside of being a caregiver. In their reality, the male characters are used to the fact that only poor and desperate women work, and when they do, it is solely out of the necessity to make more money to provide for their children, but never to acquire new skills or fulfil their potential. Furthermore, keeping women at home causes them to rely on men when it comes to forming opinions on the outside world. As Tyson observes:

Of course, another advantage of keeping women at home, modestly dressed and quietly behaved, was that it reaffirmed men's ownership of women's sexual and

⁵⁵ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 93.

reproductive capacities. The threat posed by the New Woman of the 1920s, then, had repercussions on many levels of public consciousness.”⁵⁶

Women’s rights started to improve significantly around the early 20th century, but these changes were not always fully appreciated by everyone. Interestingly, Tyson’s observation shows that women’s dependence on men was probably no longer economic but was caused by men’s desire to control women’s sexual rights and reproductive abilities. That is why the New Woman was seen as a threat since men feared they might lose the sense of control they were used to. In the above-mentioned excerpt from *Herland*, Terry never says that women stay home because men want them to but because of their obligation to take care of children. As already mentioned in this thesis, Brannon explains that the higher responsiveness of females to babies is due to believing that it is something they should do, rather than for any biologically explainable reason.⁵⁷ In addition, Somel (one of the female characters) curiously asks about the meaning of “the home”, as she does not know what it means. It might be due to their whole island having a homely feeling and the fact that their communal life does not differentiate between being at home and in public, therefore, they do not classify any job (traditionally home chores or taking care of children) as domestic or feminine, which is something that the male characters would perhaps do in their world. Aside from motherhood, society of the female characters seems to centre around sisterhood. In the conversation about feminism, sisterhood is markedly connected to radical feminism, rather than any other feminist theories, since it revolves around shared oppression of women, which could also be seen as a bonding experience. Moreover, Beasley notes that radical feminism emphasises the importance of treating women’s oppression as sexual, rather than reasoning that it may be based on social class or other factors. As mentioned before, sharing a traumatic experience of being exploited results in women establishing a form of sisterhood.⁵⁸ The value of sisterhood to the female characters is crucial, as illustrated here:

There you have the start of Herland! One family, all descended from one mother! [...] The first five daughters had grown up in an atmosphere of holy calm, of awed watchful waiting, of breathless prayer. To them the longed-for motherhood was not only a personal joy, but a nation’s hope. Their twenty-five daughters in turn, with a stronger hope, a richer, wider outlook, with the devoted love and care of all the surviving population, grew up as a holy sisterhood[.]⁵⁹

Fundamentally, sisterhood for the female characters means feeling spiritually connected, since their strong interrelation helps them maintain a strong nation standing on the principle of

⁵⁶ Tyson, *Critical Theory Today*, 122.

⁵⁷ Linda Brannon, *Gender: Psychological Perspectives* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2005), 214.

⁵⁸ Beasley, *What is Feminism?*, 54.

⁵⁹ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 88–89.

motherhood and supporting each other for the benefit of their children. Furthermore, this paragraph from *Herland* shows that they were also all aware of initially coming from the same mother. Their awareness of being in essence one big family is also reflected in their names, as illustrated here:

“No surnames at all then?” pursued Terry, with his somewhat patronizing air. “No family name?”

“Why no,” she said. “Why should we? We are all descended from a common source—all one ‘family’ in reality.” [...] “But does not each mother want her own child to bear her name?” I asked.

“No—why should she? The child has its own.”

“Why—for identification—so people will know whose child she is.”

