

literature, and it will provide its readers with many points of departure and debate. The anthology is carefully edited, and the reader will also warmly welcome the selected bibliography at the end of the book.

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Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Crux* (1911). Durham, NC: Duke University Press 2003; 171 pages; ISBN 0-8223-3167-5; £12.95 paper.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1994,² and named the sixth most influential woman of the twentieth century five years later in a poll conducted by the Siena Research Institute.³ Acclaimed internationally for her 1898 *Women and Economics*, Gilman's prolific literary output included five additional nonfiction works, eight novels, and hundreds of short stories, poems, plays, essays and lectures from the 1890s to the 1930s. In the early twentieth century, Carrie Chapman Catt described her as "the most original and challenging mind, which the [women's] movement produced."⁴ Yet the majority of critical studies in the late twentieth century focused on just two of her many works, her short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" and the utopian novel *Herland*. This pattern has been shifting in the past decade, and scholars of American studies, cultural studies, and women's studies have increasingly paid critical attention to the full range of her work.⁵ The 2003 reissue by Duke University Press of her 1911 *The Crux*⁶ is part of this larger process. As cultural theorist Dana Seitler emphasizes in her introduction to the new edition, we are fortunate to have the novel back in print. Seitler makes a convincing case for some of the ways in which the novel "enables an account of how the

2. The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Society – About Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Site hosted by Denise K. Knight, <http://www.cortland.edu/gilman/AboutCPG.htm>. Accessed Jan. 17, 2004. The National Women's Hall of Fame was established in 1969 in Seneca Falls, New York to acknowledge the contributions of American women both in terms of public recognition, and through a museum. See National Women's Hall of Fame – Our History, <http://www.greatwomen.org/history.php>. Accessed Jan. 17, 2004.

3. The Siena Research Institute was founded in 1980 at Siena College in New York. The organization conducts surveys from the local to national level in the United States on social, historical, economic, political, and cultural issues. Results have been published in both regional and national journals, academic as well as popular. See Siena College- Siena Research Institute – SRI, <http://www.siena.edu/sri/>. Accessed January 17, 2004.

4. National Women's Hall of Fame-Women of the Hall, <http://www.greatwomen.org/women.php>. Accessed January 17, 2004.

5. See for example Mark W. Van Wienen, "A Rose by any Other Name: Charlotte Perkins Stetson (Gilman) and the Case for American Reform Socialism," *American Quarterly*, 55:4 (December 2003); Dana Seitler, "Unnatural Selection: Mothers, Eugenic Feminism, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Regeneration Narratives," *American Quarterly* 55:1 (March 2003).

6. Excerpts from the novel were published in Ann J. Lane, ed., *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader: The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Fiction* (N.Y.: Pantheon, 1980).

histories of our feminisms are not politically transparent but fraught with a complex and dialectical history of promise and damage" (18). The novel is especially important for contemporary readers not least because of the ways in which it complicates accounts of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century discourses in gender, sexuality, race, class, and ethnicity in a story that combines motifs of women's friendship and community with ideological questions about economic independence and reproductive choice.

Gilman saw herself as more "preacher" than "poet,"⁷ and as she did in her 1912 essay on "Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper," in her preface to *The Crux* she indicates that the novel is meant to be educational. The book she writes is first "for young women to read; second for young men to read; and after that, for anybody who wants to. Anyone who doubts its facts and figures is referred to 'Social Diseases and Marriage' by Dr. Prince Morrow, or to 'Hygiene and Morality' by Miss Lavinia Dock, a trained nurse of long experience" (Gilman 23). This overt didacticism at times detracts from the novel's artistic merit, but her overt agenda also contributes to its ideological interest for a new, fourth group of readers: cultural and literary historians, and American studies teachers and students nearly a hundred years later. Gilman drew on history, sociology, philosophy, and psychology in order to envision what she saw as a humanist, utopian future. Her views, she insisted, were not necessarily "feminist," but rather the world was overly "masculinist," and what she hoped for was a more balanced, humane alternative.⁸ For example, the protagonist Vivian Lane is described by one of the male characters toward the end of the novel as "... so beautiful and so clever, and so pleasant to everybody. She's square-like a man. And she's kind-like a woman, only kinder" (156). Gilman's androgynous ideal is enacted in various gendered dynamics throughout *The Crux*, most fully by Vivian.

