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"They Were All Blondes": Intersections of Racism, Feminism, and Eugenics in Mary Bradley Lane's *Mizora*

ABSTRACT This chapter will read Mary Bradley Lane's largely unknown proto-feminist utopia *Mizora* (1881) with a specific focus on how the novel reflects notions of racial and moral purity, both of which are apparently portrayed as signifying social progress—a progress which eventually eliminates the male part of the human population. To situate the novel in its socio-political and cultural context, this interplay of different notions of purity will be read in the light of gendered readings of human evolution in the wake of Charles Darwin, where writers such as Eliza Burt Gamble or Charlotte Perkins Gilman envisage the female of the species as the primary and more perfect of the human sexes. Linking such 'purification' of humankind with Angelique Richardson's notion of 'eugenic feminism' (2003), this article investigates how the ideals of Mizoran society as presented by Lane show that a proto-feminist, perfectly female utopia is inevitably accompanied by ideas of social and ethnic purity, all of which find their apotheosis in the all-blonde, all-female society in *Mizora*.

KEYWORDS eugenics, feminism, matriarchy, racism, utopia

In 1915, Charlotte Perkins Gilman published the serial novel *Herland* in her own monthly magazine *The Forerunner*. Only available in book form since 1979, the book has been widely hailed as a touchstone in feminist utopian fiction. *Herland* chronicles the adventures of three male explorers in a hitherto-unknown country populated exclusively by women and provides an account of the social, political, and cultural results of this unusual state of an all-female and, crucially for this article, all-white society. Gilman clearly frames the emergence of this matriarchal society in the context of Darwinian evolutionary theory, as is demonstrated by this report, which

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Van, the novel's first-person narrator, gives about the world the three men come from:

> I explained that the laws of nature require a struggle for existence, and that in the struggle the fittest survive, and the unfit perish. In our economic struggle, I continued, there was always plenty of opportunity for the fittest to reach the top, which they did, in great numbers, particularly in our country; that where there was severe economic pressure the lowest classes of course felt it the worst, and that among the poorest of all the women were driven into the labor market by necessity. (Gilman 2009, 63)

Van's report connects the biological issue of evolution, as a law of nature, with differentiations of gender and social and economic participation. His social Darwinist narrative, which unmistakably channels Thomas Huxley's famous dictum of the "struggle for existence—the war of each against all" (1895, 206), is contrasted with the peacefully egalitarian sisterhood prevalent in Herland, a country with "no kings, and no priests, and no aristocracies," where growth is achieved "not by competition, but by united action" (Gilman 2009, 61). When Moadine, who acts as a tutor to the male explorers, explains to her astounded visitors that the peace and stability of her country's society rests solely on "the literal sisterhood of our origin, and the far higher and deeper union of our social growth" (67), Gilman undoubtedly invites her readers to understand Herland society as the result of a melioristic development towards a post-Darwinian society without struggle, violence, and hierarchies; a society which exhibits a marked influence of Peter Kropotkin's notion of 'mutual aid' as the main factor in evolution (2006).[1]

Gilman's vision of this apparently perfectly egalitarian and serenely enlightened culture of sisterly love, which—in Jennifer Hudak's words—is "representative of the ultimate progression of humankind through evolution" (2010, 463), is, however, motivated by and conditional on what Michael J. Monahan calls a "politics of purity" (2011, 77), a systematic regime of social engineering which strives towards the elimination of sexual and also—this will be the salient point for my investigation—racial difference. The biological foundation and scientific justification for the "new race" of superwomen that inhabits Herland (58) is parthenogenesis, i.e. the ability of organisms to reproduce asexually, an ability which was acquired by the founding mothers of Herland after the men of the country were killed as