“We keep our most careful records,” said Somel. [...] Here, as in so many other instances, we were led to feel the difference between the purely maternal and the paternal attitude of mind. The element of personal pride seemed strangely lacking.”⁶⁰

Terry generally seems to struggle with accepting any new information throughout the whole book. It might be speculated whether his prejudice was based on gender discrimination and feelings of stereotypical male supremacy in education, or simply on his personal background, education and life experiences. In either case, his stance is described as somewhat patronising, meaning that there is an undeniable sense of superiority in his attitude. He appears to be very confused by the lack of surnames on the island and the broken tradition of every family member carrying the father’s surname, a custom which symbolically expresses everyone in a family belongs to the father. In conclusion, it is suggested that the value of surnames for the male characters is solely in priding oneself on having a child. To support this claim, it is said that other potential reasons for using surnames, for example identification, can be done in different ways, for instance by keeping records instead of assigning every child a surname. The need for surnames is thus not present on the island where the local community ensures that any differences between the inhabitants are minimised. Furthermore, since their children are seen as the descendants of the whole nation, they do not feel the need to take personal pride in being mothers. Such a conclusion leads to an assumption that the male characters struggle with their ego more significantly, while the female characters overall give a humbler impression. It even seems that unlike the male characters, the female ones do not consider themselves a higher species than other living creatures, as illustrated here:

[“]Of course we want children, and children come—but that is not what we think about.”
“But—but—it seems so against nature!” she said. “None of the creatures we know do that. Do other animals—in your country?”

⁶⁰ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 110.

“We are not animals!” I replied with some sharpness. “At least we are something more—something higher.[”]⁶¹

Such an attitude only further enhances the importance of staying in touch with nature for the female characters, as they not only identify as a part of it, but they also see themselves as no better than any other creature. The only exception they seem to be willing to make is if any animal would become dangerous for their children, which yet again is in contrast with how the male characters feel, as seen here:

As a matter of fact we began to feel Jeff something of a traitor—he so often flopped over and took their side of things; also his medical knowledge gave him a different point of view somehow.

“I’m sorry to admit,” he told them, “that the dog, with us, is the most diseased of any animal—next to a man. And as to temper—there are always some dogs who bite people—especially children.”

That was pure malice. You see, children were the—the RAISON D’ETRE in this country. [...] “Do we understand that you keep an animal—an unmated male animal—that bites children? About how many are there of them please?”

“Thousands—in a large city,” said Jeff, “and nearly every family has one in the country.” Terry broke in at this. “You must not imagine they are all dangerous—it’s not one in a hundred that ever bites anybody. Why, they are best friends of the children—a boy doesn’t have half a chance that hasn’t a dog to play with!”

“And the girls?” asked Somel.

“Oh—girls—why they like them too,” he said, but his voice flatted a little.⁶²

One of the female characters is baffled when Jeff on behalf of the male characters explains their habit of keeping animals potentially dangerous to children just because they ironically believe they are important companions to their young ones, especially boys. Furthermore, it is specifically unmated male dogs that are presented as a possible threat, so it may even be assumed that the dogs in this paragraph serve as a metaphor for men. One could wonder whether there is a hidden meaning in the threatened children, possibly referring to women who experience oppression and fear in daily life. That way, when the male characters argue that not all dogs are dangerous since only one in a hundred ever hurts a person, and the female characters do not find this argument satisfactory as such a truth does not remove the danger factor, it could imply that similarly, even if it were only one woman in a hundred who would be oppressed, it would still not mean that gender discrimination has vanished. This idea of solidarity corresponds to the notion of sisterhood analysed previously in this thesis.

⁶¹ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 184.

⁶² Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 82.

One may assume that individuality is generally lacking on the island, judging from some parts of the novel like as this one: “As such, their time-sense was not limited to the hopes and ambitions of an individual life. Therefore, they habitually considered and carried out plans for improvement which might cover centuries.”⁶³ Indisputably, the focus of the female characters’ lives is ensuring that the entire nation and its future flourish. However, neither one of them ever expresses her dissatisfaction with this system, as the individuality of the female characters was never forcibly repressed against their will. Instead, because of their shared desire for a strong and prosperous nation, the emphasis on collectivism over individualism seems like a free choice. Even so, when seeking a deeper explanation for the scarcity of individualism, the strong interconnection of the national spirit of the female characters and motherhood could lead to the assumption that it is a reflection of a stereotypically common struggle of mothers to maintain their individual personalities after giving birth. As Firestone observes, referring to a woman and her child (or children) as one identical persona is a prevalent attitude in society. She also criticises this alleged special mother-child bond which is based on nothing else but the oppression of women.⁶⁴ Such an opinion shows the enormous influence of the environment and social norms on people. Understandably, when women’s personal identities merge with those of their children, it then happens that they revolt against such an omission. Yet, while the female characters in *Herland* seem to omit their individualities to some extent, it does not stem from their mother roles but rather from their prioritising of the nation collectively. This crucial factor of voluntariness saves them from harbouring resentment towards their society.

