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Analysing the Relationship between Spatial Representations and Gender in Charlotte Gilman's Novel, Herland

Charlotte Gilman'ın Herland Romanında Mekansal Temsiller ve Cinsiyet Arasındaki İlişkinin Analizi

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the connections between architecture, interior spaces, urban environment, and social issues through the medium of literary fiction. In particular, it analyzes the spatial representations through cues and interpretations as well as their impact on social inequalities, specifically gender discrimination, which is the governing theme that shapes the plot in Charlotte P. Gilman's utopian fiction Herland. Space within literature can be seen as an essential part of storytelling because it allows the reader to fully comprehend the surroundings that the author hopes to portray. To address the questions and issues mentioned, an in-depth study of the novel, the author, the author's time, and related publications were employed to further understand the relationship between space, gender, and literature. The conducted analysis revealed this relationship by the elimination of gender roles and the alteration of conventional spaces; thus, depicting a more utopian country, as a form of literary criticism to her dystopian era.

Keywords: *Gender and space, architecture and literature, utopian fiction, Charlotte P. Gilman, Herland.*

Öz

Bu makalenin amacı, edebi kurgu aracılığıyla mimarlık, iç mekanlar, kentsel çevre ve sosyal konular arasındaki bağlantıları araştırmaktır. İpuçları ve yorumlar yoluyla mekansal temsilleri ve özellikle toplumsal cinsiyet eşitsizliği ve hatta esas olarak Charlotte P. Gilman'ın ütopyacı kurgusu Herland'i şekillendiren cinsiyet ayrımcılığı gibi temalar üzerindeki etkilerini analiz etmektir. Edebiyat içindeki mekân, hikâye anlatımının önemli bir parçası olarak görülebilir; çünkü okuyucunun yazarın literatür boyunca tam anlamıyla bütüncül olarak betimlemeyi umduğu çevreyi tam olarak kavramasını sağlar. Bahsedilen soruları ve sorunları ele almak ve mekân, cinsiyet ve edebiyat arasındaki ilişkiyi daha iyi anlamak için roman, yazar, yazarın yaşadığı dönem ve ilgili yayınlar derinlemesine incelenmiştir. Yapılan analiz, toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin ortadan kaldırılması ve geleneksel alanların değiştirilmesi ile bu ilişkiyi ortaya çıkarmıştır; böylece distopya dönemine bir edebi eleştiri biçimi olarak daha ütopik bir ülkeyi betimlemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *cinsiyet ve mekân, mimarlık ve edebiyat, ütopyacı kurgu, Charlotte P. Gilman, Herland*

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Introduction

This paper explores the connections between architecture, interior spaces, the urban environment, and social issues through the medium of literary fiction. Specifically, it analyses spatial cues and interpretations and their impact on social inequalities in Charlotte P. Gilman's utopian novel, *Herland*, written in 1915. Architecture and the urban environment are essential in literature because they allow readers to fully imagine the ambiance and setting that the author wishes to portray. Architecture and literature are intertwined rather than opposing one another: "Architecture, as the art of building, gives concrete form to the external world according to the structures of imagination; whereas literature, as the art of written language, gives symbolic form to the same world" (Spurr, 2012: 3).

Space can also be seen as an essential part of storytelling in literature because it allows the reader to fully comprehend the surroundings the author hopes to portray in the work. Spaces expressed within literature support the overall environmental tone: "Literary works often rely on the evocative description of the protagonists' environment; the house, the street or the city appearing as a precisely constructed décor against which the narrative can unfold" (Grafe, Havik, & Maaskant, 2006: 3). Architectural spaces and environments provide supplementary tools in literary works, with examples of architecture evident in many novels. In utopian or dystopian fiction, literary space is sometimes conveyed surrealistically, going beyond what is known to mankind. Nonetheless, the architectural and urban environment is still expressed.