1 For a comprehensive overview of Kropotkin's influence on both Gilman and Lane, see Fisher (2014).

a consequence of internal warfare. Referring to these mythological foremothers, Van relates that they "were tall, strong, healthy, and beautiful as a race" (78), and this health and beauty is the result, so the novel clearly suggests, of a corporeal as well as moral process of purification, with the practice of parthenogenesis guaranteeing that both body and mind remain unblemished by the vicissitudes and imponderabilities of actual sexual intercourse. It is, however, not only sexual purity that characterizes the matriarchal society of Herland. Early on, the readers are informed that "these people were of Aryan stock, and were once in contact with the best civilization of the old world" (55), demonstrating both the racial (in this case, white Anglo-European) homogeneity of the Herlanders and the moral superiority derived from this uniformity. Van, who, as a trained sociologist, is acutely aware of the potential societal implications of biological principles, is not slow in drawing the conclusion that the maintenance and continuation of this kind of community needs to be based on eugenic principles, as "those held unfit [for motherhood; W. F.] are not allowed even that; and that to be encouraged to bear more than one child is the very highest reward and honor in the power of the state" (70). To sum up this admittedly very cursory introduction to *Herland*, we must acknowledge that the proto-feminist utopia of female rule and sisterly unity imagined by Gilman is founded on a rejection of corporeality and sexuality on the one hand, and, on the other hand, on a conception of racial uniformity and pure whiteness, as well as strict measures of eugenic social engineering by which this purity is accomplished. Bernice L. Hausman elegantly recapitulates and evaluates this embeddedness of (female) virtue in racist and classist fantasies of white supremacy by claiming that, in *Herland*, "eugenicist ideology surfaces in relation to maternal fitness rather than racial difference, although the suggestion of an Aryan race reminds the reader of the linkage of eugenics to ideas concerning race purity" (1998, 499).

In this article, I want to transfer the examination of this embeddedness and interconnection between female evolution, racial purity, and population control in the form of eugenics to another text, one which does not enjoy the canonical status of *Herland* but which serves as a pertinent counterpoint to Gilman's novel: Mary Bradley Lane's *Mizora*, a novel published 30 years before *Herland*, which likewise portrays a society consisting entirely of white women, who, in the name of scientific and biological progress, have established a community devoid of competition and struggle. Juxtaposing these two utopian narratives, I will argue that *Mizora* offers a more nuanced analysis of the complicated nexus of science and ethics in the colonial encounter and imagination than *Herland*, at times even challenging the conventional gender ascription of the male explorer and

conqueror. While not altogether managing to escape the colonial politics of purity, Lane's novel still exhibits a level of (post-colonial) scientifically informed self-reflectivity, a position from which it contemplates and reflects on a variety of significant socio-political and biological discourses of the day and the complex ways in which they are interrelated. In order to situate my comparison of the two texts within their scientific and cultural background, I will first briefly sketch some of the main contemporary scientific and sociological sources which feed into the emergence of what Angelique Richardson has termed "eugenic feminism" (2003), a notion I will subsequently attempt to triangulate with an enquiry into the racist connotation of Gilman's and Lane's utopian imagination that is based on Monahan's notion of a "politics of purity" (2011, 77). With a view to the overall topic of this volume, my contribution will attempt to read *Mizora* as an imaginative attempt to move beyond a binary understanding of science as either a progressive, liberating force or as a (willing or unwitting) instrument of Western imperialism by demonstrating how the emancipatory potential of science for improving society is entangled with an imperial politics of race.

The Ascent of Woman? A Short History of Gendered Evolution

In order to be able to place *Mizora* and *Herland* within this complex and contested field, it is first necessary to briefly provide a rough overview of the scientific and socio-political discourses against which both novels need to be read. Darwin had famously all but left out the human from his *The Origin of Species* (first published in 1859) and only came to address the consequence of his theories of natural and sexual selection for human society in *The Descent of Man* (1871). There, without probably very much actually meaning to do so, he sets the tone for a gendered reading of evolution which, arguably and to a certain degree, is still prevalent in our days. When he writes that certain human traits and powers are "more strongly marked in women than in man," that "these faculties are characteristic of the lower races, and therefore of a past and lower state of civilization" (Darwin 2004, 629), and that "[at] some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilised races of man will almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world" (183), he creates what could anachronistically be called an intersectional template which intricates gender difference and gendered hierarchies with questions of racial superiority.