Subsequently, the issue of motherhood wholly becoming a woman’s new personality is contrasted with the question of men and the impact of fatherhood on them, as shown here:

“The only thing they can think about a man is *fatherhood!*” said Terry in high scorn. “*Fatherhood!* As if a man was always wanting to be a father!” This also was correct. They had their long, wide, deep, rich experience of Motherhood, and their only perception of the value of a male creature as such was for Fatherhood.⁶⁵

Terry’s annoyance insinuates that his opinion on the magnitude of parenthood is legitimately different for each gender. This perspective could be seen as a reflection of the male characters’ way of hypocritical thinking, since in their world treating women based on merely their social roles related to men (as for example either their wives, daughters or mothers of their children)

⁶³ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 114.

⁶⁴ Sulamith Firestone, *The dialectic of sex: the case for feminist revolution* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 72.

⁶⁵ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 168.

is accepted as normal. By doing so, they fail to consider women's feelings and desires to assert themselves outside of this realm. The close-minded outlook of the male characters on women's worth mirrors their own prejudice and what they deem valuable in women. This preconception results in them fearing to be equally undervalued by the female characters. Here is another example of their limited view of reality:

“They're all old maids—children or not. They don't know the first thing about Sex.” When Terry said *Sex*, sex with a very large *S*, he meant the male sex, naturally; its special values, its profound conviction of being “the life force,” its cheerful ignoring of the true life process, and its interpretation of the other sex solely from its own point of view.⁶⁶

The bias coming from gender norms highly influences the ability and enthusiasm of the male characters to understand the newly discovered habits, customs and traditions of the native inhabitants of the island. Their ego and feelings of superiority presumably cause their defensive behaviour, as illustrated by calling themselves “the life force,” a role clearly reserved for women on the island. Nonetheless, the importance of both males and females is traditionally equal in procreation.

Investigating dynamics in families, one is left with the general truth that mothers often face major challenges related to traditionally performing the role of the primary caregiver for children, but fathers' obstacles are also of great concern. As Pateman points out, the myth of the male “breadwinner” can be highly complicated for men who are and were traditionally in the role of “breadwinners” due to being perceived as workers in the family unit. Since housewives' work and their domestic service were not included in measurements of national productivity, this housework was not labelled as true “work” – something that happens in workplaces in the capitalist world. However, this meant that men became fully responsible for the support and protection of their children and wives, who, on the other hand, became economically dependent on them.⁶⁷ This indisputably put pressure on men to provide for their families at any cost and because of being forced to spend more time at work, men could often feel deprived of forming deeper emotional relationships with their children. On the other hand, feeling responsible for protecting their families is connected to reinforcing masculinity in a stereotypical way, as once more illustrated in *Herland*: “The tradition of men as guardians and protectors had quite died out. These stalwart virgins had no men to fear and therefore no need of protection.”⁶⁸ Interestingly, even the male characters notice that the only danger women

⁶⁶ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 179–180.

⁶⁷ Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (California: Stanford University Press, 1988), 136–137.

⁶⁸ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 89.

could need to be protected from is that of men. This causes them to feel rather emasculated, which leads to an assumption that by being responsible for securing their families, men can affirm their masculinity in a stereotypical sense. Either way, when men are interested in nurturing children and fulfilling these desires, they are expected to do so in their free time while still prioritising work to ensure financial security. Children growing up in environments structured this way understandably copy such patterns and apply them in their adult lives, which only further reinforces this dynamic between mothers-caregivers and fathers-breadwinners.

Not only nurturing children but also education is an important subject matter related to parenthood. In *Herland*, education is seen as synonymous with rearing children. Furthermore, it is separated from motherhood, as illustrated here:

“[T]hen she [a girl with disproportionate egotism] would be likely to rear them [children] in the same spirit.”