To fully understand the issues discussed here regarding *Herland*, it is important to define certain terms, explain the concepts of space and time, and the utopian setting of the novel. There are various definitions of utopia and utopian thinking, which are deeply influenced by Greek thought (Mumford, 1971). Mumford (1969: 11) defines utopia as "another name for the unreal and the impossible" whereas for Kumar (1991: 43), "utopia is a timeless and unchanging constant, an archetype of the human social imagination". According to Rona (1973: 99), "in its most general context, [utopia] is a conformation of rational social organization for social, thus individual happiness". This means that a utopia is an author's depiction of the perfect world, setting, or situation, thus their individual happiness. Utopia has also been described as "aiming for something better. To get somewhere better involves change, so, among other things, utopianism is about social change" (Martell, 2018: 435). Mannheim (1960, 173) also asserts that utopia mainly functions to transform the status quo by surpassing current reality (as cited in Barlas, 1992). For Ellul (1976: 25), "The construction of a utopia always seems an attempt to avoid reality. It is true that a society that lacks a living image of the future is condemned to disappear" while Levitas (1990: 181) claims that the essence of utopia is a desire "for a different, better way of living" or "dreams of a better life" (Bloch, 1988: 4). Departing from the model of More's Utopia, utopia is

generally considered as literary genre that "involves the fictional depiction of an alternative society" (Barlas, 1992: 38).

The twentieth century paved the way for modern utopias, as Berneri (1969: 293) notes: "The fashion for Utopian schemes of nineteenth century seemed to die out in the twentieth century. In his modern utopia, Wells rejected the classical utopia and refused to delineate a perfect society (Berneri, 1969). Davis (1981: 15) defines modern utopia in contrast to classical utopias as seeking "to change social arrangements, only thereby changing man, and furthermore it seeks to incorporate a capacity for change within the model society".

Due to the size of the topic of utopianism as social change, this paper will only focus on gender inequality in the novel and the author's life in Victorian America of the late 1800s to early 1900s. For a long time, gender inequality has been a significant social issue, with women battling for their social and economic rights (Essig & Soparnot, 2019: 373). There are many definitions of gender inequality. Most commonly, it is seen as a "social process by which people are treated differently and disadvantageously, under similar circumstances, on the basis of gender" (Oxford Dictionary of Sports Science and Medicine, 2007) or "legal, social and cultural situation in which sex and/or gender determine different rights and dignity for women and men, which are reflected in their unequal access to or enjoyment of rights, as well as the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural rules" (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020).

During the twentieth century, gender inequality was much more recognised as a major social issue as women were only seen as mothers and wives, and socially discouraged from working outside the family home (Smith, 1973). According to Smith (1973: 41), only one in every seven women in 1940 participated in the labour force. They were also viewed as "continual victims of social and economic discrimination. Upper- and middle-class women's choices were limited to marriage and motherhood, or spinsterhood. Both choices resulted in domestic dependency" (Cruea, 2005: 187). The feminist movement began in the early 1900s alongside the Progressive movement. Both were closely followed by Gilman, as can be seen clearly through her work and the overall voice that shapes her novels (Bowers, 2018). It is therefore important to evaluate various themes and topics that are evident throughout the novel to fully understand this relationship and make a connection between these social issues and the spatial issues discussed in the novel.

Thus, recognizing the issues discussed within the novel, as well as understanding the importance of architecture and urban space within literature, this paper investigates how gender issues shape the overall literary space. Various studies have underlined the reciprocal relationship between architecture and literature. Bolak Hisarlıgil (2011: 5) explains this relationship as an exchange of metaphors, considering novels as a "rich texture of physical, psychological, sociological and cultural aspects". She continues: "The visual image created in the reader's imagination forms the

narrative space including geographies, townscapes, landscapes, houses, interior spaces, spatially located objects and things" (Bolak Hisarlıgil, 2011: 11). Machado also discusses this reciprocity: "Fictions are the testimony of a longing for another reality, a reality that is different from most of the built reality; the rhetoric is there to make the reader desire that which has been imagined … Don't we want the as-of-yet non-existent to exist?" (Machado, 1986 as cited in Antoniades, 1992). Although novel is inherently a temporal art form, it also has relations with the spatial arts like architecture, painting, and sculpture (Kestner, 1981). Scholars therefore try to reveal the "connections between literary form and architectural form" and the ways that "the structures of the texts reflect construction of the spaces the authors are writing about" (Bryden, 2012: 213). Thomson (2004, 317) claims that these connections link the material and immaterial: "These realms are physically constructed spaces of architecture and those spaces are conjured up in words – imaginary and physically charged spaces of literature".