This template is readily taken up by scientists and cultural theorists alike, as the following two particularly influential examples show: no-one has done more to rework Darwin's theories into tools for analysing, predicting, and regulating the behaviour and governance of human societies than Herbert Spencer. As part of this reworking, Spencer, in *The Psychology of the Sexes*, presents an 'explanation' for the evolved gender difference of human character dispositions in the simple fact of motherhood, which for him means that "only that mental energy is normally feminine which can coexist with the production and nursing of the due number of healthy children" (1874, 31), resulting in turn in "an arrest of individual development" in the female of the species (32). Spencer, it needs to be stressed, does not fully endorse this state of affairs but sees it, rather, as another interim stage in human development which needs to be and will eventually be overcome, suggesting that "as civilization readjusts men's natures to higher social requirements, there goes on a corresponding readjustment between the natures of men and women, tending in sundry respects to diminish their differences" (35). In other words, the elimination of—or at least a reduction in—gender difference can count, for Spencer, as a mark of social and ethical improvement. In *The Evolution of Sex*, one of the scientific bestsellers of the late nineteenth century and my second example, Patrick Geddes and Arthur Thomson supply the terminology for this dual economy of gendered human development: while men, "simply because they are males," are more active and generally "tend to live at a loss"—a mode they classify as *katabolic*—women, in contrast, are *anabolic*, with restraint and "constructive processes predominating in their life" (1889, 26).

While such readings of evolutionary gender differentiation, which take male development as the evolutionary standard and female development as arrested or defective, certainly constitute both the scientific and sociological mainstream of the day, alongside this mainstream exists another tendency, one which has only recently been recuperated academically and which is also very pertinent to reading *Mizora*.[2] A number of (mostly female) writers employ their reading of Darwin and, to a lesser extent, Spencer to make a case for, as Eliza Burt Gamble puts it in *The Evolution of Woman*, "the female as the primary unit of creation," whereas "the male functions simply supplemental or complementary" (1894, 31). Parthenogenesis, she argues in this context, proves her point that—from an evolutionary perspective—the male may occasionally be nice to have around but can, on the whole, be regarded as surplus to requirements and will, in

2 For detailed accounts of this alternative, proto-feminist interpretation of evolution, see Deutscher (2004), Vandermassen et al. (2005), and Hamlin (2014).

the fullness of time, find himself "weighted in the struggle for supremacy" (77). By uncoupling the evolutionary mandate of procreation from the biological fact of male–female sexual intercourse, parthenogenesis—as Thomas Galt Peyser notes—also "suggests that women's bodies are or can be free from phallocentric law" (1992, 2).

Whereas Gamble, and other writers such as Antoinette Brown Blackwell or Francis Swiney, find in Darwinian evolution evidence for an innate female superiority, thus reversing the conventional gendered hierarchy which Darwin himself had helped to establish, there exists another strand of argument which uses evolution to argue for the irrelevance of gender difference altogether. Gilman herself is a pertinent case in point here, claiming as she does in *Women and Economics* that there is no such thing as sexual determinism and that any "arrested development" (1900, 330), meaningfully taking up Spencer's phrase, is a consequence of the socio-economically underprivileged condition of woman in her times. Tellingly for the topic of this article, Gilman frames her analysis of female oppression in terms of racial improvement, which—in contradiction to Darwin's view of evolution as essentially blind and non-teleological—she sees as the purpose and goal of human development: she claims that the "sexuo-economic relation has debarred her from the social activities in which, and in which alone, are developed the social virtues. She was not allowed to acquire the qualities needed in our racial advance" (329). Even though, in all likelihood, Gilman's use of the term 'race' refers in this context to the entirety of the human species rather than any ethnologically defined subset, the very fact that its reference is unfixed and that it even "broadly encompasses both characteristics of sex and skin color" (Mahady 2004, 104) gives evidence of its versatility for the ideological implementation of structures of dominance and submission.