The plot develops around a multigenerational group of New England white women who leave their small New England town and go west to Colorado where they establish what quickly becomes a thriving boarding house for single men, many of whom have gone west to seek their fortunes in the silver mines. Seidler argues that Gilman's narrative form both reflected and transformed the male Western narrative of flight made popular in novels such as Owen Wister's *The Virginian*. For Gilman, the men who have gone West seem pleased to interact with the women protagonists, and they benefit not only from their competence in running the boarding house, but also admire and learn from their expertise in activities from dance instruction and professional cooking, kindergarten teaching, to gymnastics training. Seidler notes that in terms of chronology as well as narrative vision of possibilities for women's emancipation, this novel stands midway between the debilitating world of the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" written in 1892, and the utopian feminist world represented in *Herland* in 1915 (Seidler 9). Unlike the protagonist in "The Yellow Wallpaper," the

7. The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Society, <http://www.cortland.edu/gilman/CFPs.htm>. Accessed Jan. 17, 2004.

8. Lane 1980, xiv.

female characters of *The Crux* are able to enact a range of practices that characterized women social reformers of the Progressive era. The Western geographical space its characters inhabit is also a figurative space for upward social progress, ideas that Gilman would enact in a futuristic setting when she wrote *Herland*.

The "crux" of the title and Gilman's politicized agenda in the book is that the main character, 25 year old Vivian Lane, still vaguely in love with her teenage sweetheart Morton Elder, must decide whether or not she will submit to his persistent efforts to win her affection and trust after she learns that he has developed both syphilis and gonorrhea. She struggles with the notion of whether she can and should try to reform him by marrying him, which is precisely what her charming older friend and mentor Adela St. Cloud advises. The narrator, on the other hand, leads the reader to suspect Mrs. St. Cloud's wisdom, the errors of which are mirrored in her manner of dress. She clothes herself in "soft clinging fibers, always with a misty, veiled effect to them" which seem to mirror her misguided commitment to female sacrifice and endurance for the sake of men. On the other hand Vivian benefits from the experience and knowledge of a second mentor, the progressive, independent-minded woman doctor, Jane Bellair, as well as from the experience of her caretaker grandmother, Sevilla Pettigrew. Both of these women do their best to keep her from marrying Morton. While her grandmother confronts Vivian directly by telling her not to marry him, Dr. Bellair addresses the medical ethics of the period.

In Gilman's time, syphilis and gonorrhea were difficult to diagnose and cure. Although the Wasserman test for syphilis was developed in 1906, no reliable means of diagnosing gonorrhea existed at the time she wrote *The Crux*. Nor would penicillin be available until 1942 as a treatment for sexually transmitted diseases. A medical doctor, Jane Bellair is the most articulate spokesperson in the novel for Gilman's politics, and her indirect rather than directly confrontational response to the medical protocol of the day reflects the anxiety and uncertainty around the diagnosis and cure of sexually transmitted disease.⁹ Gilman does not make Morton a patient of Dr. Bellair, but of another doctor, Richard Hale, who is both a colleague and long-term friend of Jane's. Dr. Bellair tries to convince Dr. Hale to counsel Morton about the danger of giving birth to deformed children should he marry Vivian, but he refuses, insisting that he is a doctor and not a social worker. The reader is thus encouraged to consider issues of gendered power in the medical profession. Ironically Richard is the man Vivian eventually marries, a detail that seems somewhat contrived to fit Gilman's political agenda. While Richard represents male control of the medical profession, as a character he is emotionally weaker than both Jane and Vivian; it seems that his reluctance to confront Morton directly has more to do with his own inability to come to terms with disappointment in love sixteen years earlier than with any outright hostility toward women. The fact that he and Vivian marry becomes a vehicle through which Gilman displaces (rather than overturns) the conventions of the nineteenth-century plot of female domesticity with its proverbial ending with marriage or death

9. Lane 1980, xxiv.

for the heroine. Vivian marries, but she does so on the basis of a rational reflection rather than the conventional female emotional choice. Nor is she forced to choose between her career as a kindergarten teacher, for which she is deeply passionate, and her marriage. In Gilman's fictional world, both women and men have the potential of developing androgynous strength, but it is the women who seem to lead the way.