Gilman's novel, *Herland,* has been selected for this study due to her forward-thinking approach to literary feminism through her own perspective of gender issues in 1900s using spatial representations. The main argument has two parts. Firstly, it focuses on gender and space within the novel through the perspective of being utopian and carrying spatial representations of women throughout the fictional land. Secondly, it considers the issue of architecture and new housing reforms by emphasizing distinctive spatial features in the utopia represented in the novel. The research methodology used is architectural literary analysis. That is, literature is explored to research and define architectural space through the use of a written medium, such as a novel (Tuna Ultav, Çağlar, & Durmaz Drinkwater, 2015). This methodology uses the spatial cues and settings described in literature to further analyse architectural notions. Gilman's novel is used to discuss the role of women as urban and architectural designers; it tackles the question of whether men and women design differently while adopting a feminist approach to designing architectural spaces and urban environments.

This paper analyses gender roles, interiors, and urban environments through Gilman's literary fiction. Gilman's feminist philosophy is thoroughly explored through the text via the exaggerated environment that she created and the banishment of men from her literature. The novel was a direct critique of her time.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Her Novel *Herland*

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) was an American writer, commercial artist, magazine editor, lecturer, and social reformer. As an influential women's rights' figure of her time, she strongly criticized America's social reforms and ideologies governing women's role within society, as well as promoting various ideologies through literature. Her work was rediscovered and gained importance during the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Wladaver-Morgan, 2018). Through her lifetime, Gilman was a leading

activist hoping to change contemporary social inequalities through "an attack on conventional gender roles, particularly the idea that domestic work is naturally tied to being female and that men's work is the sole source of human progress" (Bowers, 2018: 1314–1315).

Herland is a utopian novel, written in 1915 but first published in 1979. The novel is viewed as utopian because, in the story, the people have sufficient resources, the country's population is under control, there is enough land and food for all, and is the country is peaceful (Christensen, 2017). The story is narrated by one of the main characters, Vandyck Jennings (Van). Gilman demonstrates the common mentality of men during her era through three stereotypes. The first is Terry O. Nicholson, a strong, wealthy, confident, and overly-masculine man who views women as members of the weaker gender who need men to survive and thrive. He expects them to be overly feminine and cannot understand the country of Herland. Jeff Margrave, the opposite of Terry, is a romantic who idolizes women to the extreme. He considers them as holy and in a way worships them. Finally, Van, the narrator, is presented as the wisest, and most rational and mature character. He keeps an open-mind throughout the novel and is the only character that Herlanders are comfortable with and feel like he is one of their own; he is the most relatable (Henry, 2018). According to Arnold, the narration of Van creates a chance "to approach the notion of femininity, and masculinity […] from a male perspective in a believable way" (Arnold, 2006: 303).

The story begins with Van and two of his friends voyaging to a country that they have heard is only occupied by women and female children. Gilman explains in the novel that a fire that happened many years ago in Herland. The one surviving woman became asexual and gave birth to five girls, who in turn gave birth to other girls to create an asexual, purely female society. Gilman's strong belief in motherhood and the importance of nurturing a strong, educated society is also evident in her book *Women and Economics,* where she explains:

> It seems almost unnecessary to suggest that women as economic producers will naturally choose those professions, which are compatible with motherhood, and there are many professions much more in harmony with that function than the household service. Motherhood is not a remote contingency, but the common duty and the common glory of womanhood. If women did choose professions unsuitable to maternity, Nature would quietly extinguish them by her unvarying process. (Gilman, 2015 [1898]: 133)

In *The Man-Made World* (1911), Gilman suggests all the world's problems can be solved by motherhood. This is also clearly and strongly illustrated in *Herland,* which features a peaceful, loving, utopian society in which motherhood plays an important role. McCrary describes Herland's government as "maternal, ruled by a Land-Mother and local Over-Mothers" (McCrary, 2019: 76). "Herland is not a political association, designed to provide a basis for common action to secure what a family cannot. Rather,

it is a family practiced on a large scale – a nursery, playground, and workshop" (McCrary, 2019:77). The evolution of motherhood was of great importance to Gilman, who advocated it in many of her publications, including *Herland*.

Gilman was a mother herself, yet suffered from serious postnatal depression (Gilman, 1991 [1935]: 88). Her ideology of motherhood was that it should be a collective effort that allows mothers to participate actively in the society (Hudak, 2003: 465). In accordance with her own views, Gilman sent her daughter at the age of nine to live with her father and "second mother", who was a good friend and who her daughter knew and loved since infancy. Gilman rejected the condemnation she received for this decision, explaining that "her second mother was fully as good as the first, better in some ways perhaps" (Gilman, 1991 [1935]: 163).