It is certainly no coincidence that Gilman links her narratives of female empowerment and equality with eugenic notions of social and racial improvement. In her study *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Angelique Richardson pursues this connection and finds it so pervasive as to warrant its own critical category, 'eugenic feminism,' the objective of which she claims to be "the construction of civic motherhood which sought political recognition for reproductive labour" (2003, 9). In a nutshell, this connection is based on the notion that the existing patriarchal structures are so resilient that nature, on its own, will not be able to realize the potential of what Alfred Russel Wallace, co-discoverer of natural selection, calls "the cultivated minds and pure instincts of the Woman of the Future" (quoted in Richardson 2003, 55). Nature, therefore, is in need of human help in the form of regulating future society by way of controlling

and directing reproduction. Calling to mind Geddes and Thomson's dual economy of male and female gender dispositions as katabolic and anabolic, respectively, Richardson shows that within the context of eugenic feminism, "degeneration was a masculine narrative, while regeneration, which reversed its plot, was feminine" (52). That this plot reversal also bears profound consequences for the political sphere is evident from her assessment that "eugenic love was the politics of the state mapped onto bodies: the replacement of romance with the rational selection of a reproductive partner in order better to serve the state through breeding" (8–9). The argument here, by espousing "the vital contribution of women in regenerating the British imperial race" (xvii), integrates Gilman's and Spencer's notion that a revaluation of woman's role and status in society could, indeed, enhance the human condition in general with the colonial fantasy and politics of racial purity. According to Monahan, this fantasy is based on the "normative presumption [...] that any given individual ought to clearly and unambiguously be a member of one and only one racial category, and that each category will itself be discrete and self-contained" (2011, 77). This normative purity, I would suggest, figures as the nexus of the eugenic practice of mapping state politics onto bodies, implying, as it does, that both sexual and racial nonconformity need to be eradicated on the path towards realizing the supposed pinnacle of human evolution—the chaste, white Anglo-European, who "stands as a racially pure category at the pinnacle of social, cultural, and economic hierarchies" (84).

This glorification of sexual and racial purity in the name of science and human progress entails, of course, various configurations and strategies of exclusion and suppression, but also of empowerment and agency. On the one hand, it provides apparent scientific justification for the colonial project of conquest and subjugation of supposed 'lower races' and adds fuel to the fear of racial miscegenation insofar as "whiteness is understood as pure humanity [and] that the purity of whiteness must be protected" (Monahan 2011, 85). On the other hand, it lends itself equally well to being deployed in the service of female emancipation and participation. According to Jessica Walsh, for example, many feminists of the time "supported eugenics, since it offered an entry point for discussions of reproductive rights" while at the same time "encouraging the language of national pride so often employed by reformers campaigning against repressive and allegedly primitive laws and traditions" (2002, 219–20).[3]

3 In this context of the national and ethnic dimension of evolution and eugenics, Kimberley Hamlin recalls the notion of 'race suicide,' a term first used by Edward A. Ross in 1901, referring to "the idea that middle- and upper-class