The fear of "race suicide" is an ever-present shadow to the affirming discourse of economic freedom, reproductive rights and personal autonomy in Gilman's writing. Suggestions of white innocence and purity are represented not only in the dialogue but also in repeated images of Vivian's white clothing, the "delicate whiteness" of her features, and her "delicate level brows" (28). Servilla Pettigrew says that "Our girls mostly save the race" (139), but the suspense created through events is designed to show that these "girls" must consciously work against the forces of irrational passion, and that the more innocent and naïve the woman, the greater the danger.

The novel first appeared serially in Gilman's feminist journal *The Forerunner* in 1910. This was the year the NAACP was founded, and one year before the Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire. Figuratively, too, the entire Progressive Era from the 1890s to the 1920s was one of heated struggle over how to define the needs and goals of the women's movement, and this discussion was reflected in the narrative forms women writers chose. Feminist critic Elizabeth Ammons notes that the fiction of women authors during these years by no means represented issues of power in transparent or consistent ways. Gilman was among a number of women who published novels, along with Frances Watkins Harper, Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Nella Larsen, and others. Despite their disagreements, these writers shared the belief that fiction could be a tool for representing issues ranging from the sexual exploitation of women to the expression of a distinctively female voice; from the identity of the woman artist, mother, or daughter to the oppression of women of color by white women, and the difficulty of dealing with multiple discrimination as a female immigrant, lesbian, black, Asian or Native American (Ammons 5).

Gilman's own experience mirrored this larger discussion, and the events in *The Crux* are in part autobiographical. When she arrived in California with her daughter Catherine in 1889, her flight from an oppressive marriage signaled a determination to leave behind nineteenth-century domestic virtues and to dedicate her life to public service. Like the characters in the novel, she gained economic independence in running a boarding house with her friend Adeline Knapp. Ten years later, strongly influenced by Edward Bellamy's 1888 *Looking Backwards* and the Nationalist movement for reform socialism the book had spawned, Gilman had published *Woman and Economics* and was arguably one of the best-known women intellectuals in the United States and Europe (Van Wienen 606). By the time she published *The Crux* in her journal *The Forerunner*, Gilman had developed an approach to social progress that was influenced not only by Bellamy's egalitarianism, but also by Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism and the eugenics theories of sociologists Lester Frank

Ward and Edward Alsworth Ross. She embraced Ross's argument that the female sex as the "race type" was responsible for developing humans that would be more intelligent, efficient, and ethically capable of functioning at a higher level of social advancement, and as well as the belief that the principle of natural selection could be used in the economic sphere to justify prejudice against "evolutionarily-stunted" African Americans, Native Americans, and Chinese.¹⁰ As Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams notes, Gilman "hoped for racial unity" but assumed that it would be on white terms, that blacks should want to "progress" to white ways of living.¹¹ Gilman was convinced that the transition from slavery to freedom had not been facilitated in a way conducive to social evolution. In "A Suggestion on the Negro Problem" (1908), for example, she recommended that African Americans "enlist" into a "new army" designed to produce "honorable employment" for those "negroes below a certain grade of citizenship." Their collective community would provide labor for the mainstream white majority at the same time that it would train its participants to think and act like whites.¹² The idea sounds remarkably like a cross between a plantation owner's dream and a Native American boarding school.