The story in *Herland* continues with the men reaching the legendary land, where they are in awe of its futuristic civilization. Because it has been isolated from the rest of the world, it does not follow any of the social, cultural, or geographic norms known to the travellers. The three men are first held captive for several months, although imprisonment is different to other types known to the world in that the prisoners are treated with the upmost comfort and care, being fed, clothed, and educated during their captivity.

Meanwhile, Herland's women still perform the roles given to them by the society within the scope of their 'duties' as if they were in a man-made world. This contradiction invites the reader to question the place of a woman in a society by considering a feminist approach in which it is impossible to talk about gender-based work. Van, Terry, and Jeff's captivity provides the comfortable environment that they are used to in their own world, unlike the basic conditions of being in a cell.

This contradiction can be discussed within the context of motherhood. Their place of imprisonment was actually a large spacious room with a bathroom and walk-in closet, with all necessities provided. Later, the men are allowed more freedom to discover, understand, and further advance their knowledge of Herland's culture. As a result, each voyager forms a relationship with one of the Herlander's and eventually gets married. Gilman addresses the topic of marriage within the novel as something new and unnecessary for the Herlanders. Nonetheless, the three men eventually convince them by explaining what marriage is:

> 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. It is because we are monogamous, you know. And marriage is the ceremony, civil and religious, that joins the two together — 'until death do us part.'" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 127-128)

During this stage of the story, Gilman further elaborates on the differences between the men's world and Herland. The three men assume that their relationships will evolve towards a more patriarchal household. However, they are unable to change the Herlanders' views nor "master" their wives:

"The more external disagreement was in the matter of 'the home,' and the housekeeping duties and pleasures we, by instinct and long education, supposed to be inherently appropriate to women" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 132). The main character, Van, believes he can convince his wife to adopt patriarchal marriage standards by reasoning with her using logic and communication. However, he fails and discovers that his wife is so obstinate about her Herland societal views that he ultimately adopts her perspective: "There was something so powerful, so large and changeless, in those eyes that I could not sweep her off her feet by my own emotion as I had unconsciously assumed would be the case" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 136).

The book has been described as a utopian novel because of the social, educational, and agricultural reforms it promotes. Regarding this radical progressiveness in the novel, Gilman describes advanced agricultural systems that can produce enough for all the inhabitants: "they worked out a system of intensive agriculture surpassing anything I ever heard of, with the very forests all reset with fruit — or nut-bearing trees" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 73). Even unproductive trees or trees with inedible fruit were genetically modified to eventually bear edible food. As Van describes it, "they had experimented, and now showed us this particularly lovely graceful tree, with a profuse crop of nutritious seeds" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 85). The forests within the novel are havens while everything in the exterior space not only looks beautiful within the landscape but also produces food. The Herlanders also ensure their land is fruitful and functional throughout the year by advances in fertilization, specifically by composting all their waste and returning it to the earth. As Van reports, "[the] culturists had worked out a perfect scheme of refeeding the soil with all that came out of it … properly treated and combined — everything which came from the earth went back to it" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 86). This ensured that the inhabitants had edible produce throughout the year.

Main Discussion

In this discussion, we explore Gilman's approach to the feminist movement in *Herland* and her use of an interdisciplinary discussion that incorporates architecture, urban design, and sociology. We do this through an analysis of her presentation of gender, space, architecture, and new housing reforms. Firstly, she uses gender and space in a utopian way in that only women live in Herland. Secondly, she depicts architecture and housing in relation to the norms in our society when Herland is owned by women only. Analysis of the novel's spatial representations is thus an important tool to understand the utopia's sociological structure and the gender issues that Gilman highlights.

Gender and Space within Herland

Gilman has imagined *Herland* as a utopia where women live in a collective society. This utopia has changed contemporary norms, whether imposed or natural, in different disciplines, such as architecture, to meet the women's needs and lifestyle. This makes it important to determine what Gilman

means by utopia and how she elaborates it in the novel. According to Jameson (2005: 137);

> The Utopia, we said, was a text in which the relations between the individual and the collectivity are substituted for the dual relations between two or small numbers of individuals which make up the existential or social life of the self. That more purely existential, or personal level, is here constituted by gender and gender relations, on which once again the fact of the body and of biology and anatomy can be seen more directly to determine large scale social structures.