The New Puritans: Race and Gender in *Mizora*

If all this remains a bit vague for the moment, I hope my reading of *Mizora* will provide some further explanation and illustration. The text, which Jean Pfaelzer has ennobled as "the first major work of utopian fiction in America" (2012, 323), was first published in serial form in the *Cincinnati Commercial*, and, as Murat Halstead, the editor of the full novel ten years later, would highlight, not much was—or is now—known about its author, Mary Bradley Lane. He merely notes that Lane "kept herself in concealment so closely that even her husband did not know that she was the writer who was making this stir in our limited literary world" (Lane 2000, 5).[4] *Mizora* can be seen as an almost paradigmatic example of a literary utopia. It deploys the conventional ploy of a traveller journeying from our world to another, where she encounters a society which is organized along notably different lines than contemporary readers would be accustomed to. In this case, and here is a first significant deviation from the usual utopian template, the traveller is female: a Russian woman by the name of Vera Zarovitch, who, as Pfaelzer informs us (2000, xiv), is very likely modelled on Vera Zasulich, who, like the novel's protagonist, was exiled from Russia for her role in anarchist insurgence.[5] While escaping from Russia, Lane's Vera Zarovitch gets lost on the Arctic Ocean and finds herself sucked into a gigantic current. After the decidedly orgasmic experience of penetrating "a curtain of rainbows fringed with flame," dying the little death of a "semi-stupor, born of exhaustion and terror," and reawakening to a "rosy light, like the first blush of a new day," she finds herself near the "shores of a new and beautiful country" called Mizora (Lane 2000, 13–14). After first taking in the sights and sounds of this "land of enchantment" (14), she eventually meets a young woman called Wauna, who quickly becomes her confidante and person of reference, as well as Wauna's mother, the Preceptress, who, as the head of the National College, is aptly positioned

white women were not having enough babies and that soon nonwhite, lower-class populations would become the majority," adding that concerns regarding race suicide "were typically voiced in Darwinian, survival-of-the-fittest language" (2014, 97).

4 For anyone familiar with Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892), this image of a women putting pen to paper in concealment from her husband will generate another interesting link between these two writers.

5 For a detailed account of the life of this eminent Russian, see Bergman (1983). For an investigation of Russian influences on Lane, in particular Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*, see Wiemer (1995).

to impart on Vera her knowledge about the history, customs, and general do's-and-don'ts of her newly adopted home country.

Before we investigate this new home and the racist politics of purity on which its society is founded, we should first take a look at the way Lane establishes her narrator as a scientist and, more specifically, a female scientist. When Vera stresses both the "strong sense of duty" she owes to science and her description of her tale as "a simple narration of facts" (Lane 2000, 7), she quite clearly demands for herself the role of a serious analyst of the biological and sociological phenomena she encounters in Mizora, staking her claim for authority from the onset on its practical value rather than any abstract theorems and doctrines:

> Yet, who, sweeping the limitless fields of space with a telescope, glancing at myriads of worlds that a lifetime could not count, or gazing through a microscope at a tiny world in a drop of water, has dreamed that patient Science and practice could evolve for the living human race, the ideal life of exalted knowledge: the life that I found in Mizora; that Science had made real and practicable. (Lane 2000, 7–8)

While she fails to acknowledge that this scientific ideal is essentially based on an eradication of difference and an equation of progress and whiteness, Vera nevertheless does her best to model her adventurous voyage to Mizora as a veritable anthropological field trip, from which usable and applicable intelligence is to be expected. In this light, her supplementary quip, that the "tongue of woman has long been celebrated as an unruly member," only to become—by dint of this, her very own narrative—"the primal cause of the grandest discovery of the age" (8), can be seen as a rather radical bid for female participation. By claiming the authority to generate and record her very own narrative of exploration and (grandest) discovery, she tries to subvert the previously very male annals of this particular genre. With a nod to Freud and Lacan, her "unruly" tongue could thus be stylized as a female substitute for the phallocentric patriarchal order, her scientific account of Mizora representing, in this reading, a refusal to accept and play by the conventional rules for conveying tales of colonial conquest and scientific world-making. In line with this self-perception as a scrupulous scientist, Vera approaches Mizora with a mixture of inquisitiveness, disbelief, and what we would nowadays probably call ambiguity tolerance. The first and most obvious cognitive dissonance she has to face is the total absence of men in Mizora, a segment of the population which, back home, had been of "vital necessity" and the general "arbitrator of all domestic life" (20), without whom neither the running of the state nor the running