Utopian visions are invariably susceptible to excesses, oversights, and mistakes which become visible only with the passage of time, and the racial and ethnic dimensions of Gilman's thinking are troubling at the millennium, when ethical questions around reproductive freedom, genetic engineering, and human rights for indigenous peoples and other colonized peoples, immigrants and refugees in the Western world are urgent as never before. Yet it seems important that the full spectrum of her ideas be made visible and subject to analysis. White scholars should not only focus on those elements in her work that anticipate what seems progressive in contemporary feminist social and political agendas. Rather, as Ann Lane suggests, Gilman's racism should "instruct [anti-racist scholars and activists] to look more carefully at our own thinking for signs of similar backwardness that is so pervasive that we too are unable to identify those lapses."¹³ Seidler may exaggerate the contribution of this particular novel when she argues that "it is perhaps not too ambitious to suggest that *The Crux* might in some way change contemporary accounts of both Gilman's work and early feminism" (19),¹⁴ but this does not diminish the importance of her insights and suggestions for further research.

10. Dale M. Bauer, ed., Introduction to excerpt from Edward Alsworth Ross, "The Causes of Race Superiority"; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (Boston, New York: Bedford Cultural Edition, 1998), 210.

11. Lisa Ganobcsik-Williams, "The Intellectualism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Evolutionary Perspectives on Race, Ethnicity, and Class," in Jill Rudd and Val Gough, eds., *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Optimist Reformer* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 20.

12. "A Suggestion on the Negro Problem," in Larry Ceplair, ed., *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Nonfiction Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 179.

13. Lane, "Gilman and Feminism: Her Legacy for the 1990s," in Rudd and Gough, eds., 6.

14. For other examples of the shifting accounts of early feminism and of Gilman, see Rudd and Val Gough, eds.; Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992).

The reissued novel as introduced by Dana Seitler is refreshing at an historical moment in which questions about the purpose of American studies demand transcultural responses, but where the mention of race, class, and gender often sounds to many scholars, teachers, and students like a tired litany of political correctness. The crux of the matter is perhaps expressed well in Toni Morrison's observation that color has had a persistent presence in the white American literary imagination, both as historically perceived peril, and, in our time, as much-needed promise.¹⁵

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Melvin G. Holli, *The Wizard of Washington: Emil Hurja, Franklin Roosevelt and the Birth of Public Opinion Polling*. New York, NY: Palgrave, 2002. 123 pages; ISBN 031229395X; £ 37.50 cloth.

Emil Hurja (1892-1953) came to Washington, DC in 1933, having begun his career as a provincial journalist and sometime Democratic Party worker. But he was a man of various trades: between 1917 and 1933, Hurja edited a newspaper in Texas, published a string of California newspapers, and worked as a stock analyst on Wall Street. In 1932 he became an advisor on Franklin Roosevelt's first election campaign. Moving to Washington, he became a political advisor to Roosevelt and, Holli argues, exerted a powerful influence on the shaping of FDR's 1936 re-election campaign. After that Hurja switched sides, working for Wendell Wilkie during his 1940 presidential bid. When that campaign failed, Hurja fell into relative obscurity – especially after the newsmagazine he purchased, *The Pathfinder*, failed to compete successfully with its competitors.

Holli rests his book on Hurja's seminal work as a pollster,¹⁶ making a case for Hurja as a formative figure of twentieth-century American politics. For me, however, the book is of interest as an American success story that brings together ethnicity, business and politics – and is remarkable, I think, as a narrative of a kind of mid-twentieth-century political entrepreneur:¹⁷ a chronicle of the successes and struggles of a man who made his own breaks – or to be less prosaic, a man who managed to make important political connections almost entirely on his own – in a relentless climb toward political influence and social acceptability.

15. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1992).

16. "Hurja is not as well known to historians or political scientists or political writers as [are] George Gallup or Louis Harris . . ." because his polling techniques were developed in the service of the Roosevelt administration and the White House did not want to reveal the extent to which political opinions were framed in reference to polling. A second reason rests on George Gallup – widely recognized as the father of modern opinion polls – was a tireless "self-publicist" (122).

17. I came across the term in John H. Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).