As Jameson indicates, Gilman's utopia is based on determining social structures by considering the gender of individuals. Gilman addresses the social issue of gender inequality and bases the storyline on it. Gender, in the case of *Herland*, females, is what governs and defines her literary space. She criticizes the mentality of her time through the three male characters that voyage to Herland, showing how the three men were so sure that men are living there because it could not be so perfect and civilized with only women residing there: "'But they look – why, this is a CIVILIZED country!' I protested. 'There must be men'" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 12). The more they ventured into the land, the more they were sure that men also lived there, as it could not be possible otherwise:

> The road was some sort of hard manufactured stuff, sloped slightly to shed rain, with every curve and grade and gutter as perfect as if it were Europe's best. "No men, eh?" sneered Terry. On either side a double row of trees shaded the footpaths; between the trees bushes or vines, all fruit- bearing, now and then seats and little wayside fountains; everywhere flowers. (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 19)

The overall feel of the country is a sort of whimsical, green, and peaceful paradise that offers newcomers a serene ambience; to an extent, the land and the inhabitants seem intimidating to most and intriguing to others:

> Everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanness, and the pleasant sense of home over it all. As we neared the centre of the town the houses stood thicker, ran together as it were, grew into rambling palaces grouped among parks and open squares, something as college buildings stand in their quiet greens. (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 20)

Because gender governs the overall space, this space has the same characteristics as women; the country solely exists to benefit its all-female inhabitants. As Rendell (2003: 229) explains regarding gendered space: "This approach focuses on the problems inherent for women as users in 'man-made' environments and the ways in which patriarchal ideology is inscribed in space". Gilman describes Herland's towns as covered with mostly white and pastel pink buildings, and grand open spaces of greenery:

> But this place! It was built mostly of a sort of dull rose-coloured stone, with here and there some clear white houses; and it lay abroad among the green groves and gardens like a broken rosary of pink coral. 'Those big white ones are public buildings evidently,' Terry declared. 'This is no savage country, my friend. But no men? (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 24)

The three men are in awe at the environment and structures surrounding them. However, they assume men that men must also live here because their male-dominated perspective cannot imagine that women could create such an advanced country. Gilman emphasizes this repeatedly through the men's astonishment as they further discover the land. The men are actually very fond of the spaces within Herland: "Now I found an endlessly beautiful undiscovered country to explore, and in it the sweetest wisdom and understanding" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 139).

Architecture and New Housing Reforms within Herland

Coleman (2005: 48) claims that there is a strong relationship between architecture and utopia:

> Utopia is an almost inescapable companion of architectural invention. Architectural projections and utopias are close relations: both argue against inadequate existing conditions while drawing upon the past to augur a transformed future envisioned as superior to the present.

In this respect, Christensen notes how Gilman was ahead of her time in terms of the utopian architectural reforms suggested in the novel: "The physical land of *Herland* is one of the novel's most interesting features … Gilman has been praised for her environmentalist thinking in *Herland*, and in certain aspects, praise is justified" (2017: 292). After the three explorers are captured for invading Herland, they find themselves in front of some kind of fortress where they are going to be imprisoned. Its architecture is unlike any of the other buildings in the country. As Van describes it: "A large building opened before us, a very heavy thick-walled impressive place, big, and old-looking; of grey stone, not like the rest of the town" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 26). Although they are detainees, they are not treated inhumanely; rather they are offered food, Herlanders' clothes, and a spacious living area, where they can roam freely within their prison: "A big room, high and wide, with many lofty windows whose closed blinds let through soft green-lit air; a beautiful room, in proportion, in colour, in smooth simplicity; a scent of blossoming gardens outside" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 26).

The interior and exterior spaces in the novel are mostly presented as airy, light, soft, and beautiful. In the book, *Gender Space Architecture,* Rendell (2003: 225) asks a very important question: "Do women practice architecture differently?" In the case of *Herland*, the architecture and the general atmosphere express motherly characteristics, such as caring, safe, beautiful, homey, and with many fruitful gardens. Hence, although not limited to this, motherhood is a doctrine that partially defines Herlanders' way of living and upbringing: "By motherhood they were born and by motherhood they lived — life was, to them, just the long cycle of motherhood" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 64). In addition, the land is created, maintained, and developed for future generations in a motherly cycle of constantly evolution. They do this because they cherish Herland; it is in a sense collectively their child, which they need to take care of and improve, both for their and their children's sakes:

> They loved their country because it was their nursery, playground, and workshop — theirs and their children's. They were proud of it as a workshop, proud of their record of ever-increasing efficiency; they had made a pleasant garden of it, a very practical little heaven; but most of all they valued it. (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 102).