of a respectable household would be feasible. Not so in Mizora, apparently, where men have followed the dinosaurs into well-deserved extinction "three thousand years ago" (93) and have been substituted by the "race of superior people" (110) that is the all-female, racially homogenously white society "of the highest type of blonde beauty" (15) in contemporary Mizora. The Kennedy-esque explanation for this development provided by the Preceptress—that "it is not what Nature has done for us, it is what we have done for her" (110)—not only underlines that, as far as the Mizorans are concerned, it is very much the obligation of (wo)mankind to show nature the correct direction in which to evolve; it also echoes notions of an inherent and, as it were, natural superiority of the female sex similar to those formulated by Gamble and Swiney, for whose vision of an eventual female triumph in the struggle for existence the Mizoran "family of sisters who knew no distinction of birth or position among themselves" (28) can figure as something like an apotheosis. And while Lane does not explicitly refer to parthenogenesis as such, the biological continuation of this triumphantly female society, based as it is on controlling the development of "the germ of all Life" (which is—tipping her hat to Darwin—also their "one common beginning" [103] or ancestor), is undoubtedly based, as Katherine Broad has it, on "parthenogenesis as a systematic and transparent narrative of scientific development" (2009, 250). In other words, the elimination of the male, and thus of gender difference, in the process of human procreation is presented as a necessary and scientifically required step towards the purification of human society.

When Vera subsequently learns more about how Mizoran society developed and by which means it is maintained, it becomes clear that the egalitarian sisterhood of Mizora, like that of Herland, is very much the result of a systematic act of social and biological engineering. "By following strictly the laws that govern the evolution of life," so the Preceptress proudly explains, "we control the formation of the body and brain" (110). Her daughter Wauna exhibits a similar sense of superiority over Vera when she tells her that

> had my ancestors thought as you do, and rested on an inferior education, I should not represent the advanced stage of development that I do. […] The gradations of advancement from one intellectual basis to another, in a social body, requires centuries to mark a distinct change in the earlier ages of civilization, but we have now arrived at a stage when advancement is clearly perceptible between one generation and the next. (67)

Reaching this advanced stage requires the conquest and deactivation of the presumably unshakeable laws of the natural world, a feat from which the Preceptress extrapolates the developmental as well as the moral superiority of her own society over Vera's society of origin: "*You* are the product of a people far back in the darkness of civilization. *We* are a people who have passed beyond the boundary of what was once called Natural Law. But, more correctly, we have become mistresses of Nature's peculiar processes. We influence or control them at will" (90; emphases in the original).

But again, as in *Herland*, the prevailing of the female of the species in the struggle for—even physical—existence and the overcoming of "Natural Law" cannot be considered an unmitigated triumph of the subaltern, since it is predicated on notions and politics of racial purification similar to those we have encountered in Gilman's matriarchal fantasy. Mahady clearly pinpoints an "intolerance of difference" as the "precondition" for Mizoran social ideals (2004, 104), and Lydia Fisher recognizes the "distinctly racist maternalism" she identifies in Mizora as directly related to the social ideal of a cooperative society as proposed by Kropotkin (2014, 193). In Vera's report, the gendered and ethnic homogeneity of Mizora presents the indispensable foundation for those ideals to become achievable, as only this process of purification solves "the undeniable problem of racial difference and the difficulties it presents for a society based not on competition, but on mutual aid, by first acknowledging racial difference in the narrative, and then eliminating it" (200). Such a claim is not without real-life analogues either. Benjamin Kidd's *Social Evolution*, for example, highlights the interconnection of ideals of racial superiority and the moral improvement attached to a feminization of the human character and society, in which the release of an "immense and all-pervading fund of altruistic feeling" is cited side by side with the necessity to "abandon the idea […] that the coloured races left to themselves possess the qualities necessary to the development of the rich resources of the lands they have inherited" as prerequisites for "the whole onward movement with which our age is identified" (1894, 298, 316).