“That we never allowed,” answered Somel quietly.

“Allowed?” I queried. “Allowed a mother to rear her own children?”

“Certainly not,” said Somel, “unless she was fit for that supreme task.”

This was rather a blow to my previous convictions.

“But I thought motherhood was for each of you—”

“Motherhood—yes, that is, maternity, to bear a child. But education is our highest art, only allowed to our highest artists.”

“Education?” I was puzzled again. “I don’t mean education. I mean by motherhood not only child-bearing, but the care of babies.”

“The care of babies involves education, and is entrusted only to the most fit,” she repeated.⁶⁹

This clash of opinions yet again displays how uniquely the female characters perceive education and its relation to motherhood. The female characters believe education should be performed solely by carefully selected representatives. The question of differentiating between child rearing and education is also intriguing. Contrastingly, the male characters expect every mother to be able to successfully raise children irrespective of their eligibility for such a duty, which could be interpreted as their underestimation when it comes to the perplexities of raising children. Perhaps they cannot assess how demanding childcare is, perhaps they are simply not concerned with it as they believe that such tasks are women’s obligation and not theirs. The two opposing stances concerning rearing children are demonstrated here:

“Then you separate mother and a child!” [...] “Not usually,” she patiently explained. “You see, almost every woman values her maternity above everything else. [...] That is, the child-rearing has come to be with us a culture so profoundly studied, practiced with such subtlety and skill, that the more we love our children the less we are willing to trust

⁶⁹ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 118.

that process to unskilled hands—even our own.” [...] “But the poor mother—bereaved of her baby—”
“Oh no!” she earnestly assured me. “Not in the least bereaved. It is her baby still—it is with her—she has not lost it. But she is not the only one to care for it. There are others who she knows to be wiser.[”]”⁷⁰

The male characters seem to expect every mother to take full responsibility for taking care of children. Moreover, they cleverly claim that mothers should never be separated from their children and that their entitlements should not be limited, which conceals the fact that they do not want to feel obligated to participate in childcare. It is quite ironic that the male characters regard the system on the island as restrictive since outside of this discussion, they shamelessly take ownership over their women as illustrated here: “What is a ‘wife’ exactly?” she [Alima] demanded, a dangerous gleam in her eye. “A wife is the woman who belongs to a man,” he began. But Jeff took it up eagerly: “And a husband is the man who belongs to a woman.”⁷¹ Jeff’s immediate response to the definition of a wife once again hints at his belief in male supremacy. Besides the fact that the male characters make themselves sound more caring than they potentially are, such a narrative also allows fathers to resign from their parenting role and hold women accountable for it instead.

Although education on the island in *Herland* is in the hands of selected women, it is important to clarify what it, in effect, meant to them. Their chosen representatives performing educative functions should not be imagined as traditional educators at school who teach children everything society expects them to know to become conforming citizens. Instead, it is described this way:

They had faced the problems of education and so solved them that their children grew up as naturally as young trees; learning through every sense; taught continuously but unconsciously—never knowing they were being educated. [...] But the babies and little children never felt the pressure of that “forcible feeding” of the mind that we call “education.”⁷²

In other words, education on the island is something that naturally happens and is not intentionally taught. However, this way of educating is only possible because the whole population lives peacefully and in a close bond with nature, which helps them to let their children grow up freely. Even so, that does not take away the fact that each of the female characters consciously or subconsciously engages in making their country a peaceful place for their children who grow up to be pacifists. Consequently, all the female characters appear very

⁷⁰ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 119.

⁷¹ Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 161.

⁷² Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper & Herland*, 135.

tolerant, calm and patient, which becomes even more obvious when they communicate with the male characters and teach them about their culture, history and customs, while simultaneously learning about theirs. In contrast, the male characters often struggle to accept new information and seem quite obstinate, which could be due to the way they were educated as children. The aforementioned term “forcible feeding” implies imposing information and education on children, a technique that could lead to repressing imagination, inventiveness and creative thinking in children, impacting them all the way to adulthood. This was not the case for the female characters in *Herland*, where motherhood and the applied practices stemming from motherly unconditional love seem to liberate everyone, including mothers.