The edible spore bearing fruit gardens further symbolize the feeling of motherhood, by illustrating the idea of Mother Nature. As the men start to explore the environment, they discover that the Herlanders have taken everything into consideration for the men to feel comfortable while held captive by addressing their needs:

> A door stood somewhat ajar; it opened into a most attractive bathroom, copiously provided with towels, soap, mirrors, and all such convenient comforts, with indeed our toothbrushes and combs, our notebooks, and thank goodness, our watches … Then we made a search of the big room again and found a large airy closet, holding plenty of clothing, but not ours. (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 27)

Frequently in *Herland*, and in her other publications, Gilman criticizes the norms of a typical house layout. She suggests a different model for a house:

> They had, every one of them, the 'two rooms and a bath' theory realized ... Long since we had been given our own two rooms apiece, and as being of a different sex and race, these were in a separate house. It seemed to be recognized that we should breathe easier if able to free our minds in real seclusion. (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 135)

Gilman also expressed strong beliefs through her writing about how a household should function and look, such as eliminating kitchens. She believed this would create a more functional household where women, men, and children can focus on themselves and their role within society rather than allowing the household chores to define them. Thus, she turns Herland into one huge kitchen. In *Women and Economics*, in which she applies the same logic as her utopian novels, Gilman explains in great detail the role of women and family members within both the household and society:

> Take the kitchens out of the houses, and you leave rooms which are open to any form of arrangement and extension; and the occupancy of them does not mean 'housekeeping.' In such living, personal character and taste would flower as never before … The individual will learn to feel himself an integral part of the social structure, in close, direct, permanent connection with the needs and uses of society. (Gilman, 2015 [1898]: 162)

She believed that a house should serve the needs of its user, which to her meant women. She depicted kitchenless housing in her literature by creating eating areas shared with others and the public, where professionals prepare the food: "Outside was another large room, furnished with a great table at one end, long benches or couches against the wall, some smaller tables and chairs. All these were solid, strong, simple in structure, and comfortable in use – also, incidentally, beautiful" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 29). To her, this decreased the amount of housework a typical woman was expected to do

(Degler, 1956). In *Herland*, none of the houses include kitchens: "For food we either went to any convenient eating-house, ordered a meal brought in, or took it with us to the woods, always and equally good. All this we had become used to and enjoyed – in our courting days" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 135). The idea of being kitchenless is reflected in *A Room of One's Own*, written by Virginia Woolf in 1929, in which she includes two main keywords: Woman and Literature. Although it seems to be a story, it is fictional, in which "Lies will flow from [her] lips, but there may perhaps be some truth mixed up with [lies]; it is for [the reader] to seek out this truth and to decide whether any part of it is worth keeping" (Woolf, 2004 [1929]: 9). Woolf indicates that the women need their own rooms to become creative intellectually. Owning their own rooms provides freedom without thinking about the roles imposed on them as women by the society. Woolf talks about the inequalities and difficulties women face in society by focusing on the limitations in their social life: being imprisoned in their homes. If a woman does not have her own money, she cannot own her life. A house presents many activities that are the duties of a woman in her home: cleaning, cooking, and taking care of her children and her husband. As Woolf (Woolf, 2004 [1929]: 179-180) puts it: "For all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it. And the novels, without meaning to, inevitably lie."

For Woolf, the only solution to go beyond having "nothing of it all" and overcome these difficulties and inequalities is for the woman to have "her own room" and write as a free individual. While motherhood is one of the greatest roles in Herland society, Woolf sets the production of a literary text, represented by the metaphor of literary birth, against biological motherhood (Abel, 1993: 87).

Marcus (2006: 217) argues that "*A Room of One's Own* intervenes in debates about women and creativity, fuelled in part by the obsession with 'genius' of the first decades of the century, and uses fictional strategies to talk about women and about fiction". *Herland* reveals a new perspective for considering women's role in a society, city, or home. According to Alberti (as cited in Allen, 1997: 809), "The woman, as she remains locked up at home, should watch over things staying at her post, by diligent care and watchfulness. The man should guard the woman, the house, and his family and country, but not by sitting still". Gilman, however, presents an all-female environment, a civilized and peaceful land with no need for protection. She focuses on showcasing how different Victorian American society is from the norms of *Herland*. That is, her utopia represents the world as it should be, and how a proper society should work.