Again, it is the notion of purity that is of essential importance for the workings and ideology of this all-female, all-white society. The realization of the Mizoran project of societal perfection and purification entails for one the suppression of bodily sexuality, which presents a potential breeding ground, quite literally, for the kind of interracial contamination which, under the name of 'miscegenation,' figures as one of the great moral panics of the late nineteenth century. In contrast, "our children," so Wauna reports, "come to us as welcome guests through portals of the holiest and purest affection" (130). By reconfiguring the female genitals in the process

of giving birth as immaculate gateways channelling religious virtue and unblemished chastity (it is not for nothing that parthenogenesis is colloquially known as 'virgin birth'), Mizorans eliminate the dangers of (moral) defilement and racially contaminated progeny that potentially accompany the act of sexual procreation. Noting the ambiguous, both liberating and restrictive, function parthenogenesis assumes in this elimination of sexual diversity, Broad observes how, in Mizora, "parthenogenesis releases women from prescribed gender roles as wives and mothers, but it continues to curb women's autonomy by citing women as bearers of a glorified social purity" (2009, 251).

In a similar attempt to eradicate diversity and impurity, Mizoran social engineering also entails the imposition of "a higher culture" (72) on the working classes, and, crucial in the light of my argument here, the "elimination" of those Mizorans with "dark complexions," since "the highest excellence of moral and mental character is alone attainable by a fair race. The elements of evil belong to the dark race" (92). In short, the Mizoran social ideal is only attainable by a quite literally select section of the population: non-working-class, white females.

In the course of her stay, Vera is comprehensively introduced and exposed to the history, ideology, scientific practice, and general self-understanding of her host country, and, mindful of her self-stylization as scientific observer, she attempts a summary assessment of the relative merits of the onward social development and the eugenic measures introduced to attain and maintain it. Accordingly, her judgement is balanced and considered: "I am," she says, "of the opinion that their admirable system of government, social and political, and their encouragement and provision for universal culture of so high an order, had more to do with the formation of superlative character than the elimination of the dark complexions" (92–93). In other words, the opinion at which Vera seems to arrive is that the ideal of racial purity and the apotheosis of whiteness is a mere afterthought to or by-effect of the biological realization of the morally and physically superior female ideal. Likewise, after 15 years in Mizora, Vera feels a strong yearning to return home, which suggests in itself a certain kind of reflexive distance from her object of (scientific) enquiry, a critical stance which sets her narrative apart from the glorification of white female supremacy we encounter in *Herland*. At the same time, it illustrates her awareness that Mizora is not an Elysian field of social equity—an assessment reinforced by the Preceptress's unequivocal establishment, earlier on, of the unsurmountable evolutionary gap between Vera's society and Mizora. Moreover, the fact that Wauna, who accompanies Vera back to 'our' world, dies shortly after arrival also goes to show that the utopian

world of Mizora—while providing an interesting thought experiment—is nowhere near fit for the practical purpose of late Victorian socio-political reality, as the "lofty ideal of humanity that she represented was smiled at or gently ignored" (145).