CONCLUSION

This thesis explores the concept of motherhood in the novel *Herland* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, which stands on the idea of the connection between the liberation of women and peace in the world. It examines how motherhood influences the female characters and their expression of femininity, at the topic of fatherhood and its influence on men, and at rearing children and the way it impacts them later in life. All the basic principles of life on the utopian island come down to all women (mothers or not) living their lives freely without being oppressed by anyone, whether it be a politically or socially more powerful gender group. Such a way of life allows these female characters to collectively make decisions beneficial for their whole nation and to ensure their children will be able to live contentedly in the future.

Due to *Herland* being perceived as a feminist novel, one may assume that matters traditionally criticised by feminist theoreticians would not be present on this island occupied by women only. However, there are several principles that seem highly valuable for the female characters but might be traditionally criticised by feminists for their possible potential to oppress women. One excellent example is the whole notion of motherhood. The female characters have an extremely optimistic attitude towards it, as everything on their island revolves around establishing a strong nation for their children. Instead of perceiving giving birth to children and becoming mothers as merely a biological act of procreation or their duty, they consider motherhood their religion, pride and strength. They see motherhood as a chance to create the best nation possible for each one of them. They are not distracted by any conflicts, as there is no violence present on the island; they do not try to impress anyone, as they are all equal and no one is seen as hierarchically superior; they do not suffer from being pressured to constantly conform to any social norms, as they never set any for themselves. Their mindset is alien to the male characters, who presumably represent a traditional Western patriarchal society, as they know motherhood to be principally a woman's duty, not her free choice.

When the male characters set foot on the island for the first time, they are baffled by the independence of the female characters, and they struggle to understand a society that is so different from their own. Ironically, while the foundation for the peaceful existence of the female characters is motherhood as a religion, the male characters criticise a lack of femininity on the island. Since their subconscious interpretation of femininity refers to women acting in a way that is meant to impress men or women performing stereotypically feminine tasks, they do not seem to understand that what they are looking for are not true womanly qualities, but something their society taught them about women and the way they should be. These false

expectations are not related to gender as such, but are a mere reflection of the culture and civilisation these male characters came from.

Regarding gender, signs of prejudice arise frequently in the novel. One closely connected to motherhood is the concept of virginity. Due to the nature of reproduction on the island and no need for male involvement, virginity has no value for the local inhabitants. On the contrary, the male characters highlight that the notion of virginity is important, while also emphasising it is practically reserved for females who have not mated, and the importance of male virginity is significantly lower. After further analysis, it also becomes clear that in patriarchal society, virginity has a direct influence on a woman's worth. Such a viewpoint points to gender discrimination, since a woman's value in society is exclusively determined by men.

With respect to children and their education, the female characters practice different methods than the male characters. The education on the island is in the hands of carefully selected representatives, who are capable enough to perform this substantial task. However, it is not the traditional formal institution established in the patriarchal society but rather guidance delivered in the undertakings of daily life. Historically, women did not always have access to educative tools, so the fact that education has vital importance in this feminist novel seems to be a reaction to that reality. Be that as it may, it could also be simply because educating children is almost a promise of a high-quality nation, a core value of the female characters. Following their principles and beliefs, all stemming from a genuinely loving perception of a motherly role is what keeps their country and society thriving. All that results in the whole nation of mothers on the utopian island living harmoniously, without war.