She also criticizes Victorian American society through the use of emotions like the disgust and shock experienced by the native Herlanders as they listen to the male characters in the novel: "It took some time to make clear to those three sweet-faced women the process which robs the cow of her calf, and the calf of its true food; and the talk led us into a further discussion

of the meat business. They heard it out, looking very white, and presently begged to be excused" (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 52). Gilman illustrates the architectural differences between Victorian America and *Herland*. Victorian America had a very specific architectural style that is not evident in descriptions of the exterior facades and interior spaces in the novel. Instead, Van describes it as looking more South American with a rich history:

> The walls were perfectly smooth and high, ending in the masonry of the building; and as I studied the great stones. I became convinced that the whole structure was extremely old. It was built like the pre Incan architecture in Peru, of enormous monoliths, fitted as closely as mosaics. (Gilman, 2017 [1915]: 33)

Gilman criticizes Victorian interior spaces subliminally by changing the interior space layouts and functions of Herland's houses, as mentioned earlier. The most prominent characteristic of Victorian interiors was their segregation into "three main functional zones of the house: private, service and social or living spaces" (Behbahani, Ostwald, & Gu, 2016: 350). This house typology was not evident in *Herland*, as Gilman completely separated the service zone from the house.

In *Architecture and Feminism*, Chase indicates that, at the end of the nineteenth century, "decoration and gardening were seen as 'feminine' pursuits; they were lighter, less challenging, and more appropriate activities for women than the 'masculine' profession of architecture" (1996: 132). Conversely, in Gilman's time, professions like architecture were seen as masculine. Nevertheless, she strongly demonstrates the competences of women throughout *Herland* by revealing the various capabilities of women in countless professions, particularly their ability to create a new country by themselves. The three men's comments about the structure and design details of the housing units and the country's architecture in general show her ideas about the roles of women in society and professions.

Concluding Remarks

"Gilman dreamed of an environment in which nature and culture coexisted in beautiful harmony. The built form of her utopian world facilitated an easy equality between men and women" (Allen, 1988: 87). Gilman's social reforms were not only a criticism of gender inequality; they were also an initiative to create a new ideology, an alternative lifestyle to her time. Through her novels, but particularly in *Herland*, she tackled many different issues evident during her time such as, education, motherhood, egotism, and women's status in society as a whole. Her narration of the novel from three different male perspectives to elaborate on her social criticisms is ingenious because it covertly discusses the problems of the male mindset evident during her time.

After analysing the relationship between the novel and the literary within it, we can conclude that there is a correlation between gender and spatial

representations. Gilman was a firm believer in both feminism and motherhood as the most important social role known to men. She therefore creates a haven from the characteristics associated with motherhood. She emphasizes how a perfect society should exist in today's world. From her perspective, if the world followed these guidelines, of education, sisterhood, unity, eliminating egos, and thriving as a nation rather than individuals, then countries would be much more advanced. By describing a utopian country in a positive, colourful, and harmless way, Gilman allows the reader to fully experience and imagine it.

The novel covertly criticizes the norms of exterior and interior spatial representations through the use of invented environments and spaces. These dominate literature based on a feminist approach. She achieved this by exaggerating the norms of Herland as it demonstrated the struggle women were facing. Hence, she created an outlet to encourage a different mindset that amplifies the role and capabilities of women. That is, women can achieve more than their socially expected role of motherhood and taking care of a household. She achieved this by imagining housing reforms, a green and fruitful urban space, and a perfectly engineered environment that is almost intimidating to newcomers, solely governed and created by women.

While architecture, and interior and urban design are expressed in fiction, such as Gilman's book, literature also uses them to create a more realistic and conceivable narrative. Additionally, it becomes a medium for revealing and documenting the current situation, issues, and discussions in society and sociology, such as gender inequality. These interdisciplinary relationships can nourish each other and create new opportunities for revealing new platforms to discuss the current agenda in different disciplines. In Gilman's book, spatial representations help to strengthen the narrative by considering a utopia, a land consisting only of women and their daughters. The novel highlighted gender inequality and women's position in society at that time. Further studies could focus on extending these discussions to different subjects on new platforms by considering significant interdisciplinary works based on the discussions on *Herland* and the framework of this study.

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