What conclusions can we, as readers, now draw from Vera's assessment? I agree with Broad that the elimination of sexuality and the subsequent avowal of moral purity helps to subvert the Victorian patriarchal order by reducing conventional gender roles and ascriptions to absurdity while, at the same time, retaining another conventional patriarchal strategy for upholding a hierarchy of the sexes, which is the inherent connection of women to the natural world. I disagree, though, with her view that the novel fully endorses the elimination of difference, relating to both gender and skin colour, on which Mizoran superiority seems to be based. I would rather read the novel not primarily as a biological utopia of pure and purely white femininity—although it also invites such a reading. Instead, I would suggest taking Vera, our narrator, at her own word and understanding her journey to Mizora as a scientific and, in particular, sociological thought experiment, which she observes as disinterestedly as possible and of which she finally comes to appreciates some aspects, such as "the beauty and charm of the public parks" (41) or the replacement of nobility of birth by intellect and educational merit as social means of stratification (cf. 42–43), while disapproving of others, like the extinction of all forms of animal life (cf. 54), the complete lack of any form of spirituality (cf. 131–32), or, indeed, the elimination of 'man'kind 3,000 years earlier, for whom she weeps "the bitter tears of actual experience" and with whom she identifies precisely on account of their shared history of emotional, and thus necessarily capricious, inconsistent and impure, human condition: "*They* had experienced the treachery and ingratitude of humanity, and had dealt in it themselves. *They* had known joy as I had known it, and their sorrow had been as my sorrows. *They* had loved as I had loved, and sinned as I had sinned, and suffered as I had suffered" (91; emphases in the original). Notwithstanding her fascination with the rigidity of Mizora's socio-moral purification and, above all, their scientific achievements (the Mizorans, we are informed, for example, have become proficient at the process of separating "water into its two gases, and then, with their ingenious chemical skill, converted it into an economical fuel," 58), Vera understands implicitly that this "immense family of sisters who knew no distinction of birth or position among themselves" (28) at the same time represents a loss, or at least a fundamental re-definition, of what it means to be human, and she is not prepared to accept this unreservedly. Somewhat counterintuitively, the undoubtedly racist politics of

purity in the novel need, therefore, to be understood—borrowing a term from Rangan and Chow—as "a technology of rationalization" (2013, 404) for Vera, as an imaginative figuration by a female scientific narrator with the aim of trying to evaluate and weigh up the multifarious implications of such quests for purity.

Conclusion

So, if we finally put *Mizora* on the scales, we can note with Fisher that the novel "proves to be unusually sensitive to the problems and pitfalls of a progressive scientific vision" (2014, 182) and concur with Pfaelzer that it is "a vexing and vexed novel" (2000, xi). It is not, however, a white supremacist phantasy of racial purity run by a brigade of flaxen-haired Brunhilds, an accusation which could be levelled with considerably more justification against Gilman's *Herland*, which attempts to prove, as Hudak perceptively observes, "that the 'best' kinds of people resemble Gilman herself: upper-middle class white women whose rejection of gender stereotypes relies upon notions of racial purity" (2010, 475–76). I would rather follow Pfaelzer in seeing Mizora as "an unstable text that resists as it reproduces its era's concerns with sexuality, race, domestic labour, aesthetics, and female education" (2000, xi). As I have tried to demonstrate in this article, it is particularly sensitive when it comes to the interplay of notions of racial and moral purity, where it allows for two interesting suppositions: first, with regards to gender, it calls attention to the potentially ambiguous consequences of deploying evolution to argue for an innate female superiority, let alone monocracy, however emancipatory and liberating this may seem at first glance. Rather, as Vera's confident self-stylization as a scientist demonstrates, evolution should be read as providing equal opportunities for both sexes when it comes to exploring, describing, and making sense of the world. In this context, *Mizora* certainly complicates one traditional assumption about gender in the imperial imagination, namely, that the woman's place is in the home and at the hearth, while it is incumbent upon the male to scientifically explore, 'civilize,' and, if necessary, subjugate ever more new imperial spaces. Second, when seen from an explicitly post-colonial perspective, the uniformly white sisterhood of Mizora represents confirmation that social and cultural progress and liberation is never pure and always necessarily a relative concept; that, more often than not, what we today would, on the whole, consider to be positive developments, like female empowerment and participation, can go hand in hand with, or can even be reliant on, more adverse transformations,

like in this particular case the elimination of ethical difference or eugenic social engineering. *Mizora*'s imaginative achievement is precisely this: it invests a woman with enough scientific authority to reveal and deliberate the endless complexity and multiple contingencies that adhere to any notion of human purification and, in so doing, muddles those apparently clear-cut ideological boundaries and hierarchical power relations that underpin both the patriarchal and the colonial regime.

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