RESUMÉ

Utopický román *Herland* od Charlotte Perkins Gilmanové nabízí čtenářům jedinečný vhled do utopické společnosti, kde žijí pouze ženy. Možná právě proto je toto dílo populární u velkého množství feministicky inklinujících čtenářek, které se mohou při jeho čtení imaginárně přenést do světa, který patří jen a pouze ženám a je tedy na nich, jaký si ho vytvoří. Možná překvapivě se ovšem utopická společnost v knize *Herland* nevyznačuje stereotypními znaky, jaké by patrně někteří lidé mohli ve feministickém románu tohoto rázu očekávat. Hlavním smyslem života všech ženských postav, žijících na fiktivním ostrově jménem Herland, je mateřství. Při rozboru románu *Herland* vyvstává otázka, zda je opravdu možné ženskou roli matky interpretovat jako jakýsi dar, nebo spíše úděl omezující její postavení v tradičním společenském nastavení. Problematika znázornění mateřství ve feministickém románu *Herland*, rozpoznání konkrétních specifik a zohlednění širšího sociokulturního kontextu doby, ve které byl napsán, je hlavní tezí této práce.

Jak už bylo zmíněno, rozebíraný román se klasifikuje jako feministické dílo. Sama autorka knihy, Charlotte Perkins Gilmanová (1860–1935), se řadí mezi americké feministické spisovatelky. Hlavní problémy a témata, o která se zajímala, jsou odrazem doby, ve které žila a působila. Gilmanová a její aktivita se pojí s takzvanou první vlnou feminismu. Její velkou vášní byl boj za ekonomickou nezávislost žen. Například závazek manželství v jejích očích představoval potenciální omezení ženských práv především právě kvůli ekonomickým důvodům. Ženy často čelily nutnosti vzdát se jakékoliv možnosti zisku peněz související s povinností starat se o děti, jež byla primárně přisuzována právě matkám, nikoliv otcům. Samotné manželství Gilmanová popsala jako jakýsi obchod – tuto metaforu použila pro znázornění faktu, že dívky jsou od dětství vedeny svými matkami k tomu zůstat pokorné a slušné, čímž se zvyšuje jejich šance zaujmout na imaginárním trhu dobrého manžela. Pro ochranu svých dcer tyto matky často působily emociálně nedostupně, v domnění, že je tím ochrání v budoucích manželských svazcích. Takový byl případ nejen Gilmanové, která vyrůstala izolovaná a s nedostatkem mateřské lásky, ale i množství dalších autorek a žen v té době. Ženy tedy často čelily problémům pramenícím z pocítění nedostatku mateřské lásky v dětství, ale později také z naplňování mateřské role, která mohla mít jistý omezující charakter. Tyto a další problémy, jimž ženy čelily, byly jedním z důvodů pro jejich zájem produkovat literární díla zabývající se sociálními problémy. Jak z této části vyplývá, mateřství často nemělo pro ženy pozitivní hodnotu, ale spíše jakousi utlačující funkci.

Ve své povídce *The Yellow Wallpaper* Gilmanová reflektuje své negativní zkušenosti a zážitky z manželství s Charlesem Walterem Stetsonem, s kterým se v roce 1894 (dva roky po vydání povídky) rozvedla. Oproti tomu román *Herland*, vydaný v roce 1915, nabízí diametrálně odlišný úhel pohledu na tematiku ženství. Toto utopické dílo přenáší čtenáře na ostrov obývaný pouze ženami, který navštíví tři mužské postavy, Vandyck, Jeff a Terry. Při poznávání civilizovaného a prosperujícího ostrova mají tito muži problém si vůbec představit, že se na něm nenachází ani jeden původní mužský obyvatel. Tento předsudek je příkladem jejich předpojatosti vůči schopnostem žen, která se opakovaně objevuje v rámci celé knihy.

První rozebírané téma v románu, které souvisí s mateřstvím, je ženskost, její jedinečnost a specifika. Při poznávání života na tomto ostrově, obývaném pouze ženami, začnou mužské postavy ironicky narážet na nedostatek ženství tak, jak ho znají. Ačkoliv si toho nejsou zpočátku vědomi, femininní projevy, které se podvědomě snaží nalézt, vůbec nesouvisí s anatomickými a fyziologickými specifiky žen. Rysy, které znají jako ženské z jejich vlastní země a kultury, jsou jen jisté normy, které se tak naučili vnímat pouze z nastavení jejich vlastní společnosti. Jedním z nenaplněných očekávání, které mají, je snaha žen o zaujmutí svých mužských protějšků vzhledem. Takovou potřebu ale ženské postavy v románu *Herland* nemají, jelikož jejich prioritou není snaha jakýmkoliv způsobem vynikat, a už vůbec ne na někoho zapůsobit. Ba naopak, jelikož rozmnožování na ostrově probíhá bez potřeby mužského přičinění, tyto ženy mají možnost naplno se věnovat sobě a svému národu, který důsledkem této péče může vzkvétat. Ač by se tedy mohlo zdát, že naplnění svého specifického potenciálu stát se matkou bude vnímáno jako dokonalý projev ženství, mužské postavy to tak dlouhou dobu nevidí. Jeden z nich, Terry, odůvodní svou lhostejnost ke vztahu mateřství k ženskosti nepotřebností mužů k otcovství, tedy vlastně jejich vyvržením z celého principu rozmnožování. Jeho názor, že pokud jakožto muž nemá nárok přičinit se v rodičovství, nemá ani povinnost zajímat se a uznávat mateřství, působí vcelku egocentricky. Ovšem ne všechny mužské postavy působí stejně zatvrzelým dojmem. Například Vandyck začne pomalu docházet k uvědomění, že jejich vlastní vnímání ženskosti nemá nic společného s ženami jako takovými, ale je pouhou projekcí jejich vlastního očekávání, která od žen mají.

Tato problematika je úzce spjatá s dalším rozebíraným tématem, čímž je otcovství. Jak už bylo zmíněno, utopický román *Herland* je specifický nulovou potřebou mužského přičinění k rozmnožování. Zdá se, že z důvodu strachu ze zahanbení, nepotřebnosti a znejistění vlastní identity toto zjištění mužské postavy těžce nesou. Může to být pouze jistou vzpourou proti mateřství jako prioritě žen, čímž se obrazně blokuje jakákoliv snaha ženských postav zalíbit se mužům, ale důvod lze hledat i jinde. V knize totiž dochází k situaci, kdy se bez potřeby zahrnutí

mužů do rozmnožování zcela ztrácí jakákoliv závislost žen na nich, jelikož zde lze názorně vidět, že jako společnost fungují tyto ženy bezproblémově. To vede mužské návštěvníky k otázce, zda se jejich jediný společenský význam nachází v otcovství. Jejich nespokojenost poukazuje na paradox, kdy oni sami vidí hodnotu žen jen v rolích, které vykazují vůči mužům – jako jejich manželky či matky jejich dětí.

Poslední rozebírané téma je výchova, její význam a možné způsoby jak výchovy, tak vzdělávání dětí. V románu totiž dochází opět ke kontrastu výchovy z tradičního pohledu, skrytého v názorech mužských postav, a z jistého matriarchálně laděného feministického pohledu, který zastávají postavy ženské – tento pohled na výchovu dětí se vyznačuje několika specifiky. Jedním z nich je to, že výchova by měla být pouze v rukách důkladně zvolených žen, které budou dostatečně zkušené na to, aby tak zodpovědnou činnost zvládly. Je to proto, že obyvatelky ostrova považují své děti a jejich dobro za absolutní prioritu. Zároveň se lze domnívat, že zodpovědně branou výchovou se ženské postavy snaží o zajištění vysoce civilizované společnosti, která může být vnímána jako záruka šťastné budoucnosti. Další ze specifik je způsob výchovy, jelikož atmosféra a celá podstata ostrova, která spočívá v mírumilovném životě v souladu s přírodou, umožňuje vychovávat děti zcela přirozeným a nenásilným způsobem. Tyto děti nedochází pravidelně do škol, ale místo toho jsou vychovávány pouze tím, že načerpávají informace ze svého okolí a od předem vybraných žen, které je svým vzorem vedou k pozitivnímu chování, klíčovým hodnotám a principům života na ostrově.

V závěru práce je shrnuto, jak všechny aspekty života ženských obyvatel na fiktivním ostrově v utopickém románu Herland vedou k celkové spokojenosti celé populace a jejich národa, který nezná války, zlo ani nenávisť, ale naopak žije v naprostém míru a lásce.

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